



## 5. Expanding Healthy Food Access

Access to affordable, healthy, nourishing food is one of the most basic human needs. Beyond this, Oakland’s food system also plays a major role in shaping Oakland’s culture, identity, and employment opportunities. However, there are parts of Oakland that lack food access, and many Oaklanders struggle with food insecurity. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as “lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life.”<sup>1</sup> Food-insecure households are not necessarily food insecure all the time. Food insecurity may reflect a household’s need to make trade-offs between important basic needs such as housing or medical bills and purchasing nutritionally adequate foods. Challenges to accessing healthy food can lead to a higher risk of chronic diseases such as obesity, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes;<sup>2</sup> when people cannot get to grocery stores that sell healthy foods, they may shop at nearby corner stores, which often carry foods high in fat, sugar, and sodium and fewer healthy options like

1 Feeding America. 2021. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/food-insecurity>. Accessed Jan 30 2022

2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Healthy Food Environments: Improving Access to Healthier Food,” last updated September 10, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/healthy-food-environments/improving-access-to-healthier-food.html>, accessed February 23, 2023.

fresh produce. EJ Communities most burdened by food access issues are shown in **Table EJ-7**. This section describes Oakland’s food network, including availability of food outlets, food availability, and food quality.

### 5.1 ISSUES AND DISPARITIES

In 2019, 11 percent of California Congressional District 13’s population (encompassing the northwest branch of Alameda County) was food insecure. More than 40 percent of the food insecure population was not eligible for food assistance programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, administered as CalFresh in California and formerly known as food stamps) and other nutrition programs because they make more than 200 percent of the federal poverty level.<sup>3</sup> Food insecurity rates differ by race and ethnicity: 20 percent of Black individuals and 15 percent of Hispanic people of any race were reported as food insecure, while the food insecurity rate among White, non-Hispanic individuals was seven percent. In Alameda County, 8 percent of residents receive CalFresh (SNAP) benefits, at an average of \$219 per

3 Feeding America. 2021. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/district/2019/overall/california/district/13>. Accessed Jan 10 2022.

person, per month.<sup>4</sup> SNAP users may use their benefits to purchase food at accepting food markets and grocery stores. In addition, benefit cards can be used at participating farmers’ markets, such as those in Temescal and Old Oakland.<sup>5,6</sup> SNAP is an important federal tool in reducing food insecurity; thus, places where there is a high rate of SNAP usage may indicate communities that could become food insecure if any federal changes affected SNAP availability or eligibility. In Oakland, tracts with the highest percentage of people receiving SNAP are located in West, East, and deep East Oakland. All tracts in the top tenth percentile for SNAP reciprocity are EJ Communities.

The percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch is often used as a proxy measure for the percentage of students living in poverty.<sup>7</sup> Beginning in the 2022–2023 school

4 California Department of Social Services. 2022. <https://public.tableau.com/shared/6C68NTX9M>. Accessed Dec 28 2022.

5 California Department of Social Services. [https://www.cdss.ca.gov/calfreshoutreach/res/Toolkit/ConsumerFliers/ConsumerFlier\\_1\\_UsingCalFreshBenefitsSimple\\_English.pdf](https://www.cdss.ca.gov/calfreshoutreach/res/Toolkit/ConsumerFliers/ConsumerFlier_1_UsingCalFreshBenefitsSimple_English.pdf). Accessed Dec 28, 2022.

