



**Special Communication to City of Burlington
Emergency Operations Center and Mayor
Regarding COVID-19**

To: Brian Lowe, Luke McGowan

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RE: Emergency food plans & hubs

Date: April 1, 2020

Key Messages:

- With school closures, job disruptions, and health risks, millions of Americans will turn to local food pantries, food banks, and supplemental nutrition programs for much-needed support.
- Feeding sites and food pantries are shutting down due to safety concerns, and food banks are losing volunteers during this pandemic. Food banks are rapidly changing distribution models to emergency food bag delivery and feeding sites offering to-go bags.
- Recent federal aid and food stamp policy changes and increased funding are helping to expand access to benefits.
- NYC and Seattle are beginning to consider direct intervention through funding support to food banks and vouchers respectively. BTV has also made a similar investment.
- Municipally organized food reserves are very challenging due to the complexity of food collection, storage and distribution, and the risk of spoilage. Alaska serves as an example of having tried to create a food reserve for 40,000 people, finding it was not feasible.
- That said, the development of **local emergency food plans** could pay big dividends in a crisis, but they are rare. Creating a food liaison or an emergency food working group could be pursued now, that could lead to an eventual emergency food plan, and city food systems resilience planning.
 - Baltimore is piloting the concept of **Resilience Hubs**, that include food, but also other disaster services such as backup power, cooking, and restroom facilities. They are planned and implemented by neighborhoods, thereby increasing social capital around the issue.
- Ensuring longer term food preparedness requires individual families to prepare, and there is a role for municipalities in facilitating that process as much as possible through education, or through community centers.
 - A unique example is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints where families are supported through **home storage centers** with the goal of having a minimum 3 month stock. The food is rotated into daily use to prevent spoilage.

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- BTV has a strong network of organizations and partners (with collection, storage, and distribution capabilities) that could form the back bone of any efforts to develop and deploy a local emergency food plan.

Addressing Immediate Needs

Emergency Food Distribution and Food Banks

LOCAL RESOURCES

- **Vermont Foodbank** has convened an internal COVID-19 Task Force to address the emerging needs of the state and support their network of 215 partner food shelves and meal sites.
- **Feeding Chittenden** which serves nearly 12,000 people we annually is already seeing a dramatic increase in demand (up by 30% as of mid-March). Since March 16th, they have distributed an average of 200 boxes of groceries per day and at this rate they anticipate running out of shelf-stable food by early April without some additional financial support. On March 26 the City of Burlington through it's Resource and Recovery efforts has provided \$ 75,000 in funding to help meet this demand.

WHAT OTHER CITIES ARE DOING

- Feeding America, the national network of foodbanks, launched the COVID-19 Response Fund and is working to ensure the emergency response includes strong support and flexibility for **federal nutrition programs** like SNAP and WIC.
 - NYC City Council is calling for **emergency funding to struggling food banks** and food assistance programs to halt a looming hunger crisis. The Council is also leaning on the Governor and state legislature to join in supporting the vital food programs.
 - Cambridge, MA has set up the Cambridge **Community Food Line** to deliver a weekly bag of produce and shelf stable grocery items to eligible individuals and families until food pantries and meal programs can reopen.
 - Food banks in San Francisco began rolling out "**pop-up pantries**" that are open to the public, co-located with SFUSD sites that are distributing free meals to any person under the age of 18, and stocked with fruits, proteins, and starches.
 - The City of Seattle is contributing \$5 million to provide **emergency food vouchers** to approximately 6,250 families in need. Families will receive two mailers of 20 vouchers (a total of \$400 a month) over the next two months.
 - Many cities are publicizing **special grocery store hours** for seniors and at risk groups
- **Federal Stimulus** is providing \$1.2 billion in food and farm aid:
 - \$500 million funding for pregnant women and mothers under the WIC program;
 - \$250 million to deliver meal packages to millions of seniors ([CSFP](#));
 - \$400 million for USDA to buy up commodities and distribute them to food banks.
 - **Food Stamps** (3Squares Vermont also known as SNAP or EBT)
 - **No work requirements** for Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents for Food Stamps.

