

Food Insecurity and Food Assistance During COVID-19: Follow-up Survey of Washington State Households

Research Brief 8

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 (Figure 1). WAFOOD 3 is planned for Summer 2021.

These WAFOOD surveys will help us to understand the continuing and prolonged impact of COVID-19 on the economic and food security of WA State residents. This brief focuses on findings from WAFOOD 2 and examines changes in food insecurity and food assistance.

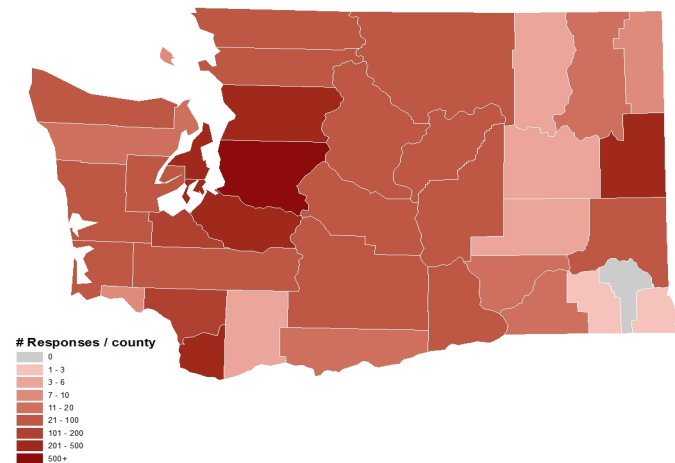


Figure 1. Geographic distribution of WAFOOD 2

Food Insecurity Remains High and Disparities Persist in WA State

- Household food insecurity (30-day) was 27%.
- Food insecurity by income ranged from 7% to as high as 53% (Figure 1).
- Food insecurity ranged from 12% to 38% depending on education.
- Food insecurity was highest among NH Blacks, AI/ANs, NH/OPIs, and others (40%).
- One-third of households with children were food insecure.

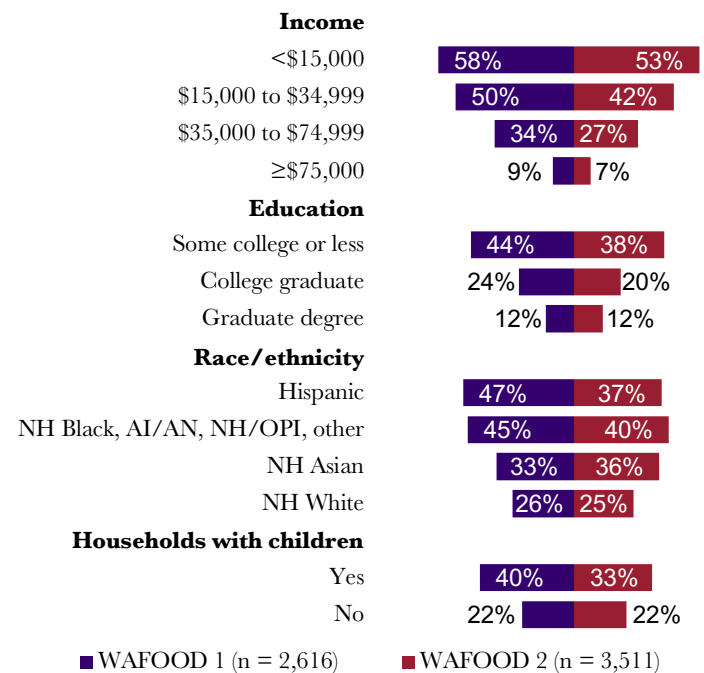


Figure 2. Food insecurity by socio-demographics

Note: NH = non-Hispanic, AI/AN = American Indian or Alaskan Native, NH/OPI = Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. WAFOOD 1 measured food insecurity prevalence from March 15th, 2020 to June/July 2020. WAFOOD 2 measured food insecurity in the past 30 days.

Key Findings

1. Food insecurity in WA State remains high.
2. Disparities in food insecurity persist.
3. Demand for food assistance has risen.

