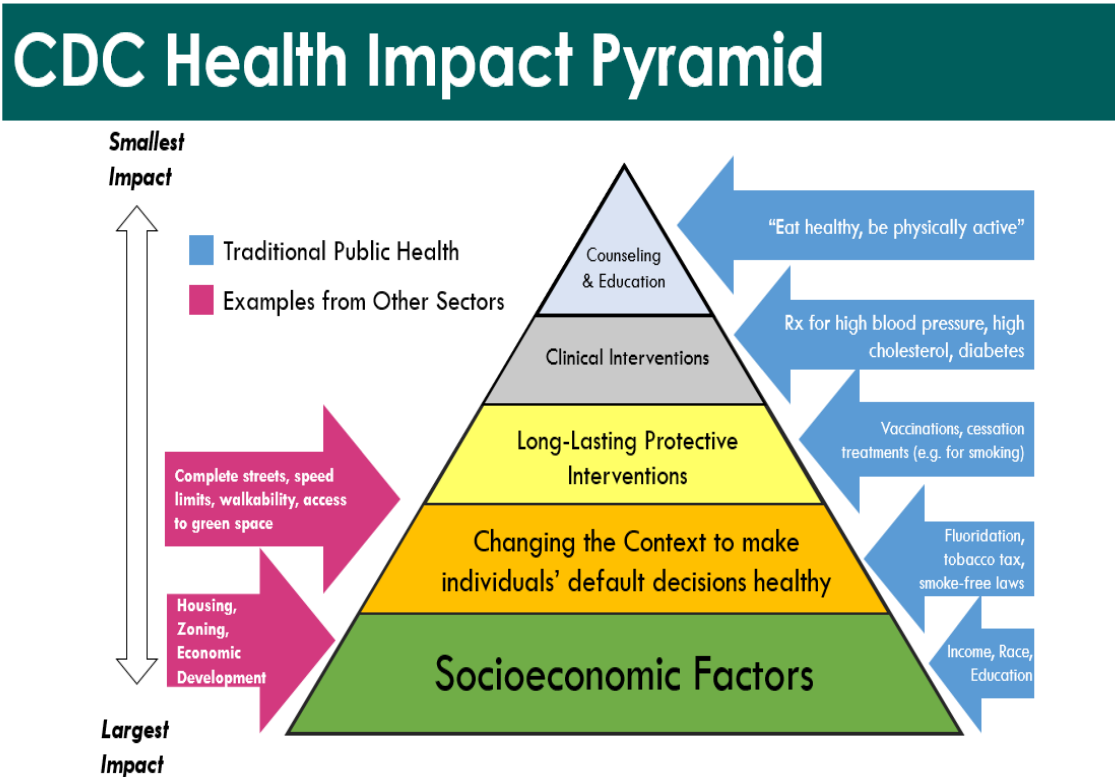


## Recommendations to Improve Food Access in Framingham

There are several factors that inhibit people from getting the food that they need on a daily basis. The good news is that Framingham has the resources to improve people's access to healthy foods, and therefore their access to a higher quality of life. This section will describe actions that can be taken by the City of Framingham and its partners to work towards improving its residents' access to healthy foods.



Source: Adapted from A Framework for Public Health Action: The Health Impact Pyramid, Thomas R. Frieden

Every action is evidence based, inclusive, and aims to address the socioeconomic factors that cause food insecurity. It is important that each recommendation combat the social and economic processes that have allowed food insecurity to become an issue, to benefit people who actually live in the community and experience these challenges, and to allow opportunities for these individuals to be involved in future decision-making processes surrounding economic development and issues of food insecurity.

## **Recommendation #1: Organize a coalition to work on improving food access**

### **Action 1.1: Convene a Food Policy Council**

A Food Policy Council should include representation from residents, food distribution organizations, farmers, local grocery stores, existing municipal departments and boards, and any other relevant groups.

#### **Action 1.1-1: Create and implement a Food Plan**

The Food Plan will detail the specific actions that stakeholders can take in order to reduce or eliminate all the barriers to food access outlined in the Community Food Assessment.

