

# FOODSHARE

Institute of Hunger Research & Solutions

## Use of Food Assistance Programs during COVID-19

In August 2020, Foodshare conducted a survey in Hartford and Tolland counties to better understand changes in food access as a result of COVID-19. A total of 512 participants completed the survey which was targeted to those with higher need for food assistance. As a result, the sample is not representative of the general population.

### Who is over-represented?

- Women (60% of sample)
- Hispanics (14%), Blacks (13%)
- Households making under \$50,000 per year (48%)

### How are people coping with food insecurity?

- Accepting food from friends and family (36%)
- Stretching food by eating less (42%)

Over 1/2 of respondents said they may use these strategies in the future.

## Key Findings

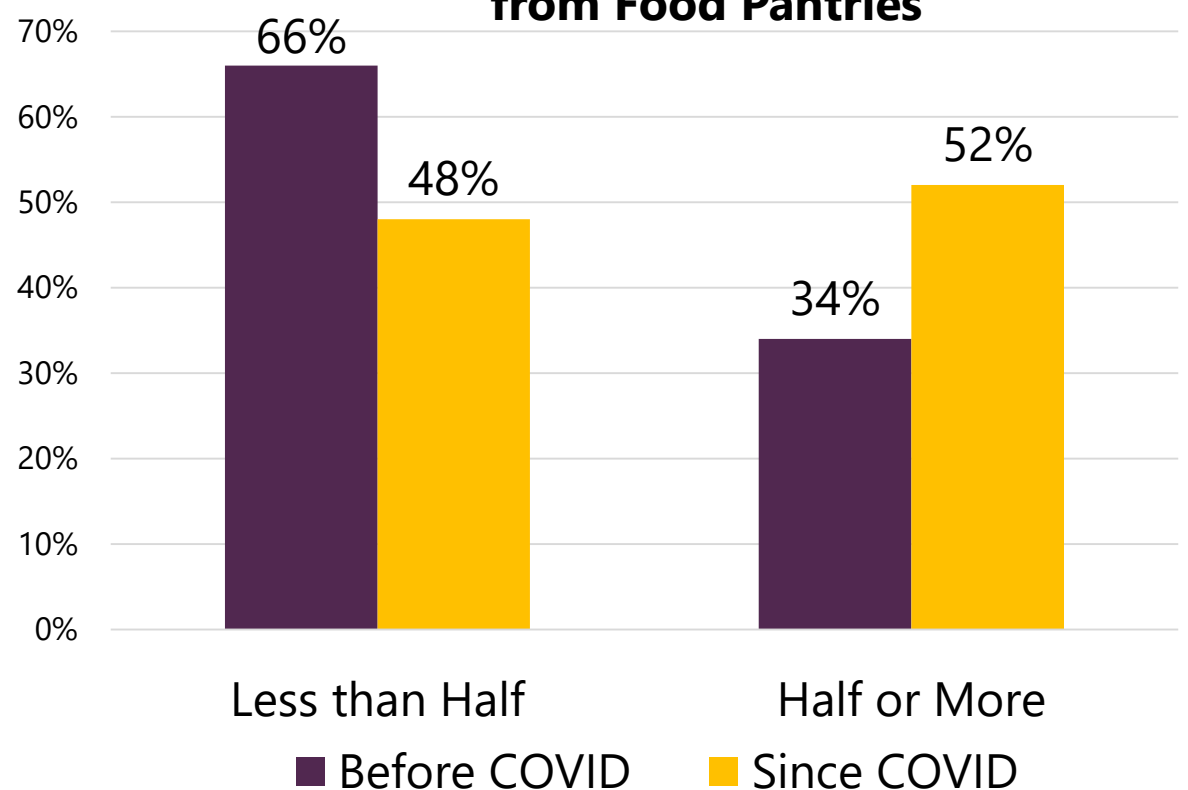
### 1 People are turning to food assistance programs more than before the pandemic.

About half of respondents (47%) have used at least one food program since the start of the pandemic, most commonly SNAP, food pantries, and school food programs. Over 1/3 of respondents (35%) have received SNAP benefits since March 2020. Additionally, more of respondents' groceries are coming from food pantries than before the pandemic.

