



tompkins food future

Introduction

The following report summarizes results from the Tompkins Food Future Community Survey distributed from late January 2021 to March 15th, 2021. Results do not constitute a representative sample of the population, but reflect information submitted by respondents. 479 people fully completed the survey and 113 partially completed it for a sum of 592 respondents. The community survey enabled Tompkins County residents to express their opinions and will be used to inform the Tompkins County Community Food System Plan.

Demographics

Demographic data was collected as part of the survey. The tables below highlight respondents by place of residence, race, and income. The percentage of respondents is then compared to census data from the American Community Survey (ACS) to show whether the breakdown of respondents approximates the breakdown of residents in the county.

Table 1: Respondents by Place of Residence (n = 470)

Municipality	Survey Respondents	Census Data (2019)
City of Ithaca	34.0%	29.8%
Town of Ithaca	10.9%	19.3%
Town and Village of Dryden	4.7%	16.2%
Village of Freeville	1.3%	0.4%
Town of Caroline	11.7%	3.2%
Town of Newfield	6.0%	5.1%
Town of Enfield	4.7%	3.4%
Town and Village of Groton	1.5%	7.9%
Town of Ulysses	2.1%	4.8%

Town of Danby	9.6%	3.3%
Village of Trumansburg	3.8%	1.6%
Village of Cayuga Heights	1.3%	3.6%
Town and Village of Lansing	4.7%	14.6%
Other	3.8%	N/A

In terms of location, survey respondents from the City of Ithaca, Town of Caroline, and Town of Danby are significantly overrepresented as compared to the census data. On the other side, survey respondents from the Town of Ithaca, Town and Village of Dryden, Town and Village of Groton, and Town and Village of Lansing are significantly underrepresented as compared to the census data. Respondents from all other municipalities are slightly over- or under-represented as compared to the census data but the numbers are relatively close.

Table 2: Respondents by Race/Ethnicity (n = 481)

Race/Ethnicity	Survey Respondents	Census Data (2019)
White	79.8%	83.9%
Black or African American	1.9%	5.4%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.2%	1.2%
Asian ¹	5.4%	11.8%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.3%
Some Other Race	8.7%	2.1%
Hispanic or Latino (of any origin)	2.9%	5.2%

¹The survey questionnaire broke down the Asian category into East Asian, Southeast Asian, and South Asian. These three sub-categories were combined for this table into the Asian category.

The survey data show the racial and ethnic breakdown of respondents is relatively similar to the overall demographics of the county for those identifying as white and American Indian or Alaska Native. Those identifying as some other race are overrepresented, however this could be due to respondents filling out the other category even though their racial/ethnic identity could be considered part of another category. Those identifying as Black or African American, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or Hispanic or Latino (of any origin) are undercounted in the survey results as compared to census data.

Table 3: Respondents by Income (n = 463)

Household Income	Survey Respondents	Census Data (2019)
Less than \$20,000	7.1%	22.2% ¹
\$20,000 - \$34,999	10.4%	9.2% ²
\$35,000 - \$49,999	12.7%	10.9%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	23.3%	19.0%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	12.1%	11.9%
Over \$100,000	23.3%	27.5%
Prefer not to respond	11.0%	N/A

¹Census data breakdown is \$24,999 or less. ²Census data breakdown is \$24,999 - \$34,999

From the data given by survey respondents who chose to answer the question about their income, it appears those with incomes less than \$20,000 were undercounted in the survey and those with incomes over \$100,000 were overcounted. The middle income categories between \$20,000 and \$100,000 were relatively similar to the income data from the census. Additionally, 11% of respondents chose not to answer the question, which could skew the comparisons presented above.

Description of Role in the Food System

Food Issues Important to Our Community

The survey questionnaire asked respondents which food issues were most important to them, what they would like to see more of, and what should be prioritized in the eventual plan. Qualitative responses (i.e. open-ended “other” responses) were filtered and distilled into main ideas and themes.

