

## RESEARCH REPORT

# Trade-Offs at the Dinner Table

The Impacts of Unwanted Compromises



Photo: Joey O'Loughlin

---

## Acknowledgements

Food Bank For New York City thanks its members for the time and effort they devoted to participate in this research, and for the work they do every day to meet their neighbors' needs.

## Prepared By

**Yousef Khalil**, Benefits Data Coordinator

**William Guillaume Koible**, Research Coordinator

**Triada Stampas**, Vice President for Research & Public Affairs

---

## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Meals – and Dollars – Lost to the Hunger Cliff.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Emergency Food Supply and Need .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Visitor Traffic at Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens .....	5
Adequacy of the Emergency Food Supply .....	7
Changes in Service Availability .....	8
<b>New York City in a SNAP .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Whom Does SNAP Help? .....	10
SNAP’s Economic Impact .....	12
<b>Conclusions.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Policy Implications.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Methodology.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Appendix A: Meal Gap by Community District .....</b>	<b>A1</b>
<b>Appendix B: SNAP Participation by Community District .....</b>	<b>B1</b>
<b>Appendix C: SNAP Dollars by Community District .....</b>	<b>C1</b>

---

## Executive Summary

Until she found out about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program), Manhattan resident Jing Shao was skipping meals to feed her daughter. A practicing nurse in China, she has been juggling multiple part-time jobs while working to improve her English, raising her child, and studying for the licensing examination that will allow her to become a nurse in the United States. “SNAP changed our lives so much,” she recounted. With SNAP, she could afford more nutritious food, and even the occasional snack for her daughter to bring to daycare. It gave her breathing room, and freed her from what had become a constant worry.

As of the time of this writing, the federal budget proposals have emerged that would impose large-scale cuts to SNAP, and the House of Representatives has announced plans to release a new version of the Farm Bill by early 2018. Because the Farm Bill will set our nation’s farming, food, and hunger policies for the next five years, the stakes are high: this is a time of both enormous opportunity and great risk.

In key legislation over the past decade, decision-makers in Washington have struck compromises on hunger issues that often simply pit the interests of vulnerable people against each other. These compromises have forced other trade-offs: the trade-offs low-income individuals must make when they cannot afford enough food; trade-offs of desperation, not choice. Trade-offs like Ms. Shao’s.

This report shares new data about the local outcomes of one such legislative compromise: the “Hunger Cliff” – across-the-board reductions in SNAP benefits in November 2013 enacted to pay for increases in school meal costs. In addition, it provides an analysis of need for and supply of emergency food at New York City’s network of food pantries and soup kitchens since those cuts; and it offers community-level data on SNAP participation in New York City.

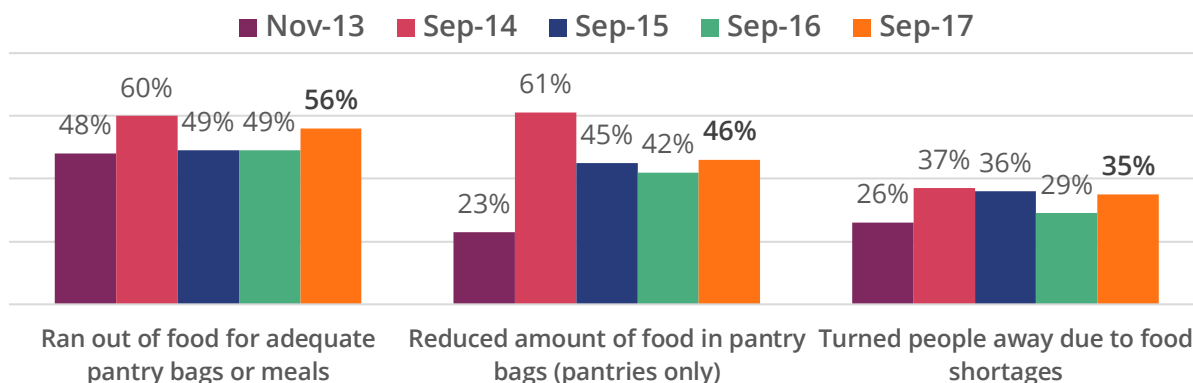
## Key Findings

**Economic losses from the Hunger Cliff have topped \$1.3 billion in New York City.** Every dollar of SNAP generates \$1.79 in economic activity – and cuts result in foregone activity. Thus far, the SNAP cuts of November 2013 have amounted to more than \$770 million in lost benefits that New York City residents could have used to purchase food. This equates to a loss of approximately 223 million meals.

**77% of food pantries and soup kitchens across New York City are continuing to see elevated visitor traffic since the Hunger Cliff.**

Nearly 80 percent of food pantries and soup kitchens reported seeing more visitors the month the cut took effect. Four years later, this is largely unchanged.

**Food shortages have increased, with more than half (56%) of food pantries and soup kitchens reporting food shortages in September 2017.**



**SNAP participants represent 40% or more of the population in six communities.**

All are in Brooklyn and the Bronx. These communities are especially vulnerable to policy proposals that would reduce SNAP benefits or access.

**The highest-need communities do not have the highest SNAP participation.**

New York City has a meal gap of 225 million meals. This is a measure of the unmet need among food-insecure New Yorkers. However, only three of the ten communities with the greatest such need are among the ten communities with highest SNAP participation.

## Conclusion

Need for emergency food has not abated since cuts to SNAP took place. The ongoing impacts are felt in our economy, and at the doors of food pantries and soup kitchens across the city. While more food is still clearly needed, we have seen that the charitable network of community-based providers cannot replace the resources SNAP provides.

As we prepare to enter a new Farm Bill process, we would do well to heed the lessons of our recent past: what sounds like compromise in the halls of the Capitol can look like sacrifice in the streets and communities of our city. Cuts in the name of legislative compromise will create trade-offs at the dinner tables of individuals and families across the country.

While the threats are real, the opportunity to end hunger and reduce hardship is in this Farm Bill as well – an opportunity that only comes once every five years. Measures to strengthen SNAP and increase the emergency food supply should be championed.

Locally, a closer look at the communities where the meal gap is high is needed in order to yield more targeted strategies for supporting community-based providers in SNAP outreach and enrollment.

## Introduction

As of the time of this writing, the Agriculture Committee of the House of Representatives has announced plans to release, by early 2018, a new version of the Farm Bill for debate and deliberation. This release will initiate a process in Congress that will set our nation's farming, food, and hunger policies for the next five years. Every reauthorization of the Farm Bill is both a time of enormous opportunity and a time fraught with risk, as each of the decisions before Congress creates winners and losers.

Among other issues, the Farm Bill sets funding and policy for two key federal anti-hunger programs: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), our nation's first and last lines of defense against hunger, respectively.

## Hunger and New York City's Meal Gap

As of 2016, 41.2 million US residents, or 12.3 percent, were food-insecure.<sup>1</sup> Food insecurity indicates a lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members, and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods. It is the term used in social science research and policy to describe what might more commonly be called hunger; in this report, the terms will be used interchangeably. In the United States, food insecurity is primarily a function of insufficient financial resources, and is closely associated with poverty.

In New York State, there are approximately 2.5 million residents struggling with food insecurity – one in eight New Yorkers (12.5 percent).<sup>2</sup> In New York City, the rate is even higher: almost 1.3 million residents, or 14.9 percent, are food-insecure.<sup>3</sup> The City's food-insecurity rate is 21 percent higher than the national rate, and 19 percent higher than the state's rate. New York City residents make up about half of New York State's food-insecure population.

The *Meal Gap* represents food insecurity as a number of missing meals that result from insufficient household resources to purchase food.<sup>4</sup> It is the difference, measured in meals, between a household being food-insecure and food-secure. Because it accounts for variation in food costs across the country, the Meal Gap provides a clear illustration of the effects of resource shortfalls in households experiencing food insecurity. And because the Meal Gap

---

<sup>1</sup> Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian A. Gregory, and Anita Singh. 2017. *Household Food Security in the United States in 2016*, ERR-237, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhard. Map the Meal Gap 2017: Food Insecurity and Child Food Insecurity Estimates at the County Level. Feeding America, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Gundersen, C., *et al.*, 2017. The City of New York adopted the Meal Gap as its official metric of food insecurity in 2014.



can be mapped, it shows us where hunger lives, helping public and private anti-hunger efforts to direct food and services to communities where need is highest.

