

The Status of Low-Income Seniors in Eugene – Lane County, Oregon

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Introduction

Purpose: FOOD for Lane County's (FFLC) purpose for conducting this survey was to better understand the state of hunger and poverty among low-income seniors in Eugene, and to become educated about issues unique to seniors. In particular, we (FFLC) wanted to learn whether seniors are able to access food and food assistance resources. Many seniors are homebound or lack reliable transportation, and are often unable to get to food pantries or meal sites, even in emergencies. Specific knowledge of these issues will allow FFLC to intelligently address the problems, and perhaps craft programs specifically designed to provide aid to seniors who need it.

Specific Purposes of the Survey:

There are five specific points of knowledge that the survey was designed to address.

- How many seniors are eating regular, full, nutritious meals? This is a basic measure of hunger. We asked this question in several ways. First, we asked a question about ensuring enough nutritious food. Second, we asked two further questions about running out of food, and skipping meals.
- What resources are seniors using? We were interested in both governmental programs (like Food Stamps, TANF, etc.) and community-based programs (like emergency food pantries, dinner meal sites, etc.). Knowing this will allow us to direct our resources intelligently.
- How adequate is Food Stamp support, among seniors receiving those benefits?
- What are the barriers to food and poverty assistance that might exist for seniors? These barriers might include transportation problems, difficulty accepting help, disabilities, etc.
- What are some of the struggles and situations of low-income seniors, *told in their own words*?

Methodology

Method of Distribution: Every year the Campbell Senior Center in Eugene does a mailing to seniors who are eligible for Low Income Energy Assistance (LIEAP). The mailing includes a reapplication form for the LIEAP program. LIEAP is funded through the Oregon Department of Human Services, and provides assistance for energy bills to low-income people. This year, the Campbell Senior Center sent the mailing to 800 seniors. We included our survey in this mailing, and requested that the recipients return it with their LIEAP application form. The survey is included as Appendix B. The survey was sent out in early November, 2002. They were returned by mail over a span of about a month and a half, from November to December, 2002.

Survey Pool: The Campbell Senior Center sent mailings to every senior (60 years or older) in Eugene, Oregon, who participated in the LIEAP program during 2001-2002. In order to be eligible for LIEAP, you must fall below 60% of the Oregon median income. In 2001/2002, the cutoff points were:

Size of Household	Monthly Income	Annual Income	Percentage of the Federal Poverty Line
1	\$1,402	\$16,820	190%
2	\$1,833	\$21,995	184%
3	\$2,264	\$27,170	181%
4	\$2,695	\$32,345	179%
5	\$3,127	\$37,521	177%

The mailings did not go to *every* low-income senior in Eugene: there are 3736 seniors over the age of 65 who fall below 185% of the poverty line, according to the 1999 US Census. It did, however, go to a sampling of those seniors: 21.41%. 391 seniors returned their surveys: a response rate of 48.9%. These responses represent 10.47% of all seniors in Eugene who fall below approximately 185% of the poverty line.

Results and Data

There were 391 surveys returned, which represents 48.88% of the 800 surveys distributed.

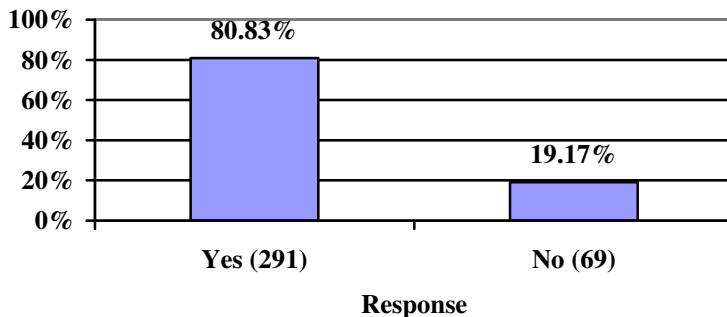
Format used: The x-axis records the possible responses to each survey question. After each response, the number of respondents who chose that answer is listed, in parentheses. The y-axis records the *percentage* of respondents who chose each answer. Not all percentages are calculated from the total number of respondents (391). Many percentages are calculated from the number of respondents to a particular *question*.

1. Are you always able to ensure you get enough nutritious food?

Question 1 was designed to determine the proportion of low-income seniors who were able to get enough nutritious food.

Calculated from the 360 responses to this question.

Chart 1: Enough Nutritious Food



In retrospect, asking this question at the beginning of the survey may have been too straightforward: it is a sensitive question, and seniors may not have been willing to reveal such sensitive information straightaway. Because of this, the results from this question may be somewhat skewed.

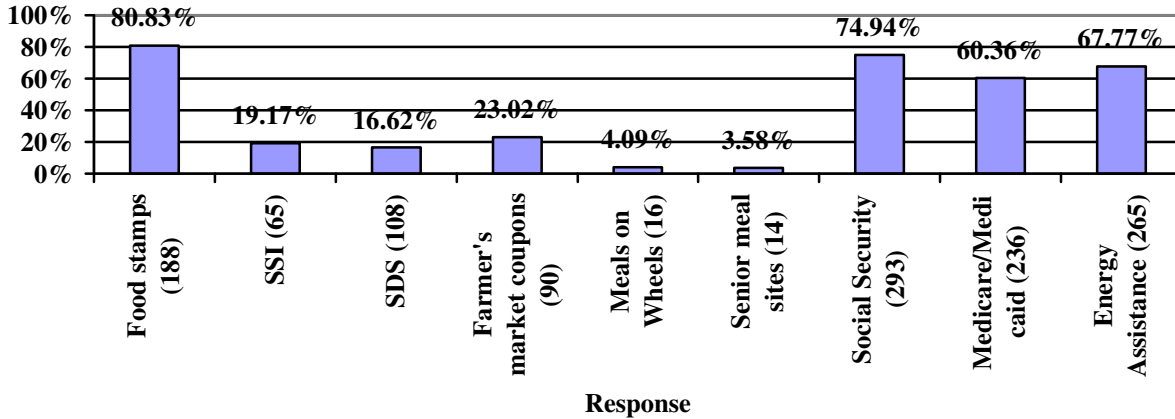
In order to see that the question produced skewed results, we can look at the respondents who answered “Yes”, and then see what they answered for question 7 (which asks a similar question). If anyone who answered “Yes” to this question also answered “Yes” to question 7, we will know that the answers to question 1 may have been not totally honest. In fact, of the 290 seniors who only answered “Yes” to question 1 (one senior answered both “Yes” and “No”), nine also answered “Yes” to question 7. There is no way to answer “Yes” to both questions, realistically. This suggests that the data in question 1 is misleading. Questions 6 and 7 (which are both similar to question 1) will be more accurate measures of hunger and food security.

