Economic Security and Food Access in Washington State During the COVID-19 Pandemic

June to July 2020, Wave 1

WAFOOD
Washington State Food Security Survey:
A UW/WSU Joint Effort in Collaboration with Tacoma Community College
Research Team: UW, WSU and TCC

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WAFOOD Survey Objectives

- Understand the impacts of COVID-19 on economic security and food access of WA State residents.
- Sought to examine employment, income and food assistance, food security, and food shopping patterns.
- Also examined barriers/supports to accessing both federal and state programs before and since the pandemic.
• Completed responses from 2,621 WA residents in 38 of 39 counties.
• Sample was female (81%), partnered (60%), with children <18 y (44%).
• Thirty percent had incomes <$35,000.
• All responses geo-coded by zip code.
• King, Pierce and Snohomish provided 59% of sample.
WAFOOD Essential and Non-Essential Workers

Employment rate was 67% before Covid-19

Essential workers (54% of employed sample)

- Healthcare: 18%
- Community and social services: 22%
- Business, finance, IT or office support: 17%
- Education and training: 16%
- Consumer-facing, high contact services: 11%
- Food-based services: 15%

Non-essential workers

- Healthcare: 4%
- Community and social services: 13%
- Consumer-facing, high contact services: 17%
- Food-based services: 9%
- Education and training: 29%
- Business, finance, IT or office support: 28%
Key Findings

1. Food insecurity was experienced in 30% of households and of those, 59% had children.
2. Food assistance was sought by 33% of households.
3. Most were satisfied with food assistance but some cited issues with food access and variety.
4. Fair or poor diets were reported by 33% and 40% said their diet worsened.
5. Greater consumption of rice, beans and eggs but less meat and fish.
6. Sporadic food shortages observed.
7. Rising food cost and reduced safety in food shopping were cited as barriers to food access.
8. Unemployment benefits sought by 28% of households 40% of which had issues applying.
9. Stimulus checks received by 77% of households.
10. More time to prepare and enjoy meals was viewed as one benefit.
Critical Disparities in Food Insecurity

Food insecurity by socio-demographics

- 30% of households were food insecure.
- Of food insecure households, 59% had children.
- Clear disparities by income, education, race/ethnicity, and marital status.
## Food Insecurity Differed by Industry Sector and Essential Worker Status

### Table 1. Food insecurity by industry sector and essential worker status among employed WAFOOD respondents (n=1,751)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry Sector</th>
<th>Overall Sample</th>
<th></th>
<th>Food Insecure</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food-based services</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer-facing, high contact services</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and social services</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and training</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/finance/IT and office support</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall Sample</th>
<th></th>
<th>Food Insecure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential workers</td>
<td>947</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Essential workers</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Food-based services: includes 1) farming, agriculture, fishing, livestock; 2) transportation and food delivery; 3) food sales, wholesale or retail; 4) food prep and services*

*Consumer-facing, high contact services: includes 1) Hospitality, hotels, real estate, rental; 2) Installation, repair, construction; 3) Personal care and services; 4) Retail sales and related occupations; and 5) Arts, design, entertainment, sports*
The Vital Role of Food Assistance

Participation in food assistance

- Not much change in overall food assistance receipt: 32% in the 12 months prior to the shutdown to 33% after.
- SNAP/WIC/school meals had to rapidly transition their programs.
- Summer school meals, city vouchers, food boxes, food banks – all increased.
- Stimulus checks received by 77%.
SNAP Benefits Not Yet Used Online

• Of the 364 respondents using SNAP during the shutdown, 58% were satisfied with benefits.

• Nearly all made full use of their SNAP benefits.
WIC Recipients Cite Limited Online Use and Food Choice as Barriers

- Of the 63 respondents using WIC during the shutdown, 62% were satisfied with benefits.
- Half said food choice was limited.
- The inability to use WIC online was a cited as a common barrier.
Many Worry They Do Not Qualify for Food Assistance

- Of the 857 respondents who received food assistance, 43% had worried that they would not qualify.
- About a third noted that it was difficult to travel to and from food program offices.
The growing role of food banks

- Of the 524 respondents who used food banks, half said they were satisfied.
- Half said a food bank was close.
- Half said there were limits on how often they could visit food banks.
Eating Habits Notably Changed

Changes in household food consumption

- One-third of respondents reported fair or poor diets.
- Many (40%), said their diet worsened during the pandemic.
Confidence in Food Access but Higher Costs and Virus Transmission Worries cited as Access Barriers

