

# COLLECTIVE PURCHASING: A Pilot Effort to Achieve Savings and Promote Collaboration Among NYC's Food Pantries



Final Report prepared by:  
KarenKarp&Partners

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# PROJECT TEAM

## Program Partners



## Funders



## Program Consultants

KarenKarp&Partners

# LETTER FROM CHEF GREG SILVERMAN

## Twenty years ago, as a chef and restaurant owner, I was frustrated by my supply chain.

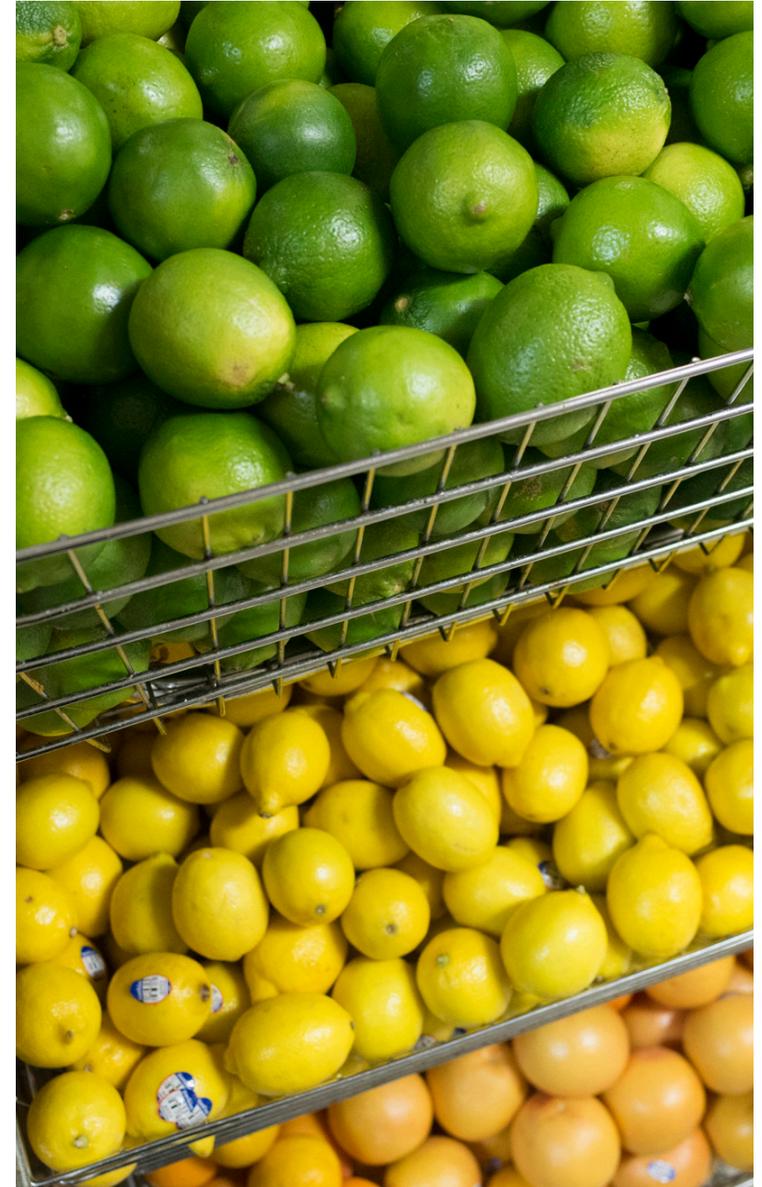
I wanted the best produce, most local proteins and dairy, and sustainable staple goods. The customers of my farm-to-table restaurant, my catering business, my cafe, and my bar all deserved the best and it was my job to make sure they got the best. I demanded better products and prices from my purveyors and used my purchase power, my network, and my voice to get it.

An estimated 1.4 million New York City residents rely on emergency food programs, including soup kitchens and food pantries, each year. Healthy, fresh produce and other regionally grown agricultural products are often not available and are at a price point too high to be within reach of New York's front line community based organizations and the food insecure customers they serve. As a front line community based organization, I once again realized that my community, my 22,000 customers, and all New Yorkers in need deserved better products and prices from our purveyors.

I reached out to my friends at many community-based organizations in NYC and began assembling a team, a network of changemakers looking to disrupt an ineffective, imbalanced, and unjust system. Our individual voices were not being heard, our collective voice was not in existence and we simply wanted choice for our customers and for our organizations.

Four NYC based anti-hunger organizations (New York Common Pantry, Project Hospitality, St. John's Bread and Life, and West Side Campaign Against Hunger) came together with the support of Robin Hood Foundation, Sea Change Capital, and NY State Health Foundation with a belief that all New Yorkers should have access to more high-quality food, such as lean protein, fresh produce, or fresh milk; that we could save money through collective action; and that by engaging more directly with other like-minded organizations we would find new ways to sustainably collaborate. A collective purchase network was piloted and we are thankful to everyone's support thus far and look forward to continued collective and collaborative changemaking.

