

## [Tompkins COVID Food Task Force End of Year 2020 Survey](#)



tompkins food future

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[FTF Consumer Information Website](#)

[FTF Food Supply Chain Information Website](#)

### **Acknowledgements:**

This December 2020 follow-up to an initial [survey conducted in June/July 2020](#) was a collaboration between [ScienceHub](#), the [Tompkins County COVID-19 Food Task Force](#) and [Tompkins Food Future](#), in addition to researchers from Cornell and Ithaca College. The survey contained questions to assess food security, food access, and information needs and gaps related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This survey would not have been possible without collaboration from [ScienceHub](#) in addition to support from the [Cornell Department of Communication](#) and generous funding from the [Cornell Atkinson Center for Sustainability](#).

Much credit is also due to the many food pantries, service organizations, and emergency food distribution partners throughout Tompkins County who provided support for survey outreach and distribution on top of the unprecedented demand for their services.

Finally, a big thank you to the Tompkins County community members who took the time to complete the survey and share their experiences and opinions.

### **General Details About the Survey**

- **Dates Open:** Surveys completed between 11/3/20 and 12/26/20
  - Some paper, some online
- **Responses:** 557 responses, 541 of which were from Tompkins County. 16 responses were excluded for reporting a residence outside of Tompkins County. ***Not all respondents provided answers to all of the questions, so the "n" value will vary depending on the question.***

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- Still Pending Analysis

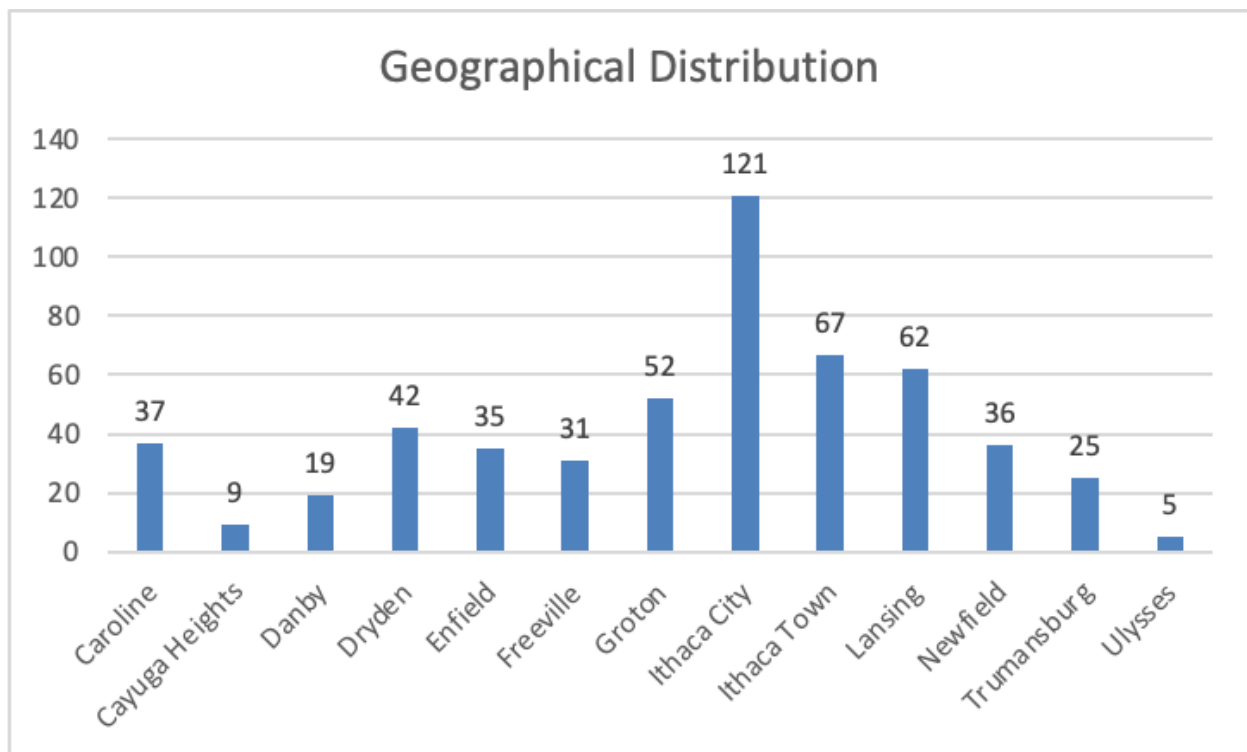
### **Movement within Tompkins County - “What do you do in [location]?”**

- Still Pending Analysis

## Geography

Most responses were from the Ithaca area (Ithaca city or Town of Ithaca). Relative to population, rural towns/villages provided a greater number of responses, likely due to the greater outreach efforts made in these communities.

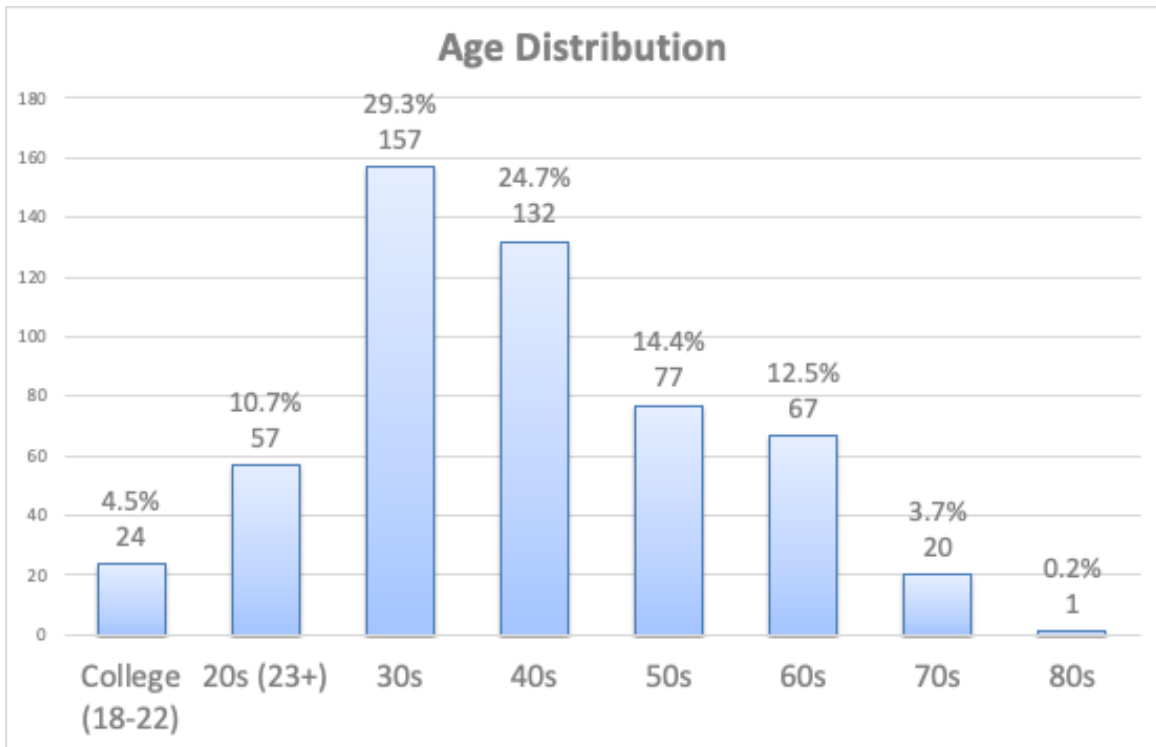
- If you would like a specific geographic area count of responses to any of the survey questions, please contact [support@citompkins.org](mailto:support@citompkins.org). It will probably not be possible to stratify by income. Please note in the graph below that some of the areas (e.g. Cayuga Heights, Ulysses, etc.) have very low response counts so the data will also probably not be particularly meaningful for these areas.



## Age

Responders ranged in age from 18-80 years of age. The majority of responders to the survey were in their 30s and 40s. “College age” was defined as 18-22 years of age and there were 24 responders in this age group. These were not included in the “20s” age category.

(Chart on next page)

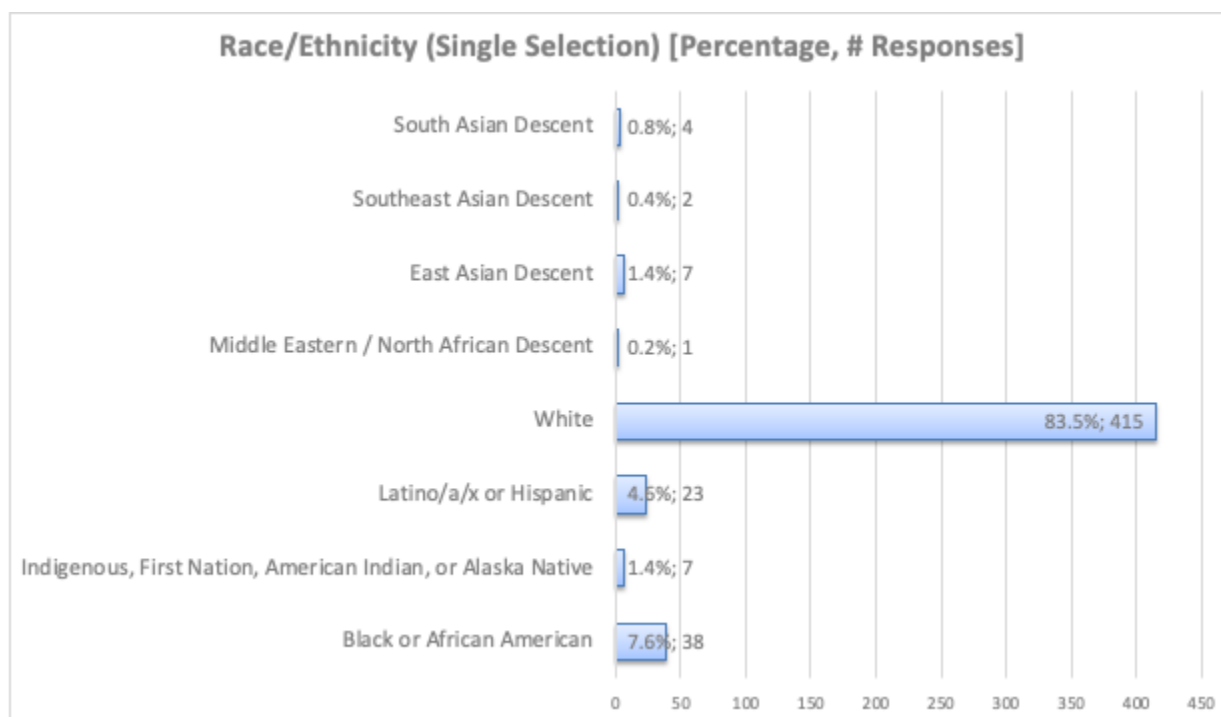


#### Ethnic-Racial Identity (n = 532)

- **Racial-ethnically, this survey population was not similar to Tompkins County overall.** For instance, the [Census](#) lists the proportion of “Asian alone” as slightly over 10% but this survey had only 13 individuals of Asian descent respond (~2%). Black or African-Americans are ~4.4% of the Census population but were 7.6% of the survey respondents providing racial/ethnic data. Responses were overwhelmingly from those identifying as White -- 83.5%, compared to roughly ~81% for the county according to Census data.
- The **497 responders who selected a single race** appear in the chart.
  - Two individuals answered “Jewish” and “Semitic” under “other race/ethnicity.” One of these responses also selected “White” and the other did not specify any of the other ethnic-racial categories. Therefore these two entries were collapsed into “White.”
- Nobody identified as Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian so this category has been omitted from the charts, although it was included in the survey.
- Thirty-five individuals (6.6%) identified as bi-or multi-racial (selecting 2+ race/ethnic identities). [Census data](#) indicate 3.5% of Tompkins County residents identify with more than one race so this group is over-represented. Most of the responses were biracial identities, with the majority (n=29) identifying with White and another race/ethnicity (in descending order: Latinx [13], AIAN/Indigenous [11], Black [10], East Asian [5], Middle Eastern [4], Caribbean [2], South Asian [1]). Two individuals identified as multi-racial (4 and 5 races/ethnicities, respectively).