#### **Action 1.1-2: Apply to funding opportunities**

The Framingham Food Policy Council should pursue funding opportunities that support the goals of the Food Plan.

#### **Action 1.1-3: Engage with the Greater Framingham Hunger Relief Network**

Members of the Food Policy Council should attend the bi-monthly Greater Framingham Hunger Relief Network meetings in order to foster collaboration among service providers and members of the city government. This will allow the two groups to discuss how they can complement each other in their efforts to reduce food insecurity.

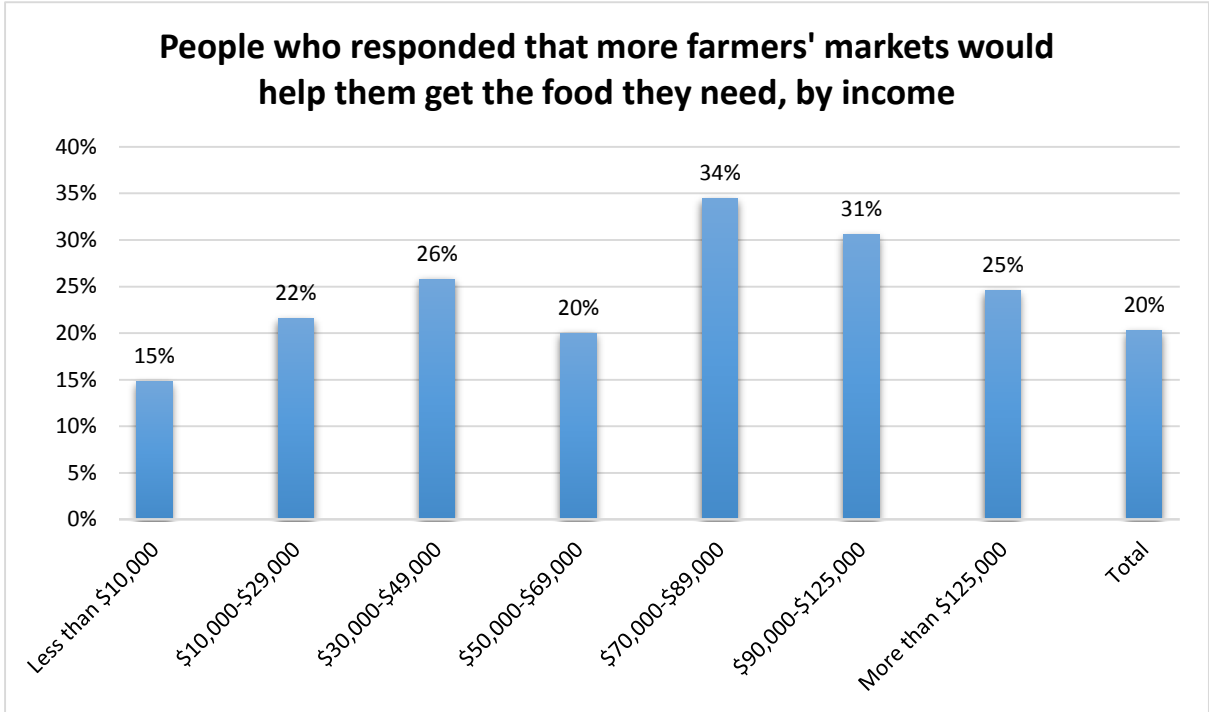
## **Recommendation #2: Increase the number of healthy food access points in South Framingham**

### **Action 2.1: Move the Framingham Farmers' Market to South Framingham, and hold the market on a weekend day**

The Framingham Farmers' Market is located in an area in North Framingham that is inconvenient for many residents of the city. Furthermore, the market is on Thursdays from 12:30-5:00 PM, during a time when many people are working and unable to attend. In order to allow more people to attend and make the market more profitable, the Framingham Farmers' Market should

seek a more convenient location to hold the market in South Framingham during the weekend.

