

Food Security and Food Access Amid COVID-19 in Spokane County Households

Research Brief 10 (Spokane County)

About the WAFOOD Surveys

The first Washington (WA) State Food Security Survey (WAFOOD 1) ran from June 18th to July 31st, 2020, receiving 2,616 responses from 38 of 39 counties. A second survey (WAFOOD 2) ran from December 4th, 2020, to January 31st, 2021, receiving 3,511 responses from 38 of 39 counties. Of those, 354 responses were received from Spokane County.

This brief provides insights into Spokane County resident food security, food assistance, food access, mental well-being, and economic assistance.

Low and Very Low Food Security Remains High in Spokane County

- Defined as low (12%) or very low (19%) food security, food insecurity was found in 31% of Spokane County households (Figure 1).

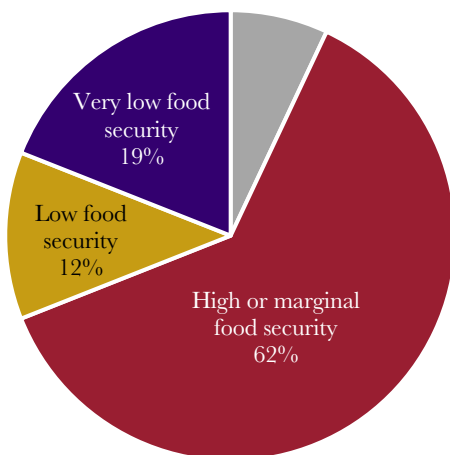


Figure 1. Food security over the past 30 days in Spokane County respondent households

Disparities in Food Insecurity Persist

- Food insecurity ranged from 7% to 58% by income and 11% to 55% by education (Figure 2).
- Food insecurity was higher in respondents identifying as Black, Indigenous, or people of color (33%).
- Food insecurity was 38% in households with children.

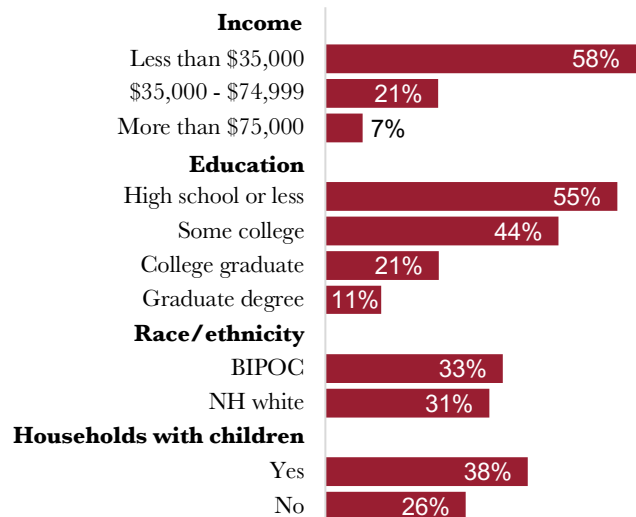


Figure 2. Food insecurity in Spokane County respondent households, by socio-demographics
NH = non-Hispanic, BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, and people of color
Note: Small subpopulation sample sizes prohibited the disaggregation of racial/ethnicity categories beyond NH White and BIPOC.

Key Findings: Spokane County

1. Food insecurity remains high in Spokane County.
2. Food insecurity and spending disparities persist.
3. Food assistance use has increased.
4. Prices and safety are key food access barriers.

Food Assistance Use Increased

- Use of any food assistance rose from 32% before COVID-19 to 41% during COVID-19.
- Use of SNAP, food banks/pantries, the School Meals Program, and mobile food boxes rose most prominently (Figure 3).