The survey questionnaire asked respondents to select up to five food issues most important to them from a predetermined list. Resulting responses to this question are displayed in Table 4 below. Over 50% of respondents selected making sure everyone has enough food/reducing food insecurity, the availability of healthy/affordable/culturally appropriate food, and supporting farm and food business in our local economy as food issues most important to them. A small percentage of respondents (4.4%) also selected “other” to provide a food issue important to them that was not listed.

Table 4: Food Issues Most Important to Members of our Community (n = 592)

Issue	Percent of Respondents
Making sure everyone has enough food/reducing food insecurity	59.0%
Availability of healthy/affordable/culturally appropriate food	53.0%
Supporting farm and food business in our local economy	50.3%
Availability of local/organic food	46.6%
Ensuring fair treatment for food producers and workers	45.3%
Mitigating climate change	39.0%
Ensuring health and nutrition at schools and other institutional settings (e.g. hospitals, nursing homes, correctional facilities)	35.0%
Reducing racial/ethnic disparities across the food system	34.5%
Minimizing food waste	32.6%
Building local food processing and distribution infrastructure	19.9%
Having enough money to buy food	19.1%
Knowing how/having space to grow my own food	13.3%
Knowing how/having means to cook my own food	10.0%
Other	4.4%

Food **access and security** is the most important issue to members of our community with 59% of respondents stating making sure everyone has enough food/reducing food insecurity and 53% of respondents stating availability of healthy/affordable/culturally appropriate food as being important to them. More specifically, respondents stated that it was important to have affordable and healthy food options near low income neighborhoods, increase rural food access, increase the availability of WIC/SNAP authorized retailers, and increase the number of Tompkins County food pantries and expand their services.

Respondents also emphasized the importance of the **physical environment and climate change** with 39% of respondents selecting mitigating climate change as an issue important to them.

Multiple respondents expressed that making the food system climate resilient was an important issue alongside ensuring access to safe and healthy water and the protection of water bodies. Respondents also expressed concern about environmental contamination of the soil and want to ensure that should residents decide to grow their own food there is access to testing for lead and other soil contaminants.

In terms of **food production**, 50.3% of respondents said supporting farm and food business in our local economy was important to them. Respondents also stated they wanted to promote permaculture and regenerative farming alongside supporting ranchers and small environmentally friendly farmers. It was also important to 13.3% of respondents to know how to or have the means to grow their own food. This knowledge and means includes access to land to grow food.

Although only 32.6% of respondents said minimizing **food waste** was an important issue, many of the open-ended other responses referenced food waste. Respondents advocated for barring non-recyclable food packaging and eliminating or reducing plastic packaging. Related to restaurants, grocery stores, and institutions, respondents wanted to ensure these institutions and businesses were not throwing away good food because it is unsellable.

Slightly more than one-third of respondents (35%) said ensuring health and nutrition at schools and other institutional settings was important to them. This **education** aspect of the food system also arose in the other responses related to both the nutritional value of food in schools and educating the community about topics such as food waste and healthy food. Respondents wanted to ensure schools were providing healthy food and educate young people about healthy eating choices.

Other issues important to respondents are the availability of **local/organic food**, having a means to **share food in the community**, **food safety**, **animal welfare**, food system **emergency preparedness**, and **reducing racial and ethnic disparities** in the food system.

Respondents were also asked what they would like to see more of in the community. The questionnaire provided a predetermined list and respondents were able to pick up to five items from the list, one of which could be “other” from which respondents could input their own item. Table 6 summarizes the responses.

Table 5: I would like to see more _____ in my community (n = 592)

Issue	Percent of Respondents
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Community Gardens	38.2%
School Gardens	36.8%
Urban Farms and Gardens	32.8%
Co-ops (community owned businesses)	29.7%
Locally Owned Food Business and Restaurants	28.2%
Garden Education	25.3%
Composting Programs	23.0%
Shared Community Kitchens	21.8%
Food Banks and Pantries	21.3%
Farms	19.3%
CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture)	17.9%
Farmer's Markets	16.9%
Pop-up Markets and Pantries	16.6%
Mobile Food Trucks	16.2%
Food Advocacy Organizations	14.9%
Grocery Stores	10.1%
Other	6.9%

The top item community members would like to see more of in the community is **gardens**, whether they be community gardens, school gardens, or urban farms and gardens. Respondents also want a community greenhouse to facilitate an extended growing season, planting fruits and vegetables in public spaces for everyone to harvest, and general shared community growing spaces.

