



# CULTIVATING CAMDEN

A STATUS REPORT



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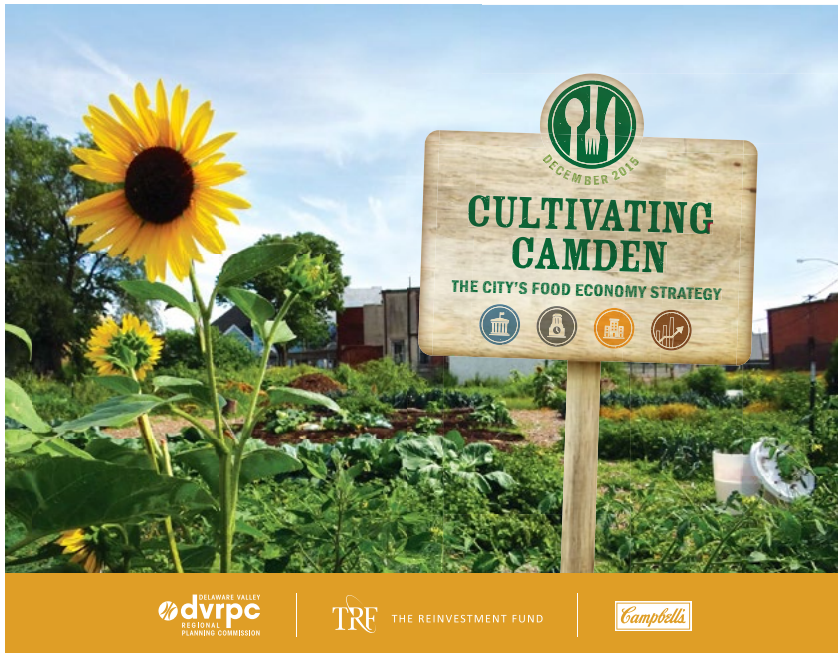
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## Introduction

### Overview of *Cultivating Camden*

In 2015, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) released *Cultivating Camden: The City's Food Economy Strategy*, which sought to increase food access and improve economic opportunities in Camden, New Jersey. The report was based on the ongoing work of DVRPC, the Campbell's Healthy Communities Program, and The Reinvestment Fund (TRF). It grew out of a desire to better understand the City of Camden's (Camden) food system so that food system actors, stakeholders, and funders could be more strategic, coordinated, and effective in their work. *Cultivating Camden* analyzed the city's current food system and food economy, acknowledging the challenges that residents face in accessing healthy food, while at the same time making recommendations to grow food as an economic sector, engage Camden's institutions, and support organizations already working to increase access to healthy food.



*Cultivating Camden* cover

Source: DVRPC

DVRPC undertook a multi-faceted approach to gather information and prioritize recommendations for the report, including analyzing demographic and economic data, researching best practices, interviewing key stakeholders, meeting with community members, and convening both an Advisory Committee and a Working Group to capture a diversity of perspectives and experiences. DVRPC also partnered with TRF Policy Solutions to conduct an in-depth analysis of institutional purchasing practices among Camden's anchor institutions. By synthesizing the data, input from stakeholders, and feedback from both the Advisory Committee and Working Group, DVRPC was able to develop a more comprehensive understanding of Camden's food system and food economy. With support from the Working Group, DVRPC drafted and prioritized over 50 recommendations to develop a final set of 33 recommendations organized into four categories by the intended implementer: Institutions, Government, Community Organizations, and Economic Development Organizations. Although DVRPC authored *Cultivating Camden*, the report noted that implementing the recommendations would take the dedicated efforts of many actors working together.

### Status Report

A lot has changed in Camden since *Cultivating Camden* was released in December 2015: new businesses, residents, programs, and funding opportunities have come to the city, bringing new energy and optimism. However, not everyone has experienced the same sense of renewal. Some Camden neighborhoods saw businesses close and more households enter into poverty during this time. Even more recently, the economic recession brought about by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic slowed or reversed some of the positive changes the city had been experiencing and led to additional increases in unemployment and food insecurity.

This report takes a look at Camden's food system five years after DVRPC originally released *Cultivating Camden*. It analyzes the most recent demographic and economic data to better understand how the



food system may have changed during this time. It also shares some of the progress that has been made towards, as well as the barriers to, implementing the recommendations in *Cultivating Camden*. Finally, it details some of the new programs and initiatives working to improve Camden's food system that have arisen in the past five years.

### Planning Process

To ensure that this status report captured not only the most recent food system data but also on-the-ground efforts, DVRPC partnered with The Food Trust and the Camden Food Access Work Group (FAWG) to engage with local food system stakeholders. The FAWG is made up of over 40 individuals from 25 organizations, representing many different aspects of the food system. Between March 2019 and February 2021, The Food Trust, with support from the Campbell's Healthy Communities Program, convened the FAWG nine times to "develop strategies to sustain efforts to improve access to and affordability of nutritious food, along with nutrition education for city residents."<sup>1</sup> DVRPC presented at the October 2020 and January 2021 FAWG meetings to share updated demographic and economic data, review the status of the original recommendations, and discuss barriers to implementation.

DVRPC also developed an online survey to collect additional feedback on the status of the recommendations. For each recommendation, the survey asked if the recommendation was (a) Already completed, (b) Still relevant but not completed, (c) Not completed but no longer relevant, or (d) Unsure of status. The survey was distributed electronically to the FAWG and was open to the public. Overall, survey participants noted that although some of the recommendations have already been completed, many are still relevant but not yet completed. Very few people responded that the recommendations were no longer relevant; however, many noted that they were unsure of the status of many of the recommendations. Taken as a

whole, the survey tells us that much has been done to improve Camden's food economy and increase food access, but that the work is still ongoing. More information on survey responses for specific recommendations can be found in the Recommendations section.

The survey also indicated that about two-thirds of respondents had used *Cultivating Camden* to varying degrees to pursue funding for their work. Some of the funding leveraged includes \$250,000 from the BUILD Health Challenge® and \$293,411 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Grant. More details on these programs can be found on page 15 and page 30. Additionally, about half of the survey respondents noted that their work shifted to focus more heavily on food access in recent years, whereas about 15 percent of respondents noted that their work had shifted to focus on health more broadly in recent years.

Finally, DVRPC staff corresponded with individual organizations working to improve food access in Camden to capture a fuller picture of new initiatives and dive deeper into potential barriers to implementing the original recommendations.



**Youth gardening at the Resilient Roots Farm**  
Source: Resilient Roots, VietLead

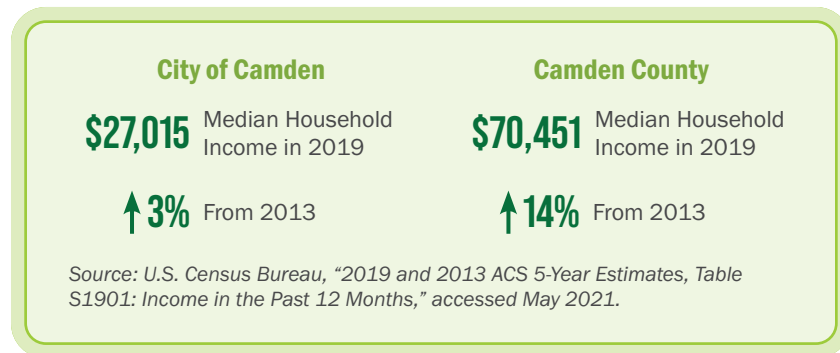
<sup>1</sup>The Food Trust, *Healthy Food Access Camden: Recommendations of the Camden Food Access Work Group*, 2020: <http://bit.ly/camdenfoodaccess>.

## Data Update

*Cultivating Camden* included a number of indicators intended to capture the state of Camden’s food system at the household, economic, and institutional levels. This status report analyzes the most recent data for the same indicators, providing a snapshot of the health of Camden’s food system and highlighting recent trends in each of the categories.

### Households

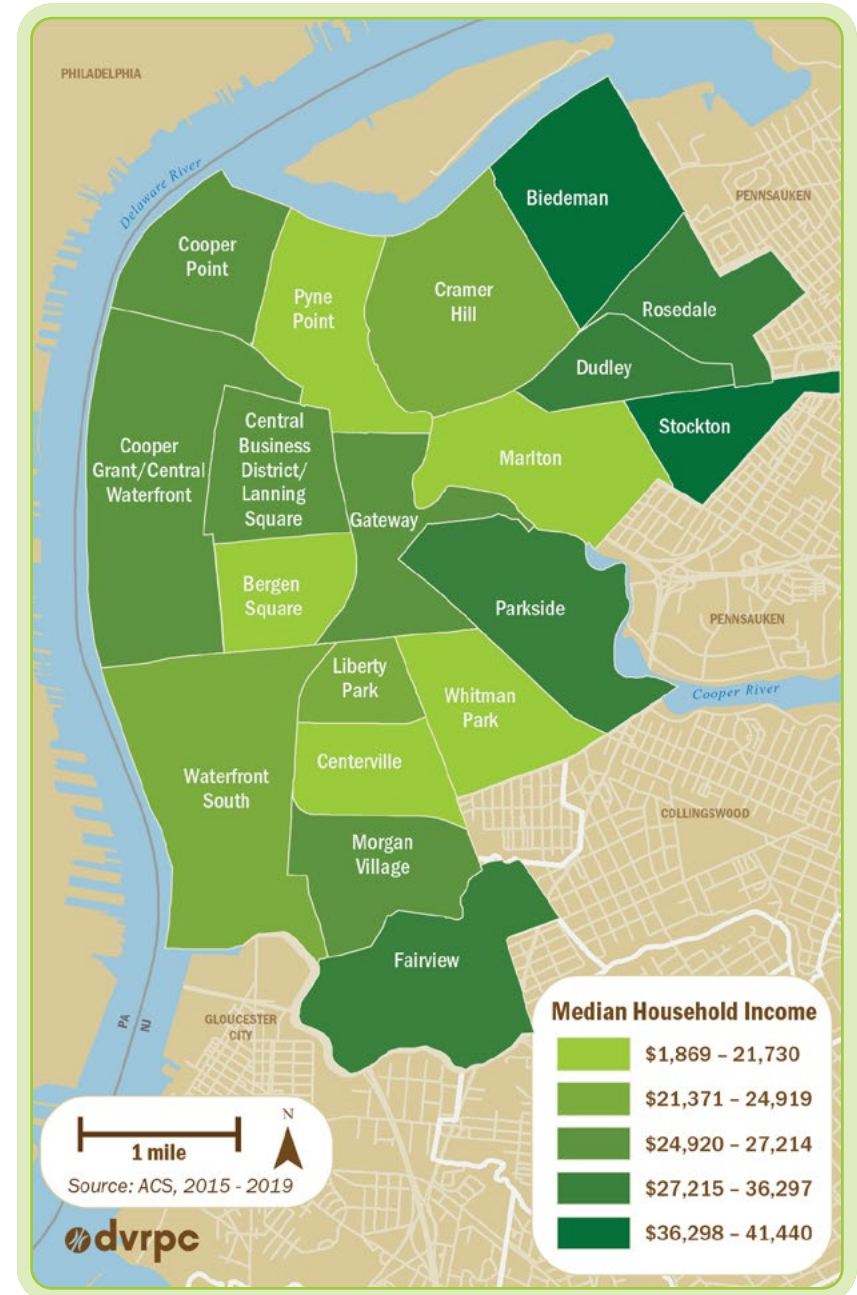
The sections below analyze some of Camden’s demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, broken down by neighborhood, that correspond strongly with a person’s ability to access food and other resources in Camden.