The stereotype of farmers' markets is that they are only for patrons who are wealthy and white. Despite this stereotype, "more farmers' markets" was the second most popular response people had when asked what would help them get the food they need.



The Framingham Farmers' Market also accepts SNAP, making it more affordable to lower-income individuals. Another program that increases the affordability of local food is the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), launched in 2017. This program allows SNAP recipients to receive a dollar-for-dollar match for fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets, farm stands, mobile markets, and community supported agriculture (CSA) farm share programs. As a result of this program, sales among SNAP recipients at farmers' markets skyrocketed around the state. SNAP sales at farm retailers in Massachusetts went up by almost 600% from 2016-2017, while the East Boston Farmers' Market experienced an 800% growth in SNAP sales during their 2017 season (Mass Food Policy Council).

The socioeconomic status of people who are able to attend farmers' markets and afford food from local food vendors has expanded. The city should hold the market in South Framingham on a weekend day in order to allow the vendors to make more money and improve lower-income residents access to healthy foods.

### **Action 2.2: Establish an indoor Winter Farmers' Market in South Framingham**

Establishing indoor location and vendors for a winter market in South Framingham would be beneficial for the following reasons:

- Allows for individuals who receive assistance through HIP (Healthy Incentives Program) to utilize their benefits year-round
- Provides an additional location for people of all incomes to access healthy foods
- Increases profit for local vendors during a time of lower demand

Potential locations for a winter farmers' market include: churches, pantries, schools, as well as other conveniently located organizations in South Framingham.

### **Action 2.3: Increase the number of pick-up locations for Community Supported Agriculture shares in South Framingham**

Creating more CSA pickups in South Framingham will be beneficial for the following reasons:

- Allows for individuals who receive assistance through HIP to have a place to utilize their benefits

- Provides an additional location for people of all incomes to access healthy foods
- Creates create a direct connection between farmers and consumers
- Allows for a sustainable income for farmers

In order to cover the staffing costs, vendors can look into a work-trade program where volunteers staff the CSA each week in exchange for a share. Potential locations for CSA drop-offs include: churches, pantries, schools, as well as other conveniently located organizations in South Framingham.

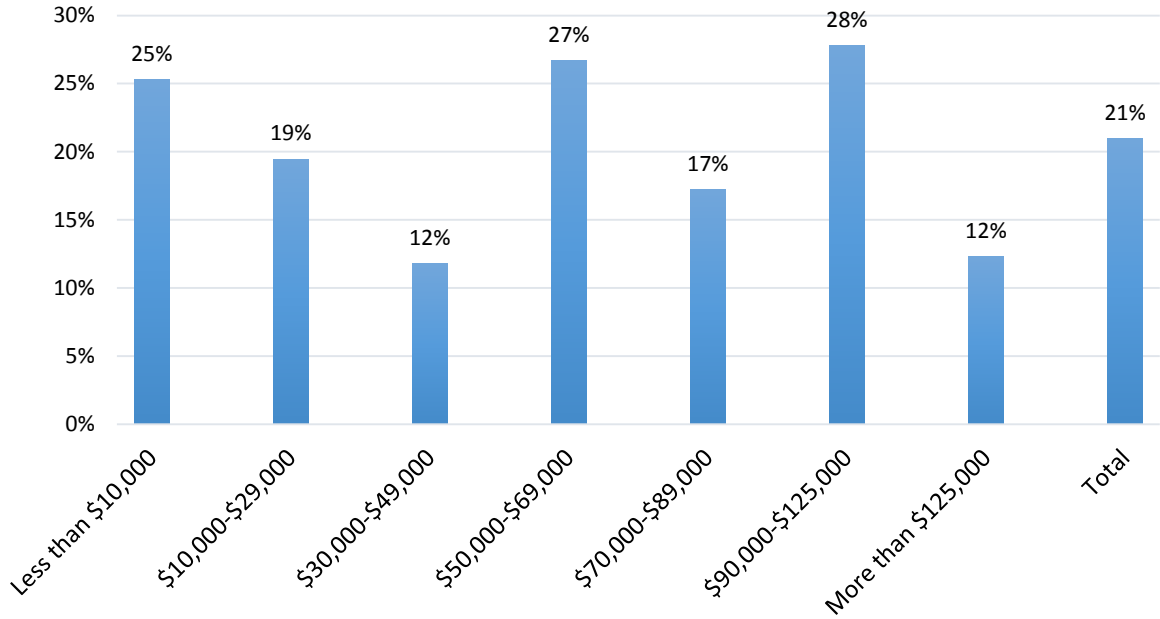
#### **Action 2.4: Increase the availability of fresh fruit and vegetables in corner stores in South Framingham**

