

Food Insecurity in King County

February 2023



King County

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I. Executive Summary

Food insecurity occurs when people do not have regular access to healthy food supplies to meet their dietary needs. Food insecure adults and children are more likely to experience poor physical, oral, and mental health than food secure people.¹ Direct contributors to food insecurity are having a lower income² and experiencing physical challenges to accessing and/or cooking food.³ Structural and historical factors are responsible for income inequality and community food access issues.⁴ Neighborhoods with large communities of color often experience disproportionate rates of morbidity, mortality, and adverse health outcomes, and these outcomes are associated with environmental characteristics such as residential segregation, poverty, and neighborhood deprivation—including fewer supermarkets.⁵ Disparities also exist in the quality, variety, quantity, and price of healthy food, reflecting inequities across several domains of access.⁶ Elevated rates of food insecurity and limited access to supermarkets in their neighborhoods have been reported nationally for African American,⁷ Latino,⁸ Vietnamese,⁹ Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander,¹⁰ as well as Navajo¹¹ and other indigenous¹² communities.

¹ Long M A, Gonçalves L, Stretesky P B & Defeyter M A. Food insecurity in advanced capitalist nations: A review. *Sustainability*. 2020;12(9):3654-3673.

² Hayes T. Food Insecurity and Food Insufficiency: Assessing Causes and Historical Trends. *American Action Forum*. Published March 21, 2021. Accessed December 14, 2022. <https://www.americanactionforum.org/research/food-insecurity-and-food-insufficiency-assessing-causes-and-historical-trends/>

³ Key Statistics and Graphics. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Published October 22, 2022. Accessed November 17, 2022. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics/>

⁴ Definitions of Food Security. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Published October 22, 2022. Accessed November 17, 2022. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/definitions-of-food-security/>.

⁵ Walker RE, Keane CR, Burke JG. Disparities and access to healthy food in the United States: A review of food deserts literature. *Heal Place*. 2010;16(5):876-884.

Misiaszek C, Buzogany S, Freishtat H. *Baltimore City's Food Environment: 2018 Report*. Baltimore, MD; 2018.

⁶ Lee RE, Heinrich KM, Medina A V, et al. A picture of the healthful food environment in two diverse urban cities. *Environ Health Insights*. 2010;4:49-60.

Kumar S, Quinn SC, Kriska AM, Thomas SB. "Food is directed to the area": African Americans' perceptions of the neighborhood nutrition environment in Pittsburgh. *Health Place*. 2011;17(1):370-378.

⁷ Powell LM, Slater S, Mirtcheva D, Bao Y, Chaloupka FJ. Food store availability and neighborhood characteristics in the United States. *Prev Med (Baltim)*. 2007;44(3):189-195.

Richardson AS, Boone-Heinonen J, Popkin BM, Gordon-Larsen P. Are neighbourhood food resources distributed inequitably by income and race in the USA? Epidemiological findings across the urban spectrum. *BMJ Open*. 2012;2(2):e000698.

Larson NI, Story MT, Nelson MC. Neighborhood Environments: Disparities in Access to Healthy Foods in the U.S. *Am J Prev Med*. 2009;36(1):74-81.e10.

⁸ Walker RE, Keane CR, Burke JG. Disparities and access to healthy food in the United States: A review of food deserts literature. *Heal Place*. 2010;16(5):876-884.

⁹ Becerra MB, Mshigeni SK, Becerra BJ. The Overlooked Burden of Food Insecurity among Asian Americans: Results from the California Health Interview Survey. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2018;15(8):1684.

¹⁰ Long CR, Rowland B, McElfish PA, Ayers BL, & Narcisse MR. Food Security Status of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the US: Analysis of a National Survey. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*. 2020;52(8):788–795.

During the first ten months of 2022, the number of households accessing food pantries and receiving Basic Food assistance, Washington's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), increased in King County,¹³ suggesting an increase in the number of people experiencing food insecurity. This increase impacts the County at the same time inflation increased, supply constraints reduced availability and increased the cost of food,¹⁴ and the County's expanded food assistance funding is coming to an end. Given this context, the King County Council asked the Executive and Public Health — Seattle & King County (Public Health) to assess resources available to food security organizations (food banks, meal programs, and community organizations giving food assistance), the magnitude of food insecurity in King County, the assistance needs of food security organizations, implementation of assistance provided to date, and determine whether any county areas are underserved by the existing food security network.

Resources to Support Food Security Organizations

The County supports local food production through the Local Food Initiative operated by the Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP) with efforts such as a south King County community food hub space, the Food Business Resource Center and the farmland leasing program which emphasizes assisting socially disadvantaged, local farmers. The DNRP is also developing food hub space for King County growers and hunger relief agencies to use for food processing. Public Health publicizes information about available services and helps people enroll for food assistance, health care and other services. Public Health is using grant funds to promote fruit and vegetable incentive programs through digital marketing and a focused peer educator model in south King County and facilitates monthly calls with food security organization representatives to share information and funding opportunities.

Outreach Conducted and Identification of Food Security Organizations' Needs

Public Health staff conducted outreach to inform this report by a) analyzing themes from listening sessions held with 81 food security organization representatives in October 2022, and b) verifying findings with food security organization representatives in December 2022.

Representatives participating in listening sessions identified needs of community members and food security organizations, as well as long-term needs such as sustainability planning. Representatives shared that community members need food, other supports such as financial assistance and mental health services, translation/interpretation services, and education (about services available, nutrition, and gardening). Some participants raised a need for more community growing spaces and funding to make and sustain these gardens. Food security organization needs included additional food resources,

¹¹ Pardilla M, Prasad D, Suratkhar S, Gittelsohn J. High levels of household food insecurity on the Navajo Nation. *Public Health Nutr.* 2014;17(1):58-65.

O'Connell M, Buchwald DS, Duncan GE. Food access and cost in American Indian communities in Washington State. *J Am Diet Assoc.* 2011;111(9):1375-1379.

¹² Jernigan VBB, Huyser KR, Valdes J, Simonds VW. Food Insecurity among American Indians and Alaska Natives: A National Profile using the Current Population Survey-Food Security Supplement. *J Hunger Environ Nutr.* 2017;12(1):1-10.

¹³ See <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/covid-19/data/impacts/food.aspx> for more details.

¹⁴ Bove, T. 'It's a constant fight': Inflation and supply-chain bottlenecks are going to be a big problem for food prices next year, Kraft Heinz CEO says. *Fortune*. Published October 25, 2022. Accessed December 1, 2022 from <https://fortune.com/2022/10/25/kraft-heinz-ceo-says-food-inflation-supply-chain-bottlenecks-will-be-a-problem-next-year/>.

Cavallo A. Food Inflation in the U.S. and Abroad. *Econofact*. Published August 1, 2022. Accessed December 1, 2022. <https://econofact.org/food-inflation-in-the-u-s-and-abroad>.

additional staff and volunteers, equipment and operations support, capacity building and flexible funding to address these needs. Participants mentioned needing space for storage, higher capacity freezers and refrigerators, refrigerated truck storage for food transport, replacement parts for repairs, space to expand food distribution, as well as security equipment to prevent theft and damage to trucks or other property. They described wanting to pay staff a living wage and provide professional development opportunities, as well as pay existing volunteers to honor their expertise and retain them. Longer term needs included assistance identifying organizational needs and solutions to better deliver resources to community, diversifying food sources and delivery systems, reducing food waste and planning to better ensure sustainable food resources.

The Magnitude of Food Insecurity in King County

Multiple sources indicate that the number of people experiencing food insecurity in King County is increasing. The average number of households receiving Basic Food assistance, Washington's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), in autumn 2022 (September-November) was 7 percent higher than the average for the first quarter of 2022. The number of people in King County receiving Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits at Public Health Centers also increased; the number receiving WIC was 6 percent higher in September 2022 than in January 2022.¹⁵ The number of households receiving emergency food assistance increased 13 percent from January to June 2022, and the number of elders seeking emergency food assistance from food banks increased 5 percent over the same period. Community members in south Seattle and south King County are at least twice as likely to experience food insecurity than others in the County, as evidenced by Basic Food enrollment data and population survey findings. Food insecurity was at least twice as high among those with the lowest income and lowest educational attainment, between 50 percent and three times as high among communities of color, and twice as high among people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and people with fair or poor health compared to the overall County.¹⁶

Ways to Provide Assistance to Food Security Organizations Identified in Listening Sessions

Listening session participants identified assistance that will help the County move toward a sustainable, local food system, support food security organizations and directly connect community with food and other resources. Long term types of assistance include engaging community in program planning and other decision making, planning for a sustainable food system, supporting transitions away from fossil fuels, planning to help reduce food-related waste, and increasing food production and supply in communities, particularly in BIPOC communities. Participants identified assistance for food security organizations that includes exploring cost sharing, public/private partnerships and other ways to collaborate, planning for a unified food security network in the region and otherwise supporting network/coalition development, language access services, support with communication materials and marketing efforts, making unused or idle resources available for organizational use, help with volunteer recruitment, as well as additional funding that is ideally sustained and flexible to cover food and operations. They noted that the County could assist community members by addressing other social determinants of health, such as housing and securing a basic income. Others offered more specific

¹⁵ See <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/covid-19/data/impacts/food.aspx> for more details.

¹⁶ For more details, please see <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/data/community-health-indicators/behavioral-risk-factor-surveillance-system.aspx?shortname=Food%20insecurity> and Availability of affordable fruits and vegetables <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/community-human-services/initiatives/best-starts-for-kids/dashboards/bskhs-combined.aspx?shortname=Affordable%20fresh%20fruits%20and%20vegetables>.

suggestions such as help ensuring food banks can link clients to other resources, using food distribution as an opportunity to connect people with other social services, and offering transportation to food distributors for people facing access barriers.

Implementation of Assistance Measures Identified in Listening Sessions

King County government has a number of services and initiatives that assist food security organizations in ways that align with some types of assistance mentioned in listening sessions.

- King County government supports services that address social determinants of health, such as housing assistance and help finding healthcare, as well as efforts to increase awareness of available services.
- Public Health is using federal grant funds that expire in September 2023 to explore with partners how best to develop a unified food security network in the County and works to publicize and enroll people in services in multiple ways described previously. Between January and October 2022, for example, CHAP navigators enrolled over 1,600 people into Basic Food and helped over 2,300 King County residents who needed advocacy assistance to continue their Basic Food benefits.
- The County's DNRP provides networking and coaching through the previously mentioned Food Business Resource Center and Public Health is using levy funds to offer free capacity building workshops for Public Health grantees in early 2023.
- DNRP continues to maintain and grow its local food initiative, including the farmland leasing program which makes land available for historically underserved growers and increases the amount of the amount of healthy and culturally relevant food produced locally. Currently, 50 farm businesses operate on county-leased land.
- King County's Office of Equity and Social Justice (OESJ) provides language access and interpretation guidance and tools to departments, agencies, residents, and businesses to support accessible communication for people with limited English proficiency and barriers with communication.

King County does not have a stable, dedicated, county-based funding stream to address food insecurity. Addressing food insecurity has required and will continue to require multiple partners, jurisdictions, and funding sources. Outside of directly providing food and funding, opportunities for King County government to further assist food security organizations identified in listening sessions include the following.

- The County could help ensure that food security organizations have a regularly updated source of available services that address basic needs.
- The County could help recruit volunteers and, with additional resources, could expand communications, networking, and capacity building efforts to assist food security organizations.
- The County could explore options to make any idle, unused resources available for food security organizations' use.
- Lastly, the County could continue its support of federal or state food assistance programs by describing the issues communities face with supporting data and supporting reauthorization and expansion of these programs.

Assessing whether any areas are underserved by the existing network of food security organizations

Available information suggests that all of King County are underserved by the existing network of food security organizations, although analysis was limited to large geographic areas. Estimating the pounds of food distributed by emergency food coalitions in the first half of 2022 per person with an income below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL; in or near poverty) gives a descriptive look at capacity to

serve. The Seattle Food Committee serves the Seattle area (council districts 2,4, and 8) and had the highest pounds of food distributed per person with an income under 200 percent FPL (60 lbs.). Hopelink (serving council districts 1,3, and 6) and the South King County Food Coalition (serving council districts 5,7, and 9 and Vashon Island) had lower pounds of food distributed per person (29 and 40 lbs. respectively). The Seattle area has the highest number of food security organizations and pounds per person in or near poverty of emergency food distributed, but the estimated pounds per person of food distributed is much less than the amount the average person eats.¹⁷ This suggests that the existing network of food resources does not meet existing food insecurity needs, and the need is greater in the northern and southern areas of the County compared to the Seattle area.

The measure estimated food provided per person with an income under 200 percent FPL has limitations. Importantly, reported pounds of food is a measure of what was provided rather than what was needed. Assuming that everyone with incomes below 200 percent of FPL experiences food insecurity may overestimate the number of people experiencing food insecurity by capturing some individuals who are food secure. It is also true, however, that using 200 percent FPL as a proxy for food insecurity could fail to capture certain populations that experience food insecurity at higher incomes. For example, a 2019 Seattle report analyzing King County BRFSS data from 2011-2013 found that food insecurity persisted up to 300 percent FPL for white adults, and up to 400 percent FPL for people of color.¹⁸ More information is needed to more accurately estimate whether specific areas of King County are underserved by the existing network of food security organizations, including data about food security organizations' scale of services (the amount of food provided, number of people served, and hours of operation) and estimated need for more specific areas or communities.

Conclusion

Food insecurity in King County increased during 2022 and remains higher than pre-pandemic levels. Some community members are more likely to suffer food insecurity than others. Food insecurity is more prevalent in south King County compared to other regions, communities of color, and people who are lower income, LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, or another diverse gender identity), or experiencing poor health. More people need food assistance when food is less available and more expensive than in recent years, and the county's federally funded COVID-related emergency food assistance programs ended or are expected to end soon.

Opportunities to assist food security organizations include the following.

- Expand and accelerate existing efforts to increase local food production.
- Increase public awareness about where to find food assistance and other services, how to grow food, and the food supply issues we face with climate change.
- Continue and expand existing engagement with food security organizations to further build a food security network and learning community, support capacity building and help explore cost sharing possibilities.
- Support continued and expanded state and federal food assistance programs and funding.
- Direct more resources towards food security organizations, especially smaller and nontraditional food providers, such as churches and senior centers.

¹⁷ The average person eats three to four pounds of food per day, which sums to 540 pounds for a six-month period. Hall B. *Forget Calories. The Weight of Your Food is What Really Matters*. Published 8/25/2019. Accessed 1/4/2023 from <https://www.stack.com/a/forget-calories-the-weight-of-your-food-is-what-really-matters/>

¹⁸ Bolt K, Carter L, Casey D, Chan NL, Chen R, Jones-Smith JC, Knox M, Oddo VM, Podrabsky M, Saelens BE, Schachter A, Ta M, Pinero Walkinshaw L, Yang A. Healthy Food Availability & Food Bank Network Report. Report for City of Seattle and Seattle City Council. Feb 2019.

- Help people access other resources, such as rental assistance, job assistance and transit benefits, at food banks; and help build the capacity of food banks to perform federal benefits outreach.
- Help recruit volunteers.

Meeting the basic food needs of community is consistent with King County's commitment to community health, health equity, and local food production, and the County's Climate Action Plan outlines longer term, priority strategies toward increased local food and food security.

II. Background

Department Overview

Public Health — Seattle & King County (Public Health) works to protect and improve the health and well-being of all people in King County by increasing the number of healthy years that people live and eliminating health disparities. Its mission is to identify and promote the conditions under which all people can live within healthy communities and can achieve optimum health.

Historical Context

Food insecurity occurs when people do not have regular access to healthy food supplies to meet their dietary needs. In 2006, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) introduced new language to describe the severity of food insecurity, distinguishing between food insecurity related to low food access and/or quality, and food insecurity causing reduced intake and hunger. Food insecurity describes a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.¹⁹ Jurisdictions often measure food insecurity with the validated survey question “The food I bought just did not last, and I did not have money to get more”.²⁰ Respondents who answer this question with ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’ are considered food insecure. In 2021, 10.2 percent (13.5 million) of U.S. households lacked access to adequate food for active, healthy living due to lack of money and other resources.²¹ In King County, an estimated 10.5 percent of people (roughly 243,000) experience food insecurity.²²

Food insecure adults and children are more likely to experience poor physical, oral and mental health than food secure people.²³ The biggest contributor to food insecurity is income; people with lower incomes are more likely to experience food insecurity.²⁴ Physical challenges to accessing and/or cooking food also contributes to food insecurity.⁵ Structural and historical factors are responsible for income inequality and community food access issues.⁴ Neighborhoods with large communities of color often experience disproportionate rates of morbidity, mortality, and adverse health outcomes, and these outcomes have been associated with environmental characteristics such as residential segregation, poverty, and neighborhood deprivation—including fewer supermarkets.²⁵ One study found that African

¹⁹ Definitions of Food Security. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Published October 22, 2022. Accessed November 17, 2022. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/definitions-of-food-security/>.

²⁰ Gundersen C, Engelhard EE, Crumbaugh AS, Seligman HK. Brief assessment of food insecurity accurately identifies high-risk US adults. *Public Health Nutr.* 2017 Jun;20(8):1367-1371.

²¹ Key Statistics and Graphics. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Published October 22, 2022. Accessed November 17, 2022. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics/>

²² Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Food Insecurity. Public Health Seattle and King County. Published January 13, 2021. Accessed December 14, 2022. <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/data/community-health-indicators/behavioral-risk-factor-surveillance-system.aspx?shortname=Food%20insecurity>

²³ Long M A, Gonçalves L, Stretesky P B & Defeyter M A. Food insecurity in advanced capitalist nations: A review. *Sustainability.* 2020;12(9):3654-3673.

²⁴ Hayes T. Food Insecurity and Food Insufficiency: Assessing Causes and Historical Trends. *American Action Forum.* Published March 21, 2021. Accessed December 14, 2022. <https://www.americanactionforum.org/research/food-insecurity-and-food-insufficiency-assessing-causes-and-historical-trends/>

²⁵ Walker RE, Keane CR, Burke JG. Disparities and access to healthy food in the United States: A review of food deserts literature. *Heal Place.* 2010;16(5):876-884.

Misiaszek C, Buzogany S, Freishtat H. *Baltimore City's Food Environment: 2018 Report.* Baltimore, MD; 2018.

American neighborhoods had 48 percent fewer chain supermarkets than their white neighborhood counterparts and Hispanic neighborhoods had only 32 percent as many chain supermarkets as non-Hispanic neighborhoods.²⁶ In addition, disparities have been found in quality, variety, quantity, and price of healthy food, reflecting inequities across several domains of access.²⁷ Among communities of color, access to healthy food is often confounded with food insecurity (limited or uncertain access to adequate food). Elevated rates of food insecurity and limited access to supermarkets in their neighborhoods have been reported nationally for African American,²⁸ Latino,²⁹ Vietnamese,³⁰ Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander,³¹ as well as Navajo³² and other indigenous³³ communities.

To increase food and nutrition security, the USDA food and nutrition assistance programs provide children and low-income households access to food. The USDA administers the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)³⁴, which provide monthly cash benefits via electronic benefit card for households to purchase food at participating retailers. In King County, over 100,000 households receive SNAP benefits and 40,000 people receive WIC benefits each month.³⁵

²⁶ Powell LM, Slater S, Mirtcheva D, Bao Y, Chaloupka FJ. Food store availability and neighborhood characteristics in the United States. *Prev Med (Baltim)*. 2007;44(3):189-195.

²⁷ Lee RE, Heinrich KM, Medina A V, et al. A picture of the healthful food environment in two diverse urban cities. *Environ Health Insights*. 2010;4:49-60.

Kumar S, Quinn SC, Kriska AM, Thomas SB. "Food is directed to the area": African Americans' perceptions of the neighborhood nutrition environment in Pittsburgh. *Health Place*. 2011;17(1):370-378.

²⁸ Powell LM, Slater S, Mirtcheva D, Bao Y, Chaloupka FJ. Food store availability and neighborhood characteristics in the United States. *Prev Med (Baltim)*. 2007;44(3):189-195.

Richardson AS, Boone-Heinonen J, Popkin BM, Gordon-Larsen P. Are neighbourhood food resources distributed inequitably by income and race in the USA? Epidemiological findings across the urban spectrum. *BMJ Open*. 2012;2(2):e000698.

Larson NI, Story MT, Nelson MC. Neighborhood Environments: Disparities in Access to Healthy Foods in the U.S. *Am J Prev Med*. 2009;36(1):74-81.e10.

²⁹ Walker RE, Keane CR, Burke JG. Disparities and access to healthy food in the United States: A review of food deserts literature. *Heal Place*. 2010;16(5):876-884.

³⁰ Becerra MB, Mshigeni SK, Becerra BJ. The Overlooked Burden of Food Insecurity among Asian Americans: Results from the California Health Interview Survey. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2018;15(8):1684.

³¹ Long CR, Rowland B, McElfish PA, Ayers BL, & Narcisse MR. Food Security Status of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the US: Analysis of a National Survey. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*. 2020;52(8):788–795.

³² Pardiella M, Prasad D, Suratkar S, Gittelsohn J. High levels of household food insecurity on the Navajo Nation. *Public Health Nutr*. 2014;17(1):58-65.

O'Connell M, Buchwald DS, Duncan GE. Food access and cost in American Indian communities in Washington State. *J Am Diet Assoc*. 2011;111(9):1375-1379.

³³ Jernigan VBB, Huyser KR, Valdes J, Simonds VW. Food Insecurity among American Indians and Alaska Natives: A National Profile using the Current Population Survey-Food Security Supplement. *J Hunger Environ Nutr*. 2017;12(1):1-10.

³⁴ Food and Nutrition Services Nutrition Programs. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Accessed November 17, 2022. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/programs>.

³⁵ Economic, Social and Overall Health Impacts: Food Insecurity. Public Health Seattle and King County. Published December 9, 2022. Accessed November 18, 2022. <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/covid-19/data/impacts/food.aspx>.

Nutrition assistance benefits improve household food security.³⁶ SNAP and WIC benefits are intended to supplement a household's food budget, however, and benefits typically run out before the end of the month.³⁷ One estimate suggests that after receiving SNAP benefits for six months, 13 percent of SNAP recipients are accessing food banks and other emergency food resources to fill gaps in the household food supply.³⁸

People created the first food banks in the 1960s to store unwanted and extra food for people in need to access rather than it being thrown away.³⁹ The state provided Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) funds to an estimated 45 food banks in King County that serve more than 2.5 million people over 1.3 million visits.⁴⁰ Food banks operating in King County rely on volunteer labor, food donations, and grant funding.⁴¹ Their funding determines the number of people that they can serve. Most food banks have limited hours of operations (approximately eight hours per week) and varying quantities and quality of food available.⁴² A recent report shared community perspectives to improve food bank access, including wanting more choice, consistent availability of quality food and staples, culturally relevant foods, and convenient access with better hours of operation and home delivery services.⁴³ In 2019, individuals relying on food banks shared with Public Health staff that they value a clean, well-organized facility, the ability to choose their own food, consistent availability of quality food, consistent availability of staple foods, and easy access through low or no barriers to eligibility, extended hours of operation, and/or home delivery options.⁴⁴ Food banks play an important role in the local food system, not only as a place for low-income households to receive food, but as a partner in reducing food waste and supporting local small growers and producers.

