



Addressing Food Insecurity in Northwest Arkansas

Identifying Barriers and Ways to Strengthen the Charitable Food System

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Made possible by support from:
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Summary

CGR (Center for Governmental Research) was engaged by the Walmart Foundation to examine food insecurity in two northwest Arkansas counties (Benton and Washington) to help the foundation and the broader community better understand the state of food insecurity and the charitable food delivery system and to identify barriers to and gaps in services within this food delivery network. The goal is to use the information, data, analysis and perspectives in this report and accompanying interactive online map of food insecurity, demographics and resources to inform planning, collaboration and investments in the community.

The study is composed of three major components and uses quantitative and qualitative research methods to address each.

- **Assess the state of food insecurity in Benton and Washington counties** through gathering demographic and socioeconomic data for the counties on food insecurity and indicators related to food insecurity, and through input from food providers, clients and other community members through focus groups.
- **Inventory food resources in the counties** using data from the Northwest Arkansas Food Bank, United Way of Northwest Arkansas 2-1-1, and other sources as well as results of an online survey developed by CGR and distributed to 150 charitable food providers to find out more about their capacity, needs, challenges and perspectives.
- **Identify barriers to accessing resources and gaps within the charitable food network** using the quantitative data as well as the perspectives of providers, clients and community members gathered through focus groups and surveys. Key to this analysis was the creation of an [online interactive map](#) displaying the location and characteristics of various types of food resources (grocery and other stores, charitable food pantries and meal programs) in the context of the demographic and socioeconomic data that help illustrate the need for food resources.

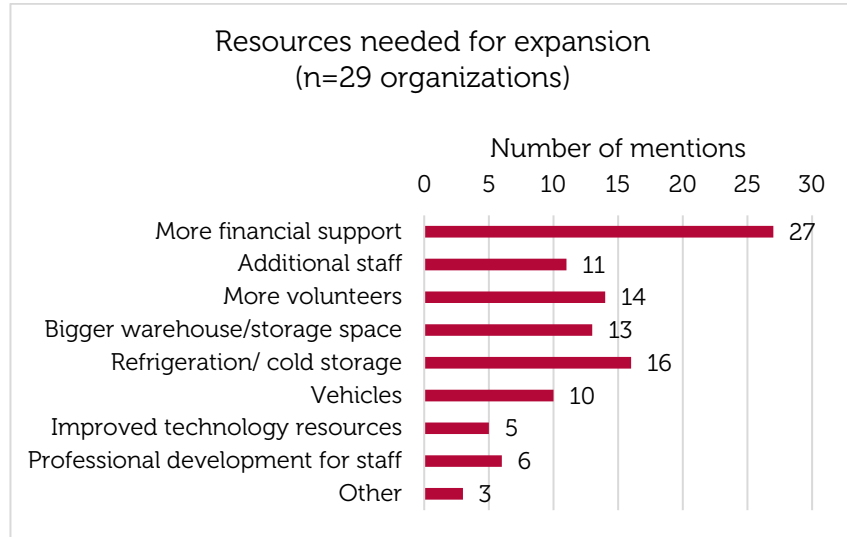
About 17% of Arkansas residents are food insecure, according to estimates. Benton and Washington counties have a bit lower rates at 11% and 14% respectively.

Who is food insecure? At the national level, rates of food insecurity are higher than average among low-income households; all households with children and particularly households with children headed by single women or single men; women and men living alone; and Black and Hispanic-headed households. In focus groups, NW Arkansans talked about the same groups: single parents, families with multiple children, grandparents raising grandchildren, college students, veterans, minorities, minimum wage workers, and disabled individuals.

What's driving food insecurity? NW Arkansans pointed to increasing housing costs, low wages, federal food benefits (SNAP) that are too low and overly complicated, health care costs, personal problems such as substance abuse and PTSD, and the high cost of healthy food.

Key findings from the survey of food providers included:

- The 65 organizations responding to the survey offer 61 food pantries, 22 onsite meal programs, and 15 meal delivery programs in Washington and Benton Counties for a total of 98 programs.
- Less than half have paid staff, while nearly all use volunteers to operate their programs. Among organizations responding to questions about budget, most had relatively small organizational budgets, operating on less than \$1 million, and small food budgets, costing less than \$50,000 a year. The largest share of funding came from individual donations (41%), followed by foundation and corporate funding (30%).
- A majority of survey responding organizations talk to clients about the SNAP program but only slightly more than a third actually work to enroll people. About half said they provide at least nutritional educational service, including informational handouts, cooking classes, or healthy recipes.
- Most programs get most of their food from the Northwest Arkansas Food Bank, with food drives or individual donations not related to the food bank and grocery store and wholesale store purchases important secondary sources.
- Most organizations would like to offer types of food that they are sometimes unable to, including fresh fruit, fresh vegetables and dairy. Affordability appears to be the biggest hurdle, followed closely by a lack of storage space and refrigeration.
- About half the organizations would like to expand their food programs, with most of those wanting to increase the variety of food they offer and/or serve more people.
- To expand, providers say they need additional funding, refrigeration capacity, additional volunteers and staff, and expanded storage space.



Focus group participants described challenges and barriers to addressing food insecurity:

Days/times of program operation: Focus group participants noted that especially for working people, getting to a food program during its hours of operation could be a challenge. Data from the survey bears this out, as shown below. While many programs operate in the late morning and early afternoon, the availability of food resources drops off significantly after 3pm, and very few programs are open on the weekends.

Confirmed hours of operation – Washington & Benton Counties

Day	12am	1am	2am	3am	4am	5am	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm
Sunday	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	7	5	3	3	3	3	3
Monday	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	16	26	30	35	27	22	21	21	16	9	5	3	3	3	4	4
Tuesday	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	17	27	30	37	30	22	22	22	16	10	7	4	3	4	4	4
Wednesday	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	16	31	35	39	30	22	22	22	15	10	6	3	3	3	3	3
Thursday	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	5	17	31	37	43	33	24	23	22	16	7	4	3	3	3	3	3
Friday	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	15	21	27	32	27	21	21	20	14	9	6	3	3	3	4	4
Saturday	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	8	10	8	6	3	3	3	3	5	3	3	3	3	3	3

Location/transportation: In rural areas, accessing resources is a challenge, participants said. The southeast area of Washington County east of West Fork and Winslow is a considered a rural low access food area -- defined by the USDA as a low-income tract with at least 500 people, or 33% of the population, living more than 10 miles from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store.

The two counties are also home to urban low food access areas -- defined by the USDA as low-income tracts with at least 500 people, or 33% of the population, living

more than 5 miles from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store. These are areas near Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers, and Siloam Springs.

Related to location, both providers and clients overwhelmingly identified transportation as a significant barrier, both because of the lack of a robust public transit system as well as the high cost of owning and maintaining an automobile.

Other system challenges included the lack of a coordinated resource providing information about when and where food programs operate, the difficulty getting food that residents want or need (especially healthy and culturally appropriate types of food), and the stigma/loss of control and dignity that program clients feel around asking for food.

Focus group participants offered a variety of suggestions for better addressing food insecurity, including improved coordination of program hours, addition of services at strategic locations and better access to public transportation. Their ideas are reflected in our overall recommendations for strengthening the system:

- **Prepare for investment in human capital:** The charitable food sector in NW Arkansas is largely made up of small, volunteer run-faith based organizations, which contributes to a fragmented, fragile system of emergency food delivery. Attempts to expand and streamline service hours or increase food variety (particularly fresh food) are likely to require an investment in human capital.
- **Explore community-identified ideas at a regional level:** The solutions generated by local providers and clients through this research are comprehensive, creative and relevant, and deserve further investigation. One way to approach this is to form regional food councils to explore community-generated ideas for improving the system including days/hours of operation, food service locations and accessibility, fresh food storage and distribution solutions, staffing needs, and community gardens. Washington and Benton counties are home to multiple urban, suburban and rural areas each with their own set of issues and assets. Any response will likely require a suite of approaches tailored to the conditions in a particular region.
- **Reach across sectors to align services with where people are:** Think through potential ways to align with other cross-sector anchors and assets that would facilitate the distribution of food at places where people already are. For example, schools provide an opportunity to connect with families that are difficult to reach because parents work long hours, are not proficient in English, or are part of more insular communities. While the school district would not necessarily have to be responsible for distributing the food, schools could host a space for food distribution by a community partner. Health-care organizations are another potentially underused asset for food distribution.

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- **Promote client choice:** Only 36% of the pantries in Washington and Benton counties that responded to the survey indicated that they offer client choice. While client choice can be difficult, particularly for small, volunteer-based providers, it can cut waste and preserve the dignity and autonomy of clients. A more in-depth analysis of those that do not provide client choice (primarily churches, but not all) could help uncover and address the barriers preventing them from doing so.
 - **Consider promoting nutrition guidelines among providers:** Food providers and clients both have concerns about the large quantity of unhealthy, high-sugar foods available at pantries. Adopting nutrition guidelines or goals can assist food program providers in purchasing and in communicating to food donors. Refusing a food donation would presumably be easier when programs have clear nutritional policies that are communicated publicly.
 - **Maximize federal resources:** Almost 60% of provider survey respondents do not help clients enroll in SNAP. Explore ways to coordinate outreach efforts to ensure that all eligible residents have the opportunity to enroll in federal food assistance programs at additional sites or that clients are referred to appropriate assistance.
 - **Continue to push on the root causes:** Nationally, food providers are shifting their role from solely providing emergency food services to supporting collaborative long-term solutions for community food security and addressing poverty. Institutions like food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens and feeding programs are addressing food insecurity while also participating and advocating collective impact and community change around issues of housing, health care, transportation, job training and living wage jobs. In addition to addressing these issues themselves, funders can support emergency food providers' engagement in larger community conversations and initiatives.

Acknowledgements

CGR would like to acknowledge and thank several partners who helped to inform and advance this research:

- Hark Center for Collaborative Care
- Northwest Arkansas Food Bank
- United Way of Northwest Arkansas
- University of Arkansas Medical Center Northwest Office of Community Health and Research
- Feeding America

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Staff Team

Alice Carle led this project along with Erika Rosenberg, supported by data analysis from Katherine Bell, Amelia Rickard and in particular Michael Silva, who created the interactive map. Donna Harris, Ph.D., and Barbara Zappia, Ed.D, contributed insights into qualitative data collection strategies and methods.

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I. Introduction

CGR (Center for Governmental Research) was engaged by the Walmart Foundation to examine food insecurity in two northwest Arkansas counties (Benton and Washington) to help the foundation and broader community better understand the state of food insecurity and the charitable food delivery system and to identify barriers to and gaps in services within this food delivery network. The goal is to use the information, data, analysis and perspectives in this report and accompanying interactive online map of food insecurity, demographics and resources to inform planning, collaboration and investments in the community.

Overview of Methodology

The study is composed of three major components and uses quantitative and qualitative research methods to address each.

Assess the state of food insecurity in Benton and Washington counties: CGR compiled demographic and socioeconomic data for the counties on food insecurity and indicators related to food insecurity, ranging from poverty to unemployment to diabetes prevalence. In addition, focus groups with food providers and clients and other community members helped to sketch a portrait of those coping with food insecurity in the region.

Inventory food resources in the counties: Data from the Northwest Arkansas Food Bank, United Way of Northwest Arkansas 2-1-1, and other sources was used to compile a list and map of charitable food resources including food banks, meal programs and meal delivery programs. Grocery stores and other for-profit food retailer data came from the U.S. Department of Agriculture on retailers that accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits (SNAP). In addition, CGR drafted and administered an online survey to 150 charitable food providers to find out more about their capacity, needs, challenges and perspectives on food security and related issues in the community. CGR received responses from 65 of these providers, for a response rate of 43%.

Identify barriers to accessing resources and gaps within the charitable food network: Using the quantitative data as well as the perspectives of providers, clients and community members gathered through focus groups and surveys, we begin to identify gaps, barriers and potential solutions. Key to this analysis was the creation of an [online interactive map](#) displaying the location and characteristics of various types of food resources (grocery and other stores, charitable pantries and meal programs) in the context of the demographic and socioeconomic data that help illustrate the need for food resources. The map also displays public transit routes and areas designated as

low food access areas and is designed to be a tool for planners, funders and others to examine the availability and proximity of different types of food resources to populations that may be in particular need.

Qualitative Research Methods

To better understand how people experience food insecurity and the charitable food system, CGR partnered with the Hark Center for Collaborative Care to conduct 24 focus groups with 1) food program providers (pantries, onsite meal programs and meal delivery programs); 2) others involved in the social safety net including human services, health, housing and educational professionals, and 3) clients. Client focus groups targeted specific populations including seniors, parents, working poor, Marshallese and the Latino/Hispanic communities. Conversations focused on contributors to food insecurity, barriers to accessing the emergency food system, challenges for providers, and ideas for addressing food insecurity and the charitable food system.