Identify convenience stores that would like to offer produce year-round. There is potential to apply for federal and state funding to increase the stores' capacity to offer these healthy foods, and help them set goals to determine what percentage of the area of the store will be dedicated to produce. Offering more produce in convenience stores in South Framingham would reduce the transportation barrier that low-income individuals face in accessing healthy foods.

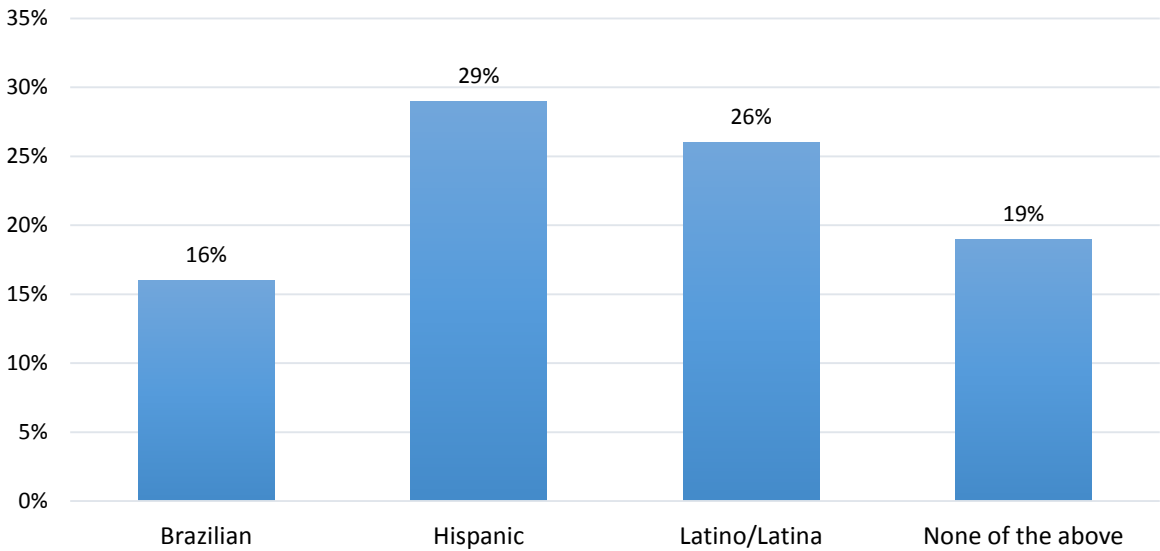
#### **Action 2.5: Explore the feasibility of adding a grocery store in South Framingham**

The most common response to the question of “which of the following would help you get the food you need” was “another grocery store,” with 21% of people from all income ranges in South Framingham selecting this response. This sentiment was shared strongly in interviews and focus groups as well.

### Respondents who said that another grocery store would help them get the food they need, by income



### Respondents who said another grocery store would help them get the food they need, by ethnicity



Adding another grocery store in a strategic location in South Framingham would allow for more culturally appropriate food options for the wide variety of ethnicities in Framingham, and would reduce the barrier of transportation in getting groceries for lower-income people in the region.

