

# Understanding and Addressing Food Security in New Jersey: Using the Six-Dimensions Framework

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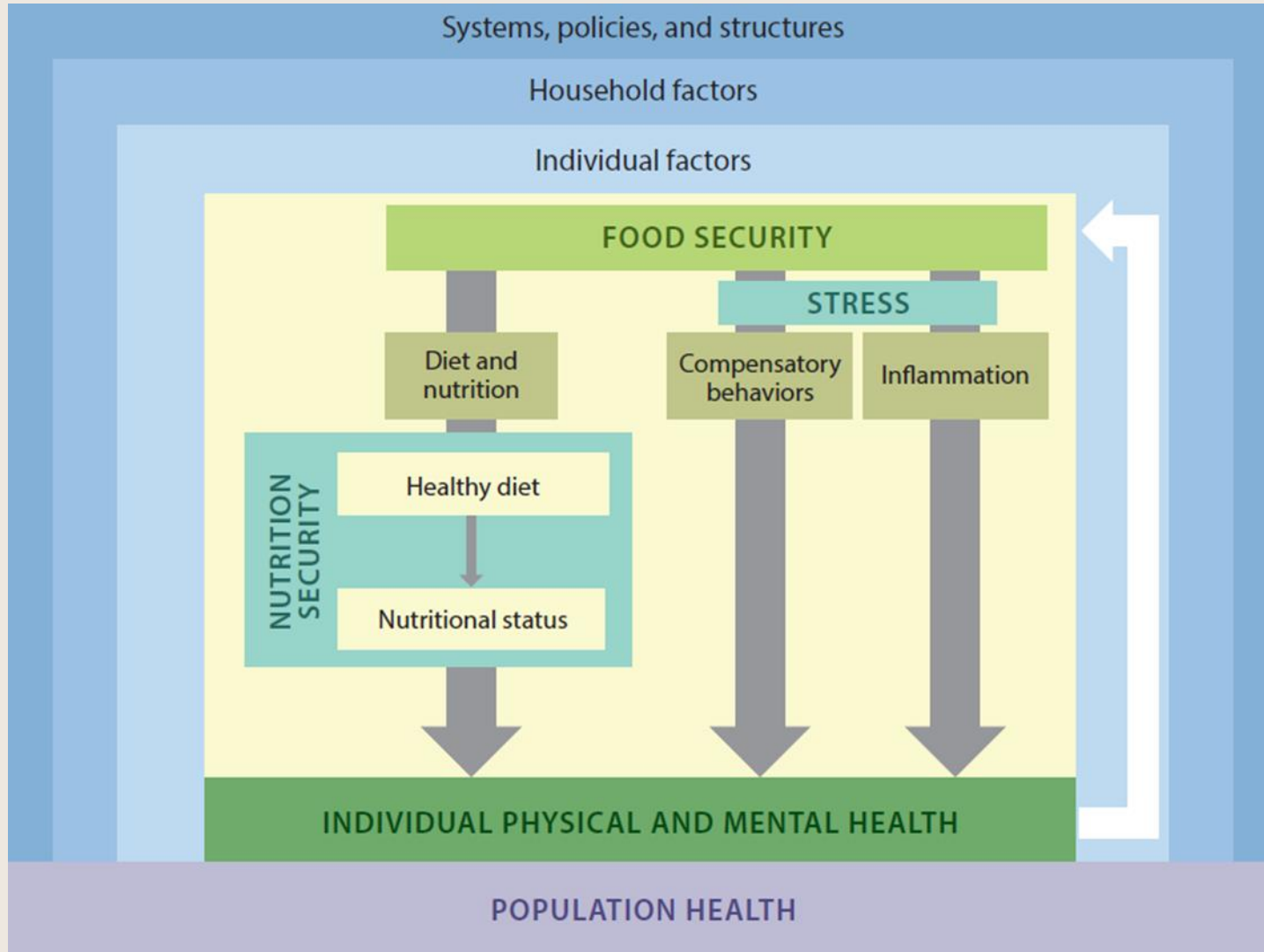
# What is food security and why is it important?



