

**Food Security Survey of At-Risk Households
in Green Bay, Wisconsin
Spring 1999**

Summary of Findings

Written by

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Salvation Army Meal Site and Pantry
Room at the Inn Meal Site
Resurrection Lutheran Pantry
Trinity Lutheran Pantry
St. Patrick's Church Pantry
Presbyterian Food Pantry
Paul's Pantry
WIC
Head Start

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Purpose of the Evaluation

This evaluation was an extension of the 1998 Food Security Research Project in Green Bay, conducted by the University of Wisconsin Cooperative-Extension (UWEX), Brown County office. The purpose of the study was threefold:

- To determine the prevalence of food insecurity in at-risk households (i.e., households using food assistance programs) in Green Bay and examine how it compared with that of 1998;
- To better understand the reasons for food insecurity of at-risk households; and
- To determine what types of initiatives would increase the availability and accessibility of food to those in need.

Introduction

The mission of the University of Wisconsin-Extension (UWEX) is to provide, jointly with other University of Wisconsin institutions and the counties within the state, an extension program designed to apply University research, knowledge, and resources to meet the educational needs of Wisconsin residents, wherever they live and work. The mission includes a focus on developing partnerships and on conducting applied research to address locally identified issues relevant to specific needs of communities.

Brown County UWEX began a Food Security Initiative in 1995 in response to changes in the political climate regarding welfare and family support programs. A partnership was developed with the Brown County Hunger Task Force (BCHTF), founded in 1982 to “alleviate and eliminate hunger in Brown County”. It has pursued this mission through four specific means:

- By providing support to local and world hunger agencies;
- By making visible to the community the extent of the hunger issue;
- By increasing the concern and participation in efforts to prevent and alleviate hunger; and
- By supporting, through participation and coordination, community and state efforts to Food security initiatives are part of a national trend, generated by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Community Food Security Initiative launched in 1995, to embrace a more holistic approach to addressing hunger needs. deal with hunger.

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A national USDA food security survey in 1998 showed about 10.5 million U.S. households (10.2 percent of all households) were food insecure, meaning that they did not have access to enough food to fully meet basic needs at all times. About 36 million persons lived in these food-insecure households, with children accounting for nearly 40 percent of this group.

Despite the strength of the U.S. economy, the nation's nutrition safety net and local grassroots efforts to reduce hunger, this survey documented that in 1998 many American families and individuals still struggled to meet basic needs. In response to this data, Brown County wanted to examine food security at a local level and determine what steps could be taken to improve it. In 1998, UWEX launched a research effort to determine the extent and degree of hunger in Green Bay, using the USDA Household Food Security Survey developed by Tufts University. The results are being used to effectively plan projects and address policy issues which could result in local solutions to food insecurity.

What is Food Security?

Food security has been defined as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. At a minimum, this includes: 1) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and 2) the assured ability to acquire personally acceptable foods in a socially acceptable way.” In contrast, food insecurity has been defined as “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways” (American Institute of Nutrition, 1990).

The concept of food security, then, involves four basic components of the food system: availability, accessibility, adequacy, and dependability of supply. Food secure communities have six characteristics:

- Availability of a variety of foods at reasonable costs;
- Ready access to grocery stores or other food sources;
- Sufficient household income to purchase adequate food to meet the nutritional needs for each household member;
- Freedom to choose personally acceptable foods;
- Legitimate confidence in the quality and safety of food available; and
- Easy access to understandable and accurate information about food and nutrition (Wagner, Butkus, & Wilken, 1990).

At the community level, food insecurity can be analyzed in terms of food supply and food accessibility. Unavailable food can be the result of having no grocery store within a reasonable distance for community residents and/or limited amounts and variety of foods at a relatively high cost. Lack of food accessibility refers to inadequate personal or household financial resources, transportation barriers or physical limitations that interfere with food shopping or preparation.

Methods

The USDA Food Security Survey was used to measure respondents' food security status. The survey was modified to include questions pertaining to relevant demographic information, such as household size, age, and employment status; reasons for food insecurity; and the potential benefits of several food assistance initiatives. Food security status is divided into four major categories:

- Food Secure: Households show no or minimal evidence of food insecurity.
- Food insecure without hunger: Food insecurity is evident in households' concerns and in adjustments to household food management, including reduced quality of diets. Little or no reduction in household members' food intake is reported.
- Food insecure with moderate hunger: Food intake for adults in the household has been reduced to an extent that implies that adults have repeatedly experienced the physical sensation of hunger. Such reductions are not observed at this stage for children in the household.
- Food insecure with severe hunger: Households with children have reduced the children's food intake to an extent that implies that the children have experienced the physical sensation of hunger. Adults in households with and without children have repeatedly experienced more extensive reductions in food intake.

Twenty-five upper level undergraduates in the Social Work Professional Program at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay conducted interviews at 11 sites during a four-week period in Spring, 1999. Hmong, Spanish and Russian interpreters were available at sites where non-English speakers were present. Data from 11 of the sites—all serving households at risk for food insecurity—were included in this evaluation. The sites were chosen because they met two main criteria:

- 1) They serve low-income individuals. They have either low-income eligibility requirements (WIC and Head Start), and/or primarily attract people in need of food (food pantries and meal sites).
- 2) The program participants were at the sites during the time period in which the survey was conducted.

Two of the sites were meal sites, six were food pantries, two were WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) offices, and one was Head Start. Because a representative sample from Head Start was unavailable to participate in the study, data gathered from this site was not included in the final analyses. All but one food pantry in Green Bay were included in this sample. Food stamp recipients as a group were not included in the sample because there was no feasible way of interviewing them. The total number of individuals asked to participate in the study was 760. The total number who agreed to participate was 566, yielding an overall response rate of 74%.

Limitations

First, though the sites include a diverse population of families and single adults, the sample does not include all sub-populations of at-risk households in Green Bay. Exact population sizes were unavailable for most of the sites. The survey was translated into Hmong, Spanish and Russian and it is unknown whether the meanings of any of the questions were changed in the translation process. While overall response rates were very high, two sites had response rates less than 50%. Interviewers indicated that individuals at these sites declined to

participate for a variety of reasons. Further, given the personal nature of some to the questions, response bias is likely in some cases. Lastly, although researchers make every effort to interview only one person per household, there is no assurance that this was accomplished given that multiple sites were sampled.