II. Overview of Food Insecurity

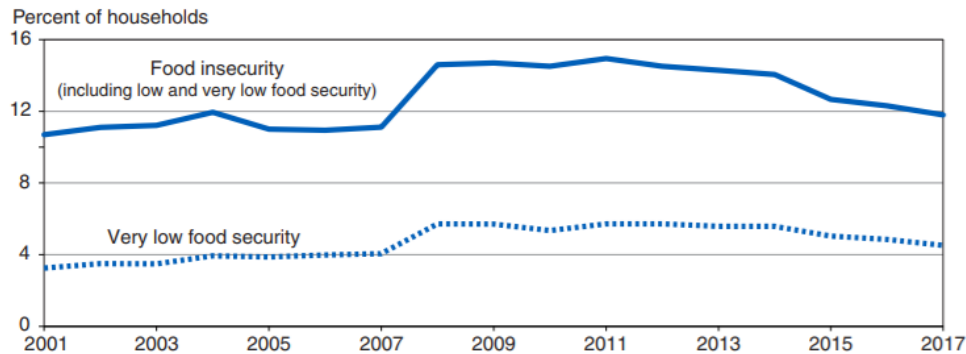
The USDA defines food insecurity as the lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods.

It further defines several ranges of food insecurity:

- **High food security:** no reported indications of food-access problems or limitations.
- **Marginal food security:** one or two reported indications—typically of anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house. Little or no indication of changes in diets or food intake.
- **Low food security:** reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake.
- **Very low food security:** reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.

An estimated 11.8% of U.S. households were food insecure in 2017, down from 2016 and continuing a decline from a high of 14.9% in 2011, while still above the pre-recession (2007) level of 11.1% (Fig. 1).

Figure 1
Prevalence of food insecurity in U.S. 2001-2017

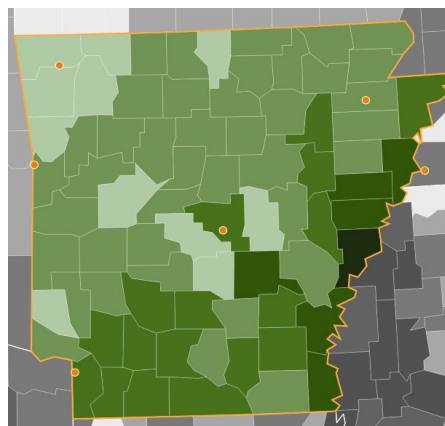


Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Food Insecurity in Northwest Arkansas

According to Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap, approximately 17.2% of Arkansas' population is food insecure – about 515,000 people. This is higher than the national rate which was 12.9% in 2016. Benton County's rate of 11% is lower than both the state and national rates, while Washington County's rate of 14% is higher than the national rate but slightly lower than the state's rate (Fig. 2).¹

Figure 2: Food insecurity in Arkansas 2016



Region	Percentage population	Number of people
United States	12.9%	41,204,000
Arkansas	17.2%	515,270
Benton	10.8%	26,380
Washington	14.3%	31,410

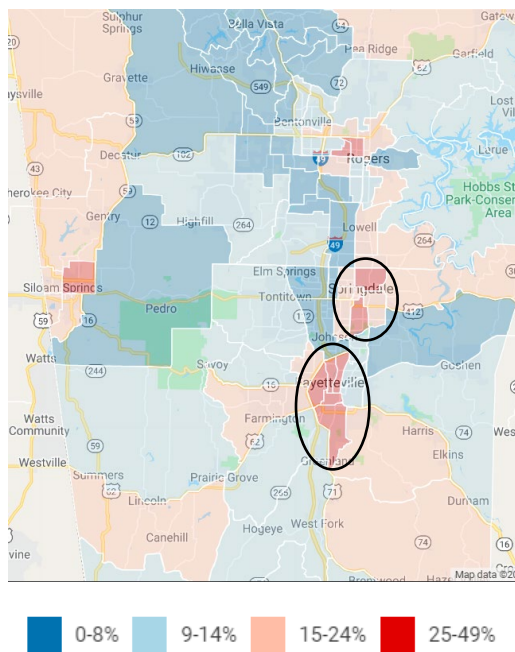
Source: Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap

Food Insecurity Rates: 4-14% 15-19% 20-24% 25-29% 30%+

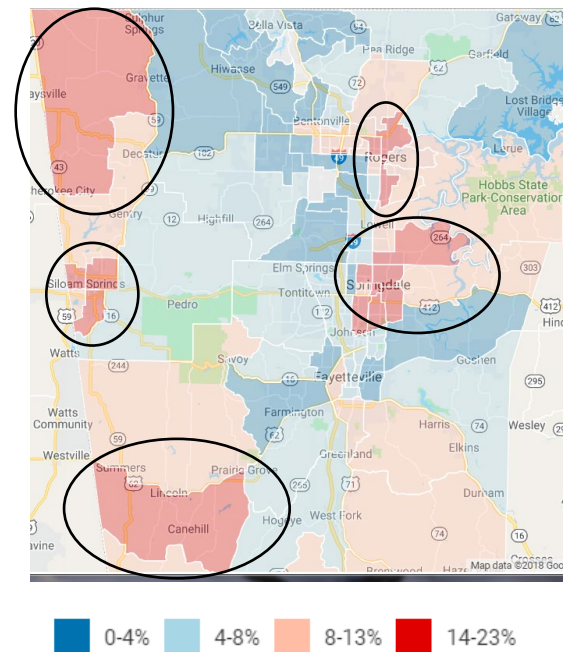
¹ Feeding America estimates the level of food insecurity in each county by analyzing the relationship between food insecurity and indicators of food insecurity and child food insecurity (such as poverty, unemployment, homeownership, etc.) at the state level. That analysis is used to estimate food insecurity in each county based on the characteristics of the population in each county. Please note that these are 2016 figures.

Below the county level, food insecurity estimates are not available. However, we can use other indicators on the interactive map to help identify areas more likely to be food insecure. For example, by comparing rates of people living in poverty, households receiving SNAP, and the USDA's Low Food Access data it is likely that food insecurity is more prevalent in the rural areas of southeast and southwest Washington County, northwest Benton County, Springdale, Fayetteville, Rogers, Siloam Springs, and parts of Bentonville.

Picture 1: People living in poverty²



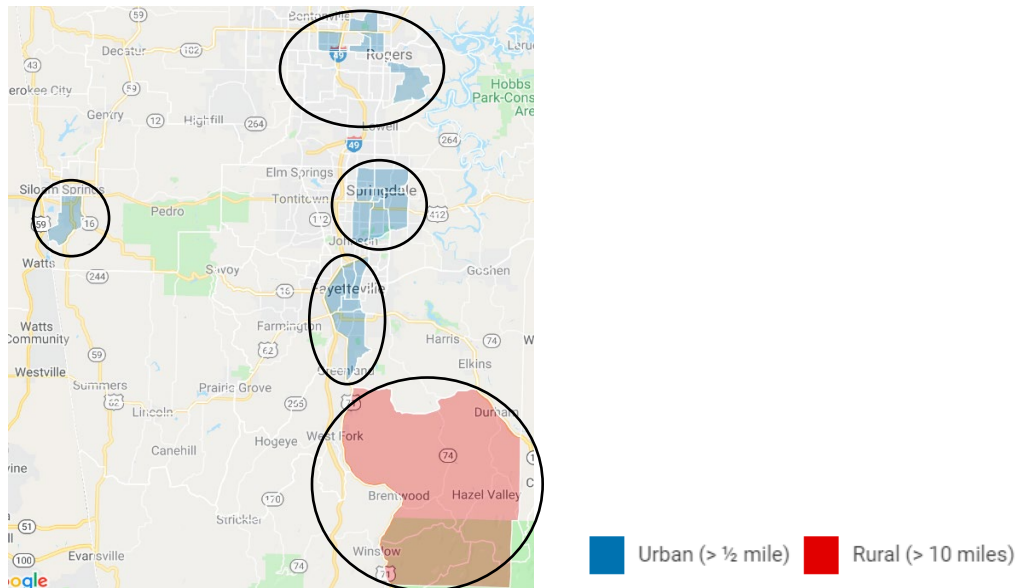
Picture 2: Households receiving SNAP³



² Poverty thresholds vary by family size and year. In 2018, the threshold for a four-person family was \$25,100.

³ SNAP is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly called food stamps.

Picture 3: Low food access areas⁴



At the national level, rates of food insecurity are higher than average for the following groups: households with incomes near or below the federal poverty line; all households with children and particularly households with children headed by single women or single men, women and men living alone; and Black and Hispanic-headed households.⁵

This mirrors feedback from focus group participants about who in NW Arkansas is experiencing food insecurity. Participants mentioned single parents, families with multiple children, grandparents raising grandchildren, college students, veterans, minorities, minimum wage workers, and disabled. Multiple participants cited an increase in seniors accessing their services.

Key Contributing Factors

To get a better understanding of what is driving food insecurity in Washington and Benton Counties, focus group participants were asked about what contributes to food insecurity locally. Later in this report, we will discuss in detail participants' views on the charitable food network and barriers to accessing resources, but to understand the factors contributing to food insecurity among individuals, we call to readers' attention the interconnected factors cited by both client and provider focus group participants:

⁴ A low-income tract with at least 500 people, or 33% of the population, living more than 1/2 mile (urban areas) or more than 10 miles (rural areas) from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store.

⁵ [Household Food Insecurity in the United States in 2017](#). United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service.

- **Increasing housing costs.** Overwhelmingly, respondents cited increasing rental and home ownership prices in both counties as a major contributor to not having enough money to purchase quality food after covering housing costs. With the growth of Northwest Arkansas over the last few years, participants said there is a significant lack of affordable housing in the area.
 - **Low wages.** Respondents were also unanimously concerned that low-wage and minimum wage jobs provide insufficient income to meet the local cost of living (food, child care, medical, housing, transportation, taxes) particularly for families.
 - **SNAP benefits too low and too complicated.** Many client and provider focus group participants cited their concerns with the SNAP program in addressing food insecurity. Issues included insufficient benefit amounts, particularly for single people with no dependents; cumbersome and time consuming processes in applying for and continually renewing SNAP benefits as well as reporting work requirements to DHS; the inability of undocumented people to access benefits; and the fact that many people earn just above financial eligibility cut off for SNAP assistance. In fact, Feeding America estimates that in 2016, 24% of the food insecure people in Washington County (approximately 7,500 people)⁶ and 30% of the food insecure people in Benton counties (approximately 8,000 people)⁷ earned too much to qualify for SNAP or WIC assistance, but not enough to achieve food security.
-
- “Food can be low on the list of priorities with all the competing demands on a limited budget of a person in poverty...ultimately it food insecurity is part of the larger issues of financial insecurity and poverty.”*
- Focus group participant
- **Health care.** Several participants identified the high cost of medical insurance, medical care and medications, particularly for seniors and chronic illnesses.
 - **Personal factors** like drugs/alcohol, disability, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after exiting the military were also observed factors.
 - **Cost of healthy food.** Healthy foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, meat, and organic foods are difficult to afford on a tight budgets. As one participant said, “People can buy two weeks’ worth of unhealthy food for the same price of two days’ worth of fresh veggies and healthy meat.”

⁶ <http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2016/overall/arkansas/county/washington>

⁷ <http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2016/overall/arkansas/county/benton>

- **Seasons.** A few focus group participants acknowledged that certain times of the year can put pressure on household budgets and thereby contribute to food insecurity. For example, summer can be more expensive since children are home from school or winter can affect the earning potential of those in the construction industry.

III. NW Arkansas' Charitable Food System

Non-profit food providers including food pantries, onsite meal programs and meal delivery services play a critical role in meeting a basic need for thousands of individuals and families each year. They are the front line in providing short term or emergency assistance to those struggling with food insecurity. Northwest Arkansas has a wide variety of non-profit programs that are helping to meet the need of thousands of hungry and food insecure individuals across the region.

Broad Overview

To attempt to capture the full breadth of the charitable food sector, CGR combined data provided by Northwest Arkansas Food Bank, United Way of NW Arkansas 2-1-1, and the National Center for Charitable Statistics on organizations that provide food pantries, onsite meal programs, or meal delivery programs in Washington and Benton counties. Of the 150 unique organizations identified through this process, the majority (72%) are religious organizations/churches, 14% are human service organizations, 6% are other organizations (other nonprofits and colleges), and 3% are senior centers.

In aggregate, these 150 unique organizations provide 141 food pantry sites, 36 on-site meal program sites, and 18 food/meal delivery programs for a total of 195 program delivery sites. Overall, Benton County is home to more program sites than Washington County (table 1).

Table 1: Number and type of program sites by county

	Benton County	Washington County	Total number of program sites
Food pantries	84	57	141
Onsite meals	17	18	36
Meal/food delivery	10	8	18
Totals in each county	111	84	195

Survey respondents

To enhance this third party data, CGR issued a survey to 150 organizations. We received responses from 65 unique organizations for a response rate of 43%.

