



**Community Ministry Food Bank
Client Needs Assessment
Final Report
October 2010**

Funded in part by
The Denver Foundation



THE DENVER FOUNDATION

Prepared by
Denise Clark, LLC
in partnership with
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Executive Summary

Purpose

The primary purpose of the Community Ministry Food Bank needs assessment process is to gather information to help plan for the future and make strategic decisions regarding professional partnerships and collaborations, culturally sensitive programming and staffing, service delivery, volunteer training and food bank inventory.

The goals of the needs assessment process are to: 1) assess the food bank's products and services including service delivery; 2) better understand the culturally specific needs of clients; and 3) identify ways to improve feeding the hungry.

Partnership

The needs assessment process involved a partnership between Community Ministry Food Bank, The Denver Foundation and Denise Clark, LLC.

Community Served

Community Ministry Food Bank serves neighborhoods in southwest Denver hard hit by poverty and hunger. In four of the neighborhoods, seniors represent more than 20% of the population, a figure that is significantly higher than Denver as a whole that has 18%. In neighborhoods such as Bear Valley and Harvey Park South, one-fourth of the population are 55 years of age or older. Also over 60% of families served by Community Ministry are Latino, 31% are Caucasian and the remaining 8% African American, Asian, American Indian, and others.

Community Ministry was founded with the recognition that families facing multiple challenges can be supported with emergency food, clothing and local community support and return to self-sufficiency. Initially, Community Ministry served a handful of families. Today, the food bank serves over 6,000 families annually.

Process and Timeline

The needs assessment was designed as a qualitative research study of the food preferences, experiences and needs of current food bank clients. The process was officially launched in October 2009 and completed in September 2010.

The needs assessment process consisted of two main components: focus groups and surveys. Surveys were administered onsite in English and Spanish to 356 current food bank clients. Focus groups were conducted with 22 members of three specific populations: 1) Hispanic mothers of elementary age children; 2) adults under age 55; and 3) seniors over age 55.

Findings

A variety of findings involving customer service, food preference and the self-choice shopping model resulted from the needs assessment process. A few of the highlights include:

1. The majority of clients have positive experiences when visiting the Community Ministry Food Bank.
2. The need for “staple” or basic food items such as eggs, milk, flour, sugar, etc. was a significant finding in both the surveys and focus groups.
3. Staple foods are more important to client than culturally familiar foods.
4. Survey respondents and focus group participant stated that fresh fruits and vegetables should be provided at the food bank.
5. Survey respondents and focus group participants consistently provided strong commentary on the self-choice shopping model.
6. The self-choice shopping model gives clients more control over their food choices.
7. The “kids corner” is a great solution for parents when shopping.

Recommendations

Several recommendations that impact Community Ministry Food Bank as well as other Colorado food banks are being made based on the needs assessment findings. A few examples include:

- Consistently provide fresh fruits and vegetables and dairy products.
- Maintain a consistent supply of staple foods.
- Increase the number of food bank visits for individuals age 55 and under.
- Implement the self-choice shopping model at all food banks that includes the use of volunteer “shopper helpers.”
- Other Colorado food banks conduct a similar needs assessment process to establish a baseline of food and service delivery preferences in their communities.
- Develop a toolkit based on needs assessment results to help food banks make important changes in service delivery and food bank inventory.

Background of the Organization

The seeds for what has become Community Ministry were planted in 1966 when women from Brentwood United Methodist Church attended a conference on Affluence and Poverty. The conference disclosed that one of the poverty pockets in Denver at that time was in Southwest Denver in the College View neighborhood. This continues to be the reality for Southwest Denver families today.

Two sisters from Loretta Heights College and four students rented a house and began to address issues of poverty and hunger. As a result College View Ministry was incorporated in 1968 and in September 1971 the name was changed to Community Ministry to better reflect that the ministry was a service organization working together with individuals and churches in the community.

Community Ministry continues to serve neighborhoods in southwest Denver hard hit by poverty and hunger. According to an analysis by the Piton Foundation, in 8 of the 13 neighborhoods served by Community Ministry, over 80% of the children qualify for free lunch. In addition, all 13 neighborhoods have average wages significantly below Denver's averages with neighborhoods such as Mar Lee, Westwood, Harvey Park, Barnum and Barnum West having average wages of less than \$15,000. Denver in 2007 had 4,730 foreclosure filings with six neighborhoods served by Community Ministry placing among the top 11 of Denver neighborhood filings.

In four of the neighborhoods, seniors represent more than 20% of the population, a figure that is significantly higher than Denver as a whole that has 18%. In neighborhoods such as Bear Valley and Harvey Park South, one-fourth of the population are 55 years of age or older. Also over 60% of families served by Community Ministry are Latino, 31% are Caucasian and the remaining 8% African American, Asian, American Indian, and others. All of these numbers represent a significant demographic shift during Community Ministry's history of service to Southwest Denver.

In 1968, eight churches sponsored Community Ministry; today, 28 churches support the organization with in kind and financial donations as well as volunteers. In 2002, operations were consolidated into one central location at 1755 South Zuni. The Garden Park Mennonite Brethren Church, which owns the building, is contributing this space at no cost (with Community Ministry contributing funds for utilities and maintenance).

Community Ministry was founded with the recognition that families facing multiple challenges can be supported with emergency food, clothing and local community support and return to self-sufficiency. Initially, Community Ministry served a handful of families. Today, the food bank serves over 6,000 families annually.

Purpose of the Needs Assessment

For over 40 years, Community Ministry has served Southwest Denver families with emergency food, clothing, and supportive resources such as school supplies, holiday food baskets, Christmas gifts for children, utility assistance and information and referral services. During this time the makeup of the neighborhoods has changed dramatically. In the 60's and early 70's many of the original families began to migrate to other areas of Denver or moved to the surrounding suburbs. The demographic change has made a difference in *how* Community Ministry serves the community and *what* foods are appropriate to clients needs. As a result, Community Ministry Food Bank embarked on its first needs assessment to explore the needs of clients.

The primary purpose of the needs assessment process is to gather information to help Community Ministry Food Bank plan for the future and make strategic decisions regarding professional partnerships and collaborations, culturally sensitive programs, services and volunteer, and food bank inventory. Specifically, the needs assessment process will:

1. Assess the cultural sensitivity of the food bank's programs, services and volunteers to effectively meet client needs
2. Better understand the culturally specific needs of clients including, but not exclusive to Spanish speakers and the elderly
3. Identify food preferences of clients, in particular, culturally acceptable foods
4. Help re-design food bank systems and operations to improve feeding the hungry.

Description of the Needs Assessment Process

In the fall of 2009, Community Ministry, with financial support from The Denver Foundation, began the development of a needs assessment process. Working with a local independent consultant, Denise Clark, and a Latino advisory team, the food bank designed and implemented a process to assess the needs of its clients.

The goals of the needs assessment process are to: 1) assess the food bank's products and services including service delivery; 2) better understand the culturally specific needs of clients; and 3) identify ways to improve feeding the hungry.

Possible benefits of such a process include:

- Identify standards of practice and general operations to improve emergency food services with a cultural sensitivity to choice for individuals and families as well as the elderly
- Identify food preferences of food bank clients (eliminate assumptions and preconceived ideas)
- Inform food purchasing decisions and food donation drives
- Help eliminate waste associated with emergency food distribution
- Make available findings of unique research project
- Establish promising practices for food banks.

The results of the needs assessment will be disseminated to food banks and food pantries statewide, the media and other stakeholders and used to make programmatic changes to most effectively and appropriately meet the needs of the changing demographic of communities throughout Colorado.

Design

The needs assessment was designed as a qualitative research study of the food preferences, experiences and needs of current food bank clients. The needs assessment process consisted of two main components: focus groups and surveys.

Methodology

Surveys were administered onsite in English and Spanish with current food bank clients. Focus groups were conducted with three specific populations: 1) Hispanic mothers of elementary age children; 2) adults under age 55; and 3) seniors over age 55.

The survey was designed to generate data to help Community Ministry understand the diverse needs of clients and successfully meet the needs of the community it serves (see Attachments A and B). Food bank clients completed a total of 356 unduplicated surveys. The vast majority of surveys were completed in English.

Please note: The 356 clients who completed the survey represent approximately 8 to 10% of the total number of unduplicated clients served by the food bank annually.

The focus group component of the needs assessment was designed to facilitate more in-depth discussions with specific populations served by the food bank to learn more about their needs, food preferences and ideas for needed changes in the food bank's services and operations. Three focus groups were held in July 2010. Twenty-three unduplicated individuals participated in the focus groups. Denise Clark, in partnership with Community Ministry, created the focus group guides (see Attachments C – E). Each focus group discussion lasted 60 to 90 minutes.

Timeline

The needs assessment process took approximately one year. The timeframe for each phase is listed below.

Oct – Dec 2009: Research and Prepare for Assessment Process

Jan – April 2010: Design Process and Create Tools

May – July 2010: Administer Surveys

July 2010: Conduct Focus Groups

Aug – Sept 2010: Analyze Results and Write Report

Results and Findings

The data from the surveys represents the unique perspective of individuals served by the food bank and therefore, the entire analysis pertains to this community. However, special attention should be paid to the comments made during the focus groups and in the surveys in which respondents specifically identified food preferences and shared how they experience receiving services as a client of the food bank.

Two methods of data presentation are used in this report: charts and data tables. Both pie charts and bar charts have been created to visually display survey question results. Data tables and bulleted lists have been provided to summarize highlights of the focus group discussions.

