

# ASK YOUR CANDIDATES

2022

NJ VOTER'S GUIDE

## FARM & FOOD POLICY QUESTIONS

**Now is the time to talk to candidates about the resiliency of our food system.**

Politicians elected this November will have a key role in shaping food policy, particularly the 2023 Farm Bill. The Farm Bill is a package of legislation affecting agriculture, food systems, and equal access to food and nutrition that is passed approximately every five years. It is critical to improving the accessibility and sustainability of New Jersey's food system. The Farm Bill...

- Contains policies and initiatives to support small, beginning, and underserved farmers to increase the production and distribution of healthy, locally grown foods, foster sustainable farming techniques, and provide nutritional aid to millions of Americans.
- Touches on a wide range of issues including health care, poverty, climate change, and school food.
- Is the legislation that funds university research, aids those affected by natural disasters, and helps local communities expand recreational and outdoor activities.

# INTRODUCTION

Education on topics related to regenerative, regional and community-based food and farming is a priority for the New Jersey Food Democracy Collaborative (NJFDC), which collaborates with organizations across the state.

The questions provided in this **Ask Your Candidates: A 2022 NJ Voter's Guide** will help you assess the qualifications and current viewpoints of candidates running for office. Candidates at all levels of government will be more likely to pay attention to farm and food policy if they are asked questions like these. If your candidate is already focused on these issues, raising these questions will help determine where they really stand on these important issues affecting the resiliency of our food system.

Members of the NJFDC team prepared this resource. It was inspired by and modeled on the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association's [2022 Questions for Candidates](#), with their permission.

In this document, you will find advocacy tips and questions for candidates running at the local, state, and federal levels. This resource was compiled to provide potential candidates with the knowledge they need to actively consider and address issues related to food, farming, food security, and the environment.

**Informed candidates are more likely to support policies encouraging sustainable agricultural and food systems if they are put into office. Discussions in the public sphere on these topics are essential for raising people's consciousness and becoming ready to hold their representatives to account.**

To raise awareness surrounding food system concerns, we recommend using this guide in public settings such as debates, forums, and town hall meetings.



The NJFDC is a state-wide food system stakeholder network, inspired by the food policy council model, that focuses on fostering robust multi-sector collaboration and coordination among organizations, businesses, and government on food and agriculture issues, and advancing policy change to increase equity and resilience of NJ's food system.

## COLLABORATION ACROSS STATES IS KEY TO OUR WORK

This guide was modeled off of Carolina Farm Stewardship Association's *2022 Questions for Candidates: A Voter's Guide to Questions on Farm & Food Policy in the Carolinas*



CFSA is a farmer-driven, membership-based 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that helps people in North and South Carolina grow and enjoy local, organic food.



# ADVOCACY 101

## Some tips for building relationships with candidates

The stronger your relationship with a current or prospective policymaker, the greater the likelihood that you will be able to influence the outcomes of problems that are important to you. Even though you are unlikely to reach consensus on every topic, it is still possible for the two of you to collaborate well and create a positive relationship over the course of time.

### INTRODUCE YOURSELF



Become acquainted with your candidates and their staff members. Candidate's policy positions are shaped by their staff, especially at the state and federal levels. So it's best to spend time getting to know both the candidates and their staff.

Share your thoughts and concerns on issues or specific bills. Use the following resources to search for bills or find your lawmakers and US representatives:

- <https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/>
- <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>

You can use any means available to make your position known to them. This can be done by phone, letter, email, letter to the editor, town hall meeting, or in-district meeting for incumbent lawmakers. Email is typically best, but phone calls are also great.

Follow your candidates and representatives' social media pages, engage in their posts, and sign up to get updates on when they will have in-person events that you may want to attend.

Make sure your representative in government knows about all of your efforts. Sign candidates and elected officials up for your newsletter, action alerts, and email list.

**Do not be afraid to introduce yourself!**

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### DO YOUR RESEARCH



Learn the candidate's interests to better understand their motivations and stances. Gaining insight into their personal history, professional experience, and key concerns will help you connect with them on a deeper level. Sustainable agriculture may help one candidate promote healthy ecosystems. Another may be more interested in public health, and another in sustainable agriculture's economic role. Do your background research and make sure you are up to date on current topics in their area of interest.