Respondent profile

Of these 65 provider survey responses, 45% identify as religious organizations, 34% identify as human service organizations, 3% are senior centers, and 18% identify as "other," including independent non-profits and colleges/universities.

These 65 responding providers offer a total of 61 food pantries, 22 onsite meal programs, and 15 meal delivery programs in Washington and Benton Counties for a total of 98 programs.

Of the 61 food pantries, the majority, 64%, provide prepackaged bags or boxes of food, while 26% pantries allow clients to choose their own food, and 10% provide both.

Eligibility requirements

Nearly all the onsite meal programs and the majority of survey-responding food pantries say that anyone can access their services, while nearly all of the responding meal delivery services report that their clients must meet certain eligibility requirements (Fig. 3).

Survey Respondent Snapshot

Type of organizations (n=65)

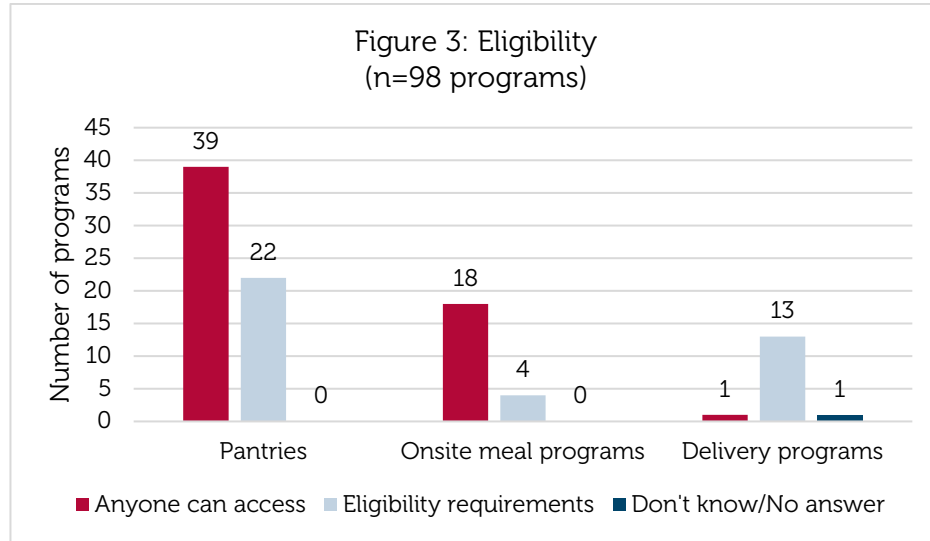
- 45% Religious organizations
- 34% Human service organizations
- 3% Senior Centers
- 18% Other

Type of programs offered (n=98)

- 61 Food pantries
- 22 Onsite meal programs
- 15 Meal delivery programs

Type of food pantry (n=61)

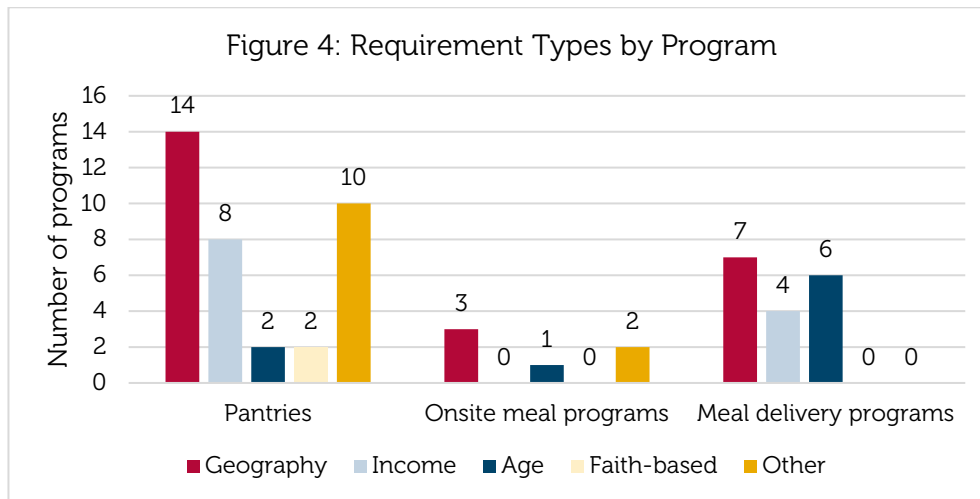
- 64% Prepackaged bags or boxes
- 26% Client choice
- 10% Pantry provides both



For the 22 food pantry programs reporting eligibility restrictions, the most common requirement is based on geography with 14 pantries restricting services to those who live in a certain county, city, or zip code(s); 10 of these pantries reported “other” requirements such as obtaining a referral, restricting the number of times a person could utilize the pantry, and being an existing client or student. (Fig. 4)

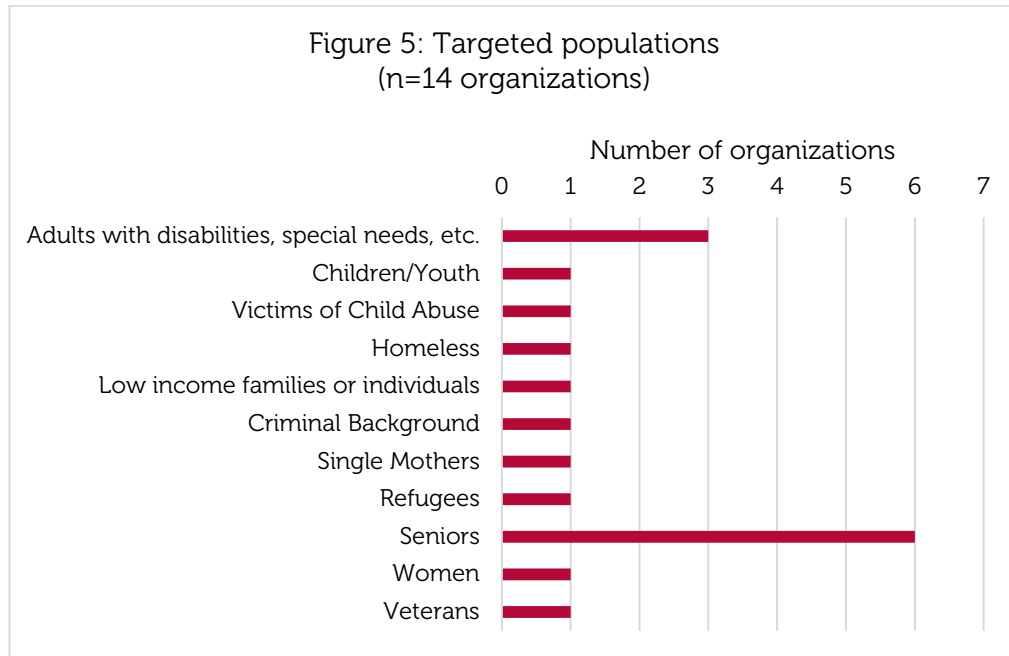
The four onsite meal programs with eligibility requirements tend to focus on geography or other requirements which center on specific populations, primarily homeless. (Fig. 4)

Finally, the 13 survey-responding meal delivery programs with eligibility requirements most often utilize geographic, age and income requirements, in that order. (Fig. 4)



Targeted populations

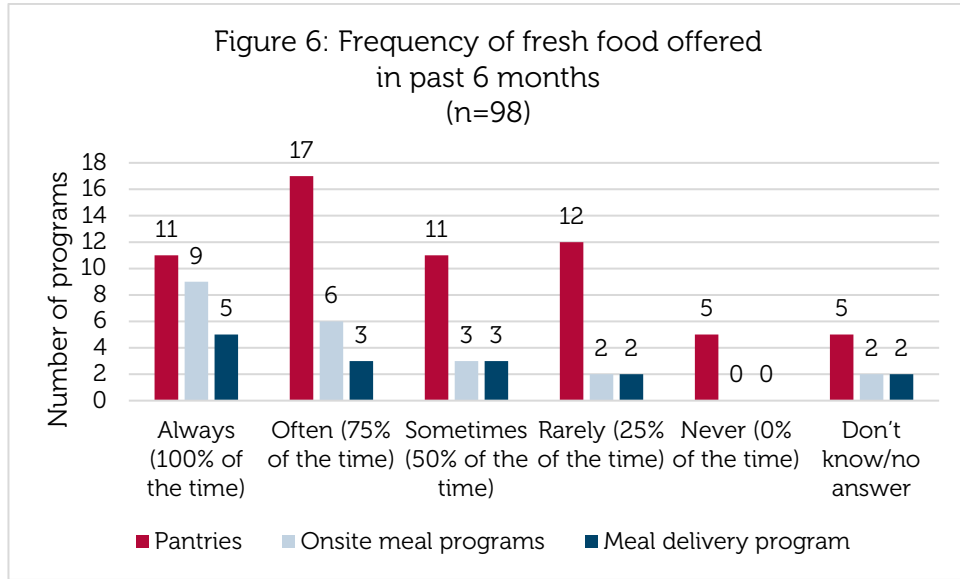
Only nineteen percent of the 65 responding organizations report targeting their services toward a specific population. The most common targeted population are seniors followed by adults with disabilities. (Fig. 5). Note that providers can have more than one targeted population.



Types of food provided

In line with what might be expected, the survey found that onsite meal programs tended to provide fresh food more often than pantries. When asked how often programs offered fresh foods (fruit/vegetables/meat/dairy) over the last six months, food pantries report the greatest variability of responses with 46% of food pantry respondents offering fresh foods always or often, 38% offering these foods sometimes or rarely, and 8% never offering fresh foods. (Fig. 6)

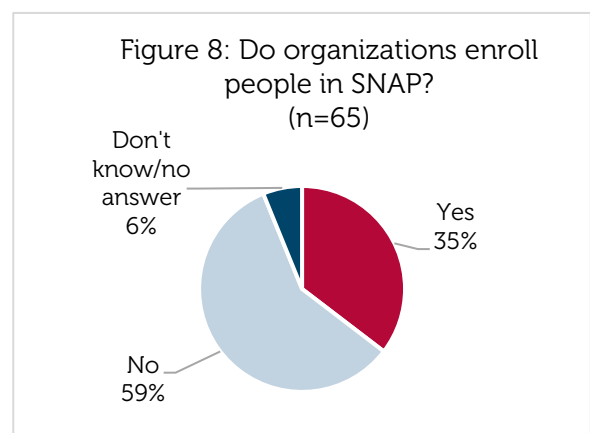
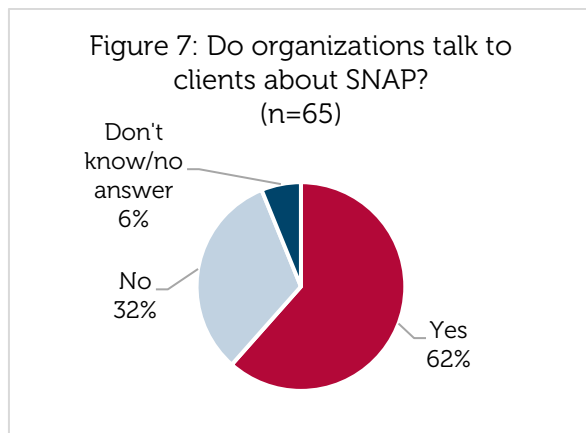
On the other hand, a larger proportion of the responding onsite meal programs report offering fresh food, with 68% offering fresh food always or often. Finally, 53% of responding meal delivery programs report delivering fresh food always or often. (Fig. 6)



Other services provided

Assistance with SNAP

The majority of survey responding organizations talk to clients about the SNAP program but only slightly more than a third actually work to enroll people. (Figs. 7 & 8) Respondents report enrolling approximately 322 people in SNAP in the past year.

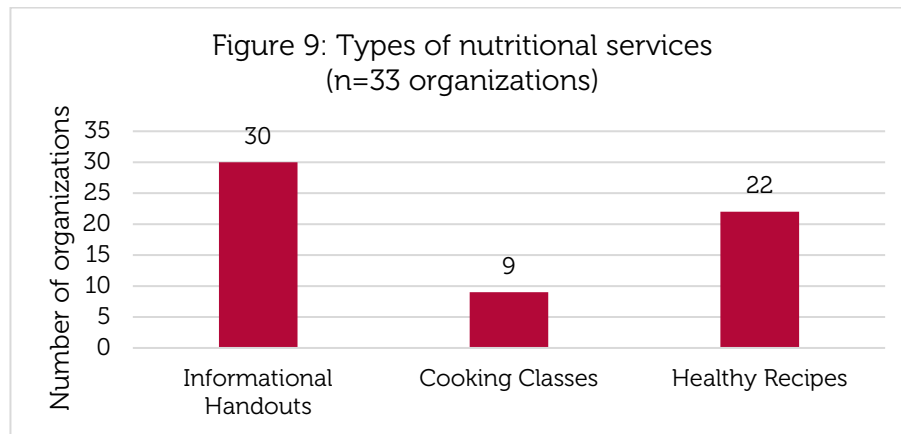


Of the 23 organizations that help enroll people in SNAP, 17 operate food banks, 12 operate onsite meal programs and seven operate meal delivery programs. Note that organizations can have more than one of these programs.