(Chart on next page)

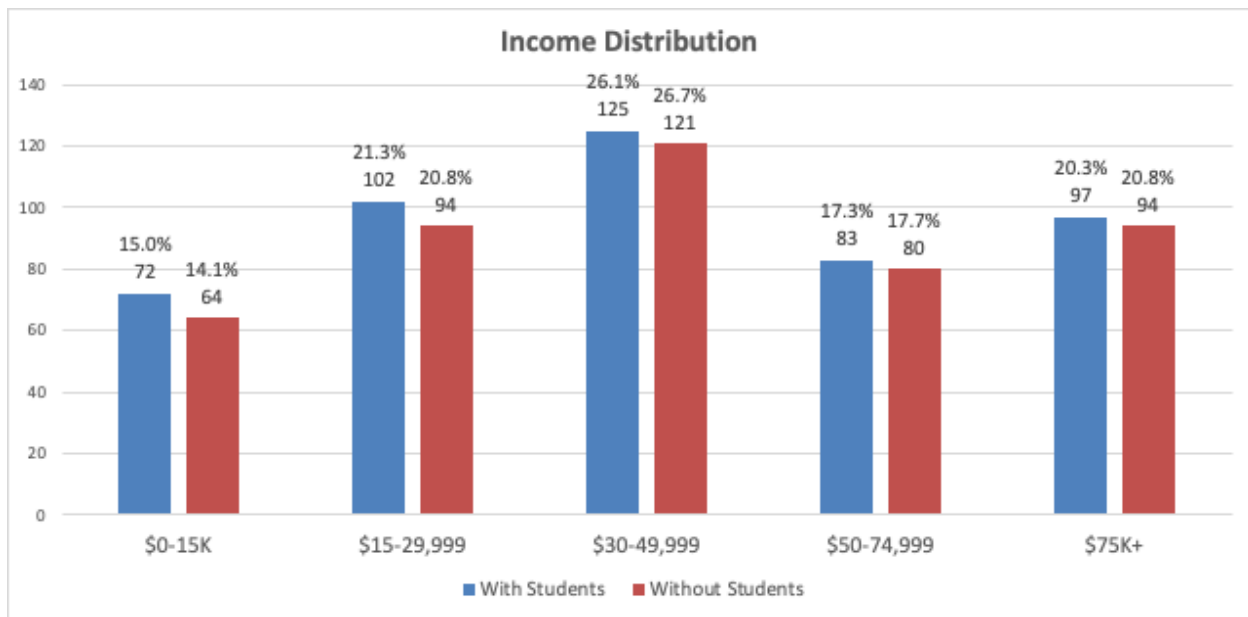
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#### Household Income (n = 479)

- 479 responders reported income data. Median income for Tompkins County is [\\$59,176 \(2019\)](#). The majority of responses with income data were incomes less than \$50,000, indicating that outreach to lower income households was successful -- the [first FTF survey](#) responses skewed to higher income households. Twenty-six (26, 5.4%) of the responders providing income data were students. Excluding these entries did not alter the distribution markedly although it seems to have a greater effect at income levels below \$30,000.

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### Household Income by Race/Ethnic Identity

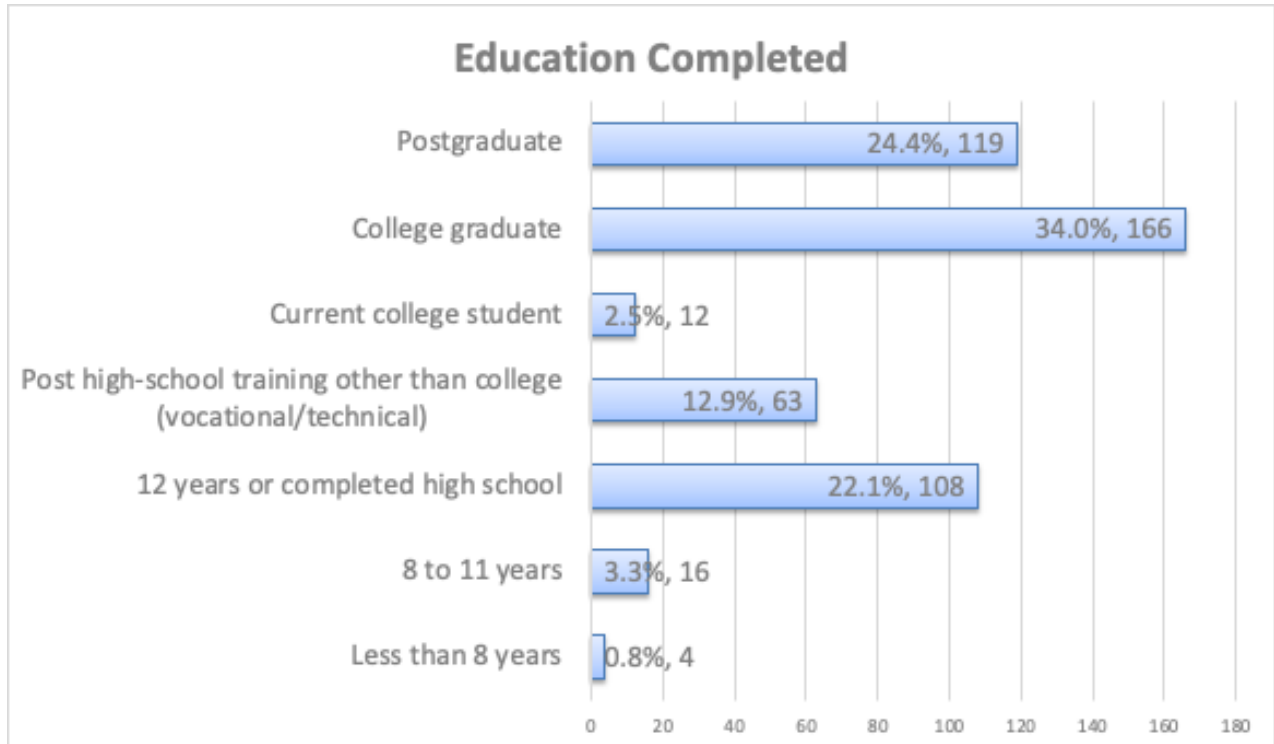
- It is difficult to derive meaningful conclusions based on the intersection of income & race or ethnic identity because of extremely limited/non-existent data for some groups. **None of the summaries were stratified by race/ethnic identity.** See the multiple “0” entries in the table below marked in red.

Income Band					
Race/Ethnicity	\$0-15K	\$15-29,999	\$30-49,999	\$50-74,999	\$75K+
Black or African American	6	17	7	3	4
Indigenous, First Nation, American Indian, or Alaska Native	1	2	2	0	2
Latino/a/x or Hispanic	4	6	10	1	1
White	51	70	93	70	81
Middle Eastern / North African Descent	0	0	0	1	0
East Asian Descent	1	0	3	0	1
Southeast Asian Descent	0	1	1	0	0

South Asian Descent	0	0	1	1	1
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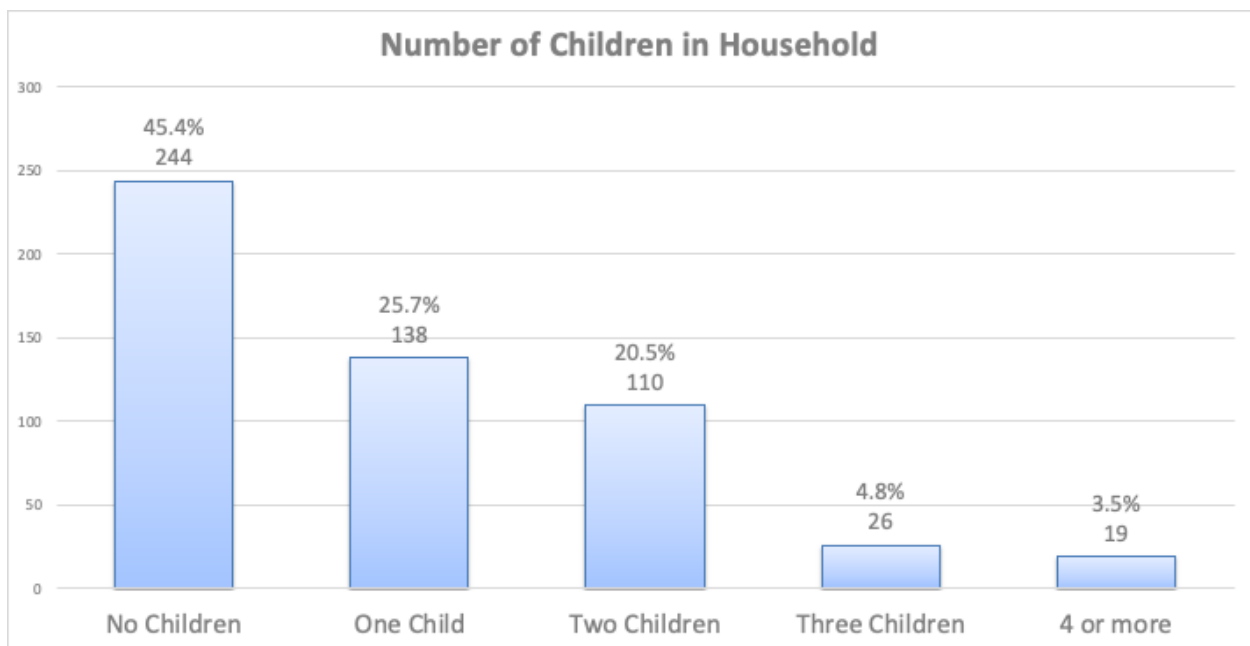
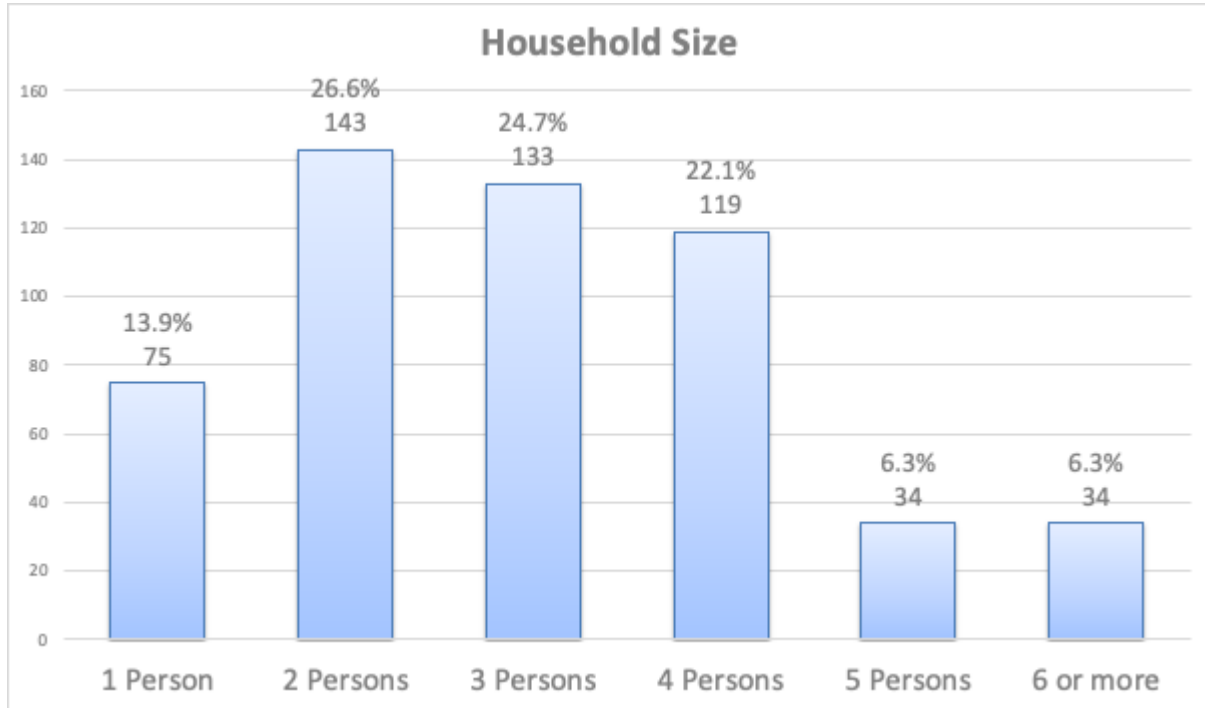
### Education (n = 537)

537 responders provided educational data on educational attainment. The [US Census](#) states that 94.4% of Tompkins County residents 25 and older have at least a high school diploma or equivalent, and 53.5% have at least a bachelor's degree. For those in this age group providing educational and age data (n = 488), these data mirror the larger county as a whole fairly well. 95.9% had completed high school and 58.4% had at least a bachelor's degree.