### Household Income and Poverty Rate

According to the 2019 5-Year American Community Survey (ACS), the median household income is slightly more than \$27,000 for they city of Camden and over \$70,000 for Camden County. As shown in Figure 1, the lowest median incomes are found in the Pyne Point, Bergen Square, Whitman Park, and Centerville neighborhoods. Neighborhoods along the city’s eastern edge like Stockton, Rosedale, Biedeman, and Parkside have the highest household incomes in the city. Communities along the waterfront, particularly Central Waterfront, Central Business District/ Lanning Square, and Cooper Grant, had the greatest increases in median household income between 2013 and 2019, with increases over 50

Figure 1: Median Household Income by Neighborhood





percent (see Figure 2). The Bergen Square, Whitman Park, and Dudley neighborhoods had some of the largest decreases in median household income during this period, with decreases between 28 and 20 percent.<sup>2</sup>

The poverty level is a function of both household income and family size. The federal weighted average poverty level for a family of four in 2019 was \$26,172. Approximately 36.4 percent of city of Camden residents live below the poverty line, which is three times the county’s poverty rate (12.2 percent). As shown in Figure 3, the Cooper Point and Cramer Hill neighborhoods have the highest poverty rates with over 50 percent of residents living below the poverty line.<sup>3</sup> Although the city’s poverty rate is still very high, it decreased by 8.5 percent between 2013 and 2019—a greater decrease than the county experienced during this time (6 percent decrease). The Cooper Point and Dudley neighborhoods had the greatest increase in the percentage of residents living below the poverty level between 2013 and 2019, with increases of 67 and 46 percent, respectively. The Marlton and Waterfront South neighborhoods had the greatest decreases in the poverty rate during this time period (35 percent).

Although pockets of the city experienced positive household income trends, across the city incomes are still very low and the poverty rate is high—both of which strongly and negatively affect food security.

### Unemployment

The unemployment rate in the city of Camden is 12.9 percent, which is two times greater than the county’s (6.6 percent). As shown in Figure 4 on page 05, the highest unemployment rates in the city are in the Waterfront South and Bergen Square neighborhoods, at around 26 percent. The lowest unemployment levels are in the northeast corner of

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, “2019 and 2013 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table S1901: Income in the Past 12 Months,” accessed May 2021.

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, “2019 and 2013 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table S1701: Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months,” accessed May 2021.

**Figure 2: Percent Change in Median Household Income by Neighborhood, 2013–2019**





Figure 3: Poverty Rate by Neighborhood, 2019

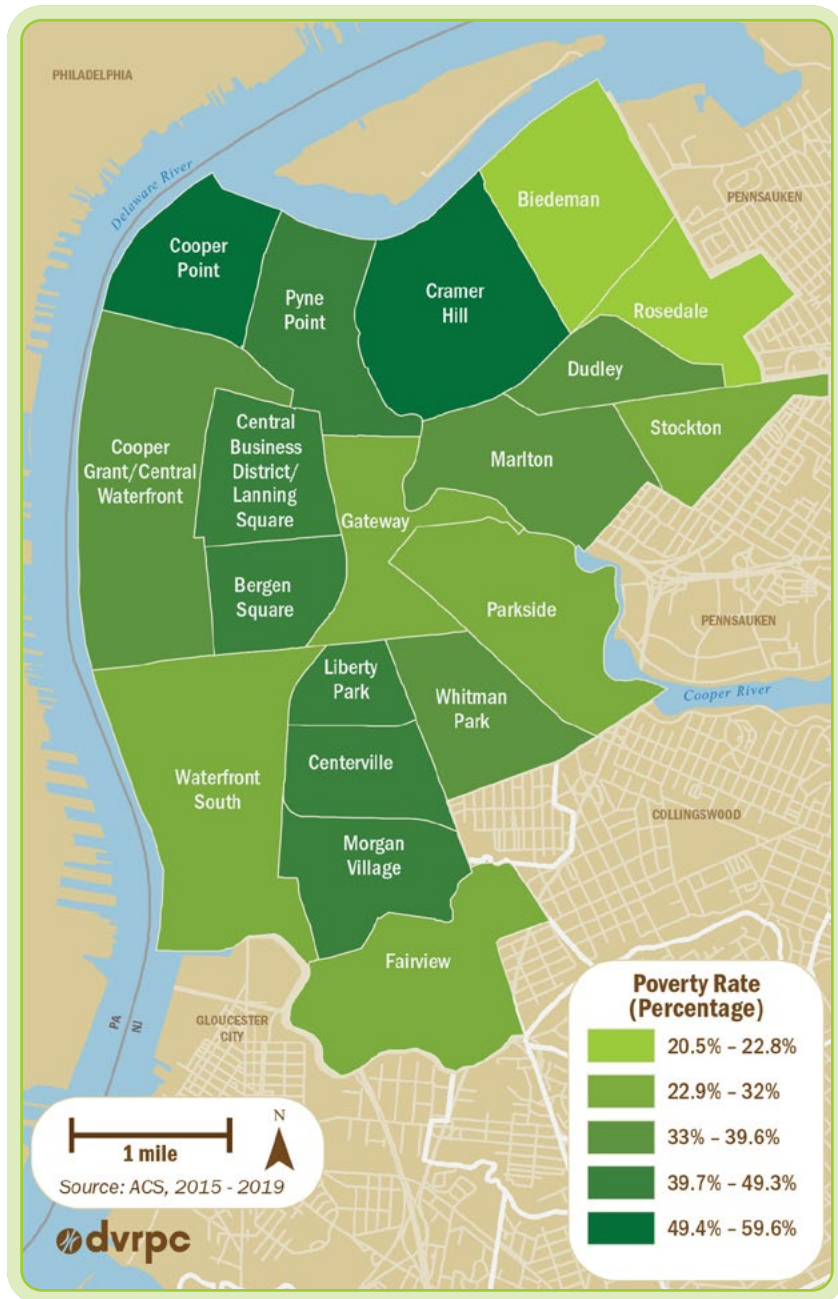


Figure 4: Unemployment Rate by Neighborhood, 2019



the city in the Biedeman, Rosedale, Dudley, and Stockton neighborhoods (rates between 4.7 and 7.6 percent).

Both the city and the county’s unemployment rate decreased by almost 50 percent between 2013 and 2019. Within Camden, the Rosedale, Dudley, Morgan Village, Biedeman, and Lanning Square neighborhoods had decreases in unemployment between 60 and 80 percent. Only two neighborhoods saw increases in unemployment during this time period: Waterfront South and Central Waterfront/Cooper Grant (both 11 percent).

### Household Vehicle Ownership

Physical access to food—being able to get to a grocery store, corner store, or farmers’ market—is an important part of food access. Although owning a vehicle is not the only way to allow for physical access to food, it can be a key factor in areas without reliable transit or safe, walkable access to a grocery store. As shown in Figure 5, the highest rates of carless households in Camden are in the Pyne Poynt (55 percent), Centerville (46 percent), Marlton, and Bergen Square neighborhoods (both 41 percent). Some of these neighborhoods are located closer to downtown Camden, where there is generally better access to transit services and higher student populations, and therefore, may have higher rates of carless households by choice. However, some of these neighborhoods also have the lowest median household incomes in the city, which may indicate that these families likely do not have cars because they cannot afford it rather than because they have made a lifestyle choice to not own a car. Comparatively, the lowest rates of carless households are in the Stockton, Waterfront South, Dudley, and Beideman neighborhoods (between 16 and 25 percent carless households).<sup>4</sup>

