

Feeding Our Community Report Executive Summary



Survey Dates:
March 2021 – March 2022

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**FEEDING OUR
COMMUNITY SURVEY**





University of Nevada, Reno

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Executive Summary

Nearly a decade ago, Feeding America conducted a large-scale hunger study within the United States, including at the Food Bank of Northern Nevada (FBNN). The current project builds upon and updates these incredibly informative results. FBNN contracted with the Nevada Center for Surveys, Evaluation, and Statistics (CSES) at the University of Nevada, Reno, to conduct a year-long surveillance survey. To better serve its neighbors, FBNN was interested in conducting a community survey that consists of two parts: a needs assessment and neighbor satisfaction survey. This survey included community attitude questions regarding life circumstances and key determinants of food insecurity. This report outlines the approach to that study, including the survey sampling and weighting methodologies, the materials used, adjustments made throughout the process, and conclusions.

Data collection ran from March 2021 through February 2022 (with some sites finishing in March 2022). A total of 40 sites of various size were included from throughout FBNN's neighbor population in northern Nevada and eastern California Region. FBNN and CSES collaborated to develop the survey tool, devise a sampling strategy, train volunteers, and recruit respondents. The final sample included 1,769 respondents (a 36.51% response rate). Unless otherwise specified, all analyses in the report are weighted using demographic data from FBNN, to reduce sampling error that can occur when some demographic groups are under-represented in the final survey sample, compared to their known prevalence in the population studied).¹

The sample represented urban (67.84%), rural (9.45%), frontier (12.00%), and California (10.72%) regions within FBNN's service area. Neighbors who responded to the survey were mostly female (53.97%), white (57.02%), and ages 19-59 (55.93%). It was most common for respondents to have a high school degree (34.10%), no military history (83.40%; see Table 11 in full report), and an annual income between \$10,000-\$19,999 (27.40%).

Goal 1 of this projects was to identify neighbor barriers, neighbor characteristics, and use of FBNN services. Neighbors began the survey by answering questions about their participation in programs directly supported by FBNN, such as Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)/Senior Boxes (14.61%), food pantries (67.77%), and Mobile Harvest (23.51%). Neighbors also reported whether they had participated in other food bank and pantry programs, like soup kitchens (11.37%), Prescription Pantry (2.71%), Produce on Wheels (3.36%), school pantries (4.54%), SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; Food Stamps or EBT) application assistance (39.78%), or other programs (4.95%).

The next section of the survey covered questions about accessing food. Most neighbors reported traveling 10-20 minutes (36.40%) or less than 10 minutes (32.70%) to their nearest food supply store. A large majority of neighbors drive their own vehicle to get food (59.00%). About

¹ For example, because women are more likely to take responsibility for domestic chores like procuring food, we anticipated that women would be overrepresented in the survey. In the raw survey data, women represented over 70% of survey respondents, compared to 54% in the weighted sample.

two-thirds to three-quarters of neighbors have access to various cooking appliances, such as a working stove or burner (74.90%), oven or toaster oven (62.52%), or microwave (70.24%), refrigerator with freezer (72.95%), though 10.08% of neighbors reported access to none of the listed appliances. The majority of respondents included in this analysis (97.57%) provided an answer for this question, and of those, only 1.86% indicated that they preferred not to respond.

Next, neighbors responded to questions about food security. Over one-in-five neighbors (20.80%) said they run out of food and lack money to get more food almost every month. Another 22.90% experience this some months but not every month, and 26.80% of neighbors experienced it once or twice in the last year. Similarly, 15.90% of neighbors cut the size of their meals or skipped meals entirely almost every month in the last year due to lack of money for food. Nearly half of neighbors also responded to the statement “I buy unhealthy foods more often than healthy foods because they are more affordable” with agree or strongly agree (48.00%). When asked how frequently they visit pantry programs, 33.10% of neighbors responded, “Often, this is my primary source of food.” Another 54.10% of neighbors responded that they come sometimes, to supplement their food budget. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (65.70%) responded with something other than “always” when asked how often they are able to meet their household’s food needs for the month after visiting a pantry program. Neighbors participate in many assistance and benefit programs, though these programs might still be underutilized. For instance, just 39.36% of neighbors report receiving SNAP, 11.55% receive CSFP/Senior Boxes, and 11.02% receive free- or reduced-price school meals. Fewer than 5% of respondents indicated usage of each of the other benefit programs listed.

