



Food Access Survey Summary Report

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By Teron Moore, Royal Roads University Practicum Student

The Food Recovery and Redistribution survey included three sections:

- Food recovery, purchasing and donation patterns
- Transportation and storage capacity
- Collaborative food distribution

It is the belief of the researcher that understanding these key areas would open up opportunities for increases in the efficiency of food service provision and help to build resilience for potential challenges in the future.

Methods:

In the fall of 2009, 40 participant agencies were selected from the 2009 Capital Region Food Resource Directory on the criteria that they had some form of meal provision program in place. Of these agencies, 20 were able to take part, giving a response rate of 50%. Agency programs were diverse in nature, including food cupboards, community kitchens, meal provision and food banks covering a broad range of focus groups including youth, natives, elderly, families and women. The survey was completed in October through December 2009, with 20 agencies in the Capital Region and surrounding areas including Sooke, Sidney and Langford.

Highlights:

Over half of the agencies that participated in this study indicate that they are under increasing pressure from unstable funding for next year and 87% responded that they are currently working at full capacity. Many agencies rely on food donation from the public to meet demand for food, making them vulnerable to changes in donation patterns. 50% of agencies indicate that they do not always have sufficient food supply to meet the demands of their clients. Within this context, many food provision programs are under significant pressure to meet the trend of increasing demand for their services.

Food Supply

The vulnerability of current food supply has driven an investigation into the feasibility of using recovered food as a supply source for food provision agencies. However, the survey identifies that there is significant confusion over what constitutes recovered food as opposed to donated food. A number of respondents also voiced concern over ethical issues related to utilizing recovered food in their programs. If recovered food is to become a source of food supply for these agencies, further clarity is needed into acceptable procedures for utilizing recovered food.

Transportation

Efficient food distribution is highly dependent on transportation systems. Through the survey, we found that 50% of agencies use staff/volunteer personal vehicles to transport food. Opportunities to work together to fully utilize community capacity exist in this area as 4 agencies listed that they would be willing to share their transportation capacity with other agencies. Logistics to accomplish this, may be relatively simple as most agencies indicated that they would prefer to have food received at the start of the week (Monday and Tuesday). If food sourcing and transportation could be organized between agencies to allow for shared use of potential volunteer and/or transport capacity, then system efficiency may be increased. The idea of getting collaborative food transport organized for early in the week would be ideal for agencies with sufficient storage for this food.

Storage

There are 7 agencies that indicate a lack of storage capacity at their site. Solutions identified by the respondent for this challenge vary from purchasing larger freezers to making more frequent pick-ups for food. Conveniently, 4 agencies indicated that they may have storage space that they would be able to share. If these organizations could be linked and agreements drafted to support one another's activities, the challenge of sufficient storage space may be mitigated.

Collaboration and communication

It appears that 70% of agencies collaborate at some level with other agencies, however the extent to which this happens is unknown. It was noted that there are a number of opportunities to share transportation, storage and staff/volunteer capacity. However communication seems to be a challenge for many agencies. The survey illustrates that communication between agencies and their clients is not well established and communication with other agencies and government agencies is severely lacking. Opening lines of communication between agencies with the goal of sharing resources may be an ideal way to help to take off some of the pressures felt by many agencies.

Possible next steps

The survey supports idea of interactive wiki-style web site, linking agencies to information on available food supplies in the community. This

may help to increase levels of communication between agencies in order to support services in times of acute shortages of capacity. This may also lead to other useful information being posted on the site related to other collaborative opportunities (i.e., transportation, storage and staff availability).

The survey also supports establishing roles and responsibilities of larger food agencies as hubs for food distribution to smaller agencies. In this way, smaller agencies may become less reliant on current methods of food sourcing and become more resilient to changes in donation patterns, funding instability and localized changes in demand for services.

Special Thanks

A big thank you goes out to all those that participated in the survey, it would not have been possible without your time, patience and thoughtful responses. Thanks also to Heather Hratch, Janelle Hatch, Christina Peacock, Linda Geggie, the Community Council and CR-FAIR who all maintained steadfast support throughout the process.