



THE UNIVERSITY
OF VERMONT



Maple
Mountain
Consulting

Transportation Barriers to Food Access in Vermont

Impacted Populations Report

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I. Introduction

As part of the development of a Food Security Action Plan in Vermont, MMC was contracted to conduct a study of transportation-related barriers to accessing healthy and local food amongst priority populations. The first phase of our study included a review of relevant research studies and a set of key informant interviews within various sectors of the state's food systems. This included interviews with transportation experts, food assistance professionals, food producers, policymakers and healthcare experts, amongst others.

Our analysis of common themes and issues raised by both key informants and in the literature provides a framework for understanding the transportation and food access landscape in Vermont. Broadening and deepening these insights requires adding the invaluable perspectives of those who experience food insecurity and confronting transportation barriers on a lived, everyday basis. This report should thus be read as a complementary study to our expert(s) review and is based on interviews with Vermonters who have experienced food insecurity and/or access food assistance on a semi-regular basis.

Significant Barriers and Solutions

Our previous study of transportation barriers and food access identified several significant themes identified by previous research and key informants as central to understanding this dynamic in the state (*Review of Relevant Research on Transportation Barriers* pages 3-10) and interviews with key informants across the state (*Interviews with Key Informants* pages 14-24):

- **Vermont's rural character and built environment**
- **Access to personal transportation**
- **Inadequate public transportation**
- **The supply chain of culturally appropriate food**
- **Stigma and cultural factors associated with reliance on food assistance**
- **Affordability**
- **The housing crisis**
- **Staffing and volunteer shortages**
- **Lack of resource awareness and program usage**

Our study also showed that these long-standing issues were exacerbated by two factors in particular: the COVID-19 pandemic and rising inflationary pressures.

Solutions to barriers identified in the research and by key informants fell into three categories:

- 1) Bringing people to food**
- 2) Bringing food to places that people already access**
- 3) Bringing food directly to people**

II. Adding the Voices of Impacted Populations

In order to build upon these findings and deepen them with the perspectives of those actually experiencing hunger, food insecurity and accessing food assistance, MMC was contracted to conduct further research with so-called impacted populations across a number of priority areas. In particular, we were asked to explore the specific experiences of Vermonters within rural regions, where transportation challenges can be especially severe, with particular attention to those who might experience intersecting and overlapping domains of marginalization such as LGBTQ+, BIPOC, individuals living with poverty, disabilities or in rural areas. We consider multiple methods for collecting such data including focus groups and surveys, but eventually decided that the most ethically and effectively appropriate method was to conduct short interviews with individuals at places where they most regularly accessed food assistance.

Recruitment

Between October and December 2022, we conducted interviews in several rural counties in Vermont with the assistance of several community partners who helped us to recruit participants. In particular, we were assisted by Northwest Family Foods (NWFF), Northeast Kingdom Community Action and RuralEdge Housing and Community Development to identify locations where we would be able to approach individuals accessing food assistance. We are grateful for the help in coordinating logistics, scheduling aid and general hospitality they so generously provided to our research team. We would also like to thank each interview participant for taking the time to sit down and speak with us.

Populations Interviewed and Methods Utilized

For the purposes of this study, ‘priority populations’ refers to Vermonters who experience food insecurity and/or access food assistance regarding their particular views of transportation barriers to food access. We conducted interviews with 48 individuals in the Northeast Kingdom and Northwest Vermont. Of the 48 interviews, 40 occurred in-person: 19 took place at CVOEO’s Northwest Family Foods in Saint Albans, 10 at Northeast Kingdom Community Action’s food shelf in St. Johnsbury, 7 at Rural Edge’s Mountain View Residence in St. Johnsbury, 5 at Rural Edge’s Passumpsic View Residence in St. Johnsbury and 3 at Rural Edge’s Gilman Senior Housing in Gilman. 4 additional interviews with individuals initially encountered at a number of these sites were completed via a follow-up phone call.

Site Name	Organization	Town	# of interviews in-person	# of interviews via phone call
Northwest Family Foods (NWFF)	CVOEO/ Franklin Grand Isle Community Action	Saint Albans	19	1
Northeast Kingdom Community Action (NEKCA) Food Shelf	NEKCA	St. Johnsbury	10	1
Mountain View	Rural Edge	St. Johnsbury	7	0
Passumpsic View	Rural Edge	St. Johnsbury	5	1
Gilman	Rural Edge	Gilman (Lunenburg)	3	1

At NWFF and NEKCA, interviewees were recruited on the spot as they browsed the food shelf and invited to sit down for a brief interview. Our team spent three days interviewing at NWFF and one day at NEKCA. At the Rural Edge locations, staff gave notice to residents beforehand and invited them to participate in an interview at a set time and location. Phone interviews were also arranged for individuals who indicated interest in participating in the study but did not have time to do so during the arranged in-person sessions. MMC offered participants \$20 at the end of their interview as compensation for their time. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and then analyzed to identify any recurring or significant themes.

III. Findings

In the following section we present some of the main themes emerging from our interviews with impacted populations. We focus on four specific areas in our findings, beginning with demographic data on our interviewees, an overview of barriers and successes, a review of transportation barriers in particular, and a list of potential solutions as suggested by interviewees. Please note that names of all project participants are redacted. We include names of organizations only when it is necessary for context.

A| Demographic Overview of Interviewees

Table 2: Interviewee Demographics & Background						
Interviewee ID# (Names Redacted)	Town of Residence	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity (stated as reported by interviewee)	Employment (stated as reported by interviewee)	# of people in Household
1	Sheldon	20	F	Hispanic	Full time (dairy worker)	4
2	St. Johnsbury	70	F	White	Retired	1
3	Fairfield	62	F	White	Retired	2
4	Fairfax	35	F	White	Self-employed	4
5	Saint Albans	59	M	Black	Unemployed, seeking employment	2
6	St Johnsbury	81	F	White	Retired	1
7	Saint Albans	58	M	Hispanic/Indian	Unemployed, seeking employment	1
8	Lyndonville	44	F	White	SSI	2
9	Swanton	76	F	White	Part time (Retired but became home health care provider)	3-4
10	Saint Albans	65	F	White	Retired	1
11	Swanton	65	F	White	SSDI	2
12	St. Johnsbury	26	F	White	Self-employed	5
13	Lyndonville	39	F	White	Unemployed	4
14	Lyndonville	45	M	White	Unemployed	4
15	St. Johnsbury	?	F	White	SSI	5
16	Lyndonville	54	M	Black	SSDI	4
17	Lyndonville	34	F	White	SSDI	4
18	St. Johnsbury	61	M	White	Retired	1
19	Swanton	76	F	White	Retired	2
20	Fairfield	68	F	White	SSI	3
21	Lyndonville	72	F	White	Part time (food service)	2
22	Lyndonville	41	F	White	Unemployed	4
23	St. Johnsbury	67	M	White	Retired	2
24	St. Johnsbury	74	F	White	Retired	1
25	St. Johnsbury	87	F	White	Retired	1
26	St. Johnsbury	74	M	Native American	Retired	1
27	St. Johnsbury	76	F	"I'm not sure how I can answer that. I'm ethnically Jewish. And I don't identify as white, although in a culture that we are living in think people think of me as white. I'm certainly not black or brown. I'm not Native American. My ancestors came from Eastern Europe, mostly."	Mostly retired, part time Tai Chi instructor	1
28	St. Johnsbury	64	F	White	Unemployed	1
29	Danville	48	M	White	Unemployed- Stay at home dad & gig work	5
30	Alburgh	61	M	White	Disabled	2
31	Colchester	29	M	White	Self-employed	1
32	Swanton	79	M	White/Indigenous descent	Retired dairy farmer	4
33	Saint Albans	75	F	White	Unemployed/retired	1

