

Strategy to Improve Nutritional Security and Minimize Hunger

City of Baltimore
COVID-19 Emergency Food Response



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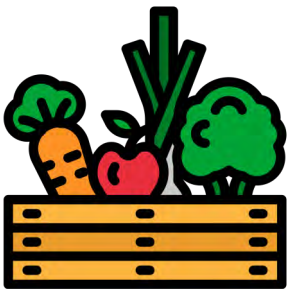
OVERVIEW

In response to the 2019 novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the City of Baltimore developed a comprehensive Emergency Food Strategy involving City agencies and critical nonprofit, business, and community partners. Due to the existing planning efforts and fundamentals already in place, the City was able to design a multipronged emergency food security response based on four key pillars:

- (1) protect and maximize federal nutrition benefits and provide emergency assistance;
- (2) distribute meals;
- (3) distribute food boxes;
- and (4) build food system resilience through urban agriculture.

This document will summarize the evolution of the City's efforts from March 2020 to March 2021 to use food distribution as a means to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 and prevent escalating food insecurity due to the pandemic. This report reflects on the first year of the response, while most of the strategies continue as the response is ongoing.

A YEAR IN REVIEW: MARCH 2020 TO MARCH 2021



731,000 food boxes distributed. Over \$20 million in City, State, and Federal food resources flowing to residents for free, 75% being highly-sought fresh produce and perishable meat and dairy products to support nutritional security.



13.6 million meals served: 10.2 million to youth, 2.2 million to older adults, and 850,000 for the general public.



Urban Agriculture
Funding urban agriculture projects through Healthy Food Priority Area funds (\$82,000).

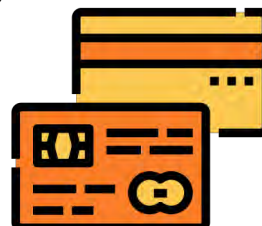


Partners
12 City agencies, 150+ partners, 300 sites

Funds Leveraged -
\$66 million in City, State, Federal, private, and philanthropic dollars dedicated to improving food



\$400 emergency assistance cards available spring 2021 to 15,000 households who are less likely to qualify or apply for SNAP.



Federal Nutrition Benefits
SNAP provided \$405.8 million to Baltimore City residents. Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 4 Baltimoreans were on SNAP. In February 2021 and March 2021, almost 1 in 3, or nearly 200,000 residents were on SNAP.



FOOD POLICY AND PLANNING

The Food Policy and Planning Division (FPP) of the Department of Planning oversees the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative (BFPI). BFPI’s three tiers encompass government, organizations, and residents via an interagency collaboration across Baltimore City agencies, the Food Policy Action Coalition (Food PAC), and Resident Food Equity Advisors. With a structure already in place, staff were able to mobilize and focus primarily on the COVID-19 response.

During COVID-19, the Food Policy Director and team of Food Planners: 1) lead the strategic planning for the food security response; 2) conduct mapping and data analysis; 3) oversee the produce, grocery, and mixed box strategies and implementation, including logistics, funding, community outreach, and site expansion; 4) coordinate with the Emergency Operations Center and state and federal agencies; 5) leverage significant public and private funds for food and transportation; 6) expedited Online SNAP and prevented 15,000 residents from losing SNAP; 7) convene Resident Food Equity Advisors and Food PAC; 8) and support urban agriculture and local food system resilience.

The Emergency Food Response is an excellent example of mobilizing interagency collaboration to develop and implement the Response.



**See next page for all agencies*

In addition, FPP coordinates Food PAC, a group of 75+ organizations and individuals working on food, including those directly involved in feeding and those with support roles such as signing residents up for SNAP. During the pandemic, Food PAC has served as a virtual convening space for organizations to meet; share information, resources, and community needs; and provide the Food Policy Director with a high-level view of all feeding activities in order to prevent over-saturation and assess geographic or population gaps.

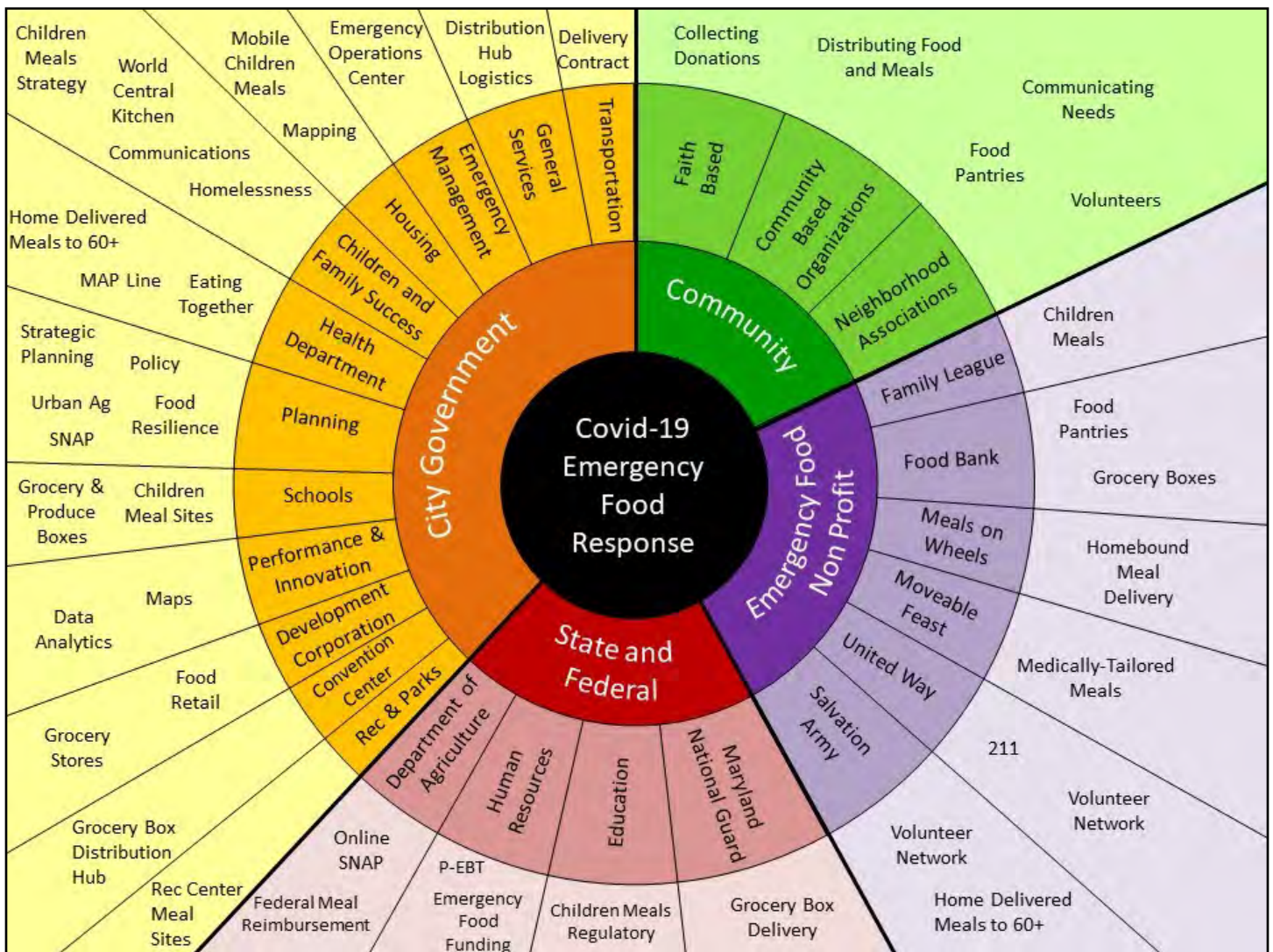
FPP also works with the Resident Food Equity Advisors (RFEA) to collectively drive equitable food policies through an inclusive, resident-led process. Advisors apply and are paid for their time. During the pandemic, FPP met virtually with the RFEA to gather input to direct parts of the Emergency Food Response.



EMERGENCY FOOD PREPAREDNESS

In response to the 2015 Uprising, the City convened an Emergency Food Working Group to create a *Plan for Food Access in Incidents and Disasters*, and has coordinated feeding responses during minor emergencies such as snow events that close schools for multiple days at a time. As warning signs of the pandemic emerged, FPP convened Emergency Food Working Group members to discuss readiness and potential COVID-19 plans. When Maryland declared a state of

emergency, FPP hosted partners on daily calls for the first month to create coordinated plans, prevent duplication, and assess remaining gaps. Due to this history of communication and collaboration, feeding agencies were poised and ready to respond and adapt feeding programs based on various pandemic waivers. As plans began to solidify, calls and convenings were dialed back to weekly, but ongoing communication has remained key.





EMERGENCY FOOD PREPAREDNESS



The FPP team played a role in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and was granted access to WebEOC, the online platform for information sharing and resource requests. This is how requests were made to MEMA for resources early in the pandemic, and meal and food updates were entered into WebEOC for inclusion in the daily, then weekly, Situational Reports issued by MOEM.



The existing social networks FPP has cultivated and participates in - the Emergency Food Working Group, Food PAC, and others - allowed partners across Baltimore to build from shared knowledge and existing social infrastructure to mobilize immediately. These social and professional networks grew significantly over the course of the pandemic and expanded to include partners who had never provided food previously, but have since incorporated food into the missions of their organizations.