Nutritional education services

Slightly more than half (51%) of the 65 responding organizations report providing at least one of the following nutritional educational services: informational handouts, cooking classes, or healthy recipes.

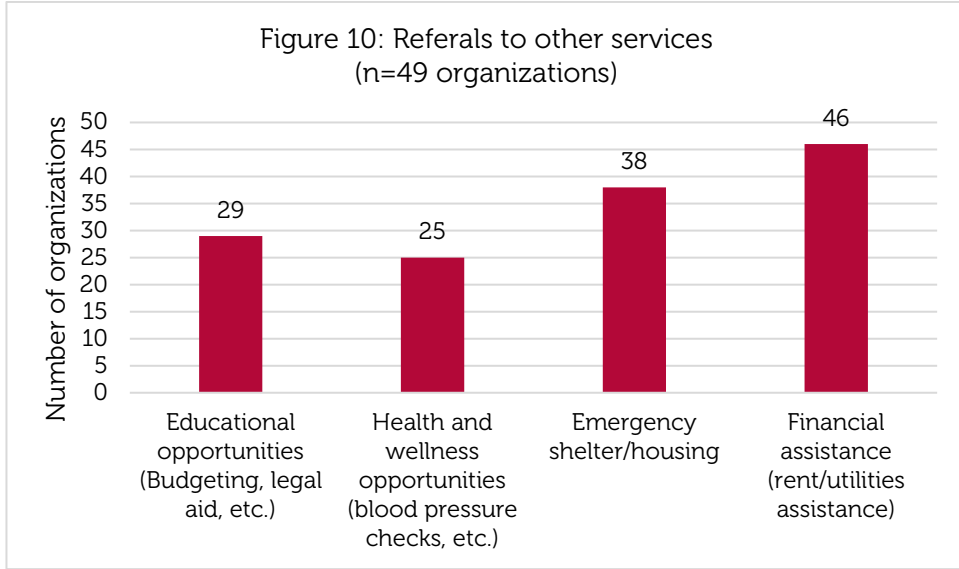
Of these 33 organizations providing nutritional services, most (91%) provide informational handouts; 67% provide healthy recipes and about a third (27%) provide cooking classes. (Fig. 9) Note that providers can provide more than one nutritional service.



Almost a third (28%) of the 65 responding providers said they referred clients to other organizations for nutritional educational services. Referrals included Arkansas Hunger Relief, 211, Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters program, University of Arkansas, UMAS, SNAP, WIC, County Extension Agent-Family & Consumer Sciences, Tri-Cycle Farms, Health Department, Mercy Community Clinic, Diabetes Association, American Heart Association, Winslow Community Action Center.

Other wrap-around services

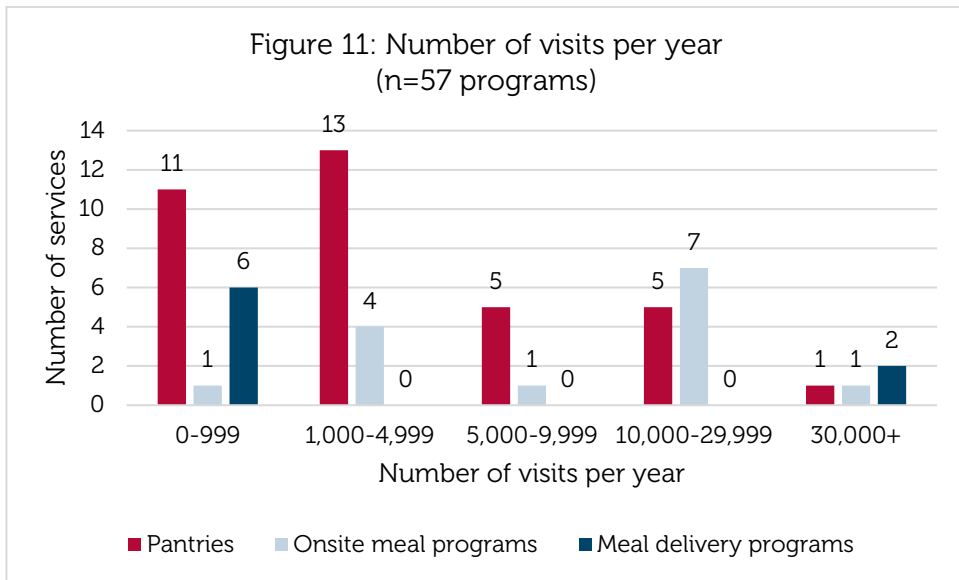
Seventy-five percent of the 65 responding organizations report that they refer clients to other types of services. Of these 49 providers, 82% provide referrals to financial assistance; 68% to emergency housing, 52% to educational opportunities, and 45% to health and wellness services (Fig 10). Other types of referrals mentioned by respondents included counseling, in-home care, low-income taxpayer clinic, and other pantries. Note that providers can provide referrals to more than one service.



Provider capacity

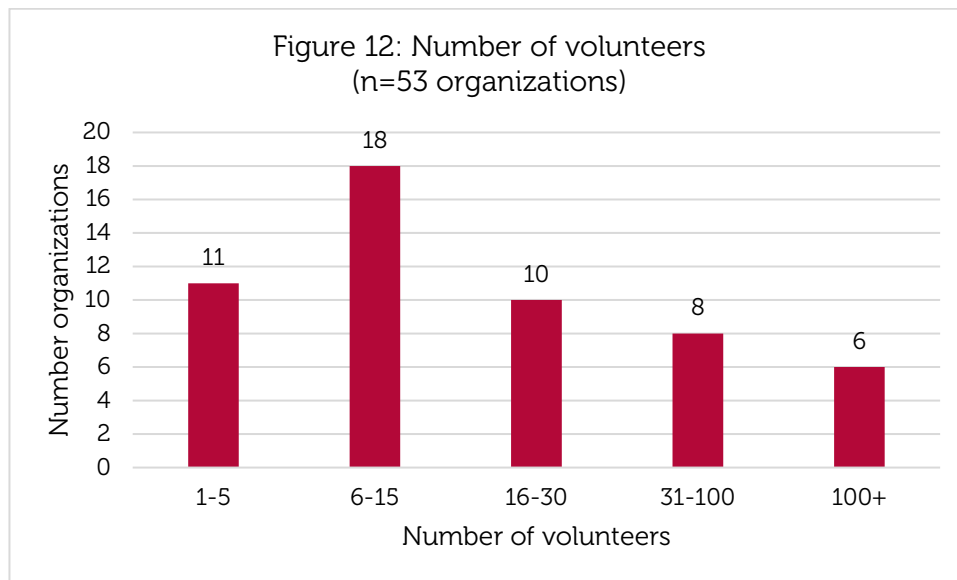
Number of visits

Figure 11 below shows that most food pantries reported less than 5,000 total visits per year (includes duplicate visits), while a slight majority of onsite meal programs report more than 10,000 visits a year (Fig. 11). It should be noted that only slightly more than half (57) of all 98 programs responded to this question.



Volunteers and staff

Northwest Arkansas' charitable food system is highly dependent on volunteers. Ninety-seven percent (59) of the 61 organizations that responded to this question say they utilize volunteers to operate their food programs. The number of volunteers for the 53 organizations that provided volunteer figures range from two (2) to a church that reported 600; however the majority of organizations have 1-15 volunteers (Fig 12).



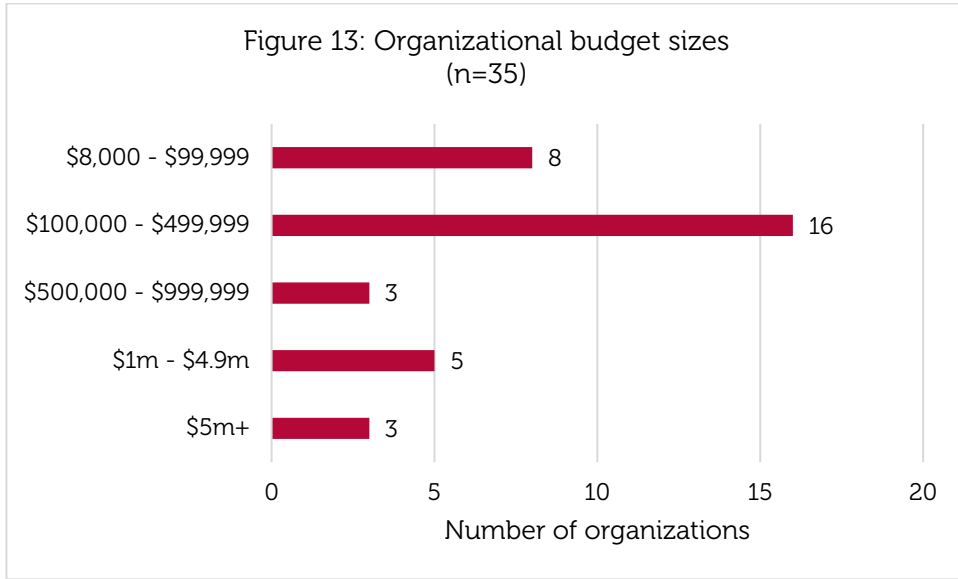
On the other hand, less than half (28) of the 61 organizations responding to this question say they have paid staff that work with their food programs. The number of employees ranges from 1 to 40, however most providers (11) report employing one staff member that works between 4 and 40 hours a week, or an average of 27 hours a week.

Bilingual capability

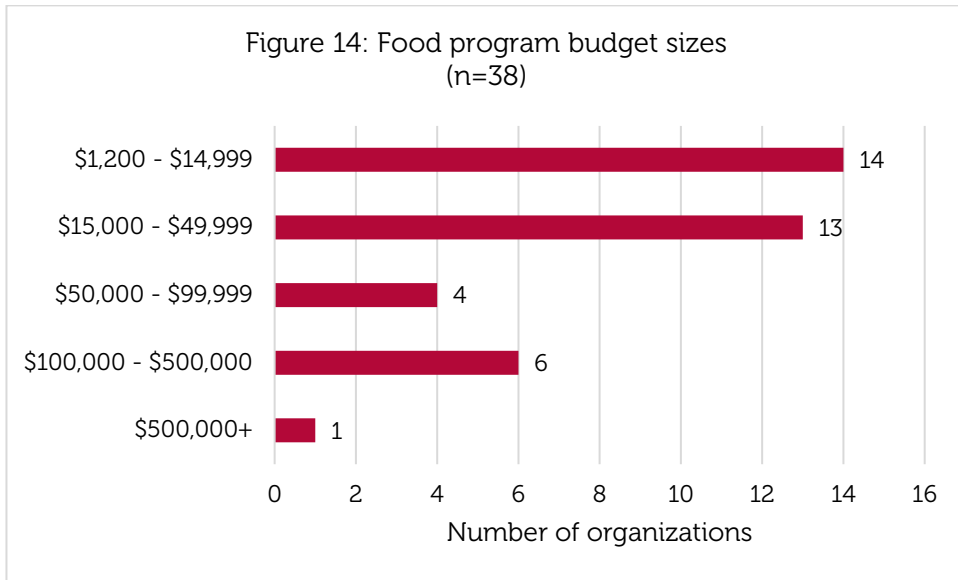
Of the 65 survey responding organizations, 39% (or 25 providers) report the ability to provide bilingual services. The most common languages are Spanish (18) and Marshallese (4). Other languages mentioned once each include Arabic, French, and Korean.

Budget sizes

Based on the 35 organizations that answered the question about budget size, it appears that the charitable food system is largely comprised of small organizations. Organizational budget sizes for those providers that supplied a response to this question range from \$8,000 to \$16 million, with the most providers falling within the \$100,000 to \$500,000 budget range and approximately 77% (27 providers) operating on less than \$1 million annually (Fig 13).