Housing security was the next major section of the survey. The most common housing type for respondents was renting a home (45.00%), followed by owning or paying mortgage (26.70%). Almost 13% of respondents are unhoused or living in a homeless shelter (12.80%). Respondents often face tradeoffs between paying for food and paying for other expenses, like housing (40.90%). Over half of respondents reported transportation costs (51.30%), utilities (40.90%), phone bills (40.80%), and medical bills (31.20%) as common tradeoffs, as well.

The survey also covered economic and financial security. The most common job situations indicated for respondents and their adult household members were “Retired and not working,” “Unemployed and looking for work,” and working “One full time job only” (see Table 27a in full report). Respondents provided their sources of supplemental income, too: 44.67% receive Social Security, 33.06% receive SNAP², and all other sources provided a small proportion of supplemental income. About 17% of neighbors have no supplemental income (16.91%). When asked what they would do if they lost their income source tomorrow, 31.15% said they would rely on a food bank or pantry program. Another 18.36% would rely on welfare,

² In the survey, SNAP benefits were included in the question about supplemental income. However, these benefits are restricted in their usage, and can only be used to purchase grocery items. The monetary value of SNAP benefits varies considerably based upon eligibility criteria, and the minimum benefit is just \$16 per month.

programs, and benefits; 16.92% would rely on family or friends, and 11.99% would rely on emergency housing or a homeless shelter.

The COVID-19 pandemic also played a role in neighbors' use of food banks and pantries. Over a quarter of respondents (28.80%) reported visiting as a direct result of the pandemic. In addition, most people used these programs more (45.60%) or the same amount (39.20%) as in the previous three months.

Goal 2 of this project was to complete a neighbor satisfaction survey of FBNN's services. Respondents overall were either satisfied (39.21%) or very satisfied (47.83%; 87.04% in sum) with the quality of products provided. Likewise, respondents were satisfied (34.49%) or very satisfied (56.74%; 91.23% in sum) with the services provided. Despite high levels of satisfaction, neighbors also reported barriers to accessing these programs and services. The most common barriers reported were hours of operation (19.80%) and days of operation (17.70%), followed by wait time (14.90%) and pantry location (13.50%), though the percent of neighbors indicating these factors as barriers varied between regions (see Table 34).

To add additional context and to better understand neighbors' reasons for using FBNN and partner pantry programs, we asked respondents to respond to one open-ended question at the end of the survey: *"Would you please tell us a bit more about your situation so that we can better understand why you are using food bank services at this time?"* A total of 1,367 respondents (77%) gave substantive comments that provide context about their use of a food bank or pantry program. CSES conducted an unweighted thematic analysis of these comments (see Tables 35 and E1 in full report). Many respondents indicated that they use a food bank or pantry program to supplement their food budget without providing any additional information about their life circumstances. Aside from these more generic comments, the most common themes included low or limited income (including social security), unemployment, "cost of living" issues ("rising cost of living," "rising rent," etc.), housing issues (including homelessness), and disabilities. More information about neighbor comments can be found in the Open Response section of this report. Additional neighbor quotes are presented throughout the report as they pertain to the results presented.

One-third of neighbors identified as seniors aged 60 or older, which is disproportionate to the representation of this age group in the broader population and is more than twice as many neighbors as reported receiving CSFP box services. Many respondents mentioned social security and retirement income as being insufficient to afford food. Poverty was a key determinant of food need for neighbors in FBNN's service region, but it is worth noting that approximately 7% of neighbors reporting household incomes above \$40,000 per year, and 19.0% of neighbors using food pantries and programs held a post-secondary level degree.

