



Somerville Community Food Assessment

2026

Appendices

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Taxi to Health End of Program Report

From April 2022-October 2024, 1,020 known clients used the taxi program for a total of 21,186 rides, costing a total of \$524,476.

The Taxi to Health Program offered free taxi rides to food, medical, and other health needs for Somerville residents with limited incomes and no or unreliable car access.

The program aimed to:

- Be participant-centered by prioritizing accessibility and adapting to the needs of participants.
- Support a broad definition of health.
- Target priority populations, including those with or at risk of food insecurity, low income, minority & limited English proficiency.

The program was funded through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). It ended in October 2024 because the city could not incorporate the program into the City budget.

How did the program operate?

The program was administered directly by Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities (OFAHC) staff. Staff managed program applications, onboarding, communications and outreach, participant management, program rule

enforcement, record management, reporting, and evaluation. Taxi services, including dispatch, were provided by a contractor, Green and Yellow Cab of Somerville.

After enrolling in the program, participants received paper vouchers to use as payment for taxi rides.

Participants were allotted 4 vouchers/month for periods of program time. They could use the vouchers at any rate they needed during the program period.

- For example, people enrolled in Spring 2022 were allotted up to 48 vouchers for April 2022-February 2023. They could use those 48 vouchers any time during that period to meet their needs.
 - » Vouchers were mailed in packs of 12, which had to be requested. This helped staff monitor how quickly people used them.

Program staff made some exceptions for people with high needs and a history of following program use guidelines to receive extra vouchers as funding was available.

Vouchers were typically mailed. However in-person pickup options were added over the course of the program in response to participant challenges accessing mail. By the last year of the program, participants could receive vouchers by mail, at OFAHC's office during specified walk-in hours, or request a pickup at a Somerville Public Library location.

Participants usually managed their own booking through the taxi company. OFAHC staff was available to help people initially navigate the booking, and in cases where participants need ongoing support booking rides staff made a referral to a social service provider.

The program allowed people to take rides to and from:

- Food access locations: grocery stores, food pantries, farmers markets
- Medical needs: non-emergency medical appointments, prescription pickups
- Other health-supporting needs: social services, including case management, housing or utility support; housing search locations; banks and other financial services; transit locations, excluding the airport; courts and legal services

Food and medical needs were included in promotional materials. Other health-supporting needs were covered and discussed with participants after enrolling but not actively promoted. Participant use was monitored with random checks of rides and assistance from the taxi contractor in flagging rides not covered in the program. Most random checks that initially seemed questionable turned out to be appropriate uses of the program. For example, when staff followed up with a participant who appeared to have been picked up from a restaurant, the participant explained they had been at a nearby grocery store with a busy parking lot and had chosen the restaurant across the street as an easier pickup spot for the taxi company.

How did people apply for and access the program?

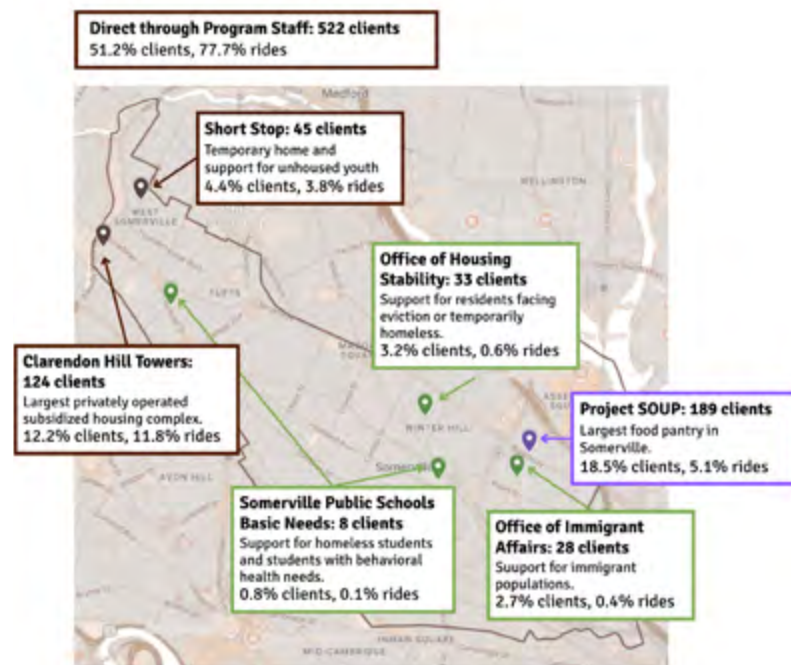
People could access the program in three ways:

- Through a google form (in English and Spanish).
- By phone.
- With a service provider who knew about the program.

OFAHC promoted the program at outreach events and meetings with service providers. OFAHC had access to interpretation services and, later in the program, a bi-lingual program assistant.

In addition, the program had **6 partner organizations** who held vouchers and distributed them directly to residents or clients. Partners increased accessibility and supported priority populations who might otherwise have had difficulty using the program.

Fig 01: Program partners included residential facilities, supportive services, and the city's largest food pantry.



Service provider partners – Office of Housing Stability, Office of Immigrant Affairs, and Somerville Public Schools Basic Needs/Social Work – often used vouchers to meet an immediate need for someone in crisis. Later the person either did not need more support or was referred to the program to receive vouchers directly.

Residential partners like Clarendon Hill Towers and Short Stop were the only source of vouchers for participants living at those locations, thus there were more clients and each client typically used more rides.

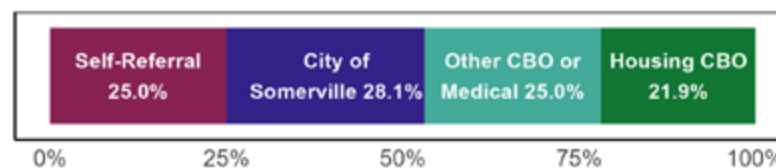
Project SOUP, the **food pantry program** of the Somerville Homeless Coalition, typically provided people with rides home from the pantry. The 189 Project SOUP clients only accessed the program to get home from Project SOUP.

Program partners added increased flexibility for users. **7.6% of clients used vouchers from multiple sources over the course of the program. For example:**

- Some clients from the Office of Housing Stability were referred to get vouchers directly from the program after getting 2-4 from their housing case manager for immediate needs.
- Some participants who struggled to manage the vouchers on their own received support from multiple programs to get vouchers and arrange rides.

HOW EFFECTIVE WAS THE PROGRAM IN SUPPORTING ACCESS?

Fig 2A: Participants connected to the program through multiple avenues



1 in 4 users found the program on their own.

3 in 4 users were connected by an organization.

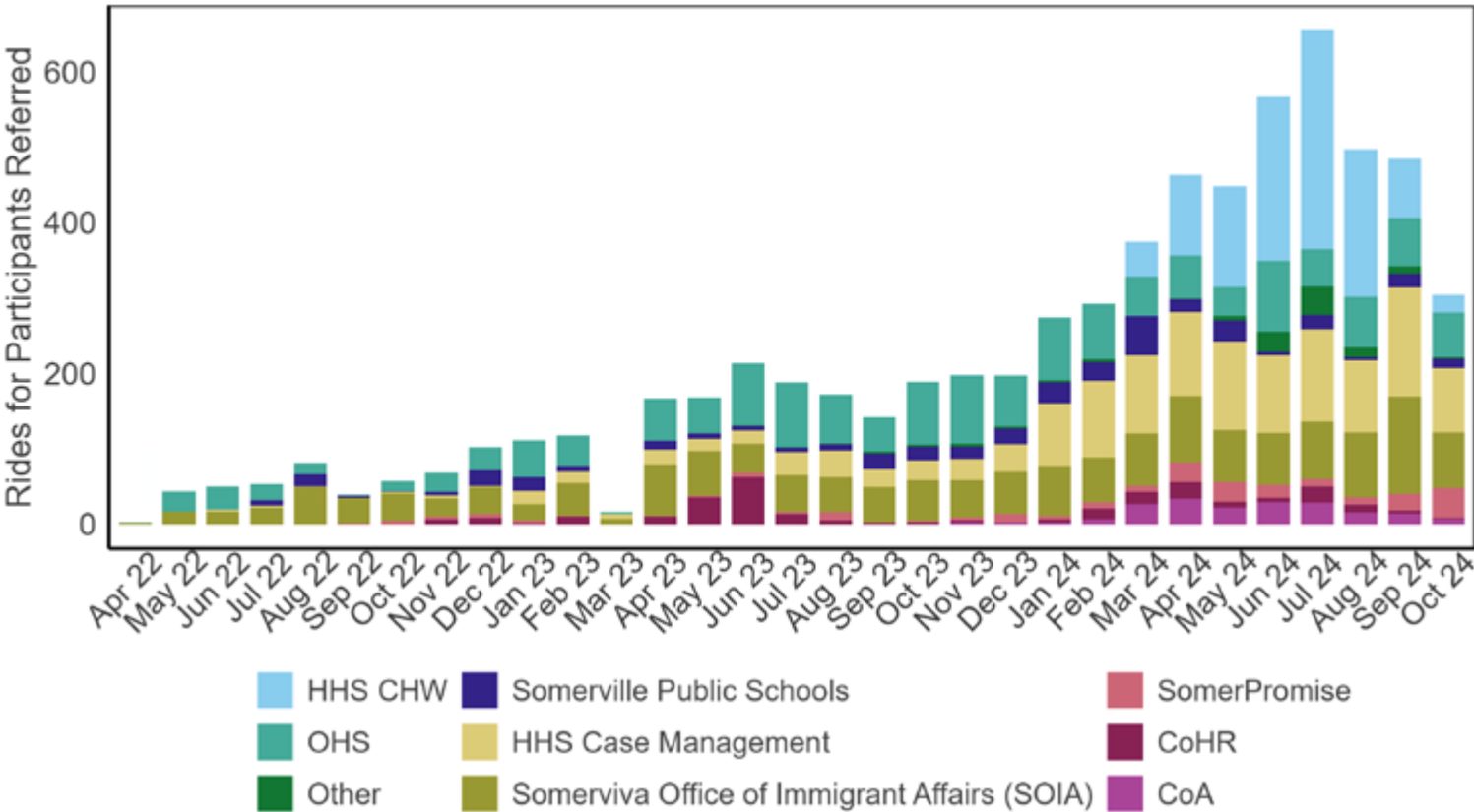
Key community-based organization (CBO) referrers included: Riverside Early Head Start, Respond Inc, Somerville Homeless Coalition, Padres Latinos de SPS.

The program was a key support for City of Somerville service providers: City of Somerville referrals were the largest group of referrals to the program at 28% of all referrals. As City offices became familiar with the program, they leaned increasingly on it to connect clients to needed services.

89.6% of people referred to the program used their vouchers.
118 people connected never used the program.

- A mid-program survey (Summer 2023) to investigate why people didn't use the program returned some of the following:
 - » People did not understand how to use the program and for what exactly they could use the vouchers.
 - » Non-English speakers had difficulty booking rides because the taxi company employees only spoke English.
 - » People often did not receive the vouchers by mail.