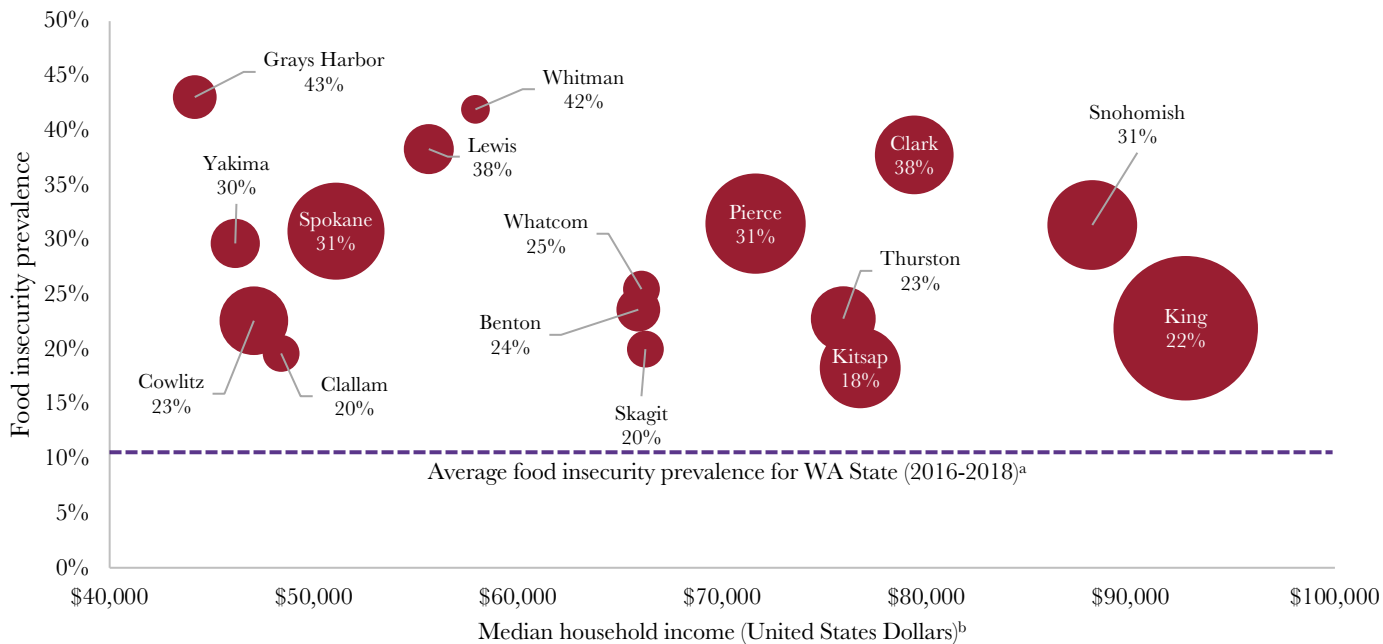


Figure 3. The association between household income and food insecurity by WA State counties, WAFOOD 2

Note: Bubble size indicates the number of responses to the WAFOOD 2 survey for each county. Only those counties with 30 or more responses or 10 or more respondents experiencing food insecurity were included to preserve respondent confidentiality. WAFOOD 2 measured food insecurity in the past 30 days.
^aThe WA State food insecurity estimate came from the United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service using the 2016-2018 Current Population Survey data.
^bData on Median Household Income are 2019 projected estimates based on data from the US Census Bureau and calculated by the WA Office of Financial Management.

Food Insecurity by County

- Food insecurity was highest in Grays Harbor, Whitman, and Lewis counties (Figure 3).
- Food insecurity was lowest in Skagit, Clallam, and Kitsap counties.
- Figure 3 shows that food insecurity among WAFOOD 2 households remains well above pre-COVID-19 levels for WA State (10%).

More Demand for Food Assistance

- Use of any food assistance rose from 29% before COVID-19 to 33% in WAFOOD 1 and to 42% in WAFOOD 2 (Figure 4).
- Demand for SNAP, School Meals, and food banks/pantries saw the largest increase between WAFOOD 1 and WAFOOD 2.