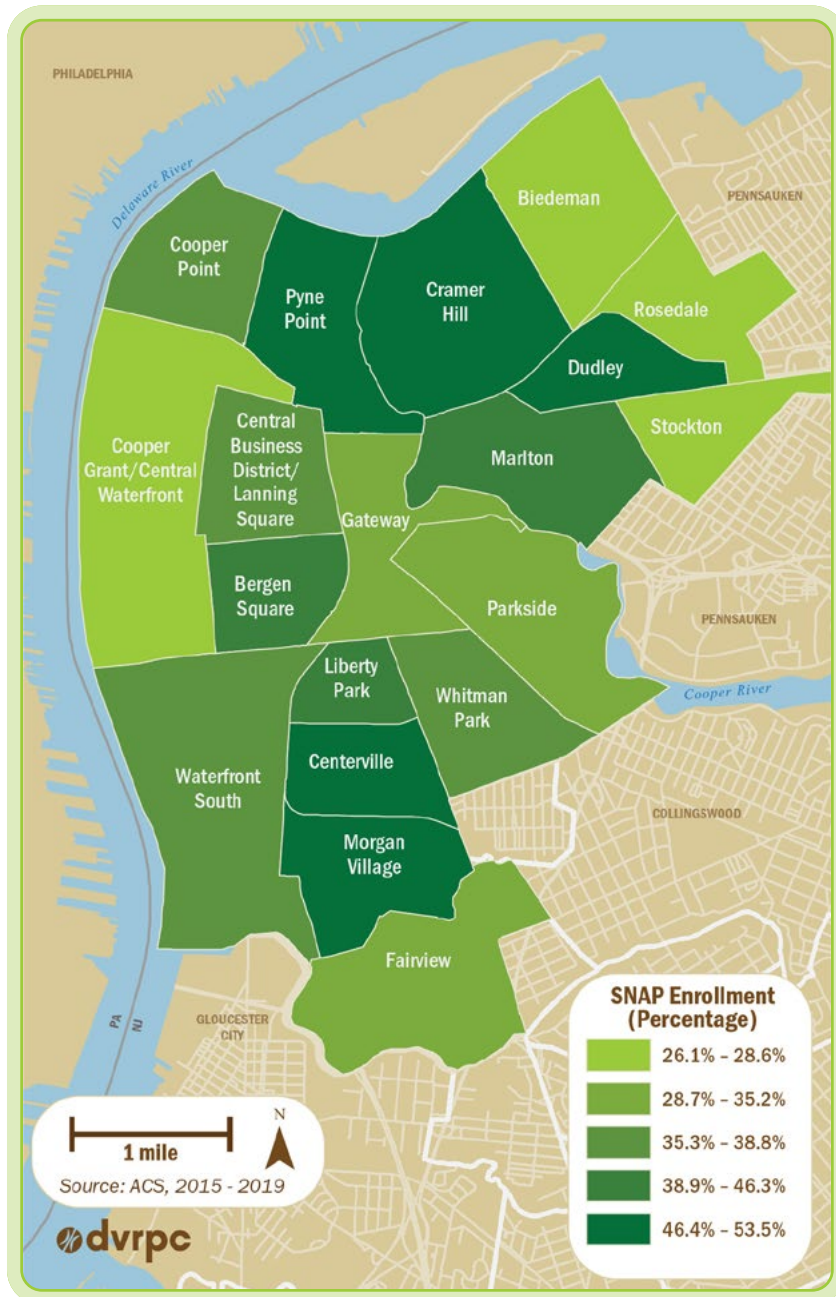
Figure 5: Rates Carless Households by Neighborhood, 2019



<sup>4</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, “2019 and 2013 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics,” accessed May 2021.



Figure 6: SNAP Enrollment by Neighborhood, 2019



### Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation

SNAP is one of over a dozen food assistance programs managed by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service that provide resources to food-insecure households. SNAP is an entitlement program and therefore is available to all eligible households and individuals that enroll. The size of a household's benefit is based on income and certain expenses. The average New Jersey household participating in SNAP received \$224 per month in 2019, down from \$267 per month in 2013.<sup>5,6</sup> Approximately 11.5 percent of households in Camden County and 38.5 percent of households in the city of Camden received SNAP benefits in 2019—less than a 1 percent increase from 2013. About half of households in the Cramer Hill, Centerville, Dudley, Pyne Poynt, and Morgan Village neighborhoods were enrolled in SNAP in 2019. Many of the neighborhoods in northeastern Camden, including Rosedale, Biedeman, and Stockton, had the lowest SNAP enrollment at around 28 percent (see Figure 6).<sup>7</sup>

### SNAP during COVID-19

During the COVID-19 state of emergency, the state increased monthly SNAP benefits for each household by \$95 or 15 percent, whichever was greater. Unfortunately, census tract-level SNAP participation data is not available for 2020 or 2021; however, we know that the number of New Jersey households receiving SNAP benefits increased by 20.8 percent between December 2019–2020. Statewide SNAP participation rose another 13.8 percent between December 2020–2021.<sup>8</sup> Camden County saw a similar increase in its household SNAP participation rate: a 21.9 percent increase between December 2019–2020 and a 12.7 percent

<sup>5</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, New Jersey: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, January 15, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, New Jersey: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, February 27, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "2019 and 2013 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table S2201: Food Stamps/ SNAP," accessed May 2021.

<sup>8</sup> State of New Jersey, Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development, *Current Program Statistics*, December 2021.

increase between December 2020–2021.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the amount of SNAP benefits issued to participating Camden County households increased by over 25 percent between January 2020–2021.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> USDA Food and Nutrition Service, “SNAP Data Tables: Bi-Annual State Project Area/County Level Participation and Issuance Data,” accessed February 2022.

## Economy

This section focuses on Camden’s food industries, as analyzed in the original *Cultivating Camden* report. The callout box below outlines the three-digit subsectors that are classified by the North American Industry Classification System, or NAICS, and featured in the original report. Although some subsectors, such as *Food Manufacturing*, are concentrated in the food industry, other subsectors, like *Truck Transportation*, are more tangential but still play an important role.

### Food Industries

**NAICS 311:** Food Manufacturing industries are those that transform livestock and agricultural products for intermediate or final consumption. These products are then sold to wholesalers or retailers for distribution to consumers.

**NAICS 424:** Merchant Wholesalers, Nondurable Goods sell nondurable goods—items with a normal life expectancy of less than three years—to other businesses. Nondurable goods can include paper and paper products, chemicals and chemical products, drugs, textiles and textile products, apparel, footwear, groceries, farm products, petroleum and petroleum products, alcoholic beverages, books, magazines, newspapers, flowers and nursery stock, and tobacco products.

**NAICS 445:** Food and Beverage Stores sell food and beverages from fixed point-of-sale locations. They often have special equipment (e.g., freezers, refrigerated display cases, refrigerators) for displaying food and beverage goods and have staff trained in food processing.

**NAICS 483:** Water Transportation industries provide water transportation for passengers and cargo using ships, barges, and boats.

**NAICS 484:** Truck Transportation industries provide over-the-road transportation of cargo using motor vehicles, such as trucks and tractor trailers.

**NAICS 493:** Warehousing and Storage industries provide facilities to store general merchandise, refrigerated goods, and other warehouse products. They may also provide logistics services that can include labeling, breaking bulk, inventory control and management, light assembly, order entry and fulfillment, packaging, pick and pack, price marking and ticketing, and transportation arrangement.

**NAICS 722:** Food Services and Drinking Places prepare meals, snacks, and beverages for immediate on-premises and off-premises consumption. Some establishments provide food and drink only, while others provide various combinations of seating space, waiter/waitress services, and incidental amenities, such as limited entertainment.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Industries at a Glance,” accessed May 2021.



## Food Sector Employment

According to the 2018 Census Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD), 32,735 people work in Camden, a 5 percent increase since 2012. The majority of jobs are concentrated in the downtown Camden, Gateway, Lanning Square, and Parkside neighborhoods.<sup>11</sup>

Due to data availability, food-related employment was analyzed at the county level. Within Camden County, 31,703 people worked in one of the selected food industries in 2018. This represents just over 17 percent of Camden County's total employment. Within the food economy, *Food Services and Drinking Places* is the largest employment sector with more than 15,000 employees. The next largest industry is *Food and Beverage Stores*, which has slightly more than 5,000 employees. As shown in Figure 7, five of Camden County's seven food-related industries had an increase in total employment from 2012 to 2018. The *Warehousing and Storage* sector had the 150 percent increase in employment during this period, although it employs a small portion of Camden County's food-related workforce.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 8 on page 10 illustrates employment data from the 2015 National Establishment Time Series. This data provides geographic locations and total employment (indicated by the size of the bubble) for employers within the City of Camden.

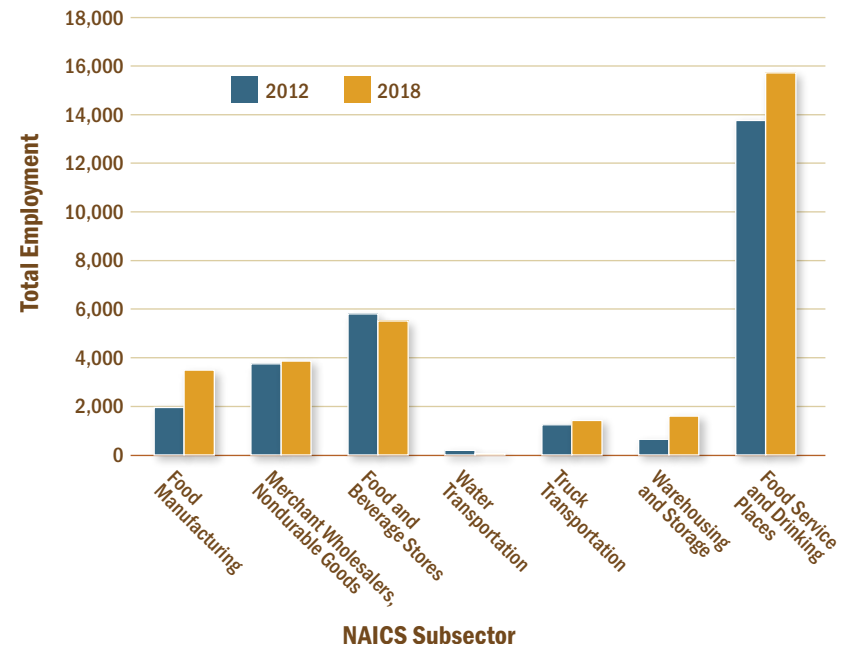
- There were 15 *Food Manufacturing* firms, two of which had at least 200 employees. The top employer is much larger than the second employer, and the remaining firms are all fairly small with fewer than 20 employees.
- *Merchant Wholesalers, Nondurable Goods* had 31 firms. Only three of the firms had at least 10 employees, indicating that small businesses comprise most of this subsector in the city.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics*, "Work Area Profile Analysis: Camden, NJ 2018," accessed May 2021.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *2018 and 2012 County Business Patterns*, accessed September 2020.