Results

Characteristics of the Sample

Respondents at the two meal sites were not significantly different from one another in their food security and similarly, respondents at the six food pantries did not differ from one another in this regard. Thus, for ease of interpretation, data from the 10 individual sites were combined into three types of sites: meal sites, food pantries and WIC. Brief summaries for meal sites, food pantries, and WIC are also included because of differences among the respondents at each type of site.

Gender

- 83% of respondents were female

Age

- 48% of respondents were between the ages of 20 and 29
- 81% of respondents were younger than 40
- males were older than females (median age = 30-years-old vs. 26-years-old)
- age of respondents varied by site (median age at meal sites=42, food pantries=36, WIC=24.5)
- 48% of household members were less than 18-years-old (28% were less than 6-years-old and 20% were between the ages of 6 and 17)
- 2% of household members were 65 or older

Ethnicity

- 63% of respondents were Caucasian
- 14% of respondents were Hispanic
- Hmong, Russian, Native American, and African-American groups each represented less than 10% of the sample
- all minority groups were disproportionately over-represented in the sample compared to the population in Brown County

Household Size

- 8% of respondents lived alone
- 44% of respondents resided in households with a total of two or three people
- 48% of respondents resided in households with a total of four or more people

Type of Household

- 78% of respondents resided in households with children
- 56% respondents lived in households with two or more adults and one or more children
- 25% of female respondents resided in single parent households
- 20% of males and 6% of females lived alone

Education

- 34% of respondents had not completed high school
- education varied by ethnicity with higher percentages of Caucasian and Russian respondents graduating high school
- 56% of Native-American, 52% of African-American respondents, and 35% of Hispanic respondents completed high school
- of the 56% of Hmong respondents who answered this question, 62% reported completing high school; of all Hmong respondents, including those who did not answer this question, 35% said they had completed high school

Type of Transportation Used to Get to Food Sites

- 72% of respondents drove their own car
- 18% rode with someone else or borrowed a car
- 7% walked or bicycled
- 4% rode the bus or took a taxi

Types of Food Assistance Received

- 76% of respondents received WIC assistance during the last year
- 45% received assistance from friends or relatives
- 38% received food assistance from food pantries
- 26% received free or reduced school meals
- 24% received food stamps
- 16% of respondents with school age children received summer lunches in the park and 5% of received summer breakfasts at the resource center

Current Employment Status

- 75% of respondents had been employed some time during the last year
- 57% of respondents less than 65-years-old were currently employed and of those, 75% worked fulltime
- 51% of respondents resided in households with one employed adult, 27% in households with two employed adults and 8% with three or more employed adults
- males were more likely to be employed than females
- Caucasians, Hispanics and African-American were more likely to be employed than Native-American, Hmong and Russian respondents

Hourly Wage

- average wage was \$7.87 per hour (median = \$7.50 per hour) compared to the minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour
- males earned more per hour than females (median wage = \$8.00 vs. \$7.50 per hour)
- wages varied by ethnicity: median wages were \$8.00 per hour for Caucasians and African Americans, \$7.00 per hour for Hmong and Hispanic respondents, and \$6.50 per hour for Native American respondents
- wages varied by education: median wages were \$8.00 per hour for those with education beyond high school, \$7.27 per hour for those with a high school diploma, and \$7.10 for those without a high school diploma

Sources of Income

- 83% of respondents resided in households that received income from employment during the last month
- 15% of respondents received Supplemental Security Income (SSI), 11% received child support, 10% social security, and less than 10% received income from unemployment, disability, pension, welfare or other sources
- respondents whose household did not receive employment income during the last month were more likely to receive SSI, social security and/or disability than households with employment income
- 64% of Native American households had income from employment compared to at least 75% of all other households

In summary, although respondents in this study represent a diverse group of individuals, most were female, relatively young (less than 40 years old), and Caucasian. Minorities were fewer in number but were disproportionately over-represented in the sample compared to the population of Brown County. The majority of respondents also resided in households with more than one adult and one or more children, although 25% of females headed single parent households and 20% of males lived alone. Almost half the members of households in this sample were children less than 18 years old while only 2% were 65 or older.

Respondents tended to be less educated than the general population with more than a third not graduating from high school. Further, graduation rates were particularly low among minorities, in part because of an influx of Hmong and Hispanic immigrants. Not surprisingly, respondents with more education earned more and were more likely to be employed. Most respondents drove their own car but almost a third relied on other forms of transportation.

Most respondents received food assistance from WIC during the last year, while lower, but substantial percentages sought assistance from friends or relatives, food pantries, and free or reduced school meals. Only one-fourth of respondents reported received food stamps during the last year and small percentages received summer lunches in the park and summer breakfasts at the resource center.

More than half of respondents were currently employed and 75% had been employed sometime during the last year. While these figures suggest a much higher unemployment rate for this population, our data does not indicate what percentage of those unemployed are seeking work. The average hourly wage (\$7.87) was considerably higher than the minimum wage (\$5.15 per hour) but similar to that of Wisconsin residents who had recently been discontinued from welfare. Most respondents (83%) resided in households that had income from employment during the previous month and those who did not were more likely to receive SSI, social security, and/or disability than other households.

Characteristics of Meal Site Respondents

- male and female respondents were equally represented
- 67% of meal site respondents were 40 or older
- respondents were predominantly Caucasian (73%), with 14% Native American, 8% African-American, and less than 5% Hispanic
- a large proportion of respondents lived alone (42%) and most respondents resided in households without children (71%)
- males were more likely to live alone while females were more likely to head single parent families or live with other adults and no children
- 29% drove their own car; 61% walked, bicycled or took the bus, and 11% rode with someone else or borrowed a car for transportation
- large percentages received food assistance from a variety of sources during the last year: shelters (66%), food pantries (71%), friends/relatives (42%), free or reduced school meals (24%), and food stamps (24%)
- 26% were employed fulltime and 62% were unemployed
- median wage was \$7.05 per hour

Characteristics of Food Pantry Respondents

- 76% of respondents were female
- 25% were less than 30-years-old, 40% were 40 or older, and 8% were 60 or older
- 45% of respondents were Caucasian, 16% were Hmong, 16% Native American, and 8% African American, and 9% were Hispanic
- 72% lived in households with children and 36% had three or more children in their households
- a higher percentage of females lived in households with multiple adults and at least one child or as single parents, whereas males were more likely to reside in households with multiple adults and no children or as single adults
- 51% drove their own car, while 29% borrowed a car or rode with someone else
- large percentages received food assistance from a variety of sources during the last year: friends/relatives (42%), free or reduced school meals (46%), WIC (36%), meal sites (23%), and food stamps (36%)
- 27% were employed fulltime, 21% part-time and 53% were unemployed
- median wage was \$7.05 per hour

