



Economic Security and Food Access During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Snohomish County

June to July 2020, Research Brief 5 (Snohomish County)

About the WAFOOD Survey

The Washington (WA) State Food Security Survey (WAFOOD) funded through the University of Washington (UW) Population Health Initiative (UWPHI) was deployed from June 18th to July 31st, 2020. The goal was to understand the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on economic security and food access of WA State residents. A total of 2,621 WA residents in 38 of 39 counties responded. Of those, 241 respondents resided in Snohomish County.

This brief provides a snapshot of survey participant responses on the status and conditions of employment, income and food assistance, food security, and food shopping patterns among Snohomish County (SC) residents.

Key Findings: Snohomish County

1. Food insecurity was experienced in 28% of households and of those, 59% had children.
2. Food assistance was sought by 28% of households.
3. Fair or poor diets were reported by 33% and 43% said their diet worsened.
4. Greater consumption of eggs, flour, and rice, but less meat and fish.
5. Sporadic food shortages observed.
6. Rising food cost and reduced safety in food shopping were cited as barriers to food access.
7. Unemployment benefits sought by 32% of households 35% of which had issues applying.
8. Stimulus checks received by 77% of households.
9. More time to prepare and enjoy meals was viewed as one benefit.

Critical Disparities in Food Insecurity

- Using the United States Department of Agriculture 6-item validated scale, 28% of SC households were food insecure .
- Of food insecure SC households, 59% had children.
- The prevalence of food insecurity ranged from 7% to as high as 65% by income (Figure 1).

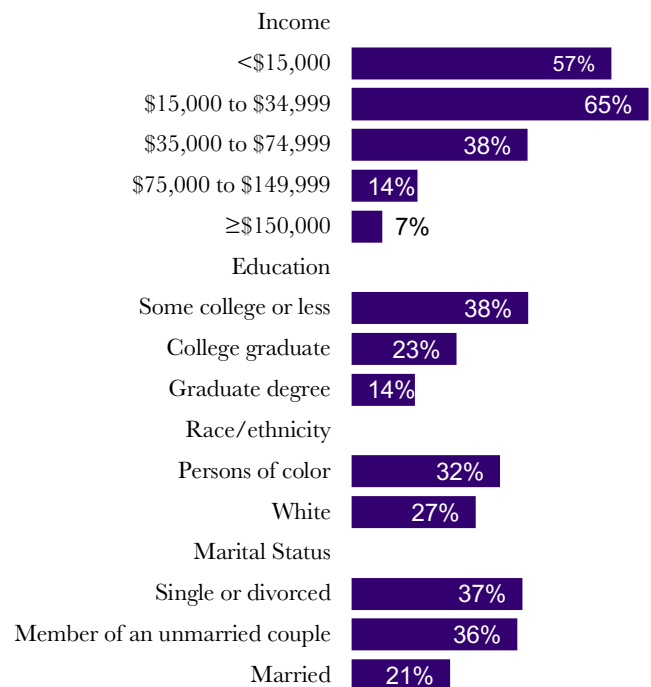


Figure 1. Food insecurity in Snohomish County respondents, by socio-demographics

- The prevalence of food insecurity ranged from 14% to 38% depending on education.
- Respondents of color were more likely than white respondents to be food insecure.

The Vital Role of Food Assistance

- SC respondents overall participation in food assistance programs saw a modest increase, from 23% in the 12 months prior to the shutdown to 28% after.
- Receipt of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) benefits declined (Figure 2).
- Meals from food banks/pantries, School Meals, Summer School Meals Programs, city agency grocery voucher or cash cards, and mobile food boxes increased.

