



Manhattan Community Board 3

FOOD NEEDS ASSESSMENT

MANHATTAN CB3 FOOD NEEDS ASSESSMENT



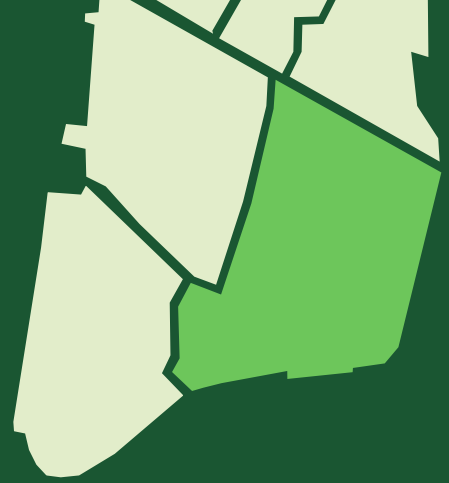
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Version 1 . 2026 | **Research and Analysis:** TYTHEdesign

This report is not a market analysis, a comprehensive inventory of all food resources, or an evaluation of Lower East Side Ecology Center programs. It provides a snapshot of community perspectives, maps key resources, and offers a high-level analysis of publicly available data on food insecurity and Manhattan's CB3 demographics.

Overview



The **Lower East Side Ecology Center** is a local nonprofit dedicated to promoting a sustainable New York City through community-based education, stewardship of green spaces, and community engagement. Its **Food Justice Program** is a neighborhood initiative that integrates urban gardening, food access, environmental education, and public health. Launched in 2021 in partnership with Henry Street Settlement, the program uses a small educational garden to teach residents about the food system while improving access to fresh, healthy food on the Lower East Side.

In preparation for the Ecology Center's one-acre site in East River Park, expected to open in 2027, the Food Justice Program conducted a community needs assessment of Manhattan Community Board 3 (including the majority of the Lower East Side, East Village, and Chinatown) to understand local food access challenges, existing resources, and opportunities for addressing food insecurity.

This report presents the findings of that assessment, which drew on a public survey, community interviews, fieldwork, desk research, tabling experiences, and conversations with neighborhood residents. It documents:

- Current food resources and community members' perspectives on access to healthy food
- Opportunities for CB3 community-based organizations to strengthen neighborhood-based food access through programs, services, gardens, and green spaces
- Recommendations to guide community-driven, adaptable, and responsive the future programming at the Ecology Center
- Insights to support advocacy at the local and policy level

This assessment reflects the Ecology Center's commitment to advancing equitable food access and enhancing support systems for the community.

METHODOLOGY

By prioritizing community voices, the Ecology Center is better equipped to create unique food justice programming that has lasting value for the community. Over a seven-month period from May to November 2025, the Ecology Center, in partnership with TYTHEdesign, collected insights from neighborhood residents, local business owners, Ecology Center program participants, local food pantry clients, and community leaders.

Getting Community Involved



After defining goals, focus areas, and research questions with the Ecology Center, TYTHEdesign developed a stakeholder engagement plan to gather community insights on food access challenges, resources, and opportunities. The research approach centered on three key drivers: transparency, co-creation, and broad usability. The overarching objective was **to ensure meaningful, inclusive, and expansive engagement that would result in community-driven insights.**

Research was rooted in five main questions:

1. What are CB3 community members' perspectives on food access, healthy food, nutrition, and food justice?
2. What food resources exist in CB3, which are most used, and what, if any, are the barriers to accessing those food resources?
3. Which demographics and indicators reflect residents most impacted by food insecurity?
4. What organizations and social services provide food resources and address food insecurity?
5. What opportunities exist to reduce food insecurity in CB3?



To establish an inclusive and expansive engagement, we deployed the following methods:

Surveys were distributed in print and online in four languages (English, Spanish, Simplified Chinese, and French) through outreach at community events, pantry service hours, and Ecology Center events. All survey distribution was done by Ecology Center staff including SYEP participants.

Interviews with local subject matter experts, such as pantry directors, offered insights into the general landscape of food insecurity, food resources provided by local nonprofits, and a better understanding of the current needs of clients.

Focus groups with community leaders garnered insights and feedback through a virtual roundtable conversation on food insecurity, issues facing local residents, and opportunities to address food access locally.

Observation and community mapping engaged young people through participatory action research. SYEP participants plotted food resources and services across CB3, verifying information to reflect current conditions on the ground. Learn more about the role of SYEP on page 6.

Publicly available data was analyzed to inform neighborhood snapshots and understand the changing landscape of Manhattan Community Board 3, drawing heavily from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey data sets.

Research Definitions

This project began with the Ecology Center and TYTHEdesign's alignment on the following key definitions, which were used to establish the scope of the research and provide guardrails for the type of information collected and analyzed.

- **Food Justice:** the right to grow, sell, and eat healthy food
- **Food Security:** access to enough healthy food at all times in order to live an active life—healthy for the person and the environment
- **Healthy Food:** fresh, nutritious, affordable, locally grown, and culturally-appropriate; demonstrates care for workers and animals¹
- **Nutrition:** balanced diets (macro/micro); recipes that accommodate medical dietary needs/illness
- **Food Resources:** places to get food that are low-cost and affordable; food pantries, community fridges, and garden spaces; education; food benefits (SNAP); social service agencies that support benefits; access to gardening tools, equipment, compost, etc.
- **Distribution Sites:** locations where food resources are shared with community members; pantries, community fridges, food banks, soup kitchens, etc.

¹ Definition from [Just Food](#)

LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

The survey captured perspectives from people across all ages, and insights were gathered from many members of the CB3 community who, as indicated by median income, may be experiencing food insecurity. However, due to the research limitations outlined below, the demographic information, findings, and opportunities collected in this report should not be considered a comprehensive representation of all residents of CB3.

- Data collection relied on participants who voluntarily chose to complete the surveys and determined what information they were willing to provide. As a result, respondents did not consistently answer all questions and, in some instances, provided minimal information. The depth of the analysis was, therefore, limited by variation in the level of detail provided across responses.
- The data collection process primarily focused on individuals experiencing food insecurity, with many surveys conducted at food pantries. This approach may have influenced the perspectives captured on food access and insecurity and may not fully reflect the views of individuals who are not experiencing these challenges.
- These findings were limited by a relatively small sample size and uneven data collection across CB3. Given the limitations of the Ecology Center's existing network, surveys were distributed digitally to Chinatown-based organizations, but they were not administered in person at any Chinatown locations. As a result, the research sample may not be fully representative of the CB3 community.
- In selecting locations for survey distribution, the Ecology Center prioritized sites in CB3 that offered respite from summer heat and offered a safe space for 14 SYEP participants to gather. As a result, distribution locations did not necessarily reflect the full diversity of CB3 neighborhoods.
- During data collection, participants were verbally prompted to identify their zip code based on whether they worked or lived in a particular area. In many research studies, geographic identification is based solely on place of residence. Because this distinction was not consistently established, this report refers to participants as CB3 community members rather than residents, as residency could not be confirmed in all cases.
- Although surveys were provided in multiple languages, not all members of the Ecology Center team collecting surveys spoke those languages. This may have affected some individuals' willingness or ability to participate in the survey.

While the majority of insights included in this report have been pulled from the survey, desk research from publicly accessible sources, community mapping, and community interviews have been included to provide a more complete picture of food access in CB3.

Empowering Youth in Community Research

The Lower East Side Ecology Center and TYTHEdesign used a youth participatory action framework to bring New York City Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) participants into the community research process to deepen the relevance and impact of its Manhattan CB3 Food Needs Assessment. As researchers, SYEP participants played a key role in gathering first-hand perspectives from CB3 residents and community leaders, ensuring that local voices and lived experiences were at the center of the research. Through one-on-one interviews with staff at community-based organizations, conversations with community leaders addressing food insecurity, and direct survey engagement with CB3 residents, these youth researchers helped capture challenges and opportunities within the local food ecosystem. Additionally, they contributed to an up-to-date community map of food resources and services across CB3, verifying information to reflect current conditions. Integrating SYEP participants will ultimately help shape the future of the Ecology Center's Food Justice services and programming to better meet the needs of CB3 residents.

SYEP PARTICIPANTS

Operated by NYC's Department of Youth and Community Development, SYEP is the nation's largest youth employment program, connecting New Yorkers between the ages of 14 and 24 with career exploration opportunities and paid work experience each summer. Participants explore different interests and career pathways, develop productive workplace habits, and engage in learning experiences that strengthen their social, civic, and leadership skills.

The Ecology Center's SYEP participants were a diverse group of 14 older youth (ages 16-24) interested in the arts and sciences with an emphasis on environmental and social work. The majority of these participants live in the Lower East Side, but some commuted from as far as Staten Island.

THE ROLE OF SYEP IN THE COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Through this rigorous internship program, SYEP participants engaged in on-the-ground, youth participatory action research to better understand the food access landscape in Manhattan Community Board 3. Their research project included three parts: administering public surveys to local community members, interviewing food justice leaders in the community, and recommending updates to Hunter College's NYC Food Policy Guide.

“

I'm noticing just how impactful my work is towards the communities we are in.

—2025 SYEP participant

”



Youth Participatory Action Research

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is an innovative approach to community research in which young people are trained to conduct research to improve their lives, their communities, and the institutions intended to serve them. With YPAR, young people are the researchers and changemakers. This isn't desk research; this is on-the-ground community investigation.