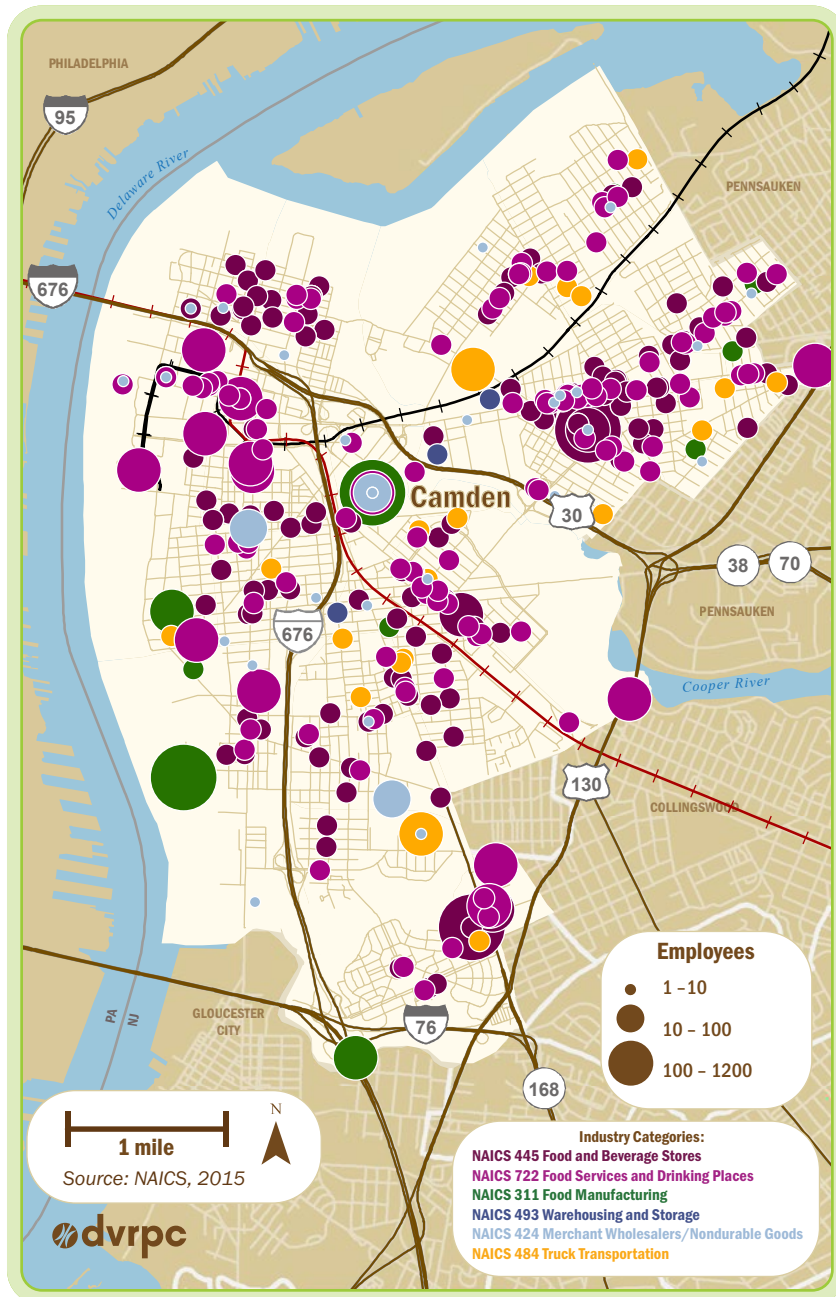
- *Food and Beverage Stores* had 160 firms. Two of them had at least 100 employees. The remaining firms appear to be relatively small and scattered throughout the city, especially along major corridors.
- *Truck Transportation* had 22 firms, only two of which had at least 20 employees, continuing with the trend of mostly small businesses in the city's food industries.
- *Warehousing and Storage* had three firms, all with fewer than 10 employees. Given the growth in this subsector in the county overall from 2012 to 2018, it is evident that this growth occurred elsewhere in the county.
- *Food Services and Drinking Places* had 131 firms. Seventeen of them had at least 10 employees. The firms appear to be clustered along major corridors, especially in the northeastern section of the city.

Figure 7: Total Employment by Food Industry, 2012, 2018



Source: County Business Patterns, 2012, 2018

Figure 8: Food-Related Employers by Industry and Size, 2015



### Location Quotient (LQ)

Location Quotients (LQs) are a way to quantify how concentrated an industry is in a particular area compared to a larger region, such as the state or the nation. The LQ calculation shown in Figure 9 divides the percentage of people employed in a particular industry in a local economy by the percentage of people employed in the same industry in a larger economy. For example, if the *Food Manufacturing* industry accounts for 5 percent of total employment in Camden County and 3 percent of total employment in the United States overall, then it would have an LQ of 1.67. As noted in Figure 9, this analysis assumes that LQ values of 1.25 or higher represent exporter or basic industries. Industries with high LQs are often the industries that an area specializes in and indicate that the area exports goods and services from these industries to other geographic areas. Exports can help drive economic growth as they bring outside money into the local economy. Exporting or competitive industries may present opportunities for further economic growth because they typically already have the labor force, transportation network, and supplies.

Figure 9: Location Quotient Calculation

Calculation	Value	Implication
$LQ = \frac{\left( \frac{\text{Local Industry Employment}}{\text{Local Total Employment}} \right)}{\left( \frac{\text{Broad Region Industry Employment}}{\text{Broad Region Total Employment}} \right)}$	LQ ≥ 1.25	Area industry has potential to be classified as exporter (basic industry).
	LQ < 1.25 and > 0.90	Area has about the same number of workers employed in a specific industry as the larger comparison area.
	LQ ≤ 0.90	Local industry has fewer employees than comparison region. May indicate opportunity to develop businesses in the local area.



There are two food industries in Camden County that have an LQ of 1.25 or higher: *Food Manufacturing* (1.65) and *Food and Beverage Stores* (1.25). The latter stands out because, along with *Food Services and Drinking Places*, it is focused on serving the local population and LQs for local-serving subsectors tend to hover somewhere around 1.0.

Three industries had increases in their LQs between 2012 and 2018: *Food Manufacturing* (+0.73), *Warehousing and Storage* (+0.60), and *Truck Transportation* (+0.03). This indicates that these industries grew more in Camden County relative to the same industries nationwide. Some industries experienced the inverse, such as *Water Transportation*, which experienced a substantial decrease in LQ (-0.84). See Table 1 for more information.

**Table 1: Change in Food Industry Location Quotients in Camden County**

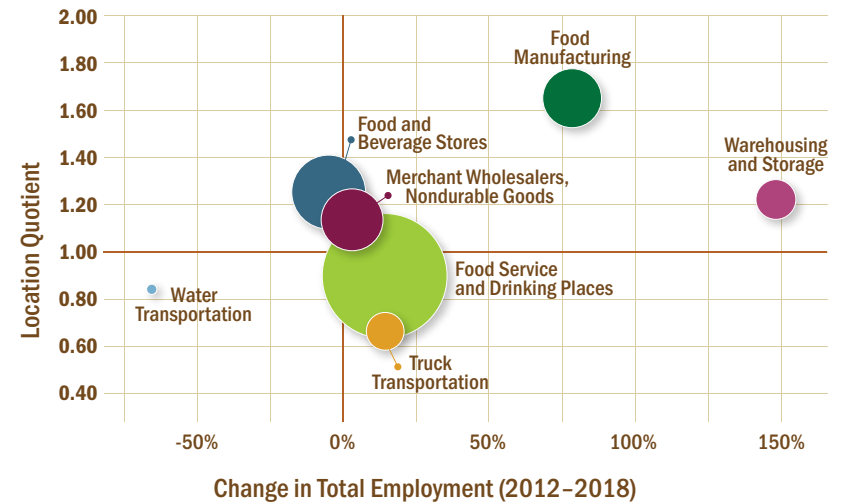
NAICS	Description	2012	2018	Change
311	Food Manufacturing	0.92	1.65	0.73
424	Merchant Wholesalers, Nondurable Goods	1.16	1.14	-0.03
445	Food and Beverage Stores	1.39	1.25	-0.14
483	Water Transportation	1.69	0.84	-0.84
484	Truck Transportation	0.64	0.66	0.03
493	Warehousing and Storage	0.62	1.22	0.60
722	Food Services and Drinking Places	0.95	0.90	-0.05

Source: County Business Patterns, 2012, 2018

Figure 10 provides a dynamic look at Camden County's food industries. The horizontal axis is the change in total employment from 2012 to 2018, while the vertical axis represents the industry's LQ. The size of the bubble is proportionate to the number of employees that the industry has in

Camden County. *Food Manufacturing* and *Warehousing and Storage* stand out because of their growth from 2012 to 2018. *Warehousing and Storage* grew nearly 150 percent, while *Food Manufacturing* grew by more than 75 percent. *Food Manufacturing* also stands out based on its LQ, as none of the other industries are above the 1.50 mark. Lastly, *Food Services and Drinking Places* stands out given how much larger it is than the other industries. Conversely, this also shows the relatively small size of the *Water Transportation* and *Truck Transportation* industries within Camden County.

**Figure 10: Change in Food Industry Total Employment and LQ (2012-2018)**



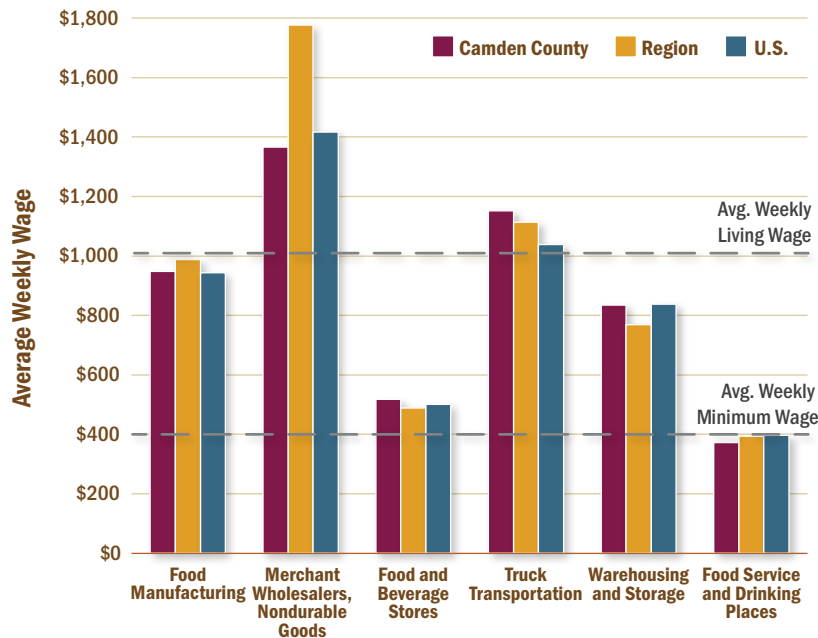
Source: County Business Patterns, 2012, 2018

### Food Sector Wages

Figure 11 on page 12 shows the average weekly wages across the various food industries using the Bureau of Labor Statistics Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) 2019 data. These wages assume a 40-hour work week for a single individual. Average wages are shown at the county, regional, and national level. For context, wages are compared to the state minimum wage (set at \$10/hour to match the 2019

data) and the living wage for Camden County for a two-parent household with one child.<sup>13</sup> The living wage factors in expenses like rent, food, and healthcare, yielding a comprehensive analysis of the income needed to provide for a household.