Respondents were also concerned with **shared community food spaces** such as shared community kitchens (21.8% of respondents wanted to see more in the community). Respondents who answered “other” also emphasized community food spaces such as a shared community animal processor/butcher and community freezer lockers and walk-in coolers alongside community gardens.

Other areas brought up by respondents include an increased focus on **reducing food waste**, **improved distribution networks** for food, and more options for **CSAs to have single person subscriptions**.

After answering questions about food issues most important to them and what they would like to see more of, respondents were then asked to prioritize potential actions from a predetermined list on a scale of 1 to 10. Tables 6 and 7 summarize responses about which actions should be prioritized.

Table 6: What Should be Prioritized, top 5 Actions (n = 409)

Rank	Increase Access to Healthy Food	Increase Local Food Production	Protect Natural Resources	Foster Social Equity	Improve Farm Viability
1	25.4%	25.2%	22.5%	6.8%	5.1%
2	16.6%	19.3%	12.7%	12.0%	20.5%
3	13.9%	15.2%	20.3%	9.3%	16.4%
4	22.0%	10.5%	15.4%	8.6%	13.4%
5	10.3%	8.3%	13.4%	8.3%	10.0%
6	8.1%	7.8%	6.1%	22.2%	12.5%
7	2.4%	6.1%	5.6%	12.5%	12.5%
8	1.0%	6.1%	2.7%	10.5%	6.4%
9	0.2%	1.5%	1.2%	9.0%	2.9%
10	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	0.2%

Table 7: What Should be Prioritized, bottom 5 Actions (n = 409)

Rank	Emergency Preparedness	Grow Regional Economy	Reduce Food Waste	Support Community Health and Wellness	Other
1	4.4%	4.2%	3.2%	1.5%	1.7%
2	3.2%	5.6%	6.1%	3.4%	0.5%
3	3.9%	7.6%	8.3%	4.9%	0.2%
4	4.4%	8.8%	8.6%	8.3%	0.0%
5	8.6%	9.3%	23.7%	7.8%	0.2%

6	9.0%	9.5%	18.3%	6.4%	0.0%
7	8.3%	27.6%	13.4%	11.0%	0.5%
8	10.5%	15.9%	11.0%	35.2%	0.7%
9	46.5%	11.0%	6.1%	20.0%	1.5%
10	1.2%	0.5%	1.2%	1.5%	94.6%

The **highest priority actions** ranked by respondents were increasing access to healthy food, increasing local food production, and protecting natural resources. 25.4%, 25.2%, and 22.5% of respondents considered those actions their first priority, respectively. There was a steep drop-off from the highest priority actions among respondents, making it difficult to evaluate the priority level of actions other than those three. In terms of the highest percentage of respondents ranking an action as their highest priority, fostering social equity and improving farm viability were the next highest actions.

Other responses were similar to responses to previous questions. There was a continued emphasis by respondents on **community networks** with multiple respondents writing as a priority neighbors helping neighbors when it comes to food and a possible food sharing network matching private citizens who have extra food with families in need to give food to. Responses also continued to prioritize **minimizing food waste, increasing food access, emergency preparedness, and local food production.**

Respondents were also asked the question: *within the next 10 years, what is one hope you have for the Tompkins County food system? (or, one hope for food in TC).* Responses to this question reflected many of the responses above about what is important to respondents, things they would like to see in the community, and actions they prioritize. Respondents hope that in the next ten years the food system can help reduce climate change, food security is lessened, food access is increased, healthy and organic food is more available and affordable, food waste is reduced, there is better access to locally grown food, there are more community gardens, that local farmers are able to sell more food in grocery stores, and that there is more racial/cultural diversity among producers and increased land access for people of color.

Food Access and Security

The community survey also asked specific questions about food access and security such as the primary ways individuals and their households got food, reasons why people do not always have the food they want, and what good food is to them.

