

Food Systems and Security during COVID-19

Becca Jablonski, Assistant Professor and Food Systems Extension Economics
Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Colorado State University

Ethics and Ecological Economics Forum
May 24, 2021



Colorado State University

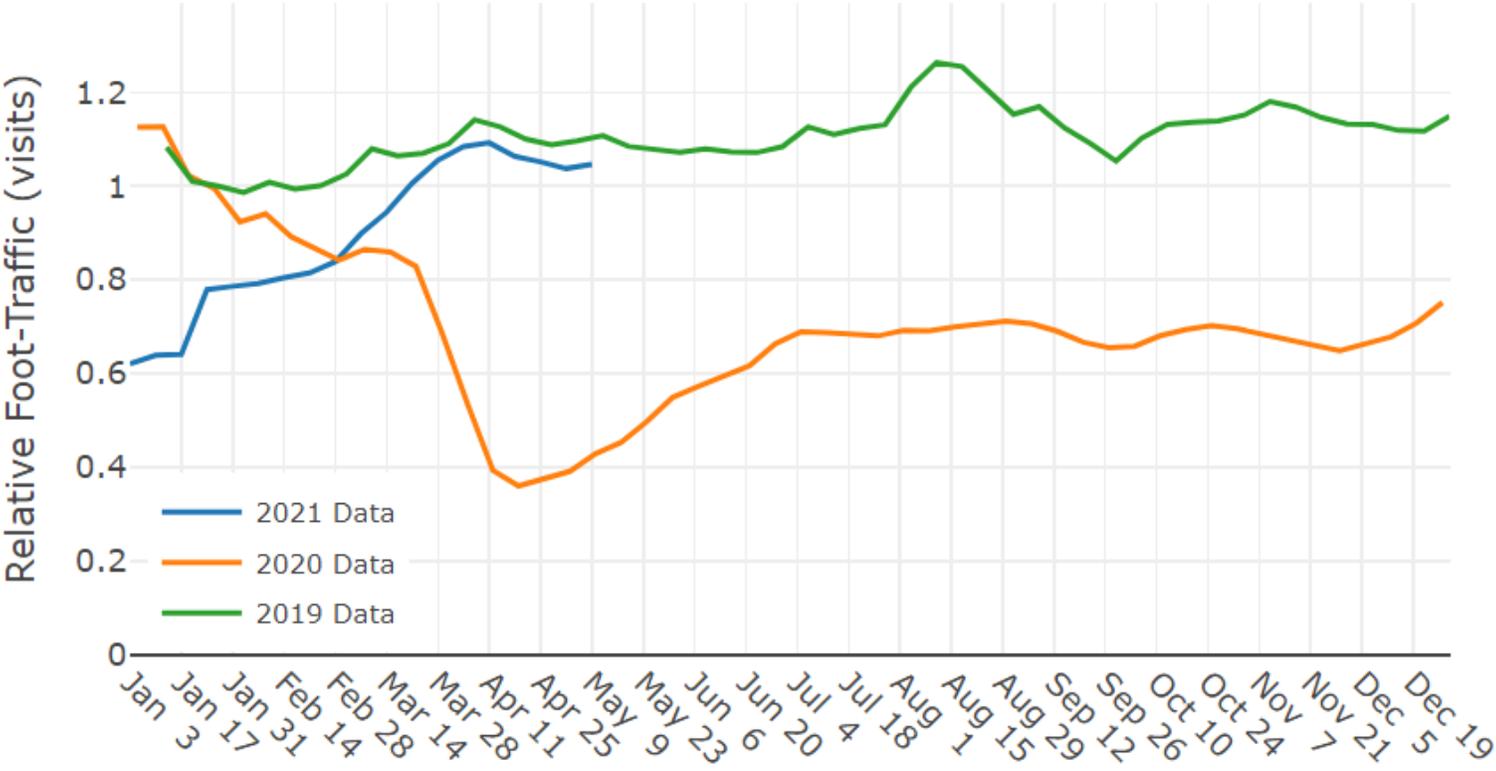
A photograph of a grocery store aisle. The shelves are mostly empty, with some products visible on the lower shelves. A white sign is attached to the side of a shelf, reading "ONE PER CUSTOMER PLEASE" in bold, black, uppercase letters. The sign is slightly tilted. The background shows more shelves and products, but they are out of focus.

**ONE PER
CUSTOMER
PLEASE**

No question that consumer behavior has shifted due to COVID-19 and social distancing measures.