Characteristics of WIC Respondents

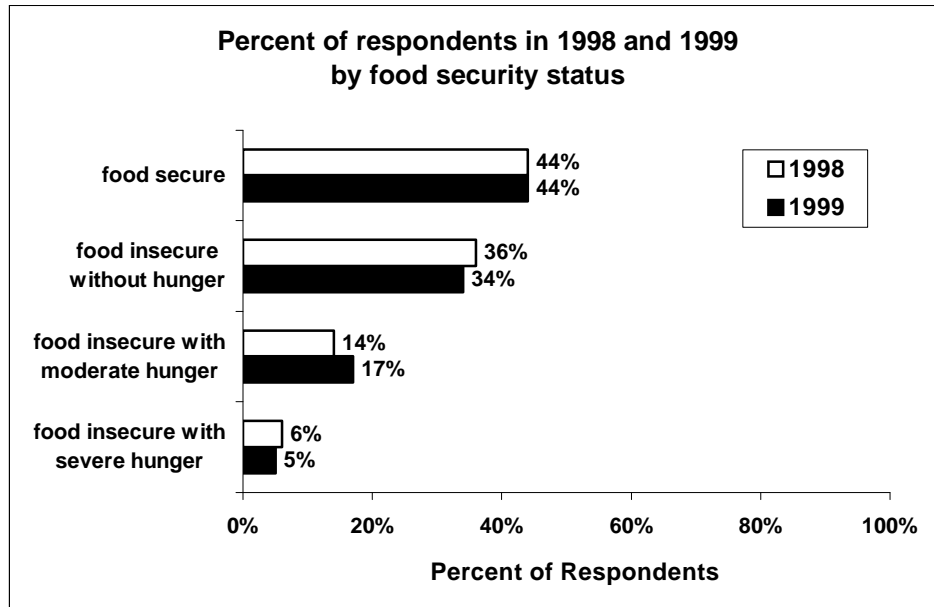
- 86% of respondents were female
- 76% of respondents were less than 30-years-old and 6% were 40 or older
- 66% were Caucasian, 17% were Hispanic, 8% were Hmong, and other minorities each represented less than 5%
- 85% had children and 29% had three or more children in their households
- a higher percentage of males resided in households with multiple adults and children while a higher percentage of females resided in single parent households
- 82% of respondents drove their own car; 14% rode with someone else or borrowed a car
- respondents received food assistance from a variety of sources during the last year: friends/relatives (47%), free or reduced school meals (22%), food pantries (21%), and food stamps (23%)
- 51% were employed fulltime and 37% were unemployed
- median wage was \$8.05 per hour

In summary, most respondents were female at food pantries and WIC, whereas male and female respondents were equally represented at meal sites. Respondents at meal sites tended to be older, WIC respondents tended to be younger, and those at food pantries were more evenly spread across age groups. At meal sites and WIC, most respondents were Caucasian while at food pantries less than half were Caucasian. Meal site respondents were more likely to live alone and to reside in households without children compared to food pantry and WIC respondents. Almost all WIC respondents drove their own car compared to about half of food pantry respondents and less than a third of meal site respondents. Meal site respondents were more likely to walk, bicycle or take the bus and food pantry respondents were more likely to borrow a car or ride with someone else going to the pantry. WIC respondents were also more likely to be employed and to earn more per hour compared to meal site and food pantry respondents. Conversely, they were less likely to seek food assistance from a variety of sources compared to meal site and food pantry respondents. Meal site respondents tended to seek assistance at shelters more than other respondents and most also received assistance at food pantries during the last year. Food pantry respondents were more likely to receive food stamps and free or reduced school meals compared to other respondents.

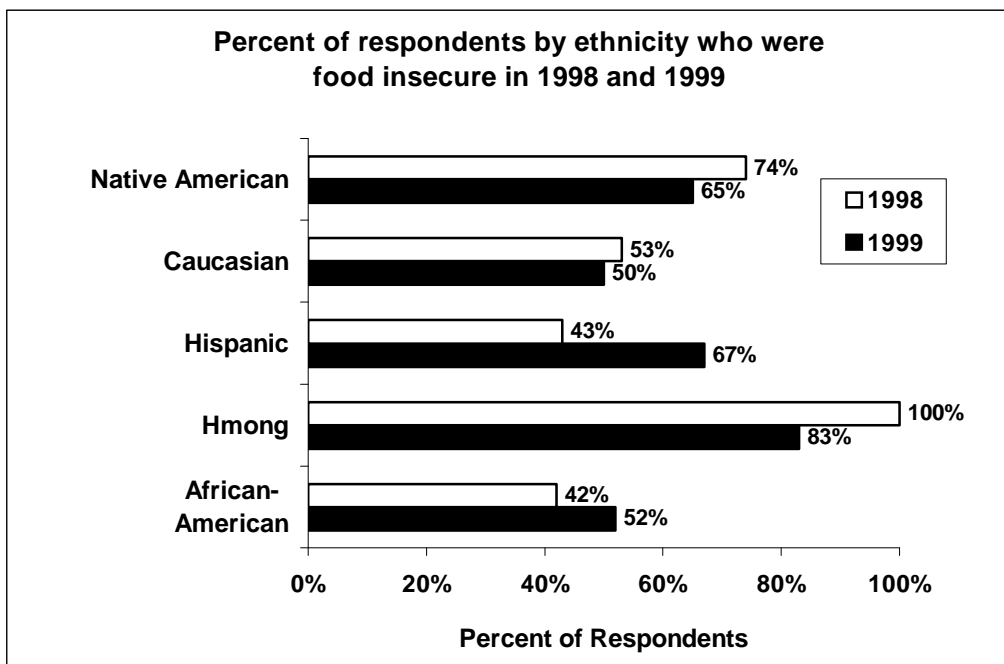
Food Security Status

Comparison to 1998 Food Security Status

- Overall, food security in 1999 was very similar to 1998: 44% of respondents were food secure, about a third were food insecure without hunger, and about 20% were food insecure with hunger. Findings do not indicate whether the number of people seeking food assistance increased or decreased between 1998 and 1999.