As Table 1 shows, the Meal Gap in New York City in 2015 (the most recent year for which data is available) was approximately 225 million meals, ranging from a high of 87.6 million meals missing from Brooklyn, to nearly 8 million meals missing from Staten Island.

	<b>Food Insecurity rate</b>	<b>Food-Insecure Population</b> <i>(rounded)</i>	<b>Meal Gap</b>
Bronx	16.1%	229,800	41,207,200
Brooklyn	18.8%	488,560	87,607,300
Manhattan	13.9%	226,420	40,601,100
Queens	11.5%	264,440	47,418,700
Staten Island	9.4%	44,500	7,979,600
<b>New York City</b>	<b>14.9%</b>	<b>1,253,720</b>	<b>224,813,900</b>

**Table 1.** Source: Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhard. *Map the Meal Gap 2017: Food Insecurity and Child Food Insecurity Estimates at the County Level*. Feeding America, 2017.

It is evident that need does not map uniformly across New York City, or even within boroughs, as Figure 1 shows. For example, the borough of Queens has both the community district with the city's highest meal gap, and that with the lowest (for details by community district, see Appendix A).

## SNAP, TEFAP and the Hunger Cliff

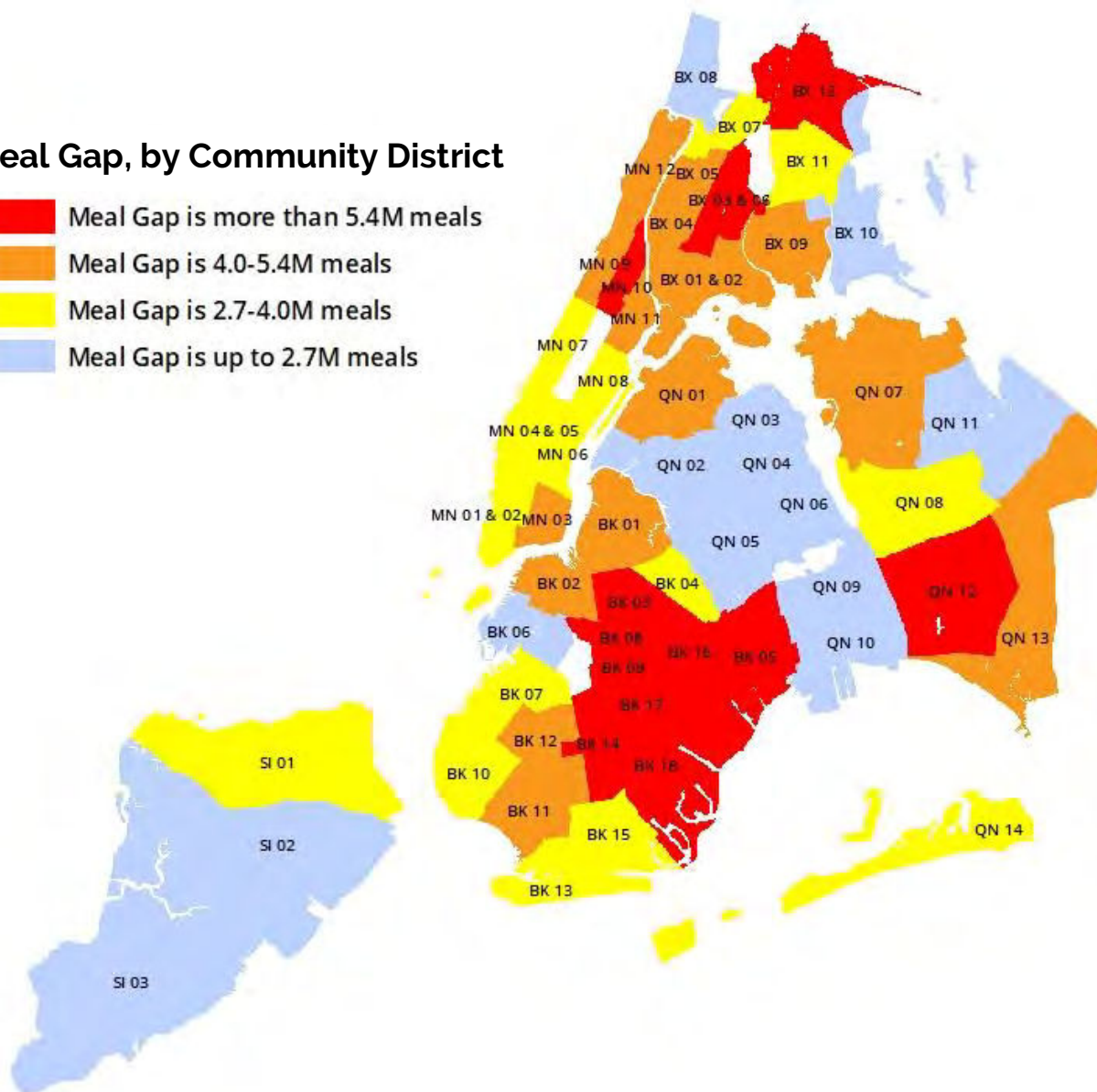
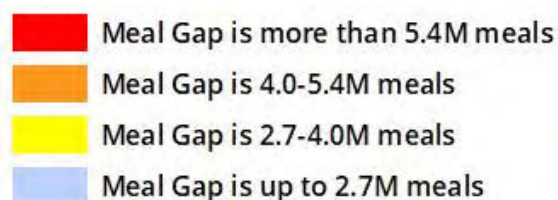
SNAP supplements the resources of low-income households vulnerable to hunger by providing a monthly food allotment to help meet the household's food needs. To receive SNAP, a household must meet program criteria that include income, immigration status and employment. Most participating households are surviving at or near the federal poverty level, and significant portions include children, seniors, and people with disabilities.

There is evidence that SNAP participation has benefits well beyond reducing food insecurity, such as increasing participating households' overall financial security, and reducing the risk of falling behind on housing and utility costs.<sup>5</sup> The reduction in out-of-pocket spending on food has also been shown to free up resources for other vital household expenses, such as transportation and education.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Shaefer, H. Luke and Gutierrez, Italo *The Effects of Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program on the Material Hardship of Low-Income Families with Children*. The National Poverty Center, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Kim, Jiyeon. "Do SNAP Participants Expand Non-Food Spending When They Receive More SNAP Benefits?—Evidence from the 2009 SNAP benefits increase." *Food Policy*, December 2016.

## Meal Gap, by Community District



**Figure 1.** Source: Food Bank For New York City analysis based on Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhard. *Map the Meal Gap 2017: Food Insecurity and Child Food Insecurity Estimates at the County Level*. Feeding America, 2017.

The existence of a meal gap despite SNAP and other nutrition assistance programs (including child nutrition programs such as school meals, summer meals and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, more commonly known by its acronym WIC) indicates an unmet need remains.

If SNAP is the first line of defense against hunger, food pantries and soup kitchens – collectively known as emergency food providers – are the last line of defense. TEFAP, a key source of emergency food, provides federally purchased commodities from domestic



growers to food banks, which in turn distribute them to food pantries and soup kitchens. In New York City, TEFAP is the single biggest source of food for emergency food providers.

In November 2013, an unprecedented, across-the-board benefit reduction in SNAP took place. The impacts of that moment, termed the “Hunger Cliff,” have illuminated the relationship that exists between these first and last lines of defense against hunger. In New York City, many SNAP recipients find that their benefits are not sufficient to afford the food their families need for the entire month. Indeed, the previous year, Food Bank For New York City research found that nearly 60 percent of New York City residents at food pantries and soup kitchens were receiving SNAP and turning to emergency food when their allocations were exhausted.<sup>7</sup> It is little surprise, then, that food pantries and soup kitchens saw an immediate, widespread increase in visitor traffic when benefits were reduced in 2013.<sup>8</sup> Subsequent research has found that this increased demand for emergency food has not abated; years later, food pantries and soup kitchens are still seeing more need for their services than before SNAP benefits were reduced.<sup>9</sup>

This report summarizes three key analyses: first, an analysis of the meals that have been lost in New York City as a result of the Hunger Cliff; second, the findings from the current year’s survey of need and supply at New York City’s food pantries and soup kitchens; and last, a geographic analysis of the impact of SNAP in New York City.

