

Food Access

Overview

Disparities in accessing affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food in Baltimore reflect the City's uneven distribution of resources, history of segregation, limited access to opportunities, and other structural and systemic barriers. These disparities are influenced by multiple factors such as socioeconomic conditions and geographic locations.

Local government has a limited role to play in the quantity and location of grocery stores. Grocery stores, like all other stores, are private businesses and make market decisions about where to locate. Baltimore City provides incentives for grocery stores and assists with site assembly and zoning.

In 2021, a Maryland Food Bank survey found that 33% of residents said they were food insecure. This number increased from 27% in 2017. Data also showed that food insecurity among all respondent groups has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lack of access to nutritious foods

Baltimore's BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) residents have experienced uneven distribution of resources and racist policies. Today, many of Baltimore's Black neighborhoods, the "Black Butterfly", are also Healthy Food Priority Areas, meaning they lack access to nutritious foods.

What are food systems?

Food systems include the food we consume, as well as how food is produced, transported, sold, recovered, and disposed of. Food systems also include the policies, goals, and values that accompany each step of the process. While urban food systems rely on food produced around the world, there are many opportunities to influence what happens within a city.

Cities are playing an increasing role in supporting healthy, sustainable, and equitable food systems. Some residents seek access to land and resources to grow their food, while others seek to influence decisions about what food retail is available to them, their ability to nourish their household members with healthy and culturally appropriate food, and to secure resources to maintain food security.

Persistent disinvestment has compromised the ability of many neighborhoods to access these opportunities and achieve these goals. When community members are in a position to define what they need from the food system it builds power; and when institutions listen and respond to these needs, a more equitable system can be achieved.

There are also economic disparities that impact residents' ability to purchase nutritious and culturally appropriate foods. Many low-income communities face barriers to accessing and buying food. They may have to rely on more affordable and less nutritious options. Community divestment and policy issues also contribute to a lack of food access. This can be in the form of lack of financial investment to support grocery stores or limited or unreliable public transportation making it difficult for those without a vehicle to travel to food retail stores. Zoning and land use policies also impact the availability of healthy food. Some neighborhoods have more fast-food retailers, convenience stores, dollar stores, and drive-throughs that sell minimal or no fresh produce or other nutritious options because the zoning code does not restrict them outright, or the total number located in a particular area.

Engaging communities and residents

Baltimore City's long-standing food environment analysis, paired with resident feedback, provides insight into the food environment. It highlights where vulnerable populations are concentrated, the barriers residents face in accessing healthy food, and how this changed and was exacerbated by the pandemic.



Farm Alliance Black Butterfly Teaching Farm in Farring-Baybrook Park.

Low community engagement and participation can impact residents' ability to advocate for change in the food system. Engaging community members in decision-making is critical for addressing disparities. Resident Food Equity Advisors (RFEAs) are one way that Baltimore City has engaged the community to advocate for changes to create a more equitable system.

Building food system resilience

Growing food is a form of resilience and emergency response during a pandemic when so many have faced food insecurity or have been cut off from typical sources of fresh food. Urban agriculture and Black-led urban farms provide alternative healthy food options to communities while activating underused green spaces and vacant lots.

Ownership is key to getting community buy-in on urban agriculture. Without some form of ownership, there is the constant threat that the land will be taken away. Providing financial resources and support to BIPOC-led urban farms empowers communities and supports community resiliency.

Understanding the Food System

Production

Food production includes the growing, raising, and harvesting of fruits and vegetables, grains, animals, and other raw materials for food. Baltimore has diverse food production methods, however, the majority of farming in the region occurs outside of Baltimore.

Processing

Food processing is the transforming of raw ingredients, such as the milling of grain into flour. Processing facilities play a crucial role in Baltimore in getting food from producers to consumers. Often these facilities sort and package food as well as transport food items to distribution centers or retail.

Distribution

Food distribution refers to the storage, transport, and delivery of any food product from one place to another. Roads are the main mode of transportation; however, food products may be transported via railways, water, or air.