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- VT is authorized to provide **temporary emergency benefits** up to the max benefit per household, extend certification for expiring benefits, and reduce reporting requirements.
- Vermont EBT accepted at over 75 locations in Burlington, including at [Walmart](#) for pickup or delivery (delivery fee not covered). Search [here](#) for a full list of retailers.
- **Burlington School District** with support from Burlington Parks, Recreation and Waterfront, continues to provide much needed [free breakfast and lunch](#) at select schools and sites.
- **UVM is undertaking a survey:** [Food access and food security during Coronavirus.](#)

Recovery and Resilience

- **Enhance emergency preparedness capacity at food pantries, food banks and emergency food distribution sites as well as small food retailers.**
- **Create a City emergency food plan and a food liaison for emergencies.** Planning for building a more resilient food system is the most important way to mitigate the effects of a crisis. The complexity of the food system makes planning for cooperation amongst public and private stakeholders critical. Also incorporate food systems planning into the long range planning process.
 - Baltimore provides an excellent recent example of this effort with their Emergency Food Working Group and their recent [Emergency Food Plan](#).
 - VT Law School recently published [Food Systems Resilience: Concepts & Policy Approaches](#) focused on the state level, that could serve as a starting point.
- **Individual emergency preparedness** is common in disaster prone areas encourage households establish a 3-7 day food store as a common disaster preparedness measure.
 - [FEMA Emergency supply kit instructions](#)
 - Alaska provides a guide for a budget friendly [7 day emergency food kit assembled over 12 weeks](#).
- **Food storage hubs** in centralized locations or neighborhoods are not common, but there are some examples and cautionary tales.
 - The State of Alaska examined the potential to purchase and store food for 40,000 people for seven days, and wanted to be sure it could get to where it was needed. They ran into difficulties with procurement in terms of volume and type of food.
 - The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints provides an example. Food storage is a tenant of faith, and the Church facilitates it through [Home Storage Centers](#) with bulk food items to allow for stocking and refreshing of food stores, typically to last three months.
 - Baltimore has started to institute a [Resilience hubs](#) pilot program, a decentralized neighborhood approach to disaster preparedness in local community centers, or multi family housing developments, including food, restrooms and backup power. They also serve as a way to build social capital around disaster preparedness.

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Key Resources

- [City of Burlington COVID-19 Food Access Resources](#)
- [Hunger Free Vermont Food Access Updates](#)
- [Baltimore Food System Resilience Advisory Report \(2019\)](#)
- [Guide to Developing Resilience Hubs](#)
- [Mormon Church: Food Storage System](#)
- [Mormon Church: long term food storage guidelines](#)
- [The Resilience of America's Urban Food Systems](#)
- [VT Law School Food Systems Report](#)
- [Analysts call for SNAP increases during COVID-19 pandemic to boost food security, economy](#)

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Table 6a. Strategies for Addressing Vulnerabilities in Baltimore's Food System

Food System Component	Strategies for Addressing Vulnerabilities
Economic Access	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support economic development programs in food insecure neighborhoods. 2. Improve uptake of existing economic food assistance programs (before and after disasters). 3. Continue to advocate for policies and programs that reduce food insecurity by addressing its root causes, including poverty, employment, and discrimination.
Physical Access	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider food access in public transit redesign. 2. Explore alternative transportation methods for accessing food. 3. Develop a community food storage and communications plan.
Production	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Incentivize increased agricultural product diversity in urban, regional production. 2. Support local farmer emergency preparedness capacity. 3. Advocate for federal and state policies that support agricultural resilience. 4. Support research to understand regional supply chains and their agility during emergency events.
Processing/Wholesale	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluate the Baltimore metro region's processing facility capacity.
Distribution	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expand opportunities for local and regional food aggregation and distribution. 2. Assess feasibility of alternative food transport programs (e.g., "Meals on Heels"). 3. Ensure that main transportation routes used for food delivery are cleared as quickly as possible after an event.
Retail	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support small business preparedness capacity in the food sector. 2. Identify and designate critical food retail facilities in each neighborhood.
Donation/Food Assistance Organizations (FAO)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enhance preparedness capacity of FAOs – support planning, backups 2. Improve coordination and communication between FAOs and with Baltimore City liaison. 3. Identify and designate critical food assistance distribution sites.
Acceptability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enhance capacity of FAOs to provide for clients' special dietary needs. 2. Ensure that food stored in communities is culturally appropriate, safely used, and anticipates special dietary needs of community members. 3. Continue and expand existing initiatives that support access to healthy, nutritious food in the city.
Government*	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. With community input, create a Baltimore Food System Resilience Plan. 2. Identify indicators to assess resilience, preparedness, and recovery performance in Baltimore's food system.
Social Capital*	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support increased social capital in all communities. 2. Strengthen and draw from existing community-level social networks to increase food access after events. 3. Provide opportunities to increase trust between community members and City institutions. 4. Support community ownership and operation of neighborhood food stores.
Labor*	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support safe and equitable labor and hiring practices in the city's food industry. 2. Identify best practices for protecting food laborers, developing backup labor.
Waste*	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage the inclusion of waste removal contingency plans in business and FAO preparedness training. 2. Support development of food recovery infrastructure in the city; incorporate into preparedness & recovery training for FAOs & businesses.

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