Chef Greg Silverman  
Executive Director  
West Side Campaign Against Hunger



# PROJECT BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

The concept for the Collective Purchasing Initiative was developed and pursued by Greg Silverman, Executive Director of West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH), whose background as a chef and in food operations spurred a desire to find out whether New York City's food pantries could achieve meaningful savings by combining their substantial purchasing power. After securing funding from Robin Hood, Sea Change Capital, and New York State Health Foundation in early 2018, Greg recruited three of the city's other largest food pantries to participate in a pilot project: Project Hospitality (PH), St. John's Bread & Life (SJBL), and New York Common Pantry (NYCP). Collectively, these four organizations serve over 5.7 million meals annually, and spend about \$1.2 million per year on food, exclusive of grants received from the federal, state, and city governments. WSCAH retained food systems consultancy Karen Karp & Partners (KK&P) to lead the project research and facilitate the group's activities.

The project launched in August 2018, with the following objectives:

1. All New Yorkers will have access to more high-quality food, such as lean protein, fresh produce, or fresh milk.
2. Participating organizations will save at least 5% on purchased food (for equivalent quantities; some groups may increase quantities purchased with savings).
3. Food organizations will collaborate more effectively, at minimum with at least three continuing participation in the collective purchasing initiative.
4. Through the strategic planning and implementation process, additional collaboration opportunities will be defined. These opportunities might include ways of widely disseminating findings from the pilot, and might also include other new ways of working together, sharing resources, and acting collectively.

All four organizations receive funding through three government grant programs: The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), a federal

	NYCP	PH	SJBL	WSCAH
Meals Served	2,520,669	1,169,627	697,637	1,333,020
TEFAP	\$155,055	\$251,975	\$76,522	\$260,670
HPNAP	\$375,000	\$375,000	\$309,311	\$375,000
EFAP	\$82,249	\$154,692	\$121,764	\$112,179
Estimated Annual Food Spending	\$295,844	\$349,839	\$342,183	\$211,555
City Harvest Lbs. Received	601,000	234,168	127,228	476,741
Food Bank Lbs. Received (Donated)	74,410	157,742	NA	18,142
Other Donated Lbs. Received	570,237	22,982	24,427	120,664

**TABLE 1. OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS, FY 2018.** *The figures shown here are for FY 2018 (2017-2018), and include data for food pantry and soup kitchen operations for each organization. Data provided to KK&P by each organization.*

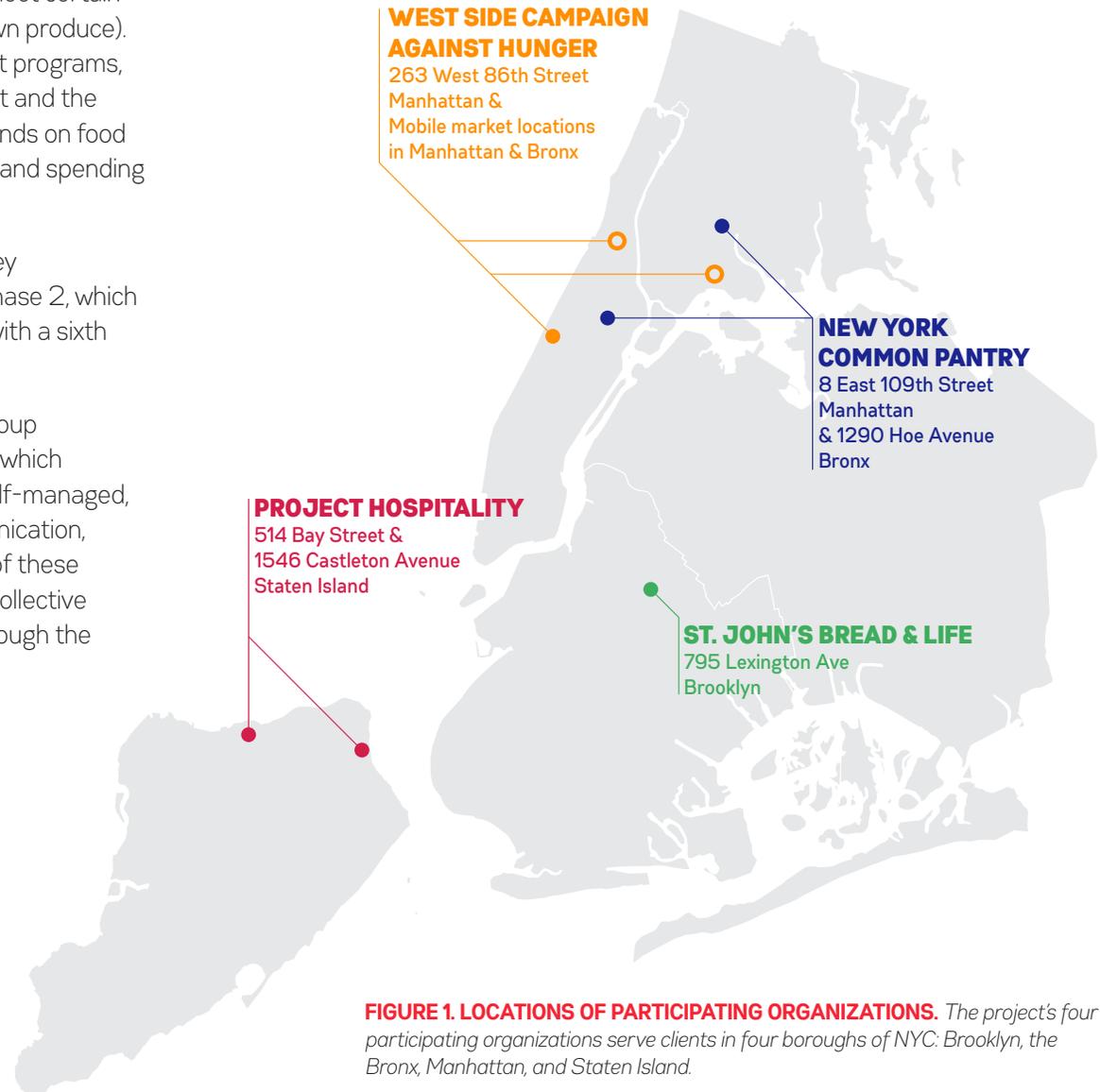
grant program administered by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service; New York State's Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP); and New York City's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP), managed by the city's Human Resources Administration. TEFAP and EFAP are both disbursed directly through the Food Bank for NYC; recipient organizations draw down their grant amounts through a limited range of products they receive from the Food Bank. Smaller programs in NYC also receive HPNAP funds in this way, through the Food Bank or United Way; however, larger HPNAP grantees (including all four organizations participating in this project)

