OFFICE OF THE NEW YORK STATE COMPTROLLER

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The Cost of Living in New York City: Food

Highlights

- In 2022, the food price index in the New York City metropolitan area grew 8.8 percent from 2021, the highest growth in over 40 years. In 2024, the local food price index grew 1.8 percent from 2023, lower than the nation (2.3 percent).
- Between 2012-2013 and 2022-2023, the average household across the New York City metropolitan area spent less than 10 percent of its income on food.
- Between 2012-2013 and 2022-2023, food away from home costs in the New York City metropolitan area grew 43.6 percent while food at home costs grew 65.8 percent during the same period.
- Between 2019 and 2024, the price indices for the main components of food (food at home and food away from home) grew more than 20 percent each for both the New York City metropolitan area and the nation.
- In 2022-2023, households in the Northeast making less than \$15,000 spent almost 70 percent of their income on food, a 16 point jump in only four years compared to just a 0.7 point jump for households making \$200,000 or more.
- One in nine households in New York State experienced food insecurity in 2020-2022.
 The majority of households experiencing food insecurity in the State reside in the City (over 1.2 million residents).
- In 2022, the Bronx had the highest percentage of residents that experienced food insecurity (20.2 percent) while Staten Island had the lowest (11.5 percent).

Nationally, food made up the third largest cost (the fourth largest cost locally) at 12.9 percent of average household spending, or about \$9,664, in 2022-2023. In the New York City metropolitan area, food costs were higher at \$11,288. However, food costs in the area made up a smaller share than nationally, at 12.5 percent of overall household spending, as housing comprised a larger share locally.

Food costs in the New York City metropolitan area rose by 56.2 percent between 2012-2013 and 2022-2023, more than the national increase of 46.4 percent. The food price index rose sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic partly due to higher costs of labor, supply chain disruptions and geopolitical conflict, after years of relatively small price increases at about 2 percent annually.

Along with food costs, many large metro areas also saw income growth preceding and during the pandemic, as unprecedented federal stimulus boosted a rebounding economy. Between 2012-2013 and 2022-2023, income before taxes in the New York City metropolitan area rose by almost 52 percent; however, this lagged the growth in food costs during the same period.

While the food share of income for the average household in the New York City metropolitan area was around the national average, lower-income households in New York City are more likely to face food insecurity. As the food price index is still currently over 25 percent higher than it was in 2019, many households in the area continue to face cost burdens that could worsen if tariffs on food items are sustained. Elected leaders must continue to monitor the cost of this most basic need and take measures to keep food affordable in the City.

Food Cost Growth in NYC Metro Greater Than Nation

In 2022-2023, food costs — which include food at home and food away from home — comprised the third largest category of household spending (behind housing and transportation) nationally while in the New York City metropolitan area, food comprised the fourth largest category (behind housing, transportation and personal insurance and pensions). Historically, food costs have been the third largest category of household spending in the area, but spending shares are not always consistent as costs grow in a given year, according to the Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES), which derives household expenditures from consumer spending habits. The New York City metropolitan area includes New York City and 18 surrounding counties and in this report may be referred to as New York City or the "metro area."2

The nation's food cost share for households was slightly higher (12.9 percent) than the metro area's (12.5 percent). Part of the reason for the lower share locally is its higher share of housing (roughly 40 percent compared to less than

34 percent in the nation; see the Office of the New York State Comptroller's (OSC) housing cost of living report).³

In the metro area, food costs grew by a total of 56.2 percent between 2012-2013 and 2022-2023 (see Figure 1). While this growth was sizable, it was smaller than in other large metropolitan areas such as Philadelphia.

