

Pantry Patron Preference Survey

Survey 2022



Food Pantries and Food Insecurity

1 in 9 Utahns experience food insecurity, lacking consistent access to obtain enough food to support a healthy lifestyle and increasing their risk for developing certain chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers.¹

Although not a solution to food insecurity, food pantries serve an important role in helping individuals meet their food needs. Though meant to be a short-term resource, 42% of Utah pantry patrons report using pantries several times in the last 12 months. This gives food pantries a vital role in having the ability to improve the negative consequences shown to impact the health and well-being of individuals who are food insecure.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, attention was brought to the lack of food diversity in food pantries through community health workers and various non-profit organizations working in emergency food. This survey was created to assess client's experiences at the pantry with the aim to identify their major needs, preferences, and barriers.

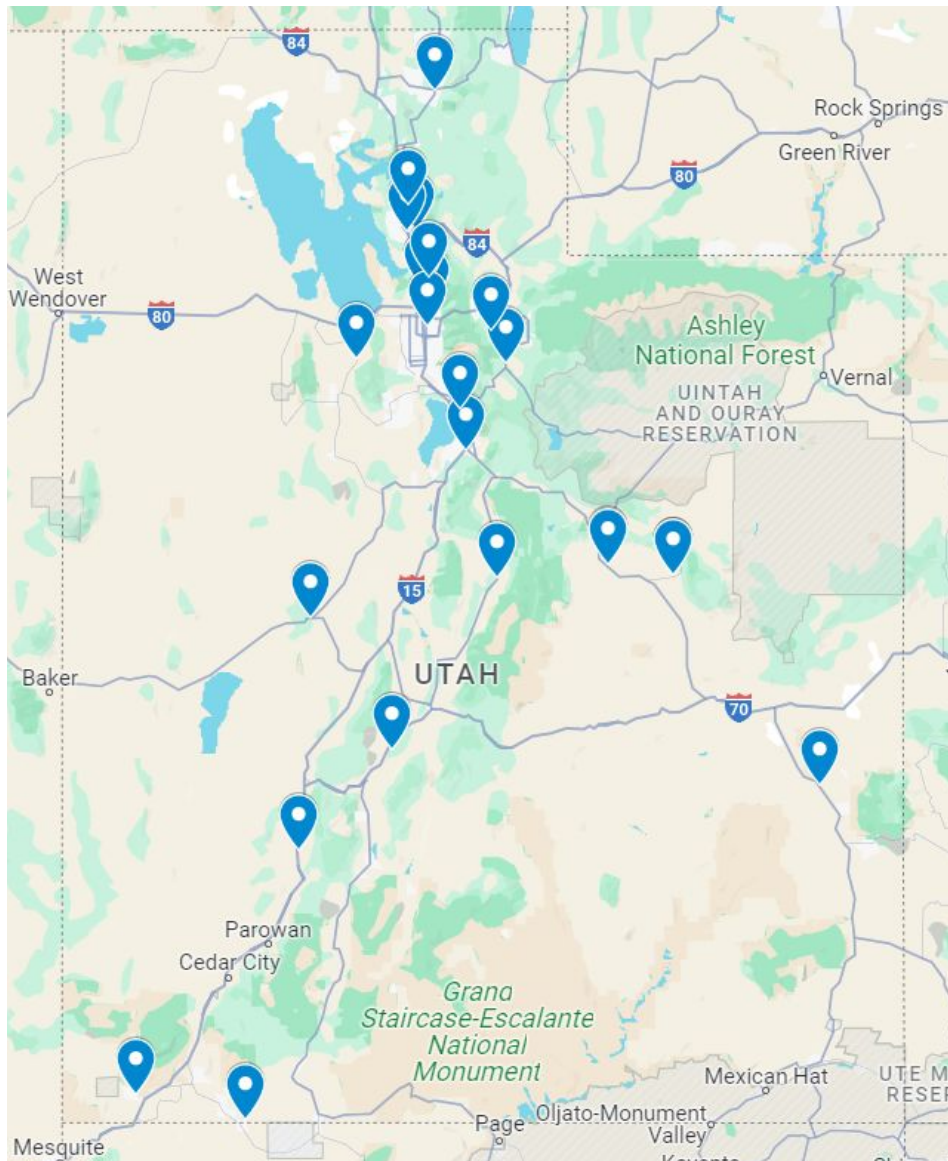
Methods

Convenience sampling was used, meaning surveys were done with patrons who were at the food pantry at the time the survey was conducted. The survey was optional and \$10 grocery gifts cards were offered to respondents. The survey was only offered at each food pantry for 1 or 2 days, so some clients may not have had the opportunity to take the survey if they did not go to the food pantry on that day. The survey was offered in English and Spanish on paper and electronically. The survey collected data on patrons' food preferences, pantry atmosphere and environment, supplemental resources, barriers to using the pantry, and demographics like household size and ethnicity.