6 United States Department of Agriculture. <https://www.usdalocalfoodportal.com/fe/searchresults/?term=&location=Oakland,%20CA,%20USA&directory=farmersmarket&x=-122.2711639&y=37.8043514&c=0>. Accessed Dec 28, 2022

7 National Center for Education Statistics. 2015. “Free or reduced price lunch: A proxy for poverty?” <https://nces.ed.gov/blogs/nces/post/free-or-reduced-price-lunch-a-proxy-for-poverty> Accessed Dec 28, 2022

year, all public and charter schools serving transitional kindergarten through 12th grade are required to provide two free meals to every student each school day, regardless of their eligibility for other meal programs. Served meals must comply with USDA nutrition guidelines, including milk and calorie requirements. The Universal Meals Program ensures that the nutritional needs of children who require affordable food options are met during the school day. In addition, the City's Summer Food Service Program provides free breakfast and lunch to Oakland kids and teens during summer break. Tracts with the greatest percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch are located in Acorn/Jack London Gateway, central East Oakland, and deep East Oakland.

### FOOD ACCESS

The grocery store is the primary source of healthy food for most Oaklanders, providing access to a wide variety of nutritious and relatively affordable produce and other foods compared to other types of food outlets like convenience stores. However, racial and socioeconomic inequities in access to healthy food have led to differential food access for communities of color. Current market forces driving the location of chain supermarkets continue to perpetuate food access inequity tied to policies that created residential segregation, poverty, and "supermarket flight" from certain neighborhoods. While incentives or other efforts may be needed to overcome these forces for traditional supermarkets, there are also mission-driven grocery store operators, such as food co-ops, that have emerged as an alternative that can provide healthy, culturally relevant food, while building community power and ownership. Food advocates have also urged more focus and support for smaller independent grocers that have served East and West Oakland for decades.

While development of full-service food retailers is an important strategy, existing convenience stores, dollar stores, corner stores, or gas station markets often provide the only retail food options in some areas of the city. Most corner stores sell a limited selection of non-perishable food items and less nutritious snack foods, though some also carry fresh produce and other nutritious fares. Initiatives to encourage stocking more fresh produce and healthier food options can include financial incentives, promotion and marketing, infrastructure investment (e.g., purchasing new refrigeration units or display stands), and produce supply

chain development. The location of full-service food outlets and smaller convenience stores is shown in **Figure EJ-19**. While there are large grocery stores within a walkable distance for residents of Lake Merritt, Temescal, and Rockridge neighborhoods, considerable portions of East and West Oakland do not have one close by. East Oakland does have key smaller food markets which aim to fill the gap between larger stores.

Community gardens and farmers markets can help to improve fresh food accessibility in areas of lower food access. Community gardens are dedicated plots of land where residents can grow food or other plants; many are started by residents who recognize that their communities are underserved by traditional fresh food retailers. Community gardens can promote the concept of food autonomy, where people are empowered to control their food and food systems. The City can take additional steps to make City-owned land available for community gardens, prioritizing areas and community stewards that will have the greatest impact on food-deprived communities. Some research has shown that people who participate in community gardens eat more fruits and vegetables and worry less about running out of food before the end of the month. Oakland also has several farmers markets that accept SNAP, which benefits both the farmers and low-income shoppers. Moving farmers markets to more central locations, accessible by transit, can also promote food access.

### FOOD DISTRIBUTION AND RECOVERY

Supporting a fine-grained network of food distribution points can also help to improve food access. For example, libraries, schools, parks, and even large parking lots can become sites where sales or distribution of fresh food can occur. Improving the effectiveness of existing food distribution programs, especially in underserved areas and those with higher prevalence of food insecurity, can be a cost-effective way to improve access to affordable healthier foods. For example, and the City could coordinate with community organizations to better connect eligible residents and families to federal, State, and local food programs, as well as emergency food assistance.

Edible food recovery programs divert food waste by redistributing unused food from food generators such as grocery stores, supermarkets, restaurants, corporate kitchens, and other wholesaler/distributors. Feeding hungry people through food recovery

is the best use for surplus food and a vital way for Oakland to conserve resources and reduce waste thrown in landfills. The City can support food recovery by supporting existing capacity of food generators and develop new capacity to recover, divert, and redistribute consumable food to those in need.

