

Food Preference Survey 2021 Executive Summary

The COVID pandemic has exacerbated the food scarcity issue for NYS residents and the US alike. More individuals and families are seeking food resources through the charitable food network than ever before. More families rely on staple grocery items through their local food pantry. As individuals and families seek food resources, food programs are working to offer them what they want and need. The question is, are food pantries able to meet the preferences of food pantry guests?

Understanding individuals' food needs and preferences is a critical element to addressing food insecurity with dignity and intention. In response to strategic initiatives and funders asking for stakeholder data, Feeding New York State developed a statewide food preference survey for food pantry guests to complete.

This survey aimed to:

1. Better understand the types of foods that people prefer to receive through food pantries.
2. Provide data set points that demonstrate the top five food items guests are seeking through the charitable food network
3. Build an opportunity to source food items that support guest preferences and assist FNYS members with acquisition

About FNYS:

Feeding New York State's mission is to lead a unified effort for a hunger-free New York State, to ensure every community in New York State has access to good, healthy food.

We have led the work to end hunger by:

- Supporting the ten members of New York State by managing statewide grants
- Sourcing food for our members
- Partnering with farmers and the food industry to encourage donations
- Fostering relationships with elected officials
- Partnering with other anti-hunger organizations
- Educating the public on hunger issues
- Researching and sharing best practices among FNYS members and teams

To ensure individuals and families have access to the nutritious meals they need, when they need them, Feeding New York State has committed to moving beyond our current operations, to engage community members in planning how to continue to provide assistance to our members during the pandemic as well as long into the future. We play a pivotal role in developing a unified state voice, using the collective impact of the ten NYS food banks, to work toward systemic change. The data gained from the 2021 food preference survey allows Feeding NYS to better understand the respective needs and desires of food pantry recipients and service areas across the state.

In partnership with Colgate University and their Upstate Institute, Feeding New York State was connected to a student who assisted with data collection and analysis. The Upstate Institute fosters connections between Colgate University and the regional community to engage students, faculty, staff and residents through scholarly collaborations that support our Upstate region. The goal is to promote and advance a broad and deep understanding of the diverse cultural, social, economic and environmental resources of Upstate New York through community-based research, civic engagement and the reciprocal transfer of knowledge.

Feeding New York State surveyed food pantry guests to better understand the types of foods that people prefer to receive through food pantries. Results showcased the top five food items that community members would like to receive when visiting a food program.

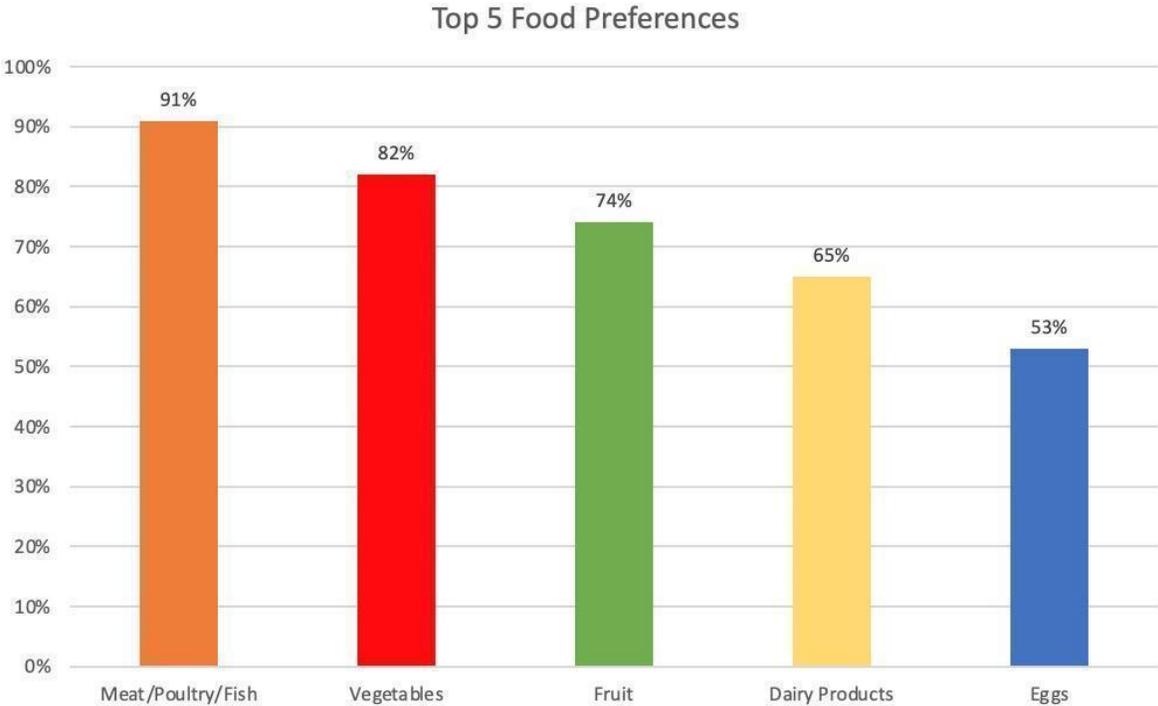
Pantry Guest response to Food Preference Survey:

The survey evaluated trends in food preferences, such as what guests wanted in fresh, frozen or canned commodities, what the top five food items sought out at the pantry, as well as other factors related to food decisions.

The survey was completed by 389 guests at 62 food pantry locations, primarily in five food bank service areas within NYS. Among guests participating in the survey, there were 74% female respondents and 25% male. One respondent identified as nonbinary. Distribution of key demographic characteristics, such as age varied with a majority of respondents within the 35-64 age group with 68.76%. Employment distribution was evenly spread across respondents with 23% employed full-time, 18% employed part-time, and 20% retired. Important to note, residential composition was primarily suburban (41%) with the remaining respondents coming from rural (28%) and urban (22%) communities.

Food Preference Survey Key Findings:

One of the main goals of the 2021 food preference survey was to uncover the top 5 food preferences of food pantry recipients in NYS. Through our survey, we found that 91% of respondents prefer meat, poultry, and/or fish in their top 5 food preferences when visiting the food pantry. The next four highest food preferences that participants desire in their top 5 food preferences include vegetables (82%), fruit (74%), dairy (65%), and eggs (53%) respectively. Furthermore, the food ranked as most desired by participants was meat/poultry/fish with 61% of respondents ranking it as their #1 food preference when visiting the food pantry.



What type of fruit/veggies/meat are preferred (fresh, frozen, canned)?

Fruit - 84% prefer fresh, 5% prefer frozen, 11% prefer canned

Vegetables - 73% prefer fresh, 13% frozen, 14% prefer canned

Meat/Poultry/Fish - 49% prefer fresh, 49% prefer frozen, and 2% prefer canned

Preparation of fruit, vegetables, and meat/poultry/fish is a significant topic of discussion among food pantry recipients and distributors. When asked about preference of fresh, frozen, or canned options of fruit, vegetables, and meat/poultry/fish from the food pantry, participants had varied responses. In response to a question about preferred fruit preparation, 84% of respondents desired fresh fruit, 11% preferred canned, and 5% favored frozen. Similarly, when asked about preferred vegetable preparation from the pantry, 73% preferred fresh vegetables, 14% favored canned vegetables, and 13% desired frozen vegetables. Finally, when asked about preferred meat/poultry/fish preparation, respondents were evenly split between fresh (49%) and frozen (49%) preparations with the remaining 2% preferring canned meat/poultry/fish.