Respondents were asked to select up to five ways they primarily get food from a predetermined list. Nearly all respondents (93.4%) selected the **grocery store** as one of their primary ways of getting food which is to be expected. There appears to be strong support for **farmer's markets/farm stands** and **community supported agriculture (CSA)** with 36.7% and 25.3% of respondents selecting these two choices as a primary way they get food, respectively. Slightly under half of respondents (44.3%) said they **grow their own food** as a primary way they get food. This is somewhat surprising as only 4.6% of respondents identified as farmers, however 48% respondents identified as a home or community gardener.

Table 8: PRIMARY ways respondents get food (n = 592)

Means of Getting Food	Percent
Grocery Store	93.4%
Grow Your Own	44.3%
Farmer's Market or Farm Stand	36.7%
Restaurant or Diner	33.8%
Community Support Agriculture	25.2%
Supercenter	19.6%
Warehouse Club	13.2%
Specialty Food Store	11.7%
Meal or Grocery Home Delivery	9.3%
Food Pantry or Food Distribution Program	8.6%
Other	8.1%
Fast Food Restaurant	6.8%
Hunting/Fishing/Foraging	6.8%
Dollar Store	4.2%
Cafeteria	3.4%
Gas Station or Convenience Store	1.7%

Not everyone is able to have the food they want. Respondents were asked in the questionnaire to select all reasons that applied to them as to why they may not have the food they want. **Dietary restrictions** were the top reason people did not have the food they want at 21.1% of respondents, with **not enough time for cooking or shopping** having the second highest number of respondents

at 20.6%. Somewhat concerningly, the third highest reason for respondents not having the food they want is **not having enough money for food**, with 11% of respondents identifying that as the reason they do not have the food they want. Other reasons respondents listed for not having the food they want is that they **only buy what is available locally, fear of grocery shopping during the pandemic, and lack of energy or knowledge to cook the food they want.**

Table 9: Reasons WHY people may not have the food they WANT (n = 592)

Reason	Percent
Dietary restrictions	21.1%
Not enough time for cooking or shopping	20.6%
Not enough money for food	11.0%
Food want to eat is not available	10.5%
Other	8.3%
Do not know how to cook the food	3.2%
Lack of transportation	3.2%
Mobility issues from personal disability or health issues	2.7%
Food doesn't fit religious or cultural needs	1.9%
Lack of food preparation facilities/appliances	1.9%
Time of food pick-up is an issue	1.7%
Lack of information about where to get free/low-cost/subsidized food	0.8%
Lack of internet sign up for food program	0.2%

The phrase “good food” means different things to different people, and respondents were asked to select from a list of phrases what good food is to them. There were quite a few statements with high percentages of respondents stating these statements meant “good food” to them, with **nutritious/healthy** (87.2%) and **enjoyable to eat** (83.1%) being the top two phrases. Perhaps surprisingly, only 57.4% of respondents stated good food was affordable, 45.8% of respondents stated good food was conveniently accessed, and 17.9% of respondents stated good food was quickly accessed. Other responses were quite variable.

Table 10: Good Food Is... (n = 592)

What Good Food Is	Percent
Nutritious/Healthy	87.2%
Enjoyable to eat	83.1%
Is safe to eat	78.0%
Grown in environmentally sustainable ways	71.8%
From farms that treat their workers fairly	71.5%
From farms that treat their animals humanely	70.8%
From local farms	70.1%
Shared with my family and friends	64.2%
Affordable	57.4%
Conveniently accessed	45.8%
Part of my cultural heritage	29.1%
Quickly accessed	17.9%
Other	10.8%

Food Waste

Respondents were also asked a series of questions about food waste, including reasons they threw food in the trash, whether they compost, and if they would participate in a curbside pickup food scrap program.

Figure 1 shows that 72.3% of respondents rarely throw food away or only throw food away a few times per week. Respondents were also asked to select the reasons they threw food in the trash or compost from a predetermined list. The most common reason for throwing food in the trash or compost was **leftovers sitting too long in the fridge** with 65.7% of respondents stating this as a reason (see Figure 2). **Having too much food and not being able to eat it before it spoiled** (22.7%) and the **food quality being questionable** (17.1%) were the next most common reasons for respondents to throw food in the trash or compost.