**Issues experienced in accessing food**

- Food is getting more expensive: 64%
- Do not feel safe in supermarket: 58%
- Cannot afford to stockpile foods: 29%
- Public transport not safe: 24%
- Fresh food may not be safe: 23%
- Grocery delivery or pick-up issues: 17%
- Packaged food may not be safe: 13%
- Grocery delivery not available: 10%
- Reduced supermarket hours: 9%
- Service closures: 9%
- Reduced food bank hours: 8%
- I have no transportation: 7%
- No issues: 9%

- Among barriers to food access, respondents cited concerns over increased food cost and safety in shopping for food.
Workplace responses to the shutdown

- Asked what would happen if they got sick, 62% said they could use paid time off while
- Some (38%) said they could use paid medical leave.
Stimulus Checks Received by Most; Unemployment Rising

- Three-fourths (77%) of WA residents surveyed reported receiving a stimulus check.
- Twenty-eight percent of respondents reported receiving unemployment
  - Of those, 40% reported difficulty in applying
# Positive Outcomes Amid COVID-19

- More time to prepare meals
- Community involvement and support
- Supportive local food vendors
- Connecting with farmers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More free time to enjoy preparing food and mealtime</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People in your community helping out one another access food</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local grocers and restaurants support by stocking healthy foods</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to food assistance services in your community</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting with local farmers to bring food direct to you</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community leaders listening to the residents' food access concerns</td>
<td>9%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
All respondents were geocoded by ZIP code for analysis of economic disparities by location.

Most responses from Western WA with 59% of responses coming from King (KC), Pierce, and Snohomish counties.
WAFOOD Survey Statewide Coverage by County

Sample demographic comparison

- Demographics closely mirrored the racial/ethnic, education, and age distributions of KC and captured those of WA.

Source: 2018 American Community Survey data by county
Six Report Briefs

- WAFOOD Survey Brief #1: Economic Security and Food Access in Washington State During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Overall
- WAFOOD Survey Brief #2: Economic Security and Food Access During the COVID-19 Pandemic: King County
- WAFOOD Survey Brief #3: Economic Security and Food Access During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Pierce County
- WAFOOD Survey Brief #4: Economic Security and Food Access During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Clark County
- WAFOOD Survey Brief #5: Economic Security and Food Access During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Snohomish County
- WAFOOD Survey Brief #6: Mapping COVID-19 Risk Factors by King County ZIP Codes
WAFOOD Survey Impacts: Stakeholders and Partners

- Northwest Harvest: Northwest Harvest has used the survey for outreach and distribution and plans to utilize our findings as a resource in a case being built by their network calling for Congressional action on a COVID-19 relief package.
- Food Lifeline: Informed their racial and geographic equity mapping efforts to inform future programming and support food access by those most disproportionately affected by hunger.
- Extension: WSU has disseminated findings to inform the COVID-19 responses being carried out through WSU Extension offices.
- NFACT: Our findings have been shared with the National Food Access and COVID Research Team (NFACT), and will help to inform the study and survey design of other researchers across the nation responding to COVID-19.
- Mayor Jenny Durkan: Our findings were presented to Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan, and will help to inform the city’s ongoing COVID-19 responses.
WAFOOD Survey: Targeting hard to reach populations

• Funding for more WAFOOD waves (fingers crossed!)

• New targeted project: “COVID-19 Food Access among American Indian/Alaska Native Tribes in WA State: The value of food sovereignty”
  • Funder: UW Population Health Initiative (PI: Otten)
  • UW/WSU/TCC in partnership with the Northwest Tribal Epidemiology Center

• New targeted project: “Community-driven approaches to identify barriers to food security due to COVID-19 and solutions to improve food security and resilience in agricultural communities”
  • Funder: UW Population Health Initiative (PI: Spector/Krenz)
  • UW in partnership with WA DOH and El Proyecto Bienestar.

• New targeted project: “Assessing the Impact and Feasibility of WIC Remote Services and Expanded Food Options”
  • Funder: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Healthy Eating Research Program (PI: Otten)
  • UW in partnership with the Washington State WIC/DOH
The WAFOOD survey team wishes to thank the UWPHI, the UW School of Public Health (UWSPH), and the Department of Epidemiology for their support.

We also wish to thank numerous community partners and stakeholders who helped shape this project:

- Among those are: WA Department of Health, WA Department of Agriculture, WA Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition, WA SNAP-Ed, KC Local Food Initiative, Northwest Harvest, Washington State University (WSU) Extension, United Way of WA, and numerous food banks, food pantries, charitable organizations, community organizations, county health departments, and local health jurisdictions.
For More Information or to Contact the Study Team

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