**Action 2.6: Allow SNAP recipients to apply their benefits to grocery delivery services**

Other states have recently launched pilot programs that allow SNAP recipients to use their benefits for home deliveries from grocery stores. Giving SNAP recipients of Framingham the opportunity to have their groceries delivered would significantly reduce the barrier of transportation to healthy food access.

**Action 2.7: Explore the possibility of extending pantry hours**

Work with pantries and their clients in order to understand what operating hours would be most effective. If possible, adjust hours to match clients' preferences allowing for more people to benefit from pantry's services.

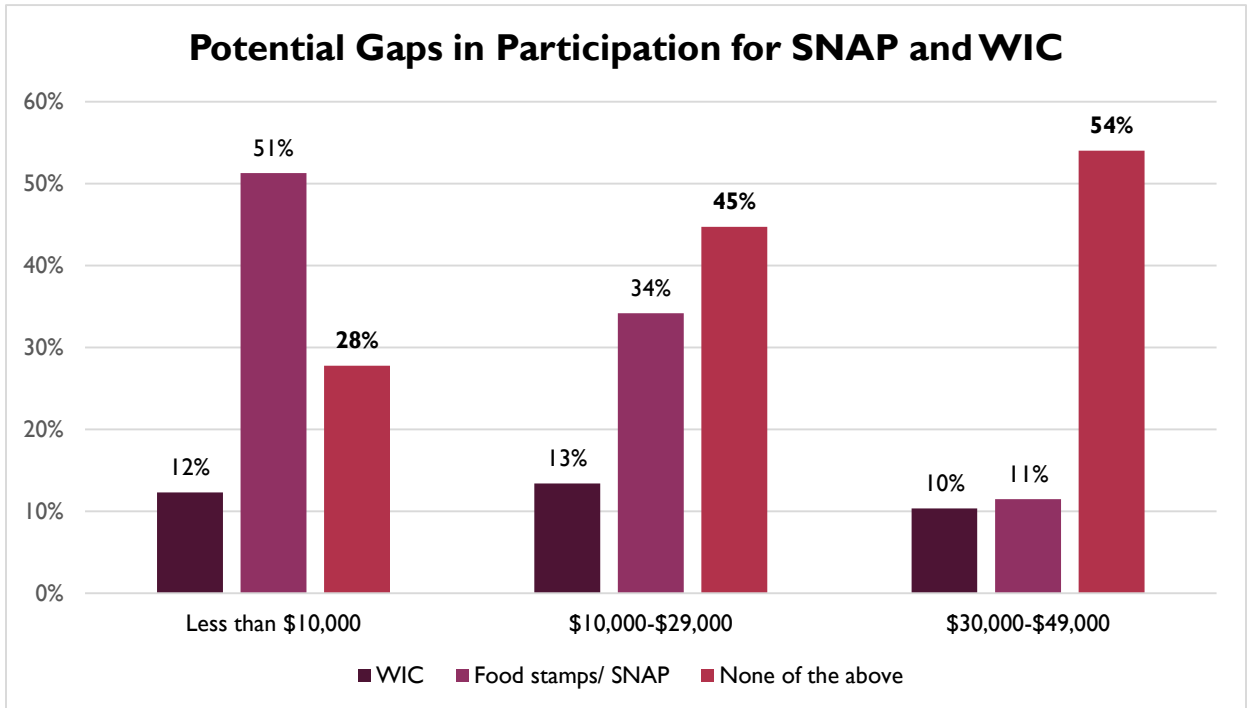
**Recommendation #3: Reduce the SNAP gap by maximizing enrollment and increasing access points for recipients**

**Action 3.1: Connect with stores, CSA vendors, and other vendors in order to maximize the number of places where people can use their benefits**

Conduct outreach to vendors who do not accept SNAP about the benefits of accepting it, and then provide guidance and support through the application process to become a certified SNAP retailer. Accepting SNAP allows for increased accessibility lower-income consumers and potentially more profit for the vendor.

### Action 3.2: Maintain and expand existing efforts to ensure all individuals who are qualified to receive SNAP are doing so

There are likely many people who live in Framingham who are eligible to receive SNAP but are not doing so.