SURVEY RESULTS

Respondent Characteristics

Chart 1: Gender

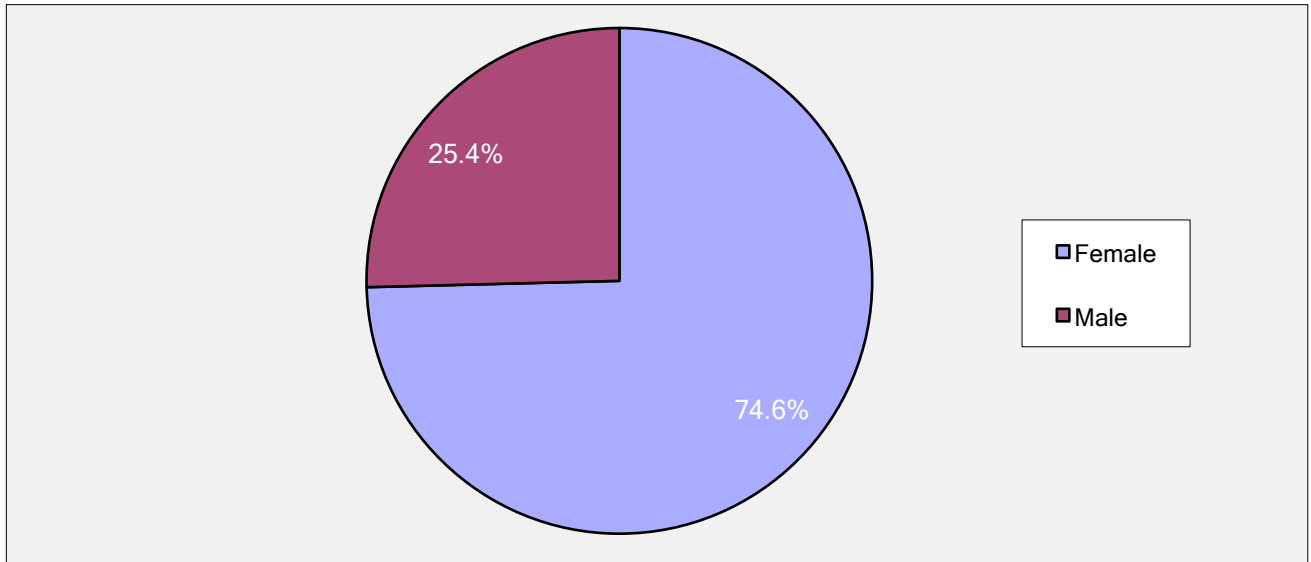


Chart 2: Age

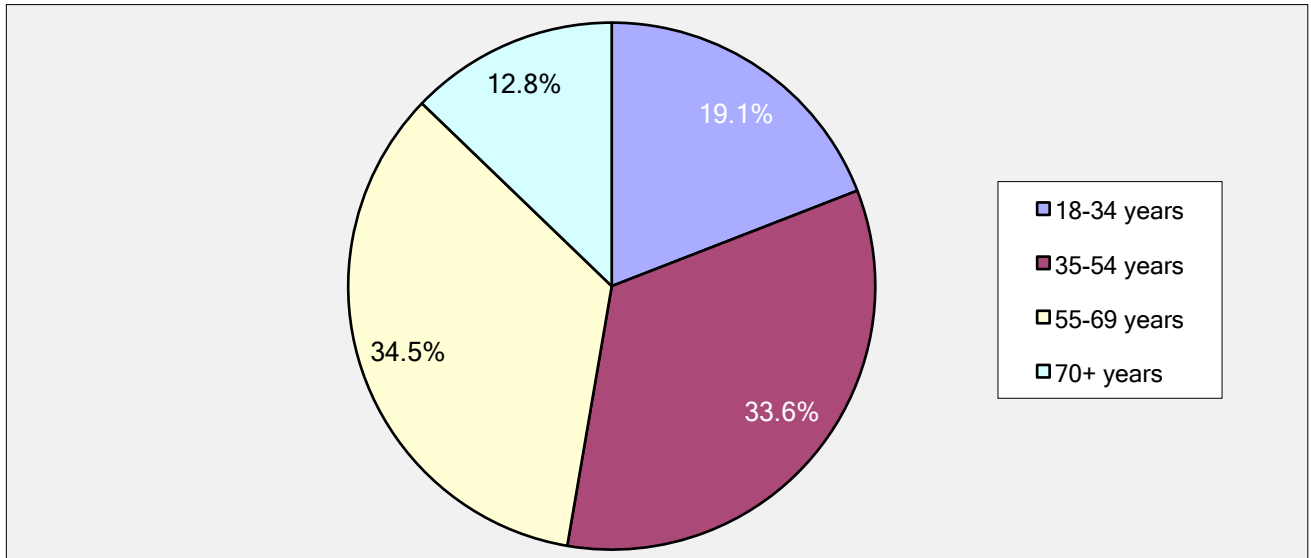


Chart 3: Marital Status

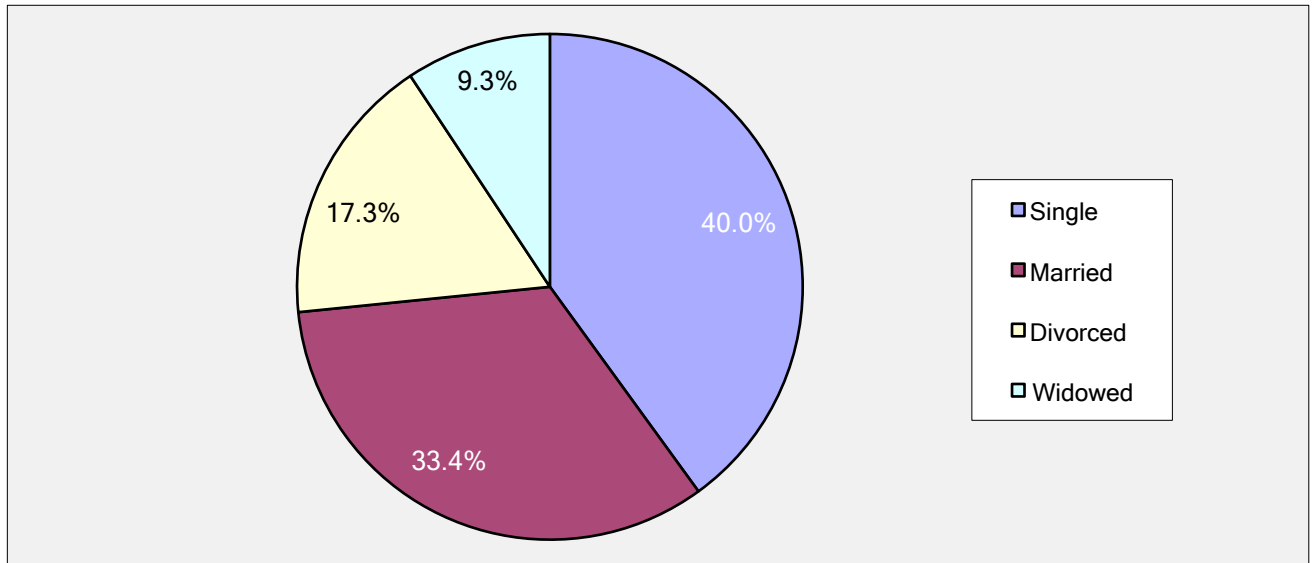
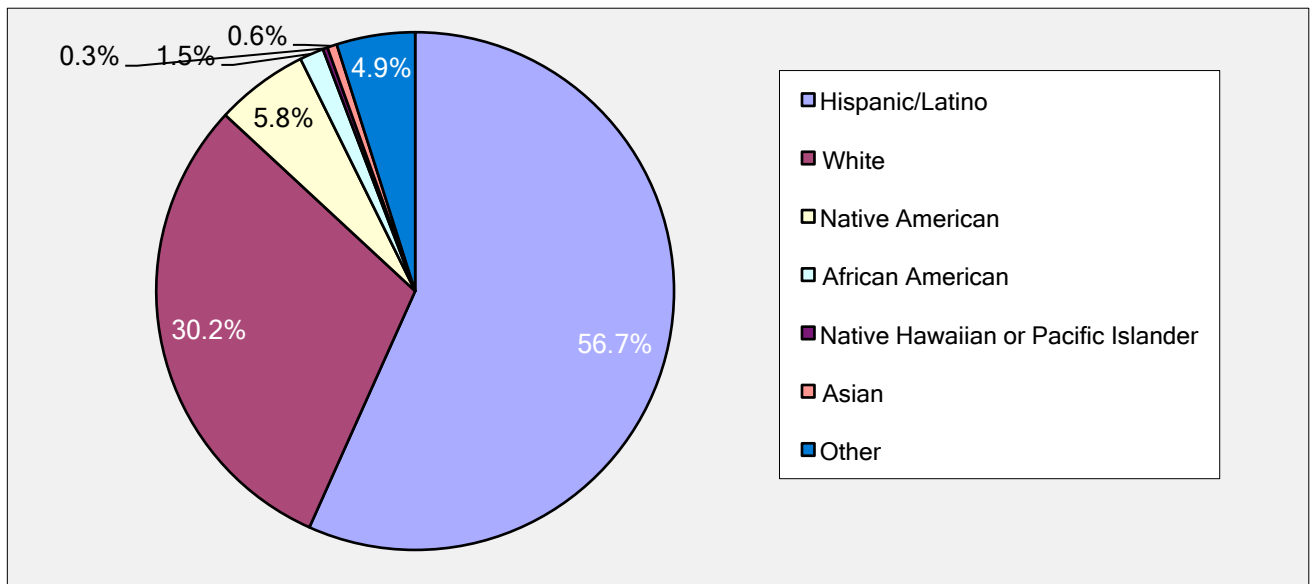


Chart 4: Race



Please note: The percentage of individuals by race completing the survey is significant statistically because it closely represents the percentage by race of individuals served by the food bank. For example, 60% of annual food bank clients are Hispanic.

Household Composition

Respondents answered three questions regarding the composition of their households. The average for each is listed below:

1. Number of adults living in your house – 2.2
2. Number of children living in your house – 1.2
3. Number of families living in your house – 1.3

Please note: The number of children living in the households of food bank clients may be impacted by the fact that 68% of individuals completing the survey were age 55 or older.

Client Experience

Chart 5: Client Visits

Approximately how many times do you visit our food bank?