### Household Size (n=538)

Households ranged in size from 1-10 persons. Most of these were 2-4 person households. Slightly more than half of households (55%) reported having children (range 0-7), with most having either one or two children.



### Food Insecurity (n = 318)

**Question:** In the past 12 months, because of lack of money or other resources did you or others in your household... (check all that apply)

- ... reduce the amount of food eaten?
- ... reduce the quality of food eaten?
- ... worry about not having enough food to eat?
- ... run out of food?
- ... borrow money to buy food?
- ... share the effort or cost of getting food with others?

These respondents answered “yes” **to at least one** of the food insecurity statements.

**Respondees could select more than one answer**, so the total number of responses will exceed the *n* value (318).

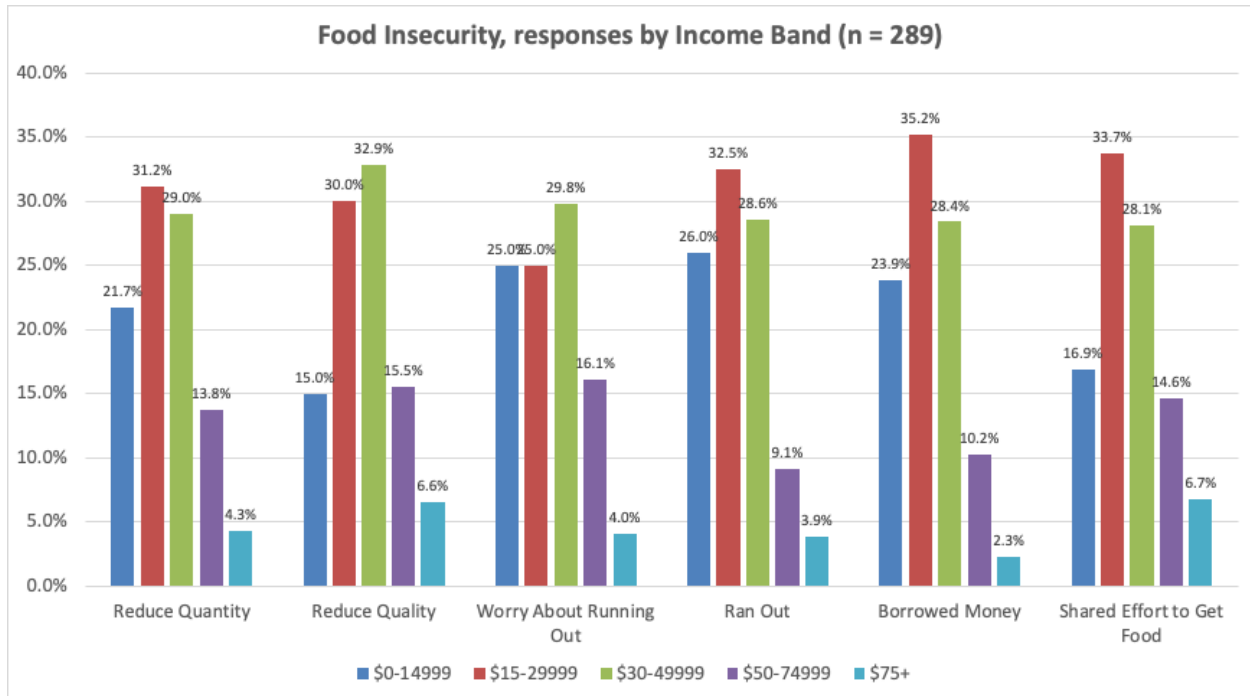
- 149 (46.9%) households had **reduced the amount of food eaten**.
- 231 (72.6%) households had **reduced the quality of food eaten**
- 135 (42.5%) households had **worried about not having enough food to eat**
- 80 (25.2%) households had **run out of food**
- 97 (30.5%) households had **borrowed money to buy food**
- 102 (32.1%) households **shared the effort or cost of getting food with others**

These findings are consistent with the idea of “trading down” food quality (i.e. fresh → frozen → canned or name brand → store brand) in response to economic pressures before reducing food intake entirely.

### Food Insecurity, by Household Income (n = 289)

This graph shows data from the households who provided income data **and** reported experiencing the corresponding sign of food insecurity (reducing food quality, reducing food quantity, running out, etc.). Lower income households, particularly in the \$15-50K household income range, were the most likely to report signs of food insecurity compared to households above 50K income.

(Chart on next page)

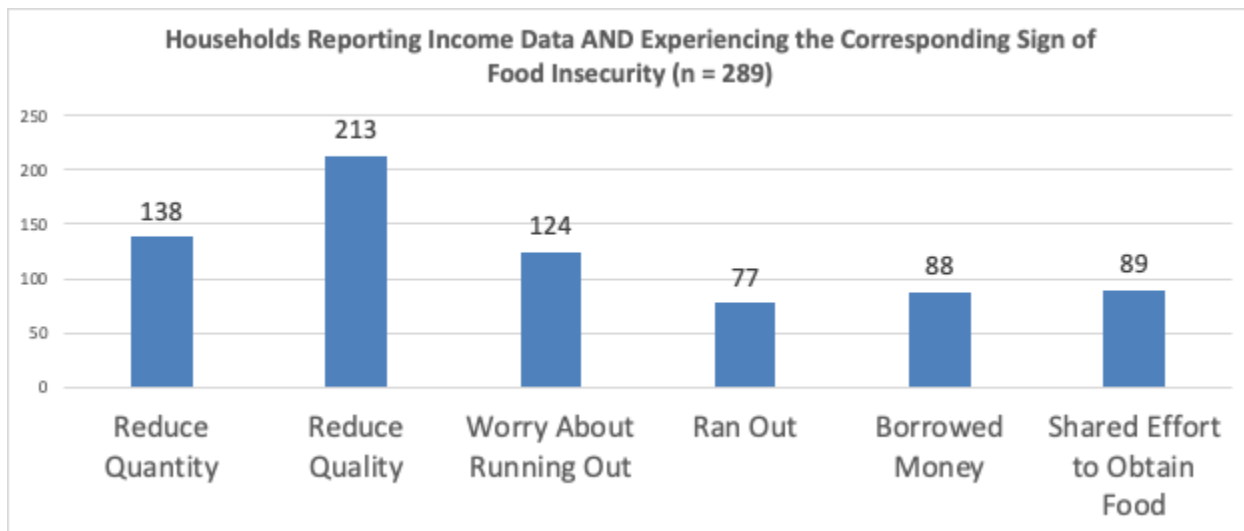


**Table for Food Insecurity, Responses by Income Band**

*(This is the same as the graph above)*

	Reduce Quantity	Reduce Quality	Worry	Run Out	Borrow \$	Share Effort
<b>\$0-14999</b>	21.7%	15.0%	25.0%	26.0%	23.9%	16.9%
<b>\$15-29999</b>	31.2%	30.0%	25.0%	32.5%	35.2%	33.7%
<b>\$30-49999</b>	29.0%	32.9%	29.8%	28.6%	28.4%	28.1%
<b>\$50-74999</b>	13.8%	15.5%	16.1%	9.1%	10.2%	14.6%
<b>\$75+</b>	4.3%	6.6%	4.0%	3.9%	2.3%	6.7%

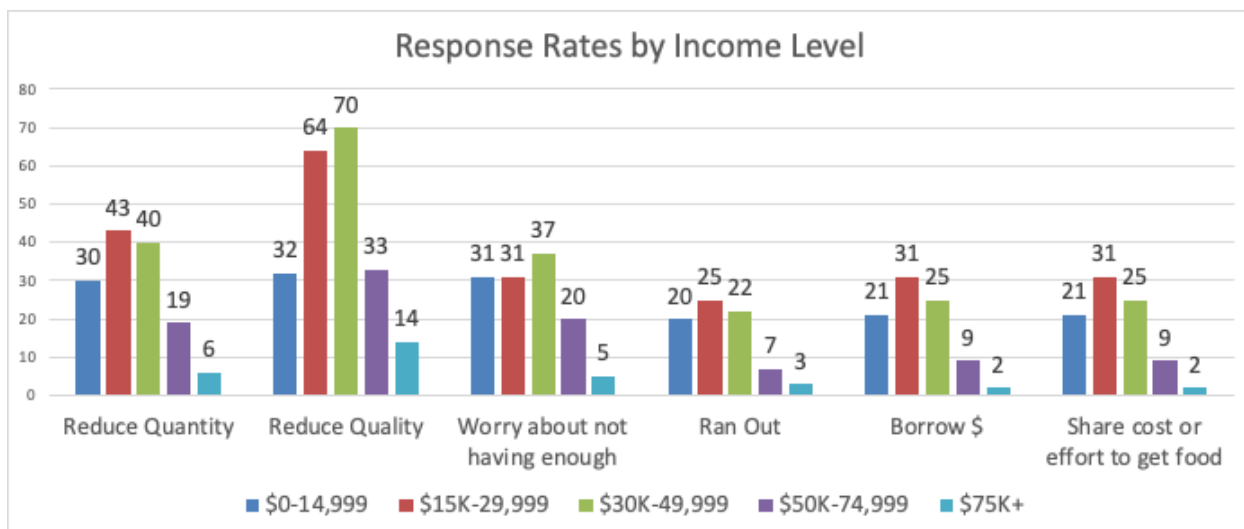
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### Food Insecurity in 2020 vs. 2019 (comparison data)

**Question:** Here are the statements you selected in the last question. How often did you or someone in your household do each in the past 12 months compared to the previous year?

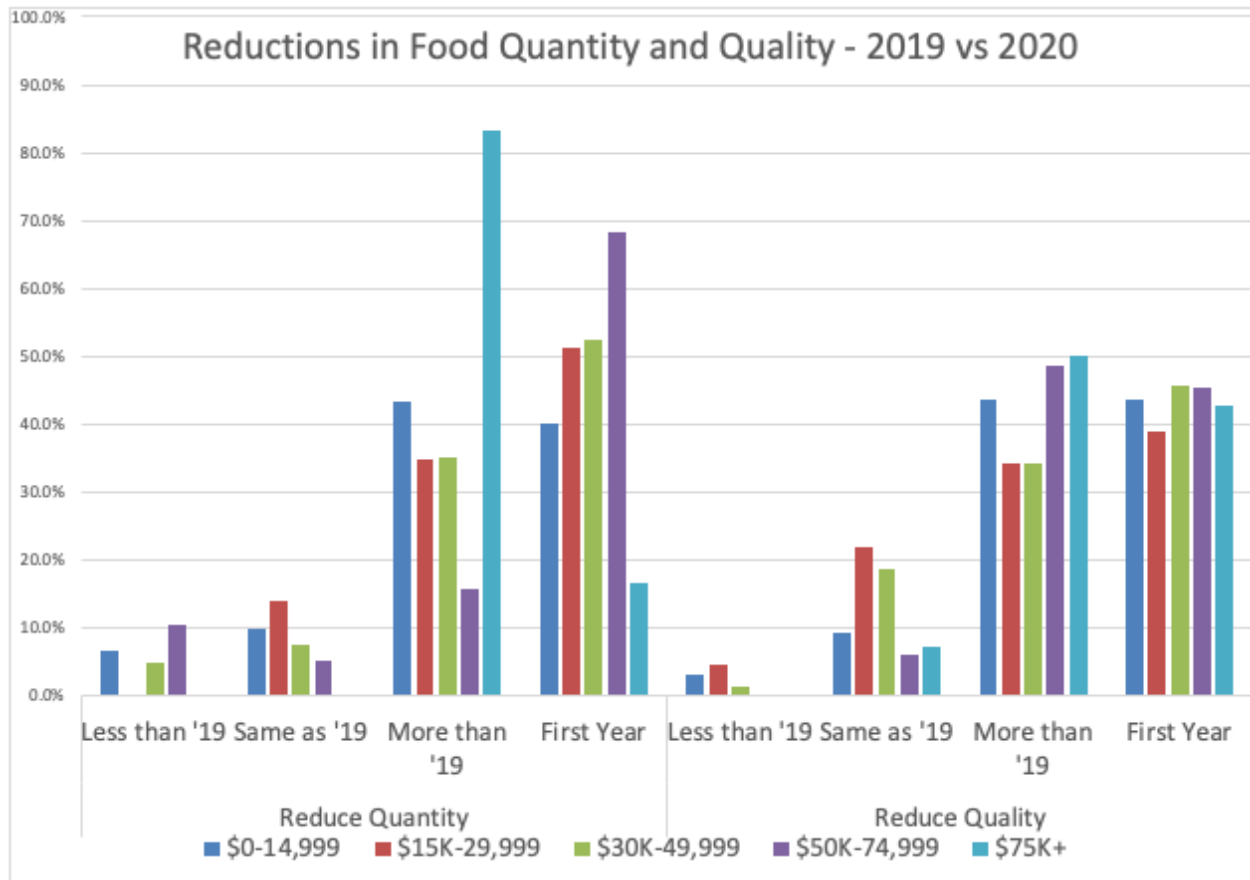
**Note:** the charts below are displayed in percentages. These should be interpreted with caution in the \$50-75K (purple) and \$75K+ income ranges (teal) because households providing 2019 vs 2020 data were generally less than 10 households, especially at the \$75K+ level. See the graph below showing overall responses by income level.