2. Do you participate in any of the following programs? Check all that apply:

Question 2 was designed to find out what *governmental* resources low-income seniors use. There are many resources available to seniors, and it will be helpful to know which are being utilized to their fullest, and which are underutilized.

Calculated from the 391 responses total.

Chart 2: Governmental Resources Utilized



Food stamps, Social Security, Medicare/Medicaid, and Energy Assistance are the four most utilized governmental programs among the nine possibilities offered by the survey. It makes sense that many of these seniors receive Energy Assistance, because these surveys were distributed to seniors along with the Energy Assistance application, and the seniors who filled the survey out were already involved, in some way, with the Energy Assistance program.

It is striking to see how few seniors participated in the other five programs: Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Senior and Disabled Services (SDS), Senior Farmer's Market Coupons, Meals on Wheels, and the Senior Nutrition Meal Sites. This makes sense, perhaps, for SSI, which requires certain eligibility criteria that many low-income seniors may not meet. It also makes sense for the Senior Farmer's Market Coupons, which is a relatively new program, and was not able to provide coupons to all eligible and interested seniors. Hopefully in coming years the budget for this program will increase and the program will be able to accommodate all interested eligible seniors.

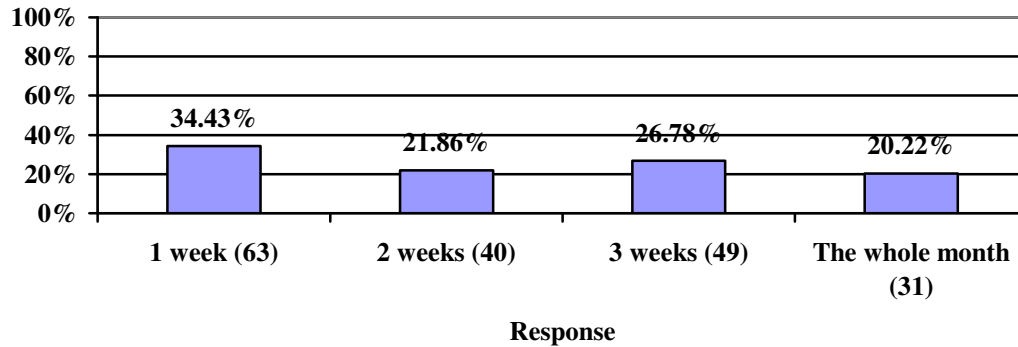
However, it seems that Meals on Wheels and the Senior Meal Sites are two programs that are particularly underutilized. Only 4% of the seniors surveyed received support from Meals on Wheels, and even fewer seniors, 3.5%, went to Senior Nutrition Meal Sites. Those two numbers contrast starkly with the 19% of seniors who are unable to ensure full, nutritious meals (from question 1). It is also particularly surprising that those two particular programs are underutilized, because they are both meant to directly address *hunger*. *Why* are these programs underutilized? Question 5 will help us determine this.

3a. If you receive Food Stamps, how long do they last, on average?

Questions 3a and 3b are designed to find out how sufficiently Food Stamps meet the needs of low-income seniors. By asking how much more seniors would need in Food Stamps, it is also designed to get an idea of how far the program is from being *able* to meet that need.

Calculated from the 183 responses to this question. There were 188 people on food stamps.

Chart 3: How Long Food Stamps Last



Only 20% of respondents who receive food stamps report that the benefits last the entire month. Indeed, the *majority* (55%) of respondents run out of food stamps within the first two weeks of the month. Although 34% of respondents (a plurality of respondents) said that they run out of stamps in the first week, many of those same respondents wrote on their surveys that they only received \$10 each month, and that amount was inadequate – those respondents often wrote in “1 day” as an answer to this question. The fact that so many seniors receive the minimum benefits is troubling, and might be one reason why senior food stamp participation rates lag behind that nation average. I will discuss this further in the Discussion section.

3b. How much more in Food Stamps would you need each month?

One hundred and five seniors responded to this question. This represented 55.85% of all respondents who receive Food Stamps. The average of those responses was \$54.50. The responses ranged from \$10 to \$200.

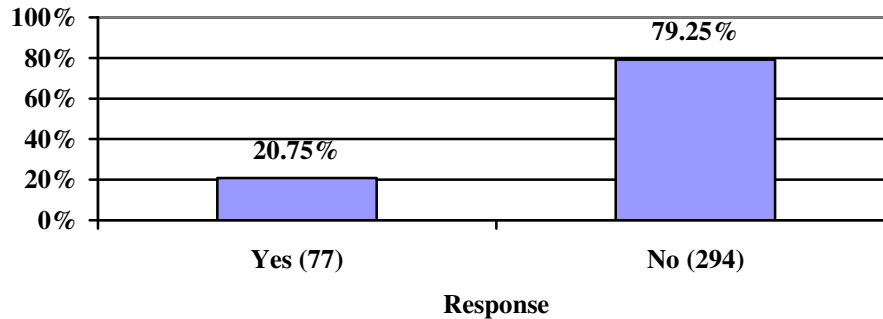
The percentage of respondents to this question is roughly equivalent to the percentage of food stamp respondents who ran out of food stamps after two weeks. It is clear from this data that the food stamp benefits that seniors receive are, to a large extent, inadequate. This may be related to the fact that many seniors receive the minimum \$10. I will discuss this fact in the discussion.

4a. In the past 12 months, have you received emergency food assistance? (i.e., got a food box or ate at a meal site (soup kitchen), etc.)

Questions 4a and 4b are designed to see what community-based services low-income seniors utilized over the previous 12 months.

Calculated from the 191 responses to this question.

Chart 4: Emergency Food Assistance Received

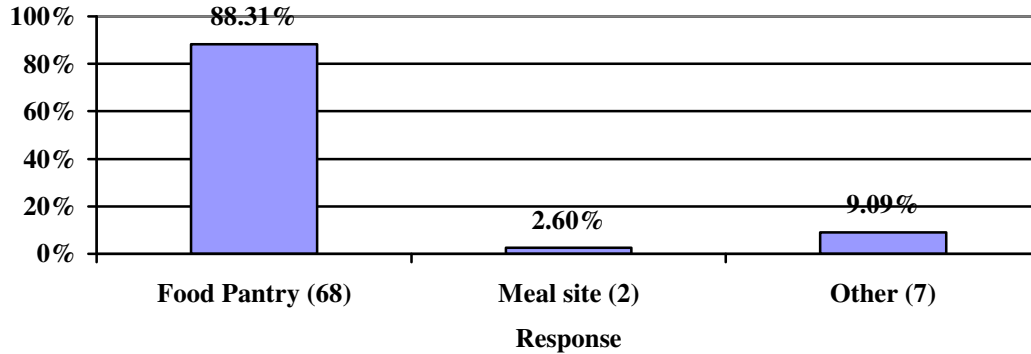


It is troubling that the number of seniors who answered “Yes” to this question is so low. 21% itself is not an unreasonable percentage, but it is when compared to the percentage of seniors who are running out of food sometime during each month: 43% (from question 6). This means that at least half of the seniors who are running out of food at some point during each month are *not* getting help from food pantries, or meal sites.