Federal nutrition assistance programs and food banks are emergency food resources and are not designed to ensure a household has sufficient healthy food to meet all dietary needs (food secure). Local jurisdictions have been taking additional steps to ensure equitable access to healthy food, including

³⁶ Mabli J, Ohls J. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program participation is associated with an increase in household food security in a national evaluation. *J Nutr*. 2015 Feb;145(2):344-51. doi: 10.3945/jn.114.198697.

³⁷ Carlson S, Llobrera J, Keith-Jennings B. *More Adequate SNAP Benefits Would Help Millions of Participants Better Afford Food*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. July, 2021. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/more-adequate-snap-benefits-would-help-millions-of-participants-better>

³⁸ Worthington J, Mabli J. *Emergency Food Pantry Use Among SNAP Recipients with Children*. Mathematica Policy Research Issue Brief. April, 2017. <https://www.mathematica.org/download-media?MediaItemId=%7B78C51BB4-8659-4D3A-A6D0-D83C20E8EB5F%7D>

³⁹ History of Food Banks. Feeding America. Published 2022. Accessed November 17, 2022. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/our-history>.

⁴⁰ Email communication, WSDA, 11 Oct. 2022.

⁴¹ How Food banks and food pantries get their Food. Feeding America. Published December 29, 2021. Accessed November 17, 2022. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-blog/how-food-banks-and-food-pantries-get-their-food#:~:text=Food%20banks%20receive%20food%20from,for%20distribution%20in%20their%20communities>.

⁴² Bolt K, Carter L, Casey D, Chan NL, Chen R, Jones-Smith JC, Knox M, Oddo VM, Podrabsky M, Saelens BE, Schachter A, Ta M, Pinero Walkinshaw L, Yang A. *Healthy Food Availability & Food Bank Network Report*. Report for City of Seattle and Seattle City Council. Feb 2019. <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/data/~media/depts/health/data/documents/healthy-food-availability-report.ashx>

⁴³ Community Perspective: Improving Food Access. Published 2021. Accessed December 20, 2022. <https://www.northwestharvest.org/news-insights/community-perspectives/>

⁴⁴ Bolt K, Carter L, Casey D, Chan NL, Chen R, Jones-Smith JC, Knox M, Oddo VM, Podrabsky M, Saelens BE, Schachter A, Ta M, Pinero Walkinshaw L, Yang A. *Healthy Food Availability & Food Bank Network Report*. Report for City of Seattle and Seattle City Council. Feb 2019.

government procurement of food, increasing food access in schools, zoning land for urban agriculture, and enhancing transportation to food retailers.⁴⁵ These and other actions to ensure food access are critical as climate change threatens food production through increased temperatures, changes in precipitation and drought conditions, more severe weather events, warming oceans and rivers, and sea level increases.⁴⁶

Current Context

Economic instability and high numbers of unemployed people in 2020-2021 resulted in increased food insecurity.⁴⁷ The quick infusion of COVID-19 relief funding towards food security efforts illustrated that government can do more to improve food access. The USDA expanded and created new cash assistance programs including SNAP Emergency Allotments and Pandemic EBT. The IRS distributed child tax credits to families with children. These three cash assistance programs have decreased food insecurity.⁴⁸ In addition, King County and City of Seattle issued one-time food vouchers totaling over \$30 million to people in need. Over the past two years, federal, state, county, and city funding went to King County food banks, meal programs, and community-based food programs to support their operations and to purchase quality foods from local businesses, farmers, and processors for distribution.

Locally, Public Health partnered with United Way of King County (United Way) to pass through \$5.4 million American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to community-based organizations, meal programs, food banks/food pantries, and coalitions. United Way contracted with 35 community-based organizations, meal programs, and food banks/food pantries, and eight coalitions serving over 100 agencies. The purpose of these funds was to increase access to culturally appropriate food within economically disadvantaged communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.⁴⁹ In addition, United Way used a portion of their contracted (ARPA) funds to purchase culturally specific food boxes through Cascadia Produce, in support of their Home Grocery Delivery program. The food boxes were delivered weekly to households throughout King County via United Way's national partnership with DoorDash. United Way's Home Grocery Delivery program launched in July 2020 and provided over 470,000 deliveries to over 6,000 households. Public Health also allocated approximately \$250,000 of ARPA funding to support two farm-to-food bank programs. The Neighborhood Farmers Market Alliance's Growing for Good Program and Harvest Against Hunger's King County Farmer Share Program used the funding to assist food pantries, meal programs and other food assistance providers to purchase food directly from local farmers. These ARPA funds enabled the County to continue the [Farm to Food Pantry program](#),⁵⁰ initially

⁴⁵ Leib E. All (food) politics is local: increasing food access through local government action. *Harvard Law & Policy Review*. 2013;7(2):321-342.

⁴⁶ Cho R. How Climate Change Will Alter Our Food. *Columbia Climate School*. Published July 18, 2018. Accessed December 15, 2022. <https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2018/07/25/climate-change-food-agriculture/>.

⁴⁷ Otten J, Collier, S M, et al. *The State of the Washington State Food System During COVID-19: Taking Stock and looking ahead: December 2021*. Center for Public Health Nutrition, University of Washington.

Schachter A, Song L, Neal S, Pajimula F, et al. [Increases in Food Needs in King County, WA, Spring-Summer 2020](#). Public Health Seattle & King County; Assessment Policy Development and Evaluation Unit. August 2020.

⁴⁸ Lacko, A. M., & Henchy, G. 2021. *Hunger, Poverty, and Health Disparities During COVID-19 and the Federal Nutrition Programs' Role in an Equitable Recovery*. Washington, DC: Food Research & Action Center. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/COVIDResearchReport-2021.pdf>.

⁴⁹ United Way King County. Tackling Disparities With the Food Security Assistance Program. Published February 8, 2022. <https://www.uwkc.org/breaking-the-cycle-of-poverty-news/tackling-disparities-with-the-food-security-assistance-program/>.

⁵⁰ See [Harvest Against Hunger | Farm to Food Pantry](#) for more information.

funded by a Regional Food System grant from the [King Conservation District](#),⁵¹ which provides food banks, meals programs, senior centers, and other community organizations distributing free food with funding to purchase produce directly from farmers.

The sum of these food security programs reduced food insecurity. Early evidence suggests that the new and expanded federal food and cash assistance programs prevented a dramatic increase in food insecurity,⁵² which may be why the number of households receiving Basic Food assistance decreased during the fall and winter of 2021 (Basic Food is Washington State's term for SNAP; Figure 1).

Almost all of these new or expanded food/cash assistance programs at the federal, state and local levels introduced during the pandemic ended December 31, 2022, including SNAP Emergency Allotments, Pandemic EBT, Disaster Household Distribution, City of Seattle Emergency Grocery Vouchers, King County Food Security Assistance Program, Child Tax Credit Advance Payments, Food Box Distribution through the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program, and eligibility waivers for school meals and Basic Food (Figure 1). Of the remaining active policies and programs, two will expire 30-90 days after the end of the federal COVID-19 emergency declaration, including the waiver to provide WIC benefits remotely and expanded eligibility for college students to receive Basic Food. In addition, on March 31, 2023, King County Metro will end its food delivery services. Currently, the only expanded food assistance programs that continue in 2023 are United Way of King County's Home Grocery Program and three grant opportunities administered through the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA): We Feed Washington Food Program, Food Assistance Resiliency Grants, and Local Food Purchasing Assistance Pilot Program.

Recently, King County has seen an increase in the number of people experiencing food insecurity. The number of households receiving Basic Food in King County increased monthly between January and August 2022 (Figure 1).⁵³ This increase impacts the County at the same time inflation increased, supply constraints reduced supply and increased the cost of food,⁵⁴ and the County's expanded food assistance funding is coming to an end. Given this context, the King County Council asked the executive and Public Health to assess whether food insecurity is increasing in King County, the assistance needs of food security organizations, and determine whether any county areas are underserved by the existing food security network. This report summarizes evidence that food insecurity is increasing, explores what assistance would help food security organizations working to provide community members healthy food, and explores the geographic distribution of emergency food sources in the County.

⁵¹ See [King Conservation District \(kingcd.org\)](#) for more information.

⁵² Coleman-Jensen A, Rabbitt MP, Gregory CA, & Singh A. 2021. Household Food Security in the United States in 2020, ERR-298, *U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service*. Accessed December 1, 2022 from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/102076/err-298.pdf?v=3374.2>.

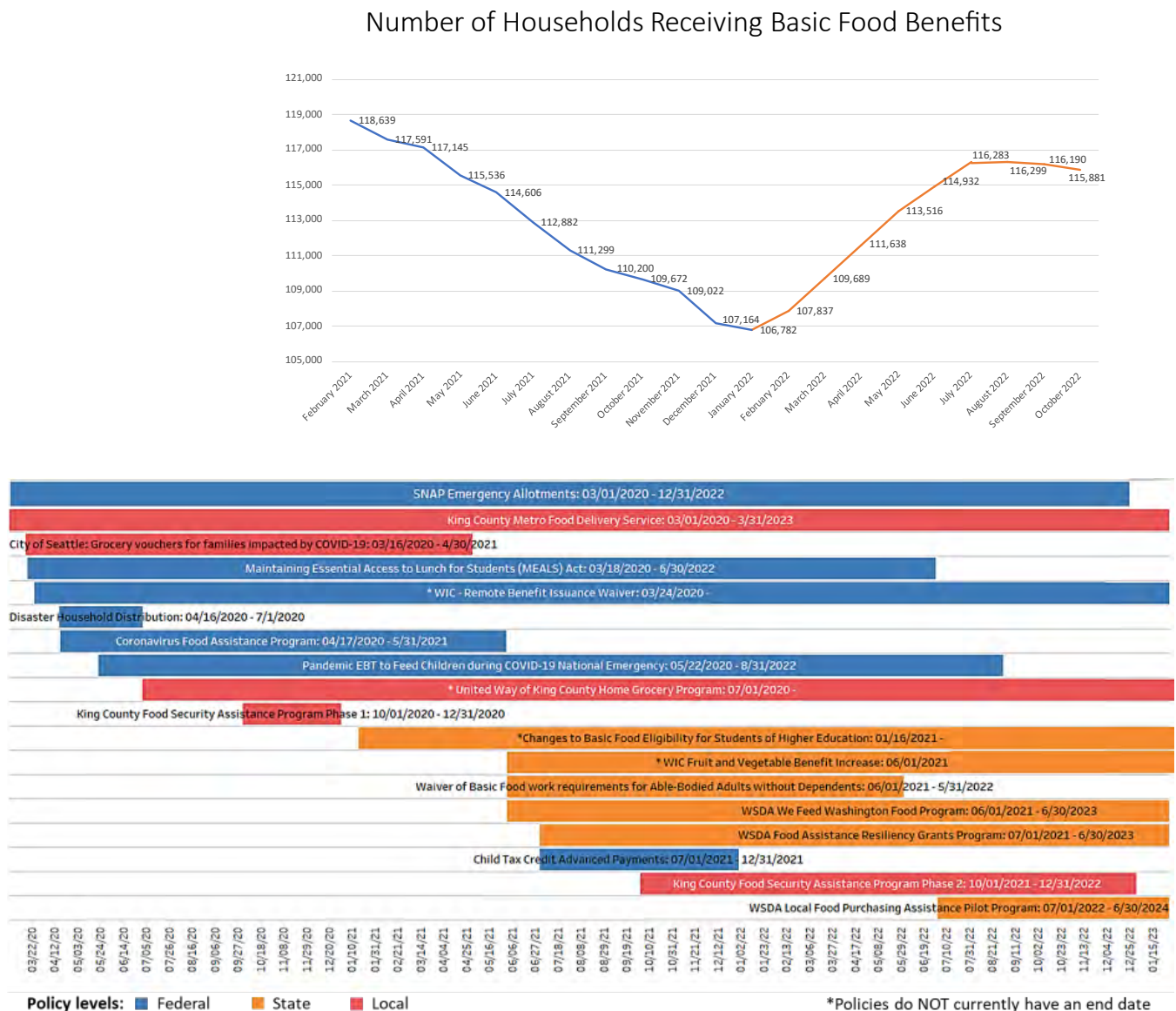
Llobrera J. 2022. Food Insecurity at a Two-Decade Low for Households with Kids, Signaling Successful Relief Efforts. *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*. Accessed December 1, 2022 from <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/food-insecurity-at-a-two-decade-low-for-households-with-kids-signaling-successful-relief>.

⁵³ See <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/covid-19/data/impacts/food.aspx> for more details.

⁵⁴ Bove, T. 'It's a constant fight': Inflation and supply-chain bottlenecks are going to be a big problem for food prices next year, Kraft Heinz CEO says. *Fortune*. Published October 25, 2022. Accessed December 1, 2022 from <https://fortune.com/2022/10/25/kraft-heinz-ceo-says-food-inflation-supply-chain-bottlenecks-will-be-a-problem-next-year/>.

Cavallo A. Food Inflation in the U.S. and Abroad. *Econofact*. Published August 1, 2022. Accessed December 1, 2022. <https://econofact.org/food-inflation-in-the-u-s-and-abroad>.

Figure 13. King County Households Receiving Basic Food between February 2021 - October 2022 and Timeline of Food Assistance Policies and Programs⁵⁵



Report Methodology

Public Health staff produced this report and referenced available data that describes community food insecurity and food-related assistance received. To solicit the input of food security organizations for this report, Public Health staff conducted 11 listening sessions in October with 81 representatives of food security organizations (food banks, food pantries, senior centers, meal service providers, and community organizations providing food or food services; see Appendix B for participating organizations and Appendix D for detailed listening session methods and findings). In early December, the Public Health

⁵⁵ See <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/covid-19/data/impacts/food.aspx> for details.

team shared a written summary of the resulting themes for participants’ review and validation. Listening session participants represented each of the council districts as well as a variety of communities served.

III. Report Requirements

This section follows the structure of the Motion’s requirements. Narrative describes resources that support food security organizations, outreach conducted to identify needs and the magnitude of food insecurity, ways to provide assistance to food security organizations, and implementation of assistance measures upon completion of the outreach.

A. Identify resources to support food banks and food security organizations, including, but not limited to, senior centers, experiencing the impacts of inflation. The executive should conduct outreach to food banks and food security organizations, including, but not limited to, senior centers, and other agencies involved in the food network, such as Nourishing Networks, in King County to identify needs and determine the magnitude of food insecurity in King County. In conducting outreach, the executive should identify ways to provide assistance to food banks and food security organizations, including, but not limited to, senior centers, such as, but not limited to, grants and volunteer outreach and recruitment, and outreach should be conducted with at least one organization located in each council district, if possible, and serving a variety of cultural and socioeconomic groups.

Existing Resources to Support Food Security Organizations

Current resources that support food security organizations in the county range from sustainability planning and information sharing to more direct supports such as land, food resources and funding.

Planning for Sustainable, Local Food Production

King County promotes local food production and access to healthy food to people experiencing hunger through its [Local Food Initiative](#)⁵⁶ established by the King County Executive in 2014. The initiative aims to build a stronger farm-to-plate pipeline by:

- Better connecting local farms to consumers,
- Increasing access to healthy, affordable foods in underserved areas,
- Supporting farmers and protecting farmland, and
- Creating a sustainable farm-to-plate pipeline more resilient to the effects of climate change.

A staff person within the Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP) supports this work and assists with grant-funded projects. A recent project invested \$1 million to help establish the region’s first community food hub. The South Seattle Community Food Hub will be operated by community-based organizations and provide local small-to-medium-sized growers with one location where they can bring their produce, store it, process and package it, then sell the food directly to hunger relief organizations. Work on the project is expected to start in early 2023, with operations beginning the following year.

The Local Food Initiative and the King Conservation District funds the Food Business Resource Center⁵⁷ operated by Business Impact NW to provide trainings, one-on-one coaching, referrals to resource

⁵⁶ See <https://kingcounty.gov/elected/executive/constantine/initiatives/local-food-initiative.aspx> for more details.

⁵⁷ See [Food Business Resource Center | Resources for Food Entrepreneurs \(businessimpactnw.org\)](#) for details.

partners, and networking events for farmer groups, kitchen incubators, regional food system partners, eateries, and other food businesses.

King County is also wrapping up grant-funded planning work with the Council of Development Finance Agencies (CDFA), a national association dedicated to the advancement of development finance concerns and interests, to design an economic development planning strategy that supports King County's local food system. This approach builds off of the Local Food Initiative and focuses on using traditional development finance tools – such as tax-exempt bonds, revolving loan funds, and tax credits – to meet the agriculture, small business, and food systems infrastructure needs in support of local food system innovation.

The County's Strategic Climate Action Plan (SCAP)⁵⁸ reaffirms the County's commitment to addressing food security. It describes priority actions to work toward sustainable food security in our communities, reducing food-related waste and moving toward clean energy. SCAP priorities include supporting the development of a community-led food justice coalition in partnership with Public Health and Local Food Initiative (SCAP SRFC 5.03.01a).

Increasing Land Availability for Local Food Production

Farmland and other peri-urban⁵⁹ areas in King County is expensive (farmland regularly sells for over \$30,000 per acre in King County), thus farmland access is a challenge for traditionally underserved communities.⁶⁰ The King County agriculture program⁶¹ has built a portfolio of farms that provide farmers who otherwise are not able to secure farmland an opportunity to produce healthy food for their communities, and to establish and grow new businesses. King County's Farmland Leasing Program⁶² leases approximately 200 acres of county-owned farmland to new, BIPOC, and people the USDA indicates are "socially disadvantaged" farmers.⁶³ In 2022, approximately 50 farm business were operating on County-leased land.⁶⁴ To facilitate communication with farmers and community organizations on these leased lands, King County hired a member of King County's Hmong community to serve as farm manager and immigrant farmer outreach coordinator. In addition to providing land, the County works collaboratively with the organizations to provide on-farm infrastructure improvements, business support services and market access.

⁵⁸ See <https://kingcounty.gov/services/environment/climate/actions-strategies/strategic-climate-action-plan.aspx> for more details.

⁵⁹ "Peri-urban" is defined as an area immediately surrounding a city or town.

⁶⁰ See <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/dnrp/newsroom/newsreleases/2022/August/31-Horseneck-Farm.aspx> for more information.

⁶¹ See <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/dnrp/wlr/sections-programs/rural-regional-services-section/agriculture-program.aspx> for more information.

⁶² See https://kingcounty.gov/~media/services/environment/water-and-land/agriculture/agcommission/meetings/2022/02-10-22/KCFarmLeaseProgramOverview_AgCommission02102022.ashx?la=en for details.

⁶³ The USDA defines socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers as "...farmers and ranchers (SDFRs) as those belonging to groups that have been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice. SDFRs include farmers who are Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Hispanic or Latino, and Asian or Pacific Islander."

⁶⁴ Borsting M. *King County Farmland Lease Program*.

https://kingcounty.gov/~media/services/environment/water-and-land/agriculture/agcommission/meetings/2022/02-10-22/KCFarmLeaseProgramOverview_AgCommission02102022.ashx?la=en. Updated February 10, 2022. Accessed December 21, 2022.

King County is also gradually transitioning farmland at Horseneck Farm in Kent to be accessible to growers who reflect the racial and cultural diversity of south King County. This increases the diversity of fresh produce grown to provide more culturally relevant food in one of the most racially and culturally diverse regions in the country. More locally grown fresh produce is now available at local farmers markets and in weekly vegetable boxes as a result. About half of the 26-acre Horseneck Farm is now tended by people of color – nearly all immigrants and refugees – due to the partnerships with International Rescue Committee's New Roots Program, Living Well Kent, Wakulima USA, and Highline College. The remaining 13 acres will be leased to community partners over the next two years while an adjacent 10 acres on the southwest corner will be restored as salmon habitat.⁶⁵ The County also has a voluntary [farmland preservation program](#) that purchases development rights on select properties in order to keep land in agricultural use.

Increasing Awareness and Education of Nutrition and Food Assistance

In King County, Public Health acts to increase awareness of Basic Food, food security programs and other services throughout the county using multiple methods. Public Health's Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) program staff partner with community-based organizations, school districts, hospital systems, and hunger relief agencies to increase access to nutritious foods through a variety of grant-funded efforts. Current projects include implementing food insecurity screening and making connections to resources in health clinic settings, promoting community-led farmers markets and their food access programs. It also includes working with King County food banks to adopt and implement nutrition standards to prioritize the procurement and distribution of healthier, culturally relevant foods. HEAL program staff currently promote the SNAP Market Match fruit and vegetable incentive program through digital marketing and a focused peer educator model in south King County. Grant funding for these activities expires in September 2023.

Public Health's Access & Outreach Program has 20 certified Navigators who connect people to food assistance and other supports and services through their community outreach, Public Health Centers, Community Health Access Program (CHAP) phone line and two outreach storefronts. Between January and October 2022, CHAP navigators enrolled over 1,600 people into Basic Food and helped over 2,300 King County residents who needed advocacy assistance with the Department of Social & Health Services (DSHS) in order to continue their Basic Food benefits. Through May 2024, a Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) grant enables Public Health to support contracted navigators from multiple communities to connect people in their communities with food assistance and other services. Another CDC grant funds Public Health and community partner efforts to provide trainings, skills workshops and peer learning opportunities for community health workers and similar professions, including development of ways to help people stay informed about existing resources, until the grant ends in August 2024. Through the federal Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) grant which expires in 2023, Public Health partners with community-based organizations to improve nutrition, increase physical activity, and connect community members with services to meet their needs toward improving the health of African-born, African American, and Asian American populations in south Seattle, SeaTac, and Tukwila.

Supporting Networks and Coalitions

Food security organizations' most direct type of support, funding, typically comes from varied grant sources; state, local and/or federal. A subset of King County food security organizations across the

⁶⁵ See <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/dnpr/newsroom/newsreleases/2022/August/31-Horseneck-Farm.aspx> for details.

region receives funding through Washington State's Department of Agriculture to provide emergency food assistance. The City of Seattle provides additional funding for Seattle area food banks. Public Health's HEAL team uses grant funding to facilitate information sharing among local food security organizations, increase awareness of assistance types available and nutrition standards, and plan for community engagement toward a unified food security network in King County.