## Meals – and Dollars – Lost to the Hunger Cliff

When SNAP benefits were reduced in November 2013, every individual and family was affected. For more than one million New York City households, it resulted in the immediate loss, on average, of nearly \$18 per month in benefits.<sup>10</sup> Although SNAP is designed to be responsive to changes in food expenses – benefits are adjusted every year according to inflation in food costs – benefit amounts four years later have yet to regain the lost purchasing power that the Hunger Cliff triggered. In fact, the gap has widened: monthly household SNAP benefits in 2017 are nearly \$21 less than they were before November 2013.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the Hunger Cliff continues to impact our country and city, as low-income individuals and families continue to cope with fewer resources to purchase needed food.

One way Food Bank For New York City has been monitoring the impact of the Hunger Cliff since November 2013 has been to quantify, on an ongoing basis, the foregone food

---

<sup>7</sup> *NYC Hunger Safety Net 2011-12: Serving Under Stress Post-Recession, the State of Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens Today*. Food Bank For New York City. 2012

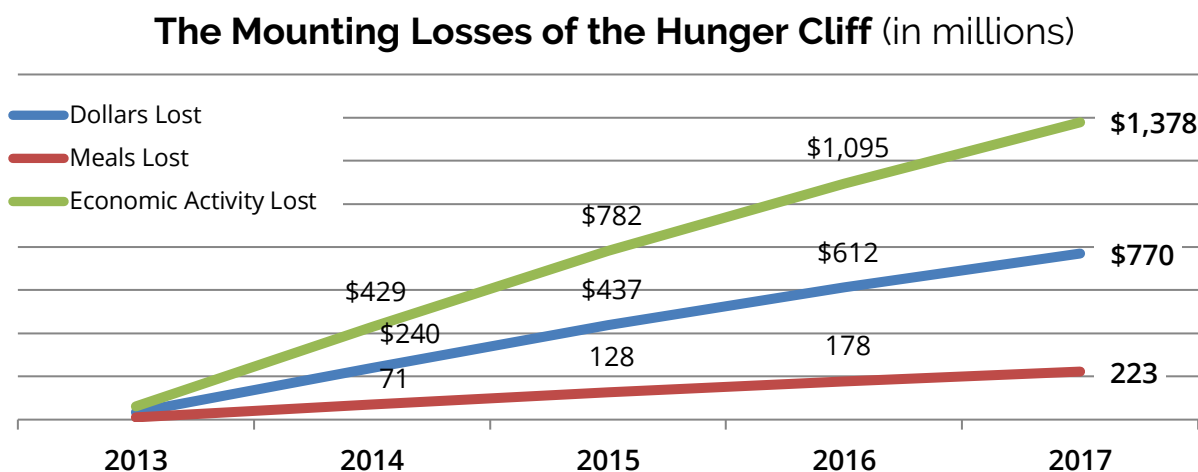
<sup>8</sup> *Still Scaling the Hunger Cliff: Need at NYC Food Pantries & Soup Kitchens*. Food Bank For New York City. 2016

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Food Bank For New York City analysis of reported SNAP participation and benefit data by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

purchases – and the associated foregone economic activity – that have resulted from the cut. As Figure 2 below shows, the cumulative losses – in dollars, meals and economic activity – continue to grow.



**Figure 2.** Food Bank For New York City analysis of SNAP participation and benefit data (Nov. 2013 – Aug. 2017) reported by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) and the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA).

For New York City, the Hunger Cliff has amounted to a cut of more than \$770 million in lost benefits that could have been used to purchase food. This equates to a loss of approximately 223 million meals in New York City since November 2013. The economic losses to the city top \$1.3 billion so far.

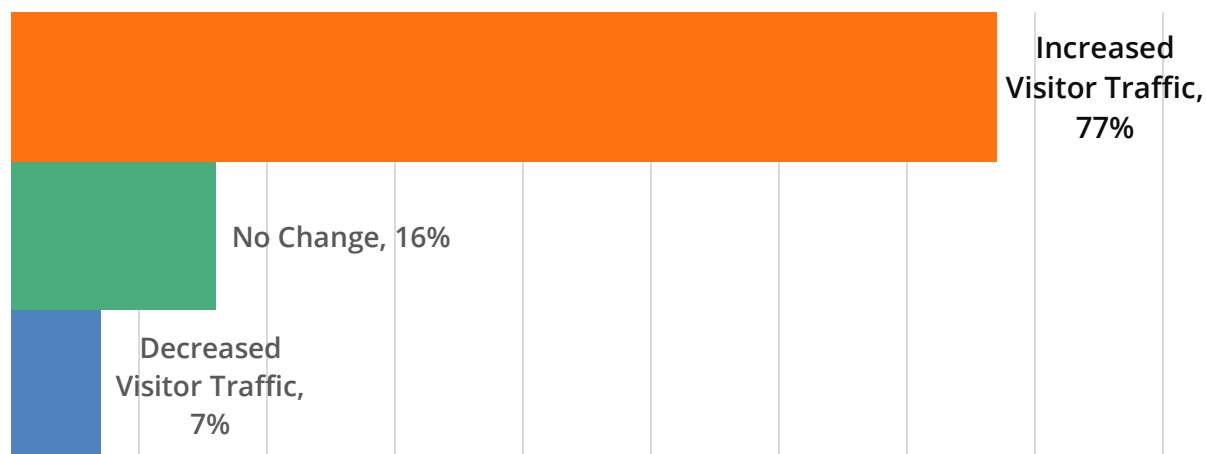
## Emergency Food Supply and Need

Since the Hunger Cliff, Food Bank has surveyed its member kitchen and pantries every year to gauge the need for their services in the wake of the SNAP cuts. For this report, Food Bank surveyed member food pantries and soup kitchens to compare visitor traffic and food shortages in 2017 to 2013, before the cuts took effect. The findings of that survey, presented here and compared to the findings of similar surveys conducted in September 2016, September 2015, September 2014, and November 2013, provide a snapshot of trends in supply and demand in New York City's emergency food network.

### Visitor Traffic at Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens

More than three-quarters (77 percent) of food pantries and soup kitchens surveyed reported an increase in the number of visitors in September 2017 compared to September 2013, as shown in Figure 3.

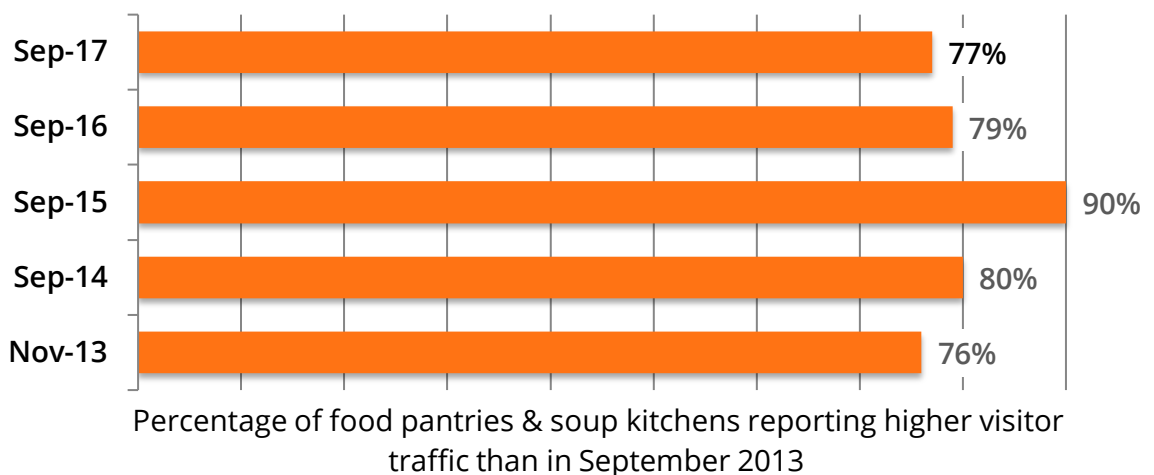
**More than 3/4 of NYC food pantries and soup kitchens saw increased visitor traffic in September 2017, compared to September 2013.**



**Figure 3.** Percentage of food pantries and soup kitchens reporting increased, decreased, or unchanged visitor traffic in September 2017, relative to September 2013.

Figure 4 shows that this is consistent with a trend that began when the SNAP cuts of November 2013 went into effect. While the 77 percent reported this year is lower than the 90 percent reported in September 2015, it is comparable to the 76 percent of food pantries and soup kitchens reporting increased visitor traffic in November 2013, as compared to the immediately preceding months (September/October 2013), and to the 80 percent reported in September 2014 and the 79 percent reported in 2016.