In addition, each food pantry manager was surveyed regarding their perspective on the needs of their pantry.

The survey was administered at 26 pantries (557 individuals) across Utah, representing urban and rural locations.

¹ Overall (all ages) hunger & poverty in Utah: Map the meal gap. Overall (all ages) Hunger & Poverty in the United States. (n.d.). <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2020/overall/utah>



46% of respondents lived in urban areas, while **54%** of respondents lived in rural areas.

26

Pantries

557

Individuals

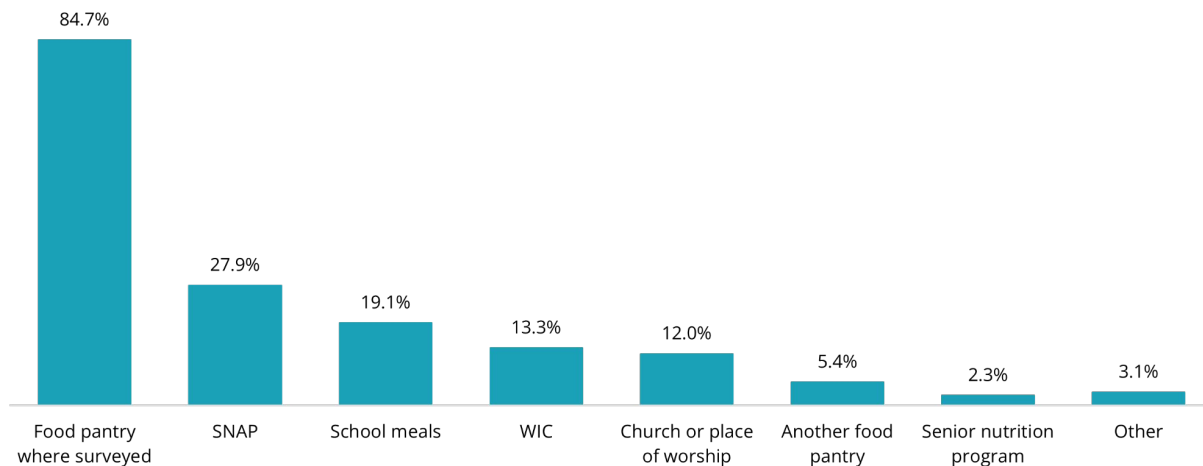
Results

Description of pantry patrons

Of the total respondents, 93.6% met criteria for food insecurity (hunger vital signs questionnaire²). Only one fourth of clients indicated using food assistance programs (SNAP, 25.8%; WIC, 12.3%), yet 27% requested resources on food programs be provided at pantries. 42% of respondents reported coming many times to the pantry in the past 12 months. 42% of respondents reported coming a few times.



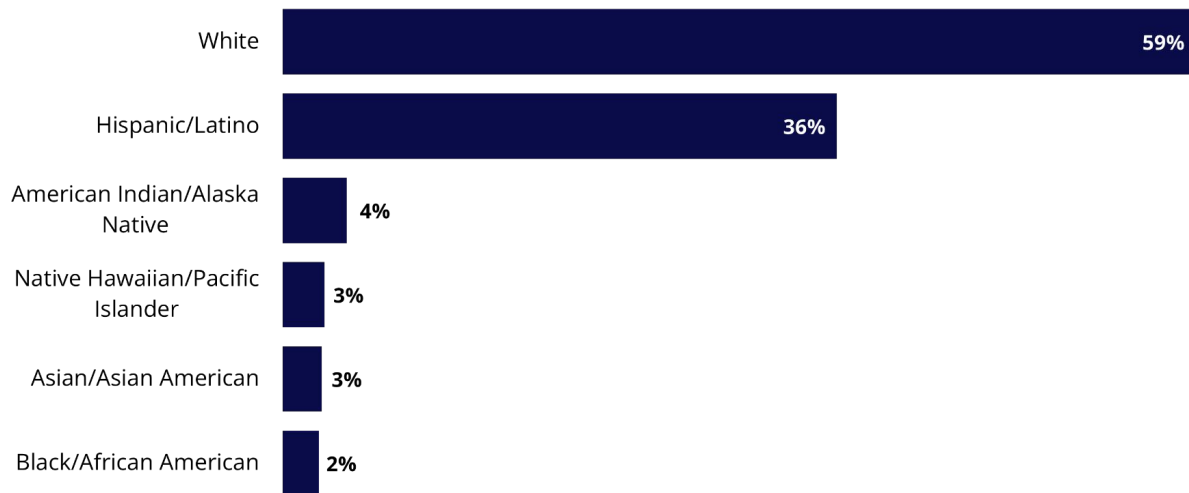
Food assistance program used in the past 12 months, October–December 2022 (n=517)