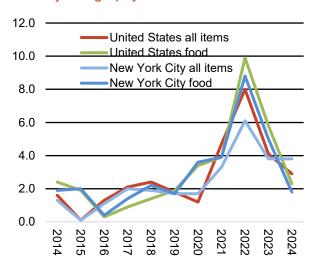
Several reasons have been provided for food price inflation in recent years, including higher costs of labor and other inputs and supply chain disruptions related to public health, severe weather and geopolitical events. Prior to the pandemic, the food price index (as measured by the Consumer Price Index or CPI) in the metro area, as well as in the nation, grew by around 2 percent (see Figure 2).4 In 2022, the food price index in the metro area grew by 8.8 percent over the prior year as the pandemic disrupted global supply chains and geopolitical events pushed prices up. In 2024, the food price index in the metro area grew by 1.8 percent over the prior year, returning to levels seen prior to the pandemic.

FIGURE 1Average Food Expenditures by Select Metropolitan Area and United States

Metropolitan Area	2012-2013	2018-2019	2022-2023	Percent Change, 2012-2013 to 2018-2019	Percent Change, 2018-2019 to 2022-2023	Percent Change, 2012-2013 to 2022-2023
Chicago	\$7,373	\$8,891	\$10,895	20.6%	22.5%	47.8%
Dallas	\$7,177	\$7,651	\$9,549	6.6%	24.8%	33.1%
Houston	\$7,155	\$8,575	\$8,267	19.8%	-3.6%	15.5%
Los Angeles	\$7,510	\$9,177	\$11,667	22.2%	27.1%	55.4%
Miami	\$5,695	\$6,304	\$8,183	10.7%	29.8%	43.7%
New York	\$7,225	\$9,843	\$11,288	36.2%	14.7%	56.2%
Philadelphia	\$7,662	\$8,813	\$12,069	15.0%	36.9%	57.5%
San Diego	\$6,915	\$10,651	\$11,628	54.0%	9.2%	68.2%
San Francisco	\$8,401	\$11,486	\$14,138	36.7%	23.1%	68.3%
Seattle	\$8,265	\$10,291	\$12,756	24.5%	24.0%	54.3%
United States	\$6,601	\$8,046	\$9,664	21.9%	20.1%	46.4%

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey; OSC analysis

FIGURE 2
Annual Percent Change in All Items and Food
Prices by Geography



Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Price Index; OSC analysis

The CPI data is more current than the CES (including 2024) and is used to understand the change in prices of a basket of goods and services, but does not provide average cost levels for items. Changes in the CPI, particularly for food, may also be due to something called

downsizing (shrinkflation), which is a practice where food companies reduce the quantity or size of a food product while keeping the price the same. One 2024 study found that 77 percent of consumers surveyed noticed shrinkflation in food products.⁵

The two most volatile goods and services measured by the CPI are food and energy. As a result, economists often look at the core CPI — which excludes food and energy — for a more stable reading of price changes over time.

In the recent past, the food price index rose the most in 2022, as global supply chain issues caused by the pandemic negatively affected imports. Disruptive geopolitical events including the Russia and Ukraine War and an avian flu caused the food price index in the nation (9.9 percent) and locally (8.8 percent) to grow by the largest rates in 40 years. In 2022, many food products across the nation experienced relatively high year-over-year growth in their price indices. These included eggs (32.2 percent); fats and oils (18.5 percent); dairy and processed fruits and vegetables, which include frozen, canned, dried

FIGURE 3
Average Food Cost Burden by Select Metropolitan Area and United States

	2012-2013	2018-2019	2022-2023	Percent Change, 2012-2013 to 2018-2019	Percent Change, 2018-2019 to 2022-2023	Percent Change, 2012-2013 to 2022-2023
Chicago	9.8%	10.3%	9.8%	0.4%	-0.5%	0.0%
Dallas	9.8%	8.6%	8.5%	-1.3%	-0.1%	-1.4%
Houston	9.0%	8.9%	9.3%	-0.1%	0.4%	0.3%
Los Angeles	10.6%	10.2%	9.4%	-0.4%	-0.8%	-1.2%
Miami	10.2%	8.5%	8.9%	-1.6%	0.3%	-1.3%
New York	8.9%	9.6%	9.2%	0.6%	-0.3%	0.3%
Philadelphia	10.9%	9.0%	10.1%	-2.0%	1.1%	-0.9%
San Diego	9.0%	10.9%	9.5%	1.9%	-1.4%	0.5%
San Francisco	9.0%	8.3%	9.1%	-0.7%	0.8%	0.1%
Seattle	10.3%	8.9%	9.6%	-1.4%	0.7%	-0.7%
United States	10.2%	10.0%	9.9%	-0.2%	-0.1%	-0.3%