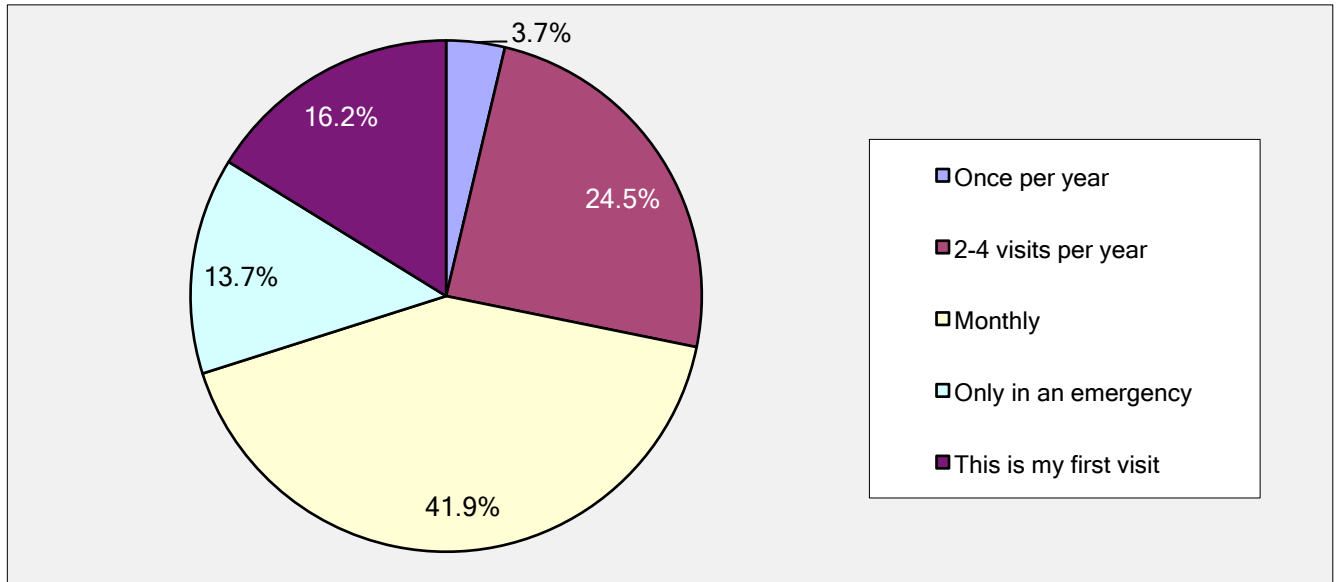
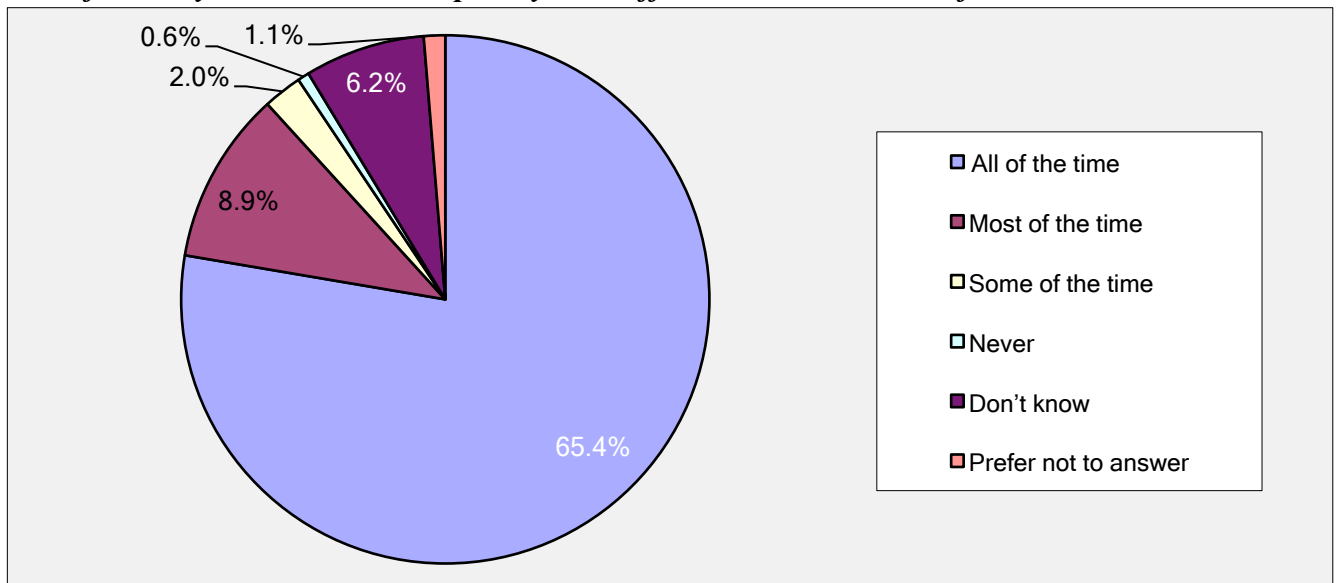


Chart 6: Treated with Dignity and Respect

How often are you treated with respect by the staff and volunteers at our food bank?



Please note: When asked if they are treated with dignity and respect by staff and volunteers of the food bank, 22 respondents chose “Don’t know” and four chose “Prefer not to answer.” Sixty-

two survey respondents skipped this question entirely. Knowing that 57 individuals indicated, “This is my first visit” (see Chart 5), we can assume that the majority of skipped questions and responses of “Don’t know” and “Prefer not to answer” came from first time visitors to the food bank (approximately 65%). Having had no prior experience visiting the food bank, first time visitors were unable to answer this question. The reasons for the other 35% of respondents choosing “Don’t know,” “Prefer not to answer” or skipping the question is unknown.

Chart 7: Problems Experienced by Client

What problems have you experienced in getting food from this location?

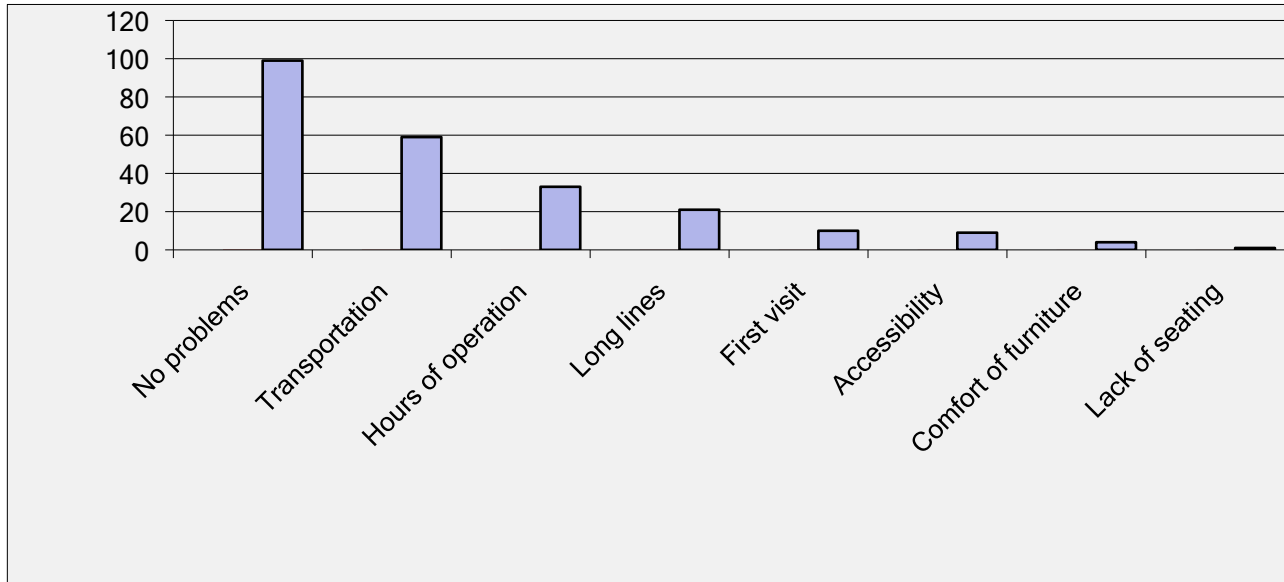
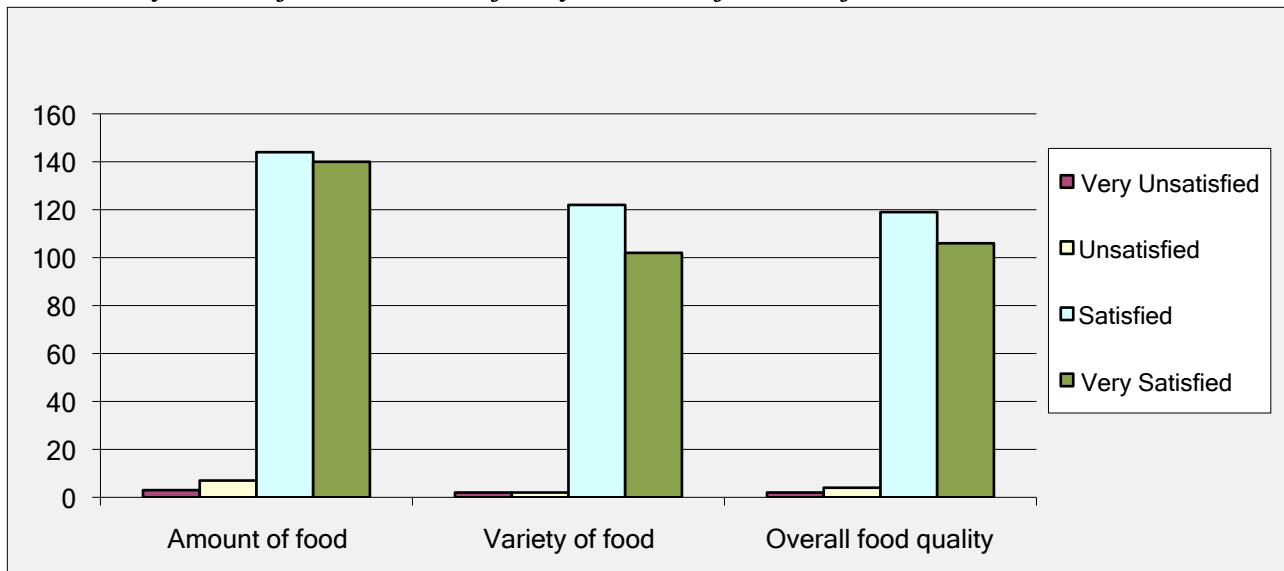


Chart 8: Client Satisfaction

Please rate your satisfaction with the food you receive from our food bank.



