

Question 1: What is your number one concern regarding food security in New York City?

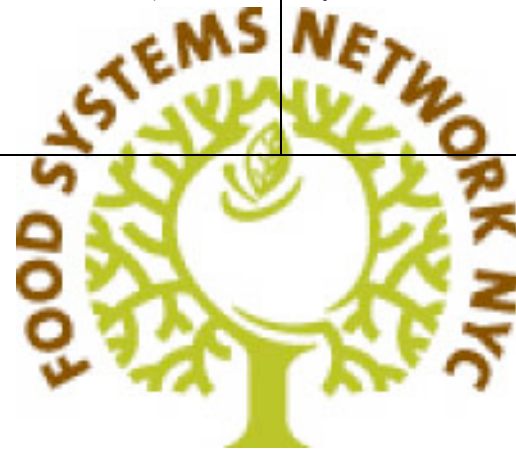
Bill de Blasio	Eric Gioia	Mark Green	Norman Siegel
<p>Fresh, healthy food should be accessible to every New Yorker. This has two components, both of which we must address. First, there is physical availability. While some neighborhoods enjoy a variety of fresh food sources, other areas are “food deserts,” with a disproportionate number of fast food outlets and few locations to purchase fresh, healthy foods. The other aspect of accessibility is affordability. Food aid is fundamental to New Yorkers in need, and while New York City has made significant gains in increasing Food Stamps access and enrollment over the past several years, estimates of those who are eligible but still not enrolled range from 400,000 – 700,000.</p>	<p>It is ensuring all New Yorkers have access to fresh, affordable, nutritious food in their neighborhoods – meaning that the food must be both affordable and locally available. When I first took office, approximately 850,000 New Yorkers were enrolled in the food stamp program, with roughly 800,000 more eligible but not enrolled. Through investigations, hearings and legislation, I have spent the past seven and a half years working to eliminate barriers to access, so that those working hardest to make ends meet are able to feed themselves and their families. Since I took office, the food stamp application has been simplified from a 24-page document to a two-page application with two pages of instructions. At least one HRA food stamp office and job center in every borough is open extra hours on evenings and weekends to accommodate the schedules of working New Yorkers. And after the City Council passed my legislation, NYC will finally have its first ever online food stamp application this January, so that New Yorkers trying to access the program don't have to lose time from work or caregiving responsibilities by having to wait in line at an office.</p> <p>But more needs to be done. Too many neighborhoods have ready access to highly processed junk food in convenience stores and fast food restaurants, with little, if any, fresh, whole food available. I have worked with the Council for the Environment of New York City (CENYC) to open up two greenmarkets in my district (LIC & Sunnyside), but some neighborhoods don't even have a full-service supermarket, which should be considered a fundamental component of any neighborhood, like a school. I am eager to see the impacts of the incentives in the FRESH initiative, but I would also like to see that initiative expanded and enhanced in specific ways (see response to question 5 below). Too many children are marketed and sold junk food both inside their schools -- from vending machines, student stores, and a la carte in the cafeteria -- and outside, at fast food restaurants located just outside the school walls. I am hopeful that the issue of competitive food in schools will be addressed as part of Child Nutrition Reauthorization this year, and I will advocate for legislation at the state and local level if it is not. And when economists at Columbia and Berkeley found that fast food restaurants located within 0.1 mile of a school caused increased rates of obesity among students, I called for legislation to restrict the opening of any new fast food restaurants within that distance of a school.</p>	<p>Groceries in New York City often cost as much as 60 to 80 percent more than in other metropolitan regions and we have limited access to fresh produce in low-income and minority communities. We must lower the cost of food in New York City and ensure that healthy fresh produce makes it onto the shelves of grocers in every neighborhood.</p>	<p>Fair and equitable access to healthy, nutritional food is of the utmost concern. It is a fact that in this city there are certain neighborhoods where healthy food vendors are always within walking distance, and there are other neighborhoods where only fast food chains proliferate and groceries that don't offer fresh produce or other nutritional options are the norm. As a matter of public health and economic justice, government needs to address this disparity, because it results in greater rates of obesity and a general tendency towards less healthy lifestyles for those who live or grow up in disadvantaged neighborhoods.</p>

Question 2: What steps can the public advocate take to ensure that our city’s institutions—such as hospitals and schools—have increased access to healthy, fresh food from local producers? Please explain the regulatory and/or economic challenges of implementing your proposals.

