

Food Bank of the Southern Tier Executive Summary 2020 Community Food Distribution Evaluation

The Food Bank could not safely host Mobile Food Pantry distributions (MFP) after the COVID-19 pandemic required large-scale social distancing in mid-March. **As a result, Mobile Food Pantries were suspended and replaced with drive-thru Community Food Distributions (CFD).**

Pantry Trak MFP household data was used to identify high need areas and **10 CFD locations** capable of facilitating a drive-thru distribution for up to 500 households were selected.

- Broome County: SUNY Broome, Binghamton, High Schools in Whitney Point & Windsor
- Chemung County: County Fairgrounds, Horseheads
- Schuyler County: Highway Department, Watkins Glen and moved to Watkins Glen International Racetrack for improved traffic flow
- Steuben County: County Fairgrounds, Bath, Wesleyan Church, Painted Post & High School, Hornell
- Tioga County: Elementary School, Owego
- Tompkins County: Tompkins Cortland Community College, Dryden

A **pre-registration process** was implemented to ensure distributions did not exceed a safe limit of 500 vehicles, ensuring each household received approximately the same amount and variety of food. Pre-registration opened two days before each distribution and was available online or by calling an 888 number to reach trained staff and volunteers. Pre-registration also helped ensure that Pantry Trak household data continued to be collected. Most participants pre-registered, but no one was turned away if there was still food left and about 250 households were served without registering.

March-May 2020 CFD Summary:

- 18 distributions
- Nearly 712,000 pounds of food distributed
- More than 7,700 households served, resulting in more than 23,000 requests for food
- 215 deliveries were coordinated with partners to ensure households without transportation or who could not leave their homes received food

June 2020 Client Survey

Survey Goals:

- Process Evaluation: Registration and Drive-thru/delivery
- Product satisfaction: Quantity, quality, variety, ease of making meals
- Participant comfort level
- Comparison of MFP and CFD
- Technology: Applications and satisfaction
- Demographics & COVID-19 Impact
- Story collecting & Relationship building

Of the nearly 5,000 unique households that attended at least one CFD from March-May, 4,162 had valid phone numbers and were notified of the survey through an automated call-em-all service by phone call or text. Respondents were also entered in a drawing for a \$20 grocery store gift card. 787 surveys were completed either through an online survey link or by contacting the Community Impact Manager by phone.

Process Evaluation & Product Satisfaction

Registration

Households gave the registration process high marks. Comments consistently referenced the easy, fast process and excellent customer service. On a scale of 1-5 – where 1 was the worst and 5 was the best – respondents rated the following a 4 or 5:

- Amount of time it took to register - 94%
- Ease of registering - 97%
- Helpfulness of operator (if by phone) - 98%

Drive-thru/Delivery

Again, responding households were overall very satisfied. Comments consistently praised how organized the distributions are and the volunteers/staff onsite. Wait time was the most common critique, but many also mentioned that they understand this is to be expected with the volume of participants. Respondents rated the following a 4 or 5:

- Amount of time the distribution took - 78%

- Convenience of the CFD location - 92%
- Helpfulness of staff/volunteers - 94%
- Delivery process (if applicable) - 94%

Satisfaction with Food

All CFDs distributed perishable items including, dairy, meats and produce. During the month of April some also distributed a shelf-stable food box with grains/pastas, dried beans and canned goods. The food boxes were discontinued due to supply chain issues and the lack of enough quantity and variety of these food items.

Regarding the perishable items, 87% of respondents rated the quality, variety and ease of making meals with the food provided a 4 or 5. 92% gave the same rating for the amount of food they received.

Of those that also received the shelf-stable food box, respondents rated the following a 4 or 5:

- Variety - 83%
- Ease of making meals - 86%
- Quality – 87%
- Amount of food - 89%

Comments did indicate that produce quality can be an issue, that people have food safety concerns based on container dates that are close or past and that 1-person households may be receiving more food than they can reasonably use.

Feelings about Attending the CFD

Survey takers were asked if they were comfortable participating in the CFD program. The vast majority – 90% – reported that they were definitely comfortable, 9% were somewhat comfortable and 1% were not at all comfortable. 20 respondents shared comments about their discomfort and the primary theme was around the idea of needing to get help for food and seeing people they knew at the distributions. Many also shared that the ability to stay in their car helped with privacy and the workers/volunteers were welcoming.