4b. If yes, where did you go for emergency food?

Here are two graphs, the first calculated from the 77 respondents who checked that they had received some food assistance, and the second calculated from all 391 respondents.

Chart 5: Types Of Emergency Food Assistance Received, Of People Receiving Assistance



Calculated from all 391 responses:

Chart 6: Types Of Emergency Food Assistance Received, Of All Respondents



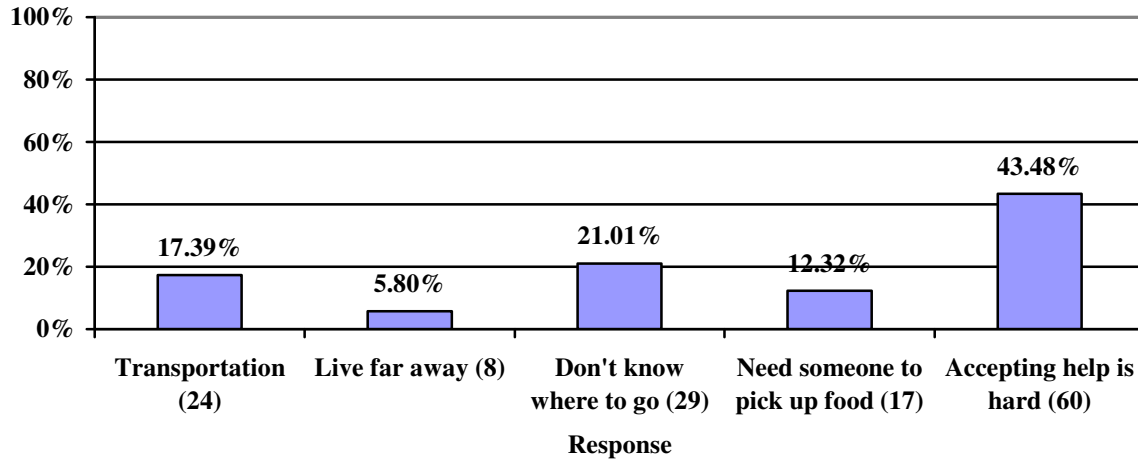
It is clear seniors who received community-based food assistance received that assistance primarily from Emergency Food Pantries. Almost no one went to a meal site. This may be because seniors feel that going to a meal site is too embarrassing, too low. We know from question 5 (below) that the stigma factor played an important role in seniors' decisions to get food assistance.

5. If you needed emergency food assistance over the past 12 months, but were unable to obtain it, please help us understand why. Check all that apply:

Question 5 is designed to determine why seniors are unable to access food assistance, if they need it. The question identifies *hurdles* to getting emergency food assistance.

Out of the 138 responses to this question.

Chart 7: Reasons For Not Getting Help



This was perhaps the most surprising of all the results of the survey. 43% of seniors checked the box marked: “Accepting help is hard for me” – and many seniors checked *only* that box, which suggests that the stigma attached with food assistance was the primary, powerful reason why many seniors went hungry.

The second highest reason seniors gave for not getting food assistance was lack of knowledge about where to go to *get* the food assistance. This seems like a barrier that could be overcome with informational flyers, mailings, and posters.

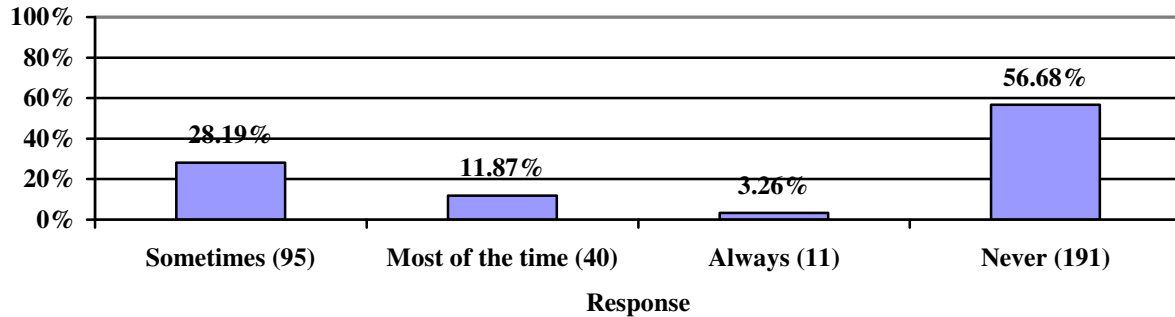
The third and fourth reasons seniors gave both concerned transportation and not being able to get to the available assistance. Although these percentages are relatively high, they don’t come close to the effect that stigma and embarrassment has. However, it is somewhat puzzling that almost 20% of these seniors don’t get assistance because of transportation issues, while at the same time so few seniors use Meals on Wheels, the food program that delivers to low-income seniors. If transportation is an issue, why don’t more seniors take advantage of this service? I will address this in the discussion.

6. How often do you run out of food before the end of the month?

Questions 6 and 7 are similar to question 1, but are more detailed. They also came later in the survey, so respondents may have felt more comfortable by then, and more willing to answer truthfully to sensitive questions.

Calculated from the 337 responses to this question.

Chart 8: Running Out Of Food



Only 57% of the seniors said that they never run out food before the end of the month. This leaves 43% of seniors who run out of food at some point before the end of the month – a huge percentage. However, this doesn’t necessarily mean that 43% of seniors are actually going hungry – seniors who run out of food might then be borrowing from friends, or getting help from family, or even getting food assistance from a food pantry. If a senior is running out of food “always” or “most of the time”, there may be more serious hunger present.

This question essentially asks about food insecurity (although not necessarily food insecurity with hunger). If someone is running out of food unexpectedly, then he or she is most likely food insecure, because that is exactly what food insecurity is: having an uncertain or limited availability of necessary food and proper nourishment.

How can we find a number roughly equivalent to the number of seniors who are food insecure without hunger? We must first identify all seniors who are food insecure, who are *not* hungry. Since answering “Yes” to question 7 indicates food insecurity *with* hunger (explained below), we can count up the number of seniors who answered either “Sometimes”, “Most of the time”, or “Always” to question 6, but who *also* answered “No” to question 7. It turns out that there are 92 seniors who responded in this way. The percentage that we are looking for, then, is the proportion of 92 food insecure seniors without hunger, out of the original 337 seniors who responded to this question: 27.30%. Here is a table that records food insecurity without hunger over a variety of populations.