Fig 2B: City of Somerville offices were the largest source of referrals, and their clients' share of rides increased over time



- Following this feedback, some materials and procedures were adjusted, including:
 - » Creating an explainer for low English proficiency users to book through the taxi company's mobile app.
 - » Arranging options for people to pick up vouchers at the program's office or a local library through a partnership with Somerville Public Library staff.
 - » Improving participant communication procedures with timed standardized text messages to 1) ensure participants received vouchers and 2) offer an opportunity to ask program staff questions.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS?

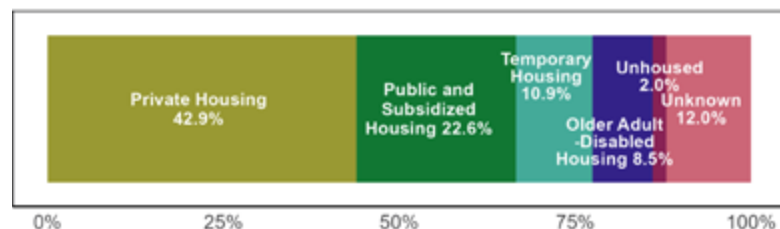
To make the program as accessible as possible, OFAHC kept the application simple. Key demographic metrics were: 1) the participant's first language, 2) whether the participant was 60 or older, and 3) at least one criterion of need. We also collected participant home addresses whenever possible.

Where did program participants live?

At least **13%** of participants were **unhoused or in shelters**.

At least **31%** of participants lived in **income-restricted housing**.

Fig 03A: Participants by housing type bar graph

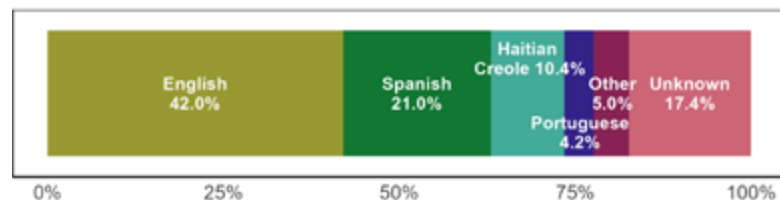


Note: Clarendon Hill Towers and Short Stop were a program partners, as described above. The Temporary Housing class includes people living in shelter, staying with a family member, or in a transitional housing program like Short Stop.

The group of 'unknown' housing type comes largely through partner programs and likely includes many chronically homeless or temporarily homeless people.

What were clients' first languages?

Fig 03: About half of participants spoke a language other than English (for those whose first language was known)



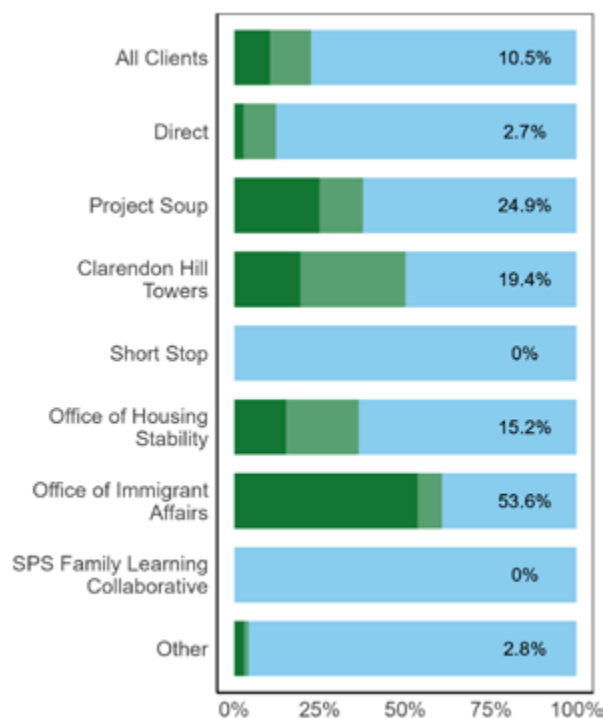
About **1 in 4** Somerville residents speaks a language other than English at home.

At least **2 in 4** Taxi to Health participants were not English first language speakers.

The program was able to reach many limited English speakers and help them access the program, often with support from program staff and case managers who referred these clients.

Partners were key to connecting **older adults** with limited English.

Fig 04: Partner programs were key connectors, especially for older adults who did not speak English.



- **Dark green** is the percentage of older adults whose language is not English and corresponds to the percentage listed for each bar.
- **Light green** is English-first-language older adults.
- **Blue** is all other clients.

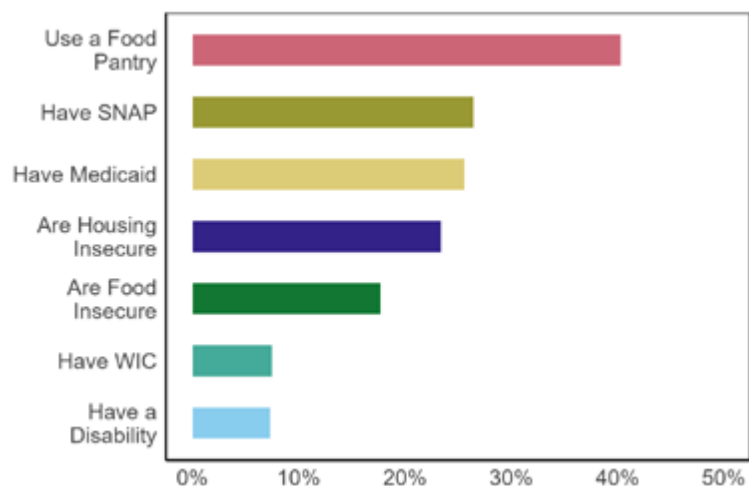
What were the most common self-identified eligibility criteria?

Participants met at least 1 of the following eligibility criteria:

- Receiving SNAP
- Receiving WIC
- Enrolled MassHealth (Medicaid)
- Living in Public or Subsidized housing
- Screening positive for food insecurity by the following screening questions:
 - » I sometimes run out of food before I can afford to buy more.
 - » I used a food pantry or free meal to stretch my food budget over the past year.
- Housing insecure or experiencing homelessness.

In some cases, participants were allowed to use the program if they attested to being severely rent-burdened (50% + income towards rent) or if they had a disability and moderate income.

Fig 05: Participants by eligibility criteria



Note: Participants (or case managers filling out the application for clients) were asked to voluntarily select all that apply. In many cases participants may have selected only one, even if others did apply, if in a hurry or unwilling to share sensitive information.

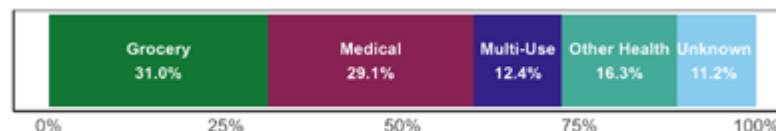
Food pantry use was the lowest barrier qualifier; pantries are accessible to people ineligible for SNAP due to immigration status, people who feel stigma around using government benefits, and people who are just over income for benefits but still struggle to access enough good food.

Food insecurity is likely under-reported because it is a sensitive question for participants to answer. It's also important note that disability reporting is low because it was collected only later in program.

HOW DID PEOPLE USE THE PROGRAM?

3 in 5 rides were to grocery and medical needs.

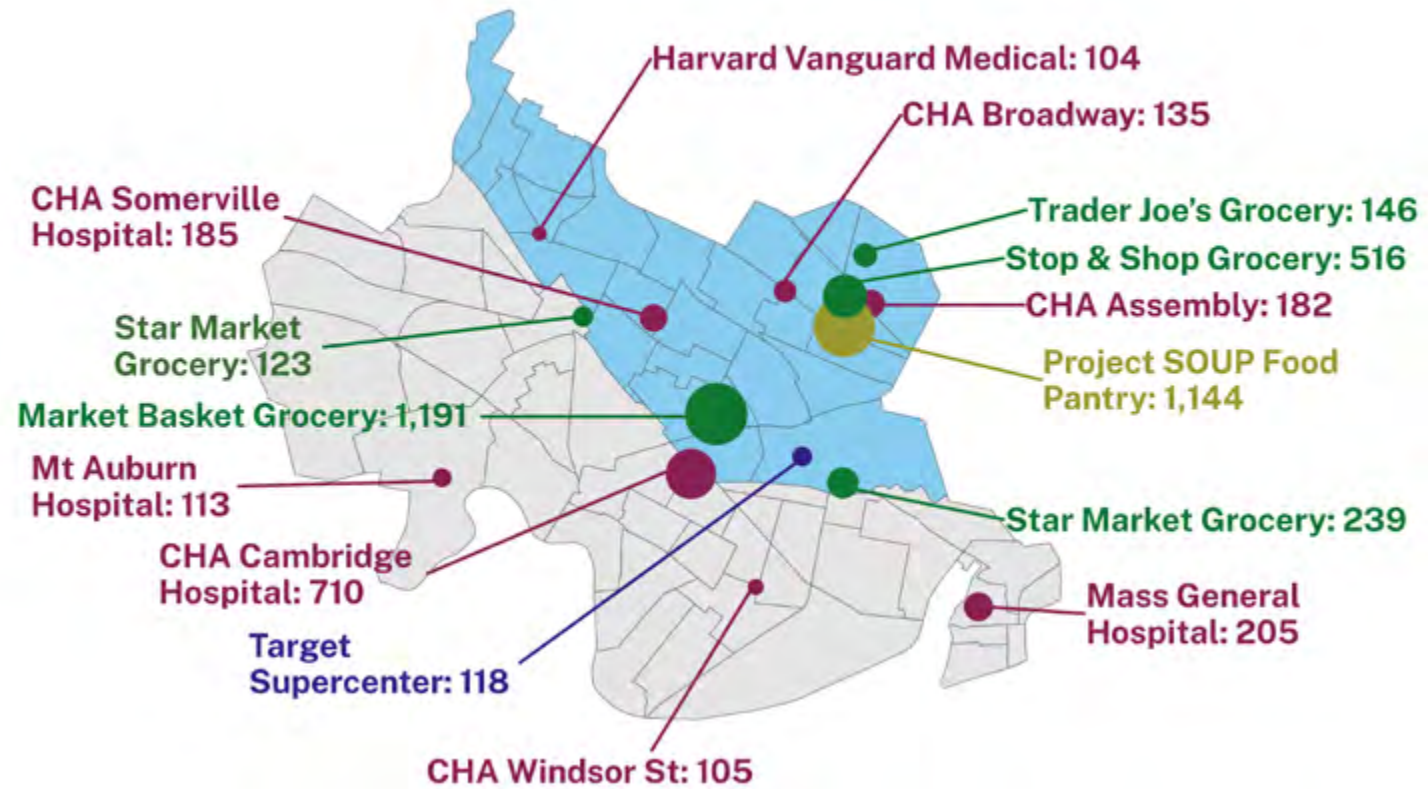
Fig 06: Grocery and medical rides accounted for at least 3 in 5 rides.



The program strove to offer participants the flexibility to use program as you would a personal vehicle by allowing people to meet multiple needs with one or several trips. **Multi-use rides** were rides with multiple trips to health needs or rides to a destination with multiple services where it is not known what services were accessed. For example:

- A ride to a doctor's appointment, then to a pharmacy, then home.
- A ride to a development or square with doctor's office and grocery store.

Fig 07: The most frequently accessed food and medical destinations were in or close to Somerville.



46% of all rides were **within Somerville**.

Note: Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA) is the most common primary care provider for Somerville residents. Project SOUP was a partner, which influences the number of rides taken there. However, one third of participants who went to Project SOUP received vouchers through another means.