Important principles of YPAR implemented in the Ecology Center's 2025 SYEP program included:

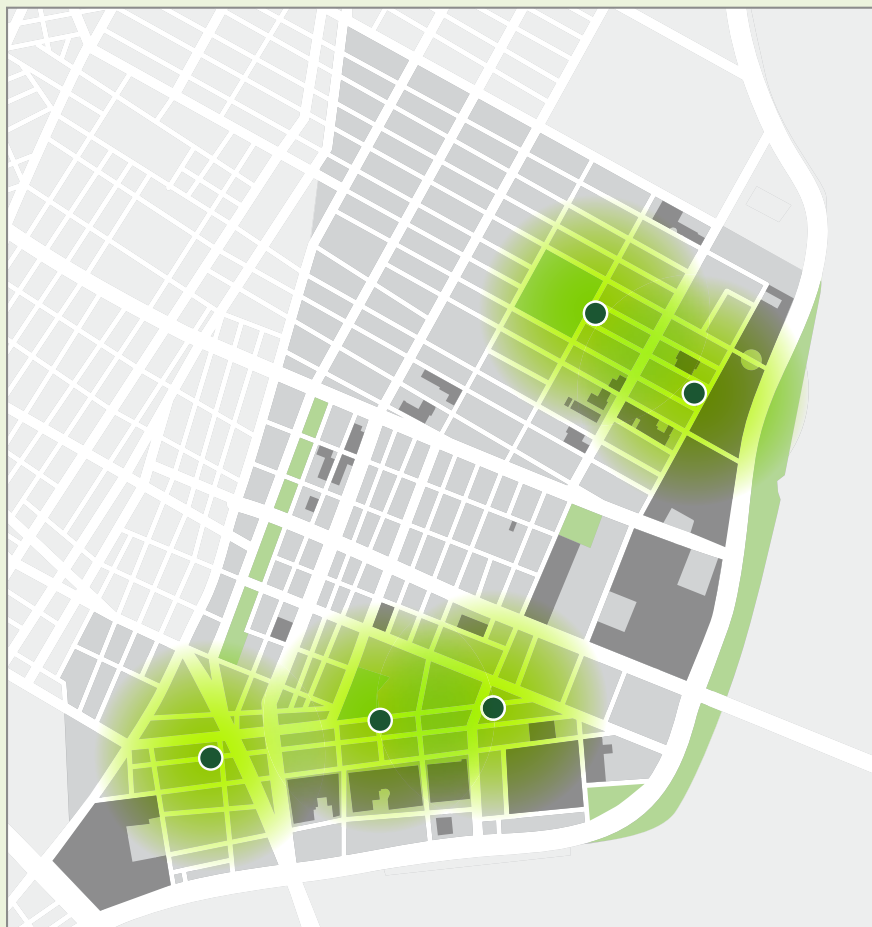
- Gaining skills and experiences to support positive youth development
- Creating meaningful change in the community
- Engaging participants in a variety of research methods
- Being transparent and intentional about decision-making roles and power throughout the project

From July 7 to August 15, 2025, the work of mapping, surveying, and food distribution happened simultaneously. The team engaged community members at 24 CBOs, 70 delis and bodegas, and at multiple food distribution sites across CB3. These community research efforts were designed to help researchers learn more about what the Lower East Side Ecology Center can offer its neighbors as they construct a new building and deepen its programming. Concurrent with their role as youth researchers, SYEP participants also grew and donated food to a community fridge.

The SYEP team was divided into smaller groups and rotated through sessions: five people supporting the host organization's food distribution work, four people mapping food resources in the neighborhood, and five people surveying. Using food distribution sites like The Lower Eastside Girls Club, Trinity's Services and Food for the Homeless, and Manny Cantor Center as a homebase, researchers collected 159 surveys from community members.

Those responsible for survey collection carried prepared clipboards with English, Spanish, and Simplified Chinese language surveys—the most commonly spoken languages in CB3. They also distributed incentivizing gifts of wildflower seeds and lavender sachets. Consequently, the youth researchers realized that many male-presenting respondents were not motivated by the seeds and sachets, so they decided to carry miniature bags of trail mix, which proved to be a successful incentive for every respondent.





“

Spread more awareness about the issues and challenges people face so more people ... may be willing or able to help others.

–2025 SYEP participant

”

SYEP Data Collection Locations

This map highlights the food service organizations that served as homebase locations, where SYEP participants worked alongside food justice leaders. They used these sites as a starting point to then radiate out and map community food resources.



To map the area, SYEP participants formed a circumference around the homebase site and fanned out from there. Each team member was assigned a different role:

- The *cartographer* used the maps to mark the ground their team covered, identify the food resources they observed, and place them on the map using an icon.
- The *researcher* used the internet to find information already existing online about the business and worked closely with the observer.
- The *observer* held a printed copy of the Hunter College NYC Food Resource Guide, noted differences between online and on-the-ground information, documented the details they gathered from business representatives, and recorded the updated information in the Food Resource Guide.
- The spokesperson asked representatives to confirm hours, contact information, which food assistance benefits they accepted, and clarify discrepancies between their answers and posted information.

SYEP STUDENT REFLECTIONS

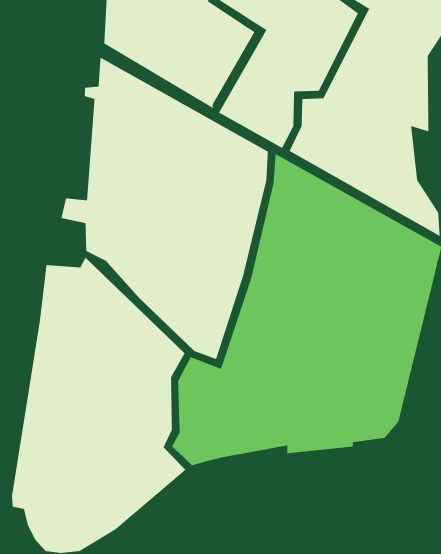
The SYEP participants learned how strenuous on-the-ground data collection can be. They saw that quality data often comes down to quality engagement. “How do we approach people with the right questions and the right attitude?” was a guiding question for their surveying and mapping sessions.

Participants noted that language barriers, administrative burden, and the uneasiness of waiting in food lines affected the number and quality of survey responses. When people were relaxing or happily socializing, the researchers found people more likely to complete the surveys. They also found that many respondents preferred to complete the surveys aloud while researchers wrote down their answers. While conducting their community mapping research, the SYEP team noted an abundance of restaurants and boutiques in CB3. Many SYEP individuals indicated a feeling that these businesses were not for LES residents like themselves and that they out-competed culturally relevant and affordable resources.

By the end of the program, the team had become more confident mapping and liaising with community members, organizations, and leaders. They were quick to figure out the best methods for reaching their survey quotas and less sensitive to the rejections of passersby who were less interested in completing the survey. They saw that their efforts were impactful and became intrinsically motivated researchers and contributors.



Community Snapshot



This snapshot of Manhattan Community Board 3 (CB3) offers insight into the composition of the catchment area for this community needs assessment. The purpose of this snapshot is to provide an overview of the current make-up of the community, highlight food insecurity factors, and document existing food resources.

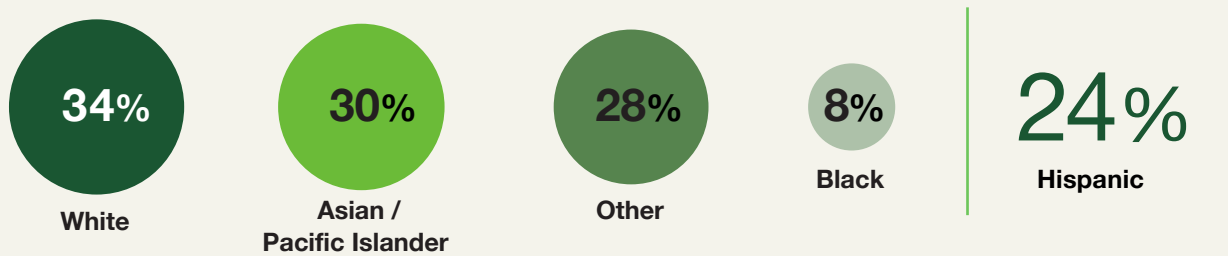
The data presented here is primarily drawn from the 2024 American Community Survey (ACS), which provides detailed demographic, social, and economic information by zip code—except where indicated with a footnote. It is important to note that a single zip code may encompass areas outside of CB3's neighborhood boundaries.

DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

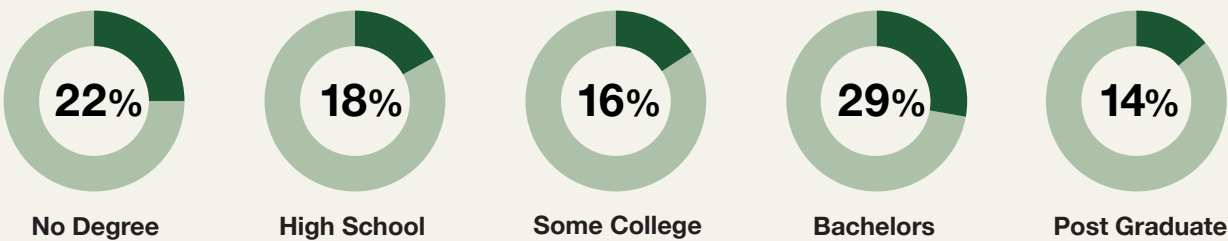
The following demographic data provides an overview of CB3 residents.



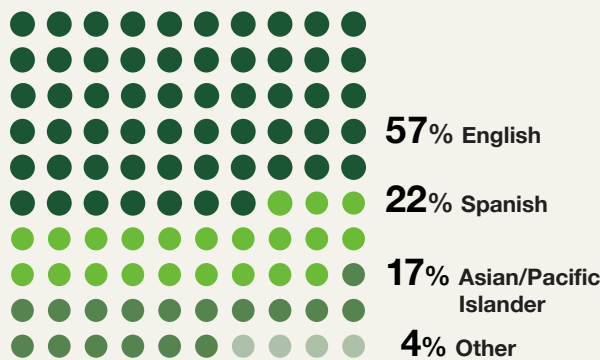
RACE AND ETHNICITY³



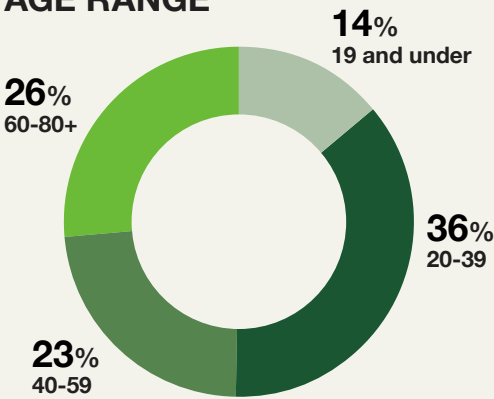
LEVEL OF EDUCATION



LANGUAGE



AGE RANGE



² Pratt Center for Community Development, [Housing Needs in Manhattan CB3](#)

³ NYU Furman Center, [NYC Neighborhood Data Profiles: Lower East Side/Chinatown | MN03](#), May 2025

FOOD INSECURITY FACTORS

Food insecurity is defined as not having consistent access to enough healthy food to live an active life that supports personal and environmental health. The following data examines a series of potential contributing factors that may impact one’s food access needs.