<u>Food insecurity without hunger</u>	<u>percentage</u>
National, all households	7.4%
National, household with seniors living alone	4.1%
National, households below 185% of poverty	18.9%
Oregon, all households	13.7%
Oregon, households below 185% of poverty	35.2%
<u>Eugene, Oregon, seniors below 185% of poverty</u>	<u>27.3%</u>

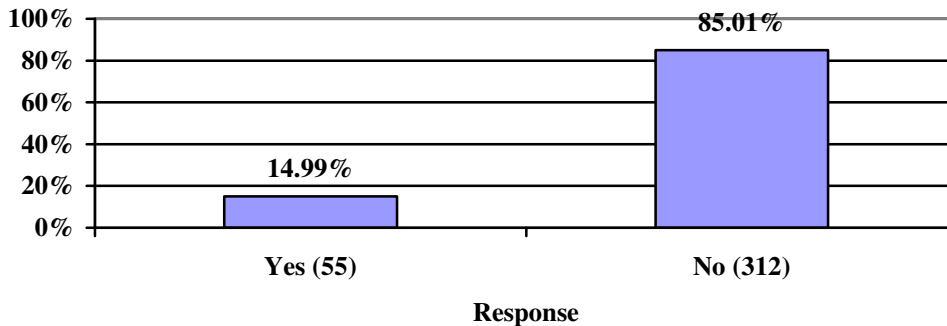
It seems that low-income seniors in Eugene have slightly lower rates of food insecurity without hunger than other low-income households throughout Oregon. I will discuss this later, in the discussion.

It is important to recognize that although answering “Sometimes”, “Most of the time”, or “Always” to this question *suggests* food insecurity, it is not the same question that the Census uses to measure food insecurity. In fact, it is a somewhat more lenient measure. The Census takes in account ability to afford balanced and nutritionally appropriate meals, as well as fear of running out of food, in determining food insecurity. We never asked seniors about these issues. Because of this, the percentage that we obtained may be low. In reality, the rate of food insecurity without hunger may be higher than we found.

7. In the past 12 months, did you or anyone else in your household ever have to cut or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

Calculated from the 367 responses to this question.

Chart 9: Skipping meals



This question is vital because it measures food insecurity *with* hunger. If a senior is literally skipping a meal, or cutting the size of a meal, he or she will be hungry. In fact, this question is one of the questions used by the U.S. Census to determine food insecurity with hunger. It is shocking to see that seniors in Eugene, who fall below approximately 185% of the poverty line, are food insecure with hunger 15% of the time. This is far above the national average, even for the appropriate income level. Here is a table that records food insecurity with hunger, over a variety of populations.

<u>Food insecurity with hunger</u>	<u>percentage</u>
National, all households	3.3%
National, household with seniors living alone	2.0%
National, households below 185% of poverty	8.9%
Oregon, all households	5.8%
Oregon, households below 185% of poverty	13.3%
<u>Eugene, Oregon, seniors below 185% of poverty</u>	<u>14.99%</u>

The fact that the surveyed seniors have a slightly higher rate of food insecurity with hunger than even low-income households in Oregon suggests something important about what it means to be a low-income *senior*. I will discuss this further in the discussion.

8. What is the hardest part about making sure you get enough nutritious food?

There were a wide variety of responses to this question. These responses are listed at the end of this report, as Appendix A.

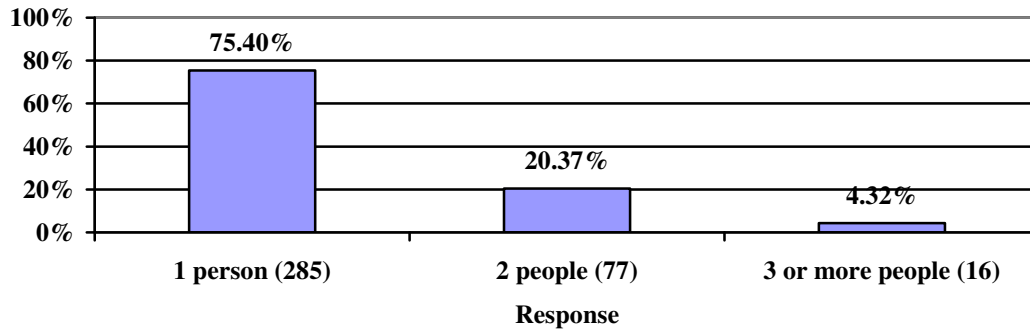
9. Please share any ideas you have that will help improve your access to food:

There were a wide variety of responses to this question also. These responses are listed at the end of this report, as Appendix A.

10. Please check the number of people in your household:

Out of the 367 responses to this question.

Chart 10: How Many People In The Household



Three quarters of the seniors surveyed lived alone. One fifth lived with one other person, perhaps a spouse or friend. The rest lived with two or more other people, possibly grandchildren, siblings, extended family, etc.

Discussion

Food Security

There are two important new food security numbers in this report. The first is that 15% of low-income seniors in Eugene are food insecure with hunger. The second is that 27% of low-income seniors in Eugene are food insecure without hunger. Compared to food insecurity rates in Oregon among households with comparable income data (households that fall below 185% of the poverty line), seniors have *higher* food insecurity rates with hunger, but *lower* food insecurity rates without hunger. These differences are indicative of issues that are specific to seniors.

It is first important to note that our measuring system for food insecurity without hunger is very conservative. It only measures the frequency with which seniors run out of food. It does not take into account seniors who are on the verge of running out of food: seniors who either fear running out of food, or who don't know where their next meal will come from, but who still manage to eat. This shortcoming in our measurement scale means that the food insecurity without hunger rate that we found is probably lower than what really exists.

The fact that low-income seniors in Eugene have a lower rate of food insecurity without hunger than other low-income Oregon households makes sense. Seniors generally have stable social security incomes, have retirement funds, some savings, and sometimes own their own homes. They have fewer general expenses than non-elderly households, because their children have already left the home. Seniors are also subject to fewer sudden drops in income more than non-senior households. Often, poverty is caused by a dramatic and sometimes sudden shift in family composition (a divorce, the birth of a child, the loss of a job, etc.), and seniors are generally insulated from these potential income influences. Although seniors do have a higher risk of becoming sick, and thus incurring high medical costs, this seems to be less of a factor for

food insecurity without hunger than other major income variation. However, I think that high medical and prescription drug costs play a significant role in forcing the shift from food insecurity *without* hunger to food insecurity *with* hunger.

Low-income seniors in Eugene have a higher rate of food insecurity with hunger than other low-income Oregon households. This may be explainable given the other information we discovered in this study. Although many low-income seniors access some federal programs like Social Security and Food Stamps, most do not take advantage of other programs, like food pantries, the Senior Nutrition Meal Sites, and Meals on Wheels. Many seniors said that the reason for this was that they are uncomfortable asking for and accepting help.