# What is food security?



# Why is food security important?



- Affects stress (systemic and psychological) and contributes to compensatory behaviors like eating a less healthful diet and forgoing medication to afford food.
- Leads to increased risk for diet-related chronic health conditions (like diabetes and heart disease), inability to manage conditions once acquired, and increased health expenses and mortality rate.



# Food Insecurity in New Jersey

About 800,000 people in New Jersey are experiencing food insecurity

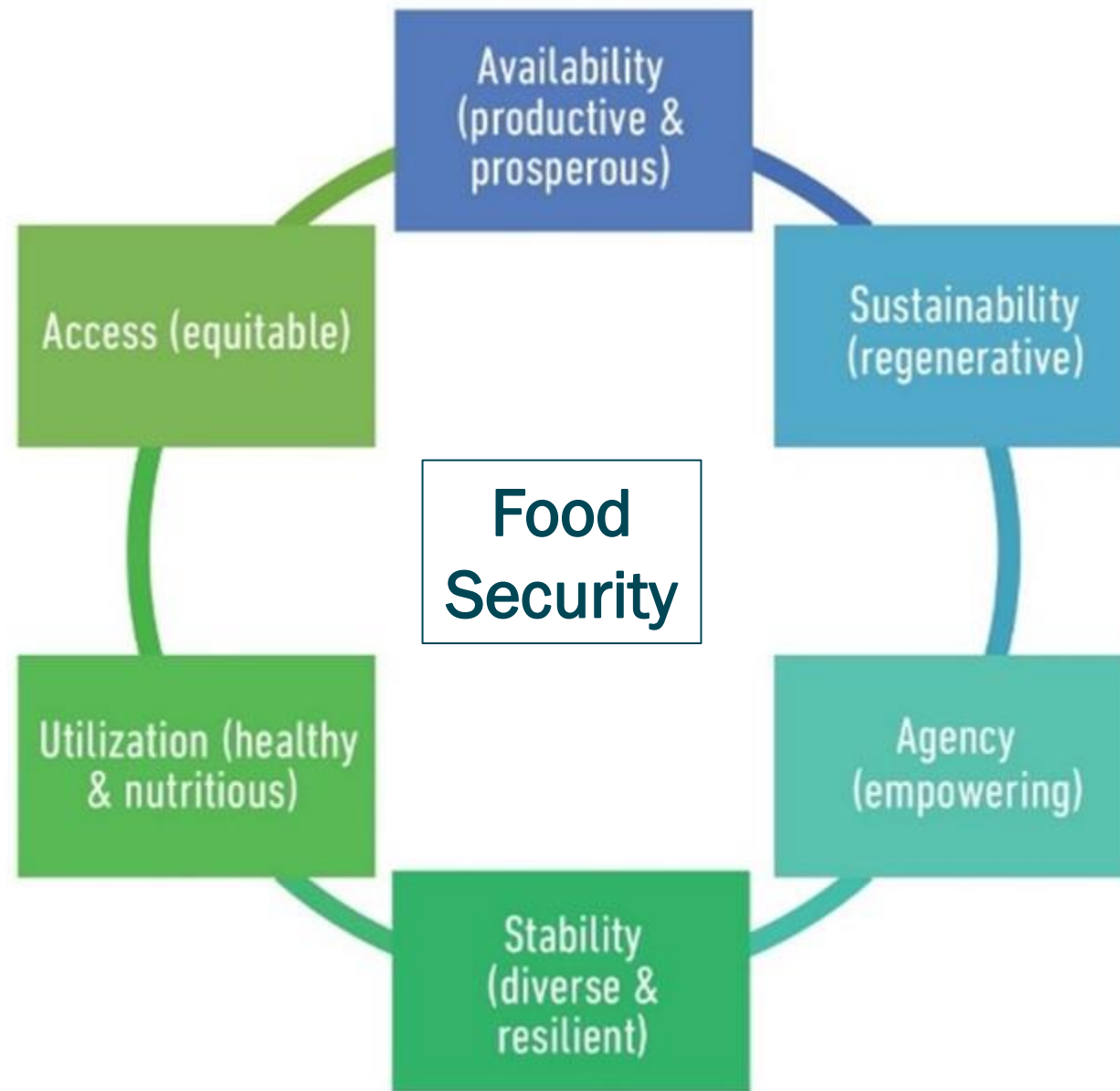
High cost of living, long distance to grocery stores are key drivers of NJ food insecurity