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### ALWAYS FOLLOW UP



Sending a thank-you note as a follow-up is a must. Don't forget to thank a candidate for their time after a recent encounter. Sending an email will do the trick. Expressing gratitude for candidates' time can go a long way toward cementing relationships and paving the way for further interactions.

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### ENGAGE FREQUENTLY



Candidates are typically extremely busy people. Invite them to events and engage with them often. They should be invited to every event that you hold, and you should remind them of your invitation roughly one month before the event, as well as once more the week of the event.

# CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

## CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR SCHOOL BOARD, CITY COUNCIL, OR COUNTY COMMISSIONER POSITIONS

### **1. What else can be done to ensure that everyone in our community can access local food?**

Chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and obesity can be reduced in a community by making it easier for people to access healthy, low-cost food. Farmers' markets, roadside stands, and food hubs, which aggregate products from various local producers in a centrally located facility to sell to larger markets, make it simple to obtain fresh food from local farmers. [1] Improved access to these resources is still needed in many New Jersey communities. Many cities and counties are working to make food more accessible by promoting eligibility for SNAP, and encouraging SNAP/EBT payment processing machines at farmers' markets and other locations.

### **2. Do you support a city/municipal policy for a "right to food", meaning that our municipality recognizes that all citizens, especially those with a greater need, have the right to be able to physically and economically access adequate, healthy, culturally appropriate food at all times?**

Although the United States as a whole has yet to officially recognize the "right to food," that does not mean that local governments cannot provide such protections for their residents. When addressing the issue of food insecurity from a human rights perspective, the focus is broadened to take into account both the social and economic factors that contribute to the problem. [2] In addition to bolstering the cities' position as a state leader in protecting and empowering its most vulnerable citizens, this policy gives those who are food insecure a voice in policy conversations concerning food and nutrition.

### **3. Should the city/municipality incentivize or require local food access points, such as community farmers' markets and corner stores, to accept NJ SNAP/EBT, WIC, and Senior Nutrition vouchers, as well as participate in healthy food incentive programs, such as Garden State Good Food Bucks?**

Farmers' markets can be excellent providers of fresh fruits, vegetables, and other nutritious foods throughout the state of New Jersey. Communities in New Jersey have been working to increase the number of EBT

machines to provide access to markets and roadside vendors for all residents in recent years. Unfortunately, several counties across the state still do not have any SNAP-authorized farmers' markets, leaving many unable to access these markets. Candidates should be dedicated to increasing SNAP beneficiaries' access to these foods while also supporting economic opportunities for NJ farmers and producers.

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#### **4. What more can we do, locally, to reduce food waste and increase excess food recovery?**

NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) estimates that 22% of New Jersey's municipal solid waste consists of food waste. That is an estimated 1.46 million tons of food waste, or 325 lbs of food waste per person, per year. [3] In an effort to combat food waste, Governor Murphy signed bill A2371, which requires large food waste generators to separate and recycle food waste.

Municipal and county governments can support education and awareness about food waste reduction and composting, and investigate drop-off and curbside pick-up programs for food waste diversion. School districts can create composting programs and school food waste education programs to reduce food waste and cut costs.

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#### **5. In 2022, NJ became the first state in the nation to require public schools to teach about climate change for all grades. What has our municipality done to ensure that our school district is prepared and has the resources it needs**

#### **to do this well and what more should be done for the next school year?**

Climate change is one of the planet's biggest threats, and New Jersey is especially affected. An increase in climate change education can reduce carbon emissions significant amounts over time. High-quality education will prepare our state for green-collar jobs. Candidates should support early and multifaceted climate change education for all children. Effective climate change education requires high-quality professional learning for all teachers and staff. Educators need high-quality curricular resources at multiple entry points. Climate change education requires leadership from school boards and administrators. School boards should accurately, clearly, and comprehensively communicate climate change and its career and financial benefits. [4]