It appears that once seniors get to the point that they are hungry, they are not able to escape that state by utilizing resources that are available to them. Of low-income seniors who reported that they were food insecure *with* hunger (by answering “Yes” to question 8) – seniors who are literally cutting or skipping meals – only 45.45% had been to a food pantry. These are seniors who are not only eligible for food boxes, but who also *desperately need* that assistance. Even fewer of these seniors are going to general meal sites (3.63%), and even *fewer* are going to Senior Nutrition Meal Sites (1.8%), which are meal sites set up specifically for seniors.

The reasons that seniors have given for *not* utilizing needed resources include reluctance to ask for help, lack of transportation, and lack of knowledge about the resources. Because of these reasons, seniors who are on the borderline between food insecurity without hunger and food insecurity with hunger may have more trouble avoiding hunger than other populations. This results in high rates of hunger for seniors.

Resources

Some of the most surprising results of this study were the responses to the questions about the various resources that low-income seniors took advantage of. Many resources, like Food Stamps and Social Security, were well-utilized by the seniors we surveyed. However, other potential resources were dramatically underutilized.

Five governmental programs were utilized by under twenty-five percent of the seniors who responded. Three of those programs – the Senior Farmer’s Market Coupons, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and the Senior and Disabled Services Division – had low participation rates for acceptable reasons. The Senior Farmer’s Market Coupon program only recently started, and only had enough funding for a limited number of coupons. The lack of participation was not for lack of interest, just lack of funding. Hopefully next year the program will expand and allow more seniors to participate. SSI is a program specifically targeted at the disabled, and the truly disadvantaged. Low participation in this program is a factor of strict eligibility requirements, rather than low interest. The Senior and Disabled Services Division is a similar issue. As a program, SDSD offers specific financial support for assisted living help, nursing home assistance, and emergency prescription drug coverage. Again, these are specific services, and not applicable to every senior, which explains the somewhat low participation rates.

Two other governmentally funded programs – the Meals on Wheels program and the Senior Nutrition Meal Sites – have surprisingly low participation rates among low-income seniors in Eugene. The Meals on Wheels program in Lane County is limited in its scope, and is only able to serve a small minority of eligible seniors. This does not nearly meet the need. There are many seniors on the waiting list for the Meals on Wheels service.

The Senior Nutrition Meal Sites have low participation rates for a few reasons. First, because of the stigma associated with accepting help, many seniors may be unwilling to go to

meal sites at all. Even community-based meal sites had very low participation rates among seniors. Second, each meal site requests a three dollar donation, and these donation requests are mandated by federal law. The donation is entirely voluntary, but there is evidence to suggest that many seniors feel obligated to make a donation. Since so many seniors do not ask for help because they are embarrassed, it would not be unrealistic to assume that at the Senior Nutrition Meal Sites seniors may feel obligated to pay the three dollars. Additionally, there is anecdotal evidence that in many of these meal sites seniors are made to feel that the donation is *not*, in fact, voluntary. These factors may result in a poor attendance at these sites (only 4% of low-income seniors in Eugene attend the sites, despite the prevalence of hunger). The Senior Meals Sites are in a somewhat schizophrenic position, however. On the one hand, 25% of their funding comes from these three dollar donations. On the other hand, encouraging the donation may discourage senior participation. The donation itself is not a flawed idea. Combined with the heightened pride unique to many seniors, however, it may discourage clients more than it intends to. I will discuss this later.

Community resources were also strikingly underutilized. Less than one percent of low-income seniors in Eugene ever attended a community meal site. Because they are so public and communal, meal sites particularly may play into many seniors' reluctance to ask and accept help.

Emergency food pantries were utilized by 17% of low-income seniors. This number is somewhat low, given that 43% of seniors report running out of food sometime during the month. Furthermore, only 45% of *hungry* seniors went to a food pantry, which means that over half of the hungry seniors in Eugene are getting no community assistance. We have to wonder, what is the other 55% of hungry seniors *doing* to get food? Are they getting help from friends or family? Or are they going hungry in their homes?

Suggestions

In this section I will lay out a few suggestions that can help ameliorate the situations of low-income seniors. As with most serious problems, solutions must come from all levels of society. My suggestions will range from personal introspection, to community involvement, to statewide policy changes, to federal policy changes.

The number one reason why low-income seniors did not get assistance, even if they needed it, was that they were uncomfortable asking for help. This is an incredibly difficult problem to deal with, because the causes of shame and stigma are deeply ingrained within our society. The embarrassment of poverty does not stem from any group of people in particular. Rather, it comes from the community at large. It is sobering to be faced so clearly with the tangible effects of this stigma. It seems that the stigma affects seniors more than many other groups (we know this because of other studies done on non-senior populations, and those populations did not find it as difficult to ask for help). Seniors may have even lived through the depression, and have witnessed tough times, but have also witnessed a triumph over those tough times. Perhaps they feel that they should be able to triumph over these tough times, but it is a very different world now. It is increasingly difficult to escape poverty in our world, and no one can be expected to do it without help.

It will take re-examination of our attitudes towards poverty on both a personal and a community-wide level in order to begin to reduce the shame that is currently associated with being poor. We must examine our own beliefs about work ethics and morality: what does it mean to “be able” to work? We must learn to be more tolerant of different life situations, and become far more empathetic and compassionate as a community.

One way to bridge the disconnect between low-income seniors and the rest of the community is to encourage volunteers to spend time at senior centers, or with other homebound seniors. Volunteers can encourage seniors to get assistance if they need it.

Senior center staff can also encourage their clients to ask for assistance if they need it. Senior centers are in unique positions, because they come into contact with many seniors who do not otherwise go out into the public. Senior centers are social outlets for seniors who might not otherwise have any social interaction. Their staffs are able to engage with seniors and encourage them to get assistance in an environment that is comfortable to their clients.

Another community based suggestion is the development of a real delivery system for food boxes. Meals on Wheels provides a small number of cooked meals to homebound seniors, which is wonderful, but Meals on Wheels is severely limited by its funding. Very few seniors can take advantage of this program, and even the seniors who do take advantage of it receive only one meal, not a 3-5 day food supply. Furthermore, very few seniors who we surveyed in this study actually took advantage of this program (4%), far fewer than reported skipping meals (15%), and even far fewer than reported that transportation was one reason that they were unable to get food assistance (17%). Since Meals on Wheels does not, by itself, satisfy the apparent need, a food box delivery system could make a substantial impact on hunger among seniors.

There are difficulties in starting a food box delivery service. First, who would deliver the boxes? Second, where will the boxes come from? Third, how can we identify seniors who truly need delivery, as opposed to seniors who would simply rather not pick up the box themselves? Finally, it seems that many of the seniors who have the greatest need for a food box delivery are also the seniors who have little contact with the outside world. How are we to find those seniors, and deliver food to them?