## PROJECT BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

receive HPNAP funding directly and therefore have the freedom to use their HPNAP funds with any vendor, as long as their purchases meet certain guidelines and benchmarks (e.g. a minimum purchase of NY-grown produce). In addition to the food received or purchased through these grant programs, all four organizations also receive donated food from City Harvest and the Food Bank, while also spending their own independently raised funds on food purchases. Table 1 (p. 6) summarizes the various grant, donation, and spending amounts for each organization, as well as meals served.

Project Phase 1, which comprised in-depth research to identify key opportunities, ran from August 2018 through February 2019. Phase 2, which piloted collective purchasing via relationships with five vendors (with a sixth added later) ran from April – September 2019.

Formal collective purchasing usually takes one of two forms: a group purchasing organization (GPO), a third-party procurement entity which members can join and buy through; or a buying group, which is self-managed, with participating organizations sharing responsibility for communication, vendor cultivation, etc. For this initiative, the team explored both of these options, as well as others which might not be considered formal collective purchasing but which leveraged other opportunities revealed through the group's research phase.



# PHASE 1: RESEARCH

## Process

The project's research phase was built around a tremendous effort on the part of each participating organization: data entry of a full year's worth of food purchase invoices. Each organization committed substantial staff time to enter invoice data dating from September 2017 through August 2018 into a consistent digital format. This process took over two months to complete, and in the end, the group collectively entered over 10,000 individual item purchases amounting to over \$2 million in spending. The group met in November 2018 to review preliminary analysis, and again in January and February 2019 to review more detailed analysis and to discuss emerging opportunities for improved purchasing.