Figure 1: Respondents throwing away food in the past 30 days (n = 534)

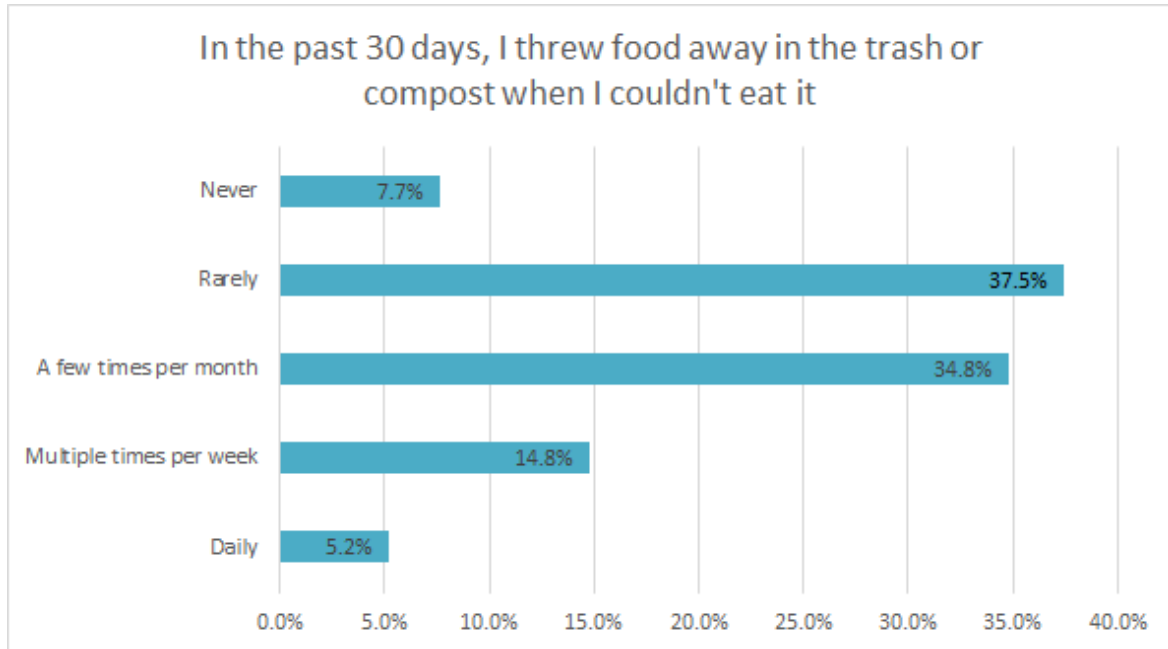
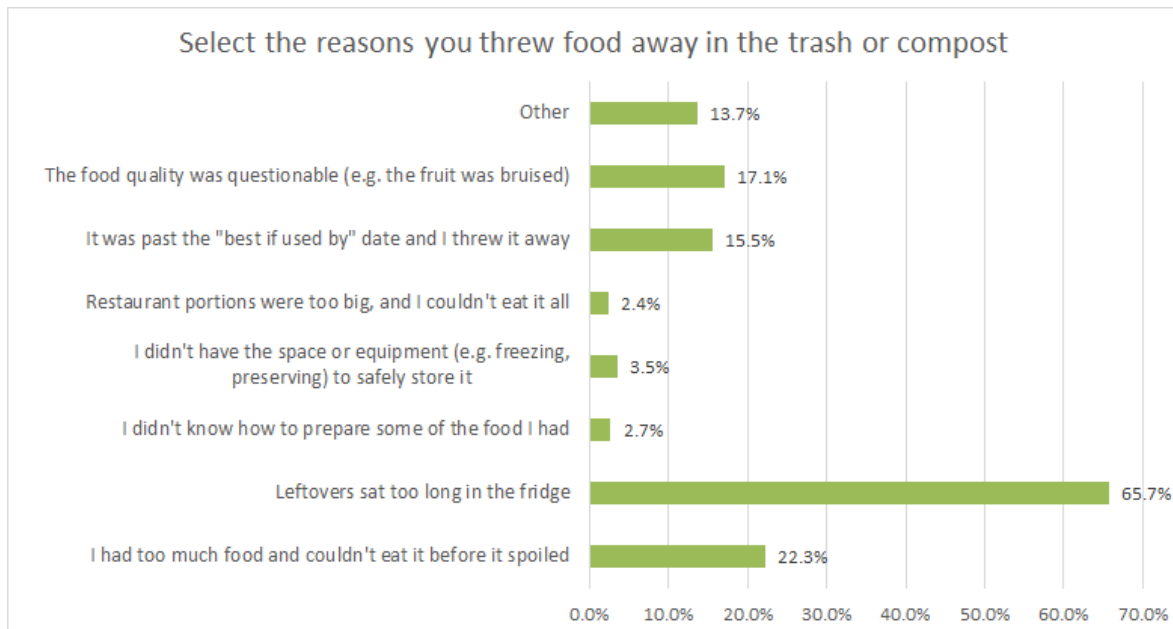