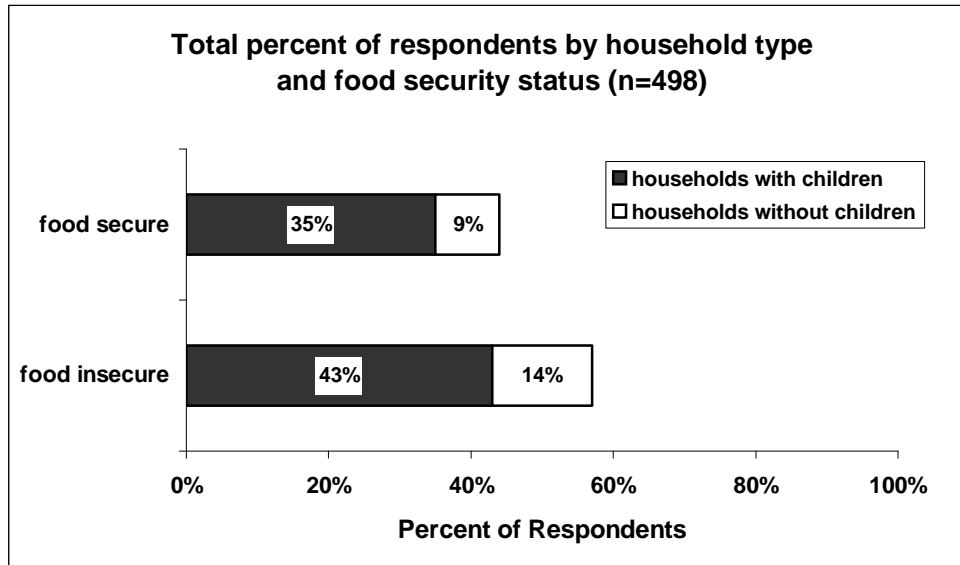
- Hispanic respondents were significantly less food secure in 1999 compared to 1998 (33% vs. 57%, respectively).
- Hmong respondents became somewhat more food secure between 1998 and 1999 probably because of the reinstatement of food stamps to them during the last year.



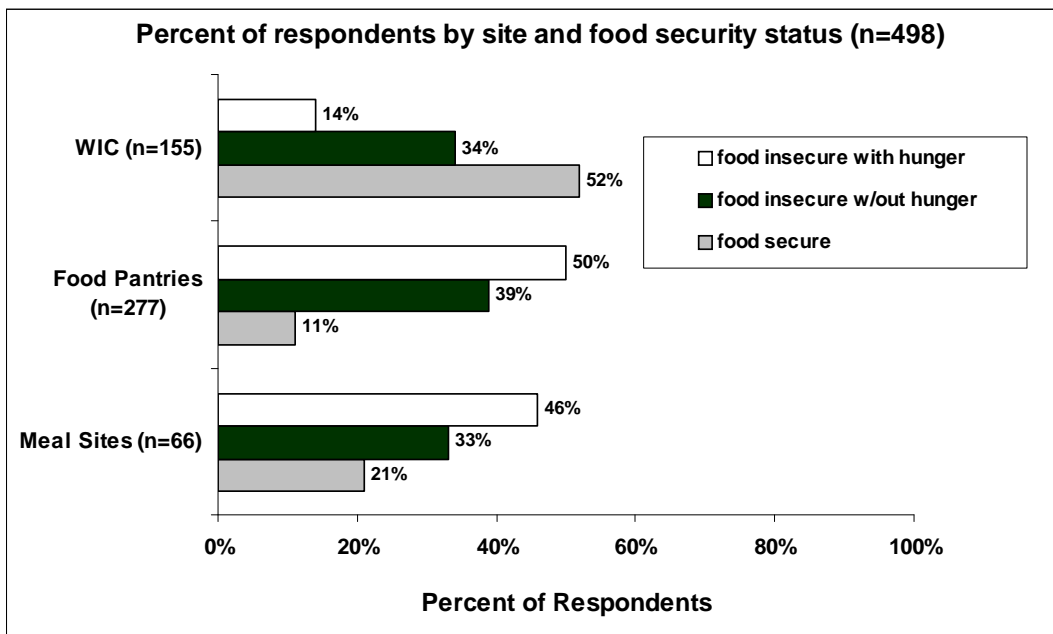
- Higher percentages of Native American, African-American and Hispanic respondents were food insecure with hunger in 1999 compared to 1998.

Food Security Status in 1999

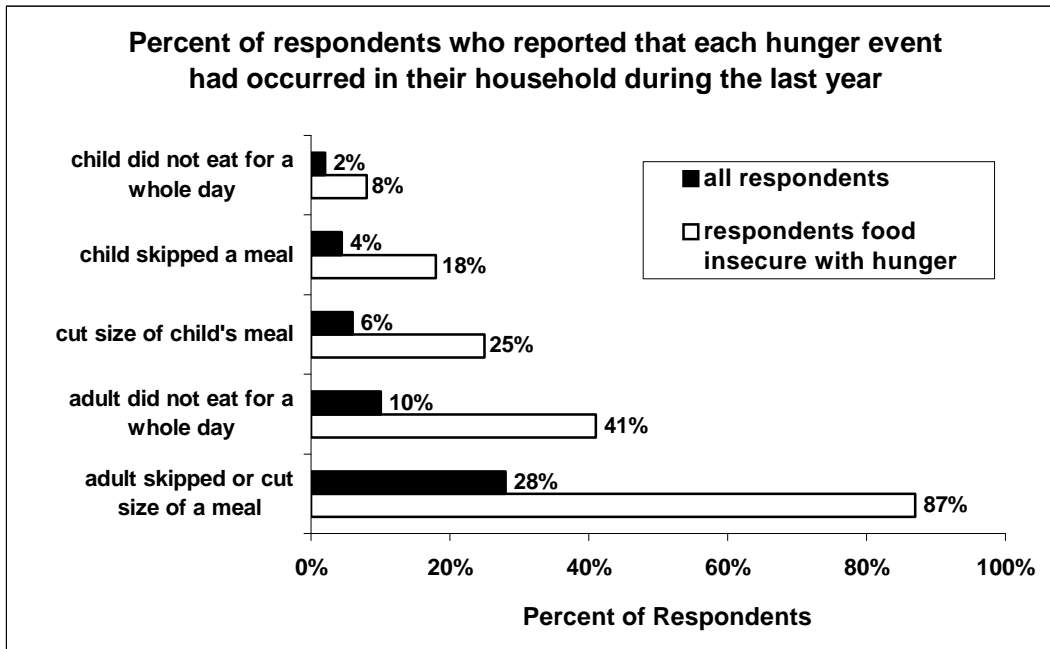
- Overall, 56% of households were food insecure; 43% of all households had children and were food insecure.



