



NANTUCKET FOOD SECURITY ASSESSMENT

*Standardizing Food Security Data and Defining
System Priorities to Address Food Insecurity*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared by **BEAM Partners**

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Overview

This report, commissioned by Nourish Nantucket and conducted by BEAM Partners, delivers the first comprehensive, data-driven assessment of food insecurity across Nantucket Island. **It establishes a shared baseline for understanding the scale, composition, and structural drivers of food insecurity**, and provides an actionable investment framework and implementation roadmap spanning the next 12–36 months.

The analysis synthesizes program budget data, system modeling artifacts, living-wage population analysis, and stakeholder input. It uses a Nantucket-calibrated living-wage threshold ($\leq 470\%$ of the Federal Poverty Level) as a planning definition of food insecurity, moving beyond traditional deep-poverty measures to capture the full scope of need on an island defined by extraordinary cost-of-living pressures.

CENTRAL FINDING

Food insecurity on Nantucket is best understood as both a living-wage gap issue and an access issue, not only a deep-poverty issue. A substantial share of residents live with limited financial margin in a high-cost environment, leaving them vulnerable to food hardship—especially when transportation barriers, scheduling constraints, and island logistics compound the challenge.

Scale of Need

Using the adjusted year-round operational planning baseline of 20,000 residents, the analysis identifies three tiers of food insecurity risk:

5,893

residents at or below the living-wage threshold ($\leq 470\%$ FPL)

4,719

residents in the living-wage gap (135%–470% FPL)

1,174

residents below 135% FPL (deep-poverty proxy)

Household composition is critical: approximately 2,471 residents in older-adult households and 2,718 residents in households with children fall below the threshold—together representing 88% of the planning population. This concentration has direct implications for how Nantucket must design access pathways, communication strategies, and service models.

Structural Drivers

Three structural factors shape food insecurity on Nantucket in ways that distinguish it from most mainland communities:

High Costs Compress Margin

Housing and essential expenses leave many employed residents with limited

Seasonality Drives Instability

Nantucket’s seasonal economy creates predictable periods of financial strain,

Island Geography Shapes Access

Food access depends on transportation and freight systems sensitive to

budget flexibility, pushing food insecurity well beyond deep-poverty households into the living-wage gap.	deepening chronic vulnerability while simultaneously reducing system capacity when demand rises.	weather, timing, and cost—affecting both households and providers and making system reliability a core planning concern.
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Current System Resources

The current food security system represents a full economic footprint of approximately **\$5.94 million annually**, including \$4.85 million in cash operating expenses and \$1.09 million in valued in-kind donations and volunteer labor. Food costs (\$2.61 million) represent the single largest expenditure, followed by staff wages (\$1.40 million). The system currently serves approximately 2,750 people per year.

Understanding the Gaps

The report identifies five distinct gap types that must be addressed in concert to strengthen Nantucket’s food security system. Conflating these gaps leads to confusion, competing narratives, and poorly aligned investment:

Gap Type	What It Means
Need–Reach	Residents likely to need support who are not reaching the system consistently
Adequacy	Difference between what households receive and what they need for stability
Capacity	Mismatch between demand and what the system can reliably deliver
Coordination	Friction from weak referrals, unclear handoffs, and limited network visibility
Measurement	Difference between what stakeholders need to know and what data can show

Each investment recommendation in the full report is tied to the primary gap it is intended to reduce, creating a clear link between strategy and measurable progress.

Strategic Implications

The findings support three critical implications for Nantucket’s food security planning:

- 1. Planning must extend beyond traditional eligibility lines.** A strategy focused only on deep poverty will miss the majority of the need identified in this report. Nantucket needs a broader approach that includes prevention, stabilization, and early-intervention supports for households under financial strain.
- 2. Access conditions are structurally consequential on an island.** Food security depends not only on whether programs exist, but on whether residents can use them consistently. Transportation, hours, delivery capacity, language access, and seasonal shifts all determine whether resources translate into reliable food access.
- 3. System capacity and resilience determine whether stability is sustained.** Coordination, throughput, surge readiness, staffing stability, and delivery infrastructure are central to food security planning—they are part of what makes reliable access possible.

Investment Required to Close the Gap

CASH-ONLY OPERATING NEED

\$11.4M – \$12.5M
annually

FULL ECONOMIC FOOTPRINT

\$14.0M – \$15.3M
annually (incl. in-kind & volunteer)

Estimates reflect scaling current per-person costs to the full 5,893-person planning population, with a 10–20% system-strengthening factor. These are planning-level estimates intended to guide investment strategy, not precise fundraising targets.

Priority Recommendations

The report recommends a coordinated, portfolio-based approach to investment across five priority areas:

1. Center the living-wage gap in strategy and communication

Ensure Nantucket’s food insecurity profile reflects the full range of households under strain, not only those in deep poverty.

2. Reduce access friction for high-barrier groups

Prioritize older adults, households with children, and residents facing language, transportation, mobility, or scheduling constraints.

3. Strengthen coordination and referral flow

Enable residents to move more easily between programs while reducing duplication, missed handoffs, and unnecessary complexity.

4. Invest in reliability and surge readiness

Treat staffing stability, delivery capacity, procurement resilience, storage, and disruption planning as core system infrastructure.

5. Adopt a lean shared measurement framework

Focus on reach, access, reliability, and resident experience to evaluate progress and communicate credibly with funders.

Implementation Roadmap

Timeframe	Priority Actions
0–90 Days	Finalize shared definitions and language; build reconciliation table for key figures; standardize partner reporting templates; confirm governance and baseline stewardship
3–12 Months	Pilot systemwide deduplication; launch community voice feedback mechanisms; address key access barriers with targeted fixes; publish baseline dashboard narrative for funders and partners
12–36 Months	Expand deduplication and systemwide measurement; institutionalize baseline as maintained “single source of truth”; deepen coordination infrastructure; embed community voice into governance; shift evaluation toward stability outcomes

The Role of Nourish Nantucket

Nourish Nantucket serves as a **convener, catalyst, and gap-solver** within Nantucket’s food security ecosystem. The organization strengthens the island’s collective response to food insecurity by fostering collaboration across partner organizations, identifying unmet needs through data and community input, and directing resources where they can have the greatest impact. Nourish Nantucket is not positioned as a competitor to long-standing providers—its role is to strengthen the system, support partners, and step forward when critical gaps remain unaddressed.

Looking Ahead

Food insecurity on Nantucket is solvable—but solving it requires moving beyond incremental program expansion toward a systems-level approach. Success will be measured not only by the volume of food distributed, but by whether the island’s food access system becomes easier to navigate, more reliable under stress, and better able to direct resources where they reduce the most meaningful barriers. This report provides the shared baseline, shared language, and strategic framework to make that progress possible.

About This Report

This executive summary is drawn from the *Nantucket Food Security Assessment*, prepared by BEAM Partners (Samuel Landercasper, Principal) for Nourish Nantucket. The full report provides detailed methodology, data analysis, an investment framework, and a sequenced implementation roadmap. Estimates are intended for planning and prioritization, not program eligibility.