Fig 08: Taxi use for food needs reveals gaps in access and preference for personal vehicle over bus when grocery shopping.

Legend: Number of Trips to Block Group

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| — 1-5 trips | → 24-61 trips |
| → 6-13 trips | → 62-212 trips |
| → 14-23 trips | |

MARKET BASKET



STAR MARKET PORTER



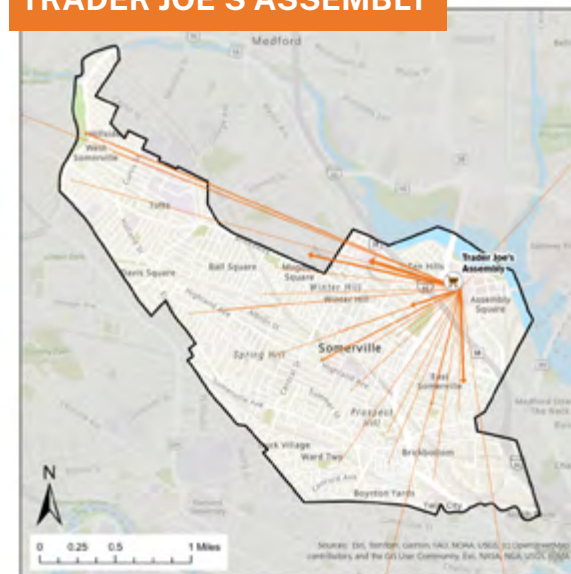
STAR MARKET TWIN CITY



STOP & SHOP MCGRATH



TRADER JOE'S ASSEMBLY



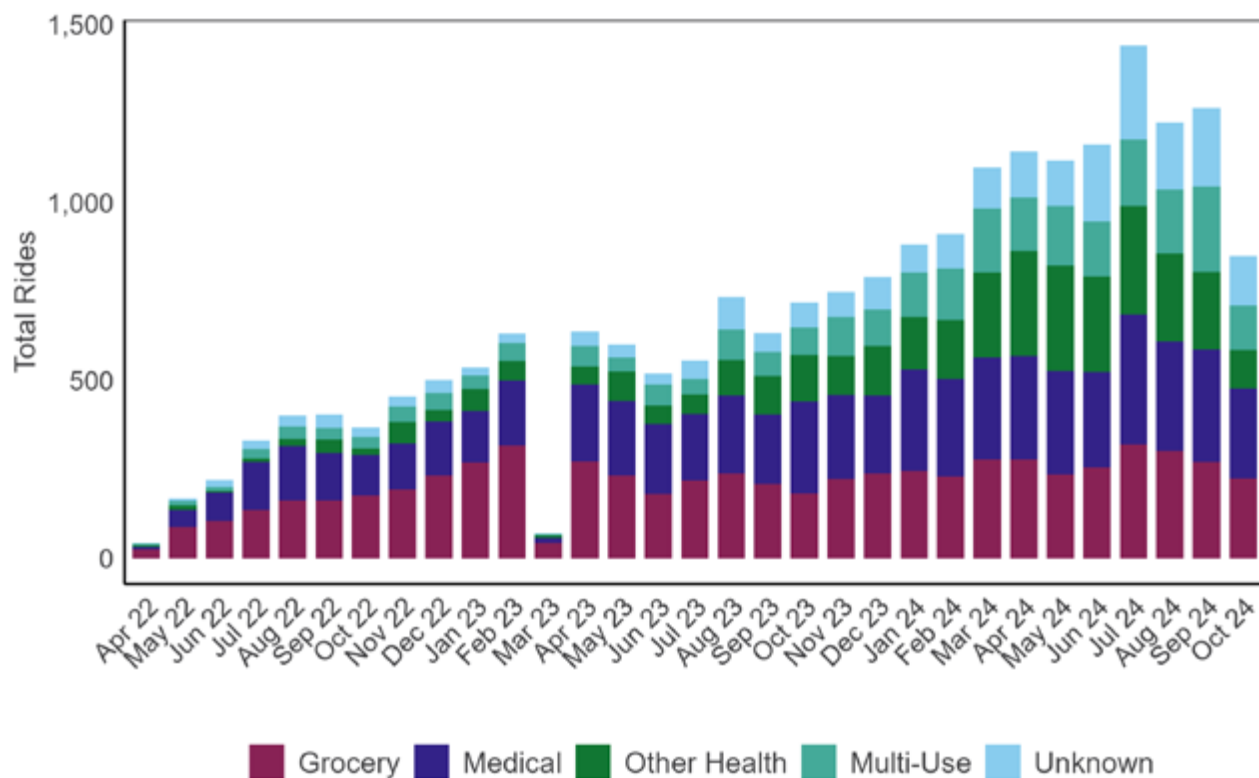
Participants' choices in how to use the program for food needs provide insight into gaps and limitations in transportation to food. The large number of trips from the Mystic Housing area highlights limited bus options for the city's largest public housing development. A concentration of trips from Clarendon Hill to Market Basket, a trip that is served by a good bus round, suggests that bus is not the preferred means of transportation to get food. Many residents also chose to take trips to grocery stores farther from their home, even when located near a grocery, illustrating that not all groceries stores are the same in terms of affordability and cultural comfort.

On average, **participants took 3 rides/month** with participants' average number of rides/month ranging from less than 1 to 25.

75% of participants took 4 rides or fewer per month, and 90% of participants took 7 rides or fewer per month.

In a few cases, participants used many vouchers in a short time when they needed a lot of support. For example, a recent arrival to the US used almost all his allotted vouchers in 4 months to find housing, a job, and ESL training in addition to regular use for grocery and medical needs.

Fig 09: The program grew over time and other health and social need rides increased as a share of the total.



Over time and with more referrals from City and other service providers seeking support for their clients, the program approved more types of ‘other’ health needs. Figure 9 also shows the growth in use of the program over time with steady promotion and follow-up to ensure participants could use it smoothly. During the height of use (April 2024-August 2024) we had a 16-hour a week program assistant whose primary role was to onboard and support participants.

What are some examples of “Other” destinations?

The program included a lot of flexibility for participants if they could explain why something was needed to support their physical and mental health. For example, while getting to work was not an approved use, it was approved in some cases when public transit lines were down for maintenance. Below are a few more examples of destinations classed as ‘Other’, which has significant impacts on the wellbeing of participants:

- Rides arranged in collaboration with the Somerville PD’s group of Social Workers for people at the station to go directly to detox programs.
- Rides to the closest DTA office (the state agency that administers SNAP in MA) or MassHealth (Medicaid) office to resolve application issues.
- Currently wait time for the DTA can be an hour+, or more likely you get an automatic disconnect.
- One-time rides to a program that gives free furniture and homewares for newly housed people.
- Rides to appointments for people in the process of applying for public housing in the Boston area.

- Rides to the MBTA (regional public transit) Mobility center to get approved for para-transit (ironically you must get there in person to be approved).

A note on data quality: Taxi to Health program staff received an invoice from Green and Yellow Cab, the program contractor, every month. The invoice backing included a list of rides taken with pickup and destination addresses. In many cases addresses do not tell us exactly where the client went and for what reason. Staff do their best to clean up and identify the addresses, but there is still a considerable amount of uncertainty in the data.

WHAT DID THE PROGRAM COST?

Rides cost an average of \$24.75. The contract with the taxi vendor set rates for most trips based on prices from Somerville to the destination/pickup city. Rides within Somerville were least expensive at \$18 for a within-Somerville ride. Boston proper was divided into neighborhoods. For participants traveling to cities without set rates or between cities outside of Somerville, rates were mileage based.

The monthly cost and number of rides per month varied widely based on how participants chose to use their vouchers.

On average, participant rides cost \$76.34 per month per person.

WHAT DID PEOPLE VALUE ABOUT THE PROGRAM?

To assess the program's outcomes, staff conducted a survey of referral participants and of service providers who referred clients to the program.

The participant survey reached 130 people by phone, about 12.7% of users. Respondents were close to a representative sample of language, housing type, and age groups, though participants who connected through partner programs were not included.

Highlights:

- 7% said they skipped medical appointments before the program.
- 16% mentioned being late to appointments before the program.
- 44% commented that public transit was slow, frequently delayed, or involved complex transfers.
- 71% mentioned the program saved them stress.
- 10% mentioned spending more on food when asked how the program saved them money.

WHAT DID RESPONDENTS SAY?

- The cab rides saved me a lot of time from not having to travel; I used to miss or arrive late to my appointment; I have a young child and it's been amazing.
- I'm on disability and a fixed income; it saved me money.
- Extra time was valuable to have more rest time - I work nights, and my sleep can be fitful; [I had] more time to prepare healthy food; generally better quality of life.

- It's expensive to transport two kids. [The taxis were] faster and more convenient, better to carry things.

The service provider survey reached 13 people across a variety of social service programs, all of whom relied on the program to support their clients:

- It was really useful to be able to help clients **access our office**, especially for a first meeting, when otherwise it would have been more **complicated and difficult to try to get them here**. - Housing Case Manager
- Able to connect **linguistically isolated and disabled constituents** with care that they need at local hospitals that they otherwise would not be able to access. - Public Health Nurse
- Clients were able to access appointments that they otherwise would not have been able to/that would've been **a financial and/or time burden to them**. - Housing Case Manager

They mention that the program fill in gaps left by existing programs and helped build independence in clients:

- After some time, families were familiar with how to use the program and were able to **independently use the resource**. It eliminated a barrier for folks to seek medical care and food. - Social Worker of Basic Needs at Somerville Public Schools
- Many clients **complained about the PT1 program or other available ride programs** in terms of ease of use, specifically around having to schedule in advance and waiting for pick and drop off. - Social Worker with Somerville PD

They also mention the value to their own piece of mind of being able to solving a small but immediate problem for clients:

- Able to offer **tangible, fast solution to at least one problem** facing clients with very low to no income who are navigating tight schedules and money. - Rental Assistance Advocate

PROGRAM END AND NEXT STEPS

The Taxi to Health program ended October 2024, with the end of the ARPA funding period.

There were three challenges to continuing the program using the City's budget:

- Not legal for the General Fund to directly support a program that only services some residents.
 - » Direct Aid amendment.
 - » Council on Aging is an exception.
- High cost.
- Mismatch with institutional structure: no Division clearly a good fit to manage it.

In the fall of 2023, OFAHC received a technical assistance grant from the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission (MAPC) to explore options to continue the program following the end of ARPA funding. Table 1 shows the options proposed, their pros, cons, and estimated costs. For reference,

The Taxi to Health program had an average of **8,201 rides/year** (683/month) and an average cost of **\$203,023/year** (\$16,919/month).

Next steps for OFAHC include: Advocacy for MassHealth PT-1 Program improvements: Using the Massachusetts DTA as example, the department has Advisory Boards made up of people who interact with the program and a statewide SNAP Coalition of advocates who regularly connect with the department to share feedback.

Create a Transit Equity Working Group for City stakeholders to work collaboratively on this issue.

Work interdepartmentally to get shuttle access into Community Benefit Agreements with new developments.