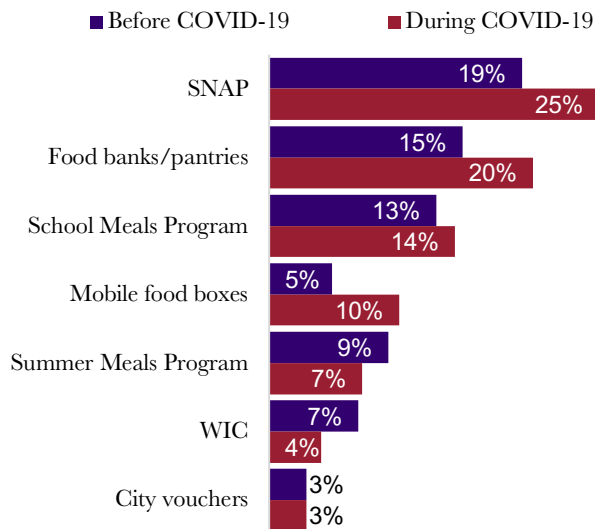


Figure 3. Participation in food assistance among Spokane County respondent households

Worry About Qualifying and Insufficient Benefits Reported as Key Barriers to Food Assistance

- Of the 152 respondents using any form of food assistance, over one-third (39%) had worried they would not qualify for benefits (Figure 4).
- One-third (30%) said benefits were insufficient.

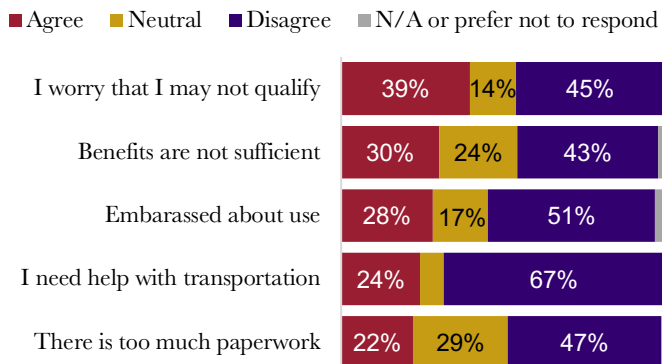


Figure 4. Barriers to food assistance use among Spokane County respondents
 Note: Responses with small percentage values (<8%) removed for display purposes.

Issues Accessing Baking Supplies and Meat Continue

- One-third (35%) of respondents reported difficulty accessing flour and baking supplies (Figure 5).
- Some reported difficulty accessing fresh or frozen meat (34%) or chicken (24%).
- About a quarter of respondents reported difficulty accessing pasta or rice (24%), canned products (24%), and fresh vegetables (23%).

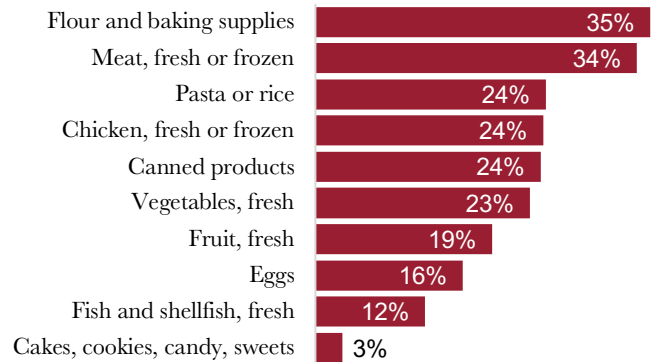


Figure 5. Food access concerns in Spokane County respondent households

High Prices and Limited Selection Cited as Top Food Access Barriers

- Most (60%) respondents reported seeing increased food prices during COVID-19 (Figure 6).
- Half (50%) reported that food selection in stores was more limited.
- Many (43%) said they did not feel safe in supermarkets.

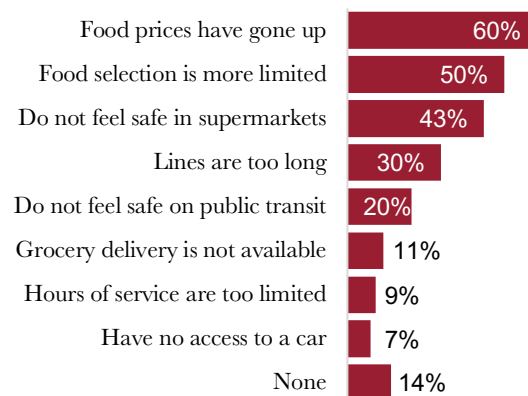


Figure 6. Shopping issues during the pandemic among Spokane County respondents

Fruit and Vegetable Consumption Low, Few Consume Sugary Drinks

- About half of respondents reported consuming fruit or other vegetables fewer than once per day (Figure 7).
- At least one sweet food item (e.g., cakes, cookies) was eaten each day by 25% of respondents.
- Most (81%) respondents reported consuming less than one sugar-sweetened beverage daily.