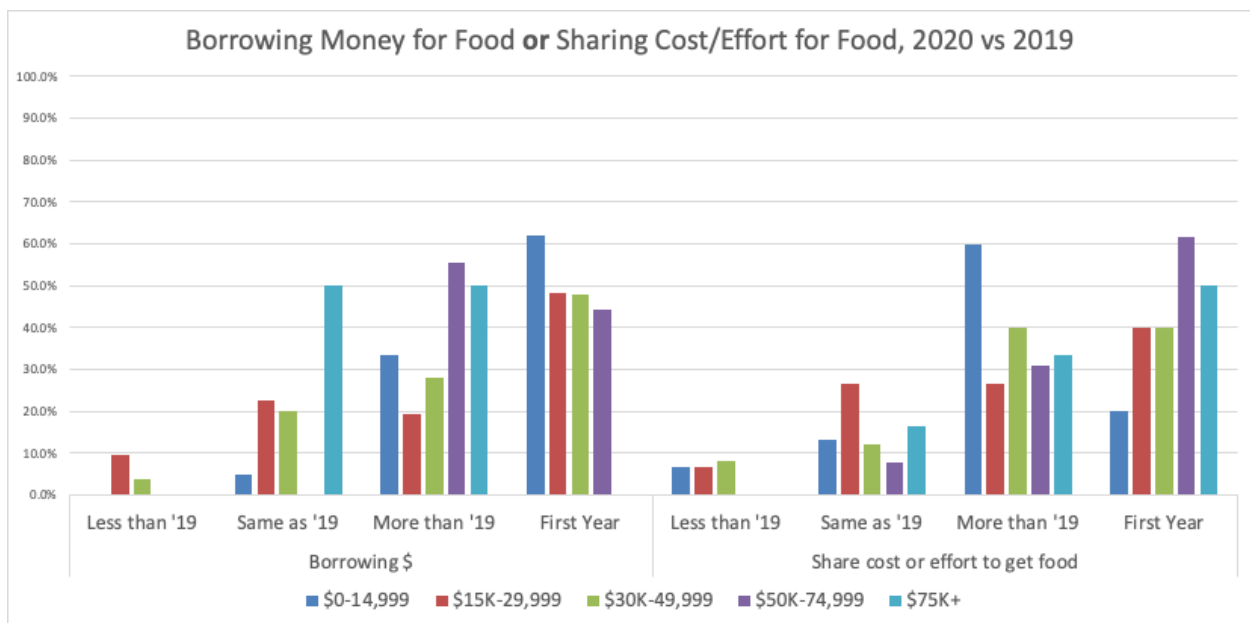
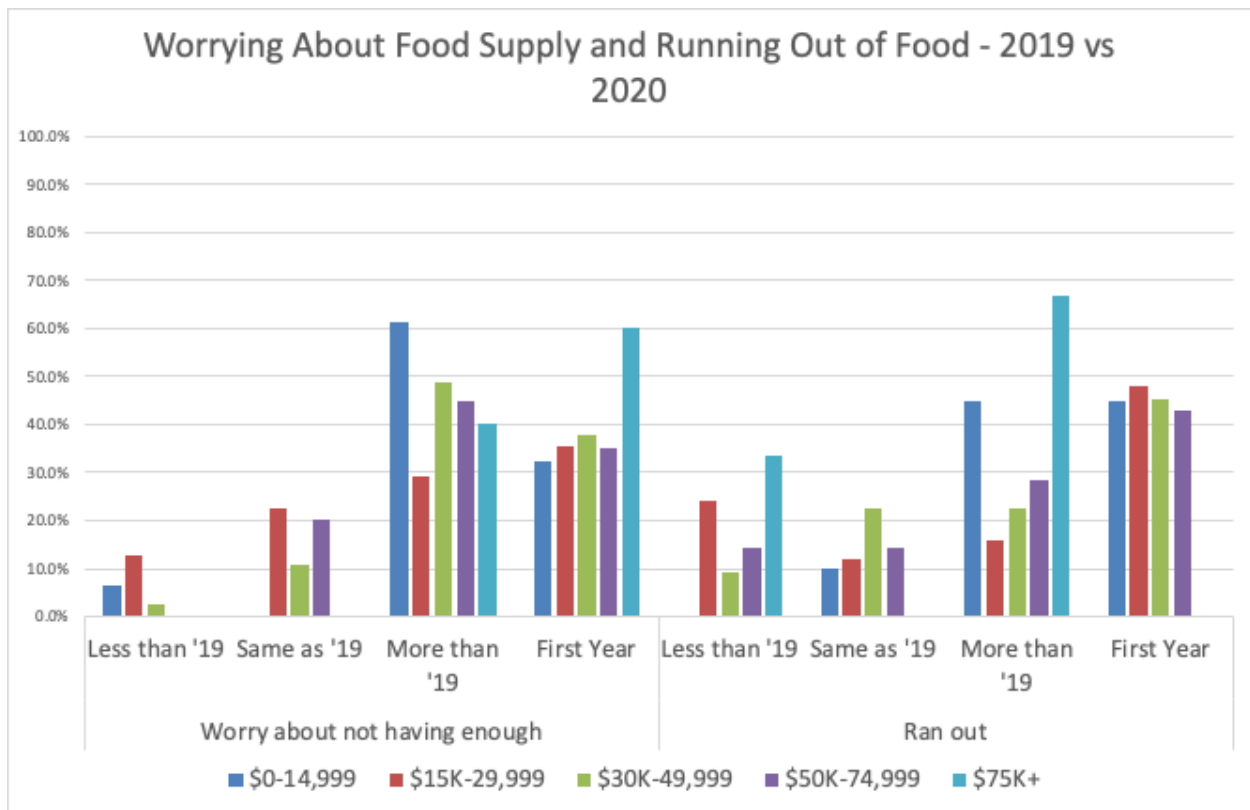


When each group is interpreted together, generally, the figures show that more households, across the income levels experienced food insecurity either at a greater frequency compared to 2019, or for the first time in 2020. This is consistent with national reports

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documenting a steep increase in first-time users of the emergency food system. **Note: 75K+ bracket had extremely low response count.**

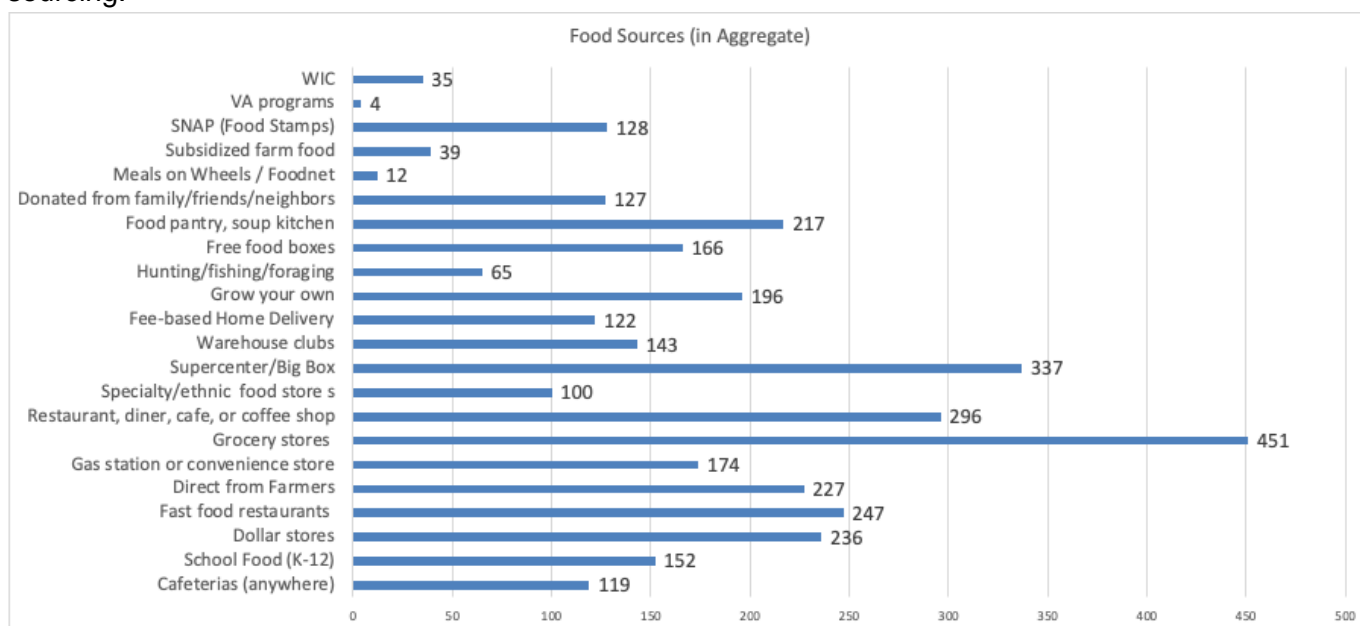




## Food Sources Utilized in the past 12 months (2020)

**Question:** Please select ALL of the ways you and your household have gotten food in the past 12 months. (check all that apply)

The table below shows the answers to this question, **in aggregate**. Food retail, either prepared food from restaurants or shopping at grocery stores/supercenter overwhelmingly dominate food sourcing.

