



Testimony of

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Oversight – An Update on FoodWorks

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My name is Louise Feld and I am the Senior Policy Associate for Food and Economic Security at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC). CCC is a 70-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe. Thank you to the City Council Committees on Government Operations and Contracts, and to the Committees' Chairwomen Gale Brewer and Darlene Mealy, for holding today's hearing. CCC would also like to thank all of the New York City Council members for their continued commitment to helping our City's children and families access healthy, fresh food. Finally, CCC wishes to express our great appreciation to City Council Speaker Christine Quinn for her comprehensive FoodWorks plan, which has sought to improve New York City's food system from "ground to garbage."

The policy ideas contained in FoodWorks, a number of which have begun to be successfully implemented, are both critical and timely given the number of New Yorkers struggling with poverty, food insecurity and hunger. As the new U.S. Census data released last week show, New York City's overall poverty rate is now 21.2 percent, which means that one in every five New Yorkers lives in poverty.¹ Even more sobering, the child poverty rate in New York City is 31.4 percent, with over 553,000 children living in poverty.² Further, 21.2 percent of New Yorkers – about 1.9 million people – receive SNAP (commonly called "Food Stamps"). Among New York City families with children, 32.2 percent participate in SNAP – representing an over 60 percent increase between 2007 and 2012.³

These sobering statistics indicate a clear and continuing need for a plan such as FoodWorks. Among its many recommendations, FoodWorks includes bold initiatives that aim to make food more affordable for all New Yorkers; to better New Yorkers' health and diets; and to create and support food-related jobs in New York City and the surrounding New York State agricultural region. CCC is hopeful that current and future City leaders will maintain efforts to address food insecurity and continue the FoodWorks initiatives.

CCC is particularly interested in the FoodWorks initiatives that improve children's access to healthy food. Given the upcoming change in Council and Mayoral administrations, we are testifying today about the recommendations we believe are most critical for children and families:

Strengthen the safety net of hunger and nutrition programs

Safety net programs are absolutely vital resources to the large - and still growing - number of New Yorkers who struggle with hunger and food insecurity. Programs such as SNAP and WIC are critical supports that help New Yorkers feed their families and access the nutritious foods children need for healthy growth and development. Moreover, these programs function as economic engines, bringing federal resources to local supermarkets, corner stores, farmers'

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, 2012.

² Id.

³ Id.

markets, and even Green Carts. Research shows that there is \$1.80 of economic activity resulting from every \$1 of SNAP spent. Further, SNAP receipt has been proven to lift a significant number of Americans above the poverty level. To demonstrate SNAP's impact in specific New York City neighborhoods, we have attached to our testimony a map that details how many New Yorkers in each New York City Community District received SNAP in 2011. As this map shows, in some neighborhoods more than 80 percent of households depend on SNAP.⁴

Sadly, SNAP is currently under attack on the federal level. Just last week the U.S. House of Representatives voted to cut \$40 billion of SNAP funding over a ten-year period. In light of this hostile climate towards SNAP, we are so thankful that the Speaker, the Council and the Administration all clearly recognize the undeniable importance of this program for New Yorkers' food security and the local economy.

We hope that the next Administration will continue the current FoodWorks and Council initiatives that have resulted in an increased number of eligible New Yorkers enrolling in the program. For example, we appreciate the Medicaid match, which helped identify thousands of New Yorkers who qualified for SNAP, and the Council support provided to non-profits for SNAP outreach. We also hope to see implementation of other innovative programs that help qualified New Yorkers enroll in and receive SNAP, such as the new FoodWorks initiative that would target outreach, including at VITA tax preparation sites, to immigrant parents with eligible citizen children. Further, we hope that the next Administration and Council will explore creation of similar outreach to WIC-eligible New Yorkers, in order to increase participation in that program. On a related note, we are hopeful that the Council will be considering advocating at the State level for the efficient and expeditious inclusion of WIC on the SNAP EBT card, to make the use of the two programs easier for recipients who are enrolled in both.