INDUSTRY LEVEL PATTERNS

Sit Down Restaurants





Food At Home



Food Away From Home

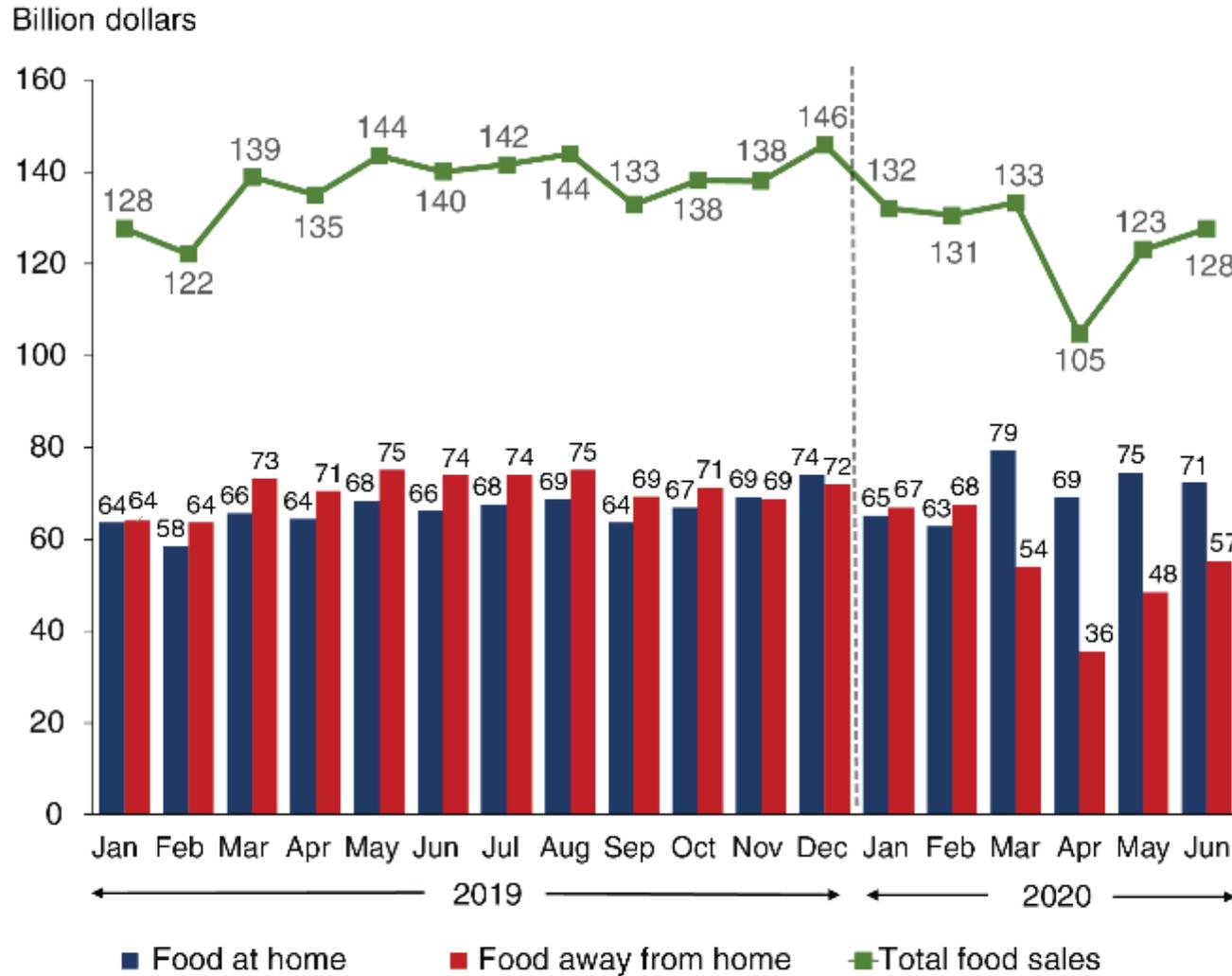


Food Acquisition



**Local Markets
Traditional Markets**

U.S. total food, food-at-home, and food-away-from-home spending, January 2019-June 2020



Note: These monthly food sales data exclude food which is furnished and donated, home-produced, and served at educational institutions.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service (ERS) using data from ERS's Food Expenditure Series.

- U.S. food spending in June 2020 was \$12 billion less than in June 2019.
- As of November 2020, U.S. food spending was still almost \$7 billion less than in November 2019.
- FAFH spending (as well as total food spending) rebounded July-October 2020, and then declined again in November.

Local Food Systems Response to COVID

Building Better Beyond

Search Over 180 Resources

Our Partners

Brought to you by:





ABOUT THE PROJECT

Enrich & expand existing efforts across LRFS responding to COVID

Document and disseminate innovations and adaptations

Cross-sector collaboration and learning

Strategize for long term resilience of LRFS

ABOUT THE TEAM

Multi-agency, multi-sector collaborative initiative

Cooperative Agreement with USDA AMS

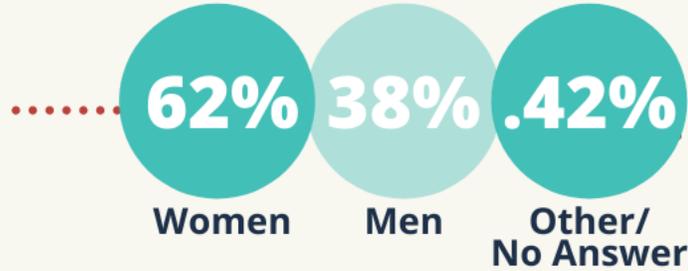
3 University Partners

17 Community of Practice Coordinating Organizations

Engaging Local and Regional Food Systems as a Whole



Consumer Food Insights

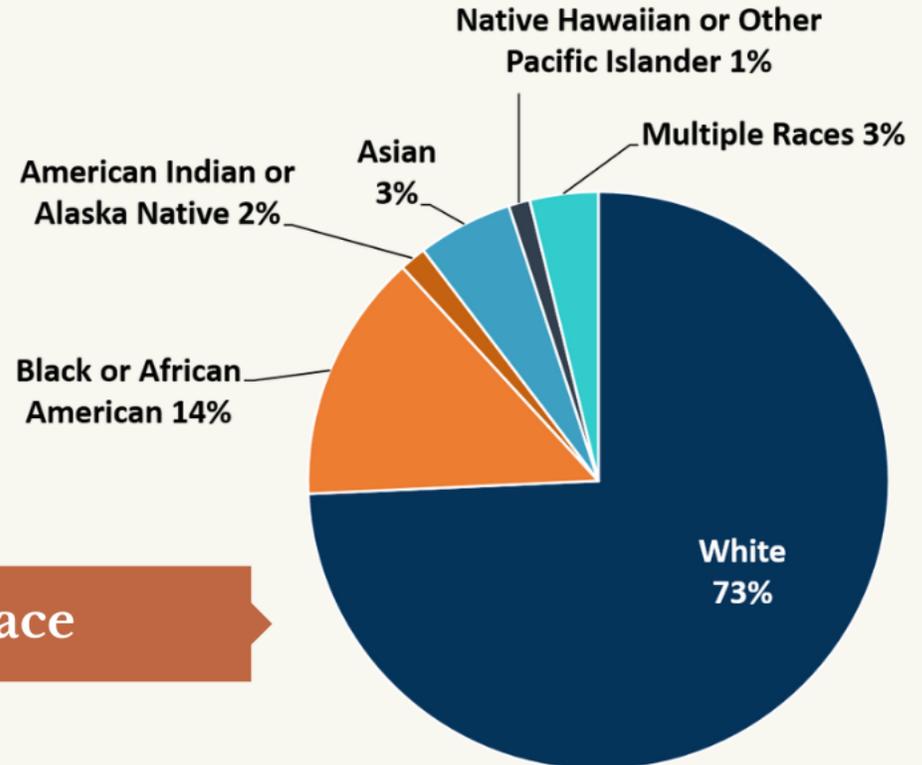


National Survey including 5,000 households

Income



Race

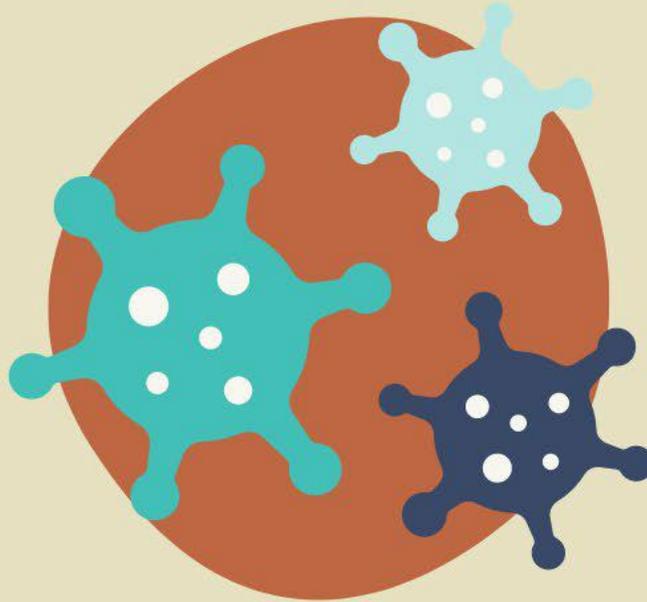


**September
2019**



**The Before
Times**

**April
2020**



**Pandemic
Begins**

**September
2020**



**The New
Normal**

Describing Food Insecure Respondents

58%

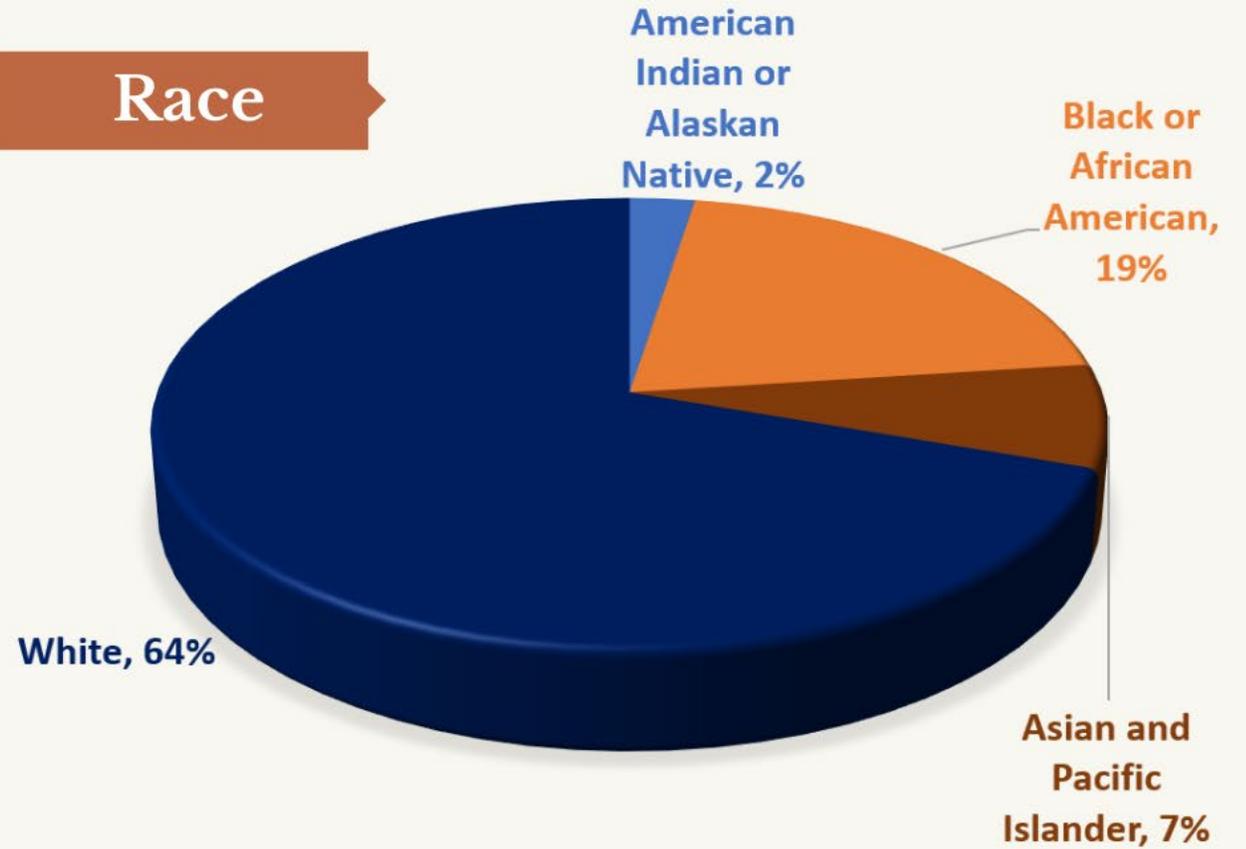
of food insecure households were found to be classified as low-income

