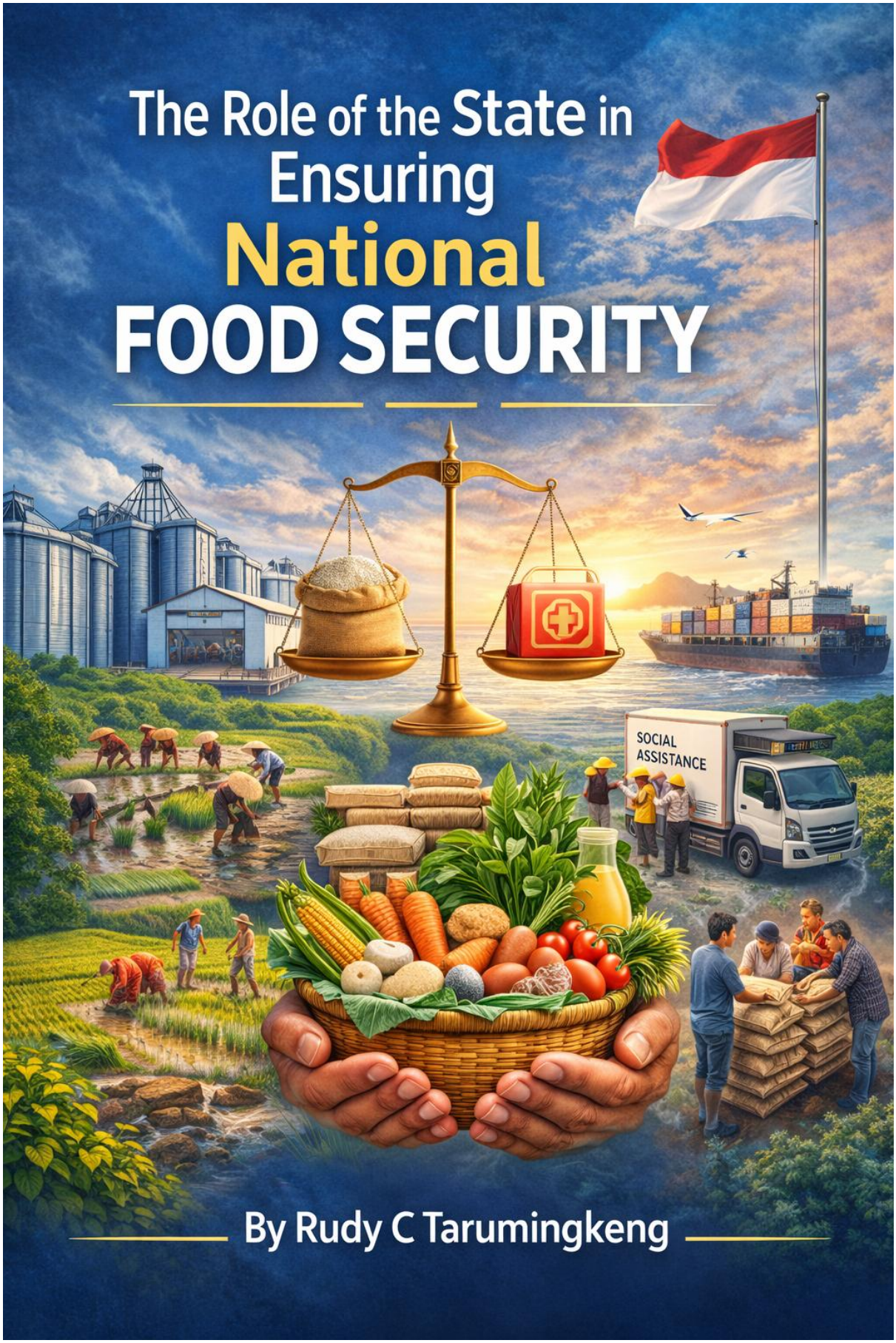
The Role of the State in Ensuring
National
FOOD SECURITY
SOCIAL ASSISTANCE
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11 Maret 2026

THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN ENSURING NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY

Food security is never produced by the market alone. It emerges from the interaction of production, distribution, prices, social protection, public health, infrastructure, trade, and political legitimacy. At its core, food security means that people have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food at all times. The FAO's *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025* underscores that high food-price inflation has weakened purchasing power and worsened access to healthy diets, especially for low-income groups, even where aggregate food availability has improved. (FAOHome)