**Figure 11: Average Wages by Food Industry, 2019**



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics QCEW, 2019

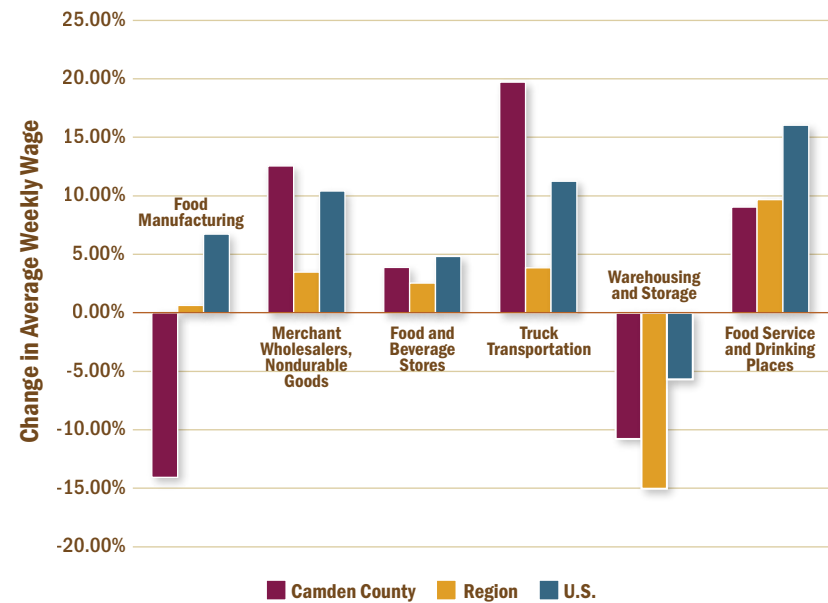
The *Merchant Wholesalers, Nondurable Goods* industry has the highest average wage among Camden County’s food industries at \$1,366 per week. Although this is the highest average wage among the selected food industries, it is lower than the region (\$1,776) and the U.S. (\$1,416). The *Truck Transportation* industry has the next highest average wage at \$1,152, which is higher than both the regional (\$1,114) and U.S. (\$1,039)

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Amy K. Glasmeier, *Living Wage Calculation for Camden County, New Jersey* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2021).

averages. Additionally, these are the only two industries of the group with average wages that are higher than the living wage for Camden County. The two lowest average wages, *Food and Beverage Stores* (\$518) and *Food Services and Drinking Places* (\$372), are half of the living wage of \$1,009 per week.

As shown in Figure 12, four of the food industries in Camden County saw an increase in average weekly wages from 2012 to 2019. Two of them (*Merchant Wholesalers, Nondurable Goods* and *Truck Transportation*) outperformed both the region and U.S. overall. The *Merchant Wholesalers, Nondurable Goods* industry had an increase in average weekly wages of 13 percent, while the *Truck Transportation* industry saw an increase of 20 percent. Conversely, the average weekly wage decreased in two of the food industries in Camden County. *Food Manufacturing’s* average wage decreased by 14 percent, and *Warehousing and Storage’s* average wage decreased by 11 percent.

**Figure 12: Change in Average Weekly Wages by Food Industry, 2019**



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics QCEW, 2019



### In Summary

Taken together, the data paints a complicated picture of both the city and county's food economy. Some industries are competitive and/or growing but may not pay a living wage or represent a very small percentage of jobs in Camden County. For example, the two industries with higher LQs and larger growth in total employment (*Food Manufacturing and Warehousing and Storage*) experienced decreases in their average weekly wages

between 2012 and 2019. Other industries offer better compensation but employ a relatively small number of people, presenting fewer workforce opportunities. Many of the city's food industries are small enough that one business opening or closing can have a significant effect on the local food economy. More research is needed to better understand what is driving the changes and what can be done to support more businesses and family-sustaining jobs within the city's food economy.



**Junior Supermarket**  
Source: Mel Epps for The Food Trust





**Virtua Mobile Farmers Market**

Source: DMH Photography, Virtua Health



## Recommendations

### Status Report and Barriers to Implementation

As noted in the Introduction, *Cultivating Camden* proposed 33 recommendations over four implementer groups: Institutions, Government, Community Organizations, and Economic Development Organizations. The recommendations included a range of actions that stakeholders could take—from policy reforms to the expansion of existing initiatives to new programs and partnerships. Although the plan was published just over five years ago, many organizations and stakeholders across Camden have worked to implement recommendations that align with their missions. The following section provides an overview of the status of each recommendation, highlights efforts underway to improve Camden’s food system and food economy, and identifies some of the barriers to implementation. DVRPC reviewed news articles, surveyed members of the Camden FAWG, corresponded directly with individual organizations, and used staff knowledge of Camden food system efforts to better understand the status of the recommendations.

### Institutions

A 2013 report by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defined anchor institutions as “long-standing and deeply-rooted community organizations that often are the largest contributors to their communities’ continued economic stability and strength.”<sup>14</sup> As major employers and purchasers of goods (including food), anchor institutions can be significant economic drivers in their communities and local food system. Additionally, anchor institutions have often made considerable physical investments in a place and tend to remain where they are, even as conditions change around them. This rootedness means that anchor institutions tend to have

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of University Partnerships. *Building Resiliency: The Role of Anchor Institutions in Sustaining Community Economic Development*, [www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/oup/AnchorInstitutions.html](http://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/oup/AnchorInstitutions.html), February 2013.

an economic interest, in addition to a social and moral interest, in investing in and improving the wellbeing of their community.

Camden is home to many anchor institutions, including healthcare systems like Cooper University Healthcare and Virtua Health System, higher education institutions like Rutgers University-Camden and Cooper Medical School of Rowan University, private employers like Campbell Soup Company, cultural organizations like the Adventure Aquarium, and community organizations like the Salvation Army Kroc Center.

*Cultivating Camden* proposed six recommendations for Institutions, as seen in Table 2 on page 16. Although none of the recommendations have been completed, about half have moved forward in some capacity. Additionally, when asked which of these recommendations should be the top priority now, stakeholders responded with I.1, I.2, and I.3. More information on the recommendations and various programs working to implement them can be found below.

### Recommendations in Action

#### Food Bucks Rx (FBRx) in Camden (I.1)

There are several produce prescription (or “Food Bucks Rx”) programs active in Camden, managed by The Food Trust and several healthcare partners. The Food Trust launched one of their first pilots in 2018 in partnership with the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers (Camden Coalition), Cooper Pediatrics, and Fayer’s Market, with funding from Campbell Soup Company and the USDA. In this program, Cooper Pediatrics healthcare providers screened families for food needs during a child’s regular check-up appointment. If the screening identified a need, social workers would provide families with food resource information like the location of food pantries. Families who were already enrolled in SNAP also received FBRx vouchers that they could redeem for fresh fruits and vegetables at Fayer’s Market or at the seasonal Virtua Farmers Market. In 2020, thanks to expansion of the USDA Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program, families with children enrolled in Medicaid plans

Table 2: Status of Institution Recommendations

Recommendations			Status
 <p><b>INSTITUTIONS</b></p>  <p>Already Completed</p>  <p>In Progress</p>  <p>Still Relevant but Not Yet Started</p>  <p>Not Completed but No Longer Relevant</p>	I.1	Implement FreshRx programs with vouchers for healthy food and integrate nutrition education at each hospital in Camden.	
	I.2	Increase regional food purchasing by creating a Regional Purchasing Organization (RPO) and working with international food vendors and management companies.	
	I.3	Encourage further collaboration on food-system-related research between nonprofits, hospitals, universities, and schools to expand the evidence base for food-related programming.	
	I.4	Recapitalize the Camden Food Innovation Fund, a collaborative grant-making fund at the Community Foundation of South Jersey.	
	I.5	Launch a Fresh Carts Initiative that partners with local institutions, such as hospitals, to increase access to healthy foods and support local food entrepreneurs.	
	I.6	Better utilize 2-1-1 to coordinate emergency food programs.	





**Taste test at the Parkside Learning Garden.**

Source: Jonathan Wetstein, *Parkside Business and Community in Partnership*

became eligible to receive FBRx as well. As of May 2021, Cooper families have redeemed over \$6,500 in FBRx for fresh produce.

Virtua Health’s Food as Medicine program is another produce prescription program in Camden. Virtua healthcare providers can refer patients that have been diagnosed with a diet-related chronic disease and are experiencing food insecurity to the Eat Well Food Farmacy program. The program provides nutrition education, social support services, and access to free produce and nonperishable groceries at Virtua’s Mount Holly and Camden locations. Virtua Health is now also providing FBRx to patients, which complements its other wrap-around services (more information follows).

The Roots to Prevention Partnership (RTP) Camden—a cross-sector group of food system organizations, healthcare providers, community organizations, educational institutions, and local governments—is also working to expand produce prescription programs throughout the city. RTP

Camden was one of 18 collaborations nationwide that received a 2019 BUILD Health Challenge® grant. With matching funds from Virtua Health and Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey, RTP Camden is working to increase income opportunities for urban farmers and healthy food choices for residents in Camden. They are doing this by:

- convening an Advisory Board of Camden residents to help guide RTP Camden programs and decisions;
- expanding the FBRx program to additional healthcare providers and adding redemption sites across Camden, such as healthy corner stores and Virtua’s Eat Well Mobile Farmers Market and Mobile Grocery Store;
- expanding access to wrap-around supports and social services that promote healthy lifestyles;
- administering free for-profit garden training, food safety, cooking, and nutrition workshops online; and
- supplementing Virtua Health’s Food Access Programs with fresh produce grown by Camden residents.

Between July 2020 and July 2021, RTP Camden partner organizations distributed FBRx vouchers to approximately 200 patients through different pilot programs, with over \$5,500 redeemed. Virtua Health is distributing FBRx to Food Farmacy participants, and the Camden Coalition is distributing FBRx to patients who identify as food insecure at participating Accountable Health Communities screening sites. The Food Trust also onboarded seven additional corner stores as FBRx redemption partners, bringing the total number of mobile stop and corner store redemption sites in Camden to 15, offering residents more convenient options to use FBRx to buy fresh fruits and vegetables.

In addition to expanding FBRx programs in Camden, RTP Camden has also brought together nonprofits, hospitals, universities, and government agencies to expand the evidence base for food-related programming. Faculty from Rowan University’s Health and Exercise Sciences Department are leading the data collection and analysis component of the RTP

Camden work. Working with Virtua and the Camden Coalition, they will evaluate the program’s impact on both FBRx recipients and Camden growers.