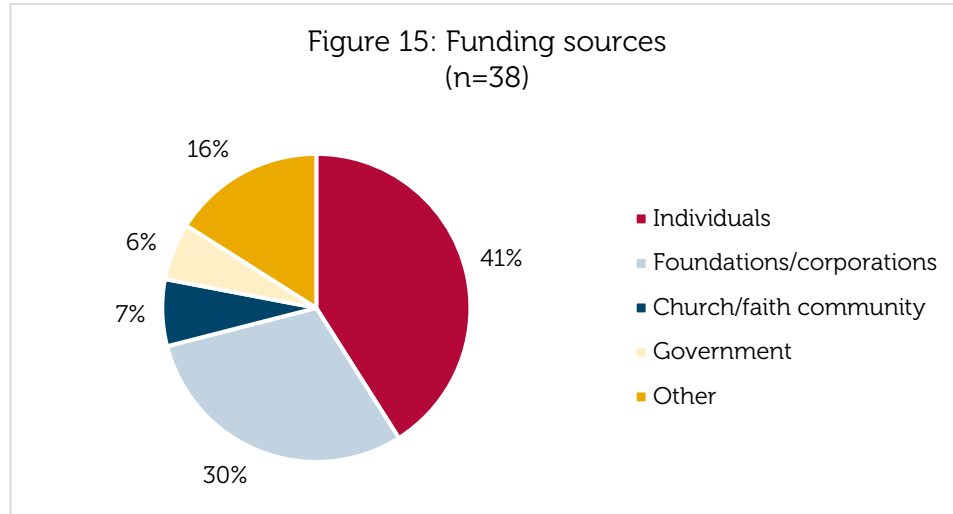


Food program budget sizes for those organizations that provided a response to this question range from \$1,200 to \$2.55 million. However, the majority – nearly 70% – of program budgets are less than \$50,000 (Fig 14).



Sources of financial support

Of the \$4.7 million in funding reported by these 38 organizations, the largest share (41%) came from individuals, followed by foundations and corporations at 30% (Fig. 15).



Where providers source their food

The chart below shows the percentage of the 60 organizations that answered questions about the sources of their food that say they get at least some of their food from each source, and the average share each source provides toward organizations' overall food supply (Table 2).

Northwest Arkansas Food Bank is the most significant source of food, cited by 85% of organizations and providing an average of 63% of organizations' food supply. Individual food drives and grocery store purchases are also a significant source of food for many organizations. Government commodities provide a fair share of food for those relatively few organizations that receive them. Slightly less than half cite direct donations from businesses (Walmart, Tyson, etc.) not facilitated by the NWA Food Bank as a source of food and among those that do, it still is a relatively small portion of the food they source.

Table 2: Food sources

	Share of Organizations (n=60)	Average share of organizations' food supply
NWA Food Bank	85%	63%
Food drives/individual donations not facilitated by NWA Food Bank	62%	26%
Grocery store and/or wholesale store purchases	60%	21%
Direct donations from businesses not facilitated by NWA Food Bank	48%	18%
Farmers	18%	5%
Government commodities	13%	33%
Other	10%	30%

Ability to provide types of food

Sixty-five percent of the 65 survey responding organizations say there are types of food that they would like to provide, but are sometimes unable to do so. Table 3 shows the types of foods that providers are sometimes unable to offer, the number of providers that say they are not always able to offer that type of food, and the frequency of reasons given as to why providers are not always able to offer that type of food.

Table 3: Types of foods organizations are unable to offer and why

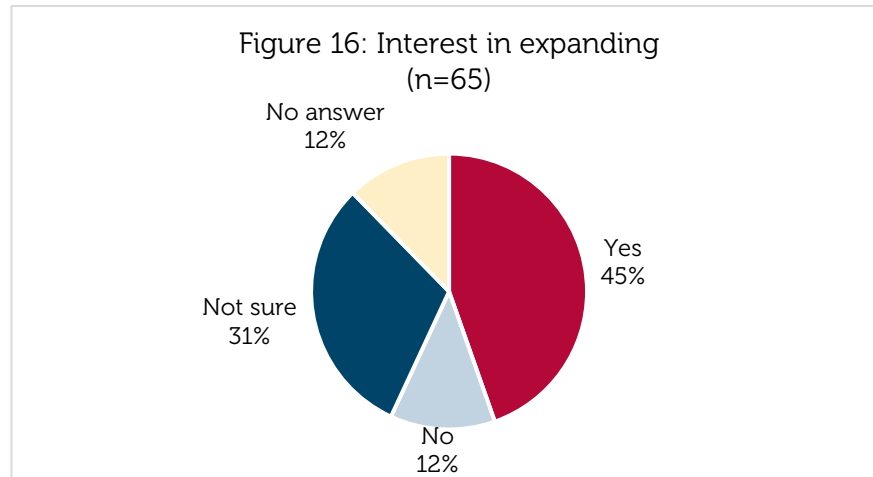
Type of food unable to provide	Number of providers	Reasons why providers are unable to provide these foods			
		Can't afford	No refrigeration	No storage space	Other
Fresh Fruit	36	16	10	12	11
Fresh Vegetables	35	15	10	12	11
Meat (fresh/frozen)	23	12	5	5	9
Dairy	33	10	10	10	13
Non-perishable foods	10	2	0	2	6
Culturally specific foods	5	5	0	2	6

The foods that organizations are most often not able to provide are fresh fruit, fresh vegetables and dairy. Other types of food that respondents mentioned being unable to provide at times include juice, canned proteins, and nutritional supplements (i.e. Boost, Ensure).

Affordability appears to be the biggest hurdle for all products across the board, particularly for fresh fruit and veggies and for fresh or frozen meat. This is followed closely by a lack of storage space and refrigeration. Lack of access to these products is another issue raised by respondents.

Interest in expansion

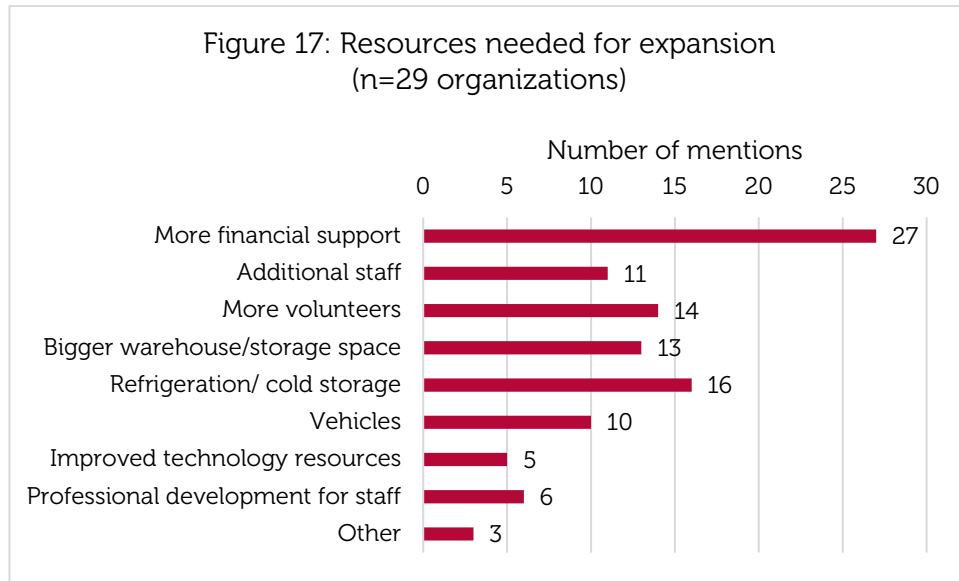
The number of providers interested in expanding is split nearly evenly between those that are interested (45%) and those that are not interested or not sure they want to expand (43%) Fig 16.



The reason most often given for not wanting to expand or being unsure of expansion was the lack of space (14 mentions). Other reasons include limited capacity of volunteers (8), lack of funding (7), already meeting current demand (6), limited staff (3), limited time (3), and limited unspecified resources (3).

Of those interested in expansion, most want to increase the variety of food they offer (25) followed by a desire to serve more people (23). These providers would also like to add or expand wrap-around services (10), increase their ability to enroll clients in SNAP (9), increase ability to refer clients to other services (9), and provide or expand bilingual services (7). Providers also mentioned wanting to expand service days and hours, offer a better selection of ethnically appropriate foods, and provide toiletries for homeless people.

It is not surprising that respondents identified additional financial support as the number one required resource for supporting this expansion since additional dollars can be used to invest in the other resources need for expansion which included: refrigeration and cold storage which can help preserve the life of fresh food, volunteer recruitment and support, and larger storage spaces (Fig. 17).



IV. Barriers to and challenges in the system

To get a better understanding of how this sector actually works for the people who utilize the system as well as for the people who work within it, CGR's Arkansas-based partner Hark Center for Collaborative Care conducted a series of 24 focus groups with 1) food program providers (pantries, onsite meal programs and meal delivery programs); 2) others involved in the social safety net including human services, health, housing and educational professionals, and 3) clients and community groups. Client groups targeted specific populations including seniors, parents, working poor, Marshallese and the Latino/Hispanic communities.⁸

Barriers for clients

Days and service times

Focus group participants unanimously cited the difficulty in accessing food pantries and onsite meal programs when they are were open, particularly if working a full-time job.

- "Their hours of operation are not always convenient for those who work. They should open until 7 pm or later."
- "Hours don't work for people that work day shift; some people work two jobs; People have to ask off to visit a food pantry."
- "There are logistical issues with hot meals, as people have to travel from meal to meal. Working clients are often unable to make it to hot meals. There is some coordination in the Fayetteville area, however, as churches have discussed the times and days when they provide meals."

Data from the survey bears this out. Table 4 shows the number of food programs (pantry, meal program, and delivery programs) in both counties that report providing services each hour of the week. (Please note that these figures only reflect the service hours for 96 programs confirmed through the survey.) It is clear that service hours are at their peak in the late morning and early afternoon and drop off significantly after 3pm and again after 4pm. Very few are open on the weekends.

⁸ See Appendix B for a list of focus groups.

Table 4: Confirmed hours of operation – Washington & Benton Counties

Sunday	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	7	5	3	3	3	3	3
Monday	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	16	26	30	35	27	22	21	21	16	9	5	3	3	3	4	4
Tuesday	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	17	27	30	37	30	22	22	22	16	10	7	4	3	4	4	4
Wednesday	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	16	31	35	39	30	22	22	22	15	10	6	3	3	3	3	3
Thursday	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	5	17	31	37	43	33	24	23	22	16	7	4	3	3	3	3	3
Friday	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	15	21	27	32	27	21	21	20	14	9	6	3	3	3	4	4
Saturday	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	8	10	8	6	3	3	3	3	5	3	3	3	3	3	3
	12am	1am	2am	3am	4am	5am	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm

Location

Focus group participants identified living in certain locations, particularly rural areas as a barrier to accessing the charitable food system.

- “Rural areas are particularly prone to food insecurity. There are fewer food pantries and community meals. There is no public transportation. Usually the only store is Dollar General, which is more expensive.”
- “Rural areas have trouble with accessibility. Some will drive over an hour for a doctor’s appointment and food pantries.”
- “When you go from Fayetteville to West Fork or Winslow you lose all of those services.”

The data also supports this observation. For example, the southeast area of Washington County east of West Fork and Winslow is a rural low access food area -- defined by the USDA as a low-income tract with at least 500 people, or 33% of the population, living more than 10 miles from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store. An overlay of the few non-profit food programs in the area (Pic. 4) illustrates a potentially difficult place to be for a food insecure person.

Other rural areas that may be worth investigating further appear in southwest Washington county and northwest Benton County, as they have low-income populations between 27% and 68% and relatively few charitable food services located within them.

There are also a few urban low food access areas -- defined by the USDA as a low-income tract with at least 500 people, or 33% of the population, living more than 5 miles from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store. These are areas near Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers, and Siloam Springs. Picture 5 shows the

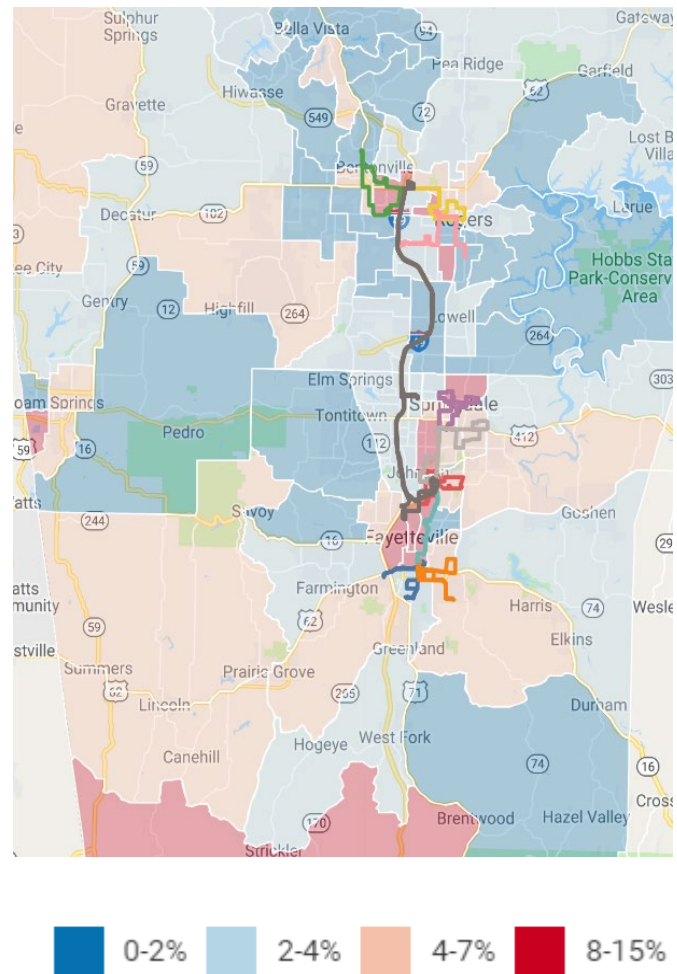
Transportation

Related to location, both providers and clients overwhelmingly identified the lack of transportation as a significant barrier to accessing charitable food services.