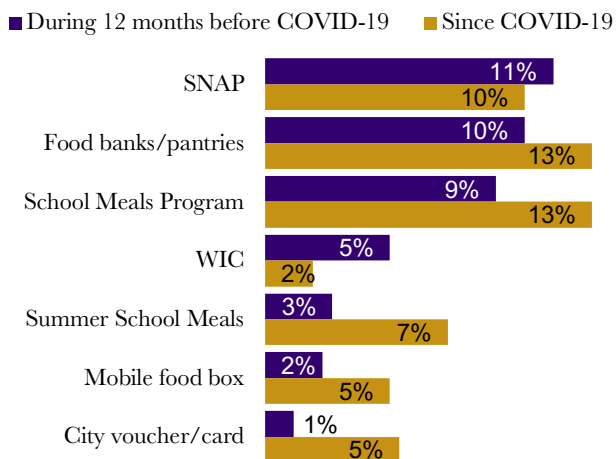


Figure 2. Snohomish County respondent’s participation in food assistance

Many Worry They Do Not Qualify for Food Assistance

- Of the 74 respondents who received food assistance, many (50%) had worried that they would not qualify (Figure 3).
- About a third noted that it was difficult to travel to and from food program offices to recertify.

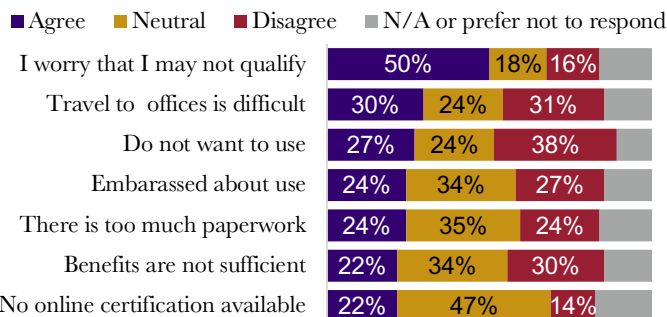


Figure 3. Barriers to food assistance program usage by Snohomish County respondents

Eating Habits Notably Changed

- Thirty-three percent of SC respondents reported fair or poor diets and 43% said their diet worsened during the pandemic.
- Higher consumption of eggs, flour, and rice reported by about a quarter of SC respondents (Figure 4).
- Lower consumption of meat (chicken, beef, and pork) and fresh fish and shellfish reported by 38% of SC respondents.
- Lower consumption of sugars, sweets, cakes, cookies, and pies reported by about a third.

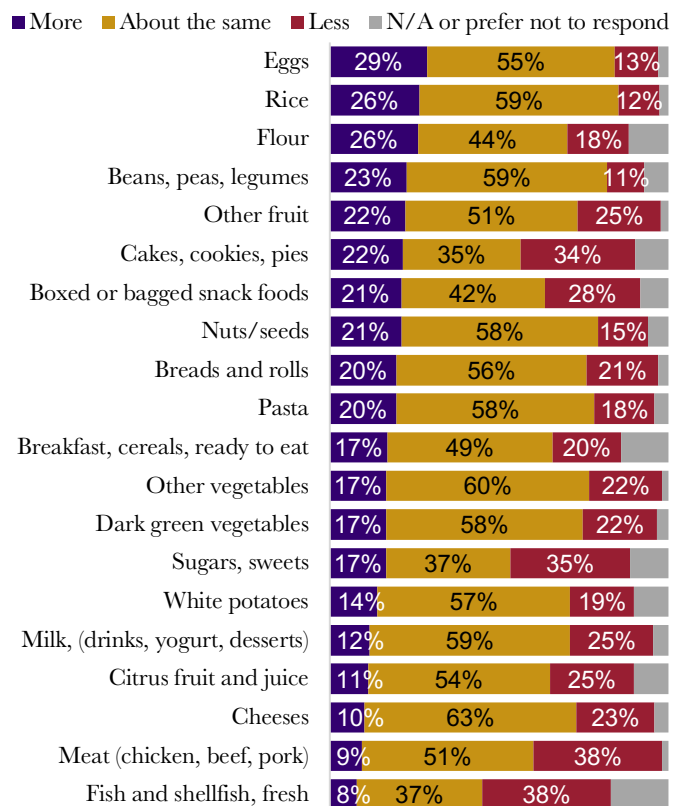


Figure 4. Changes in Snohomish County household food consumption

Confidence in Food Access but Higher Costs and Shortages Seen

- Most (76%) SC respondents said that they were confident in their household’s ability to access the foods they needed over the next 4 weeks.
- Reduced access to flour and baking supplies reported by 45% of SC respondents (Figure 5a).
- Reduced access to meat (beef or pork) and chicken reported by over a third.