That point is crucial for understanding the role of the state. A country can produce more rice, maize, fish, or vegetables and still face food insecurity if prices are unstable, logistics are weak, climate shocks damage harvests, or poor households cannot afford nutritious diets. The World Bank's 2025 food-security update likewise shows that global food conditions remain vulnerable to commodity-price swings, fertilizer costs, and broader economic shocks, even when some staple markets appear well supplied. (World Bank)

In the Indonesian context, this question is especially important because food security is tied not only to welfare but also to political stability, social justice, and national resilience. Recent official data from BPS show that Indonesia's rice production improved markedly in early 2025, with March 2025 rice production for food consumption reaching 5.14 million

tons and January–April 2025 production projected well above the same period a year earlier. At the same time, Bappenas and other state institutions have continued to frame food security as a strategic national priority linked to agricultural transformation, land protection, and stronger food-system governance. (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia)

The role of the state in ensuring national food security, therefore, is not limited to increasing harvests. It includes safeguarding production capacity, stabilizing prices, protecting vulnerable consumers, building reserves, managing trade prudently, investing in agricultural infrastructure, supporting farmers, regulating land use, improving nutrition, and coordinating responses to climate and market disruptions. This essay argues that the state remains indispensable because food security is a public-good problem with deep ethical, economic, and strategic dimensions. The stronger the systemic risks facing the food sector, the more important capable and legitimate public institutions become. (FAOHome)

Food Security as a Public Responsibility

The first reason the state matters is conceptual. Food is not a luxury commodity like many other market goods. It is tied to survival, health, social peace, and human dignity. The FAO's Right to Food guidelines explicitly frame food security within a human-rights perspective, emphasizing that states bear responsibility for progressively realizing the right to adequate food and for creating the legal, economic, and institutional environment through which people can feed themselves with dignity. (FAOHome)

This means that the state's responsibility is broader than direct food provision. In normal circumstances, governments do not feed entire populations directly. Instead, they create the conditions that make secure access to food possible: productive agriculture, fair markets, functioning transport systems, health and nutrition policy, income

support, disaster response, and legal protection of land and water resources. In crises, however, the state may need to intervene much more directly through public procurement, reserves, social assistance, and emergency logistics. That dual role—enabling in normal times and intervening in exceptional times—is one of the defining features of food governance. (FAOHome)

This public responsibility becomes even clearer when food markets fail. Markets can distribute goods efficiently under certain conditions, but they do not automatically guarantee equity, price stability, nutritional adequacy, or national resilience. Farmers may underinvest if credit is scarce. Traders may prioritize profit over affordability. Imports may suddenly become expensive or unavailable. Climate shocks may destroy harvests in one region while leaving others relatively unaffected. Because food systems are vulnerable to these failures, states must act as coordinators, regulators, insurers, and, when necessary, providers of last resort. (World Bank)

The State as Guardian of Domestic Production

A central role of the state is to protect and expand domestic food-production capacity. No country can rely entirely on international markets for staple security without exposing itself to geopolitical, logistical, and price risks. This does not mean autarky is always desirable, but it does mean that the production base of a nation has strategic value. Indonesia's recent policy discourse has emphasized food self-sufficiency and stronger domestic supply, and official statements from the Cabinet Secretariat in early 2026 presented 2025 rice performance as evidence of strengthened national food independence, with production rising and consumption-rice imports avoided during the year. (Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia)

Yet production policy is not simply about exhorting farmers to grow more. The state shapes production through irrigation, seed systems,

fertilizer policy, extension services, research, mechanization support, crop insurance, land protection, and rural infrastructure. Without these public supports, the burden of risk falls too heavily on small producers. In Indonesia, Bappenas has repeatedly linked food security to agricultural transformation and stronger agrifood governance, including collaboration with FAO and research institutions to improve food-system resilience and innovation. (FAOHome)

There is also a timing issue. Private actors often think in one-season or one-year horizons, but food security requires multi-year stewardship. Irrigation rehabilitation, seed development, soil quality, flood control, climate adaptation, and rural roads do not produce instant political spectacle, yet they determine long-term productivity. This is why the state must think beyond seasonal output. BPS data showing improved rice production in early 2025 are important, but these gains are meaningful only if institutions can sustain them across future climate variability and market stress. (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia)

The State as Protector of Agricultural Land and Natural Resources

Food security ultimately depends on land, water, and ecological stability. If prime agricultural land is converted rapidly to non-agricultural uses, short-term production programs will struggle to compensate. If irrigation systems deteriorate, if watersheds fail, or if soil fertility declines, then food security becomes more fragile regardless of current stock levels. This is why the state's role includes protecting the ecological foundations of food systems, not just managing annual crop outcomes.