34	Lyndonville	38	M	White	Unemployed	6
35	St. Johnsbury	75	F	White	Retired	1
36	Saint Albans	65	M	White	Retired	1
37	St. Johnsbury	81	F	White	Retired	1
38	Saint Albans	56	M	White	Unemployed	1
39	St. Johnsbury	50	F	White	SSDI	2
40	West Swanton	30	F	White	Unemployed	5
41	Saint Albans	35	M	White	Part time	1
42	Saint Albans	76	F	White	Retired	2
43	St. Johnsbury	28	F	White	Unemployed	4
44	Gilman	64	F	White	None	1
45	Gilman	58	F	White	None	1
46	Gilman	78	M	White	Retired	1
47	Gilman	65	F	White	SSDI	1
48	Alburgh	54	F	White	SSI	1

Table 3: Interviewee Food and Transportation Background

Interviewee ID# (Names Redacted)	Travel time to get to food (one way)	Has a reliable vehicle?	Primary mode of transportation	Other modes of transportation	Identified barriers to food access	How important are nutrition labels to you?	Do you know enough about food assistance programs in this area?	Solutions?
1	20 minutes	N	Car (partner's)		Time, lack of personal vehicle, baby formula shortage	N/A	No	Baby formula at food shelf
2	5-10 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		Health (standing for extended periods of time, carrying heavy bags)	Very	No	More public awareness about existing programs
3	10 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		None named	Very	Yes	"Seems fine now"
4	20-30 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		Time, gas (prices), difficulty securing SNAP benefits	Not very important	Yes	More warm, ready to go meals, expanding food shelf hours (option for later drop-in hours), more fresh foods (stopped coming for a bit due to rotten meats)
5	Varies quite a bit (5 minutes to an hour)	N	Bike	Rides with friends, public transportation	Transportation, having enough gas money (to help pay for friends' gas), cost of food/inflation	Not important	No	More buses, more housing

6	5 minutes	N	Rides with friends	Walk, public transportation	Transportation, allergies (limits ability to receive food assistance)	Very important	Yes	Shopping trolleys at Mountain View (for people to get their groceries from the community center or bus stop to their home)
7	Varies quite a bit	N	Walk	Public transportation, rides with friends, hitchhike	Transportation, money (lack of income, cost of food/inflation)	Important	Yes	Expanded public transportation, buses that go out of Saint Albans more frequently.
8	5-10 minutes	N	Car (housemate's)		Cost of food/inflation	Important	No	None named
9	25-30 minutes	N	Car (partner's)		Time (wait times at food shelf), Health (standing/sitting while waiting for food shelf), Cost of food	Not very important	Yes	Home deliveries for people with limited mobility, more public transportation
10	5 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		Cost of food/inflation	Important	Yes	None named
11	15-20 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		Cost of food/inflation	Important	Yes	Another food shelf location, better public transportation
12	Varies (5-30 minutes)	Y	Car (personal)		Cost of food/inflation, having enough gas money, Lack of childcare (made it difficult to get to the store when baby was home), food sensitivities (limit what she and family can accept through food assistance)	Very important	Yes	More fresh and organic foods available through food assistance, more awareness and education on healthy foods.
13	Varies (20-30 minutes if they have a ride, a few hours via RTC shuttle)	N	Car (friend's)	Public transportation, walking	Lack of personal vehicle,	Not very important	Yes	Organized carpool for transitional living residents, increase food stamps
14	Varies (20-30 minutes if they have a ride, a few hours via RTC shuttle)	N	Car (friend's)	Public transportation, walking	Lack of personal vehicle, lack of driver's license	Not very important	Yes	Increase food stamps, increase RCT shuttle frequency, open food shelf during weekend hours
15	15-20 minutes	N	Walking	Rides with friends	Cost of food/inflation, food sensitivities, lack of awareness/being new to area	Very important	No	Create (or increase distribution) of local resource guide, more gluten free food in food shelves
16	20 minutes to an hour	Y	Car (personal)		Cost of food/inflation	Not important (but important when he is getting food for his kids)	Yes	Higher quantity of food for families with kids at food shelves, transportation support for people transitioning out of incarceration

17	20 minutes to an hour	Y	Car (personal)		Cost of food/inflation, availability of healthy/fresh foods	Important	Yes	More fresh vegetables at food shelves, bus should run on weekends and during evenings on weekdays, a program to help with gas money, a grocery store in the area with option to buy in bulk
18	5 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		None named	Not very important	Yes	None named
19	30-45 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		Cost of food/inflation	Very important	Yes	Higher quantity of food available at food shelves, especially milk and eggs.
20	20-25 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		Less fresh vegetables in the winter time	Important	Yes	None named
21	20 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		Cost of food/inflation	Not important	Yes	Places that give people cooked meals
22	5-10 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		Cost of food/inflation	Very important	No	More vegetables, bread and fresher meats in food shelf,
23	5 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
24	5-30 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		Expired/rotten food from food assistance, access to fresh foods in winter, food sensitivities	Very important	Yes	More education around food and healthy cooking, start a cooking program at Rural Edge residences,
25	10-15 minutes	N	Walking	Rides with family	Health (unable to drive), food allergies & sensitivities	Important	Yes	An option to personalize the commodity food boxes so she doesn't receive food she is allergic to.
26	10-15 minutes	N	Walking	Rides with friends	Lack of personal vehicle, cost of food/inflation	Very important	No	Audio quality poor-response inaudible.
27	5 minutes	Y	Walking	Car (personal)	Cost of food/inflation	Very important	No	More education around food and healthy cooking, more awareness about resources in the community, maybe start a cooking program at Rural Edge residences
28	5-20 minutes	Y	Car (personal)	Rides with friends	Budgeting on a fixed income, cost of food/inflation	Not important	Yes	Start a car share among Rural Edge residents, do more research