Retail

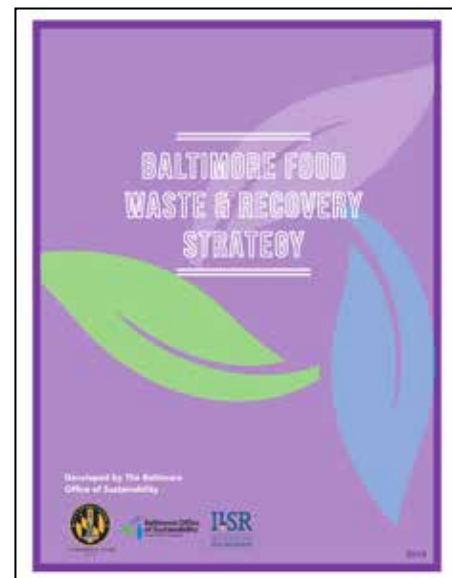
Food retail involves the sale and distribution of food products to consumers. In Baltimore, food retail includes various options, including grocery stores and supermarkets, small grocery and corner stores, convenience stores, public markets, farmers markets, farm stands, food banks and pantries, and restaurants.

Consumption

Food access and consumption varies across neighborhoods throughout Baltimore. Due to redlining and an historic lack of investment in Baltimore's Black communities, neighborhoods have varying degrees of access to affordable healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables.



Baltimore's Food System.



Food Waste Management

How food waste and packaging are handled is important to the resiliency and sustainability of the food system. Food waste can occur at various phases within the food system, from production to consumption.

Current Efforts

Improving Nutritional Security, Food Access, and Food Equity in Baltimore City During and After COVID-19 (\$11+ million)

This American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funded project aims to shift Baltimore's reliance away from emergency food assistance, and instead support local and regional food procurement and production. In support of these efforts, it has allowed us to continue produce box distributions to ensure residents have consistent access to fresh fruits and vegetables. It has supported increased Online Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation to address inequitable access to home-delivered groceries. The funding from this work has also helped expand nutrition incentives offered at farmers markets and funded an individualized Food Rx (food is medicine) program at MedStar Harbor Hospital. The funding is also helping to train the next generation of BIPOC growers through a farm incubator program run by the Farm Alliance of Baltimore.

Food Policy Action Coalition

Established in 2010, Food Policy Action Coalition (PAC) members work actively to improve food access and Baltimore's food system. It has grown from 18 to over 600 members representing nonprofits, universities, farms, businesses, hospitals, and residents to provide opportunities for collaboration and idea-sharing.

Food PAC Goals

1. Food PAC members identify and inform DOP's Food Policy and Planning Division of food policy barriers to collectively address the policy issues from an organizational, City, State, or federal level.
2. The Food Policy and Planning Division informs Food PAC members on City, State, and federal policy implications that impact Baltimore's food environment.
3. Food PAC members collaborate to increase knowledge and break down silos to be more effective in addressing food access and improving the food system.

Resident Food Equity Advisors

The Food Policy and Planning Division created the Resident Food Equity Advisors (RFEA) program in 2017. RFEAs are cohorts of Baltimore City residents who represent

community organizations, urban farmers, restaurant owners, corner store employees, public housing sites, and other collaborators. The program was launched to drive equitable food policies through an inclusive, collaborative process. RFEAs' input is used to create a set of policy recommendations. Their recommendations led the City Council to pass an approximately \$150,000 annual appropriation for the Healthy Food Priority Area Funds, which support resident-driven projects in Healthy Food Priority Areas.

Related Plans

- [COVID-19 Emergency Food Response Report](#)
- [Food Systems & Urban Agriculture - The Sustainability Plan](#)
- [Baltimore City's Food Environment: 2018 Report](#)
- [COVID-19 Food Environment Brief - Nov 2020](#)
- [ARPA Proposal Overview: Improving Nutritional Security, Food Access, and Food Equity in Baltimore City During and After COVID-19](#)



Resident Food Equity Advisors 2023 Cohort.

Goals & Measures

Goal 1 Increase accessibility of healthy and culturally appropriate foods, particularly in areas of high food insecurity.

This can be achieved through policy and funding that supports initiatives and efforts related to addressing health, economic, and environmental disparities. These could include efforts to expand access and use of programs like SNAP and WIC, supporting formal Food is Medicine legislation, partnering with community organizations on alternative modes of food.

Goal 2 Engage residents in food systems education and support community-led work, particularly for urban farmers, families with young children, and older adults.