Bill de Blasio	Eric Gioia	Mark Green	Norman Siegel
<p>This is an issue I have already started to address through FoodprintNYC, a City Council Resolution I introduced this summer. As Public Advocate, I will work as a Citywide leader to advance the aims of FoodprintNYC, which is designed to lessen the impact that the City’s food choices and production systems have on climate change through the launch of a public awareness campaign, greater access to local, fresh, healthy food, and the mobilization of the financial and technical support needed to sustain these efforts, especially in low-income communities and City-run institutions.</p>	<p>The Bloomberg Administration has leveraged the City's enormous buying power to make significant strides in improving the nutritive content and quality of food in our schools and other institutions, like corrections facilities. But there needs to be an advocate to address the regulatory and economic hurdles that stand in the way of further progress -- so that more of the food served by City institutions is fresh, local and minimally processed -- and as a Member of the City Council, some of my greatest accomplishments -- like bringing a bank to Queensbridge Houses, a public housing development of approximately 15,000 residents nearly a mile away from the nearest bank -- have been achieved not through the legislative or budgetary authority of the City Council, but through coalition-building, organizing and advocacy.</p> <p>I understand that fresh, whole or minimally processed food from local producers is more expensive than the food for which the City currently contracts. I support efforts on Child Nutrition Reauthorization at the federal level to increase reimbursement rates for meals served to children (and some adults) through the federal child nutrition programs. Larger reimbursements will permit the City to purchase better food. I also support measures to incentivize purchases of fresh food, particularly from local producers. City and State procurement policies must also be evaluated. While there is good reason to have measures in place mandating that government contracts go to the lowest-cost qualified bidder, in this case they pose an obstacle to securing the healthiest food for the millions of children and adults the City feeds. I will work alongside the Mayor's Office to come up with ways to address these challenges.</p>	<p>Childhood obesity alone is costing the State \$242 million in public and private medical expenses each year which balloons to nearly \$6.1 billion for obese adults. In fact, the New York State Comptroller recently found that 20 out of 30 public schools offered junk food in direct violation of the Chancellor’s policies. As Public Advocate I will join with the New York State and City Comptrollers to make sure that schools actually stop offering junk food, replacing food in vending machines and school lunches with healthy alternatives made from locally grown food. Similarly we can ask City funded hospitals like the Health and Hospitals Corporation to replace junk food in vending machines with healthy alternatives and make sure that hospital meals served in cafeterias and to patients comes from local producers. Both of these steps would go a long way towards reducing the billions we spend each year on obesity in children and adults, so that these changes would essentially pay for themselves. It would also be important to couple these initiatives by addressing the massive waste that occurs in hospitals, schools and other institutional settings by partnering with the Food Bank for New York City and City Harvest to reclaim food to help end hunger in our City.</p>	<p>The backbone of my campaign and my desire to serve as New York City’s Public Advocate is my vision for how this unique elected position – the only position in America that represents the people against the government – can operate as an example of democracy in action. The City Charter specifies in section 24g, “The public advocate shall establish procedures for receiving and processing complaints, responding to complaints, conducting investigations, and reporting findings, and shall inform the public about such procedures.” One approach I would take is to not only contact the appropriate city agencies when it is appropriate, but also to connect concerned residents, community groups and non-profits to the appropriate agencies, so they don’t get the run-around when trying to deal with city bureaucracies. That way, for example, the component groups of the Food Systems Network could have greater interaction with city government, using the Public Advocate’s office as a mechanism. I would also emphasize the decentralization of the office, establishing satellite Public Advocate offices in each borough, and then recruiting and training a citywide network of volunteers to do intake at public venues such as housing developments or senior centers. This interface would increase the points of contact with residents who make use of the city’s institutions, and thereby realistically allow the Public Advocate’s office to exercise its oversight function over the city agencies responsible for the provision of food in such locations as hospitals and schools. Where we identify substantial recurring grievances in terms of the nutritional value of the food that is provided, then it becomes the charge of the Public Advocate to analyze the systemic nature of the problem and make appropriate recommendations. I support the FRESH program that is discussed in question #5 and would provide oversight and explore a public awareness campaign to make sure it is successfully implemented, which I will discuss at more length in question #5.</p>

Question 3: The growing, packing, preparing, and shipping of food generates significant greenhouse gas emissions. By producing more of our food closer to home, New York City can help minimize its carbon footprint, as advocated by City Council Resolution #2049 “FoodprintNYC.” The resolution builds on the environmentally friendly policies and programs recommended in the Manhattan Borough President’s 2009 report “Food in the Public Interest.” What’s your position on Resolution #2049, and how should the Public Advocate work to reduce NYC’s foodprint?