29	10-15 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		Cost of childcare, cost of food/inflation,	Couldn't hear response.	No	Baby formula at food shelf, more education on what is available.
30	30-40 minutes	N	Rides with others		Lack of driver's license, lack of personal vehicle, lack of public transportation, cost of gas money, dependency on others/inconsistent ride availability, access to fresh foods	Not very important	Yes	Fresher foods at food shelf
31	20 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		Cost of fuel/having enough gas money, cooking limitations (lives in transitional housing)	Somewhat important	Unsure	Provide cooking/dining ware for people in transitional housing (can opener, utensils, pans), allow pre-made food to be purchased with food stamps, offer more nutrient-dense foods via food assistance programs
32	15-20 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		Expired/rotten food from food assistance, cost of food/inflation	Not important	Yes	Volunteer ridesharing
33	5-15 minutes	N	Walking	Rides with support person	Health/mobility	Somewhat important	Yes	Food delivery for people with limited mobility
34	An hour and a half	N	Public transportation	Rides with others (paid)	Cost of fuel/having enough gas money, cost of food/inflation, time (time it takes to get to food shelf via public transportation),	Very important	Yes	More sweets, milk and meat at the food shelf, deliveries from food shelves, a communal refrigerator to store food at NEKCA
35	10 minutes	Y	Car (personal)	walking, rides with friends, public transportation	Health/mobility, weather (doesn't drive when conditions are poor)	Somewhat important	Yes	Education on how to use what comes in commodity boxes
36	Varies (5 minutes with vehicle, 20-30 minutes on foot)	N	Walking	Rides with support person	Health/mobility, will sometimes stay home if it is icy, difficulty accessing SNAP benefits	Very important	Yes	Extend food shelf hours (12-2 is hard, especially for people who work during the day),
37	Varies (5 minutes-30 minutes)	Y	Car (personal)		Weather (doesn't drive when weather conditions are poor),	Very important	Yes	More carpooling, more education about the benefits of raw food and healthy eating

38	5 minutes	N	Walking	Public transportation	Health/mobility, cost of food/inflation, accessing SSDI benefits	Important	Yes	More fruits, milk and eggs at the food shelf, more food shelf locations, more housing
39	20 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		Health/mobility, cost of food/inflation	Not important	Yes	More juice and less expired foods at food shelf, continue the middle of the month food stamp benefits
40	15 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		Cost of fuel/having enough gas money, expired foods, difficulties accessing resources (WIC and food stamps)	Not very important	Yes	Fresher foods at food shelf
41	"not too long"	N	Walking	Public transportation	Public transportation availability (doesn't run on Sundays), lack of a personal vehicle, inspection regulations, stigma	unsure	Yes	More awareness about existing resources, something to combat negative stigma associated with receiving assistance
42	10 minutes	Y	Car (personal)	Rides with others	Food sensitivities, cost of food/inflation, stigma, difficulties accessing resources (food stamps)	Important	Yes	Less paperwork for assistance programs (she likes the NWFF doesn't require you to fill out paperwork),
43	5-10 minutes	Y	Car (personal) *not reliable*	Rides with others	Unreliable vehicle, infrastructure (bad road conditions), cost of housing, stigma, children have special dietary needs	Very important	Maybe	Fresher foods at food shelf, combat negative stigma
44	15-20 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		Distance to nearest grocery store, weather (doesn't drive when conditions are poor)	Very important	Yes	Community storage space for food, more transportation options, local grocery store, get commodity boxes delivered
45	15-20 minutes	N	Rides with others		Lack of personal vehicle, lack of public transportation	Very important	Yes	Community storage space for food, more transportation options, local grocery store, get commodity boxes delivered
46	15-20 minutes	Y	Car (personal)		Cost of food/inflation	Very important	Yes	More awareness about existing resources, more visible signage

47	15-20 minutes	Y	Car (personal) *not reliable*	Rides with others	Lack of reliable transportation, cost of food/inflation, cost of fuel/having enough gas money	Very important	Yes	Deliver commodity boxes to Gilman, give more recognition to food assistance programs
48	35 minutes	Y	Car (personal) *not reliable*		Lack of reliable transportation, cost of food/inflation, cost of fuel/having enough gas money, distance to nearest grocery store	Not very important	Yes	Public transportation in the Islands, carpool system

B| Successes: What is working well?

We provide here some direct quotes from interviewees about what they feel is working well for them in terms of transportation and food access. Overall, research participants spoke positively about food assistance programs:

I think they do better than a good job here [at NWFF].

I really feel they have such a good variety. I couldn't see what might be missing that they should have. Oh, they got vegetables, all kinds of vegetables. I couldn't complain about anything or say, well, they shouldn't have more of this because it's such a variety.

Right here, Community Action [NWFF]. Community Action, they help out a lot...Martha's Kitchen too, I go over there and eat. They all know me, I go by there sometimes. When I got money, I buy stuff, I still donate it back because they help me out and that's what the Lord says you got to do.

I go eat every day at Martha's Kitchen, you know when I'm having kind of a bad day with food, when I really don't have nothing to eat, they'll give us breakfast and some lunch.

NECKA has more choices of like, fresh vegetables and stuff, but a lot of the food shelves are all processed foods, and a lot of families can't do processed foods

NEKCA is very, very good with the people from anywhere in the state of Vermont. And they are wonderful. They go above and beyond for you. You know. And then they have it like you go in like grocery shopping pick out what you want.

Someone just told me like hey, you should try coming to NEKCA for baby food and to get diapers and stuff like that, so I came here and realized how much food there was... you're going to save more on food so we can put that money to more bills.

I like the food shelf on Grand Isle and here because you can pick the food you want. And that's what you're going to eat. You ain't gonna throw it away or waste it.

Even with coming to the food shelf, and Martha's Kitchen, and having the food stamps. Between all of that, it really is great.

.....

I think they check all the boxes...here at the [NWFF] food shelf. It's, I mean, they get stuff delivered from Hannaford. You know, there's all kinds of breads and cookies, donuts, mac and cheese, pasta sauce and pasta. They got a cooler in there for meat and eggs and cheese, prepared foods, even some wraps in there.

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Martha's Kitchen. I 100-totally-percent agree with their mission. And that's one of the reasons why I chose to volunteer there because it doesn't matter who you are, where you come from. It just doesn't matter. Anything, you can just walk in there and get yourself a nice hot meal.

One interviewee mentioned the ease of getting food from a free food box left on the stoop outside a local church:

I liked the way they put those boxes out...It's just, you know, people can just go, that's all...it's not embarrassing, you just go and it's there.

Saint Albans participants talked about how they can easily get around the downtown area on the free public bus:

The bus goes through and they don't charge a cent to go out to Walmart. Pretty much here, anywhere from Food City, anywhere around town they go.