Public Health's HEAL team engages food security partners regularly through monthly coalition calls, regional meetings, and opportunities to collaborate in support of a local, equitable, and sustainable food system. Public Health's HEAL team will also use \$50,000 in USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Education (SNAP-Ed) funding to explore with community how best to create a unified food security network in our region between now and September 2023 when the funds expire. Public Health's [Food Protection Program](#) works directly with food service establishments, including food banks and meal programs, to provide food safety education, training and regulation.

Outreach and Identification of Food Security Organizations' Needs

Outreach Conducted

Public Health staff reviewed notes from past meetings with food security organizations and referenced available data that describes community food insecurity and food-related assistance received. To solicit the input and perceptions of food security organizations for this report, Public Health staff conducted 11 listening sessions during the last week of October 2022 with 81 representatives of food security organizations (food banks, food pantries, senior centers, meal service providers and community organizations providing food or food services; see Appendix B for participating organizations and Appendix D for detailed listening session methods and findings). In early December, the Public Health team shared a written summary of the resulting themes for participants' review and validation and in a December 13 meeting of food bank representatives. Listening session participants represented each of the council districts as well as a variety of communities served. Facilitators oriented participants to the purpose and process for the listening sessions, provided context including no allocated funds in the 2023 adopted budget, and asked the following three questions.

1. How extensive is food insecurity in King County currently? What are some indicators of that (i.e., how do you know)?
2. What are the needs of food banks, meal programs, and other food security organizations in King County?
3. What are ways that King County can provide assistance to food banks, meal programs, and other food security organizations?

Needs identified by Food Security Organization Representatives in Listening Sessions

Listening session participants identified needs of community members and food security organizations, as well as long-term needs such as sustainability planning. In the short-term, participants reported community members needing more food and access to other services, including a coordinated care approach for people engaged in multiple services. Participants also noted several needs related to systems level change to support long-term food security for community members and a sustainable, local food system that ensures community access and health.

Community member needs identified by participating food security representatives included food, other supports such as financial assistance and mental health services, translation/interpretation services, and education (Table 1). Most (78 percent) of the 81 participants in listening sessions reported that demand for food was increasing when asked about the extent of food insecurity in communities (Table D1).

At the same time food security organizations faced an increase in the number of people seeking emergency food, participants reported seeing a decrease in the supply of food and staffing. A participant offered that while *"supply is tightening up, we're actually increasing number of people we're serving. And in addition, the food supplies that we get is kind of a mixed bag of what's available right now...so it's always kind of hit or miss what foods are available."* Participants described needing greater quantities of food and high quality, fresh, nutritious food. Some reported needing more protein sources and dairy products. They noted people needed connections to other services as well as food, especially mental health supports, and land for growing food. Participants pointed out that land is needed for local community gardens and larger scale farms. As a participant described, *"land access... that's something that's definitely been identified a lot, both in rural areas for protecting farmland, making it accessible for folks who wanted to start farms and also facilitating establishing community gardens in residential areas."* Some participants brought up the need for more community growing spaces, especially in south King County, and the funding to make and sustain these gardens. Education needs mentioned centered on wanting better awareness of services and types of assistance available, knowledge about nutrition, how to grow food or start gardens, and why local food production is important for the future.

Table 1. Needs Identified by Listening Session Participants		
Community Needs	Organizational Needs	System Needs
Food: healthy and fresh food, protein sources, cultural foods	Flexible funding and additional food supply	Assistance identifying organizational needs and solutions to improve services
Connection to other services and supports	Land, operations support and equipment (space, trucks, etc.)	Diversifying food sources and delivery/distribution systems
Translation/interpretation services	Staff and volunteers	Reducing food waste
Education/Increased awareness of services, nutrition, and growing food	Technical assistance, capacity building, communication tools, education on services available	Planning to better ensure a sustainable local food system

Food security organization needs included additional food, staff, space, equipment, operations support, capacity building, and flexible funding to address these needs. Multiple participants noted that the number of volunteers working in their organization had declined and not recovered from pandemic period lows. They described wanting to pay staff a living wage and provide professional development opportunities, as well as pay existing volunteers to honor their expertise and retain them. Participants described aims to hire multi-lingual staff to better serve their community, and a need for highly skilled, reliable staff for effective operations. Participants mentioned needing space for storage, higher capacity freezers and refrigerators, refrigerated trucks for food transport, replacement parts for repairs, space to expand food distribution, as well as security equipment to prevent theft and damage to trucks or other property. The needs of food distribution organizations varied: some are trying to work out of trailers and refrigerated trucks; others serve community and provide food, meals and other supports out of a building or other space. These needs were consistent with those identified in a recent survey. A statewide survey to assess the current capacity and future needs of food security organizations showed that many organizations were facing capacity or space limitations, and the greatest need was for

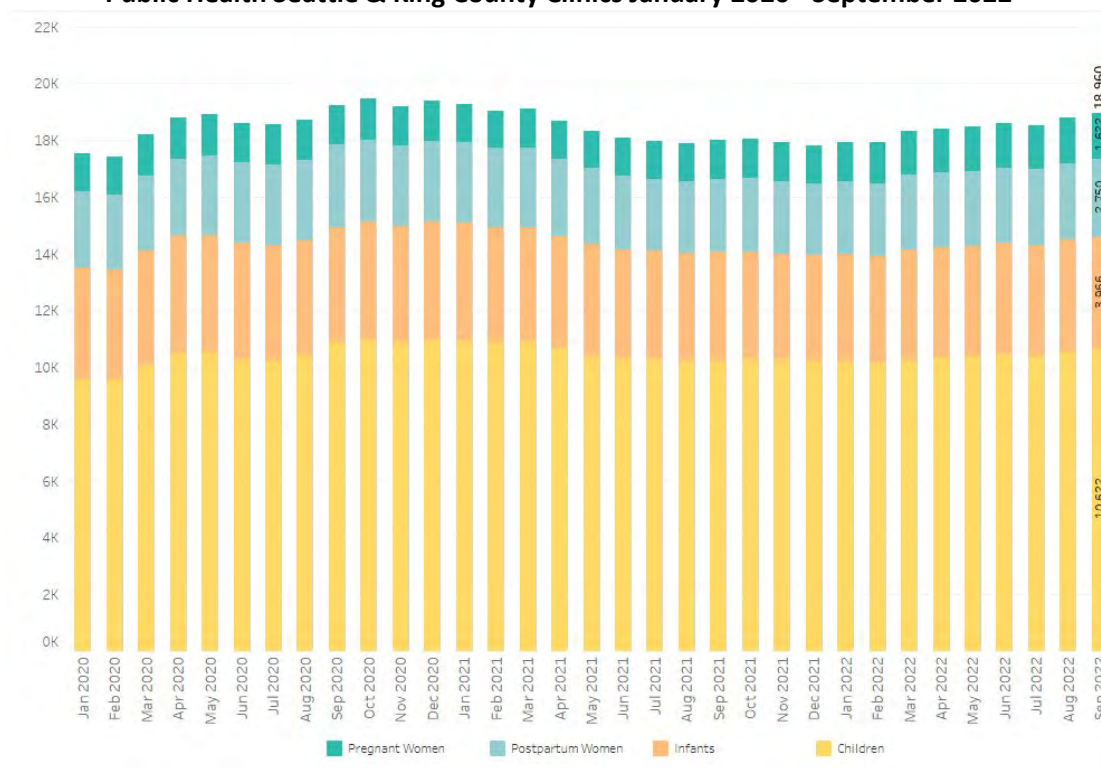
refrigerated deliveries, likely because home deliveries had increased during the pandemic.⁶⁶ In addition, some participants expressed a need for better communication between organizations and to community members about food resource locations and their descriptions of services.

Food security system needs included assistance identifying organizational needs and solutions to better deliver resources to community, diversifying food sources and delivery systems, reducing food waste, reducing waste generated by food assistance organizations, and planning to better ensure a sustainable local food system.

The Magnitude of Food Insecurity in King County

Research identified multiple sources indicating that the number of people experiencing food insecurity in King County is increasing. As noted earlier, increases in the number of households receiving Basic Food in King County between January and August 2022 (Figure 1, page 14).⁶⁷ In 2021, over the same period, counts decreased each consecutive month. The average number of households receiving Basic Food in autumn 2022 (September-November) was 7 percent higher than the average number during the first quarter of 2022 (Figure 1). The number of people in King County receiving benefits through WIC at Public Health Centers also increased (Figure 2); in September 2022, the number receiving WIC was 6 percent higher than what it was in January 2022.⁶⁵

Figure 2. Enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children (WIC) at Public Health Seattle & King County Clinics January 2020 - September 2022



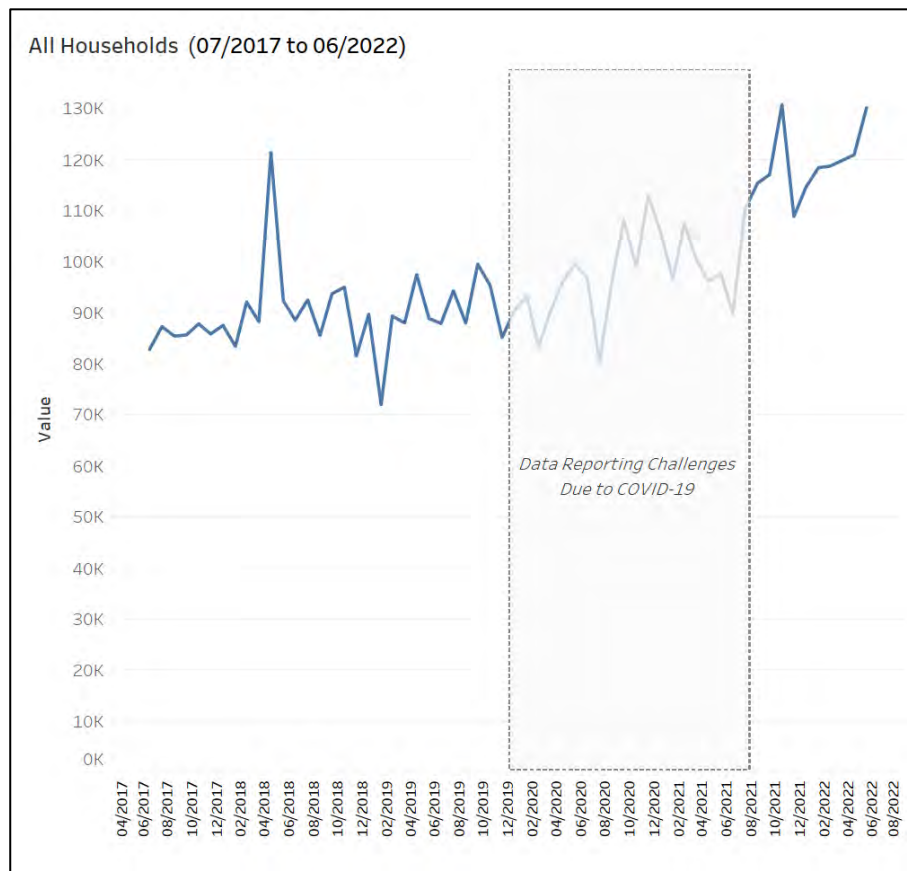
⁶⁶ Harvest Against Hunger, University of Washington School of Public Health and Washington State Department of Agriculture. *Washington State Hunger Relief Capacity Report*. Published 2021. Retrieved 12/10/2023 from <https://www.harvestagainsthunger.org/2021-capacity-survey/>.

⁶⁷ See <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/covid-19/data/impacts/food.aspx> for more details.

Washington State provides state EFAP funding to 45 food banks in King County. From July 2021 through June 2022, these food banks served over 2.5 million people and had over 1.3 million visits (Table 2). While it is difficult to compare these counts to prior years given the pandemic and relaxed data collection requirements due to safety protocols during pandemic surge service months, a look across time shows that the need for emergency food services is higher with King County emergency food assistance providers serving more households in the first half of 2022 and second half of 2021 than at any point since 2017 (Figure 3). The number of households receiving this emergency food assistance increased 13 percent from January 2022 (114,775 households) to June 2022 (130,187 households; Figure 3).

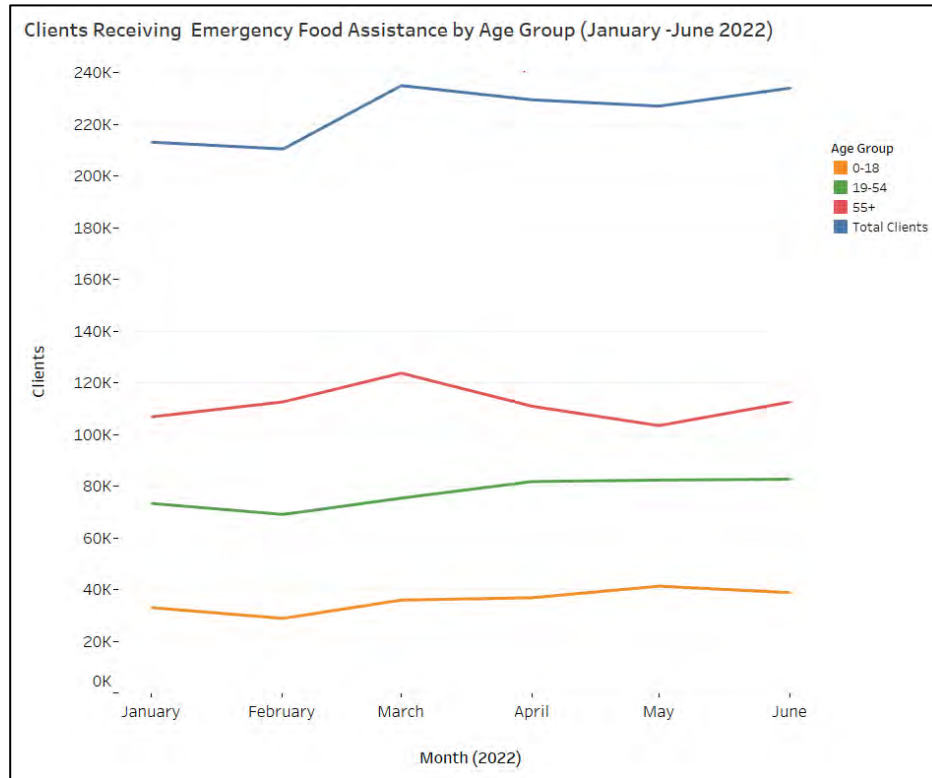
Table 2. WSDA Emergency Food Assistance Provided to King County Food Banks (July 21, 2021 – June 22, 2022)	
Total clients served	2,575,718 people
Total household served	1,395,485 households
Pounds of food Distributed	27,161,380 lbs.
Food Pantry Full Service	40,746,115 lbs.

Figure 3.4 Households Served by King County Emergency Food Providers by Month



In early summer, from May to June 2022, food security increased more among elders (55 years of age or older) than people 54 years of age or younger (Figure 4). The number of elders receiving emergency food assistance was 5 percent higher in June 2022 compared to January 2022 (112,568 and 106,859 people respectively; Figure 4).

Figure 4.6 Clients Receiving WSDA Emergency Food Assistance in King County by Month in 2022



In summary, data from multiple sources (WIC, Basic Food, EFAP) show an increase in people seeking food assistance through summer and autumn of 2022. The US Census Household Pulse Survey showed inconclusive results for self-reported food insecurity questions from the Seattle/Tacoma/Bellevue Metropolitan Service Area, and population surveys have limitations in how representative they are of populations (See Appendix C for more details). Most (78 percent) listening session participants reported an increase in the number of people seeking food resources (Appendix D, Table D1). They confirmed what the EFAP client totals show; the number of elders seeking emergency food assistance from food banks increased during 2022.

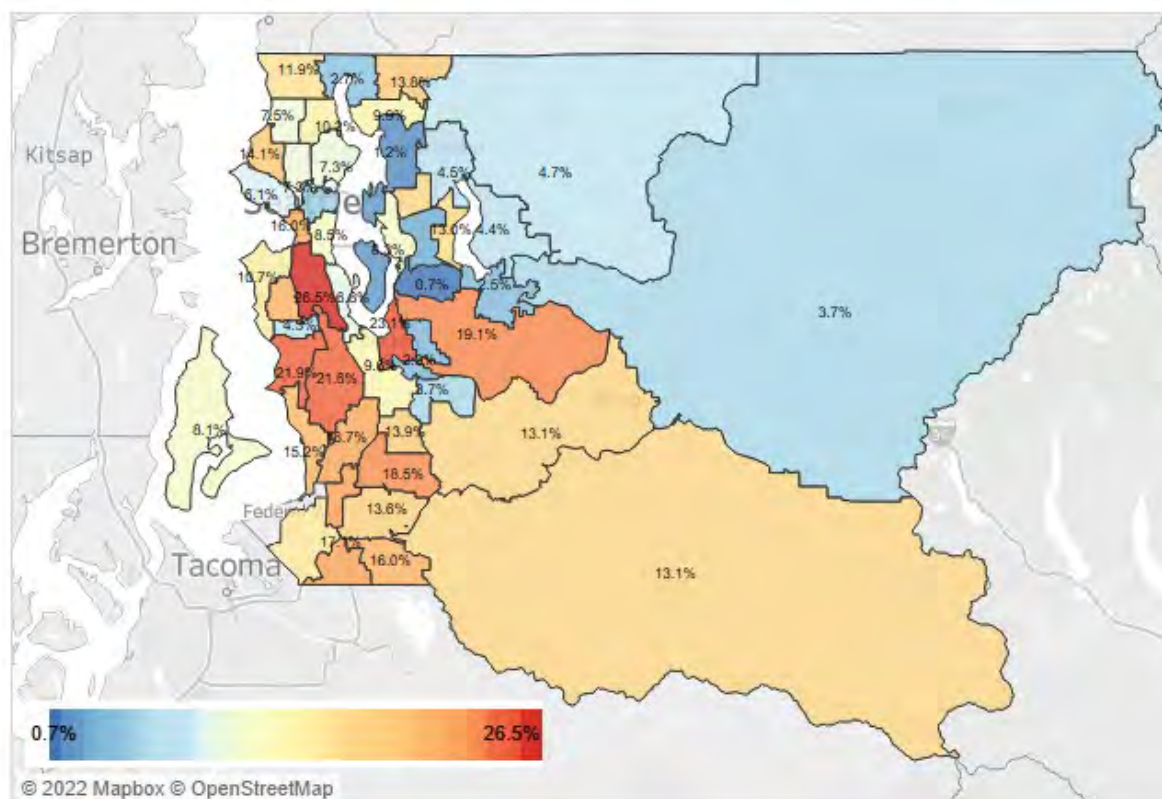
Who in King County is More Likely to Experience Food Insecurity?

While population-based surveys do not definitively show whether or not the number of people experiencing food insecurity is increasing, they can inform a better understanding of who is at greater risk of not having enough food. The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey findings illustrate that community members in south Seattle and south King County are more likely to experience food insecurity compared to other locations in King County (Figure 5).⁶⁸ Basic Food assistance recipient information and the Best Starts for Kids Health Survey findings show a similar geographic pattern (Appendix C, Figures C1, C5).

⁶⁸ BRFSS data are shown in aggregate over multiple years to provide a more reliable estimate and avoid increases or decreases in an annual survey that may be related to sampling strategies.

Figure 5. BRFSS Survey Respondents Reporting Not Enough Food by Region

Food insecurity (adults), King County (average: 2018, 2019 & 2020)



Food insecurity was highest among those with the lowest income and lowest educational attainment (see Appendix C, Figures C4 and C6). People of color experienced food insecurity at higher rates than the County's population overall. For example, 27 percent of Hispanic/Latinx adults, 32 percent of Black adults, and 14 percent of adults identifying with multiple races reported food insecurity compared to 10 percent for the County overall (Appendix C, Figure C4). Rates of food insecurity were two times higher among individuals who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual than among those who identified as heterosexual (Appendix C, Figure C4). Adults reporting fair or poor overall health were more likely to report food insecurity than people identifying as having good to excellent health (46 percent and 22 percent respectively; Appendix C, Table C1).

Ways to Provide Assistance to Food Security Organizations Identified in Listening Sessions

Listening session participants identified ways to help the County move toward a sustainable local food system, support food security organizations, and directly connect community with food and other resources. Longer-term, system change assistance needs include planning for a sustainable food system, supporting transitions away from fossil fuels and other climate change adaptations required, planning to help reduce food-related waste, and increasing food production and supply in communities, particularly in communities of color. One participant expected that in the future *"a food system that allows people opportunity to grow their own food when they choose to. And for those who choose to grow food, how do we create a network that would help to distribute the food in a very affordable way, an easy way for people to access it?"*

Participants suggested a few ways that King County could assist food security organizations' work toward sustainable food provision and assistance, such as supporting long-term funding strategies and community partnerships, diversifying food sources, and investing in alternative fuels. For example, supporting the transition to electric vehicles for food transportation and delivery, as well as solar panels and other clean energy conversions needed, can offset short-term costs, and provide long-term savings.

Multiple participants requested community engagement and input into decision-making. A participant shared:

"ensuring that... community members, BIPOC organizations, predominantly BIPOC serving organizations, really play a central role in any new program development that the county is looking to develop - I think that's really crucial, to have the voices of those who are directly impacted in the creation of any new program development."

Listening session participants identified assistance for organizations that includes a) the exploration of cost sharing, b) public-private partnerships and other ways to collaborate, c) planning for a unified food security network in the region and otherwise supporting network/coalition development, as well as d) flexible funding for food and operations, ideally multi-year and sustained over time. Participants described technical assistance and capacity building needs. They noted that grant applications and reporting are a burden, and not all organizations have staff expertise in these areas. A participant wondered if the County could make idle resources, such as storage space and/or vehicles, available for food security organizations' use: *"[if the county is] aware of surplus, assets that might be idle, that could be repurposed or be used to support broader food distribution- whether that's a building facility, whether it's even as much as cargo vans...Or if they know of a business closing that is idle."*

Some participants noted that the County could help address other social determinants of health, such as housing and securing a basic income. Others offered more specific suggestions such as help ensuring food banks can link clients to other resources and using food distribution as an opportunity to connect people with other social services. Multiple participants suggested increased funding for services that prevent people from having to rely on food banks, such as rental assistance and living wage jobs or supports. Another participant mentioned housing assistance: *"The focus group we have hosted, they said that between 70 and 80 percent of their income was going to rent. So...on the preventative side... how do we prevent people from paying so much money, so much of their income to rent?"* This same participant identified the need to have more human services supports to build longer-term wealth and address inequities:

"The two years of the pandemic amplified everything...in that people are becoming poor... it's going to take longer for people to generate wealth, you know, intergenerational wealth, people are incredibly behind, you know, if they were behind before the pandemic, you can imagine how far behind they are now, like, it's just that it's deepening."