As with any study, this project includes several limitations that should be considered when reviewing the study results, including language and literacy barriers, focus and attention barriers, inconsistent recruitment between sites, and changes to the distribution models. This survey had an especially unique situation in that it was conducted during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was responsible for many of the distribution model changes. Further, the results of this study reflect a service population affected by the economic impacts of the pandemic. While many respondents in this study were using food banks and pantry programs

prior to COVID, *and other economic trends were already driving food bank usage*, a large number of respondents (28.8%) reported that their use of these programs was a direct result of the pandemic. Additionally, nearly half of the respondents (45.5%) reported an increase in their use of food banks and pantry programs in the months prior to survey participation. Therefore, COVID's influence on the service population reflected in this report cannot be disentangled from the persistent service population. More information on study limitations is presented in the Limitations section of this report.

Barriers and key determinants of need varied by region. For example, neighbors in the urban region were significantly less likely to report access to appliances for storing or cooking food, and more likely to report unstable housing situations – which is unsurprising given that alternative dwellings such as motels and shelters are concentrated in urban areas. These differences between regions likely indicate actionable differences in service needs, for example allocating more food that does not require cooking to the urban region or allocating bulk goods to the frontier regions where neighbors travel further to get food and do so less frequently. These insights can inform the allocation of resources and efforts to reach the service population going forward. Although these limitations should be considered when using these data to make informed decisions, the information provided in this report can guide FBNN's efforts to serve neighbors to the extent that FBNN has influence or direct control over changes to service. Additional considerations are presented in the Discussion section of this report.

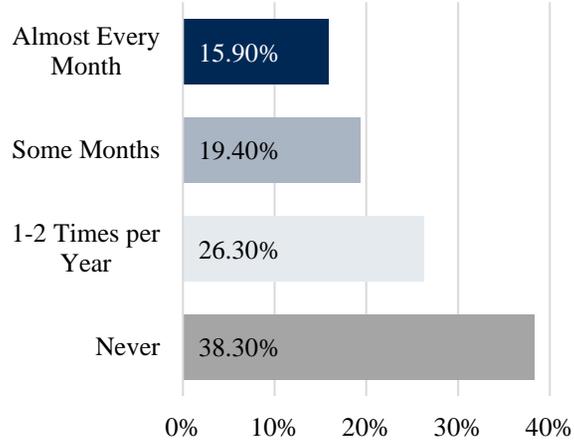
FEEDING OUR COMMUNITY SURVEY



Neighbors who rely on FBNN services work hard to support themselves and their families!

Though many neighbors live below federal poverty guidelines, many others do not. Neighbors report trouble making ends meet, even when they make good money.

Neighbors Eat Less or Skip Meals



Neighbors' Reliance on FBNN & Partners



KEY TAKEAWAYS

33.1% Of neighbors use food pantries as a primary source of food for their household