- **SNAP eligibility guidelines**
  - Family of 2: \$2,743 gross monthly (~\$33,000 annual)
  - Family of 4: \$4,183 gross monthly (~\$50,000 annual)
- **WIC eligibility guidelines**
  - Family of 2: \$2,470 gross monthly (~\$29,000 annual)
  - Family of 4: \$3,747 gross monthly (~\$45,000 annual)

In order to make sure that the most vulnerable people are getting the food they need, those who are eligible to receive SNAP need to be identified and assisted in applying to receive these benefits.



## **Recommendation #4: Improve transportation accessibility for low-income individuals**

### **Action 4.1: Partner with ridesharing services and utilize Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to develop vouchers for low-income residents**

A significant number of residents in South Framingham are not able to afford a car. Meanwhile, public transportation does not adequately get them where they need to go. In order to meet their needs, the city should connect with the ridesharing services in the region to discuss a program that would offer rides at a reduced rate for low-income individuals. The cost of the vouchers could be jointly covered by CDBG and funds from the ridesharing company.

In the past, communities have collaborated with private taxi companies and used CDBG to launch taxi voucher programs for residents that meet the Housing and Urban Development low-income qualification. A modern version of this program could be feasible with cooperation between the City of Framingham and ridesharing services.

### **Action 4.2: Consider a bike share in Framingham**

In order to allow for residents to get around by as many modes of transportation as possible, Framingham should consider the feasibility of getting a docked or dockless bike share system. Focus groups, surveys, and interviews with people across boundaries of race and income should be conducted to determine if it is something the community wants, and if ridership would support the costs of implementing it.

### **Action 4.3: Emphasize the impacts of transportation accessibility on low-income individuals in the Framingham Transportation Master Plan**

The Framingham Transportation Master Plan should emphasize the need to improve transportation accessibility for traditionally disadvantaged populations in the city.

#### **Action 4.4: Seek funding opportunities and technical assistance that will improve transportation accessibility for low-income individuals in South Framingham**

Apply to funding opportunities to support transportation projects that will increase people's ability to get to places where they can purchase healthy foods. Technical assistance can be pursued from organizations such as the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, and others as necessary.

### **Recommendation #5: Improve outreach and communication efforts to ensure that people know what food-related services exist in Framingham**

#### **Action 5.1: Create a food access resource guide for residents**

Develop a website as a comprehensive resource guide for residents on food-related information such as advertising summer meal sites, information about food pantries services and donation needs, guidance on applying for SNAP and WIC, depicting the Community Food Assessment and any food-related initiatives, education about food waste, information about farmers' markets and CSAs, and any other news related to food access in the region. The goal of creating this resource guide is for there to be one source that residents can easily see all the resources that are available to them.

#### **Action 5.2: Expand existing outreach efforts on what food-related services are available to people**

One of the biggest takeaways from this assessment is that it is difficult for individuals to be aware of all the services, events, stores, and opportunities available to them. People frequently fall in and out of a state where they need the support of local agencies as a result of illness in the family, job loss, and other factors. As one interview participant pointed out, these people don't know where to go for services and do not know what is available to them, so they may suffer without benefiting from any of the support services in the city. Create an outreach campaign to educate all Framingham residents, particularly low-income individuals, about the services that are available to them.

### **Action 5.3: Develop a City of Framingham transportation resource guide**

A comprehensive guide of all the transportation options and services in Framingham will help improve people's knowledge of what is available to them, and therefore allow residents to have increased physical mobility.

## **Recommendation #6: Reduce the barriers to community agriculture as a way to reduce Framingham residents' reliance on external food sources and allow them the freedom to grow what they want**

### **Action 6.1: Establish additional community gardens in South Framingham**

There is a demand for more community gardens in South Framingham. The majority of the housing in this area of the city is made up of rental units where people do not have property to grow food. Creating more communal spaces around the city where residents can grow food will improve their access to healthy food, and improve their connection to the community.