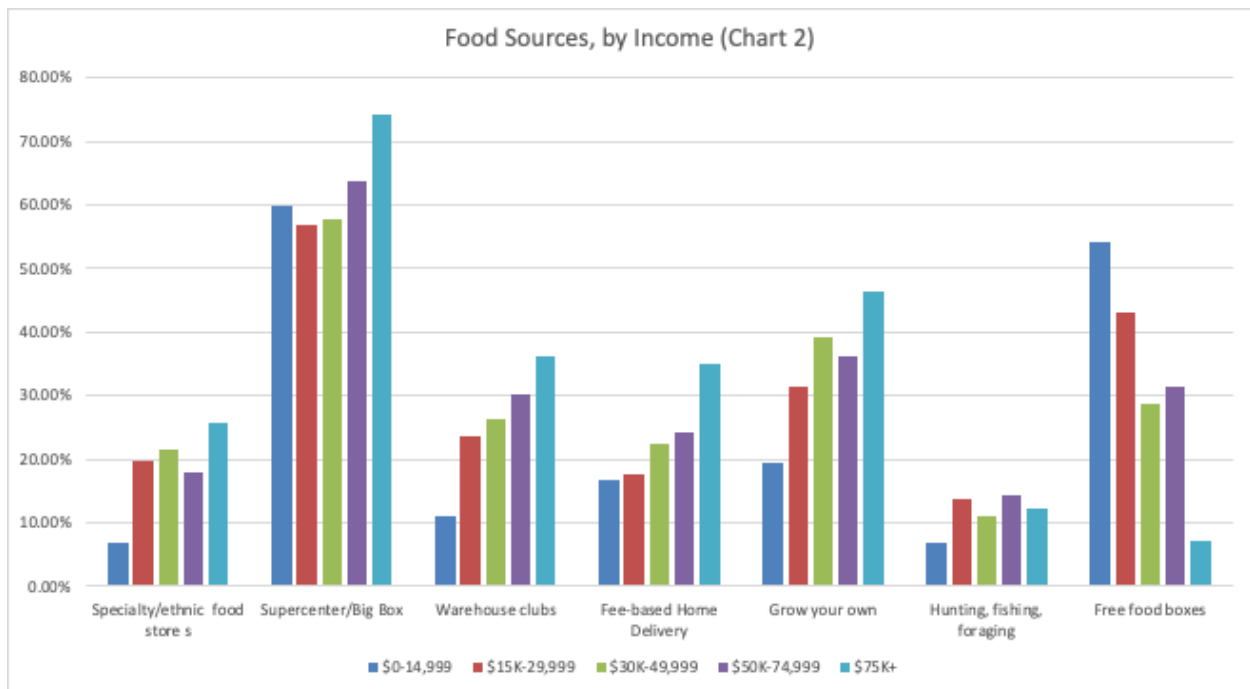
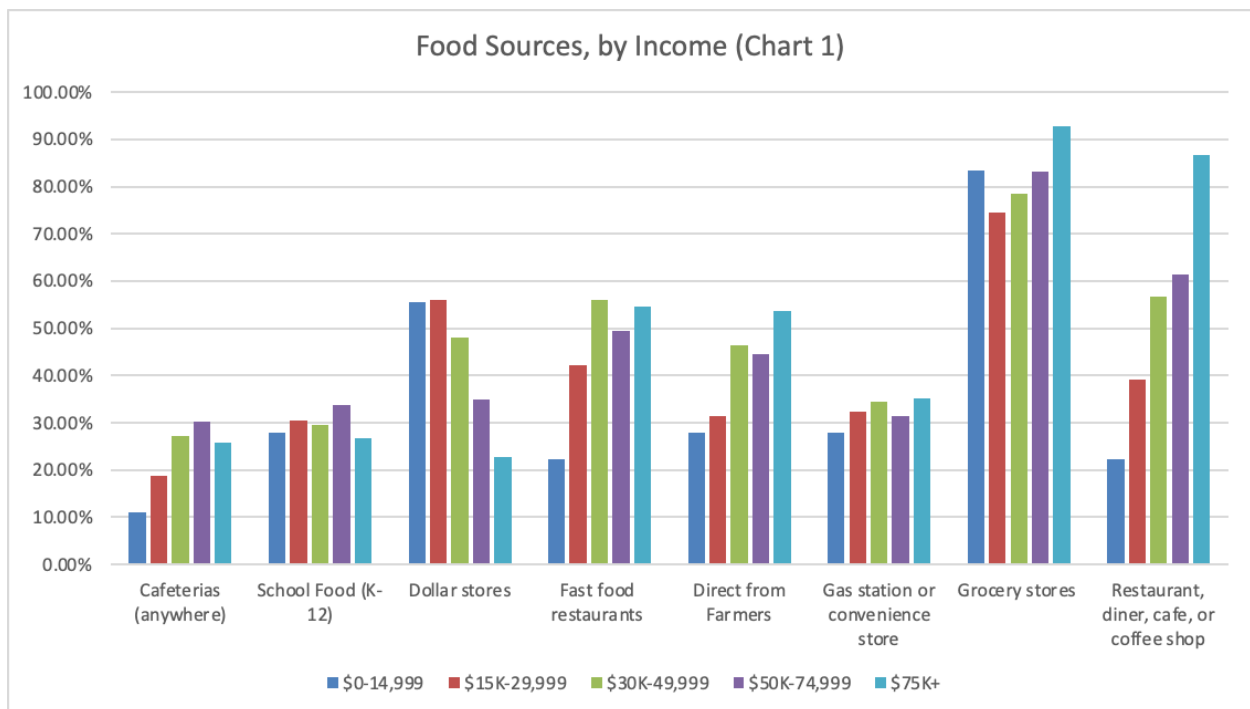


## Food Sources, by Income

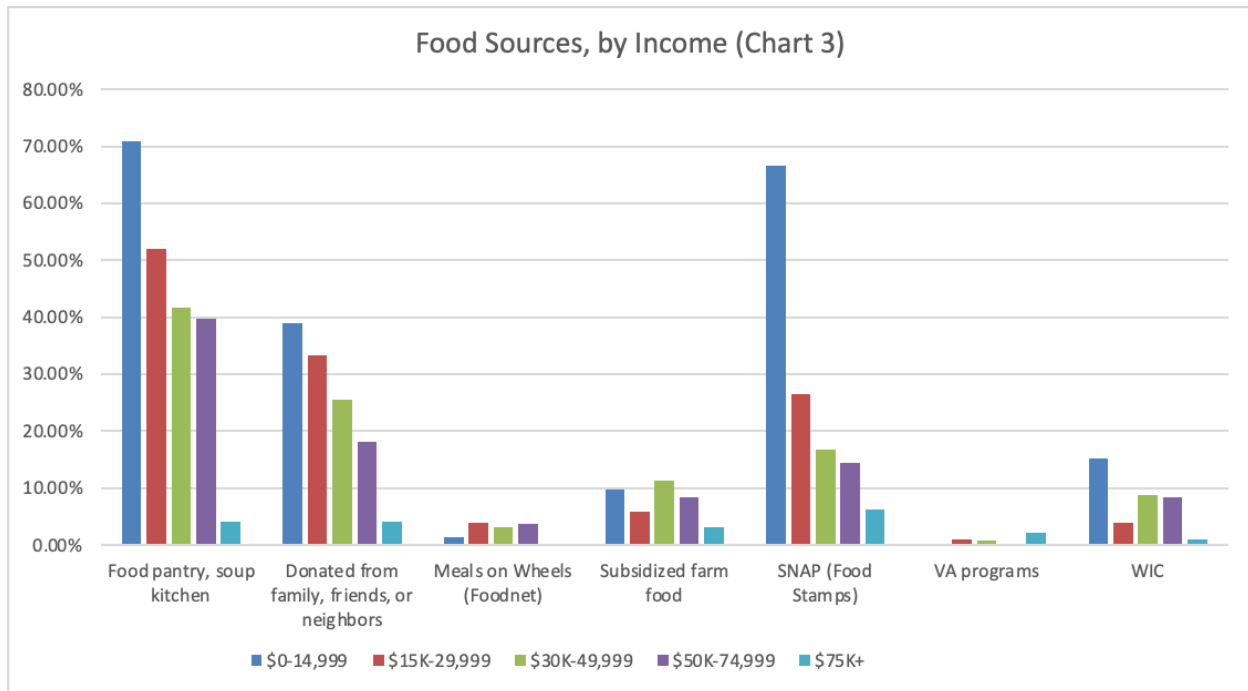
When disaggregated by income, some trends emerge:

- Eating out at restaurants, diners, and coffee shops tracks household income, whereas fast food consumption is comparatively similar across income groups except for the lowest income group (\$0-15K).
- The proportion of households reporting that they garden tends to rise with income level, but foraging/hunting/fishing is relatively even between groups.
- Shopping at warehouse clubs, or using fee-based home delivery services all correlates positively with income level -- i.e. higher income = more likely to use.
- Lower income households are more likely to shop at dollar stores than higher-income households.
- Direct purchases from farmers (e.g. Farmers' Markets, farm stands, CSAs, etc.) are more common amongst higher income households.
- Participation in school food and gas station/convenience store purchases are relatively equal between income groups..
- Unsurprisingly, use of emergency food system resources (e.g. food pantries, soup kitchens), food assistance, and government benefit programs is higher among lower income households than higher income households.

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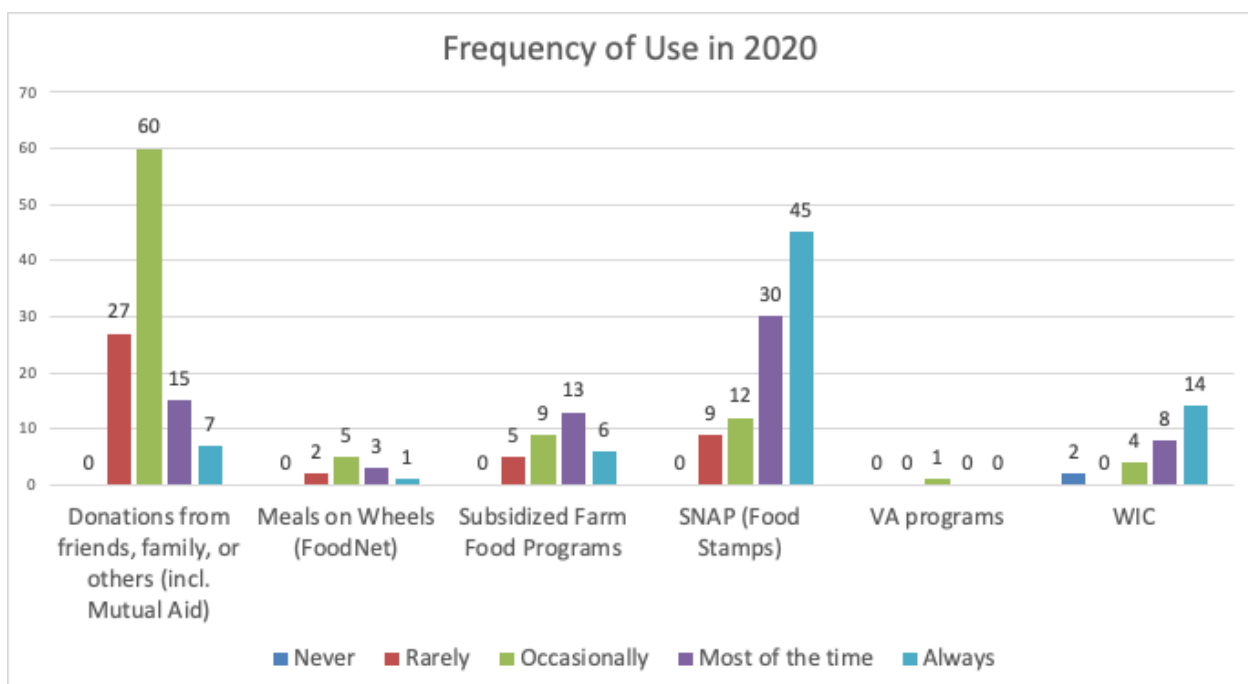
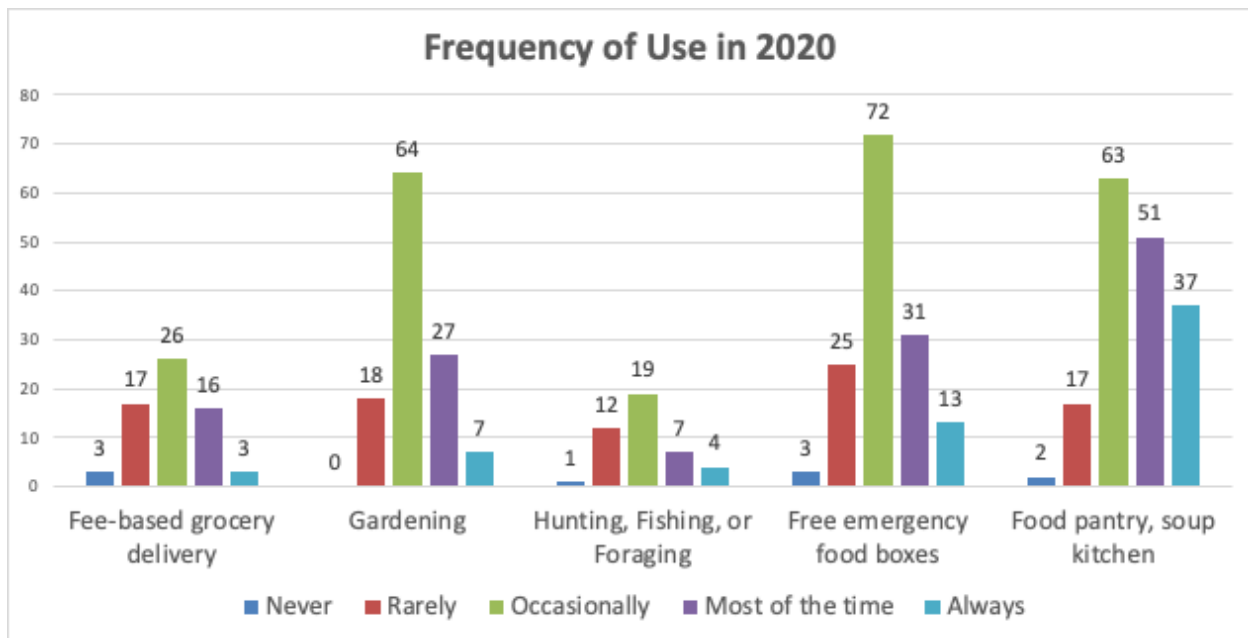


### Food Source, Frequency of Use in 2020 - Aggregated

**Question:** Here again are the food sources you selected earlier. In the past 12 months, how often have you used each source?