Lastly with regard to the safety net, we are pleased that FoodWorks recognizes the beneficial role that farmers' markets and federally-funded food programs play in helping New Yorkers access healthy, local foods. As data from our recent report *From Farm to Table: The Use of Federally-Funded Food Programs at New York City Farmers' Markets* show, use of SNAP, the WIC Fruit & Vegetable check, and the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) in our City's farmers' markets positively impacts both the food security of low-income families and the incomes of regional farmers.

We appreciate that FoodWorks, the Administration, and the Council have enabled and encouraged New Yorkers to use SNAP benefits at our City's farmers' market. The number of New Yorkers who make SNAP purchases at farmers' markets grows substantially each year, as a result of the DOHMH Health Bucks program and the repeated Council distribution of one-year funds to support EBT technology at the markets. Given the positive impact the ability to use SNAP at farmers' markets has on the food security of New Yorkers, the next Administration should ensure that all New York City farmers' markets are equipped with EBT technology, baseline funds to sustain that technology at every market, and continue to support the Health

⁴ Keeping Track Online (2013); <http://data.cccnewyork.org/>.

Bucks program. We also hope, as our report recommends, that the Health Bucks program will be expanded to include a targeted match for WIC Fruit & Vegetable check purchases.

Increase School Meal options and participation

Federally-funded school meal programs represent another critical resource in the fight against childhood hunger and obesity, as they provide children from low-income families with consistent access to nutritionally sound, free or reduced-price meals. About 75 percent of the City’s 1.1 million public school students come from families with incomes low enough to qualify for free or reduced-price school lunches,⁵ and thus school meal programs have the potential to impact the food security of a large number of children. Unfortunately, too many children who could benefit from school meal programs do not participate. A number of these children choose not to eat school meals because they do not want others to label them “poor.”

We applaud FoodWorks for its strong support of school meals. We wish to see the school meals initiatives detailed in FoodWorks – citywide Breakfast in the Classroom, universal free school lunches, and implementation of school dinner for high-need students funded through CACFP’s Afterschool Meals Program – implemented. These programs would destigmatize school meals, make it easier for parents to enroll their children, provide greater options for after-school meals, and ultimately increase the number of children who eat needed healthy food at school. This, in turn, would have a positive impact on children’s health and well-being, as well as their academic achievement. To achieve these goals, we hope that the next Administration will:

- Expand the Breakfast-in-Classroom program (BIC) citywide

According to the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), New York City’s school breakfast participation rates are repeatedly the poorest among 26 major U.S. cities, despite the fact that breakfast is free for all our City’s public school children. CCC shares the belief expressed in FoodWorks that the City should establish BIC in all New York City schools in order to ensure that more children have access to a healthy breakfast. In our 2012 report entitled *The School Breakfast Program in New York City Public Schools: Results from a Parent Survey Concerning Student Participation*, CCC recommended that the BIC program, which provides breakfast in children’s classrooms at the start of the school day, be mandated in all classrooms citywide.

BIC is the best way to increase children’s participation in school breakfast, as it helps to reduce the barriers that otherwise prevent students from eating breakfast at school. For example, BIC eliminates the stigma some children associate with receiving a free meal in the cafeteria prior to the beginning of the school day. BIC also decreases parents’ stress, because they would otherwise have to rush their children to school early in the morning, before the school day begins, in order to guarantee that their children eat breakfast in the school cafeteria. Because BIC helps diminish these obstacles, it results in more children actually eating breakfast, which is critical to their healthy development and ability to

⁵ Children from families at 130 percent of the federal poverty level qualify for free school meals, while children from families at 185 percent of the federal poverty level qualify for reduced-price meals.

achieve academically. We therefore hope to see this FoodWorks priority implemented citywide.

- Expand Universal School Meals lunch program

Although the participation rates for school lunch are higher than for school breakfast, they are still low. More than 400,000 New York City public school children do not participate in school lunch, despite the fact that a large number of them are from families with incomes low enough to qualify them for free or reduced-price meals. Also as with breakfast, fear of being stigmatized prevents many children, especially teens, from participating. In addition, the current administration of the school lunch program is burdensome to parents and school staff; most parents must, each year, fill out an application that requires the disclosure of personal financial information, while school staff must, each day, determine which students do and do not have to pay for their meals.