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#### **6. In addition to the \$6.2 billion the state has received, the federal government has given over \$3.5 billion to towns and counties in New Jersey through the American Rescue Plan Act's (ARPA) Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds program to help them recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. [5]**

#### **How should we spend our local American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to make our food system more resilient?**

ARPA funds can be used by municipalities and counties to support local communities and address the economic problems and public health crises that have been brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Cities all throughout the country are using their ARPA allotments to

invest millions of dollars in local food system resiliency and emergency food assistance programs. For example, Bergen County used its funds for the Food Security Task Force in 2020 to help its network of nonprofit and faith-based food pantries. This has allowed the county to address chronic hunger and emerging needs regionally. With the help of the Food Security Task Force, the County has identified what people need and helped those who need it the most. Amid rising rates of hunger early on during the pandemic, the County's network of nonprofit partners was vital in ensuring efforts were focused equitably and benefited frequently forgotten and underserved communities. [6]

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**7. Do you support a city's provision of a central directory of all emergency food providers to aid coordination and cooperation among emergency food providers? If so, what do you believe the city's role is in the development or dissemination of the directory?**

Although directories of emergency food providers are available in a variety of formats, municipalities located throughout the state of New Jersey would benefit from the establishment of a central directory listing all of their identified emergency food providers.

Having a central database of these services will help the city facilitate communication and cooperation during times of crisis. This directory should be prepared, maintained, and disseminated by the city in a way that makes it simple for members of the general public to access it.

**8. Access to land for producing food is a major barrier for young and beginner farmers, and urban farmers. Do you support the addition of urban agriculture overlay zones and/or an urban agricultural element to our municipal Master Plan to support sustainable food production and equitable food access for all residents?**

In the 2022 National Young Farmer Survey, 59% of young farmers said finding affordable land to buy or lease was very or extremely difficult, up from 39% in 2017. Efforts should be made to support young and BIPOC farmers and farmworkers to advance secure and resilient food systems for the future. [7]

A municipal or county food policy audit is an easy and effective way to help our city/municipality identify opportunities to improve support for local agriculture at all scales and decrease food insecurity.

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**TIPS FOR VOTERS  
WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN  
FOOD AND FARMING ISSUES IN  
YOUR LOCAL AREA?**

Consider joining a local food council or starting one. Food councils are community-based groups that work to make local food systems more stable. You can help strengthen the links between food, health, the protection of natural resources, economic growth, and agriculture. By participating in a food council, you're working to solve big problems in the food system and give communities more control over the food they grow and eat. **Check out [NJFDC's resource page](#) for some helpful places to start getting involved in your local area.**



# CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

## CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR NJ STATE ASSEMBLY AND SENATE OFFICES AND OTHER STATE-LEVEL POSITIONS

### **1. Do you agree with the use of economic incentives to support the infrastructure needs of small, community-facing farmers and community food systems?**

Many farmers don't grow enough to sell through the large-scale channels and prefer to focus on growing food for their surrounding community through a CSA model or community farmers' markets. This business model supports community food security, but requires special infrastructure investments and policy supports.

There are many ways to help farmers get more local food into their communities. These include access to cold storage or shared community kitchens and packing facilities for food hubs. These kinds of infrastructure and capital improvements can be very important for meeting the needs of local farmers and building resilient community food systems.

### **2. What policy changes do you support to help improve physical and technological infrastructure that would strengthen community food systems?**

Access to safe public transportation and affordable, reliable internet can reduce disparities in access by making it easier to purchase healthy food and to register and learn about public programs like SNAP and WIC.

### **3. What steps should the state government take to increase the purchase and sale of NJ grown/produced foods, especially among retail outlets and large institutions such as food banks, schools, and healthcare centers?**

#### **Do you support the use of state funding to encourage schools to purchase more NJ-produced foods?**

Scaling production for wholesale to schools, distributors, and larger grocery stores is difficult for some small and mid-sized farmers.

Food hubs and local distributors alleviate some of the difficulties by connecting food producers and consumers. A food hub centrally stores, processes, and sells food from local producers to larger markets. [1]

New Jersey can support strong farm-to-institution programs with grants or low-interest loans to schools, existing food hubs/local food aggregators and distributors, and other anchor institutions to increase their ability to add Jersey Fresh items to their purchase orders and menus.