Indonesia's current planning framework reflects this concern. Bappenas has emphasized the need to control the conversion of rice fields and to strengthen the protection of sustainable food-agricultural land under the 2025–2029 development agenda. More broadly, Bappenas English-language communications in 2025 repeatedly tied food security to

agricultural transformation, long-term development planning, and more resilient agrifood governance. (Bappenas)

This is an area where the state's regulatory function is indispensable. Land-use decisions made solely through decentralized, short-term commercial incentives can gradually erode national food capacity. Protecting agricultural land is therefore not anti-development; it is a form of strategic development planning. The same applies to water governance. Irrigation, flood control, watershed management, and climate adaptation all require public coordination because they cross farms, districts, and markets. No individual farmer can govern a watershed or climate risk alone. That is a classic justification for state action.

The State as Builder of Food Infrastructure

Food security depends not only on production but on the ability to move, store, process, and distribute food efficiently. Poor logistics can make one region abundant while another experiences scarcity and high prices. Storage failures can produce post-harvest losses that undermine production gains. Weak roads or ports can isolate rural producers and raise consumer prices. In archipelagic countries like Indonesia, logistics policy is therefore inseparable from food policy.

The practical significance of this can be seen in official efforts to maintain government rice reserves and distribute stabilization rice across regions. Reporting in early 2026 cited very large Bulog-managed reserves and continued distribution programs aimed at keeping rice available and prices under control, while separate operational measures included pre-positioning rice for emergency response in transport nodes. Even when these statements appear in administrative or operational language, they reflect a broader state function: food security depends on a logistical state, not merely an agricultural one. (INP | Indonesian National Police)

Infrastructure also includes information infrastructure. Governments need timely data on crop conditions, market prices, reserve levels, import needs, disaster impacts, and nutrition vulnerabilities. Without such information, interventions become reactive and often mistimed. BPS production releases, reserve reporting, and Bappenas planning processes all show the importance of statistical and planning capacity in food governance. A modern state secures food not only through warehouses and canals, but through institutions that can see, forecast, and coordinate. (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia)

The State as Market Stabilizer

One of the most visible state roles in food security is price stabilization. This is politically sensitive because food inflation hits poor households hardest. The FAO's 2025 SOFI report places special emphasis on high food-price inflation as a major obstacle to food security and nutrition, even where hunger indicators show modest aggregate improvement. The lesson is clear: availability alone does not guarantee access when prices rise faster than incomes. (FAOHome)

States therefore intervene in food markets for reasons that go beyond ordinary competition policy. They may conduct buffer-stock operations, subsidize transport, cap prices temporarily, release public reserves, support import adjustments, or channel subsidized food to vulnerable groups. Indonesia's SPHP rice program is one example of this stabilizing role. Reporting from late 2025 and early 2026 described the continued use of SPHP rice distribution to maintain price stability, backed by significant public stocks. (Antara News)

There are, of course, trade-offs. Price controls can discourage farmers if they push farmgate prices too low. Overuse of reserves can weaken future buffers. Subsidies can be fiscally costly. The state's task is therefore not simply to suppress prices, but to manage a fair balance between consumer affordability and producer viability. This balance is

one reason food governance is difficult. A just food policy must protect consumers from sudden spikes while ensuring that farmers still receive incentives to produce. (kemenkopangan.go.id)

In this sense, food security is not a static condition but an active balancing process. The state mediates between different interests: farmers, traders, consumers, logistics actors, and fiscal authorities. If it fails, either inflation or production disincentives can undermine the system.

The State as Keeper of Strategic Food Reserves

Strategic reserves are one of the clearest instruments through which the state expresses responsibility for food security. Private markets generally do not hold buffer stocks for public welfare purposes; they hold stocks for commercial reasons. Government reserves serve a different function. They create insurance against supply disruptions, natural disasters, speculative spikes, and sudden import difficulties.