The aggregated figures across income levels show increases in use of government benefits, and emergency food assistance on an “occasional” to “always” basis. The difference in use of SNAP (food stamps) compared to other emergency food resources may be related to the intermittent nature and content of free food distributions, compared to the fungibility of money/SNAP.

The Mutual Aid Tompkins “Blue Food Cabinets” are included under the category “Donations from Friends, Family, and Others.” However, there may have been overlap/confusion with the “Free Emergency Food Boxes” category, which refers to emergency food distributions like pop-up food pantries or the food distributions organized by the FTF in mid-2020 to coincide with gaps in school/summer food.

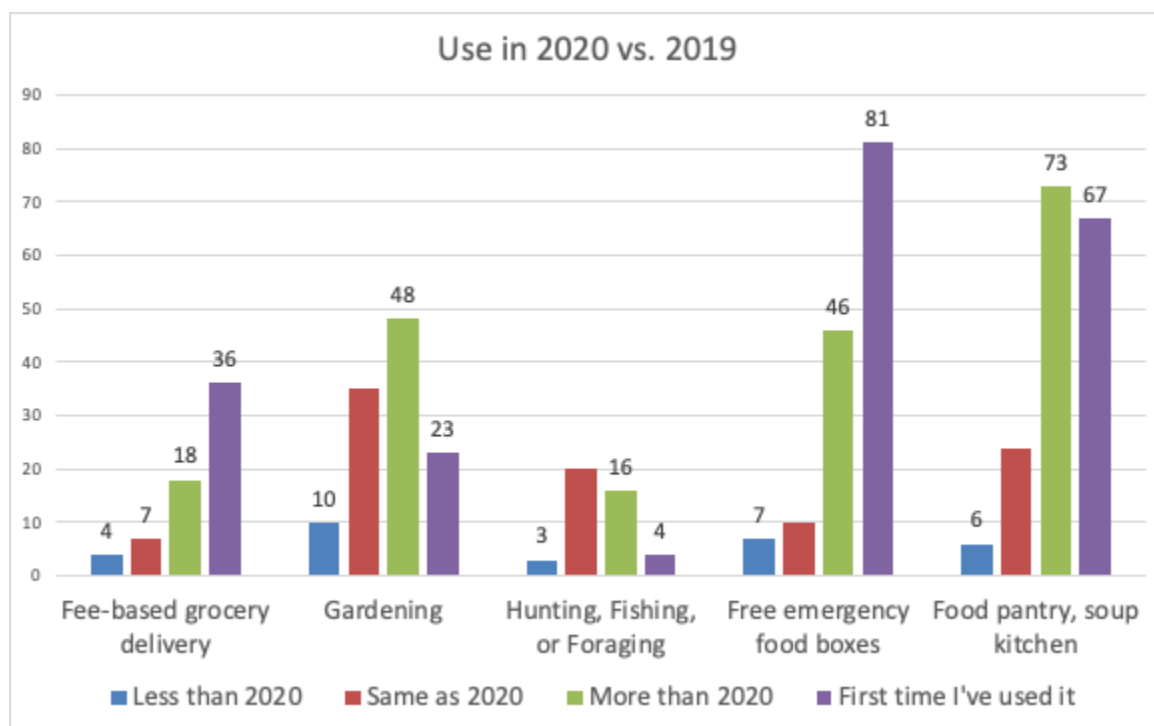


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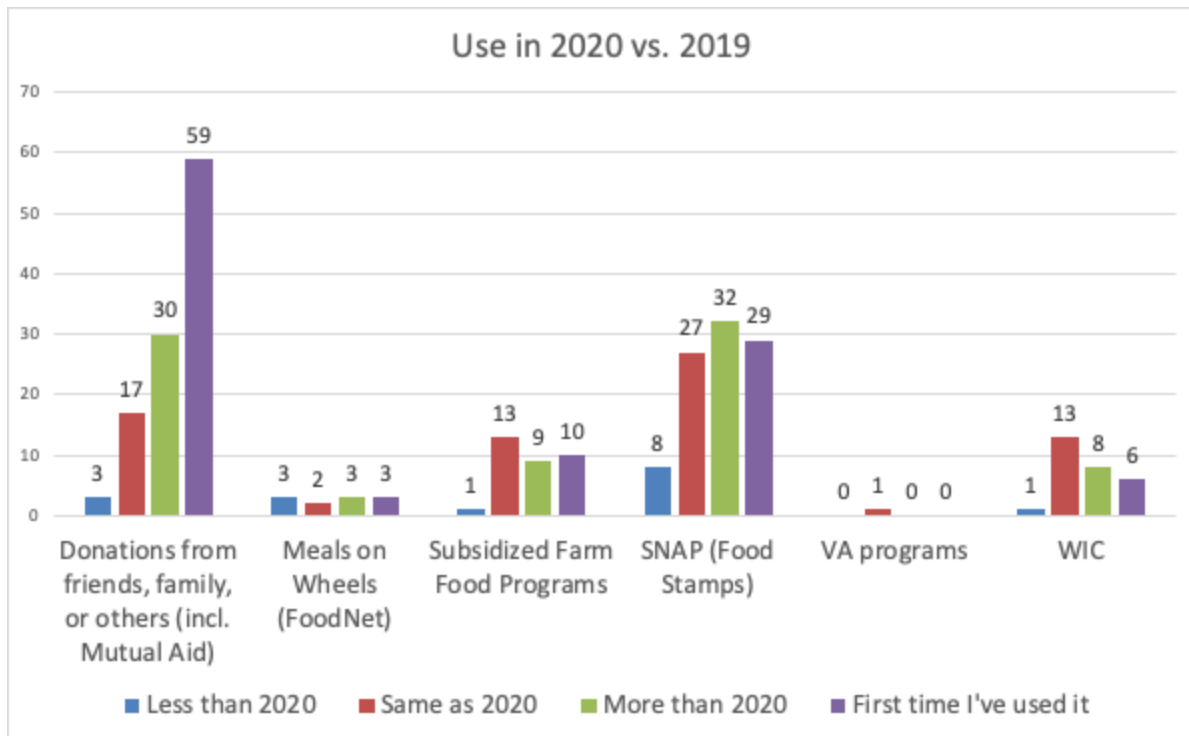
## Frequency of Use in 2020 vs 2019

These data also parallel the many anecdotes nationwide showing that the pandemic has exacerbated the demand for free/subsidized food and caused people new to the emergency food system and government benefits to take advantage of these resources for the first time.

- **Note:** Caution is advised interpreting data for “donations from friends” category as this includes the Mutual Aid Tompkins blue “food sharing cabinets” which was a program started in 2020. This category was also often confused with “free emergency food boxes” category so there may also be some double-counting.

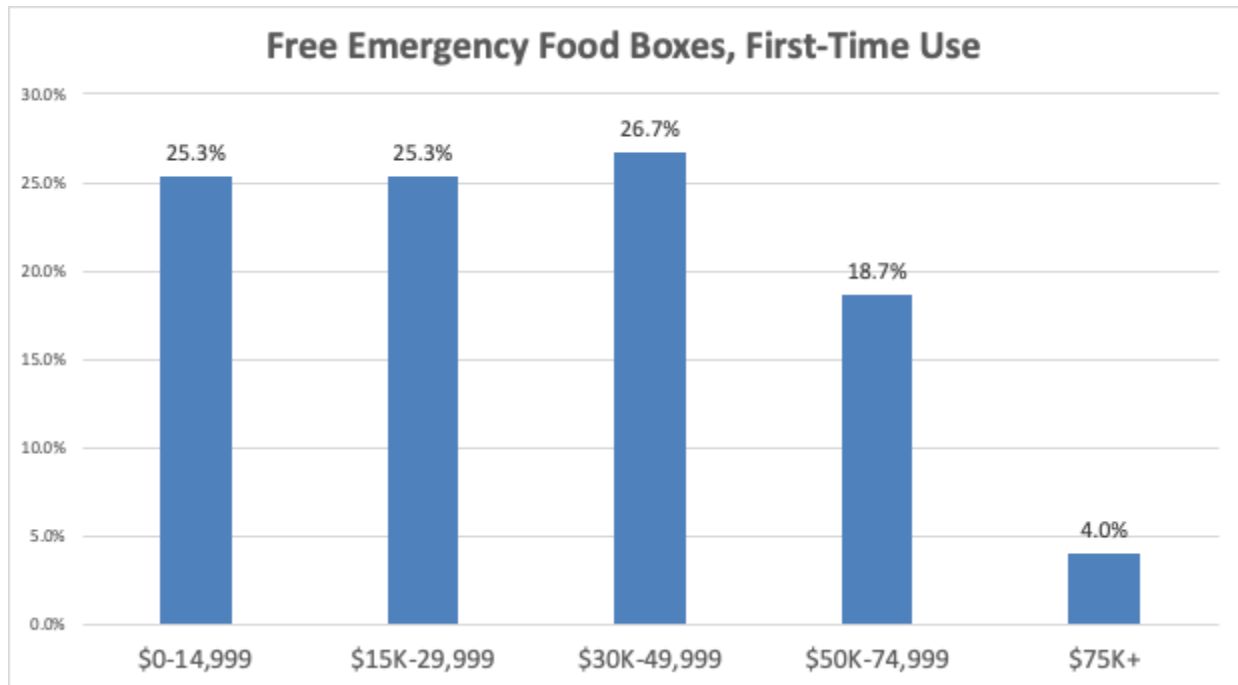


(See next page for more charts)



There was not enough data to disaggregate responses for “first time” users by income for many food source categories; some individuals answered this question but did not provide income data. For example, the survey recorded 29 responses as first-time users of SNAP, but only 7 respondents with “first time” status also provided income data. The one exception was the “Free Emergency Food Boxes” category for which there were 75 entries with income/use data. This may be because this category (meant to include emergency food distributions) was often confused with the Mutual Aid Tompkins “Food Sharing Cabinets.” **The \$75K+ income category only had four responses so should be interpreted with caution.**

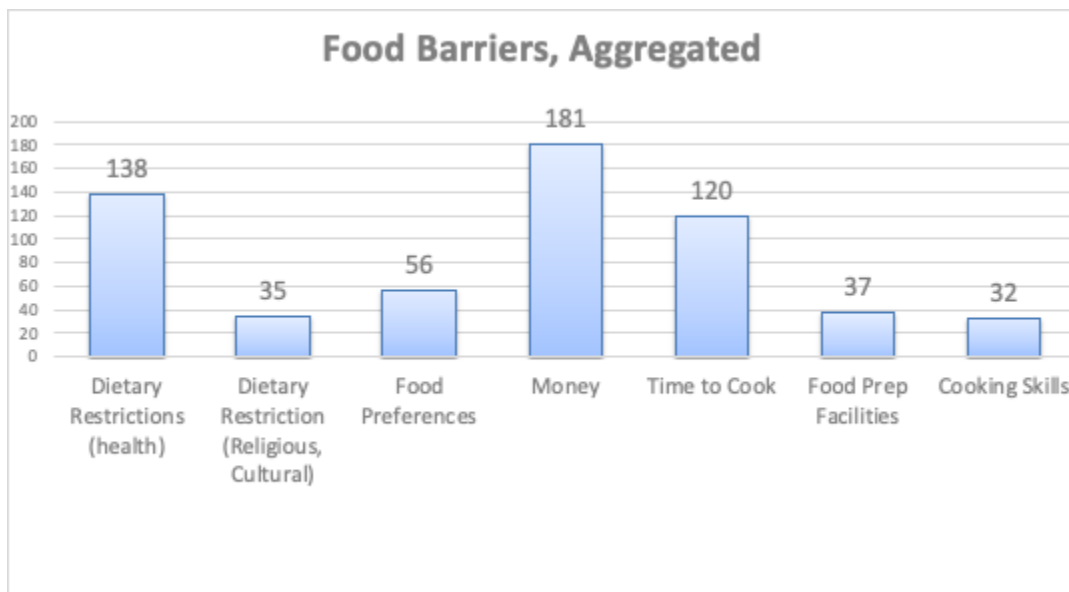
(See next page for chart)