Another participant worried about provisions for seniors, given many rent and cost increases exceed social security increases. Someone highlighted that the reimbursement rate for aging and disability services needs to be updated to reflect the increased cost of living.

Participants highlighted that food security organizations also need up-to-date information about and linkages to the local service network to increase knowledge about what food resources are available, what organizations are providing resources, and who would qualify for that resource. One participant^{T1} noted *"I refer people to food banks – it would be helpful if they also referred seniors to senior centers – not sure if local food banks know about senior center meal programs."* Participants noted it would be

helpful to also help community members find supports closer to their residence. Some participants noted additional assistance needed to directly serve community, such as expanding food assistance and access in multiple ways, addressing other social determinants of health, increasing access to interpretation and translation services, as well as promoting awareness and education about services available, nutritious diets, how to grow food, and the importance of local food production.

Table 3. Assistance Identified by Listening Session Participants		
Assistance for Community	Assistance for Organizations	Assistance for System Change
Help ensure food programs can link clients to other resources	Share up-to-date service information and linkages with the local service network	Plan for a sustainable local food system
Address other social determinants of health	Plan for a unified food security network in the region	Support transitions from fossil fuels and other climate change adaptations required
Increase access to interpretation and translation services	Explore cost sharing, public-private partnerships, and other ways to collaborate	Plan to reduce food waste and waste generated during food assistance provision
Promote awareness and education, ideally in multiple languages	Provide flexible funding for food and operations, including equipment and staffing	Increase food production and sales in communities

During the listening sessions, participants reviewed and selected their top three priorities from the potential types of assistance highlighted by Motion 16219 (Appendix D, Table D2). Among the 79 poll respondents, over half prioritized grants (54 percent) and directing more resources toward food security organizations (52 percent). Nearly half (49 percent) prioritized creating a unified food security network. Roughly one-third (30 percent) prioritized helping food security organizations connect community members to additional supports, the reauthorization of federal food assistance (29 percent), and building the capacity of food security organizations to perform federal benefits outreach (27 percent). Fourteen percent identified volunteer recruitment as one of their top three priorities.

Implementation of Assistance Measures Identified in Listening Sessions

Listening session participants identified an array of potential assistance measures ranging from direct supports for community members, to funding and supports for the food security organizations, to long-term sustainability planning. In the short-term, they reported community members needing more food and access to other services, such as mental health, transportation, and housing services, and noted that some community members needing multiple services would benefit from including a coordinated care approach. Participants also noted needs related to a plan for long-term food security and a sustainable, local food system that ensures community access and health.

King County does not have a stable, dedicated, county-based funding stream to address food insecurity. Addressing food insecurity and developing a sustainable local food system is not solely King County's problem to solve, and to that end, it has required and will continue to require multiple partners,

jurisdictions, and funding sources. Outside of directly providing food and funding, however, King County government has a number of services and initiatives that assist food security organizations in ways that align with some types of assistance mentioned in listening sessions.

King County government supports services that address social determinants of health, such as housing assistance and help finding healthcare, as well as efforts to increase awareness of available services. As mentioned previously, Public Health's Access and Outreach program connects people to services in multiple ways; a) they support an online list of resources,⁶⁹ b) manage and staff the CHAP line⁷⁰ which connects people to healthcare and other resources including WIC and Basic Food, and c) attend community events to increase awareness of services. The Department of Community and Human Services manages a range of programs and initiatives to support vulnerable residents in the county that include housing assistance, early childhood supports, behavioral health, and violence prevention among others.⁷¹ Public Health supports efforts to increase awareness of services with grant funding; specifically, the federally funded REACH work and the HEAL team supports for food security organizations described previously. A CDC-funded program to train and deploy community health workers is supporting development of a web-based resource where people can access information about available programs and services to help meet community members' basic needs.

Technical assistance and capacity building supports for food security organizations currently are limited to assistance provided by staff during regular meetings with community partners and grant or levy-funded planning and learning opportunities. The County's DNRP provides networking and coaching through the previously mentioned Food Business Resource Center and Public Health is using levy funds to offer free capacity building workshops for Public Health grantees in early 2023. [Communities of Opportunity](#) is part of The [Best Starts for Kids Initiative](#) and supports community organization capacity building through Learning Community opportunities that include offering workshops and providing toolkits (see the website for [community collaboration](#) and [Human Resources equity](#) toolkits). The [Best Starts for Kids Initiative](#) also has a pool of consultants that provide support to organizations on a number of fronts, including applications for funding and evaluation planning; this approach could serve as a model if additional funds could be allotted to support this need.

Listening session participants noted that one benefit of a strong food security network in the region would be the opportunities for partners to learn from each other and share innovations and resources. As described previously, the HEAL team will use federal grant funds that expire in September 2023 to explore with partners how best to develop a unified food security network in the County. Existing and future coalitions will be useful networks for building capacity in small ways such as sharing information about existing resources, new information or serving as a peer learning community.

County efforts to increase local food production and support socially disadvantaged farmers and community members align with assistance requested in listening sessions. The County's Local Food Initiative, implemented by the DNRP, supports local food production through the Farmland Lease Program, local food system infrastructure, and access to technical assistance and business support. Currently, 50 farm businesses operate on county-leased land. The County's climate action plan builds on this work by prioritizing improved food access and a sustainable food system.

⁶⁹ See <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/locations/health-insurance/access-and-outreach.aspx> for more information.

⁷⁰ See <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/locations/health-insurance/access-and-outreach/community-health-access-program.aspx> for more information.

⁷¹ See <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/community-human-services.aspx> for more information.

Although the Farm to Food Pantry, King County Food Security Assistance and food box distribution programs' funding have ended, their implementation resulted in government and community partnerships and processes that will benefit any similar, future operations. Similarly, the community partnerships, infrastructure and operations developed to distribute vaccinations and supplies including food for people unhoused during the pandemic can be transferred to future programs. Lastly, the County can continue its support of federal or state programs like WIC, SNAP/Basic Food, child nutrition programs, school meals and EFAP, by describing to policymakers the issues communities face, sharing data to demonstrate need, and supporting reauthorization and expansion of these programs.

King County's Office of Equity and Social Justice (OESJ) provides language access and interpretation guidance and tools to departments, agencies, residents, and businesses to support accessible communication for people with limited English proficiency and barriers with communication.⁷² Its objective is to ensure all services, programs and activities are meaningfully accessible to all constituents. Food security organizations can make use of this service in their efforts to better serve community members. Public Health also manages a grant-funded language access program which contracts with community navigators to interpret education and other communication materials and assist with mass distribution education campaigns. The funding for this program expires in May 2024.

Outside of directly providing food and funding, opportunities for King County government to further assist food security organizations identified in listening sessions include the following.

- The County could help ensure that food security organizations have a regularly updated source of available services that address basic needs.
- The County could help recruit volunteers and, with additional resources, could expand communications, networking, and capacity building efforts to assist food security organizations.
- The County could continue its support of federal or state programs like WIC and emergency food assistance programs (such as EFAP and SNAP/Basic Food) by describing the issues communities face with supporting data and supporting reauthorization and expansion of these programs.
- The County could explore options to make any idle, unused resources available for food security organizations' use, if any such resources exist.

If the County has vehicles or storage space not currently being used, making it available to food security organizations would help address the storage and transportation needs mentioned in listening sessions.

Assessing Whether any Areas are Underserved by the Network of Food Security Organizations

B. The executive should also identify any geographic locations in King County, including, but not limited to, any areas in rural or unincorporated King County, that are underserved by the existing network of food banks and food security organizations.

Data reviewed for this report suggests that all areas of King County are underserved by the existing network of food security organizations, although analysis was limited to large geographic areas given the type of data available. Public Health and partners compiled a list of 212 food security organizations available during the pandemic and while some changes in service providers may have occurred, it remains a comprehensive list.⁷³ Looking at organization locations relative to an estimated percent experiencing food insecurity based on BRFSS survey measures can help provide context.

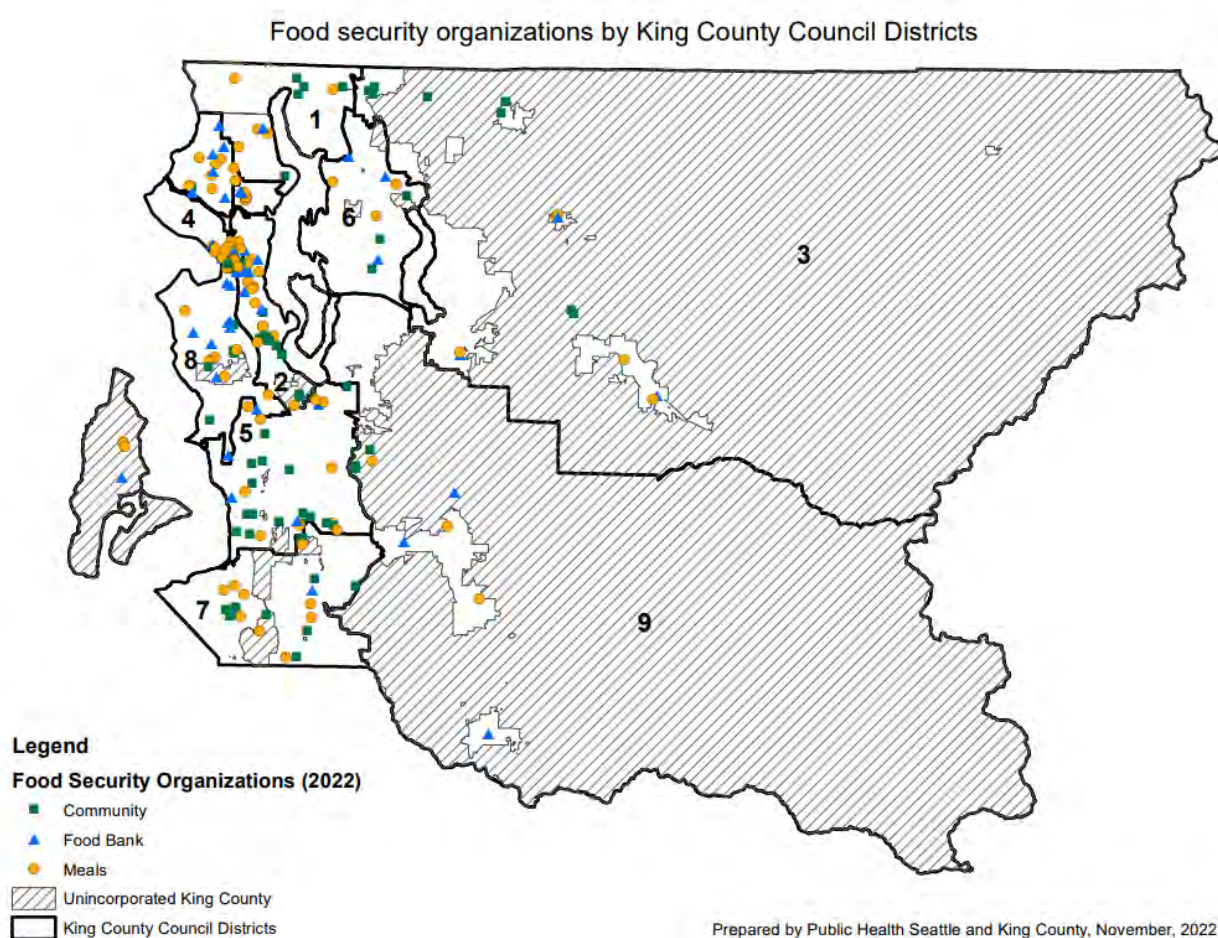
⁷² See <https://kingcounty.gov/audience/employees/translation-interpretation.aspx> for more information.

⁷³ A list of these organizations is available upon request of the authors.

Where are the Food Banks in King County Located?

Public Health and partners identified 50 food banks, 97 meal delivery programs, and 65 community organizations⁷⁴ providing food resources like food boxes in addition to their primary services or otherwise part of the local food production and security network (Figure 6). A food bank is defined as a provider and EFAP contractor connected to an emergency food coalition. A meal program serves community meals to specific populations (e.g., people unhoused, seniors, teens, families). Organizations categorized as community based are food programs that are not an EFAP contractor, not connected to a coalition, and less established than a food bank (includes programs such as mobile food pantries and food distributions at community-based organizations). It is important to note, when considering the geographic spread of organizations, that this map shows only the number of organizations with physical locations in a council district. No information about the scale of services such as the amount or type of food provided, number of people served, or hours of operation were available for analysis.

Figure 6.7 Location of Food Security Organizations by Organization Type



⁷⁴ Public Health and City of Seattle compiled this list of food resources in King County based during the COVID-19 response; the number and type of organizations offering food assistance has likely changed.

What are the Locations of King County Food Banks Relative to the Estimated Need for Emergency Food Resources?

To assess the number of food security organizations relative to estimated need, the Public Health team estimated need using two approaches. The first uses household income at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) as a proxy for food insecurity. Based on the income eligibility criteria for Basic Food and the high cost of living in King County,⁷⁷ it is assumed that people living at or below 200 percent of FPL experience some economic hardship and therefore food insecurity. The second estimates the number of people experiencing food insecurity by applying BRFSS food insecurity prevalence estimates. The BRFSS measure is a more specific measure of food insecurity but has not been measured since 2020-2021, thus does not reflect the most recent increase observed in other data sources. Assuming that everyone with incomes below 200 percent of FPL experiences food insecurity may overestimate the number of people experiencing food insecurity by capturing some individuals who are food secure. It is also true, however, that using 200 percent FPL as a proxy for food insecurity could fail to capture certain populations that experience food insecurity at higher incomes. For example, a 2019 Seattle report analyzing King County BRFSS data from 2011-2013 found that food insecurity persisted up to 300 percent FPL for white adults, and up to 400 percent FPL for people of color.⁷⁸

A comparison of the number of estimated people experiencing food insecurity to the number of identified food security organizations located within each King County council district shows some alignment with estimated need (Table 4 and Appendix Table C2). For example, the four council districts with over 50,000 people having incomes below 200 percent FPL (2,5,7, and 8) each have 22 or more food security organizations working in the district. Council district 4 has 22 food security organizations as

Council District	Estimated People 200% FPL	Estimated People Food Insecure ⁷⁶	Organizations in King County Unincorporated	Community Based	Food Banks	Meal Programs	Total Food Security Organizations
1	44,716	21,538	<i>Not applicable</i>	5	3	5	13
2	61,255	25,621	4	13	7	24	44
3	21,109	11,002	18	8	4	6	18
4	37,054	25,268	<i>Not applicable</i>	1	8	13	22
5	75,494	43,139	1	16	3	10	29
6	32,941	15,189	0	3	2	3	8
7	63,080	38,382	6	9	2	11	22
8	63,607	38,764	8	7	18	22	47
9	35,961	20,073	7	3	3	3	9

⁷⁵ Estimated Population Under 200% FPL is based on ACS 2016-2020 estimates and Estimated Population Experiencing Food Insecurity is based on BRFSS 2017-2021 estimates.

⁷⁶ Based on BRFSS 2017-2021 estimates.

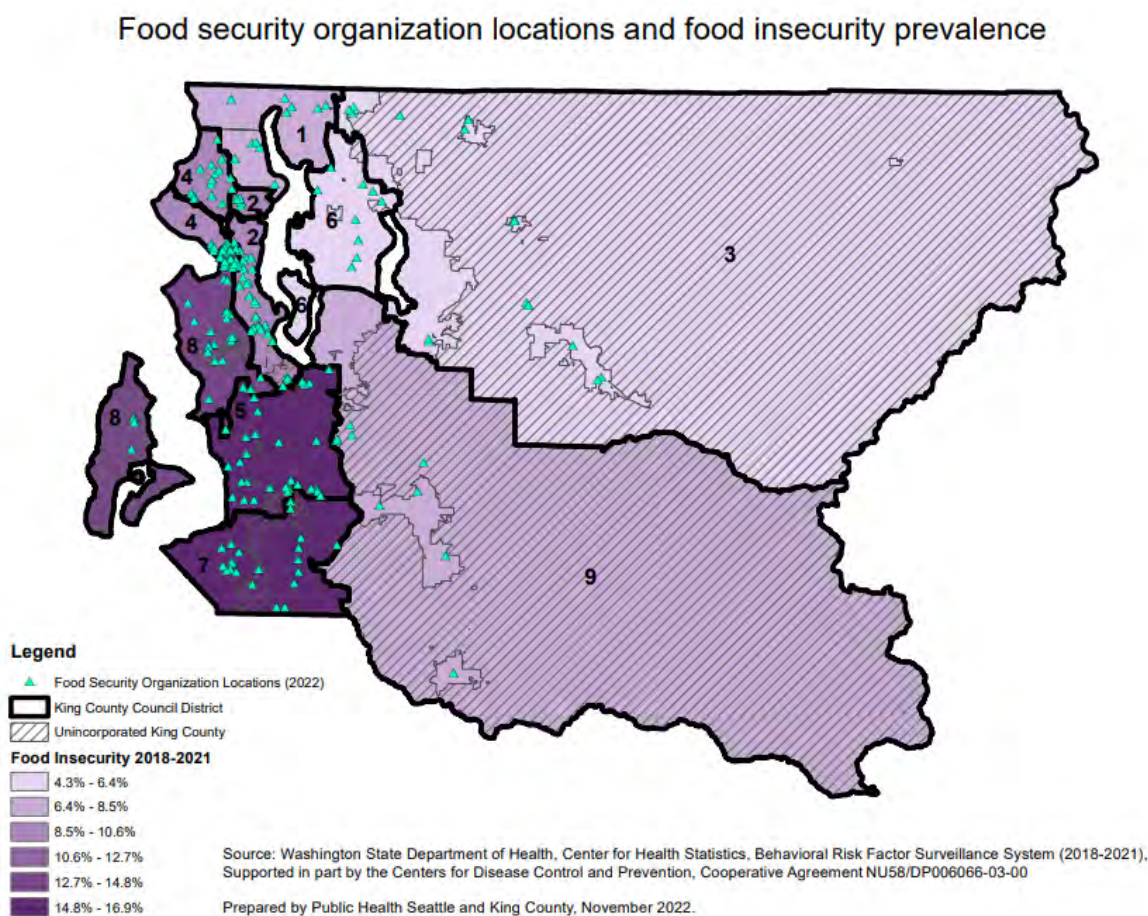
⁷⁷ Ekart, K. For single adults and families alike, higher cost of living in all Washington counties. *UW News*. Oct 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.washington.edu/news/2020/10/15/for-single-adults-and-families-alike-higher-cost-of-living-in-all-washington-counties/>

⁷⁸ Bolt K, Carter L, Casey D, Chan NL, Chen R, Jones-Smith JC, Knox M, Oddo VM, Podrabsky M, Saelens BE, Schachter A, Ta M, Pinero Walkinshaw L, Yang A. Healthy Food Availability & Food Bank Network Report. Report for City of Seattle and Seattle City Council. Feb 2019.

does district 7, though district 4 has a lower estimated number of people in or near poverty (under 200 percent FPL) and estimated to be experiencing food insecurity. It is difficult, however, to determine whether the number of food security organizations located in a specific district is sufficient to meet food insecurity needs without knowing how many people are served nor the amount of food distributed by each organization. The people served and amount of food distributed by each organization was not available, thus Public Health did not perform that level of assessment for this report.

Mapping the comparison of the number of estimated people experiencing food insecurity to the number of identified food security organizations located within each King County council district shows the same pattern of a rough alignment with estimated need. Overall, as shown in the map below, districts with a higher percentage of people reporting food insecurity in the BRFSS survey tend to have more food security organizations than areas with lower percentages of people reporting food insecurity (Figure 7). Distributions of food security organizations are not, however, equal; for example, districts 8 and 7 have over 38,000 estimated people experiencing food insecurity, and district 8 has more food security organizations and food banks than does district 7. As mentioned previously, this is a count of organizations only, and does not account for the number of people served. For example, it may be that the 22 organizations in district 7 serve the same number of people and distribute the same amount of food as the 47 organizations in district 8.

Figure 7. Food Security Organizations and Residents Experiencing Food Insecurity



To accurately estimate which areas in King County are underserved by the existing network of food security organizations, including food banks and meal programs, it is necessary to have accurate data on the percentage of the population experiencing food insecurity and the number of people served and amount of food provided, ideally for more specific geographies. Essentially, estimates of demand and supply are required to assess whether and where gaps exist. Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) distributes EFAP dollars to 45 food banks in King County through three coalitions. WSDA shared the estimated amounts of food distributed and number of people served by emergency food providers for the overall county and the three coalitions distributing food.⁷⁹ These data are available for the three emergency food distribution coalitions that serve King County and the County overall.

Examining pounds of food provided relative to the estimated number of people with incomes under 200 percent FPL in the area each coalition serves gives a descriptive look at capacity to serve. The Seattle Food Committee⁸⁰ had the highest pounds of food distributed per person in or near poverty (60 lbs.), which serves the Seattle area (council districts 2,4, and 8; Table 5 and Figure 8). Hopelink (serving council districts 1,3, and 6) and the South King County Food Coalition (serving council districts 5,7, and 9 and Vashon Island) had lower pounds of food distributed per person (29 and 40 lbs. respectively). The Seattle area has the highest number of food security organizations and pounds per person in or near poverty of emergency food distributed, but the estimated pounds per person of food distributed is much less than the amount the average person eats.⁸¹ This suggests that the existing network of food resources does not meet existing food insecurity needs, and the need is greater in the northern and southern areas of the County compared to the Seattle area.