### **Action 6.2: Allow agricultural uses by-right in all residential and business zones in the city**

Zoning changes such as this one reduces the unnecessary barriers that people face in growing their own food.

### **Action 6.3: Revisit the Board of Health animal regulations to allow more people to own animals as appropriate**

Allowing residents to more easily own animals will reduce their reliance on external food sources.

### **Action 6.4: Allow rooftop gardening either by-right or by special permit in all zones**

Making rooftop gardening more feasible for people in Framingham could make it easier for people to access healthy foods.

## **Recommendation #7: Create a coalition whose main goal is to improve the income mobility of low-income residents in Framingham**

### **Allow 7.1: Develop an Economic Mobility Steering Committee**

An Economic Mobility Steering Committee, made up of engaged residents, businesses, members from existing departments and boards, local schools, and the MetroWest Chamber of Commerce, should be established. The goal of this committee should be to improve low-income individuals' quality of life, access to necessary services, and health outcomes by reducing the barriers to upward mobility and wealth generation.

#### **Action 7.1-1: Conduct an Economic Mobility Assessment**

An assessment of the barriers and/or opportunities to improve income mobility will be necessary to improve the lives of people in the community. This assessment should aim to understand the forces that create generational poverty, the quality of employment opportunities for the population, and the leverage points for increasing the amount of money people make.

#### **Action 7.1-2: Create and implement an Economic Mobility Action Plan**

Based on this assessment, an Economic Mobility Action Plan should be created. The plan should draw on the findings of the assessment in order to reduce poverty and increase economic mobility among traditionally underserved populations. Potential focuses of the plan could include:

- Taking inventory of the business composition of the city
- Adequately preparing youth for 21<sup>st</sup> Century jobs
- Adding or reforming programs in the public and regional technical schools to focus on training students for burgeoning industries
- Launching entrepreneurship electives in schools that serve Framingham students
- Creating a mandatory personal finance course in Framingham schools
- Expanding programs that connect Framingham students with businesses

- Raising money for college grant programs for lower-income students
- Collaborating with other departments, committees, and organizations in the city on issues that relate to economic mobility
- Directing city funds to initiatives that reduce generational poverty
- Advocating for a higher minimum wage for adults
- Applying to funding opportunities that support the goals of the action-plan
- Other plans as deemed appropriate by the assessment

## **Recommendation #8: Maintain and expand redistribution efforts**

### **Action 8.1: Maintain and expand existing connections between farmers and pantries to increase the amount of fruits and vegetables available to low-include individuals**

Improving the connections between farmers and pantries could increase the amount of healthy foods that pantries are able to offer to their clients.

### **Action 8.2: Adopt commonplace use of an app or website that allows restaurants to sell food that would otherwise be thrown out at a reduced rate during designated pickup times**

There are several apps that help consumers track restaurants that have excess food. Implementing this will reduce food waste and improve people's access to low-cost foods.

### **Action 8.3: Develop an app or website where people can see the inventory and needs of pantries**

This makes it easy for potential donors to see the inventory and the needs of a pantry will improve the quality and array of foods that they are able to offer clients.

**Action 8.4: Eliminate the sales tax exemption for soda and use the subsequent tax revenue on programs that increase access to healthy foods**

Making an unhealthy item more expensive could be a way to subsidize efforts to make healthy foods more accessible.

**Recommendation #9: Continue to conduct assessments in order to improve Framingham's food system**

Forthcoming research on food access in Framingham could focus on the following:

- Determining more opportunities for food delivery or access points
- Identifying the food retailers that do not accept SNAP
- Surveying restaurants on their experience with food waste
- Where food waste occurs in the city and why
- The impacts of time and convenience on healthy food consumption for moderate-to-high income individuals
- Opportunities to increase food production in the city
- Improving weekend emergency food service among low-income individuals
- Increasing the amount of healthy and culturally appropriate foods in schools
- Understanding appropriate areas for community agriculture
- Ways to improve people's purchasing power
- Other studies as necessary