



**Lowcountry Food Bank
Feeding America Client Survey (FACS):
Summary Report**

Prepared By:



Robert W. Kahle, Ph.D.
Gloria Roderick, MPA

August 2021



Feeding America Client Survey Summary Report

Background, Method and Objectives

The Lowcountry Food Bank (LCFB) commissioned Kahle Strategic Insights to conduct a survey of its clients at drive through distributions. The drive through distribution approach represents just one of the distribution models used by LCFB and was particularly important and a frequently employed method as a safe way to distribute food during the pandemic. A sample of clients who walked-in to the LCFB's headquarters in North Charleston, SC was also surveyed.

The overall goals of the client survey were to better understand the characteristics of those needing food assistance and to provide insights to assist the food bank with its equitable distribution strategies. Questions included family composition, the USDA food security question series, and queries about the effect and impact of the pandemic.

Data were collected at 23 sites across the 10-county Lowcountry service area. The sites were mostly elementary, middle, or high school parking lots (10). Other sites were partner agency parking lots which included churches and community centers (9), law firm parking lots (2), a strip mall parking lot and a hotel parking lot. In total, eight data collection sites were led by partner agencies and the remaining 15 the LCFB provided food directly to clients.

In total, 721 surveys were collected from October 2020 through May 2021. The survey, consisting of 33 questions, was adapted from the Feeding America Client Survey (FACS). Professional interviewers administered the survey via tablets to clients in their vehicles. The survey took less than 10 minutes to complete. Respondents were given a \$10 grocery store gift card as a "thank you" for participating. A summary follows. The full reports can be found at the LCFB website.

Limitations of this Research

Results presented below are based on a sampling of clients at drive through distributions. The sample was not random in the sense that interviews were conducted with those who were waiting in line for food assistance. While this was a common form of food distribution during the pandemic for safety reasons, there are other distribution methods used by the LCFB that are not included in this survey.

In some cases, it was possible to interview every third or fourth car, introducing an element of randomness, but this was not consistently possible for logistical reasons. As a result, the findings presented are not projectable to counties or even the sub-population of the data collection site.



Feeding America Client Survey Summary Report

The unit of analysis is the household (not the individual client). Nearly all interviews were with clients representing one household. In some cases, multiple households were in the same car. Generally, only one household representative per vehicle was interviewed. In some instances, clients arrived on foot or via bicycle. These individuals were included in the interview process. In only a few cases, “good Samaritans” who collected food to deliver to others were interviewed. If the respondent was not accepting food assistance for their household, they were not interviewed. Good Samaritans routinely volunteered their status during the recruitment portion of the interview process, and the interviewer moved to the next car in-line.

Interviews were collected over a seven-month period from October 2020 through May 2021. The nature of the pandemic and associated food insecurity is likely to have varied by time and place during this data collection window.

Factors like the day of the week of the distribution and the time of day of the distribution were coded and analyzed without meaningful differences. Some meaningful findings were uncovered examining first time sites versus long-time partner agencies which are reported in the detailed final report, but not included in this summary report.

The LCFB 10-county service area is diverse and there are substantial differences in demographics across the region. Below we provide a summary data table of population and percent of total living below the poverty line. Deeper analysis of 2020 census data will be another data input for the LCFB’s food distribution planning but beyond the scope of this report.

**LCFB Service Area:
2019 Population and Percent Living Below Poverty Line**

	2019 Total Population	% Below Poverty Line
Charleston	411,406	11.2
Horry	358,081	12.8
Berkley	227,907	10.7
Beaufort	192,122	10.3
Dorchester	162,891	9.2
Georgetown	61,952	17.9
Colleton	37,585	21.8
Williamsburg	31,324	26.4
Jasper	28,657	17.7
Hampton	19,564	20.5