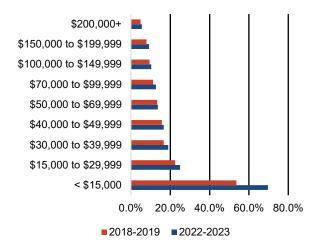
Note: Food cost burden refers to food costs divided by income before taxes for the average household. Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey; OSC analysis

Report 2-2026 3

and juices (each 12 percent); and meats, poultry and fish (9.6 percent).

Between 2023 and 2024, global supply chain issues eased, along with food price growth, as the food price index in the metro area grew 1.8 percent compared to the nation's 2.3 percent growth. However, the local food price index in 2024 was still 25.2 percent higher than in 2019. In addition, several of the issues driving food price growth remain as risks to food prices in the near future, and new inflationary risks, have emerged.

FIGURE 4
Food Cost Share of Income in the Northeast
Region by Income Bracket



Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey; OSC analysis

Income and Food Category Lower Cost Burden in NYC Metro

Along with food costs, many large metro areas also saw incomes grow during the pandemic with unprecedented federal fiscal stimulus and a rebounding economy. As a share of income, food costs in the New York City metropolitan area averaged 8.9 percent in 2012-2013 (see Figure 3). By 2022-2023, food's share of income locally grew to 9.2 percent even as it declined nationally. In comparison, the share in the Dallas metropolitan area — which experienced the largest decline among select metro areas in food

costs as a share of income — was 1.4 percent during the 10-year period.

While the average household locally spent 9.2 percent of its income on food in 2022-2023. the share varied significantly by income bracket. In the Northeast region — defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as spanning Pennsylvania to Maine, and which comprises the Philadelphia, Boston and New York City metropolitan areas households making less than \$15,000 faced the highest food cost burden (see Figure 4). In 2022-2023, households making less than \$15,000 spent almost 70 percent of their income on food, a 16 point jump in just four years compared to only a 0.7 point jump for households making \$200,000 or more, who spent substantially less of their income on food. The share of spending toward food rose among all income groups in the region during the analysis period.

Though this data is not available at the metropolitan area level, New York City makes up about 30 percent of collected data for the Northeast region, and the issue of affordability based on the income scale remains applicable to local residents.

In the fourth quarter of 2024, the Siena College Index of Consumer Sentiment for New York reported that 81 percent of New Yorkers were worried about rising grocery prices. In 2025, a poll conducted by Change Research on behalf of No Kid Hungry New York reported that 86 percent of New Yorkers' incomes are not keeping up with the rising cost of food. The poll also reported that half (53 percent) have seen debts rise over the past 12 months because of higher food costs.

Food Insecurity Affects One in Nine New York Households

Given the relatively large share of income spent on food, lower-income households in the City are more likely to face food insecurity, defined as the inability at times to acquire adequate food for one or more household members due to a lack of

resources.⁹ During the pandemic, food insecurity grew in New York as many people were out of work and food prices grew rapidly. While one in 10 or 10.3 percent of New York households experienced food insecurity in 2019-2021, one in nine or 11.3 percent of households statewide (875,000 families) were food insecure by 2020-2022.¹⁰

One of the reasons the number of New York households that experienced food insecurity grew in 2022 was that extraordinary federal assistance programs, including emergency food benefits, lapsed. As a result, food insecurity nationally grew for the first time in over a decade to 11.2 percent in 2020-2022. Notably, the lapse of federal assistance programs, such as expanded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, came at a time when the metro area experienced strong food inflation (8.8 percent) in 2022.