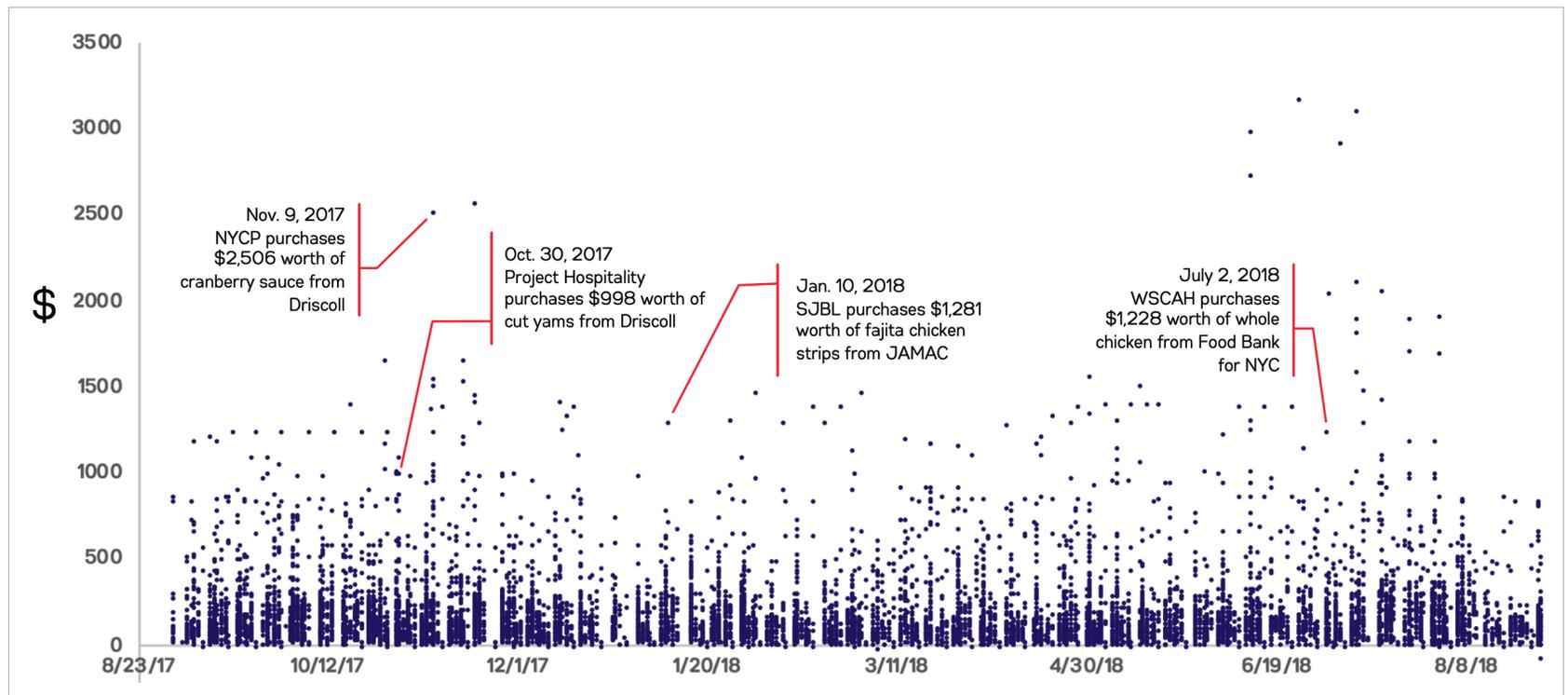
## Findings

During the 2017-2018 period of analysis, the four organizations purchased from 19 different vendors, with Driscoll Foods, Food Bank for NYC, and Ace Endico being the most significant suppliers by dollar amount. Food items were grouped into broad categories (e.g. canned foods, fresh fruit, grains & pasta, etc.); the top five food categories by dollar amount were canned foods, fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, dairy, and meat & poultry.

For a more detailed analysis, the group identified 12 staple products – four fruits, four vegetables, two types of milk, and two types of animal protein – which in aggregate accounted for over one-fourth of the organizations' purchasing, and were also aligned with the project partners' agreed upon

**FIGURE 2.**  
**OVERVIEW**  
**OF COMPILED**  
**PURCHASING DATA.**

*Participating organizations entered 10,572 individual item purchases from Aug. 1, 2017 through Sept. 30, 2018. Each point on the figure at right represents one of those purchases; four illustrative examples are called out.*



## PHASE 1: RESEARCH

objective focusing on fresh produce, lean protein, and milk. Price and quantity analysis were completed for each of these 12 products in order to provide a baseline reference when vetting new vendor and purchasing opportunities.

Relevant findings from the purchasing analysis include:

- **Striking variations in price between vendors.** For example, Cream O Land's average quart milk price (\$1.17) was 48% higher than Derle's (\$0.79).
- **Different product preferences among organizations.** For example, each organization purchased the bulk of their chicken in a different format: thighs and drumsticks for WSCAH, wings and legs for NYCP, strips for SJBL, and whole for PH. NYCP purchased substantial quantities of plantains, while SJBL purchased none.
- **All four organizations follow a similar annual purchasing pattern,** with purchasing quantities peaking in October and November, followed by a drop off in the winter, and another smaller peak in July.

As the purchasing analysis progressed, the team began exploring and vetting potential vendors and approaches for a pilot phase. These included:

- **Broadline Vendors.** Ace Endico and Driscoll were the two main broadband vendors already serving the four organizations. After quantifying the potential aggregate purchasing volumes for the four organizations, Driscoll and Ace Endico were approached for proposals on what discounts they might offer to the group. Unfortunately, neither responded with significant savings proposed.
- **Group Purchasing Organization, Food & Supply Source (FSS).** FSS is a GPO that serves nonprofits and social and human services organizations across the U.S. FSS uses the aggregate purchasing power of its 3,000-plus member organizations to negotiate discounts with vendors. Vendors, not member organizations, bear the cost of the GPO operations, so it

costs nothing for purchasing organizations to join FSS. For this project, FSS offered relationships with three key vendors: DiCarlo, a broadband vendor comparable to Ace Endico and Driscoll; Baldor, a Bronx-based produce purveyor; and Cream O Land dairy. Cream O Land was already serving WSCAH, but not through negotiated competitive pricing.