Table 5. King County Food Emergency Coalition Information by Estimated Populations					
Coalition (Council Districts)	Resident Population	People with incomes <200% FPL	Lbs. of food distributed Jan- Jun 2022	Estimated lbs. per person <200% FPL	Total clients served Jan-Jun 2022
Hopelink (Districts 1,3,6)	769,721	98,766	2,868,272	29.0	169,767
Seattle Food Committee (Districts 2,4,8)	781,190	161,916	9,711,926	60.0	822,774
South King County Food Coalition (Districts 5,7,9, & Vashon Island)	766,788	174,535	6,996,420	40.1	380,780

The measure estimated food provided per person in or near poverty has limitations. As mentioned previously, the number of people under 200 percent of the FPL likely does not capture all of the people experiencing food insecurity and reported pounds of food is a measure of what was provided rather than what was needed. Some of these areas are large, and there is likely variance within each region as well as between them. It is also possible that some clients may receive services in a different area than where they reside. In other words, some communities in a given council district may have more

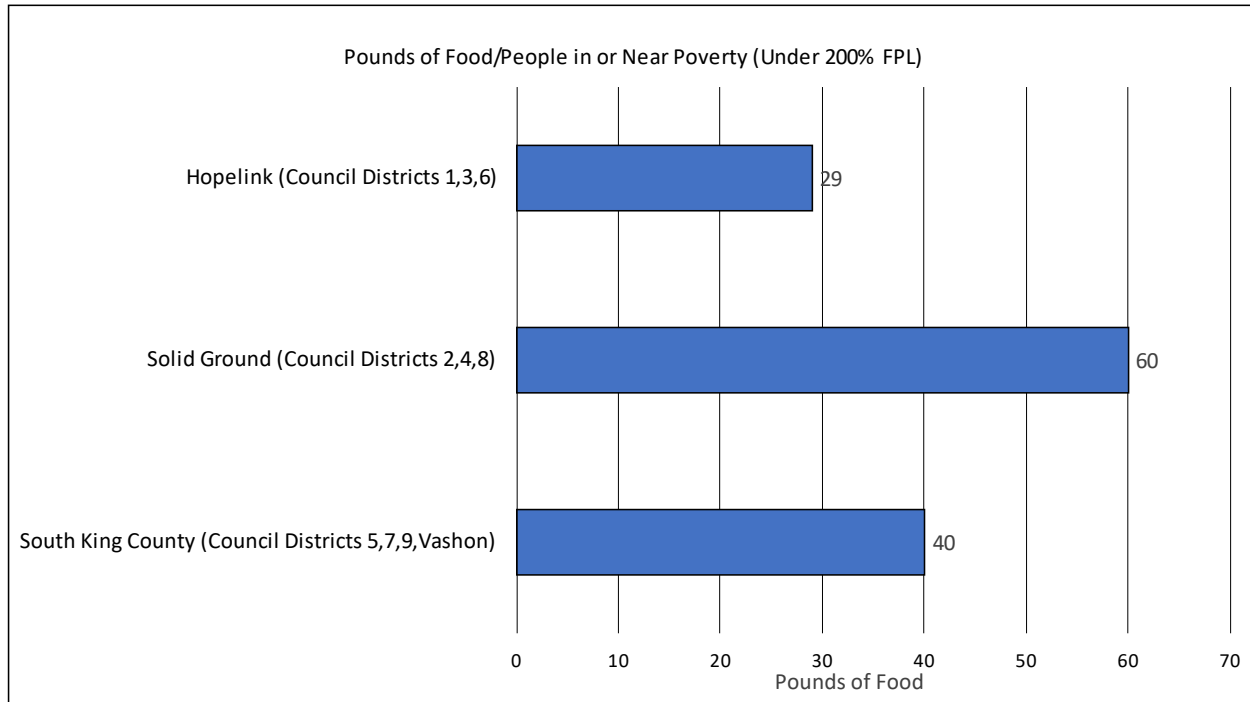
⁷⁹ Neither the number of people served nor the total amount of food distributed are not currently available for individual food security organizations, which limits the type of analysis possible.

⁸⁰ For more information, see <https://www.seattlefoodcommittee.org/>

⁸¹ The average person eats three to four pounds of food per day, which sums to 540 pounds for a six-month period. Hall B. *Forget Calories. The Weight of Your Food is What Really Matters*. Published 8/25/2019. Accessed 1/4/2023 from <https://www.stack.com/a/forget-calories-the-weight-of-your-food-is-what-really-matters/>

proximal access to food bank resources than other communities in that district. For example, a 2019 assessment of Seattle area food access examined food access by more specific geographic areas and analysis suggested prioritizing food access improvement efforts in some northern, lower-income neighborhoods as well as south Seattle.⁸²

Figure 8.8 Pounds of Food Distributed per Person in or Near Poverty by Emergency Food Coalition



Food security organization representatives shared that North SeaTac and Skyway (between Seattle and Renton) are underserved by the existing network of food security organizations. Some mentioned that immigrant communities and people for whom English was a second language were underserved by the existing network. Additional data would inform a more comprehensive analysis about whether specific areas of King County are underserved.⁸³ As King County expands local food production, it may also be useful to determine how much land is or could be available for agricultural use, and how much food can be produced given the amount of land available (a foodshed assessment).⁸⁴

⁸² Bolt K, Carter L, Casey D, Chan NL, Chen R, Jones-Smith JC, Knox M, Oddo VM, Podrabsky M, Saelens BE, Schachter A, Ta M, Pinero Walkinshaw L, Yang A. *Healthy Food Availability & Food Bank Network Report*. 2019. [Healthy Food Availability & Food Bank Network Report \(kingcounty.gov\)](https://kingcounty.gov/healthy-food-availability-report)

⁸³ For example, see Bacon C M, Baker G A. The rise of food banks and the challenge of matching food assistance with potential need: towards a spatially specific, rapid assessment approach. *Agric Hum Values*. 2017; 34:899–919.

⁸⁴ Blum-evitts S. *Designing a Foodshed Assessment Model: Guidance for Local and Regional Planners in Understanding Local Farm Capacity in Comparison to Local Food Needs*. 2009. 2014. 288. <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses/288/>.

Summary of Findings

C. The executive should report to the council on the outreach conducted, the magnitude of food insecurity in King County, any identified ways to assist food banks and food security organizations, including, but not limited to, senior centers, and results of implementation of any assistance measures, and any geographic locations identified that are underserved by the existing network of food banks and food security organizations.

Public Health staff conducted outreach to inform this report by analyzing themes from listening sessions held in October 2022 with 81 representatives of 66 food security organizations and verifying findings with food security organization representatives of food banks in December. Listening sessions focused on three questions:

1. What are the needs of food banks, meal programs, and other food security organizations in King County?
2. How extensive is food insecurity in King County currently? What are some indicators of that (i.e., how do you know)?
3. What are ways that King County can provide assistance to food banks, meal programs, and other food security organizations?

The number of people receiving Basic Food, WIC and emergency food assistance in King County show an increase in people seeking food assistance over the past few months. Most (78%) listening session participants reported an increase in the number of people seeking food (Appendix D Table D1). They confirmed what emergency food assistance totals show; the number of elders seeking emergency food assistance from food banks is increasing. Community members in south Seattle and south King County are more likely to experience food insecurity than other regions of the County, as evidenced by Basic Food assistance data and population survey findings (Appendix C Figures C1, C3 and C5). Food insecurity was highest among those with the lowest income and lowest educational attainment, among communities of color, people who identify as LGB, and people with fair or poor health (see Appendix C).

Listening session participants identified assistance that will help the County move toward a sustainable, local food system, support food security organizations, and directly connect community with food and other resources. System change assistance needs included engaging community in program planning and other decision making, planning for a sustainable food system, supporting transitions away from fossil fuels and other climate change adaptations required, planning to help reduce food-related waste, and increasing food production and supply in communities, particularly in BIPOC communities. Listening session participants identified assistance for organizations that included exploring cost sharing, public-private partnerships and other ways to collaborate, planning for a unified food security network in the region and otherwise supporting network/coalition development, language access services, support with communication materials and marketing efforts, making unused or idle resources available for organizational use, help with volunteer recruitment, as well as sustained, flexible funding for food and operations. They noted that the County could help address other social determinants of health, such as housing and securing a basic income. Others offered more specific suggestions such as help ensuring food assistance programs can link clients to other resources, using food distribution as an opportunity to connect people with other social services, and offering transportation to food distributors for people facing access barriers.

As noted earlier in this document, King County does not have a stable, dedicated, county-based funding stream to address food insecurity. Addressing food insecurity and developing a sustainable local food

system has required and will continue to require multiple partners and funding sources. Outside of directly providing food and funding, however, King County government has a number of services and initiatives that can provide assistance to food security organizations and/or support their mission, assistance that aligns with the type requested in listening sessions.

King County government supports services that address social determinants of health, such as housing assistance and help finding healthcare, as well as efforts to increase awareness of available services. Technical assistance and capacity building supports for food security organizations currently consist of the ad hoc assistance provided by staff during regular meetings with community partners or county-supported planning and learning opportunities such as events hosted through the [Communities of Opportunity](#) initiative. For example, the Communities of Opportunity website has a [community collaboration](#) and a [Human Resources equity](#) toolkit which may be useful to some food security organizations. The HEAL team will use federal grant funds that expire in September 2023 to explore with partners how best to develop a unified food security network in the County. The County's Local Food Initiative continues to lease land to local farmers to increase the amount of locally produced, healthy and culturally relevant food available, and supports projects across the food system including infrastructure development (food hubs) and providing business and technical support for growers. King County's Office of Equity and Social Justice (OESJ) provides language access and interpretation guidance and tools to departments, agencies, residents, and businesses to support accessible communication for people with limited English proficiency and barriers with communication.⁸⁵ The County's climate action plan aligns with this work and will help move the County closer to improved food access and a sustainable food system. The County can continue its support of federal or state programs like WIC, SNAP, Basic Food, child nutrition programs and EFAP, by describing the issues communities face with supporting data and supporting reauthorization and expansion of these programs. Lastly, the County could explore options to make idle, unused resources available for food security organizations' use.

Existing information suggests that all of King County are underserved by the existing network of food security organizations, although analysis for this report was limited to large geographic areas given the data available. Estimating the pounds of food distributed by emergency food coalitions in the first half of 2022 per person with an income below 200% FPL (in or near poverty) gives a descriptive look at capacity to serve (Table 5 and Figure 8). The Seattle Food Committee serves the Seattle area (council districts 2,4, and 8) and had the highest pounds of food distributed per person with an income under 200% FPL (60 lbs.). Hopelink (serving council districts 1,3, and 6) and the South King County Food Coalition (serving council districts 5,7, and 9 and Vashon Island) had lower pounds of food distributed per person (29 and 40 lbs. respectively). The Seattle area has the highest number of food security organizations and pounds per person in or near poverty of emergency food distributed, but the estimated pounds per person of food distributed is much less than the amount the average person eats. This suggests that the existing network of food resources does not meet existing food insecurity needs, and the need is greater in the northern and southern areas of the County compared to the Seattle area.

The measure estimated food provided per person with an income under 200% FPL has limitations. Importantly, reported pounds of food is a measure of what was provided rather than what was needed. Assuming that everyone with incomes below 200 percent of FPL experiences food insecurity may overestimate the number of people experiencing food insecurity by capturing some individuals who are food secure. It is also true, however, that using 200 percent FPL as a proxy for food insecurity could fail to capture certain populations that experience food insecurity at higher incomes. For example, a 2019 Seattle report analyzing King County BRFSS data from 2011-2013 found that food insecurity persisted up

⁸⁵ See <https://kingcounty.gov/audience/employees/translation-interpretation.aspx> for more information.

to 300 percent FPL for white adults, and up to 400 percent FPL for people of color. More information is needed to more accurately estimate whether specific areas of King County are underserved by the existing network of food security organizations, including data about food security organizations' scale of services (the amount of food provided, number of people served, and hours of operation) and estimated need for more specific areas or communities.

IV. Conclusion

Food insecurity in King County increased during 2022 and remains higher than pre-pandemic levels. Some community members are more likely to suffer food insecurity than others. Food insecurity is more prevalent in south King County compared to other regions, communities of color, and people who are lower income, LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, or another diverse gender identity), or experiencing poor health. More people need food assistance when food is less available and more expensive than in recent years, and the county's federally funded COVID-related emergency food assistance programs ended or are expected to end soon.

Representatives of food security organizations identified types of assistance that would help address their and communities' needs in listening sessions held in October 2022. Outside of additional funding, opportunities to assist food security organizations include the following.

- Expand and accelerate existing efforts to increase local food production.
- Increase public awareness about where to find food assistance and other services, how to grow food, and the food supply issues we face with climate change.
- Continue and expand existing engagement with food security organizations to further build a food security network and learning community, support capacity building and help explore cost sharing possibilities.
- Support continued and expanded state and federal food assistance programs and funding.
- Direct more resources towards food security organizations, especially smaller and nontraditional food providers, such as churches and senior centers.
- Help people access other resources, such as rental assistance, job assistance and transit benefits, at food banks; and help build the capacity of food banks to perform federal benefits outreach.
- Help recruit volunteers.

Meeting the basic food needs of community is consistent with King County's commitment to community health, health equity, and local food production, and the County's Climate Action Plan outlines longer term, priority strategies toward increased local food and food security.

Appendices

Appendix A: Motion text

A MOTION requesting the executive to identify resources to support food banks and food security organizations experiencing the impacts of inflation.⁸⁶

WHEREAS, from 2018 through 2020, Communities Count reported that about 10.5% of adults in King County reported that food that was bought for their households sometimes or often did not last, and they did not have money to purchase more food, and

WHEREAS, lack of adequate food can affect physical and mental health, and children who grow up in homes without enough food are at increased risk of illness and academic and social problems, and WHEREAS, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics ("the BLS") reported that the consumer price index for all urban consumers rose 9.1% from April 2021 to April 2022, and

WHEREAS, during the same period, the BLS reported that food prices increased 11.4 percent, led by higher prices for meats, poultry, fish and eggs, and the Seattle Times reported on May 27, 2022, that food banks are experiencing increased operating costs due to inflation at the same time that demand is increasing as food costs rise for households, and

WHEREAS, on June 15, 2022, the United State Federal Reserve raised its key short term interest rate by three-quarters of a percentage point, its largest hike in twenty-eight years, impacting credit card, mortgages, savings rates, and stocks, and

WHEREAS, public health - Seattle & King County has granted five million dollars to seventy-four food banks in 2022, and

WHEREAS, moneys are not currently available for further food bank support, and

WHEREAS, some strategies to support food banks could include, but are not limited to:

1. Helping to influence the federal government to reauthorize federal benefits, such as the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program ("SNAP") and other programs in the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, which is set to expire on September 30, 2023;
2. Directing more resources towards food security organizations, especially smaller and nontraditional food providers, such as churches and senior centers;
3. Helping to create a unified food security network by building connectivity and relationships between food security organizations around the region;
4. Helping individuals access other resources, such as rental assistance, job assistance and transit benefits, at food banks; and
5. Investing in and building the capacity of food banks to also perform federal benefits outreach, as every dollar invested in SNAP outreach yields local benefits beyond the direct federal assistance;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

⁸⁶ Motion 16219 <https://mkkclegisearch.kingcounty.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5698782&GUID=A456317F-FC41-42F9-AE32-956566EE9111&Options=Advanced&Search=&FullText=1> .

A. The council requests the executive to identify resources to support food banks and food security organizations, including, but not limited to, senior centers, experiencing the impacts of inflation. The executive should conduct outreach to food banks and food security organizations, including, but not limited to, senior centers, and other agencies involved in the food network, such as Nourishing Networks, in King County to identify needs and determine the magnitude of food insecurity in King County. In conducting outreach, the executive should identify ways to provide assistance to food banks and food security organizations, including, but not limited to, senior centers, such as, but not limited to, grants and volunteer outreach and recruitment, and outreach should be conducted with at least one organization located in each council district, if possible, and serving a variety of cultural and socioeconomic groups. The executive should begin implementation of any assistance measures upon completion of the outreach.

B. The executive should also identify any geographic locations in King County, including, but not limited to, any areas in rural or unincorporated King County, that are underserved by the existing network of food banks and food security organizations.

C. The executive should report to the council on the outreach conducted, the magnitude of food insecurity in King County, any identified ways to assist food banks and food security organizations, including, but not limited to, senior centers, and results of implementation of any assistance measures, and any geographic locations identified that are underserved by the existing network of food banks and food security organizations. The executive should electronically file the report not later than February 7, 2023, with the clerk of the council, who shall retain the original and provide an electronic copy to all councilmembers and the lead staff of the law, justice, health and human services committee, or its successor.

Appendix B: Organizations participating in outreach efforts

Staff or other representatives of the following organizations participated in listening sessions to support data collection and validation of findings for this report. At least one food security organization located in each council district participated in the listening sessions. Participating organizations served a variety of cultural and socioeconomic groups and are noted below followed by their King County council district or other physical location noted in parentheses.

- 4Tomorrow (1)
- ACT - A Common Thread (Puyallup)
- Adult Disability Services (8)
- African Community Housing & Development (5)
- Alimentando al Pueblo (8)
- Asian Counseling and Referral Service (2)
- Auburn Senior Activity Center (7)
- Bellwether Housing - Sunrise Tower (4)
- City of Kirkland (6)
- City of Renton (5)
- Community Lunch on Capitol Hill (8)
- Cultivate South Park (8)
- Des Moines Area Food Bank (5)
- EastWest Food Rescue (3)
- Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns Council (6)
- El Centro de la Raza (2)
- FareStart (8)
- Farmer Frog (Woodinville)
- Feeding Feasible Feasts (Edgewood)
- Feeding Washington (Spokane)
- First Tongan Senior Association (8)
- Food Lifeline (8)
- For All (8)
- Global to Local (5)
- Greater Maple Valley Community Center (9)
- Harvest Against Hunger (8)
- Highline College Food Pantry (5)
- Hopelink (1)
- Imagine Housing (6)
- Ireta P'urhepecha (7)
- Issaquah Food Bank (3)
- Korean Women's Association (7)
- Lifelong Health For All (8)
- Living Well Kent (5)
- Making A Difference Foundation (Tacoma)
- Miracle Food Network (Ferndale)
- Mission Africa (7)
- Multi-Service Center Federal Way (7)
- North Helpline (1)
- Northshore School District (1)
- Nourishing Networks Consortium (6)
- Open Doors for Multicultural Families (5)
- Operation Sack Lunch (4)
- Pacific Islander Community Association of WA (7)
- Pike Market Senior Center & Food Bank (8)
- Plateau Outreach Ministries (9)
- Prison Scholar Fund (4)
- Rainier Valley Food Bank (2)
- Reach Renton (5)
- Redmond School Break Food Box Program / Open Kitchen (3)
- Restore and Repair Missionary Outreach (2)
- Snoqualmie Valley Food Bank (3)
- Sno-Valley Senior Center (3)
- Solid Ground (4)
- Sustainable Renton (9)
- The Auburn Food Bank (7)
- The Silent Task Force (2)
- The Storehouse (9)
- United Way of King County (8)
- UTOPIA-WA (5)
- Vashon Maury Community Food Bank (8)
- Wakulima USA (5)
- Washington Food Coalition (Washington State)
- West Seattle Food Bank (8)
- World Relief Western Washington (5)
- YMCA of Greater Seattle (5)

Appendix C: Existing Information about the Food Insecurity in King County

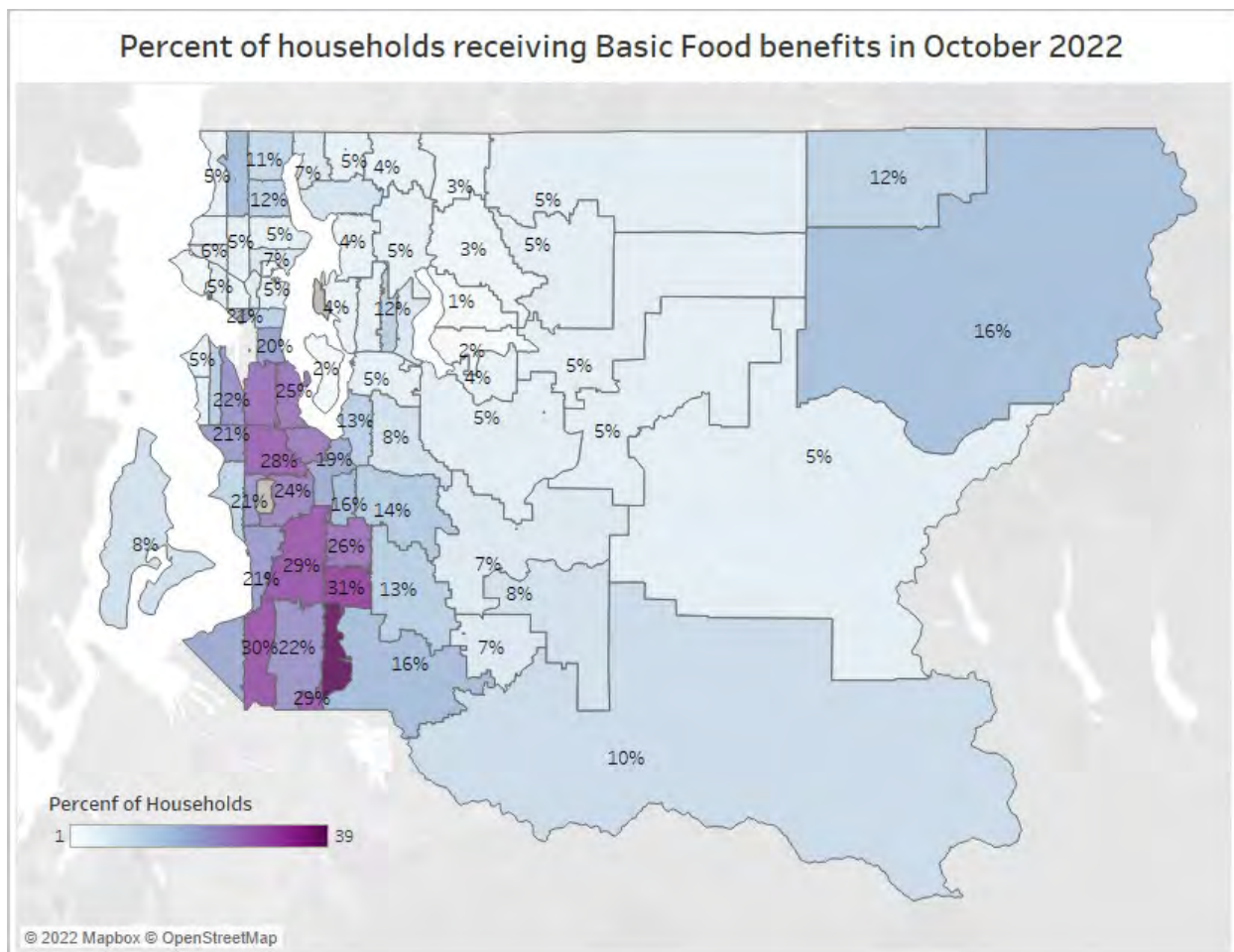
To inform determinations about the magnitude of food insecurity, this report reviews information about recipients of Basic Food, recipients of WIC, and Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) data on food banks in King County with EFAP funding. To help inform who is most at risk of food insecurity, population survey results from three surveys: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey data, U.S. Census Pulse Survey data, and the Best Starts for Kids (BSK) health survey data on basic needs for food and availability of fresh fruits and vegetables.

The following information provides additional context about the magnitude and who is most at risk of food insecurity, including the demographics of people more likely to be facing hunger and food insecurity than others.

Recipients of Basic Food Assistance

A higher percentage of residents receive Basic Food in south Seattle and south King County compared to the rest of the county (Figure C1).