Source: Censusreporter.org **Census data:** ACS 2019 1-year unless noted



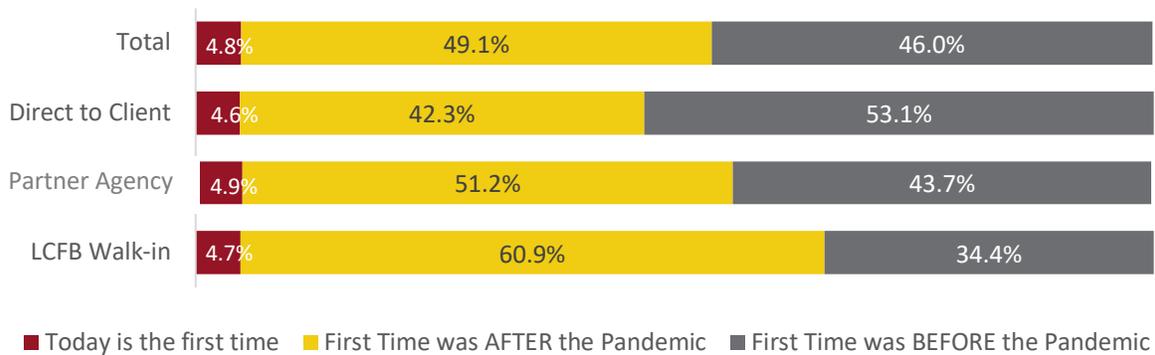
Feeding America Client Survey Summary Report

COVID-19 and The Newly Food Insecure in the Lowcountry

More than half of clients surveyed are newly food insecure since March of 2020. Fifty-four percent of clients report that the first time they needed to ask for food assistance was after the start of the pandemic. Nearly five percent were receiving food assistance for the first time at the distribution event where they were surveyed.

Comparing direct to client distributions with partner agency-led distributions and walk-ins at the LCFB headquarters reveals that walk-ins are the group most commonly newly food insecure. Roughly, six out of ten walk-ins needed food assistance for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic. Direct to client and partner agency led distributions are composed of fewer newly food insecure clients, but still more than four out of 10 needed food assistance for the first time since the start of the pandemic. The clients' ability to access food assistance during the day and any day of the work week, as opposed to the fixed time of the drive through distributions may explain the differences in the proportions newly food insecure.

Newly Food Insecure by Distribution Type

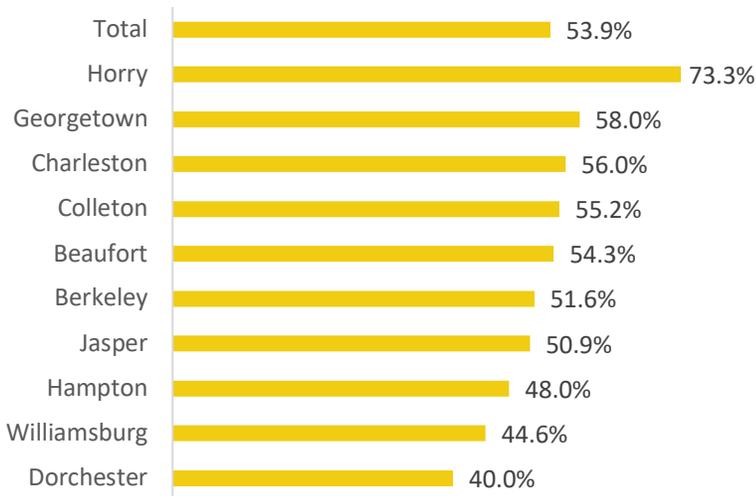


Of those surveyed in the ten-county service area, Horry County (anchored by Myrtle Beach) has the highest proportion of newly food insecure households, as 73.3%, indicated they needed food assistance for the first time since the start of the pandemic. Georgetown and Charleston Counties follow Horry in the proportion of newly food insecure households among survey respondents.



Feeding America Client Survey Summary Report

Percent Newly Food Insecure by County



Of those surveyed, families with children under age 17 are more likely to be newly food insecure (59.4%) compared to households with seniors (48.5%). The newly food insecure are more commonly families and from larger households.

This sample of the newly food insecure are much less likely than those who needed food assistance before the start of the pandemic to receive SNAP benefits (18.2% vs. 26.8%).

