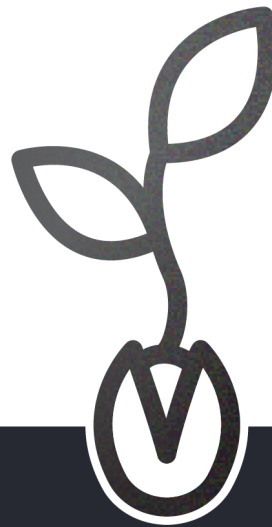
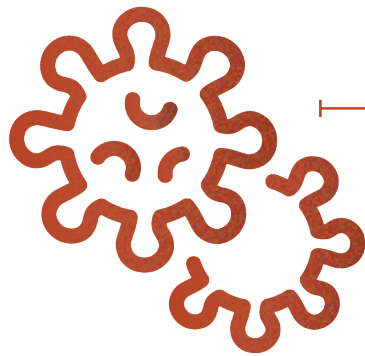
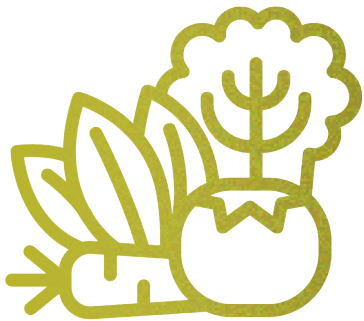


Assessing WA Food Systems Through an Equity Lens

Bridging the Gap
Through a Culturally
Relevant Approach



Conducted by an Informal BIPOC Leadership Team that was assembled in August 2021 in collaboration with the WSU Food Systems Program

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Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

The Washington State Department of Agriculture funded the Washington State University Food Systems Program to conduct an assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks affecting Washington's food system, with a special emphasis on identifying the needs and barriers of underserved, food-insecure Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) and other socially disadvantaged communities.

The purposes of this report are to:

- Identify ways to respond to sustained high rates of food insecurity exacerbated by COVID-19
- Identify food supply chain disruptions
- Identify disproportionate negative impacts on BIPOC Communities related to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Provide recommendations for next steps towards ensuring systemic equity in Washington State food security

Methods Used

To understand the WA Food System before and during COVID-19, a number of methods were used to assess the needs, trends, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats present. Specific attention was given to the impacts on underserved communities, food insecure BIPOC, and other socially disadvantaged communities.

The assessment included existing data as well as new information gathered as part of a rapidly assembled BIPOC Leadership Team's relational approach to data collection and analysis.

Findings and Conclusions

Overwhelmingly, food insecure BIPOC and other socially disadvantaged communities were rarely a priority in existing datasets, and decision-making about food system development and food insecurity interventions. The report highlights how institutional and systemic racism and oppression limit the leadership of BIPOC communities, constraining communities' access to food, capital, data, time, and structural essentials necessary to thrive.

The results urge an intentional shift in the food system, and support centering BIPOC and other socially disadvantaged communities in their self-determination, and leadership.

Recommendations for Next Steps

Suggestions rooted in racial equity and justice include:

- Approach food access programs using an inclusive, culturally relevant, equity-based model.
 - Develop an equity filter specific to programmatic work that can be applied throughout government programs, examples of equity filters can be found by various food security organizations in WA.
- Use a bottom-up approach to increase BIPOC participation in outreach within BIPOC communities.
 - This includes providing enough time for authentic, non-transactional engagement and collaboration
- Increase support for BIPOC-led teams, farmers, producers, distributors, and food justice advocates.

- Including but not limited to financial investment.
- Ensure that data collection methods, analyses, and reporting align with the leadership and expertise of BIPOC and socially disadvantaged communities.
 - Including participatory action research, community-based participatory research, and other research designs that prioritize the voices, wisdom, leadership, and expertise of BIPOC communities.
- Increase BIPOC participation in food systems and other public-benefit programs in design, implementation, evaluation, and policy-directed interventions.
 - Including BIPOC participation in hunger relief, land access and capital campaign decisions, grants and funding, resources for infrastructure, and more initiatives.
 - Including BIPOC leadership from the inception of any initiative addressing the needs of their community.
- Increase BIPOC decision-making in government and other agency-led initiatives.
 - Including BIPOC leadership from the inception of any initiative addressing the needs of their community.



Haki farmers break ground on our their urban farm location in Thurston County

Supporting local grass root initiatives can help elevate the level of service during a pandemic or disaster.



Black farmer at Woodbridge Farm in Jefferson County

Land & Labor Acknowledgements

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the first peoples of this land, acknowledging their elders, both past and present, as well as future generations. We acknowledge the 29 tribes in Washington, and those unrecognized, as well as the land and waters that were the ancestral homelands of those who have inhabited this place for centuries. This acknowledgment is to recognize the violence, displacement, and erasure that Indigenous people here and throughout the world experience, and the resulting historical trauma. We hope the approach of this team can provide healing, reframing from a colonized lens promotes spiritual grounding within each individual that supports community connections so that we may know one another. It is also to honor and pay respect to the indigenous cultures and communities that are thriving today.

Acknowledgement of Black Labor

We want to acknowledge that Washington has benefitted from the system of white supremacy, which prioritizes the erasure, co-optation and appropriation of Blackness. We recognize that labor is not and cannot be the only value of Black bodies. We will uphold anti-racist values in all facets of our work —the art we make, our day-to-day operations, our work in the classroom, our farmlands, and in the community.

This living acknowledgement of Black Labor is a statement that recognizes and honors the African people who were enslaved at the hands of white colonizers and subjugated to unpaid labor and the descendants of enslaved African people. The purpose of recognizing this deep and difficult history is to show respect, gratitude and appreciation for the insurmountable contributions of the enslaved who worked the land against their will for generations for the sake of American capitalism, as well as increase awareness about the horrific outcome of a distorted Black American history.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Food is one of the basic human needs and yet, in the United States where we have an abundant food supply, many Americans still go hungry. There are opportunities for abundant healthy and culturally relevant food options to meet the needs of communities of color. Many factors contribute to food insecurity, such as food shortages due to drought and flood events, war and conflict, climate change, poor nutrition, poor public policy, economy, and food waste. In the United States, racial disparities contribute to the impact that food insecurity has on communities of color. In response, many policies and programs have attempted to scale up their implementation of programs targeting these communities. For decades, demographics have been collected on Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), but demographic data can only have meaningful impacts if it can be used to quantify the extent of racial disparities and economic gaps and be used to find real solutions for what that data reveals.

Studies in Black communities have revealed many layers of inequalities that lead to poverty or food insecurity ([Appendix 1](#)). When governments, governmental agencies, and institutions research intend to address inequities in the food system and programs intended to create better access for healthy food, hunger relief, or address barriers in our food system, they need to use these findings to create a comprehensive system that addresses the racial disparities associated with food insecurity. Identifying the needs and barriers of food access among BIPOC and other socially disadvantaged communities cannot be done properly unless structural racism and its implications are examined. It is clear that decades of residential segregation by government projects and practices lead to economic, racial, and health inequalities. Lack of applying racial equity principles in hunger-relief and nutritional programs misses the opportunity to ensure those suffering from food insecurity will benefit from government programs.

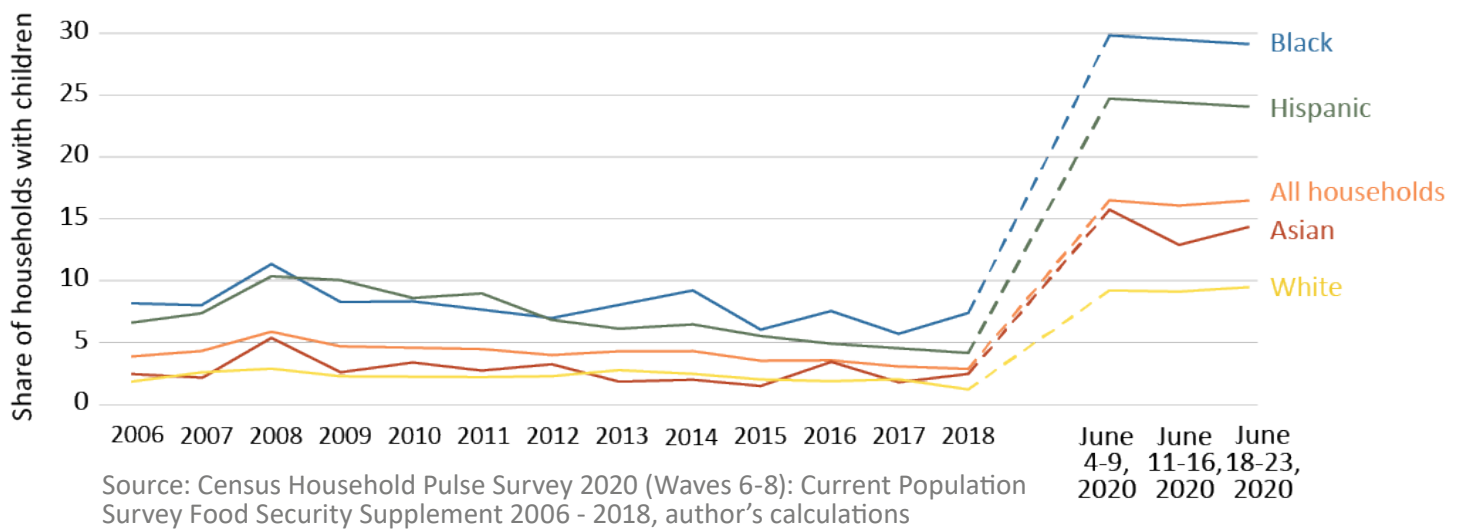
This report was designed, in part, to provide WSDA with a better understanding of how BIPOC communities perceived the impacts of COVID-19 on the food system, and how they pivoted their areas of work to accommodate the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report will also help inform future farm infrastructure grants and public investments that will become available later in 2021 and into 2022. To this end, this report includes substantive feedback on how future investments and decision-making can better prioritize BIPOC and socially disadvantaged communities. The overall goal is to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks of Washington's food system after a year of dynamic transformation across all aspects of the supply chain. WSDA will use these findings to develop a suite of new programming in alignment with the intent of the legislature. The primary objective of these programs will be to ensure access to a safe and nutritious supply of food to support a healthy and thriving Washington population. Secondary objectives include: 1) increasing the economic viability of farmers and food businesses, with resources prioritized for underrepresented farmers and ranchers, as well as women, minority, and small business owners, 2) bolstering and pursuing access improvements within the established Food Assistance contactor network, and 3) reaching outside of the existing Food Assistance network to find hunger relief organizations serving BIPOC and socially disadvantaged communities that are not otherwise well served in the existing network or that need additional support to work toward a more inclusive future and enhanced coordination between this network and the established Food Assistance network. In order to meet these objectives, the Agency must conduct an assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks affecting Washington's food system, with a special emphasis on identifying the needs and barriers of underserved food insecure BIPOC and socially disadvantaged communities that have been impacted by COVID-19.

1.1 Pandemic and Racial-Justice Uprising

Racial disparities have existed before COVID-19. This is not a new finding; communities of Color have been organizing around racial justice and calling for equitable solutions for decades. Organizing to end hunger and create equity in our system has been viewed as a form of protest and civil disobedience by many. The truth remains that many of these communities have experienced racial injustices for decades, and data-driven solutions have not offered any hope or change. The start of the COVID-19 pandemic and events leading to racial justice uprisings in 2020 pivoted communities of Color to organize around food justice, public safety, health, education, and houselessness. It was a significant time for change, and many communities faced unprecedented events. These experiences forced communities to rethink strategies to organize themselves around racial justice and equity. Public benefits (SNAP, TANF, and unemployment insurance) usage increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this rapid increase caused stress on a system which was not prepared to handle such a swift uptick in usage.

Fig.1 Households with Children in which Children are Food Insecure by Race/Ethnicity, National



Father and daughter enjoying a harvest at Haki Farmers Collective in Thurston County

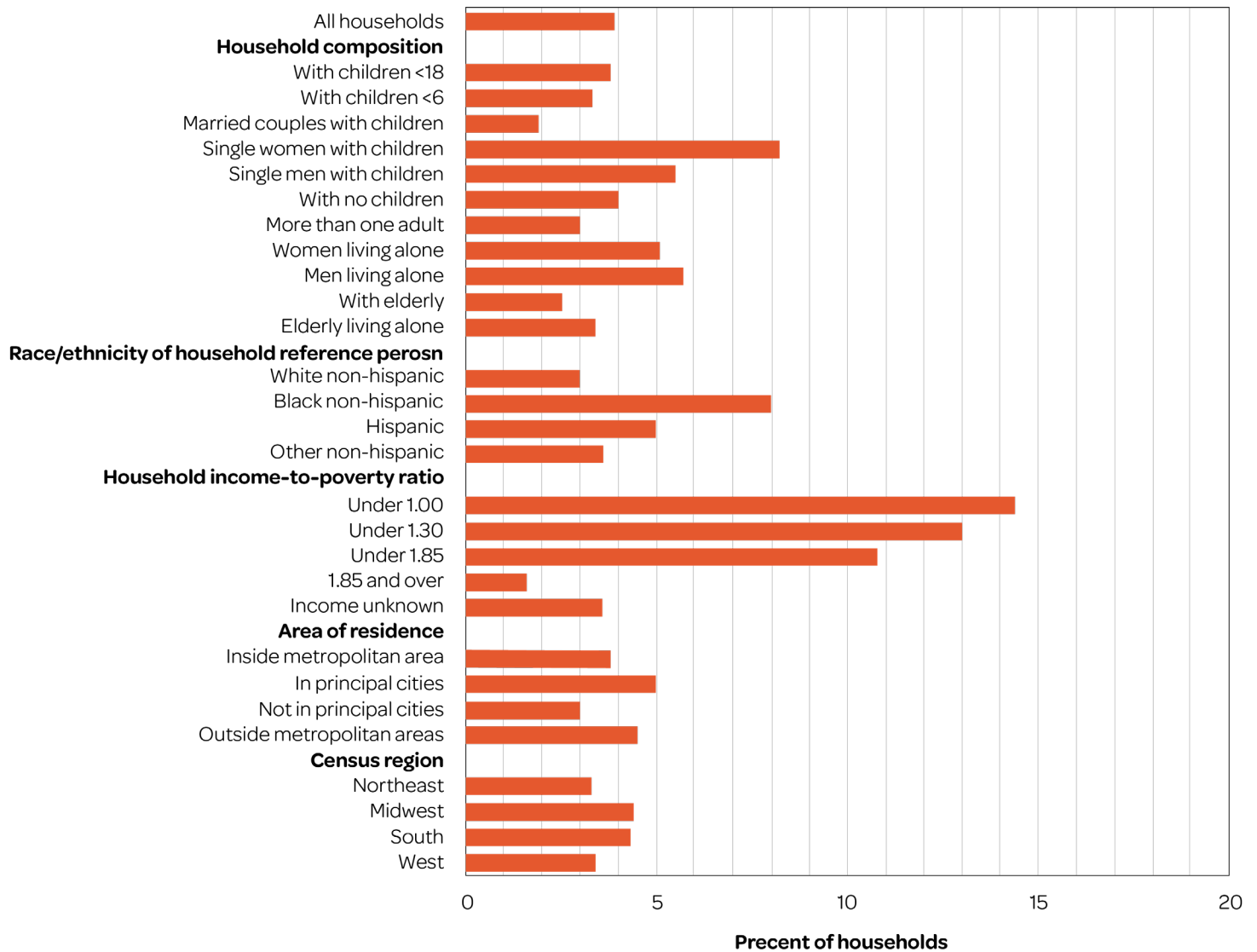
“Families might help themselves by utilizing available spaces for gardening taught by community members skilled in growing food.”