Additional Client Information

Additional information collected using surveys is summarized below:

- 60% of respondents do most of their grocery shopping at supermarkets or grocery stores.
- 23% of respondents do most of their grocery shopping at discount stores such as Walmart, Target and K-Mart.
- 99% of respondents understand what documents are required to receive food at the food bank.
- 85% of respondents state that they can prepare their favorite meal with food items received from this location.
- 82% of respondents claim that other food banks do not provide the food items they prefer.
- Some respondents stated that there are other food banks in the Denver Metro Area do provide the food items preferred by clients.
- 16% of respondents state that they have special dietary needs due to health issues or religious beliefs (e.g., diabetic, low fat, lactose intolerant, food allergies, high blood pressure, low salt, vegetarian).

Food Preferences

The tables below list in descending order the preferred food items ranked in each food category.

QUESTION: Which of these items do you like to receive from our food bank? *Please note that these are food items are consistently available at the food bank.*

Chart A: Grains

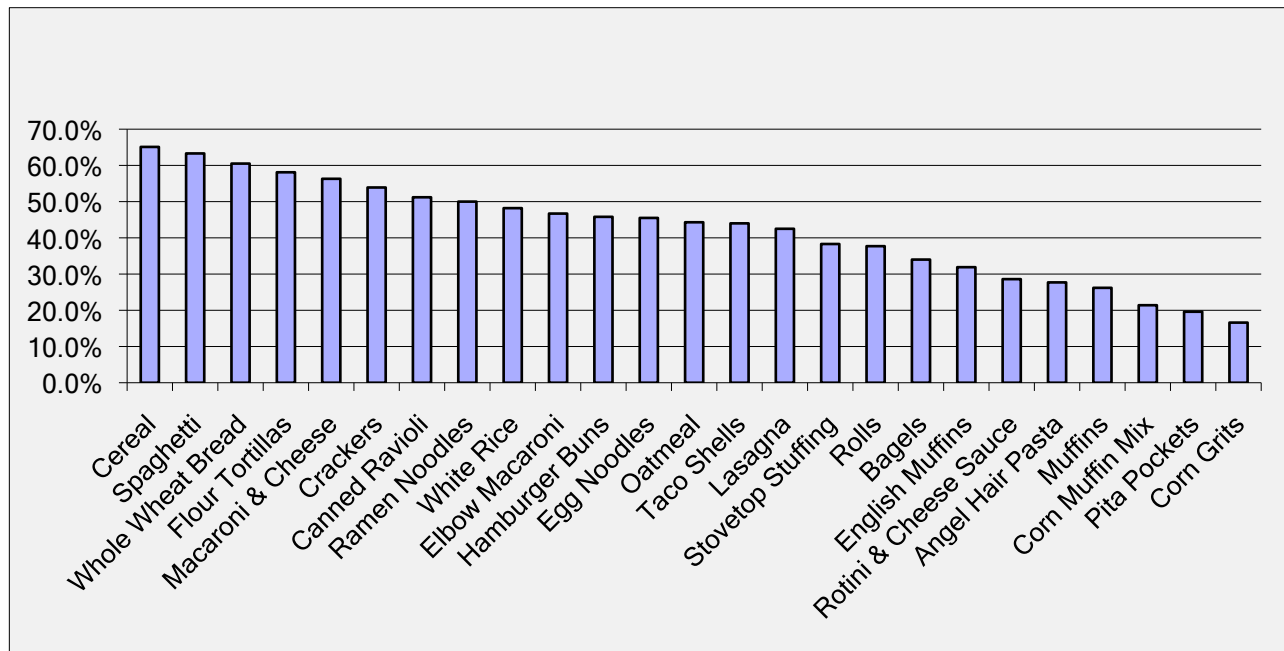


Chart B: Vegetables – Canned

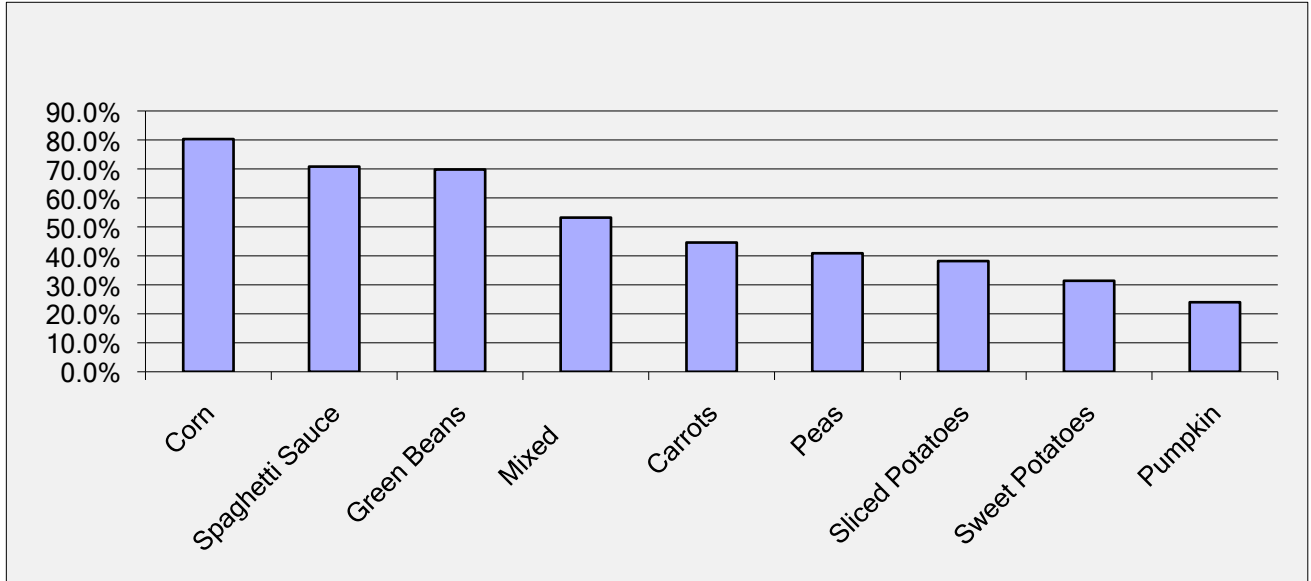


Chart C: Fruits – Canned

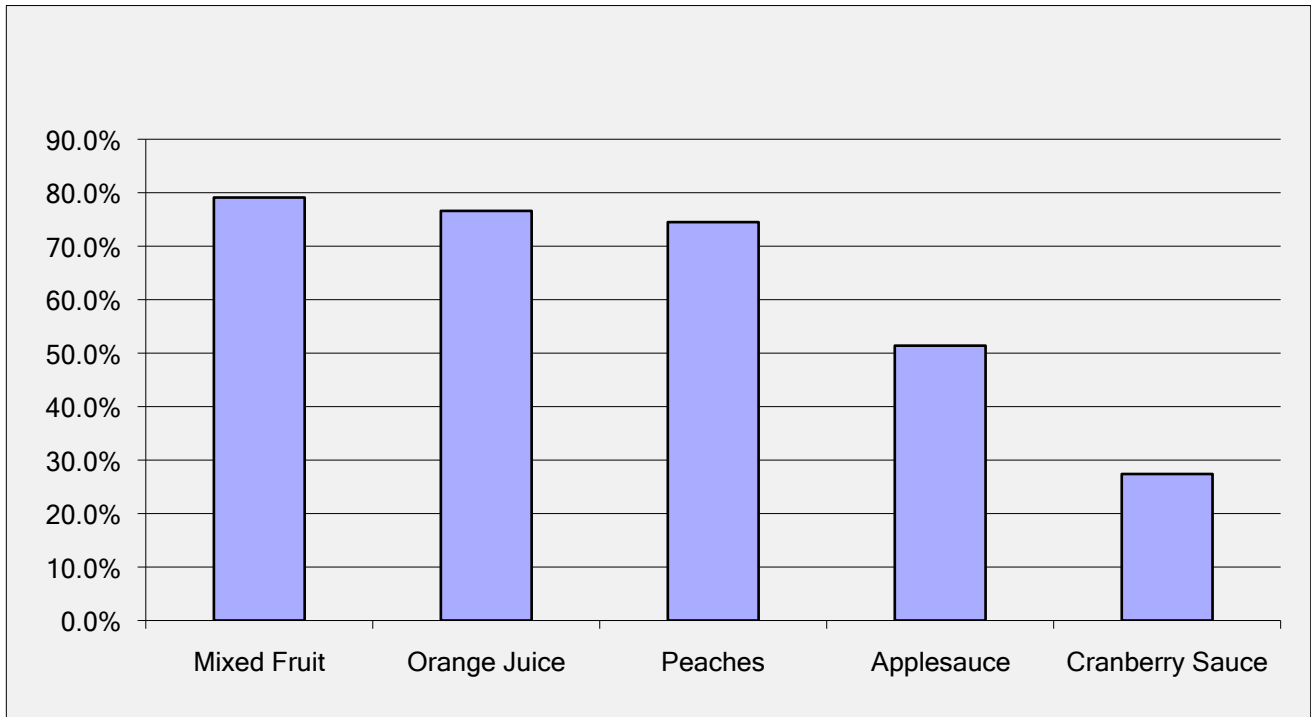


Chart D: Milk – Dairy

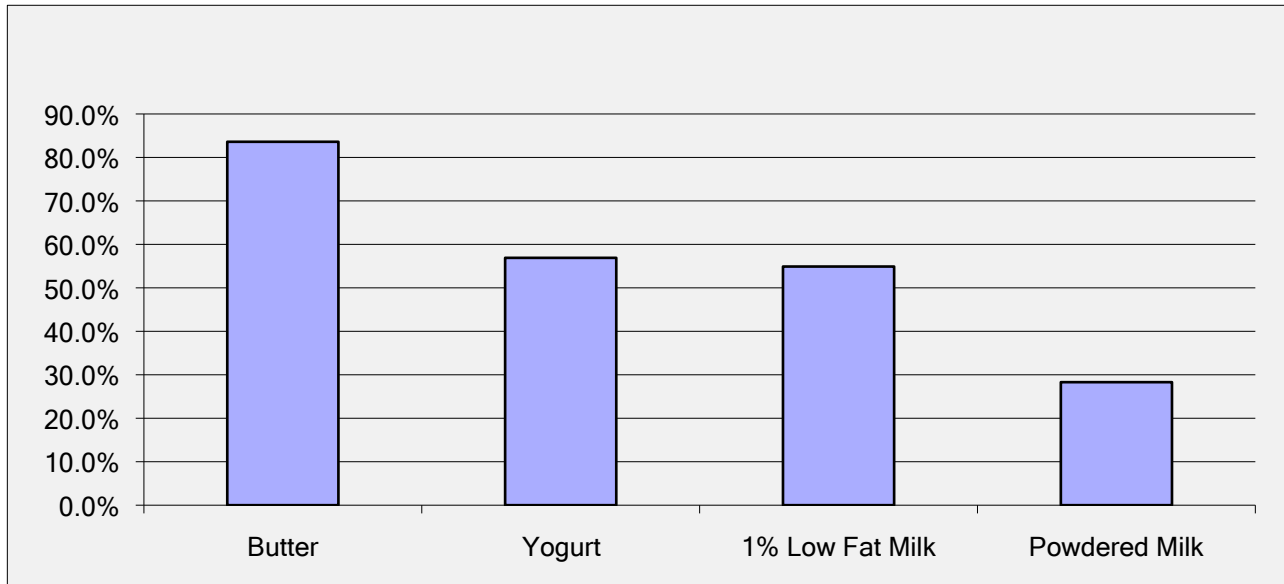


Chart E: Meat & Beans Protein

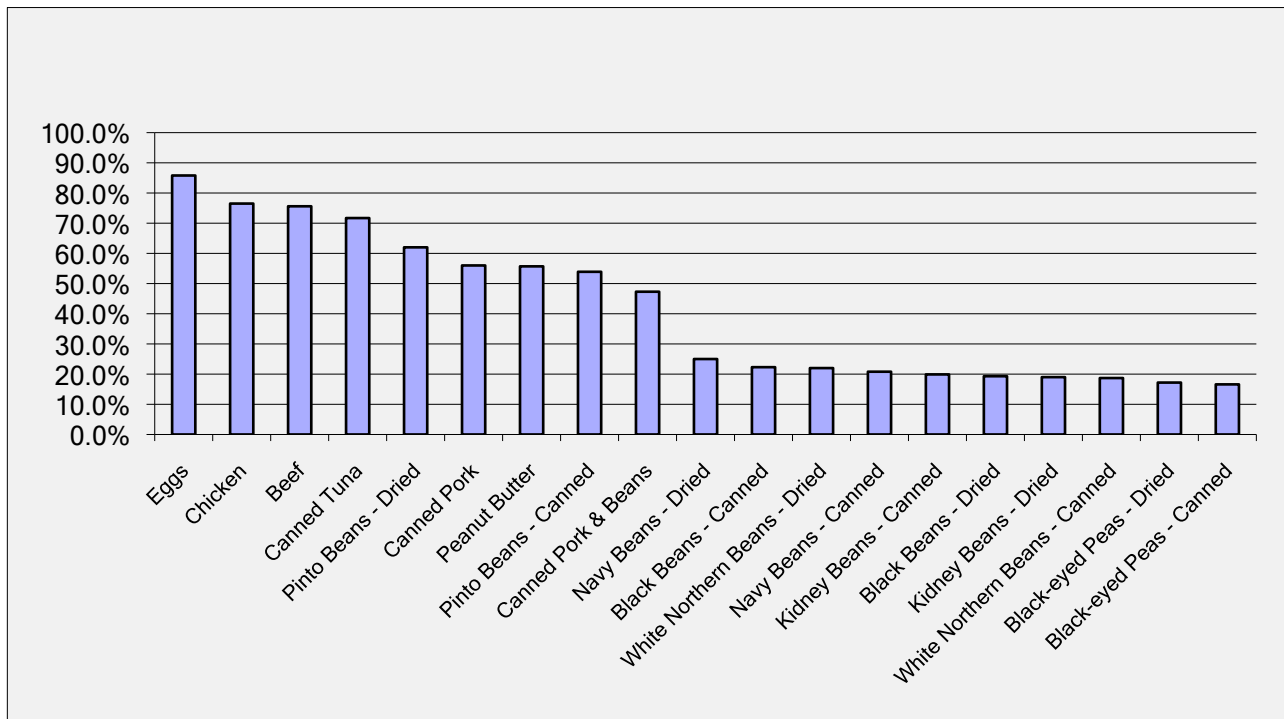


Chart F: Soup

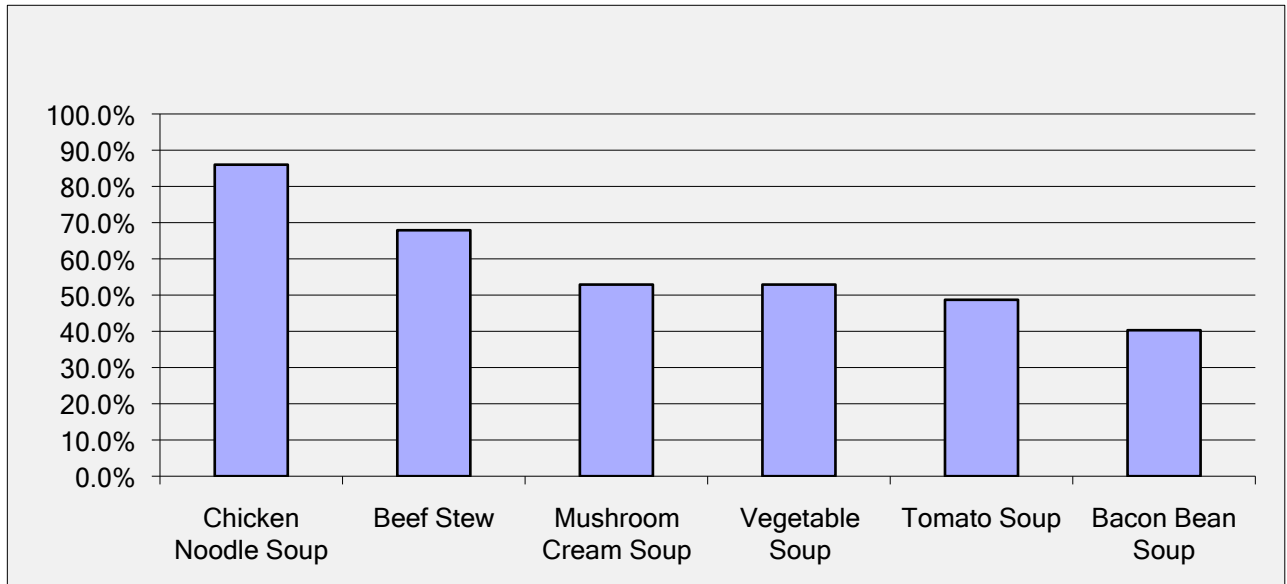
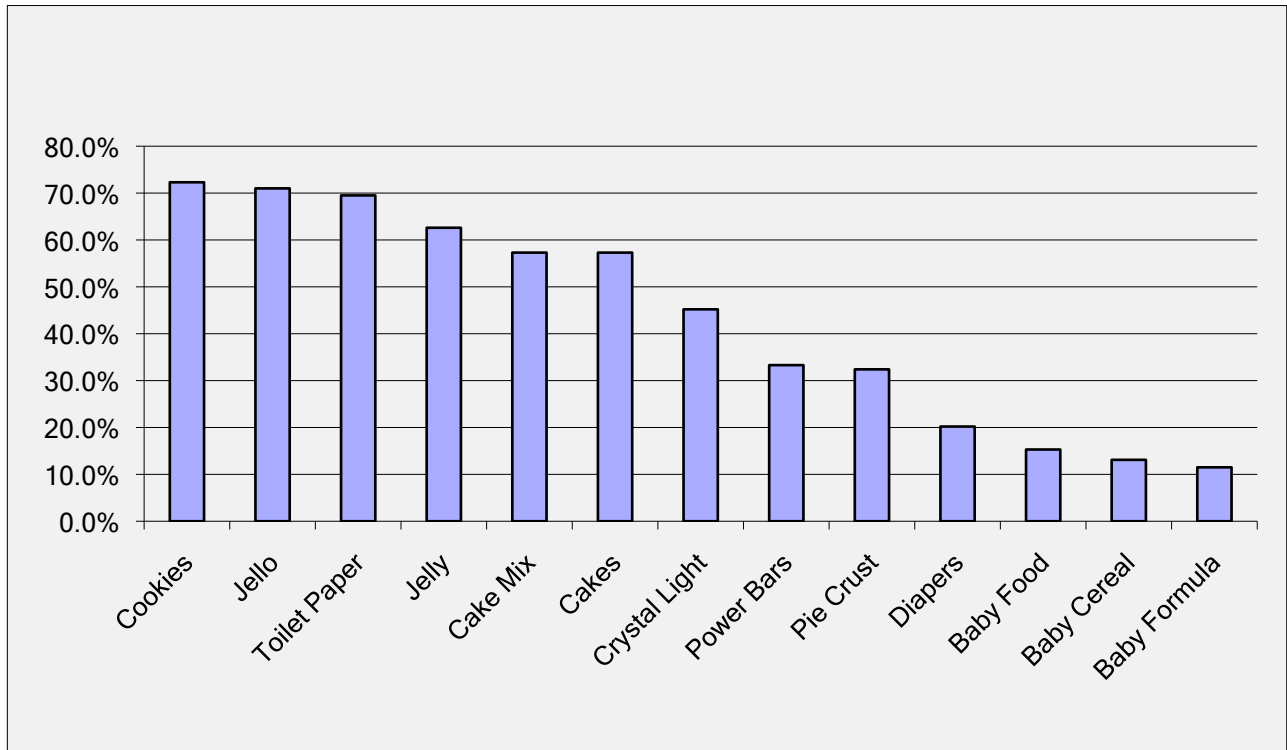


Chart G: Other



QUESTION: Which these items would you like to receive from our food bank? *Please note that these are food items are not consistently available at the food bank.*