This can be achieved by more regularly engaging with residents around food systems to develop new policies and processes, increasing opportunities for urban agriculture, partnering with Baltimore City Public School Food and Nutrition team to educate youth and families, connecting existing and prospective urban farmers with educational and training opportunities, supporting existing organizations that engage in food systems and food

sovereignty work, and promote mobile nutrition clinics and food workshops. access, investing in local food growing and storage solutions, and passing a Staple Foods Ordinance.

Goal 3 Increase opportunities for urban agriculture to facilitate access to fresh, healthy, and culturally appropriate foods for historically disinvested neighborhoods.

This can be achieved by supporting existing and prospective urban farmers through securing land tenure for existing urban farms, reducing barriers to urban farming, providing more contracting opportunities to sell produce and goods through City institutions and local food businesses, and facilitating connections between urban farmers. The City can further support these efforts by allowing City-owned vacant lots to be used for agriculture, providing soil testing and water infrastructure, creating government positions to support urban agriculture, developing a food hub in partnership with Baltimore Public Markets, and investing in existing organizations that support urban agriculture.

Goal 4 Provide economic supports to help grow local food businesses and develop the local food economy, with an intentional focus on minority and women-owned businesses as well as those led by other underrepresented identities.






This can be achieved by establishing local food cooperatives, expanding the procurement and sale of local produce, streamlining processes and regulations for small food businesses, partnering with MOED and other agencies and organizations to create food career pathways, and providing technical assistance to local cooperatives and urban farmers.













Highlighted measures











MEASURE	DIRECTION	AGENCY SOURCE
% of city population utilizing SNAP		DOP
Number of residents living in Healthy Food Priority Areas	↓	DOP
Sources: Mayor’s Action Plan for Baltimore and Baltimore Sustainability Plan.		

FOOD ACCESS



Goal 1. Increase accessibility of healthy and culturally appropriate foods, particularly in areas of high food insecurity.

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|------|---|---|
| 1.01 | Support technical assistance for corner store owners providing healthy foods and accepting benefits like SNAP and SNAP for Women Infants, and Children (WIC). #EquityFramework |  |
| 1.02 | Increase awareness and usage of online SNAP to improve resident access to food options, particularly in Healthy Food Priority Areas. #EquityFramework #DigitalEquity |  |
| 1.03 | Provide training and support to residents on how to use online SNAP and other online food services/supports. |  |
| 1.04 | Partner with organizations that provide technical assistance to small grocers to provide online grocery shopping and accepting online SNAP and e-WIC. #EquityFramework #DigitalEquity |  |
| 1.05 | Pursue federal and state action to expand and improve SNAP and other food benefits. |  |

#	RECOMMENDATION	TYPE
1.06	Pursue federal and state legislation change to expand access to food-is-medicine programs.	
1.07	Support and fund alternative modes of food access, such as mobile food pantries, with a focus on fresh produce. #Equity-Framework #EquitableDevelopment	
1.08	Fund cold storage for community organizations and residents in Healthy Food Priority Areas. #EquityFramework #EquitableDevelopment	
1.09	Pursue a Staple Foods Ordinance for licensed grocery stores (including corner stores, gas stations, dollar stores, and pharmacies) to ensure that everyone has access to healthy foods no matter where they shop. Pair this with increased funding for inspections to increase compliance. #EquityFramework	
1.10	Ensure every hospital in Baltimore City offers a food is medicine program.	
Goal 2. Engage residents in food systems education and support community-led work, particularly for urban farmers, families with young children, and older adults.		
2.01	Engage residents in policy creation through Resident Food Equity Advisors program and support community-led processes that seek to build greater food sovereignty, and participation in, and control of, the local food system. #EquityFramework	
2.02	Develop strategies for encouraging community participation in urban agriculture projects and the purchase of local farm products. #EquityFramework #SmallBusiness	
2.03	Partner with Baltimore City Public Schools' (BCPS) Food and Nutrition team for engagement and outreach to provide food and nutrition education in schools. #EquityFramework	
2.04	Promote residents' familiarity with culturally appropriate nutrition and growing, storing, preparing, consuming, and properly disposing of food, with a focus on fruits and vegetables.	
2.05	Connect urban farmers to education and training opportunities. #SmallBusiness #WorkforceDevelopment	
2.06	Continue building a diverse network of collaborators and residents to improve food access in Baltimore. #EquityFramework	
2.07	Support organizations that provide nutrition education and educate residents on food apartheid history. #EquityFramework	