- BIPOC Impact Survey Participant



Fig. 3 Prevalence of very low food security by selected household characteristics, National

Source: USDA Economic Research Service using data from the December 2020 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements, U.S. Census Bureau.



The COVID-19 disruption disproportionately negatively impacted communities of Color in Washington State according to a report by the Washington State Department of Health (DOH). In terms of confirmed probable cases, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI) and Hispanic populations had the highest age-adjusted confirmed or probable case rates, while Asian and multiracial populations had the lowest case rates. Confirmed or probable case rates for NHOPI and Hispanic populations were approximately three times higher than case rates for Asian and multiracial populations. Confirmed or probable case rates for Black populations were approximately two times higher than case rates among Asian and multiracial populations.

Fig.4 - Risk for COVID-19 Infection, Hospitalization, and Death By Race/Ethnicity

Rate ratios compared to White, Non-Hispanic persons	American Indian or Alaska Native, Non-Hispanic persons	Asian, Non-Hispanic persons	Black or African American, Non-Hispanic persons	Hispanic or Latino persons
Cases¹	1.7x	0.7x	1.1x	1.9x
Hospitalization²	3.5x	1.0x	2.8x	2.8x
Death³	2.4x	1.0x	2.0x	2.3x

Race and ethnicity are risk markers for other underlying conditions that affect health, including socioeconomic status, access to health care, and exposure to the virus related to occupation, e.g., frontline, essential, and critical infrastructure workers.

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavihttps://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html#printrus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html#print>

In terms of hospitalizations, COVID-19 rates among confirmed or probable cases were the highest amongst NHOPI populations and lowest for white populations. In addition, NHOPI hospitalization rates among confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases were eight times higher than those of white populations. The Hispanic hospitalization rates among confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases were approximately four times higher than those of white populations. Hospitalization rates for Black and American Indian and Alaska Natives were approximately 2.5 times higher compared to those of white populations.

In terms of deaths, the report shows that white populations experienced the lowest rates, with NHOPI populations dying at a rate of six times higher, American Indian or Alaskan Native and Hispanic populations dying at a rate of three times higher, and Black populations dying at a rate of 2.5 times higher than white populations. These results indicate multiple barriers in health, education, and healthy food access within these communities that contributed to higher disparities during COVID-19.

CHAPTER 2 The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) Needs Assessment

2.1 The Needs Assessment Approach and Design

In response to sustained high rates of food insecurity, food supply chain disruptions, and disproportionate impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the WSDA funded the Washington State University Food Systems Program to conduct an assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks affecting Washington's food system, with a special emphasis on identifying the needs and barriers of underserved, food-insecure BIPOC and other socially disadvantaged communities. This study cross-references studies conducted by University of Washington (Fig.5) between June 2021 to April 2021 for a deeper understanding of the status of WA Food System during COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the goal of the needs assessment was to emphasize how to overcome access barriers and meet the unique needs of BIPOC and other socially disadvantaged communities, by making it easier to:

- Identify ways WSDA can understand and mitigate weaknesses in Washington's food system
- Clarify how WSDA can build capacity for overall resilience and diverse food production
- Demonstrate how public agency efforts can address food insecurity and other systemic inequities

A team of BIPOC leaders facilitated and guided the design of this assessment. This process offered a clear path towards creating future inclusive and equitable hunger relief programming, regional market analyses, and assessments of public agencies' work to create a more resilient, equitable, and just food system. Throughout, this team of leaders underscored the importance of adopting a broader perspective and the value of including robust BIPOC representation at all levels of decision-making.

This approach was intended to create long-lasting, equitable, sustainable and resilient public systems by identifying key issues that exist within our current systems. By doing so, we can address the root causes of inequities, particularly for food insecurity within BIPOC and socially disadvantaged communities.

2.2 Study Limitation and Opportunity

The needs assessment required a short turnaround due to the WSDA's urgency to assess the state of the food system to inform decisions about immediate next steps for ongoing emergency food security response. New and increased funding was appropriated by the legislature to provide hunger relief resources to food-insecure communities -- especially unique populations, like home-bound seniors, immigrants, BIPOC and other distinct cultural communities, as well as unique geographic areas including cities, rural counties, census tracts, or a combination.

2.3 Methodology

The need assessment took three approaches: 1) literature review, 2) survey, and 3) a SWOT analysis.

The literature review looked at existing studies and policy briefs, other models that provided an overview of the existing food system, and lessons that could help create more robust and inclusive hunger relief solutions. An informal survey of grassroots organizations working with underserved communities in urban and rural areas in WA was conducted, and results of the surveys were aggregated into the SWOT analysis.

Using an analysis of broader contexts, the study aimed to 1) reveal the impacts of COVID-19 on the food system in Washington State and uncover how structural racism contributed to food insecurities during the pandemic,

and 2) identify state hunger and nutrition programs that are the first in line for fighting hunger for many food-insecure BIPOC and socially disadvantaged communities and recommend community-driven hunger relief programs that serve individual communities effectively. Some of the key programs identified as part of the SWOT analysis were the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and child nutrition programs (which include school meals, after-school meals, summer meals, Box Program, Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer or EBT); and other local and state programs such as [The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations; \(FDPIR\) for Indigenous communities and the Nutrition Assistance Program.](#)

2.3.1 Literature Review

The team examined over 60 reports, policy briefs, documents, and other models of hunger relief, from prior to and during the pandemic. To understand the intensified impacts of COVID-19 on the food system and food access for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and socially disadvantaged communities in Washington State, priority review was given to reports and studies published in 2020 - 2021 that explicitly gathered information on specific racial groups. Relevant documents published before 2020 were also reviewed for food access trends.

The time limitation of the needs assessment led the team to narrow the review, which resulted in its non-exhaustive nature. The limitations of existing data aggregation for BIPOC communities limited the ability to conduct a precise analysis on individual communities. For example, some reports included data on Black, Indigenous, and Latinx groups, but data on other people of color such as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI) was missing. In some cases, people of color were not well-represented in the data reviews -- even within large COVID-19 data sets. Another limitation was the redundancy in data citations, the majority of Washington State policy briefs and studies pointed to the same WA Food Survey (WAFOOD Survey, 1,2,3 etc...).

Some key themes emerged and are discussed as well as referenced throughout this document and the accompanying presentation. The literature review guided the SWOT analysis framework and strengthened the needs assessment. Looking at the overall trends in the food system, the team examined how innovative organizations invested in their community. The team also witnessed and participated in shifts from the business-as-usual food access and hunger relief approach. New models for mutual support led by communities of Color during the pandemic were apparent in the review. Understanding these new models and innovative ways to approach hunger relief in an emergency shifted the SWOT analysis approach by applying an equity lens throughout. This approach is demonstrated throughout the report and in the recommendations.

2.3.2 Survey

The BIPOC Leadership Team collectively designed an interview structure to ensure cultural competency. Given the limited time frame for this project, the team leveraged mutual relationships to conduct voluntary interviews with community groups and individuals. Informal surveys were conducted with BIPOC farmers, producers, activists, and community members. The rushed one-month time frame did not allow for a representative survey sample size. The results were primarily used to provide case studies to the WSDA to have a better understanding of how BIPOC communities perceived the impacts of COVID-19 on the food system, and how they pivoted their areas of work to accommodate the challenges presented by the pandemic. The results of the informal survey were woven into the SWOT analysis to give a balanced assessment, including real-time data collection. There were many lessons taken from this survey and one is the lack of *large-scale* real-time data on communities of Color and the disconnect that persists between those collecting data and the BIPOC communities. The study survey acted as the beginning of deeper relationship and capacity building through interactive and collectively led processes aimed towards creating meaningful change beyond the deadlines for this assessment.

2.3.3 The Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis

To more fully understand how the food system responded to the impacts of COVID-19, the team did a SWOT analysis that looked across various datasets and reports published between 2020 and 2021. This information reflected how food insecurity was exacerbated during the pandemic. Farmers, producers, distributors, and other key stakeholder insights were analyzed. Results were compared through these uniquely themed areas: inequities and innovations, pivoting of the system, demand on the supply chain, equity balance, stressed government relief, and data gaps.

The literature review provides a deeper understanding of the damaging effects of the pandemic on BIPOC communities. It further solidifies much that is already understood through anecdotal evidence - that BIPOC communities require targeted interventions, and that there is no silver bullet to solving food insecurity, especially during these challenging times. We also learned that BIPOC communities are resilient and often quickly find community-based solutions.



Black farmers tend to the land by planting culturally relevant crops in the PNW

“Understanding individual farmer/producer needs and abilities can lead to better funding opportunities that support the needs of grassroots community-led hunger relief efforts”.

- BIPOC Impact Survey Participant

A young BIPOC student learns about aquaponic farming in Snohomish County



3.1 Key Themes

There were some key themes that emerged from the literature review that demonstrated the cascading impacts of COVID-19 on the whole food system, especially among BIPOC and socially disadvantaged communities.

The review revealed the importance of federal and local food assistance programs, especially in BIPOC communities -- while innovations in the food system, in some instances led by Indigenous groups, were spurred as a result of the challenges brought on by the global pandemic. These innovations come out of long-term resistances created from indigenous communities.

Many existing programs and services were enhanced to accommodate the urgency in food supply needs such as Food Distribution for Program for Indian Reservation (FDPIR) an alternative program of the SNAP that supports their communities within the food deserts. FDPIR introduced new services to the members that allowed easy access to the services such an enhanced online system. The National Women's Law Center (2020) reported that "Federal programs like SNAP and FDPIR reduce tribal self-governance because tribal leaders are usually excluded from federal decision-making about nutrition assistance." Indigenous groups used Coronavirus aid, relief and economic security to re-evaluate their tribal food system, reallocate resources and create innovative ways to create better hunger relief programs for their communities.

With supply chain disruptions happening and markets shrinking due to COVID19 impacts, American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) food systems turned to different mediums such online storefronts and social media marketing to find new markets and increase commodity access. In 2020, as part AI/AN innovative goals, Intertribal Agriculture Council launched the Native Food Connection program and with their already existing, Made and Produced by American Indian Certification program that aimed at amplifying tribal food products through facilitation of ways to sell their products and better branding/marketing strategies.

As the literature review showed, there were extensive and long-term damaging effects from the pandemic among BIPOC communities. Key lessons learned from the review demonstrated both the resiliency of BIPOC communities, and their ability to adapt quickly to a changing system in order to meet the needs of their communities. Many communities experienced food insecurity in the past. Indigenous groups, for example, experienced food system challenges prior to the pandemic, and implemented adaptation strategies that laid the groundwork for their success during this time. Additionally, this review showed that many gaps exist in BIPOC-focused research. Although there were many briefings and studies done between 2020 and 2021, most of these studies focused primarily on food insecurity in the entire food system, with a lack of BIPOC-specific data. The lack of BIPOC-focused research creates a huge barrier in addressing hunger relief and other essential services that have been shown to disproportionately affect these communities. As such, additional resources channeled toward BIPOC-focused food system research could further increase understanding of the nuances associated with existing barriers.

3.2 Challenges Exacerbated During COVID-19

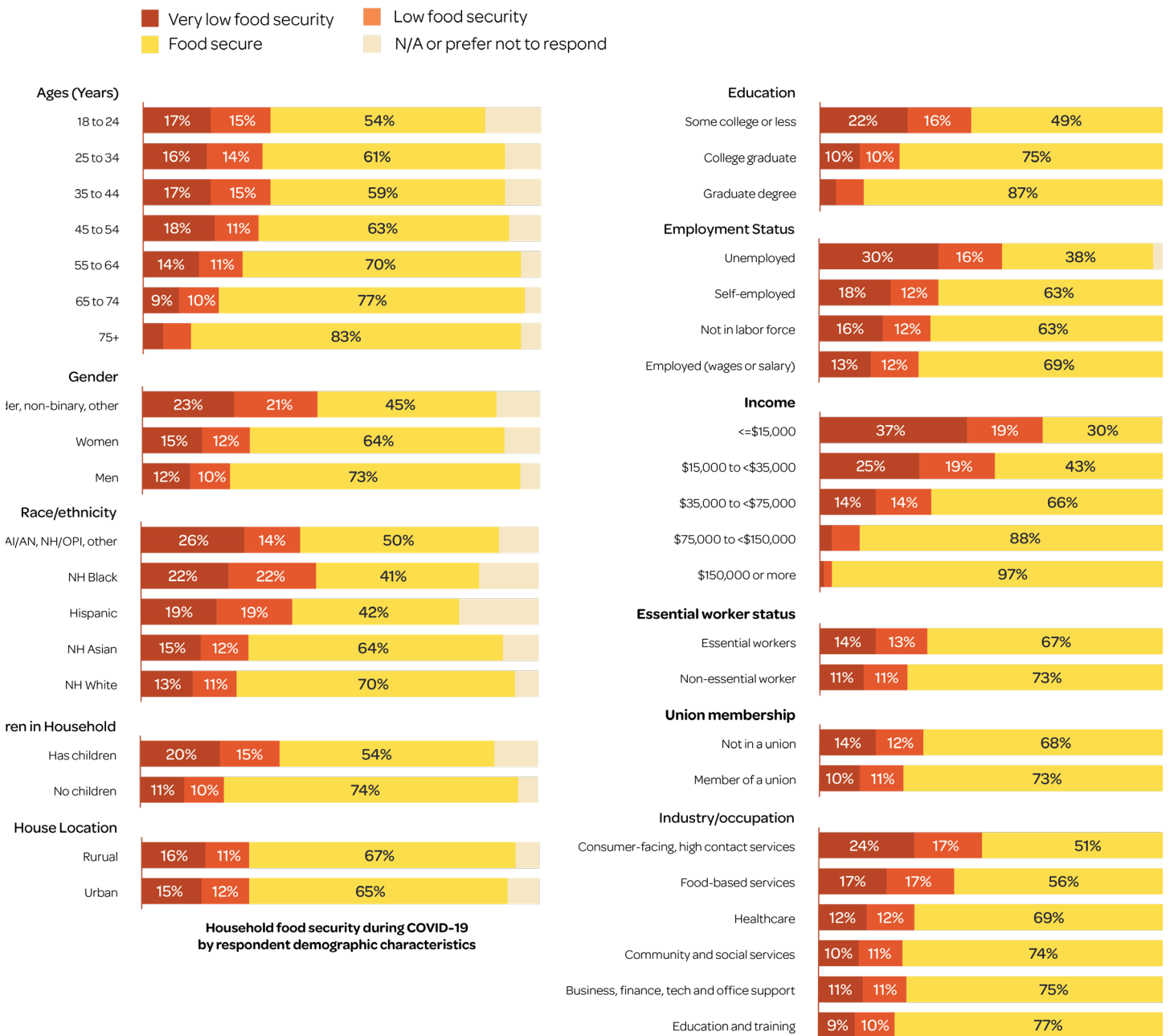
The WAFOOD Survey conducted by the University of Washington (WAFOOD Survey, p. 2) showed low food security among households with children, and among respondents of color overall, due to the impacts of COVID-19.