Issues are compounded by poverty, unemployment, and transportation limitations

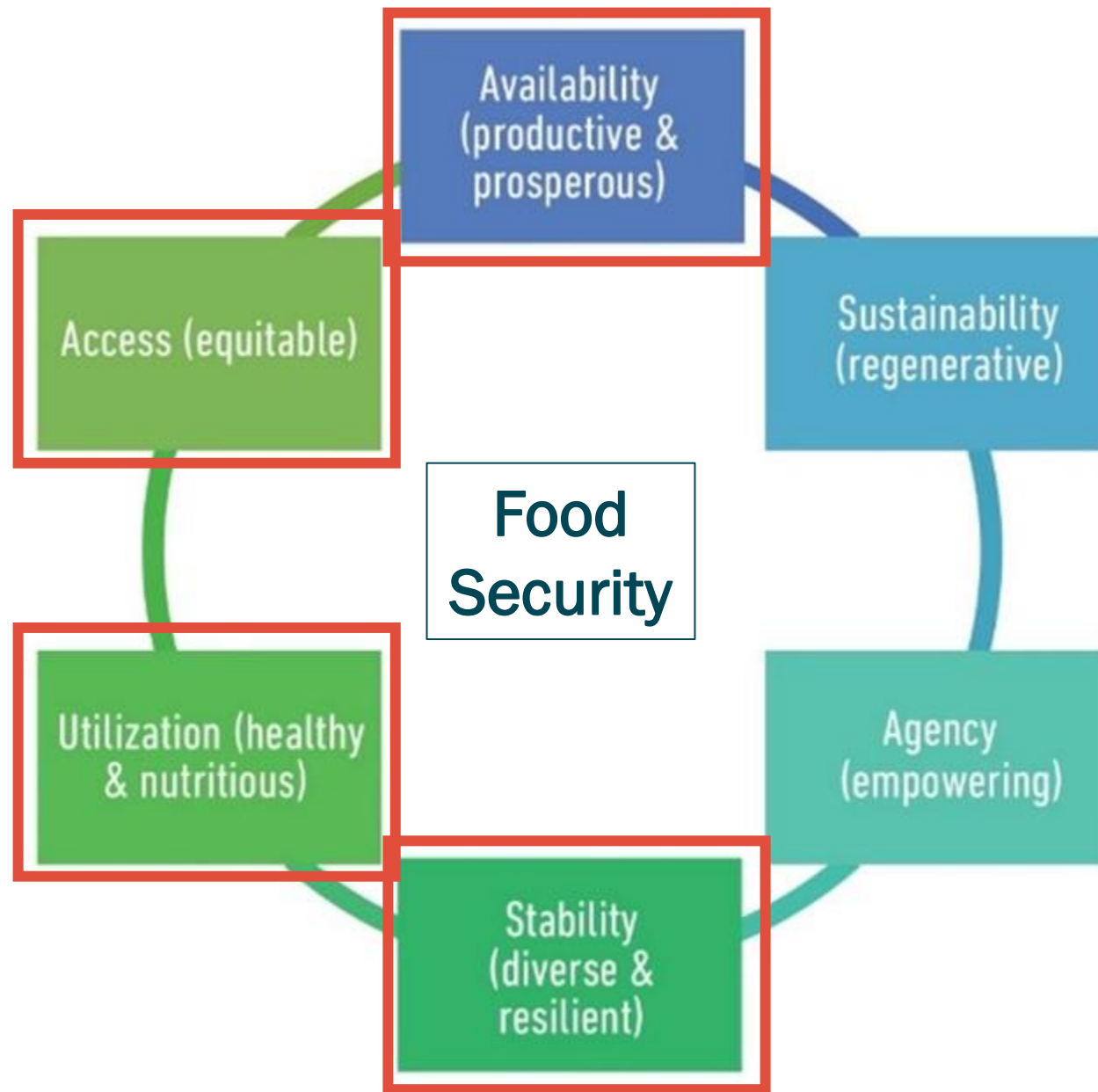


What  
conditions are  
needed to  
establish food  
security?

