

A “foodprint” is a component of an individual’s ecological footprint, including all of the resources required to support a healthy diet for one person over the course of one year. A “foodshed” describes the geographic area that supplies a population with food.

Recent growth in interest in local food and the sustainability of the food system leads to the question: *Where could my food come from?* One critical factor related to this question is the capacity of local agriculture to meet the food needs of local people. Could the farms in New York state, for example, produce all the food the people in the state need?

WHAT FOOD DO THE PEOPLE IN NEW YORK STATE NEED?

Regions throughout New York tend to specialize in certain types of agriculture, such as dairy, feed grains and orchard crops.

According to a recent study, each New Yorker requires 727 kilograms of primary food commodities annually. Plant foods constitute approximately two-thirds of New Yorkers’ diet (on a weight basis), while livestock products account for the remaining third.

The study estimated that New York already produces a sufficient quantity of fluid milk to meet the food needs of its population, but falls short in other agricultural classes, such as grains, fruits and vegetables. Therefore, New York state would need to reallocate some agricultural land to accommodate these needs.¹

DOES NEW YORK AGRICULTURE HAVE THE LAND AND ABILITY TO SUPPORT THE ENTIRE STATE?

New York state has 3.15 million hectare, a metric unit of area defined as 10,000 square meters, of agriculture land cover. However, due to land availability and resources, nearly two-thirds of the land must be devoted to perennial foods, plants that live more than two years, which leaves slightly more than one-third for annual crop production or products.

Using the Foodshed Model created in one study, food was unevenly distributed among the different population centers throughout New York state. The residents of New York are dispersed throughout a mixture of rural and urban places, but are not evenly distributed: Of the 125 population centers considered in one study, 63 percent of the state’s almost 19 million people reside in or near the greater New York City area, with an additional 23 percent of the population residing in or near the 15 urbanized areas directly outside New York City. Because of this unequal distribution, the state’s largest population center, New York City, was largely unfed by food produced locally in the state. Research findings suggest that in a heavily populated state like New York, while land availability is satisfactory, varied food sources — local, regional and imported — are necessary to feed the population.² To learn more about the Foodshed Model, visit our [resource page](#).

COULD ESTABLISHING BETTER FOODSHED USAGE DECREASE NEW YORK’S FOODPRINT?

Different cities might have different definitions of what constitutes local food. Foodsheds surrounding urbanized areas in New York are twice as big, and New York City’s foodshed is almost ten times as large, as the foodsheds in rural parts of the state. In addition, perennial foods are not grown on the same amount of land as annual food throughout the state; therefore, foodsheds have to extend farther to access these foods. However, it appears that reallocating where certain foods are grown throughout the state has the potential to significantly reduce the size of New York’s foodprint.

Local and regional food systems can maximize the value of land by specializing in the production of certain foods. One study suggests that, due to natural resources in New York, the highest and best agricultural use of land favors production of dairy, eggs, fruit and vegetables, relative to grains and meat. However, which of these foods should be a priority is an issue of public discussion and opinions differ on which foods bring the most regional and cultural value.³

¹ Peters, C. J., Bills, N. L., Lembo, A. J., Wilkins, J. L., & Fick, G. W. (2012). Mapping potential foodsheds in New York state by food group: An approach for prioritizing which foods to grow locally. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems*, 27(2), 125–137.

² Peters, C. J., Bills, N. L., Lembo, A. J., Wilkins, J. L., & Fick, G. W. (2009). Mapping potential foodsheds in New York state: A spatial model for evaluating the capacity to localize food production. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems*, 24(1), 72–84.

³ Peters et al. (2012).