Table 1: Exploration of options to address transportation to health needs				
Option	Description	Pros	Cons	Annual Cost Estimate
Fixed Route Shuttle	Shuttle could be operated by a contractor to most common destinations in Somerville	• Limited means testing required • Prioritizes area with less public transit	• Not door to door • Limited destinations • High wait times	\$184,787-\$277,180
On-Demand Shuttle	Shared shuttle could be available for on-demand rides, not on fixed route; Somerville only	• Convenient • Door-to-door	• Unpredictable demand = difficult to budget for • Very expensive	Other programs: • \$760,000 for ~45,000 trips • \$1,282,667 for ~60,600 trips
Subsidized Transit Package	Funds could cover multiple transit modes at no or low cost	• Builds on existing reduced cost MBTA passes • Encourages public transit as first option • Can cover trips outside of Somerville	• Harder to fund • Management challenge with two separate modes	\$552,500 for MBTA pass + \$50 taxi voucher (~8500 ppl paying \$15/month)

Appendix 2: Somerville Mobile Farmers Market Summary

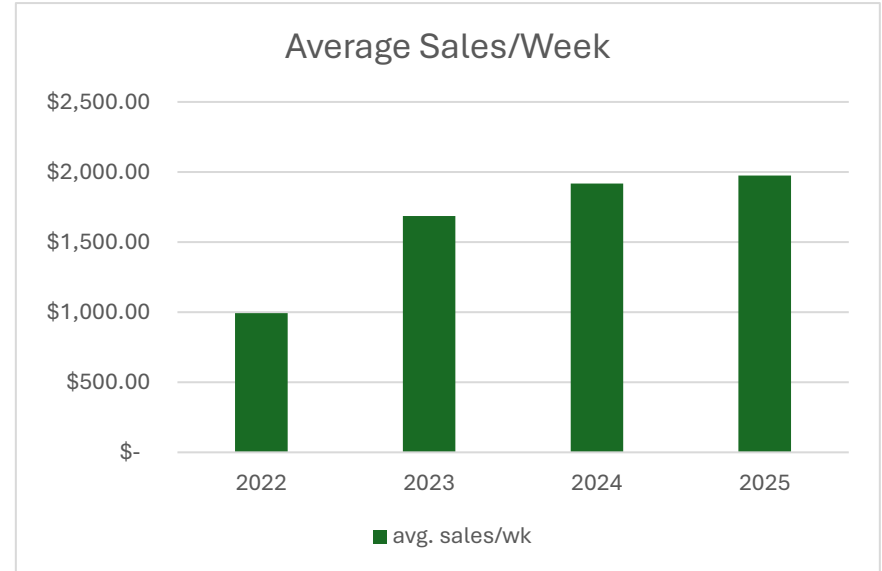
Summary of Market Data 2025 vs Previous Years

Produced in November 2025 by Quinn Glickman, Mobile Farmers Market Assistant for the Somerville Mobile Farmers Market within Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities.

Summary:

Every year, once the Somerville Mobile Farmers Market (SMFM) concludes for the season, sales data from the Square point-of-sale platform is reviewed and analyzed to help staff evaluate program growth and impact. The locations of the market are Clarendon Hill Towers (CHT), Council on Aging/SCALE (COA), East Somerville Public Library (East or Library), and Mystic Housing (Mystic). The following charts provide a good visual summary of how the SMFM has reached people in Somerville. A reduction in farmers market coupons, confusion around SNAP cuts and a pause on the HIP program are all factors to consider when looking at the 2025 sales data.

Average sales/week (to account for differences in season lengths) is charted below.



Sales were the highest in 2025 vs. all previous years, despite unique challenges in 2025. Sales were **up 8.6% from 2024**.

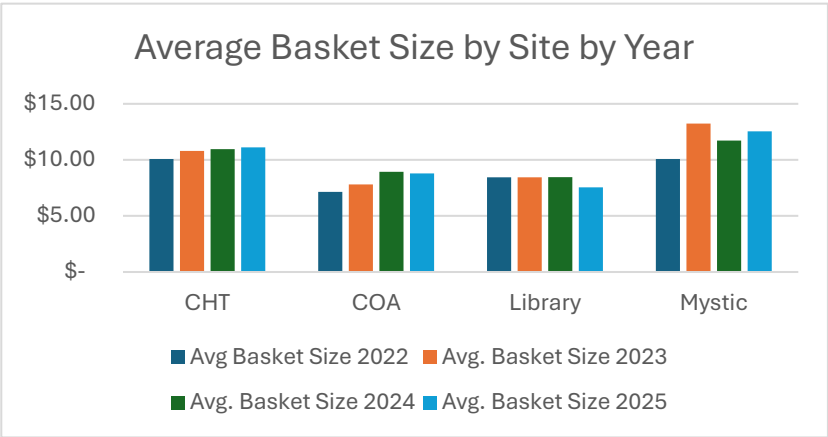
Total Sales have increased each year steadily at East and COA. Sales at Clarendon/North decreased slightly in 2025, which can be attributed to the coupon reductions that we saw at the site this year. Sales at Mystic are the highest they’ve been yet but seemed to dip in 2024 compared to 2023.



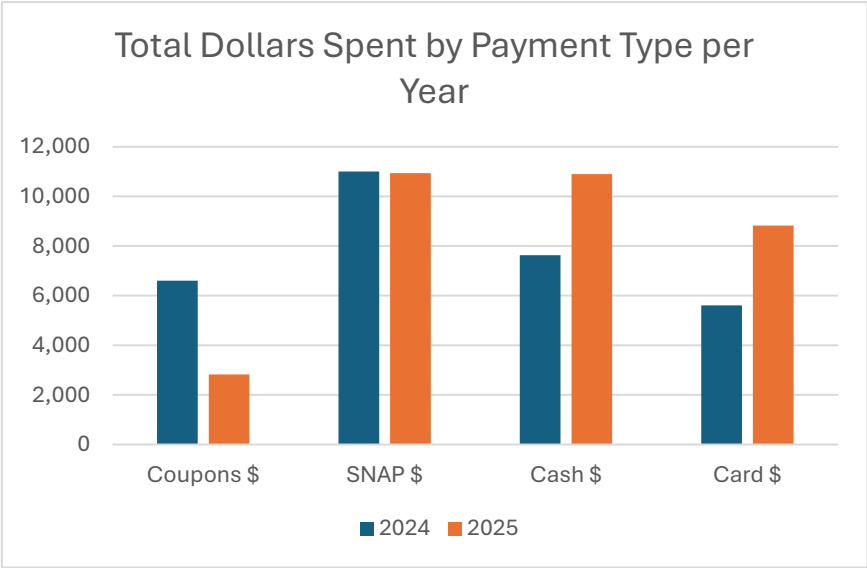
Top selling items by gross sales were tomatoes (\$3,076), potatoes (3,043), broccoli (1,655), onions (\$1,617) and corn (\$1,534).

Top selling items by most transactions were corn (\$1,874), scallions (\$1,683), potatoes (\$1,171), tomatoes (\$1,037) and onions (\$852).

The average basket size, meaning how much produce a shopper purchases per visit, is **higher at CHT, lower at COA, lower at East and higher at Mystic** than in 2024.

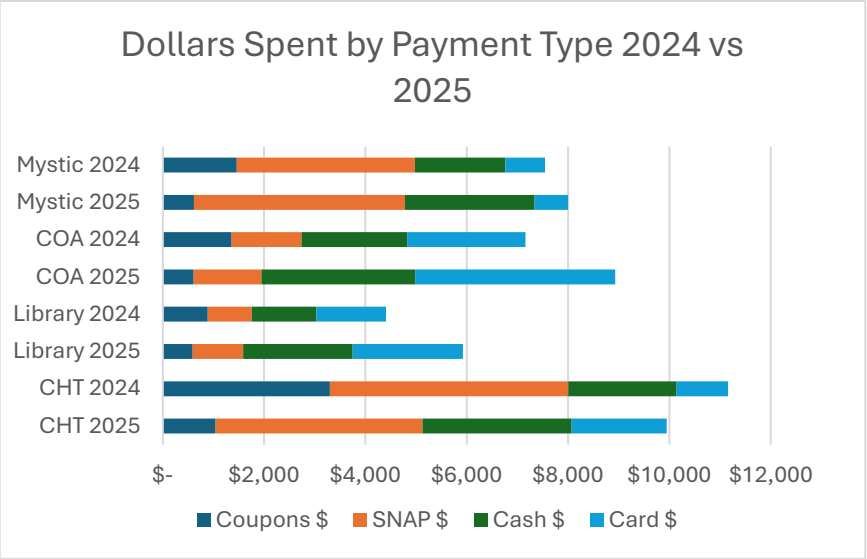


The coupon cuts, HIP confusion, etc. seem to not have affected the average basket size. That is, **people are spending the same amount of money on each transaction as in previous years** but using **different payment methods** to do so.



With the reductions in coupon and SNAP benefits, payment type shifted to cash and cards.

The graph below compares payment type by site and year.



At every site, **customers are making up for the lack of coupons with cash and card payments**. Each site saw **more sales in 2025 than in 2024**, except for Clarendon Hill Towers, where it is likely **the coupon deficit was too large to make up with cash**, even though there was an additional ~1500 dollars spent at CHT in 2025 using cash and card vs. in 2024.

2024 Qualitative Analysis of the Somerville Mobile Farmers Market

To complement program evaluation with sales data, staff in 2024 intercepted market shoppers to ask them four questions to help tell more of a story of why people shop at the market.

During the last few weekends at the SMFM in 2024, staff spoke with 62 shoppers across all four locations and asked them the four questions below. Questions were asked in English, Spanish, Portuguese and Haitian Creole. Select responses included with the corresponding question:

1. Why do you shop at the Somerville Mobile Market?

- *"The produce arrives fresh, almost straight from the garden"*
- *"HIP - that's a huge thing - I like that it's a farmers market & it's right here - especially for the elderly"*
- *"Closer, convenient, no transit needed"*
- *"Help us get more with food stamps, beans, people are very helpful, I learned about HIP"*
- *"Vegetables are great, selection is great, prices are good, people are friendly, I'm up here a lot anyway"*

2. What do you value in this market over other grocery options?

- *it's close to me, "I just get down and come here", fresh ingredients*
- *convenience, broccoli is fresh, cheaper price on certain items*

- *"I love it - healthy + [less] expensive...nothing better than it"*

3. Who else does the food you prepare with this produce feed? (ie family, friends, church meals, neighbors).

- *"Family"*
- *"Friends, neighbors"*
- *"Family - Sunday dinner"*
- *"I live alone...cook for self but I buy produce for 2 others, persons with a disability"*

4. In general, how many people do you cook for with these ingredients?

- Responses ranged from one person to seven people.

Growing Food in Somerville: Understandings and Aspirations

*A project by
students in the
Fall 2024
Fieldwork Lab class
(ANTH 161)*



Photo: Amelia Neiman





Background & Methods

In Fall 2024, students in Cathy Stanton's Fieldwork Lab class (ANTH 161) partnered with the City of Somerville's Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities to explore **how people cultivating food in the city think about their activities** and **what they hope to see in the future, including ideas about possible roles for the city**. The research was intended to inform the updating of the Somerville Community Food Assessment.