In a Young Farmers COVID-19 survey (2020) of farmers and ranchers, 75% of the respondents indicated being forced to reduce market outlets, 54% added costs to accommodate alternative sales strategies, and 45% reported facing disruption in the food system and were not able to complete projects planned prior to the

pandemic. Another 45% reported lack or unavailability of resources to support their business, 42% reported unanticipated caretaking responsibilities during the pandemic, 43% had reduced income from off-farm work, and 26% faced inability to retain employees. Seventy percent of the young farmers surveyed experienced more than one non-farm impact such as losing off-farm income, serving as caretakers, and dealing with personal health impacts of COVID-19. Further results show that 51% of respondents expressed the need for more resources to support new sales channels for their products, and 45% expressed the need for direct financial assistance.

Fig. 6 WAFOOD 1 and 2 Washington State Food Security Survey, Surveys 1 and 2

Source: https://nutr.uw.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/WAFOOD2_disparities_brief_11_20210811.pdf

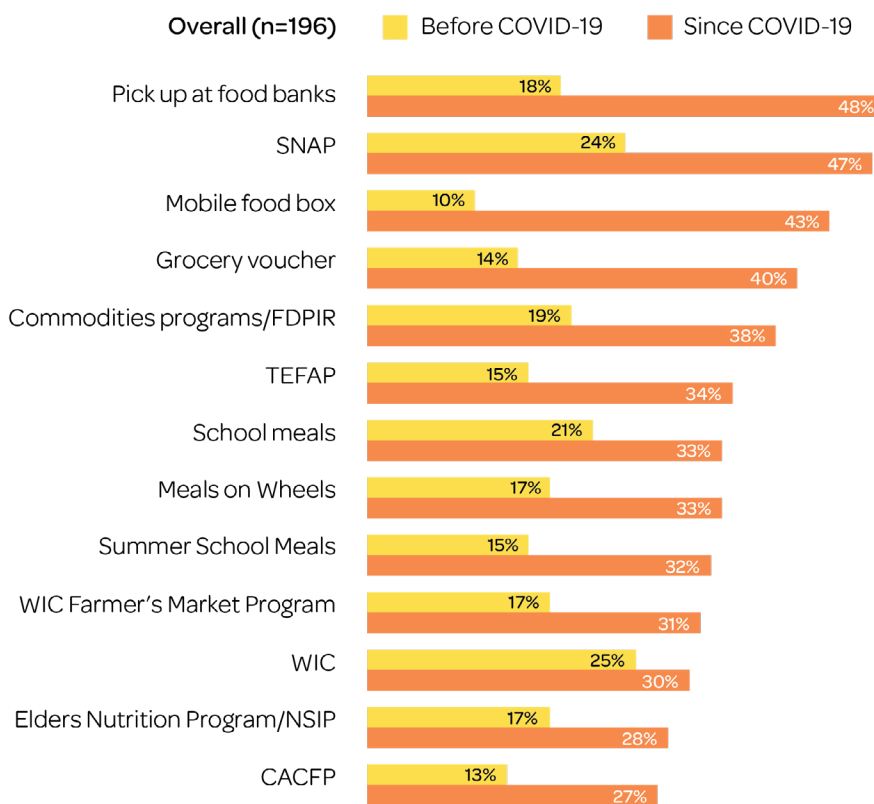


Other sources went further to look at increased risks for BIPOC and socially disadvantaged communities caused by other natural disasters and demonstrated that communities were working together to build an emergency hunger response. Initial findings for the COVID-19 Farmworker Study (2020) showed that Western US wildfires persisting during the pandemic exacerbated the impacts of COVID-19.

Studies on American Indian or Alaskan Native communities by Local Food Systems (LFS) - “Reclaiming Innovation in Indigenous Food Systems: Navigating COVID-19 disruptions and enacting post-colonial foodways” (May 2021) -- stated that the pandemic did not introduce new issues to tribal food systems and food supply chains; it exacerbated existing issues the Indian Country already faced.

Most tribal nations are located in the heart of food deserts. People living in food deserts usually have no access to healthy food. In the tribal nations, approximately 75% of all individuals within these areas live farther than 1 mile from a supermarket (LFS-IB-15, May 2021). And at least one in four AI/AN travels more than 10 miles to these stores. This creates a barrier in accessing essential staple foods. Furthermore, there were existing barriers in accessing vital finances, resources and markets to support their small-scale farm operations prior to COVID-19.

The WATRIBAL Survey shows statistical increase in food insecurity prior to COVID-19 and during COVID-19.



According to national data, producers largely felt they lost revenue opportunities as vendors, including processing facilities, distributors, and scaled-down operations. For example, American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) ranchers and fishery operators faced extended wait times for accessing meat and fish processing facilities, and likewise reported wait times of a year or longer for some fisheries locations within Washington State. An Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) survey on impacts to tribal food systems during COVID-19 found that approximately 52% of producers estimated lost revenue of at least \$10,000, and demographics where 85% of producers' averaged sales totaled less than \$25,000 per year. The losses were devastating. Disruptions on livestock and other market channels created a ripple effect throughout tribal agriculture operations. According to the survey, 36% of tribal producers reported a reduction in their workforce, and 53% reported either partial or full closure of their businesses.

Fig. 8 Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board Food Assistance Use Greatly Increased During COVID-19

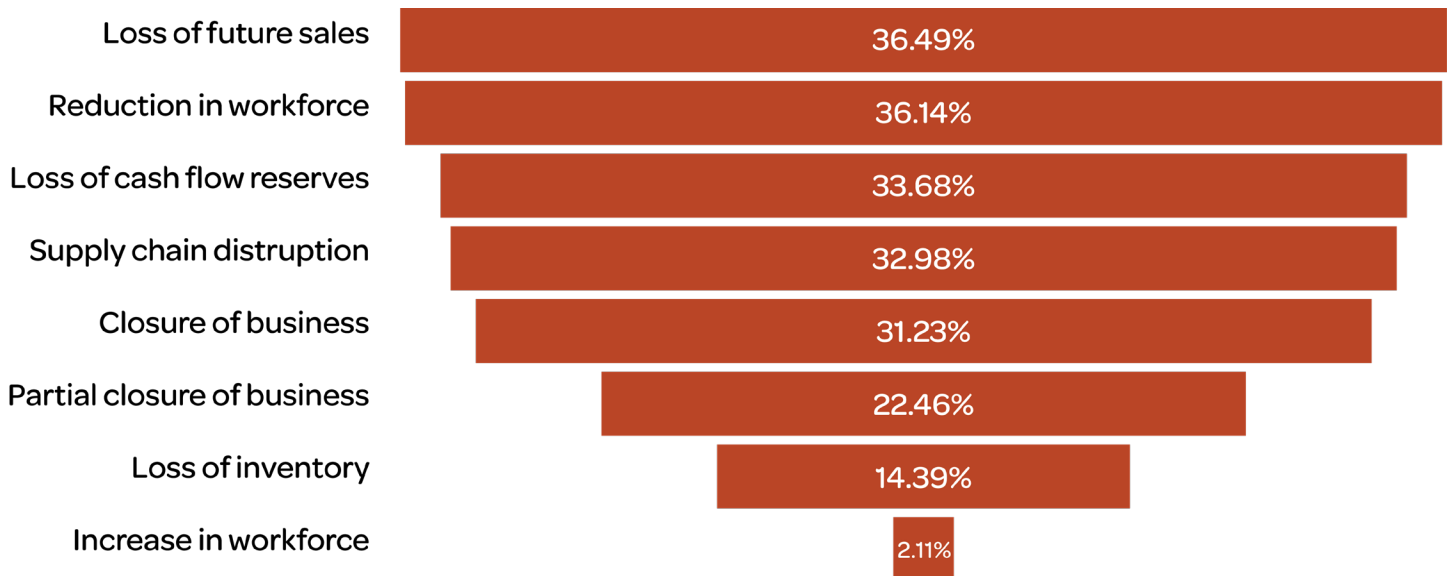
Source: https://www.npaihb.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/8-Warren-Mears.V_NWTEC-Quarterly-Board-Report-72021b.pdf

3.3 Social Safety Nets and Food Assistance (Such As SNAP)

Studies conducted from 2020-2021 showed the maximum SNAP benefit did not cover the cost of a modestly priced meal in 96 percent of all U.S. counties. A study by USDA (June, 2021) reported nearly 9 in 10 SNAP participant households faced barriers in securing a healthy diet, with the cost of food cited as the most common,

Fig. 8 Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) Survey Results of COVID-19 Effects on Tribal Producers (n=285) and Tribal leaders (n=53)

Source: [Reclaiming Innovation in Indigenous Food Systems: Navigating COVID-19 disruptions and enacting post-colonial foodways – Local Food Systems Response to Covid \(localfoodeconomics.com\)](https://localfoodeconomics.com/reclaiming-innovation-in-indigenous-food-systems-navigating-covid-19-disruptions-and-enacting-post-colonial-foodways-local-food-systems-response-to-covid)



while 4 out of 10 families who received SNAP were at net zero income. The need for food assistance is deep. Northwest Harvest (2020) noted that up to \$115 million per month could be required to address food insecurity during the peak of the pandemic (Northwest Harvest, pg.17).

3.3.1. Racial Disparities in Food Assistance Access

A study by Women in Law (2020) on access to SNAP and population specific barriers to SNAP eligibility and access highlighted the key barriers facing Black, Indigenous, People of Color and other underserved groups in accessing SNAP as:

- Trauma within BIPOC communities from generations of historical race-based violence leading to distrust of government programming
- Gender and racial narratives have demonized and shamed women of color and especially black women
- Ineligibility of people who are undocumented for many diverse assistances programs
- Lack of translation services to enable access for more language communities

The food assistance supply chain faced major challenges in meeting the transportation demand to supply food banks and pantries. Meal programs suffered labor challenges such as reduced volunteer pools due to social distancing, lack of packaging, lack of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment for Infectious Control), and limited ability to handle alternative methods of maintaining the distribution sites (Northwest Harvest, pg.26). It is important to note that many barriers in food assistance programs preceded COVID-19's presence in the United States - as noted by the age of the data in the Women in the Law report.

3.4 Re-Evaluating the Role of Food and Nutrition Assistance Programs Due to COVID-19

COVID-19's effect on the food system has been complex. Despite the initial shock to supply chains, the system has largely functioned as intended -- yet relief has not come for many who have experienced harm from embedded inequities. While the dislocations associated with the pandemic have been felt broadly throughout socially disadvantaged communities, it is particularly important to foreground the negative effects on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) individuals and communities. The legacy of cultural and policy decisions have contributed to creating an inequitable food system. During COVID-19, food banks distributed 50% more food in 2020 compared with 2019, and US government spending on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) increased more than 48%, from \$60.3 billion in the 2019 fiscal year to \$89.6 billion in 2020 (Urban Institute, 2020).

While SNAP and Food Banks play a valuable role, they do not address the systemic features that contribute to food insecurity. The persistence of various COVID-19 impacts metrics underscore the idea that current approaches are not addressing the root causes of inequities. Moreover, the existing government framework for addressing food insecurity has been criticized for maintaining many of the ills it seeks to remedy. While the framework is set to address food insecurity, those charged to deliver food to those in high need lack the connection with those they serve and more often ignore the need to remove root causes that have forced these food insecurities to exist in the first place. With social polarization continuing to drive food insecurity in many communities, this framework reinforces a system of oppression in at least three ways:

- Charity reproduces white supremacy culture narratives.
- Charity is reactive and short-term.
- Charity creates unintended consequences that reinforce existing inequalities.

Grassroots food systems allow consumers to play an active role in food production.

“We share space for folks to come and remember and engage in our sovereign food practices in a safe space. We also share foods from local farms to BIPOC families as well as numerous food preservation opportunities.”

- BIPOC Impact Survey Participant

CHAPTER 4 SWOT and Survey Analysis

The SWOT analysis revealed distinct areas of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the Washington food system that were exacerbated by COVID-19. In the review, racial inequities played a role in how deeply COVID-19 negatively impacted Black, Indigenous, People of Color and socially disadvantaged communities. The six areas highlight the unbalanced food system and indicate where barriers and improvement points were hinged during the 2020 pandemic. The SWOT analysis serves as a starting point to shift food access for many communities of color and socially disadvantaged groups. It is clear that the food system has failed to engage with communities of color and has continued to use a top-down approach to address food insecurity, while the underlying causes continue to be ignored. The SWOT analysis also reveals a lack of engagement with BIPOC farmers, producers, and distributors in any government-initiated food system program.

4.1 Food Insecurity and COVID-19 Food System Disruption: Inequities and Innovations

Inequities for communities of color were exacerbated during COVID-19, which resulted in many communities coming together to create new solutions with very limited resources. One key issue that showed inequities in the system was lack of funding and resources to meet the unforeseen rapid demand for food and housing for underserved communities.

WAFOOD surveys (1 & 2) reported some increases in participation during COVID-19 among BIPOC in SNAP (18% to 21%), school meals (19% to 21%) and food bank use (17% to 25%). While WIC usage stayed the same (7%), use of grocery vouchers and receipt of mobile boxes increased (6% to 10% for grocery vouchers) (4% to 10% for mobile boxes).