- **Specialized Vendors.** Derle, a dairy vendor, and Dagele Brothers, a produce farm and aggregator/distributor, were both already serving New York Common Pantry. Price analysis revealed that these two vendors were already offering quite competitive pricing. Extending these relationships across the group of organizations was identified as one potential approach.
- **New York State Contract Extension Program.** Through a conversation with Sarah Barton, Director of Program Development at New York State's Department of Agriculture and Markets, and subsequent research, the team discovered that as charitable organizations, they were legally eligible to make purchases under the state's centralized commodity contracts via the contract extension program. This functions similar to a GPO, but with the state government as price negotiator, using the purchasing power of its state agencies to secure competitive pricing on a range of goods and services. For the purposes of this project, the relevant contract was the Retail Food contract, which was serviced by Driscoll. The contract requires a per-order minimum of \$300, and is based on a 12% "cost-plus" structure (all pricing is a consistent 12% markup on the cost to Driscoll).
- **Tiered Volume Discounts via Greenmarket Co.** Greenmarket Co. is the wholesale arm of GrowNYC, the city-run network of NYC farmers' markets. Greenmarket Co. was already servicing SJBL and WSCAH. Greenmarket Co. offered the group a tiered volume discount structure (with increasing discount percentages for increased volumes).
- **Food Bank for NYC.** While the Food Bank was not able to offer discounts on their already-low prices, their pricing was included as a reference point

## PHASE 1: RESEARCH

in the vendor opportunity analysis.

The above vendor opportunities were assessed through two analyses: sample invoice analysis, whereby sample broadline invoices from each organization were modeled under each of the potential vendor scenarios; and focus product analysis, whereby the 12 identified focus products were similarly evaluated with prices from each potential vendor. Key findings from these analyses were as follows:

- **The Food Bank almost always offers the lowest price.** Particularly with certain staple products like chicken and shelf-stable milk, the Food Bank's wholesale prices were significantly lower than those available through other vendors. However, the Food Bank's inventory fluctuates unpredictably, so it cannot be counted on for consistent supply of any one product.
- **The New York State Contract Extension for Driscoll offered substantial savings, better than any other broadline opportunities evaluated.** Invoice analysis found that the state contract offered savings ranging from 10-28% over prices currently being paid, including those already being paid to Driscoll outside of the contract.
- **Derle and Cream O Land (via FSS) offered comparable - and improved - pricing on fresh milk.** For example, by switching from Cream O Land direct to Cream O Land via FSS, WSCAH was positioned to save 28% on milk quarts.
- **For fresh produce, both Dagele Brothers and Baldor (via FSS) offered**

QTY	PACK	ITEM	CASE PRICE	TOTAL COST	NYS-Driscoll TOTAL COST	NYS-Driscoll SAVINGS \$	NYS-Driscoll SAVINGS %
1	12 / 32 oz	Chicken Broth Unsalted	\$40.68	\$40.68	\$28.36	\$12.32	30%
8	6 / #10	Vegetables Mixed LRS	\$39.94	\$319.52	\$226.24	\$93.28	29%
6	8 / 16 oz	Alfredo Mix	\$86.49	\$518.94	\$380.64	\$138.30	27%
1	4 / 3 LTR	Oil Olive Extra Virgin	\$99.00	\$99.00	\$98.84	\$0.16	0%
8	6 / #10	Beans Green LRS	\$30.18	\$241.44	\$175.28	\$66.16	27%
8	6 / #10	Carrots Sliced Med. LRS	\$32.94	\$263.52	\$173.36	\$90.16	34%
2	1 / 1200 ct	Sugar in the Raw PC	\$39.72	\$79.44	\$51.26	\$28.18	35%
1	36 / 1 LB	Butter Unsalted AA Solid	\$3.79	\$136.44	\$108.00	\$28.44	21%
2	1 / 8.81 LB	Butter Whipped Cups 400 CT	\$4.99	\$87.92	\$66.96	\$20.96	24%
5	46 / 3.5 oz	Chkn Breast Golden Crisp CKD	\$42.45	\$212.25	\$152.90	\$59.35	28%
8	1 / 250 ct	Ravioli Cheese Med Square	\$25.87	\$206.96	\$136.40	\$70.56	34%
<b>TOTAL:</b>				<b>\$2,206.11</b>	<b>\$1,598.24</b>	<b>\$607.87</b>	<b>28%</b>

**TABLE 2. SAMPLE INVOICE ANALYSIS.** The analysis shown above compares an actual Project Hospitality - Driscoll invoice (grey columns at left) to the prices that would be paid for those exact items under the New York State Driscoll contract (purple columns at right). This analysis documents a potential savings of 28%, or over \$600 on this single \$2206 invoice.

**significant savings over average prices currently being paid by the group.** Dagele Brothers and Baldor offered comparable savings – 17-18%. Greenmarket Co.'s proposed discounts did not match the savings available through Dagele and Baldor.