Bill de Blasio	Eric Gioia	Mark Green	Norman Siegel
<p>I am proud to have introduced Resolution 2049, calling on the City Council to adopt FoodprintNYC. I believe that health and global warming are two immense challenges facing our City. Today it is estimated that nearly 1/3 of green house gas emissions come from pollution caused by the production, processing and transportation of food. Resolution 2049 is the first ever City Council Resolution to address climate change through our food system. As Public Advocate I would continue to advance citywide initiatives to increase the use of locally grown, healthy food and decrease the amount of pollution caused by food transportation, shipping and packaging.</p>	<p>I support Resolution #2049 and am proud that the New York League of Conservation Voters has recognized my environmental leadership in endorsing my candidacy for Public Advocate. As Public Advocate, I will monitor local and regional sourcing of the City's major food contracts, work to ensure our City is creating opportunities for employment in green jobs, and encourage the expansion of community gardening and urban farming (see answer to question 4 below).</p>	<p>I have spent my entire career as a consumer advocate, exposing grocery price gauging, economic discrimination and released a series on “Why the Poor Pay More.” I Support Resolution #2049 as well as many of the recommendations in the Manhattan Borough President’s report “Food in the Public Interest,” and will continue to advocate for consumer rights, economic and social justice so that we have a healthier and greener city.</p>	<p>I support Resolution #2049 as an example of an innovative way to address environmental policy, and find it especially crucial given that PlaNYC did not substantially address food-related environmental issues. As Public Advocate I would exercise oversight to make sure that the recommendations of Food in the Public Interest are satisfactorily implemented, and I would use the Public Advocate’s office to buttress the public awareness campaign that will allow this new policy to have as much effect as possible.</p>



Question 4: New York City is home to more than 600 community gardens and many urban farms that have demonstrated valuable contributions to the social, economic, and environmental health of neighborhoods. What are some specific ways the City could increase the amount of space devoted to urban farming? How would you, as public advocate, advance the issue?

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<p>If we can have a fast food restaurant on almost every corner, then we can certainly have a garden. I believe that a program like Foodprint will only be successful with the support of our elected officials and the participation of our communities. In order to create the type of broad, long-lasting changes this City desperately needs, we must give our citizens an avenue for participation. I have already taken action toward this goal by establishing an open-access map through Google Maps that plots food co-ops, community gardens, and urban farms. Ideally this map would become a place for people interested in establishing a community garden to plot potential locations and to help foster new ideas.</p> <p>There is already a large network of existing organizations doing excellent work to advance the locally-grown movement, and as Public Advocate I would seek to partner with these groups and utilize the infrastructure they've built and give a public platform to their worthwhile missions.</p>	<p>I am so pleased that community gardening and urban farming are flourishing in New York City. Too few children growing up in New York City get to learn and experience where food comes from and how it grows. As Public Advocate, I will create an Urban Farming and Community Gardening Resource Center, where urban farmers and gardeners can share information, and where individuals and community groups interested in the various forms of farming and gardening taking place in New York City -- whether it be on rooftops or on the ground -- can find the information they need. In addition, I will work with interested community groups to locate suitable space for farming or gardening, and help them identify resources to get them started. The first place to start in identifying space would of course be unused City-owned property, but I would also work to reach out to owners of privately-owned vacant lots to facilitate use agreements.</p> <p>Urban farms and community gardens not only provide food and education, they are a source of community dignity and pride. As Public Advocate, I will work with NYCHA and private funders to create rooftop or courtyard gardens in any public housing development where residents are interested and willing to tend the soil. With roughly the same number of public housing residents in New York City as the entire population of a city like Miami, New York can become a real example of the role gardening and farming can have in major US cities.</p>	<p>Gardens provide a focal point for building a community, an opportunity to convert blight to local green space and an economic resource, and to feed the local community. As Public Advocate, our office would implement our "Brownfields to Greenfields" initiative proposed in "A Plan for a Greener City," released earlier this year and available at www.markgreen.com/greener_city.</p>	<p>I support extending Resolution #1033 and other measures to make community gardens more permanent and better maintained. We rank last per capita of any major American city in the amount spent on park maintenance; this statistic reveals worlds about our priorities and must be changed. The Public Advocate is one of only three citywide offices, granting it a crucial oversight role when it comes to all the city's parks. Designating a GreenThumb jurisdiction for plots that operate as urban farms would facilitate such oversight. As Public Advocate, I would create an open-spaces task force to fulfill the office's watchdog role and release independent reports on the Department of Parks & Recreation, with specific recommendations on community garden policy. For example, I believe we should expand the NYC Composting Program to provide material assistance to urban farmers. I am also interested in leveraging the city's position with insurance companies to potentially reduce the insurance premiums of community gardeners, which are prohibitive in many cases.</p>

Question 5: What are the main obstacles preventing full-service supermarkets from locating in low-income neighborhoods, and what can city agencies do to eliminate them? What is your position on the City's FRESH program, which includes zoning and financial incentives to develop supermarkets offering fresh produce in NYC communities underserved by grocery stores? What challenges, if any, do you see in implementation?