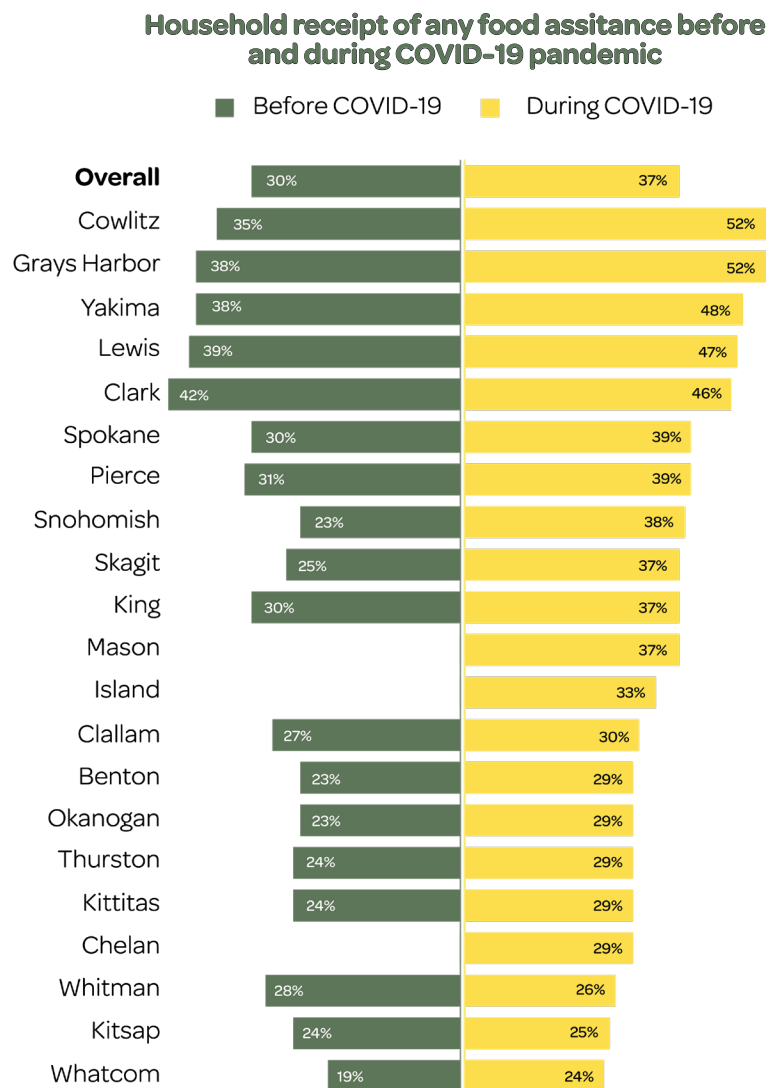
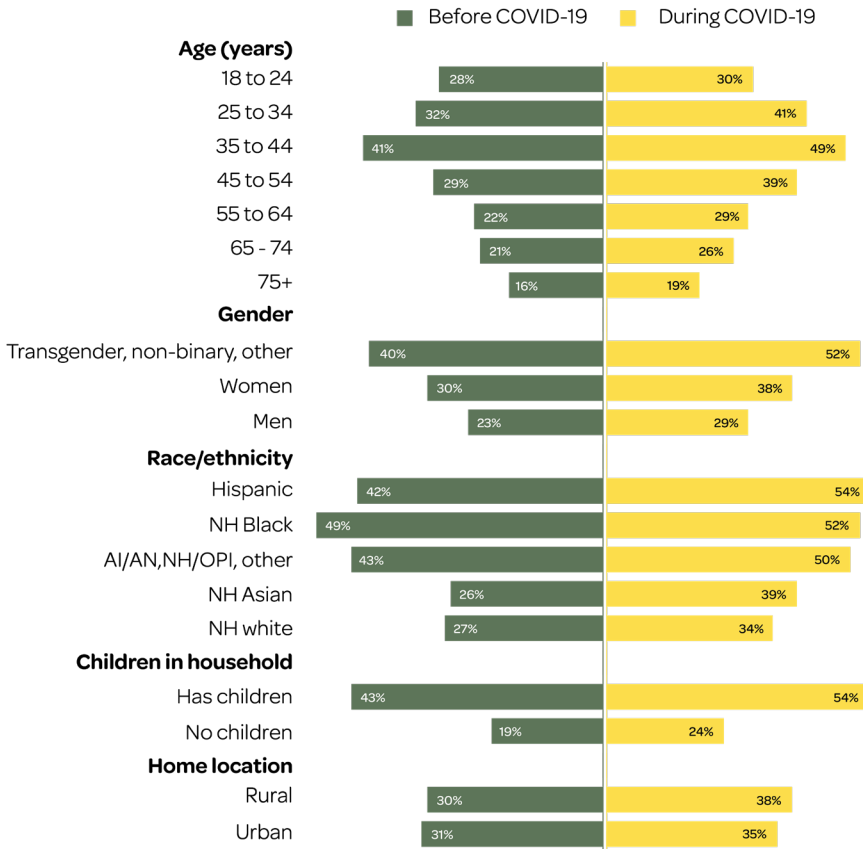


Fig. 9 Source: WAFOOD 1 and 2 Washington State Food Security Survey, Surveys 1 and 2

Household food assistance before and during COVID-19 by respondent demographic characteristics



These observed changes indicate that communities of color had continuously experienced lack of food even before COVID-19. During COVID-19, there was an increase in communities' usage of grocery vouchers and mobile boxes. Understanding these shifts in food assistance in a BIPOC context is difficult, because the existing data does not adequately disaggregate by specific BIPOC communities. We do know from our analysis of interviews and informal data collection efforts that BIPOC leaders want better resources to educate their communities about COVID-19 (prevention, risk, and recovery), while at the same time expressing a lack of trust in government to provide the necessary services and resources to serve their communities.

Fig. 9 Source: WAFOOD 1 and 2 Washington State Food Security Survey, Surveys 1 and 2

Source: [WAFOOD 1 and 2 Washington State Food Security Survey, Surveys 1 and 2](#)

4.1 Food Insecurity and COVID-19 Food System Disruption: Inequities and Innovations

Inequities were exacerbated during COVID. Communities are coming together to create new solutions but need funding.

STRENGTHS

New Collaborations

- | COVID-19 presented new solution-based programs and mechanisms for food access, especially within underserved communities
- | Multiple communities came together; government and higher education institutions increased their food programs to support the most vulnerable communities

WEAKNESSES

Fragility Within the Food System

- | Unpaid labor force within mutual aid work.
- | Food system infrastructure is not well-supported or sustainable, especially for rural communities
- | Distribution and waste management logistics are struggling
- | Lack of understanding of cultural relevance in BIPOC communities

OPPORTUNITIES

New Funding for Sustainable Partnerships

- | Funding to support logistics, capacity building, language access
- | Public-private philanthropy equitable partnerships
- | Funding to create better infrastructure for BIPOC farmers and producers
- | Funding to increase delivery of shelf-stable culturally relevant food

THREATS

Lack of Investment in Community Organizations

- | Lack of structural support and investments in existing mutual aid networks
- | Lack of investment in building long term, mutually beneficial trusting relationships with BIPOC-led grassroots organizations
- | Funding to create better infrastructure for BIPOC farmers and producers
- | Funding to increase delivery of shelf-stable culturally relevant food

4.2 Food Insecurity and COVID-19 Food System Disruption: Farmers/Producers Pivoted

Producers were hit hard by COVID-19 and pivoted rapidly. Larger operations often increased prices and decreased labor costs; smaller farms were more nimble and more able to serve the community. Larger farms are more likely to be white-led and more likely to receive funding through COVID-19 relief.

STRENGTHS

Expansion of Community Networks and Collaboration Supports

- | Working with more local farmers and producers, including new and existing BIPOC producers
- | Consumer support for local agriculture
- | Broadened public focus on hunger relief efforts to include small-scale farmers and value-added producers
- | Multiple communities came together; government and higher education institutions increased their food programs to support the most vulnerable communities

WEAKNESSES

Labor: Many Larger Farms Reduced Workers' Hours or Staff

- | Farmers rely on unpaid or underpaid labor
- | Inequities in pay, wellbeing, and quality of life
- | Limited COVID-19 resources such as PPE and educational materials.
- | Priority for existing farm operations over new and beginning farmers within Government aid programs
- | Lack of transparency around available support for farmworkers, including unemployment benefits
- | Distribution and waste management logistics are struggling
- | Lack of understanding of cultural relevance in BIPOC communities

OPPORTUNITIES

New Funding to Support Resilience

- | Mitigates climate change; adaptation and mitigation for farmers and ranchers
- | Improves capacity building among BIPOC grassroots organizations
- | Expands language access to align resources with the needs of individual communities
- | Invests in a sustainable and waste free food system
- | Increases availability of culturally relevant fresh produce and products with longer shelf life for food banks and other distribution sites
- | Supports creation of new culturally relevant and diversified food programs within the BIPOC communities and grassroots partners
- | Potential collaboration with CA and OR to address regional and multi-state solutions re: climate impacts ([Ex: Covid19 Farmworker Survey](#))
- | Funding to create better infrastructure for BIPOC farmers and producers
- | Funding to increase delivery of shelf-stable culturally relevant food

THREATS

Climate Change Impacts on Food System

- | Increased water shortages and fire threats
- | Increased droughts and flooding affect food production and delivery and creates further stress on BIPOC and socially disadvantaged communities' access to food
- | Lack of infrastructure support (transportation, distribution, storage) for small to mid-scale local agriculture
- | Limited equity-centered funding
- | Lack of direct focus on discrete BIPOC communities that experience higher food insecurity due to climate change
- | Funding to create better infrastructure for BIPOC farmers and producers
- | Funding to increase delivery of shelf-stable culturally relevant food

4.3 Food Insecurity and COVID-19 Food System Disruption: Stressed Supply Chains

Supply chains are stressed due to COVID-19 disruptions (loss of trade markets and in-person closures) along with climate change. Transportation and distribution infrastructure is needed immediately, whole systems design is essential for long term solutions.

STRENGTHS

Rapid Coordinated Emergency Response Supports

- | Coordination across jurisdictions, bringing people together
- | More family and community-generated support organizations emerged
- | New organizations emerged out of COVID-19 to combat hunger and bridge the racial inequities in our food system
- | Larger organizations allocating funds directly to farmers, producers and distributors

WEAKNESSES

Logistics

- | Weak logistical support for trucking, transportation, and storage
- | Lack of proper logistics for food waste management systems
- | The lack of fresh produce supply and longer shelf-life food
- | No resource support for local food distribution
- | System not set up to accommodate the rapid increase in usage communities

OPPORTUNITIES

New Funding Opportunity

- | To support supplier and supply chain diversification
- | Capacity building for local food distributors and centers
- | To shift hunger relief distribution
- | Improved funding and contract procurement process that is incubated or supported with an interface person

THREATS

Existing Racial Disparities Reinforced

- | The incentive for larger donors to receive tax write offs on donations to hunger relief, as well the rush that communities feel to donate unused food products results in food waste.
- | Missing an equity-centered approach to funding
- | Limited community-owned business development opportunities
- | Inequitable access to the tools needed for BIPOC Communities to thrive, including distribution, storage, processing and handling

4.4 Food Insecurity and COVID-19 Food System Disruption: Investing in Equity

BIPOC communities are leading grassroots mutual aid food security efforts. Hunger relief done by any agency must center racial equity -- investments are needed in collaborative infrastructure to co-create culturally relevant food solutions with new and existing BIPOC-led organizations that champion unique communities. Racial inequity in hunger relief programming was highlighted throughout the needs assessment. Low investment in BIPOC communities and the need to create spaces for BIPOC to build new collaborative infrastructure and partnerships were key issues observed in the food system before and during COVID-19. Hunger relief and other general services targeted to BIPOC and socially disadvantaged groups are common. While these programs may aim at creating change, they lack engagement with the BIPOC organizers at the design and implementation level and therefore perpetuate harmful systems of food saviorism which maintains systemic racism. Partnering with BIPOC in the food system is critical in creating a resilient food system among BIPOC and socially disadvantaged groups. It is essential to secure resources in order to create an equitable food system.

STRENGTHS

Increased Commitment to Racial Equity in Data and Implementation

- | More multi-source collection of racial and cultural data
- | Funding for BIPOC-led data collection and outreach

- | Increase technological access, digital skills, and digital navigation support to close the digital divide to reach BIPOC communities in rural areas who currently do not have access to broadband internet
- | More first-person data collection such as needs assessments led by BIPOC
- | Community-based data collection

WEAKNESSES

Lack of investment In Equity Work Across Food Systems

- | Lack of support to food organizations led by BIPOC communities that are already engaged in this work
- | Lack of commitment to remove systematic racism with a focus on action driven strategies

- | Lack of intersectional frameworks to address racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia
- | Limited or non-existent feedback loops for BIPOC communities to give funders and key decision-makers feedback about the quality and cultural relevance of the food

OPPORTUNITIES

More Investment for BIPOC Convening and Leadership Teams

- | Working with BIPOC Communities to strengthen the food system and bridge existing racial disparities in health, nutrition programs and education within communities of color

- | Engaging BIPOC at every level of policy making and program designs
- | Paid opportunities, investment in, and authentic partnerships with existing BIPOC-led grassroots organizations that are leading the Food Sovereignty Movement on the ground programs and education in communities of color

THREATS

Without Relationship Building Within BIPOC Communities, Harmful Systems will Persist

- | Without deep participation of BIPOC communities at the table, the ability to authentically collaborate with BIPOC communities will continue to be limited

- | Business-as-usual food saviorism methods deliver the same outcomes and overlook existing gaps that have continued to affect certain programs and funding for underserved BIPOC communities

4.5 Food Insecurity and COVID-19 Food System Disruption: Government Relief Stressed

Government food relief has been rapid, but not connected to ongoing community needs. Relief has been implemented with minimal attention to strategic, long-term investments in reducing the root causes of hunger.

In key findings by Northwest Harvest (2020), in Washington State, 2.2 million people -- roughly one-quarter of Washington's population -- struggle to put food on their tables, and 900,000 of these individuals (41%) will continue to struggle with hunger beyond COVID-19.

STRENGTHS

Extension of the Government Program Eligibility to Serve More People

- | More families qualified for food and health assistance
- | More food programs established and/or increased (SNAP, School Meals, etc.)

WEAKNESSES

Lack of Understanding of Cultural Relevance of Individual Communities

- | Food distributed did not meet individual community cultural needs
- | Food did not meet healthy dietary needs

OPPORTUNITIES

Ability to Redefine New Government Programs

- | Creation of new reimagined programs that center BIPOC Leadership
- | Enhanced SNAP and WIC programs
- | Expansion of qualifiers to support continued food access past COVID-19 strains

THREATS

Lacks BIPOC Leadership in Design and Implementation

- | Many services required applying online and had long phone hold times, technological access gaps exist within BIPOC communities
- | Increased dollar amount per household did not match increased food prices
- | Lack of formal BIPOC leadership structures meant that support needed was misidentified

4.6 Food Insecurity and COVID-19 Food System Disruption: More Specific Data Equity Needed to Understand BIPOC Gaps

Hunger relief data across Washington State has significant shortcomings in regard to cultural competency and reporting from BIPOC communities. Investments must be made in relationships with existing BIPOC-led organizations and coalitions to understand the needs of each unique community.