WAFOOD Coverage by County

- WAFOOD had more 18-34-year-olds, women, Whites, college graduates, and households with incomes \leq \$75,000 than WA State (Table 1).
- WAFOOD 1 and 2 samples were comparable.
- WAFOOD 2 had fewer college graduates and households with incomes of \geq \$75,000.

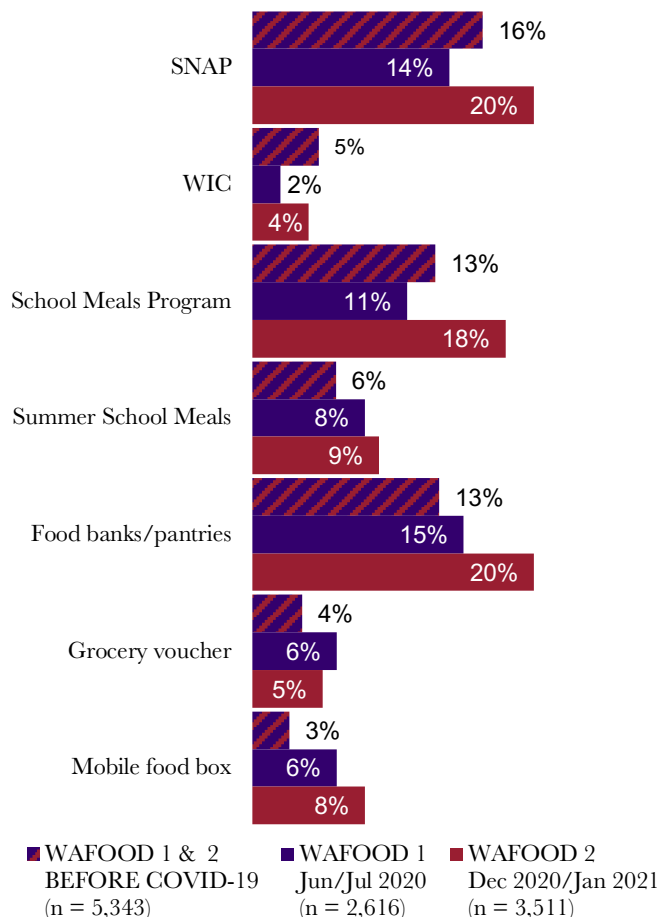


Figure 4. Increased reliance on food assistance

Note: WAFOOD 1 & 2 BEFORE COVID-19 sample combines all responses from WAFOOD 1 (n = 2,616) and new respondents from WAFOOD 2 (n = 2,727). In WAFOOD 1, “BEFORE COVID-19” was defined as the 12 months before March 15th, 2020. In WAFOOD 2, “BEFORE COVID-19” was defined as anytime during 2019.

Table 1. WAFOOD 1 and 2 respondent sociodemographics compared to WA State

Characteristic	Wave 1	Wave 2	WA
	n = 2,616	n = 3,511	State ^a
Age (years)			
18 to 34	24%	21%	31%
35 to 54	43%	44%	33%
55 and older	32%	34%	36%
Gender identity			
Women	81%	83%	50%
Men	15%	13%	50%
Other	3%	3%	--
Race/ethnicity			
White	73%	75%	67%
Hispanic or Latinx	8%	8%	13%
Asian	6%	5%	9%
Other	9%	8%	11%
Bachelor's degree or higher	55%	50%	37%
Household annual income			
Less than \$15,000	14%	12%	7%
\$15,000 to less than \$35,000	17%	20%	13%
\$35,000 to less than \$75,000	27%	29%	27%
\$75,000 or more	33%	29%	52%

Note: Other gender includes transgender, nonbinary, and self-described. Age category percentages for WA State based on author calculations using US Census Bureau data.

^aUS Census Bureau 2019 American Community 1-year estimates.

Acknowledgements

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For More Information Please Visit

<https://nutr.uw.edu/cphn/>

<https://www.nfactresearch.org/washingtonstate>

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.

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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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