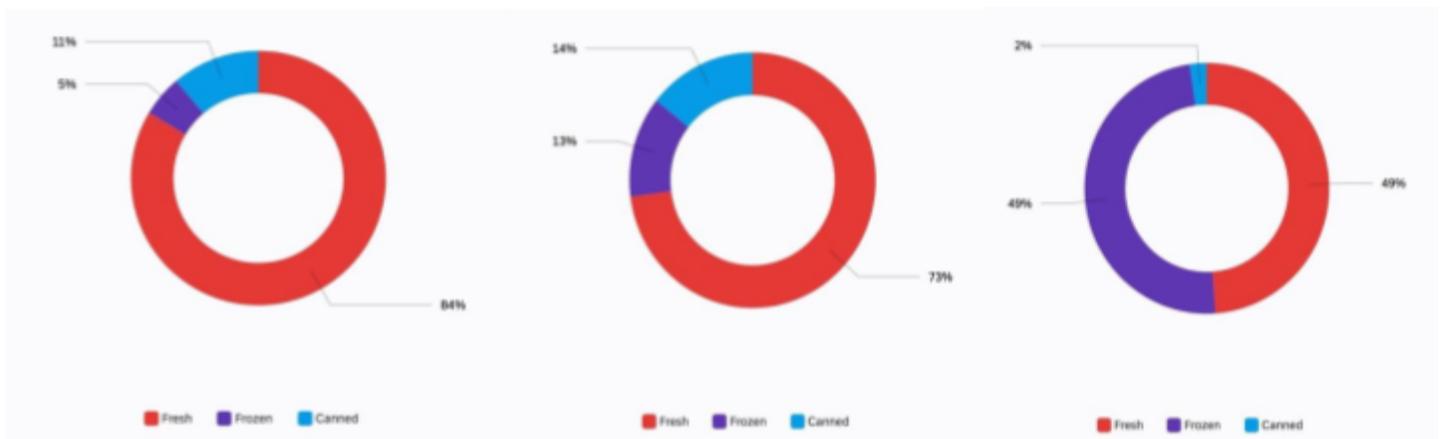


Figure 1: Fruit Preference

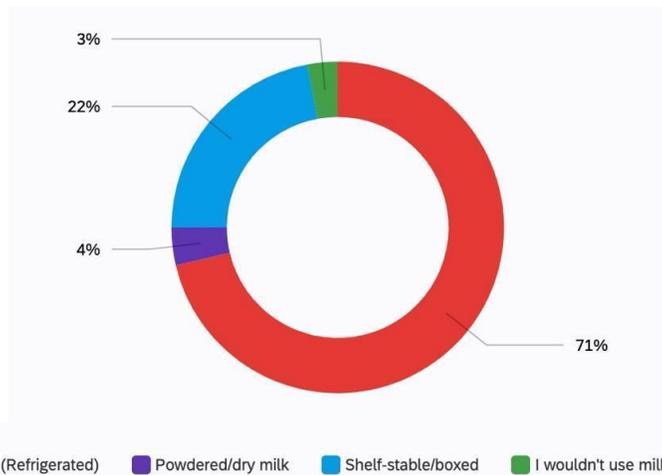
Figure 2: Vegetable Preference

Figure 3: Meat & Poultry Preference

Milk preference:

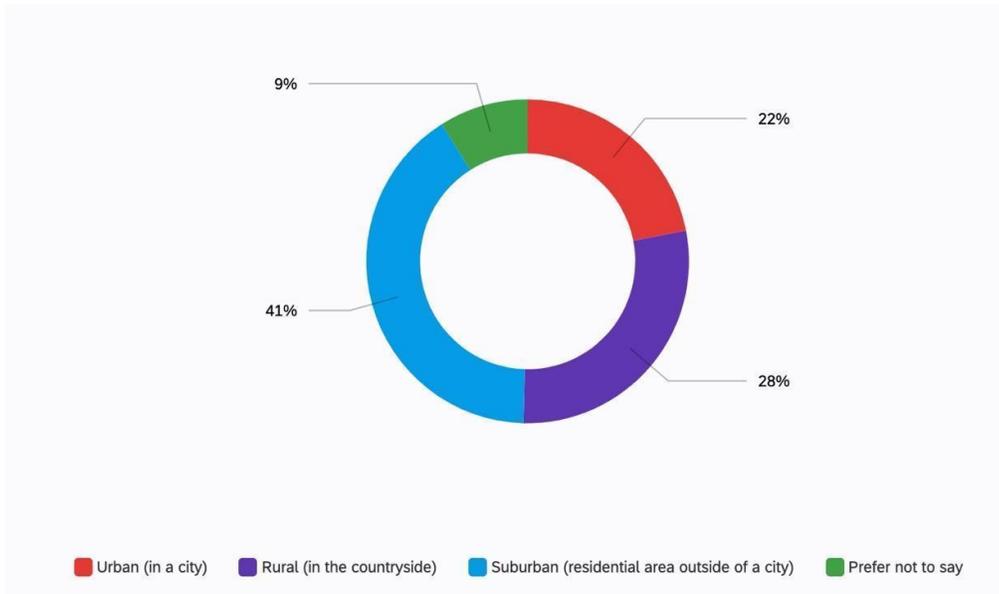
71% of respondents prefer to have fluid milk from the pantry with shelf-stable/boxed milk coming in second at 22%. Only 4% preferred powdered/dry milk and 3% preferred not to use milk from the pantry.