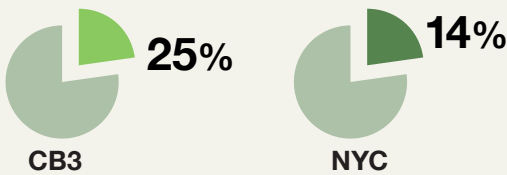
ECONOMIC DATA

\$54,482
Median Household Income

58% of older adults
earn less than **\$29,000**

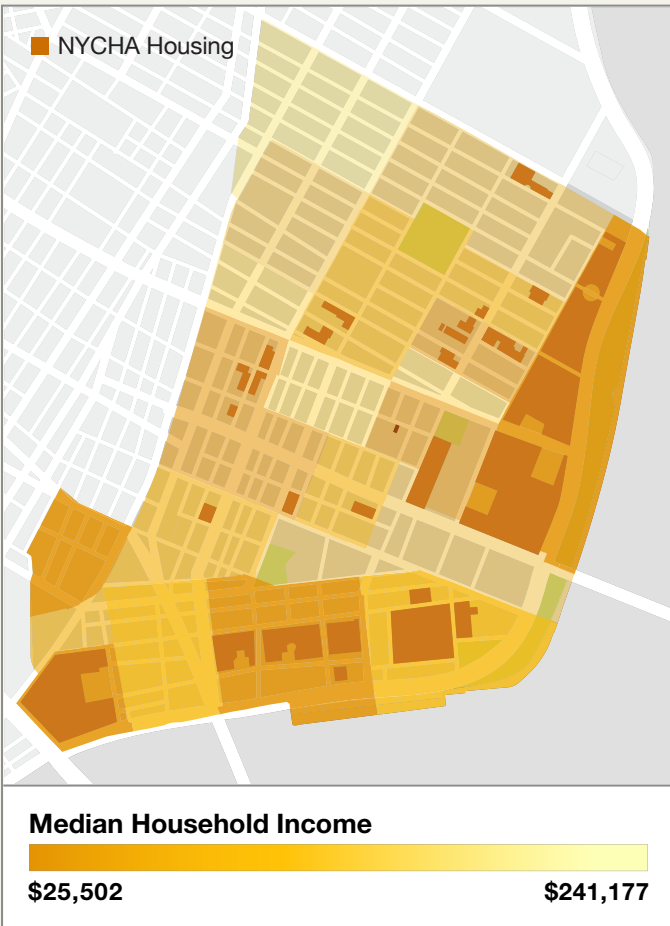
	Under \$50k	\$50-100k	\$100-200k	Over \$200k
CB3	47%	18%	19%	16%
NYC	30%	26%	21%	29%

BELOW THE POVERTY LINE



The poverty line—the minimum amount of money one needs to fulfill life’s basic necessities—changes based on how many people live in the home and their ages. The number is the same across the U.S. and is updated for inflation annually.

The map on the right displays the distribution of wealth across CB3. While the average median household income is higher than New York City as a whole, the rate of households living below the poverty line in CB3 is 10% higher.

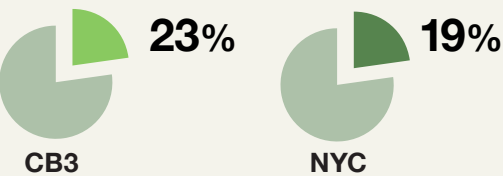


HEALTH DATA

Food insecurity is strongly linked to poorer diet quality and increased risks of chronic conditions such as diabetes and obesity. It also contributes to stress and immune dysfunction, which can further worsen health. These effects are often intensified by broader social and economic inequalities.⁴

	Obesity	Diabetes	Hypertension
CB3	14%	13%	22%
NYC	25%	12%	27% ⁵

FOOD INSECURE⁶

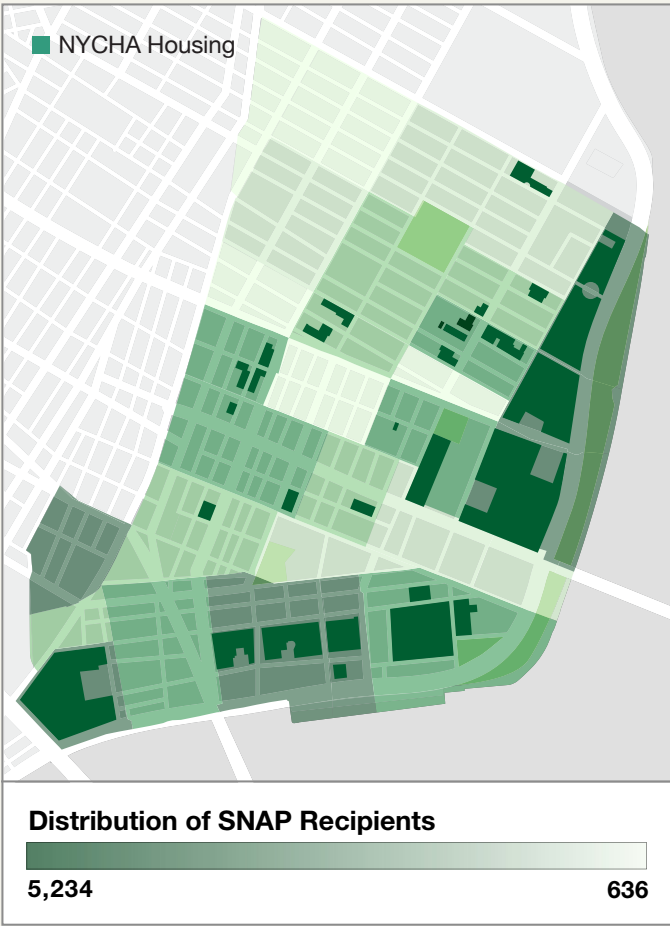


24% Rent Burdened

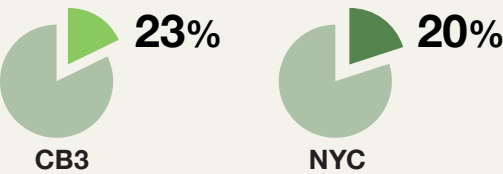
Defined by HUD as spending more than 30 percent of income on housing⁷

The map on the right highlights the distribution of people who utilize SNAP benefits in CB3. Since 2019 the neighborhood has seen a 1.5% increase in benefit utilization.

Nutrition benefits available for low-income New York residents include access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program; cash assistance under the Temporary Aid to Needy Families Program (TANF); Health Bucks; Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP); and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) for adults over 60.



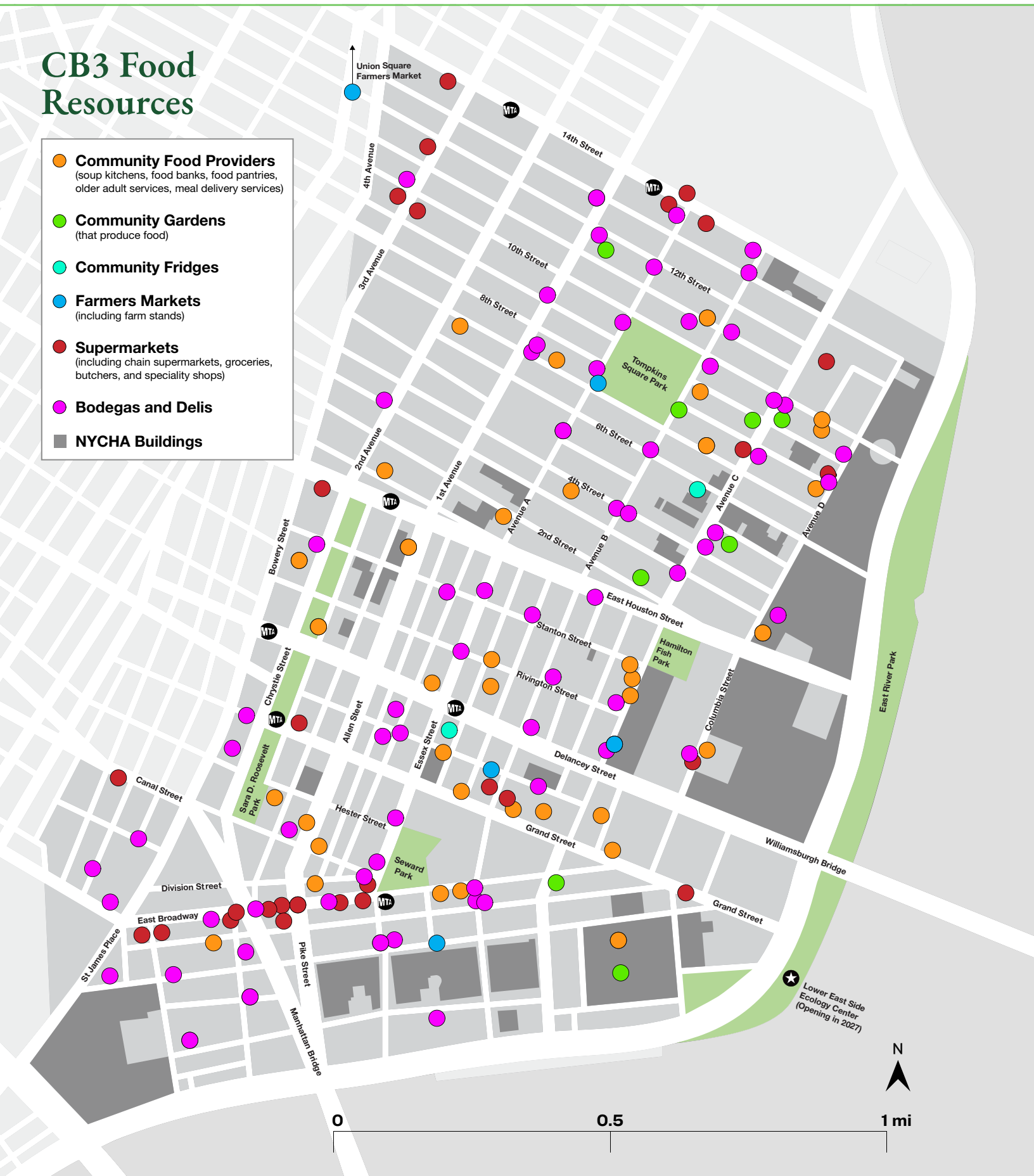
SNAP RECIPIENTS IN CB3⁸



⁴ National Library of Medicine, Food Insecurity, Neighborhood Food Environment, and Health Disparities: State of the Science, Research Gaps, and Opportunities; ⁵ NYC DOHMH, Community Health Profiles Homepage; ⁶ New York City Council, Emergency Food in NYC; ⁷ NYU Furman Center, NYC Neighborhood Data Profiles: Lower East Side/Chinatown | MN03, May 2025; ⁸ New York City Council, Emergency Food in NYC