Indonesia's recent reserve management offers a concrete example. Official and quasi-official public reporting in late 2025 and early 2026 repeatedly referred to historically high government rice reserves managed by Bulog, with these reserves explicitly linked to price stabilization, emergency readiness, and protection against shocks. Whatever one's view of precise political claims around self-sufficiency, the reserve function itself is a classical state role: it allows the government to act when markets alone cannot respond quickly enough. (kemenkopangan.go.id)

The ethical and strategic rationale for reserves is strong. Food is different from many other goods because supply shocks can become socially destabilizing very quickly. A reserve buys time. It gives the state room to respond before panic, hoarding, or price spikes spiral. It also allows targeted interventions during droughts, floods, transport disruptions, or

international-market turbulence. In an era of climate extremes and geopolitical fragmentation, this stabilizing role has become more—not less—important. (Vietnam+ (VietnamPlus))

Yet reserves also require governance discipline. Stocks must be rotated, quality maintained, logistics financed, and releases timed appropriately. Reports on quality testing of Bulog-held rice in 2025 underscore that reserves are not meaningful if quality control fails. A reserve that cannot be safely distributed in a crisis is only a paper asset. (Antara News)

The State as Provider of Social Protection and Nutrition Security

Food security is not only about supply chains; it is also about household purchasing power and nutritional outcomes. Even in years of adequate national production, many households remain vulnerable because they lack stable income. That is why the state must complement food-production policy with social protection.

The FAO's 2025 SOFI report stresses that high food-price inflation has undermined access to healthy diets, especially for poor populations. This means a food-secure state cannot judge success solely by cereal stocks or harvest volumes. It must also ask whether households can afford nutritious food, whether child malnutrition is falling, and whether vulnerable groups are protected in times of price stress. (FAOHome)

This broadens the state's role significantly. Government becomes not only a producer-supporting and market-stabilizing actor, but also a guarantor of social access to food. Cash transfers, targeted food assistance, school feeding, maternal and child nutrition programs, and emergency food support all become part of the architecture of national food security. In policy terms, this is where food security meets welfare policy and public health.

This perspective is consistent with the right-to-food framework. States are expected not only to refrain from harming people's access to food,

but also to protect and facilitate it—especially when households cannot secure adequate food through market participation alone. (FAOHome)

The State as Trader, Gatekeeper, and Diplomatic Actor

Food security also has an external dimension. Few countries can or should produce every food commodity in every season with perfect domestic sufficiency. Trade can supplement supply, stabilize deficits, and improve dietary diversity. But excessive dependence on imports for staple security can expose a country to world-price volatility, export restrictions by other states, shipping disruptions, or exchange-rate shocks. The World Bank's food-security updates in 2025 continued to show that global food conditions are influenced by commodity markets, fertilizer prices, and broader economic uncertainty, even when some staple prices moderate. (World Bank)

The state therefore acts as a gatekeeper between domestic and international food systems. It must decide when imports are necessary, when domestic procurement should be prioritized, and how trade policy should protect both consumers and producers. This is not easy. Importing too late can produce scarcity and price spikes. Importing too early or too much can depress farm prices and weaken domestic production incentives.

Indonesia's recent official messaging around avoiding rice imports for consumption in 2025 and preserving strong reserves reflects this strategic balancing problem. Even when such claims carry political symbolism, they point to a real state function: governments must continuously arbitrate between the benefits of trade and the strategic need for domestic production resilience. (Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia)

In that sense, national food security is partly diplomatic. Fertilizer supplies, commodity imports, agricultural cooperation, and research

partnerships all shape the domestic food system. Bappenas' 2025 international collaborations on food systems transformation and agricultural cooperation show that national food security today also depends on the state's ability to build external partnerships while preserving internal resilience. (Bappenas)

The State as Risk Manager in an Age of Climate and Crisis

Contemporary food security is increasingly shaped by systemic risk. The *Global Report on Food Crises 2025* highlights conflict, economic shocks, climate extremes, and displacement as major drivers of acute food insecurity globally. Even when a specific country is not in famine conditions, these drivers still matter because they affect prices, logistics, production, and household vulnerability. (World Food Programme)

This is why the state's role has expanded from routine agricultural administration to strategic risk management. Food-secure states must prepare for El Niño, floods, pest outbreaks, fertilizer shocks, global price swings, and transport disruptions. They must invest in climate adaptation, early warning systems, drought-resistant seeds, irrigation resilience, agricultural insurance, and emergency logistics. They must also ensure that food-security institutions can respond quickly across ministries and levels of government.