ANTH 161 introduces students to the suite of ethnographic methods used by anthropologists, including participant-observation, fieldnote writing, formal and informal interviewing, spatial analysis, and related skills. Students completed the following:

- made multiple visits to four field sites (see pg 4)
- wrote fieldnotes and took photos
- conducted and transcribed 21 interviews with gardeners and others
- conducted a literature review of more than 100 relevant recent sources (see Annotated Bibliography in separate file)
- coded data according to themes that emerged through our readings and class discussion
- gave a preliminary presentation to city staff from interested departments at City Hall, and
- produced final portfolios of individual work with a brief capstone reflection.



Students:

Taara Alvarez Nishio, Priyanka Anand, Lex Buffonge, Michelle Burger, Alice Fang, Zelda Mayer, Amelia Neiman, Yayla Tur, Yucheng Wang, Koloris Wu

Professor:

Cathy Stanton



The image at left, by Amelia Neiman, shows a “volunteer” cherry tomato plant growing out of a tree stump in the Durrell garden, illustrating how plants exercise their own forms of agency alongside gardeners and planners within spaces of cultivation. Images above are by Cathy Stanton.

OFAHC staff and Prof. Stanton pre-selected four main sites for our research, aiming to cover a range of different growing sites and models:

City of Somerville Community Gardens
6 interviewees from 4 of the 9 gardens (Durrell, Glen Park, Osgood, Tufts) plus observations at 2 others (Albion and Bikepath). Interviewees included the overall coordinator for the city gardening program.



Mystic Housing Community Garden
2 interviewees (one current and one former gardener/organizer) plus several observational visits



Somerville Community Growing Center
4 interviewees (2 staff, 2 volunteers) plus informal conversations and several visits to observe events



Mutual Aid Medford and Somerville (MAMAS)
6 interviewees plus observations of several MAMAS garden locations



We also interviewed one gardener from the Concord Avenue garden, a neighborhood-run project, and talked informally with people knowledgeable about Groundwork Somerville, whose staff were furloughed during Fall 2024.

We didn't observe or study schoolyard gardens, shared gardens on private properties (besides the MAMAS gardens), or other similar projects, but we heard about them from many of our interviewees.

Industrialism separates cities from food production, a historical anomaly	First urban gardening projects in Boston area	Widespread urban gardening around Boston in both world wars	Short-term school garden project; 1 st community garden on Highland Ave, 1974	Tufts Ecology Club started garden on Tufts campus	Mystic Community Garden started by Vietnamese resident of Mystic Housing	Somerville Community Growing Center created on site of school torn down in 1991	Groundwork Somerville founded as a project of the Growing Center	MAMAS founded as mutual aid response to COVID-19 pandemic; gardens started 2021
19 th -20 th c	1890s	1910s 1940s	early-mid 1970s	late 1970s	1991	1993	2000	2020



Timing & Context

- We are in a moment of reckoning with the many complexities of the seemingly simple activity of growing more food in cities. For example:
 - As Sam Bass Warner argued in his 1987 study of Boston's community gardens, **modern industrial and postindustrial cities are inherently inhospitable to cultivating food** because of the way that particular kinds of commercial production and development have been prioritized over more than two centuries.
 - The early 21st century wave of enthusiasm for local foods and greener cities has now encountered the **underlying disparities and pressures within both urban land use and food access**, which usually reflect distinctions of class, race, and gender. Urban agriculture and community gardening have often been seen as solutions to these systemic issues, which require deeper kinds of change. Much of the recent scholarly literature on urban food cultivation has focused on how individuals, communities, and governments are navigating these tensions.
 - **The Covid 19 pandemic heightened the effects and awareness of disparities** around food and many related resources. The pandemic opened up many big questions but as with the scholarly literature, **there is not a broad consensus yet** on what this means for current and future food and gardening projects.

"Cities without gardens are the products of exceptional circumstances, a sort of bad mutation brought on by the land rush of the 1750-1930 era." (Warner 1987, 6)

"Contradictory processes of capitalism both create opportunities for urban agriculture and impose obstacles to its expansion." (McClintock 2014, 148)

"In the early pandemic, people had a lot more time available... It was also more top of mind—there was this external problem in the world causing people to have less access to food or money. That motivated a lot of people to get involved and do something about it. Now that life is more back to normal, fewer people are coming in with the time energy and availability for the project, and that's definitely an issue." (Interviewee, 2024)



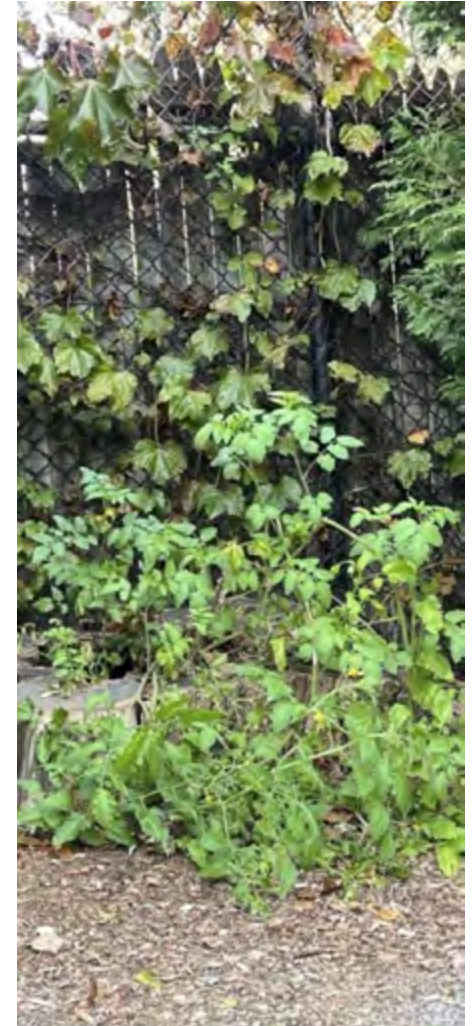
Literature review

We reviewed 110 journal articles, book chapters, and books from the extensive multidisciplinary scholarship on community gardening and urban agriculture, with a focus on anthropological and anthropology-adjacent work of the past decade. We were attentive to general and emerging questions and understandings around motivation, demography, relationships, outcomes, current and possible future models, and roles for state actors. We also flagged theoretical terms and concepts that seemed relevant to our partners' concerns and constructed a timeline for thinking about food cultivation in cities of the industrial era.

An annotated reading list is being shared with OFAHC separately and we can share any individual articles on request. Rather than write up a separate literature review, we have integrated ideas and insights from the literature where they are relevant to the sections of the report itself.

General Findings & Recommendations

1. There is **no one-size-fits all model** for community gardening and urban agriculture; urban growing is inherently context- and community-specific as well as continually in flux and shaped by multiple kinds of agency (including that of non-humans).
2. These activities are often framed as alternative or resistant to the mainstream industrial food system, but it may be more useful to think about them as **complementary starting-points** for increasing participation in civic discussions about food.
3. City involvement in urban food cultivation can be a **mixed blessing**.
4. The city's most useful role may be as a **convenor and conduit** for practical resources.



1. There is no one-size-fits all model for community gardening and urban agriculture; urban growing is inherently context- and community-specific as well as continually in flux and shaped by multiple kinds of agency (including that of non-humans).

Both the literature and our research showed that there is a very wide range of motivations for growing food in the city.

“It’s just a fundamental human urge.”

Individual mental, physical, spiritual, environmental health

- *“From gardening, I gain--how can I say?--stability. And then, reduce my health (problems). I had high blood pressure, high blood sugar, and it’s all reduced by growing food, and eating my own food, and fruits, and vegetables from my garden.”*
- *“It’s a large source of grounding and comfort.”*
- *“Continuously helps me with feelings of loneliness and helplessness in the face of impending climate doom.”*

Education

- *“[Kids at Mystic garden] love learning that, you know? Messing with the dirt. They love it.”*
- *“My favorite part has been watching or being a part of other people’s learning experience, and other people’s awe and childlike wonder at the growth of things.”*

1. There is no one-size-fits all model for community gardening and urban agriculture; urban growing is inherently context- and community-specific as well as continually in flux and shaped by multiple kinds of agency (including that of non-humans).

Motivations (*continued*)

Search for a sense of community

- *“It's not a community garden. It's a community effort.”*
- *“It's a very kind of light touch community... We don't spend hours in big meetings hashing out our rules that everyone's gonna have. It's more like we collaborate where necessary to keep it moving forward and the main goal is that everybody is into their garden.”*

Food provisioning/saving money

- *“I think there's kind of a difference between people who garden because they like it, and people who garden to supplement their food...”*

Ophélie Véron proposes the term “community food spaces” for grass-roots and community-based food projects, to reflect the fact that they are often projects based around food rather than simply about food. Like other scholars and some of our interviewees, she recognizes the tendency for these spaces to be exclusionary, but at the same time they may also reach toward social justice both locally and structurally.

1. There is **no one-size-fits all model** for community gardening and urban agriculture; urban growing is inherently context- and community-specific as well as continually in flux and shaped by multiple kinds of agency (including that of non-humans).

Motivations (*continued*)

Some of these motivations overlap while others are in tension or conflict.

- Food provisioning vs leisure/recreation/pleasure
 - This difference often reflects differences of class and ethnicity/race.
- Long-term/permanent vs opportunistic/temporary
 - There are advantages and disadvantages to each.
 - Ironically, it is often newcomers and temporary residents (eg students) who use gardening as a way to become more attached to place.
 - Also ironically, urban green spaces, including food spaces, are increasingly recognized as contributors to “green gentrification,” adding to challenges of affordability and access.
- Human vs non-human agendas
 - The aims of rats and other pests conflict with human aims!
 - Plants also propagate themselves, sometimes serving as teachers for human gardeners.

/continued

1. There is no one-size-fits all model for community gardening and urban agriculture; urban growing is inherently context- and community-specific as well as continually in flux and shaped by multiple kinds of agency (including that of non-humans).

Motivations (*continued*)

Some of these motivations overlap while others are in tension or conflict.

- Individual vs collective responsibility
 - In general, the gardeners we talked with felt strongly attached to their own individual plots, although they often shared some garden work with others.
 - *“There are common areas, they don’t really have vegetables growing in them, or fruit or herbs. We have tried to have some group blueberries or herbs, but they haven’t really taken so well, not because people are disinterested really, but just because the way they were planted, or maintenance, or whatever... And then the plots themselves. Those are private, like no one goes into another person’s plot unless they’re taking care of that person’s plot while that person’s on vacation, or something which happens quite a bit... But typically we just stay within the same plots and everyone just kind of understands that.”*
 - There were some difficulties in both maintenance and participation at the MAMAS plots, where the ideal of communal gardening was in tension with challenges of organization and consistency.
 - *“People are hesitant to interact with a space that they don’t feel ownership over.”*

2. Community gardening and urban agriculture are often framed as alternative or resistant to the mainstream industrial food system, but it may be more useful to think about them as complementary starting-points for increasing participation in civic discussions about food.

Some scholars and interviewees emphasized the importance of *not* seeing urban food growing as a potential solution to food insecurity. Rather, it can be a useful starting-point for asking what can be done to change a system that doesn't feed everyone adequately (a question linked with other issues like housing affordability and access to education and health care).

Anthropologist Hanna Garth (2021) calls for “**nonsovereign cooperative approaches**” — i.e. ways of working toward greater food security that accept the continued need for large-scale industrialized food while also pursuing multi-scalar projects that push against corporate dominance and widen local participation in decision-making around food. This is “nonsovereign” in that it's not primarily about detaching from the dominant system (as food sovereignty projects seek to do) but rather about working for change alongside and even within that system. Somerville's Mobile Market could be one example of this kind of project.