**Percentages of food pantries and soup kitchens reporting increased visitor traffic have been consistently high since the Hunger Cliff.**



**Figure 4.**

## Adequacy of the Emergency Food Supply

More than half (56 percent) of the food pantries and soup kitchens surveyed reported they had run out of food, or particular types of food, needed to make adequate meals or pantry bags in September 2017 (as shown in Figure 5).

### More NYC food pantries and soup kitchens are experiencing food shortages since the Hunger Cliff.

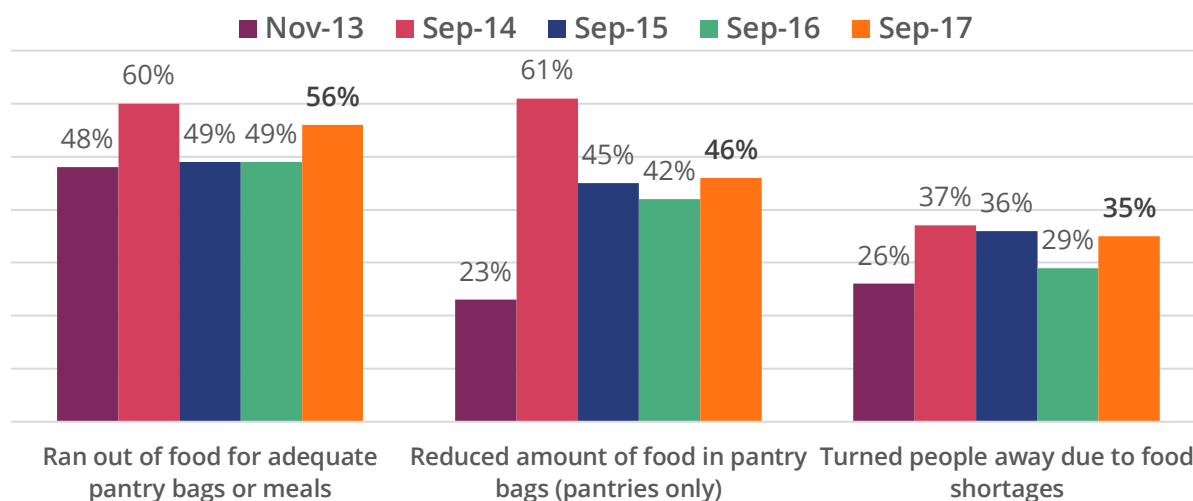


Figure 5

This is a significant increase in the prevalence of food shortages from the 49 percent reported in the past two years. The four-percentage-point drop from the peak experienced in 2014, when 60 percent of food pantries and soup kitchens reported these food shortages, is within the statistical margin of error for these findings.

Nearly half (46 percent) of food pantries reported reducing the number of meals in their pantry bags during the month of September 2017 because they had run out of food, or particular types of food, as indicated in Figure 5. This figure demonstrates that levels of food rationing among food pantries have remained consistent in recent years – at approximately double the rate seen in November 2013, when it was 23 percent. The percentage of food pantries that reported reducing the number of meals in their pantry bags in 2017 is comparable to the 45 percent reported in September 2015, and the 42 percent reported in September 2016.

As seen in Figure 5, more than a third (35 percent) of food pantries and soup kitchens reported that they had turned people away during the month of September 2017 because they had run out of food, or particular types of food required to make adequate meals or

pantry bags. This represents a return to rates comparable to the September 2014 peak, after a dip to 29 percent one year ago.

## Changes in Service Availability

As shown in Figure 6, nearly one-third (30 percent) of food pantries and soup kitchens surveyed reported an increase in their operating hours in September 2017, compared to September 2013.

This is comparable to the 28 percent of food pantries and soup kitchens that reported an increase in operating hours during the months of September 2015 and September 2016, and continues an upward trend in the number of pantries and soup kitchens reporting increasing their operating hours since the Hunger Cliff.

### **The number of food pantries and soup kitchens having increased their operating hours since the Hunger Cliff is a growing minority.**

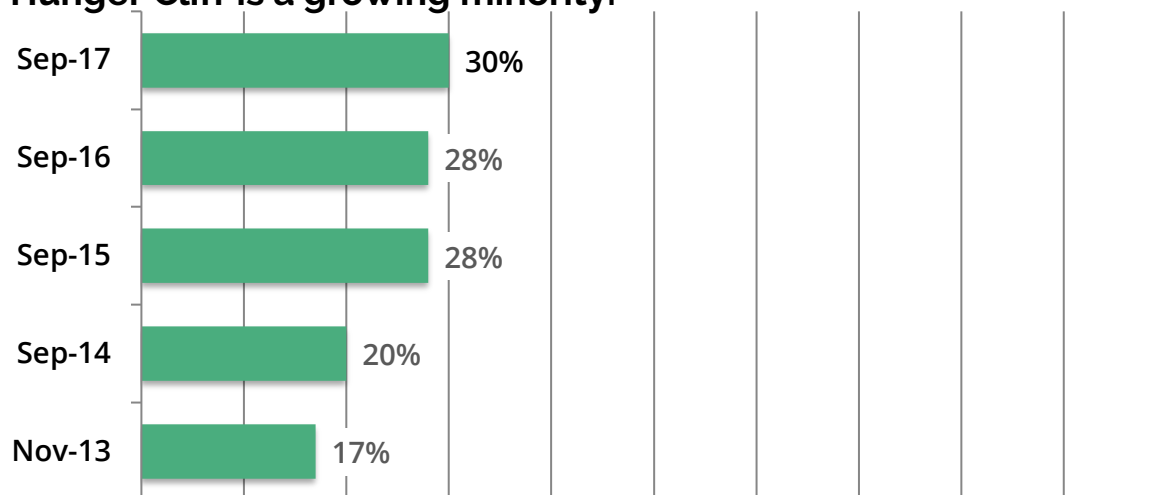


Figure 6.



## The Life-Changing Impact of SNAP

Jing Shao, a nurse from China, moved to Manhattan with her young daughter determined to make her way in New York. Though she had been a practicing nurse back home, she cannot be employed as a nurse here before passing the National Council Licensure Examination. To make ends meet in the meantime, Ms. Shao has found herself juggling up to four part-time jobs at a time, all while raising her daughter, studying for the test, and working to improve her English.

Ms. Shao had very little money for food and was making do. While for her daughter that meant often going without snacks, for Jing it meant sometimes having to skip meals, and often forgoing meat for less expensive items in the food she prepared at home. She was relieved to learn through word of mouth that she could be eligible for SNAP. Not knowing there was a free alternative, she paid an agency to prepare and submit her application.

### **“Enrolling in SNAP changed our lives so much.”**

The benefits allowed her to provide more nutritious meals for her daughter, and freed her from the strain of stretching what remained in the pantry until the next paycheck. Ms. Shao was delighted to be able to buy her daughter better food, and even the occasional snack to bring to daycare.

When her SNAP benefits ended without notice, Ms. Shao was distraught. By that point, however, she had heard that the Chinese American Planning Council and Food Bank For New York City were working together to help people with their SNAP applications, and decided to see if someone could help her get her benefits back. It was there that she met with one of Food Bank’s benefit specialists, who was able to guide her through the process of re-enrolling in the program.

### **“This program makes a huge difference.”**

Ms. Shao is hopeful for her family’s future. She knows that when she passes her licensing exam and is able to find work as registered nurse, it will give her the financial freedom not to have to rely on SNAP. But for now, SNAP is a vital support for her family. “It’s not that people are lazy. I have jobs, and study, and raise my daughter, but it’s still hard without my SNAP benefits. Most people are embarrassed to talk about SNAP – they feel ashamed – but I’m proud to share my story because it is very important that people get enough food, especially kids. This program makes a huge difference for kids like my daughter.”