Participants discussed the lack of a robust public transit system as well as the high cost of owning and maintaining an automobile, with the following themes discussed.

- “Not all pantries and meal programs are on bus routes.”
- “Buses are unreliable and don’t run at hours convenient for workers.”
- “It can take hours to get somewhere on the bus.”
- “We do provide some bus passes for clients, but buses don’t always go where people need to be.”
- “Accessing food services in Fayetteville is easier than in Bentonville due to public transportation.”
- “For those that do have a car, gas and repairs are expensive and eat into our food budget.”
- “Some churches work together to make sure that there is a free meal every night of the week, but transportation can still be an issue.”

Picture 6: Households without vehicles with public transportation overlay

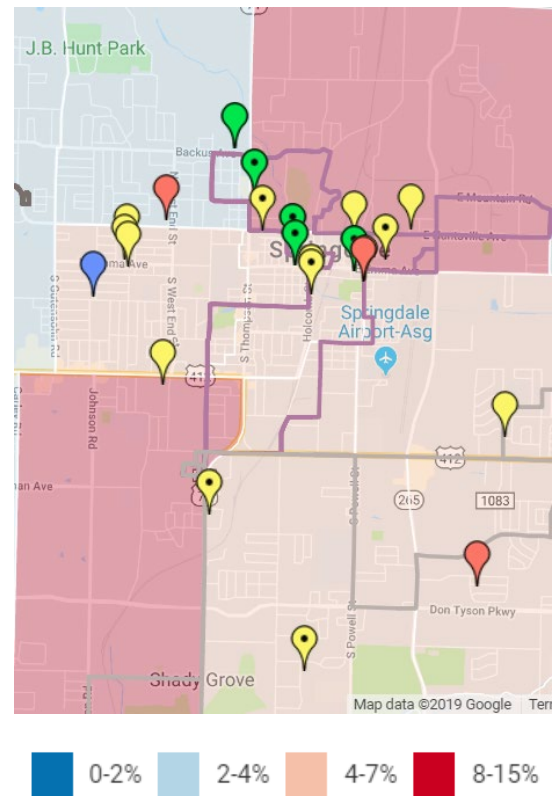


Picture 6 above shows the percentage of households without vehicles with an overlay of the Ozark Regional Transit routes in the area. There are indeed a few tracts with higher percentages of households without vehicles that are not served by public transit particularly in rural areas.

When adding the locations of food pantries and both onsite and meal delivery programs to the same map, areas northeast and southwest of Springdale stand out as areas with higher percentages of people without vehicles that appear to not have easy access to transit (Pic 7). The area pictured is also urban low food access areas -- defined by the USDA as a low-income tract with at least 500 people, or 33% of the population, living more than 5 miles from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store.

Other areas with higher rates of people without vehicles and a lack of public transportation include areas outside Siloam Springs and southeast Washington County.

Picture 7: Springdale area



Knowledge of charitable resources and obtaining accurate information

Clients in particular were frustrated with the complexity of knowing where to go for food and meals given the seemingly random nature of when services are provided and the challenge of obtaining accurate and up-to-date information.

- "Hours aren't always posted or consistent. Many times people think they're going to make it to the resource, but they're just closing the doors."
- "Published lists are almost out of date as soon as they are printed."
- "Clients often have to access multiple pantries to get what they need. It's difficult to remember when pantries and meals are open."

Type of foods provided

Focus group participants also discussed challenges related to the ability to access the types of food they need or prefer, particularly healthy food and ethnically appropriate food, and the difficulty in turning down unwanted food.

- “People with dietary needs and health concerns are not able to get appropriate food at the pantries, and often volunteers do not have the medical or dietary knowledge to know what foods are harmful.”
- “I see a lot of shame and blame when clients have to decline food they cannot eat due to dietary restrictions.”
- “Pantries need more fresh produce, canned fruit, protein, ice for storage of fresh foods, bottled water. Bread and sugary foods are always available.”
- “Sometimes the food provided does not fit the Marshallese culture. We use our gas to get to food pantries, then end up with food that we take but never eat, like pasta. Wish there was more rice and beans instead of pasta.”

Focus group participants also raised concerns about the types of food available for housing insecure populations.

- “Pantries need to think through what homeless people need. Most don’t have a cooler or lunch pack to store fresh food and most don’t have can opener for canned foods.”
- “Even once people are in housing, they don’t necessarily have all the equipment they need to cook. Losing the United Way Gift in Kind program will make things more difficult.”

Participants raised issues around receiving unfamiliar and unrelated foods:

- “Get random foods that don’t make meals.”
- “Sometimes we get food that people don’t know how to prepare.”

Finally, participants expressed a wish that providers would also offer non-food items:

- “Need more paper goods and hygiene items. These cannot be purchased with SNAP dollars.”
- Several providers mentioned the loss of United Way Gift in Kind program as challenge in supporting clients.

Client treatment

Food program clients also highlighted several personal barriers and hurdles to accessing food, including the stigma around asking for food, the loss of control and dignity, and language and documentation issues.

- “There is stigma around asking for food. It can feel dehumanizing and humiliating to make so many calls and jump through all the hoops just to eat.”
- “It feels like because you are low-income, you don’t get to care about your food options anymore. It would be helpful if pantries allowed you to choose your own food.”
- “The intake process can be difficult. Having to re-live your story during intake is painful and embarrassing.”
- “Some places ask you to stay and chat for religious counseling and sometimes people don’t have enough time or just don’t want to.”
- “Documentation can be a barrier for those who do not have it because they have lost it in crisis or because they are undocumented.”
- “Language is a barrier to understanding available resources and how to maintain government assistance. This is particularly difficult for the Marshallese and Hispanic populations.”
- “There are not always translators for interviews.”

Challenges for providers

Challenges for providers centered on the lack of storage capacity for fresh and frozen food, the need to distribute perishable food quickly, the feeling that they need to accept all donations – even unhealthy ones for fear of turning down a donor, volunteer management, and funding.

- “Sometimes we are overwhelmed by fresh produce. It’s a good problem because we want to be able to offer it, but it has a short shelf-life. It’s also a challenge to utilize and store dairy products or frozen goods, like chicken. The dairy spoils quickly and sometimes the chicken comes in bulk, so it needs to be divided into smaller packages. Either way, freezer/refrigerator storage for these items is scant. Is there an avenue for storage collaboration? Is there potential for foundations/corporations to donate space/freezers?”

- “Many times, fresh food is donated near the end of its shelf life, so it has to be used right away. Pantries often have to work together to distribute these larger sized donations.”
- “At times, pantries get donations that are not needed or in demand, particularly unhealthy donations ... but we don't want to say no.”
- “Some donors think that people that are food insecure don't get treats, so unhealthy food gets donated often especially at holidays. We can't turn them away.”
- “Dependable volunteers are hard to come by. Volunteers need to be supported, nurtured and recognized.”
- “We need funds to support additional shifts, especially at times when we get donations of fresh foods. The food may need to be delivered immediately but without additional funding support to pay for more staff, that food does not always find a way to where it needs to be.”

V. Proposed solutions from participants

Both focus group participants and provider survey respondents were asked to think about 1) how to make it easier for people to utilize the charitable food resources in Washington and Benton counties, and 2) to identify the most important thing the community can do to decrease food insecurity. Responses were broad and creative, but focused on a few main themes:

Additional strategic service locations

Many respondents and participants suggested strategically expanding the number of food sites that are closer to where people live and where people are already going, such as schools, government buildings, and medical centers. Some suggested providing bagged lunches at parks and having the larger employers provide free meal programs as an employee benefit. There was a sense that Fayetteville had a strong network of support services while Springdale did not have enough pantries.

Other ideas focused on creating more mobile pantries to serve remote areas and deliver charitable food services to homebound seniors, homeless, and low-income housing. One person suggested creating a food truck that accepted food stamps.

There were several suggestions that focused on creating more community gardens for people to grow and share their own fresh produce. Community gardens also serve as a neighborhood hub where people can gather.

Coordinate and lengthen service days/hours

Both providers and clients overwhelmingly felt that food service providers could be more deliberate in coordinating hours of operation. They also suggested that they extend their hours beyond 6 pm to meet the needs of those who work.

Strengthen information sharing

Many also proposed that the distribution of information about charitable food resources should be expanded in the community. A coordinating organization should be responsible for creating and maintaining a comprehensive list of all charitable food resources in Northwest Arkansas including hours, days, and restrictions. The publication of charitable food resources should be available to social service providers, schools and located in public places including libraries and grocery stores.

Facilitate better transportation

Respondents recommended the creation of more bus routes and more stops that are closer to food resources. They also suggested reimbursing clients for the cost of gas, providing bus passes, and providing dedicated transportation to food programs in the evenings and weekends.

Eliminate/simplify restrictions

Other ideas focused on limiting the bureaucratic requirements needed to gain access to charitable food. While survey results show that the majority of food pantries and onsite meal programs are available for everyone, intake procedures and interviews are still seen as cumbersome by clients. A few participants suggested a voucher system in which other (non-food related) social service providers would screen clients and issue vouchers for use at one or more of the food providers, which would help eliminate or streamline intake procedures at the food service provider level.

Other ideas include doing away with limits on the number of visits to food pantries or free meals; allowing clients to get a month's worth of food at one time to cut down on the need for multiple trips; and allowing clients to send a relative or friend to pick up food on the client's behalf.

Streamline client tracking

Providers acknowledged that there is a need to coordinate among themselves and with other organizations and began to suggest ways for how they could work differently. For example, some discussed the need for food providers to use a coordinated data management system to track those needing assistance and when and where they get help. Platforms like HARK and Charity Tracker were mentioned as systems that allow organizations to make real time referrals to other organizations. This practice would help agencies follow up on referrals so to not just put the burden on the family to reach out to another agency.

Re-think fresh and prepared food distribution system

Other suggestions focused on how to more strategically obtain and distribute fresh food that needs to get out to people quickly. One participant noted that there may need to be two systems – one for shelf stable food and another for perishable food that will require a whole new way of thinking. Several suggestions focused on the creation of regional or geographic food hubs with storage capacity that can accept

large donations of fresh foods and surplus prepared food that nonprofits and people could access directly “without having to shuttle it around too much.”

Public education campaign

Several respondents pointed to a lack of understanding among residents in Northwest Arkansas about families that encounter financial instability and suggested a public education campaign to address stereotypes associated with food stamps, food pantries, and community gardens.

Others suggested a public education campaign to help inform people about the types of donations most needed to cut down on unhealthy or unneeded food.

Policy/advocacy

A few respondents discussed the importance of advocating for changes to programs such as SNAP and WIC to make it easier for people to obtain and utilize these programs.

Another suggested redesigning land use policies to facilitate large scale urban agriculture such as the [Fayetteville 2030: Food City Scenario](#). This plan envisions an urban food production system larger in scale than the individual garden yet smaller than the industrial farm and includes green infrastructure, public growscapes, and urban spaces related to food processing, distribution, and consumption.

Others talked about tax incentives and financing to attract for-profit food businesses to low-income neighborhoods.

Address housing, employment, livable wage

Survey and focus group participants overwhelmingly returned to the need for the community to address the larger factors contributing to food insecurity and poverty, including creating more affordable housing and generating and preparing people for livable wage job opportunities. For these respondents, strengthening what is intended to be an emergency food system only treats a symptom of the larger problem. Ensuring that people have food is an important endeavor, but without a complementary effort to address the other contributing factors to food insecurity, the concern is that the community will have institutionalized a second, unequal system of food access and delivery that could even contribute to the problem it is trying to solve.

VI. CGR observations/suggestions

Prepare for investment in human capital

The charitable food sector in NW Arkansas is largely made up of small, volunteer run-faith based organizations. This is reflective of the generous spirit of NW Arkansas' community, but also contributes to a fragmented, fragile system of emergency food delivery. Any attempts to expand and streamline service hours, increase food variety (particularly fresh food) will likely require an investment in the human capital needed to streamline the system. Funders will need to think through where they can leverage and expand existing assets and where they may need to create new functions or programs.

Explore community-identified ideas at a regional level

The solutions generated by local providers and clients through this research are comprehensive, creative and relevant, and deserve further investigation. Washington and Benton counties are home to multiple urban, suburban and rural areas each with their own set of issues and assets. Any response will likely require a suite of approaches tailored to the conditions in a particular region.

One way to approach the next phase of work is to form regional food councils tasked with exploring these community-generated ideas for improving the system including days/hours of operation, food service locations and accessibility, fresh food storage and distribution solutions, staffing needs, and community gardens.