- The type of site at which respondents were interviewed and the number of different types of sites they visited were strongly related to food security status.
 - 52% of WIC respondents reported being food secure compared to 11% of food pantry and 21% of meal site respondents.
 - Conversely, about 15% of WIC respondents were food insecure with hunger compared to 50% of food pantry and 46% of meal site respondents.



- 28% overall and more than 50% of food pantry and meal site respondents indicated that an adult in their household skipped or reduced the size of a meal during the last year.
- 10% overall, 25% of food pantry, and 21% of meal site respondents said an adult in their household went without food for an entire day.
- About 5% of respondents reported their children skipped a meal or that the size of their children's meals were cut during the last year.
- 2% of respondents reported that their children went without food for an entire day during the last year.



Food Security Status and Demographic Characteristics

- Females in the 1999 sample were more food secure than males.
- Respondents between the ages of 30 and 60 tended to be less food secure compared to younger and older respondents.
- Minority groups were more food insecure with hunger (54% of Hmong, 41% of Native Americans, 34% of African-Americans, and 29% of Hispanic respondents) compared to Caucasians (15%).
- 55% of households with children were food insecure compared to 60% of those without children.
- 22% of households with children were food insecure with hunger as were 23% of those without children.
- Adults living alone reported the highest level of food insecurity followed by single parent households.
- Respondents with more education were more food secure than less educated respondents.

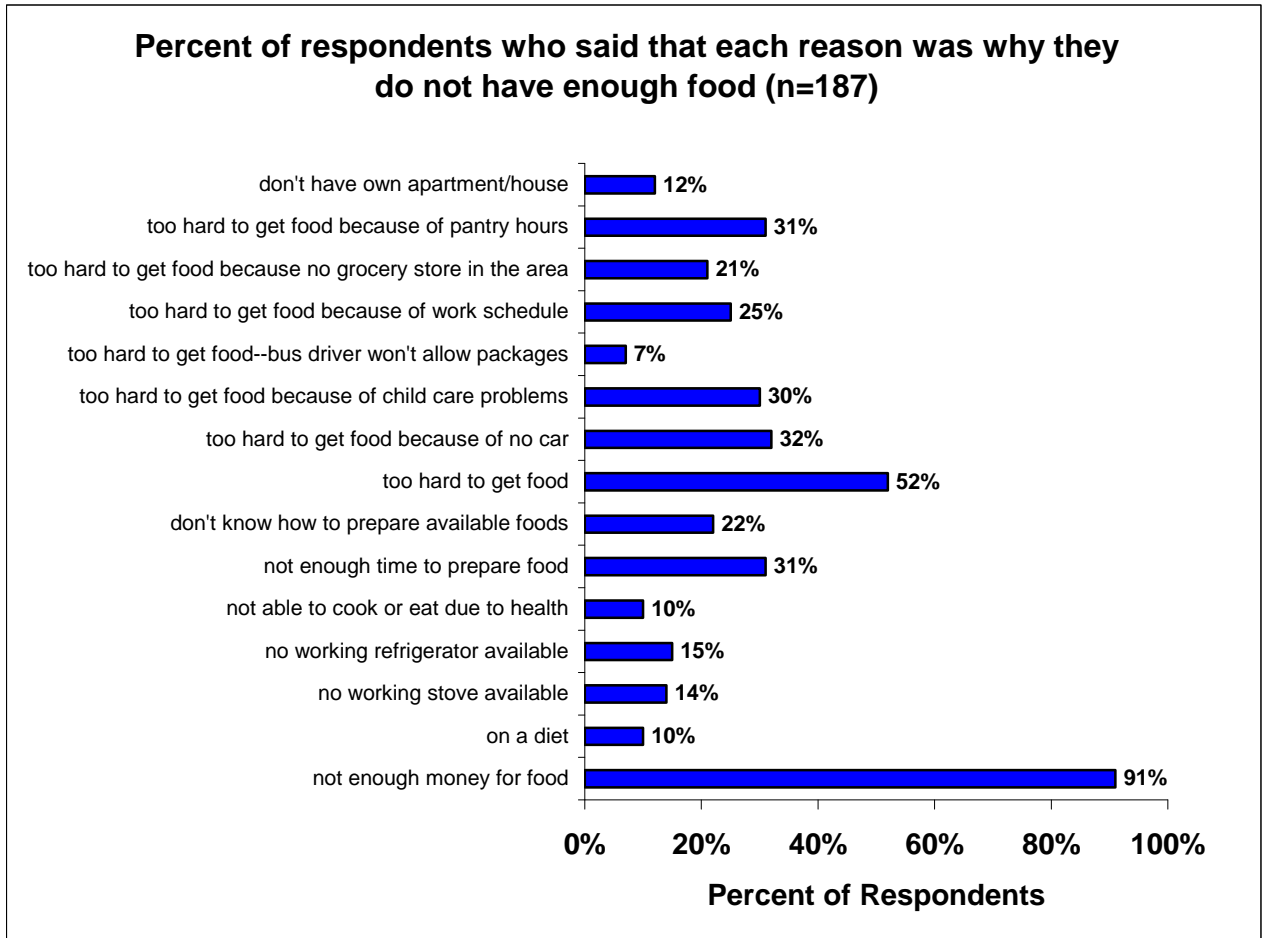
Food Security Status and Types of Food Assistance Received

- Almost all respondents who were food secure received WIC assistance (92%) compared to 66% of food insecure respondents.
- Higher percentages of food insecure respondents received almost all other types of food assistance compared to those who were food secure.
- At least 50% of respondents who were food insecure received assistance from food pantries or friends or relatives during the last year.
- Only 19% of respondents who were food insecure with hunger used summer lunches in the park, 4% used summer breakfast at the resource center, and 18% used meal sites.
- A third of the respondents who reported going to food pantries during the last year said that the first time they received food at a food pantry was within the last year.
- Higher percentages of African-Americans and Hispanics began receiving food pantry assistance during the last year
- Respondents who started going to food pantries in the last year were more likely to be employed and to earn the median wage or less for this sample compared to those who first visited a food pantry more than a year ago.
- Substantial percentages of respondents (16% overall) said they knew someone who needed assistance at their site but was unable to receive it. This was reported by 31% of those who were food insecure with hunger.