City Government Prioritizing Food Insecurity: Because food access and nutrition insecurity are pressing issues in Baltimore, and FPP staff were able to escalate the issue early on, the City understood the need to prioritize food in the COVID-19 response. This led to early acknowledgement of the link between food insecurity and health risks for COVID -19, as well as earlier access to resources and funding streams.



FOOD DISTRIBUTION AS A STRATEGY TO MITIGATE COVID-19 TRANSMISSION



Based on the unmet needs of vulnerable populations and the characteristics of Baltimore’s food environment, the City developed its feeding strategy to directly provide resources through meal and food box distribution. The public distribution model was developed based on the CDC¹ and BCHD² guidance as a way to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 caused by residents moving around the city for food, and to prevent food insecurity as a risk factor for contracting and experiencing severe symptoms of COVID-19. The strategy relied on the following best practices:

- **Neighborhood-Level Distribution:** By providing meals and food boxes at approximately 100 sites at any given time across the city, Baltimore made it easier for residents to stay within their neighborhood to get high quality food, eliminating some of the need to use public transportation or shared rides for food, and reducing shoppers in supermarkets. In other parts of the country, food banks and jurisdictions set up large-scale drive through models where residents could pop their trunks and have a box of food placed inside. This model was not viable in Baltimore because 30% of residents do not have access to personal vehicles.³ Therefore, a decentralized network had to be created.

1 Considerations for Food Pantries and Food Distribution Sites. (n.d.). Retrieved January 09, 2021, from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/food-pantries.html>

2 COVID-19 Food Handling Guidelines for Food Pantries, and Non-profit Food Distribution Sites. (2020, May 13). <https://coronavirus.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/COVID->

3 1 in 4 Baltimore Residents Live in a Food Desert. (n.d.). Retrieved January 06, 2021, from <https://clf.jhsph.edu/about-us/news/news-2015/1-4-baltimore-residents-live-food-desert>



FOOD DISTRIBUTION AS A STRATEGY TO MITIGATE COVID-19 TRANSMISSION



- **Distribution Network to Increase Stability:** Creating a diffused network of many small sites allowed fewer people to use each site, thereby reducing risk for staff, volunteers, and recipients. Further, any temporary closures due to COVID-19 exposure or other reasons had less impact than if the City were reliant on mass distributions.
- **Outdoor Distributions:** All distributions occurred outdoors and site workers were provided with personal protective equipment (PPE), sanitizer, and guidance on how to maintain social distancing.
- **Home Delivery:** Boxes continue to be available for home delivery to older adults and anyone medically, socially, or economically impacted by COVID-19, including those quarantining, in order to keep high-risk populations at home.



Supply Chain: The onset of the pandemic saw significant disruptions of the supply chain so that many food products were not available at the grocery store or to food banks and food assistance organizations. This disruption served as one of the major red flags that the City would have to become actively involved in the procurement of food during the pandemic.



FOOD DISTRIBUTION AS A STRATEGY TO MITIGATE COVID-19 TRANSMISSION



- **Food for Multiple Days:** The CDC encouraged feeding providers to give resources for multiple days so that residents did not have to go out as frequently.⁴ Most meal sites were able to give between two and seven days worth of meals at a time. Grocery boxes were estimated to offer enough shelf-stable food for a family of four for a week; produce boxes offered enough produce for a family of four for a week; and mixed boxes offered enough dairy and meat for a family of four for a week, plus produce.
- **Produce and Perishable:** Perishable products, especially produce, were less available at corner and convenience stores and some low-income supermarkets even before the pandemic. Providing these highly sought after products for free reduced the need for residents to travel to supermarkets outside of their neighborhood, and made produce more available for populations with diet-related disease.

⁴ Considerations for Food Pantries and Food Distribution Sites. (n.d.). Retrieved January 09, 2021, from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/food-pantries.html>



IDENTIFYING VULNERABLE POPULATIONS



HOW FEMA DEFINES ELIGIBLE VULNERABLE POPULATIONS FOR FEEDING ACTIVITIES

FEMA Policy 104-010-03, Section B 2 (d) Work Eligibility, states, “Populations in an impacted community that may need the provision of food as a life-saving and life-sustaining commodity may include:

1. *Those who test positive for COVID-19 or have been exposed to COVID-19, but who do not require hospitalization.*
2. *High-risk individuals, such as people over 65 or with certain underlying health conditions, and*
3. *Other populations based on the direction or guidance of the appropriate public health official.”*

Feeding America estimates that food insecurity has risen from 18% to 21.7% in Baltimore City as a direct result of COVID-19, and the child food insecurity rate is projected to be 33%.⁵ The pandemic has caused extreme hardship for people that were more likely to face food insecurity before COVID-19.⁶ However, it is also the first time that more than 40% of Americans experienced food insecurity.⁷ Food insecure residents may be more susceptible to contracting COVID-19,^{8,9} making this a public health crisis in many respects.

The City includes food insecure residents as high-risk individuals for feeding operations. This is based on guidance from the Health Commissioner of Baltimore City stating that food insecure populations are more vulnerable to COVID-19, and that safe food distribution is a health-promoting strategy to mitigate community transmission of COVID-19.

5 <https://www.feedingamericaaction.org/the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-food-insecurity/>

6 https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/National%20Projections%20Brief_3.9.2021_0.pdf

7 <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/11/19/covid-pandemic-first-time-many-americans-experienced-food-insecurity.html>

8 Naja, F., & Hamadeh, R. (2020). Nutrition amid the COVID-19 pandemic: A multi-level framework for action. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 74(8), 1117-1121. doi:10.1038/s41430-020-0634-3

9 Goger, A. (2020, June 17). For millions of low-income seniors, coronavirus is a food-security issue. Retrieved December 23, 2020, from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/03/16/for-millions-of-low-income-seniors-coronavirus-is-a-food-security-issue/>



IDENTIFYING VULNERABLE POPULATIONS



Food insecurity plays a prominent role in underlying health conditions, including but not limited to some types of cancer, chronic kidney disease, heart conditions, type-2 diabetes, and diet-related diseases that have been deemed as high-risk factors for COVID-19 infection and severity by the CDC.¹⁰ In consideration of these statistics, and given Baltimore’s food environment, without providing additional food resources during the course of the pandemic, people experiencing food insecurity would have faced critical food shortages in addition to increased travel around the city, which would have further contributed to community spread of COVID-19.

FEMA REIMBURSEMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic is designated a federal emergency. Through the Stafford Act, local governments are given the authority to conduct feeding activities to provide for food needs caused directly by the emergency. As such, some of these feeding activities are eligible for reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Jurisdictions are instructed to use all other federal feeding resources first, which is why Baltimore relied heavily on federal meal programs for children and older adults and the Farmers to Families food boxes, and encouraged residents to apply for SNAP and utilize P-EBT (see sections below). However, gaps still remained as federal and state resources ebbed and flowed, and the food box programs for distribution and home delivery helped fill those gaps. Each month, the City submitted a letter to the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), which submitted to FEMA to keep the agencies abreast of the feeding work occurring in Baltimore City.

The City received 100% FEMA reimbursement for all food box distributions through March 2021, a total of \$14.7 million.

¹⁰ Certain Medical Conditions and Risk for Severe COVID-19 Illness. (n.d.). Retrieved January 06, 2021, from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>



BALTIMORE'S FOOD ENVIRONMENT AND COVID-19

The FPP Division has mapped and analyzed Baltimore's food environment since 2012 and uses this data to create City-issued food environment maps^{11,12} to inform analyses and plans. In Baltimore, food deserts are now called Healthy Food Priority Areas (HFPAs). HFPAs are based on four factors: proximity to a supermarket, vehicle ownership, income, and availability of healthy food at all food outlets in a given Census Block Group.

Shopping for food is an inherently risky behavior during the pandemic, increasing the potential for community transmission, especially for food insecure residents in HFPAs. There are many characteristics of the food environment that impact the spread of COVID-19 as residents move about the city to find the food they want and need. Baltimoreans of all income levels do not shop at the store closest to their homes, and regularly shop at two to three stores.¹³



11 Baltimore City's Food Environment Report: 2018 Report. (n.d.). <https://clf.jhsph.edu/sites/default/files/2019-01/baltimore-city-food-environment-2018-report.pdf>

12 Food Policy & Planning. (2021, January 13). from <https://planning.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/City%20Covid%20Map%20Brief%20November%20FINAL%2011.20%20v2.pdf>

13 MorganStateU. (n.d.). Understanding Access to Grocery Stores in Food Deserts in Baltimore City. Retrieved January 08, 2021, from https://www.morgan.edu/school_of_engineering/research_centers/urban_mobility_and_equity_center/research/completed_research/food_deserts.html



BALTIMORE'S FOOD ENVIRONMENT AND COVID-19



Given that one third of Baltimoreans do not have access to a personal vehicle¹⁴ and most Baltimore neighborhoods do not have nearby supermarkets,¹⁵ residents must travel to get food and often use public transit. The 500+ corner and convenience stores across the city provide neighborhood level access, but generally lack healthy perishable foods,¹⁶ and their small size and cramped layout makes it difficult for patrons to practice social distancing. Online shopping and curbside pick-up are encouraged by the CDC.¹⁷ However, only three retailers in Maryland were approved to accept SNAP benefits online during most of the pandemic, and residents cited lack of pick-up and delivery windows and elevated prices online compared to in-store for certain products.¹⁸

Baltimore's long-standing food environment analysis, paired with resident feedback mechanisms, provided insight into the food environment, where vulnerable populations are concentrated, the barriers residents face in accessing healthy food, and how this all has changed and been exacerbated during the pandemic.