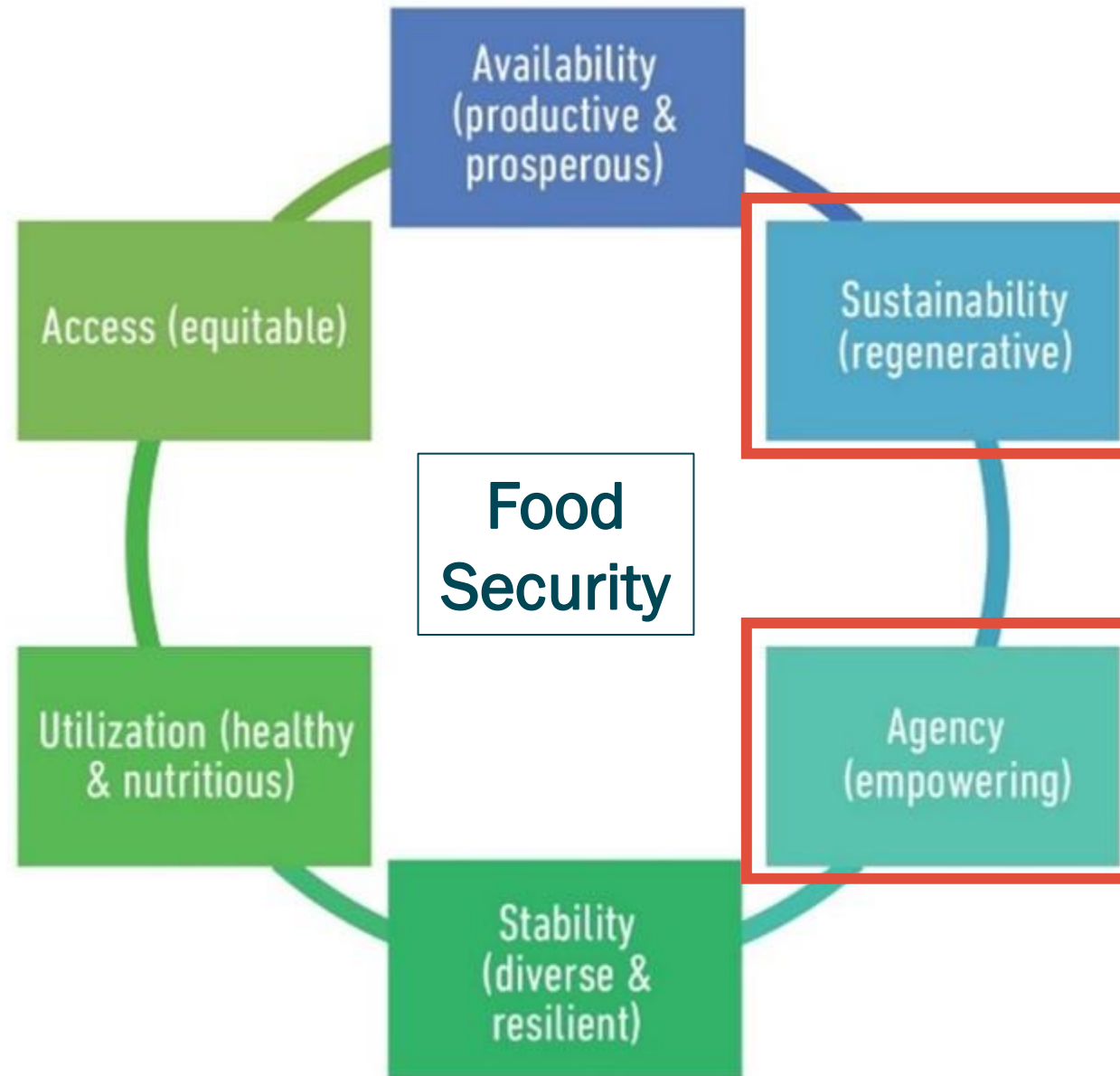












# How is New Jersey Currently Addressing these Six Dimensions?



# Availability & Physical Access

## Food Desert Relief Program

Provides \$40 million per year in tax credits, loans, grants, and/or technical assistance to alleviating build grocery stores with healthy options.