While food insecurity exists statewide, the majority of households experiencing food insecurity in the State reside in the City (over

FIGURE 5
New York City Food Insecurity Percentage of Households, 2022



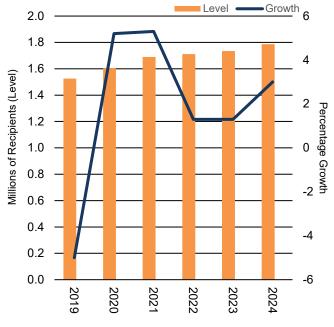
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1.2 million residents).¹¹ In 2022, the Bronx had the highest percentage of residents experiencing food insecurity while Staten Island had the lowest percentage (see Figure 5).

Some City households that experience food insecurity may rely on federal SNAP benefits, which are calculated based on the cost of groceries for a family of four. SNAP benefits each year are adjusted for inflation. As of 2023, 21.9 percent (744,508) of City households received SNAP benefits. While most food (such as fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy, bread and snacks) is covered, SNAP benefits do not extend to food away from home or hot food at the point of sale. In 2020 and 2021, the number of SNAP recipients citywide grew by over 5 percent for each year (see Figure 6). While growth slowed in recent years, it has started to pick up, growing by 3 percent in 2024.

Utilization of SNAP benefits was more concentrated in the South and Central Bronx, where more than half of households received SNAP benefits in four low-income neighborhoods.

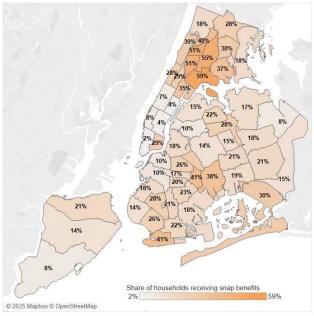
FIGURE 6
New York City SNAP Recipients



Source: New York City Human Resources Administration

Report 2-2026 5

FIGURE 7
New York City SNAP Utilization by Share of Households by Neighborhood, 2023

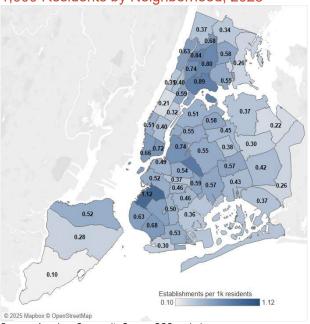


Sources: American Community Survey; OSC analysis

Other areas with elevated SNAP participation include Central Brooklyn, Northern Manhattan, the Rockaways and Coney Island (see Figure 7).

Another aspect of food insecurity is food "deserts," areas where access to healthy and fresh food and produce is limited due to the absence of supermarkets, grocery stores or farmers' markets. Several efforts by the City and State to increase access to affordable and healthy food in deserts have improved access in some areas. Supermarket density, based on the number of supermarkets per 1,000 residents suggests higher densities of available food in some traditional food deserts, including the Bronx and parts of Central Brooklyn. 13 Other areas, including Coney Island, West and Central Harlem and the outer reaches of Queens and the Bronx, still have generally lower rates of supermarkets per resident (see Figure 8).

FIGURE 8
New York City Number of Supermarkets Per 1,000 Residents by Neighborhood, 2023



Sources: American Community Survey; OSC analysis

Food at Home Saw the Largest Growth in the NYC Area

The impact of inflation on food costs and security is further reflected in food purchased by households. Food can be broken down into food at home (groceries) and food away from home (restaurant and fast food).

Food at home costs were the leading contributor to total food costs in New York City between 2012-2013 and 2022-2023. In 2012-2013, food at home costs in the area made up 56.9 percent of total food costs (see Figure 9). Over the 10 years, local food at home costs grew at a much higher rate (65.8 percent) than nationally (48.8 percent). By 2022-2023, food at home costs in the area made up 60 percent of total food costs.