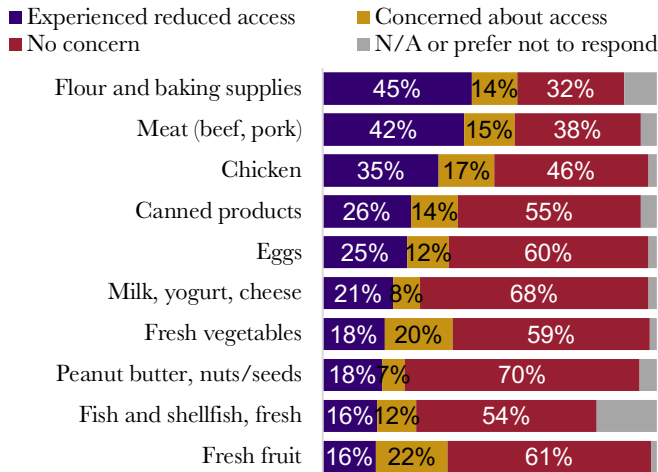


Figure 5a. Snohomish County household concerns about food access

- 16-18% reported concerns about their ability to access fresh vegetables and fruit.
- Few were concerned about access to chocolate, candy, boxed or bagged snack foods, packaged baked goods, and sugary drinks (Figure 5b).

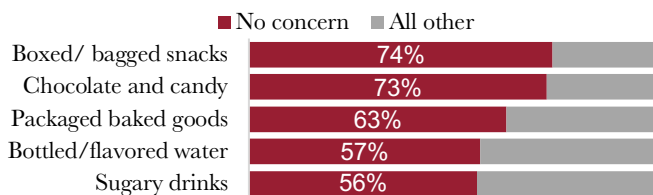


Figure 5b. Household concerns about food access by Snohomish County respondents

- Among barriers to food access, respondents cited concerns over increased food cost and safety in shopping for food (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Issues experienced in accessing food by Snohomish County respondents

WAFOD Sample a Mix of Essential and Non-Essential Workers

- Sixty-four percent of the SC respondents were employed prior to the shutdown.
- About half of employed respondents held a job that was classified as essential, defined as those who report to work despite Washington State's "stay home, stay healthy" orders.
- Of the employed, 24% were in a union.
- A higher proportion of essential workers were found in community and social services, healthcare, and food-based services (Figure 7).
- A higher proportion of non-essential workers were found in high contact services, education, business, finance, or office support (Figure 8).