## Food Retail Innovation in Delivery Grant

Subsidizes the costs of installing temperature-controlled food lockers that enable food delivery and safe storage into food desert communities.





# Financial Access, Utilization, & Stability

## Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Provides consistent access to food for lower-income households. NJ first state with state-subsidized minimum amount of \$95 per month.

## Summer Grocery Benefits for Kids

Provides \$120 to families with school-aged children for food during the summer. Automatic enrollment for children already receiving FRLP.

## New Jersey SNAP Education (SNAP-Ed)

SNAP-Ed funds programs to teach NJ residents how to make healthy, budget-friendly food choices and lead more active lives.





# Sustainability & Agency

## Farmers Against Hunger – Gleaning Program

Since 1996, they have been organizing volunteers to help fight food waste and address hunger. They harvest produce that can not be sold and donate it to NJ food banks, churches, and other groups engaged in feeding their communities.

## Healthy Choice Pantry Model

The Growing Healthy Pantries initiative was conducted by five food banks across New Jersey and other state and national partners to pilot and promote choice pantry models and enact changes that allow for more healthy options to be available to families in need.



# Early Findings from our Recent Research Project on Agency and Sustainability in New Jersey



# Defining Agency and Sustainability

## Agency

“capacity of individuals or groups to make their own decisions about what foods they eat; what foods they produce; how that food is produced, processed and distributed within food systems; and their ability to engage in processes that shape food system policies and governance” (W.H.O., 2022)

- Agency related to food choice – *Food Choice Agency*
- Agency related to influencing the food system – *Civic Engagement Agency*

## Sustainability

“long-term ability of food systems to provide food security and nutrition in a way that does not compromise the economic, social and environmental bases that generate food security and nutrition for future generations.” (W.H.O., 2022)

- Longer-term and systems-level compared to Stability (household, short-term)

# Why is Agency and Sustainability important?

## Agency

- Dignity: Building food choice Agency contributes to feelings of dignity, self-worth, and ability to practice cultural traditions.
- Responsive Food Policy: Building Civic Engagement Agency helps inform responsive food policy decisions by empowering those facing the issues.
- Healthful Choices: Building food choice Agency allows people to make healthful choices and follow health advice from health care professionals.

“[The doctor] says eat more protein and less carbohydrates and I’m going ‘that’s nice, that’s nice’ I can’t do it, but it’s nice... They don’t really understand. I don’t have control over a lot. (TN interviewee)”

## Sustainability

- Provide food: Be able to provide affordable healthy food for future generations.
- Sustain livelihoods: Maintain availability of good jobs within food production, processing, distribution, and all other sectors involved in the food system.



# Exploring Agency and Sustainability in New Jersey

## Goal

- Understand how people in New Jersey view Agency and Sustainability to inform measurement and action planning

## Interviewees (n=55)

- People experiencing food insecurity from northern NJ (n=10), central NJ (n=13), southern NJ (n=10).
- Anti-hunger organizations (n=7), food production/farming (n=8), and food processing/distribution (n=7).

Analyzed interview data to identify and describe key themes.

# Agency



# Agency Quotes



"They serve what they serve [at the shelter]. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's got vegetables, but at the end of the day it is better than what I don't have."

Translated from Spanish: "Sometimes, someone may want to eat something that is more nutritious and much better for their health. But their economic situation doesn't allow them to access certain foods that are considered healthy. So, people can't choose what they eat but they try to eat whatever they can afford."

"For my students, they depend on school lunch, there's no fruits or vegetables [at home]. I wanted to open up a little produce store...but it's very difficult...policies are so manipulated, and the politics...it's very hard to be of assistance."