FoodWorks recommends that the New York City Department of Education take advantage of federal options that permit all students to eat lunch for free, every day, regardless of income eligibility and without parent-submitted applications. We agree, and believe that establishing citywide, universal free school lunches would help feed students, many of whom do not have consistent access to the healthy food they need to grow and learn. We hope that the next Administration includes in the City's budget the \$20 million of City funding needed to implement universal school lunches citywide. This investment will raise participation, which will in turn increase - by a projected \$59 million - the amount of federal and state reimbursement money the City will receive for serving more meals.

- Continue to implement menu improvements

We appreciate that the City has acted to improve the quality of meals served in New York City's public schools. The growth in the number of schools that have salad bars, detailed in FoodWorks, represents one such effort. However, as FoodWorks recognizes, further attempts to institute menu improvements, and ultimately serve higher quality meals, may be challenging, or even impossible, in schools lacking sufficient kitchen equipment. We therefore urge current and future City leaders to determine which school kitchen facilities must be upgraded, and include funding for such improvements in the Department of Education's Capital Budget.

- Support nutrition education and school gardens

School food is not simply about the meals served to students, but also encompasses nutrition and agricultural education. The Council has funded several garden education initiatives, mentioned in FoodWorks, that teach New York City students about where their food comes. These school gardens, as well as nutrition education programs, help children learn about healthy meals and their larger environment. They are therefore vital components of children's education that should be supported and promoted.

In a discussion of food eaten in school settings, we would be remiss not to mention the importance of CACFP. CACFP provides meals, snacks and nutrition education, not just in the after-school programs, but in child care settings as well. We urge current and future decision-makers to support and utilize this crucial resource.

Expand fresh food retail in underserved areas of the City and strengthen local food supply

FoodWorks includes a multitude of ideas to bring food into “food deserts” - communities where residents have limited access to healthy, affordable food. We support the FoodWorks initiatives that aim to increase the presence of healthy and fresh food retail outlets in underserved communities. For example, CCC has long supported the Green Carts program, advocating for its establishment and then producing a report about the first year of its implementation. We are pleased the number of Green Carts equipped with EBT technology has grown, and hope that the City will explore ways to help Green Cart vendors serve New Yorkers year-round, including through partnerships with CBOs and other agencies, so that vendors can be housed indoors and continue to work and serve their communities during inclement winter months.

Further, CCC also advocated for FRESH at its inception, and we are so pleased that already 16 new and expanding grocery stores have been approved. We agree that the next Administration should build upon and learn from the program’s successes, using it to upgrade outdated infrastructure at grocery stores in neighborhoods that lack sufficient fresh food retailers. Such upgrades should include efforts to ensure that these retailers, including and especially smaller stores and bodegas, have the capacity to obtain and refrigerate fresh produce, fish, and meats. We also hope that the City will consider additional grants or incentives that would encourage food retailers to improve or further develop their outlets in underserved neighborhoods.