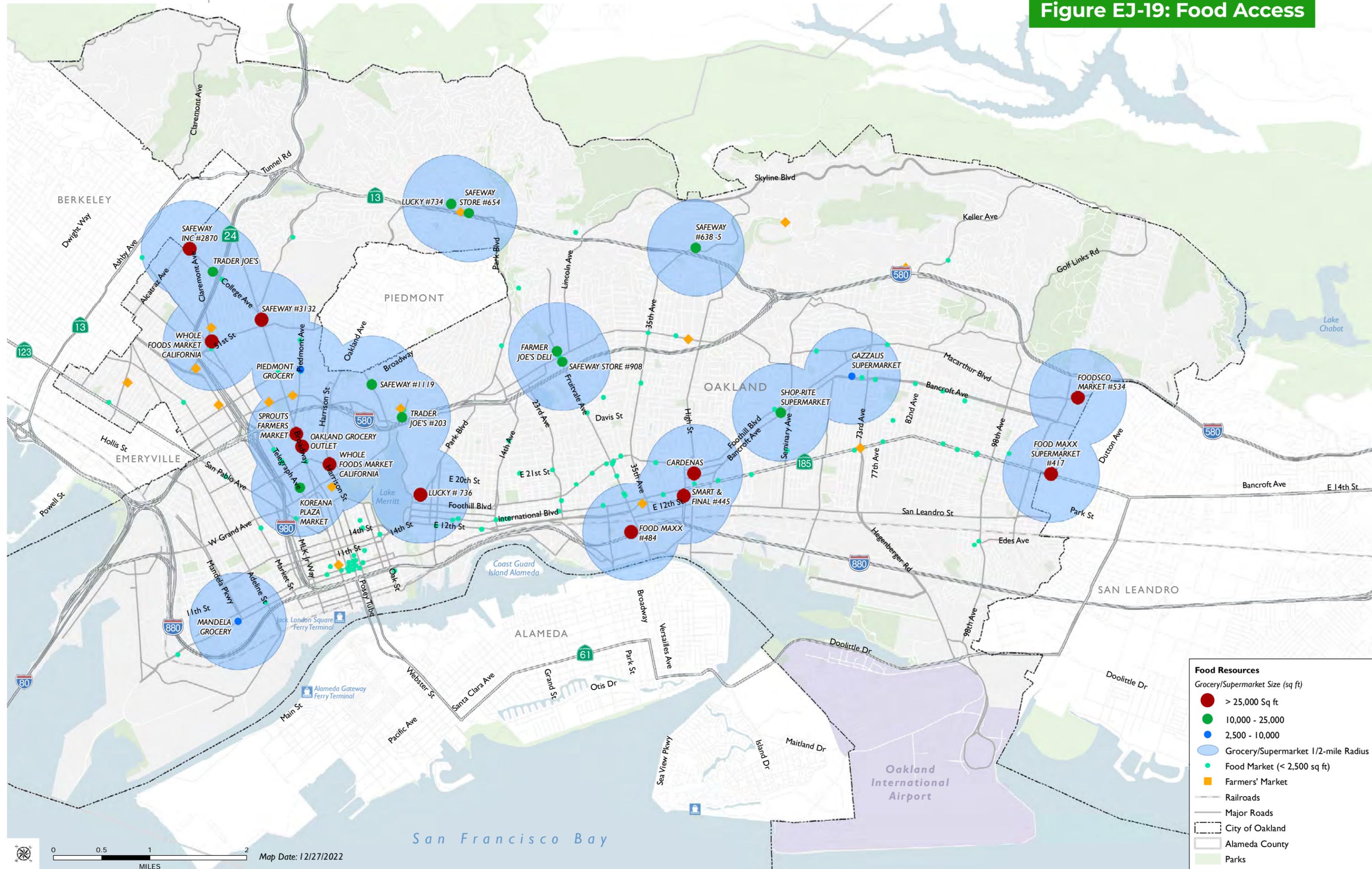
### FOOD ASSISTANCE AND EDUCATION

The price of food—in addition to taste, nutrition, convenience, and other factors—affects people's food choices, and is one of the greatest barriers to accessing healthy food. Participation in food assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (also known as CalFresh) and Women, Infants, and Children nutrition program (WIC), can help to improve food security, offer benefits that enable families to purchase healthier diets, and free up resources for other necessities. The City will seek to understand barriers, promote access and community awareness, and expand acceptance of these benefit programs at retailers and farmers markets in partnership with community organizations.