Many Washington data sources on hunger relief that the Leadership Team identified source the same study (WAFOOD) and lack the granularity necessary to understand specific needs within individual groups. For example, racial data was suppressed to preserve anonymity due to a low response rate. To date, existing Washington data sources were white led, no BIPOC-led research was found. Typical research frameworks interpret data through a white lens, prioritizing quantitative data and positioning participants and their information outside of their cultural context. In contrast, a qualitative approach that allows participants to offer a first-person perspective empowers individuals to represent themselves and their communities more accurately. Without investment in relevant outreach strategies and priority given to representing more specific communities, data gaps will persist. Beyond language accessibility, other factors need to be considered, including information and technology access, community engagement strategies, and mobility and access issues. In conjunction with investing in the above equity frameworks, working with existing BIPOC-led organizations to understand what information already exists on community food needs will orient researchers in an existing framework of effective mutual aid networks.

STRENGTHS

Existing Mutual Aid Networks Are Champions of the Local Food Security Movement

- | Existing organizations already have access to data and information needed to serve BIPOC communities

- | New ways to address food access were established that allowed for readily available data collection points. These new models of collecting data gave access to a first-person voice in data collection which uses stories from the ground to enhance existing data on communities of color. One example is using participatory action research, like the Black Brilliance Research Project (Black Brilliance Research Project, as presented to City of Seattle, February 2021).

WEAKNESSES

Missing Data

- | Difficult to determine BIPOC-specific trends for local areas
- | Data suppression to preserve de-identified data/anonymity
- | Grouping BIPOC groups together as monoliths within data sets
- | No BIPOC-led data sets were identified
- | Lack of grassroots data
- | Data does not exist in languages other than English, unusable to some communities
- | No data representation of BIPOC farmers

OPPORTUNITIES

Co-creating Sophisticated, Community Designed, Driven and Owned Data Collection

- | Designing data collection with BIPOC-led groups to ensure accurate data is used to develop programs targeting BIPOC and socially disadvantaged communities
- | To develop an organized data strategy, data sovereignty, and to create more effective ecosystems of support
- | Investing in relationship building and long-term engagement with BIPOC communities beyond transactional dynamics

THREATS

Lack of Support for Existing Networks

- | Data is often commissioned to white-led organizations who do not specifically partner or prioritize working with existing mutual aid groups who are directly connected to BIPOC communities
- | Lack of language accessibility or investment in effective outreach strategies
- | Lack of data means no funding to specific communities
- | Services tailored based on data solicited by government entities
- | Quantitative data is prioritized over qualitative data and storytelling methodologies, a key component of knowledge sharing and transfer within BIPOC communities

Data is often commissioned to white-led organizations who do not specifically partner or prioritize working with existing mutual aid groups who are directly connected to BIPOC communities.

Data analyzation support for this report was provided in collaboration with Inclusive Data Solutions, a BIPOC led grant and research consulting firm which centers Black liberation in their work. Inclusive Data's goal is to support community-led work that create futures where we can all thrive.

In this section of the SWOT overview, critical parts of the food system were found to have contributed to the way communities shifted during COVID-19. Here, key SWOT insights appear alongside illustrative examples.

5.1 Strengths Snapshot

- More state institutions supporting BIPOC communities
- BIPOC grassroots organizations (including mutual aid networks) are leading the food security movement
- Access to national and statewide statistics help show consumer trends
- More direct funds allocated directly to distributors
- The addition of schools in outreach and emergency food distribution beyond basic child nutrition programs
- Collaborations with local Economic Development Council to align relief efforts

“Creating community hubs and community gardens funds to help secure spaces for these communities so they can be more involved in creating better and healthy styles for themselves [has been one of the most helpful things the government has done during this crisis].”

- BIPOC Impact Survey Participant



5.2 Weaknesses Snapshot

- Lack of locally sourced culturally relevant staple crops (ex. millet, amaranth, rice)
- Lack of support for local BIPOC farmers/ producers
- Burdensome requirements with limited technical assistance for funding opportunities
- Many community needs are related to food needs (ex. like access to capital)
- Policy-directed data older than three years is often dismissed, which discounts historical documents specifically relevant to Indigenous treaties, historical disparities, reports, etc.
- More support is needed to develop deep and robust community-owned data agreements, policies, and programs for BIPOC and socially disadvantaged groups

“The slow and steady degrading of the food chain starting at the regional national level, then mid-pandemic, mid-chain to small producer gaps and shortages [is one way that COVID-19 affected food insecure BIPOC and other socially disadvantaged communities.]”

- BIPOC Impact Survey Participant



5.3 Opportunities Snapshot

- COVID-19 can serve as a wake-up call to develop proactive year-round preparation and support to be ready for the next crisis
- Increase access to fresh food and culturally relevant meals and distribute food directly to community instead of becoming dependent on food banks as the source of hunger relief
- Translators and interpreters can help expand outreach and increase access to resources
- Grow a low-emissions and worker-owned food distribution system, as well as a food logistics system for BIPOC producers and products
- Improve technological infrastructure and support
- Invest in data equity, ensuring robust, co-created and managed initiatives with BIPOC communities
- More systems reform, more redistribution of resources and access to economic development



“Creating a system within counties that integrates everyone involved in community organizing or food access services can actually help remove barriers of food access in many of these communities.”

-BIPOC Impact Survey Participant

5.4 Threats Snapshot

- Climate injustice disproportionately impacting communities of color
- Large companies have incentive to donate based on quantity not food quality, exacerbating waste
- Lack of cultural sensitivity within different BIPOC communities, created homogenization and leads to lack of granularity in data and food waste
- Asymmetries in who has access to data, larger organizations have more access
- Short timelines for assessments -- using data from grassroots communities requires long-range consideration for engagement and authentic relationship building
- COVID-19, lack of robust outreach, and fragile communication networks made it difficult for BIPOC communities to pivot and sustain their operations



“Washington not having heat wave considerations on the books for farmworkers and those in adjacent essential work positions (those working outside), despite knowing the risk of climate change and changing seasonal temperatures - and their projections in our region - for several years [was a major threat].”

-BIPOC Impact Survey Participant

“Creating a system that continues to do business as usual [has been the least helpful thing the government has done].”

-BIPOC Impact Survey Participant

CHAPTER 6 Recommendations and Next Steps

These recommendations are based on current models that were reviewed, as well as the analysis of SWOT and survey results. If these recommendations are taken into account in the development of future hunger relief and food system development programs, it can create the basis for healthier and more resilient communities, especially for BIPOC communities.

1. Approach food access programs using an inclusive equity-based model that sources culturally relevant solutions for hunger relief.

Implement programs that approach food security by first applying an equity lens and models that are inclusive of BIPOC leadership. Current distribution models create barriers for farmers, producers, and food justice advocates to participate, thus making it harder to implement an equity-centered system approach that is more intentional. By not being able to contribute directly to the decisions that apply or intend to address racial inequities in food, health, and education, many of these communities have not been able to offer input on their community-specific needs. WSDA must create a more inclusive hunger relief program encompassing those involved in food access and food justice in communities of color.

Culturally-centered support is necessary and important. This approach can ensure that programs are more accessible based on locality and proximity of services. Demonstrating cultural competence in this way can also remove individual constraints to create better access to culturally relevant and healthy foods among communities of color. Food systems must provide hunger relief in an equitable way for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and socially disadvantaged communities.

The current food system lacks sensitivity to diverse BIPOC communities and has opted to fit BIPOC into one system that is expected to serve all. Design and implementation of new hunger relief programs should take into account the authenticity and originality of individual BIPOC communities throughout Washington State. Hunger relief should take into account the cultural and health relevance of the food being supplied to individuals of Color. Furthermore, health and cultural relevance should be included as a qualifier of any food program and should be tailored to fit individual community needs. While this may seem an expensive undertaking, working with leaders of Color who are already working within their communities can serve as the first step in understanding the needs of BIPOC and socially disadvantaged communities.

2. Use a bottom-up approach to increase BIPOC participation by starting with outreach within BIPOC communities themselves.

Remove barriers that disqualify BIPOC from inclusion in hunger relief programs, food access, and other public programs/initiatives and funding channels. Some of the barriers include but are not limited to:

- Lack of representation in decision-making roles on how funds should be distributed (before the funding mechanism is finalized)
- Long and lengthy application processes that do not take into account language diversity or barriers (e.g., getting a DUNS or SAM.gov or RFP/RFQ in-language)
- Limitation on qualification criteria that often require years of qualifications in public service that disregard the fact that many BIPOC individuals have been omitted in these systems and have not participated in any state/national vendor contracts thus making them ineligible to participate
- Limited access to technical assistance from providers with expertise in demonstrated success with BIPOC communities

- Lack of access to resources to participate in any funding or public-driven projects
- Lack of culturally specific and accessible outreach efforts to BIPOC regarding funding and public initiatives. In most cases, those with longstanding relationships get notified of such opportunities when they open up.

Communities of Color have historically employed a methodology of self-help community organizing and mutual aid that enables access to food, health, and education. These networks of grassroots organizers have increasingly grown to address the systematic bias that historically removed these communities from higher-level decision making in the aforementioned areas. Partnering with networks established by BIPOC and focused on BIPOC needs can help streamline food access and other nutrition programs.

3. Increase financial support for BIPOC-led teams, farmers, producers, distributors, and food justice advocates.

In most cases, BIPOC-led organizations that engage in food access and food sovereignty operate with very little capital and are often funded through a volunteer or mutual aid-based funding system. Allocating discretionary funds to support these organizations can increase food access services and farming in these communities. COVID-19 created new ways of responding to unexpected events and provided a ripple of challenges to many BIPOC communities. Creating funding for infrastructure for BIPOC farmers, producers, and distributors can position them to more easily respond to future emergency events.

4. Increase BIPOC participation in food system program design, implementation, evaluation, and policy-directed interventions.

Systemic oppression lies at the foundation of the US food system and is still present today. The US food system was built on the exploited labor of Black and Indigenous people, and yet these same communities play a very limited role in deciding how the food system operates to serve BIPOC communities. Creating more pathways for BIPOC participation in program designs, implementation, and evaluation can lead to a better food system that focuses on individual communities. When partnering with organizations and contractors who do not identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color, agencies must ensure that partners follow performance measures that ensure that their hunger relief strategies use an equity lens. In particular, staff must have the necessary training to ensure that discrimination and stereotyping are not tolerated while offering services and collaborating with communities of color and socially disadvantaged groups. WSDA programs should require partners to promote equity, remove bias, and consistently apply an equity lens. Partners must demonstrate the importance that lived experience can bring to these situations, the importance of expanding hiring pools for staff to include BIPOC networks, and also ensure that key staff are well-trained to represent and promote equity, reduce bias, and improve program outcomes. This must go beyond simply attending training without changing behavior and systems. Partners should consistently demonstrate and affirm their sensitivity to racial bias in food system work and show consistent growth in applying racial and equity measurements and principles to narrow equity gaps.

5. Increase BIPOC leadership in hunger relief programs and other government contracting.

When redesigning a hunger relief program and government contracting system, including BIPOC in the design and review process can strengthen the projected outcomes. Working across the different BIPOC communities and engaging with these communities will result in increased participation and the number of programs that are implemented.

6. Ensure that data collection methods, analyses, and reporting align with the leadership and expertise of BIPOC and socially disadvantaged communities.

In the collection of data, WSDA, other government sectors, and partners should acknowledge that gaps in data collection and aggregation (race and ethnicity) have contributed to structural racism. BIPOC-centered data collection, statistical methods, and distribution could bridge gaps in food access for communities of Color and socially disadvantaged groups. Partnering with BIPOC community leaders to ensure accurate, disaggregated, and consistent demographic data collection and sharing it with those engaged in food access and nutritional health community outreach could increase positive outcomes for programs targeting communities of color and socially disadvantaged groups.

Centering the needs of communities of color in the design of food access and other food system programs could benefit future projects. BIPOC community members disproportionately live in neighborhoods with limited healthy food options and are more than likely to suffer from food-related health issues such as diabetes and obesity. While wealth and decision-making power across our food system are still predominantly held by a white majority, BIPOC has limited economic opportunity and access to generational wealth. These disparities are visible across every data set and have resulted in federal policies and practices deliberately designed to discriminate against and deny BIPOC opportunities in funding and resources, thus limiting healthier options for food, health, education, and public safety.



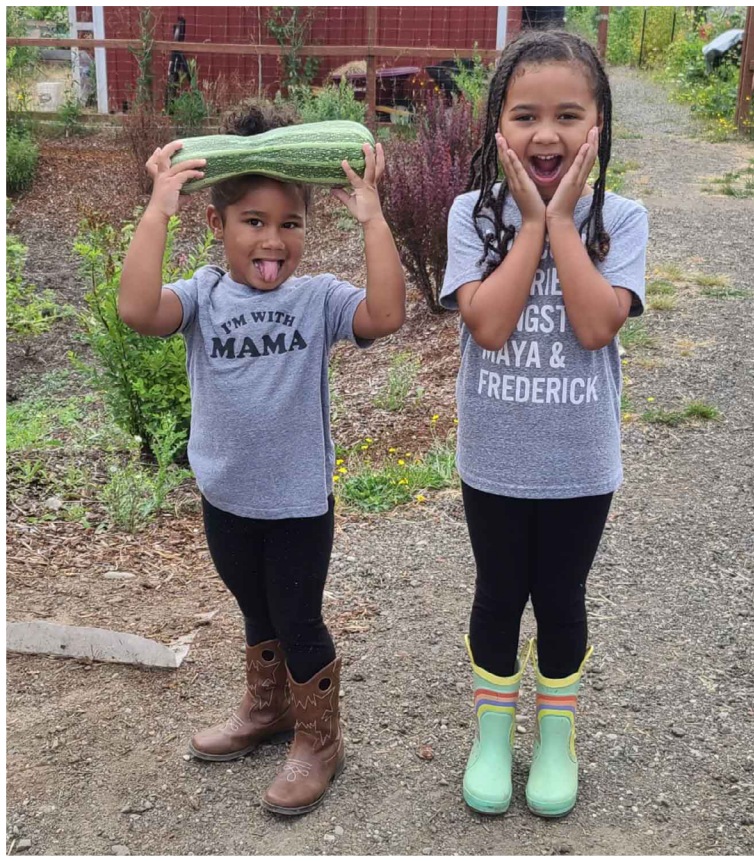
“Community leaders were speedy to respond to pandemic to secure food for their community members, and partnerships were strengthened.”

-BIPOC Impact Survey Participant

Conclusion

Though the constraints in timeline prevented the Informal BIPOC Leadership team from providing an exhaustive study of food security within BIPOC populations in Washington State due to COVID-19, this preliminary report reveals data that is consistent with the lived experiences of communities of Color throughout the state. Rapid innovations have emerged from BIPOC-led hunger relief organizations on the ground, but more must be done to invest in these programs at every step of policy design, implementation and reflection.