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Another perk of living in St. Albans, I actually use the downtown bus, GMTA downtown bus and they do a route that actually stops at Hannaford. So I can walk up to the top of Kingman Street, get on the bus at three after the top of the hour. So for an example, three after noon and then before 12:30 I'm there at Hannaford's.

It really does not take very long. I think that's great as well and it's an absolutely amazing, especially for people who don't have transportation to be able to utilize the bus like that. It's absolutely amazing.

.....

I mean it takes away a certain level of independence not having a vehicle like that where you can just sit and go here or there. I'm gonna go down to the grocery store today. Whatever again, that's lacking, but that's really where the bus schedule picks up.

Saint Albans residents also expressed gratitude for 'Captain Veggie Man', who occasionally brings vegetables to Taylor Park and distributes them at no cost:

And then so here's another great program actually, it was Captain Veggie Man. Okay, so it was a Facebook post and I'm not on Facebook. I don't do the whole social media thing, right. So someone came to me one day this past year, and they have this ginormous bag full I mean there's ears of corn, cucumbers, lettuce, kale, whatever, whatever, I mean, it was one of those great big reusable totes. Where did you get all that? And they were like, let me tell you. I went up to Taylor Park. It was like every Thursday this guy did it. And he was handing out free vegetables to everybody in the park.

.....

So it was just, it was unbelievable to see how much he had too, you know what I mean? It was like I don't know if this is what this guy does. Or if he has other places that he sells to this is his access and so this is his way of giving back. I don't know if that's how he was doing it or whatever. But yeah, interesting, to say the least. amazing at the same time.

Crop cash at farmers' markets & EBT were mentioned by several interviewees:

Summertime I like to do farmers markets. They have where you can use your food stamps for there, so that's very helpful.

.....

With EBT you get \$10 extra and then at one point this summer or this fall they were giving us \$20 extra, and that was good because I was able to buy up enough potatoes for the winter. And I don't have a cellar here but I have a friend with the cellar so she stores my potatoes for me.

.....

Well I think EBT is great. You can just depend on it, you know, this is automatic and it's gonna be there. It's there. You know, sort of like Social Security. It's amazing how well organized that is, it has amazed me because anything government, you know, anything the government does, you know, it could be screwed up...

.....

[SNAP] is plenty of money. It really is, especially for one person.

Some participants pointed to case workers, neighbors, friends and family as valuable supports:

We do have friends that you know, look out every now and then or whatever. When they got extra or something. You know what I mean? They know we got kids

.....

Well, [support person-name redacted] is really helpful. He gives me rides and checks in on me when the weather is bad.

.....

Today I can stock up because I have [support person- name redacted] here helping me out with her car and carrying my bags.

Carpooling was also an important element of overcoming transportation barriers:

Interviewer: What about the transportation piece? I know you have a car but it sounds like you're helping a lot of people who don't have cars.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: So if you if you're not available, do you know what they do?

Interviewee: They wait 'til I am.

.....

Well, as long as I can drive, I'm okay. If it gets to the point where I can't drive, that's going to be a different ballgame because I don't think RCT goes over to Littleton. But I have friends who go to Littleton so I could probably work out things with them to get over there.

.....

We go all the time together. I go get the numbers in the morning. And then at quarter to 12 [name redacted] and [name redacted] come over and pick me up and we go to the food shelf.

Others share innovative approaches to navigating barriers to transportation and food access:

Every month I have a crew of elderly people I drive to Littleton with me. And they carpool with me and they all give me gas money. I'll bring them shopping. There's maybe three people every month. One lives at another [residence] downtown and is friends with my uncle. Another friend of mine that passed away, her ex-fiancé is blind and can't see so I bring him and sometimes we go with [name redacted] or some other people here. I've brought people here to the store.

.....

My goal is to find employment that I can walk to. So just remove [a car] from the equation.

.....

Hannaford To Go. Now I don't know if they actually deliver that or if that's just something where someone does the grocery shopping for you. So you can call them. You got two hours left to your work day and you call up the grocery store and they can do that time saving, I guess. Someone else can do the grocery shopping for you and then you swing in after work and you pick it up

Some residents in Gilman with limited transportation developed a system for dividing up grocery shopping. One resident, a former cook, regularly makes dinner for the group:

And I usually cook for what, her, another friend, the gentleman across the hall from me just came home from the hospital but I do bring him meals. So I usually on an average during the summer, I was only doing it three days a week and usually during the winter I do it five, I cook for like five people.

Some participants described using coupons and regularly visiting multiple stores when they shop to find the best deals:

I've already saved a few hundred [dollars] this year to date [using coupon apps], and so three-hundred on one and three-hundred on another, like it adds up. And that's just with stuff I had to buy and it's like okay, click the coupon and get the deal, and I've had a lot that didn't even just go through so it would have been more. Obviously there's things I bought because there's a coupon and I'll try it. But yeah, that definitely . . . helps . . .

I go to a variety of stores. I'll go like if they got sales, I'll go to those. And I've come here before. I don't come to the food shelves right now because I get that month to month commodities for seniors over 60. And they've got the food shelf there too. So I get double.

Well, in the summer I have two gardens, two different community gardens. So I go there and I go to the farmer's market, which is here on Saturdays. But if I need to buy food I go over Littleton because there's a very good food co-op there that gives really good discounts to elderly people.

Some months my sister wants to go shopping in Woodsville or Littleton to Walmart and I buy my groceries there, because it's a hell of a lot cheaper. Milk is, or bread is \$3 and some odd sense a loaf. And there it's what? \$2.90-something. On a limited income, you have to save where you can. You can't, even though you would like the higher-priced item, you can't afford it.

I'm not paying \$20 for a Schwan's meal when I can go get 20 \$1 meals, if I had to.

C| Barriers

Interview participants were asked about the barriers they face when trying to access food. Their responses align with the findings from our earlier research study and key informant interviews:

Vermont's Rural Character and Built Environment

The vegetables [I get] are mostly from here but in the summer I go down to the farmers market. But I have kind of a problem with that because I have all these bags to carry and no way to get there.

.....

Barriers? rides. It's not the same ride every time I want to come. So I don't really come to the food shelves every week, or come every two weeks. I come when I can get the ride to get here.

.....

I have a vehicle but because of the new rules and regulations of the state about inspection...and my vehicle that I do have needs work to be able to pass inspection. There's that barrier. I mean just a car payment alone and insurance. I mean we can go right down the list. Car payment, insurance, upkeep. God forbid something goes wrong.

.....

Now I'm scared...I hope nothing goes wrong with the vehicle because then I'm not going to be able to get to work and then if I can't get to work then what? Am I going to lose my job? And then you have regular upkeep like oil changes, brakes, wheel bearings, and that's not even if something doesn't majorly go wrong mechanically with the vehicle.

.....