Given the time limitations and financial and physical barriers people with disabilities and low-income families may face when preparing meals, it is important to increase education around convenient and easy-to-prepare healthy food options. The City will play a role in providing marketing and educational campaigns targeted at increasing food growing and healthy eating to support new healthy food retail in EJ Communities.



**Figure EJ-19: Food Access**



Map Date: 12/27/2022

SOURCE: Alameda County Public Health Department Environmental Health Division, 2021; City of Oakland, 2021; ALAMEDA County GIS, 2021; Dyett & Bhatia, 2021

## Building Resilience: Community-Led Food Security

Community organizations have led the charge in building local resilience and increasing food security. City Slicker Farms leads the urban farming and food justice movement in West Oakland, having transformed a vacant brownfield site into a thriving community park and farm. City Slicker has built more than 400 backyard and community gardens since 2001, and their West Oakland Farm Park is a vibrant community hub on land that was once heavily contaminated. City Slicker Farms also includes other programs that increase food access (the Backyard Gardens Program); support food sharing (participation in the Town Fridge collective); and build skills in farming and cooking (the Food and Farming Skill Sharing Program.)

In Deep East Oakland, Planting Justice (PJ) Nursery hires and trains formerly incarcerated people at their two-acre Rolling River tree nursery in the Sobrante Park neighborhood. In the last 10 years, the team has built over 450 edible gardens throughout the Bay Area. In partnership with Sogorea Te' Land

Trust (STLT), an urban indigenous women-led community organization, PJ facilitated the transfer of the Rolling River Nursery's plot back into Chochenyo and Karkin Ohlone stewardship. This partnership recognizes Oakland's Ohlone history and grants STLT access to the land in perpetuity.

Mandela Grocery Co-op in West Oakland is a worker cooperative (co-op), which is a model that serves as an effective tool for creating long-term, dignified jobs, particularly in urban low-income communities. The Mandela Grocery Co-op is a grocery store that is operated, centrally governed, and democratically controlled by its worker-owners and sources from local entrepreneurs and farmers in California with a focus on Black and Brown farmers and food makers.

The Saba Grocers Initiative is a network of Arab immigrant and Black corner store owners working to build a food system where fresh fruits and vegetables are affordable for all. Initially

funded by Oakland's 2017 "soda tax" after successful community organizing efforts, Saba Grocers helps its network of members secure fresh fruits and vegetables through bulk wholesale purchase and distribution to each member store. They also distribute Saba Food Cards, a closed loop Visa worth \$250 each for residents in need of assistance, developed in partnership with 25 independent store owners in Oakland. The Initiative also coordinates a "Fresh 5x" nutrition incentive program funded by the USDA and distributes funds to local grocers that supplement CalFresh and CalSNAP benefits. Saba Grocers helps to sign people up for SNAP benefits, and for every dollar they spend on fresh produce, they get five additional dollars for additional produce, helping lower-income residents stretch their monthly grocery budgets by a significant amount.