“Food insecurity is always an issue. Backyard gardening, though, is not a very efficient way of addressing food insecurity... The gardening group [of MAMAS] has talked with the groceries group [which distributes supermarket gift cards] in the past about whether they could provide tomatoes from the garden if someone requested them. But logistically, that's very difficult and would probably have minimal impact. Most of the items people request from the grocery store are not things that are available in the garden.

“People certainly get more food from the groceries team than they do from the gardening team. But the gardening group, I think, is a combination of food and social things. For me, I'm very into the idea that our goal is to actually produce food and make something tangible. But, in terms of practicality, you're not going to grow that much food in a small box in your yard. So, I have to always remind myself that the goal is about community building as well as food. It's not just about the food. Even if we don't succeed in growing much, or if people come to the gardens and don't actually do any work, that can still be considered a success.”

3. City involvement in urban food cultivation can be a mixed blessing.

Many of our interviewees saw a positive role for the city in supporting urban growing.

- *“When we talk about having community gardens, I think they bring people so much happiness and like it's so nice being able to be outside and enjoying, like doing some physical work and seeing, you know, your work pay off... So I think it's a really good use of the city's resources just in terms of the happiness it brings people. It might not be as, like, practical as you know, new curbs. But it does really have a positive impact.”*
- *“In some ways it's more beneficial to get things using social connections [instead of institutional ones]. But it's a lot more work and it's a lot less predictable.”*

A few were critical of “top-down” involvement.

- *“Some of the governance stuff with the city has been really annoying... A few years ago...people from the city began making large policy pronouncements about the community gardens... Without ever spending any time in one, they would hold forth and say, ‘Here's our new rule, we've got to do this. You've got to do that. We're going to force every plot to turn over every three years. You can't have a plot for more than three years,’ which totally destroys any notion of community.”*

Gardens can be included as a valid form of land use in city plans and zoning. However, given the unique need for personal responsibility in gardening, such a top-down strategy cannot guarantee that local interest would sustain the garden program in all contexts. A better strategy is to structure a public decision-making process that responds to community-driven initiatives. The efforts of neighborhood groups that organize enough to petition for a garden and have the wherewithal to maintain it should be legitimized by public officials, and such groups should be provided with public resources to sustain their efforts. (Lawson 2005, 300)

4. The city's most useful role may be as a convenor and conduit for practical resources.

The city could find ways to support “anchor people” who create continuity and help share knowledge at growing sites.

- *“You need a couple at least anchor people that are going to be always around.”*
- *“People want to be here [at the Growing Center], and they want to be a part, but... they don't want a big responsibility. They're like “I don't want to!” Or they're afraid maybe they don't know enough.”*
- Groundwork Somerville's staff have also served as anchor people in multiple ways and sites. But as one interviewee pointed out, *“It's expensive to live in Somerville and get paid nonprofit salaries.”*

The rats and other pests may offer openings for collaboration.

- *The bunnies and the rodents really kind of changed things.*
- *“[The rats feel like] a pretty impossible problem.”*
- The city's Rodent Control and Public Education program is an existing resource that could be more connected to urban food growing projects. Gardeners who were dealing effectively with rats tended to be those whose approach was similar to the city's—i.e. finding ways to make places less attractive to pests rather than trying to eradicate them altogether.
- Some gardeners embraced the challenge of outsmarting the pests, like one who said, *“The vinegar takes care of weeds. So I would just put it on the weeds around the garden, and if you do it pretty consistently, it kind of keeps the rabbits and rodents away... [I learned this] just reading online, trying stuff out, or whatever. So it's fun to try different things right?”*
- Others found collective ways to address problems: *“This year was the year that we graduated to zappers, and we have a sort of community going in on the budget... So some of us shared rat zap duty, so they ordered the traps, figured out how they worked, and then, it's easy.”*

4. The city's most useful role may be as a convenor and conduit for practical resources.

Several gardeners expressed a wish for more consistent communication about the resources provided by the city.

- *"We get new deliveries of the stone dust here, usually annually, although this year they couldn't drop it off because of the higher curbs, so we're going to have to figure that out."*
- *"Our water availability season is getting shorter and shorter. We often wait for people to turn on water. Sometimes two, three, four weeks later than we used to many years ago. So I'm trying to advocate for a little bit longer growing season."*
- *"It appears that things like getting mulch is sometimes a challenge."*
- *"We do have some rain barrels. We do collect water. So we are able to sort of extend our own garden a little bit. But because we've had such little rain, it did not work out for us this year at all. But we have so many more gardeners, getting our water kept on would be a great resource for us."*
- The city could potentially help gardeners to share knowledge across different sites, for example among those with functional rain barrels and those hoping to add them, like this site where the coordinator said, *"Every year, people are like, 'Oh, let's get a rain barrel,' but we don't have a drain pipe for it to go in. And every year I say, 'Oh, yeah, we could do that if we can figure out how to collect the water.' And then every year people are like, 'I have no idea how to do that' [laughs]. So, just some of that stuff."*



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See annotated bibliography in separate file.



Growing and Production

Growing Food

Why are community gardens important to Somerville residents?

- Gardening supports not only growing food but is also important for **community connections** and **mental health**.
- Gardens contribute to food security on different scales, depending on:
 - size of garden and amount of food produced.
 - income level of the gardener.
 - what's being grown, ex culturally relevant or hard to find foods.

Where can people garden in Somerville?



- 11 Community gardens managed by the City of Somerville
- 2 Dedicated community gardens for Somerville's largest public housing sites
- 4 Public Mutual Aid Gardens and several others not listed publicly but available to those who get involved with the MAMAS Gardening Collective
- 1 grassroots organized garden in the Concord Ave Community Space
- 3 gardens managed by organizations who provide access and workshops
 - Somerville Central Library Raised Beds
 - The Somerville Community Growing Center
 - Groundwork Somerville's South Street Farm

What barriers do people face in gardening?

- **Rats** are a problem.
- **Water is a barrier** and we need a better system of understanding procedures connected to this.
- We need to do a better job **communicating opportunities and connecting with each other**. The Somerville Loves Urban Gardening (SLUG) facebook page is a good start.
- **Limited space** is a common reason people do not garden.

"From Gardening, I gain... stability. And then reduce my health [problems]. I had high blood pressure, high blood sugar and it's all reduced by growing food, and eating my own food and fruits and vegetables from my own garden."- Community Member

"I think there's a kind of difference between people who garden because they like it, and... people who garden to supplement their food... and its sort of both [for me]." - Community Member

"It's a very kind of light touch community... We don't spend hours in big meetings hashing out our rules that everyone's gonna have. It's more like we collaborate where necessary to keep it moving forward and the main goal is that everybody is into their garden." - Somerville Community Garden Plot Holder

Making Food

Prepared meals, either to-go or in a community space, support many residents:

Day-laborers, people who are homeless, and people living in **doubled-up housing** or single-room occupancy (SRO) housing may all have limited access to spaces to cook and store food.

People with disabilities may have limited ability to prepare food, and those who are **under the age of 60** have very limited meal delivery options.

What challenges do organizations face in offering more prepared meals?

Getting the appropriate permits, licenses and insurance:

Organizations are often reluctant to pursue new community-facing food uses for their facilities due to a permitting and licensing process that is considered complicated and easy to violate.

Finding funding for programs:

Organizations are unsure of what funding they may qualify for and daunted by the application process for funds to help with food or facility upgrades.

Coordinating volunteer labor:

Organizations are often reluctant or unable to recruit volunteers from outside of their organization and/or unable to coordinate them when they present themselves.

Limitation of building space and intended use:

Organizations report some pushback and concerns from their own administrations about new community uses for their facilities.

Where can people find Community Fridges and Prepared Meals in Somerville?

- Monday Night Meal
- Dormition Family Table
- Hearty Meals for All
- Come to the Table
- Union Fridge
- St Clement Fridge
- Winter Hill Fridge
- City Hall Annex Frozen Meals
- Somerville HS Frozen Meals



Growing and Production	Your Vote! Place a Green , Yellow or Red sticker here	Comments or Changes <i>If you chose yellow or red, why?</i> <i>What are changes you would make to the recommendation?</i> <i>Who should be involved?</i>
1. Improve communications on urban agriculture through connections with community gardens and better transparency.		
2. Pilot a shared garden plot for community use with city and non-profit staff management.		
3. Invest in more city staff to better manage and activate community growing spaces to build resilience via community connections, mental health benefits and growing food.		
4. Find funding to re-invest in proper management of school gardens.		
5. Make it easier to use underutilized kitchen space to prepare ready-to-eat meals at low cost (i.e. high school kitchen).		

Food Distribution and Pantry Access

How do pantries get food?



Where can the community engage?

Regular donations of money are the best way to support pantries. However, pantry managers understand and appreciate that food donations help people feel more involved and raise awareness of the work pantries do. They highlight that **targeted donations of needed food items** are most useful:

"A guy came and said, 'I'm going to purchase something on your behalf, what do you need?' We said black beans and that was it. He went and bought \$800 of black beans."
-Pantry Manager

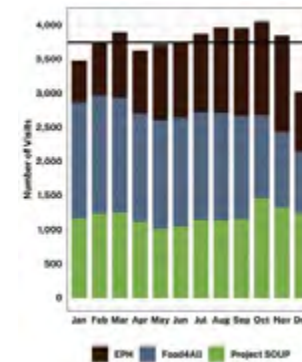
How easy is it to get to pantries?

Somerville's pantry programs are concentrated in **East Somerville** and **Winter Hill**. Pantry staff say that **many people walk** to the pantry.

Local buses increase access a little but still leave some parts of the city **without easy transit** to free food.



How much food do pantries distribute?



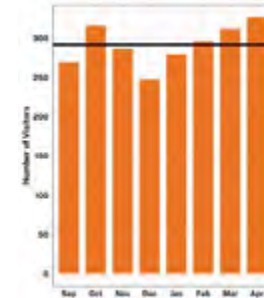
The three largest Somerville pantries receive an average of **3,740 visits per month**.

It's difficult to determine exactly how many residents use pantries because we don't know how many people go to multiple pantries. Pantries also have different ways of tracking visits. Instead, **this chart shows how many visits our local pantries had per month in 2024.**

Note: Shepherd's Kitchen, a monthly food distribution, is not shown in this preliminary analysis.

Programs like Just Eats and Free School Food Markets help to fill in the gaps in free food access.

The **monthly Somerville Public School Free Markets** received an average of **292 visits from school families each month**, September 2024-April 2025.

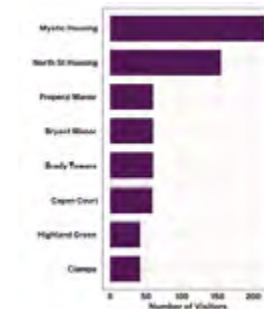


School Markets offer free choice distributions at West Neighborhood Neighborhood School and East Somerville Community School. Markets usually include eggs, lots of produce, and dry goods like rice and canned tuna.

Just Eats brings an average of **695 boxes of food** to public residents each month.

Distributions are every other week. The boxes are pre-made boxes and include mostly fruits and vegetables.