Chart H: Grains

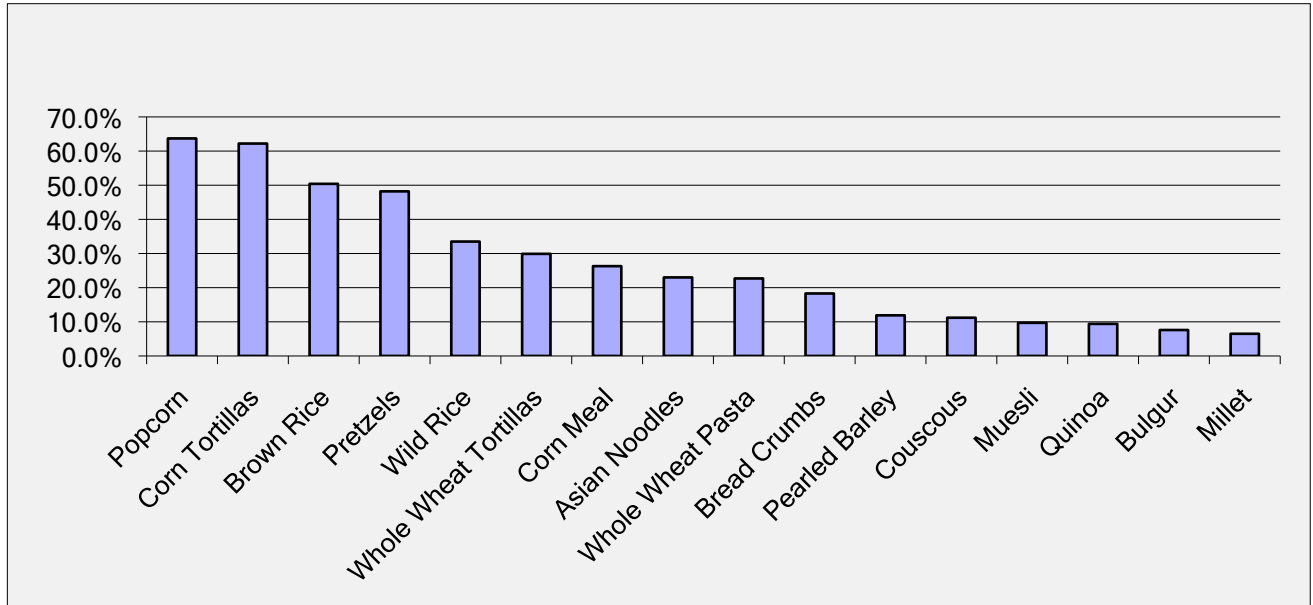


Chart I: Vegetables – Fresh Produce

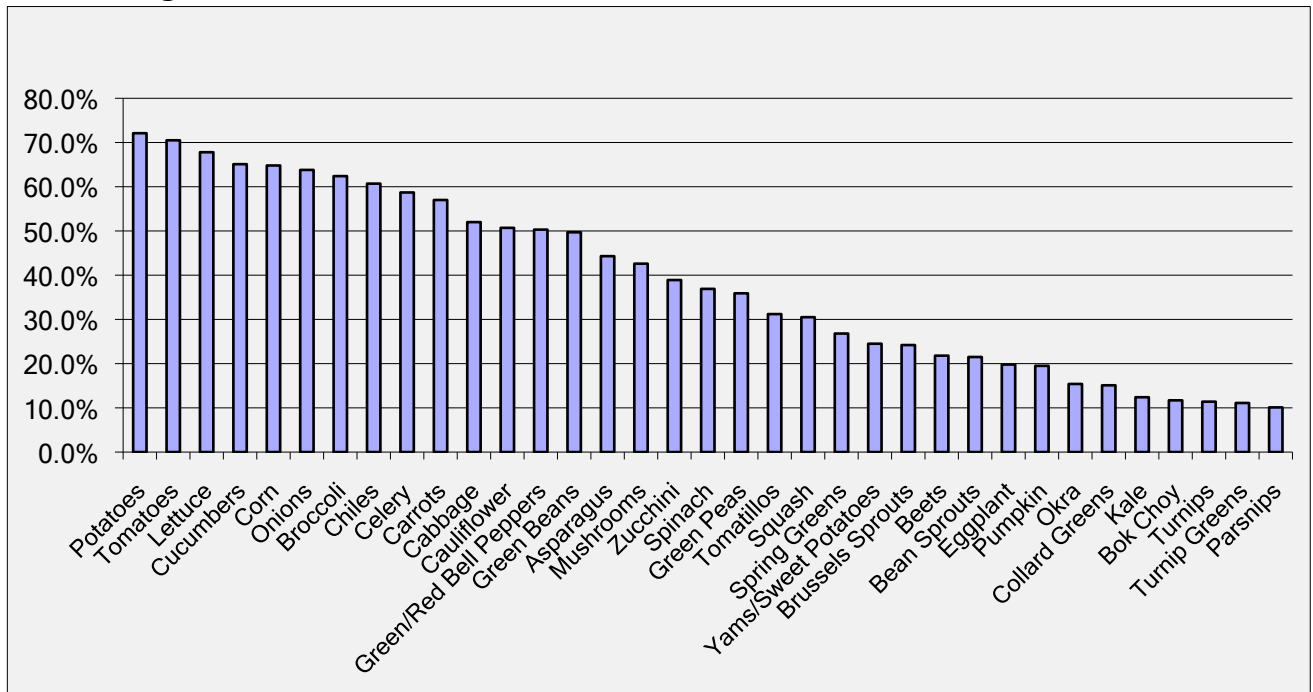


Chart J: Fruits – Fresh Produce

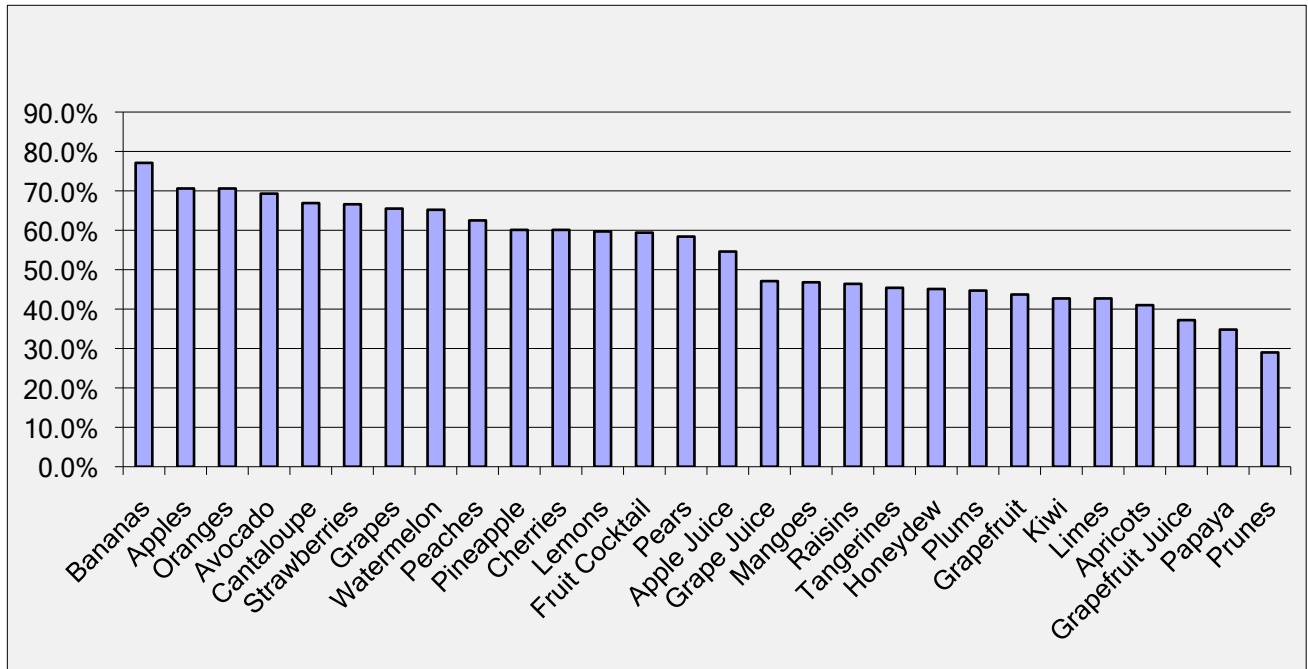


Chart K: Milk – Dairy

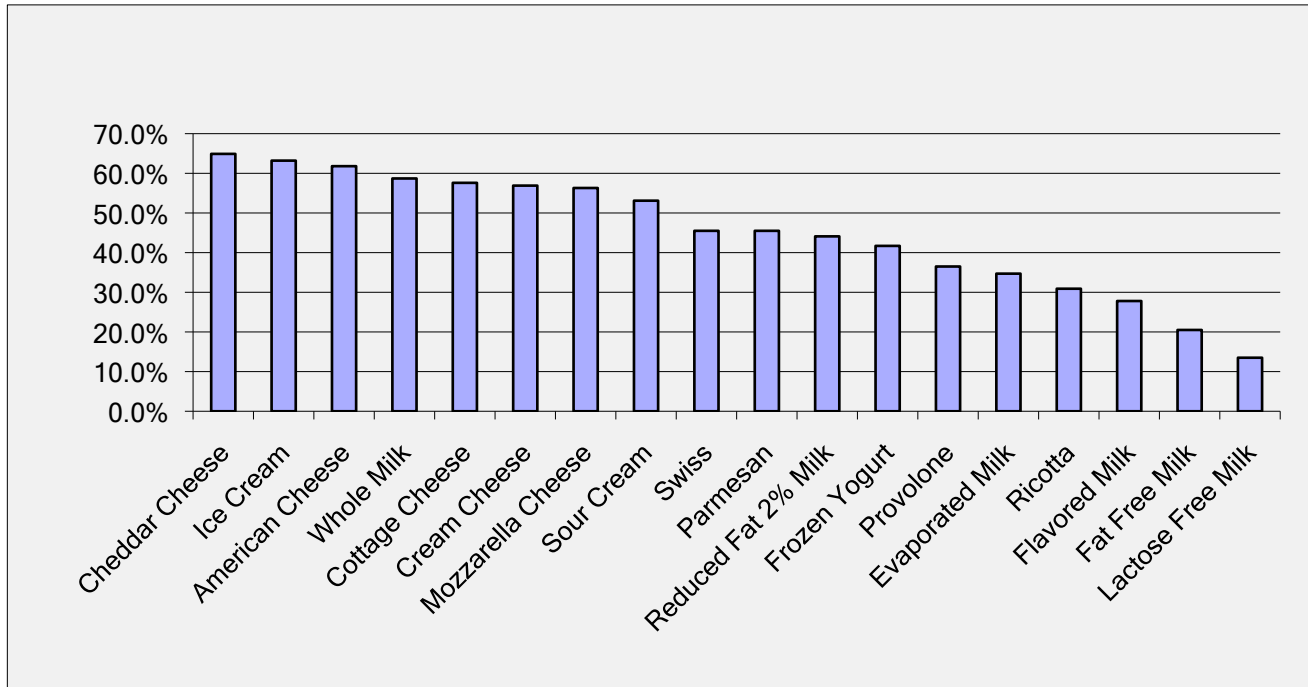


Chart L: Meat & Beans – Protein

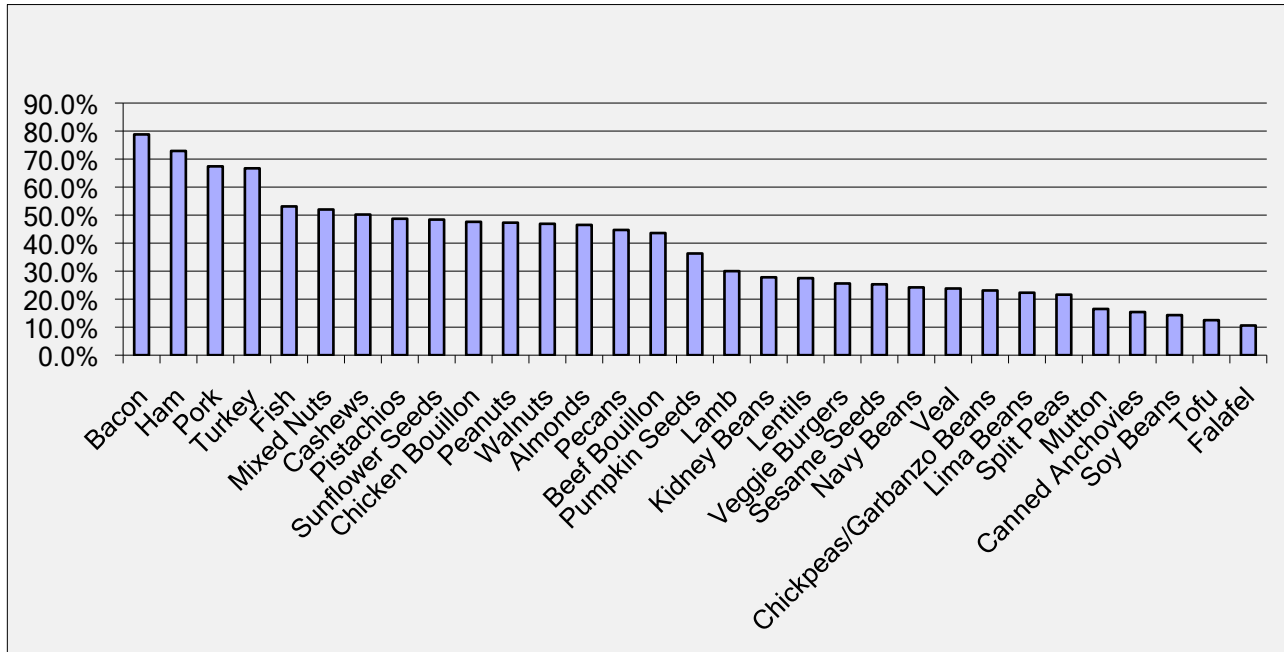


Chart M: Oils, Spices & Condiments

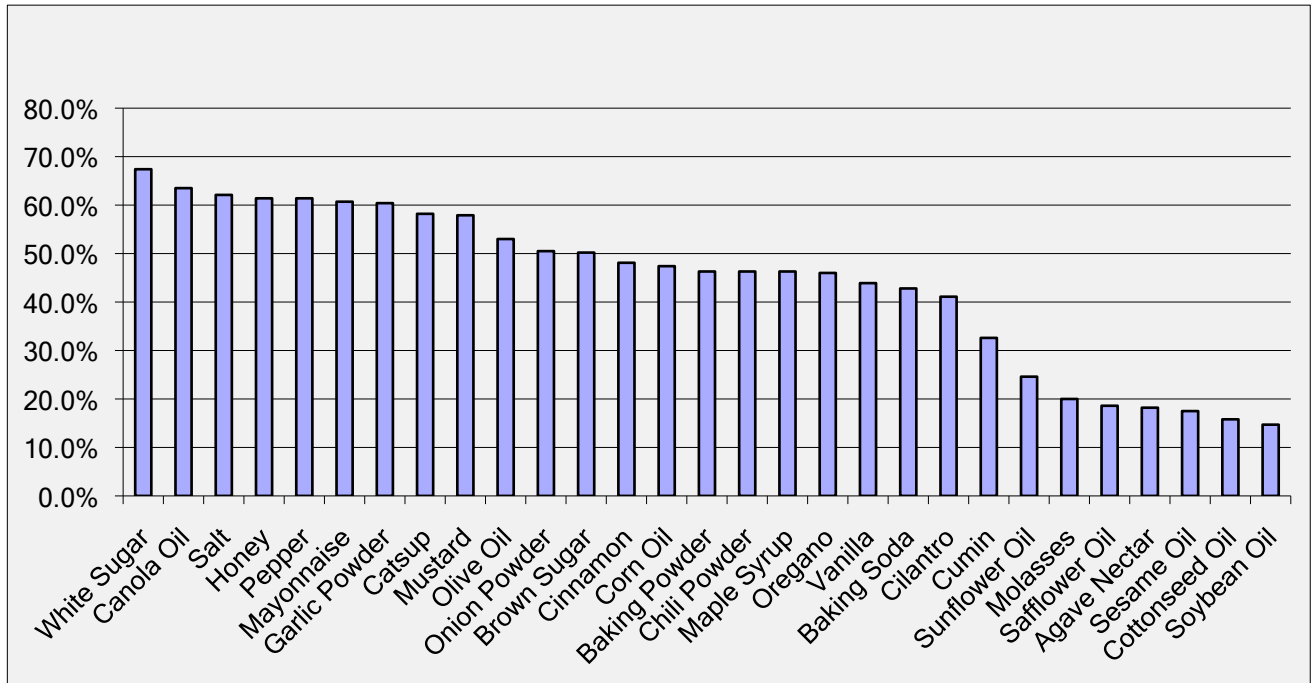
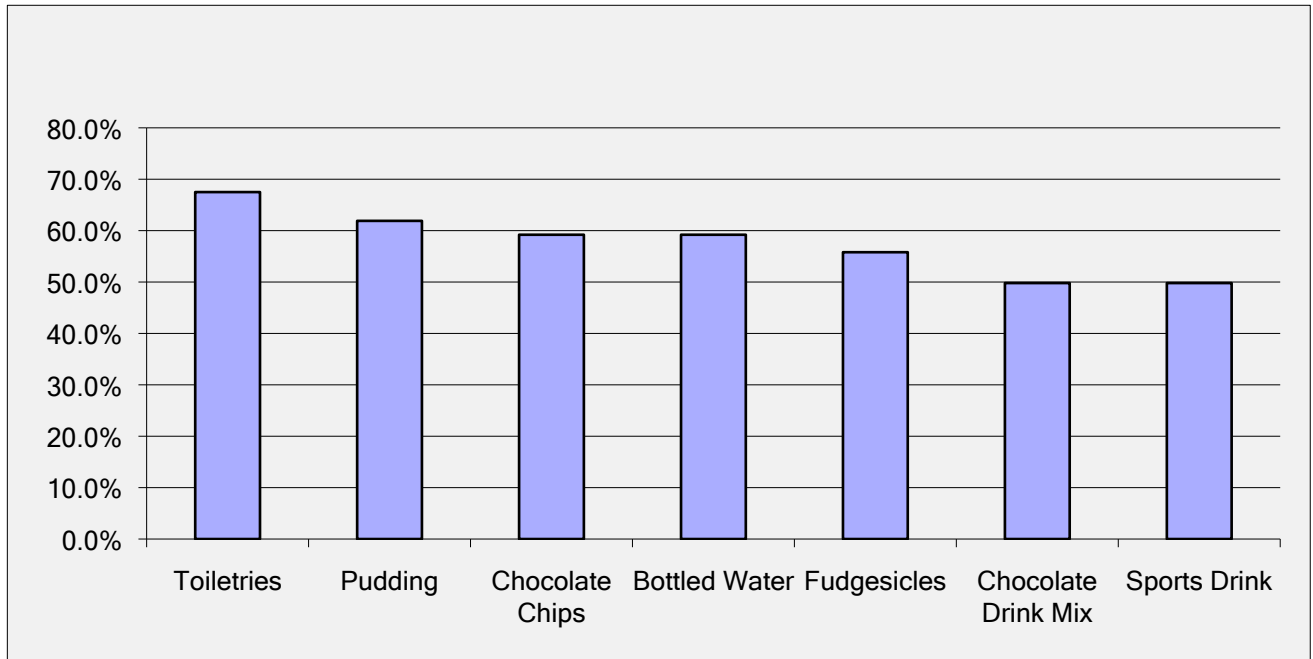


Chart N: Other



Additional Client Comments

The survey provided several opportunities for respondents to share additional comments. The list below highlights additional comments shared, in writing, by respondents:

- *This is the best place I've been.*
- *I enjoy the new change that was made to look like a market.*
- *I'm not a picky person, just grateful for each and every one of you for your time and effort in helping the needy. God bless!*
- *I'm proud to get what I receive.*
- *Occasionally long lines.*
- *Everything is great!*
- *What you offer is enough. Beggars can't be choosers. Thanks again. How about some lobster? Ha ha!*

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Table 1: Focus Groups

Type	Location	# of Participants	Gender
Hispanic Moms of Elementary Age Children	Community Ministry Church	6	6 Females
Adults Under Age 55	Community Ministry Food Bank	7	5 Females 2 Males
Seniors Over Age 55	Community Ministry Food Bank	10	6 Females 4 Males

Focus group questions generated information from respondents that complemented survey data. In particular, by asking probing questions during conversations with participants, more in depth information was shared. Tables 2-4 and the bulleted lists that follow illustrate key points made during the focus group discussions.