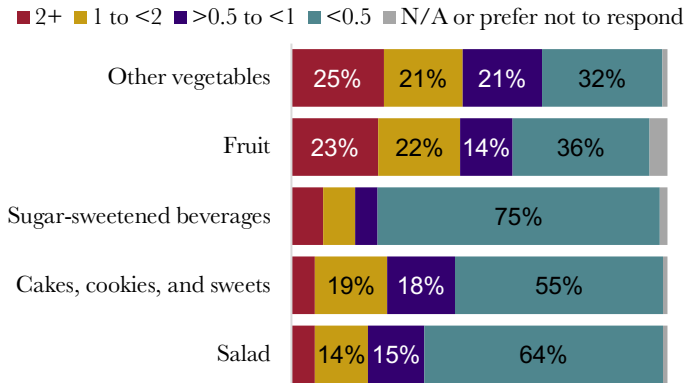


Figure 7. Food consumption (times per day) amid COVID-19 among Spokane County respondents
Note: Responses with small percentage values (<8%) removed for display purposes.

Lower-Income Households Spent Less on Food-Away-From-Home

- Overall monthly food-at-home spending was \$177 per person while monthly food-away-from-home spending was \$40 per person (Figure 8).
- Monthly food-at-home spending ranged from \$158 to \$207 per person by income.
- Monthly food-away-from-home spending ranged from \$29 to \$46 per person by income.

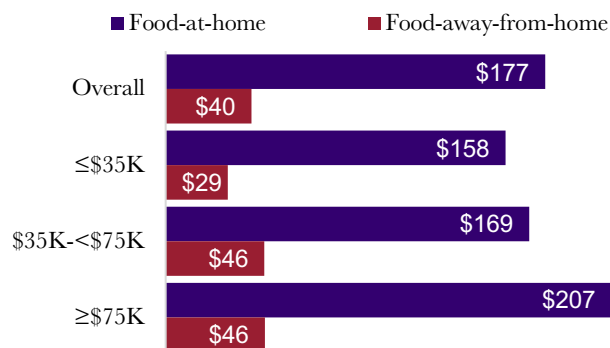


Figure 8. Average monthly food expenditures per person in Spokane County respondent households

Diets Worsened and Physical Activity Declined During COVID-19

- Most (61%) said they were less physically active during COVID-19 (Figure 9).
- Many (40%) respondents said their diets worsened with 36% rating their diet as fair or poor.
- About one-third (37%) were obese.

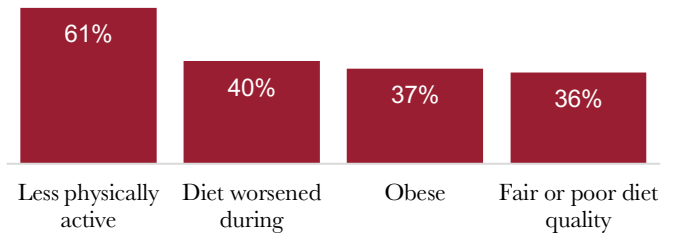


Figure 9. Health and health behavior during COVID-19 among Spokane County respondents

Many Experienced Elevated Stress, Anxiety, and Depression

- About half (52%) of Spokane respondents said they felt stressed all or most of the time in the past 30 days (Figure 10).
- Many were classified as anxious (50%) or depressed (42%) based their responses to the Patient Health Questionnaire four-item scale.

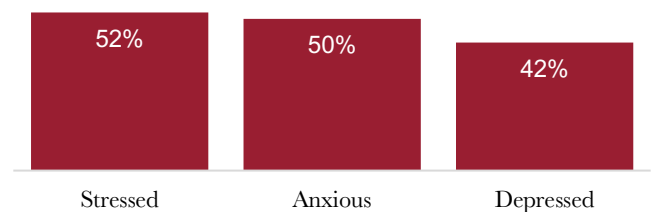


Figure 10. Mental well-being amid the pandemic among Spokane County respondents

Nearly all Received a Stimulus Check, Unemployment Elevated

- Nearly all (92%) of respondents said they received a second-round stimulus check.
- Unemployment benefits were sought by 36% of households with one-third (30%) of those reporting difficulties applying.