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<p>City government needs to take a more proactive role in bringing grocery stores that offer affordable, fresh and healthy foods into every community. Zoning and financial incentives are an important part of achieving this goal. As Public Advocate, I would use my role with the City Planning Commission, my authority to introduce legislation and my position to conduct citywide oversight to ensure that our government is taking every step necessary to open up food access in under-served communities.</p>	<p>New York City's FRESH program is a very good start in encouraging full-service supermarkets to locate in underserved, low-income neighborhoods, and in combination with the New York State Healthy Food/Healthy Communities initiative, it addresses many of the financial, regulatory and land use issues identified by the supermarket industry as barriers to entry in high-need neighborhoods. However, addressing the issues of the supermarket industry is only one piece of the equation, and in that respect, the FRESH program does not go far enough. The needs of low-income consumers and workers also matter. I support the UFCW's Building Blocks agenda that good food, good jobs and good health go hand in hand. Every supermarket that receives public incentives should, as a condition of public support, accept WIC and food stamps, so that public funding is not going to support businesses that are unaffordable and inaccessible to the people who need them. Every supermarket that receives public funding should also pay its employees fair wages, and to the greatest extent possible, hire from within the communities where they locate. It is not clear how widely or broadly the supermarket industry has historically availed itself of all available State and City business incentives -- like ICIP (now ICAP) -- but one of the challenges of implementation for the City will certainly be to market the program and ensure that those in a position to use it do.</p>	<p>I support the City and State partnership which came together in the FRESH program which will create over a dozen new supermarkets in underserved neighborhoods. While this program is essential, we should continue to expand Mayor Bloomberg's excellent work in this area by providing more farmer's markets and green stands in underserved communities. We should also consider working to expand local small neighborhood markets and food cooperatives. While the FRESH program will bring big box grocery stores to underserved neighborhoods, we should also do all we can to encourage local small businesses that can provide the same products and services since they are more likely to create higher quality jobs with revenues that remain local.</p>	<p>As I wrote in the second question, I support the FRESH program, and I would provide oversight as Public Advocate to make sure it is successfully implemented. I believe a public awareness campaign will increase the effectiveness of the program, and as Public Advocate I would work with stakeholders to see that it is promoted in the best way possible. Promotion should be targeted first towards residents, who, if they were aware of the benefits of healthier shopping, would increase the profitability of healthier food vendors and thereby incentivize them further. Another should be directed at existing food vendors to educate them about the business benefits of providing fresh produce. Potentially, more funding and subsidies may be needed to insure the success of this program, and given the inherent public health interest and associated reduction in health care spending, I would be open to advocating for such funding, and where possible I would use the office to actively reach out to groceries to encourage them to qualify for the program.</p>

Question 6: The Hunts Point food market district in the Bronx is a critical point for food distribution in New York City. It includes several publicly owned market buildings that current vendors advocate need substantial improvements or replacement. There is also a call to create a wholesale farmers market as a distribution point for locally grown food throughout the region. What changes do you support? Which components, if any, should the City pay for directly?

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<p>I understand that New York City can be difficult for small regional farmers to access, and am very open to the idea of a centralized drop off point. It is in the City’s interest to ease the delivery process for these farmers. A first step to determining what role the City should play would be setting up a commission to study the health and economic benefits of establishing such a distribution point, and recommend a plan of action. The commission would include, at a minimum, the Department of Health, Department of Economic Development, and the Independent Budget Office.</p>	<p>The soundness of our food distribution infrastructure is critical to the life of this City as few other issues are. I support improving and replacing market buildings in ways that improve the City's capacity to warehouse and distribute food. I also support the creation of a wholesale farmers' market, to give regional growers a venue and a distribution hub for the sale of their goods. City capital funding is appropriate for infrastructure improvements that result in a public good, and I support the financing to support improvements to City-owned market buildings and create a wholesale farmers' market.</p>	<p>Projects like the Hunts Point food market are critical for facilitating the distribution of locally grown foods and economic growth in the small business community in transactions between small businesses. As we suggested in “Our Next Economy: THE Creative City,” available at http://www.markgreen.com/THE_Creative_City, we must abandon large corporate projects that often fail to return on our investments in favor of investing in small businesses. I would support any initiatives to provide technical assistance and full financing for local food distributors with by creating permanently affordable market spaces</p>	<p>If there are publicly-owned buildings that are not suitable for food vendors in such a critical hub, then that is a serious issue that I would investigate as Public Advocate. I believe that the Hunts Point food market could be a lynchpin in the FoodprintNYC effort, especially since the South Bronx is an essential target in that effort. I would be interested in meeting with the stakeholders to ascertain what would be required in terms of infrastructure and public support to bring a wholesale farmers market to Hunts Point.</p>