66%

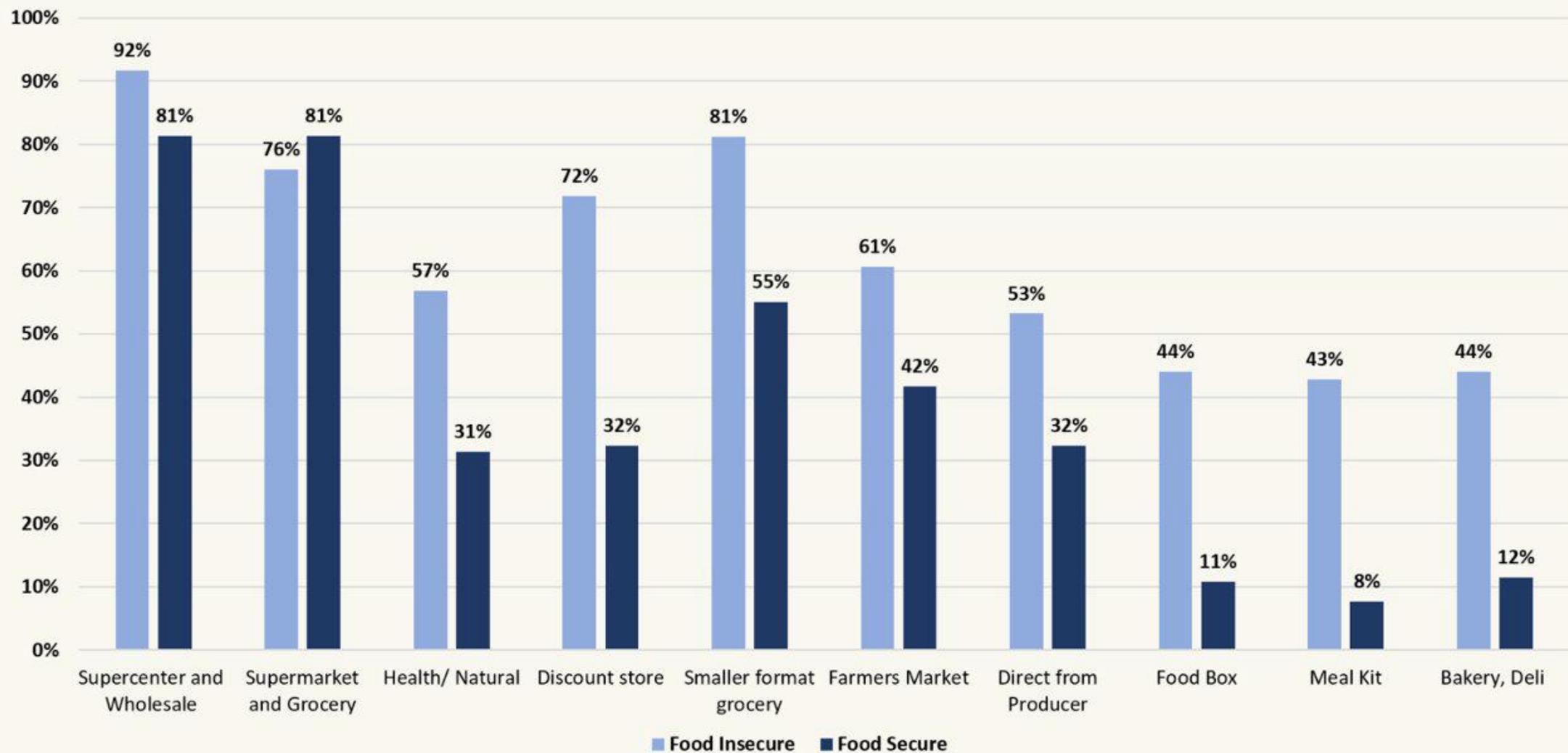
of food insecure households experienced a change in income or job after April 2020