Food Security Status and Wages/Sources of Income

- Respondents who were employed fulltime were more food secure than those who were unemployed (50% vs. 39% food secure).
- The food security status of those who were employed part-time was almost identical to that of unemployed respondents: 40% were food secure.
- Respondents who reported earning the median hourly wage or less were similar to unemployed respondents in their food security: roughly 40% reported being food secure. In contrast, 57% of those earning more than the median wage reported being food secure.

Reasons for Food Insecurity

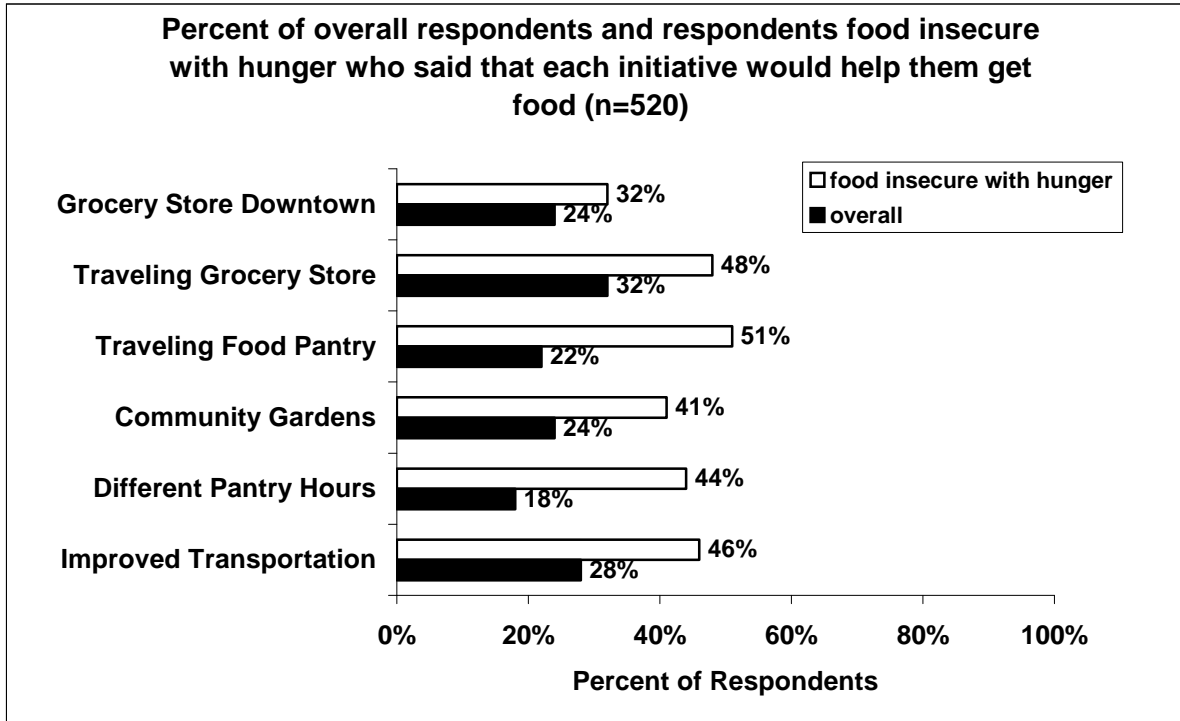


These findings indicate that virtually all respondents were unable to acquire the food they need because of a lack of money despite the fact that most respondents resided in households with employment income. Substantial percentages of respondents also gave reasons tied to economic issues: not having a car, having childcare problems, and not being able to get food due to work schedules. This suggests that at least some respondents are working long hours which prevents them both from getting to food pantries during open hours and from preparing food.

With few exceptions, higher percentages of respondents who were more food insecure gave each reason compared to those who were more food secure. Respondents' reasons for not having enough food also varied by ethnicity. Higher percentages of Native Americans, Hmong, and African-Americans said that it was difficult to get food because of transportation; Hmong and Hispanic respondents were more likely to report that they do not know how to prepare available foods and that it is difficult for them to get food because of child care problems; Hmong respondents were more likely to have problems getting food because there is no grocery store in their area; African-American, Hmong and Hispanic respondents were more likely to have problems getting food because of their work schedules; and African-American, Hmong and Native American respondents had difficulty getting food because they could not get to the food pantry during open hours.

Initiatives to Alleviate Food Insecurity

Respondents were also presented with several food assistance initiatives and asked to identify which ones would help them get the food they need. The proposed initiatives and percent of respondents who reported that each would benefit them were:



- **Traveling grocery store**
 - 32% overall
 - 48% of those food insecure with hunger
 - 65% of meal site and 51% of food pantry respondents
 - 41% of African-American and Native American, and 38% of Hmong respondents
- **Improved transportation**
 - 28% overall
 - 46% of those food insecure with hunger
 - 50% of meal site and 46% of food pantry respondents
 - 38% of males
 - 45% of minority respondents
- **Community gardens**
 - 24% overall
 - 41% of those food insecure with hunger
 - 50% of meal site and 39% of food pantry respondents
 - 41% of Hmong, 37% of Native American, and 30% of African-American respondents

- **Grocery store downtown**
 - 24% overall
 - 32% of those food insecure with hunger
 - 66% of meal site and 40% of food pantry respondents
 - 45% of males
 - 59% of African-American and 38% of Native American respondents
- **Traveling food pantry**
 - 22% overall
 - 51% of those food insecure with hunger
 - 62% of meal site and 51% of food pantry respondents
 - 33% of males
 - 44% of African-American, 40% of Native American, and 27% of Hmong respondents
- **Different pantry hours**
 - 18% overall
 - 44% of those food insecure with hunger
 - 50% of meal site and 42% of food pantry respondents
 - 30% of African-American, 42% of Hmong, and 31% of Native American respondents

In summary, substantial percentages of respondents said that the food assistance initiatives presented to them would be beneficial. This is especially true of the traveling grocery store and improved transportation, which suggests that access to food is a serious problem for this population. The findings also indicate that the proposed initiatives would be particularly beneficial to those who are most food insecure. About half of the respondents who were food insecure with hunger said a traveling food pantry and a traveling grocery store would be helpful; almost half reported that improved transportation, different pantry hours, and community gardens would be helpful; and almost a third also said that a grocery store downtown would be helpful. With few exceptions, substantial percentages of all minority groups indicated that the initiatives would be beneficial, reflecting the high level of food insecurity among these individuals.

