



To: Institutions of Higher Education
From: New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education
Date: December 5, 2023
Subject: New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate One-Pager

The New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA) is responsible for coordinating the administration of the State’s food security programs, advocating for residents experiencing food insecurity, and advancing policy to secure greater access to food relief programs in New Jersey.

Additional information about OFSA and its portfolio of work is available in the attached one-pager. OFSA would also like to share the following research article, [“Food Insecurity Among Pregnant and Recently Pregnant Emerging and Young Adults: An Online Cross-Sectional Survey Study,”](#) published by the *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition* for more information on food insecurity as it relates to parenting learners.

Please feel free to direct any questions to OFSA@ag.nj.gov.

WHAT IS FOOD SECURITY?

"Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets dietary needs and cultural preferences for an active and healthy life."

- U.N. Committee on World Food Security High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, 2020



OFFICE OF THE
FOOD SECURITY
ADVOCATE

ABOUT THE NJ OFFICE OF THE FOOD SECURITY ADVOCATE

The New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA), the first executive-level office of its kind in the nation, is tasked with coordinating the administration of the State's food security programs, advocating for those who are experiencing food insecurity, and developing new policy initiatives to advance food security and facilitate greater access to food relief programs.

OFSA has adopted the above definition of food security from the United Nations' High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition. This definition includes the theoretical underpinnings in which OFSA informs its research strategy: the six pillars of food security, which provide an expanded and evolved understanding of the social issue. The pillars include:

- **Availability** – refers to individuals having sufficient and nutritional foods physically present in a person's environment
- **Access** – refers to the resources a person must obtain for appropriate and nutritious foods
- **Utilization** – refers to the intake of sufficient and safe foods to meet nutritional needs
- **Stability** – refers to the reliable supply of foods overtime and is often conceptualized as the stability of the first 3-pillars
- **Agency** *emerging concept* – refers to the capacity of individuals or groups to make their own decisions about the foods they eat and that are produced
- **Sustainability** *emerging concept* – refers to the long-term food system ability to provide food security in a way that does not compromise economic, social, and environment for future generations

OFSA serves as a convener and collaborator, building consensus across resident leaders, "food and/more than food" pantries, community (previously called soup) kitchens, "social profit" community-based organizations, the six state-designated food banks, legislators, state agencies, agriculture, food rescuers, philanthropy and others to make true food security a reality for everyone, reducing stigma around basic needs supports and expanding communities' capacity to build resiliency, promote positive childhood experiences and ultimately, heal themselves.

SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE

Building understanding around a common language, developing research and evaluation strategies to gather data to inform statewide and county-level efforts, and spotlighting food security stories from those thinking beyond bags of food to a more holistic and collaborative approach that can transform daily life for generations to come are core components of OFSA's work.

Food Sovereignty

: People's right to healthy & culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, & their right to define their own food & agriculture systems.

Source:
La Via Campesina



Foodways

: The role of food and food-related behavior in cultural groups, & the ways in which food knowledge is transferred within & varies between different societies.



Source: Encyclopedia of Food & Culture

FOOD SECURITY STORIES

These stories come from those who find ways to provide more choice and a dignified shopping experience for food pantry guests, continuously glean fresh produce and more from growers and retailers, prepare meals in community kitchens, coordinate home deliveries for discharged patients and the homebound, and help eligible customers of all ages apply for supports such as rental, utility and other assistance during their time of need. Browse more firsthand accounts on LinkedIn and Facebook at @NJOFSA.



We believe that reducing poverty is the largest hurdle to overcome in the path to food security for all. We work with our clients to provide job training, language classes, courses in resume writing, provide them with information on subsidies

available to them and more. In partnership with local agencies and the Mercer County Board of Social Services, we help to connect individuals and families with short-term emergency shelter, utility payment, health care enrollment, SNAP enrollment, rental assistance arbitration and medication assistance. While we hope for a day when our food pantry might not be necessary, we are here to help our neighbors feed their families and overcome challenges whenever they arise.

Leslie Koppel
Executive Director
Rise, [Highstown](#) and [East Windsor](#)

PARTNER IN THE MOVEMENT

Let OFSA help you: **Connect** to cross-sector conversations and best-in-class partnerships that are prioritizing food security to share your expertise. **Develop** a better understanding about the right to food and the six-dimensional framework OFSA has adopted for advancing food security. **Shoutout** the hands and hearts you know who are helping eligible local neighbors access existing supports in their time of need. **Think through** other ways this office can be a resource for your work. Contact us:

OFSA@ag.nj.gov

LinkedIn & Facebook: [@NJOFSA](#)

“To make food security a reality, we need to continue the conversation with our pantry customers beyond food. We start with food, and we grow relationships from there through our partnerships with social services, mental health services, county programs and education programs.”

Sarah Teti
Director of Local Mission
First Presbyterian Church of [Metuchen](#) Food Pantry, a partner of the [Metuchen/Edison](#) Assistance League
(above photo)



“So far this year, through September 2023, we have served over 25,153 individuals from all over South Jersey. The number of families we served has increased by more than 50% from last year. This summer, local farmers and gardeners made sure we had fresh produce every day we were open. We’re now working on ways to purchase fresh produce during the winter months so we can continue providing nutritious food year round.”

Cheri Slack
Director of Procurement
Greater [Woodbury](#) Cooperative Ministries, Inc.
Food Pantry

“Food security work is about putting economic power in people’s pockets instead of putting food in their cupboards.” - Mark Dinglasan, OFSA Executive Director