The other food at home category (packaged and canned food intended for consumption at home) was the main contributor to growth in the area's food at home cost over the 10-year period, especially over the 2018-2019 to 2022-2023

FIGURE 9
New York City Metropolitan Area Average Food Cost by Category

	2012-2013	2018-2019	2022-2023	Percent Change, 2012-2013 to 2018-2019	Percent Change, 2018-2019 to 2022-2023	Percent Change, 2012-2013 to 2022- 2023
Food at Home	\$4,111	\$5,352	\$6,817	30.2%	27.4%	65.8%
Cereals and Bakery Products	\$590	\$710	\$918	20.3%	29.3%	55.6%
Meats, Poultry, Fish, and Eggs	\$988	\$1,323	\$1,513	33.9%	14.4%	53.1%
Dairy Products	\$442	\$539	\$672	21.9%	24.7%	52.0%
Fruits and Vegetables	\$855	\$1,145	\$1,394	33.9%	21.7%	63.0%
Other Food at Home	\$1,236	\$1,635	\$2,320	32.3%	41.9%	87.7%
Food Away from Home	\$3,114	\$4,491	\$4,471	44.2%	-0.4%	43.6%
Total Food Cost	\$7,225	\$9,843	\$11,288	36.2%	14.7%	56.2%

Note: Other Food at Home is packaged food intended for consumption at home. Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey; OSC analysis

period. This included the pandemic onset period when food prices rose, people sheltered in place and restaurants shuttered, suggesting that consumers relied more on having prepared food at home during this time.

In recent weeks, the federal administration has announced or implemented tariffs on goods imported to the U.S., which have implications for the price and availability of food items (see OSC's report on the New York City metropolitan area's import and export economies). 14 According to the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics, the portion of the New York City Metropolitan Area within New York State — which includes Nassau, Suffolk, Westchester, Rockland, Orange, Dutchess and Putnam counties — is estimated to have imported over \$7 billion in food items in 2023. 15 Among these items, more than 50 percent of cereal grains and animal feed into the metro area came from Canada and more than one-third of other agricultural products and milled grain products came from the rest of the Americas (territories of the U.S., Central and South America) and Europe, respectively.

Food away from home — which includes restaurants, fast food places and vending

machines — was the second largest food cost component in the metro area between 2012-2013 and 2022-2023. In 2012-2013, food away from home costs in the area made up 43.1 percent of total food costs. Over the 10 years, food away from home costs grew 43.6 percent compared to 42.8 percent nationally. In 2022-2023, food away from home costs made up 39.6 percent of total food costs locally compared to 39.2 percent nationally, suggesting a slightly higher reliance on food away from home for New Yorkers. Restaurants and fast food places are generally more expensive than food at home because of additional labor and operational costs.

Food away from home costs declined during the pandemic between 2018-2019 and 2022-2023, declining by 0.4 percent to \$4,471, on average per household, as many <u>restaurants</u> were limited in providing indoor service or shut down completely due to COVID-19 restrictions in place at the time. ¹⁶

The food away from home price index grew more than the food at home price index in 2019 (see Figure 10). In 2022, the food at home price index grew more than the food away from home price index for the metro area and the nation, due to

Report 2-2026 7

FIGURE 10

Annual Food CPI Percentage Change in New York City Metropolitan Area and United States

		New York City		United States			
Year	Food	Food At Home	Food Away From Home	Food	Food At Home	Food Away From Home	
2019	1.7%	0.9%	2.8%	1.9%	0.9%	3.1%	
2020	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%	3.4%	3.5%	3.4%	
2021	3.9%	2.7%	5.4%	3.9%	3.5%	4.5%	
2022	8.8%	10.2%	6.7%	9.9%	11.4%	7.7%	
2023	5.0%	4.1%	6.6%	5.8%	5.0%	7.1%	
2024	1.8%	0.8%	3.7%	2.3%	1.2%	4.1%	
2019-2024	25.2%	23.1%	28.7%	27.9%	26.8%	29.7%	