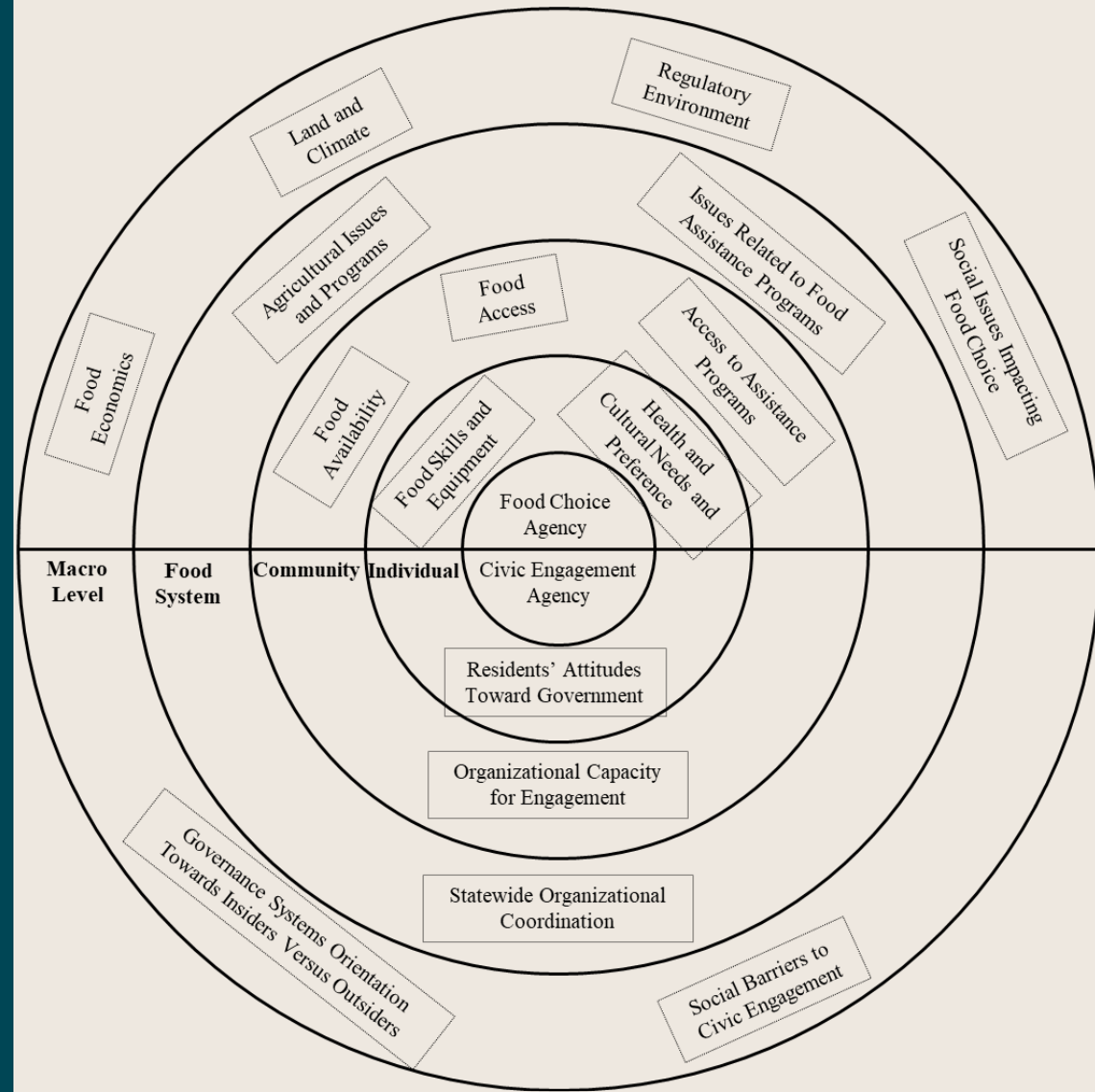
# Drivers of Agency in New Jersey

## Food Choice Agency

- Macro level: food economics, land and climate issues, regulations, social issues
- Food system: agriculture, nutrition assistance programs
- Food environment: food availability and access, and program access
- Individual: Food skill and equipment, health/cultural needs and preferences

## Civic Engagement Agency

- Macro-level: Governance systems orientation towards insiders/outside, social barriers
- Other levels: organizational coordination across the state, organizational engagement capacity, attitudes towards government/political processes





# What can be done to address Agency?

Short Term | ----- | Long Term

Making enrolling in nutrition benefit programs easier and raise awareness. Improve benefits programs and promote choice in emergency food programs.