[My car] is not very reliable. Okay. I've had it for a year. I'm going to be stranded pretty soon. I don't know what I'm going to do. My car breaks down, my van breaks down, I don't know what the heck I'm going to do. I really don't. I don't live in the town of Alburgh. I live like three miles from the village almost to Rouses Point. So I'm like, way on the outside of Alburgh. Way out there.

.....

I know a lot of people that can't go [to the food shelf] because they don't have transportation. And I'm not a taxi and my vehicle is having troubles, so I believe transportation is a big issue for people.

Public Transportation

We need more buses, buses that you put like 50 cents into or whatever it could be? More transportation around here [Saint Albans]. I heard in Burlington they got the buses. They need more stuff around here in this community.

.....

There is a bus that goes, like if you really need to get to St. Albans and want to be here and have to be here, you got to stay here all day. You got a bus that'll pick you up at five in the morning in Alburgh, bring you down here, meet the bus here again at 4:15 at Food City and bring it back to St. Albans. So that's the only transportation really as far as like that goes. They do have buses but you have to catch them at the right time or you ain't got a ride.

.....

Transportation could be better, like we don't have transportation right now.

[We typically go shopping in] St J, Littleton, sometimes Newport, but it's hard to get there. Especially if you don't have a vehicle or gas money to pay someone. It's hard to like find transportation, here in Vermont.

.....

Interviewer: Okay, and do you use public transportation now?

Interviewee: Oh hell no. That thing's terrible.

Interviewer: What makes it terrible?

Interviewee: 'Cause everywhere you go you gotta wait. Like, if you get dropped off somewhere, you know, wait like an hour and a half or something to get picked back up. Not only that, like we've been sober for years. So you ride the bus, you got people asking you for drugs or where to get drugs and for us as a big part of it. Like we want to stay sober. So you know what I'm saying? We avoid those, you know. And like you [interviewee's partner] said, you have to wait. Right? Sometimes an hour, hour and a half. And then sometimes they just don't even show up like, we were in St. J and they didn't even show up.

.....

[The bus] doesn't go towards the grocery store. You would have to take the bus downtown get on another bus and then go a different way. Public transportation, public transportation time would probably be like 45 minutes to an hour [to get to a grocery store].

.....

I have an elderly couple that I pay on the first of every month because they give me rides. And if they can't give me a ride, I take the bus...Yeah. I'd rather do that than ride the bus because it just takes too long. Some days I wind up having to take the bus, and it just takes a lot longer [3 hours round trip]

.....

Really, the only barrier that I would have would be a day of the week which is Sunday, which is the day that the bus doesn't run.

.....

Well, yeah they can call a taxi but that's like \$14 a mile.

.....

Transportation would be a big thing. You know, if they had if they had, like, a bus or something. Just go to certain towns or whatever, and notify people of it. I know a lot of people don't have transportation. And I don't know what the hell they do.

Stigma

I've been a farmer producing goods...milk and beef and stuff like that. So, I felt very funny asking for, for food. And then a friend of mine said, 'farmers don't make a lot of money. We receive a lot of money, but we got to put it out.

.....

When we came out [of the food shelf] one day, this man said to me, "What are you doing here? Look at the way you're dressed. Look at what you're driving." But what he doesn't understand is my truck is almost eight years old...and I turned around and I said, "Listen mister, you don't know me. You don't know what I'm going through. You don't know what's going on in my life." Anyway, I just, boy, it's a good thing [my friend] wasn't there. She's such a sweetheart.

.....

I just think there needs to be maybe a little more awareness and this is huge with me too, because I feel like this is why I mentioned the window earlier Martha's Kitchen. Some people don't really want to come in. I feel like there's a very negative stigma for somebody who comes to the food shelf, or someone uses Martha's kitchen, or whatever. I feel like the negative stigma is that they're less than because they're going in getting help.

Affordability, Cost of Food, & Inflation

I mean, if it wasn't for food stamps, it'd be the price of rent nowadays. I live in a two-bedroom apartment and the only thing not included is my electricity and I pay \$1,300 a month for a tiny two bedroom...but even with VRAP's help, when they were ending they paid 70% one month and 50% the other month. Because I pay so much in just rent...I'm still behind again. So there's no catching up.

.....

I just don't have the income to grocery shop. I've worked hard for 45 years and now I'm living on peanuts.

.....

They ain't got the stuff today for dairy. Everything's so expensive that a lot of food shelves can't even get to it. You know so yeah, but either way, they're both good and it's food on the table for people that need it, you know?

.....

[Groceries] sometimes dip into savings, you know. It's a simple fact that prices are going up and I'm kind of shocked. And they did increase the food stamps but still, it's for me, because I buy organic. You know, my health is more important than saving, you know, getting something cheap. And it's just not worth it for me.

.....

Well, sometimes they [NEKCA] can only do what they can do. If they can't get it in, they can't get it in. And the way prices have been lately, wow, everything's skyrocketing. I went and bought it myself...bought milk at the end of the other day, and it boosted up 20 cents.

.....

I noticed with inflation you can get this wild caught sockeye salmon at White's Market here in town and it used to be like \$18-\$19 and you'd get a big piece and it would be like three meals. Now it's \$30. But I figured this transportation to get it from there to here, or you know a lot with inflation is that charge more because they can get away with it, like what the other companies are doing, so. I mean, my car gets good mileage but I used to be able to fill it up with \$8. Then it went up to \$30. Now it's back down to \$18. But I'm spending more on gas so I have to conserve my trips. I have to really think through, you know, can I live without that and just go to the store twice a week rather than going, you know, every other day.

.....

We shop at Food City and Family Dollar. You know, get the bargain stuff. Because with the food stamps, you can't spend on high priced stuff, because we ain't got it like that. Cheap stuff is better for me.

.....

Things have gotten so expensive. Terribly expensive. I just, I can't afford it.

.....

My biggest compromise is I gave up drinking coffee [because of the price].

.....

Well, I do eat different things but sometimes I just can't afford a lot.

.....

I went to buy a thing and milk and I think it was Hood and it was almost \$6 a gallon. But I chose the no name brand because that was like \$1-something cheaper. So yes, I do find that I always look up prices. Always.

.....

It's hard. The hardest part is prices of everything has gone up so much. It restricts and a lot of times now we want to focus on the meals instead of like the snacks that the kids want and take to school. So it's choosing which one's more important.

.....

I changed my diet. And I've been eating a lot of like fruits, nuts and berries. Stuff like that. And it's, it's expensive. You know, and you can't get it from the food shelf.

Interviewer: And so if gas gets higher, if food prices get higher then...?

Interviewee: There's no...I can't eat or nothing

.....

It's hard to keep everyone fed. That's why I started coming to the food shelf.

.....

Prices are going up. And it's gotten to the point where I can't afford it anymore. I try to mainly come here because I'm trying to save my money.

.....