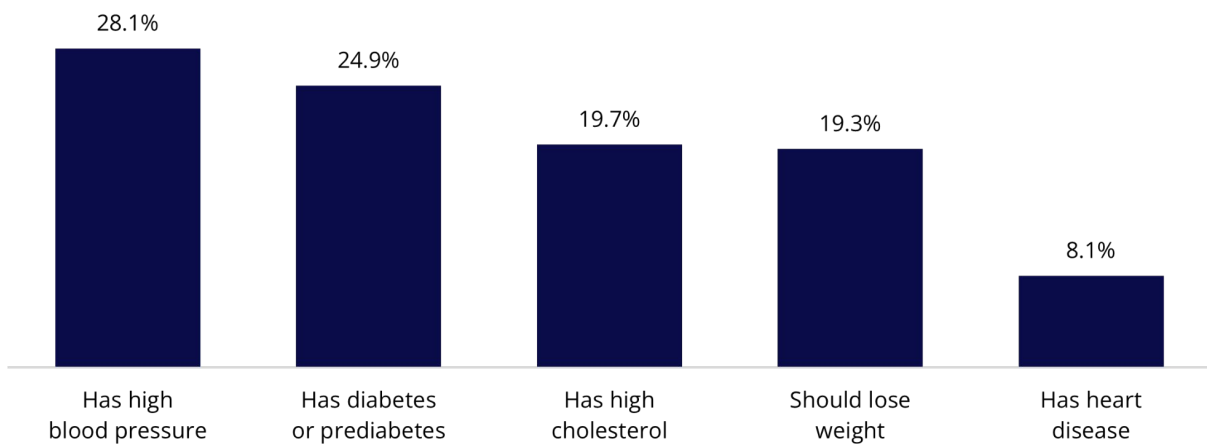
²Hager, E. R., Quigg, et al. (2010). *Development and Validity of a 2-Item Screen to Identify Families at Risk for Food Insecurity*. *Pediatrics*, 126(1), 26-32. doi:10.1542/peds.2009-3146.

The majority of respondents reported their ethnicity as White (59%), followed by Hispanic/Latino (36%). Eighty-five percent of respondents indicated someone in their household being at risk for chronic disease.

What is your race or ethnicity? You can choose more than one (n = 552)



Percent of doctor diagnosed health concerns (n=519)



Patrons reported food preferences

87% of respondents reported having access to **traditional foods** that they like to eat.

The food types most commonly rated as “important” to have available at the pantry included:

- White meat
- Red meat
- Fruit
- Oil
- Grain
- Vegetables
- Herbs and spices
- Fish
- Legumes

And within those food categories, over half of respondents listed the following as important to have available at the pantry:

- Chicken
- Beef
- Olive oil
- Rice
- Pork
- Turkey

81% of participants wish they could get **more food**.