The easiest option would be to engage a group of volunteers, be they associated with the food bank or not, and use those volunteers to coordinate the food box delivery program. These volunteers would work with the food bank and gather names of hungry seniors who call in, asking for food. They could use senior centers to identify low-income seniors who are in need of regular or occasional food box deliveries. They could also use the waiting list for Meals on Wheels and identify eligible, homebound seniors that way. Once a list of eligible, homebound seniors in need is created, there would still be various logistics to work out. For example, many seniors have dietary restrictions. The volunteers would need to know those restrictions (along with preferred food items) in order to provide food boxes to the seniors. Once these logistics are established, the volunteers can start delivering food boxes regularly. It would be too difficult to start an entirely new pantry to meet the needs of these seniors, and it makes more sense to use the existing pantries to obtain the food. Since the Lane County food pantry network is based on a geographical eligibility system, where you are required to use the food pantry that is assigned to the area in which you live, it would be necessary to determine the assigned food pantries of each of the seniors in the program. We could distribute the impact of providing food for the seniors over all of the food pantries by getting food for each senior from the pantry to which he or she is each assigned. This would avoid placing a large burden on any one of the pantries individually. Once the pantry assignments and the dietary preferences are set, the program would be ready to proceed.

On a statewide level, Oregon has just enacted major cuts to the Senior and Disabled Services Division of state government. These cuts will have a significant impact on low-income seniors. First, many low-income seniors will lose emergency prescription drug coverage. Second, many seniors who depend on assistance to pay for a caregiver to assist them in their

homes will lose funding for that caregiver. This means that many seniors who were previously able to live independently, at home, will now be forced to move in with family, or into an assisted living home, if they can afford it. Seniors who received these benefits have a range of disabilities, from needing assistance with basic movement to needing assistance with bathing and toileting. Third, many seniors will lose financial assistance to pay for nursing homes. If the nursing homes cannot operate without this assistance, they will be forced to discharge the seniors, who may have nowhere else to go. Clearly, these cuts will leave many seniors in even greater need. The Oregon legislature must try to make up for these cuts, by providing alternate funding for low-income seniors and seniors with disabilities.

On a national level, I have three suggestions about how to decrease hunger among seniors. First, provide adequate and reliable prescription drug coverage to all low-income seniors. Prescription drugs are not currently covered under Medicare, so seniors are left to pay for essential but horribly expensive medications on their fixed incomes. For low-income seniors, these prescription drug payments could easily come at the expense of basic food needs.

Second, raise the minimum monthly Food Stamp benefit from ten dollars to twenty-five dollars. For policy reasons, this must be done on a federal level, not on a statewide level. Because of their fixed incomes, many seniors (44%) are only eligible for the inadequate ten dollar minimum. This low amount, combined with the stigma of asking for help, discourages many seniors from applying for Food Stamps at all. In fact, the Food Stamps participation rates among eligible seniors are lower than participation rates of other populations. If seniors instead received a more meaningful twenty-five dollar benefit, they would be more willing to apply. Additionally, the extra money would help seniors who already receive Food Stamps make it through the month.

Third, the Senior Nutrition Meal Site program should be changed so that the clients are not asked to give a voluntary donation of three dollars. The Senior Nutrition Meal Site program provides meal sites specifically for low-income seniors. This is a wonderful idea, because the program provides food to seniors who are in need. However, as mentioned above, the requested donation may be discouraging seniors from attending the meal site. Senior Nutrition Meal Sites should strike the three dollar donation. This would encourage attendance at a program that is already intended to be free.

Conclusion

Hunger has been a problem for Oregon for at least the last eight years, when it has been ranked first in hunger by the United States Department of Agriculture. There are many reasons why this is the case: high unemployment, a high percentage of seasonal employment, a crumbling timber industry, and the difficulty in reaching rural communities in such a large state. Hunger in Oregon will continue to be a problem until the Oregon legislature seriously addresses it and enacts policies designed to eliminate it.

Within Oregon, there are specific populations who are at high risk of hunger. Seniors, children, and the disabled are three examples. This study shows that hunger among seniors is particularly acute. This is partially because of economic issues, like fixed incomes and high prescription drug costs, but also because of social issues, like difficulty in asking for help, transportation problem, and

Hunger among seniors runs the dangerous risk of being easily overlooked. Hungry seniors are not in your face; they are not homeless or out on the streets. They are quietly facing

rising medical costs, and proudly trying to make ends meet. They have worked all their lives contributing to our community. They now need our support more than ever.

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Appendix A

Responses to questions 8 and 9

8. What is the hardest part about making sure you get enough nutritious food?

9. Please share any ideas you have that will help improve your access to food:

We combined the answers to these questions, because often a response to question 8 was more appropriate for question 9, or vice versa.

<u>Summary of free responses:</u>	<u>percentage</u>
Lack of money or basic income	52.6%
Difficult to prepare food and afford proper nutrition	18.4%
Difficult to find transportation to get food or food assistance	11.0%
Difficult to be low-income and accept help	1.8%
Don't know where to go to get food assistance	1.3%
Other varied topics	14.9%

Money/Income:

120 responses, or 52.63% of all responses.

Trying to fix food for my husband and grandson that they will eat. And knowing it is not what they should have. I go without so they can have food

Money to buy food. Also nutritious programs

Having enough money AND the stamina to cook.

being able to pay for it

knowing where to go for lowest prices to make my money stretch farther

a correlation between your money and cost

Tiypeq purchasing amt \$

Watching carefully for sales and my budget

too expensive, mac and cheese and spag is cheaper

Price of organic foods

making last all mo.

The cost of the food. \$65.00 doesn't last very long.

Paying for meals

Prices of some fruit and vegetables too high

cost of food

The high prices of food. Especially fruit

Not enough money in my budget. There are always a problem with the city transportation, stores moved away is one problem and also the city transportation has moved out of distance.

Not enough Food Stamps or Money

cost of food

If when you do get to the store and you see some really good bargains, you would have enough food stamps to buy in advance in order to have for the future needs.

stretching the food stamps and AFS grant to feed an ever-hungry teenager healthy meals. Cost of food is bad!

food is so expensive, well everything else is, also.

Making my S.S. last through the whole month.