CB3 Food Resources

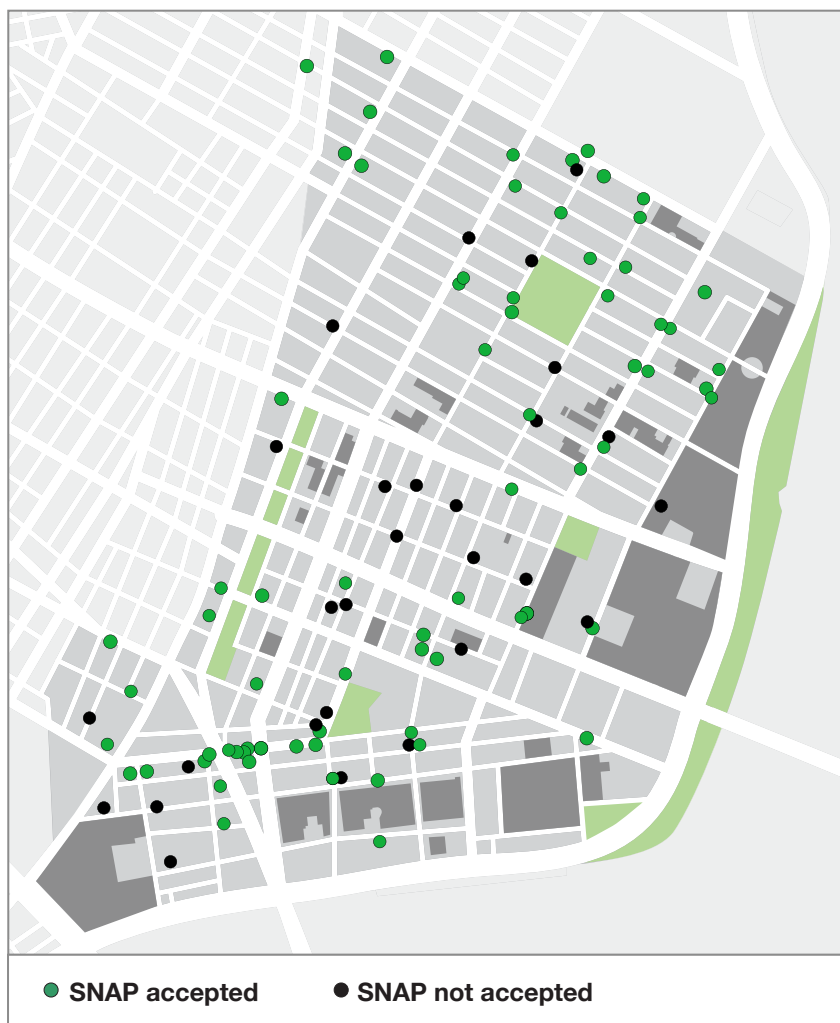
- **Community Food Providers**
(soup kitchens, food banks, food pantries, older adult services, meal delivery services)
- **Community Gardens**
(that produce food)
- **Community Fridges**
- **Farmers Markets**
(including farm stands)
- **Supermarkets**
(including chain supermarkets, groceries, butchers, and speciality shops)
- **Bodegas and Delis**
- NYCHA Buildings**



CB3 FOOD RESOURCES

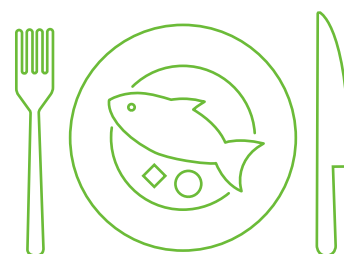
Food resources are places to get food that is affordable—including, but not limited to, supermarkets, food pantries, community fridges, and garden spaces—and the ability to access gardens, gardening tools, food benefits, and social service agencies that support benefits.

The map on the previous page depicts existing food resources across CB3. Information was collected through desk research, secondary resources—including the Hunter College New York City Food Policy Center’s NYC Food Resource Guide—and the support of SYEP participants. These resources should not be considered a definitive list for CB3 and should be regularly updated to reflect current conditions.



Food Resources Accepting SNAP

The map above highlights the distribution of food resource locations that accept SNAP benefits in CB3. Since 2019 the neighborhood has seen a 1.5% increase in residents’ benefit utilization.



150

food resources
included on the map

21%

are **emergency food providers** (pantries, soup kitchens, etc.)

48%

of food resources
are **delis/bodegas**

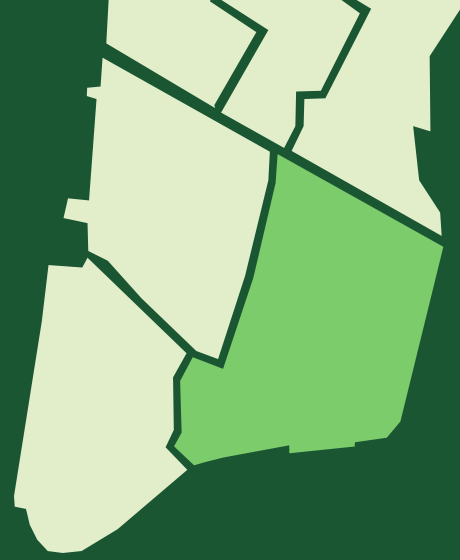
“

It’s a matter of people knowing that [resources] exist and knowing how to use them.

—Alex Lawrence, Executive Director, Trinity’s Services and Food for the Homeless

”

Community Insights



The Lower East Side Ecology Center's community food needs assessment set out to gather perceptions from New Yorkers on food access in their neighborhoods, investigate the current landscape of food access including resource utilization and services, and uncover existing barriers impacting individuals' food insecurity. A public survey collected quantitative and qualitative responses from CB3 residents and beyond regarding existing food resources, food security challenges, and opportunities to address these needs in the majority of the Lower East Side, Chinatown, and the East Village.

CB3 SURVEY PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

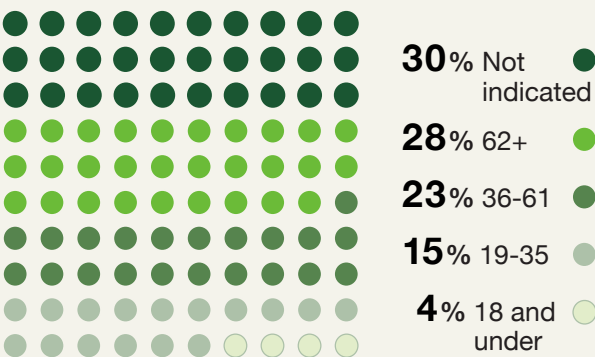
Survey collection took place at street festivals, farmers’ markets, food distribution locations, online, and on street corners. A total of 252 surveys were collected from May 25 to November 17, 2025. 192 of those survey respondents self-indicated that they live or work in zip codes in Manhattan CB3.

252 Total survey participants

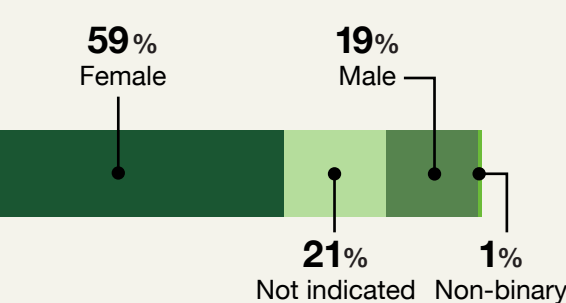
192 Manhattan CB3* survey participants only

* Zip codes 10002, 10003, 10007, 10009, 10013, 10038 only

AGE RANGE



GENDER



RACE/ETHNICITY

(people could identify more than one)

- 34% Asian / Asian American
- 17% Hispanic / Latino
- 16% White / Caucasian (Non-Hispanic)
- 11% African / African descent
- 1% American Indian / Alaskan Native
- 1% Middle Eastern
- 0% Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander
- 24% Not indicated

ESTIMATED INCOME

- \$0 – \$25,000 26%
- \$25,001 – \$50,000 5%
- \$50,001 – 100,000 12%
- \$100,001 – \$250,000 8%
- \$250,001 and above 1%
- Not indicated 48%

COMMUNITY PERCEPTION OF FOOD ACCESS IN CB3

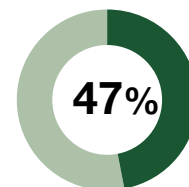
To better understand community perspectives on existing food resources and healthy, nutritious foods in CB3, survey participants were asked a series of questions that sparked their first impressions of food access in their neighborhood. These included sharing three words to describe food availability in their neighborhood and how they would rate ongoing access to nutritious and healthy food.

OVERALL PERCEPTION

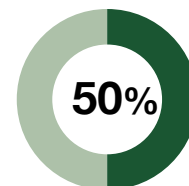
A number of patterns emerged across data and community interviews. Community perceptions revealed that **CB3 offers adequate food resources**, with 60% of CB3 survey respondents who answered this question (n:136) indicating that their food needs are being met.

Two key issues arose. Only 29% of all CB3 respondents indicated that they found healthy and nutritious food within their budget. Additionally, only 38% of respondents indicated that they are able to find the cultural or traditional food they eat, illustrating that even though they have adequate food for their household, it is not always meeting their financial or cultural needs.