With over 2.6 million residents of New York State not having sufficient access to dairy, we found it important to ask about milk preferences at the food pantry in order to gain data to close that gap. When asked about preference of fluid, shelf-stable/boxed milk, and powdered milk, we found that 71% of respondents prefer to have fluid milk from the pantry, 22% favor shelf-stable milk, 4% prefer powdered milk, and 3% prefer not to use milk from the pantry.



Residence:

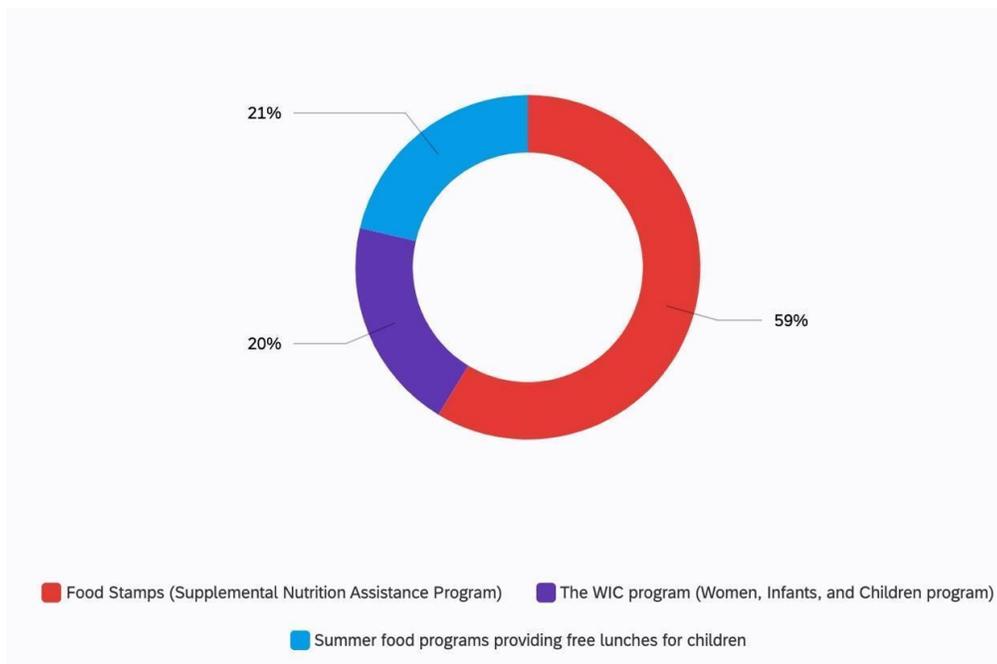
41% of respondents live in a suburban area, 28% live in a rural area, 22% live in an urban area, and 9% preferred not to say



Social Service Program Participation Food programs:

Across NYS there are 2.7 million residents that rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); 58% of SNAP participants are families with children. In 2019, 380 summer meals sponsors served healthy meals at nearly 3,000 sites across New York, providing 287,000 children with wholesome meals for breakfast and lunch.

Corresponding to those statewide statistics, in our survey, we found that 59% of respondents participate in SNAP, 21% participate in summer food programs providing free lunches for children, and 20% participate in the WIC program.



Feeding New York State Insights

- Members are currently acquiring wholesome commodities such as protein, dairy and produce however FNYS recognizes that additional commodity support assists with increased meal requests
- Acknowledging food preferences will help FNYS work toward preferred items across the state. We recognize that we are not able to meet individual needs or all cultural needs but will work to source food items that complement or enhance current member inventories.
- FNYS would like to enhance the opportunities for dairy access for members across NYS.

Summary

As food programs navigate the impacts of the pandemic and the opportunities to source food, FNYS will continue to work alongside its members to assist in acquiring food resources, when possible, that represent the food preferences of food program recipients.

Next steps:

We will use the data to highlight food program recipient feedback in future funding proposals that support acquisition and distribution of wholesome foods or specifically focus on the top five food items preferred.

Additionally, FNYS in partnership with five members and two dairy representatives was awarded the Feeding America Boundless Collaboration grant and will use the survey data for evaluating approaches to create a long term model of dairy across New York State.