Councils could consist of food providers, other social service providers, schools, residents, and clients and use data from this study to inform their analysis. Examples of other communities that have taken a regional approach include Asheville, NC, where the MANNA Food Bank groups provider agencies in geographic zones. Its zone coordinators live and work in their zone and facilitate learning and collaboration among partner agencies. The Maryland Food Bank in Baltimore developed Network Partner Area Councils by facilitating monthly meetings with groups of partner agencies in particular geographic locations and helping agencies to work collectively and share resources.⁹

⁹ Edwards, Martha Shore. [Trends & Best Practices in Food Distribution Systems: A Focus on Food Banks & Partner Agencies](#). A Report for the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust. October 2014.

Reach across sectors to align services with where people are

Think through potential ways to align with other community anchors and assets that would facilitate the distribution of food at places where people already are. For example, schools provide an opportunity to connect with families that are difficult to reach because parents work long hours, are not proficient in English, or are part of more insular communities. While the school district would not necessarily have to be responsible for distributing the food, schools could host a space for food distribution by a community partner. Health-care organizations are another potentially underused asset for food distribution. Feeding America offers a tool kit for assessing readiness and creating value through food bank/health care partnerships.¹⁰

Promote client choice

Only 36% of the pantries in Washington and Benton counties that responded to the survey indicated that they offer client choice. While client choice can be difficult, particularly for small, volunteer-based providers, it can cut waste and preserve the dignity and autonomy of clients. A more in-depth analysis of those that do not provide client choice (primarily churches, but not all) could help uncover and address the barriers preventing them from doing so.

Other innovative ways to facilitate client choice includes implementing an online ordering system for clients, which allows clients to order from home and pick up their pre-packaged bags quickly. Examples of food pantries with online ordering include St. John's Bread of Life in Brooklyn, NY and the New York Common Pantry in Harlem.

Another interesting model is The Salvation Army's DMG Foods -- a non-profit grocery store in northeast Baltimore. DMG Foods is not a pantry, rather a low-cost grocery store open 7 am to 7 pm six days a week that combines a traditional grocery shopping experience with a suite of social services, including nutritional guidance, shopping education, workforce development, and meal planning.

Consider promoting nutrition guidelines among providers

Food providers and clients both have concerns about the large quantity of unhealthy, high-sugar foods available at pantries. Adopting nutrition guidelines or goals can assist

¹⁰ ["Assessing Readiness and Creating Value through Food Bank/Health Care Partnerships."](#) Feeding America

food program providers in purchasing and in communicating to food donors. Refusing a food donation would presumably be easier when programs have clear nutritional policies that are communicated publicly. For example, the Food Bank of Central New York set targets of 85% nutritionally sound food and 15% being for treats and snacks.

Maximize federal resources

Almost 60% of provider survey respondents do not help clients enroll in SNAP. Explore ways to coordinate outreach efforts to ensure that all eligible residents have the opportunity to enroll in federal food assistance programs at additional sites or that clients are referred to appropriate assistance.

Continue to push on the root causes

Nationally, there is a trend among food providers in shifting their role from solely providing emergency food services to supporting collaborative long-term solutions for community food security and addressing poverty. Institutions like food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens and feeding programs are addressing food insecurity while also participating and advocating collective impact and community change around issues of housing, health care, transportation, job training and living wage jobs. Funders should continue to work on these issues themselves, but can also support the engagement of emergency food providers in larger community conversations and initiatives.

Appendix A: Guide to Online Map

The [online interactive map](#) that CGR produced for this project contains a rich variety of data and resources. The interactive map allows users to display specific food resources (whether charitable providers or grocery stores or specialty stores) over demographic or socioeconomic factors (such as the poverty rate, share of residents unemployed or housing affordability). In this way, it can be tool for examining the availability and proximity of different types of food resources to populations that may be in particular need. At a simpler level, the map can be used to show how geographically dispersed different food resources are, and to analyze the availability of different food resources on different days or at different times.

Here is a brief overview of the data and sources used to create the interactive map.

Food Pantries, Onsite Meal Providers & Meal Delivery Programs: This information was initially obtained by combining data from Northwest Arkansas Food Bank, United Way of NW Arkansas 2-1-1, and the National Center for Charitable Statistics. CGR enhanced the data through a survey of providers. However, only a subset (43%) responded to the survey. Therefore, the map denotes which providers verified their days and hours of operation by having a pin with a dot. Those without a dot are not verified but may have days and hours of operation information found through other sources. Using the drop-down menus, users can choose to see only providers open on certain days or certain times of day.

Grocery Stores and other food resources: This information was obtained from combining USDA's list of retailers that accept SNAP and data scraped from yellowpages.com.

Public Transit: The map also shows public transit routes, as these can be key to people without access to cars reaching food resources. Public transit route data was provided by Ozark Regional Transit.

Indicator Data: This data provides demographic and socioeconomic context for thinking about food insecurity. This information mostly came from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. CGR used responses aggregated over five years (2012-16) in order to improve the accuracy of the estimates. Information for some indicators are available for a variety of geographic levels (census tract, county, incorporated place – which means town or city, etc.). However, some of the data is not available for all geographic levels. Some indicator data came from other sources, including overweight/obesity data, which came from the CDC's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, and free and reduced price lunch data, which came from Arkansas Department of Education.

Low Food Access Areas: Data reflects the [definition](#) developed by the USDA Food Access Research Atlas and is for 2015. Low income is defined as a census tract with a poverty rate of at least 20%, or a median family income less than 80% of the statewide median family income; or a tract in a metropolitan area that has a median family income less than 80% of that metropolitan area's median family income. Low food access areas are low-income tracts with at least 500 people, or 33% of the population, living more than ½ mile (urban areas) or more than 10 miles (rural areas) from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store.

Dependency Ratios: The age dependency ratio is a measure defined by dividing the combined under 18 years and 65 years and over by the 18-64 years population and multiplying by 100. The children dependency ratio only looks at the population under 18 divided by the 18-64 population and the senior dependency ratio looks at the 65+ pop divided by the 16-64 population.

Housing Affordability: For the affordability of owning a home, researchers calculate the ratio of the median home value divided by the median household income, adjusted for inflation. A ratio of less than 2 or 3 is considered affordable. For rent affordability, we look at the proportion of household income that goes toward monthly rent, utilities and fuel, calculated by dividing median rent by median household income for renters. The federal Housing and Urban Development Department guideline for affordability is that rent should consume no more than 30% of household income.

Appendix B: List of Focus Groups

Population	Date held	Location	# of people
Marshallese Community	6/20/2018	JTL Shop Library	13
Marshallese Elders	6/18/2018	Springdale Public Library	9
Hispanic/ Latino Population	6/20/2018	Rogers Public Library	10
Aging Population Benton County	6/19/2018	Village House	24
Aging Population Washington County	6/18/2018	Schmeiding Center	8
Parents	6/19/2018	Rogers Public Library	17
Housing Insecure	6/21/2018	8th Street Motel	17
Housing Insecure	6/26/2018	Hometowne Suites	14
Housing Insecure in Fayetteville	6/18/2018	Salvation Army Fayetteville	11
Housing Insecure in Springdale	6/19/2018	Samaritan Community Center	18
Working poor -English/Marshallese Speaking	6/28/2018	Ozark Mountain Poultry	7
Working Poor - Spanish Speaking	6/28/2018	Ozark Mountain Poultry	8
Benton County Working Poor (2 Groups)	6/19/2018	2nd St. Pantry at 1 st United Methodist Church	24
Working Poor - Washington County	6/19/2018	Potters House Office	4
Hunger Relief Providers	6/22/2018	Feed Communities	12
Smaller Hunger Relief Providers	6/19/2018	Center for NonProfits	7
Faith Based Providers	6/19/2018	Central United Methodist Church of Rogers	9
Housing Providers	6/20/2018	7Hills Veterans Services Office	6
Interagency Resource Collaborative	6/21/2018	Center for NonProfits	11
Medical professionals	6/20/2018	Mercy Behavioral Health Clinic	10
Dental Professionals	6/16/2018	Welcome Health- Dental Day	13
Rogers Public School Teachers	6/21/2018	Central United Methodist Church of Rogers	5
Sunny Side of Leadership Breakfast	6/14/2018	Double Tree Hotel Bentonville	6
HARK Community Liaisons	6/18/2018	412 Annex	7

Appendix C: Population Focus Groups Protocol¹¹

Thank you for agreeing to be part of a focus group to better understand if food is accessible and available in our community. For those of you who have never participated in a focus group, I just want to tell you that it is a research technique commonly used to gather information from people who have valuable insights and want to share them. Your answers to our questions should not be considered “right” or “wrong.” Rather, they are information that you can supply based on your experiences, observations, or feelings in order to inform steps we should take as a community to address the problem.

In an effort to better understand if food is accessible, affordable and available in our community we are collecting information around three main topics:

1. Whether people have enough food and why they may not
2. How people experience the local food assistance programs in our area
3. Where people get their food when they do have adequate funds

The purpose of this discussion is to help us understand how serious food insecurity may be in our community and the services in place to address this issue. Food insecurity refers to not having access to adequate amounts of affordable foods through normal means, such as buying food at supermarkets, convenience stores, or farmers’ markets or even gardening.

We are working with a community group that wants to understand if our community needs to improve the food resources available for all people.

Please be assured that all your responses are confidential and will be used for statistical purposes only. Our summary report will make no references to names.

I want to start by saying how difficult it can be to discuss these issues publicly. But almost everyone, if not everyone, in this group is familiar with these problems. They are nothing to be embarrassed about. Your candid responses and discussion will be most helpful to us as we try to develop a community-based action plan.

Before we begin, let’s go around the room and introduce ourselves. But instead of telling us just your name, why not tell everyone your name, how long you have lived in this area, and what your three most favorite foods are?

¹¹ Adapted from the USDA Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit

-
1. People sometimes go to different places and programs to get enough food to go around when they are running short of money. What types of food assistance programs and services (both government and charitable) have you gone to for food and how often? (MAKE A LIST OF RESPONSES) (Probe for: food assistance programs, food pantry, soup kitchen, other "free" food resources).
 - a. Which of these places don't work for you? Why?
 - b. Which of these places works the best for you? Why?
 - c. Do they each have a different role—do you go to them at different times or use them differently, such as for getting different types of food?
 2. Has anyone used emergency food providers in the community like (such as 7Hills, Genesis Church, Life Source, Samaritan House, Salvation Army, etc.) Why or why not? (Probe for didn't need it, not comfortable getting free food, transportation, program environment, safety, hours of operation).
 3. How often do you rely on emergency food providers for food assistance? Do you frequent more than one emergency food provider on a regular basis?
 4. Are you able to obtain the types of food you want at these providers? (Probe for healthy options – both fresh and non-perishable, -- and for culturally-specific food, i.e. Kosher, others.)
 5. How do you get to the food providers you use? Are they accessible?
 6. What would make it more convenient or appealing for you to utilize emergency food assistance?
 7. Now for a broader question. Imagine that you have been given the money and opportunity to do something in the community to help people use food assistance programs (both government programs *and* the local charitable emergency food programs) to the fullest degree possible. What would you do?
 8. One final question. What do you think the community (government, businesses, people) could do to make it easier for people to get enough food? Think about how they could work to make food accessible, available, and affordable.

Appendix D: Provider Focus Groups Protocol¹²

Thank you for your willingness to take part in this focus group. This focus group is part of a Walmart Foundation funded study of food insecurity in Washington and Benton Counties. The purpose of this focus group is to explore each of your perceptions regarding the issue of food insecurity in this community.

I'd like to begin by defining food security. The handouts I've given you define both household food security and community food security. Although they are integrally connected, they are also quite separate situations. For example, a household may be food insecure—household members may not be able to afford to purchase food from normal retail food outlets and they may have had to take several different actions to stretch their food or may have gone without food on numerous occasions. However, in the community, food may be affordable, available, and accessible through normal markets. That is, community food security may not be a problem, but some households in the community may be food insecure.

Let's try to discuss these two issues separately. First, let's talk about household food security:

1. According to Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap, 11% of the population in Benton County (or about 26,000 people) and 14% of the population in Washington County (or about 31,000 people) are food insecure. How do you see the problem manifest itself among people in Washington and Benton Counties?
2. Do you see specific populations having issues with food insecurity?
3. How do people cope with the problem of food insecurity?
4. What are the factors contributing to food insecurity among households?

Now, let's talk about community-level or system-level food security.

5. Are there differences in food accessibility, availability and affordability in different geographical parts of the community? Explain.
6. What do you think are the biggest problems related to food security for providers at the community, or system, level?

¹² Adapted from the USDA Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit

7. What do you think are the biggest problems related to food security for clients at the community, or systems, level?
8. How do local governments, funders and providers currently address food insecurity? What does the community-level food security system look like at this time?
9. Who are the key stakeholders in addressing food insecurity? These can be high-level officials or community-level partners or champions.
10. What do you think the community (government, funders, businesses, organizations) could do to make it easier for people to get enough food? Think about how they could work to make food accessible, available & affordable. We want all of your ideas...think outside the box.
11. What policy changes would make it easier for people to get enough food? Think about how they could work to make food accessible, available & affordable. We want all of your ideas...think outside the box.