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Price Index; OSC analysis

supply chain issues, geopolitical conflicts and livestock diseases. Between 2019 and 2024, the price indices for both food categories grew over 20 percent locally and nationally, with food away from home growing more for both areas. During this period, there were population shifts due to the pandemic and high costs of living in New York that led to some people moving away from the City and towards other parts of the nation, possibly contributing to slower growth locally.¹⁷

Outlook

While food costs are affected by many factors, recent increases have been fueled by supply chain disruptions created by disruptive public health, severe weather and geopolitical events, which may continue in the near term. Recent discussion of tariffs on food inputs such as fertilizer as well as other food items, including fresh produce, has the potential for continuing a recent trend of food costs rising at near the same rate as incomes. Given that food costs burden those with lower incomes more, it is imperative that assistance continues to be provided to those in need, especially as a growing number (one in nine households statewide) is food insecure.

The City and State must continue to monitor the rising costs of food and their impact on New York household budgets to tailor programs to reach those in need while remaining cost efficient.

Some of these households also rely on federal SNAP benefits, which could be at risk with federal cost-cutting measures targeting essential assistance programs. Already, more New Yorkers suggest that they have had to go into debt because of rising food prices, and reductions in federal supports would likely cause food insecurity to grow. While food price growth has cooled recently, if tariffs on food items are sustained, a rise in food inflation across the New York City metropolitan area and the nation may occur, particularly in food away from home. In addition, federal programs such as the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement, intended to support food banks and local groups which provide food, have had funding canceled, which may in turn make it more difficult to provide food to those most in need.

There are several programs and proposals, in addition to those provided by the federal government, that the State and the City administer to help families experiencing food insecurity. The State administers the Women,

Infants and Children Program, Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Nourish New York Program, and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program. ¹⁸ The City operates Community Food Connection, which provides funding to more than 700 food kitchens and pantries for those in need. ¹⁹ Many of these pantries are located in areas where median household incomes are lower and shares of households and children living below the poverty level are higher than citywide averages. For a list of over 150 food pantries in New York City, including by borough, click here.

With the potential for continued foreseen and unforeseen pressures on food prices, the provision of assistance for food remains a critical part of any safety net. It is clear that certain types of households in the City, some of which are geographically concentrated, continue to need support to keep food on the table. State and local efforts that encourage access to high-quality and affordable food, especially in light of potential changes to federal programs which provide critical aid to those in need, will continue to be necessary to ensure families do not go hungry.

Report 2-2026

ENDNOTES

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- ¹² U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Inflation and Rising Food Prices: How Does Federal Food Assistance Change?," January 19, 2023, https://www.gao.gov/blog/inflation-and-rising-food-prices-how-does-federal-food-assistance-change.
- ¹³ Supermarkets are defined by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code 44511.
- ¹⁴ OSC, Imports and Exports in the New York City Metropolitan Area, March 2025, https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/osdc/pdf/imports-and-exports-in-nyc.pdf.
- ¹⁵ The U.S. Department of Transportation defines geographic areas based on the U.S. Census Bureau's Commodity Flow Survey, which maps out the flow of goods to, within and from the United States. For the purposes of this report, the New York City metropolitan area refers to the commodity flow survey (CFS) area designated by the U.S. Census Bureau as New York-Newark, NY-NJ-CT-PA CFS Area (NY Part). OSC defines these items as live animals and fish; cereal grains and milled grain products; eggs, honey and other products of animal origin; meat, poultry, fish and seafood; other agricultural products excluding animal feed and forage products and other prepared foodstuffs.
- ¹⁶ OSC, New York City Restaurant, Retail and Recreation Sectors Still Face Uphill Recovery, Report 17-2022, January 2022, https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/osdc/pdf/report-17-2022.pdf.
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