¹⁴ 1 in 4 Baltimore Residents Live in a Food Desert. (n.d.). <https://clf.jhsph.edu/about-us/news/news-2015/1-4-baltimore-residents-live-food-deser>

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Baltimore City's Food Environment Report: 2018 Report. (n.d.). <https://clf.jhsph.edu/sites/default/files/2019-01/baltimore-city-food-environment-2018-report.pdf>

¹⁷ Considerations for Food Pantries and Food Distribution Sites. (n.d.). <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/food-pantries.html>

¹⁸ Huang, A. (2020). 'Resident Food Equity Advisors - Call 1'. August 7, 2020. Baltimore FPP. Virtual.

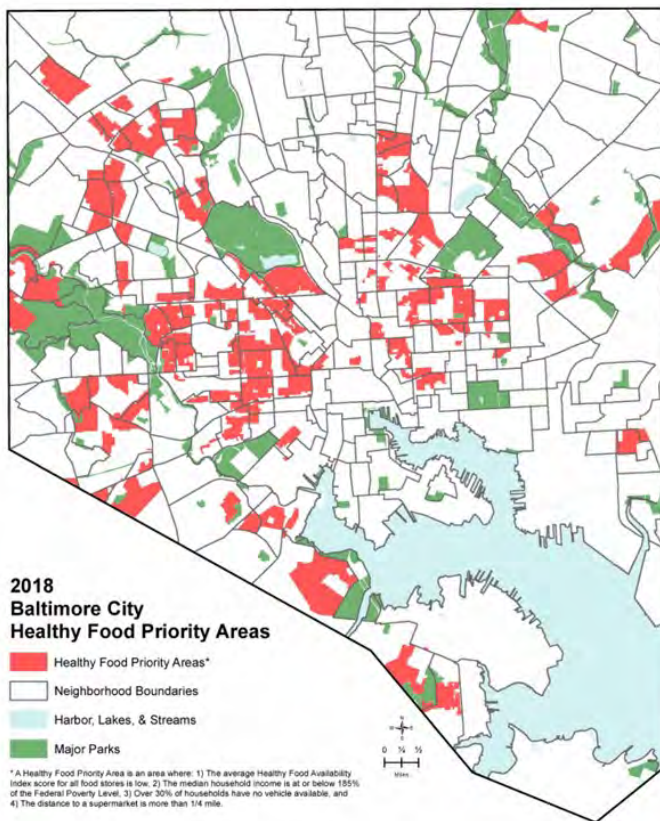


BALTIMORE'S FOOD ENVIRONMENT AND COVID-19

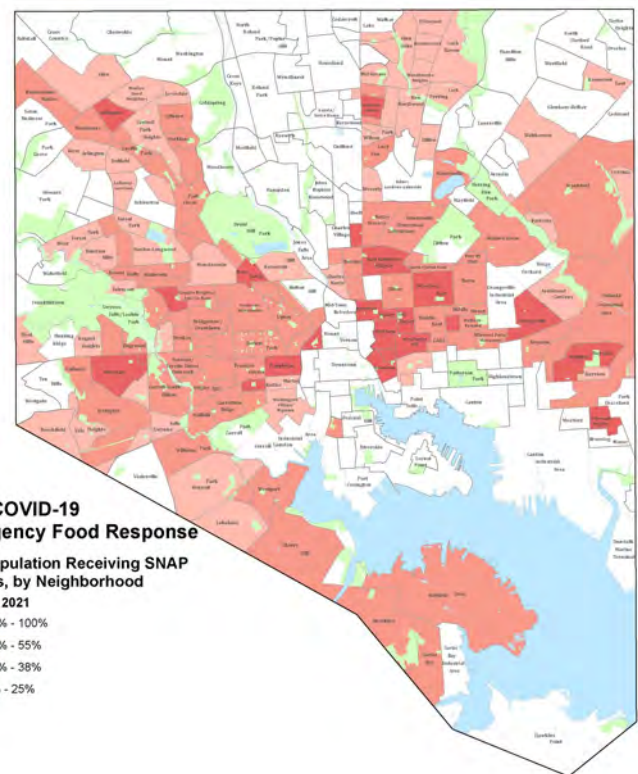
The City of Baltimore has mapped HFPAs (formerly called food deserts) in partnership with the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future since 2012. These maps show areas with concentrated barriers to accessing healthy food. When the pandemic upended the supply chain, prevented the use of public transportation, caused many people to lose their jobs, and other social and economic hardships, the HFPA designation became less relevant. As a result, FPP worked with the Maryland

Department of Human Services to map monthly SNAP participation by neighborhood as another indicator to show need and food insecurity. In general, residents apply for SNAP as a safety net to prevent food insecurity. SNAP participation is not a perfect indicator for food insecurity – however monthly SNAP participation by neighborhood is better able to show acute need than HFPAs. The SNAP layer was used in the COVID-19 Food Environment briefs discussed below.

Healthy Food Priority Area vs. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Participation



Impact: 146,000 residents in Healthy Food Priority Areas
Strategy: [8-point Healthy Food Environment Strategy](#)
Resource: [City & Council Food Environment Briefs](#)



Impact: 188,000 residents on SNAP
Strategy: [COVID-19 Emergency Food Response](#)
Resource: [COVID-19 Food Environment Brief](#)



BALTIMORE'S FOOD ENVIRONMENT AND COVID-19

Mapping also played a crucial role for policymakers to understand the rapidly changing food environment and emergency food strategies being deployed during the pandemic. FPP created COVID-19 Food Environment Briefs to show the extent of the City's efforts paired with other resources. These locations were overlaid onto monthly SNAP participation data to gauge increasing need during the pandemic (see SNAP section below). These briefs helped policy makers, such as City Council members, understand what was happening in their districts, and provided additional context for city, state, and federal food policy.

BALTIMORE CITY
COVID-19 FOOD ENVIRONMENT BRIEF
November 2020

TARGETED STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE FOOD SECURITY

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Baltimore developed a comprehensive Emergency Food Strategy involving many city agencies and critical nonprofit, business, and community partners. The food security response is based on four key pillars: (1) distribute grocery, (2) distribute meals, (3) protect and maximize federal nutrition benefits, and (4) build food system resilience through urban agriculture.

The map below depicts the wide network of distribution sites for meals, food boxes, and other food resources. Since April, 9 million pounds of food boxes and 5.7 million meals have been provided at over 400 sites and through home delivery. As food insecurity escalates, SNAP participation has risen to nearly one third of Baltimore residents. Mapping areas with higher concentrations of SNAP, among other factors, guides the response.

COVID-19 Food Environment Map

- Food Box (85)
- Grocery Box (12)
- Mixed Rice (36)
- Youth Grab & Go (111)
- Older Adult Meals (33)
- Community Driven Response (42)
- Food Pantry (58)

% of Population Receiving SNAP Benefits, by Neighborhood
August 2020

- 35% - 100%
- 25% - 35%
- 15% - 25%
- 0% - 15%

DISTRICT 7
COVID-19 FOOD ENVIRONMENT BRIEF
December 2020

OVERVIEW

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Baltimore developed a comprehensive Emergency Food Strategy involving many city agencies and critical nonprofit, business, and community partners. This food security response is based on four key pillars: (1) distribute food boxes, (2) distribute meals, (3) protect and maximize federal nutrition benefits, and (4) build food system resilience through urban agriculture.

The Food Policy and Planning Division of the Department of Planning oversees the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative (BFPI). This brief provides an overview of the food environment per city council district during the COVID-19 pandemic and summarizes food policy priorities moving into pandemic recovery and long-term resilience.

SUMMARY OF COVID-19 FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN DISTRICT 7

The City of Baltimore is supplementing federal benefits with direct food resources. The City has provided 9 million pounds of food boxes and 5.7 million meals at over 400 sites and through home delivery from April–November. The current City-sponsored COVID-19 Food Distribution sites and other resources are mapped on the following page.

IN DISTRICT 7 FROM APRIL–NOVEMBER:

	FOOD BOXES		MEALS		SNAP
•	Currently 10 sites	•	Total: 563,000	•	~18,000 Participants
•	21,900 food boxes	•	Youth: 497,000	•	34.5% of residents
•	575,000 pounds	•	Older Adults: 65,300		

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)

Historically, BFPI has used Healthy Food Priority Areas (formerly called food desert) to show food access needs. However, with the pandemic disrupting the economy and food system, this indicator was replaced with SNAP after applications reached a record high in the spring. SNAP data are available monthly and can be tracked over the course of the pandemic, providing more real-time insight than the Healthy Food Priority Area map.

SNAP is proven to reduce food insecurity. It is even more vital during the pandemic, providing participants autonomy as supply chain shortages may affect typical sources of food. Citywide, in August, there were 188,800 residents on SNAP, bringing \$33.4 million of federal funding into the city for participants to purchase food.

As a safety net, it is vital that Baltimore City residents enroll in, stay on, and maximize the impact of SNAP. Key pandemic considerations:

SNAP Enrollment: Eligible residents should apply for and stay on SNAP through recertification. However, the need and number of applications are surpassing the capacity to process them, creating a lag in time between when residents apply and are approved to receive benefits.

Online SNAP: SNAP payment for groceries online became available for the first time in June 2020. Participants need to be made aware of this opportunity to shop at home.

Pandemic EBT: This additional food benefit can be spent like SNAP and is provided to families with children enrolled in Baltimore City public schools, intended to make up for loss of access to school meals. This will amount to hundreds of dollars per child. Families should not throw away their cards, which will be reloaded every two months.