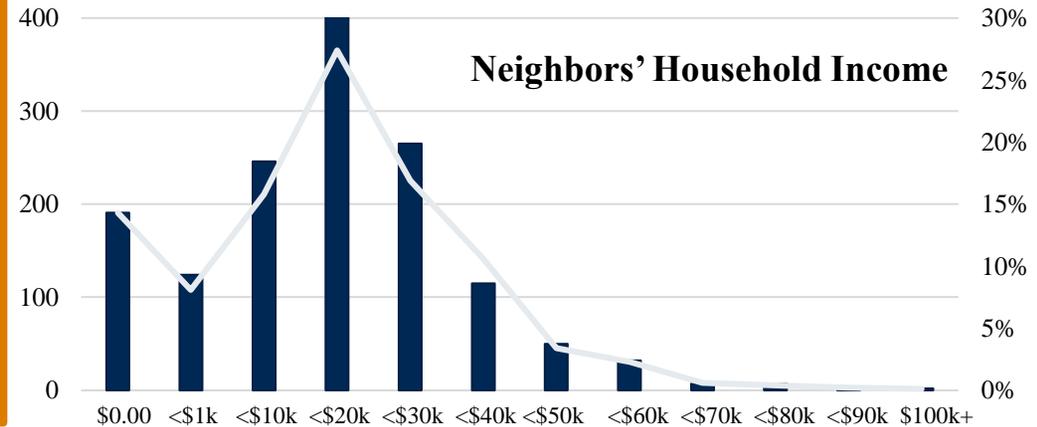
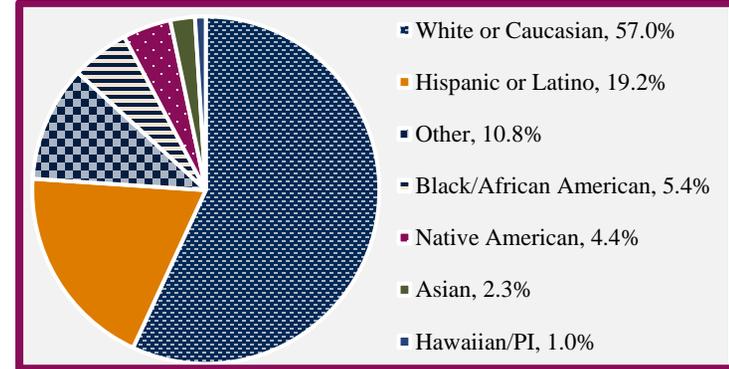
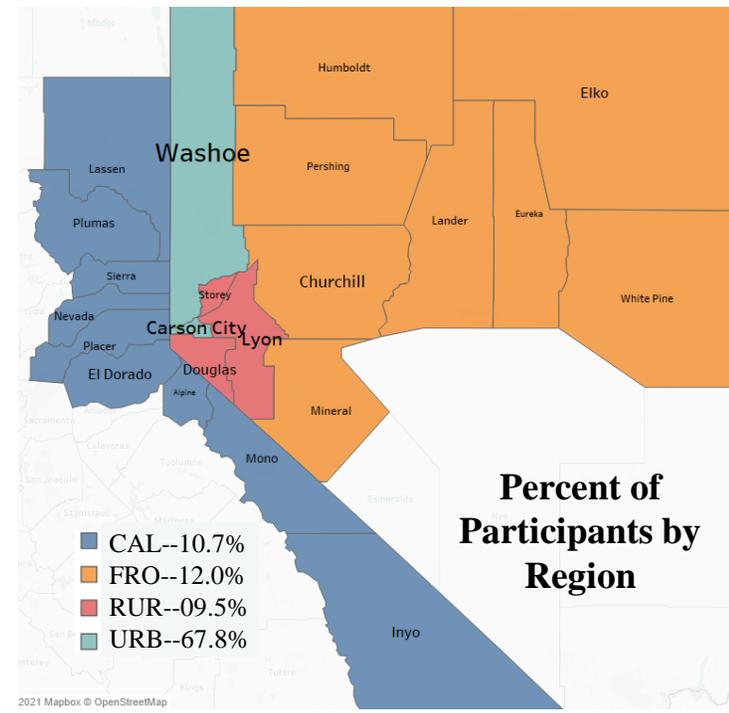
27.5% Of neighbors have at least one adult in their household working full time

20.8% Of neighbors reported running out of food every single month

Hours and Days of Operation are the greatest barriers for neighbors to access FBNN and partner services.

33.1% of households receive **SNAP** benefits, but many still need food bank help:

"I really needed to supplement SNAP, I only get \$60, and most of my other income goes to housing. So, the food banks are really important."