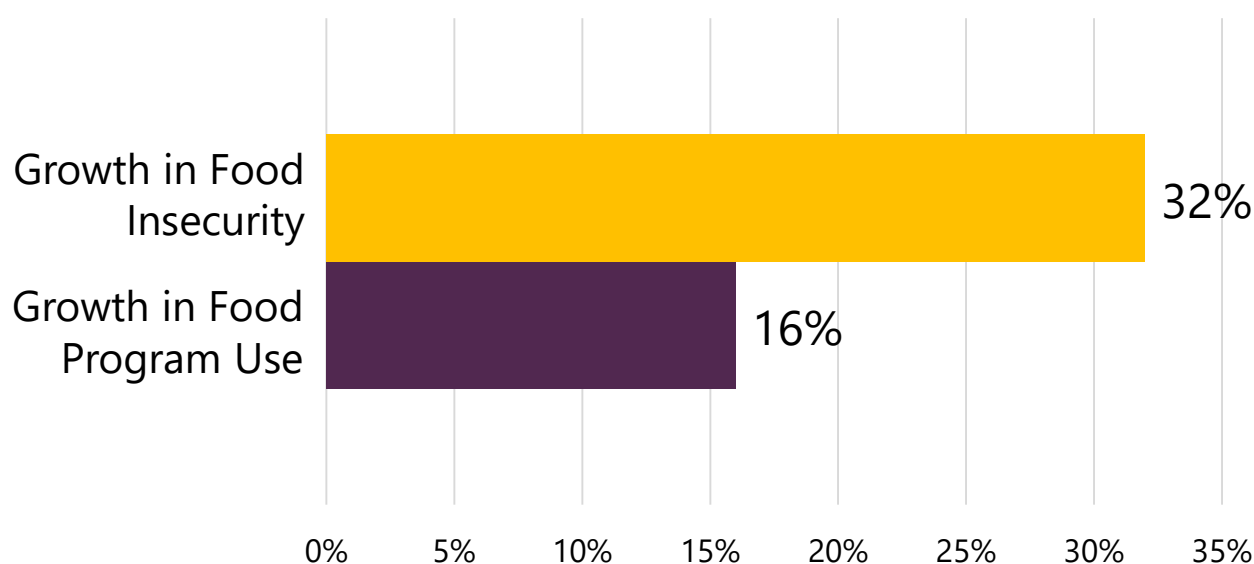
**51%**

of respondents who are enrolled in SNAP have to seek other help because their benefits run out

Amount of Groceries coming from Food Pantries



### 2 The increase in food assistance has not kept up with the rise in food insecurity.



Though all demographic groups have experienced an increase in rates of food insecurity, respondents are not using food programs at the same rate. For example, 64% of Hispanic respondents are food insecure, but only 34% have used a food pantry since March 2020, and only 48% have received SNAP benefits. **Over half of respondents who experienced worsening food security (59%) did not seek additional food assistance to meet their increased need.**

### What changes do people who are food insecure say would be the most helpful?

- Extra money to help pay for food or bills (86%)
- Food delivery from food pantries or food banks (80%)
- Food pantry staff or volunteers that speak their language (80%)

### 3 The need for food assistance is not the same among demographic groups.

People of color, families with children under the age of 18, and households that experienced a job disruption are more likely to be food insecure, and more likely to utilize food programs since March 2020. Among people of color, food program usage has grown the most for Black respondents, increasing 50% compared to 17% for white respondents and 3% for Hispanic respondents.

#### Food Pantry Guests Since COVID

80%

have experienced a job disruption

69%

have children under the age of 18

43%

are respondents of color

### 4 People using pantries for the first time have a unique set of barriers and concerns.

The current crisis has brought many families to food pantries and food banks for the first time. They often require additional support in order to be connected to all the resources food pantries have to offer and to feel comfortable during their visit. Pantries have met this need the majority of the time, with 65% of new pantry users saying they felt welcome by pantry staff and **78% saying they would recommend food pantries to other people in need**. However, stigma and logistical barriers remain prominent. Among people using pantries for the first time:

- 58% report difficulties traveling to food pantries
- 54% are worried people will find out they use pantries
- **67% say they don't want to use food pantries because they want to support themselves**



3 in every 10 pantry users during COVID (31%) have never used a pantry before.

#### Programmatic and Policy Recommendations

Unlike previous surveys conducted of people attending Foodshare programs, this survey enrolled people who may not be using Foodshare services, and highlights potential barriers. Results provide valuable insights into how people interact with food assistance programs, including their decision to enroll, their choice of program(s), and their experience and satisfaction, and should be used to inform future policies regarding food assistance.

- Pantry environments should be family-friendly and reflect clients' cultural makeup. This may require having bilingual staff or volunteers on site and/or posters and signs in multiple languages.
- Food programs can expand their outreach to target people who are food insecure but not currently seeking assistance by simplifying the enrollment process, promoting services via social media, and training volunteers and staff to reduce stigma.
- Food programs, when possible, should expand their services to accommodate clients' needs by offering food delivery or expanded benefits and/or referring clients to other programs that do offer these resources.
- Foodshare can amplify the voices of diverse individuals who are seeking help during COVID to mitigate concerns about not wanting to rely on food pantries and being embarrassed to seek help.

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National Food Access and COVID Research Team

The National Food Access and COVID Research Team (NFACT) is a national collaboration of researchers committed to rigorous, comparative, and timely food access research during the time of COVID. We do this through collaborative, open access research that prioritizes communication to key decision-makers while building our scientific understanding of food system behaviors and policies.

To learn more visit [nfactresearch.org](http://nfactresearch.org).



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