I don't buy a gallon of milk anymore. I will use water in my cereal. I'm not paying \$5, \$6 for a gallon of milk. It's ridiculous.

.....

I mean, I would like to use like the Fresh Box or you know some of that stuff, but they don't take food stamps. So as someone on a Social Security Income, I can't afford that. And that's a healthier alternative.

Cost of Fuel

We have Dollar General in Fairfax. So I end up going there a lot for things because the price of gas and like it's that much quicker and easier to just okay, pop over, but then yeah, I hate that they don't have like fruits and veggies.

.....

Once a week [I go with my friend to the Milton food shelf] and sometimes we don't go because they don't have enough gas to keep traveling all the way up there, you know? They struggling too. They just, they go up there when they got the gas.

.....

Walmart is about half an hour, Price Chopper is 5 minutes. But if I go to Walmart, it cuts my bill in half as if I went to Price Shopper it would be double...even in gas it's still cheaper.

.....

The issue is getting to where you have to go. And I live up in the boonies so I mean, getting to the places where I need to go is always money. So it's a money issue, you know, to get to the places, so yeah. And is it worth it? Yeah, paying somebody maybe 10 bucks to get down here to get food is worth it to me.

.....

Gas money. If I don't have it, I go without [food]

Cooking, Food Shortage & Storage Limitations

Yeah. Well, since we've been in since we've been in the hotel, we cook with a microwave. So it's hard to manage meals, and then we only got a little refrigerator. (Interviewee living in transitional housing)

.....

It will be different once we get on the stove, and you know, I mean, cook a regular meal. Right now it's just stuff that you can heat up in the microwave. (Interviewee living in transitional housing)

It's difficult to if you don't have an income it is difficult to come by pots, pans, things like that.

.....

It was the [name redacted] food shelf. They're not used to dealing with like people who live in vehicles or are completely unhoused. So I couldn't take anything that was like refrigerated obviously or stuff like that. And they were like we have all this canned food and I was like I don't have a fucking can opener, do you? And they're like, No, we don't.

I think for people that are receiving general assistance or are in an emergency shelter program, the biggest nutritional hold back that they're going to have is their access to refrigerator, microwave, stove, and utensils.

Like you can give them a bunch of food but if they don't have any way to do anything with it...

.....

Some of the hotels do not have microwaves. And those people I do not know what they do. I'm assuming they have to go out and find food or eat cold cans of soup, I mean I used to eat cold, cold canned food all the time.

It's not the best, but it's food. Yeah, I think standardizing what is accessible to those in emergency shelter programs would be great.

.....

I can't keep [fresh foods] fresh. They go bad, even when you store them in the refrigerator or freezer...I visit this food shelf just about every day. (Interviewee in transitional housing who is sharing a mini fridge with two other individuals)

.....

Yeah because we went to find baby formula and we couldn't get any. She drinks one that comes already prepared. And it's out of stock. It's gone. And now she's no longer breastfeeding. And we try looking for it at the stores but there's isn't any. Only in the hospital, but they are scheduling out until December 20th.

Limited Hours of Operation for Food Shelves & Public Transportation

I think more hours here would be helpful.. 12pm-2pm is pretty limiting, especially for people who work during the day.

.....

Well that's like, a lot of people's barriers are the weekends. Most people who have a job can't make it to the food shelf during the week, and the shuttle doesn't run on the weekend to even get to the grocery store. It could be easier.

.....

And then the two hour window of the time that it's open here, and if you don't get here, at least an hour earlier, like you're waiting, you know what I mean? You're spending half a day like sitting around (NWFF)

.....

Sometimes my daughter can take me, sometimes she can't. And I won't do RCT because they make you wait for hours and comes back up and everything else- I can't commit. (Gilman)

.....

And she's in Richford. They do have a bus. But it like runs at 5am till 5pm. One way trips, you know what I mean? So you're stuck here in the city [Saint Albans] all day long waiting for the bus to bring you back.

.....

They could just okay, yep, you're here for [the food shelf], pop back and then it would also avoid this whole madness of like everybody here at once. People like trying to cut in front, when people get like, already I've seen it today where it's like, oh my god, is there gonna be a fight here. You know, like people are arguing and it's like, because it's such a crunch...That's why I kind of stopped coming. Because the mayhem of the people around.

Not Having Enough Time to Wait for the Bus or Wait in Line for the Food Shelf

This interviewee is 20 years old, has a 8 month old baby, and works 12 hour shifts 6 days a week: “It’s just here [NWFF food shelf] where I come occasionally, and when I don’t have time to come, well...”

.....

The lines are crazy this summer...Really long lines. I wanted to go the other day, but I just couldn’t deal with standing there that long. (NWFF)

.....

We’re taken hours out of the day to get there and it’s like, okay, I didn’t really get anything to make a meal. (NWFF)

.....

And then I’ve come to the food shelf a couple times. At one time when I came, people had to wait out in a line out the side door there. There was a big line. I didn’t want to I didn’t I have back issues, and I couldn’t stand there and wait. So I kind of stopped coming. But since we’re in town today, I thought I would see if I could. So I was lucky, you know, it worked out. (NWFF)

Lack of Resource Awareness and Program Usability

And we’ve had 3 Squares before. And I’ve been waiting for a while now because application process to renew, I didn’t get it in time, but then you have to redo it. They asked for 30 days pay stubs, and by the time they get the application and they go to process it oh, well, we need the next week’s pay stub. So then you’re having to send that in and then wait even longer. So that’s what I’m waiting on as of now to get our 3 Squares back.

.....

We need to know where things are. Maybe a new resource guide.

.....

I didn’t really know this place [NEKCA] existed until someone told me.

.....

I do think it’s a little interesting that they bar you from [using food stamps for] hot foods, and it’s not based on like it’s not based on zoning, either like that. For some reason. They say they can’t do that because they’re unable to distinguish between hot food at a restaurant and like hot food at say like a grocery store or something like that. Or they think people will use it to like buy Domino’s or something. I don’t really understand that but you are able to buy like energy drinks and shit like that with it which are like not nutritionally necessary.

.....

When speaking about their experience applying for disability: This is the system, a hoop I’m jumping through right now and it’s not fun that’s for sure. Because I decided not to go on disability, but it’s making it harder for me. Because by not going on disability, I’m going to be a working body so they’re not helping people like, I don’t understand that either, I really don’t.

.....

Well, if I had the EBT card I wouldn’t be sitting here talking to you right now. I haven’t been able to get food stamps yet. But I’m trying.

.....

WIC. I used to use it but they’ve made it so complicated. I’d go up to the register and half of what I got didn’t count. Also food stamps. I lost them this month. I don’t know what happened and I haven’t been able to get ahold of them so now I have to find the time to go in person.

Lack of Food Education (cooking healthy meals)

A lot of the people that live in this building just, it really bothers me that they don't cook and I don't know if they don't know how to cook, they don't like to cook, but they'll buy all this pre-frozen, packaged stuff

.....