Implementing a one-stop benefits application hub. Supporting local agriculture sector to lower food costs. Addressing food deserts.

Supporting community involvement in food policy decisions, such as by fostering local and regional food policy councils that draw on multi-sector participants to help inform food policy.

Streamlining food systems governance, promote inclusive models, and increase coordination across the food system.

# Sustainability



# Sustainability: Quotes from New Jerseyans

“There is limited resources and a lot of barriers for new food producers to enter the industry... If you are a young farmer, you can't afford to get started.”

“People throw away stuff by the bags...there is a lot of waste, too much waste, and a lot of restaurants don't want to get involved because they don't want the blowback.”



“...the whole point of supporting local is to be able to ensure that...food is consistently available for communities, and also those communities and market outlets are consistently there and open for growers.”

# Drivers of Sustainability in New Jersey

## Demographic, environmental, & regulatory

- Demographic trends, regulatory/political environment, and land/climate issues.

## Trends/issues for food access & waste

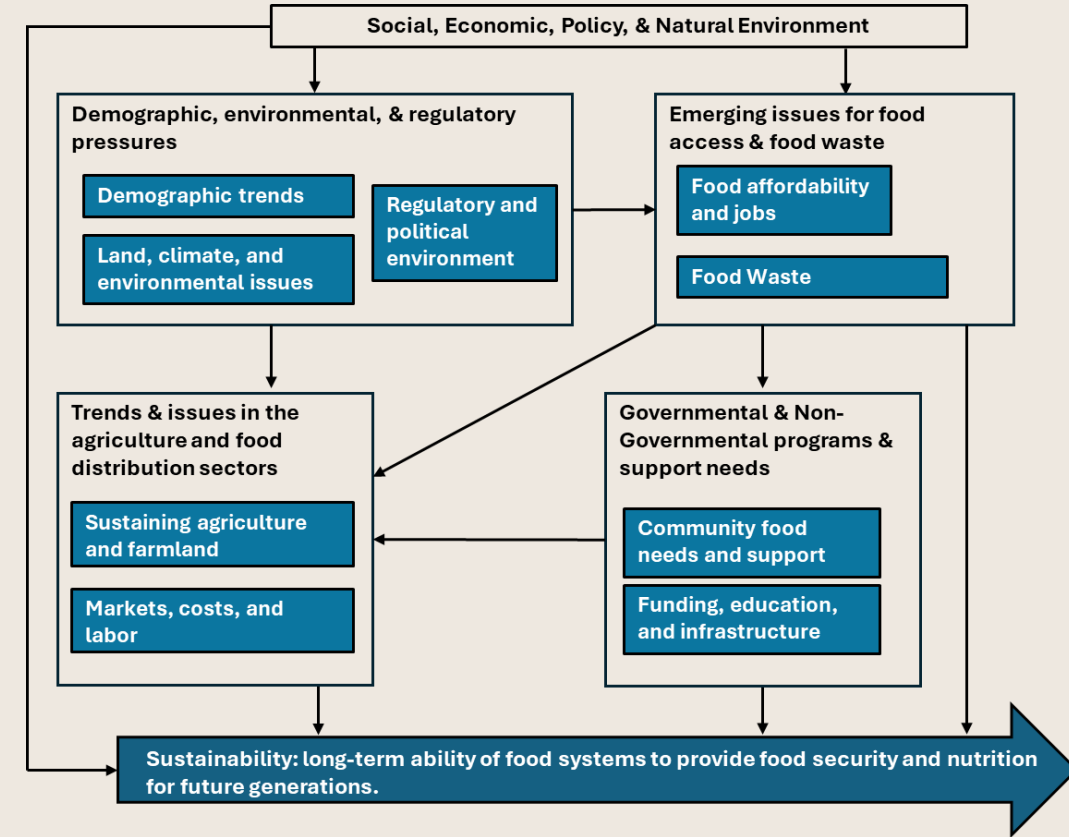
- Food affordability, access to good jobs, and addressing food waste

## Trends/issues in agriculture & distribution

- Sustain local agriculture, support next generations, land use struggles, and address markets and costs

## Gov. & NGO programs & support needs

- Community food needs, programmatic needs, funding for food/agriculture education and infrastructure





# What can be done to address Sustainability?

Short Term | ----- | Long Term

Educate consumers and commercial sector about food waste and mitigation strategies. Continue and expand efforts to promote and incentivize locally grown NJ food. Educate food across system on food needs of various recent immigrant groups.