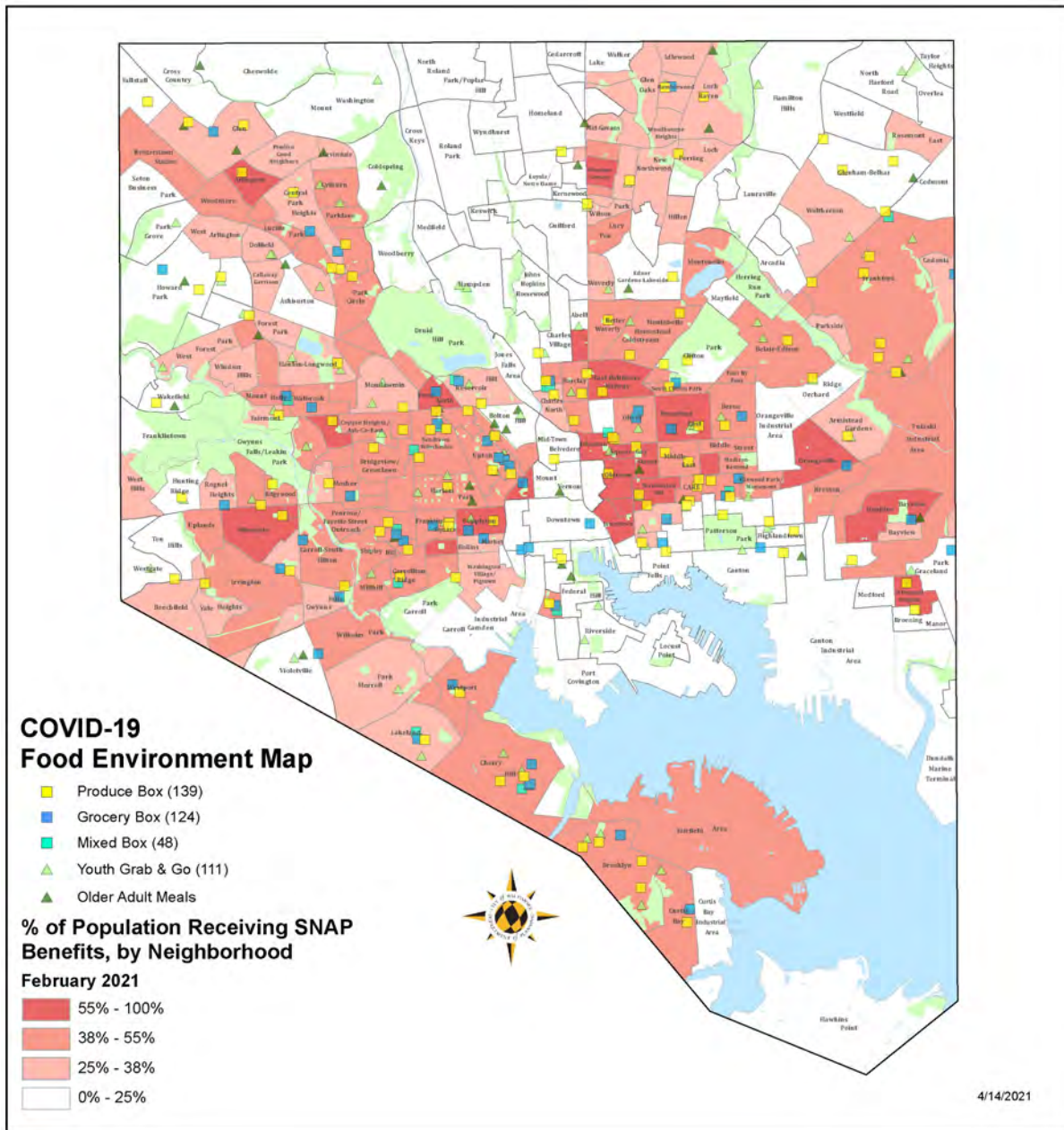
Population Receiving SNAP (Aug 2020)

DISTRICT 7 IMPACT
34.5% of population, approx. 18,000 people



BALTIMORE’S FOOD ENVIRONMENT AND COVID-19

Relevant agencies partnered to use their key data sets and identify new needs through ongoing planning calls. Using ArcGIS virtual mapping tools allowed the team to quickly overlay important factors to find target geographies for resource distribution to vulnerable populations^{19, 20} including Healthy Food Priority Areas, COVID-19 hotspots, monthly SNAP participation at the neighborhood level, high concentrations of specific age groups, limited-access-to-benefits populations, and areas not already served by other feeding programs.



19 Food Policy & Planning. (2021, January 13). Retrieved January 13, 2021, from https://planning.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/Council%20Covid%20Map%20Briefs%20FINAL_compressed.pdf

20 (n.d.). Retrieved January 13, 2021, from <https://baltimore.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Nearby/index.html?appid=32ce54bc99e746f5bc4c386208cee3e7>



BALTIMORE'S FOOD ENVIRONMENT AND COVID-19

SITES

187

PRODUCE BOXES

410,000 produce boxes (7.9 million pounds) have been distributed by Coastal Sunbelt Produce and The Common Market from May 2020 through March 2021. Boxes average 20 pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables.

124

GROCERY BOXES

More than 183,000 grocery boxes (5.3 million pounds) have been distributed from April 2020 through March 2021. Boxes contain 30 pounds of shelf-stable food from the Maryland Food Bank. Home-delivered grocery boxes are available for older adults and residents impacted by COVID-19.

48

MIXED FOOD BOXES

To help fill the “center of the plate” needs of food insecure residents, 137,000 mixed boxes (3 million pounds) of meat, dairy, and produce were distributed from September 2020 through February 2021 by Saval Foodservice.

31

OLDER ADULT MEALS

The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) and partners are providing home delivered meals to approximately 2,300 older adults weekly and served over 1.7 million meals between April 2020 and March 2021. The sites on the map represent residential facilities with multiple participants.

111

YOUTH GRAB AND GO MEALS

Over the course of the pandemic, children have had access to meals at schools, recreation centers, community sites, and mobile sites. These sites have changed to adapt virtual and in-person school settings and offer breakfasts and lunches, or suppers and snacks. On average, more than half a million youth meals are distributed per month and over 10.5 million meals were served between March 2020 and April 2021.

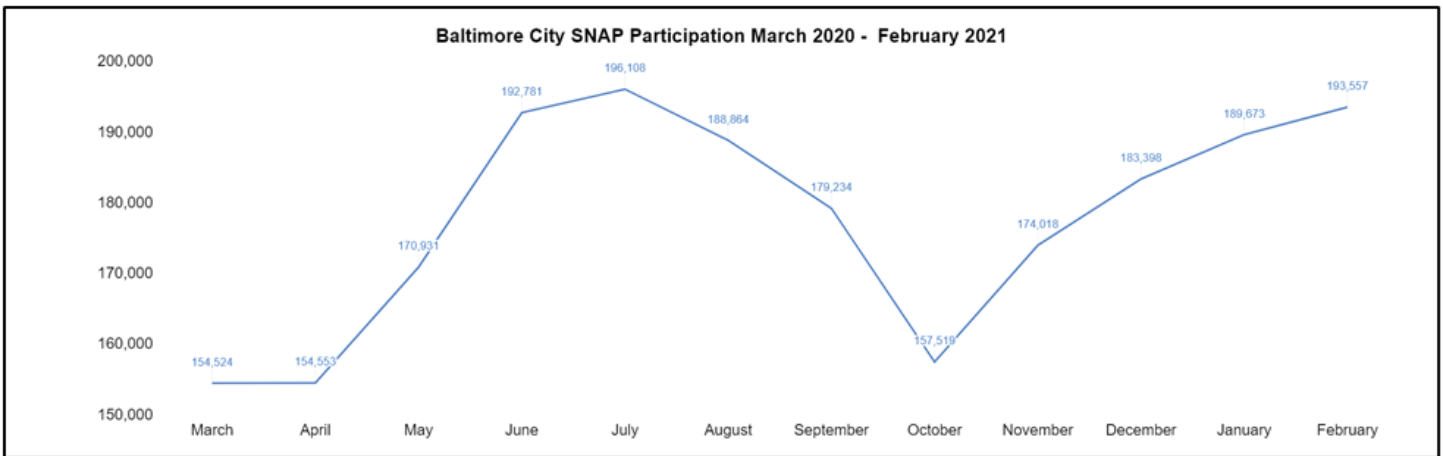


FEDERAL NUTRITION BENEFITS: SNAP

SNAP has always been a safety net for low-income Baltimoreans. Fluctuations in SNAP participation can serve as a bellwether of increasing or decreasing food insecurity at-large. When participation in SNAP rises, food insecurity should go down because more people have funds to buy the food they want and need. FPP has monitored SNAP trends for the City and worked with the Maryland Department of Human Services to track SNAP participation by neighborhood over the course of the pandemic.

Baltimore City SNAP participation peaked in July at over 196,000 participants, then began to fall, bottoming out in October at

pre-pandemic levels. Even as food insecurity remained high, many participants were dropped due to enhanced unemployment benefits received as part of the federal COVID-19 relief package. These benefits were counted as income and put some participants over the income threshold. Therefore, many participants were disqualified from SNAP. This issue was resolved in later relief packages. Participation rose through the fall to near peak levels again with over 193,500 participants as of February 2021. These trends match state and national patterns.