Implies some households are newly food insecure

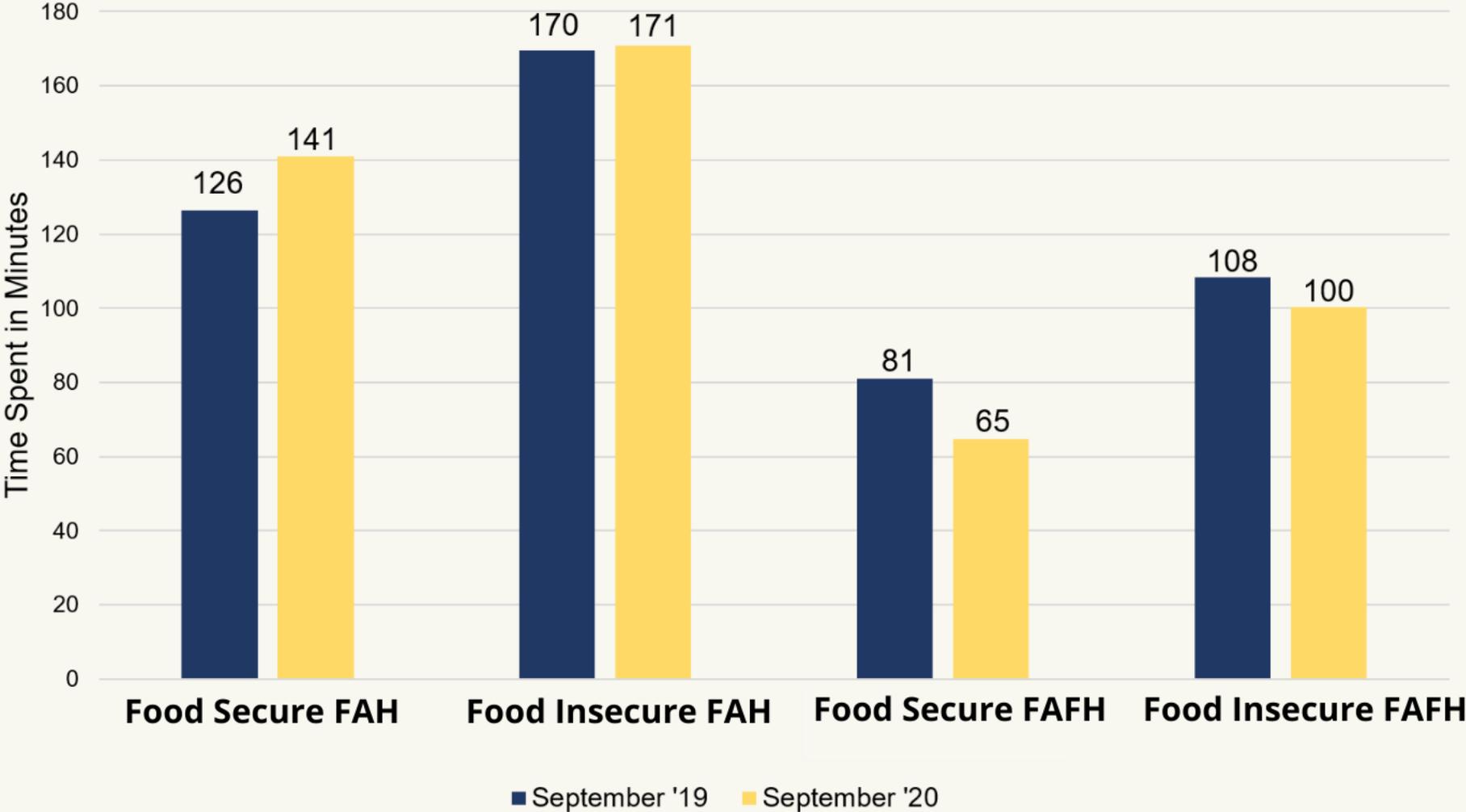
Race



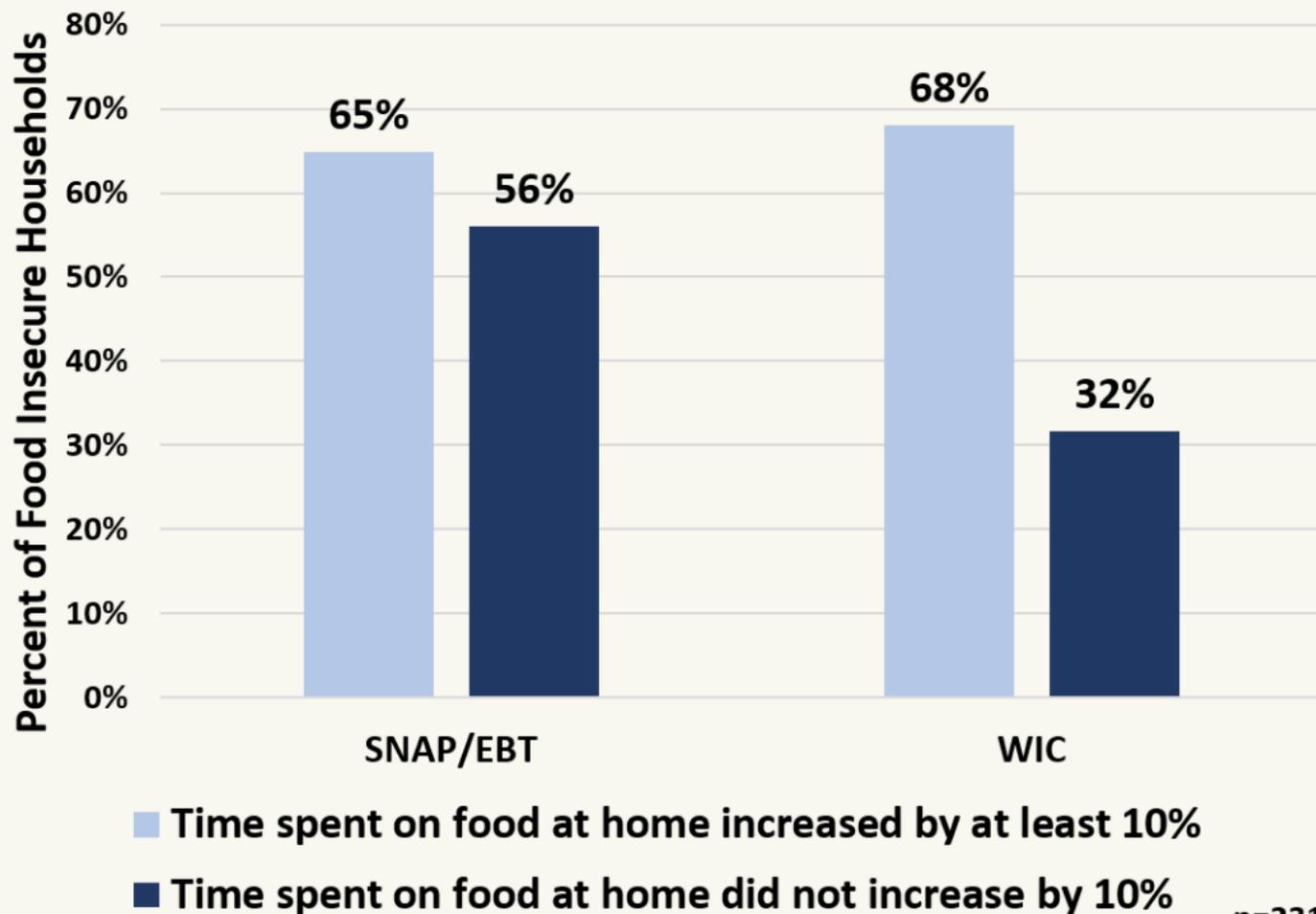
Market Channel Selection



Recent Shifts in Time Use & Food Security



Utilization of Public Assistance Programs by Food Insecure Households

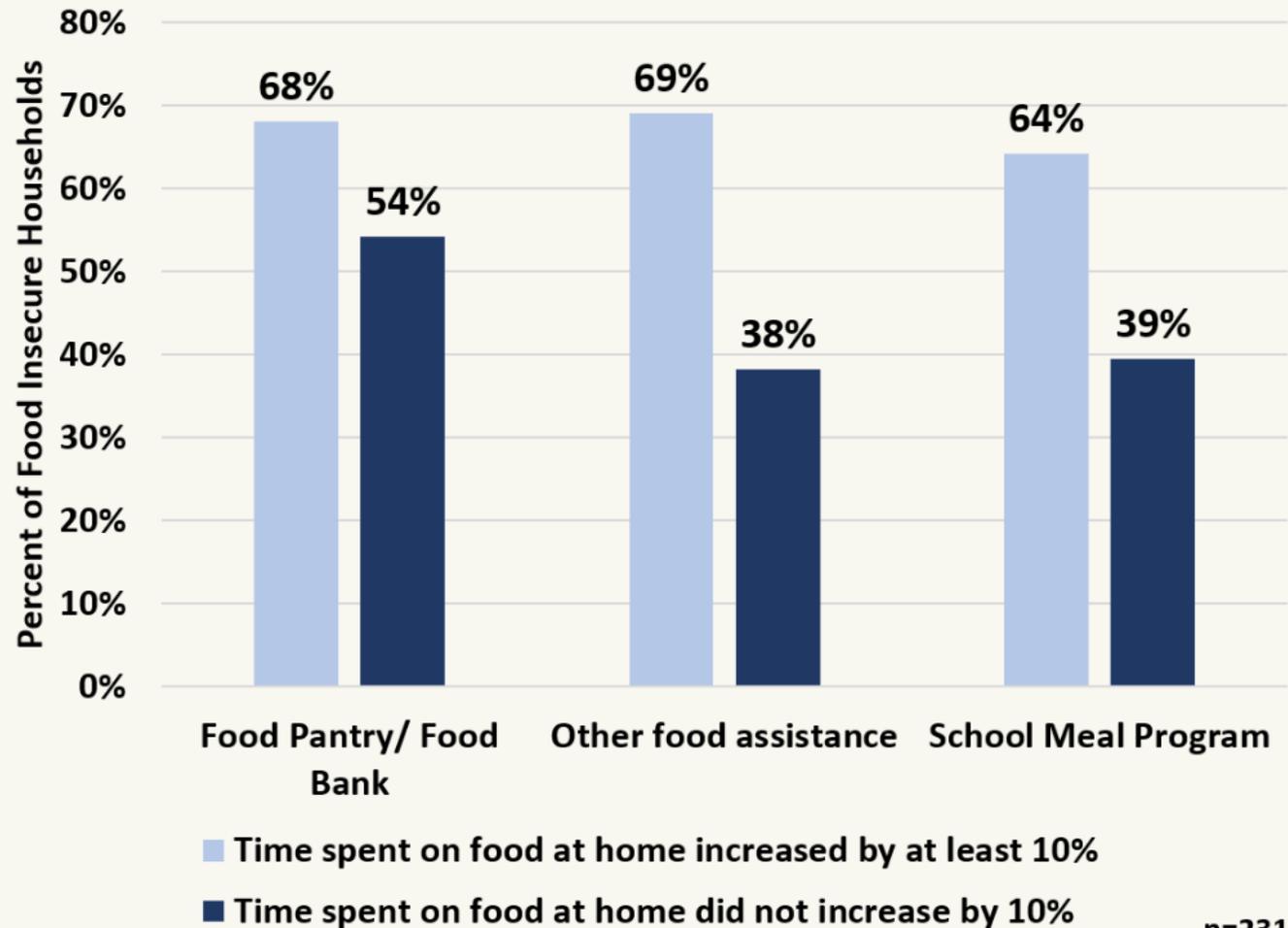


n=2314

Households whose time restriction did not lessen most often used SNAP, at least 56% participation

- SNAP allows online registration, online ordering & delivery, and has automated distributions
- The least-used program was WIC, at 32% participation

Food Acquisition by Food Insecure Households



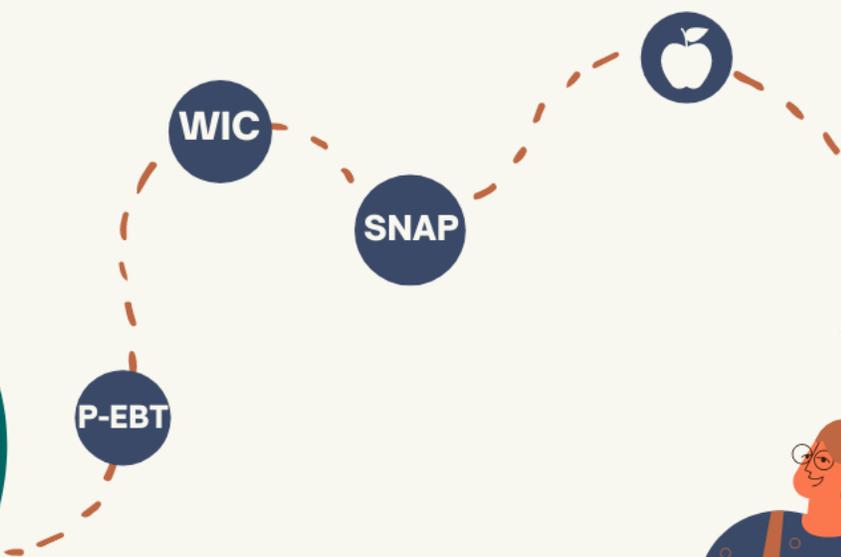
n=2314

Food insecure households that did increase the time they spent procuring and preparing food were:

- More likely to acquire food at food pantries or food banks
- Much more likely to acquire food via school meal programs and/or other food assistance programs

The Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) program provides states with resources to support households with children under the age of 18.

On January 22, the USDA announced that P-EBT benefits will be increased by around 15%



P-EBT and other food assistance programs -> Food Insecure households shopping at unconventional market channels

- “Double-Up Food Bucks” Programs
- SNAP Online Purchasing



CLOSED
DUE TO COVID-19





National School Lunch Program

2nd largest food and nutrition assistance program in the U.S.