Given the above findings, the group agreed to the following design for a six-month pilot:

- All organizations would register for the NYS Contract Extension for broadline purchases through Driscoll.
- Organizations would choose between Derle or Cream O Land (via FSS) for fresh milk. Because they had an existing relationship with Cream O Land, WSCAH continued purchasing from them, while all other organizations purchased through Derle.
- Organizations would buy produce through Dagele Brothers and/or Baldor. The team would continue to explore potential discounts through Greenmarket Co., but Greenmarket Co. would not be a part of the pilot at

## PHASE 1: RESEARCH

its launch.

While organizations were encouraged to shift their purchasing to pilot vendors as outlined above, there was no minimum purchase requirement or target dollar amount. All organizations were mindful of their existing vendor

relationships, and generally wanted to maintain them for a range of reasons. But all organizations agreed that they would commit to some level purchasing with pilot vendors for the period of the pilot.



# PHASE 2: PILOT

## Process

The pilot was officially launched with Dagele Brothers, Derle Dairy, Cream O Land (via FSS) and Baldor (via FSS) in April 2019; moderate paperwork delays slowed the launch of the NYS contract extension program, but all organizations were buying from Driscoll through that contract by early May. The pilot with these vendors ran through September. After continuing to develop the opportunity with Greenmarket Co., WSCAH and SJBL also engaged in a brief pilot with that vendor for September and October.

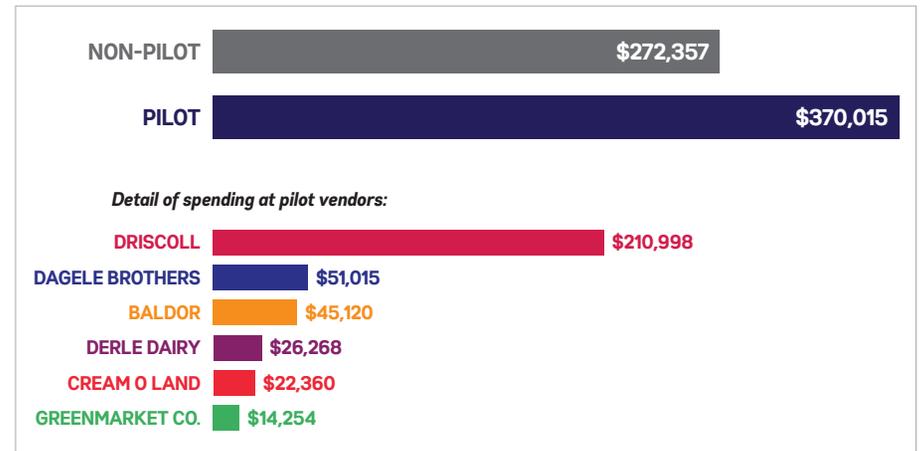
During the course of the pilot, organizations submitted invoices to KK&P, who logged and analyzed the purchasing data. Representatives from each organization also completed biweekly (and later, monthly) online surveys to track the qualitative aspects of the pilot vendor relationships, such as customer service, product quality, and ongoing challenges and successes. The team held monthly conference calls over the course of the pilot to discuss progress, reflect on experiences, share information, and troubleshoot challenges as they emerged.

## Outcomes

Over the six months of the pilot, the four organizations spent just over \$370,000, about 58% of all documented spending, through the pilot vendors, as shown in Figure 3.

**According to invoice analysis, the pilot achieved an estimated savings rate of 19% on pilot purchases, amounting to over \$68,000 saved - more than \$160,000 when extrapolated annually.**

KK&P completed invoice analysis for each unique organization-vendor relationship to estimate savings as compared to 2018 purchases. This analysis estimated savings ranging from 5% (PH purchases from Dagele



**FIGURE 3. OVERVIEW OF PILOT SPENDING.** The figure above illustrates spending at pilot vendors over the course of the initiative. Driscoll pilot purchases ran May-September; Greenmarket Co. pilot purchases ran September-October, and all others ran April-September.

Brothers and SJBL purchases from Baldor) to 71.7% (PH purchases from Derle; PH went from paying \$2.79 for a quart of milk to paying \$0.79), as shown in Table 3. Overall, according to the invoice analysis, the pilot achieved an aggregate estimated savings rate of 19% on pilot purchases, amounting to over \$68,000 saved during the pilot, and over \$160,000 when extrapolated annually. Estimated savings rates by organization ranged from 4% for NYCP to 31% for PH. NYCP's savings rate is low because they were already purchasing through Dagele Brothers and Derle, so savings were not calculated for those vendors; however, NYCP staff have noted that the in-depth research in this project was helpful in affirming that those vendor relationships were beneficial.