## New York City in a SNAP

### Whom Does SNAP Help?

Among participating SNAP households in New York State, nearly one third (30.9 percent) included a child, as of 2015 (the last year for which data is available). Approximately one third of all households had an elderly member (33.5 percent), and roughly one quarter of all participating households had a non-elderly disabled member (24.5 percent).<sup>12</sup>

Eight out of ten SNAP (80.3 percent) households reported income below the federal poverty level. The *average* SNAP household in New York State had an income that is less than three-quarters (73.2 percent) the federal poverty level. (For a household of three, this equates to an annual income just under \$15,000.) If SNAP benefits were counted as cash, the value of those benefits would reduce the poverty rate among New York recipients by 26.8 percentage points, from 80.3 percent to 53.5 percent.<sup>13</sup>

Manhattan resident Jing Shao, whose story appears on the previous page, illustrates the life-changing impact SNAP can have for those who struggle to afford food.

Nearly 1.7 million, or approximately one in five, New York City residents relies on SNAP for food. The proportions vary geographically, by borough and community. As Table 2 shows, the borough with the highest percentage of SNAP recipients is the Bronx, where one in three residents receives support from the program. Staten Island and Queens have the lowest percentages, at 13 percent each.

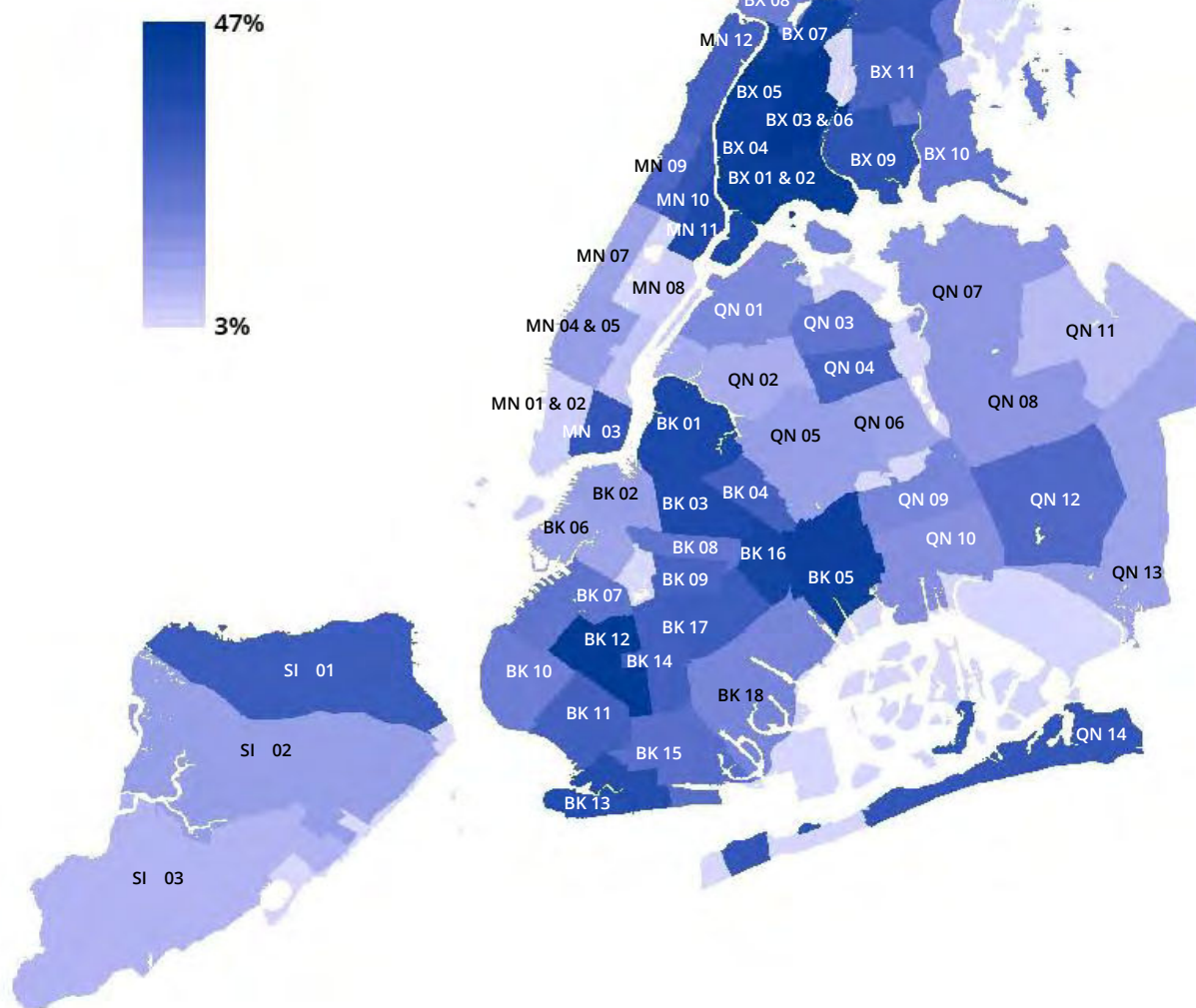
Borough	Population (2016)	SNAP Recipients (as of Oct. 2016)	% Receiving SNAP
Bronx	1,455,720	473,526	33%
Brooklyn	2,629,150	608,900	23%
Manhattan	1,643,734	239,290	15%
Queens	2,333,116	308,422	13%
Staten Island	476,015	62,653	13%
<b>New York City</b>	<b>8,537,735</b>	<b>1,692,791</b>	<b>20%</b>

**Table 2.** Food Bank For New York City analysis based on 2016 population data from the American Community Survey and 2016 SNAP enrollment data from HRA.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2015*, by Kelsey Farson Gray, Sarah Fisher, and Sarah Lauffer. Project Officer, Jenny Genser. Alexandria, VA, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

## % of NYC Residents Relying on SNAP, by Community District



**Figure 7.** Food Bank For New York City analysis based on 2016 population data from the American Community Survey and 2016 SNAP enrollment data from HRA.

Geographic disparities are even more pronounced at the community level, with the highest percentage of SNAP recipients at 47 percent, and the lowest at 3 percent. As Figure 7 shows, SNAP recipients are in the greatest proportion of the population in community districts in the Bronx and Brooklyn, where close to one in two grocery shoppers may be relying on SNAP for their food purchases. In six of the 12 community districts in the Bronx, for example, SNAP recipients make up 40 percent or more of the population. This is also true of two of Brooklyn's 18 community districts. The table in Appendix B provides detailed information at the community district level.

While a considerable number of New York City residents are enrolled in SNAP, hundreds of thousands more are eligible but not enrolled.<sup>14</sup>

## SNAP's Economic Impact

The average monthly benefit amount for a SNAP household in New York City is approximately \$260. In the aggregate, SNAP enables nearly three billion dollars in food purchases in New York City annually.

When people redeem their benefits at supermarkets, farmers' markets and other food retailers, SNAP provides economic support to communities and local businesses. Because SNAP participation varies by borough and community, so, too, does the distribution of these dollars. In communities with a high proportion of SNAP recipients, it functions as a financial lifeblood for the local food retailers that accept the benefits. As Table 3 indicates, with more than 600,000 SNAP recipients, Brooklyn receives more than one billion dollars in benefits annually, more than any other borough. The map in Figure 8 shows community members across New York City collectively receive – and shop with – tens of millions of SNAP dollars every year.

<b>Borough</b>	<b>SNAP Recipients</b> <i>(as of Oct. 2016)</i>	<b>SNAP Households</b> <i>(as of Oct. 2016)</i>	<b>SNAP \$ (est.)</b>
Bronx	473,526	254,404	\$829,958,491
Brooklyn	608,900	322,601	\$1,067,231,208
Manhattan	239,290	158,957	\$419,408,369
Queens	308,422	180,583	\$540,577,408
Staten Island	62,653	34,636	\$109,813,166
<b>New York City</b>	<b>1,692,791</b>	<b>951,181</b>	<b>\$2,966,988,642</b>