Neighbor Quotes

- I am low income and live in an affordable living apartment but for some reason the property manager doesn't understand low income where a person only receives social security, disabled, and below the poverty level. She has increased my rent ever more than I can afford. Bills comes first and so I depend on the food bank for food on veggie day, commodities, and perishables. This is a must to make it within my budget, which is difficult. I am on low-income programs to help me as well. Only those with low income have a right to the food bank.
- I am on a fixed income; my rent has been raised and I have no money for food. I am barely surviving after I pay all my bills.
- It's hard for me, I always need food and my job doesn't even pay for all my bills. I can't pay rent so I'm sleeping at my sister's house for a few days now.
- I'm a single mom working part time and my son depends solely on me. I'm paying medical bills that I owe the hospital for both him and me.
- I am a disabled, retired nurse. I live alone, within eyesight of my town's food bank. Happy for that ! My income is 1,040.00 a month and I have a real hard time having any money left after bills for food and household items, soap, etc. The local food bank is the only resource for any help in the town I live in! Thank goodness for that!!
- I am retired and living on Medicare, and with the cost of rising living, i.e., groceries, housing utilities, it [is] becoming harder to meet my living expenses.
- I was a caregiver for my mother, and I am no longer doing that. Looking for work right now.
- With the way things are, rising gas, food, just about everything is going up. it's harder and harder to survive. Thank God for the Food Bank!!!
- I got a better job and am no longer eligible for SNAP, however what I make barely covers the cost of rent in Reno.
- My kids are growing so they are eating more, and healthy vegetables and fruits are so expensive. So, I rely on food banks to get some food for the week and buy whatever else I need with the money I have left after paying bills.
- I am 77 and my husband is 81. He is suffering from prostate cancer and there are a lot of medical bills on top of inflation and our only income is Social Security.
- Most funds go towards gas so spouse can commute to job. We are in an extra rural location.
- Supporting grandchildren and financial assistance for adult children who had lost their income due to the pandemic that would otherwise be homeless without assistance from me. Trying to financially support two households for up to 8 persons.
- Don't have a place to stay so it's hard to be dependable for a job when I don't know where I'm going to sleep.
- Need good food that doesn't spoil so I can store it in a locker due to living at homeless shelter.

- Staying with family now because I can't pay rent. I can't afford food on my own.
-
- I suffer from increasing paralysis, and I have a severe heart condition. I need to eat low sodium foods as well as healthy foods that snap program just can't afford.
- Struggling with untreated PTSD. Finding the larger system too challenging to gain assistance. Housing is the biggest problem for me as being unsettled adds to inability to stabilize for adequate/appropriate work.
- I had a stroke three years ago and I am unable to work Social Security disability does not pay me enough to buy myself healthy food.
- I am a single mom of three who works full time and delivers food part time. I have three teens and don't qualify for state assistance. The budget does just not stretch especially with all three kids home.
- I am a single mother with 3 kids on the autism spectrum. it is difficult to find adequate and affordable childcare to enable full time employment.
- Husband not well and taking care of 86-year-old mother-in-law.
- Due to pandemic I retired and afraid to return to work until we know more about the COVID-19. I have worked over 50 years and raised 11 children.
- Have immune system issue. Food bank is the difference in being able to eat healthy to stay strong and well.
- Elko F.I.S.H has helped me get through the hardest part in my life, with clothing, household items, and food. I am so grateful that Elko F.I.S.H has been there for me.
- Our food bank most of the time gives 2 to 3 months expired foods.
- Lately we notice that the fresh fruits and veggies are at the end of their life and sometimes soft and some mold.
- I just got out of prison and am needing food until I find employment. I work very hard.
- I am a mom who left abusive husband. Trying to start over to keep my kids.
- Had to leave a domestic violence situation with my kids. Lost my job over it. Used up saving keeping a roof over our heads. Now I have a part time job & going to school to get a better job for us to live better in a few months.
- I only use food banks when I am in need to help get through the month.
- My divorce was extremely financially straining. I am still trying to recover from the devastation.
- My husband passed away and everything fell apart financially as he was the sole provider, and I was a stay-at-home mom taking care of my special needs son.