Food waste

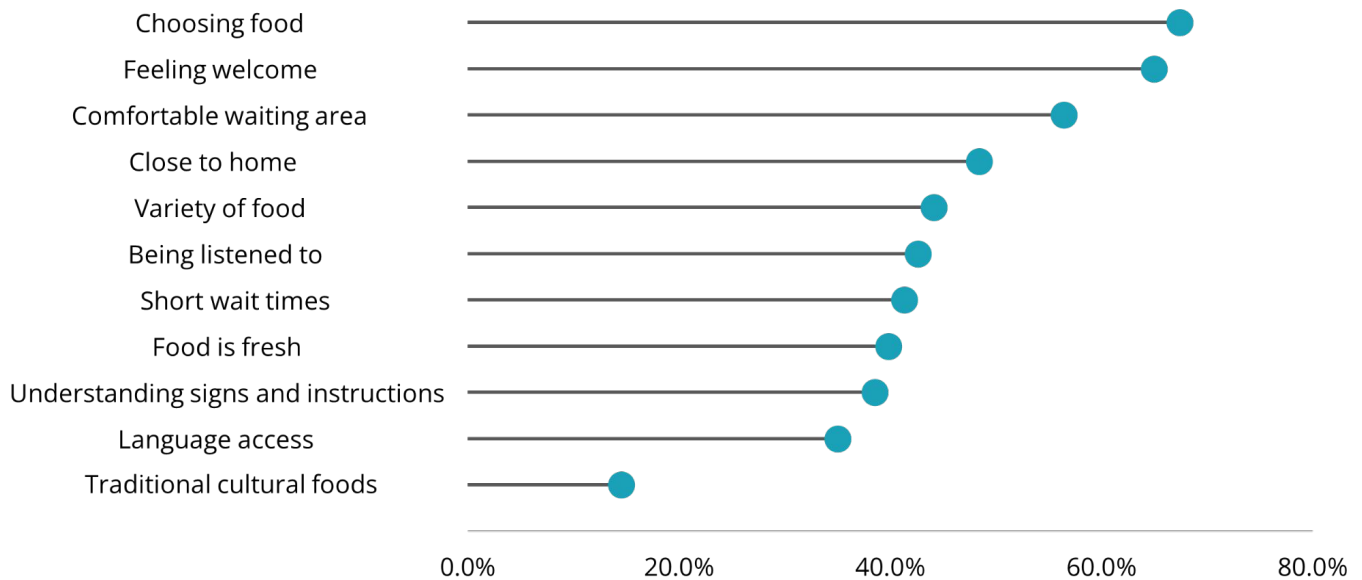
Sixty-two percent of respondents reporting not wasting any of the food they received at the pantry, while 38% of respondents reported wasting a little or some of the food. The vast majority of respondents reported the cause of waste food was due to “The food is already bad or rotten when I get it,” followed by “I don’t like the type of food.”



Reported needs

Other non-food resources of interest included financial aid (28.97%) and job information (21.11%). Most desired foods included whole fresh foods. The most notable things that were important to patrons were the ability to choose their own food (67%), someone saying hello to them and making them feel welcomed (65%), and having a place to sit and wait (56%).

Most important aspects of the food pantry (n=537)



In a final open-ended question asking, **“What else is important to you?”** by far the two most common sentiments were that desire for **more food variety** (11.2%) and **gratefulness for good customer service and friendly staff** (11.7%).

Manager’s reported needs

The foods in greatest demand according to the food pantry managers were consistent with what the patrons reported being important to them—meat, fresh produce, dairy, pasta, baking and cooking supplies like oil and sugar and flour. Pantry managers reported wanting to offer these foods in greater quantities, but are limited by a lack of money, staff, and space. Many reported not having enough food to offer. They described being limited by the donations they receive from the Utah Food Bank and the public.

Conclusions and recommendations

Not surprisingly, food pantries are struggling to provide the amount of and type of food that their patrons desire. Patrons and managers agree that meat, fresh produce, and staple cooking ingredients (flour, oil, etc.) are important. Perhaps surprisingly, most patrons report having access to traditional food that they like to eat. Both being able to choose their own food and feeling welcomed were important to patrons. There is opportunity in offering patrons more ongoing resources such as federal nutrition programs, job training programs, and financial aid. Future work might include gaining support from the Utah Food Bank to help assist pantry managers in addressing the needs and preferences of pantry clients identified in the survey as well as rethinking how to solicit financial support and food donations.

It should be noted that the last open-ended question of the survey, “Is there anything else you want to tell us about the food pantry?” yielded 34% of respondents expressing gratitude and 11% of them specifically calling out the staff positively. Especially when food volume and variety are not ideal, pantry staff can continue to make a positive effect on the lives of their patrons by putting effort into hospitality.



Acknowledgements

Special thanks to our partners for making this survey possible: Utah State Extension Create Better Health team, Jeanie Delaney at the Utah Food Bank, the Food Choice Subcommittee, Utah's local health departments, the pantry managers, and the survey respondents.

Project contact: Laura Holtrop Kohl, lholtrop@utah.gov Utah Department of Health and Human Services