*Sources: City Slicker Farms website, Planting Justice Website, Mandela Grocery Co-op website, Oakland Equitable Climate Action Plan 2030, Saba Grocers Initiative website*



**Table EJ-7: Top 10th Percentile Tracts by Indicator — Expanding Healthy Food Access**

TRACT NAME (WITH SCORE)				
SNAP <sup>1,2</sup>	FOOD ACCESS <sup>2</sup>	FARMERS' MARKETS	COMMUNITY GARDENS	FREE/REDUCED PRICE MEAL <sup>2</sup>
Lockwood/Coliseum/	<b>Prescott/Mandela Peralta (0.91)</b>	<b>Brookfield Village (1.00)</b>	Montclair North (1.00)	Port Lower* (0.99)
<b>Rudsdale (0.99)</b>	<b>Acorn (0.91)</b>	Sequoyah (0.99)	Glen Highlands (0.99)	Acorn Industrial* (0.99)
<b>DeFremery/Oak Center (0.99)</b>	<b>Brookfield Village (0.91)</b>	Redwood Heights West (0.98)	Piedmont Pines (0.98)	<b>Melrose (0.98)</b>
<b>Bancroft/Havenscourt East (0.98)</b>	San Antonio/Highland Terrace (0.91)	<b>Brookfield Village/ Hegenberger (0.97)</b>	Montclair South (0.97)	<b>Acorn (0.97)</b>
<b>Prescott/Mandela Peralta (0.97)</b>	Golf Links (0.91)	Lincoln Highlands (0.96)	Caballo Hills (0.96)	<b>Jack London Gateway (0.96)</b>
<b>Fruitvale/Hawthorne (0.93)</b>	<b>Prescott (0.91)</b>	Lower Dimond School (0.96)	Panoramic Hill (0.96)	<b>Fremont District (0.96)</b>
<b>Cox/Elmhurst (0.93)</b>	Bushrod/Childrens Hospital (0.91)	<b>Cox/Elmhurst (0.95)</b>	Sequoyah (0.95)	<b>Elmhurst (0.95)</b>
<b>Sobrante Park (0.93)</b>	<b>Brookfield Village/ Hegenberger (0.91)</b>	<b>Stonehurst (0.94)</b>	Oakmore North (0.94)	<b>Bancroft/Havenscourt East (0.94)</b>
<b>Acorn (0.93)</b>	Mills College (0.91)	Laurel/Upper Peralta Creek (0.93)	Woodminster (0.93)	<b>New Highland (0.93)</b>
<b>Brookfield Village (0.93)</b>	Sequoyah (0.91)	<b>Prescott (0.92)</b>	Upper Piedmont Ave (0.92)	<b>Harrington/Fruitvale (0.92)</b>
<b>Fremont District (0.91)</b>	Port Lower* (0.91)	Woodminster (0.91)	<b>Seminary (0.91)</b>	<b>Webster (0.91)</b>
<b>Bunche/MLK Jr (0.91)</b>	<b>Sobrante Park (0.90)</b>	Foothill Square/Toler Heights (0.90)	<b>Sobrante Park (0.90)</b>	<b>Arroyo Viejo (0.90)</b>

*Note: Bolded and blue census tracts are EJ Communities.*

*\* Indicates census tract with low population.*

*1. Only includes 11 tracts in top decile due to ties. Next highest score is 0.86.*

*2. Maximum score is not 1.00 due to ties.*

## 5.2 GOALS AND POLICIES

### GOAL EJ-5 SUPPORT A FOOD SYSTEM THAT PROVIDES NUTRITIOUS, AFFORDABLE, CULTURALLY RELEVANT, AND AFFORDABLE FOOD TO ALL OAKLANDERS

#### Improving Food Access

**EJ-5.1 New Healthy Food Grocers.** Leverage tax and fee deferral/reduction programs, California Food Financing Initiative funding, and other economic development grant monies to attract new healthy food grocers and co-ops and help them establish and/or make necessary improvements. As shown in **Figure EJ-19**, allow small grocery stores within residential areas. As a priority, efforts should be focused in areas underserved by healthy food retail with good access to the transportation network, where grocery stores and food co-ops are most economically viable.

**EJ-5.2 Community Gardens Program.** Partner with nonprofits, especially Indigenous groups, to expand the City's Community Gardens Program, with policies to address maintenance and permit Indigenous community harvesting/ foraging of parks. The program should include garden spaces, community-maintained edible landscapes, and amenities in public spaces.