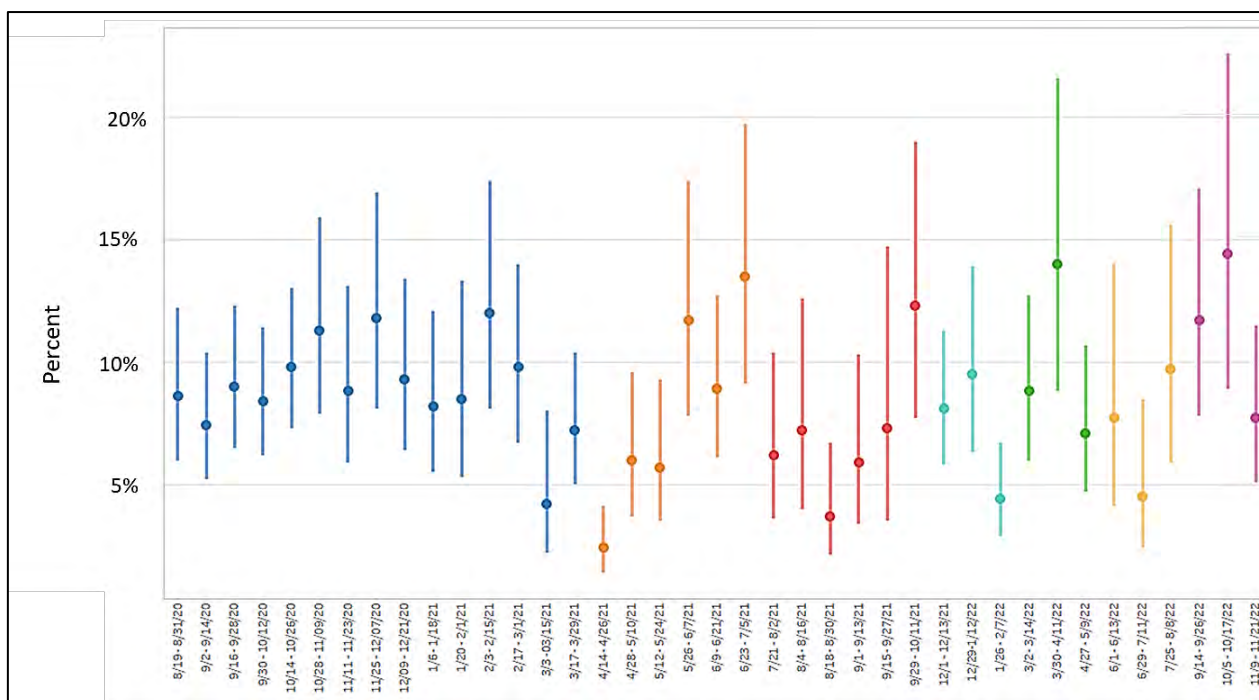
Figure C1. Basic Food Recipients by Region



U.S. Census Pulse Survey food insecurity information

The U.S. Census Pulse Survey regularly collects data on food needs since early in the pandemic for the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which combines King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties (Figure C2). In autumn, results suggested that food insecurity has increased in the region. Among adults with children, 14% in the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue Metropolitan Statistical Area reported “sometimes” or “often” not having enough to eat in their households during the past week in October 2022, which is nearly 50% higher than the 9.7% reported in July and August 2022 (Figure C2); roughly double the rate observed in early July 2022. The most recent survey results (11/9-11/21/2022) show lower rates of food insecurity and no significant differences from the most recent phases.

Figure C2. Percent of Adults in Households with Children in Seattle/Tacoma/Bellevue MSA Who Sometimes or Often Did Not Have Enough Food to Eat, Phase 2 - 3.6: Aug 19, 2020 - Nov 21, 2022



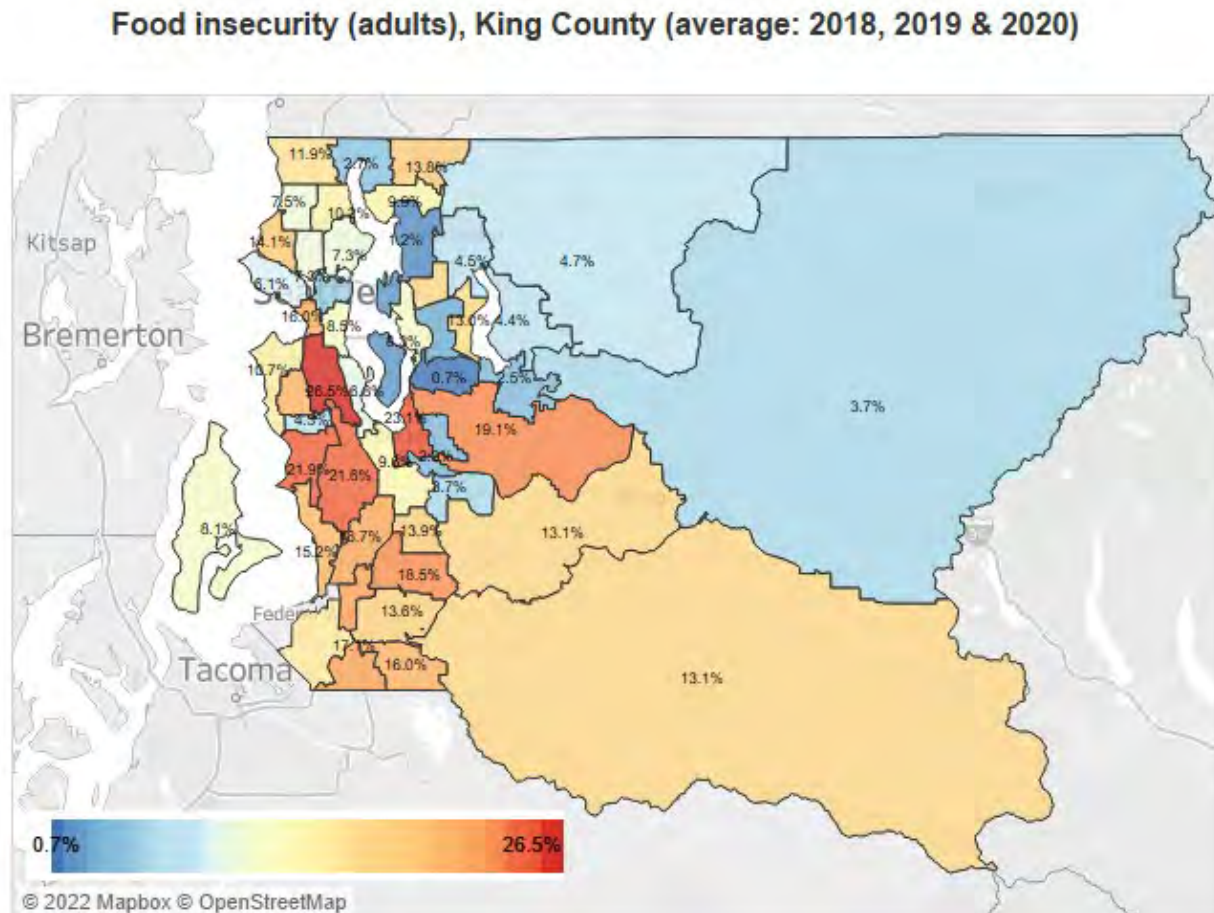
Demographics of People Facing Food Insecurity From the BRFSS Survey

Two other population surveys show similar patterns by region in food insecurity prevalence. These surveys are conducted annually or less frequently and thus cannot measure whether food insecurity has increased in the past six to nine months. The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is an annual, random telephone survey conducted in English and Spanish of non-institutionalized adults aged 18 years or older. In the most recent reported year (2020), 9% of adults in King County were food insecure, meaning they bought food in the last 12 months that sometimes or often did not last and did not have money to get more.⁸⁷ As with other measures of food insecurity, data from 2018-2020 BRFSS

⁸⁷ For more details, please see <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/data/community-health-indicators/behavioral-risk-factor-surveillance-system.aspx> and <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/data/community-health-indicators/behavioral-risk-factor-surveillance-system.aspx?shortname=Food%20insecurity>

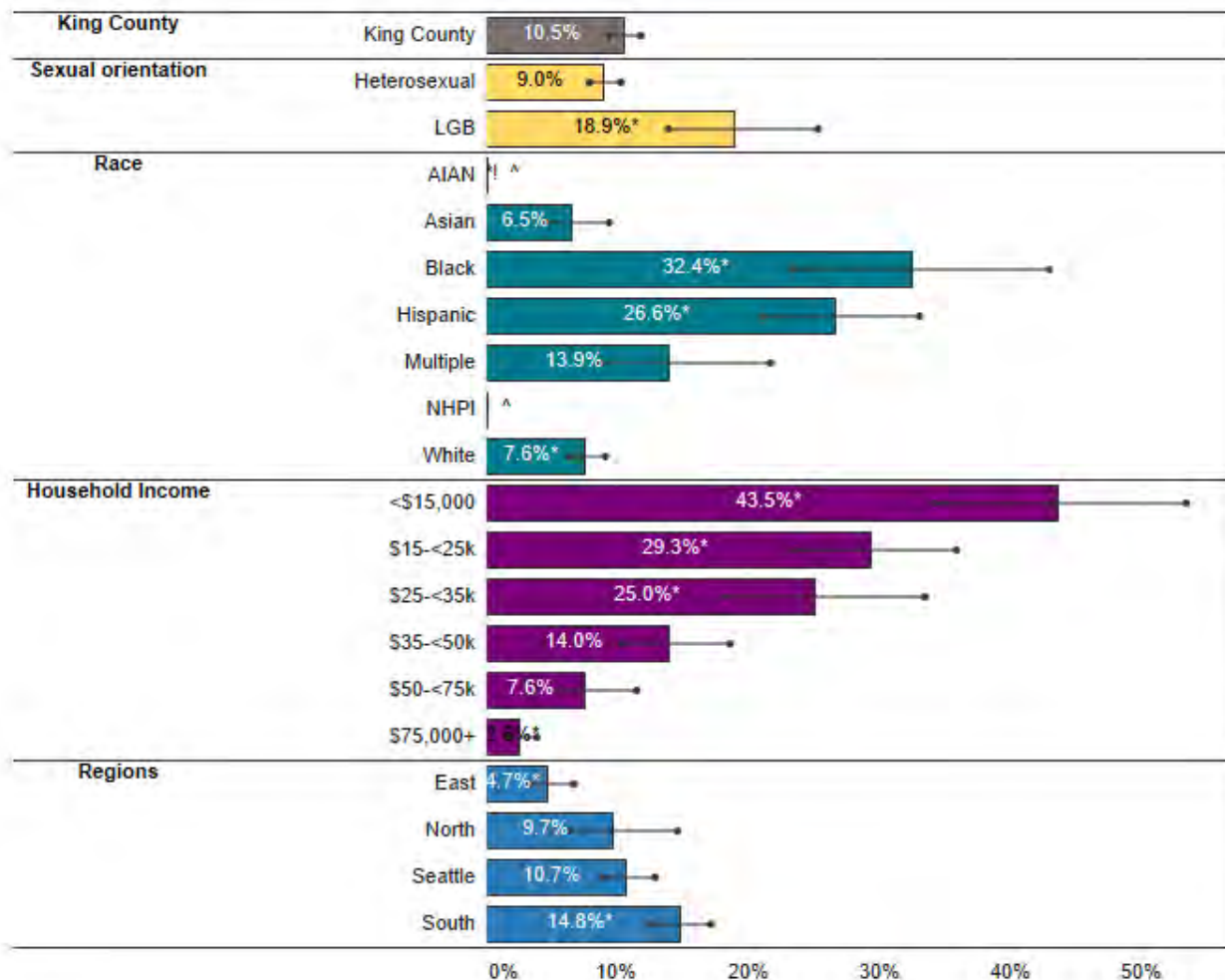
survey show that the prevalence of self-reported food insecurity is highest in south Seattle and south King County (Figure C3).

Figure C3. Respondents Reporting Not Enough Food by Region From BRFSS Survey



Based on aggregate BRFSS survey results for King County (2018-2020), a higher percentage of LGBTQ+ adults reported not having enough food compared to other adults (19% and 9% respectively; Figure C4). Over one-fifth (27%) of Hispanic/Latinx adults experienced food insecurity, as did 32% of Black adults and 14% among multiple race adults. The percentage of adults reporting food insecurity increased as income decreased (Figure C4).

Figure C4. Food Insecurity Among Adults, King County BRFSS Survey (average: 2018, 2019 & 2020)



Best Starts for Kids Health Survey Findings for Food Insecurity

A representative sample of families with children six months of age to 5th grade completed the Best Starts for Kids Health Survey (BSKHS) in 2017, 2019, and 2021. One of the survey questions asks whether caregivers at any time in the last six months struggled to meet food needs. Overall, 28% of parents and caregivers reported it was difficult to afford food at least some of the time since the most recent child was born. Percentages were higher in south Seattle and south King County (Figure C5). As observed for King County in other surveys, food insecurity was highest among people reporting lower income levels, lower education levels and younger respondents (Figure C6). Caregivers identifying as LGTBQ+ were more likely to report food insecurity than people identifying as heterosexual (42% and 22% respectively; Figure C6).

Figure C5. Basic Need for Food by Region, Best Starts for Kids Health Survey

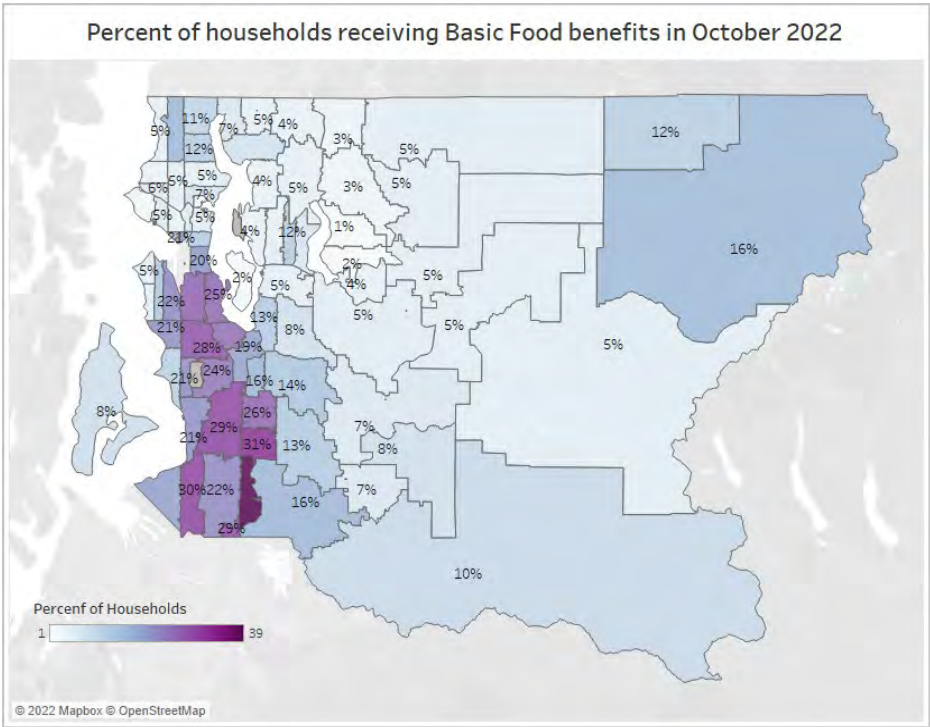
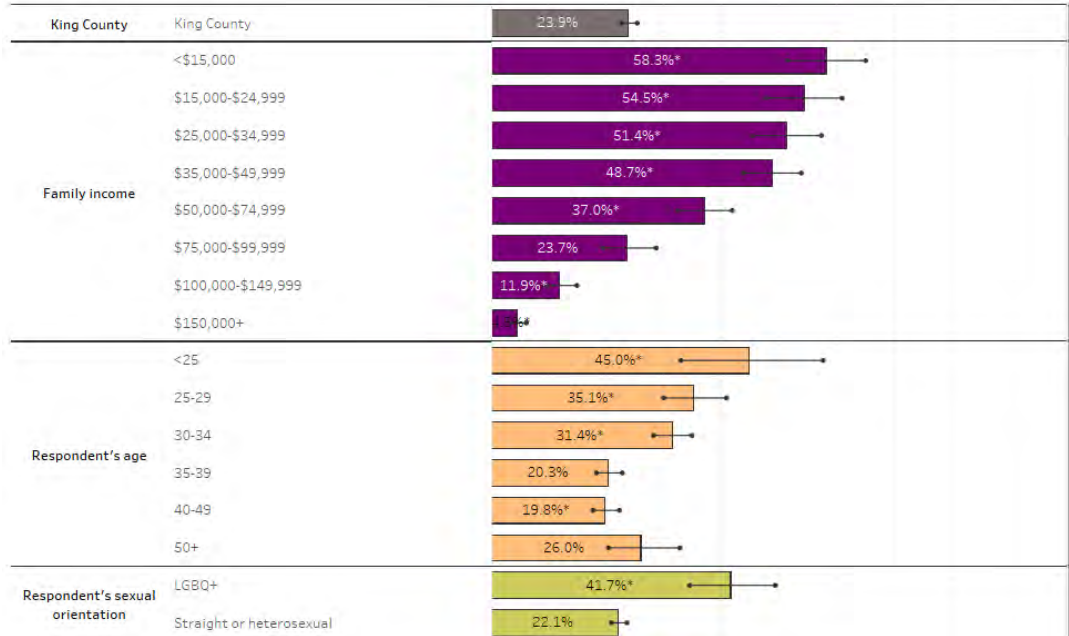


Figure C6. Difficulty Affording Food Some or More of the Time in King County (BSK Health Survey, 2016-2020)



Respondents identifying as having fair or poor overall health were more likely to report food insecurity than people identifying as having good or excellent health (46% and 22% respectively; Table C1).

Table C1. Respondents Who Find it Hard to Cover Basics Like Food by Health Status⁸⁸	
Overall health	Percent (Confidence Interval)
Excellent, very good or good overall health	22.4% (21.1% – 23.7%)
Fair or poor overall health	46.1% (41.9% – 50.3%)
Total	25.1% (23.9% – 26.4%)

Another BSK Health Survey question asks whether caregivers can usually or always find affordable fresh fruits and vegetables in their neighborhood. Among parents and caregivers, most (84%) reported being able to find fresh fruits and vegetables in their neighborhood.⁸⁹ As with questions about food insecurity, caregivers with less education and lower income levels were less likely to report usually or always finding affordable fruits and vegetables in their neighborhood. Caregivers reporting good, fair, or poor health were less likely to usually or always find affordable fresh fruits and vegetables than caregivers reporting very good or excellent health (78% and 85% respectively). Caregivers in south King County (74%) were less likely to usually or always find affordable fresh fruits and vegetables than caregivers in the Seattle (83%), East (90%), and North (88%) regions.

Figure C7. Available and Affordable Fresh Fruits and Vegetables in Neighborhood



⁸⁸ Best Starts for Kids Survey, all years (2017, 2019, 2021).

⁸⁹ See Availability of affordable fruits and vegetables <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/community-human-services/initiatives/best-starts-for-kids/dashboards/bskhs-combined.aspx?shortname=Affordable%20fresh%20fruits%20and%20vegetables>.

King County Emergency Food Programs Relative to Population Estimates

As noted in the report, Public Health and partners developed the referenced list of county food security organizations operating during the pandemic; changes in community resources that occurred since then are not reflected. The following table is a more comprehensive version of Table 4 on Page 30 and provides estimates of lower income and food insecurity prevalence.

Table C2.										
Estimated Populations and Food Security Organizations by King County Council District										
Dist.	2021 Est. Population	Estimated People with Income below 200% FPL ⁹⁰		Estimated People Experiencing Food Insecurity ⁹¹		Number of Food Security Organizations				
		Percent	Number	Percent	Number	In/serving unincorp. King County	Comm-unity	Food Bank	Meals	Total #
1	256,405	17.4%	44,716	8.4%	21,538	N/A	5	3	5	13
2	261,435	23.4%	61,255	9.8%	25,621	4	13	7	24	44
3	255,869	8.2%	21,109	4.3%	11,002	18	8	4	6	18
4	257,833	14.4%	37,054	9.8%	25,268	N/A	1	8	13	22
5	255,263	29.6%	75,494	16.9%	43,139	1	16	3	10	29
6	257,448	12.8%	32,941	5.9%	15,189	0	3	2	3	8
7	254,183	24.8%	63,080	15.1%	38,382	6	9	2	11	22
8	261,922	24.3%	63,607	14.8%	38,764	8	7	18	22	47
9	257,343	14.0%	35,961	7.8%	20,073	7	3	3	3	9

Roughly speaking, areas with a higher percent of people living in or near poverty have more food security organizations than council districts with lower percentages of people living in or near poverty (Income below 200% FPL; Figure C8). Examining the estimated number of people living in or near poverty by Health Reporting Area (HRA) shows differences in the prevalence of poverty and likely food insecurity within some council districts (Figure C9).

⁹⁰ Under 200% FPL using American Community Survey (ACS) 2016-2020 estimates.

⁹¹ Based on BRFSS 2017-2021 estimates.