The USDA defines food desert—now referred to as low-access tracts—as “a geographic area where at least 33% of the population is greater than one-half mile from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store for an urban area.”⁹ According to this definition, **CB3 is not considered a food desert**. This aligns with our survey findings and community perception.



of CB3 survey respondents have had **enough food for their household every day of the last year**



indicated they have **the equipment to prepare food at home**
(e.g., oven, stovetop, countertop, pots, pans, and other tools)

Three Words on Food Availability

When asked for **three words that came to mind that describe food access** in CB3, the following terms appeared most often:

Unhealthy GOOD / VERY GOOD
Accessible **EXPENSIVE** Supermarkets
Available LIMITED Trader Joe's, specifically

⁹ USDA Economic Research Service, Amber Waves: [Mapping Food Deserts in the United States](#)

Although the majority of CB3 survey respondents indicated they had enough food and could find it in the neighborhood, other key themes surfaced regarding how community members perceive what's available in the neighborhood.

- Food is widely perceived as expensive, and 'affordability' is inconsistent and varies by location and store type.
- Physical access to many food providers (supermarkets, bodegas, etc.) exists, but *quality* access (healthy, affordable, and nearby) is limited.
- Food may be plentiful, but choice still feels limited, especially when it comes to healthy options and dietary accommodations.
- Healthy food exists but is harder to find and afford than unhealthy food.
- Cultural diversity is present, but specific dietary needs are under-served.

“

Key Food and other brand supermarkets are nearby, but they're too expensive.

–CB3 Survey Respondent

”

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Culturally Relevant Food

While rising food costs present a more urgent need, access to cultural foods or ethnic products were mentioned consistently across survey responses, including, but not limited to, Chinese and Bengali foods, halal meat, and Kosher options, noting that “cultural produce is the most difficult” to find. In fact, one SYEP researcher noted that survey participants “would describe their access to food as easy but their access to healthy food or cultural specific foods [as] limited.”

CB3 presents a diverse array of international options for dining out, but 14% of survey respondents indicated that improving access to culturally relevant food was an important way to address food insecurity. One survey respondent has changed their diet to meet food availability in the area. “There was a halal butcher on 9th Street that has since shut down. I get some Halal chicken at Wegman’s but have primarily adopted a vegetarian diet,” while others find themselves traveling to get what they need. “[The] Bengali grocery store is not nearby. I need to travel to other boroughs to buy [those foods].”

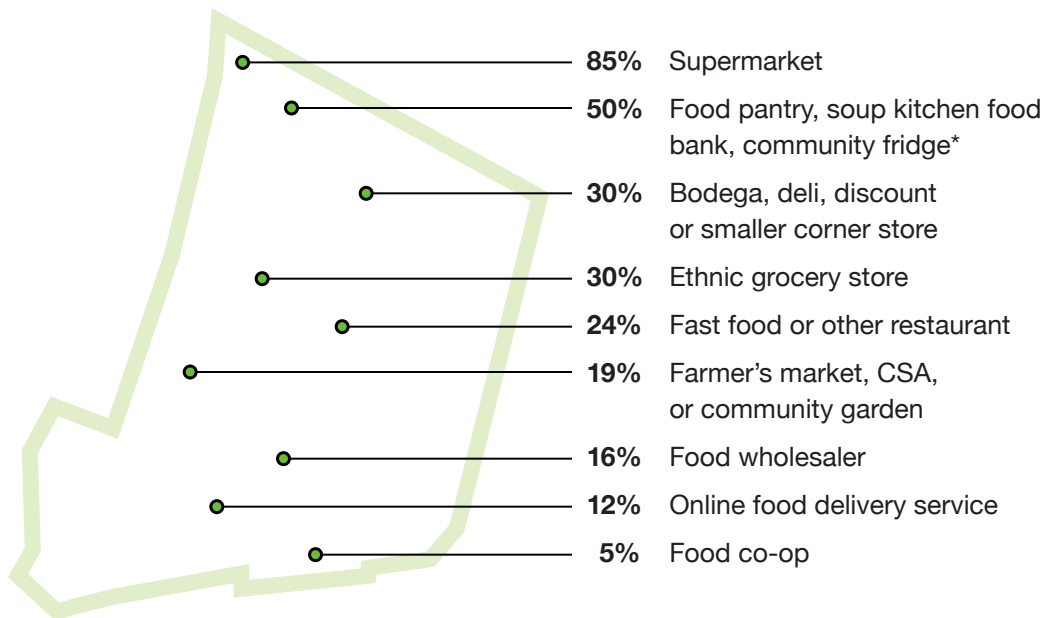
Diversifying food pantry options to include more culturally responsive items might be a step in the right direction—“something that doesn’t only meet the survival needs but also cultural and community needs” may go a long way toward overcoming food insecurity for all of CB3’s diverse residents, notes one insightful youth researcher. (For more Opportunities, see pg. 36).

FOOD RESOURCE UTILIZATION

A key component of this study was uncovering the current landscape of food resources and how residents of CB3 are utilizing them.

Food resources can be grouped into two categories: **spaces where you can purchase food** (Trader Joe's, bodegas, Costco, CVS, etc.) and **locations that provide food for free or at a low cost** (community fridges, gardens, pantries, etc.). The CB3 Food Resource Map (pg.15) highlights a community map of these assets. As these neighborhoods are constantly changing, the map should be a living document of food resources in CB3.

Survey respondents were asked to **indicate where they typically shop for food**, and responses revealed patterns in food acquisition habits.



In addition to identifying locations where they purchase goods, survey respondents were asked to indicate their use of existing social services that provide resources and address food insecurity. Those who indicated they utilize food assistance are primarily SNAP recipients (45%) and food pantry clients (37%). All other social services such as community fridges, gardens, Health Bucks, WIC, and food delivery or boxes were all below 10% utilization.

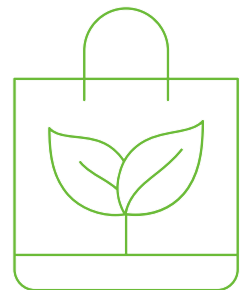
* While 50% of survey responses indicated use some sort of emergency food services, the percentage of pantry, soup kitchen, and food bank users is likely higher due to the fact that approximately two thirds of surveys were collected at food distribution sites.

“

At times, I have utilized wholesalers like Costco when a friend has offered to drive; I would use wholesalers more often to buy bulk goods at cheaper prices (e.g. toilet paper, trash bags) if it was easier to access locally.

–CB3 Survey Respondent

”



COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

The Real Users of Emergency Food Services

While collecting surveys at a CB3 food pantry, an SYEP researcher reflected that they'd "seen a few kids come to the soup kitchen who seemed underprivileged, and that kinda disheartened me because no young person, or at least kids, should have to travel out of their home just to eat a meal. It should be an option, not a need."

There is a misconception around the users of emergency food services like soup kitchens, food pantries, and community fridges. With half of survey respondents indicated that they accessed food at one of these locations in the past year, it's worth considering, "Who are the actual recipients of these resources?"

Alex Lawrence of Trinity's Services and Food for the Homeless and Nicholas Guillem at Lower Eastside Girls Club independently highlighted diverse population changes since they began working at their respective organizations. Clients of the LES Girls Club have shifted from primarily older adults to more intergenerational. Nicholas pointed out that "people bring their young children, and then young adults are also being made aware of the space and finding value in it." Separately Alex describe people with a wide range of backgrounds among those who return to the Trinity's Services pantry. "These are New Yorkers, the vast majority of whom have some kind of work in their life or some kind of income."

One of Trinity's Services' most popular initiatives is the College Student Pantry. "Especially in this neighborhood, there's a real misperception sometimes. I've heard people say, 'Oh, these NYU kids, they're fine or whatever,' when the reality is most NYU students aren't paying cash for their tuition, right?" In fact, Alex went on to say, an estimated 60% of their total pantry guests only come one to three times. "There's an idea that people always need food, are always sort of mooching, or whatever you want to call it...But the fact is, most people just come when they need it, and that it's really there as a safety net for people."

“

It's a really interesting way to think about food insecurity, right? It's this thing that ebbs and flows with people's issues, whatever they may be.

—Alex, Trinity's Services and Food for the Homeless

It may be a certain period in their life that they're struggling or going through a hard time, then they'll lean on us as a resource for a period, and then once they get back on their feet, they...no longer come and visit us.

—Nicholas, Lower Eastside Girls Club

”

BARRIERS TO RELIABLE NUTRITIOUS FOOD ACCESS IN CB3

The US Department of Agriculture¹⁰ indicates that, across the nation, the top drivers of food insecurity—defined as the lack of reliable access to enough nutritious food—are social-economics, the cost of goods, and access to food. Across CB3 survey participants, similar themes emerged when asked about their barriers to accessing affordable and healthy food.

BARRIER 1. FINANCES

The cost of food was overwhelmingly identified as the number one reason CB3 residents struggle to access the food they want to eat. In fact, approximately 64% of respondents indicated that cost was the biggest barrier to accessing healthy food in CB3. One survey respondent indicated that they are “often going to multiple different grocery stores to shop for goods at the cheapest cost, buying individual items at each respective store.”

These costs are greatly impacted by income constraints, which are further exacerbated by rent burden—spending more than 30 percent of income on housing (See more on the impact of rent burden on pg. 33). Another survey respondent said, “Options nearby are difficult to afford as someone who is employed full time,” and, while SNAP and other government relief programs exist for eligible residents, community interviews revealed that these benefits aren’t always being utilized (See more on pg. 24).

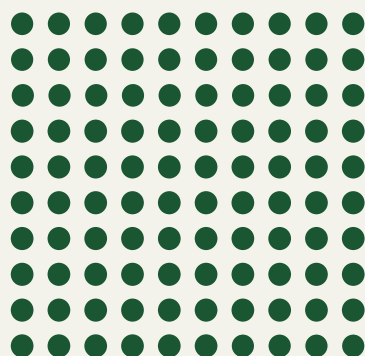
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Six people to feed, you can imagine. To buy eggs is \$10 or more. Crazy.