Fund infrastructure and coordination around food waste reduction, management, and gleaning. Help build lasting profitable supply chains for local food to institutional purchasers and commercial markets.

Farming educational and promotion programs for public. Skill building and funding around financial management, marketing, and environmental sustainability for young farmers. Address land use policies and barriers to entry for new farmers and non-traditional farmers.

Fund agricultural infrastructure for climate mitigation and sustainability. Include climate change projects and adaptation measures in city plans, policies, and ordinances. Investigate need to improving food processing and distribution infrastructure.

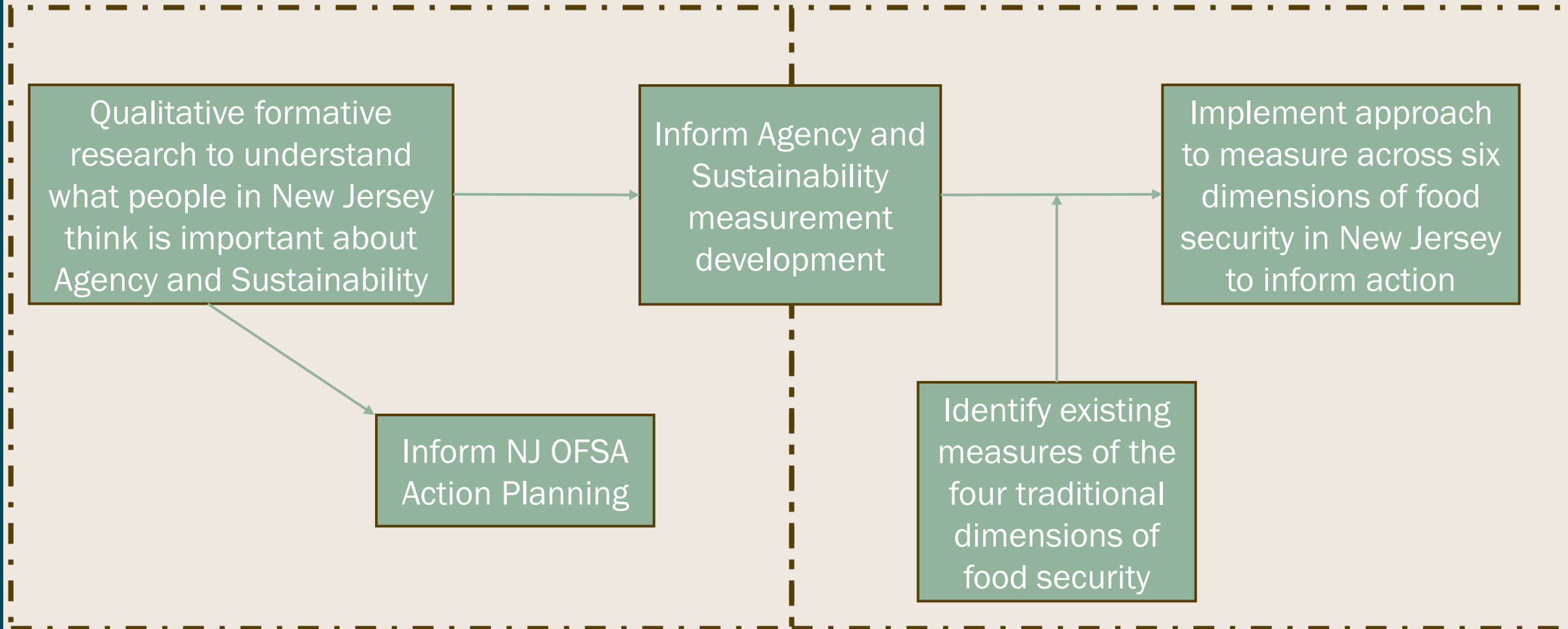
# Next Steps



# Future Directions

## Phase 1 – 2023-2024

## Phase 2 – 2024-2025





# Thank You!

## Questions?

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