

## Healthy Food Service Guidelines for New York Act

**Food service guidelines** are standards for healthier food and beverages in settings like government facilities, worksites, and institutions. This bill ([S4644/A5682](#)) will make it easier for New York State residents to eat healthfully in state facilities and programs.

### *Why improve the foods and beverages available in state facilities and programs?*

- Poor diet is linked to diabetes, heart disease, some cancers, and other chronic diseases, which lead to lower quality of life, higher health care costs, and premature deaths.
- New York State (NYS) currently lacks a comprehensive policy ensuring the healthfulness of the food it procures for food service or sales across all state agencies. Some state agencies have their own nutrition guidelines, but they vary in strength and oversight.
- [Comprehensive food service guidelines](#) for all NYS agencies would have a positive impact on the health of the millions of employees, visitors, students, patients, recipients of state services, and people in state custody that receive or purchase food from NYS facilities, institutions, and programs each year.

### *Why now?*

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, NYS agencies and state-funded programs continue to feed millions through emergency food-relief organizations, correctional facilities, public hospitals, Office for the Aging programs, and others.
- Improving diet quality is more important than ever, since nutrition-related chronic diseases also increase the risk of poor outcomes from COVID-19.
- The majority of the state's food service programs target socially at-risk populations—older adults, individuals with mental illness, and low-income residents—all groups with higher rates of nutrition-related diseases that are linked to severe illness from COVID-19.

### *The road to food service guidelines in New York*

- In 2008, New York City was the first major city in the country to set [nutrition standards](#) for all foods purchased or served by the city. As a result, city agencies [decreased](#) their use of added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium. In 2019, agencies [complied](#) with 91% of the standards on average.
- In 2012, the New York State Food Policy Council (now the Council on Hunger and Food Policy) appointed a working group that recommended [strong nutrition standards](#) for statewide food purchasing.
- The New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM) also advocated this type of policy for the state in a [2012](#) report and again in [2017](#) in collaboration with the American Farmland Trust (AFT) and Farm to Institution New York State (FINYS).
- Through the [Creating Healthy Schools and Communities Initiative](#), the NYS Department of Health (DOH) awarded five-year grants (2015-2020) to county health departments and community organizations. One of the priorities was [food service guidelines](#) and procurement policies as an approach to increasing access to healthier food to people throughout the state.
- In early 2020, the NYS Office of General Services (OGS) finalized its new solicitation for centralized contracts for procuring food products for state agencies. DOH worked with OGS

to incorporate language allowing for OGS to require vendors to designate in their price guides whether products meet nutrition guidelines, if state agencies were to adopt them. Bidders were also required to designate NYS Food Products in their price guides.

### *New Yorkers are ready for healthier options*

We polled 1004 adult New York residents online on September 22, 2020 for their opinions about food served by state-supported programs and institutions such as public hospitals, universities, childcare centers, prisons, senior centers, and food pantries. The sample represented New York residents of diverse age, race, income, education, and other demographic characteristics.

#### *Key Findings*

- 71% of respondents said the food that state-supported programs and institutions serve should include mostly or only healthy options, including a majority of every demographic subgroup.
- 88% of respondents said they would favor the state adopting guidelines for state-supported programs and institutions to serve more healthy foods, including 75% or more of every demographic subgroup.
- 65% of respondents said they would favor the state adopting guidelines for state-supported programs and institutions to serve fewer unhealthy foods, including a majority of every demographic subgroup.
- 85% of respondents said they would favor a goal that state-supported institutions and programs spend 25% of their food dollars on healthy food produced by New York State farms, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and milk, including 60% or more of every demographic subgroup.

### *Leverage state food dollars to support health and the local economy*

- This is a low-cost policy, mainly shifting money the state is already spending from less healthy to healthier foods and beverages. The 2017 FINYS/AFT/NYAM report [estimated](#) that publicly funded institutions in NYS spend more than \$957 million annually on food. That is significant purchasing power that could be better leveraged to support residents' health and the state economy.
- Improving diet quality has the potential to be [cost-saving](#) by cutting back on long-term health care costs from chronic disease.
- Food service guidelines are also an opportunity to support NYS food producers during a painful economic downturn. If guidelines promote healthy, fresh, minimally processed food products grown in NYS, they would further leverage public spending to support local farms and the regional food system. The 2017 FINYS/AFT/NYAM report also [estimated](#) that increasing purchases of minimally-processed food grown in the state to 25% of NYS institution food budgets could generate more than \$208 million of new economic output. This could build on existing efforts by state entities to support New York food producers, such as the Food Metrics Law, NYS Farm to School, Buy NY, and the Nourish New York initiative.

*For more information, please contact the Center for Science in the Public Interest at [policy@cspinet.org](mailto:policy@cspinet.org).*