

Less Food, More Demand: Food Pantries in

NYC are feeling the squeeze of federal and local funding cuts

April 7, 2025 Michaela Keil



Recovered food is prepared to be distributed at a mobile food bank at Feeding Westchester in Elmsford, N.Y., Wednesday, Nov. 15, 2023. Photo: Seth Wenig/AP

Share this:

The demand for food assistance is as high as it was during the pandemic, according to President of the Food Bank For New York Leslie Gordon. Inflation, high cost of living and economic uncertainty added to already high rates of food insecurity due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, one in four children in NYC

doesn't know where their next meal will come from. "What we see is that it takes sometimes as much as 10 years, believe it or not, for low-income communities, often the hardest hit, to recover from a crisis like [the COVID-19 pandemic]."

Yet local food pantries already report fewer food options. Recent Trump administration cuts to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and reductions in federal support for state-run programs immediately strain the Food Bank For New York City and other wholesalers for community organizations — though the alphabet soup of grant names and programs makes the actual impact murky. "We don't know yet what the impact is," Gordon said. Local food assistance programs and food pantries are bracing for even more severe consequences in the coming months. Further cuts could destabilize the entire food assistance safety net.

Food pantries around the country get their food and funding through an interconnected web of programs and grants. Food often comes from a centralized food bank, like the Food Bank for New York City, and from local donations. Funding, however, may come in the form of grants and programs from the USDA, FEMA, the State of New York, corporate donations and individual contributions.

GrowNYC, an environmental nonprofit that distributes food from farmers to greenmarkets, food pantries, and restaurants, relies on direct government grants and wholesale food sales for funding. Many of those wholesale food sales come from nonprofits like food pantries that get separate funding to buy the food from GrowNYC. The Food Bank For New York works in a similar way.

"As these types of cuts continue across all levels of government, thousands of New Yorkers will lose access to fresh food — not just the individuals we serve directly, but also the emergency feeding organizations, food pantries and community-based groups that rely on our distribution networks," GrowNYC spokesperson Andrina Sanchez wrote to the Brooklyn Eagle.

Less food, higher demand

There is no doubt that the people of New York City rely on food pantries and related programs. The New York Common Pantry, a food pantry based in the Bronx and East Harlem, reported a 9% increase in visits to its pantries and hot meal programs in the fiscal year-to-date over the same period last year. An analysis from City Harvest, an organization that redirects food that would go to waste toward food pantries and soup kitchens, showed that average monthly visits to soup kitchens and food pantries are up 75% across NYC compared to pre-pandemic levels.

“Inflation has hit everyone hard. Over the last year alone, an additional 100,000 New Yorkers fell into poverty,” said Richard R. Buery, Jr. CEO of Robin Hood, an anti-poverty group in a February press release.

Other food pantries, including Community Help in Park Slope (CHiPS), noted increases in visits as well.

But with the federal funding cuts, there is less food. CHiPS and another food pantry, which asked to remain anonymous, have reported fewer options from the Food Bank For New York City. The Eagle reviewed two food purchasing receipts from a food pantry — one from February of 2025 and one from February of 2024. There were about half as many foods available in 2025 as in 2024.

Although Gordon seemed somewhat skeptical that these food pantries had fewer options, citing seasonality as an alternative explanation, she did mention about “two and a half million pounds of food” suspended due to a USDA pause of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) — a \$500 million nationwide program. This amounts to about 74 truckloads of food for the Food Bank For New York City.

“I don’t have a lot of information,” Gordon explained. “All I can see in our system is that those loads are hanging in the balance. Maybe they’ll come in, maybe they won’t.”

Nationwide, the pause on CCC funding — and eventual cancellation of shipments — has left food banks scrambling to meet demand in Kansas, Ohio, Minnesota, Missouri and more.

But for New York City, with more residents than Kansas and Missouri combined, the problem is amplified by the extreme need for food and threats to local funding.

Funding cuts from New York City

Food pantries are facing more than the splashy headline cuts from the Department of Government Efficiency and the Trump administration.

In fiscal year 2024, New York City food pantries subsidized by the Community Food Connection (CFC) reported 35.3 million visits — 9.1 million higher than in FY23. CFC is a city-run program to fund and help distribute food to more than 700 food assistance organizations.

The fiscal year 2026 budget proposal by Mayor Eric Adams “slashes city funding for the CFC of FY25 levels of \$60 million by 58%, reducing it to just \$20.9 million citywide,” according to New York Common Pantry Director of Communications and Events Ellen Miller. The city budget is not finalized until June.

“The City has ensured the Community Food Connection program provides quality, nourishing food to those that need it most,” said Kate MacKenzie, Executive Director of the Mayor’s Office of Food Policy in a statement to the Eagle. “We are working with our partners in the Council to make sure that this year is no different.”

Looking forward

Much of the impact from these cuts will come later in the year. The city fiscal year begins on July 1, which is when new rounds of funding are allocated to community programs. The New York Common Pantry said the organization is

“bracing” for the impact of changes to the budget. A recent USDA cut to a program means that 1.5 million pounds of free food distributed by GrowNYC will end in the new fiscal year unless an alternate source of funding is found.

Trump administration’s threats to cut funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) loom large and would be a major blow to these community organizations.

Although SNAP is a federal program and would require congressional approval for any major change, there are workarounds to disrupt its operations and defund its programs. Similar to defunding Medicaid, attacks on SNAP would come in the form of attacks to the United States House Committee on Energy and Commerce, which runs and distributes funding to the SNAP and Medicaid programs.

As of April 2024, 20% of New York City residents were SNAP recipients. Any cuts to the program would put a further strain on food pantries and community food distribution programs — SNAP provides 9 times as many meals as standard food banks.

“Nearly 2 million New Yorkers rely on SNAP, and in the face of drastic cuts threatening programs that help families make ends meet, many are turning to food pantries for support,” MacKenzie stressed. “No cuts to SNAP are acceptable. Full stop.”

As GrowNYC spokesperson Sanchez explained, “The ripple effects will destabilize regional food systems, drive up hunger, and erase years of progress in food justice and economic resilience.”

Chrisaleen Ciro contributed reporting.