**EJ-5.3 Community and Home Gardening.** Support community and home gardening efforts and – particularly in EJ Communities underserved by healthy food retail – by providing financial incentives such as land transfers or discounted water rates and technical assistance in the form of online and library resources and workshops on gardening basics and cooking easy, healthy meals with fresh produce. Work with community groups to increase the prevalence of accessible, local gardens. Other incentives may include:

- Explore the expansion of outright permitting of community gardens in areas where a Conditional

Use Permit is currently required, particularly in the Broadway Valdez District (D-BV) and Central Estuary (D-CE) zones.

- Incentivize urban agriculture in urbanized areas by offering reduced property tax assessments or relief from Oakland vacancy tax in exchange for converting vacant or unimproved property to an agricultural use through a contract agreement for an initial period of five years.

**EJ-5.4 Urban Agriculture in New Development.** Promote rooftop gardens, edible gardens, and other sustainable agricultural landscaping alternatives within multi-unit, commercial, and industrial developments.

- Target creation of rooftop gardens highly visible from neighboring properties.
- Permit indoor “vertical food farms” in industrial areas.
- Reduce permit fees for large-scale farming of edible products.



**EJ-5.5 Entrepreneurship and Food Innovation.** Actively support food innovations such as street (sidewalk) vending, food cooperatives, pop-up markets and similar innovations that do not fit into the traditional brick-and-mortar storefront, farmers market, or community garden models. Promote indoor farming of fruits and vegetables in industrial zones.

#### Food Assistance and Nutrition Programs

**EJ-5.6 Food Assistance Programs.** Work to increase community awareness of and participation in existing federal food assistance programs, such as the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) nutrition program and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Approaches can include:

- Providing information in City newsletters, on the City's website, and at community centers and other City facilities.
- Explaining to merchants the incentive to registering to accept WIC and SNAP payments (immediate expansion of market of potential customers).
- Supporting additional programs for local grocers to supplement CalFresh and CalSNAP benefits with cash match incentives.
- Partnering with community organizations that support low-income community members who are not eligible for food assistance through identification of funding or grants.

**EJ-5.7 Food Security Resources & Partnerships.** Coordinate with citywide community-serving organizations, the Oakland Unified School District, Alameda County, and other public agencies to ensure that eligible residents and families have access to federal, State, and local food programs, as well as emergency food assistance during public health and other crises. Partner with these service providers to distribute food at community centers and other central locations in areas with high

food insecurity and/or low access to food. During such emergencies, support the Alameda County Community Foodbank to expand hours and keep distribution centers operational.

**EJ-5.8 Education and Awareness.** In partnership with local agencies and community organizations, develop curriculum and marketing materials encouraging the growth and consumption of healthy food. Provide these to the Oakland Unified School District and community organizations focused on food justice and nutritional education. Support community organizations with financial incentives such as land transfers or discounted water rates and technical assistance in the form of online and library resources and workshops on gardening basics and cooking easy, healthy meals with fresh produce.

### Food Recovery

**EJ-5.9 Food Recovery Program.** Support existing capacity of organizations within Oakland's food system, and develop new capacity, to recover edible food that is otherwise wasted, and distribute that food for human consumption. This includes:

- Exploring potential for agroforestry, where trees, shrubs, and agricultural crops are interspersed, in community gardens or parks, to create additional food sources.
- Engaging with stakeholders, including local food donation, recovery, and collection organizations, to build robust collection and food storage capacity, and reliable distribution systems to the neediest populations.
- Engaging with food generators such as supermarkets, wholesale distributors, large hotels, and institutions, to donate surplus edible food that food recovery partners want or will accept and ensuring food generators comply with the Edible Food Recovery requirements of SB 1383.
- Informing edible surplus food generators about strategies and best practices for preventing the waste of surplus food.



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