



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

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PRESS RELEASE

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February 10, 2022

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NJEDA BOARD APPROVES NJ FOOD DESERT COMMUNITIES DESIGNATIONS LIST

Authority Adopts Final List of 50 Communities that May Be Eligible for \$240M in Food Desert Relief Act Funding

Trenton, N.J. (February 10, 2022) – The [New Jersey Economic Development Authority \(NJEDA\)](#) today announced that it approved the final list of [New Jersey's 50 designated Food Desert Communities](#) during its Board meeting yesterday. Over the next several years, up to \$240 million in funding through the Food Desert Relief Act will be available to strengthen food security and combat food deserts in these communities.

The Food Desert Relief Act is part of the Economic Recovery Act (ERA), signed into law by Governor Phil Murphy in January 2021. The Act directs the NJEDA to address the food security needs of communities across New Jersey by providing up to \$40 million per year for six years in tax credits, loans, grants, and/or technical assistance to increase access to nutritious foods and develop new approaches to alleviate food deserts. The NJEDA expects to issue regulations later this year, a critical step in the development of any Food Desert Relief Act-related programs.

"New Jersey has long been at the forefront in the fight against food insecurity," said Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver, who serves as the Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs. "We have a moral duty to reduce food insecurity within our state's borders and the programs we create under the Food Desert Relief Act will strengthen our ability to connect New Jerseyans in the 50 designated Food Desert Communities with access to much-needed nutritious food."

A January 2022 U.S. Census Bureau survey found that nearly one in 13 New Jersey households reported not having enough to eat in the past seven days. The total population of New Jerseyans

residing in Food Desert Communities exceeds 1.5 million individuals across a diverse range of communities in all 21 of New Jersey's counties.

Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin has been a vocal advocate of finding ways to eliminate food deserts and played a key role in the passage of the Food Desert Relief Act.

"The statistics surrounding food insecurity are sobering and unacceptable," said Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin. "By approving the designation of New Jersey's Food Desert Communities, we are a crucial step closer to directly addressing the impact of food deserts on New Jersey communities and to securing access to fresh and nutritious foods, with real brick and mortar food retailers and neighborhood food service programs, so everyone feels the comfort of knowing where their next meal will come from."

The designation of Food Desert Communities approved yesterday includes consideration of factors such as: food retail environment, demographics, economic indicators, and health indicators. The NJEDA developed the list and accompanying methodology for designation of the Food Desert Communities in partnership with the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (NJCA) and the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), along with input from the New Jersey Department of Human Services (NJHHS) and New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH). The NJEDA issued a Request for Information (RFI) in March 2021 to solicit insight into food security challenges faced by communities across the Garden State, including specific obstacles and disparities within communities that are considered "food deserts." The RFI also asked for feedback on specific criteria for the Food Desert Communities designation. The list was created based on feedback received through the RFI process and input compiled from research and from other public-sector organizations. The final list was revised to incorporate written and verbal input submitted by members of the public based on the draft list of Food Desert Communities released in January 2022.

"The level of engagement we saw throughout the public feedback process underscores the importance of bringing the issue of hunger out of the shadows," said NJEDA Chief Executive Officer Tim Sullivan. "Under Governor Murphy's leadership – and armed with one of the most comprehensive process and methodology for designating Food Desert Communities in the nation – we will continue to work with our sister agencies to create a robust suite of programs to address food insecurity in every county in our state."

"Known the world over as the Garden State, New Jersey is currently home to over 10,000 farms," said New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher. "We can, and must, leverage the ingenuity of our farmers and the resources made available through the Food Desert Relief Act to connect food insecure New Jerseyans with access to the fresh-grown fruits and vegetables produced at these farms."

Enrollment in nutrition assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) were among the factors considered in the designation of the Food Desert Communities. Overseen by NJHHS, NJ SNAP served more than 900,000 New Jerseyans in 2021 and has provided more than \$2 billion in extra food assistance since March 2020. NJ WIC, administered by NJDOH, served over 140,000 women and children between October 2020 and September 2021.

“The Murphy Administration is committed to combating food insecurity throughout New Jersey, and these new designations are a big step toward ensuring all residents – no matter their zip code – have access to healthy food,” Human Services Acting Commissioner Sarah Adelman said. “Healthy food promotes healthy living, and we look forward to continuing to work with the NJEDA to promote access to nutritional meals across New Jersey. We also urge anyone facing food insecurity to visit njhelps.org to see if they qualify for assistance.”

“This once in a lifetime pandemic has greatly exacerbated the issues of food insecurity in our state,” said Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli. “The whole-of-government approach will help us to provide the resources and supports our communities need to assist families in leading long, healthy lives.”

Today’s announcement also follows action taken yesterday by the NJEDA Board to [create Phase 3 of the Authority’s Sustain & Serve NJ program](#). Sustain & Serve NJ supports New Jersey nonprofits combatting food insecurity by providing grants to organizations to purchase meals from local restaurants and distribute them for free to residents throughout the state. To ensure the program benefits New Jersey’s small restaurants, participating establishments must have 50 or fewer employees. To date the program has supported the purchase of nearly 3.2 million meals from over 400 restaurants. The NJEDA expects to open applications for Phase 3 of the program in early March.

The Food Desert Relief Act is part of the New Jersey Economic Recovery Act of 2021 signed into law by Governor Murphy in early 2021. In addition to the Food Desert Relief Act, the ERA creates a suite of programs that includes tax credits to incentivize job creation, new construction, and revitalization of brownfield properties; financial resources for small businesses; historic property reinvestment; new funding opportunities for early-stage companies in New Jersey; and support for the growing film and digital media industry. The NJEDA will continue to engage the public as new programs and rules are developed.

[About the New Jersey Economic Development Authority](#)

The New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) serves as the State’s principal agency for driving economic growth. The NJEDA is committed to making New Jersey a national model for inclusive and sustainable economic development by focusing on key strategies to help build strong and dynamic communities, create good jobs for New Jersey residents, and provide pathways to a stronger and fairer economy. Through partnerships with a diverse range of stakeholders, the NJEDA creates and implements initiatives to enhance the economic vitality and quality of life in the State and strengthen New Jersey’s long-term economic competitiveness.

To learn more about NJEDA resources for businesses call NJEDA Customer Care at 609-858-6767 or visit <https://www.njeda.gov> and follow [@NewJerseyEDA](#) on Facebook, [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

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PRESS RELEASE

November 17, 2023

New Aspire Rules Aimed to Strengthen Affordable Housing & Expand Eligibility Approved by NJEDA Board

TRENTON, N.J. (November 17, 2023) – The New Jersey Economic Development Authority’s (NJEDA) Board yesterday approved the adoption of new rules for the Aspire Program aimed to spur development and increase affordable housing in communities across the state.

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PRESS RELEASE

November 16, 2023

Governor Murphy Announces Letter of Intent for Proposed Life Sciences, Health Care, and Tech Innovation Hub in Jersey City

JERSEY CITY, N.J. (November 16, 2023) – Governor Phil Murphy today announced that the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) and SciTech Scity LLC (“STS”), have signed a non-binding letter of intent to form a limited liability company to be called “Edge Works.”

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PRESS RELEASE

November 16, 2023

NJEDA Board Approves Program Aimed to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions

TRENTON, N.J. (November 16, 2023) – The New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) Board today approved the creation of a new pilot program that will provide grants to commercial building owners and tenants undertaking retrofit construction projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions from existing commercial buildings.

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