Having enough \$

Not having the money (or food stamps) available to shop the sales and get enough to last till the next time that item is at a good price again. Our budget is so tight we shop the sales and use coupons and do all we can to get the most for our money but sometimes it is just not enough. The 30.00 food stamps we now get is a great help!
 The high prices of Fresh Produce.
 There is no hardest part - the food stamps just run out and income too low to make up.
 The prices at grocery store
 Health is important; organic, vegetarian food is more expensive
 good nutritious food too expensive
 Having money to purchase it
 Cost - not enough money.
 lack of funds
 The expense of food. Paying car insurance, fire insurance, Loans on the home
 Making for sure I can afford fresh fruit and milk as they are very expensive at times.
 Low income
 Having enough money to get what I need
 The high price of food in stores
 Having to use a credit card
 Planning ahead - fresh fruit and vegetables are expensive. I don't drive, so I need to walk to stores for sales (the exercise is good, but I couldn't do it if I had small children)
 Making effort to budget and spend time - watching coupons - canning - watching ad specials - cutting to necessary living - simple things of life.
 last two weeks of month
 running out of things
 having it on hand
 Stretching my money through the end of the month
 Smart buying
 have many medications to buy
 Sometimes - my finances run out - but I get through it.
 increase food stamp ratio to income so people like me can afford dental work - eye glasses and medical attention It's a crime the way seniors are neglected after paying years of taxes
 coupons - 2 for 1's are good. Be careful shopping and freeze leftovers.
 more money
 Buy items that are on sale
 More in food stamps, for more fresh fruit and vegetables
 e.a. I have to spend some of this for food to get by.
 The best thing for me is a job. There is no way that I can survive on what little social security income and pay for the medical needs. I have other needs that a woman needs for the care of her health such as toiletries, skin care, haircare.
 If I could afford it.
 Need more fiber and so much I am allergic to. I get \$345.00 for room and board elec for discount for seniors at the market
 Better nutrition in boxes we get once in a while or more. Food stamps at end of month. \$5 each isn't enough after we pay bills.
 Red Apple will deliver my groceries if I spend more than \$50 - don't always have that.
 More in Food Stamps, \$10.00 in Food Stamps NOW
 I don't know, more food stamps, perhaps.
 An increase in food stamps would make it possible to shop once a month
 I try very hard to be a good shopper by checking grocery add and fresh veg places.
 Food prices need to come down
 More senior farmers coupons
 I wish there were coupons for locally grown organic produce (to be used at Markets like Kiva, Sundance) all year long. I don't think Food Stamps should be good for candy, gum, soda pop, chips, or other junk food.
 I would like to see increase in food stamps
 I don't know if I qualify for food assistance and have never tried to get help. I could use some assistance near the end of the month for food, if I qualify.
 More stamps

Making my S.S. last through the whole month.
 dollars for meat
 Shopping and cooking
 the money
 Planning, so that the stamps and the month come out even
 Unable to afford meats, they are so expensive!
 having money to buy it
 Watching the prices, what they are and if I can afford fresh fruit and veg
 high prices
 not a nuff money
 so much goes out for gas lights phone and medicine etc. Over 200.00 some in winter, 194 last Feb.
 Keeping enough money back for food
 money
 having the financing to buy it
 more food stamps
 having enough money to buy food. Husband 100% disabled, I have medical problems, I am going for surgery
 not enough money
 food too costly
 finding everything on sale
 I have twenty-one hundred dollars of debt for dentures/dental, eyeglasses, items that medicare/medicaid doesn't
 cover, plus prescriptions
 Being careful if I buy the things I can stretch
 meat and fresh vegt are too expensive
 Having enough cash to get it
 Please see question 1, not enough money (or food stamps) for food also I am a notch baby - I get less income than
 others.
 Cost
 not enough money - food stamp allowance. I'm also diabetic too
 Trying to make money last until next check
 Finding sales
 I have to put off paying other expenses in order to buy food
 money
 Stretching food dollars
 money/job necessity
 making food stamps stretch far enough to buy it with
 Making the food stamps last all month - I have a lot of food allergies it's a struggle at times to choose food correctly
 Paying cash for food
 Prices too high
 fresh fruit and vegetables too expensive anything healthy is too expensive. Everything too expensive. Going into a
 grocery store is like going into an over priced antique shop.
 The escalating prices for food - even even vegetables and fruits are very expensive - (household itens like soap and
 detergent a lot, too)
 My VA pension is 798 a month, after rent my priority is cigarettes. Any person who kicked addiction will tell you
 nicotine is a drug fvery few can kick. Now that cigarette taxes are through th e roof, I pay 282 dollars monthly for
 digarettes. No one wants taxes except on the disenfranchised poor, most smokers are poor. when catholics had food
 weekly, and methodists monthyl, i got by fairly well. now it's catholics once a month and methodists once every
 three months. a friend of mine in upscale north eugene gets food delivered to her complex. that would be fine,
 except poor families thereby are apparently going hungry big time.
 Shopping when groceries are on sale
 Not able to afford Fresh fruits and vegetables and right kind of cereal.
 Not enough money, not enough food stamps
 Having to dip into meager income to make up the dificiency
 Just spend my money wisely.
 having enough money
 financial
 The cost of nutritious food

I am on coumadin and I have to be careful what I eat so I do not get too much vitamin K, so I am not sure if I get enough nutritious food. My medications are really high
Getting groceries home on the bus. Can't keep car running well enough to depend on it - usually walk on or take bus. Try to buy organic and it's expensive.

Special Dietary Needs/Preparation:

42 responses, or 18.42% of all responses.

Money to buy food. Also nutritious programs
Having enough money AND the stamina to cook.
loss of appetite
It is hard to get sugar free food
I live across street from market and can walk there - I have to plan carefully to get enough nutrition - use coupons - make casseroles etc.
It really isn't hard if you know not to eat junk food.
Preparation
I hate to eat and I eat when I feel it's necessary
I cook and stretch food.
Cooking it
Can't get proper diet, because I have diverticulitis and asthma. I need high fiber and greens such as broc., fish. I can't afford to buy.
Low salt, Low sugar, Low Cholesterol, needed for diet with Diabetic and Heart Patients cooking it myself
Leaving the junk food on the store shelves
The way I have to eat I have to grind every thing up just hope get the right kind of food.
Fresh fruit and Veg.
to make meals for two
staying away from junk food places
no salt, no fat
Not knowing what to eat. Too tired to cook.
Sick a lot of the time
Cooking for one
I have problem with reading labels
not having energy to prepare it
Need more fiber and so much I am allergic to. I get \$345.00 for room and board elec for discount for seniors at the market
getting it cooked
finding food I'm not allergic to from insecticides irradiation, nucsides etc enforced by BUSHwackers. I vote for tom harkin 4 pres or J jeffords or Gebhart in 2004. We need some one who will not ship all our best food and jobs overseas. Haven't seen a REAL tangerine in 17 years, only "asian dumped".
balancing a meal
physical handicap and low energy level
way to cook it
food for diabetic
Cooking /buying meals for one person. Without a larger freezer it's difficult to make meals, say, to feed me two-three meals (homemade tv dinner) w/o adequate freezer space
being diabetic - and having to buy special diet foods
I use only fresh veggies
I eat a lot of veg, fresh veg, not much meat
Being able to have fresh fish, lowfat beef, chicken etc also fresh fruit and vegetables out of season.
cooking for one person
Cooking it - making up mind, as things don't taste good
Planning a menu
selecting a balance

I don't dare to eat the fruits and vegetables, which are the best sources of vitamins and minerals, because they are frequently contaminated with bacteria and chemicals, that harm many people. The same happen with the meats, and so on

Buying expensive vegetables/fruit in winter

I am on coumadin and I have to be careful what I eat so I do not get to much vitamin K, so I am not sure if I get enough nutritious food. My medications are really high

Transportation:

25 responses, or 10.97% of all responses.