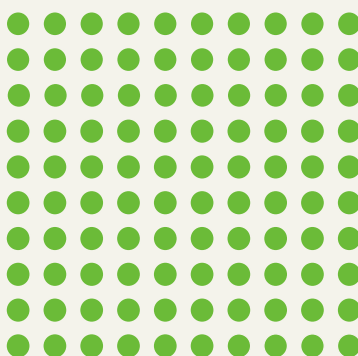
—CB3 Survey Respondent

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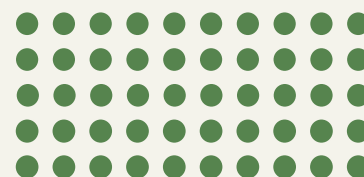
When asked for three words to describe food access in CB3, there were approximately:



100 mentions of **cost and affordability**



100 mentions of **food quality, availability, and variety**



50 mentions of **access and proximity**

¹⁰ Rabbitt, M. P., Reed-Jones, M., Hales, L. J., Suttles, S., & Burke, M. P. (2025). [Household food security in the United States in 2024](#) (Report No. ERR-358). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

Where SNAP Access Falls Short

With 45% of survey respondents indicating that they have utilized Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits in the last year, it's essential to consider how emergency food providers in CB3 can support education, access, and enrollment in SNAP. Alex Lawrence from Trinity's Services pointed out that data shows "when SNAP is funded robustly, grocery prices go down." About 248,000 retailers—from superstores to farmers' markets—across the country profit from the use of SNAP benefits due to the increased purchasing power lower-income households have to buy directly from stores.¹¹

Irrespective of unresolved funding and support from the federal government for nutrition assistance (such as SNAP and WIC), there is still a gap between eligibility and participation. Trinity's Services' experience with DOHMH's Health Bucks program illustrated that not all eligible participants were spending the money they received. And several survey responses pointed to a lack of public information on benefit acceptance. (See pg. 23 for more on this barrier to food access and pg. 15 for the Food Resources Map).

It's not just a matter of people knowing that resources exist, they also need to know how to use them. Enrollment barriers include digital literacy challenges and a complex application process that often discourages completion. Alex points out that, while some may find the system "very intuitive...it's complicated for some people. They start to sign up, and then they give up." Providers at both Trinity's Services and ROCC NYC (formerly Artists Athletes Activists) have independently taken action to mitigate these challenges with SNAP sign-up initiatives (Trinity's Services) or Community Days (ROCC NYC), where "staff from the Human Resources Administration...share information about the resources."

Physical barriers aren't the only thing standing between CB3 residents and more equitable food access. One survey respondent shared that they "don't have EBT benefits—partly because, culturally, it's not seen positively in my household, and my husband is strongly against applying. There's also concern that receiving benefits like EBT could affect our future opportunities." Nicholas from the Lower Eastside Girls Club shared his belief that this "barrier comes more from pride and wanting to live and provide for themselves in a dignified way rather than relying on a service like a food pantry." Breaking through this cultural or perceived barrier is essential to alleviating food insecurity.

“

There's also a stigma attached to receiving benefits...You have to present it in a way where people feel like they're welcomed and that it's not a bad thing, or they don't have to be ashamed of asking for help or receiving benefits.

—Power Malu, ROCC NYC
(formerly Artists Athletes Activists)

”

¹¹ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, [SNAP Boosts Retailers and Local Economies](#)

BARRIER 2. FOOD AVAILABILITY

CB3 survey respondents consistently indicated that the neighborhood lacks fresh produce, meat, and seafood; culturally-appropriate food; and products to satisfy restricted diets.

The item CB3 residents indicated as most difficult to access is fresh, quality produce—with 70 references across two survey questions (“*What specific types of food have been most difficult for your household to access?*” and “*What are the biggest barriers to accessing healthy food in your neighborhood?*”) Fresh meat was the second-most in demand food item respondents were missing in CB3.

Across the surveys, there were several references to a lack of culturally relevant food (indicating the distance to Chinatown from the Lower East Side and the East Village as well as the absence of Bengali groceries, specifically). A small number of survey respondents also indicated difficulty finding products to meet specific dietary needs including low salt, low sugar, vegan, gluten-free, or organic diets.

TOP 5 DESIRED FOODS

1. Fresh, quality produce
 2. Meat
 3. Cultural & ethnic foods
 4. Seafood
 5. Eggs
-

“

Meat! Costly and limited in [the] pantry program.
—CB3 Survey Respondent

”

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Fresh Food Feels Out of Reach

Tabling event participants and survey respondents shared their frustration around the lack of available and quality fresh food. Several participants made reference to lower priced-produce going bad quickly and higher quality produce being prohibitively expensive at local supermarkets. In these cases, fresh food becomes functionally inaccessible, despite technically being available.

Power Malu—a community leader with ROCC NYC—has had multiple conversations with community members about their lack of access to fresh produce and quality, affordable meat at neighborhood pantries and food banks. To help fill this gap, ROCC NYC took matters into their own hands by putting up community fridges in the neighborhood and inside public schools, where people would have access to fresh food.

Another potential solution Power identified is to partner with fresh produce purveyors willing to distribute to food service organizations at a discounted rate. “If we’re not growing food, and we don’t have enough spaces to grow, to be able to share with people, then you have to buy the produce.” They reinforce the Ecology Center’s view that more community gardens can help increase access when “people just go there and take what they need...If we have more of that, that would be great.” (See more recommendations for accessing fresh, quality groceries on pg. 36)

BARRIER 3: PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY

Distance to grocery stores and public transit; mobility and health restrictions; and lack of vehicle ownership all limit food accessibility across the CB3 community. Challenges accessing public transit or private vehicles—including difficulty carrying groceries and/or traveling longer distances—prevent residents from getting to the stores they prefer due to variety or cost.

20% of respondents indicated that lack of transportation, on top of mobility or health limitations, regularly impacts their ability to buy the food they want. For one person “with mobility difficulties, bringing home food from pantries is physically painful and exhausting.” Several community members indicated that city infrastructure contributes to these challenges with sidewalk impediments, inaccessible subway stations, and blocked bus shelters.

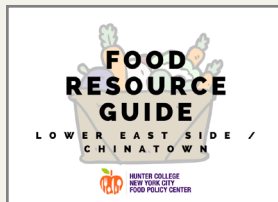
TOP 5 IMPEDIMENTS TO FOOD ACCESS

1. Distance to walk
 2. Weight of groceries
 3. Physically inaccessible entrances, paths, or aisles
 4. Family friendliness
 5. Crowds
-

Policy Research in Action

The **Hunter College New York City Food Policy Center** invests in innovative and evidence-based solutions to prevent diet-related diseases and promote food security in New York City and other urban centers. Working with policy makers, community organizations, and public advocates, the Center strives to create healthy, sustainable food environments and promote community and economic development. Through interdisciplinary research, policy analysis, evaluation and education, the Center leverages the expertise and passion of Hunter College students and staff to make New York City a model for fair food policy.

SYEP researchers verified the information listed in their Food Resource Guide by connecting with locations to confirm details. Learn more on pg. 7.



“

More frequent free buses... repairing streets [and] sidewalks to make them accessible... That really highlights that there are other aspects to this that's not just putting food in people's mouths.

—Angelina Montez, Hunter College New York City Food Policy Center

”

Speaking the Same Language

One unexpected barrier surfaced through interviews with community leaders: language. While the community needs survey was translated and distributed into Spanish, Simplified Chinese, and French, there were no specific questions on language and therefore no survey responses highlighting this as a barrier to food access. Community leaders, however, across CB3 have observed this time and again.

These language barriers are magnified when accessing social service benefits, as Lily Chin from the Lower East Side Partnership pointed out, “[Applicants] have trouble navigating through the legal or any papers that they have to fill out to get things done.” She further highlights that when programming is offered exclusively in English, some CB3 residents are prevented from taking advantage of essential services. Nicholas Guillem, Lower Eastside Girls Club, also mentioned in his interview that the “language barrier is a big part of [accommodating the needs of people at the pantry]. We don’t have anyone on staff that speaks Mandarin, Cantonese, or Fujianese, so, even if we were to offer information that is translated on paper to those languages, if that person would actually come here, I think they would find it very inaccessible.”

The effects of this barrier on non-English speakers are visible firsthand at Cafewal, a free restaurant created as a food-based job training initiative, run by Tyler Hefferon of EVLovesNYC. “One of the biggest barriers that we’ve been running into is that the job skills have been progressing a lot faster, in some cases, than the language skills. The language barrier is something that’s harder for us to work with. A lot of training programs around New York City already have strict parameters on your English ability, and they won’t even accept people who are early...English learners.” While this may seem peripheral to food access, a lack of English language skills adds another layer on one’s ability to get a job in order to pay for food. This particularly affects the immigrant and refugee community in the city and in CB3, specifically.

CB3 organizations can offer a variety of food justice programming, services, and opportunities, but without the ability to communicate authentically with those who need them, there will still be community members whose needs remain unmet.

“

No matter the organization, it’s very important to have...liaisons, coordinators, managers who have the option of a second language, or a translator who can provide a second language option for programming that happens.

–Lily Chin, Lower East Side Partnership

”

BARRIER 4: AWARENESS

The fourth barrier to emerge from community interviews was confirmed through survey responses: there is a decided lack of information and awareness around food resources and income support. While these efforts are clearly being made by local CBOs, there remains a gap for a portion of the community in how best to locate the services they need.

For example, only 36 people indicated that they have gotten their food at a farmers' market, CSA, or community garden in the last year. Lily Chin, Lower East Side Partnership, highlights that many CB3 residents she speaks to believe that "farmers' markets are very expensive, and that being true for these residents, they are not aware of the EBT Market Bucks." There seems to be a perceived barrier that these resources are not for them.

While the survey did not directly ask where participants get information about neighborhood food resources, we heard from several survey respondents that their food insecurity can be attributed to a lack of information around these resources (like pantry locations or schedules).

Community leaders and neighborhood CBO representatives have further reiterated this gap, highlighting that efforts to connect community members in need to available resources often fall short.



4 out of 10 respondents indicate that they **lack the knowledge or confidence to prepare healthy meals**

“

If you have limited knowledge, then you won't be aware of all the good things around you.

– CB3 Survey Respondent

I'm not aware of soup kitchens... community gardens, and Grow NYC, fresh food boxes, meal delivery services that are cheap / EBT.

– CB3 Survey Respondent

”

How Education Can Fill the Food Access Gap

While many CB3 community members believe they have adequate access to the food they need, the reality is that many residents lack education around how to use the wide range of food resources available to them. Classes and workshops are offered by CB3 CBOs, but what community members have the capacity to take advantage of these services?

Lily Chin, in her role as Community Kitchen and Program Manager at the Lower East Side Partnership, shared that their “public classes mostly attract folks who are older or retired. More than 50% of our folks who attend these classes are above the age of 60.”