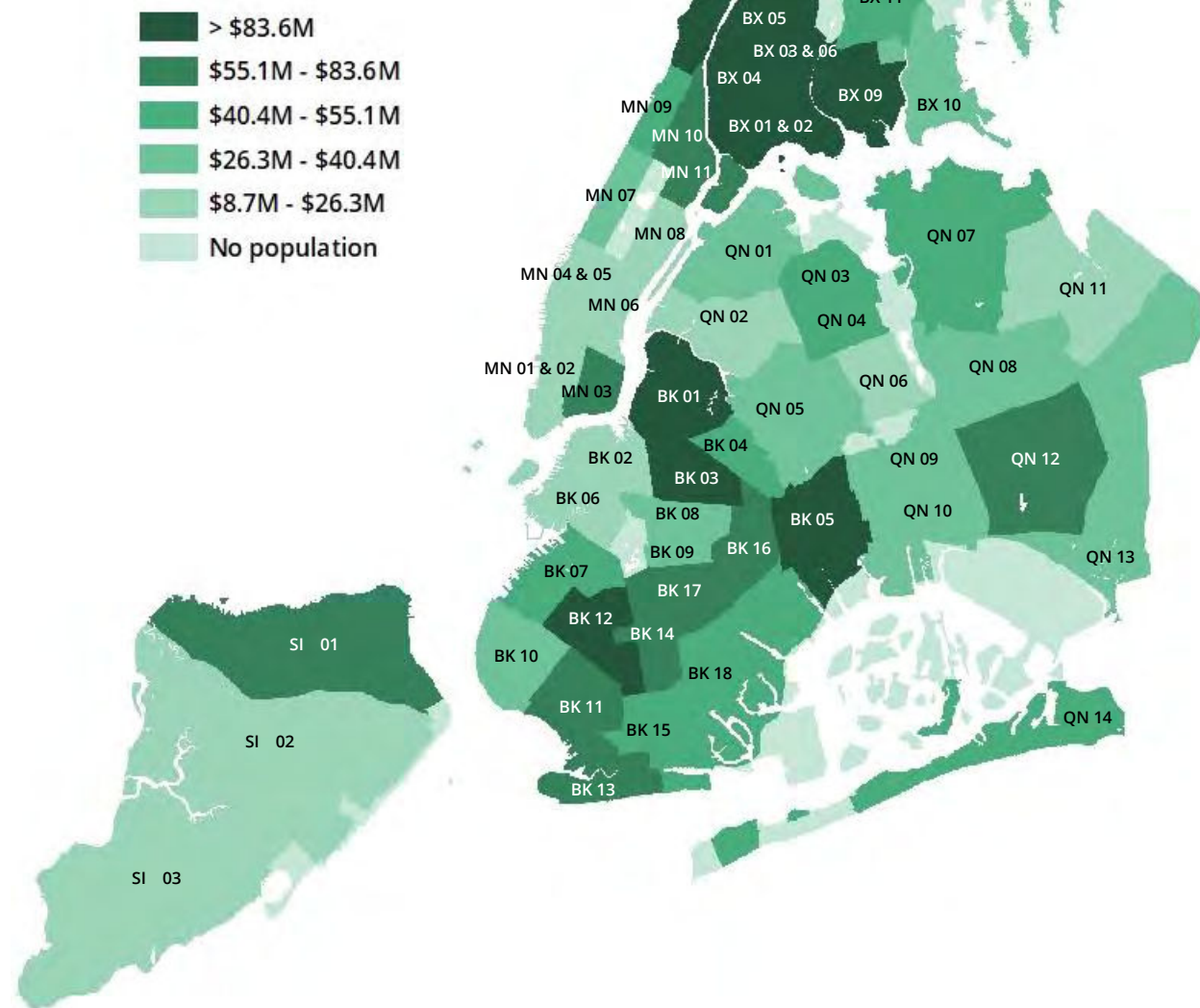
**Table 3.** Food Bank For New York City analysis based on 2016 SNAP enrollment data from HRA and benefits data from OTDA.

The USDA has found that every dollar of SNAP spending generates \$1.79 in economic activity.<sup>15</sup> This equates to more than \$5.3 billion in New York City alone.

<sup>14</sup> There are a number of methods for estimating the unenrolled SNAP-eligible population. While it is beyond the scope of this report to evaluate the relative strengths of these methods, suffice it to say that even the USDA's Program Access Index, a method that tends to generate a relatively high participation rate (and therefore a relatively small population of eligible nonparticipants), generates an estimate of more than 330,000 eligible, unenrolled New York City residents (using 2016 population and participation data).

<sup>15</sup> Hanson, Kenneth. *The Food Assistance National Input-Output Multiplier (FANIOM) Model and Stimulus Effects of SNAP*. ERR-103. U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Econ. Res. Serv. October 2010.

## Estimated Annual SNAP Dollars, by Community District



**Figure 8.** Food Bank For New York City estimates based on 2016 SNAP enrollment data from HRA and benefit data from OTDA.

## Conclusions

Looking at the communities that register the highest need (as measured by the Meal Gap), we see little correspondence with the communities that have the highest participation in SNAP (see the shaded cells in Table 4). For example, only one community district among the five with the highest Meal Gap is among the top ten in terms of its proportion of residents receiving SNAP.



Rank in City	Meal Gap	% of Population Receiving SNAP
1	Queens 12	Bronx 03 & 06
2	Brooklyn 18	Bronx 05
3	Brooklyn 03	Brooklyn 12
4	Brooklyn 16	Bronx 01 & 02
5	Brooklyn 17	Brooklyn 05
6	Bronx 03 & 06	Bronx 04
7	Manhattan 10	Bronx 08
8	Brooklyn 05	Brooklyn 16
9	Brooklyn 14	Manhattan 11
10	Brooklyn 08	Brooklyn 01

**Table 4.** Top 10 Community Districts, by Meal Gap, percentage of population receiving SNAP, and amount of annual SNAP benefits.

Further research is needed to determine the potential for increasing SNAP enrollment in the highest-need communities, both in terms of program eligibility and the resources needed to grow or initiate local outreach efforts. Food-insecure residents may be ineligible if they are recent immigrants, or if their income is too high for SNAP (but too low to afford enough food).

In the meantime, survey findings reveal that, four years after the Hunger Cliff, the number of food pantries reporting elevated visitor traffic remains at the same high rate. While determining causation is beyond the scope of this report, the 2013 SNAP cuts continue to represent a significant systemic factor contributing to the reduction of food purchasing power for lower-income New Yorkers, particularly as top-line economic indicators such as the unemployment rate have shown improvement since the recession.

Moreover, the supply of food for food pantries and soup kitchens is failing to keep up with need. After a decline in the proportion of pantries and kitchens reporting food shortages in 2016, more pantries and kitchens reported shortages in 2017. This year's findings have not fulfilled the hope of a continued downward trend.

The insufficiency of the food supply provides context for the finding that only 30 percent of food pantries and soup kitchens have increased their operating hours, despite increased demand: it makes little sense to keep a pantry open for more hours when there is not more food to distribute. In addition, it is helpful to bear in mind that the average annual operating budget for a food pantry or soup kitchen in New York City is less than \$25,000, and that most rely on volunteers for their operations.<sup>16</sup> While examples of resourcefulness within the emergency food network abound, it takes time to develop the resources – whether adding hours for paid staff or recruiting new volunteers – to increase operations.

<sup>16</sup> “Abundant in Heart, Short on Resources: Need at Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens Today.” Food Bank For New York City, 2017.

## Policy Implications

Too often over the past decade, decision-making on hunger issues in Washington has been characterized by trade-offs that pit the interests of those most vulnerable to hunger against each other. Some recent examples:

- The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 reduced SNAP benefits to pay for a six-cents-per-meal increase for school lunches.<sup>17</sup> This legislation, which triggered the Hunger Cliff, effectively paid for poor children's lunches by taking away their dinners.
- This same legislation cut, capped and restructured SNAP-Education (SNAP-Ed) funding as a trade-off for policy improvements that make nutrition education for SNAP-eligible families more effective. Virtually overnight, the programmatic scope of SNAP-Ed was expanded while the national funding was reduced. Meanwhile, the funding formula that was applied cut New York State's allocation by 40 percent, while other states saw increases. The loss for low-income children and families in New York paid for the gain for similar families in other states.
- The last Farm Bill, the Agricultural Act of 2014, cut \$8.6 billion from SNAP benefits targeted for public housing residents and others in 16 states – including New York – in order to pay for such initiatives as incentives for farmers' market purchases made with SNAP. This sacrificed the ability of some SNAP recipients to afford enough food in order to encourage others to buy more fruit and vegetables.<sup>18</sup>

Each of the trade-offs above was defended as reasonable, even necessary, to prevent deeper cuts. However, as we prepare to enter a new Farm Bill process, we would do well to heed the lessons of our recent past: what sounds like compromise in the halls of the Capitol can look like sacrifice in the streets and communities of our city. If cuts to anti-hunger resources are proposed in the upcoming Farm Bill, hunger and hardship will only increase. For the most vulnerable among us, basic living standards will be harder to achieve.