Indonesia's policy trajectory reflects this need. Bappenas, FAO, and related institutions have emphasized stronger governance for agrifood-system transformation, while prior planning documents and project-completion reporting have pointed to crop-insurance programs and the need to integrate agricultural risk management into medium-term planning. (FAOHome)

A state that ignores these risks may appear efficient in calm years but fail in crisis years. True food security is proven not when harvests are easy, but when shocks arrive and the system still protects the population.

The State as Institutional Coordinator

Food security is not managed by one ministry alone. It crosses agriculture, trade, finance, health, public works, marine affairs, transport, social welfare, local government, statistics, and disaster management. This means the state's role is not only sectoral but coordinative.

Institutional coordination matters because fragmented government can undermine even good policy. One agency may push farm expansion while another allows rapid land conversion. One institution may seek low consumer prices while another fails to support farm incentives. One ministry may improve production while another neglects logistics or nutrition. The state must therefore act as an organizer of the whole system, not just a patron of one component.

Bappenas is especially important in this regard because its planning role links food security to wider development strategy. Its 2025 communications repeatedly connect food security with agricultural transformation, long-term national planning, and governance reform in agrifood systems. This reflects an essential truth: national food security is not just about rice fields or warehouses; it is about state capacity to align many moving parts. (Bappenas)

This coordination role also has a democratic dimension. Food policy creates winners and losers. Farmers want remunerative prices. Consumers want affordable food. Traders want predictable rules. Local governments want development space. A legitimate state must coordinate these interests transparently and credibly. Otherwise, food policy becomes erratic and politicized.

Limits of the State and the Need for Good Governance

To say that the state is central does not mean that every state intervention is wise. Poorly designed subsidies can distort markets. Heavy-handed controls can undermine farm incentives. Politicized

procurement can breed inefficiency. Corruption in food logistics can weaken trust. Bureaucratic fragmentation can delay response. Therefore, the real issue is not state versus market in simplistic terms, but the quality of state action.

Good food governance requires competence, transparency, accountability, and data quality. It requires states to know when to intervene and when to enable. It requires institutions that can learn, adapt, and coordinate across sectors. The FAO's right-to-food approach is useful here because it does not call for indiscriminate control; it calls for responsible governance that protects, facilitates, and fulfills food security in ways consistent with human dignity. (FAOHome)

In practical terms, this means the state should not attempt to replace farmers, traders, and consumers as the primary actors in the food system. Rather, it should create a stable and just framework in which they can function while ensuring that public risks, public goods, and vulnerable populations are not neglected.

Conclusion

The role of the state in ensuring national food security is fundamental because food security is not a self-correcting market outcome. It is a strategic and ethical public objective. The state must protect domestic production, preserve agricultural land and water, build infrastructure, stabilize prices, maintain reserves, support vulnerable households, manage trade prudently, prepare for crises, and coordinate institutions across the food system. Global evidence from FAO, the World Bank, and the *Global Report on Food Crises* shows that even when global hunger improves modestly, inflation, climate shocks, and economic volatility continue to threaten access to food. (FAOHome)

In Indonesia, recent BPS production gains and large reserve levels have strengthened the state's capacity to claim progress, but those gains do

not eliminate the need for sustained governance. Food security must be maintained through long-term agricultural transformation, land protection, strong logistics, social protection, and institutional coordination. Bappenas' current emphasis on agrifood-systems transformation and food-security partnerships reflects this broader reality. (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia)

Ultimately, the state is not important because it can do everything itself. It is important because only the state can legitimately organize the collective conditions under which a nation can feed itself with stability, fairness, and resilience. Markets produce and distribute food, but states secure the system within which food remains available, affordable, and politically sustainable. In an age of climate disruption, commodity volatility, and geopolitical uncertainty, that role is becoming more—not less—essential. (Open Knowledge FAO)

Glossary

Agrifood system
The full system of activities and institutions related to food production, processing, storage, transport, trade, consumption, and nutrition. In current policy language, food security is increasingly discussed through the broader lens of agrifood-system transformation rather than production alone. FAO and Bappenas have both used this framing in recent cooperation on Indonesia's food-system governance. (FAOHome)