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#### **4. How will you help protect farmland in New Jersey?**

Protecting farmlands from development encroachment is critical. The size of farms in NJ has been decreasing since the 1980s, with the average size of a farm in acres being 99 in 1987 to 74 acres in 2017. [8]

The NJ Farmland Preservation Program has preserved 240,000 acres to date. NJ Land Link keeps land in agriculture by helping farmers find land and business prospects. [9 & 10]

Many acres of preserved farmland are not producing food, yet every year, state universities graduate eager young would-be farmers who face tremendous hurdles with accessing land to farm through purchase or long-term lease.

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#### **5. How can New Jersey better support new and beginning farmer development throughout the State, including addressing the significant barriers to land access and tenure for new and beginning Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) farmers?**

The average farmer is nearly 60 years old. [11] New Jersey puts one of its most significant economic drivers at risk if it doesn't support the next generation of farmers.

While this state has several new and beginning farmer programs, it is difficult for them to access capital for land or infrastructure investment. Supporting new farmers with access to capital and the right to farm is vital for ensuring a sustainable food system for New Jersey.



Right now the Right to Farm Act has a number of eligibility requirements that make it hard for smaller and non-traditional farms to be protected by the law and take part in programs like the Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP).

One of these barriers is that small farms with less than 5 acres must make at least \$50,000 in sales before they can apply for the benefits of the act. [12]

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### **6. What are your views on city, county, and state-wide food policy councils and proposing legislation that appropriates funds to such organizations?**

Food policy councils strengthen all aspects of the food system (production, distribution, acquisition, and reclamation) by providing stakeholders with an equal voice in promoting policies that shape a sustainable, equitable food system and its ancillary benefits. Food policy councils can help to ensure the best possible outcomes for communities applying for funding from The Food Desert Relief Program. [13]

### **7. Would you support a legislative push and funding to ensure SNAP Nutrition Incentive Programs like Good Food Bucks, to increase access to fresh produce (i.e., fruits and vegetables) and that can be scaled throughout the state of NJ and made permanent?**

Good Food Bucks is New Jersey's only SNAP Nutrition Incentive Program for farmers' markets, farm stands, mobile markets, CSA programs, and grocery stores. City Green's Good Food Bucks provides financing, training, and technical assistance to partner markets so SNAP beneficiaries may eat more fruits and vegetables while helping local farmers. SNAP clients get an extra \$1 to spend on fresh fruits and vegetables for every \$1 they spend at a partner market.

More New Jerseyans use Good Food Bucks each year. Since 2016, almost 16,000 SNAP and WIC shoppers have participated. Over 6,500 customers utilized Good Food Bucks in 2021. Through the Good Food Bucks Program, recipients of federal benefits bought \$125,000 worth of Jersey Fresh food with their SNAP, WIC, and Good Food Buck incentives from New Jersey farmers and sellers last year. [14]

SNAP Nutrition incentive programs like NJ's Good Food Bucks Program are most successful and impactful when they gain the support of the state. A permanent funding source is needed.

### **8. Do you think municipal governments that permanently allocate public lands for sustainable food production for community food security should receive incentives from the State?**

Urban agriculture (or urban farming) is the process of cultivating, processing, and distributing food in and around cities, as well as a strategy for preserving and using land or buildings in cities to produce food in an environmentally sustainable manner for the surrounding community. The creation of an urban land trust in our city or at the state level for the creation of permanent urban food production areas, would help with food security and have economic development benefits including job creation.

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### **9. How can the State encourage New Jersey farmers to adopt climate-smart techniques and adaptation measures to help our food systems become more resilient?**

Climate-related impacts on the food system are a threat to our state. NJ can become more food secure in the face of climate change by creating programs with incentives and training to help farmers change their farming practices so that they store carbon, reduce emissions, or adapt to climate change will be crucial.