As this year's – and previous years' – surveys have found, New York City's soup kitchens and food pantries still do not have sufficient food to meet increased need in the wake of the SNAP cuts of 2013. While more food is still clearly needed, we have seen that the charitable network of community-based providers cannot replace the resources SNAP provides. Cuts in the name of legislative compromise will create trade-offs at the dinner tables of individuals and families across the country.

---

<sup>17</sup> Public Law 111-296.

<sup>18</sup> Thanks to action by the Cuomo Administration, state funding was diverted to prevent this cut from taking effect in New York State. But for this action, nearly 300,000 New Yorkers residents would have lost, on average, \$127 per month in SNAP dollars – or approximately \$457 million per year [“Governor Cuomo Announces New York State will preserve \$457 million in SNAP Benefits for 300,000 Households” (press release). 25 February 2014.].

While the threats are real, the opportunity to end hunger and reduce hardship is in this Farm Bill as well. Measures like the Closing the Meal Gap Act (H.R. 1276) would strengthen SNAP by increasing benefit adequacy and streamlining program access. Greater investments in TEFAP and in farm-to-food bank initiatives would increase the supply of nutritious food at food pantries and soup kitchens. Reauthorizing the Commodity Supplemental Food Program will support good nutrition for low-income seniors. Taken together, these measures have the potential to dramatically reduce hunger in our city and country.

## Methodology

### SNAP Analysis

Participation data from the New York City Human Resources Administration from October 2016 was compared to 2016 population data in the American Community Survey. Benefits data from the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance was used to generate estimates of the value of SNAP benefits by community district.

### Hunger Cliff Analysis

The calculation of meals lost due to the Hunger Cliff SNAP cuts represents the difference, in meals, of average household SNAP benefits in New York City both before November 2013 and since.<sup>19</sup> The average cost of a meal in New York City is \$3.50.<sup>20</sup>

### Emergency Food Provider Survey

To generate the food pantry and soup kitchen survey findings, an online survey was sent to a total of 810 food pantries and soup kitchens. Responses were collected in October 2017.

After rejecting duplicate and incomplete responses, a total of 261 food pantries and soup kitchens were randomly selected for analysis, in proportion with the composition of Food Bank's agency network as follows: 213 food pantries (81 percent of the sample) and 48 soup kitchens (19 percent of the sample). The confidence interval for most survey results, at the 95 percent confidence level, is plus or minus 5 percentage points. The only exception is for survey results presented for food pantries only, which have a confidence interval of plus or minus 5.5 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

---

<sup>19</sup> Monthly SNAP participation and benefit data is reported by OTDA. The analysis excluded months in which non-recurring benefit issuances, such as Disaster SNAP benefits after Super Storm Sandy, would skew the average.

<sup>20</sup> Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhard. *Map the Meal Gap 2017: Food Insecurity and Child Food Insecurity Estimates at the County Level*. Feeding America, 2017.

## Appendix A: Meal Gap by Community District

Community District(s)	Food Insecurity	Food-Insecure Population	Meal Gap	Rank in Borough	Rank in City
Bronx 01 & 02	21%	33,037	4,917,759	4	16
Bronx 03 & 06	24%	41,048	6,110,324	1	6
Bronx 04	21%	30,248	4,502,719	5	21
Bronx 05	21%	28,610	4,258,869	6	22
Bronx 07	18%	22,764	3,388,593	7	37
Bronx 08	13%	13,788	2,052,383	10	52
Bronx 09	18%	33,141	4,933,336	3	15
Bronx 10	13%	16,498	2,455,852	9	44
Bronx 11	16%	21,326	3,174,580	8	39
Bronx 12	25%	36,362	5,412,784	2	12
Brooklyn 01	17%	26,105	4,214,060	11	23
Brooklyn 02	19%	24,795	4,002,659	12	27
Brooklyn 03	30%	41,831	6,752,794	2	3
Brooklyn 04	17%	23,518	3,796,421	13	30
Brooklyn 05	24%	36,372	5,871,517	5	8
Brooklyn 06	12%	13,446	2,170,506	18	49
Brooklyn 07	14%	21,366	3,449,045	16	36
Brooklyn 08	28%	35,491	5,729,289	7	10
Brooklyn 09	30%	33,730	5,444,972	8	11
Brooklyn 10	14%	18,679	3,015,377	17	40
Brooklyn 11	16%	30,302	4,891,615	10	19
Brooklyn 12	19%	31,090	5,018,824	9	14
Brooklyn 13	21%	22,965	3,707,260	14	32
Brooklyn 14	22%	35,626	5,751,127	6	9
Brooklyn 15	15%	22,876	3,692,921	15	33
Brooklyn 16	33%	41,748	6,739,348	3	4
Brooklyn 17	29%	39,048	6,303,421	4	5
Brooklyn 18	21%	43,710	7,056,144	1	2
Manhattan 01 & 02	12%	17,932	2,870,844	9	41
Manhattan 03	19%	30,662	4,908,864	2	18
Manhattan 04 & 05	14%	20,917	3,348,616	8	38
Manhattan 06	12%	17,869	2,860,735	10	42
Manhattan 07	12%	23,528	3,766,744	7	31
Manhattan 08	11%	24,277	3,886,549	6	29
Manhattan 09	20%	25,707	4,115,500	5	26
Manhattan 10	29%	37,853	6,059,992	1	7
Manhattan 11	22%	26,281	4,207,351	4	24
Manhattan 12	13%	28,583	4,575,906	3	20

## Tradeoffs at the Dinner Table: The Impacts of Unwanted Compromises

Queens 01	15%	26,596	4,147,320	4	25
Queens 02	11%	14,691	2,290,936	11	48
Queens 03	6%	11,019	1,718,242	13	54
Queens 04	11%	15,061	2,348,539	9	46
Queens 05	9%	15,544	2,423,979	8	45
Queens 06	12%	13,395	2,088,844	12	50
Queens 07	13%	31,512	4,914,003	3	17
Queens 08	15%	23,364	3,643,318	5	34
Queens 09	10%	14,704	2,292,896	10	47
Queens 10	12%	16,668	2,599,202	7	43
Queens 11	9%	10,772	1,679,758	14	55
Queens 12	23%	54,688	8,528,040	1	1
Queens 13	17%	33,357	5,201,742	2	13
Queens 14	19%	22,713	3,541,879	6	35
Staten Island 01	13%	23,099	3,907,151	1	28
Staten Island 02	9%	11,749	1,987,254	3	53
Staten Island 03	7%	12,328	2,085,195	2	51

**Table 5.** Source: Food Bank For New York City analysis based on Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhard. *Map the Meal Gap 2017: Food Insecurity and Child Food Insecurity Estimates at the County Level*. Feeding America, 2017.



## Appendix B: SNAP Participation by Community District

Community District(s)	Population (2016)	SNAP Recipients (10/16)	% Receiving SNAP	Rank in Borough	Rank in City
Bronx 01 & 02	166,272	69,725	42%	3	4
Bronx 03 & 06	174,740	82,358	47%	1	1
Bronx 04	151,835	60,867	40%	4	6
Bronx 05	135,115	59,589	44%	2	2
Bronx 07	138,899	49,157	35%	5	7
Bronx 08	108,865	16,818	15%	10	34
Bronx 09	193,240	54,952	28%	6	13
Bronx 10	111,431	17,443	16%	9	33
Bronx 11	124,632	24,860	20%	8	25
Bronx 12	150,691	37,757	25%	7	14
Brooklyn 01	166,361	54,340	33%	4	10
Brooklyn 02	143,328	14,229	10%	17	44
Brooklyn 03	148,237	48,070	32%	5	11
Brooklyn 04	139,306	28,671	21%	10	23
Brooklyn 05	160,769	64,923	40%	2	5
Brooklyn 06	114,007	10,291	9%	18	48
Brooklyn 07	149,399	25,756	17%	13	30
Brooklyn 08	134,788	22,393	17%	14	32
Brooklyn 09	110,382	21,709	20%	11	26
Brooklyn 10	118,804	18,281	15%	15	35
Brooklyn 11	189,426	39,031	21%	9	22
Brooklyn 12	151,250	66,182	44%	1	3
Brooklyn 13	116,847	33,311	29%	6	12
Brooklyn 14	163,620	34,565	21%	8	21
Brooklyn 15	159,017	29,148	18%	12	29
Brooklyn 16	109,658	37,240	34%	3	8
Brooklyn 17	145,860	32,242	22%	7	19
Brooklyn 18	208,091	28,518	14%	16	37
Manhattan 01 & 02	152,813	5,220	3%	9	54
Manhattan 03	159,296	38,687	24%	3	16
Manhattan 04 & 05	140,247	14,679	10%	6	42
Manhattan 06	141,162	4,965	4%	8	53
Manhattan 07	189,492	16,613	9%	7	49
Manhattan 08	219,004	5,555	3%	10	55
Manhattan 09	125,195	23,436	19%	5	28
Manhattan 10	143,487	35,397	25%	2	15
Manhattan 11	134,279	44,269	33%	1	9
Manhattan 12	238,759	50,469	21%	4	20