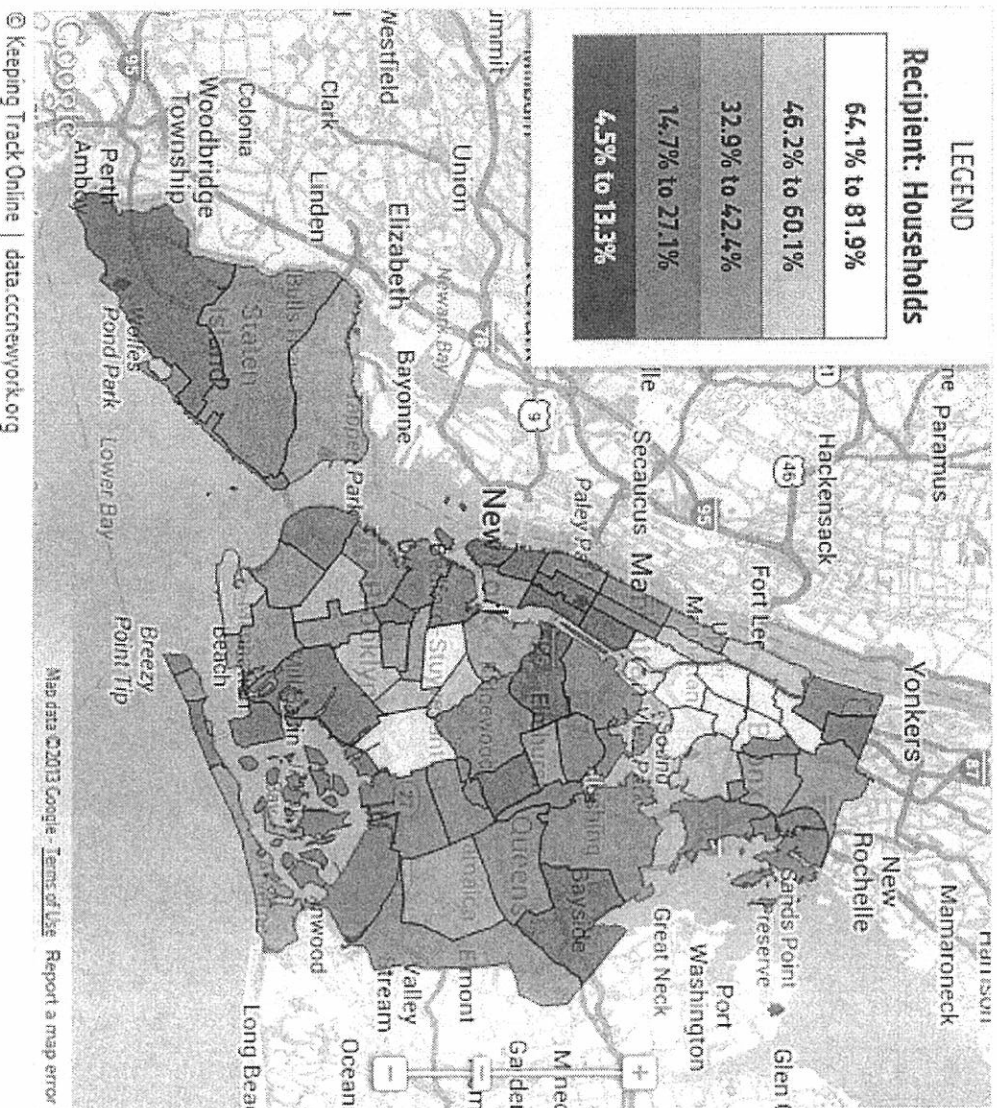
Finally, while we appreciate the potential that FRESH presents for food access in neighborhoods throughout the City, we must also recognize that not every retailer can leverage FRESH, especially during challenging economic times. We therefore urge current and future City decision makers to think creatively about how to assist smaller retailers in both acquiring fresh produce, including exploration of bulk or cooperative purchasing arrangements for groups of small stores, and negotiating the Hunts Point market. We also urge the City to explore not only how to get food into underserved neighborhoods, but also how to get residents from underserved neighborhoods to outlets that sell affordable food. For example, we would like to see the exploration of expanded use of bus services linking NYCHA residents and other community members in neighborhoods that are hard to reach via public transportation with food retail outlets, or increased use of mobile markets.

In sum, an increasing number of New York City families are facing ever-growing challenges in their attempts to feed their children the nutritious and affordable meals necessary for healthy growth and development. Continuation, and in some cases implementation, of many of the FoodWorks policies is clearly needed to increase New York families’ food security and improve

their health. CCC is grateful for the Speaker and the Council's diligent work to increase all New Yorkers' access to healthy, affordable foods.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.

Percent of Households Receiving SNAP by Community District, 2011



New York City

Recipient: Households

33.2%
IN 2011



Recipient
Percent; 2011

Change since
2009

Category	2011	Change since 2009
Individuals	22.2%	3.1%
Households	33.2%	4.8%

Source: New York City Human Resources Administration, *District Resource Statement Fiscal and Service Reports* (Fiscal Years 2002 and 2003, Fiscal Years 2005 and 2006, Fiscal Years 2006 and 2007, Fiscal Years 2007 and 2008, Fiscal Years 2009 and 2010, Fiscal Years 2011 and 2012); retrieved from <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/html/statistics/statistics.shtml>.