

Observations and Recommendations: State of Food Insecurity, City of Syracuse, New York, USA

**Joint Report Prepared by:
FAHNN**

**Supported by:
NESAWG**



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This report is a working collaboration of the following coalition of NGOs for UPR-USA:

Food Access Healthy Neighborhoods Now! (FAHNN): Is a grassroots community organization in the Valley/Southside of Syracuse, NY, advocating for crucial access to healthy fresh food options in one of the most impoverished cities in the nation.

Supported by **NESAWG**, Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group. Mission: We unite as Black, Brown, Indigenous, Aboriginal Earthworkers and frontline communities in the Northeast region to cultivate a just, regenerative, thriving food system for all.

The overall purpose of this collaboration is to uphold food security in the city of Syracuse, New York, United States.

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I. Executive Summary

Food Access, Healthy Neighborhoods Now! (FAHNN) is committed to improving Syracuse's food security landscape through offering affordable, locally grown produce and New York state value-added products at an outdoor

summer farmers market, since June 2022, and an indoor winter farmers market, since January 2023. As of July of 2024, FAHNN added additional programming with a Wednesday evening market and workshop series, providing vital educational workshops for the community.

FAHNN finds it imperative to publicize the human rights violations committed by local, state, and federal governments against the people of Syracuse, New York. Our children's health and well-being are at stake! Syracuse has the 2nd highest child poverty rate in large cities in the nation and the highest rate among large cities in New York State.¹ In 2022, 45.8% of Syracuse's children were living below the poverty line.² Our children suffer most from the lack of access to adequate, nutritious, and affordable food.

Each tier of government has failed in its duties to provide food security to Syracuse's population, lacking a comprehensive action plan that considers the convoluted nature of the issue. These issues are entangled with the failure to empower black farmers, address lead in the water, and codify the right to forage. Marginalization is not equal across demographics; race, gender, and age act as determinants of economic status and therefore, food insecurity. The unequal distribution of food throughout Syracuse is not a coincidence, but rather a function of racial capitalism perpetuated by local, state, and federal governments. The legacy of colonization, segregation, and redlining is not only ignored, but upheld by the government, the supposed protector of rights. The term food desert encapsulates the systematic nature of food access, framing Syracuse's efforts within the context of historical injustice.

II. Background

Racialized poverty and corporate capture of the food system thwart people's efforts to feed their own communities! Built on unceded Onondaga Nation Territory, Syracuse's history of colonization, racism, and redlining has produced the highest concentrations of Black and Hispanic poverty in all US mid-sized cities. 57% of Syracuse Census tracts are food deserts.³ Where once residents could visit vibrant corner stores, smoke and alcohol shops now dominate. Decimated to 0.5% of NYS farm owners and operators, Black food producers are systematically closed out of the opportunity to contribute to racially diversified local food and farm economies.⁴

As well, the demolition of I-81, alongside gentrification and displacement stemming from industry relocation to Syracuse and higher education and hospital infrastructure expansion, all threaten the viability of an urban farm and farmer network. The dynamic New American community struggles to find culturally relevant foods in schools, emergency food systems, or local shops at affordable prices. Inadequate English as a New Language (ENL) support frustrates entrepreneurial experience and energy. Corporate industry monopolizes institutional food procurement contracts, providing cheap, low-quality food for schools, prisons, food banks, and hospitals; it further resists delivering to healthy food retailers in Syracuse's city center harming survival of independent entrepreneurs in our food insecure communities. It is in this dire context that FAHN is urging for international attention to the government's shortcomings and aggressions in Syracuse and beyond.

III. Rights Violations

The Right to Food

ICESCR art. 11(1); CRC art. 24(2)(c); UDHR art. 25(1)

The Syracuse government is guilty of not upholding the right to food through the absence of adequate public support, leaving community members to fill the gaps in the food system.

The Right to Equality

United Nations Charter, Art. 1(3)(1945); Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); Art. 1-2, 7 (1948); International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Art. 2(1), 5-6 (1966); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Art 2(1), 26 (1977);

¹Office of the New York State Comptroller. *New York Children in Need: The Urgency of Lifting Children Out of Poverty*. May 2024.

²ibid.

³ Onondaga County Health Department. *Mapping the Food Environment in Syracuse, New York 2017*. Syracuse, NY: Onondaga County Health Department, 2017.

⁴New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. *Diversity and Racial Equity Working Group Report*. August 2021.

The Syracuse government has failed to provide equal opportunity to all citizens, stripping residents of their rights through health, education, and housing. The brunt of food security obstacles are stacked upon the most vulnerable populations: the incarcerated, elderly, children, and disabled.

The Right to Water

General Comment 15 (2002); UN General Assembly Resolution 64/292 (2010); CEDAW Article 14(2)(h) (1979); ICESCR art. 11(1); CRC art. 24(2)(c); UDHR art. 25(1)

Lead contamination in Syracuse is poisoning individuals and causing irreversible damage to children, especially those of color. The government is lacking comprehensive transparency and remediation surrounding the issue. Over 600 Syracuse children were diagnosed with lead poisoning, over 10% of all children tested in 2018.⁵

Rights of the Child

CRC (1989)

Food insecurity impedes child development and access to life opportunities; it instigates behavioral issues for which harsh judgment and lack of understanding usher struggling young people as often to criminal justice systems as toward education and achievement. Malnutrition starts young, corrupts lifetime health outcomes, and magnifies risk of preventable illness such as heart disease and diabetes.