Discussion

Food Security Status

Results of this study indicate that the food security status of at-risk households in Green Bay changed very little between 1998 and 1999, with roughly 55% of respondents being food insecure. While this may be good news, given the reductions in welfare benefits, these findings indicate that a substantial percentage of at-risk households in Green Bay continue to report food insecurity. Almost 80% of respondents lived in households with children, and more than one in five of these households were food insecure with hunger. A small percentage of these households even reported that at least one of their children had skipped meals or gone without eating for an entire day during the last year because there was not enough money for food.

Food pantry volunteers reported that more people had been seeking assistance during the previous months, but because there is no uniform method of counting recipients at food assistance sites we do not know for certain. Our findings do indicate, however, that a third of the respondents who reported going to food pantries during the last year said that the first time they received food at a food pantry was within the last year. A study of Minnesota food pantries conducted in 1995 found that 46% of recipients began using food pantries within the previous year (Fang & Rode, 1996) which suggests that our finding is typical for this at-risk population and not indicative of any major changes in food assistance usage. Interestingly though, individuals who began seeking food assistance at pantries during the last year tended to be more educated, were more likely to be employed and earning less than the median wage or less per hour for this sample.

Another significant finding was that high percentages of minorities continued to be food insecure with hunger and that most of these groups tended to become more food insecure during the last year, especially Hispanic and African-American respondents. The one exception was that Hmong respondents became somewhat more food secure in the last year. This finding was not surprising given that since the 1998 study, food stamp benefits were reinstated to Hmong respondents. Nonetheless, Hmong respondents in 1999 were still the least food secure compared to all other ethnic groups with more than half of them reporting food insecurity with hunger.

Related to the finding that minority groups are less food secure, is that they also tend to be less educated. Respondents with less education were more food insecure, less likely to be employed, and earned less per hour compared to more educated respondents. And while a sizable proportion of respondents graduated high school or had schooling beyond high school, the graduation rates were less than Wisconsin averages. Hispanics, in particular, reported lower educational attainment with only about a third graduating high school. This finding may be related to the fact that there are many recent Hispanic immigrants in Green Bay and in this population of at-risk households.

The differences among ethnic groups in educational attainment were also apparent in employment rates and wages earned. A high percentage of households reported having employment income during the last month, however, minority groups were less likely to have this source of income. The unemployment rate was also quite high for this sample compared to the general population in Wisconsin (3.1% in April, 1999 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1999)), however, our data does not indicate what percentage of respondents resided in households where one or more unemployed adults were searching for work.

The mean hourly wage of respondents was similar to that of individuals in Wisconsin a few months after leaving welfare in 1998. Minority groups—especially Hispanics and Native

Americans—tended to earn less per hour compared to Caucasians and African-Americans. Females also tended to earn less than males and were more likely to be unemployed.

Surprisingly, only 24% of respondents overall and 26% of respondents with children reported receiving food stamps during the last year while many of these households were eligible for them. In a study of Wisconsin families who left AFDC or W-2 during the first three months of 1998, the State of Wisconsin, Department of Workforce Development, found that 49% of such families were receiving food stamps during the second half of that year. When asked if they knew they might be eligible for food stamps after leaving welfare, 34% said they were not aware of this. Similar results were found in a study of individuals previously on AFDC (St. Norbert College Survey Center, 1999). Thus, confusion regarding eligibility may be one of the reasons why substantial percentages of respondents in this study were eligible for food stamps but not receiving them. Other food assistance programs, such as summer lunches in the park and summer breakfasts at the resource center, were also used by relatively few respondents.

Another finding suggests that the need for food assistance programs may be greater than is currently recognized; substantial percentages of respondents said they knew someone who would get assistance at that site but was unable to and this was especially true of those who were more food insecure. Almost half of the females who were food insecure with severe hunger knew someone who needed food assistance but wasn't getting it.

Reasons for Food Insecurity

The reasons respondents gave for not having the kinds of food they wanted/needed or not having enough food reflected problems with both the availability and the accessibility of food. Virtually all respondents were unable to acquire the food they needed because of a lack of money despite the fact that most respondents resided in households with employment income. Substantial percentages of respondents also gave reasons that are tied to economic issues: not having a car, having childcare problems, and not being able to acquire food due to work schedules. This suggests that at least some respondents are working long hours which prevents them from getting to food pantries during open hours and from preparing food.

Large percentages of respondents also said that the kinds of food they want or need are not available to them, good quality food is not available, and a variety of good food is not available to them. Certain ethnic groups were more likely to cite some of these reasons. For example, many Hmong and Hispanic respondents reported that one of the reasons they do not have the food they need is that they do not know how to prepare available foods.

With few exceptions, higher percentages of respondents who were more food insecure gave each reason compared to those who were more food secure. Respondents who were food insecure with hunger were also more likely to report that they had difficulty getting enough food because of access problems.

Food Initiatives

Large percentages of respondents, especially those who were food insecure with hunger, said that the food assistance initiatives mentioned to them would be beneficial. Transportation seemed to be a concern for many individuals, with almost a third reporting that a traveling grocery store would help them get the food they need. For individuals who were most food insecure, a traveling food pantry, traveling grocery store, and improved transportation were also seen as beneficial.

BROWN COUNTY PLAN TO ADDRESS FOOD SECURITY

The Brown County plan to address community food security was developed in response to 1998 and 1999 Community Household Food Security research projects conducted in the Green Bay area by the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension (UWEX) and the University of Wisconsin Green Bay Social Work Professional Program. The action plan follows the USDA Community Food Security Initiative format to allow tracking of local projects in comparison with national efforts.

1. Creating new, and expanding existing, local infrastructures that boost food security:

- A. Enhance structure and build capacity for Food and Hunger Network.
- B. Network with other community agencies addressing needs of low income clients.