Distributions at new, first-time sites the LCFB identified reached a high percentage (57.4%) of newly food insecure households indicating that the targeting of underserved communities is working.

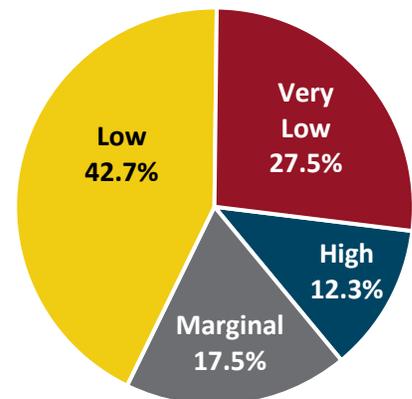
Understanding the length of time newly food insecure clients remain in need as the pandemic slows and hopefully, the economy improves, will be important for LCFB equitable distribution plans and approaches.

Food Security Among Drive Through Distribution Clients in the Lowcountry of SC:

At a minimum, food security is defined as the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods (USDA). The four food security segments are shown below based on the USDA six question food security scale (USDA Economic Research Service, Department of Agriculture. See <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/survey-tools.aspx>).

Among the total sample of 721 respondents, 27.5% are in the **very low food security** segment and another 42.7% in the **low food security** segment; summing these numbers reveals 70.2% -- more than seven in 10 -- are food insecure.

Food Security: Total





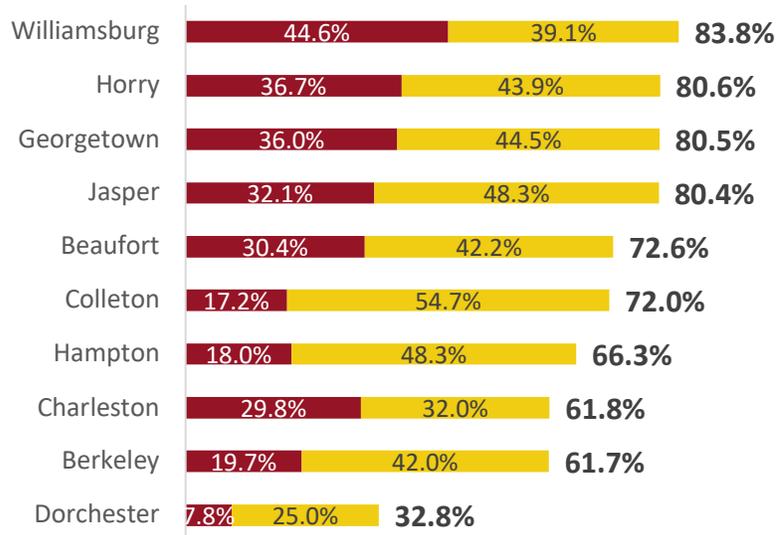
Feeding America Client Survey Summary Report

Walk-ins at the LCFB reflect 43.8% in the “very low” food security segment. LCFB walk-ins are in greater need than clients being served with direct to client or partner agency-led distributions.

Data from the survey suggest the most food insecure counties in order are Williamsburg, Horry, Georgetown, and Jasper. More than 80% of survey respondents in these counties reported being food insecure.

In general, this survey analysis shows that the Tri-County (Charleston, Berkeley, and Dorchester) reflects less food insecurity than the counties outside of the Charleston area. This may be due to more and better resources available for Tri-County families, and historically, more distribution events being held in the Tri-County.

Food Security by County



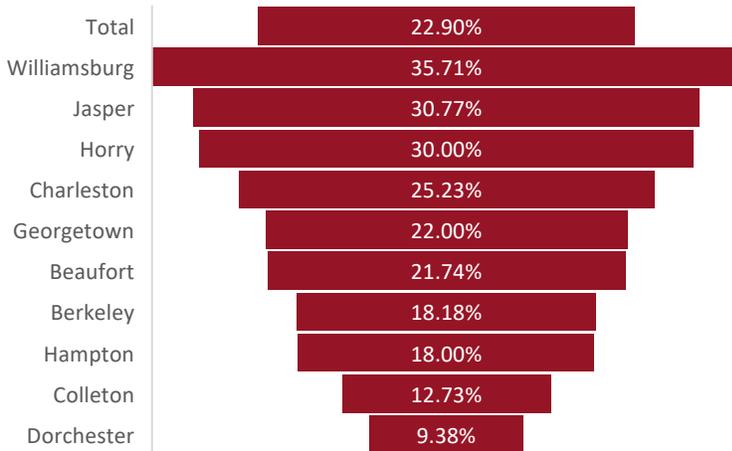
■ Very Low Food Security ■ Low Food Security