"As for Project Soup, I have seen that there are a variety of hours. So, I don't think the schedule is an obstacle, more than anything else it's the transport, which is a bit far away, that's why."
-Just Eats Recipient at Resident at North St Public Housing



Food Distribution and Pantry Access	Your Vote! Place a Green , Yellow or Red sticker here	Comments or Changes <i>If you chose yellow or red, why?</i> <i>What are changes you would make to the recommendation?</i> <i>Who should be involved?</i>
1. Investigate giving High School students getting credit to help at food pantries or school markets. Students can also receive a bag of food for helping.		
2. Develop a system to connect SNAP (and maybe MassHealth) clients to organizations to fulfill needed volunteer hours . Look for funding to provide stipends for volunteering, to be managed by a non-profit.		
3. Improve access to free, fresh food in West Somerville and Union Square.		
4. Support a food sharing space at North St Housing , including assisting with food safety training, set up space to securely store food left/brought by neighbors, and offer language support for communications around the space.		
5. Explore the feasibility of coordinating community-wide serve safe training , including subsidizing fees.		

Food Access: Getting Food

Where can Somerville residents buy food?

Significant parts of Somerville are **not within a 10-minute walk** of a grocery store.



Here, we define grocery store as a store whose primary business is selling a range of foods to prepare at home. These stores are differentiated from neighborhood markets by the range of products available, the size, and number of staff/cash registers.

"We, Latinos, Hispanics, use a lot of masa. And Stop & Shop used to have Latino products, but they've cut back. So now when I want masa, I go there and they don't have it. I go there [to Market Basket]." - Community Member

"I pick everything from the website and calculate everything so I already know how much I'm going to spend. So I'm like, Okay, I calculated everything. I'm going to spend \$135, and I make sure everything that's on my list is what I added up so I don't go over." - Trader Joe's Shopper/Community Member

Where do Somerville residents want to buy food?

The Taxi to Health and Carrot Cards were both American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funded pilot food access programs. Taxi residents **free, convenient transportation to grocery stores**. Carrot Cards gave Somerville Public School families **extra m food**. The programs operated at the same time; people could take a taxi to their preferred store to spend their carrot card

Together, these programs show us where people want to buy food in Somerville.

The Carrot Card Program

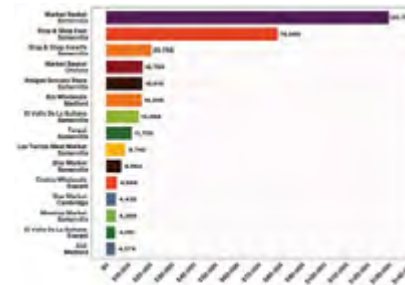
The Carrot Card program operated for three school years from September 2022-June 2024. Data is available for the first two years and is shown below.

It served:

- **646 unique SPS families** in SY22-23 at a cost of **\$212,400**
- **704 unique SPS families** in SY 23-24 at a cost of **\$262,508**

Collectively across the two school years **793 unique SPS families**.

Where did families spend their benefits?



The Taxi to Health Program

The Taxi Program operated from **April 2022-October 2023**.

It helped **about 1,000** unique Somerville residents. It cost about **\$524,500** total to offer **21,187 rides** **medical, and other needs**.

Of the total rides, 7,022 were for food only.

Where did residents choose to go for food?



Not having to worry about carrying too many bags, groceries on the great. - Taxi Program Participant

For our clients, the taxi program is highly beneficial. Many clients person meetings, need to bring documents to our office, lack the i share documents, or require assistance with basic transportation grocery shopping, visiting family in hospitals, or doing laundry. Th grateful for this program. - Case Manager

Where are Somerville High School students getting food outside of school time?

An informal online survey with 23 Somerville High School student respondents asked them to list the places students get food when the school day ends. **Top locations included fast food ests and restaurants near the high school**. Fast-food chains offer affordable and accessible options for students, particularly when other options may not be available.

1. Gaya Pizzeria x13	4. McDonald's x5	7. Burger King x1	Mobil Gas Station. x1
2. LP Pizza and Subs x7	5. Cane's x2	Dave's Hot Chicken x1	Mr Crepe x1
3. Dunkin Donuts x6	6. Home x2	Taco Loco x1	Reliable Market x1
		Mama Lisa's x1	Midnite Convenience. x1
		Pearl Street Market. x1	Opas x1

Additionally, **Carrot Card households with only a High School student** likely to **spend funds at convenience stores**. For example, LP's Market Street Market both made the top 15 spending destinations for these households.

Food Access: Getting Food	Your Vote! Place a Green, Yellow or Red sticker here	Comments or Changes If you chose yellow or red, why? What are changes you would make to the recommendation? Who should be involved?
1. Work with Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development and Economic Development to attract more food retail options on Highland Ave in front of City Hall.		
2. Explore ways to better support food funds and expand options for after school programs and activities.		
3. Expand summer meals availability beyond the current 15-minute window.		
4. Investigate how to use food delivery fees to support food access .		
5. Develop a list of food system needs that can be shared with Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development and that would be feasible food landscape asks of developers.		
6. Convene a transit equity working group , use taxi to health data to support.		Somerville High School Cobble Hill Somewhere else?

Food Access: Stretching the Food Dollar

What challenges do people have in applying for and using food benefits?

Benefit programs can be complicated to apply for – ex SNAP – or to use – ex HIP or WIC. Not everyone who is eligible applies for or uses these programs.

People who understand and use HIP love it:

"I learned about HIP at the market. It's like [the vegetables and fruits] are free, it's a farmers' market, and it's right here. –Mystic Housing Somerville Mobile Farmer's Market Shopper



But in Middlesex County, where Somerville is located, only **7-8%** of households used the program from June-October 2024.



WIC is accessible in many ways: anyone can apply regardless of immigration status, and it's administered by CHA, many parents hear about it directly through their healthcare provider. However, people have to get to the WIC office for appointments, and only certain foods are eligible.

In 2023, the latest available year, **63.3%** of eligible families participated in WIC.



SNAP is easy to use when you have it, but **can be difficult to successfully apply for**.

From October 2022 to September 2023, about **51%** of SNAP applications in MA were denied. Of those denials, more than half were due to missing parts of the application process, 1 in 4 applications, the household **could have been eligible**.

"Then, when Donald Trump's first presidency began, my husband was very scared, the first presidency. So, during his first term, my husband said, 'Get rid of all that. I don't want them to come looking for me because of government assistance and misinformation.' So I got rid of everything. It was very good for me and my family, but I chose to get rid of it." –Community Member

"People do not understand the system, so they think once they apply, they are all set, but sometimes you have to reapply every six months, or they'll send you a letter, and then you have to submit all the paperwork again. There needs to be something done to inform community members about how the system works." –Community Advocate

Tap Water: Affordable, Convenient, and Sustainable

Interviews with providers and program participants suggest an ongoing mistrust of tap water resulting in large purchases of bottled water. This is an **added expense** and creates an additional **burden for some around transport**.

"It's something you pay for. It's better because you paid for it.... It's giving them, they have to spend some money that they can save up and use for later....Yes. But remember this. I think that it's a little bit cultural and another bit psychological.....And that is one aspect. The other aspect is that the marketing of bottled water market itself Okay, better off, right? This is nicer it's cleaner. " –Community Advocate

What are some ways people stretch their benefits or adapt them to be most useful?

SNAP Goes Digital: Online Grocery Shopping

Since COVID-19, **online grocery shopping has experienced rapid growth**, with numerous online platforms now accepting SNAP. The surge in online shopping is driven by convenience–shoppers **save time, avoid crowds, bypass transportation obstacles, can easily compare prices and products, and explore other grocery stores in the area they might not have had access to in the past**. Online grocery shopping is a growing trend among younger adults, working parents, and urban residents, though usage has expanded across all demographics. Memberships or fees are often discounted with SNAP, but with limitations or fine print, creating a barrier to use.

Online Platform	SNAP eligibility	Groceries available	Delivery or Pickup?	Membership & Fees	Additional Benefits
UberEats	Yes	Wegmans, StarMarket, Shaw's	Delivery	UberOne \$9.99/month or \$96/year EBT cardholders get \$0 Delivery Fee for 3 months when they add their card as a payment method.	-All participating SNAP-eligible grocery stores on Uber Eats will accept EBT card as payment. -Up to 10% off orders -Member-only promos and special items -Cancel anytime with no additional fees
Instacart	Yes	Aldi, Shaw's, RocheBros, Costco, Stop & Shop, StarMarket, BJs	Depends on store policies	Instacart+ \$99/year New SNAP customers enjoy \$0 delivery fees on first 3 grocery orders. EBT customers get 50% off Instacart+ for one year.	-Free grocery on orders \$10+ -Free restaurant delivery on orders \$25+ -Free 1-year NYT Cooking Subscription (\$50 value)
Prime	Yes	Whole Foods	Both	Prime \$14.99/month* or \$139/year *\$3.50/month for 3 months and \$6.99/month thereafter for EBT and Medicaid recipients	-Free 1-2-day Delivery -Free same-day delivery -Fast Grocery Delivery -Free Grubhub+ for unlimited \$0 food delivery fees
DoorDash	Yes	Aldi, Stop & Shop, StarMarket, Wegmans, BJs, Shaw's, Price Rite Marketplace, Hannaford	Delivery	\$0 delivery fees on orders \$35+ when paying with SNAP	-Free delivery on eligible restaurants, groceries, etc. -Reduced service fees for eligible offers -Exclusive offers



Using Benefits at Farmers Markets

The Healthy Incentives Program and the Somerville SNAP match allow residents to get food that is **high quality, nutritious, and culturally comfortable**.

The map shows areas within a **10-minute walk of a farmers market** during the growing season, May to November.

The **Somerville Mobile Farmers Market** is an especially good way to use HIP because everything is eligible for HIP. This removes one barrier to using the program.

In the 2024 season, **1/3 of purchases** were made with SNAP, nearly all of which were **free to the shopper** because they were reimbursed with HIP.

"HIP? The double produce program. That was amazing. It was so helpful because it is... hard to get fruits and vegetables on a budget. And so... that I could go to the Union Square Farmers' Market and get this lettuce that was picked that morning, my son even ate some. He would eat the corn on the cob. He would eat some of the berries. He's such a picky eater...But then that \$16 [Monthly SNAP allotment], I can use to get the full HIP match. So I was getting the full \$40 and then the \$16.... So I only use that at the farmer's market because that makes the most sense." –Community Member

Food Access: Stretching the Food Dollar	Your Vote! Place a Green , Yellow or Red sticker here	Comments or Changes If you chose yellow or red, why? What are changes you would make to the recommendation? Who should be involved?
7. Expand the Somerville mobile farmers market to more locations. <i>*Vote on locations or share your own ideas*</i>		Somerville High School Cobble Hill Somewhere else?
8. Increase the number of people who use SNAP online shopping through awareness campaign, focusing on homebound.		
9. Resume the Tap Water Campaign.		
10. Host workshops on different topics. <i>*Vote on topics or share your own ideas!*</i>		Gardening Saving money on food Online food shopping Trusting your tap water Organic foods Food safety & food waste Summer meals Something else?
11. Host field trips to food access locations. <i>*Vote on trips or share your own ideas!*</i>		Farmers markets Food pantries Somerville mobile farmers markets Somewhere else?

Advocate and Communicate

How secure is funding for Food Access and Nutrition Security programming in 2026-2027?