Between March 2020 -February 2021, SNAP infused \$405 million into the food budgets of Baltimore City residents.



FEDERAL NUTRITION BENEFITS: SNAP



The demand for SNAP was at record highs at the beginning of the pandemic, but application approval and participation lagged, leaving many people without the benefits they needed. This gap in federal benefits was one motivating factor for the City to purchase food resources, starting with shelf-stable grocery boxes (see below). When participation fell dramatically between July and October, it was another indicator of the need for the City to provide a baseline of direct food resources to the population as federal and state resources ebbed and flowed.

The amount of SNAP each household receives is usually variable based on income threshold and household size. However, through the Congressional COVID-19 relief packages, SNAP allocations increased to provide the maximum benefits for each household based only on size. In conversation with FPP, several residents shared that the additional SNAP benefits were barely noticeable because food prices increased and certain foods were harder to find at the stores they had access to. This appears to have improved as supply chains steadied and additional resources became available.



FEDERAL NUTRITION BENEFITS: ONLINE SNAP



In late May 2020, Maryland received approval to expedite the process for certain supermarkets and food retailers to accept online payment for groceries with SNAP. The City of Baltimore has advocated for online SNAP for the past decade, and the rollout of online SNAP marked a major milestone. While the ability for SNAP users to order and pay for groceries online became even more critical during the pandemic, expanding the program while so many other shoppers were also ordering online groceries led to some drawbacks.

Feedback from Resident Food Equity Advisors and other residents revealed online SNAP is not available at enough retailers, delivery fees can be cost-prohibitive, and coupons cannot be used in most cases. Resident Food Equity Advisors provided the following recommendations to make ordering groceries online and online SNAP viable options for more people:

- Expand the number of authorized online SNAP retailers to include a wider variety of stores.
- Improve technology training for online grocery ordering, especially for older adults and people with disabilities.
- Prioritize grocery delivery windows for older adults and people with disabilities.
- Secure revenue streams to prioritize matching dollars and incentives for online SNAP.



FEDERAL NUTRITION BENEFITS: PANDEMIC EBT

Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) is intended to replace school meals that students do not have access to when schools are closed or virtual. From March through June 2020, because Baltimore City has universal free breakfast and lunch, P-EBT provided \$5.86 per day of in-school closure to all Baltimore City Public School students, regardless of income. These benefits were added to the SNAP accounts of families that already participate in SNAP, and those that do not were mailed a separate card. This program resulted in several

hundred dollars of benefits flowing to households per student.

For the 2020-2021 school year, all Baltimore City Public School students will receive \$6.82 for each school day. Benefits will be distributed retroactively beginning spring 2021.

Each state is responsible to submit a disbursement plan. In Maryland, funds are disbursed in bundled intervals. P-EBT is an innovative federally funded program that has great potential for supporting youth to be able to have benefit cards.





SITE SELECTION FOR MEAL AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION

With limited resources and great need, an intensive site selection process was conducted to place resources where they would be most impactful to residents vulnerable to COVID-19, and to attempt to avoid concentrating resources in duplicative ways. Once target geographies were established based upon current need, the City mapped existing pre-pandemic youth and older adult meal sites; Maryland Food Bank pantries; and other known resources to find locations for new feeding operations that would fill in gaps and avoid duplication. Community planners assisted in identifying key partners that had previous experience in food distributions, were actively providing food related assistance during the pandemic, and fulfilled specific parameters related to COVID-19 safety guidelines. The team worked with additional recreation centers, schools, and over one hundred community organizations to strategically place resources where they were missing.

Facilitating Safe Distributions: The City provided sites with safety guidance and best practices informed by BCHD, and used vendors to deliver PPE and sanitizer to ensure that food distribution sites would not become vector sites for staff, volunteers, or recipients.





SITE SELECTION FOR MEAL AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION



In building a network of sites, schools; recreation centers; and managed older adult sites were utilized first because they had paid staff who could be considered essential workers. Facilities were evaluated for proximity to need, ease of access and social distancing, and potential to offer other services or resources. As time went on non-profits, religious institutions, and neighborhood organizations were brought on as food distribution sites to capitalize on their deep connections to residents and their ability to recruit volunteers on a weekly basis. These sites are evaluated monthly as needs and available resources fluctuate throughout the pandemic.

It was important to create a diffuse network of sites in order to ensure a level of system resilience in the event that sites had to close, whether due to planned circumstances or events like COVID-19 exposure. For example, school meal sites were closed during their winter break in order to conduct deep cleanings, allow staff their expected time off, and provide time to evaluate operations and plan for the future. Since schools were not the sole site in a given community, the closure of these sites for two weeks did not cause major disruptions in access to meals and food boxes, as other sites were able to offset these closures.



MEALS



Federally reimbursed meal programs have emergency provisions that waive some of the normally strict rules governing the who, how, and what of meal provision. On account of the planning conducted by the Emergency Food Working Group in 2016, Baltimore meal providers have used these waivers during several large snow events. When school closure was announced on March 13, 2020 and it seemed like stay-at-home orders were forthcoming, meal providers in the City sprang into action to provide safe meals for children and older adults by the next Monday, just three days later. Federal waivers continued to evolve and allow for more flexibilities to account for the specific conditions created by the pandemic. Additionally, knowing these meals would be eligible for reimbursement (unlike some programs that have to apply to FEMA without a guarantee of reimbursement) allowed meals for children and older adults to serve as the anchor strategy for food early in the pandemic as other aspects of the response were built.

The emergency waivers used for this program allowed for flexibilities to meet the exigent circumstances of the pandemic, such as not requiring children to eat on site, allowing adults to pick up meals on behalf of their children, and allowing them to take more than one meal at a time, at times up to eight meals at once.



YOUTH MEALS



The City has continuously served meals to youth throughout the pandemic through a joint effort of its providers, which include Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS), Family League of Baltimore, and the Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD) using funds provided by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The Summer Food Service Program ("summer meals") has been used most extensively to provide meals for children during the pandemic due to the increased flexibility. Baltimore summer meal sponsor organizations have built a robust network of meal sites and mobile routes over the past several years, and many of these existing sites were called

into service for the pandemic, including recreation centers, public housing sites, and other community based partners.

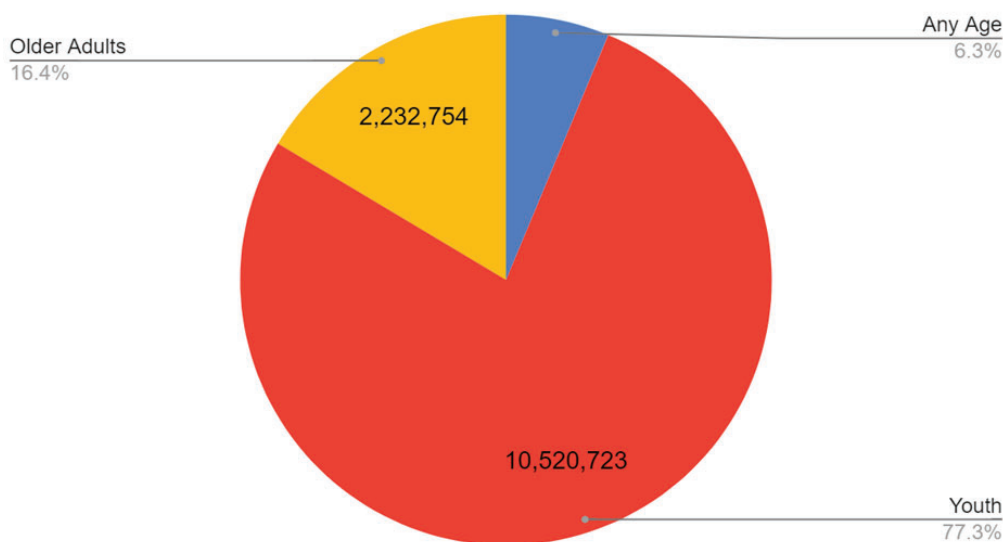
Additional federal programs that were used to serve youth included the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program at schools, which allowed children to pick up additional servings of fruits and vegetables along with their meals. Schools also provided other resources such as home delivered food to homebound high-need families and meals for adults by partnering with City Seeds, Meals on Wheels, and World Central Kitchen (WCK). In addition, many community organizations used their own funds to provide for children in need of food and other resources.



OLDER ADULT MEALS

Similarly, federal programs for older adults (ages 60+ or 65+, depending on the program) were rapidly adjusted to adhere to COVID-19 precautions. Home delivery became the primary strategy for older adult meals in order to keep vulnerable residents from having to go out in search of food. The Division on Aging continued to provide meals through their existing Eating Together in Baltimore (ETIB) program and Meals on Wheels home delivery. ETIB limited their program to sites where older adults resided and provided multiple days worth of meals. Residents were able to request to participate in the meal programs by calling Maryland Access Point (MAP) and early in the pandemic food requests quickly became the top need. With the increased demand and need to keep older adults safe, BCHD also stood up an additional home delivered meal operation in partnership with the Salvation Army and the Department of Transportation, which operated April through September of 2020. Starting in January, the Division on Aging also worked with WCK to partner with local restaurants and caterers to continue to provide meals for older adults and specific senior housing sites.