But the problem is if you got people who aren't motivated and don't want to cook I don't know what good it does. I think out of 25 apartments, there's maybe six or seven of us who cook and the rest either get Meals on Wheels or they eat out of the can, or you know TV dinner type stuff. Yeah and it's too bad because when you're elderly, everybody here is over 65, when you're elderly you need more high nutrition foods because, you know you're getting depleted as you get old, the reserves in your body, you're depleted. So you need really high energy, high nutrient food. Like I always put seaweed in the soup and I'll never tell them because they wouldn't eat if they knew there was seaweed in there.

.....

And I'm just really a little bit overwhelmed at how poorly our culture has allowed people to feed themselves and take care of themselves. It's very sad to me and I've been in business in one way or another for years. Being in this building, you know, even this event that's happening now [Thanksgiving potluck]. The people that are running it...[name redacted] and myself, I think we know a lot more about taking care of yourself than they do. And that's a problem. Yes, it's really a problem...our bodies need to be taken care of, and what we eat and what we drink and what we breathe makes a difference. And it seems like such an important message. It's hard to know what the steps are too.

.....

Yeah. A lot of education needs to be happening, and education with food. Now, this is, you know this is good, what they're doing here [Thanksgiving potluck]. But as I said, I you know, it's missing a certain kind of knowledge and it's still going to the, what I would call the government vision of you know, no salt, no sugar. No, I mean, those are sort of good, but they're not really the whole story at all

Expired Foods from Food Assistance Programs

Yeah, sometimes when you get meat here [monthly food shelf], it's gone a bit.

.....

And then you're getting meats, and you're thawing them out and they're rotten. Like and you know, it's no good. And then I go home like I grab things and it's like this is way expired, way expired, like I was dealing with stuff like that.

.....

The only problem I have with [food assistance] programs, you gotta watch the dates. Because sometimes the shelf life, it was like a year old in some of these food shelves. And I have a problem with eating outdated stuff.

.....

And but sometimes we get food that's already half rotten. You know because it's food shelf stuff. It's stuff that the supermarket's didn't feel like was good enough to sell, so it goes to the food bank and then it comes to us.

.....

I avoid the meat here [at the food shelf], because I don't trust it. It's usually pretty old.

.....

That's the biggest thing with them [food from food shelf] is most the time it's expired. I got two frozen meals out of their freezer one time and they were both expired with spoiled dairy in them... Don't get me wrong I think it's the greatest thing that ever was. But I think the way they go about things needs to be better portrayed, have safer foods so you know it's not expired. But I mean, also people who donate to these organizations need to do better.

D| Solutions: What Do People Want to Use?

At the end of each interview, we asked participants what programs or types of support they think would work well to fight food insecurity in their community. The ideas and suggestions they shared are shown below.

Education & Stigma

More awareness and education.

.....

I feel like there should be more awareness and maybe something to combat the negative stigma. Everyone's accepted here. It doesn't matter. If you make 8ok a year. Everybody struggles at some point in time, don't be ashamed because you have to come here and receive help...everybody should eat every day.

.....

Maybe the people like in our food shelves should know a little bit more about the good and bad. I know like, a lot of food shelves, get food donations, but I think maybe they should start saying they want more fresh like I know that beggars can't be choosers, but maybe more information on the good...Just more aware of things that they're giving to people, especially people that are diabetic because a lot of our community that needs help have underlying health issues and they're not getting the help from the food that is at the shelves.

.....

Advertising is the, is the way to go. Make sure you have good advertising. Just get the word out [about existing food assistance programs]. That's the most important thing.

.....

I think it would be a really good idea, like when you come to this building, that we get educated about somebody wanting some money, and you could say, we can go to this organization and you can get this and that, or you can find a place they can help you find a place to live, or they can give you a hot meal. You know, having that kind of mechanism more deliberate in the way, how you behave as a human being so people have it on their backpack, you know, that they know and somebody comes up to you and wants something. And you want to do something and you can say, well, you know, you can find a job, you can you can get a meal, you can get housing, you can get help from you know, those in I know there, there are really good organizations. And like just down the road here, the Hub has, you know, certainly has been a place for people to get food and networking and stuff.

.....

I wish there was more education regarding raw food. Because most people have no idea about it. There were forty people in that support group I was in. Every single person in that group cured a different ailment with raw food. And some of them cured diabetes, and they linked it to food. They will tell you it's not true. They'll tell you that about a lot of things. But they are absolutely ignorant about the value of food.

.....

I feel like with food insecurity mostly just having some options, more, I mean they're already doing a good job but just maybe more education about what's available to meet people's needs.

.....

I think some education so people learn how to use what they get in commodities. I think there's a lot of people don't realize what they can do.

.....

[I would like to see] that the foodbank, that all the food people that help to get better recognition for what they do, put little articles in the paper for when they go above and beyond their duty and they make sure that we get our food and everything.

Food Assistance Programs

Make sure they have transportation. And other, you know, places instead of just this (NWFF). So maybe more, you know, like one on one end of the town and one on the other. I tell you that and transportation.

.....

You know, I think it'd be better if it was fresh and cheaper prices and just you know, like here for instance, I mean, this is a great program, the food shelf when they're like oh, you can only take one thing off the shelf. You know what I'm saying? You got two kids. They're both fighting over it. You know? So it's just, it's a lot of things that play into it. Obviously, one can of food is not going to feed four people.

.....

[I'd like to see more] fruit and vegetables my husband likes. He likes to eat healthy. He's almost 70, so he's always watching his health.

.....

It would be more efficient if food shelves or other programs, if they could have somebody here to transport to them. That you could call.

.....

If someone had the time to bring some food from Martha's kitchen and the food shelf that would be hugely helpful for people who don't have mobility like I do. I just don't know what they do when they can't walk like I can.

.....

One interviewee recommended Huel, a "powdered food alternative", be made available via food assistance programs.

.....

I think standardizing what is accessible to those in emergency shelter programs would be great [referencing cooking/storage limitations].

.....

It would be nice if they could actually have a food shelf with just a section of meat.

.....

Interviewer asked a resident living in transitional housing if they have enough space to store food: "No. Another thing would be like if they could have some refrigerator that you can leave here [at NEKCA] and be able to leave things here so you wouldn't have to pick up food daily."

.....

I'd like to see more meat [at the food shelf]. I avoid the meat here, because I don't trust it. It's usually pretty old.

.....

I think that those two things, if the delivery [of food] could be made [for people with mobility limitation], the people that can't get out and ways for them, you know, to be transported.

.....

Commodity Supplemental Food Boxes

[The commodity boxes are] very good. Except on the cheese part. I wish they would have something like when you apply for it, like 'are you allergic to this item?' Then it could go to somebody else.

.....