#	RECOMMENDATION	TYPE
2.08	Update existing food assistance databases (for example, CHARMcare) and increase public awareness on how to access them. #DigitalEquity	
2.09	Leverage existing commercial kitchens in neighborhoods to provide classes for food preparation, including canning and food preservation. #EquityFramework #EquitableDevelopment	
2.10	Partner with City and state correctional institutions to bring healthy food programming into correctional facilities.	
Goal 3. Increase opportunities for urban agriculture to facilitate access to fresh, healthy, and culturally appropriate foods for historically disinvested neighborhoods.		
3.01	Protect and support existing urban farms and community gardens by securing land tenure through long-term leases or purchase of property. #EquitableDevelopment	
3.02	Make City-owned vacant lots available to purchase for urban agriculture. #EquitableDevelopment #VacantHousing	
3.03	Reduce barriers to urban farming, especially for new BIPOC farmers. #EquityFramework #EquitableDevelopment	
3.04	Create food forests on City-owned land, including parkland and vacant lots. #OpenSpace #Placemaking #Trees #VacantHousing	
3.05	Create paid positions within City government to directly support urban agriculture. #WorkforceDevelopment	
3.06	Establish a fund for soil testing and water infrastructure for urban farms and community gardens. #EnvironmentalJustice	
3.07	Continue to support the Farm Alliance of Baltimore through land tenure and funding as they train the next generation of BIPOC farmers at the Black Butterfly Teaching Farm in Farring-Baybrook Park. #WorkforceDevelopment #SmallBusiness	
3.08	Study the viability of a food hub, in partnership with Baltimore Public Markets, that expands access to cold storage, processing space, and preparation capacity for local farmers and producers. #EquitableDevelopment	

#	RECOMMENDATION	TYPE
3.09	Support aggregation and facilitate contract growing opportunities for urban farms so they can sell their products to regional wholesale food distributors and institutions such as school districts, health systems, and universities. This allows urban farms to increase their income, acreage, workforce development, and their commitment to increase healthy food access across Baltimore City. #SmallBusiness #WorkforceDevelopment	
3.10	Support the expansion of community-controlled land trusts and co-operatives to give low-income neighborhoods control of their food production. #EquitableDevelopment	
3.11	Create a centralized database of urban farms and community gardens so growers can connect and share skills, expertise, and equipment. #WorkforceDevelopment	
3.12	Provide long-term land tenure for all existing urban farms and community gardens, with a minimum of 15 years if leasing. #EquitableDevelopment #SmallBusiness	
<p>Goal 4. Provide economic supports to help grow local food businesses and develop the local food economy, with an intentional focus on minority and women-owned businesses as well as those led by other underrepresented identities.</p>		
4.01	Support the establishment of food cooperatives that are owned and operated by the community. #EquitableDevelopment	
4.02	Expand procurement and sale of locally grown produce. #SmallBusiness	
4.03	Support the creation and expansion of career pathways in the food sector. #WorkforceDevelopment	
4.04	Streamline regulations to support small food businesses. #SmallBusiness	
4.05	Improve healthy food access by focusing on locally sourced produce at Baltimore Public Markets. #SmallBusiness	
4.06	Increase local food sourcing for food businesses, schools, City agencies, and institutions through contract growing partnerships with local urban farms. #SmallBusiness	
4.07	Fund and provide technical assistance for community-owned cooperatives. #EquitableDevelopment #SmallBusiness	

#	RECOMMENDATION	TYPE
4.08	Increase funding for operations and marketing of farmers' markets and the Maryland Market Money nutrition incentives program. #EquitableDevelopment #SmallBusiness #Regional	
4.09	Increase food recovery as a means to build community empowerment, resilience, and workforce skills, while decreasing food waste and food insecurity. #EnvironmentalJustice #EquitableDevelopment #WorkforceDevelopment	
4.10	Establish at least one community-owned food cooperative in each region of Baltimore.	