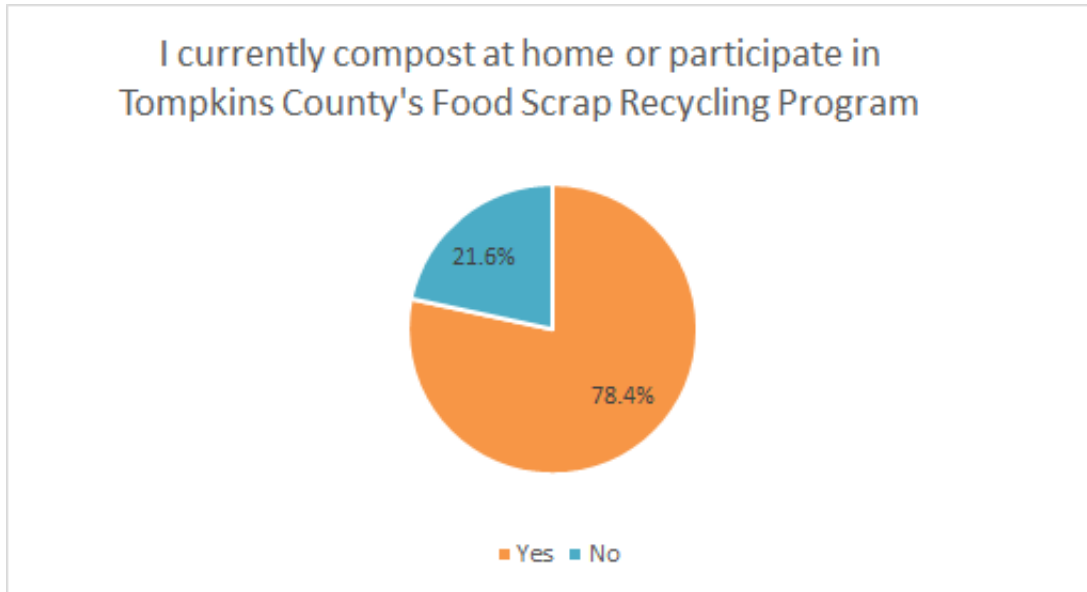
Figure 2: Reasons respondents threw food in the trash or compost (n = 592)



Specific to composting, respondents were asked whether they compost and if they would participate in a curbside pickup program for food scraps. 78.4% of respondents either compost at home or participate in Tompkins County's Food Scrap Recycling Program (see Figure 3). Of the 21.6% who said they did not compost or participate in the program, respondents provided a variety of reasons as to why they did not do either activity. These included **concerns about**

bringing pests into the home, difficulty in accessing drop-off sites, lack of information about the program, and a belief that it is not worthwhile due to the amount generated.

Figure 3: Participation in composting (n = 532)



Respondents were also asked whether they would participate if Tompkins County were to offer a curbside pick-up for food scraps. 25.7% of respondents said yes even if there was a small fee, 35.6% of respondents said yes if the program was free, and 38.7% of respondents said no. Overall, if the program was free, 61.3% of respondents would participate (assuming those who would participate even if there was a small fee would also participate if the program was free).

Figure 4: Potential Tompkins County food scraps curbside pick-up program (n = 514)