It is important to put more emphasis on the needs of BIPOC communities and include ways to eliminate structural racism that has historically caused trauma, created barriers to food access, promoted resources inadequate to certain ages and incomes, and left wide nutritional gaps in the US. Doing so will result in a stronger system that is beneficial to all communities of color who may experience food insecurity, beyond a national disaster or pandemic.



There is an opportunity to redefine and construct new ways to create culturally relevant and healthy food access for the BIPOC and socially-disadvantaged communities.

- BIPOC Impact Survey Participant
Young BIPOC Farmers Harvesting Food at
Haki Farmers Collective (Summer 2021)

Acknowledgements

Collaborators are:

- Mercy Kariuki-McGee, WSU Food Systems Project Lead/ Co-Founder Haki Farmers Collective
- Elisa McGee, Design Consulting/Co-Founder Haki Farmers Collective
- Shaun Glaze, Data Lead/Chief Consulting Officer of Inclusive Data
- Adasha Turner, Ummah Sustained AgroEcology Center at Modest Family Solutions/WSU 4-H 1st Jr Master Gardener Program
- Albert Sardinas, Food for Good/Purpose Drive Girl
- Paula Sardinas, Food for Good/Build Back Black
- Ashley Mocerro Powell, Chair of Environmental Justice Leaders
- Cameron Jones, Woodbridge Farm/Chimacum Center
- Denise Chin, Ecotrust
- Devoni Whitehead, Evans School of Public Policy
- Eddie Hill, Black Food Sovereignty Coalition
- Gary Newte, Northwest Harvest
- Horacio Perez, Black & Indigenous Organizing
- Louis Guiden, Good Shepherd Youth Outreach
- Peter Mustin, Woodbridge Farm
- Rita Ordóñez, Birdsign Consulting
- Robert Rodrigo, COO of We Do Better Relief/ Co-founder of Walk 4 Change/Logistics Manager for Peacekeeper Society
- Laura Lewis, Director WSU Food Systems
- Aba Kiser, Project Manager WSU Food Systems



Abbreviations

• AI/AN	American Indian/Alaskan Native
• BIPOC	Black, Indigenous and People of Color
• DOH	Department of Health
• EBT	Electronic Benefits Transfer
• FDPIR	Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations; (FDPIR)
• IAC	Intertribal Agriculture Council
• LFS	Local Food Systems
• SNAP	Social Safety Net and Food Assistance Program
• NHOPI	Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander
• DUNS	Data Universal Numbering System
• PPE	Personal Protective Equipment for Infectious Control
• RFQ	Request For Qualification
• RFP	Request for Proposal
• SAM	System for Award Management
• SWOT	Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
• TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
• WA	Washington
• WIC	Women, Infants and Children
• WSDA	Washington Department of Agriculture
• WSU	Washington State University
• USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
• UW	University of Washington
• WAFOOD	Washington State Food Survey
• WATRIBAL	Washington Tribal Survey

Appendices

Appendix 1

- The demographics of racial inequality in the United States: In Black Communities ([Source: https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/07/27/](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/07/27/))

Criminal justice

- [1 in 2 Black adults with a college degree or more have had a family member in jail or prison](#)
- [1 in 3 Black men born in 2001 will spend time in prison in their lifetime](#)
- [1 in 11 Black adults are currently under correctional control \(in prison or on parole/probation\)](#)
- [1 in 230 Black youth are detained in juvenile facilities](#)
- [1 in 1,000 Black men and boys will die at the hands of police](#)

Economic security

- [1 in 2 Black adults have accrued credit card debt during the past three months](#)
- [1 in 3 Black families have zero or negative wealth](#)
- [1 in 3 Black children live in poverty](#)
- [1 in 5 Black borrowers are turned down for a conventional loan](#)
- [1 in 6 Black adults were not able to pay a utility bill or paid a bill late in the past three months](#)
- [1 in 7.5 Black adults have overdrafted their bank account in the past three months](#)
- [1 in 7.5 Black adults have cut the size of their meals in the past three months](#)
- [1 in 8 Black adults were not able to pay for a \\$400 emergency expense in the past three months](#)
- [1 in 10 Black adults were not able to pay rent or mortgage in the past three months](#)
- [1 in 10 Black adults have taken out a short-term payday loan in the past three months](#)

Employment

- [1 in 2.5 Black adults were unemployed or temporarily furloughed on April 2020](#)
- [1 in 6 Black adults have lost their job or income in the past three months](#)

Health

- [1 in 2.5 Black women will die within five years of diagnosis of endometrial cancer](#)
- [1 in 4 Black children born in 1990 will experience their father in prison in their lifetime](#)
- [1 in 6.5 Black children have higher blood lead levels](#)
- [1 in 7 Black children suffer from asthma](#)
- [1 in 9 Black Americans aged 0 to 64 are uninsured](#)
- [1 in 13 Black adults were not able to see a doctor or go to the hospital in the past three months because they could not afford it](#)
- [1 in 13 Black adults were not able to fill or postponed filling a drug prescription in the past three months](#)
- [1 in 90 Black babies will die before their first birthday](#)
- [1 in 1,350 Black Americans have died of COVID-19](#)
- [1 in 2,060 Black mothers will die while pregnant, during childbirth, or shortly thereafter](#)

More Scenarios

- [1 in 6.5 Black students are suspended](#)
- [1 in 9 of Black children will enter foster care at some point before they turn 18](#)
- [1 in 13 Black Americans of voting age are disenfranchised](#)
- [8 in 10 Black adults with at least some college experience report having experienced racial discrimination, at least from time to time, including 1 in 6 who say this happens regularly](#)

Appendix 2

North Thurston School District Individual Meals by Site 2020-2021(WA)															
June	Chambers Prairie					Evergreen Forest					Horizons				
	Bkfst	Lunch	Grab & Go			Bkfst	Lunch	Grab & Go			Bkfst	Lunch	Grab & Go		
1		223					204				6	210			
2		214					210				7	212			
3		243					198				7	214			
4			5	5				9	9		10	21			
7		222					192				5	199			
8		247					198				5	205			
9		246					200				6	225			
10		262					198				5	215			
11			20	20				16	16		12	20			
14		241					193				6	217			
15		249					194				6	205			
16		254					197				6	221			
17		239					200				6	200			
18			10	10				11	11		12	15			
21		247					186				6	207			
22		229					157				6	216			
23		208					184				7	198			
24		242					214				4	155			
Summer	171	171				75	75								
Totals	171	3737	35	35	0	75	3000	36	36	0	122	3155	0	0	
	Bkfst	Lunch				Bkfst	Lunch				Bkfst	Lunch			
TOTAL Claims	Chambers Prairie					Evergreen Forest					Horizons				
	206	3772				111	3036				122	3155			

5-21 hybrid became Grab & Go														

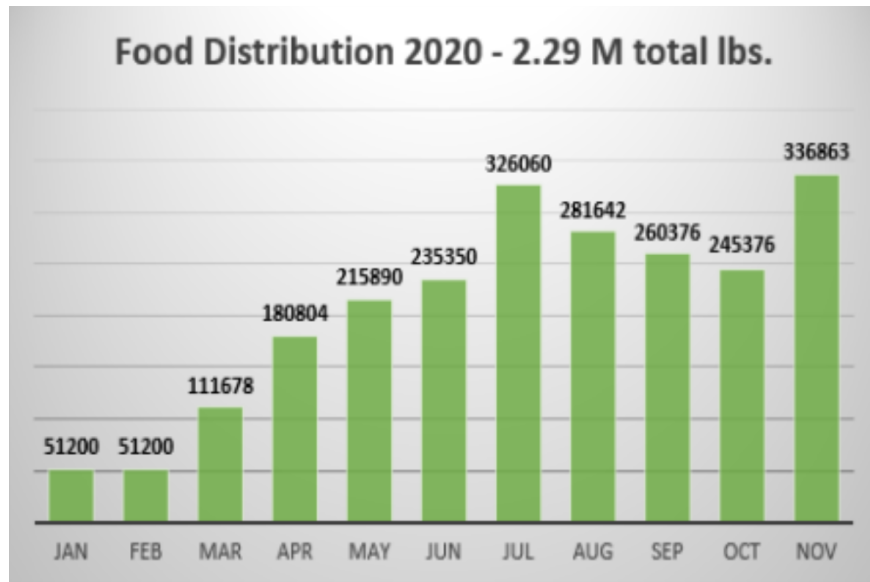
Lacey					Lakes					Lydia Hawk						
	Bkfst	Lunch	Grab & Go			Bkfst	Lunch	Grab & Go			Bkfst	Lunch	Grab & Go		Bkfst	
	8	165				45	188			108	3	188				
	8	175				42	194			108		198				
	8	168				48	193			108	4	201			1	
		25	4	4		5	7	2	2	108			5	5	1	
	8	168				46	190			94	2	216			1	
	8	169				50	204			94	3	213			3	
	7	172				63	219			94	4	201			2	
	8	167				59	208			94	2	220			2	
		18	5	5		4	7			94			5	5	1	
	7	163				64	211			106	3	197				
	9	165				56	202			106	5	200			1	
	9	164				57	217			106	5	211			2	
	8	176				57	226			106	7	207			1	
		19	3	3						106			6	6		
	7	157				54	194			88	3	177				
	6	173				60	206			88	7	200				
	7	175				57	175			88	14	200				
	8	172				52	209			88	7	197				
	98	98				86	86				64	64			57	
0	214	2689	12	12	0	905	3136	2	2	1784	133	3090	16	16	0	72
	Bkfst	Lunch				Bkfst	Lunch				Bkfst	Lunch				Bkfst
	Lacey					Lakes					Lydia Hawk					
	226	2701				2691	4922				149	3106				86

Meadows				Mt. View				Olympic View				Pleasant Glade					
Lunch	Grab & Go		Bkfst	Lunch	Grab & Go		Bkfst	Lunch	Grab & Go		Bkfst	Lunch	Grab & Go				
222			40	184			15	228			10	190					
230			40	188			16	238			10	202					
235			40	181			18	232			7	199					
	7	7	7	10			6	34	3	3	3	17	11	11			
220			38	157			16	220			6	198					
243			33	201			21	242			7	205					
246			38	186			21	235			7	204					
262			38	167			20	258			12	214					
	4	4					6	32	2	2		16	13	13			
238			37	194			20	256			10	206					
243			36	181			26	238			10	206					
235			44	200			30	233			10	206					
263			36	205			30	244			12	214					
	3	3	14	14			10	32				17	9	9			
214			39	188			30	233			8	208					
205			37	190			30	244			11	210					
205			47	196			25	250			12	205	0				
220			36	175			235	235			11	195					
57			75	75													
3538	14	14	0	675	2892	0	0	0	575	3684	5	5	0	146	3112	33	33
Lunch			Bkfst	Lunch			Bkfst	Lunch			Bkfst	Lunch					
Meadows				Mt. View				Olympic View				Pleasant Glade					
3552			675	2892			580	3689			179	3145					

Seven Oaks				South Bay				Woodland				Totals			
Bkfst	Lunch	Grab & Go		Bkfst	Lunch	Grab & Go		Bkfst	Lunch	Grab & Go					
1	178				193			3	180			2792			
2	192				193			4	197			2880			
1	191				193			8	184			2882			
		8	8			10	10			8	8	398			
1	179				200			5	188			2771			
1	186				194			6	195			2933			
1	175				224			6	208			2990			
1	185				222			8	210			3037			
		7	7			8	8			8	8	386			
1	181				204			6	200			2961			
1	171				212			5	191			2918			
1	167				207			7	196			2985			
2	178				225			8	204			3054			
	18	18				14	14			9	9	405			
1	168			0	213			4	188			2820			
1	171				207			6	204			2864			
1	165				226			6	171			2822			
1	167				231			5	187			3046			
												1252			
												0			
0	17	2672	33	15	0	0	3144	32	32	0	87	2903	25	25	0
Bkfst	Lunch				Bkfst	Lunch			Bkfst	Lunch					46196
Seven Oaks				South Bay				Woodland				Totals			
50	2687				32	3176			112	2928					47980

Appendix 3

FMS Global Strategies USDA Box Program - Monthly Food Distribution 2020-2.29 Total LBs (King County only)

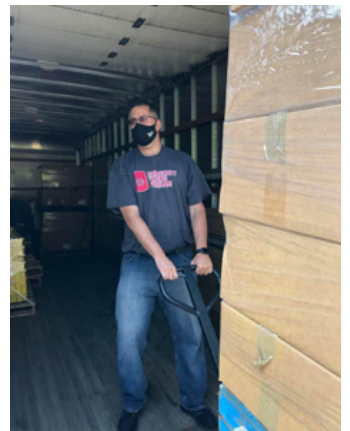


Appendix 4

- Source: FMS Global Strategies LLC, <https://www.fmsglobalstrategies.com>
- Source: 2020 USDA Box Program Food Distribution
- Source: FMS Global Strategies LLC, <https://www.fmsglobalstrategies.com>

Overall	City	%
990063	Seattle	43.16%
301754	Renton	13.15%
230,640	Lakewood	10.05%
201100	Kent	8.76%
138024	Auburn	6.01%
135640	Lynwood	5.91%
120822	Tacoma	5.26%
76130	Des Moines	3.32%
38688	Milton	1.69%
27000	Federal Way	1.18%
21200	Tukwila	0.92
4252	Redmond	0.19%
3796	Burien	0.17%
3100	Everett	0.14%
1530	Bellevue	0.07%
480	SeaTac	0.02%
270	Edmonds	0.01%

Food for Good



Appendix 5

USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Agricultural Marketing Service					
Round 1 and 2					To date USDA contractors have delivered 173,699,775 boxes of fresh produce, milk, dairy and cooked meats to disadvantaged Americans across the country
Contractor	Location	Box Type	Value	Phone Number	
Cascadia Farm Collective LLC	Seattle, WA	Fresh Fruit/Fresh Vegetable Box	\$2,736,000	530-219-0433	35.7 million food boxes invoiced in round one (May 15-June 30)
Cascadia Produce	Auburn, WA	Fresh Fruit/Fresh Vegetable Box	\$864,000	206-660-7723	50.8 million food boxes invoiced in round two (July 1-August 31)
Garden Fresh Foods	Woodinville, WA	Fresh Fruit/Fresh Vegetable Box	\$1,126,199	425-483-5467	15.2 million food boxes invoiced in round two extensions (September 1 - September 18)
Linc Foods	Spokane Valley, WA	Fresh Fruit/Fresh Vegetable Box,	\$100,000	509-230-1223	18.8 million food boxes invoiced in BOA Contracts (September 22 - October 31)
					12.4 million food boxes invoiced in round four (November 1 - December 31)
		Fluid Milk	\$18,497		
Puget Sound Food Hub Cooperative	Mount Vernon, WA	Fresh Fruit/Fresh Vegetable Box	\$281,600	360-428-7106	40.7 million food boxes invoiced in round five (January 19 - April 30)