Meals: March 2020 - March 2021

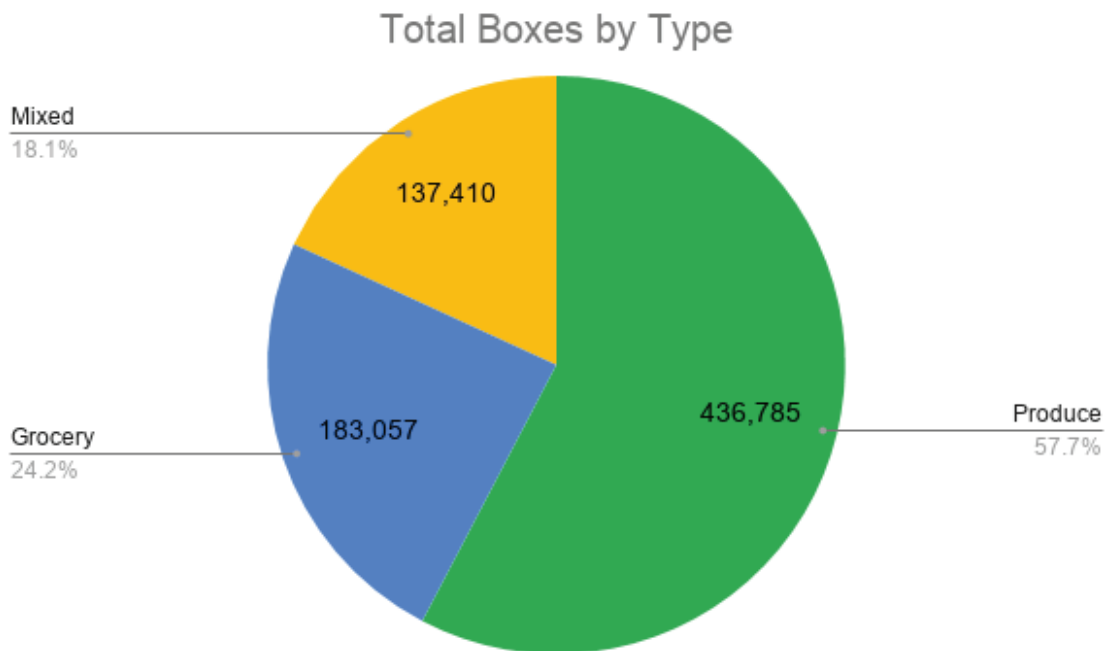




FOOD BOXES

The City’s food distribution approach for at-risk populations evolved over time and aimed at serving the needs of those most at-risk. Early in the pandemic, communities and organizations wanted to support their residents, but did not have access to stable supplies of food that they could distribute on a regular basis. Since the City had a “legal responsibility” to feed its population, and therefore could be reimbursed through FEMA, it made sense for the City to purchase food and utilize a network of City sites and community organizations to serve as distribution points.

Shelf-stable grocery boxes were the first strategy to quickly meet a need for populations that did not have access to age-restricted meal programs. As circumstances changed and needs evolved, perishable products such as produce and meat were a higher priority due to the scarcity of such products in most Baltimore neighborhoods. As such, the City’s response initially targeted shelf-stable grocery boxes and then moved toward the provision of produce and mixed boxes that contained other critical elements to sustain appropriate nutrition.



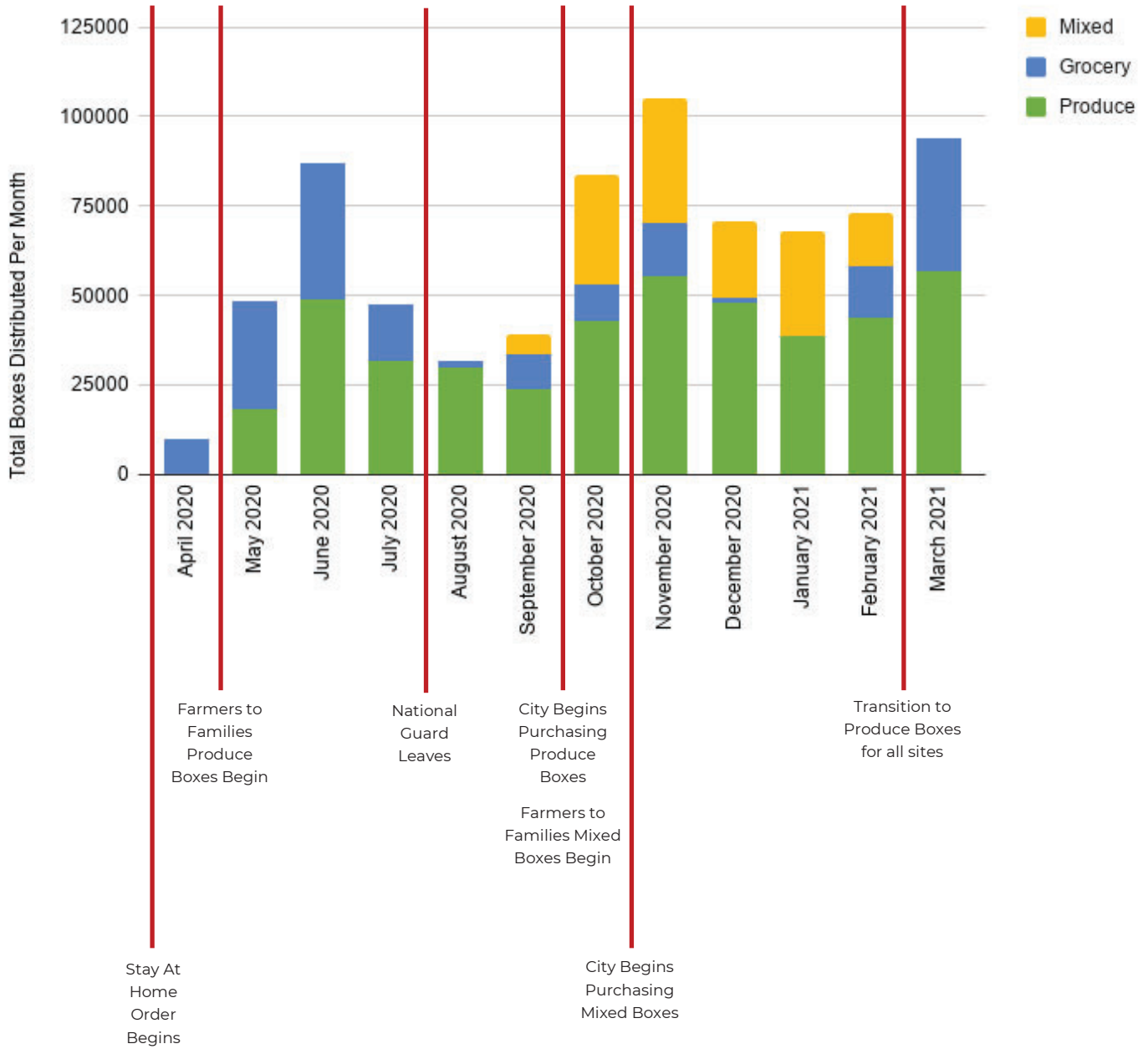
Nutritional Food Security

- 75.8% perishable products – Produce, Meat and Dairy
- 55.6 million servings of Fruits & Vegetables (F&V)
 - Equates to an additional serving of F&V for every resident living in a Healthy Food Priority Area for one year (approximately 146,000 residents).



FOOD BOXES

Produce, Grocery and Mixed Food Boxes



Multi-Vendor Contracts: The City contracted with multiple vendors with slightly different product mixes. This ensured that if one vendor had supply chain or COVID-19 safety issues there would still be food flowing from other vendors.



FOOD BOXES

TRANSPORTATION

With a decentralized food distribution strategy with many sites, transporting boxes to their distribution points quickly became a major hurdle. Over the course of the pandemic several partners were brought in to support box transportation and logistics including the Maryland National Guard, the Baltimore City Department of Transportation, Maryland Food Bank, Amazon, Maryland Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters, the Salvation Army, and paid transportation vendors. When the City began paying for produce and mixed boxes, the contracts were written to include transportation of boxes to the distribution sites. This vastly reduced the logistics management support the City had to provide, and helped expand the network of sites that could participate because boxes were delivered directly to them. This model does require that sites accept a minimum number of boxes (usually based on pallet size). However, some larger organizations were able to serve as hubs for deliveries, allowing smaller organizations to pick up appropriate quantities for their needs.





FOOD BOXES: GROCERY BOXES



Prior to the pandemic, some City residents relied on various sources of food aid. However, at the onset of the pandemic, many non-profits were unable to as effectively distribute food to their Baltimore City community partners for a variety of reasons. This included but was not limited to: lack of community volunteers, stay at home orders, disrupted food donations, supply chain, and overwhelming demand. In order to provide food resources that would help keep people home, overcome these logistical hurdles, and mitigate the spread of COVID-19, the City partnered with the Maryland Food Bank (MFB) for 30-pound boxes of shelf-stable food for distribution to high-COVID-19 risk communities.

This relationship and ongoing communication informed the adaptive strategy with MFB. Once the Maryland National Guard demobilized, the City shifted distribution to the Baltimore Convention Center as its singular distribution hub and grocery box storage

site. The distribution of grocery boxes to public distribution sites was discontinued once produce boxes were introduced in late summer 2020, and as other food sources began to come back online.

While the City distributed grocery boxes to residents, the City also stockpiled grocery boxes at the Convention Center in anticipation of a second wave of COVID-19. As other resources were made available during the summer, the shelf-stable boxes were reprogrammed to home delivery to meet a need to provide food directly to people who were quarantining or otherwise medically, socially, or economically affected by COVID-19. A partnership with Amazon was formed to use Amazon Flex drivers at no cost to the City to deliver boxes from the Convention Center directly to the homes of residents. The Salvation Army, Maryland Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), and DHCD each stepped in to fill transportation gaps and deliver boxes as well.