Appendix E: Provider Survey Instrument



Charitable Food Provider Survey

Dear Colleague,

We need your help! The Walmart Foundation is partnering with the Center for Governmental Research (CGR) to investigate the needs and capacities of charitable food programs (food pantries, meal programs, and food delivery programs) in Benton and Washington counties.

Responses from this survey will be used to create an interactive map of hunger relief services currently available in Northwest Arkansas and a written analysis highlighting gaps and barriers to food security in the region.

As a charitable food service provider, we ask that you provide us with information about your program. Questions in this survey focus on three main areas:

- Services provided,
- Populations served, and
- Organizational capacity.

Due to the wide-range of topics, please work with others in your organization to complete this survey if there are questions you are not able to answer on your own. The survey should take about 25 minutes to complete and your participation is voluntary.

****Surveys submitted on or before *August 6, 2018* will be entered in a drawing to receive one of *four \$50.00* VISA gift cards.****

Please submit one survey per organization. **You can exit and return to the survey at any time from the same computer using the same link provided in the email. Select "NEXT" before you exit to save your responses.**

In you have any questions about the survey, please email Alice Carle, Senior Associate, CGR at acarle@cgr.org.

Your organization's participation is invaluable and greatly appreciated.



First, we'd like to ask some basic information about your organization and its food program(s). For example, a food pantry, meal program or meal delivery service.



* **1. Name of parent organization or agency.** In some cases, the parent organization may have a different name than the food program. For example: First Church of Springdale (parent organization) and Bread of Life (food pantry). In these cases, please enter the name of the *parent* organization here.

2. Name of FOOD PANTRY, if different from name of parent organization (leave blank if not applicable)

3. Name of MEAL PROGRAM, if different from name of parent organization (leave blank if not applicable)

4. Name of FOOD or MEAL DELIVERY program, if different from name of parent organization (leave blank if not applicable)

5. Please provide the physical address for your organization.

Street Address

City

State

ZIP

6. Organization website

*** 7. Please choose the description that BEST fits your organization type.**

- Human Service organization
- Religious organization/church
- Other (please specify)
- Volunteer civic organization (e.g. Rotary)
- Senior center



Now, we'd like to learn more about your food program(s).



Service Information: Food Pantry

* 8. Does your organization operate a FOOD PANTRY?

No

I don't know

Yes



Food Pantry: YES

9. Please provide the name of your FOOD PANTRY program, if applicable.

10. Which of the following describes the service your FOOD PANTRY provides?

Select all that apply.

- Client Choice (client selects food from shelves or order form)
- Client receives prepackaged bags or boxes

11. Location of FOOD PANTRY, if different than the physical location of your organization.

Street Address

City

State

ZIP

* 12. What days of the week and hours is your FOOD PANTRY open? For example, "Every other Monday from 12-4 pm", or "Every Wednesday from 2-5pm".

13. Approximately how many pounds of food did you distribute in the previous year? If you don't know, leave it blank.

14. Approximately how many UNIQUE (i.e. unduplicated) clients or families did your FOOD PANTRY serve last year? If you don't know, leave it blank.

15. In TOTAL, approximately how many visits did your FOOD PANTRY receive last year, including multiple visits from the same people? If you don't know, leave it blank.

* 16. Think back over the days your FOOD PANTRY was open during the past 6 months. How often did you offer fresh foods (fruit/vegetables/meat/dairy)?

- Always (Approximately 100% of the time) Rarely (Approximately 25% of the time)
- Often (Approximately 75% of the time) Never (Approximately 0% of the time)
- Sometimes (Approximately 50% of the time) I don't know.

* 17. Who is eligible to receive services from your FOOD PANTRY?

- Anyone can access our food pantry services. I don't know.
- Clients must meet certain eligibility requirements to access food pantry services.



Food Pantry: Eligibility

18. In the boxes below, please describe the eligibility requirements for your FOOD PANTRY program. Leave blank any that do not apply.

Geography (where a client lives)

Income

Age

Participation in faith-based counseling or other faith-based services

Other



Service Information: Onsite Meal Program

* 19. Does your organization operate an ONSITE MEAL program?

No

Yes



Onsite Meal Program: YES

20. Please provide the name of your ONSITE MEAL program, if applicable.

21. Location of ONSITE MEAL program, if different than the physical location of your organization.

Street Address

City

State

ZIP

*** 22. What days of the week and hours is your ONSITE MEAL program open? For example, "Every other Monday from 12-4 pm", or "Every Wednesday from 2-5pm"**

23. Approximately how many unique (i.e. unduplicated) clients or families did your ONSITE MEAL program serve last year? If you don't know, leave it blank.

24. In TOTAL, approximately how many visits did your ONSITE MEAL program receive last year, including multiple visits from the same people? If you don't know, leave it blank.

*** 25. Think back over the days your ONSITE MEAL program was open during the past 6 months. How often did you offer fresh foods (fruit/vegetables/meat/dairy)?**

- Always (Approximately 100% of the time) Rarely (Approximately 25% of the time)
- Often (Approximately 75% of the time) Never (Approximately 0% of the time)
- Sometimes (Approximately 50% of the time) I don't know.

*** 26. Who is eligible to receive services from your ONSITE MEAL program?**

- Anyone can access our onsite meal program services. I don't know.
- Clients must meet certain eligibility requirements to access onsite meal program services.



Service Information: Eligibility

27. In the boxes below, please describe the eligibility requirements for your ONSITE MEAL program. Leave blank any that do not apply.

Geography (where a client lives)

Income

Age

Participation in faith-based counseling or other faith-based services

Other



Service Information: Food or Meal Delivery Program

* 28. Does your organization provide a FOOD or MEAL DELIVERY program?

No

I don't know

Yes



Food or Meal Delivery Program: YES

29. Please provide the name of your FOOD or MEAL DELIVERY program, if applicable.

* 30. What **days** of the week and **hours** is your FOOD or MEAL DELIVERY program available? For example, "Every other Monday from 12-4 pm", or "Every Wednesday from 2-5pm"

31. Approximately how many **UNIQUE** (i.e. unduplicated) clients or families did your FOOD or MEAL DELIVERY program serve last year? If you don't know, leave it blank.

32. In **TOTAL**, approximately how many deliveries did your FOOD or MEAL DELIVERY program make last year, including multiple deliveries to the same people? If you don't know, leave it blank.

*** 33. Think back over the days your FOOD or MEAL DELIVERY program was open during the past 6 months. How often did you offer fresh foods (fruit/vegetables/meat/dairy)?**

- Always (Approximately 100% of the time) Rarely (Approximately 25% of the time)
- Often (Approximately 75% of the time) Never (Approximately 0% of the time)
- Sometimes (Approximately 50% of the time) I don't know.

*** 34. Who is eligible to receive services from your FOOD or MEAL DELIVERY program?**

- Anyone can access our food or meal delivery program services. I don't know.
- Clients must meet certain eligibility requirements to access food or meal delivery program services.



Food or Meal Delivery Program: Eligibility

35. In the boxes below, please describe the eligibility requirements for your FOOD or MEAL DELIVERY program. Leave blank any that do not apply.

Geography (where a client lives)

Income

Age

Participation in faith-based counseling or other faith-based services

Other



Now, we would like to learn about other types of services you provide or refer clients to.



SNAP

* 36. Does your organization talk to clients about the availability of SNAP (also known as food stamps)?

No

I don't know

Yes

* 37. Does your organization help clients APPLY/ENROLL for SNAP (formerly known as food stamps)?

No

I don't know

Yes

If Yes, how many have you enrolled in the past year?

Nutritional Education

38. Do you PROVIDE any of the below nutritional education to your clients directly? Select all that apply.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Informational Handouts | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooking Classes | <input type="checkbox"/> We do not provide nutritional education services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy Recipes | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

39. Do you REFER your clients to other sources for any of the nutritional education services below? Select all that apply.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Informational Handouts | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooking Classes | <input type="checkbox"/> We do not refer nutritional education services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy Recipes | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

40. If you indicated that you refer clients to other sources for nutritional education, where do you refer them?



Referrals to Other Types of Services

41. Does your program refer clients to OTHER types of services? Select all that apply.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educational opportunities (Budgeting, legal aid, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial assistance (rent/utilities assistance) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health and wellness opportunities (blood pressure checks, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency shelter/housing | <input type="checkbox"/> We do not refer to other types of services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |



Target Populations

* 42. Are your services targeted to a specific population? For example: youth, seniors, Hispanic population, etc.

No

I don't know

Yes



Target Populations

* 43. Does your food program target specific populations? If so, please describe.

For example: youth, seniors, the Hispanic population.



Now, we'd like to learn about the types of food you provide and where it is sourced from.



Type of Food Provided

* 44. Are there types of food that your program would like to sometimes provide but is unable to?

No

I don't know

Yes

Types of Food

* 45. Which types of food are you sometimes unable to provide and why? Select all that apply.

	Can't afford	No refrigeration	No storage space	Other (describe below)
Fresh Fruit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fresh Vegetables	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meat (fresh/frozen)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dairy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-perishable foods (such as peanut butter, pasta, canned foods)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Culturally specific foods	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify)



Food Sources

* 46. Approximately what percent (%) of the food you offer comes from the following sources? Total must equal 100%

NWA Food bank purchases

Direct donations from restaurants, food production businesses, grocery stores, and/or wholesale stores not facilitated by the food bank

Grocery store and/or wholesale store purchases

Government commodities

Farmers

Food drives/individual donations not facilitated by NWA Food Bank

Other

I don't know



Now, we'd like to learn about your organizational capacity.



Organizational Capacity

* 47. Does your organization have PAID staff members that work with your charitable food program?

No

I don't know

Yes

Paid Staff: YES

48. How many paid staff? If you don't know, leave it blank.

49. How many hours per week do staff work? If you don't know, leave it blank.



Organizational Capacity: Volunteers

* 50. Do you use VOLUNTEERS to help with your charitable food program?

No

I don't know

Yes



Volunteers: YES

51. How many VOLUNTEERS work in your meal/food program? If you don't know, leave it blank.

52. How many hours per week do VOLUNTEERS work in the food program? If you don't know, leave it blank.



Organizational Capacity

53. What is the annual budget of your organization?

54. What is the annual budget of your food program(s)?

* 55. Approximately what percentage (%) of financial support for your charitable food program(s) comes from the following sources? Do not include donations of food or other in-kind support. Total must equal 100%

Foundations/Corporations

Donations from individuals

Government

Church/faith community

Other

I don't know



Organizational Capacity

56. Do you have ability to provide bi-lingual services?

No

I don't know

Yes

If Yes, please specify languages

* 57. Do you want to expand your charitable food program services?

No

Not Sure

Yes



Organizational Capacity: No Expansion or Unsure

* 58. Please elaborate on why you are unsure or not interested in expanding your program.



Organizational Capacity: Interested in Expanding

* 59. Which aspects of your services would you want to expand or add? Select all that apply.

- Serve more people
- Increase variety of food
- Increase service hours
- Increase your organization's ability to enroll people in SNAP
- Provide or expand bilingual services
- Add or expand your organization's ability to provide wrap-around programming such as, but not limited to, food nutrition programs, case management, etc.
- Increase your organization's ability to refer people to services at other organizations
- Other (please specify)

60. Please help us understand in more detail how you would like to expand by elaborating on any of the aspects selected above.

* 61. What resources would your organization need to expand or add services? Select all that apply.

- More financial support
- Additional staff
- More volunteers
- Bigger warehouse/storage space
- Other (please describe)
- Refrigeration/ cold storage
- Vehicles
- Improved technology resources
- Professional development for staff

62. Please help us understand your needs in more detail by elaborating on any of the responses you have selected above.



We would now like to give you an opportunity to reflect on and share your thoughts about food insecurity and the charitable food system as a whole in NW Arkansas.

Please answer fully and honestly, as the opinions expressed in this section will only be used in aggregate to inform the analysis of gaps and barriers to achieving food security in NW Arkansas. There will be no attempt to link an individual to answers given.



General Insights

63. How could we make it easier for people in NW Arkansas to utilize the charitable food resources in Washington and Benton Counties?

64. What is the most important thing, we as a community, could do to decrease FOOD INSECURITY? *Food insecurity is defined as the “Lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods.”*



Thank you again for your time and valuable feedback.

If you are submitting this survey on or before *August 6, 2018*, please enter your email below to be entered in a drawing to receive one of *four \$50.00* VISA gift cards.

If you have any further comments or questions regarding this survey, please contact:

Alice Carle, Senior Associate, CGR at acarle@cgr.org.

65. Please enter your email address so we can contact you if you win a gift card