#### **Camden Food System Funding (I.4)**

The Camden Food Innovation Fund was a collaborative grantmaking effort spearheaded by the Community Foundation of South Jersey and supported by Campbell Soup Company, Wells Fargo Regional Community Development Corporation, TD Charitable Foundation, Subaru of America, and DVRPC to seed innovative projects that created economic opportunity and fostered healthy eating habits in Camden. The Food Innovation Fund awarded \$132,500 dollars to five organizations over two years. Although the Food Innovation Fund has not been recapitalized since 2016, there is still a need in Camden’s food system for more and flexible funding, especially given the increased demand for emergency food and the financial strain small businesses experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Camden Community Food Fund is a new \$3.5 million initiative through which Camden residents will set priorities that drive investments in local food businesses and initiatives to address community health, food access and racial equity. Partners see Camden’s food entrepreneurs as an engine of a more equitable future—one that supports greater economic opportunity and resilience. The Community Board established in 2022 will be comprised of a majority of Camden residents working alongside Camden institutions, and will set the fund’s vision and investment priorities. The fund will raise and curate debt and grant capital with the relationships, policy, and technical assistance resources necessary to fully support the vision of the Community Board. Development of the new fund is being led by the Community Foundation of South Jersey and more than a dozen local partners with startup support from Campbell Soup Foundation and national nonprofit Fair Food Network, which brings experience in place-based community-first investment collaboratives.

#### **My Resource Pal (I.6)**

The Camden Coalition developed and launched My Resource Pal in 2016 as a way to connect South Jersey residents with free or reduced-cost social services in the area. Formerly known as My Camden Resources, My Resource Pal is a free, web-based database of direct services and programs with step-by-step instructions for how to access them. It has information on over 2,400 programs in the City of Camden, including resources for food access, housing, transportation, childcare, legal aid, and more. Residents and service providers can use My Resource Pal to find and connect to services and, depending on the organization, even make referrals or schedule appointments. Although the recommendation in *Cultivating Camden* specifically referenced 2-1-1 as the vehicle for coordinating emergency food programs, My Resource Pal provides that functionality. Multiple healthcare and social service providers throughout the South Jersey and Philadelphia regions are adopting My Resource Pal as a tool to help connect individuals to community-based resources. Both Virtua Health and Cooper Healthcare have incorporated a version of My Resource Pal (under a different name) into their electronic medical records system, which allows providers to track their referrals and get feedback from service providers. My Resource Pal will continue to become a more powerful resource for residents and service providers as more and more organizations use it to connect people to existing resources.













#### **Government**

Government plays an important part in supporting a healthy and equitable food system in Camden. Various government agencies have the authority to enact policies, develop infrastructure, and implement programs that can promote access to healthy and affordable food and grow the food economy. This starts with the city but also extends to the county, the region, and to the state.

*Cultivating Camden* proposed nine recommendations related to governmental agencies, as seen in Table 3. One of the recommendations—”Create a prioritized land inventory to identify existing and potential



**Table 3: Status of Government Recommendations**

		Recommendations	Status
 <p><b>GOVERNMENT</b></p>  <p>Already Completed</p>  <p>In Progress</p>  <p>Still Relevant but Not Yet Started</p>  <p>Not Completed but No Longer Relevant</p>	G.1	Work with alternative models of grocery stores to locate in Camden City at prime or transit-accessible spots, such as near the universities or at the redesigned Rand Transportation Center.	
	G.2	Ensure that all Camden neighborhoods have transit access to the PriceRite, Aldi, and the proposed ShopRite.	
	G.3	Develop a lease-to-own option for community gardens and urban farms to purchase land, allowing gardeners and farmers to make long-term investments.	
	G.4	Adopt agricultural zoning and create an urban farm zone.	
	G.5	Require native plants grown locally in green infrastructure initiatives and landscaping ordinances.	
	G.6	Create a prioritized land inventory to identify existing and potential community gardens and urban farms.	
	G.7	Create a land assembly strategy to accommodate a business requiring 10 or more acres of land for redevelopment to attract light manufacturing and warehousing.	
	G.8	Streamline the licensing and permitting process for new food businesses to reduce the cost of doing business in Camden City.	
	G.9	Participate in a state food policy council; encourage the creation of a state food policy council and advocate for issues affecting Camden residents, businesses, and institutions.	

community gardens and urban farms”—was partially completed as part of the *Urban Agriculture Feasibility Study for the City of Camden*. However, stakeholders noted that the majority of the recommendations were not completed, but still relevant. Additionally, when asked which of these recommendations should be the top priority now, stakeholders favored G.1 and G.2. More information on the recommendations and various programs working to implement them can be found in Table 3.

### Recommendations in Action

#### Urban Agriculture Feasibility Study for the City of Camden (G.6)

In 2018, Camden Community Partnership (CCP), formerly Cooper’s Ferry Partnership, joined with the Rutgers University Office of Urban Extension and Engagement to undertake a feasibility study of urban agriculture in Camden. As part of this study, Rutgers University staff and students conducted a land inventory to identify, assess, and prioritize suitable parcels. Due to the abundance of vacant properties in Camden, the study team established the following criteria to guide their inventory. They focused their efforts on:

1. city-owned properties;
2. areas experiencing less development pressure; and
3. large, single lots, or multiple contiguous parcels that could be joined.

The study team mapped over 90 sites across five Camden neighborhoods—Cooper’s Poynt, Pyne Point, Cramer Hill, Biedemann, and Morgan Village. From the 90 sites, the team identified seven with the potential to support urban agriculture. More information, including a summary of the land assessment survey and maps of the surveyed and priority sites, can be found in the *Urban Agriculture Feasibility Study*.

#### Virtua Health’s Eat Well Mobile Farmers Market and Mobile Grocery Store (G.1)

Although no new brick and mortar grocery stores opened in Camden in recent years, Virtua Health’s Eat Well Initiative launched two mobile food retail options. Started in the spring of 2017, the Mobile Farmers Market is a traveling produce stand that sells fruits and vegetables at eight locations



**Virtua Health’s Eat Well Mobile Grocery Store**

Source: DMH Photography, Virtua Health

throughout Burlington and Camden counties, including five locations in the city of Camden. The Mobile Farmers Market is housed in a 23-foot bus and features significantly subsidized produce, which Virtua obtains through a partnership with Whole Foods Markets. The market offers seasonal produce through a partnership with Free Haven Educational Farms in Lawnside, New Jersey. Customers pay a fixed amount to fill up either a small bag (\$3 for six items) or large bag (\$9 for 20 items).<sup>15</sup> The market also provides a 50 percent discount to customers who use their SNAP/ Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card, making its produce more accessible to a wider range of customers. Finally, the market works with registered dietitians to provide health education and nutrition education to ultimately reduce chronic disease and food insecurity.

Since it was launched, the Mobile Farmers Market has distributed over 250,000 pounds of fresh produce. Additionally, to help meet the needs

<sup>15</sup> Pricing and locations accurate as of May 27, 2021.

of individuals experiencing food insecurity as a result of the pandemic, Virtua temporarily converted the Mobile Farmers Market into a mobile food pantry, distributing over 16,500 bags of free food and supplies between mid-March and mid-August of 2020.

In the fall of 2020, Virtua Health introduced the Eat Well Mobile Grocery Store. Virtua converted a decommissioned city bus, which was generously donated by New Jersey Transit, into a year-round store-on-wheels. This 40-foot mobile store offers access to fresh fruits, vegetables, bread, milk, eggs, rice, meat, and more at seven locations across Camden and Burlington counties, including three sites in the city of Camden. The Mobile Grocery Store offers its products for at least 20 percent below retail prices, and since its inception, has had over 1,500 transactions. On average, nearly 35 percent of gross sales are SNAP/EBT transactions.

### **Community Organizations**

Nonprofit organizations, especially community-based organizations, are an integral part of Camden's community and economy. They support Camden residents by providing a wide range of services, including healthcare, workforce training, education, arts and cultural activities, after-school programs, and emergency food assistance. Within Camden's food system and food economy, community organizations have been the driving force behind many of the programs implemented and changes seen in the past five years. For example, The Food Trust has continued to build a network of healthy corner stores across the city—from five stores in 2011 to 39 stores in 2015 to 44 stores in 2020. VietLead, a grassroots community organization serving the Vietnamese and Southeast Asian communities in Philadelphia and South Jersey, has grown dramatically since it was founded in 2015. It now offers a number of programs, including intergenerational farming, youth organizing, health navigation and healing, and civic engagement. Through its Resilient Roots Farm, located in East Camden, VietLead offers internships to about a dozen students and supports local families struggling with food insecurity through their Mutual Aid Food Bag program. Parkside Business and Community in Partnership

(PBCIP), a community development corporation focused on improving the quality of life for Parkside residents, provides neighborhood residents with the education and resources they need to begin growing their own food. More recently, PBCIP expanded their food access work, spearheading the RTP Camden collaborative mentioned on page 17.

*Cultivating Camden* proposed eight recommendations related to community organizations, as seen in Table 4 on page 22. About half of the recommendations are in progress, and the remaining half are still relevant but not yet started. One recommendation—"Create a community food resources guide to connect Camden residents to existing food resources"—has been completed, although in a different format than initially envisioned. *Cultivating Camden* called for both digital and print versions of neighborhood-level food resource guides, and My Resource Pal, which was described in more detail on page 18, offers even more functionality than initially envisioned in a digital-only version by providing up-to-date information on a wide range of services. Additionally, *Cultivating Camden* recommended that partners continue to expand the Virtual Supermarket program; however, with the expansion of grocery delivery services during the COVID-19 pandemic, this recommendation is no longer relevant. As of May 2020, New Jersey residents enrolled in the SNAP program can use their electronic benefit transfer card to purchase groceries online at a variety of grocery stores, including Amazon, Walmart, ShopRite, and the Fresh Grocer. Although SNAP benefits cannot be used to pay for delivery fees, stakeholders noted that the delivery fee is often less than the cost of transportation, making grocery delivery a valuable and viable alternative. Finally, stakeholders noted that recommendations C.2 and C.3 should be the top priorities moving forward. More information on the recommendations and various programs working to implement them can be found on the following pages.