Table 2: Hispanic Mothers of Elementary Age Children

Food Preferences	Children's Food Preferences	Unmet Needs	Additional Services
Refried beans Fresh fruits and vegetable Chilis Pancake mix Rice Flour Milk Eggs Cheese	Macaroni and cheese Canned ravioli Pizza Spaghetti Popcorn	Diapers Baby wipes Formula Toiletries Laundry detergent Bus tokens Gas vouchers Juice Bottled water	Access to computers and the Internet (computer lab) Ability to search for jobs Tutoring program for kids Ability to use fax machine and copier (access to basic technology)

Answers to questions regarding cultural competency and service improvements are captured below.

Client Treatment and Cultural Competency

- It depends on who the receptionist is.
- I do like having volunteers there to help though.
- The wait isn't too long, which is nice.

Service Improvements

- Just treat everyone the same. We're all humans.
- Treat people like people. The way most people want to be treated (with dignity and respect).
- It would be nice to always have people available to translate.
- I really like the set up for kids with books, TV, etc. It keeps the kids occupied while I am getting my food.
- Having your materials and resources in both English and Spanish.
- Only distribute food that is not expired.

Additional thoughts and comments expressed during the focus group include:

- This is a good food bank.
- I appreciate seeing the director on the front lines and interacting with clients. It's obvious that she cares.
- The communication here is open. Keep this up! It makes a difference.
- Depending on who is volunteering, the atmosphere can vary from day-to-day.
- Thank you for taking the time to meet with us!

Table 3: Adults Under Age 55

Food Preferences	Family Member's' Food Preferences	Unmet Needs	Additional Services
Flour	Chicken	Toiletries	Help with paying utility bills (e.g., water) and rent
Sugar	Other meat	Toothpaste and toothbrushes	Used cars
Eggs	Desserts	Laundry detergent	Gas vouchers
Potatoes	Jello	Shampoo	Bus tokens
Fresh fruits and vegetables	Fruit	Paper plates	Food delivery to seniors with transportation issues (could be harder with self-shopping model)
Dried pinto beans	Yogurt	Toilet paper	Access to copy machine and fax
Rice		Paper towel	Computers
The basics		Eye drops	
		Cough and cold medicines	
		First Aid supplies (e.g., band-aids, hydrogen peroxide, alcohol)	

Answers to questions regarding cultural competency and service improvements are captured below.

Client Treatment and Cultural Competency

- Most of the time I am treated well.
- The people here are angels.
- The food bank manager is very helpful.
- I haven't experienced any grouchy people.
- Everyone is treated well.

Service Improvements

- Everything is fine.
- I feel respected here.
- We are treated better here than at some other food banks.

Additional thoughts and comments expressed during the focus group include:

- Always have a bilingual person onsite to translate.
- I really like the people who help us shop using the self-shopping model.
- I don't want to have to take food if I don't need it or like it (e.g., too much food for a senior couple to eat, powdered milk).
- Thank you for taking the time to meet with us!

Table 4: Seniors Over Age 55

Food Preferences	Family Members' Food Preferences	Unmet Needs	Additional Services
Lite yogurt Dairy products Fresh fruits and vegetables Butter Eggs Meat – sausage and bacon	Spaghetti Lasagna Ice Cream	Money to help with prescription drug expenses Gas vouchers (more than once a year) Bus tokens Personal care items and toiletries such as shampoo, toilet paper, lotion, deodorant, soap, laundry detergent, razors/blades and shaving cream	Make sure children are being supervised by their parents.

		Documentation papers for undocumented citizens	
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Answers to questions regarding cultural competency and service improvements are captured below.

Client Treatment and Cultural Competency

- Everyone is nice here.
- I always feel respected.
- You helped me out when another food bank messed up.
- Very strict on rules – exactly 30 days apart.

Additional thoughts and comments expressed during the focus group include:

- LEAP has been great!
- EOC has made a big difference for me. I can't believe the things I have received to improve my house!
- I'm okay with the amount of time I have to wait for food.

Initial Assumptions and Executive Responses

Twelve initial assumptions were made prior to the needs assessment process. For clarification, Community Ministry Food Bank executive staff provided responses to each assumption

Assumption 1: Individuals from minority populations prefer culturally familiar foods.

Executive Response: This assumption was based on informal conversations we have had with some of the younger Hispanic mothers in the community that prepare meals using traditional, cultural methods. Their food item needs were based on personal cooking styles. What we learned from the broader assessment is that, regardless of cooking styles, families still need basic staples such as milk, eggs, butter, cheese, fresh fruit and vegetables.

Assumption 2: The food bank's food purchasing process would be influenced by culturally familiar food preferences; therefore, the food bank would need to increase its supply of culturally familiar foods.

Executive Response: Based on this assumption, survey results would have indicated the need for more culturally sensitive foods that would impact the food purchasing process and inventory. The assessment results did not validate this assumption and strongly emphasized the need for more staple foods.

Assumption 3: Certain food items would be more popular with specific populations (e.g., pinto beans, rice, corn meal, chiles).

Executive Response: The food bank currently supplies many of the foods preferred by clients such as chilies, pinto beans, rice, etc. However, regardless of race, ethnicity or culture, all clients choose these foods.

Assumption 4: The composition of most households would include children.

Executive Response: The survey revealed that the food bank serves a significant number of households of elderly people—especially given their ability to visit the food bank on a monthly basis. Since most senior households do not typically include children, we believe that this may have influenced survey findings on household composition. Currently, however, there are many adult children with children of their own moving back in with their parents, and, in the future, may influence the composition of client households.

Assumption 5: The food bank culture is sensitive, respectful and responsive.

Executive Response: We are consciously committed to ensuring that the food bank’s culture is sensitive, respectful and responsive. The assessment results confirmed we have successfully established a positive food bank culture.

Assumption 6: Food bank staff and volunteers treat clients with dignity and respect.

Executive Response: We believe that our staff and volunteers treat clients with dignity and respect, but to have it confirmed by the survey results was encouraging. The culture and services provided by the food bank is strongly based on this assumption, and the survey findings support the assumption.

Assumption 7: Interactions with clients would need to be more culturally sensitive and competent.

Executive Response: Prior to conducting the needs assessment, the food bank staff and volunteers believed that their interaction with clients was culturally sensitive and competent. However, we assumed that we would need to implement new methods to provide more culturally sensitive and appropriate services—the survey results did not indicate this need.

Assumption 8: The food bank provides a good variety of food.

Executive Response: Survey respondents stated that the food bank currently offers wide variety of food. However, the majority of responses reveal that clients would prefer more produce and dairy products. While the variety of food offered is satisfactory, the clear need for more staple food items was evident.

Assumption 9: Toiletries and household goods would be in high demand.

Executive Response: Many survey respondents stated that they would like to see more toiletry items offered. These items are expensive to purchase, but the food bank will try to consistently provide basic supplies such as shampoo, toothbrushes, toothpaste, etc.

Assumption 10: Additional services (e.g., bus tokens, rental assistance, utilities support) would not be a frequent need.

Executive Response: Additional services, although desirable, did not seem to be a necessity. The food bank recognizes that many families come to the food bank with other needs and challenges. To help meet these additional needs, the food bank will continue to provide quality information and referral services.

Assumption 11: Many surveys would be completed in Spanish.

Executive Response: Due to the majority of clients identifying as Hispanic, we assumed there would be a greater need for surveys translated in Spanish. However, most surveys were completed in English. Therefore, it appears that much of the Hispanic population we serve is either bilingual and/or proficient in reading and writing in English.

Assumption 12: Some clients would refuse to participate in the survey.

Executive Response: We collected 356 surveys and had only a few individuals refuse to participate in the survey. The overall response to completing the survey was positive and enthusiastic.

Interpretation of Results and Findings

A number of significant findings and trends emerged from the needs assessment process:

Customer Service

1. The majority of clients have positive experiences when visiting the Community Ministry Food Bank.
2. The length of time clients wait for food is considered reasonable.
3. Clients perceive the food bank facility as clean and welcoming.

Food Received

4. The selection of food varies from visit to visit.
5. The quantity of food received is appropriate.

Food Preferences

6. The need for “staple” or basic food items such as eggs, milk, flour, sugar, etc. was a significant finding in both the surveys and focus groups.
7. Staple foods are more important to clients than culturally familiar foods.
8. Survey respondents and focus group participant stated that fresh fruits and vegetables should be provided at the food bank.
9. There were no significant differences in food preferences related to culture or age in responses among the specific populations who participated in the focus groups.

10. Culturally familiar or specific foods that made the survey's top ten lists include: flour tortillas, corn tortillas, corn meal, dried pinto beans, canned pinto beans, chiles, and Asian noodles.

Self-Choice Shopping Model

11. Survey respondents and focus group participants consistently provided strong commentary on the self-choice shopping model.
12. The self-choice shopping model gives clients more control over their food choices.
13. Clients appreciate the volunteers who help with self-choice shopping model.
14. Different findings may have resulted from the needs assessment process if the food bank had not yet transitioned to a self-choice shopping model due to increased self-worth and appreciation of new system).

Other

15. Seniors make up a significant percentage of food bank clients since 68% of survey respondents were age 55 or older.
16. The percentage of seniors completing the survey may have skewed the results of the number of children living in food bank client households since it can be assumed that most seniors are not living with children.
17. The "kids corner" is a great solution for parents when shopping.
18. Access to basic technology will help some clients (e.g., fax machine, photocopier, computers).

Recommendations

The recommendations specific to the operations and food purchasing strategies Community Ministry Food Bank include:

- Provide fresh fruits and vegetables and dairy products.
- Develop partnerships with providers of fresh fruits and vegetables and dairy products.
- Maintain a consistent supply of staple foods.
- Increase supply of toiletries and household items.
- Use the top ten lists of food items preferred to drive requests for food donations.
- Increase the number of food bank visits for individuals age 55 and under.

Recommendations that may impact operations and food purchasing strategies of all Colorado food banks include:

- Implement the self-choice shopping model at all food banks that includes the use of volunteer “shopper helpers.”
- Ensure that food bank facilities are clean and orderly.
- Create a family friendly environment and provide a place for children to reside while parents are shopping.
- Properly orient and provide continuous training of food bank volunteers to ensure clients are consistently treated with dignity and respect.
- Use data collected from the needs assessment to inform food bank strategic thinking and planning processes.
- Other Colorado food banks conduct a similar needs assessment process to establish a baseline of food and service delivery preferences in their communities.
- Develop a toolkit based on needs assessment results to help food banks make important changes in service delivery and food bank inventory.