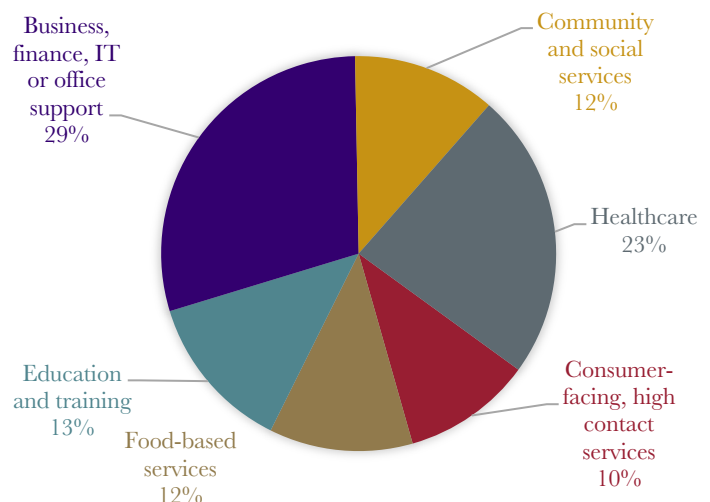


Figure 7. Industry/occupation of essential workers, Snohomish County respondents

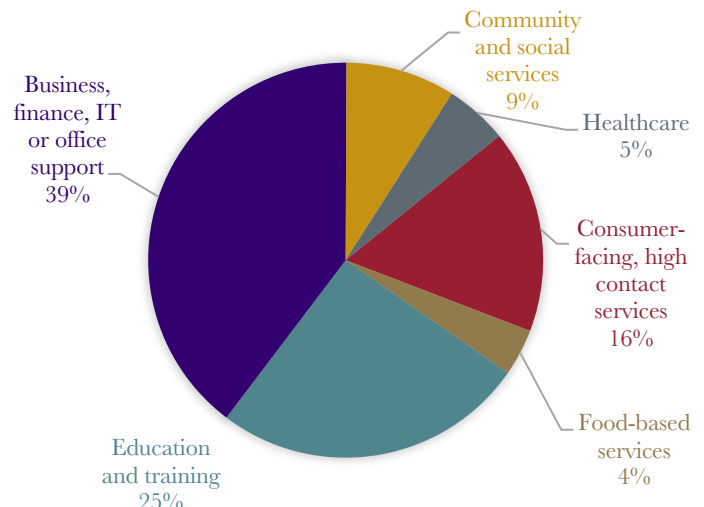


Figure 8. Industry/occupation of non-essential workers, Snohomish County respondents

Many Work from Home, Others Experience Lost Jobs or Hours

- When asked about employer adjustments to the shutdown, 40% of SC respondents said only essential workers needed to report to work with 31% encouraged to work from home (Figure 9).
- Some (25%) reported reduced work hours.
- Other SC respondents also reported temporary firm closures (11%) or permanent closures and layoffs (7%).

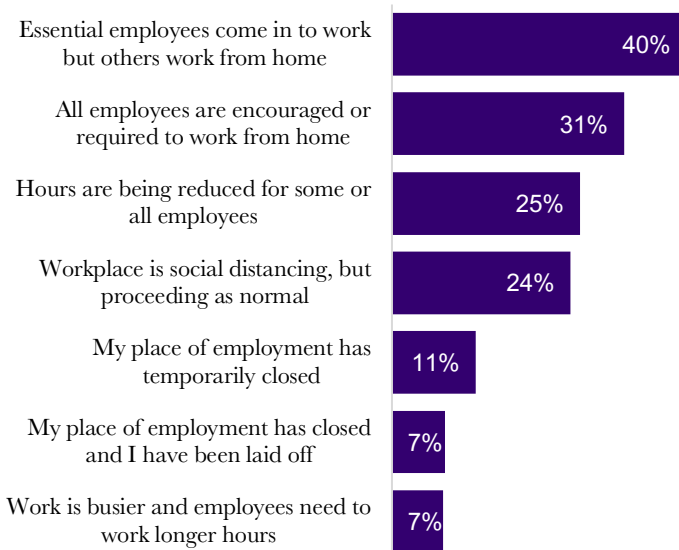


Figure 9. Workplace responses to the shutdown, Snohomish County respondents

- When asked what would happen if they got sick, 64% said they could use paid time off while some (37%) said they could use paid medical leave (Figure 10).

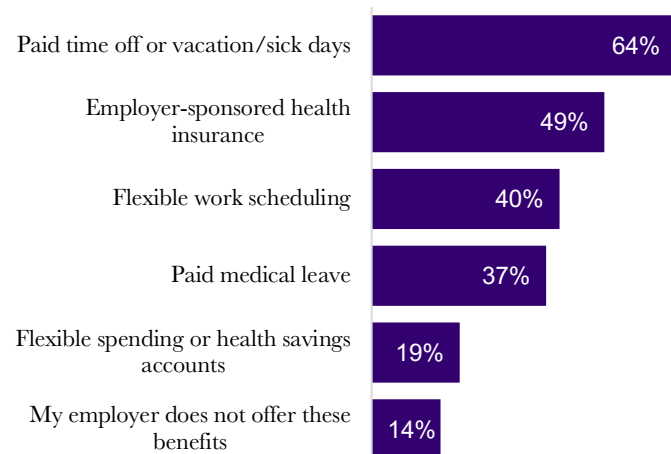


Figure 10. Workplace benefits, Snohomish County respondents

Stimulus Checks Received by Most; Unemployment Rising

- Three-fourths (77%) of Snohomish County residents surveyed reported receiving a stimulus check.
- Thirty-two percent of respondents reported receiving unemployment; however, of those, 35% reported difficulty in applying.

Positive Outcomes Amid COVID-19: Time to Prepare and Enjoy Meals

- When asked about any positive outcomes amid COVID-19, 48% of SC respondents said that they had more free time to prepare and enjoy meals (Figure 11).
- Thirty-eight percent cited members of the community helping each other access food.