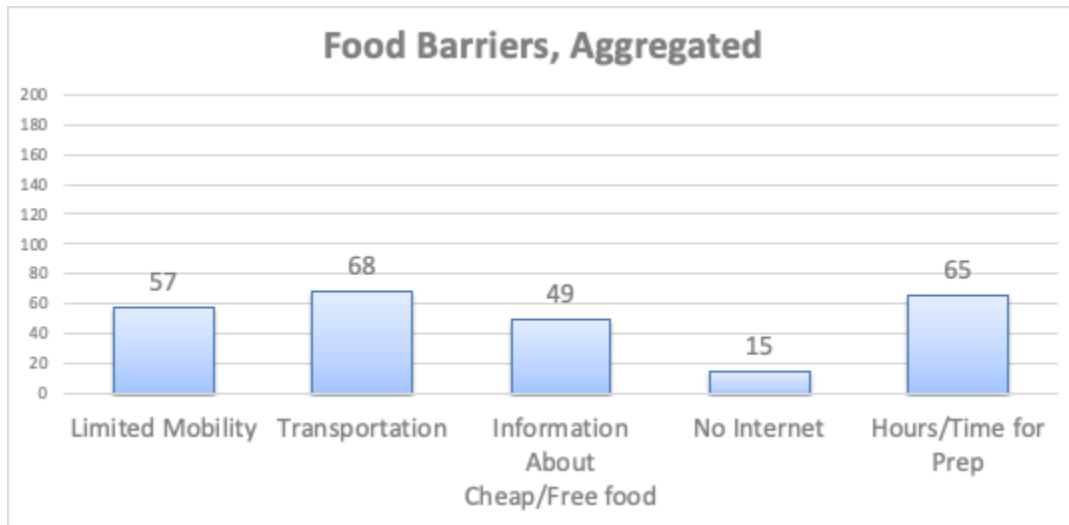
## Barriers to Accessing Food

**Question:** What are your biggest barriers or challenges when it comes to feeding yourself or your family the food you want to eat? (select all that apply)

The chart below shows the aggregated responses of individuals reporting barriers to accessing food. Money was the greatest barrier, followed by dietary restrictions and time to prepare food.



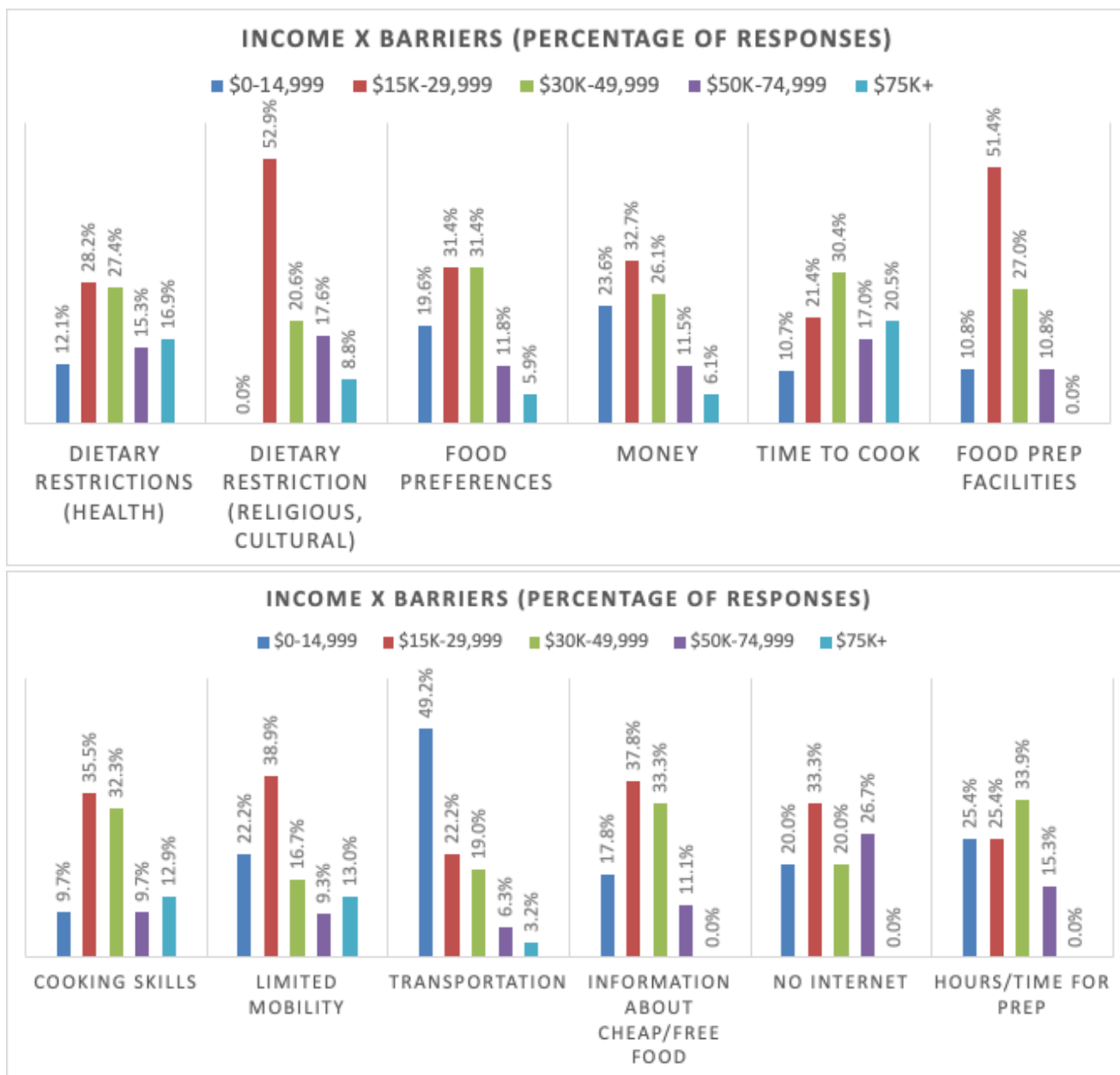
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### Barriers to Food Access, by Income

When disaggregated by income, **food preferences due to health, religious/cultural restriction, or personal preference** are a more notable barrier for households with lower incomes. See the results of a follow-up question to this below. These households may have less disposable income to purchase these foods, or the foods may not be readily accessible/available for purchase. For instance, there are barriers which though not frequently mentioned, disproportionately affect lower income households. One of these is **transportation** (fourth from right). The graph shows that it disproportionately affects households with incomes <\$15,000. **Disability/health related mobility** may also be related to transportation difficulties, and this also seems to affect lower-income household. Lack of cooking skills, paired with . **Food preparation facilities/appliances** are another barrier that affects lower-income households, with the greatest proportion in the \$15-30K income range.

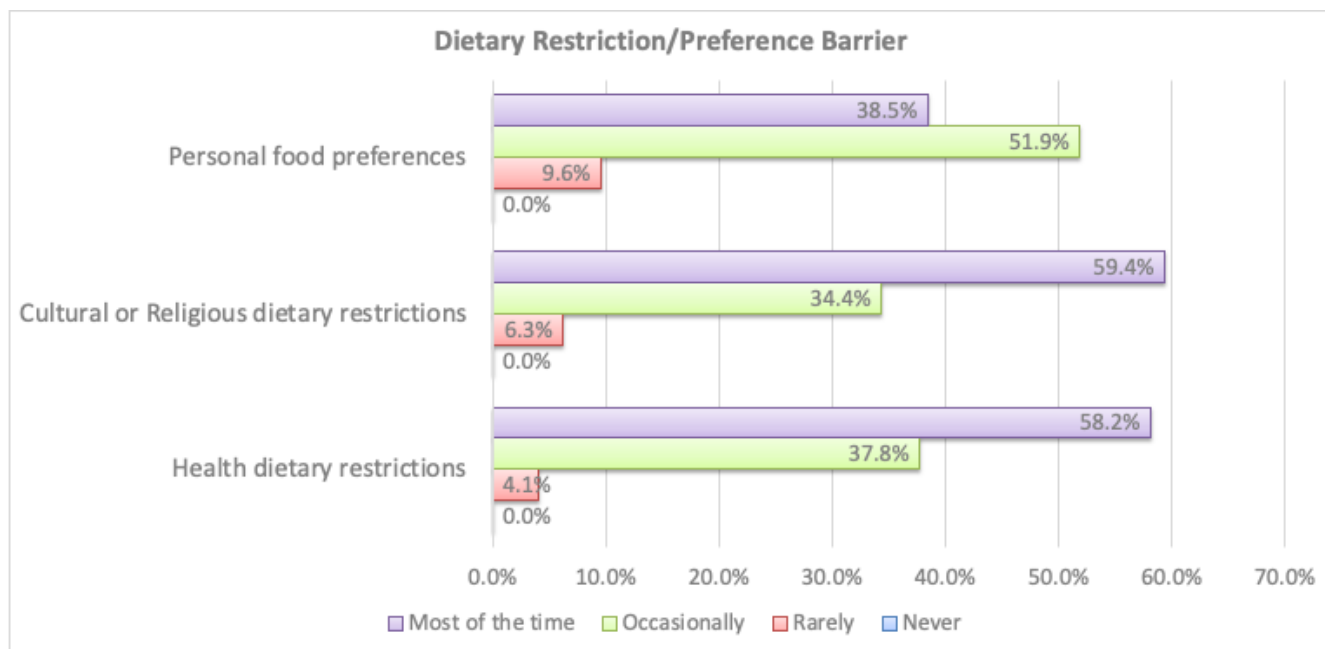
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### Food Barriers - Personal/Religious/Cultural/Health Preference or Restrictions

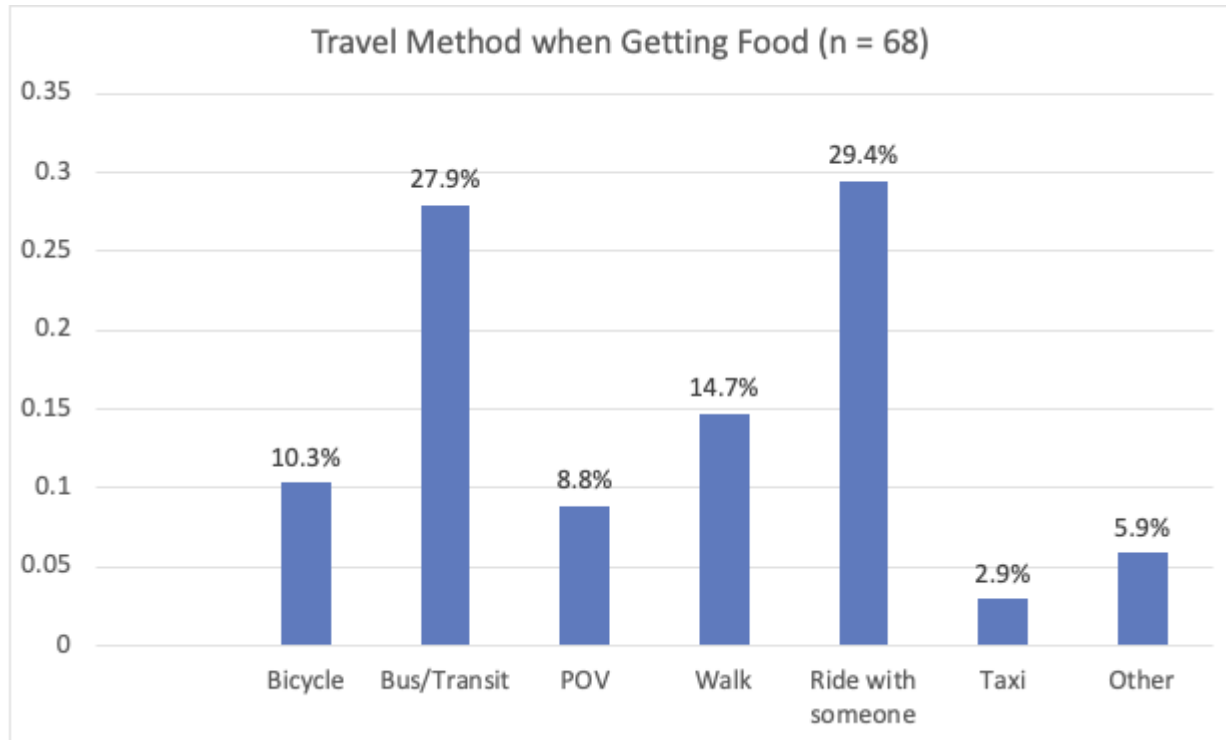
Individuals specifying that personal, religious, cultural, or health restrictions were a barrier to accessing food were asked a follow-up question to understand the difficulty they had meeting their needs. The survey responses indicate that very few people struggle consistently to meet their needs due to this barrier. Those who do are However, personal food preferences are not fully met in comparison to religious-cultural or health restrictions.