**Table 4: Status of Community Organization Recommendations**

Recommendations			Status
 <p><b>COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS</b></p>  <p>Already Completed</p>  <p>In Progress</p>  <p>Still Relevant but Not Yet Started</p>  <p>Not Completed but No Longer Relevant</p>	C.1	Create a community gardeners' cooperative to distribute surplus food and sell food at rotating farmers' markets.	
	C.2	Create a community food resources guide to connect Camden residents to existing food resources.	
	C.3	Co-locate activities and coordinate times to increase access to food resources.	
	C.4	Coordinate and expand nutrition education programs to build healthy eating and household budgeting habits.	
	C.5	Establish a commercial-scale urban farm that balances the needs for job training, nutrition education, and for-profit food production.	
	C.6	Identify and preserve long-standing and iconic community gardens that are not permanently protected.	
	C.7	Expand the Virtual Supermarket program.	
	C.8	Grow the next generation of gardeners by fostering intergenerational gardening programs.	

## Recommendations in Action

### KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy (C.3)

KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy is a family of KIPP schools in Camden that includes one elementary school, two middle schools, and one high school. KIPP partners with a variety of community organizations to provide their students and families with many supportive services in a convenient location—their child’s school. For example, KIPP’s Lanning Square campus is home to the Cooper Health Center, a full-service Cooper Pediatrics office that is open eight hours per day, year-round. The office offers comprehensive medical and dental care to KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy and Center for Family Services students at no cost. Launched in September 2018, the Cooper Health Center at KIPP saw nearly 500 students and 900 total visits in its first year.<sup>16</sup> KIPP also serves as a distribution location for the Camden Promise Neighborhood’s Hope Mobile, a monthly food distribution program in partnership with Center for Family Services and the Food Bank of South Jersey (FBSJ). Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, KIPP partnered with ModivCare (formerly Logisticare), Food Corps, and FBSJ to provide families with a weekly grocery box delivery. KIPP Lanning Square also offered COVID testing and vaccination clinics at various times throughout the pandemic.

### Urban Agriculture Feasibility Study (C.5)

Although no individual or organization has established a commercial farm in Camden yet, the *Urban Agriculture Feasibility Study for the City of Camden* mentioned on page 20 includes financial feasibility analyses for two types of urban farming operations: a soil-based farm and a hydroponic farm. The study notes that both models present a number of challenges, with hydroponic farming requiring substantial upfront costs and the more traditional, soil-based model having shorter growing seasons

<sup>16</sup> Evelyne, Kane, Aaron Truchil, Candice Dias, et al., “Camden Promise Neighborhood’s School Based Health Center Fosters Health and Learning,” *Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers*, February 8, 2021, [camdenhealth.org/camden-promise-neighborhoods-school-based-health-center-fosters-health-and-learning/](https://camdenhealth.org/camden-promise-neighborhoods-school-based-health-center-fosters-health-and-learning/)



**Students farming at the Resilient Roots Farm in Camden.**

Source: Long Luu, VietLead

and lower yields.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the study suggests that both types of operations would face significant funding and policy barriers, making commercial urban agriculture in Camden a very challenging proposition. However, the study notes that a more community-focused urban farming model may be possible given the correct policy and economic conditions and supports.

## Economic Development Organizations

Engaging Local Government Leaders—a local government member organization—defines an economic development organization as “an entity that works to enhance the prosperity of the communities it serves. This work is different for each community, and can include attracting new companies, helping existing companies grow, or assisting entrepreneurs

<sup>17</sup> Meredith Taylor, David Tulloch, Laura Lawson, et al., *Urban Agriculture Feasibility Study for the City of Camden*, (Rutgers University Office of Urban Extension and Engagement, submitted to Cooper’s Ferry Partnership, July 2, 2019).





**Staff conduct an outdoor Heart Smarts lesson in the City of Camden.**

Source: Emma Freedman, *The Food Trust*

with their businesses.”<sup>18</sup> Within Camden, a number of organizations, including government agencies, business development centers, and community-based nonprofits, have worked for years to improve economic outcomes for Camden residents and businesses. At the statewide level, the New Jersey Economic Development Agency provides financing and tax incentives to encourage businesses, nonprofits, and developers to locate and grow in New Jersey. At the city and county levels, local governments can support economic development by creating a business-friendly climate through less restrictive regulations and tax policies. Additionally, as a major land owner, the city can use its land to help subsidize new development. Camden Community Partnership (CCP) is a nonprofit organization that works to attract new businesses and residents to Camden through a number of initiatives, such as managing infrastructure investments; restoring and activating parks; and promoting Camden as a vibrant place to live, work, and play. Other local economic development organizations like the Latin American Economic Development Association;

<sup>18</sup> Anna Marcum, “A Guide to Working With Economic Development Organizations,” *Engaging Local Government Leaders*, February 8, 2019, [elgl.org/a-guide-to-working-with-economic-development-organizations-2/](http://elgl.org/a-guide-to-working-with-economic-development-organizations-2/).

Rutgers-Camden Technology Campus, Inc.; and the New Jersey Small Business Development Center at Rutgers-Camden help entrepreneurs and small businesses start and grow their companies by providing technical assistance, access to capital, subsidized office space, and promotional events. Finally, organizations like the Camden County Workforce Development Board, Center for Family Services, Hopeworks, and many others provide workforce development training and resources to allow Camden residents to participate in Camden’s growing economy.

*Cultivating Camden* proposed 10 recommendations related to economic development organizations, as seen in Table 5. About a third of the recommendations are in progress, a third are still relevant but not yet started, and a third are not completed but no longer relevant. Stakeholders noted that recommendation E.2 should be a top priority moving forward. Stakeholders also expressed some interest in recommendations E.3 and E.8, both of which are intended to provide local entrepreneurs with the space and resources needed to start or scale a food business. More information on the recommendations and various programs working to implement them can be found below.

### Recommendations in Action

#### Heart Smarts Program (E.1)

The Food Trust launched the Heart Smarts Program in 2014, providing nutrition education and Heart Bucks—vouchers redeemable for heart-healthy food—at 10 healthy corner stores across Camden. In the first year, The Food Trust distributed approximately \$3,000 worth of Heart Bucks to 750 people, with a redemption rate of about 85 percent. The Food Trust has continued to provide Heart Smarts programming throughout the city, distributing over \$10,740 worth of Heart Bucks to 1,963 people from August 2020 through July 2021. Additionally, the program has seen redemption rates of about 99 percent in recent years.

The Food Trust has continued to grow Heart Smarts, partnering with the Camden County Health Department to offer health screenings in

**Table 5: Status of Economic Development Organization Recommendations**

		Recommendations	Status
 <p><b>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS</b></p>  <p>Already Completed</p>  <p>In Progress</p>  <p>Still Relevant but Not Yet Started</p>  <p>Not Completed but No Longer Relevant</p>	E.1	Expand the Heart Bucks Program for healthy purchases in Camden’s Corner Stores.	
	E.2	Further invest in existing culinary arts training programs, such as Cathedral Kitchen and Respond, Inc., and investigate the possibility of securing additional meal contracts.	
	E.3	Expand the Rutgers Food Innovation Center by creating a satellite location in Camden that caters to the needs of low-income and minority entrepreneurs.	
	E.4	Encourage Campbell Soup Company to create a “Food Innovation District” and attract other food-related businesses to the Gateway Office Park.	
	E.5	Create a social media training program to highlight neighborhood businesses.	
	E.6	Create a small business and nonprofit circuit rider position in which a new staff person assists nonprofits and businesses by professionalizing services, updating management systems, updating websites and social media, and creating up-to-date marketing materials.	
	E.7	Create a Camden entrepreneur fair or meet-up.	
	E.8	Create a network of underutilized commercial kitchens that can be rented out by entrepreneurs.	
	E.9	Continue “pop-up” activities like Camden Night Gardens that celebrate Camden residents, support local businesses, and make Camden a destination for nearby visitors.	
	E.10	Create a pedal-powered food distribution program.	



conjunction with Heart Smarts programming. Additionally, in 2019, the New Jersey Department of Health approved Heart Smarts programming as SNAP-Ed eligible activities, which means that SNAP-Ed educators can use the Heart Smarts programming in their classes as well.

Finally, The Food Trust nutrition educators continued to provide Heart Smarts programming throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, both virtually through a series of nine nutrition education videos online and through weekly, in-person, outdoor, nutrition education events at 11 corner stores.

### Camden Food Security Collective (E.2, C.3)

The Camden Food Security Collective (official name to be determined) is a newly formed coalition of organizations and individuals working to increase food security in Camden. The group grew out of the Campbell’s Healthy Communities (CHC) program, a 10-year, \$10 million effort to measurably improve the health of young people in Camden by reducing childhood obesity and hunger. The CHC program, which followed a collective impact framework, focused on four strategic areas: food access, physical activity, nutrition education, and public will. By the end of Year 9, the CHC had created the largest citywide network of healthy corner stores in New Jersey; launched a citywide after-school sports program (Soccer for Success); added salad bars, monthly food tastings, and healthy menu changes across the three Camden KIPP Schools; and incorporated food insecurity screenings into hospital intake processes.

As the Campbell Soup Company program was approaching its conclusion, many of the partners, including Campbell, discussed various ways to continue the work under new leadership. The Camden Coalition and FBSJ stepped up to serve as the co-backbone organizations of a new collective. Between the spring of 2020 and the spring of 2021, the Camden Coalition and FBSJ conducted key stakeholder interviews, identified and engaged new partners, and led a number of focused meetings to develop a collective agenda. Through the series of conversations with stakeholders and residents, the group identified a common agenda of increasing food

**Figure 13: Camden Food Security Collective’s Proposed Collective Impact Agenda**



Source: Whitney Buchmann, Illustra Impact, Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers

security and equity in Camden by co-locating community resources, increasing residents’ financial security, and transforming the local food economy (see Figure 13). The common agenda’s strong focus on the economic side of food access acknowledges how important systemic and upstream factors are to food security. This focus, combined with some of the proposed strategies to achieve the common agenda, align with many of the recommendations in *Cultivating Camden*, as they seek to find ways to support food entrepreneurs and provide workforce development opportunities within the food system.