FOOD BOXES: HOME DELIVERED GROCERY BOXES



Outreach and targeted referral mechanisms for home delivery were implemented in COVID-19 hot spots and among vulnerable populations to minimize the need for residents to access public distribution sites. Residents who call 2-1-1 (United Way of Central Maryland) or Maryland Access Point (MAP line for older adults) are screened for vulnerability and to prevent duplication of services.

The home delivery program serves a crucial need for many of the most vulnerable residents who cannot go out to receive food resources, but was the most intensive in terms of coordination and variability. For example, produce boxes were delivered along with shelf-stable boxes for several months. However, the unpredictability of resident calls and the perishability of the produce made it difficult for the Convention Center to manage without waste. Additionally, 2-1-1 and the MAP line became primary resources for vaccine information, and the heavy use of the lines made it difficult for people to get through to place requests for home delivered boxes.

While this program is challenging at scale, the City intends to continue the grocery box home delivery program as the pandemic endures in an effort to limit vulnerable populations from having to leave home to seek food resources and in an effort to reduce the risk of transmission.





FOOD BOXES: USDA FARMERS TO FAMILIES



The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) began a program in May 2020 to support US farmers and wholesalers facing market disruptions caused by the pandemic, and communities facing rising food insecurity. USDA paid wholesalers to serve as vendors of US grown produce, meat, and dairy and to deliver food boxes to non-profit and government organizations.

The City of Baltimore saw this as an opportunity to fill the unmet needs for perishable products in the community. The City served in a coordinating capacity by building a strategic infrastructure for box distribution, and creating a network of over 100 community, school, and recreation center sites. The level of coordination from the City was tremendous, but ultimately created a system of small sites that functioned to mitigate the transmission of

COVID-19. The City playing such a role was rare across the country. Other jurisdictions saw fractured distribution of Farmers to Families boxes, with oversaturation in some areas or for certain populations, and lack of attention paid in other areas of need. Another challenge was that the USDA deployed the program in various “rounds” and shifted vendors and priorities between rounds. This would have disrupted the system Baltimore had in place, so the City had to step in to contract with vendors to ensure that the flow of food did not abruptly stop as USDA shifted its focus every few weeks.



FOOD BOXES: PRODUCE BOXES



Early on, the shelf-stable grocery boxes were well-received and provided for the most immediate need for a stable food supply. As the pandemic wore on and residents realized the true health and economic impacts it would have, the demand for fresh produce grew and FPP began to explore produce procurement options. Perishable products, especially produce, are less available at corner and convenience stores and some supermarkets in low-income neighborhoods, and COVID-19 further impacted supply chains.

Fortunately, as part of the Federal Government's COVID-19 response, the USDA Farmers to Families program provided produce boxes in the Baltimore region through two suppliers: Coastal Sunbelt Produce and The Common Market. USDA contracted directly with these suppliers between May 15, 2020 and September 18, 2020 at no cost to the City. In Baltimore, the City played a stronger role than in many other jurisdictions, with FPP working with the suppliers to determine distribution sites, communicate the program to City residents, and coordinate the overall supply effort in order to combine this aspect of the response with meals, grocery boxes, and other existing efforts.





FOOD BOXES: PRODUCE BOXES

In September, USDA shifted from produce boxes to mixed boxes. This created a void for produce flowing to Baltimore communities. As a result, the City contracted with Coastal Sunbelt Produce and The Common Market directly in order to continue this successful model and prevent a significant drop in the availability of much-needed produce.



Prioritizing Produce and Perishable

Foods: Throughout the pandemic, City staff heard that fresh produce, followed by other perishable items like meat and dairy, were the most needed foods. After Farmers to Families shifted, the City purchased these resources, increasing the amount of fresh food available. This led to residents having consistent access to top quality produce, and in some cases, greater access than they would have been able to find in their neighborhoods pre-pandemic. In addition, recipes and links to videos of cooking demos are included with produce boxes to ensure that households can make the most of these resources.

This response has proven the concept that produce distribution can happen on a large scale with little waste and high user satisfaction.



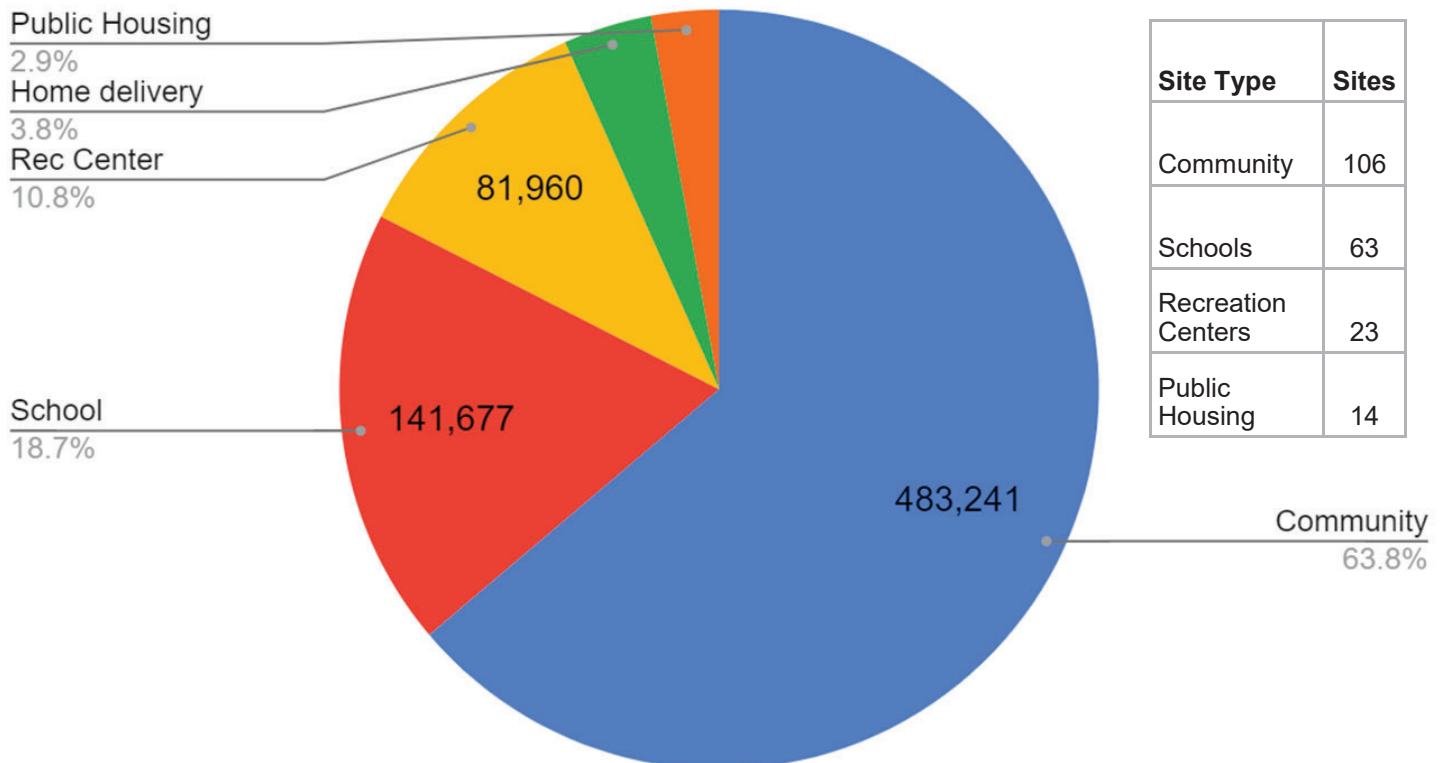
FOOD BOXES: PRODUCE BOXES



The produce box distribution network was unique in that boxes were directly delivered to sites on a weekly basis, delivering a small amount of boxes consistently. Based on site size, sites received 100-400 boxes a week. This model enabled residents to stay in their neighborhood and minimize the need to travel far to find food, especially for those not living near a grocery store.

Compared to other models where thousands of boxes were delivered to a central hub, this strategy alleviated the need for sites to purchase their own transportation or ask volunteers to use their own vehicles to pick up boxes from a centralized place. Instead, volunteers only needed to receive the delivery and conduct the distribution, streamlining the process and making it less burdensome on volunteers.

Boxes Distributed by Site Type





FOOD BOXES: PRODUCE BOXES



Additionally, since distributions occurred weekly rather than one-time large food distribution events, site coordinators were able to observe week-to-week trends and could adjust box numbers accordingly. Sites consistently gave away all their boxes with minimal food waste. If there were any leftover boxes, sites already had other partners in the community ready to receive them.

Produce box sites are in regular communication with FPP staff. Site contacts receive weekly emails from FPP notifying them of what to expect in their produce boxes, a recipe card and cooking videos to go along with that week's box provided by SNAP-Ed and City School staff, a weekly survey to complete, and other useful information such as a SNAP assistance hotline, monthly food distribution flyers, grant opportunities, and Food PAC meeting reminders. In cases of inclement weather or last minute cancellations, sites coordinated with DOP/FPP staff to reschedule or cancel deliveries. DOP, BCHD and DOT collaborated to deliver masks to community organizations conducting food distribution, providing 122,850 masks to food sites. FPP directed grant funding to support site operations, especially for those that had transportation costs or provided stipends for their volunteers.