Getting groceries home on the bus. Can't keep car running well enough to depend on it - usually walk on or take bus. Try to buy organic and it's expensive.

Getting to the store. I'm 91 and oxygen which causes a problem. Friends do help shopping

Making sure I have someone to go to the store for me

Difficult to shop - hard to get around (my wife and I both use walkers) she doesn't drive anymore.

Shopping for food transportation

Cant stand too long to cook - getting it home, afraid to go out - have fallen outside

Taking a bus to the food bank and back

Not enough money in my budget. There are always a problem with the city transportation, stores moved away is one problem and also the city transportatoin has moved out of distance.

Getting a ride to the grocery store

Trying to get assistance and trying to be independent. I don't want to go to meal sites. Due to my many disabilities I am shy - and askward sitting and rising

going to the store

If someone delivered to seniors

Going to the store, it becomes a chore and I've never had to use food stamps and find it very hard to do

Transportation - I have a form to fill out to ride

Getting to the store. I'm 91 and oxygen which causes a problem. Friends do help.

planing ahead so as to make fewer store trips

none, my daughter shops for me on weekends

getting out to buy it, which I can still do

Depending on others to shop for me

I have no drivers liscense

getting someone to pick it up for me

Shopping for food _ getting it home - I do have a son who helps me most of the time.

Figuring out where the sales are and getting there - no car

Embarrassment:

4 responses, or 1.75% of all responses.

Trying to get assistance and trying to be independent. I don't want to go to meal sites. Due to my many disabilities I am shy - and askward sitting and rising

The embarassment of being so poor.

I don't want to take it away from family's with children

get away from calling it food stamps, which is a misnomer - there are no stamps and it would get away from the stigma attached to it.

Not Knowing Where to Go:

3 responses, or 1.32% of all responses.

I don't know if I qualify for food assistance and have never tried to get help. I could use some assistance near the end of the month for food, if I qualify.

Mailings on food distribution and information on buying for single household would be helpful.

Knowing where we can go for a food box/ Holidays are especially bad - we have no extras for a special meal for the two of us. Our son goes to his in laws and we live too far from other relatives to go to their homes.

Other:

34 responses, or 14.91% of all responses.

I buy things that are nutritious food. No problem if you know of to shop.

My children are very good to me always bringing some goodies over. And usually nutritious food. Vegetables from there gardens, etc.

Don't have a problem getting enough nutritious food

This year is hard to say because I am under a lot of stress

I go to activities at the Trudy Kauffman Center. They seem to always get a variety of day-old food. I often get some of what is offered - as do other seniors

I really don't know the answer to that - I am very grateful for what I get already

I do well on the food pantry

I would like to have been included in the farmers market plan.

Im - we are OK

I'm trying to make do with what I have and thankful I have that.

I normally have enough to get mt through each month. I worry more about the people whom have children to feed.

thank YOU for all the great assistance

a friend and I share food and preparation one night I make dinner the next she does

I can extra food in the summer

looking for a job

Canning - sharing from those with garden of fruit going to waste - Don't waste any good "left overs" you can freeze

Would help to get food boxes 2 times a month

Christmas will be difficult to see my 3 have a good christmas. They have all had to have clothes and shoes as they had nothing. But I'm making it with warm clothes and other things they need.

Im fine, once in a while I get a food box

I don't know how to improve our access of food to make it last.

a FAIR annual seniors cloa increase per year.

Composting and rotatilling of Jacobs Lane garden site so older adults and alterabled can grow a small green plot each

Mother dying of lung cancer, so I do not eat good cuz I do not feel like it

Senior Marmers mkt vouchers - In summer Being a diabetic - I use lots of veggies and fruit

Right now I am doing OK if an appliance does not fail etc.

Buy food 1 week at a time

I do get enough

mow helps!

not sure

we don't always get it

I have a good sister who is my caregiver. She comes every Sunday and provides chicken to prepare for dinner - mm good ginner! Last week of the month something runs out - fresh vegetables, meat, but I don't have money for meat, but I don't need much, I eat vegetables. I always have potatoes usually, to have fried potatoes.

Doing the volunteer work of lifting + packing boxes and then delivering to my adoptees.

I work throughout the growing season to buy food when it is at its cheapest and to prepare for the freezer to have through the winter.

Appendix B



FOOD for Lane County *Senior Food and Nutrition Survey*



Hello! FOOD for Lane County is sending you this survey so we can better understand your access to food and nutrition services in our community. Your voice will help us plan for the particular needs of seniors. Please take a moment to give your input and share your ideas. This survey should only take about 10 minutes (or less) to complete and you can return it with your LIEAP energy assistance form. Your responses will remain anonymous and confidential. Thank you so much for your help!

1. Are you always able to ensure you get enough nutritious food?

- Yes No – if not, please explain:

2. Do you participate in any of the following programs? Check all that apply:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food Stamps | <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Nutrition Meal Sites |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supplemental Security Income (SSI) | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Security |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior and Disabled Services | <input type="checkbox"/> Medicare/Medicaid |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Farmer's Market coupons | <input type="checkbox"/> Energy Assistance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meals on Wheels | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

3a. If you receive Food Stamps, how long do they last, on average?

- One week Two weeks
 Three Weeks They last the whole month
 I don't receive food stamps

3b. How much more in Food Stamps would you need each month?

- \$ _____
 None

4a. In the past 12 months, have you received emergency food assistance? (i.e., got a food box or ate at a meal site (soup kitchen), etc.)

- Yes
 No

4b. If yes, where did you go for emergency food? Check all that apply:

- Emergency food pantry (food box) Community Meal site (soup kitchen)
 Emergency shelter Other _____

5. If you needed emergency food assistance over the past 12 months, but were unable to obtain it, please help us understand why. Check all that apply:

- I don't have transportation to a food pantry, meal site, etc.
 I live too far away from these services
 I don't know where to go to get food
 I need someone to pick up food for me
 Accepting help from others is hard for me
 Other reason(s) _____

6. How often do you run out of food before the end of the month?

- Sometimes
 Most of the time
 Always
 Never



7. In the past 12 months, did you or anyone else in your household ever have to cut or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

- Yes No

8. What is the hardest part about making sure you get enough nutritious food?

9. Please share any ideas you have that will help improve your access to food:

10. Please check the number of people in your household:

- One person
 Two people
 Three or more people

*Thank you for participating!
Remember to return this survey with your Energy Assistance Form!*