#### **TIPS FOR VOTERS**

##### **STEP YOUR ADVOCACY GAME UP**

Want to enhance your ability to advocate for causes that are important to you and your neck of New Jersey? Consider joining the NJFDC's Policy Work Group! Participating in a policy work group will help grow their advocacy skills and network with fellow food and farming advocates across New Jersey.

**Learn more about [NJFDC's current policy work groups!](#)**

### **10. What can the state do to expand support for existing Certified Organic and regenerative producers in New Jersey and help conventional producers implement more organic and regenerative practices?**

In January, the NJ Department of Agriculture (NJDOA) notified the state's Certified Organic Farmers that it would be terminating its certification program and repurposing those funds for organics education and marketing support. The NJDOA has not yet convened these farmers or put out a public plan for what that increased support will look like. NJ's Certified Organic farmers and farmers using organic growing practices have expressed the need for greater support from NJDOA, and more should be done to help transition conventional farmers to organic farming methods.

# CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

## CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR U.S. CONGRESS OR PRESIDENT

### **1. Will you support continuing or expanding the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) that was created in the 2018 Farm Bill?**

In the 2018 Farm Bill, the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program and the Value-Added Producers Grant Program were streamlined into the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP).

These initiatives offer essential and continuous funding to assist local and regional food systems, such as farmers markets, local and regional food enterprises, supply chains, etc. LAMP funding guarantees that local food systems are robust and resilient enough to withstand future supply chain disruptions.

### **2. Are you in favor of Congress passing the Agriculture Resilience Act?**

Agriculture and rural communities are severely and immediately threatened by climate change. Farmers and ranchers must participate in adaptation and mitigation strategies. Since many farmers and ranchers are already putting strategies and programs in place that help them become more sustainable and resilient to a changing climate, they are in a unique position to take the lead in climate

change mitigation and adaptation. The Agricultural Resiliency Act will empower farmers and ranchers willing to drive climate change solutions on the ground and refocus federal conservation, research, renewable energy, and rural economic development initiatives on climate resilience.

### **3. Will you prioritize policies that support urgent, far-reaching, and robust climate adaptation and mitigation in the food system?**

Regenerative, climate-smart agriculture will be crucial to maintaining the health of our food system in the years to come. Transitioning or adapting new practices is technically difficult and costly. In order to triple the number of producers enrolled in efforts to transition to climate-friendly on-farm practices by 2025 increased funding for the Natural Resources Conservation Service will be needed.



#### **4. What else can the federal government do to resolve the land access crisis among young, BIPOC, and beginning farmers?**

The average age of a farmer in the United States is 60 years old. [11] There are already several programs to support new and beginning farmers, but there are often social and cultural stigmas around embracing farming as a way of life.

Rather than consolidating agriculture into a handful of commercial operations, we must find a way to recruit new farmers to start their local operations to bolster local food economies.

#### **5. Do you support expanding and modernizing SNAP access and benefits on a permanent basis?**

**In times of economic hardship, each \$1 in federal SNAP assistance results in between \$1.50 and \$1.80 in economic activity. [15] It benefits everyone in the food chain, from farmers and food manufacturers to truckers, grocery stores, and store employees.**

In times of economic hardship, each \$1 in federal SNAP assistance results in between \$1.50 and \$1.80 in economic activity. [15] It benefits everyone in the food chain, from farmers and food manufacturers to truckers, grocery stores, and store employees.

With the continuing rising cost of food across the nation, more and more families are struggling to put nutritious food on the table. Additionally, most SNAP recipients are expected to lose \$82 in monthly benefits when the special rules related to the federal COVID-19 Public Health Emergency expire. [15] Now is the time for policymakers to make permanent improvements to SNAP including funding and stronger language with clear direction requiring or incentivizing states to create functional connections between FNS programs and local (in-state) producers, markets, food hubs, etc.

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## FEDERAL

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We hope this guide helps you get to know what matters to your local, state, and federal candidates. Asking these important questions of our elected officials is vital to the health of our food system.

Special thanks to the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association for the inspiration and to Kelly Day, Temple University, for creating this guide.

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**Thank you for your continued support in our efforts to contribute to a more resilient food system.**

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