Early 2025 has seen the end of some programs and several proposed cuts to other programs that help people access the food they want and need. The table below lists **how programs are funded** and **which funds are threatened or have recently ended**.

Federal	State
• SNAP • TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) \$ for food bank food that supplies pantries • Local Food Purchasing Assistance – funding to buy food from farms • SunBucks – \$120/student for summer break • Farmers Market coupons • ARPA – Taxi to Health • ARPA – Carrot Cards • ARPA – School markets • Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) • Box distributions for older adults • Meals on Wheels	• Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) • Universal School Meals – aka Free school lunch
Local: City Supported	Local: Non-Profit Supported
• SNAP match at Farmers markets • Somerville Mobile Farmers Market • Summer meals in the parks • Cold storage – from PB round 2 • Community Preservation Act funds (for affordable housing, historic preservation and open space/recreation)	• Food Pantries • School Markets • Just Eats boxes at Somerville Housing Authority • Community Meals, e.g. Monday Night Meal

Key

Green = Funding in place for FY'26 (Jul 1, 2025-June 30, 2026)

Orange = Funding is threatened

Red = Funding has ended

ARPA = American Rescue Plan Act

How else can we advocate and communicate?

What is a Caroline Cart?

Caroline Carts are special shopping carts for people with disabilities and their caregivers. The carts have a seat in front which can **securely and comfortably hold a child or adult with a disability**. This allows people with disabilities to accompany caregivers to the grocery store.



What are some of the ways we already communicate about food resources?



Advocacy and Communication

Your Vote!

Place a **Green**, **Yellow** or **Red** sticker here

Comments or Changes

If you chose yellow or red, why?

What are changes you would make to the recommendation?

Who should be involved?

1. **Continue to support advocacy around public assistance benefits**, such as SNAP, HIP, MEFAP, and **key issues**, such as immigration and food access.

Add other priorities in the comments

2. **Work with Disability Commission to advocate for Caroline Carts** for people with disabilities at grocery stores.

3. Continue and **expand on outreach around public assistance benefits** like SNAP, HIP, the SNAP Match, Farmers Market Coupons, SunBucks, etc., as well as mobile market schedules.

4. **Advocate for expediting mobility wallet**; similar to SNAP benefits but for transportation (ie. funds to be used for bus pass, blue bike membership, taxis etc).

5. Work with Somerville High School stakeholders to **improve outreach about food resources at the high school**.

6. **Strengthen two-way communication between City, the school district, and Cambridge Health Alliance** on food resources and benefits in Somerville for constituents/patients.

What Tips Do Community Members Have for Saving Money on Food?

General money-saving approaches:

- Shop with a grocery list!
- Plan meals based on what is on sale or ingredients you'd like to use up.
- Eat less meat and more beans.
- Skip dessert or drinks like juice.
- Pack lunch for work instead of grabbing something out.
- Go to the Somerville Mobile Farmers Market, Haymarket, and food pantries to stretch weekly food.

~Basil plant, it works for a tiny garnish and has probably paid for itself a couple times."

"I will go to H-Mart in Davis Sq or Reliable Market in Union Sq if I need groceries from Asian cuisines. H-Mart and Reliable Market have better prices than Market Basket on things like curry pastes, spices, etc. because they come in bulk sizes. I find a good selection of Latin American foods in Market Basket, like plantains, and haven't seen these sold elsewhere near me."

- Use apps that advertise end of day deals such as "too good to go".
- Grow herbs in pots at home, since fresh herbs are expensive at the store.
- Freeze food to extend its shelf life (ex. extra bread, chicken).
- Make stews and stir-frys with older ingredients, or use AI to generate recipe ideas.



Finding the best prices at grocery stores:

- Remember the discount applies to just one item when it is on sale in a group, for example "buy 5 for \$5" will mean you only pay \$1 even if you purchase only one item.
- Look for the carts at the back of store that have discounted produce.
- Use circulars, online or paper, to compare prices.
- Be sure to look at unit price when items are different sizes.
- Buy what's on sale—store brand and name brand products are similar.
- Animal proteins go on sale right after the holidays. Purchase, prep, and freeze.
- Many respondents said they go to Market Basket to find the most items at good prices.

Time-saving strategies:

- Prepare meals in bulk and freeze in portions for future meals.
- Prep ingredients to save and use in multiple recipes throughout the week.
- Use an Instapot or crock-pot.
- Watch online videos for tricks and tips on efficiently prepping meals.
- Use frozen veggies since they last longer and are pre-cut.

"I go to that place and see that the meat is 50% off. And of course, imagine if I get a kilo [(2 lbs)] of meat, it's going to cost me eight or nine dollars, and I'm going to pay four dollars. So... I'll take it home, cut it up into portions, and put it in the freezer."

APPENDIX 6

This appendix provides additional, detailed information and citations for food system policy and advocacy. [Table 1](#) describes how key food access programs are funded and administered. [Table 2](#) summarizes key federal legislation related to the contents of this report. Detailed and up to date information about State legislation that affects the food system can be found on the Somerville Food Coalition website (<https://somervillefoodcoalition.org/learn-and-engage/advocate>).

Table 1: How do the federal and state governments fund food benefits and assistance programs?

Program	Federal	State
SNAP	Full cost of benefit and 50% of administration.	50% of administration. (DTA administers)
WIC	Full cost of program (benefit and administration).	Manages the funding and contracts with local agencies to run WIC.
Summer EBT	Full cost of benefit and 50% of administration.	50% of administration. (DTA administers)
HIP	Not a Federal program.	Full cost of HIP benefit and administration of program.
Farmers Market Coupons	Funds the coupons.	Funds the administration of the program. (Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources administers)
Medicaid food benefits	50% or more (varies by MassHealth program and federal policies).	Less than 50%. ¹
Greater Boston Food Bank, local pantries, and community fridges	The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) partially funds.	MEFAP partially funds.
CSFP	Full cost of program (food and administration).	Administered by the state.
Meals on Wheels and Congregate Meals	Partial funding through Older Americans Act and other federal grants. ²	Partial funding from the state budget.
School Meals	Provides partial funding based on the number of identified low-income students.	Provides the remainder of funding needed to make school meals free for all.
Summer Eats	Full cost of program.	State administers and supports local sponsors who organize the program. (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education administers)

¹ Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, *MassHealth Budget*.

² Meals on Wheels America, Older Adult Nutrition Program; Meals on Wheels America, Meals on Wheels Funding.

Table 2: Selected Federal laws and regulations that affect food access

Program/Initiative	Type of Legislation	Citation	Details	Date
SNAP	Law	PL 119-21 Commonly referred to as the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” or OB3	Limits SNAP access and support, as described in Chapter 11 of this report. Changes to SNAP are traditionally taken up in the Farm Bill. This is a collection of Food Access and Agriculture legislation that Congress aims to update every 5 years. July 2025 changes were controversially taken up as part of budget reconciliation legislation. For more details on 2025 cuts to SNAP, see Figure 1.	July 2025
SUN Bucks	Law	PL 117-328 Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023	Creates SUN Bucks as a permanent program.	December 2022
	Regulation	7 CFR 292 (2024)	Provides a more detailed structure for SUN Bucks. This includes, for example, the timeline for benefit expungement (expiry) and guidance on the extent to which participating states should provide language access support.	April 2024
Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)	Law	PL 111-296 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, 2010	Creates the Community Eligibility Provision. Note that the “Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010” is a version of what is termed Child Nutrition Reauthorization legislation. Like the Farm Bill, this refers to a legislative package around related issues that is periodically updated by Congress.	December 2010
	Regulation	7 CFR 245 (2023)	Lowers the Identified Student Percentage (ISP) needed for a school or district to qualify for Community Eligibility Provision from 40% to 25%.	September 2023
NSLP Direct Certification Through Medicaid	Federal Demonstration Project	USDA Agency Website ³	Both SUN Bucks and School Lunch reimbursement rates for MA Free School Meals rely heavily on students being directly certified. Prior to 2012, receipt of Medicaid did not provide direct certification. In 2012, MA became one of 7 states to pilot direct certification for free meals via Medicaid.	Multiple pilot rounds beginning 2012
WIC Modernization: Online Shopping	Waiver	PL 117-2 The American Rescue Plan Act, 2021 (ARPA)	ARPA allowed the USDA FNS the authority to waive certain WIC requirements to support outreach, innovation, and modernization. States could request waivers to adjust the traditional definition of a vendor and allow online shopping. ⁴	March 2021

Notes: Find more information about the programs discussed in this table through the Congressional Research Service (CRS). The CRS is a non-partisan service that provides informational materials to Congress. Find more information and search for materials at congress.gov/crs-products.

Many organizations advocate at the federal level. Engaging with them is a good way to get involved in federal policy work. In food and nutrition,

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, “Direct Certification with Medicaid.”

⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, “Flexibilities in WIC.”

APPENDIX 6 CITATIONS:

Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation.
MassHealth Spending in the Governor's
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Look. 2024.

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Demonstration Projects to Evaluate Direct
Certification with Medicaid." Accessed
June 24, 2026. <https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/direct-certification-medicaid-demonstration-project>.



Timeline of SNAP Cuts in Massachusetts



NOVEMBER
2025 -
OCTOBER
2026*



IMMIGRANT RESTRICTIONS

Ends eligibility for refugees, asylees, victims of trafficking, among others if they have not become legal permanent residents (green-card holders) or citizens.

~9,600 lawfully present immigrants may lose benefits



EXPANDED WORK REQUIREMENTS

Previously exempt groups who will be impacted:

- Adults ages 55-64
- Households with children ages 14-18
- Veterans, currently homeless individuals, and former foster youth
- **~100,000 people with increased paperwork or loss of benefit**



UTILITY DEDUCTION CHANGE

Eliminating automatic deduction in utility costs for certain households who receive third party fuel assistance.

~45,000 people with increased paperwork or reduced benefit



INCREASED APPLICATION BURDENS

In an effort to reduce the payment error rate, the MA DTA requires more verifications, making it more difficult for applicants to get and keep SNAP.



SNAP-ED TERMINATED

Eliminated **\$9.1M** for food literacy and nutrition programming in income-eligible schools.

OCTOBER
2026



STATE ADMINISTRATIVE COST INCREASE

Beginning in federal FY2026, Massachusetts's share of administrative costs will increase from 50% to 75%, costing MA an additional **~\$53 million/year**.

OCTOBER
2027 +
BEYOND



THREAT OF BENEFIT COST SHIFT TO STATE

MA could have to pay for a percentage of the state's \$2.8B in SNAP benefits.

- MA's benefit cost share could be **up to \$394M per year**.
- The cost to the state depends on program error rate (PER), which is calculated based on how accurately the state assess eligibility and benefit amounts.
- The **PER is not fraud**; errors are caused by caseworker or client mistakes or misunderstandings.

Cuts also limit how well the SNAP benefit amount can respond to changes in food prices, nutrition science, and purchasing patterns. **Over time, the value of SNAP benefits will decrease compared to the cost of food.**

*For new applications, these restrictions will be effective immediately. For existing SNAP users, these restrictions will be put in place at time of recertification. Existing SNAP balances will remain on SNAP cards and will not be revoked.
Adapted from: Hawai'i Appleseed's Timeline: SNAP Cuts in Hawai'i. Last Updated Spring 2026.