(Chart on next page)



## Transportation to Food Sources

Those reporting a transportation barrier to accessing food were asked an additional question to identify how they access their food sources. Bus and sharing a ride with someone else were the most common ways, or walking.



### Responses to the “Other” category included:

- Not driving in inclement weather or when health problems are exacerbated
- Delivery
- A combination of bus and walking
- Not traveling for food at all

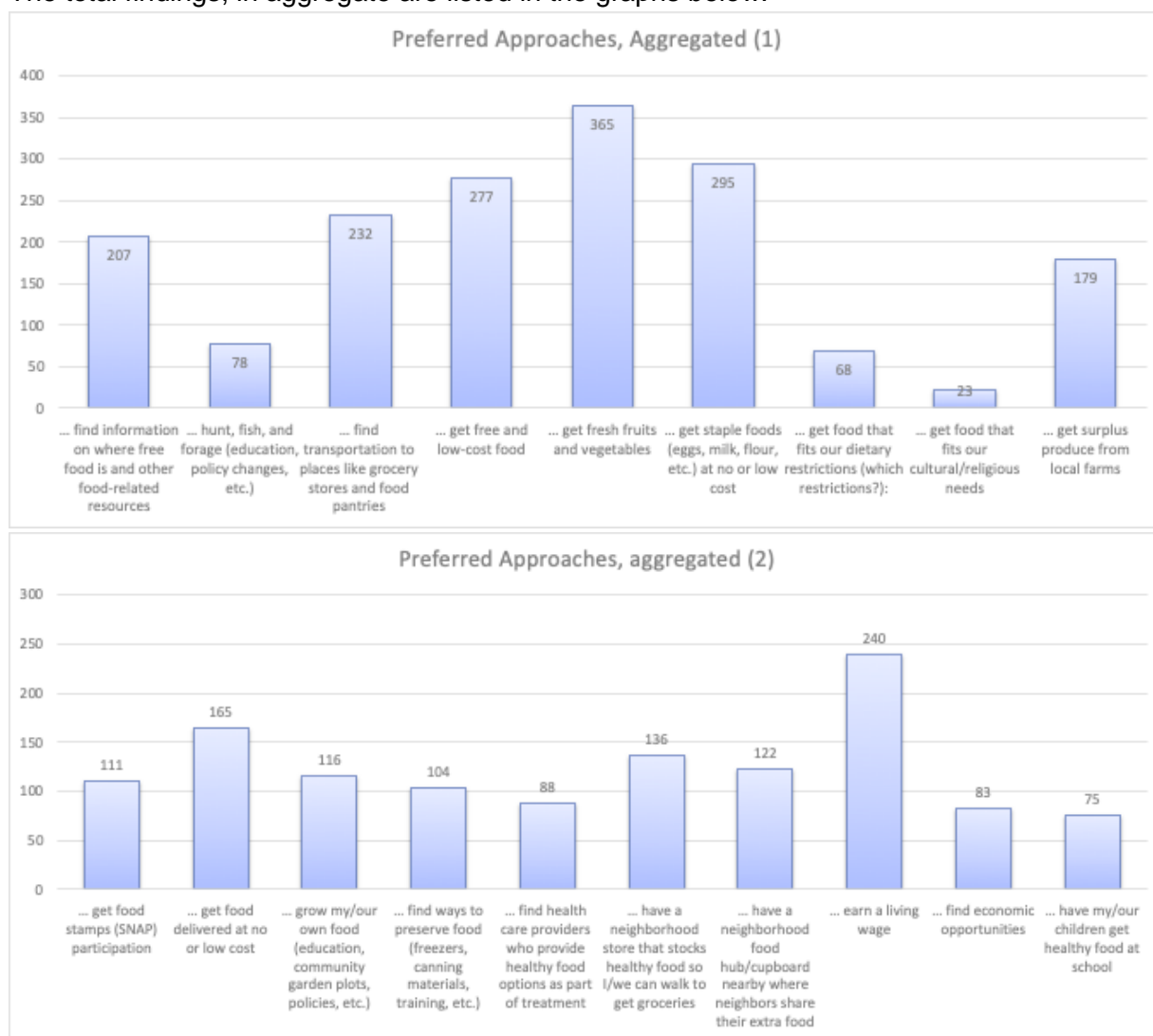
## Preferred Approaches to Resolving Food Insecurity

**Question:** Please select the FIVE top things you think our community should do to make sure everyone has enough nutritious food to eat: Make it easier to...

### In aggregate, the top 5 preferred approaches were:

1. Increasing accessibility of fresh fruits and vegetables
2. Increasing accessibility of staple foods (eggs, milk, flour, etc.) at little or no cost
3. Increasing accessibility of free and low-cost food
4. Making it easier to earn a living wage
5. Making it easier to find transportation to places like grocery stores and food pantries

The total findings, in aggregate are listed in the graphs below.



**For the “get food that fits our dietary restrictions” answer, responders were asked to specify a diet. These included:**

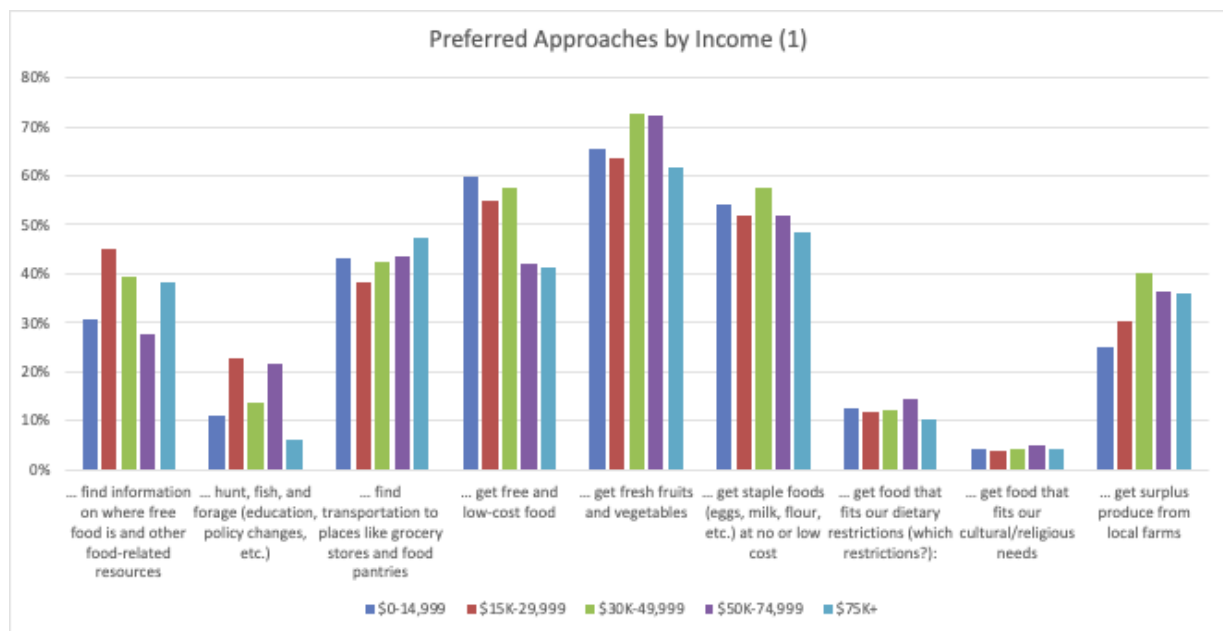
- Medical restrictions (salt, carbohydrate)
- Low carbohydrate
- Gluten free
- Vegetarian
- Vegan
- Lactose-free/non-dairy
- Common allergens (dairy, soy, wheat)
- Less processed
- Anti-inflammatory
- Religious restrictions [not specified]
- Corn free

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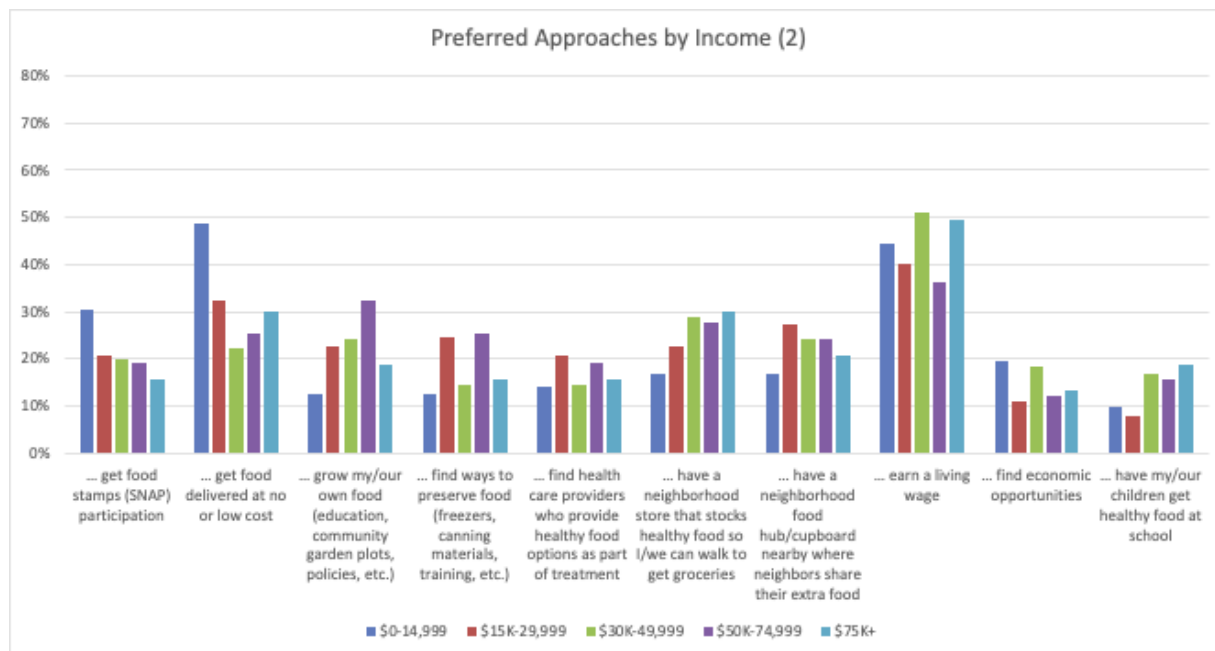
## Preferred Approaches to Resolving Food Insecurity, by income

When **disaggregated by income**, the five priorities listed above in the aggregate remain clear favorites. However, three additional options emerge as clear preferences from lower-income responses to the survey, compared to higher income responders:

- **Finding free and low-cost food** is a higher priority for households with incomes less than 50K than it is for households greater than 50K.
- **Food delivery at little to no cost** is a major priority for low-income households, particularly at the lowest band of income (\$0-15K).
- **Making SNAP participation easier** is a high priority for the lowest income households (\$0-15K).



(more charts, next page)



### Other Ways to Increase Food Access

Finally, responders were also given the option to provide written answers to resolving food insecurity/access throughout the Tompkins County community. Their answers appear **verbatim** below:

- Live in rural pods
- Expose the scarcity model for the lie it is
- Make welfare people get a job
- Direct bus service to market
- Deal with food waste from grocery stores, etc. that just get thrown away... that food can be useful to someone. Hunting education is very much needed in this community as well. Too many people are forced to forage without the proper knowledge of how to safely and humanely do so.
- Find ways to destigmatize asking for food assistance
- Make it easy to donate food for those in need
- I don't personally have a substantial issue getting food, but I'd be totally willing to drop food off at some sort of "leave what you can, take what you need" location if that is an option
- MORE DAYCARES THAT WORK WITH DSS SO KIDS SRENT ON WAITING LISTS UNTIL TGEY MAKE IT TO SCHOOL INSTEAD'