Buffer stock
A public stock of food commodities held to stabilize supply and prices during shortages, market disruptions, or emergencies. In national food-security policy, buffer stocks help governments respond quickly before volatility turns into wider social stress. This logic is also consistent with

the broader FAO right-to-food approach, which stresses state responsibility to create conditions for secure access to food. (FAOHome)

Food access
The ability of individuals and households to obtain sufficient food physically and economically. Access differs from availability: food may exist nationally, but still be inaccessible to poor households if prices are too high or incomes too low. SOFI 2025 highlights how elevated food-price inflation undermined purchasing power and access to healthy diets, especially for low-income populations. (FAOHome)

Food affordability
The extent to which households can purchase enough safe and nutritious food without severe financial strain. This is one of the most important dimensions of food security because inflation can weaken diets even where food supply is adequate. SOFI 2025 explicitly links high food-price inflation to reduced affordability of healthy diets. (FAOHome)

Food availability
The physical presence of food in a country or region through domestic production, stocks, trade, or transfers. Availability is necessary for food security, but not sufficient on its own. Indonesia's March 2025 BPS release on paddy and rice production is one example of how governments measure national food availability through official statistics. (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia)

Food reserve
Food stocks maintained by the state for emergency use, price stabilization, or strategic supply management. A food reserve differs from ordinary private inventories because it serves public welfare and national resilience purposes.

Food security
A condition in which all people, at all times, have physical and economic

access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food for an active and healthy life. Contemporary policy discussions also emphasize diet quality, affordability, and resilience. SOFI 2025 remains one of the central global references for this concept. (FAOHome)

Food sovereignty
A concept emphasizing the right of peoples and states to shape their own food systems, including production priorities, domestic agricultural protection, and local control over food resources. While distinct from "food security," it often overlaps with debates about self-sufficiency, farmer protection, and strategic reserves.

Government rice reserve
A stock of rice held under public authority for stabilization, emergency relief, or distribution programs. In Indonesia, such reserves are central to state intervention in the rice market and broader food-security management.

Healthy diet affordability
The extent to which households can afford not only calories, but nutritionally adequate diets. This has become a core concern in recent global food-security reporting. SOFI 2025 specifically emphasizes new estimates on the cost and affordability of healthy diets. (FAOHome)

Logistics resilience
The capacity of food transport, warehousing, ports, and distribution systems to continue functioning during shocks such as disasters, climate events, or supply-chain disruption. In food-security policy, logistics resilience is essential because production surpluses in one region do not automatically translate into affordable food elsewhere.

National food security
Food security viewed at the national scale, where the state is responsible for maintaining production, trade balance, reserves, affordability, and

crisis response. This concept is broader than agricultural policy because it includes logistics, welfare, planning, and risk governance.

Nutrition security
A condition in which people not only have enough food, but have sustained access to safe, diverse, and nutritious diets that support health. Recent FAO reporting increasingly links food security and nutrition as inseparable policy goals. (FAOHome)

Price stabilization
Public action to reduce excessive volatility in food prices so that consumers remain protected and farmers continue to receive viable incentives. Instruments may include reserve releases, procurement, targeted distribution, and trade adjustments.

Right to adequate food
A human-rights principle stating that every person should have regular, permanent, and unrestricted access to adequate food or means for its procurement. The FAO Voluntary Guidelines are designed to help states implement this right within national food-security policy. (FAOHome)

Social protection for food security
Policies such as cash transfers, food assistance, school feeding, and targeted subsidies that help vulnerable households access food when market income is insufficient. This is especially important during periods of high inflation or crisis.

Staple food
A food commodity that forms the dominant component of the diet of a population, such as rice in Indonesia. Staple-food policy often receives special state attention because disruptions can affect social stability quickly.

Strategic food governance
The coordinated role of the state in managing production, reserves,

logistics, trade, and welfare measures so that food remains available, affordable, and resilient under stress.

Sustainable food-agricultural land
Agricultural land protected for long-term food production in order to prevent excessive conversion to non-agricultural uses. This is especially relevant in Indonesia's planning discussions on safeguarding rice-field areas for national food security.

Vulnerability to food insecurity
The degree to which a household, region, or nation is exposed to risks that may reduce its ability to access sufficient food, including poverty, climate shocks, conflict, price spikes, and logistics failures. Global food-crisis reporting consistently emphasizes such interacting drivers.

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