



YEAR IN REVIEW

2025

Statement from the Chair

In 2025, federal budget cuts places significant strain on food system nationwide. These disruptions were felt deeply in Western New York. While no single organization can ensure that every resident maintains access to fresh, healthy food during a year of significant instability, Erie County was far more prepared to respond than it would have been without the Food Policy Council's (FPC) presence.



The FPC played a critical role in ringing the alarm early, communicating emerging needs, and helping County leadership understand where gaps were widening. We provided resources, shared guidance, supported community partners, and organized a Countywide food drive. Because these concerns were elevated quickly and clearly, Erie County leadership was able to take decisive action, including allocating \$1 million to FeedMore WNY, to stabilize the emergency food system during a time of severe strain.

I want to express my sincere appreciation to every Councilmember for your dedication, expertise, and time this year. Your work strengthened the County's ability to see issues sooner, understand their impact more completely, and respond with more precision and compassion.

I also extend my gratitude to Erie County leadership for recognizing that food systems planning is essential infrastructure. Their support allowed the FPC to maintain momentum, support local agriculture, and integrate food systems considerations across County programs and planning efforts.

The challenges of 2025 made clear how essential strong local food governance has become. Because of our members, partners, and County support, Erie County was better prepared than we otherwise would have been. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to building a more resilient, equitable, community-rooted food system.

With appreciation,

Sarah E. Gatti

Chair, Food Policy Council of Buffalo & Erie County

Our Work at a Glance

The FPC is a sub-commission of the Erie County Board of Health. In this role, the FPC advises County government on food policy and serves as a link between the County and the community. The Council helps guide County efforts, highlights issues affecting residents and producers, and strengthens collaboration across agencies and community organizations. The following report showcase the Council's projects, initiatives, and outreach in 2025 and highlights work planned for 2026.

What We've Been Working On

Organizational Improvements

- Transitioned to a bi-monthly meeting schedule, improving member engagement and overall productivity.
- Streamlined meetings to one hour, increasing efficiency while maintaining robust discussion and decision-making.

Programs and Initiatives

- Implemented the **\$1 million** New York Food for New York Families program, **providing 400+ families with free produce bags weekly for over 50 weeks.**
- **NYS Agricultural Districts and Farm Friendly Zoning** providing essential knowledge for 45 municipal officials.
- Sponsored **50 free produce bags** for the Overdose Awareness Day Event, ensuring access to fresh, healthy foods during a critical community gathering.

Launched and coordinated the Erie County Food Drive, supporting FeedMore WNY with **2,000+ pounds of food and financial contributions** amidst ongoing gaps in SNAP benefit timing and persistent food insecurity.





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What We've Been Working On (cont.)

Community Events and Partnerships

- Sponsored Big Big Table's "Big Big Bash", uplifting community-based pay-what-you-can meal models.
- Sponsored and tabled at Slow Roll's "Harvest Roll," supporting food systems visibility through a major community mobility event for the second year.
- Reestablished the Youth Working Group, expanding youth representation and leadership within food systems.

Community Events and Partnerships

- Marilla Ag-Day
Outreach and rural residents and agricultural families.
- Erie County Fair
Broad public engagement and awareness of local food systems.
- Overdose Awareness Day Event
Integrated food access with public health and harm-reduction efforts.
- Boston Local Environmental Awareness Fair
Highlighting intersections of food, environment, and community resilience.
- Slow Roll Harvest Roll
Second annual partnership showcasing local food and active transportation.
- NYS Farmers Market Federation Conference
County staff presented on FPC and County initiatives and participated in statewide dialogue on direct-to-consumer food access.

Special Projects

Highmark Stadium Procurement

- In collaboration with the Bills Foundation, organized two informational sessions on MWBE certification **reaching 70 producers**
- Coordinated a tour of **producers, processors, and food-related business owners** for the Highmark Stadium concessionaire, Legends Global, **advancing equitable local procurement and visibility for underrepresented growers.**

County Integration

The FPC continues to **meaningfully shape** County strategy, programs, and tools. In 2025, FPC insights directly supported:

- Find Fresh Erie: Ad campaign promoting a text service **connecting residents to fresh food** resources, alongside a farmers market coupon component.
- Erie Grown: Webpage strengthening **local producer** visibility and **agritourism connections.**
- Integrated Reviews: Land use review protocol now **ensures that food systems are considered** during review.

In Closing

Our work reflects the value of collaboration, community engagement, and policy-driven planning. Through strategic initiatives and targeted partnerships, especially in procurement and youth engagement, we continue to advance our mission statement. The foundation laid in 2025 positions the Council to deepen its impact in the year ahead.

The mission of the FPC is to advocate for an equitable and sustainable food system for the people of Buffalo and Erie County.