This finding implies that equitable strategies need to emphasize counties both to the north (Horry, Williamsburg, and Georgetown) and south (Beaufort, Colleton, Jasper, and Hampton) of the Tri-County. Analysis of population statistics could enhance LCFB’s understanding of the actual number of food insecure families and individuals by geographic area. Detailed 2020 census data are not yet available.



Feeding America Client Survey Summary Report

Percent 'Yes' by County: Hungry but did not eat?



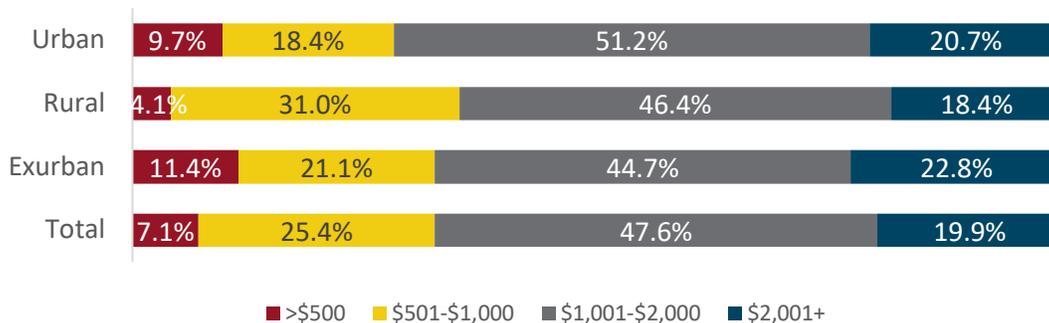
One specific measure of food insecurity is the affirmative response to the question, “In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry but did not eat because there was not enough money for food?” The graph above shows the range from 9.4% affirmative in Dorchester to more than 35% in Williamsburg. Survey respondents were often emotional or distraught when answering this question. Parents and grandparents in multigenerational

households acknowledge that they sometimes do not eat, so the children can. While food security scales can be abstract, this finding is staggering given that access to an adequate amount of healthy food is a basic human right.

Income and Employment

The graph below shows the disparity in income between rural, urban, and exurban households. Exurban is defined as areas further away from the urban center than suburbs and are often areas in transition from rural to more densely inhabited. More than thirty-five percent of those clients surveyed in the rural areas live on less than \$1,000 a month. In some rural counties, Williamsburg for example, more than half of those clients surveyed live on less than \$1,000 a month. Many of these are seniors who rely solely on social security or disability benefits. Still, there is substantial poverty in all three types of communities, with 28.1% living on less than a \$1,000 a month in urban areas and more than 11.4% living on less than \$500 a month in exurban communities. In total, 80% of households surveyed live on \$2,000 or less per month.