Right to Mental Health

ICERD art. 5(e)(iv); ICESCR art. 12(1)

Black and brown communities have higher rates of mental illness due to affordability, insurance, cultural barriers, stigmas, and trauma and systemic issues. These disparities coupled with historical injustices negatively impact mental health. Mental health professionals may not be trained to understand the specific needs and experiences of these communities.

Right to a Clean Environment

ICESCR art. 12(1); CRC art. 24(2)(c); ILO 169 art. 7(4); Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992) – Principle 1; Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment (1972) – Principle 1

A project demolishing I-81 has created an unsanitary environment for residents, causing issues that repeat racial injustice consequences when the highway was first constructed in the 1960s. Upper respiratory and other health consequences from construction have not been fully addressed. This has led to several cases of chronic illnesses.

The Right to Forage

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1977), Article 1(2); United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (2010), Article 26(2), Article 29(1)

The 2012 UN Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests in the Context of National Food Security, signed by the United States, calls on local governments to work with civil society to protect the right of access to land and resources to protect food and nutrition security. Standing municipal code in Syracuse, New York, as in so many U.S. cities, formally prohibits foraging on public land-parks, school grounds, and other urban commons. Foraging is a form of subsistence, offering a means for residents to improve their nutrition at no cost. The Syracuse Urban Food Forest Project (SUFFP), in partnership with FAHNN, is working to bring a better understanding of urban gardening, farming, and foraging in urban life. Food forests and edible green infrastructure are extensions of that vision. To that end, it is imperative that the city of Syracuse pass a new Tree Ordinance that formally includes foraging as a human right.

IV. Recommendations

We demand the right to economic justice, to community self-determination, and to the right to accessible, affordable, and nutritious food! A right to food means the ability to feed oneself with

⁵Lane, Sandra D., and Jesse Harasta. "Childhood Lead Poisoning Is an Issue of Racial Justice. Syracuse Must Address It." *Syracuse Post-Standard*, June 12, 2020.

dignity and self-determination. It empowers individuals and communities to hold governments accountable and to require that public resources prioritize the needs of affected communities and center those persons in naming rights violations and developing strategies to redress harm. Hunger and food insecurity reflect the failure of “free markets.” Charity does not end hunger. Food banks and pantries do not change structural conditions of economic, social, and cultural deprivation that most brutally impacts the lives of children and youth. New policies are needed for economic restructuring and redistribution of local food system wealth. Syracuse must encourage, expand, and subsidize local small farmers, especially those of color, to feed their local communities, especially those who normally cannot afford fresh food, by supplying corner stores and farmers markets at fair market value, as well as institutions like schools, food banks, and prisons. The City must support the training of Syracuse youth, especially Black and other people of color residents who have been channeled into dead-end, fast-food jobs or no jobs at all, toward productive food system endeavors through secure land access, education and training, credit, market entry subsidy, ENL education and translation, and technical assistance. Financing for these socially just, public health improvements should come from that part of the food system that lures the true wealth of the community, its children, into the worst excesses of ultra-processed, nutritionally empty, and culturally estranged foods and dietary patterns.

FAHNN recommends the following to achieve food security:

1. Develop a Comprehensive Food Policy Plan
 - a. Research more opportunities for land sovereignty, stewardship, and land reclamation practices to ensure that all of those who desire to learn how to farm have the right to do so.
 - b. Keep policies up to date to ensure that prior to eliminating any necessary resource, there is another vendor (grocery store) that will be taking its place.
 - i. Expand zoning laws to allow alternative forms of food access into food insecure neighborhoods.
 - ii. Collaborate with local growers and producers to bring in green markets to ensure continuous food access.
2. Create an Accountability Board led by low income frontline community members who are the first and most impacted.
 - a. Ensure that proposed changes to the Food Policy Plan are implemented and monitored.
3. Evaluate Food Availability on Campuses
 - a. Research and review school food plans to provide food accessibility 24-7
4. Create an Accountability Structure for a Healthy Food Supply
 - a. Create accessible food systems, concentrating on existing food deserts
5. Create Food Equity Impact Analysis and Develop Policies that Center Equity and Food Value
 - a. Taking into consideration that if we prioritize the most at-risk groups, all groups will be included and will benefit as well by default.
6. Make Food Rescue a Priority
 - a. Healthy foods should be gleaned and distributed to people in need.
7. Codify the Right to Forage
 - a. Update the Tree Ordinance to formally protect foraging
 - b. Establish honorable harvest principles for community stewardship of public land.
 - c. Educate city officials and employees about foraging activities and the benefits of foraging.
8. An expansion of food assistance programs
 - a. A program to feed children on weekends
9. Financial incentives and resources for new farmers

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