### Barriers to Implementation

Two of the recommendations in *Cultivating Camden* have been completed in the past five years, with another nine underway. Many of

the recommendations that are marked as in progress are related to very successful programs that have made great strides and continue to grow. They are ongoing efforts that were never intended to be done only once. For example, CCP has hosted four additional Camden Night Garden festivals since *Cultivating Camden* was published, with over 7,000 people attending the 2019 event (2020's event was canceled due to COVID-19). CCP has also grown their slate of public events to include Camden Jam, I Bike Camden, I Paddle Camden, I Walk Camden, outdoor movies, fitness classes, concerts, and more. Although these events fulfill the goal of recommendation E.9: *Continue "pop-up" activities like Camden Night Gardens that celebrate Camden residents, support local businesses, and make Camden a destination for nearby visitors*, it is marked as in progress because it is an ongoing effort that continues to benefit Camden's food economy with each event.



**Harvesting bitter melon at Resilient Roots Farm in Camden.**  
Source: Resilient Roots, VietLead

Although one-third of the recommendations in *Cultivating Camden* have moved forward, over half of the recommendations are noted as still relevant but not yet started. Why have these recommendations not progressed? What are the barriers to implementing programs that would achieve the goals behind the recommendations? DVRPC asked key stakeholders these questions to get a better understanding of the challenges they faced in starting and maintaining successful programs. Some of the commonly cited barriers are outlined below.

- **Sufficient and sustained funding** continues to be a challenge as most of the funding for food access-related programs is grant dependent.
- **Standardized data collection** remains an issue for most social needs-related data, including food access. Multiple agencies collect data in different ways, which makes it challenging to establish a baseline understanding of the problem and measure impact.
- **Lack of lead implementers:** Many of the recommendations in *Cultivating Camden* listed a number of possible lead implementers; however, none of the organizations had mandates to implement the recommendations. The recommendations that tended to move forward were ones that already had strong champions or built upon existing programs.
- **Subsidized food can undermine local food businesses** by reducing the demand for full-price food. There is a tension between providing free or subsidized food and supporting local food producers and retailers. How do we balance the need for emergency and reduced-cost food with the need for local food businesses to make money?
- **Governmental support and coordination** at all levels is necessary to see larger, systemic changes within Camden's food system and food economy. This includes a variety of actions, from adopting agricultural zoning at the municipal level to working with New Jersey Transit to create new bus routes to grocery stores to improving the SNAP and/or Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) application processes at the state and county levels.





Parkside Learning Garden  
Source: Jonathan Wetstein, PBCIP



## New Studies and Initiatives

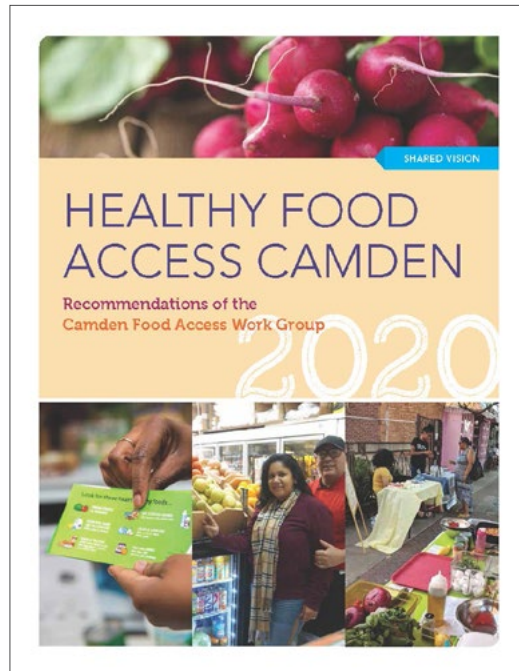
Since DVRPC published *Cultivating Camden* in 2015, a number of organizations have released new studies, undertaken new initiatives, received new funding, or formed new collectives to improve Camden’s food system. Some of these efforts are profiled below.

### Camden Food Access Work Group (FAWG) and Recommendations

The Camden FAWG was a collective of nonprofit organizations, government agencies, healthcare providers, farmers, and philanthropic partners working to improve access to healthy food in Camden. The Food Trust, with support from the CHC Program, convened the FAWG nine times between March 2019 and February 2021. The group discussed the ongoing challenges to improving food security in Camden and developed actionable strategies that they could work together to address. In November 2020,

The Food Trust published [Healthy Food Access Camden: Recommendations of the Camden Food Access Work Group](#),

which features 12 recommendations related to nutrition incentives, healthy corner stores, and farmers’ markets and farms. As the report notes, each strategy is “tailored to the unique challenges experienced by different stakeholders, including the barriers corner store owners face



**Healthy Food Access Camden report**  
Source: The Food Trust

running and stocking their businesses with healthy food, the high cost of purchasing healthy food experienced by people with low incomes, and the need among local farmers for better access to outlets to sell their food.”<sup>19</sup>

With the formation of the Camden Food Security Collective in 2021, The Food Trust decided to merge the FAWG with the larger collective with the hope that the new structure would serve as a strong venue to continue moving the FAWG’s efforts forward.

As noted in the Introduction, the FAWG also served in an advisory capacity for this report, providing insight on the status of various recommendations, new initiatives, and priorities moving forward.

### Camden Health Element

The [Camden Health Element](#) is the result of a multi-year effort to create a planning document that prioritizes health for all Camden residents as the city continues to grow and develop. DVRPC, which led the project in partnership with the City of Camden, convened a project Advisory Committee with over 30 stakeholders and engaged hundreds of community members at several neighborhood events to collaboratively develop a vision for a healthy Camden, identify areas of concern, and generate recommendations for improving public health through policy and planning-based tools. The resulting document, the *Camden Health Element*, is organized across seven domains—Healthy Food Access, Clean Environment, Access to Healthcare, Mobility and Active Transportation, Safe and Complete Neighborhoods, Housing and Homelessness, and Education and Employment—and provides goals, strategies, and actions to address how land use, development, services, and programs may support greater physical and mental health, social equity, and environmental justice within Camden.

<sup>19</sup> The Food Trust, *Healthy Food Access Camden: Recommendations of the Camden Food Access Work Group*, 2020, [thefoodtrust.org/food-access/publications](https://thefoodtrust.org/food-access/publications).

The City of Camden Planning Board adopted the Camden Health Element as an element of the city’s Master Plan in April 2021, providing it with the same legal status as all other elements of the city’s Master Plan.

### **Camden Urban Agriculture Collaborative**

In August 2020, the Camden Urban Agriculture Collaborative received \$293,411 from the first-ever USDA Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Grant. This funding included an additional \$30,000 match from PBCIP to support gardening hubs and urban farming apprenticeships throughout Camden. The gardening hubs will provide residents with the knowledge and supplies they need to grow and sell their own produce. The grant will be divided among seven community organizations in Camden that are already supporting growers in neighborhoods across the city, including nonprofit organizations focused on food sovereignty like VietLead and The Center for Environmental Transformation; community development nonprofits like Camden Lutheran Housing, Inc., The Neighborhood Center, in addition to PBCIP; as well as Camden Children’s Garden (which continues to operate the Camden City Garden Club) and Cooper Lanning Civic Association (which manages the award-winning Cooper Sprouts Community Garden).

### **Camden Corner Store Owner Affinity Group and Purchasing Cooperative**

In 2019, The Food Trust partnered with the Community First Fund (formerly FINANTA), a local community development financial institution, to launch a Corner Store Owner Affinity Group. Eight store owners received a micro-loan of \$1,200 to build their credit, along with monthly trainings to increase their business and financial capacity. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Affinity Group was indefinitely postponed.

Responding to the needs of corner store owners, The Food Trust started a WhatsApp group to provide information in Spanish about rapidly changing grants, local guidelines, and mandates. The WhatsApp group has grown to 85 store owners and has given a platform to unify store owners as

coworkers, not competition. The Food Trust is currently facilitating and supporting five corner store coordinators to lead the formalization of a nonprofit store owner association, which will have a purchasing cooperative LLC under its umbrella. Although the association had not legally formalized as of June 2021, it has begun offering technical assistance trainings to the 15 engaged store owners. The group hopes to add more members as other store owners begin to see the benefits that the trainings and purchasing cooperative can bring. Together, these groups will help to ensure the sustainability of the Healthy Corner Store Initiative—an initiative that The Food Trust has coordinated for the past 10 years with support from the CHC Program—as owners organize and band together to increase their purchasing power and advocate for their collective needs.

The **Roots to Prevention Partnership**, **Camden Food Security Collective**, and the **Urban Agriculture Feasibility Study** are other recent efforts to improve food access in Camden. As with the Camden Corner Store Owner Affinity Group, CHC played an important role in the development of both the Roots to Prevention Partnership and the Camden Food Security Collective. The CHC Program provided funding to support a day of training to help Camden nonprofits be better prepared to submit a successful application for the BUILD Health Challenge® grant. CHC also provided financial support to the Camden Food Security Collective’s backbone organizations during its startup phase. Please refer to page 15 for more information on the Roots to Prevention Partnership, page 26 for the Food Insecurity Collective, and page 20 and 21 for the Urban Agriculture Feasibility Study.



**Junior Supermarket**

Source: Mel Epps for The Food Trust

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Parkside Business and Community in Partnership

Our special thanks are also extended to the members of the **Camden Food Access Work Group** for their thoughtful discussions and suggestions.

### About Campbell's Healthy Communities

In 2011, the Campbell Soup Company launched Campbell's Healthy Communities, a 10-year, \$10 million effort to measurably improve the health of young people in Campbell's hometown of Camden, New Jersey, by reducing childhood obesity and hunger. The program follows a collective impact framework, focusing on four strategic areas: food access, physical activity, nutrition education, and public will. Since its inception, a group of cross-sector partners has worked together to:

- create the largest citywide network of healthy corner stores in New Jersey;
- launch Soccer for Success, a citywide after-school sports program serving over 900 kids annually;
- add salad bars, monthly food tastings, and healthy menu changes to Camden KIPP schools;
- incorporate food insecurity screenings into healthcare intake processes;
- expand offerings of "Cooking Matters" nutrition and culinary classes; and
- convene the Camden Youth Advisory Council—a group of high school students who are passionate about making positive change in their city—to share their expertise and advise the Campbell's collective.







**Harvest from Resilient Roots Farm**  
Source: Resilient Roots, VietLead



# Cultivating Camden: A Status Report

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**Abstract:**

This status report takes a look at Camden's food system five years after DVRPC originally released *Cultivating Camden*. It analyzes the most recent demographic and economic data to get a better understanding of how the food system may have changed during this time. It also shares some of the progress that has been made towards, as well as the barriers to, implementing the recommendations in *Cultivating Camden*. Finally, it details some of the new programs and initiatives working to improve Camden's food system that have arisen in the past five years.

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