Monthly Household Income by Type of Community

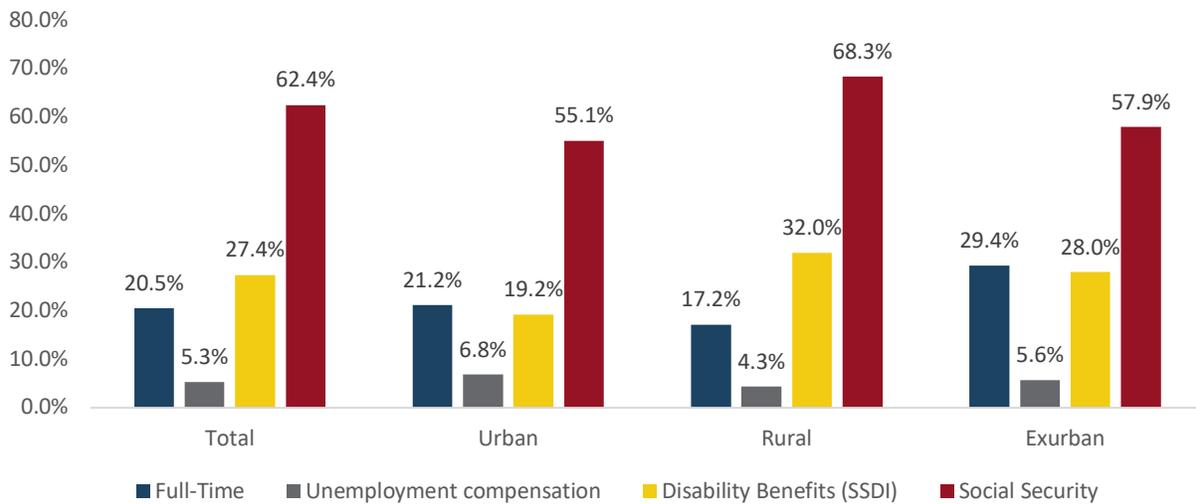




Feeding America Client Survey Summary Report

Below is the source of income by community type. Especially in rural communities, social security and disability benefits are the predominant sources of revenue. There is a higher percentage of full-time employment in urban and ex-urban communities. Seniors are the primary food assistance recipients in rural counties like Colleton (79.3%), Hampton (72%), and Williamsburg (60.7%).

Income Sources by Community Type



Observations and Implications

Newly Food Insecure: Of those surveyed, the number of “newly food insecure” (first time to receive food assistance after the pandemic started) is more than half (54%) of the total. Horry County households responding to the survey reflect the largest proportion of newly food insecure, followed by Georgetown and Charleston Counties. Understanding the length of time clients remain food insecure as the pandemic slows will be an essential element for LCFB planning. It is unclear how many newly food insecure due to the economic consequences of the pandemic will become gainfully employed and earn enough so they can again feed their families and themselves without food bank support.

Poverty: The level of poverty observed is deep and broad. Nearly one third of the total sample live on \$1,000 a month or less. A significant number live alone, especially seniors, and well below the poverty line. The lower the income, the more likely they are to be food insecure. To shorten lines, provision of food is only a part of the answer. Other significant ways to reduce other expenses (housing, health care, transportation) or other income supports are needed for these South Carolinians to live in food secure environments.



Feeding America Client Survey Summary Report

Low and Very Low Food Security

More than seven in ten of food assistance recipients surveyed are in either the low or very low food security segments. Food insecurities persist across community type, family composition, race, and other sociodemographic characteristics. The effect of the pandemic and the associated economic consequences are likely to persist for the foreseeable future. High demand for food assistance should be expected to continue throughout 2021 and beyond.

Walk-ins: The data highlighted that LCFB walk-ins are the most food insecure by distribution type. Assessing the feasibility and options for establishing and actively promoting walk-in service in Charleston and Horry counties should be analyzed and considered. Developing the partner agency network or establishing more regional distribution sites, especially in rural communities serving seniors and people with disabilities, would be advisable to address equitable food distribution goals. It will be important to try to provide and communicate the windows of time and days of the week when walk-in food assistance is available.

Drive-Through Distributions: For seniors and people with disabilities, the drive through distribution method proved convenient and manageable, even though it was necessitated by COVID-19 safety protocols, not convenience. LCFB should assess the cost and feasibility and potential adaptations of its drive through distribution models as part of its mix of distribution methods once the pandemic is controlled and beyond.

Future Research: 2020 and 2021 are the most disruptive years in the history of food banking with demand skyrocketing while simultaneously the food supply chain has become unstable and unpredictable. Staying attuned to the changing and very specific needs of its diverse clientele will be essential for the LCFB to meet its equitable distribution goals. Leveraging fundraising and new food sourcing opportunities during this time is essential. The volume of people needing food assistance and the uncertainty of the food supply chain are unlikely to change any time soon.