KK&P also completed a "market basket" analysis on 12 products representing a range of product types (similar to, but not the exact same 12 'focus products' analyzed in Phase 1); see Table 4. With the exception of two products (onions and potatoes), all market basket products show savings over 2018, ranging from 3% (green plantains) to 27% (dry red kidney beans). A representative of Dagele Brothers explained that in 2019, the national crops of onions and

## PHASE 2: PILOT

**TABLE 3. ESTIMATED SAVINGS BASED ON INVOICE ANALYSIS.** The table below summarizes estimated savings based on invoice analysis for each organization-vendor relationship, compared to prices paid for the same or similar products in the previous year. Greenmarket Co. savings are based on the actual discount applied to Greenmarket Co. prices.

	NYCP	PH	SJBL	WSCAH
<b>Driscoll (May-Sept.)</b>				
\$ Spend	\$15,976.18	\$25,659.89	\$157,592.65	\$11,769.38
Estimated Savings (%)	12.1%	29.0%	20.3%	14.8%
Estimated Savings (\$)	\$2,199	\$10,481	\$40,140	\$2,044
<b>Derle Dairy (April-Sept.)</b>				
\$ Spend	\$18,610.40	\$633.58	\$7,024.36	
Estimated Savings (%)		71.7%	6.3%	
Estimated Savings (\$)		\$1,605	\$472	
<b>Cream O Land Dairy (April-Sept.)</b>				
\$ Spend				\$22,360.41
Estimated Savings (%)				19.2%
Estimated Savings (\$)				\$5,313
<b>Dagele Produce (April-Sept.)</b>				
\$ Spend	\$37,052.00	\$13,963.00		
Estimated Savings (%)		5.0%		
Estimated Savings (\$)		\$735		
<b>Baldor Produce (April-Sept.)</b>				
\$ Spend	\$11,945.12	\$2,757.25	\$9,367.93	\$21,049.56
Estimated Savings (%)	11.0%	15.8%	5.0%	8.8%
Estimated Savings (\$)	\$1,476	\$517	\$493	\$2,031
<b>Greenmarket Co. (Sept.-Oct.)</b>				
\$ Spend			\$5,890.00	\$8,364.25
Confirmed Savings (%)			9.0%	8.8%
Confirmed Savings (\$)			\$530.33	\$739.79
<b>Total Pilot Spend</b>	<b>\$83,583.70</b>	<b>\$43,013.72</b>	<b>\$179,874.94</b>	<b>\$63,543.60</b>
<b>Total Estimated Savings (\$)</b>	<b>\$3,675.59</b>	<b>\$13,338.31</b>	<b>\$41,635.33</b>	<b>\$10,128.70</b>
<b>Total Estimated Savings (%)</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>16%</b>

**Total Estimated Savings During Pilot (\$): \$68,778**

**Total Estimated Savings (%): 19%**

**Estimated Annual Savings (\$): \$160,772**

potatoes had a very low supply, which drove up prices as compared to the previous year.

In addition to the fiscal savings, participating organizations also reported a number of qualitative benefits to participating in the initiative, as documented by survey responses over the course of the pilot phase. These benefits include (with example survey responses quoted):

- **Improved product quality and increased fresh product**
  - » “Better quality for produce”
  - » “Increased purchase of fresh produce through access to NYS grown produce (such as through Dagele)”
- **Improved product selection and pricing**
  - » “Being able to provide culturally appropriate foods to our clients at a reduced cost: Plantains, for example are much cheaper through Baldor than through Dagele (\$24 vs \$35)”
- **Improved customer service**
  - » “We’ve had excellent customer service experiences with our collective purchasing vendors.”
- **Greater choice and access to information**
  - » “We are armed with the ability to know which sources and which products cost the most or least”

## PHASE 2: PILOT

	Average effective price paid - 2018	Average effective price paid - PILOT	Estimated savings (%)
Apples (per lb.)	\$0.63	\$0.55	11%
Bananas (per lb.)	\$0.58	\$0.50	14%
Beef, ground (per lb.)	\$3.28	\$2.92	11%
Carrots (per lb.)	\$0.56	\$0.44	21%
Milk, Fresh - Half Gallon	\$2.27	\$1.93	15%
Milk, Fresh - Quart	\$0.97	\$0.82	15%
Onions (per lb.)	\$0.41	\$0.46	-12%
Plantains, Green (per lb.)	\$0.82	\$0.79	3%
Potatoes (per lb.)	\$0.39	\$0.40	-2%
Red Kidney Beans, dry (per lb.)	\$1.21	\$0.88	27%
Rice, White, dry (per lb.)	\$0.60	\$0.57	6%
Tuna, Light Chunk, canned (5 oz. can)	\$0.83	\$0.72	14%

**TABLE 4. ESTIMATED MARKET BASKET SAVINGS.** The table above compares average effective prices paid (normalized by actual purchase quantities) for market basket items in 2018 (pre-pilot), and during the pilot with pilot vendors.