<b>Community District(s)</b>	<b>Population (2016)</b>	<b>SNAP Recipients (10/16)</b>	<b>% Receiving SNAP</b>	<b>Rank in Borough</b>	<b>Rank in City</b>
Queens 01	171,988	22,954	13%	6	38
Queens 02	135,767	11,232	8%	13	50
Queens 03	166,144	28,594	17%	4	31
Queens 04	141,167	28,770	20%	2	24
Queens 05	192,600	19,908	10%	10	43
Queens 06	111,730	10,423	9%	11	46
Queens 07	245,864	26,882	11%	8	40
Queens 08	166,115	17,975	11%	9	41
Queens 09	164,094	23,222	14%	5	36
Queens 10	135,422	16,222	12%	7	39
Queens 11	117,381	6,325	5%	14	52
Queens 12	243,300	46,178	19%	3	27
Queens 13	214,163	19,517	9%	12	47
Queens 14	127,381	30,220	24%	1	17
Staten Island 01	174,943	39,084	22%	1	18
Staten Island 02	142,815	13,754	10%	2	45
Staten Island 03	158,257	9,815	6%	3	51

**Table 6.** Food Bank For New York City analysis based on 2016 population data from the American Community Survey and 2016 SNAP enrollment data from the New York City Human Resources Administration.

## Appendix C: SNAP Dollars by Community District

Community District(s)	SNAP Recipients	SNAP HHs	Annual SNAP \$ (est.)	Rank in Borough	Rank in City
Bronx 01 & 02	69,725	36,547	\$122,208,402	2	2
Bronx 03 & 06	82,358	43,026	\$144,350,514	1	1
Bronx 04	60,867	32,585	\$106,682,808	3	5
Bronx 05	59,589	31,490	\$104,442,832	4	6
Bronx 07	49,157	26,688	\$86,158,457	6	10
Bronx 08	16,818	9,887	\$29,477,245	10	42
Bronx 09	54,952	29,380	\$96,315,469	5	7
Bronx 10	17,443	10,518	\$30,572,695	9	41
Bronx 11	24,860	14,065	\$43,572,619	8	31
Bronx 12	37,757	20,218	\$66,177,449	7	17
Brooklyn 01	54,340	20,780	\$95,242,805	3	8
Brooklyn 02	14,229	9,282	\$24,939,453	17	46
Brooklyn 03	48,070	25,285	\$84,253,250	4	11
Brooklyn 04	28,671	16,690	\$50,252,235	11	26
Brooklyn 05	64,923	35,513	\$113,791,841	2	4
Brooklyn 06	10,291	6,516	\$18,037,242	18	50
Brooklyn 07	25,756	14,191	\$45,143,056	13	30
Brooklyn 08	22,393	13,776	\$39,248,659	14	35
Brooklyn 09	21,709	12,651	\$38,049,798	15	36
Brooklyn 10	18,281	10,100	\$32,041,474	16	39
Brooklyn 11	39,031	22,065	\$68,410,414	5	15
Brooklyn 12	66,182	21,507	\$115,998,515	1	3
Brooklyn 13	33,311	21,295	\$58,384,856	8	21
Brooklyn 14	34,565	19,317	\$60,582,767	7	20
Brooklyn 15	29,148	17,452	\$51,088,283	10	24
Brooklyn 16	37,240	20,199	\$65,271,293	6	18
Brooklyn 17	32,242	19,416	\$56,511,198	9	22
Brooklyn 18	28,518	16,566	\$49,984,069	12	28
Manhattan 01 & 02	5,220	4,117	\$9,149,198	9	54
Manhattan 03	38,687	25,456	\$67,807,479	3	16
Manhattan 04 & 05	14,679	11,464	\$25,728,177	7	45
Manhattan 06	4,965	4,274	\$8,702,255	10	55
Manhattan 07	16,613	12,376	\$29,117,937	6	43
Manhattan 08	5,555	4,382	\$9,736,360	8	53
Manhattan 09	23,436	14,956	\$41,076,746	5	32
Manhattan 10	35,397	21,904	\$62,041,030	4	19
Manhattan 11	44,269	26,802	\$77,591,162	2	13
Manhattan 12	50,469	33,226	\$88,458,026	1	9

Community District(s)	SNAP Recipients	SNAP HHs	Estimated Annual SNAP \$	Rank in Borough	Rank in City
Queens 01	22,954	13,505	\$40,231,935	7	34
Queens 02	11,232	6,883	\$19,686,551	12	48
Queens 03	28,594	15,990	\$50,117,276	4	27
Queens 04	28,770	16,185	\$50,425,754	3	25
Queens 05	19,908	11,172	\$34,893,150	8	37
Queens 06	10,423	7,033	\$18,268,601	13	49
Queens 07	26,882	17,235	\$47,116,619	5	29
Queens 08	17,975	10,571	\$31,505,142	10	40
Queens 09	23,222	12,843	\$40,701,664	6	33
Queens 10	16,222	9,520	\$28,432,624	11	44
Queens 11	6,325	4,260	\$11,085,954	14	52
Queens 12	46,178	27,065	\$80,937,104	1	12
Queens 13	19,517	12,222	\$34,207,836	9	38
Queens 14	30,220	16,099	\$52,967,198	2	23
Staten Island 01	39,084	20,284	\$68,503,308	1	14
Staten Island 02	13,754	8,155	\$24,106,911	2	47
Staten Island 03	9,815	6,197	\$17,202,947	3	51

**Table 6.** Food Bank For New York City analysis based on 2016 SNAP enrollment data from the New York City Human Resources Administration and benefits data from the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance.

---

## About Food Bank For New York City

**Food Bank For New York City** has been the city's major hunger-relief organization working to end hunger throughout the five boroughs for more than 30 years. Nearly one in five New Yorkers relies on Food Bank for food and other resources. Food Bank takes a strategic, multifaceted approach that provides meals and builds capacity in the neediest communities, while raising awareness and engagement among all New Yorkers. Through its network of more than 1,000 charities and schools citywide, Food Bank provides food for more than 61 million free meals for New Yorkers in need. Food Bank For New York City's income support services, including food stamps (also known as SNAP) and free tax assistance for the working poor, put more than \$110 million each year into the pockets of New Yorkers, helping them to afford food and achieve greater dignity and independence. Food Bank's nutrition education programs and services empower more than 50,000 children, teens and adults to sustain a healthy diet on a limited budget. Working toward long-term solutions to food poverty, Food Bank develops policy and conducts research to inform community and government efforts.



## Board of Directors

CHAIR, Rev. Henry Belin  
VICE CHAIR, Gloria Pitagorsky  
EXECUTIVE VICE CHAIR, Lary Stromfeld

TREASURER, Arthur J. Stainman  
SECRETARY, John F. Fritts, Esq.

Mario Batali  
Kevin Frisz  
Lauren Bush Lauren  
Katie Lee

Seraina Macia  
Nicholas Poitevin  
Lee Schrager  
Michael Smith

Stanley Tucci  
Rev. Michael Walrond  
Robert Weinmann

**Margarette Purvis**  
President and CEO

**Main Office**  
39 Broadway, 10th Floor  
New York, NY 10006  
t: 212.566.7855  
f: 212.566.1463

**Warehouse/Distribution Center**  
Hunts Point Cooperative Market  
355 Food Center Drive  
Bronx, NY 10474  
t: 718.991.4300  
f: 718.893.3442

**Community Kitchen & Food  
Pantry**  
252 West 116th Street  
New York, NY 10026  
t: 212.566.7855  
f: 212.662.1945



FOODBANKNYC.ORG



FOODBANKNYC



FOODBANK4NYC