Figure C8. Food Security Organizations and Residents in or Near Poverty by Council District

Food security organizations and percent of residents with incomes below 200% Federal Poverty Level

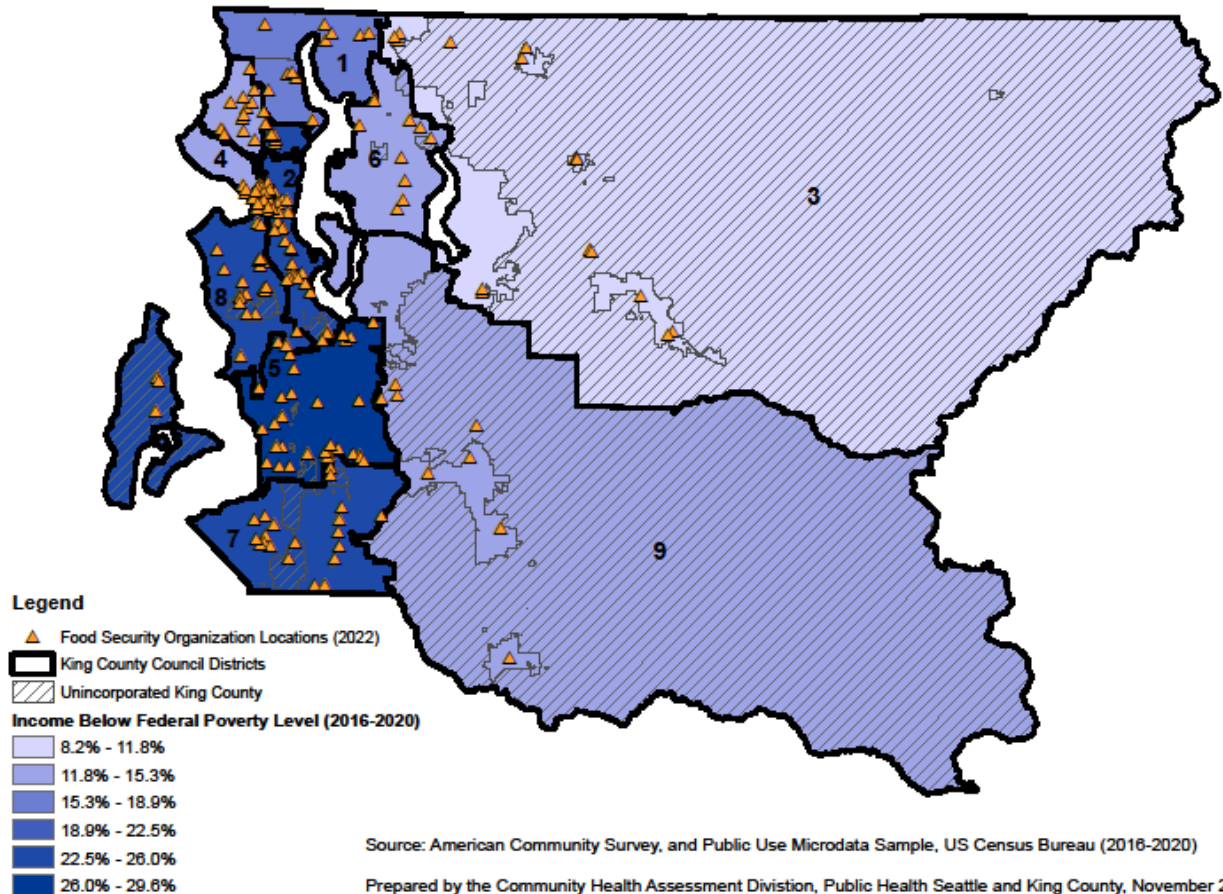
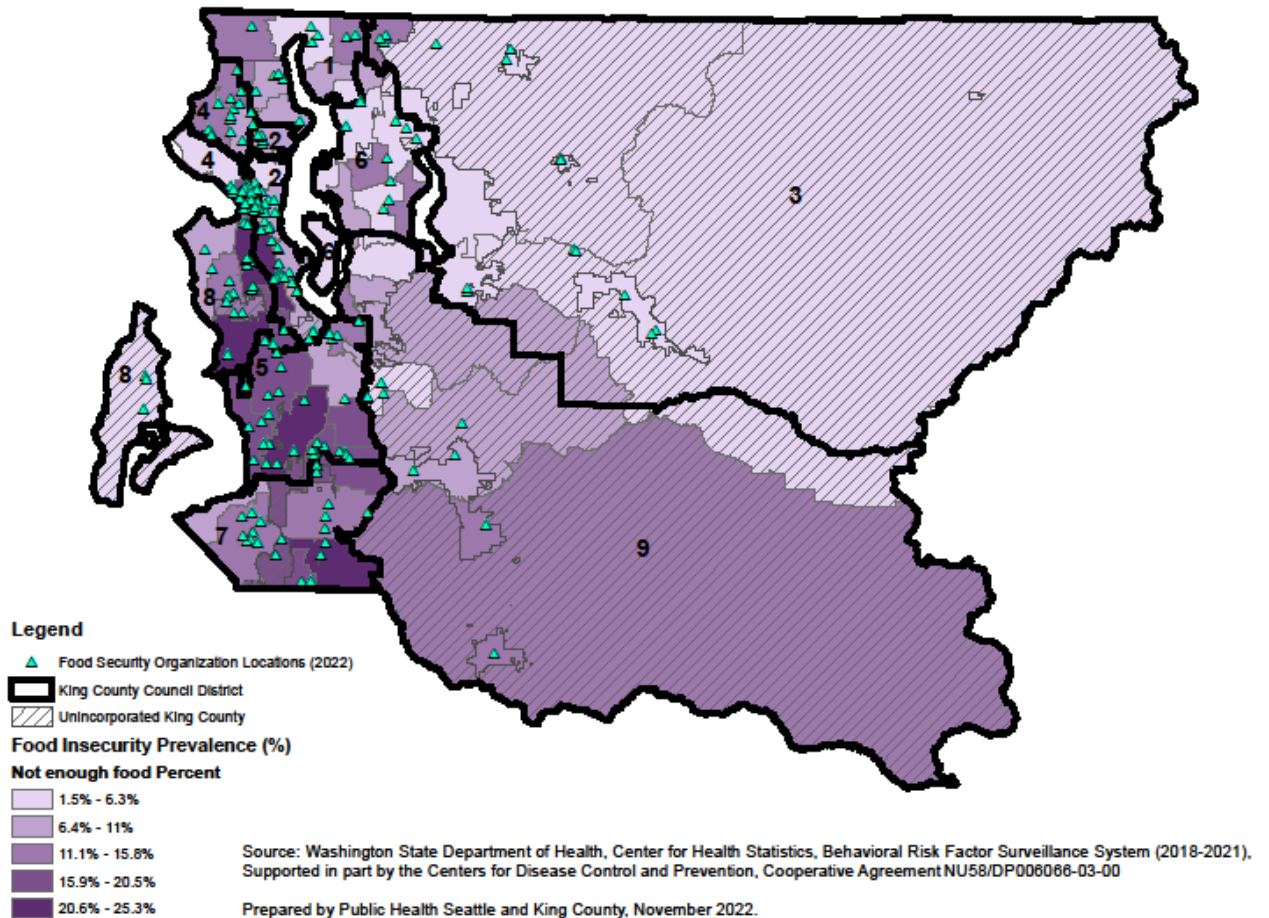


Figure C9. Food Security Organizations and Residents in or Near Poverty by Health Reporting Area with Council Districts Overlaid

Food security organization locations and food insecurity prevalence



Appendix D: Additional Information about Listening Session Methods and Findings

Methods

To solicit the input and perceptions of community-based food security organizations' staff, Public Health staff conducted 11 listening sessions during the last week of October 2022 attended by 81 representatives of food security organizations (food banks, food pantries, senior centers, meal service providers, and community organizations providing food or food services; see Appendix B to view participating organizations). The Public Health team made efforts to ensure participants represented each of the council districts and a variety of communities served. All the listening sessions were conducted in English. The listening sessions were audio-recorded for note-taking purposes. A note taker was also present during each listening session. The Public Health team transcribed then deleted the audio files after incorporating the notes, then removed all personal identification information from the listening session transcriptions. Rapid cycle coding and analysis methods were used to identify and classify thoughts and responses to three main questions that were posed during the listening sessions:

1. How extensive is food insecurity in King County currently? What are some indicators of that (i.e., how do you know)?
2. What are the needs of food banks, meal programs, and other food security organizations in King County?
3. What are ways that King County can provide assistance to food banks, meal programs, and other food security organizations?

In early December, the Public Health team shared a written summary of the listening session themes for participants' review. Themes are reviewed below in aggregate.

Findings

Most (78%) participants in listening sessions reported that demand for food was increasing when asked about the extent of food insecurity in communities (Table D1). They shared that more elders and students (colleges, community colleges, etc.) were seeking food assistance than previously, and these new clients are coming repeatedly rather than only once.

Table D1. Listening Session Participant Reported Changes in the Number of People Seeking Food Assistance		
In the last 6 months, the number of people seeking food assistance has	Count (total =79)	Percentage of 79
Increased	62	78%
Stayed the same	7	9%
Decreased	1	1%
No answer/not applicable	9	11%

Listening session participants shared that as the number of people seeking food assistance has increased, the amount of food available in the grocery stores is low and the food available to distribute is running out quicker than usual – another indication that community members may not have adequate access to food. Essentially, food security organizations report, and data supports that they are facing an increase in demand, the number of people seeking food regularly, as well as a decrease in the supply of

food and staffing. The next section summarizes the needs described by participants of the listening sessions held in October regarding rising food insecurity.

Priority community needs include food, other supports such as financial assistance and mental health services, translation/interpretation services, and education.

Food. Participants described needing greater quantities of food and high quality, fresh, nutritious and culturally relevant food. Some reporting needing more protein sources and dairy products explicitly. A participant^{M392} offered that while *"supply is tightening up, we're actually increasing number of people we're serving. And in addition, the food supplies that we get is kind of a mixed bag of what's available right now... So it's always kind of hit or miss what foods are available."* Among participants describing the need for healthy, fresh produce, dairy products, and protein sources, one shared^{M3} that *"getting halal meat, for example, is really hard, it's really expensive, and so they don't stock as much, but there's a huge need in their community."*

A participant^{T1} described the importance of offering culturally relevant foods.

"We want to be able to cater to the community we serve – our organization serves Asian and Latino neighborhoods and communities, and it's not as helpful when we give them foods that aren't culturally relevant. We want to be able to give people the things they would buy for themselves at the grocery store."

The most immediate needs of community members participants mentioned were additional food, an ongoing cash assistance program to purchase food, like Basic Food, and for transportation to get food or have it delivered. Participants offered that community members need affordable food and housing, a living wage, and communities need a sustainable, local food source.

Awareness about services. People need more information about what food resources are available (i.e., where they could go to get food), sources for additional types of support, from housing and financial assistance to how to start a garden or start a community garden. Participants requested education campaigns to let people know that extra garden produce can be donated, how to start gardens and can or otherwise preserve local foods, among other topics. A participant^{W2} highlighted another type of education campaign needed:

"We need an education plan sent out to our residents both incorporated and unincorporated that the food banks are here for them regardless of income. We need to target median income/middle income as they are struggling as well and too 'ashamed' to visit or too 'proud'. They are still trying to help while they themselves need help as well due to inflation. So, a target education opportunity for these individuals and seniors to help them feel 'allowed' to use food banks would be a win."

Mental health and other supports for community members. Support for mental health of farmers, especially as they confront climate challenges that impact crop yields and increasing operating costs. Some participants mentioned needing support for the mental health of young people. A participant^{W5} summarized *"Also, [seeing] a lot of mental health problems. We are doing a lot of programs around mental health, especially with youth. All the problems are intertwined and there are issues with smaller organizations being able to meet capacity."*

Having access to land. Participants identified that land is needed for local community gardens and larger

⁹² In this appendix, direct quotes include a superscript session reference identifier to assist any verification efforts needed.

scale farms. As a participant^{T3} described, *“land access... that's something that's definitely been identified a lot, both in rural areas for protecting farmland, making it accessible for folks who wanted to start farms and also facilitating establishing community gardens in residential areas.”* Some participants identified the need for more community growing spaces, especially in south King County, and the funding to make and sustain these gardens. One participant^{T3} shared that, *“What we normally do... some of the work that we do, we grow our own food and encourage community members to grow our own food. Finding the spaces to grow our own crop has also been a challenge.”*

Community based, participatory planning. Participants requested more opportunities for community engagement to give input on what programs, food, and products they need. Some participants requested community engagement in decision making. A participant^{W5} suggested, *“Long term, there could be a decision-making body that has the knowledge and expertise on the ground, so it isn't just the County Council trying to develop something.”*

Priority food security organization needs include additional food resources, staff, equipment and operations support, capacity building and funding to address these and other needs.

Flexible Funding. The highest priority and most prevalent need identified by participants is for funding. One participant summarized that: *“a lot of these food security organizations, they're underfunded and understaffed.”* Another^{T1} described hearing across food security organizations that money is the biggest need and *“because every program is so unique...you all know what you need. So just getting money so that you can spend it where you have the need is, I think, what people want.”*

Food Supply. Participants described a decline in the overall food supply, as well as declines in donations and pounds of food received through government sources. One^{M3} described:

“The fact that so many people live in grocery store deserts, doesn't seem to matter as much, simply because ... the stores can't keep up. Even if you live near one. I live near to [one] and they can't keep their grocery levels up. So, we're just seeing a terrible, terrible gap for folks not just to have affordable access to food, but just access to food.”

Another participant^{T3} described:

“I work with a couple of churches just as a volunteer... they'll have their food drive, and then I'll help them...with whatever comes in. And then I help distribute to the senior center and the pantries. And I see a huge drop in what's being left in the little pantries, I think, because people just don't have- people who would normally donate to a food bank or a pantry, they just don't have the extra money to put an extra couple of cans in the grocery cart or something when they go to Costco because they're finding their food budget squeezed. So, there's a definite decrease in what's being donated”.

As mentioned previously, some participants noted decreases in food supply. One^{W1} reported *“organizations that provide food supplies to many food banks around King County...at least throughout 2022...[have] drastically decreased in volume when it comes to the food.”* Multiple participants reported that grocery store donations have declined. Participants described needing greater quantities of food and high quality, fresh, nutritious, culturally relevant food. Some reported needing more protein sources and dairy products. Some participants highlighted the importance of being able to allow people to choose the food they get, and another suggested providing access to condiments, spices, and herbs.

"We do a meal program. And our biggest struggle right now [is that] we operate, we create the meals, but we don't have the bandwidth to do the distribution all the time. So, we work with community partners to do the distribution. But there's so many other members in the community who need food, and they're not tethered to an organization. And so, we're seeing that a whole bunch of people are being missed." ~Participant^{M3}

Staffing. Organizations need funding to recruit, hire and support staff with a living wage, mental health and well-being services and professional development opportunities. Multiple participants noted that the number of volunteers working in their organization had declined and not recovered from pandemic period lows. They wish to pay existing volunteers to honor their expertise and retain them. Participants described aims to hire multi-lingual staff to better serve their community, needing highly skilled, reliable staff for effective operations.

"One thing that I think we really need to do is, is pay our staff, their wages that reflects the skills and experience that we expect of the people who work for us. And it's people working in an environment, often with at-risk populations who have unpredictable behavior. It's not a minimum wage job generally working in the front line of a food bank or a meal program. You need training, you need skills, you need to have self-possession. You often need education. And... our staffing costs are going up really a lot because of inflation, but also they should be going up more because of the value of our employees." ~Participant^{T1}

Participants offered that having and maintaining enough staff is difficult and perceive a labor shortage. One^{T3} noted: *"I think everyone is feeling that labor is a huge issue"*. Food programs need more consistent volunteers and/or staff and shared ideas about the possible benefits of local relationship building and sharing of volunteers. One participant^{W1} shared *"manpower is kind of the bigger issue because we're a gleaning-based operation. So, we need more volunteers"*. Multiple participants noted that food banks need to be able to staff their organizations to be open for longer hours and need more funds to be able to pay staff/volunteers and provide benefits so they can commit to a consistent schedule. They also need to pay food bank and other staff livable wages. A few participants noted that food security organizations should pay people instead of relying on volunteers. A participant^{W5} offered *"If [food programs] are not paying livable wages to the people that work in these agencies, they are just perpetuating the situation. I feel like that is such a priority across the board because it's just creating – in the community - more need. When we have staff that are needing the very services that we are providing, it's just not making a lot of sense."*

This is consistent with observations shared in recent meetings of Public Health food security partners. Over the past two years, these food security partners shared with Public Health staff that food security organizations need long-term volunteers and one of the biggest needs for volunteers was drivers. They appreciated having access to National Guard members for several weeks at a time during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants also mentioned how useful it was to have the National Guard and AmeriCorps assistance. One participant asked if the AmeriCorps assistance could be continued. Some participants wished they had sufficient program staff to be able to have them engage directly with community so that programming is community driven. Some wished they had staff time to dedicate to grant requirements and processes.

Space and Equipment. Multiple participants across sessions noted a need for space and equipment, especially transportation-related equipment. Participants mentioned needing higher capacity freezers and refrigerators, refrigerated trucks for food transport, replacement parts for repairs, space to expand food distribution, as well as security equipment to prevent theft and damage to trucks or other

property. Some food distribution organizations are trying to work out of trailers and refrigerated trucks; others serve community and provide food and/or meals and other supports out of a building or other space.

"Coming up with enough to rent a space out, to have a dedicated location where people can find, we need a dedicated space and that can be really tough...with rising rent too and...people buying up warehouses and cooling spaces and kind of renting them out, we don't really have a lot of funding for that." ~Participant^{T3}

Some participants suggested that having a commercial kitchen could help organizations better accommodate the demand for meals.

"Food is expensive, food inflation is really high, and [organizations are] unable to accommodate for the size of clients that we're having now. And so they're either unable to purchase that quantity of food. Or they're unable to make that amount of food in their own kitchen, because we don't have a commercial kitchen or a place where we're able to cook the meals at our meal site." ~Participant^{W4}

Numerous participants highlighted a need for storage of both frozen and dry foods. A participant^{M2} described a need to store food especially in winter months. One participant^{T3} described how their organization faced multiple needs, a need for storage as well as staff.

Operational Costs. Operational costs mentioned by participants include information technology infrastructure and its maintenance, maintenance of trucks, buildings and other spaces, security equipment such as cameras to prevent break-ins and theft, as well as community members' and organizational need to purchase paper, cleaning, and other non-food products. One participant described hearing from food banks that use of their services had gone up since COVID-19, which means wear and tear on their facilities has also gone up - so funding to address infrastructure is needed.

Transportation for food distribution. Participants noted that transporting food had become very expensive, and it has been hard to find staff to drive. Organizations need funding for the equipment and operations of transporting, storing, and delivering food. Funding is needed to buy, fuel, and maintain transport vehicles, gas, chains and/or other adjustments to enable reliable food delivery. Multiple participants noted that during inclement weather trucks are not able to deliver food. At a more systems level, participants sought help finding ways to access food from larger organizations in a timelier manner, as well as identifying and mitigating challenges to delivering food to people.

Communication and education tools. Some participants expressed a need for communication and information tools, such as other types of services available. A participant^{T1} highlighted communication services as a broader need. In other words, providing organizations with communication services, such as graphic design and printing of materials would be useful.

"Marketing, graphic design help would be helpful. It seems like those are things that can go a long way. Like having that kind of expertise available to this network is so helpful. It's not often something that people have extra funding for to hire somebody who's a marketing expert to help promote anything...there's wonderful programs that organizations have funding for, but they don't have extra funding, to print flyers, and to post on social media and just all of that kind of stuff. And I think the County, or even just really large capacity organizations are set up ... They have a team, they can just send a request to their marketing team, and then get beautiful flyers and posters and things like that. It may sound silly, but I feel like that's a big need from what I've been hearing." ~Participant^{T1}

Food security system change needs include assistance identifying organizational needs and solutions to better deliver resources to community, diversifying food sources and delivery systems, reducing food-related waste and planning to better ensure sustainable food resources.

Funding. Participants requested that more funding be allocated for food security at a system level.

System change support and capacity building. Participants from food security organizations highlighted a need for capacity building in several areas. Overall, they requested capacity building or assistance identifying organizational needs at a system level, understanding how to more effectively get resources to people in need, identifying and mitigating barriers for people seeking food, and sustainability planning.

Participants in multiple listening sessions highlighted capacity building is needed to improve and diversify food source and delivery systems, as well as technical assistance to grow culturally relevant foods. Understanding the barriers for people to reach out to a food security organization was also identified. Participants also mentioned it would be helpful to have better communication about funding opportunities that fit an organization's model/needs and between food distributors to share resources.

One participant^{W3} noted that supply chain issues emerged for smaller distributors which required more advanced planning, resulting in more time and cost for the organizations. A number of organizations are currently funded with COVID-19 funds and are actively seeking ways to continue the funding after COVID-19 support ends. Participants mentioned needing ways to reduce costs and grant writing expertise. A participant^{T3} offered *"there's a lot of competition for the grant money that is available these days... unless you know how to word your application, and can understand and be understood, it can be a real challenge."*

Build sustainable business practices. Sustainable food planning, waste management and reduction, as well as sustainable business practices were needs identified by one or more participants. Some participants mentioned the need for food sovereignty to help ensure sustainable, healthy food for people.

Interpretation and translation services. To help food security organizations better serve community, participants requested having translated materials available for community and talked about the need to have staff that speak the language of the people served, and effective language interpretation and translation services available for use.

Access to land and education. Participants noted that access to land and moving toward food sovereignty and sustainable local food production is important for King County. As mentioned previously, land is needed for local community gardens and larger scale farms.

Community-based, participatory planning. As mentioned previously, participants requested more community engagement in food security programming and decision-making. A participant^{W5} suggested *"Long term, there could be a county level decision-making body that is led by community that has the knowledge and expertise in terms of the constant needs on the ground, so it's not just the County Council trying to identify certain need and holding a community engagement process, but also just having a sort of structure to have continuous communication."*

Participant ideas to increase direct support for community include expanding food assistance and access in multiple ways, addressing other social determinants of health, increasing access to interpretation and translation services, promoting awareness and education about health and food sustainability.

In the listening sessions, participants reviewed and selected their top three priorities from the potential

types of assistance highlighted by King County Council in the Motion (Table D2). Among the 79 participants, over half prioritized grants and directing more resources toward food security organizations. Nearly half prioritized creating a unified food security network. Roughly one-third prioritized helping food security organizations connect community members to additional supports, and the expansion of federal nutrition assistance programs.

Table D2. Participant-ranked Ideas Noted in Motion (<i>multiple responses possible, n=79</i>)		
Assistance Type Noted in Motion	Number of responses	Percentage
Grants	43	54%
Directing more resources toward food security organizations, especially smaller and nontraditional food providers, such as churches and senior centers	41	52%
Helping to create a unified food security network by building connectivity and relationships between food security organizations around the region	39	49%
Helping individuals access other resources, such as rental assistance, job assistance and transit benefits, at food bank (note: some already doing this)	24	30%
Helping to influence the federal government to reauthorize federal benefits, such as the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program ("SNAP") and other programs set to expire on September 30, 2023	23	29%
Investing in and building the capacity of food banks to also perform federal benefits outreach, as every dollar invested in SNAP outreach yields local benefits beyond the direct federal assistance	21	27%
Another strategy not on this list that I will share in the group discussion	14	18%
Volunteer outreach and recruitment	11	14%

Participants discussed these as well as additional types of assistance they would like to see from the County. A summary of assistance needed follows.

Expanding food assistance. Participants offered multiple ideas for increasing and improving food access and resources in communities. Some suggested that King County offer or fund emergency food programs, including food banks and meal programs, ideally with more flexibility in funding allocations. One participant suggested that the County develop a program that distributes food boxes. Others noted that the County could help increase awareness of food security and other service organizations, to improve the ease and ability of finding resources more locally for people. Other ideas mentioned include:

- Increase food stamp amounts and eligibility requirements. For example, having food benefit programs that serve people who are in middle income groups and are not eligible for SNAP.