Smith Brothers Farms	Kent, WA	Fluid Milk	\$739,350	253-478-5915	
Round 3					
Contractor	Location	Phone Number	Total Boxes Awarded	Contract Value	States Serviced
Oneonta Trading Corporation	WA	509-663-2191	25,879	\$1,503,569.90	WA
Perfect Pact, LLC	FL	216-406-6775	335,279	\$19,556,824.07	FL; KY; MS; NC; SC; WA
Sysco Corporation	TX	713-256-4506	2,335,587	\$114,476,130.10	AL; AK; AZ; AR; CA; CO; FL; GA; HI; ID; IL; IN; KY; LA; MD; MI; MT; NV; NM; NY; OH; OK; OR; PA; TN; TX; UT; VT; VA; WA; WV; WY
Round 4					
Contractor	Location	Phone Number	Total Boxes Awarded	Contract Value	States Serviced
Cascadia Produce LLC	WA	206-660-7723	85,000	\$2,771,850	WA
Pacific Coast Fruit Company	OR	503-731-9669	334,278	\$13,287,551	OR; WA
Round 5					
Contractor	Location	Phone Number	Total Boxes Awarded	Contract Value	States Serviced
Cascadia Produce LLC	WA	206-660-7723	175,000	\$5,570,250	WA
Pacific Coast Fruit Company	OR	503-731-9669	197,692	\$6,504,067	WA; OR
Source: USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Agricultural Marketing Service					
Updated May 28, 2021					

Appendix 6

Supplemental Review of the WSDA We Feed WA Pilot Program: Initial Review and Recommendations

1. Background

In May of 2021, the Washington State legislature appropriated \$27 million for state fiscal year 2022 for the WSDA to develop a state alternative to the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program and provide resources to hunger relief organizations, including those that serve black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) and other socially disadvantaged communities. Half of these funds were allocated through emergency contracts June - September 2021 to address immediate needs while WSDA was developing the new We Feed WA Pilot Food Program to further enhance the already established Food Assistance Programs. To identify access gaps and further assess the emergency food safety net, WSDA contracted the University of Washington and Washington State University to conduct a needs assessment of Washington's Food System. Alongside the need assessment, the WSDA also initiated a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to select a list of qualified organization(s) interested in partnering on the We Feed WA Pilot Food Program to support Washington-based food and farms businesses while addressing the unprecedented need for emergency food resources across Washington State caused by the COVID-19 health crisis. As a requirement, WSDA stipulated that interested partners must be able to demonstrate an ability to work with food partners and socially disadvantaged populations to distribute food and resources safely, timely and equitably.

2. Objectives

The We Feed WA Pilot Food Program had two primary objectives:

- Increase the economic viability of farmers and food businesses through the procurement of emergency food from Washington-based farm and food businesses, with resources prioritized for underrepresented farmers and ranchers, as well as women, minority, and small business owners.
- Increase emergency food access among BIPOC and socially disadvantaged communities that are not otherwise well served by the existing WSDA Food Assistance network or that need additional support by leveraging unique distribution models or relationship networks that overcome identified access barriers.

3. The State of the We Feed WA Pilot Program

Hunger has been a critical need prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, disproportionately so within communities of color and other disadvantaged communities. The lethal consequences of the pandemic on the food system pushed everyone to rethink the state of our food system and especially how we deliver food to those impacted during a state of emergency. With federal relief funding being allocated rapidly, the need to find ways to meet the rising demand for food supply is critical. WSDA saw an opportunity to rethink how they deliver food in times of an emergency, hence the "pilot program". The intentional positive outcome of the program was the ability to invite a wider pool of partners who have the capacity to deliver additional food access to those highly impacted by the pandemic by supporting the stressed supply chain, overwhelmed food banks, government SNAP/WIC programs, and the high rising number of unemployment that created unprecedented survival capacity for many individuals and households.

4. Request For Qualification (RFQ)

In this section we review the RFQ intent and the process as well as impacts of the RFQ. We further provide recommendations and an equity lens that can be used across government jurisdictions that intend to provide goods or services for underserved communities.

4.1 The Process

RFQ is a request for potential suppliers or vendors to submit their qualifications in order to be considered for a particular project or service. The WSDA RFQ was aimed at attracting potential vendors who can deliver hunger relief under the Pilot program - We Feed WA. Overall, the RFQ purpose and intent were well articulated in the initial request - “to provide hunger relief to the underserved and with emphasis to the BIPOC and socially-disadvantaged”. As previously stated the funding cycle for this project was already disbursed in a previous RFQ that enabled those already involved in the hunger relief effort to have the capacity to provide much needed relief that was exacerbated by COVID-19 impacts. Therefore, as the We Feed Pilot Program was being designed, some of the major hunger entities were already providing relief and were expected to participate in round two of the WSDA RFQ. The RFQ was not designed to attract grassroots BIPOC hunger relief programs that arguably had the most to gain from being included in the pilot program. WSDA sought to identify additional established organizations with experience and capacity to receive government funding to continue work that was already underway in various forms. There were areas for the RFQ to create an equitable process, but it was either missed deliberately or an overlook of the abilities of the existing BIPOC grassroots food access network. The RFQ was not framed to enable grassroots organizations to qualify for the contract and the metrics used to evaluate the ability to provide hunger relief to the underserved communities did not align with the capacities that grassroots organizations offer. The minimum requirements as they were laid out exempted many small-scale farmers and food access distributors, resulting in an inability to qualify. Historically, small-scale BIPOC farmers and producers have often only benefited if they fall under fiscal sponsorship of a well-established (usually white-led) farmer, food aggregator or producer.

4.2 The Review Metric

Scoring the statement of qualifications plays a big role in qualifying or disqualifying applicants. In this RFQ there were five metrics used by WSDA to qualify potential vendors, namely:

- Bidder Approach/Methodology
- Experience Demonstrated outcome
- Administration Capacity
- Staff Qualifications
- Letters of Recommendations
- Minimum Requirements

A complete review metric is included in Appendices (7 and 8) of the Assessing WA Food Systems Through an Equity Lens Report. Designing an equitable RFQ requires a thorough approach that refines the ranking criteria and links the RFQ with the intended project outcome. Assuming the intended outcome is achieved without the leadership of those that the outcomes propose to support can lead to the project not reaching its goals and result in an insufficient/inequitable performance. Some basic questions to consider in the rubric creation and evaluation process are:

- How do we want to rank these applications?
- What are the review criteria?
- Do applicants rank based on requirements stated on RFQ or what they demonstrate in their application?
- What are the minimum qualifications required and how do they make the process equitable? Do they encourage or discourage bidders who otherwise are in a position to deliver equitable service or product?
- What is the most important mission of the project that the bidder is bidding for? How does that influence the creation of the rubrics?

5. Designing a Sustainable, Inclusive, and Equitable Program Through a Competitive Process

Developing a sustainable and equitable hunger relief program that delivers food security and nutrition for BIPOC and socially disadvantaged communities is complex and driven by a variety of economic and societal burdens such as civil unrest, fragmentation and polarization, population growth and urban migration, and climate change. Taking a holistic approach to designing an impactful program takes advantage of the synergy that ensures the intended outcomes are positive and beneficial to those targeted by the program. A successful hunger relief program should be intertwined with those engaged in the community who are actors of change, producers of the food, and end-consumers as well. Successful programs should not compromise economic, social, cultural significance, and environmental stability. Such programs are dynamic and complex, they should:

- Have a broad-based intent and consider society hardships caused by inequalities, especially BIPOC and the social sustainability groups
- Be economically and sustainably viable; and
- Have a positive, zero, or neutral impact on the natural environment

5.1 Opportunities, Limitations, and Inequities in the Process

“Food philanthropy is focused on mitigating rather than ending hunger” says Raj Patel, author and academic. Hunger relief often puts a band-aid on issues while food aggregators within the food system collect large dollar amounts from the state and donors. In 2020, national census data revealed that there were 37.2 million people in poverty, approximately 3.3 million more than in 2019. Between 2019 and 2020, the poverty rate increased for non-Hispanic Whites and Hispanics. Among non-Hispanic Whites, 8.2 percent were in poverty in 2020, while Hispanics had a poverty rate of 17.0 percent. While Blacks had the highest poverty rate (19.5 percent), there was no significant change from the 2019 census. For Asians (8.1 percent) in 2020 and statistically no change in 2019. Poverty rates for people under the age of 18 increased from 14.4 percent in 2019 to 16.1 percent in 2020. There were increases for people aged 18 to 64 from 9.4 percent in 2019 to 10.4 percent in 2020. For people aged 65 and older, poverty was at 9.0 percent in 2020, and no change in 2019. No data was recorded on this particular report for American Indian/Alaskan Natives (AI/AN) (US Census, 2019)

Through a recommendation of a team of BIPOC leaders, advocates, producers and farmers, the WSDA was able to expand its recruitment to a wider range of vendors that included BIPOC-led organizations and businesses. The shift is a historical one that introduces the process that is intended to have long-reaching and intentional hunger relief for BIPOC and socially-disadvantaged communities. This shift must come in tandem with removing barriers of land ownership, culturally-healthy food access, education, health, and ensuring sources that can boost the economic welfare of under-served communities.

5.2 Allocation of dollars

The way funds are distributed is still disproportionate, with the highest hunger relief dollars going to well-established food aggregators, farmers, and supply chain distributors. While more sufficient observation on how the allocation of relief funds is distributed is needed, those currently allocated are moving to find BIPOC to fulfill the requirements of feeding black and brown communities within these new programs. It is a great investment for the government when they can shift the allocation of dollars to include small-scale farmers and food aggregators of color to create an opportunity for locally sourced food. Doing so is also a chance to change WA's food system to make it more equitable in the food distribution and food access for BIPOC and socially-disadvantaged communities.

5.3 Lack of Culturally Relevant food focus

Hunger relief programs often come in the form of food boxes provided to specific distribution sites throughout the state. Previous versions of the emergency food boxes supplied to relief participants provided insufficient, even subgrade food that was not culturally significant and offered little in the way of nutritional benefit. Food boxes that lack quality, nutrition, and cultural relevance reflect an absence of long-term vision and understanding of community needs, and ultimately fail to demonstrate care for the needs of those receiving food assistance. Providing boxes without ensuring the cultural relevance of the food within them results in food waste, erosion of trust within underserved communities, and perpetuation of food charity rather than addressing the root causes of hunger. Programs aimed at addressing structural inequities within the food system will ensure design, implementation and real-time feedback with the communities they aim to serve.

6. Creating equity in the RFQ process

The RFQ review process is the second phase of determining the process and outcome of the project being initiated. In the We Feed WA Pilot Program, the team created metrics that guided the review and employed an equity and racial justice lens throughout the review process. The creation of the review process was intentional and required looking beyond the idea of just distributing food but rather the pros and cons of the food distribution bidder approach. The full evaluation and rubric is included in Appendix (7 & 8).

7. Review Recommendations

An equitable review process should consider including those affected in the process. Below is some review recommendation that can deliver positive impacts:

- Conduct equity training for all reviewers
- Ensure that at least 75% of the reviewers represent affected communities that these proposals seek to serve (this helps ensure a majority in smaller committees)
- Create RFQ rubrics and design pre-qualifications with members of affected communities
- To ensure equity is on the forefront of the process, create one shared metrics across all reviewers
- Ensure that all of the project objectives have a place to be included in the scoring matrix
- Ensure that BIPOC farmers and producers will benefit from these programs by including them in the RFQ design process
- Ensure culturally relevant food boxes are a high priority for any relief programs
- Put higher priority on waste management as part of qualification and review process that emphasizes on:
i) Offering shelf-stable, culturally relevant products, and fresh produce, and ii) Moving beyond compactors towards zero-waste
- Increase RFQ design, implementation, and evaluation to 51% BIPOC in leadership in decision making in what happens in all BIPOC communities. (Note: Minority lead businesses are typically White women businesses)
- Reviewers need to read the Assessing WA Food Systems Through an Equity Lens Report developed so they understand the context with a notation of acknowledgement that they have read and understood the recommendations in the report
- Ensure that post-award announcement and pre-contract prioritize the retention of diversity-related sub-contract that are on contracts, ensuring that BIPOC subs will not just be dumped after award notifications. Announcements should emphasize equity and inclusion as key drivers to the selection process of the awardees.
- Post-award evaluation process to confirm diversity compliance (as part of the contract requirements)

Appendix 7

Comments on RFQ Review Rubrics		
	Grading Point	Comments
Bidder Approach/Methodology	15	
Does the bidder convey a meaningful or unique understanding of gaps in the emergency food system		This questions sets the idea that only those who have been engaged in food distribution in the past may have an understanding of emergency food system. That means they have to showcase years of work and not worry about the intent of emergency food system
Does the bidder communicate awareness of the needs of diverse producers and farmers?		Many food distributors advertise and write policy briefs that claim they have an awareness of the diversity in the food production. The fact is small scale producers and farmers are often ignored and are nowhere in the map.
Do the stated values align with the objectives of this program - a. increase access to food, especially among communities of color and b. increase the economic vitality of farmers?		Anyone can claim to increase to have values that serve communities of color and socially-disadvantaged and have the intent to increase food access for these communities but they lack i) connection with the receivers; and 2) deep understanding of the needs and the individual cultural significance of the foodways of each community
Experience of the Bidder or Firm	30	
Has the Bidder demonstrated an existing network of business partners in Washington state, and does that network meaningfully include minority-owned and other disadvantaged business enterprises and service providers?		Excludes new and beginning farmers, again prioritizing those with resources already in play within Food Relief
Does the experience that the Bidder has described working with these partners demonstrate their ability to both procure Washington foods and distribute to disadvantaged communities? Does the company have any explicit values about working with WA vendors?		Values working with WA vendors does not equate to dollars spent or commitment to supporting WA vendors. Many list farms or other orgs in WA but there is no accountability when it comes to ensuring meaningful collaboration. What does explicit values mean?
Has the Bidder demonstrated expertise and experience addressing unique food access barriers for BIPOC and socially disadvantaged communities? Did they share any lessons learned that could inform the success of this pilot program?		Bidder can claim to have expertise in food aggregation but this does not equate to expertise working in BIPOC and socially-disadvantaged communities. This question fits any BIPOC farmer/producer/distributor working at the grassroot level, but there are other grading criterias that disqualifies them even if by far it takes less expertise but more a sense of belonging and ownership of the work.