Lily’s community education classes at LESP target particular items from local pantries that recipients often don’t know what to do with. “The most recent class I had was titled ‘Vegetable and Cottage Cheese Pasta.’ A lot of folks don’t really know how to use cottage cheese, and that’s something they do receive from the food pantry pretty often...After that particular class, I had a few people come up to me and tell me that they have received this item from [the] food pantry...They either either threw it away or gave it away because they didn’t know what to do with it.”

Introducing a wider variety of class topics, times, or locations and even offering recipe cards for less familiar pantry ingredients at food distribution sites might begin to close the education gap that prevents community members from maximizing the resources available to them in CB3. (See pg. 39 for Education Opportunities)

“

I remember growing up in the Lower East Side. I had soda and chips every day and pizza every day and wasn’t educated on the vast array of food opportunities that are healthy for me...So I still see these kids getting the \$1 soda when they can have a fresh juice...There’s still a lot of education that needs to happen.

–Chris Marte,
Council Member

It’s a matter of people knowing that [resources] exist and knowing how to use them. That is a little bit harder or just takes more education.

–Alex Lawrence,
Trinity’s Services and Food
for the Homeless

”

Populations Most Affected by Food Insecurity



A key question of this study was to identify which local populations are most impacted by food insecurity. Utilizing publicly available data, New York-based food research studies (like the **Hunter College Food Policy Center**) and the **Manhattan CB3 annual report**, we uncovered that the residents most likely to be impacted by food insecurity are older adults, lower income residents, and the unhoused community.* Other notable groups that emerged through interviews with local food justice community leaders include college students, children, recent immigrants, and short-term users of emergency food services. The following section dives into what potential economic, activity-burden, and living-condition stresses may be contributing to food insecurity.

* While many survey respondents fit into these categories, data collection was unable to definitively uncover the specific needs of these groups due to its small sample size.

OLDER ADULTS

Nationally, older adults (individuals aged 65 or older) have an increased likelihood of being rent burdened and have the lowest income compared to other age groups.¹² As a result, 23% of CB3's older adult population is considered food insecure—compared with 19% citywide.

25% of CB3 residents are older adults, and there several key factors contribute to their susceptibility to food insecurity. 58% of older adults earn less than \$29,000 a year and are typically on a fixed income, so, as food prices continue to rise, food access becomes more difficult.

Secondly, many older adults face housing instability including exorbitant rent and the impacts of living alone, as 57% of CB3's older adult population do.

Finally, 32% of CB3's older adult population is living with a disability, while 29% experience ambulatory difficulties. These challenges also contribute to individuals' access to healthy and affordable food.



4 in 10 are older adults, representing the largest share of rent-burdened households in CB3

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Supporting CB3's Older Neighbors

Responses across all data collection methods confirmed that older adults are particularly susceptible to food insecurity. In fact, focus group participants from CB3 food justice CBOs highlighted the importance of prioritizing older adults with limited income and mobility in recommendations for addressing these needs.

A survey respondent pointed out that many older adults may lack knowledge of available resources due to limited digital navigation skills. While a tabling activity participant commented that “not enough supermarkets [are] selling healthy foods at prices that senior citizens on fixed incomes can afford.”

Additionally, at the Ecology Center's *Interplanted: Weaving Roots for Food Justice* panel on November 13, 2026, attendees reflected on the CB3 Resources for Older Adults map on pg. 32 and observed that “older adult services are near community food providers but not near most of the other food resources,” and that “there are few older adult service centers. Transportation is hard for older adults,” and recommend that “having more would make them more accessible.” (See Opportunities that Cater to Older Adults on pg. 37)

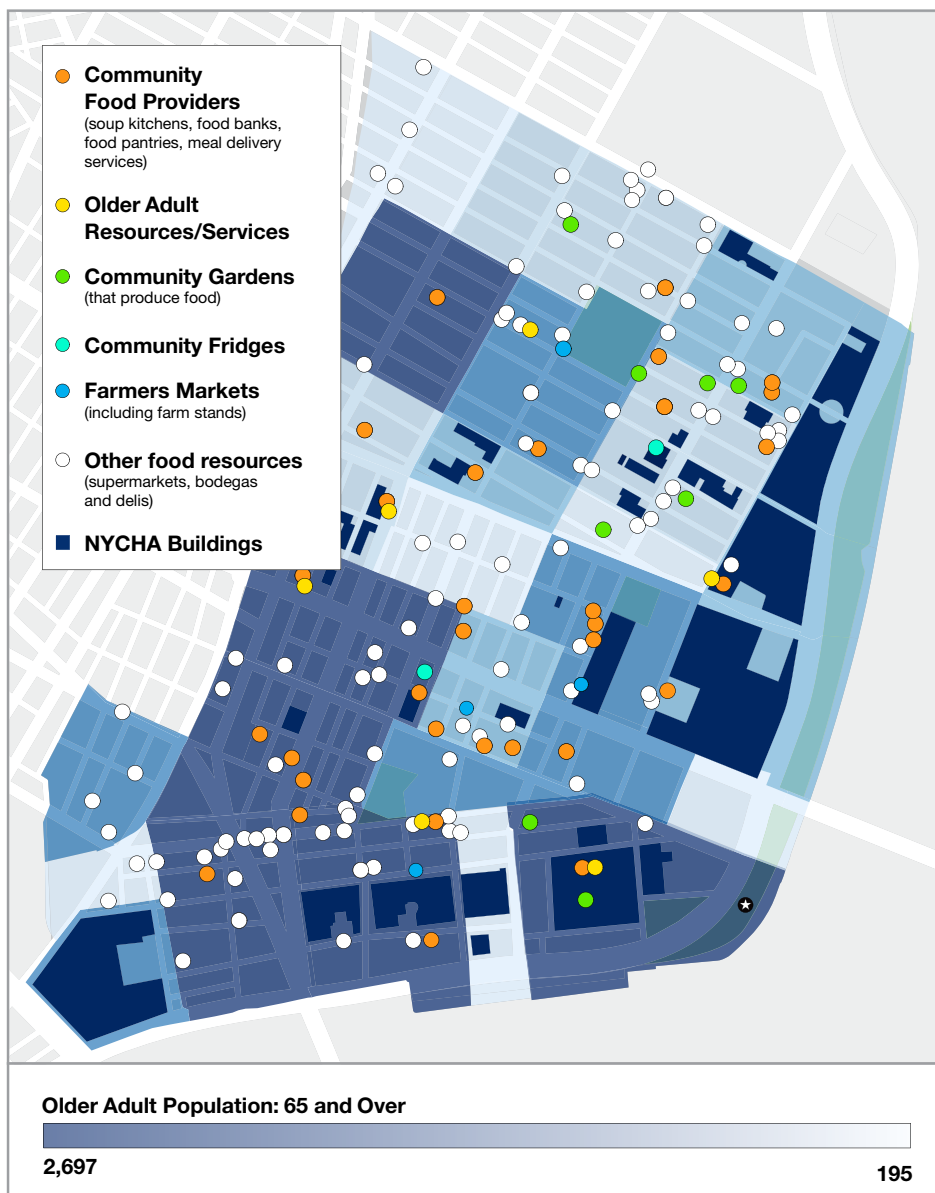
“

Anyone that has pre-existing health conditions, is in that older age demographic, may not have family support, [or] is home bound... our pantry is definitely a lifeline.

—Nicholas, Lower Eastside Girls Club

“

¹² Cobbs E, Ford MM, McCarthy J, Havusha A, Sandman D. No One Should Age Hungry: Addressing Food Insecurity Among Older Adults in New York State. 2025.



38,867
residents of CB3 are
older adults
(age 61 and over)

“

For someone that lives in LaGuardia Houses, going to Tompkins Square Market—that's a 30-45 minute walk, at least... For seniors, having more localized green markets can fill in that gap.

—Chris Marte,
City Councillor, District 1

”

CB3 Resources for Older Adults

The map above shows food resources across CB3, in the context of its older adult demographic—the darker the blue, the higher the concentration of older adults. Through the mapping of this data, a limited number of senior-specific services (yellow dots) were identified. It's unclear if this limited amount of resources meets the current needs of such a large population. Additionally, these services are not necessarily located near the highest concentrated areas of older adults, potentially impacting individual access to these services.

LOWER INCOME RESIDENTS

Across the country, lower income residents are consistently balancing financial obligations with food access. Although the median income of CB3 residents is currently higher than the New York City average, adults aged 25-44 are the only age demographic in CB3 represented in that statistic.

Studies have indicated that an individual's housing type and size plays a key role in food insecurity. For example, there are 14,900 NYCHA housing units specifically designated for low income households in CB3 alone. Those most affected live in one-, two-, five-, or six-person households,¹³ and nearly half of CB3 residents are live alone, adding an additional burden as they do not have multiple incomes to support their household.

Despite CB3's higher median household income than other Manhattan areas, it has higher rates of rent burden and individuals living below the poverty line. The number of residents using SNAP benefits in CB3 has increased 1.5% from 2019, adding increased strain on this community.



1 in 4 live below the poverty line
(vs. 14% citywide)

Facts About CB3's Older Adult Population



COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

The Rent Eats First

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines “rent burdened” as spending more than 30 percent of one's income on housing and “severely rent burdened” as more than 50 percent. As Lower Eastside Girls Club Food Justice Manager, Nicholas Guillem told our youth researchers, “If you can't afford basic needs like housing and...healthcare...food is going to be a secondary thought.” This was echoed by other community leaders interviewed for this needs assessment. EVLovesNYC's Tyler Hefferon reiterated that “food insecurity is also tied into housing insecurity,” and Alex Lawrence with Trinity's Services pointed out that you're always going to pay the rent first, so “the food can be a little bit behind.”

¹³ Pratt Center for Community Development, [Housing Needs in Manhattan CB3](#)



“

I’m on a fixed income, and the prices keep going up.

– CB3 Survey Respondent

”

CB3’s Resources for Lower Income Residents

The map above highlights the distribution of people who utilize SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits in CB3. This map specifically illustrates food resource locations that accept SNAP as well as community-based providers offering free food support services. Sites include supermarkets, bodegas/delis, as well as community-based resources (e.g., soup kitchens, food pantries, food banks, older adult services, and meal delivery services).

Desk research and community mapping uncovered that 94% of the CB3 supermarkets, bodegas, and delis that were tracked accept SNAP benefits and are geographically distributed evenly throughout the Lower East Side, Chinatown, and the East Village.