Comparison of Mobile Food Pantries (MFP) and Community Food Distributions (CFD)

53% of the survey takers also attended a Mobile Food Pantry before they were suspended mid-March. These respondents were asked additional questions to help determine their preference for each model related to the convenience of the distribution location, amount of time spent at the distribution, quality, variety and amount of food received, helpfulness of onsite staff/volunteers and their overall comfort. Overall, respondents rated the models as being about the same across most areas. However, there were a few themes that emerged:

1. When it comes to the amount of time spent at the distributions, there was an increase in the % of respondents who preferred the CFD model. Based on comments, it may be because the pre-registration process guarantees people don't have to arrive early to ensure their spot and then wait for the distribution to start.
2. From a comfort perspective, there was a strong preference in the comments for the ability to stay in the vehicle at the CFD. Seniors, the disabled and people with kids commented about this. Standing in line in all types of weather or waiting for long periods of time in crowded waiting rooms is difficult for these populations.
3. MFPs do provide choice and allow people to pick what they prefer and know they can use. This emerged as one of the areas the MFP was better at – and people understand that the social distancing requirements make it more difficult at the present time.

In addition to this feedback, the Food Bank is also tracking comparative data for April-May 2019 MFP participation and April-May 2020 CFD participation. Across our service area number of 2020 CFD households served is up 13% compared to 2019 MFP households served. However, in Steuben County, households served are down 25%.

Technology: Application & Satisfaction

Survey respondents were asked if they used the online Food Finder, located on the Food Bank's website. 38% have used this option to find food. Of those that provided input on how the Food Finder is working, 72% had positive feedback. Comments included that it works great and is easy and helpful. Respondents who expressed dissatisfaction said that it was hard to use and confusing.

Overall, technology has been critical to the implementation of the Community Food Distributions. One

important tool has been Call-Em-All a system that allows the Food Bank to send mass texts and automated calls using contact info in the Pantry Trak client data base. This service made it possible to notify prior Mobile Food Pantry clients when the program was suspended and alert them to upcoming Community Food Distributions and food pantries in their area. Of the nearly 5000 Community Food Distribution participants who registered online, nearly a quarter reported that they heard about the distribution through the Call-Em-All communication from the Food Bank. This service also made it possible get a 19% response rate for the Community Food Distribution Client Survey.

COVID-19 Impact on Households

52% of households have at least one person who is at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19 due to age or a long-term health problem.

37% feel that it will be a lot more challenging for them to makes ends meet over the next 3 months and 41% feel it will be a little more challenging to do so.

Other Food Supports

Large percentages of respondents are not receiving food support from any other programs or services. 55% do not participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – formerly known as food stamps. 41% have never received food from a food pantry or meal site and 24% did before the pandemic but have not since.

Story Collecting & Building Relationship

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked if they would be interested in being contacted by the Food Bank to share their story in more detail. More than 80 respondents agreed, and the Advocacy & Education Manager and Communication Manager are working together to connect with respondents both for story collection, but also advocacy opportunities.

Recommendations

1. Overall the CFD program is strong and should continue through the summer months as the MFP is slowly brought back online.
 - Where possible, we should consider ways to offer choice or consider household size.
 - Education on container dates is needed for participants to be comfortable consuming items that are still safe. A flyer was created for the June 12 SUNY Broome distribution for all households and will be evaluated on an ongoing basis.
 - Produce quality will continue to be evaluated, but early issues have largely been taken care of now that we are receiving Grade 1 produce through Nourish NY and USDA.
 - During the registration process, we should emphasize that the wait time will be greatly reduced by arriving between the operating hours rather than coming early. The confirmation number ensures access to the same quantity/quality product even if they come during the 2nd half of the distribution.
 - Some additional survey analysis is needed to identify if there are site specific trends that need to be addressed.
2. As we bring back key MFP locations as drive-thru, we can be confident that participants will be comfortable staying in their cars and pre-registering. Other considerations:
 - Steuben County needs to be prioritized to ensure people in the western part – Woodhull, Jasper, Troupsburg, Canisteo, Greenwood – have access. The July schedule is being planned and both Avoca and Rathbone MFP locations are included.
 - Delivery options will need to continue
3. Moving forward, we should consider a formal process/schedule for Call-em-All these communications to ensure people are not missing distributions if we are not consistently using this notification system.