- » “Overall having more vendors to use strategically.”
- » “We now have different information at our fingertips, such as capacity, ability to make delivery window, and prices overall that helps to guide purchasing better.”
- » [The biggest success has been] “the ability to compare prices across vendors, along with spending levels and experience across agencies. This has allowed for more informed purchasing practices.”

Generally speaking, organizations expressed that one of the biggest wins of this project, beyond the savings, has been the broader vendor selection they have.

Another objective of this initiative was to create a platform for communication

*“Project Hospitality [has] benefited by developing relationships with our emergency food providers in the city in a more general way. We’ve visited their sites to learn from them and we plan to implement software used by one of the pantries which will help us change the shopping experience for our clients while also helping us manage our inventory.”*

*- Carrie Bloss, Executive Director, Project Hospitality*

and collaboration among participating organizations, and for the organizations to collaborate more effectively. All four organizations have agreed that this objective was achieved. Specific examples of communication and collaboration during the pilot period include:

- The monthly team calls during which experiences with the collective purchasing initiative were shared and discussed, as well as other topics (e.g. challenges with vendor distribution whether through Food Bank, broadline distributors, or other vendors.)
- An end-of-pilot team meeting, during which additional opportunities and next steps for the collective were envisioned and discussed
- Site visits between NYCP and WSCAH to share processes, discuss mobile market approaches, and consider additional opportunities for collective action
- Partnership between WSCAH and SJBL on Greenmarket Co. volume discounts
- SJBL utilized WSCAH job descriptions as templates for creating one of their own

These collaborations and relationships among participating organizations have laid the groundwork for future directions for the collective, both in continuing the purchasing activity and in identifying additional areas for collective impact.

## PHASE 2: PILOT

### Key Learnings

Across the 14-month period of activity for this initiative, and particularly during the pilot phase, the project team gleaned learnings that will guide the work of this group as it continues:

- **Formal collective purchasing was not necessary to achieve meaningful wins.** This group kicked off the project with an assumption that combining the organizations' purchasing power would be the most effective lever in achieving savings. However, the team's detailed research and investigation of a range of opportunities (especially the NY State Contract Extension Program) revealed other approaches to achieve savings that did not require, for example, shared bids or joint purchasing. Purchasing analysis and opportunity research uncovered other, simpler avenues for collective impact.
- **Vendor relationships matter.** Relationships and trust are critical dimensions of food vendor relationships. For this reason, organizations who were able to achieve new savings through their existing vendor relationships were positioned well – such as St. John's Bread & Life, who was already making significant purchases through Driscoll, and who was thus able to achieve instant savings by switching to the NY contract, with no other changes to their primary vendor relationship. Organizations who needed to pilot, test, and onboard new vendors, while incorporating these vendors into their purchasing habits, had a somewhat more involved – though still rewarding – transition.
- **The benefits of the pilot extended beyond just savings.** Although the central objective of this initiative was monetary savings, participating organizations were also appreciative of ancillary benefits that came from a broader selection of vendors: improved responsiveness and customer service, better product quality, and generally being better informed as buyers.

- **Participating organizations benefited from informal information sharing throughout the project.** The simple platform of periodic communication between these groups, during in-person meetings or monthly calls, allowed for useful peer-to-peer learning – whether comparing notes on a vendor, updating each other about Food Bank changes (as when a glut of free fresh milk was distributed through the Food Bank, but not all organizations had the same information), or sharing experiences with various technology platforms. These learnings indicate there is much to gain by continuing consistent communication, and expanding the group to include more organizations.



# NEXT STEPS FOR THE COLLECTIVE

In September, the groups gathered for a visioning session to imagine future directions and opportunities for the collective. All groups indicated an interest in continuing to collaborate on purchasing, and to find additional topics or projects to work together on. **The group set a goal of adding four additional organizations to the collective within the year and establishing a streamlined structure for continuing the purchasing efforts.** Additional potential areas for collaboration and collective impact include:

- Advocacy to improve NYC's EFAP grant program so that it works better for recipient organizations
- Shared human resources functions, such as recruiting, performance management, and professional development
- Shared infrastructure – such as warehouse space – to more nimbly respond to food supply opportunities (whether purchased or donated)
- Collaborative approaches to food rescue

To sustain this work, the team requires the ongoing administrative, facilitation, and research support of an external coordinator or consultant, a role filled by KK&P during this pilot phase. In the near term, WSCAH is seeking additional philanthropic support to seed a next stage of collective action, with the vision for a sustainable model where, as the group expands, and each participating organization contributes some small annual amount (e.g. \$1-7K), the collective will ultimately be self-sustaining – with benefits whose value far exceed the cost of participating in the group.

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*“Participating in this pilot was an invaluable experience for our program. We learned a great amount about by hearing not only success stories, but also about the challenges that other pantries in the city face. Being in a room with all these representatives and having open and honest discussions about these challenges is something that benefitted the program and will continue to benefit our agency in the future.”*

*- Alex Hughes, Program Director - Food & Nutrition, Project Hospitality*

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