I'd like to be able to have them bring our food box [to Gilman] once a month. Commodity. Either the food bank over here because they're not more than two seconds away and put our boxes inside the community room and put our names on the boxes like a piece of paper that says our names. Because it's the same thing, everybody gets the same thing anyways. So all you need to do is bring the boxes.

Public Transportation

I think they could get better transportation. Especially for people that's coming out from being incarcerated and stuff. Like they want them to go to all these places and they don't have transportation. So that's just like a setup for just putting them right back in jail. Right because they don't have no transportation. And it's not their fault. It's just, it's just the state or the town they're in.

.....

But if there was a way for people to get to where the food shelves are to get access to it and a way to get the food home because if they were walking maybe, you know, even like these parts that are out here, it could be hard depending on the weather, so I think the transportation provided for the elderly, you know, would be really helpful so they could get there.

.....

I guess if everybody had the transportation to get to these places, I don't know if there's people that don't, of course, people that live right in town are going to be able to walk there. But people like us if they don't have transportation, and if that transportation as it is now would come down the road and pick up people instead now maybe they changed. But when I tried to get help to get them still working, then I would've had to go up that early in the morning.

Government Support

Increase the food stamps.

.....

If they had a program that would like help with gas cards, and stuff like that, I think that would help a lot.

.....

I think we should not get rid of the middle of the month food stamps. It's killing people. Because I'm literally going to live on \$200 on the 1st of every month. An extra 250, that gets me through. And people are panicking now. They're all done in January. We get no extra help. I think in your notes, welfare needs to be kept [the middle of the month payment]. That should be a permanent thing. With the economy and everything, I hope they keep giving us extra food stamps.

Carpools, Rideshares & On-Demand Transportation Options

Figure out a carpool or something.

.....

There should be a shared ride, I wonder if you could put money towards that...so much a month and everybody who needs it goes somewhere to get a driver's license...Put that money towards a car. And okay, today's your day to use the car. Just make sure you put gas in it then bring it back, and then if somebody drops out of this little thing, then they get their money back.

.....

What I would like to see is now they got that Uber or something like that. Is that what they call them? Uber. Yeah. Some kind of a program. My neighbor gives rides to people. He's 92 years old, gives the ride to people to go to the appointment or even to the grocery store. I love seeing that. And I think he's getting paid for mileage. It's not a money making thing. But he's doing something for somebody.

.....

I think we should look into people's ability to get from their house to here [NWFF].

Carrying Groceries

I think a lot of the people here come here to get their veggies. What I've noticed is they have these huge bags, and they can't hardly lift them up and they're trying to walk home with them. I think they need some help to get those from here. (Mountain View)

.....

Food is really heavy and it's time sensitive. So the distance does matter. For people that are taking public transit, like I biked to work for like five years, the things that I bought for food at that time did depend on weight because I had to bike home with it. So I wouldn't, I wouldn't buy a bunch of heavy things or stuff like that.

Hours of Operation for Public Transportation and Food Shelves

I just think the bus should run at all times. On weekends and at night.

Grocery Stores

Or if they had like, a big box store around here, like Sam's Club or something where you could buy in bulk and use your food stamps, you know, as opposed to Walmart, you can't really get things in bulk.

.....

Build us a store. [Gilman]

Housing

More housing should be available to people too. Yep. I mean down in Chittenden County, they got all kinds of places you can stay. But in St. Albans you ain't got nothing.

IV. Recommendations

The recommendations outlined in our primary report (see *Recommendations: Addressing Transportation Barriers to Accessing a Healthy Diet* pages 40-44) largely align with findings from interviews with impacted populations. Our recommendation to--

Simplify the food assistance application process, decrease paperwork and streamline approval mechanisms

--is particularly relevant, as some interviewees expressed frustration and confusion about qualifying for and/or accessing resources.

Another recommendation is to:

Improve communication and collaboration across organizations and build upon existing community-led efforts. Partnerships facilitate coordination of services, improving the reach and efficiency of the program. Partnerships are also important for promoting and marketing the transportation program, and an effective way to build ridership and community buy-in for the program. Information on program eligibility, cost, coverage, and schedule should be widely disseminated so all potential riders are aware of and may utilize the service

Some interviewees shared that they feel there is a lack of resource awareness. Notably, the individuals who took part in this study were already addressing food assistance programs. As a result of this complementary study, we are including additional recommendations to accompany the ones provided in the primary report.

Initial Recommendation:

Continue investment in linking local food assistance more intentionally to local producers. One suggestion is to supplement or replace the Commodity Supplemental Food Program with local surplus. The idea here would be to replace the existing supply that often relies on out-of-state produce and products by developing in-state models such as a so-called “Vermont food box” of locally-sourced produce and products. Salvation Farms’ is a particularly effective example of such an approach, with the non-profit’s mission to “reduce food loss on farms, increase the use of locally grown foods, and fostering an appreciation for Vermont’s agricultural heritage and future” (Salvation Farms, 2022). The program aims to strengthen the local food system through better management of surplus agriculture. Salvation Farm’s Vermont Commodity program aims to test the financial feasibility and logistical needs involved with aggregating surplus crops in one facility to serve charitable and institutional meal sites, and should be looked to as a model for expanding, replicating, and/or scaling such projects across the state.

Additional Recommendation:

Invest in educational programming that specifically targets participants of Commodity Supplemental Food Boxes and older adults. Interviews with impacted populations highlighted the need for more awareness and education surround how to best access, utilize, and store foods. Interviewees who receive CSFB indicated specific interest in learning how to best prepare and preserve food from their monthly food boxes. Some ideas here include:

- *Pairing healthy recipes with monthly CSFB*
- *Partnering with SNAP-Ed to offer cooking classes using ingredients from the CSFB.*

Initial Recommendation:

Investigate how rural populations engage with food delivery services and expand those services to accept EBT payments

Most interviewees stated that they do not use food delivery services. Of the few that did, a few mentioned Schwan’s, a home delivery service that already accepts EBT. Another individual talked about using Instacart for her groceries but stopped as soon as the free trial ended. When asked about using delivery services, many spoke about having Everyone Eats meals delivered. While it was convenient, some respondents ended up throwing or giving away meals because they did not like them.

Additional Recommendation:

Interviewees who were living in transitional housing named food storage and preparation as a barrier to what they were able to accept from food assistance programs. Some suggestions they provided are:

- *Provide can openers at food shelves or when entering transitional housing*
- *Have perishable foods available in smaller quantities so they can be stored in small refrigerators (transitional housing programs in the region of study often times provides residents with mini-fridges)*
- *Offer more ready-to-eat meals and snacks via food assistance programs*

Additional Resources & Impacted Populations-related Studies

2022 Community Needs Assessment for the Saint Albans Health Service Area

<https://www.northwesternmedicalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022-Community-Health-Needs-Assessment.pdf>

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