Feeds 84% of low-income, food-insecure households with school aged children

For students that receive lunch at school, it makes up ~33% of their daily calories

Most studies find that the NSLP is associated with significantly lower rates of food insecurity for households with children, as well as improved diet quality and academic performance





Photo credit: Tom Witham, The Counter

- Flexibility in programming and reimbursement, but no Federal mandate that schools offer food service during closure, or guidance on best practices to encourage continued participation by families and reduce the spread of COVID.
- Led to a diverse patchwork of emergency feeding programs to support children and families across the U.S.

Indicators of Effective Local Programs

1.

Cross-Sector
Collaboration

2.

Adaptable Supply
Chains

3.

Addressing Gaps
in Services to
Increased-Risk
Populations



Cross Sector Collaboration

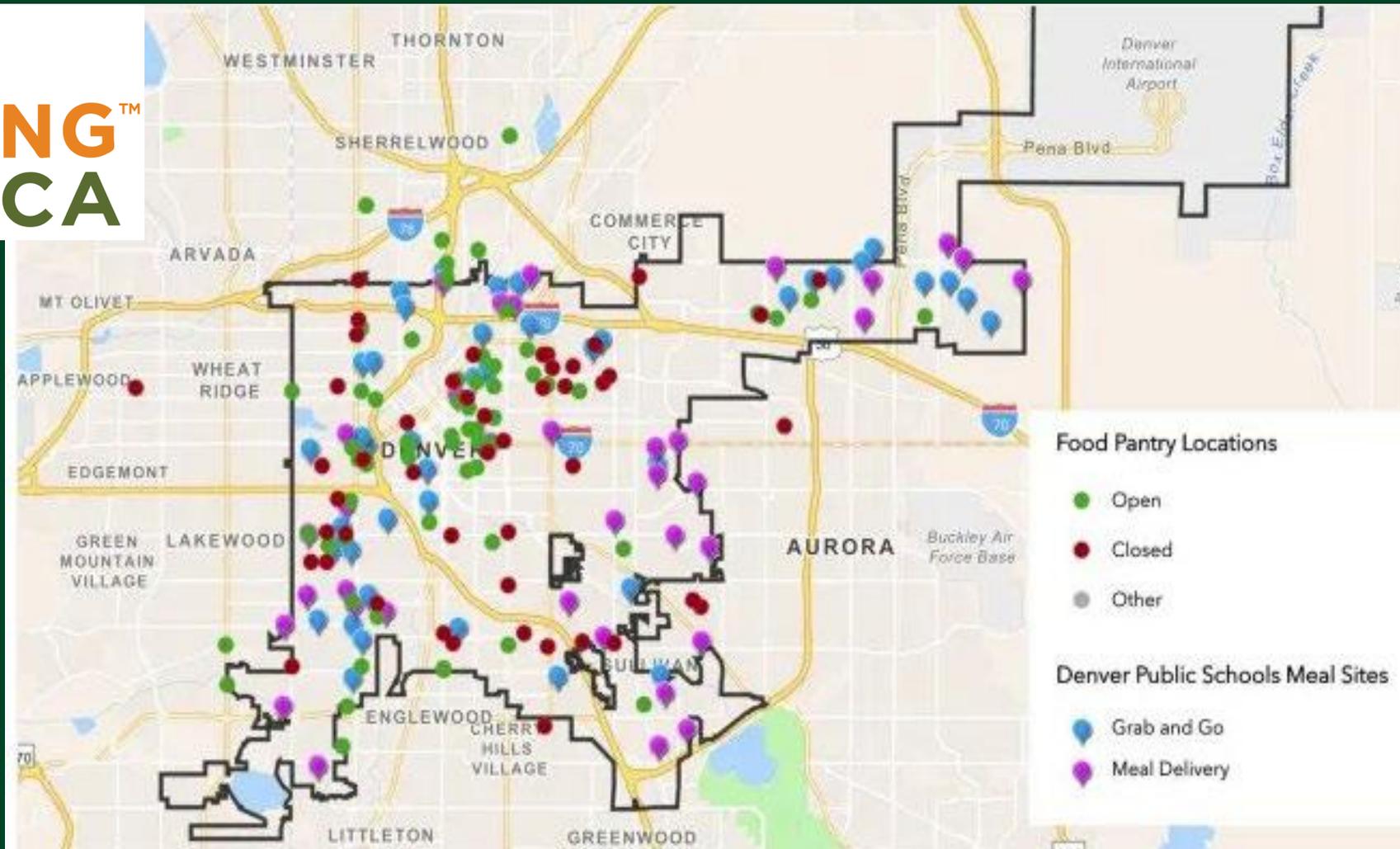


Strong networks that existed prior to the pandemic, built trust across organizations:

- Enabled cities to coordinate “needs” and “haves” across their child food security teams.
- Supported strategic placement of additional emergency food sites in underserved areas.
 - Important as cities quickly realized that the schools were serving only a small portion of kids in need.

Adaptable Supply Chains

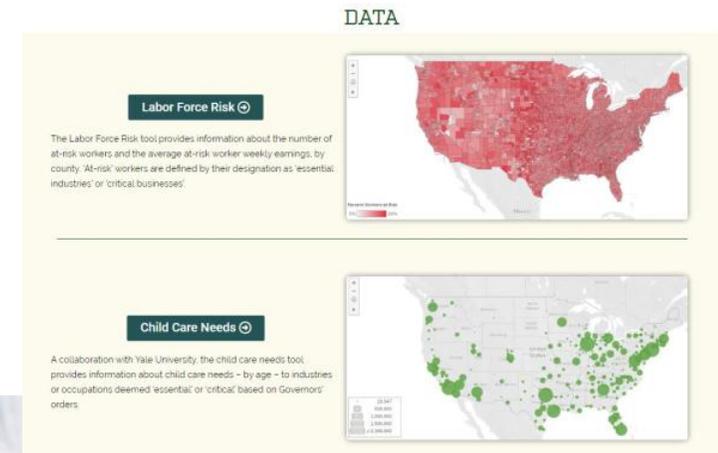
- Two supply chain issues impacted the effectiveness of emergency feeding programs:
 1. Larger networks with more buying power appeared less likely to experience supply chain challenges relative to smaller programs with more limited buying power.