Did the Bidder indicate what geographic areas they have worked in and where they are best suited to serve if selected for this pilot?		This does not prioritize WA vendors or farmers.
Does the Bidder have the necessary assets and infrastructure to engage in food procurement and distribution? Note - relationships that supplement individual business assets are in themselves assets.		This eliminates anyone with no such infrastructure but has good intentions to do the work. Obviously only established entities can do this, removing many BIPOC abilities to qualify for this bid.
Does the Bidder have necessary logistics, food safety and supply chain experience to ensure food safety for food insecure households while minimizing wasted food?		Again, this questions works best for those already established and creates a barriers for BIPOC farmers/producers who lack resources to establish such measures.
What stands out about this Bidder's qualifications and experience as a unique part of the emergency food safety net?		This was not a weighted category? This implies that the reviewer has knowledge of the emergency food safety net - and can comment or score based on the bidder being unique.
Demonstrated Outcomes	20	
Has the Bidder successfully achieved outcomes in related work in the past?		Who defines what success outcomes are? How are successful outcomes defined? Without knowing more, this question may disqualify new and beginning farmers.
Does the methodology that the Bidder uses to monitor and assess their own impact align with the two primary objectives of this project?		
Does the Bidder demonstrate their ability to capture and communicate both qualitative and quantitative outcomes?		
Administrative Capacity	10	
Does the Bidder have staff (including volunteers and contract labor) to engage in this project and/or have they demonstrated their experience scaling up or down quickly?		Infrastructure prioritizing larger, established operations. Lacks support for smaller, less resourced organizations or farmers.
Was the Bidder able to communicate their decision-making structures clearly?		
Are any producers, processors or representatives of impacted communities part of the decision-making process for this Bidder?		Suggestion to include here: "...meaningfully part of the decision making process, with more than 50% decision making power given to BIPOC individuals."
Staff Qualifications and Experience	10	

Do the key staff identified for this project have the necessary skills and experience to lead this program successfully?		Do the key staff have lived experience reflective of the communities they serve? Are the key staff deeply connected to the needs of their communities on the ground?
Letters of Recommendation	10	
Do the letters demonstrate diverse partnerships across facets of the food system?		Need to demonstrate meaningful and diverse relationships. Letters of support from partnership/collaborators are stronger than recommendations if the intent is to determine if bidder will be successful in delivering the services.
Do the recommenders speak to the details of the Bidder's strengths and/or the value of their partnership?		Do the recommenders list action items related to their collaboration?
DOES THE BIDDER MEET THE MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS, EITHER INDIVIDUALLY OR THROUGH PARTNERSHIP (SUPPORTED WITH LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION)?		
Based on what you've read, does the Bidder meet these requirements?		For first time applicants this is daunting. Better outreach needs to be in place to ensure that there are forums that any interested farmer/producer/distributor can engage in. There is need for better intentional outreach to those in engage in any form of public service regardless of size, geographic area and abilities.
- Bidder must be licensed to do business in the state of Washington		
- Bidder must be eligible to receive Federal funds		
- Bidder must have an active DUNS, TIN, Washington State UBI number, and Washington Statewide Vendor number or be able to complete registration prior to the execution of a contract with WSDA		
- 1 or more years' experience procuring and safely distributing food to socially disadvantaged and food insecure communities		
- Experience with Washington Department of Health Retail Food Code compliance https://www.doh.wa.gov/portals/1/documents/pubs/332-033.pdf		
- Experience with procurement from Washington-based food producers and processors		

Appendix 8

Equitable Evaluation for Request for Qualifications (RFQ) Rubrics		
	Grading Points	Comments
Bidder Approach/Methodology	15	
HUNGER RELIEF PLAN: Does the Bidder have a hunger relief plan for the duration of the funding period?	1.25	
FOOD WASTE PLANS: Does the Bidder have a plan for addressing food waste or demonstrated experience of mitigating food waste (Example: through farming practices, composting, produce trade, etc.)	1.25	30-40% of US waste comes from food. Average American wasters ~\$1500 per year on food waste. 6.3% is composted. Bidder should demonstrate ways to reduce waste and understanding of nutritional and cultural-significance of the food distributed.
BUILDING CAPACITY FOR EMERGENCY FOOD: Does the Bidder prioritize in their application OR have plan(s) for sharing resources and/or building capacity with underrepresented BIPOC farmers and ranchers, as well as environmental justice overburdened communities, women, minority, disadvantaged and small business owners to implement place-based emergency food systems infrastructures?	1.25	Incorporates HEAL ACT communities The Act defines environmental justice for communities most impacted by pollution.
RURALLY-BASED: <u>Is the Bidder based in - or have partnerships in - a rural geographic area of the state per WA Department of Health or state-level rural categories identified by USD</u>	1.25	Should utilize existing definitions of multi-agency. It creates a seamless effort in WA Food System.
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DISPARITIES: Is the Bidder located in and/or mention a census tract with greater Environmental Health Disparities (EHDs) AND/OR serving a region(s) of the state that faces greater EHDs?	1.25	Using HEAL ACT to guide the geographic area.

<p>SERVICING UNDERREPRESENTED POPULATIONS: Does the Bidder's service areas in Washington include significant demographics of any of the following: persons living in poverty, senior/elderly populations (persons 65 years and older), youth under age of 18, persons under 25 with limited high school education, foreign born persons, languages other than English spoken at home (LES, ELL, ESL), families and living arrangements with multi-persons per household and/or multigenerational household, housing insecurity, living with disability, and persons without health insurance?</p>	<p>1.25</p>	<p>Utilizing census to identify socially disadvantaged groups, food deserts, houseless, health/education disparities.</p>
<p>COMMITMENT TO PARTNERSHIPS OR COLLABORATIVES</p>		
<p>Does the Bidders application state and/or demonstrate a commitment to meaningfully working with WA state vendors (including food producers and processors), business enterprises, or community-led entities (grassroots, CBOs, NPOs, etc) including sharing of resources to implement food hunger relief program?</p>	<p>1.25</p>	<p>Aligning the bidder and the partners on the ground.</p>
<p>WORKING DIRECTLY IN DIVERSE COMMUNITY</p>		
<p>WORKING DIRECTLY IN DIVERSE COMMUNITY: Does the Bidder's application state and/or demonstrate they provide the direct, ongoing partnerships with disadvantaged, community-based, socioeconomically, and racially diverse Washington food producers and processors</p>	<p>1.25 points max</p>	<p>Understanding the relationship between the bidder and the community they intend to serve is critical in the delivery of the services.</p>
<p>ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH MISSION</p>		
<p>Does the Bidder's application include mission and goals that achieve the highest attainable environmental quality and health outcomes for all people in Washington through the emergency food system, including those who may face disproportionate food insecurity?</p>	<p>1.25</p>	<p>Ensuring that the food has nutritional value and has positive environmental impact from source to the consumer.</p>
<p>ADDRESSING UNIQUE FOOD ACCESS BARRIERS</p>		

UNIQUE APPROACHES: Does the Bidder's application state food access barriers that are unique as they address during the program period as a result of COVID19?	1.25	Bidder should be able to address food access barriers and indicate how they will close the gap in food access. Such efforts in advancing food sovereignty, either through farming practices, value-added production or outreach to underrepresented farmers and ranchers, as well as (environmental justice) overburdened communities, women, minority, and small business owners, and those who may experience food insecurity. Bidder must have a working knowledge of food access barriers in order to determine whether application is unique.
HOW DID THEY IDENTIFY GAPS?: Does the Bidder's application state how they came to identify gaps in the emergency food system in areas they are working, serving, or collaborating? <i>Examples: they have lived experience within the area they serve, utilize WA Environmental Health Disparities, EPA, or similar maps for data, and/or have been working with community leaders, and/or have an open policy of fair and equitable food distribution that prioritizes current community needs of underrepresented BIPOC farmers and ranchers, as well as (environmental justice) overburdened communities, women, minority, and small business owners?</i>	1.25	
EQUITY COMMITMENT		
EQUITY COMMITMENT: Does the Bidder provide a public equity commitment or statement in their RFQ?	1.25	Does bidder have an equity commitment or demonstrate their commitment to advancing equity within their own organization and in the communities they serve.
PLEASE COMMENT:	N/A points	
Experience of the Bidder or Firm		
WORKING IN COMMUNITY: Is the Bidder's place of work primarily located in the area(s) of operations or have multiple sites of operations?	3.75	
WORKING IN COMMUNITY: Does the Bidder show experiences working in (with or without partnership) the named geographic areas if selected for this pilot?	3.75	
	30	Bidder experience should demonstrate relationship with the community being served. Well established relationship should show the care given in serving the underserved.

MEANINGFUL BIPOC NETWORK: Has the Bidder demonstrated an existing network of business partners in Washington state, and does that network meaningfully include minority-owned and other socially disadvantaged business enterprises and service providers?	3.75	
DIRECT FOOD SERVICE / PROGRAMMING: Does the Bidder demonstrate expertise and experience addressing food access barriers through direct service of food AND/OR providing programming that supports underrepresented BIPOC farmers and ranchers, as well as environmental justice in overburdened communities, women, minority, and small business owner communities?	3.75	
FOOD SAFETY: Does the Bidder have necessary logistics, food safety and supply chain experiences to ensure food safety for food insecure households? Note: This could include partnerships.	3.75	
ASSETS: Does the Bidder have the necessary operational assets, infrastructures, and/or plans to meaningfully implement food procurement and distribution for the duration of the pilot program? <i>Examples: Bidders can include a combination of financial and social capital (relational) assets. Relationships that supplement individual business assets are in themselves assets.</i>	3.75	
RESPONSE: Does the Bidder mention and/or demonstrated their experience scaling emergency food systems operations up or down quickly in changing settings?	3.75	
MISC: Does the Bidder demonstrate qualities and/or approaches in their application that stands out given the context of this pilot program?	3.75	
PLEASE COMMENT:	N/A points	

Demonstrated Outcomes	20 points max	How will the bidder measure success of the project? Cultural competency can be one indication of a successful program and should be part of the evaluation process and reporting criteria.
INCREASING FOOD ACCESS / FARMER ECONOMIC VITALITY: Does the Bidder's stated values and plans align with the objectives of this program - a. increase access to food, especially among communities of color and b. increase the economic vitality of farmers?	4	
ASSESSING AND MONITORING IMPACT: Does the methodology that the Bidder uses to monitor and assess their own impact align with the two primary objectives of this project?	4	
ABILITY TO CAPTURE OUTCOMES: Does the Bidder demonstrate their ability to capture and communicate both qualitative and quantitative outcomes?	4	
PROVIDING CULTURALLY-RELEVANT SOLUTIONS: Does the Bidder demonstrate their ability and/or commitment to provide community specific needs and/or culturally-relevant staple foods that are important in the communities that will benefit during the pilot program? <i>Examples: Customization for communities that may have faith-based diets, are facing a medical condition, or serving housing insecure youth without access to cooking appliance*</i>	4	
LONG TERM GOAL TO ELIMINATE HEALTH DISPARITIES: Does the Bidder demonstrate intentionality to eliminate environmental health disparities through this pilot program through their work in the Washington emergency food system?	4	
PLEASE COMMENT:	N/A points	
Administrative Capacity	10	

STAFF CAPACITY: Does the Bidder have a staff team (including paid, volunteers, and/or contract labor) to engage in this pilot project, especially in the context of working with overburdened or socially disadvantaged communities in program implementation (including i.e. producers, processors or representatives)?	3.33333	
CASH FLOW MANAGEMENT CAPACITY: Has the Bidder demonstrated capacity or described their capacity to manage cash flow and number of transactions for the duration of the pilot program?	3.33333	
DECISION-MAKING CAPACITY: Was the Bidder able to communicate their decision-making structures and/or models clearly and transparently in their RFQ?	3.33333	
PLEASE COMMENT:	N/A points	
Staff Qualifications and Experience	10	
LEADERSHIP: Do the core staff identified for this project have the necessary skills and experience to lead this program successfully? Note: This is who submitted the RFQ.	5	
KEY STAFF AND PARTNERSHIP TEAMS: Do the Bidder's key staff and partnership teams reflect overburdened communities in the state, and/or are BIPOC, minority, socially disadvantaged, women?	5	Including those mostly affected in the implementation of the project yields higher outcomes.
BIPOC LEADERSHIP: Is the Bidder a Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color organization or run by a member of any other other socially disadvantaged communities who are located in Washington State, and/or collaborating with others who qualify serve the BIPOC and socially-disadvantaged groups.		This metric allows the bidding evaluate how well the RFQ attracted BIPOC and if the equity and inclusion efforts are being realized through the any participatory contracting.
BIPOC LEADERSHIP: Is the Bidder's leadership, board and/or staff 60% or more black, indigenous, people of color and/or a member of any other socially disadvantaged community and do they demonstrate real decision-making power within the Bidder's organization?		Same as above. Creates an equity / inclusive measurement.



PLEASE COMMENT:	N/A points	
Letters of Recommendation	10	
DIVERSE PARTNERSHIPS: Do the letters of recommendation provided in RFQ demonstrate diverse partnerships from underrepresented BIPOC farmers and ranchers, as well as (environmental justice) overburdened communities, women, minority, socially disadvantaged and small business owners?	5	Promoting equity and inclusivity in bidding process.
STRENGTH OF RELATIONSHIPS: Do the recommenders share an authentic and meaningful partnership with the Bidder and detailing any of the following: what they have done in partnership with the Bidder, how well they work together including any challenges addressed collaboratively, how resources are allocated, details of the Bidder's strengths, and/or the value of their partnership?	5	
PLEASE COMMENT:	N/A points	
Executive Order Certification	5	
DOES THE BIDDER INCLUDE EXECUTIVE ORDER 18-03 CERTIFICATION? Pursuant to RCW 39.26.160(3) (best value criteria) and consistent with Executive Order 18-03 – Supporting Workers’ Rights to Effectively Address Workplace Violations (dated June 12, 2018), WSDA will evaluate bids for best value and provide a bid preference in the amount of five (5)% to any bidder who certifies, pursuant to the certification attached as Exhibit A – Certifications, Assurances, and Executive Order 18-03, that their firm does NOT require its employees, as a condition of employment, to sign or agree to mandatory individual arbitration clauses or class or collective action waiver.	5 points max	

DOES THE BIDDER MEET THE MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS, EITHER INDIVIDUALLY OR THROUGH PARTNERSHIP (SUPPORTED WITH LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION)?		We need more ways to create an equitable bidding process
Based on what you've read, does the Bidder meet these requirements?		
- Bidder must be licensed to do business in the state of Washington		
- Bidder must be eligible to receive Federal funds		
- Bidder must have an active DUNS, TIN, Washington State UBI number, and Washington Statewide Vendor number or be able to complete registration prior to the execution of a contract with WSDA		
- 1 or more years' experience procuring and safely distributing food to socially disadvantaged and food insecure communities; either individually or through collaborative partnership(s)		
- Experience with Washington Department of Health Retail Food Code compliance https://www.doh.wa.gov/portals/1/documents/pubs/332-033.pdf		
- Experience with procurement from Washington-based food producers and processors		

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