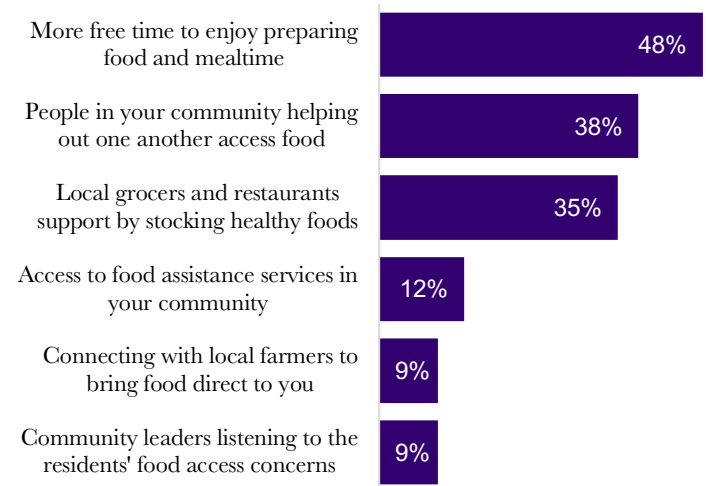


Figure 11. Positive outcomes amid COVID-19, Snohomish County respondents

WAFOD Survey Statewide Coverage by County

- The survey received 2,621 complete responses from 38 out of 39 counties in WA.
- The survey was made available in both English and Spanish.
- All respondents were geocoded by ZIP code for analysis of economic disparities by location.
- Greatest representation was from Western WA with 69% of responses coming from King, Pierce, Snohomish and Clark counties (Figure 12).

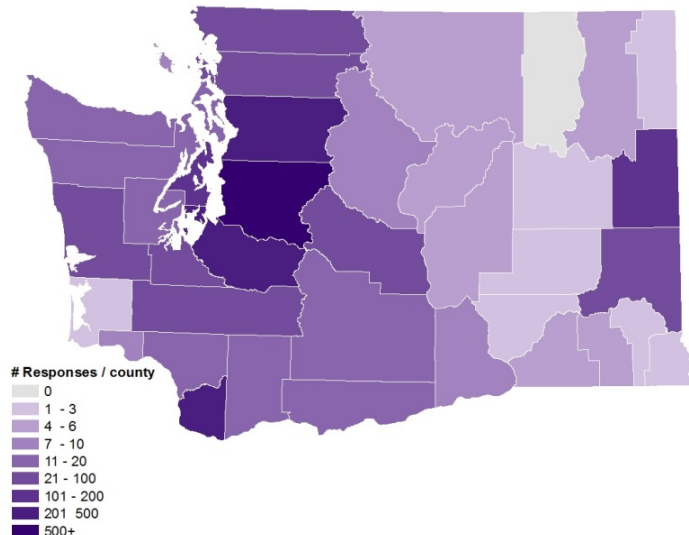


Figure 12. Geographic distribution of WAFOOD

- With some exceptions, WAFOOD demographics reflected the racial/ethnic, education, and age distributions of SC and captured those of WA (Figure 13).
- Most SC respondents (81%) were female and partnered or married (64%).
- Forty-six percent had children <18 years.
- Twenty-four percent of SC respondents had household incomes ≤\$35,000.
- On-third (60%) owned their home.

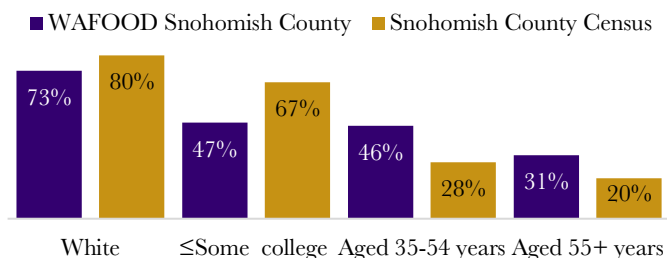


Figure 13. Sample demographic comparison
Source: 2018 ACS data by county

Acknowledgements

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For More Information Please Visit

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About the WAFOOD Team

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