FOOD BOXES: MIXED FOOD BOXES



Saval Foodservice (Saval) was also a participant in the USDA’s Farmers to Families program from September 22, 2020 through October 31, 2020. Saval worked with community partners to fill unmet need, building around the City’s produce box infrastructure. The mixed boxes filled an expressed gap in the food distribution strategy for meat, dairy, and produce. The mixed boxes contained 15 pounds of pre-cooked meat and dairy, 15 pounds of produce, and a gallon of milk. Mixed boxes were shown to be a proven model to meet the “center of the plate” needs of food insecure residents.

After the USDA ceased the Saval contract on October 31, 2020, the City contracted

with Saval at the same competitive rates to continue food box service to the impacted communities within the City. Once the City contracted with Saval, the services and supplies provided were further integrated into the City’s overall strategy to further prevent duplication of benefits. Saval coordinated the logistics and weekly delivery schedules with the sites. FPP met with Saval and the sites weekly to discuss box contents, future planning, and to get feedback on the program. The sites also filled out a weekly survey. FPP directed grant funding to support site operations, especially for sites that had transportation costs or provided stipends for their volunteers.



FOOD BOXES: MIXED FOOD BOXES



FOOD WORKERS AND VOLUNTEERS AS “ESSENTIAL”

The State of Maryland deemed food and agricultural workers as “essential” during the state of emergency. This allowed for food and agriculture businesses to remain open, and for employees and volunteers (in the case of entities like food pantries) to travel to and from work during the stay at home orders. FPP and the Office of Sustainability worked to ensure that food distribution volunteers, urban farmers, and community gardeners had the authorization they needed to avoid misunderstandings. The City also communicated directly with the Baltimore Police Department to ensure that officers were aware that urban farmers and gardeners were essential and could continue their efforts during the pandemic.

The mixed box distribution network delivered boxes directly to sites on a weekly basis. Based on site size, sites received 50-900 boxes a week. The sites were primarily churches and also included community organizations, schools, and a synagogue. The sites were mapped and analyzed and complemented the produce box sites to fill unmet geographic and population-based needs. This model enabled residents to stay in their neighborhood and minimize the need to travel far to find food, especially for those not living near a grocery store. Sites consistently gave away all their boxes with minimal food waste. If there were any leftover boxes, sites already had other partners in the community ready to receive them.



IMPACT TO COMMUNITY



The majority of food box distribution sites have been at community organizations, including non-profits; religious institutions; and community associations. These groups asked the City for food so that they could continue to support their residents and congregations in ways that they knew worked best. The City leveraged Federal, State, and City funding; purchasing power at scale; and logistics support to pair with community organizations' intimate knowledge of the populations they serve.

By partnering with so many organizations on the ground, the City was able to get food directly to households in need at the neighborhood level. Some sites served as hubs for other smaller organizations to pick up boxes. This allowed smaller sites to participate without having to meet the minimum threshold requirements or other logistic challenges such as loading zones.

\$13.5 Million Worth of Food Boxes to Support a Community-Driven Response and Network

From April 2020-March 2021, community organizations received nearly 500,000 food boxes to distribute to residents, totaling over \$13 million in resources. This included nearly five million pounds of top-quality fresh produce - the most requested category of food by far and the least available in many of Baltimore's neighborhood food environments.



IMPACT TO COMMUNITY



Per the CDC, “racial and ethnic minority groups” are at higher risk of getting sick and dying from COVID-19 due to “long-standing systemic health and social inequities.”²¹ Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino persons are more likely to contract COVID-19, and highly more likely to be hospitalized or die from the disease.²² Nationally, 1 in 5 Black individuals may experience food insecurity in 2021, compared to 1 in 9 white individuals.²³ Therefore, FPP mapped demographic information and partnered with Black- and Latinx-led organizations to target food box distribution locations to best serve areas with concentrated populations of Black and/or Latinx residents. As a result, nearly all food box sites are located in neighborhoods that are at least 50% Black and/or Latinx.

ZIP Code 21224 received and distributed the most boxes out of any ZIP Code in the City due to the intentional targeting of lower income Spanish-speaking immigrant populations when Latinx residents of Baltimore were experiencing high rates of COVID-19 infection. Due to policies in recent years that linked immigration status to benefits, low-income immigrant communities have been reticent to participate in food assistance programs like SNAP, even if members of their household qualified. Latinx-led organizations like CASA de Maryland and Centro SOL used the food boxes in home delivery programs and public distributions to provide food to some of the hardest hit communities during the pandemic.

21 Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups. (2021, February 21). Retrieved February 25, 2021, from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html>

22 COVID-19 Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities. (2020, December 10). Retrieved February 25, 2021, from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>

23 https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/National%20Projections%20Brief_3.9.2021_0.pdf



URBAN AGRICULTURE AND REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS



Growing food is a form of resilience and emergency response during a pandemic where so many have faced food insecurity or have been cut off from typical sources of fresh food. FPP provided support to several urban agriculture projects during the pandemic through the Healthy Food Priority Area Funds, totaling \$82,000. Because investing in agriculture is not reimbursable in the same way that purchasing food boxes is, the City played the role of elevating urban agriculture as a pillar in the response to outside funders and philanthropists. FPP staff used their platforms and relationships with the funding community to ensure that urban agriculture work and organizations received extensive financial support to build a longer-term solution than just immediate food response. In one example, The Farm Alliance of Baltimore, which represents over 20 urban farms in the city, created a COVID Resilience Fund and Black Farmers Resilience Fund to assist growers in weathering the unpredictability of the pandemic while building a stronger, more resilient food system. Additionally, FPP worked to get as much information as possible to urban growers about vaccine eligibility as farm workers were eligible in earlier phases than the general public, but urban growers are often disconnected from information targeted to more rural agricultural communities.



URBAN AGRICULTURE AND REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS



The City also worked to support local and regional growers through its contracts when possible. The Common Market is a nonprofit regional food distributor with a mission to connect communities with good food from sustainable family farms. The Common Market provided boxes to Baltimore through the Farmers to Families program, and the City contracted with them for produce boxes after that program ended. Their key produce growers are within 150-200 miles of Baltimore City, including at least one vendor in Baltimore City limits, and they have committed to procuring at least 75% of the contents of their produce boxes from the region during the local growing season.

RESIDENT FOOD EQUITY ADVISORS



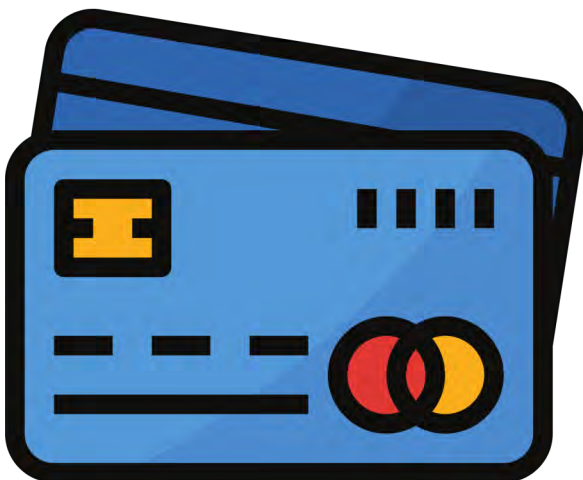
The 2020 Resident Food Equity Advisors (RFEA) cohort included 13 residents of public housing representing each of the Housing Authority of Baltimore City’s family developments. When COVID-19 hit during the middle of the cohort’s term, meetings were shifted to virtual and Advisors gave feedback on produce boxes and grocery boxes and their experiences in navigating getting food during a pandemic. Their input provides FPP with insight into the functionality of online SNAP, the state of the food pantry system, and the need for considering water and allergen-friendly options in food boxes. RFEA feedback emphasized the importance of having resources such as food pantries and community gardens on-site at public housing developments, especially in situations like the pandemic.



COVID-19 EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

A core component of the City's COVID-19 Emergency Food Response, the COVID-19 Emergency Assistance Program is designed to assist households that are struggling financially as a result of the pandemic, but cannot access mainstream supports. In the spring of 2021, the program provides one-time \$400 prepaid cards to help cover the cost of food and basic household needs: cleaning supplies, toiletries, baby care products, over-the-counter medications, personal protective equipment, etc. Cards are accepted at most supermarkets and grocery stores.

The program is currently funded to support up to 15,000 households. Eligible households receive the cards through one of 11 community-based organizations. These organizations target different segments of the population who may be less likely to access other forms of benefits like SNAP. This includes undocumented immigrants, people experiencing homelessness, members of the LGBTQ community, and those with criminal records. While this program was slower to start than other aspects of the Emergency Food Response, it helps round out the five pillars in attempting to fill population-specific gaps with tangible cash benefits.





NEXT STEPS

For the past year, the COVID-19 Emergency Food Response has constantly evolved and adapted to ever changing policies, resources, and capacity. As the City enters into this next phase of food response, food insecurity remains high and the City will continue to provide produce boxes and home delivered grocery boxes contingent on FEMA reimbursement.

With additional funds coming into the City, this is a critical moment to shift from emergency food response to building community food resiliency. The partnerships developed during the pandemic will play an important role in creating a more resilient food system as the City continues to support community efforts, expand access to Federal Nutrition Benefits, elevate urban agriculture, and think innovatively around increasing access to nutrient-rich foods.



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WEBSITE:

<https://planning.baltimorecity.gov/baltimore-food-policy-initiative>

FOOD RESOURCES:

<https://coronavirus.baltimorecity.gov/food-distribution-sites>