2. Increasing economic and job security:

- A. Budget training and asset building
 - Research has shown that budgeting training for individuals improves their ability to handle financial situations.
 - Research has shown that the way to get out of poverty is to acquire assets (ie., savings, home purchase, business startup, higher education).
 - 91% of respondents who sometimes or often did not have enough to eat during the last year reported that one of the reasons was that they did not have enough money to buy food.
- B. Coordinate with W-2 action group on education and job skills training
 - Respondents with more education were more likely to be employed (64% of respondents who were high school graduates were currently employed vs. 44% of those without high school diplomas).
 - Respondents with more education earned more than those with less education (median wages=\$8.00 per hour for those with education beyond high school, \$7.27 per hour for those with a high school diploma, and \$7.10 for those without a high school diploma).
 - Large percentages of respondents had not completed high school (34% overall, 56% of Native-Americans, 52% of African-Americans, and 35% of Hispanics).
- C. Support the concept of creating living wage employment
 - Respondents who reported earning the median hourly wage or less for this sample were similar to unemployed respondents in their food security status.

3. Bolstering federal nutrition assistance safety net:

- A. Implement USDA food stamp outreach campaign
 - 24% of respondents received food stamps during the last year.
 - 14% of all households had no employed adult and of these, only 41% received food stamps during the last year.
 - 57% of households with no employed adult had children and only 56% of these households received food stamps during the last year.
 - 51% of respondents resided in households with one employed adult and of these, only 30% received food stamps during the last year; 35% of individuals not receiving food stamps were eligible based on household size and income requirements.

- B. Social marketing for school and summer breakfast and lunch programs
- Only 16% of respondents with school age children received summer lunches in the park during the last year.
 - Only 5% of respondents with school age children received summer breakfasts at the resource center during the last year.
 - Only 67% of respondents with school age children received reduced or free school lunches during the last year.

4. Bolstering food and nutrition assistance provided by nonprofit groups:

- A. Establish a traveling non-profit grocery and/or food pantry
- 22% overall; 51% of those food insecure with hunger; 62% of meal site respondents; 51% of food pantry respondents; 33% of males; 44% of African-American, and 40% of Native American respondents said a traveling food pantry would help them get the food they need.
 - 32% overall; 48% of those food insecure with hunger; 65% of meal site respondents; and 51% of food pantry respondents said a traveling grocery store would help them get the food they need.
- B. Coordinate food pantry efforts citywide
- Evaluate concept of food pantry service areas and food pantry hours of operation and modify as needed
 - 31% overall and 38% of those food insecure with severe hunger said one reason they do not have enough food is that it is too hard to get food because they can not get to the food pantry during open hours.
 - 18% overall, 44% of those food insecure with hunger, 50% of meal site respondents, 42% of food pantry respondents, and 27% of minority respondents report that different pantry hours would help them get the food they need.
 - Establish standardized method of counting recipients at food assistance sites
 - An accurate assessment of the prevalence of food insecurity in Green Bay will help agencies understand the populations they serve and facilitate improving the services they provide. This assessment requires a more comprehensive method of counting recipients at food assistance sites.
- C. Address food needs of ethnic groups
- Consider establishing meal site programs for ethnic groups
 - Respondents at meal sites were predominantly Caucasian (73%), with few Native Americans, African-Americans, and Hispanics and no Hmong respondents. Hmong were the most food insecure group while Caucasians were the most food secure suggesting that more minorities would benefit from meal site programs.
 - Increase the variety of foods available at pantries to better serve ethnic minorities
 - 50% of Hmong, 33% of Hispanic and Native American, and 27% of African-American respondents who do not have the kinds of food they want or need said one reason was that a variety of good food is not available at the site where they were interviewed.
 - 29% of Hmong, 54% of Hispanic, 36% of Native American, and 46% of African-American respondents who do not have the kinds of food they want or need said one reason was that the kinds of food they want or need are not available at the site where they were interviewed.

5. Improving community food production and marketing:

A. Development and expansion of community gardens

- 24% overall; 41% of those food insecure with hunger; 50% of meal site respondents; 39% of food pantry respondents; 41% of Hmong and 37% of Native American respondents reported that community gardens would help them get the food they need.

B. Expand local food system to include resources and initiatives such as:

- CSA membership and distribution (Community Supported Agriculture)
- Community kitchen for food based microenterprises
- Year round indoor farmers market
- CSA producers targeted at ethnic foods
- Production gardens
- Increased wholesaler distribution of locally produced foods

6. Boosting education and awareness;

A. Catalyze community action to address food security issues

- Provide resource information and networking to volunteers and staff who work with low income individuals and families.
- Provide information/referrals to other services at food assistance sites.
-interviewers reported that many respondents inquired about other services that might be available to them.

B. Continue and expand community resource fair

C. Provide neighborhood based food access and education

- Food preparation training at low income housing sites
- Mobile pantry and demonstration kitchen
- USDA Thrifty Food Plan as basis for assistance packages and education
 - 22% of respondents who do not have enough food said one reason was that they do not know how to prepare available foods and 17% of those who do not have the kinds of food they want or need cited this reason.
 - 23% of Hmong and 50% of Hispanic respondents who do not have the kinds of food they want or need said one reason was that they do not know how to prepare available foods.
 - 30% of Hmong and 39% of Hispanic respondents who do not have enough food said one reason was that they do not know how to prepare available foods.

7. Improving research, monitoring, and evaluation:

A. Evaluate public transportation system to food outlets and monitor progress on proposed changes.

- 32% overall and 50% of those food insecure with severe hunger reported that one reason they do not have enough food is that it is too hard to get food because they do not have a car.
- 28% overall, 46% of those food insecure with hunger, 50% of meal site respondents; 46% of food pantry respondents, and 45% of minority respondents said improved transportation would help them get the food they need.

B. Support city efforts in establishment of downtown grocery (or year round market).

- 24% overall, 32% of those food insecure with hunger, 66% of meal site respondents, 40% of food pantry respondents, 45% of males, 59% of African-American and 38%

of Native American respondents said a grocery store downtown would help them get the food they need.

- C. Investigate why households at-risk for food insecurity are unable to seek aid at food assistance sites.
- More than a third of female respondents at meal sites and 26% of females at food pantries said they knew someone who would get assistance at that site but was unable to; almost half of the females who were food insecure with severe hunger knew someone who would get assistance at that site but was unable to.
- D. Establish standardized method of counting recipients at food assistance sites
- An accurate assessment of the prevalence of food insecurity in Green Bay will help agencies understand the populations they serve and facilitate improving the services they provide. This assessment requires a more comprehensive method of counting recipients at food assistance sites.

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