Denver food pantries operating in July 2020
(total is 62 of the 106 in operation prior to the pandemic)

Adaptable Supply Chains

- Two supply chain issues impacted the effectiveness of emergency feeding programs:
 2. Feeding programs that rely heavily on volunteer labor had challenges.



Addressing Gaps in Service to Increased-risk Populations

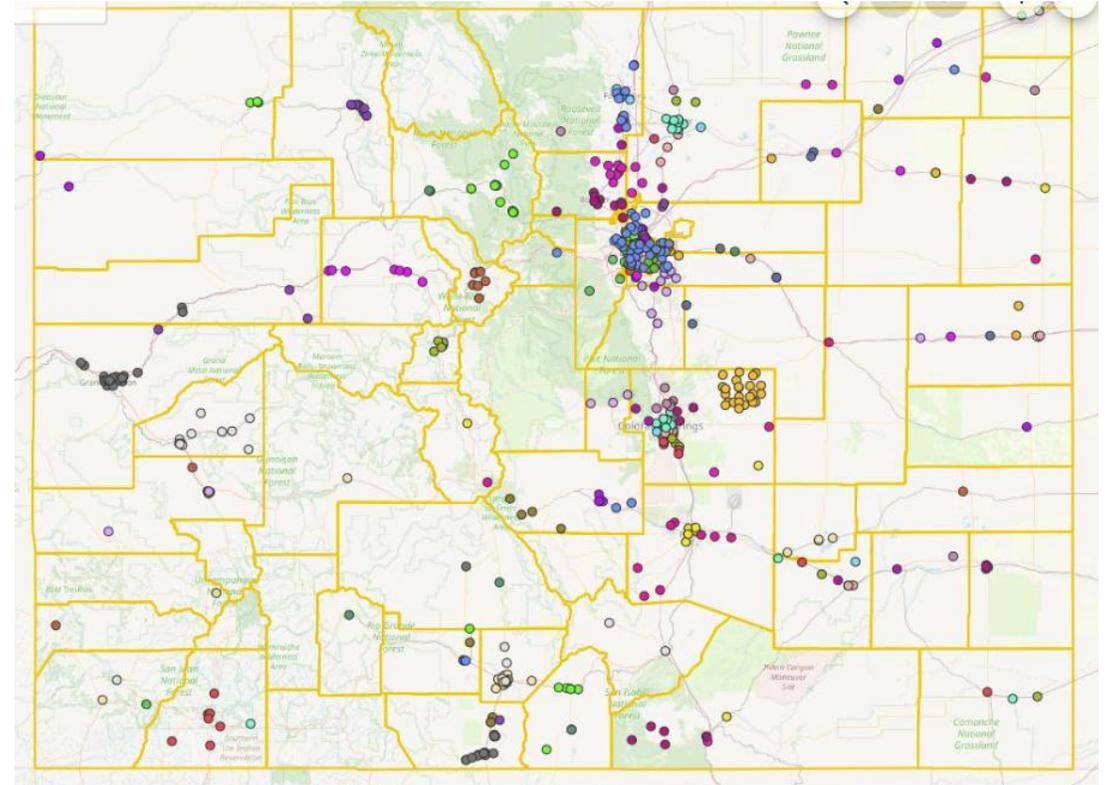
- COVID-19 has highlighted how long-standing systematic health and social inequalities have put some racial and ethnic minority groups at increased risk (CDC 2020)
- Denver prioritized documenting unmet and emergency needs and coming up with a plan to address issues.
 - Enhanced ability to do this may have been due to strong cross-sector collaboration.



On-Going Research: Impacts of School Closures

- What is the effect of school closures, and shifts to emergency food service provision on:
 - Where households purchase and acquire food?
 - Dietary Quality
- Survey of low-income households includes ~1400 respondents who live in Denver.

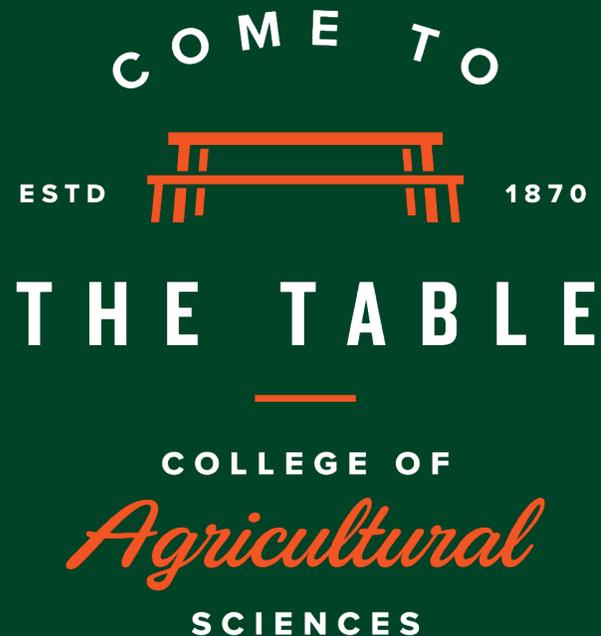
COVID-19 Meal Sites





Colorado State University's Food Systems Initiative is committed to promoting the health and wellness of our population, especially vulnerable populations, and to limit negative impacts of economic and food supply chain disruptions resulting from COVID-19.

This website compiles important information to support our Colorado food system stakeholders, as well as presents visual displays of data and synthesis of rapid-response research and white papers that we hope are useful to all making decisions about food systems activities during this difficult time.



Becca Jablonski

Assistant Professor and Food Systems

Extension Economist

Department of Agricultural and

Resource Economics

Colorado State University

B325 Clark Hall

Becca.Jablonski@colostate.edu

970-491-6133

Foodsystems.colostate.edu

Localfoodeconomics.com