- When asked about the impact of reduced pandemic aid on their finances, 16% of respondents said they were relying on food banks or food assistance more (Figure 12).

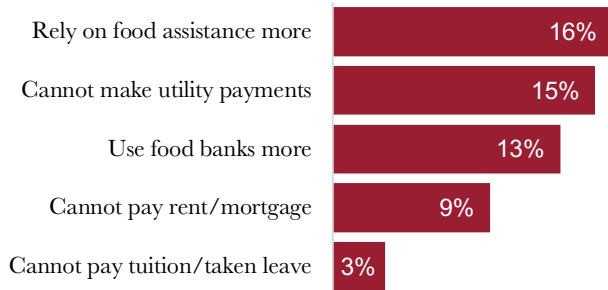


Figure 12. Impact of the loss of expanded unemployment benefits or pandemic aid on finances in Spokane County respondents

More Time for Family and Meal Prep Among Positives During COVID-19

- When asked about any positive outcomes during COVID-19, half (51%) said they had more time to spend with family (Figure 13).
- About half (45%) said that they had more time to cook and prepare food at home.
- One-third (36%) said they learned more about public health and safety.

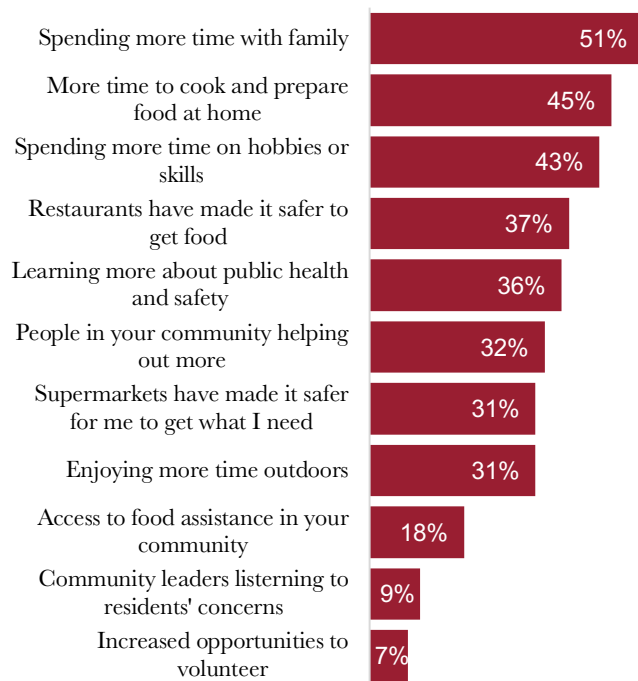


Figure 13. Positive outcomes amid the pandemic in Spokane County respondents

Acknowledgements

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<https://nutr.uw.edu/cphn/>
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About the WAFOOD Team

The WAFOOD survey was a joint effort between the UW and WSU with collaboration from Tacoma Community College (TCC). The team comprises Adam Drewnowski, Director, Center for Public Health Nutrition and Professor, Epidemiology at UWSPH; Jennifer J. Otten, Food Systems Director and Associate Professor, Nutritional Sciences and Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences (DEOHS) at UWSPH; Laura R. Lewis, Director, Food Systems Program and an Associate Professor, Community and Economic Development at WSU; Sarah M. Collier, Assistant Professor, Nutritional Sciences and DEOHS at UWSPH; Brinda Sivaramakrishnan, Professor, Community Health at TCC; Chelsea M. Rose, Research Coordinator, Epidemiology at UWSPH; Alan Ismach, Research Coordinator, Health Services at UWSPH; Esther Nguyen, Research Assistant at UWSPH; and James Buszkiewicz, Research Scientist, Epidemiology at UWSPH.

Contact Us

phisurvey@uw.edu

About NFACT

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.



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