UNHOUSED COMMUNITY

The Coalition for the Homeless estimates that, as of January 2026, 100,437 people were sleeping in shelters across the city,¹⁴ and NYC's 2025 HOPE report indicates that an additional 4,504 individuals currently experience unsheltered homelessness.¹⁵ Despite this reporting, exact numbers of CB3's homeless population remain undocumented, and as with every neighborhood across New York, CB3 is host to many of the city's unhoused. Due to a lack of legal address, these more transient members of the CB3 community are unable to access benefits available to others facing food insecurity.

To support this population, CB3 currently has 32 soup kitchens and 13 permanent shelters, among the highest number in the city. For many unhoused individuals without the ability to utilize a kitchen, CB3's food pantry resources are unattainable.

Tyler Hefferon with EVLovesNYC and Cafewal highlighted how closely food insecurity is tied to housing insecurity. "In a lot of cases things like SNAP benefits and those types of programs are not really valuable to [those] living in New York City shelter programs because they don't have a place to cook the food." Alex Lawrence, Trinity's Services and Food for the Homeless, points out that their soup kitchen skews more toward people who are unhoused or homeless, but they really see the impact of homelessness on their patrons at the food pantry. "Everyone who comes in, we do ask them to provide some kind of proof that they have some kind of home...The idea is just that, if we give you a bag of rice, you have water and a pot or a stove to cook it, that kind of thing, so the food doesn't go to waste."

Ultimately, without stable housing or access to basic cooking facilities, even the most well-intentioned support systems fall short of meeting the needs of unhoused individuals, deepening the gap in food security for this population.

¹⁴ The Coalition for the Homeless, [Facts About Homelessness](#); ¹⁵ Hope NYC, [Homeless Outreach Population Estimate, 2025 Results](#)

Opportunities

For Addressing Food Insecurity



Data from CB3 residents, local community-based organizations (CBOs), and community leaders yielded myriad strategies for addressing food insecurity. Across collection methods, participants were asked to imagine approaches to improve healthy food access. This section serves to empower neighborhood CBOs to diversify their own programming and advocate to City leaders for support in meeting community needs.

The following opportunities have been categorized into five main streams: Direct Service + Programming, Education + Outreach, Relationship Building + Community Partnerships, and Policy + Advocacy. While there is overlap across categories, the primary intention is to offer ideas that honor community members' perspectives and help overcome the barriers uncovered by this research (See pg. 23 for more).

These opportunities are not presented as a to-do list or promises that CBOs need to make to the broader community. Recommendations in each section start with immediately implementable, low-lift opportunities and move to more aspirational or longer-term initiatives. They provide an accessible starting point for community leaders to imagine the next steps in supporting the CB3 populations identified in this report as most affected by food insecurity.

DIRECT SERVICE + PROGRAMMING

These recommendations are specifically intended to support the provision of tangible aid or assistance directly to individuals or communities. While many of these ideas may align with existing programming or services, the aim is to be intentional about tying the outcomes of those programs to CB3's primary barriers to food access and those most impacted by them.

One-on-one benefits support

Provide eligibility guidance, education, and registration assistance (for SNAP, cash assistance, etc.) at food distribution sites, CBOs, and local community events

Youth grocery delivery

Partner with neighborhood schools or CBOs to provide older adult and disabled residents with groceries delivered by local young people

Rent-a-cart

Start a grocery cart rental service for residents struggling to carry groceries longer distances

NYCHA spaces

Increase food access in NYCHA developments by installing community fridges, building more community gardens, or implementing regular farmers' markets in central locations

Current needs assessment

Conduct an extensive assessment of existing CB3 food distribution sites to fill gaps in service to the populations most affected by food insecurity (i.e., older adults, lower income residents, and the unhoused population)

Mobile operations

Fill geographic service gaps with mobile services in areas where impacted residents cannot easily access CB3 food resources

Reimagined pantries

Redesign food distribution or locations to provide more choice for clients, including culturally relevant offerings and options for specialty diets

Resident discounts

Design a CB3-wide discount program to provide reduced costs for neighborhood residents at local businesses

Cater to Older Adults

- Partner with older adult residences or assisted living facilities in CB3 to coordinate regular shopping trips to warehouse stores or more affordable supermarkets outside of the area
- Establish more food distribution sites near the highest concentration of older adult residents
- Subsidize grocery delivery for older adult or disabled residents

“

In an ideal world, pantries wouldn't exist...but thinking of creative ways to build on what we're doing with the food pantry, to actually have people be able to not need it anymore, is front of mind for me.

– Nicholas Guillem,
Lower Eastside Girls Club

”

Where in the Neighborhood?

Participants were asked to indicate **specific locations in the neighborhood where they would like to see more food-growing spaces or distribution points**. This map depicts exact locations indicated and general themes that encourage more food access.



EDUCATION + OUTREACH

Key insights from community members suggest that the challenge is less about availability of resources and more about knowing they exist and how to access them. These recommendations invite CB3 organizations to act hyper-locally to target residents most affected by food insecurity, build awareness on this topic, and educate them about available resources.

Diverse educational offerings

Introduce classes on food storage, preservation; finding affordable, nutritious food in the neighborhood; growing food without outdoor space; and preparing healthy, inexpensive meals for kids

Food service attendants

Position representatives at community fridge and pantry locations to offer guidance on how to use grocery items and other neighborhood food resources

Interactive map

Operationalize the CB3 Food Resource map (see pg. 15) as an interactive, update-able digital map, so CB3 residents can view and filter for the resources they need

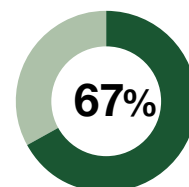
Hyper-local outreach

Investigate and deploy new outreach strategies for communicating available CB3 resources (e.g., tabling at existing events, meeting residents where they gather, speaking at local PA meetings, etc.) by engaging with residents and ensuring that outreach channels align with how and where they gather information

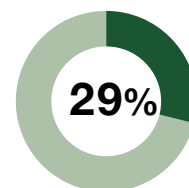
Community meals

Host regular meals open to residents in CB3—for those in need of food resources and for food justice advocates—to build community and increase food insecurity awareness and education

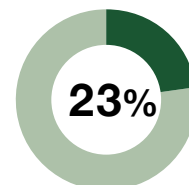
Through the survey and tabling events, the Ecology Center invited New Yorkers to weigh in on programming suggestions:



would attend events on cooking healthy meals on a budget, meal planning, or food preservation



were interested in cooking demonstrations or gardening workshops



indicated their interest in a farmers' market tour, if offered

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING + COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

One thing became clear across all data collected: no one can do this alone. Forming meaningful partnerships maximizes resources, increases efficiency, builds community, and, ultimately, strengthens the impact of the work.

Repurposed spaces

Build relationships with property owners and local real estate agents to leverage unused industrial kitchens and commercial spaces to activate these vacant storefronts for food distribution, community food preparation, soup kitchens, or education programs

Supplier relationships

Build relationships with food producers and food wholesalers to source pantry food supplies

Shelter–pantry connection

Enhance partnerships between CB3 shelters and food pantries to ensure that unhoused community members are receiving the services they need throughout the day

Rescued food waste

Actively reduce food waste in CB3 by partnering with existing food rescue programs (e.g., NY Common Pantry, City Harvest), local businesses, and homeowners

Referral protocol

Develop a system to support emergency food resource sites or neighborhood CBOs to direct clients to other available CB3 locations

Intentional resource-sharing

Create an official network across neighborhood CBOs to track and manage food donations, stagger food distribution schedules, share food supplies, and refer clients to other food service locations

Grassroots fundraising

Encourage local funding groups to sponsor a grant or mutual aid opportunity that supports small, local businesses' ability to accept SNAP

Translingual support

Ensure every food service organization has a language interpretation plan in place for communicating in a variety of languages (e.g., multi-lingual staff members, access to a language line, virtual interpretation service)

“

Making things hyper-local makes a lot of sense to address this issue...

It seems like there is a role for everyone to play in the neighborhood to create a more accessible food landscape. – *Natalie Eddings, Lower East Side Ecology Center*

Partnering will always be more powerful than trying to start something from scratch, so look... for existing structures that you can use to your advantage.

– *Alex Lawrence, Executive Director, Trinity's Services and Food for the Homeless*

”

POLICY + ADVOCACY

This section acknowledges that barriers to food access often stem from systemic issues beyond the capacity or reach of local community nonprofits. These recommendations encourage coalition-building and advocacy in the fight against food inequity, rallying policy-makers with the power to make a difference.

Collective voice

Start a community petition to increase bus service along routes near lower-cost grocery stores

Discretionary funding

Speak with elected officials about utilizing discretionary funding to subsidize local CSAs for older adult, low income, and/or NYCHA residents or designate green space for local food growing and community garden sites within CB3

Legislative action

Advocate to elected officials (local, state, and federal) for public policy that regulates food pricing

Municipal recognition

Start an awareness campaign for City officials around the impact of rent burden on food insecurity

Infrastructure reform

Work with City and local officials to address accessibility issues on local streets (e.g., sidewalk repairs, mobility upgrades), ensuring all individuals with limited mobility can safely access neighborhood food resources

“

Solutions [need to be] less about food on [the] plate and focus [more] on the policy.

– David DeVaughn, Senior Advisory for Strategy and Impact, Community Kitchen

”

Insights from Local Residents

Survey respondents identified several priorities for addressing food insecurity in CB3. More than half (54%) supported expanding food assistance programs, while 77% wanted greater access to warehouse, box, or discount grocery stores. Others emphasized the need for more fresh produce options, including CSAs and farmers' markets (34%), as well as additional food pantries, community fridges, urban farms, and culturally relevant foods. Limited awareness of existing resources also emerged as a challenge, with 20% of respondents reporting that they didn't know what programs or services were available in their neighborhood.

These findings present opportunities for future programming, local business development, and community partnerships aimed at improving both food access and resource awareness.

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Additional thanks to participating Manhattan CB3 community members

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Survey Collection Sites

- Henry Street Settlement Headquarters
- Henry Street Settlement Older Adult Center
- Lillian Wald Food Pantry
- Lower Eastside Girls Club
- Manny Cantor Center
- Middle Collegiate Church
- New York Public Library
- NYC Parks
- Office of Chris Marte
- Trinity's Lower East Side (SAFH)

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