- Ensuring people have access to benefits, like Basic Food, long term. For example, ensuring that the Basic Food program has secure funding, and/or offering food vouchers. Both of these would allow families to choose the food products they want, which participants noted is important.
- Increase Basic Food amounts and have Basic Food accepted on campuses. A participant^{T1} described that *"people, almost everybody, would prefer to get their own groceries. To have their own self-determination about stuff and not go to a food bank or a meal program. Promoting more self-sufficiency, like higher EBT [Basic Food] amounts, as opposed to people depending on food banks and meal programs being able to choose for themselves... I think that would be a better solution in the long run [to] hunger."*
- Some participants hope the County can enable food banks to increase hours of operation and provide food delivery and/or transportation services to stores with discounted food (e.g. Costco). A participant^{M3} shared that food bank operating hours was the number one barrier identified in a survey one of the organizations did with the families they serve.
- Integrate food programs and meal provision with other community services in ways that work for community. For example, a senior center partnered with a food bank to distribute emergency food through the senior center which was closer geographically and created a socialization opportunity. Other organizations are providing warm meals in the same location people can pick up emergency food provisions.
- Develop a system to distribute hot food donations. The example participants mentioned was a hot meal program developed by San Diego County, [Great Plates Delivered](#), later expanded across California.
- Enable food security organizations to provide clients with emergency weather-related items such as thicker socks for the winter or extra water for the summer.
- Having the government organize to harvest fruit trees in parks and public lands.
- Improve the environment and increase people's ability to connect in organizations' physical spaces. One participant^{W3} offered that integrating social and human interactions into food assistance activities supports people's health: *"we know loneliness is like 13 cigarettes a day. So, we want to get people out of their homes, and we want them to congregate, we want them to eat."* Another suggested that improving the environment and conditions for volunteers might increase the overall number of volunteer hours.

Participants noted that additional land is needed to increase local food production. A participant^{T3} described how more small family and community gardens, where a portion of harvest is donated, can contribute to community food security.

"There's a tiny home growers' program in our area. And it's only half a dozen families who have some kind of backyard, or window boxes or a community garden, and they contribute a few pounds of whatever they're growing throughout the growing season. And it's a tiny program, but it does work really well. But it's not enough, it would be lovely to see more. And so people instead of donating money, they're donating something that they already know something about that they enjoy, that they know their neighbors would enjoy."

Connecting people to services. Some participants noted that the County could help address other social determinants of health, such as housing and securing a basic income. Others offered more specific suggestions such as help ensuring food banks can link clients to other resources and use food distribution as an opportunity to connect people with other social services. For example, improved coordination to support community members one-stop to connect with multiple services to better meet needs, and support with expertise and cross-disciplinary care coordination. One participant offered that

the County could help expand benefit hub models to get people connected to services. Multiple participants suggested increased funding for services that prevent people from having to rely on food banks, such as rental assistance and living wage jobs or supports. Another participant^{W3} mentioned housing assistance: *“The focus group we have hosted, they said that between 70 and 80% of their income was going to rent. ...How do we prevent people from paying so much money, so much of their income to rent?”* This same participant^{W3} identified the need to have more human services supports to build longer-term wealth and address inequities:

The two years of the pandemic amplified everything...in that people are becoming poorer, ...It's going to take longer for people to generate wealth, you know, intergenerational wealth. People are incredibly behind. If they were behind before the pandemic, you can imagine how far behind they are now. It's deepening.”

Another participant worried about provisions for seniors, given many rent and cost increases exceed social security increases. Someone highlighted that the reimbursement rate for aging and disability services needs to be updated to reflect the increased cost of living.

One person suggested developing an app that locations could load information about what they have available and community members could access the information. Another participant suggested that the County and food security organizations may want to explore whether providing transportation to community members might be more effective than delivering food to people, given implementation issues like inaccurate addresses for people requiring food delivery (some reported delivering food to residences no longer occupied).

Supporting language access for community and staff. Participants offered a few ways to help ensure community members could communicate in their preferred language. First, it would help to have translation services available to food security organizations. Having partnerships with organizations that can support interpretation and communication services speaking the language of the people served would also expand language capacity. Participants also mentioned working toward hiring staff from the communities being served as a way to increase community access and comfort.

Educate and increase awareness among community members. Participants identified a need for community education to tell people that food programs exist and that you can donate your own produce from the garden, among other things (gardening, canning, cooking). Ideally, the County could provide funding and staffing for this effort. A participant also mentioned educating funders about the existing food security organizations and their needs and activities, in hopes this would lead them to proactively offer support to these organizations. Multiple people want to educate people on how to grow food. A participant^{M2} shared: *“we've all been technology based and running through technology and we've got to go back to the bare basics and start educating some of these kids on how to, and just other people in general, how to grow for their communities.”* This same participant wants to also educate people about worsening food insecurity as one of the reasons to teach youth about why and how to grow their own food. Some participants noted that it will be important to do outreach among communities to share information about how farmers can connect with farmers markets to sell the food they grow – particularly culturally relevant food. A participant^{W5} described the following:

“We did not find our culturally relevant foods in the [farmers] market... [We] invited people to the farmers markets to showcase what kinds of food and dishes we can make from what we bought from the market. But there were quite a number of African farmers who had no idea that they could [sell] their products [at] the farmers markets. This is a time that people are planting or will begin to plant for next year....Maybe they will have their product ready to bring to the farmers market. .. [Then] there will be more products that are relevant to our cultures.”

Assistance for organizations includes flexible funding for food and operations, ideally multi-year and sustained, exploration of cost sharing public-private partnerships and other ways to collaborate, lead or support network development and sustainability planning.

Funding for food security organizations. The most prevalent need and assistance mentioned by participants was for unrestricted, multi-year funds, ideally sustainable. A participant^{T3} noted that *"we try to support sustainable long-term relationships between food security organizations and growers who are directly producing food. But when... funding amounts aren't known from year to year that makes it really hard to plan for long-term purchasing relationships."* People mentioned needing funds for food, operations costs (rent, truck and refrigerator repairs, equipment, etc.), to train and pay staff, and offer better assistance to community as well as staff. One participant^{T2} described the following cluster of funding needs.

"Some of the things that we're seeing from our agencies, and also communities we're serving as well, is just the need for fresh produce [and] for culturally relevant foods including meats, and including halal meats as well. That's been a big ticket item for us. The need for refrigerated trucks, storage, including refrigerator, storage, and, of course, as mentioned before, on the call already, funding - unrestricted multi- year grant funding would be absolutely amazing to have. And program staff to engage directly with community members to ensure programming is community-driven rather than agency-driven is something that we're hearing from the community as well."

Participants raised the need and desire to compensate people working in food security or food distribution organizations a living wage. One^{T1} noted the need for unrestricted funds to address the increased expense of workforce hiring and retention:

"Our food costs are down, but our employee costs are up because every time an employee leaves, then the cost of the new one increases. So, you know, the retention, as well as finding them, and then you know, having to bite the bullet. I look at my employee costs now compared to where they were six months ago, a year ago, two years ago. It's extraordinary, where they're at. I'm just now doing my '23 budget...My employee costs for next year are going to be what my total budget was two years ago. So, it's frightening; the unrestricted funds would help with that for sure."

Another participant^{M3} noted that additional, flexible funding is needed to transition volunteers to staff.

"The whole industry thrives on the backs of people who need volunteer work. And it's all unpaid... we would be addressing food insecurity in just being able to pay a livable wage to people who do this work... Oftentimes, you go into a food bank, and you'll see elderly volunteers in there volunteering, and then you see them leave with a bag of groceries, right? And because of their work ethic, oftentimes, they feel like they have to work in the food bank to earn this food, when in fact, they should be being paid a wage for working a job, right? Because they are working a job. So, I'd like to see us as an industry start steering away from working on the backs of those who are disadvantaged."

Unrestricted, multi-year funding gives organizations flexibility in meeting multiple and varied needs. Participants need flexible funding for things like staff, fresh produce and heating and cooling services.

They also seek funds and expertise to provide other services (e.g., rental assistance, job assistance and transit benefits) to better meet community needs. One participant^{T1} described that: *"when an individual access services, one place, [and] they're able to be connected to other services and other places...that takes both funding and expertise to be able to do that. And we know that the folks that are coming to our locations are often accessing multiple services."*

Participants shared the following additional thoughts related to funding mechanisms.

- Having reporting requirements that do not ask for client's demographic information, as that can be a barrier for people to get food. A participant^{W1} shared that *"seniors really bridle at having questions asked like, 'What's your sexual orientation'?... I understand that you need to know... who's coming. But it's hard."*
- Having lower administrative barriers to funding, grant applications and reporting systems. One participant^{T1} offered: *"Seattle Public Utilities did something unique during COVID, where they had some COVID support that was like, I think 18 grand or something, but it was really low barrier and kind of suited for smaller organizations."* Others shared that ideally small organizations could have a different model to access funds, so as to not have to spend a lot of staff time applying for numerous grants, each providing small amounts.
- Administrative and technical assistance with the grants. Organizations often do not have dedicated grant writers, and grant writing takes time and requires expertise. A participant suggested that the County could offer trainings or provide technical assistance.
- Increasing funding for food security organizations through methods other than grants. Participants explained that grants, especially reimbursement based, often consume time and energy of organizations. One participant offered that the County could restructure the way the budget is allocated to assure funds reach smaller organizations. As one participant^{T3} put it *"\$11.7 billion... that King County allocated to the bi-annual budget...when [King County] says, 'there is a lack of funds...we depend on federal funding'...that is the excuse that they use but they can allocate a percentage of funds for...the needs of the communities...they must be general funding grants, easy to access, and easy to allocate those resources into the community... Bigger organizations get the money because they have the infrastructure."*
- A participant asked that funding be prioritized for non-profit organizations over for-profit organizations. Another^{M1} noted that organizations should not have to compete against each other for the same funding: *"grants make us competitive, we shouldn't have to be competing with each other. All of us, all of the different programs... have value and have worth. And how do we look at acknowledging the value and the worth without making us compete against each other for limited funding?"*

Developing mechanisms to enable cost-sharing. Participants discussed a need to share resources to help organizations through emergencies, enable pilots and testing of innovations, as well as support during growth periods. Shared resources could include staff, volunteers, equipment, space, and vehicles, such as refrigerated trucks to enable transport and safe storage. King County could take the role of a connector, a partner to help integrate cross-organizational collaboration and shared resources. Cost-sharing around things like insurance, healthcare, IT, and streamlining information, potentially reducing overall burden of reporting. Systems for pooling resources, like commercial kitchen space, rent and

"I think it would help reduce waste overall, and kind of expand our ability to reclaim unused food, if access to commercial kitchens was greater... There's a lot of kitchens that could be commercial, but you know, the barriers to getting a kitchen certified are pretty high and intimidating for folks. So, if there was any way King County could either help with funding for establishing commercial kitchens, almost like commissary kitchens, for food banks to use to process and packaged food." ~ Participant^{T1}

utilities. Another participant^{W4} wondered if the County could help make available publicly owned equipment and space that is currently idle for food security organization to use: *"[if they are] aware of surplus, assets that might be idled, that could be repurposed or be used to support broader food distribution - whether that's a building facility, whether it's ... cargo vans....or if they know of a business closing that is idle. To have that information known to those in food distribution so we might make use of it for this purpose."*

Creating a unified food security network in our region. Participants suggested need for a network that will enable communication of all available food resources, connect people to other ways of getting food, and can support other food orgs together as one unified coalition. Collaboration between multiple agencies and initiatives could increase capacity for providing services to communities, by having a bottom-up approach that allows organizations to support each other and lend each other their strengths.

Multiple participants hoped for a unified food security network that could facilitate more transparency between organizations that would allow them to share knowledge, resources, and collaborate. One participant^{W4} wondered about developing more networks of organizations coordinating food collection and distribution with each other.

"You do so much more when you have your network collaborating. It's worked really well for us. So, we've been able to expand rapidly- going from before COVID, 30,000 pounds a year, to over a million pounds a year now, and all with volunteers. And so, we collaborate with groups across Western Washington and beyond. There'll be an excess that will show up in one place that we can use in other as we're collaborators, we can do that, in just a phone call or a text. So, I think it's really, really important to foster those network relationships." ~Participant^{W4}

Another participant requested a cohesive network or system that can centralize all the players of the emergency meal system where there is more communication and collaboration. Similarly, a participant^{W4} requested that King County function as a connector between organizations and help them know who else is doing related work: *"I'm always amazed at every meeting I attend or email group I get involved with there's so many groups out there doing good work... I can't imagine that they know about each other...I think that is a way that King County is definitely situated to help and foster some of these relationships and make some introductions."* Another participant^{M2} wondered if the County could repurpose or add to the objectives of existing networks and coalitions: *"I'm on an abundance of coalition and networking calls that are put together by well-intended people. I'm not even sure how these groups come about. So, I think if there was more, you know, thought or leadership, I suppose, with relation to King County, that might actually eliminate additional meetings for me, so I have more time to do other work. So, that would be helpful."*

Participants argued that a network offers multiple types of learning. For example, organizations can share information, and smaller organizations can learn from and partner with larger organizations. Some offered that the ideal network facilitates learning innovative approaches and best practices and might help organizations break out of silos through more communication. One noted as an example that more collaborations were needed so that the benefits of collaborations with local farmers could be shared beyond those in rural regions.

Participants noted that partnerships across organizations can lead to improved cost effectiveness. Some wanted increased funding and better coordination and networking across agencies to help obtain more and better food as well as help save costs. When asked what assistance the County could provide food

security organizations, a participant^{W5} offered: *"Helping to create a unified food security network really stood out to me. I do think that there's a lot of duplication of services that happens across the county, and anywhere that we can streamline, share resources, pool resources, really goes a long way in reducing waste and saving time for folks. I think more collaboration across the food space would be great."* One participant^{W2} emphasized the need to partner with farms for access to fresh produce: *"We're really lucky to be surrounded by a lot of small farms... Our small farms already support us, and then we are able to, in turn, support them. We are stabilizing our little ecosystem out here and really helping support small farmers and getting that farm to fork going for our guests, who really appreciate it."*

Having partnerships and collaboration between meal provision organizations and food banks or food suppliers could help meet long-term needs. A participant^{M1} wondered *"if somehow, we can get a partnership with a local food bank, so we have a regular schedule that we visit them and get a pallet load of food every week. We can provide seniors those fresh produce. And also, we can use those foods to cook in our kitchen. And that will help us a lot."* Another wondered if organizations could link and develop a network of sites that can process hot food donations (repackaging, refrigerating, etc.). Other ideas mentioned include the following.

- Having partnerships with locations that have food storage space (especially cold storage) to collaborate on food distribution. Geographic focus broadly in underserved communities, and rural settings (where there may be less options currently).
- Broadening the pool of organizations (including farmers) that can accept rescued produce and increase education and awareness about this model.

A participant^{T2} asked that the County make sure the right people are at the table and connected to each other to best support community.

"We oftentimes get so into our own silos of activity... it's important for the Council to really think about who are all the different players that could potentially be involved, whether peripherally or otherwise, in a network. So being sure that we're reaching out and including some of the producers, the farmers, and others... we've got so many common friction points, we talk about capacity, we talk about transportation - farmers that we talk to are dealing with exactly the same thing. The more we can bring all of those players into that, I think probably the better the solutions are going to be."

Promote and support partnerships among small and large food security organizations. Small organizations can benefit from the resources and experience of larger organizations, and larger organizations can benefit from local community expertise. A participant^{M3} described: *"it takes a lot of work to get food to community and in communities' hands. We don't even have a food bank in our community. And some of the churches that we partner with have went to some of those food banks to try and partner and basically have been told no, you just get in line like everyone else."* Some participants noted that it would help to reduce barriers for small organizations to partner with larger agencies. One participant noted that large agencies are not always aware of barriers faced by smaller organizations.

Supporting volunteer recruitment and increasing the diversity of volunteers. As mentioned previously, most organizations have not had the same number of volunteers as they did prior to the pandemic. This increases organizational needs to spend funds on staffing, including emergency hires. Some participants suggested that King County could increase volunteer recruitment through existing channels and organizations, and if one does not exist, create a volunteer recruitment program within King County's organization or infrastructure that can tap into County employees and their network. One participant expressed a need to increase the diversity in volunteer recruitment, noting that in their organization,

current volunteers are mostly older white people. Another participant expressed a need for a volunteer model where volunteers can take food and distribute it within their own communities, rather than community members having to go to a charity or organization.

Capacity building. Participants mentioned a need for capacity building and technical assistance. They also mentioned, if possible, assistance or policy changes to protect food security organizations from liability risks. One participant^{W4} suggested that *“Government leaders... can come up with policies and legislation that will protect food banks from liability issues... so if I give you an example, some food banks only accept <non>perishable items. So, if people are wanting to donate fresh food, raw food, healthy food that actually can cater to the population that isn't really getting what they need, like herbs, spices, and whatnot, those food are being turned away. So having that legislation and policy to help local food banks be protected from the liability issue so they don't turn away specific food items. Because I think any donation is better than no donation at all.”* Other specific examples mentioned follow.

- A more efficient mechanism to distribute food is needed. One participant^{W2} stated, *“There's plenty of food out there. Food availability is only a problem because of the distribution mechanisms. What really needs work are the distribution mechanisms. Food has never been a shortage in this country. It's getting in the right place at the right time, that has been a serious problem.”*
- Participants would like assistance as they change and/or expand services to adapt to community needs and capacity. For example, someone described wanting staff or volunteers with training to help them transition their delivery model.

Other mentions include the following.

- Leverage initiatives from the private sector that help address food insecurity. An example is Kaiser Permanente and Safeway, which distributes hundreds of gift cards. A participant^{M3} described: *“The WSDA has taken a very good stance along with some other private industry folk, Kaiser Permanente, and some others that are doing good work. Safeway has a gift card program where they distribute hundreds of thousands of dollars of gift cards every quarter. And they allot them to the larger agencies, and then trust the larger agencies to disperse those to smaller agencies for disbursement into the community. Of course, there's that problem with nepotism and all of those kinds of things. So, a lot of agencies don't even know those programs exist.”*
- Having robust data and a data sharing system across food security organizations in King County. One participant^{T1} asked for *“A systemic investment in the hunger relief network across King County. If we had some investments in information technology that allowed for data sharing and more real time, that would allow resources to be targeted, more quickly... that systemic investment would allow the system to be more responsive and resilient.”*
- A dietician working long-term with food banks.
- Strengthening connection between food distributed, nutrition and health outcomes.
- Assistance for smaller organizations covering insurance costs.

Increase awareness of other food security and other service organizations. Participants highlighted that food security organizations also need up-to-date information about and linkages to the local service network to increase knowledge about what food resources are available, what organizations are providing resources, and who would qualify for that resource. One participant^{T1} noted, *“I refer people to the food banks...a lot – it would be great if the food banks... refer [seniors] to the senior centers to come a get a lunch... I wonder how many of the food banks know about our lunch programs.”* Participants noted it would be helpful to also help community members find supports closer to their residence.

Longer-term, system change assistance needs include planning for a sustainable food system,

supporting transitions away from fossil fuels and other climate change adaptations required, planning to help reduce food-related waste, and increasing food production and sales in communities, particularly in BIPOC communities.

Sustainability planning and investment. Participants suggested a few ways that King County could assist food security organizations by facilitating sustainability planning. For example, knowing funding to provide food assistance must be sustainable and working toward that objective, working toward long-term funding strategies and community partnerships, diversifying food sources and investing in alternative fuels and other supports key for sustainability. For example, providing funding to support the transition to electric vehicles for food transportation/delivery, as well as solar panels and other clean energy conversions needed can offset short-term costs and provide long-term savings.

"Transportation and moving towards electric vehicles... Many of us, you know, have to pick up our food or otherwise have transportation needs. And so, some funding that helps that transition to electric vehicles or electric trucks, I think would be helpful. Same with ... doing alternative energy sources, solar panels, or wind power for our buildings that we operate...Is there a role in which someone can help source food at scale to lower the cost of that, to then be able to distribute countywide - either working directly with farmers within our community or from other sources?"
~Participant^{T1}

One participant^{M3} expected that in the future "we've got to have a food system that allows people opportunity to grow their own food when they choose to. And for those who choose to grow food, how do we create a network that would help to distribute the food in a very equitable way, an easy way for people to access it?... For example, I know some organizations they [had] some farmers contact them to say, 'hey, we've got tons and tons of apples for you. And because they didn't have manpower to pick up fruits themselves...If the full system has the capacity to inform people, then we can actually utilize community volunteers or inform community members, you know, during that season, there could be some kind of fresh fruits available, fresh vegetables or something that will be available to people."

Multiple participants requested community engagement and input into decision-making. A participant^{T2} shared: "ensuring that by population, community members, BIPOC organizations, predominantly BIPOC serving organizations, really play a central role in any new program development that the county is looking to develop. I think that's really crucial, to have the voices of those who are directly impacted in the creation of any new program development."

A participant^{M3} suggested the system needs to adapt to work with smaller organizations and attend to the needs of BIPOC communities: "One of the biggest challenges is the systems tend to work with the larger, well-established organizations. And so, it's business-as-usual, even though the needs, the demands for food, are different now." Another participant^{M3} described a need for a BIPOC food supply chain, where BIPOC communities can grow food.

"I'm looking to see some food systems change, period. I think there needs to be a BIPOC food supply chain. I know that there are several of my colleagues in the community that have been working towards that, where we want to grow food...want to learn how to hydroponic microgreens. We have to do more than just wait for someone to give us food. We have to be given an opportunity to grow our own and I know there are several that are. Otherwise, nothing will change, and the power will lie with the growers and the folks who are deciding to distribute whatever they really want to."

Another^{T3} noted that empowering community is important for long term planning: "If we're able to get

land access, then we will be able to start growing our own food as communities of color. And that we will be able to have that opportunity to also be competitive in terms of the products that we grow and that we sell, which also gives us economic empowerment." In other words, long term food production and distribution planning should focus on helping community members farm, produce and sell food as a business, rather than focusing solely on food banks, food vouchers, and emergency assistance mechanisms. Other ideas mentioned include:

- Working with environmental health to reduce garbage production and increase food recovery;
- Collecting donations from restaurants for food banks;
- Public/private partnerships, such as a partnership with community stores to support community gardens; and
- Increasing the number of on-campus food vendors that commit to food rescue.

Participants expressed frustration about the lack of awareness and action to address food insecurity needs, as well as hope for action and gratitude that King County elected officials and staff recognize the problem and created this opportunity to give input.

Some participants reported being repeatedly asked if food insecurity was increasing and repeatedly indicating needs, and not seeing steps toward addressing the food insecurity needs. A participant^{W3} expressed: *"It's been very frustrating to continue to have these conversations. And being asked over and over again if... I'm seeing food insecurity."* Another participant^{W5} expressed gratitude that King County sought input and was aware of the increasing concerns.

"It's great that there is this one engagement opportunity and process for community to elevate needs. You made it clear that the county is not going to have food access funding in 2023. More than immediate assistance, community partners and organizations on the ground really have a lot of expertise around what the needs are. I think there are real structural needs at the King County level in terms of communities being able to have a seat at the table in identifying resources and needs. Communities should play the leadership in identifying needs and co-designing solutions and strategies." ~Participant^{W5}