

FOOD → RESCUE

IN SOUTHERN MINNESOTA



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INTRODUCTION

At the peak of COVID-19, the wastefulness of food systems was put on display for the public, with supply chain disruptions that were too big to ignore and ended up in local and national headlines. For many across the country, this was the first time they became aware of the waste in national food systems. However well before this point, food access organizations across the country were capturing impressive amounts of extra food being wasted along the supply chain. Local food access partners in southern Minnesota were already receiving rescued food from manufacturers, trucking companies, grocery stores, and distribution centers. This extra food has been playing an increasingly important role in how these organizations meet the needs of their community with increasing costs and more clients than ever before.

During their daily operations, these organizations were receiving calls for thousands of pounds of chicken, bananas, squash, chips, cheese, and even salad dressing. Despite the continual nature of this excess food, the region still felt under-prepared to manage this food and distribute it to communities in need. Arising from this need, a planning process was suggested to document how food rescue was currently working in the region and what would help individual partners and the regional ecosystem better capture this food and meet the needs of the community.

For this plan, food rescue and rescuable food are defined as “food that is still edible but is otherwise going to be composted or landfilled”. This could be leftovers from a restaurant, food that is unsold at grocery stores, food that has been denied delivery by a food distributor, unharvested items from a local farmer, or extra raw products from a food manufacturer.



OUTREACH PROCESS

With this planning process, RNDC wanted to reach a wide range of food access organizations across south central Minnesota to accurately represent the food access and food rescue landscape of the region. With the existing connections with Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) Coordinators, RNDC developed a survey and began contacting more than 40 food access organizations across the region.

Over four months, in-person interviews were conducted with 27 food access organizations across the region. These in-person interviews allowed staff to see their space, get a feel for their community, and build meaningful connections with their staff and volunteers. The interview process consisted of 17 questions that addressed topics such as where these organizations were currently getting food from, if they were already participating in food rescue, how that experience had been working, what would make it easier for them to participate in food rescue, and what kinds of food they would like to receive.



Food Access Partners Interviewed

Feeding Our Communities Partners

Salvation Army Montgomery Food Shelf

Second Harvest Heartland

Channel One

VINE

Springfield Area Food Shelf

Waseca Area Food Shelf

Lutheran Social Services - Mankato

Watsonwan County Food Shelf

**Emergency Community Help Organization
(ECHO)**

Henderson Food Distribution

Sibley County Food Shelf

Area Food Shelf of New Richland

Faribault County Food Shelf

Le Sueur Food Shelf

Le Center Food Shelf

Campus Cupboard Food Shelf

Butterfield Food Pantry

Heavens Table

Grace Lutheran

Wells Area Food Shelf

LSS - New Ulm/Southwest

St. Peter Area Food Shelf

St. Peter Children's Weekend Food Program

South Central Minnesota Food Recovery

UMN Extension - Blue Earth County

New Ulm Food Shelf

CURRENT REACH AND IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONS INTERVIEWED

Food access organizations across the region come in many shapes and sizes as they seek to match the needs of their communities with the capacity of their staff, volunteers, and funding sources. As such, each organization measures its impact and reach in different manners. Below are examples of how each organization measures its impact. These numbers not only reflect the impressive impact already being had in the region but also the large and increasing need the communities are experiencing.

1,000 Youth Weekly

137 Households Monthly

150 Households Monthly

400 Households Monthly

436 Households Monthly

2.4 million lbs. of food last year

247 Individuals monthly

2,500 Households last year

161 Households Monthly

85 Families Monthly

100 Families Monthly

262 Households last year

400 Households Monthly

300 Families Monthly

1000 Meals per month

140 households weekly

120 Households Monthly



INCREASING NEEDS

As RNDC conducted outreach to food access partners across the region it became clear that there is an increasing need for food and funding for rural food shelves and food access organizations. Apart from supply chain issues of COVID-19, food price inflation has continued, making food costs high for community members and food shelves alike. Across the board, the organizations we interviewed shared that their costs for food have increased between 10 - 20% since the pandemic and have shown no signs of going down. This has occurred at the same time as funding for households through SNAP and EBT has dropped back to pre-pandemic levels leaving many households in a difficult place. These stories from organizations we interviewed are backed up by statewide data collected by Hunger Solutions. In their 2023 Food Shelf Visits Report they found that Minnesotans made 7.5 million visits to food shelves in 2023, representing an increase of 1.8 million visits from the past year. They too pointed out that this increase was correlated with food price inflation and the decrease in support for households dropping starkly over the past few years. Examples of support that was lost included, stimulus payments, child tax credits, expanded unemployment insurance, the end of the eviction moratorium, and a return to pre-pandemic EBT and SNAP funds.

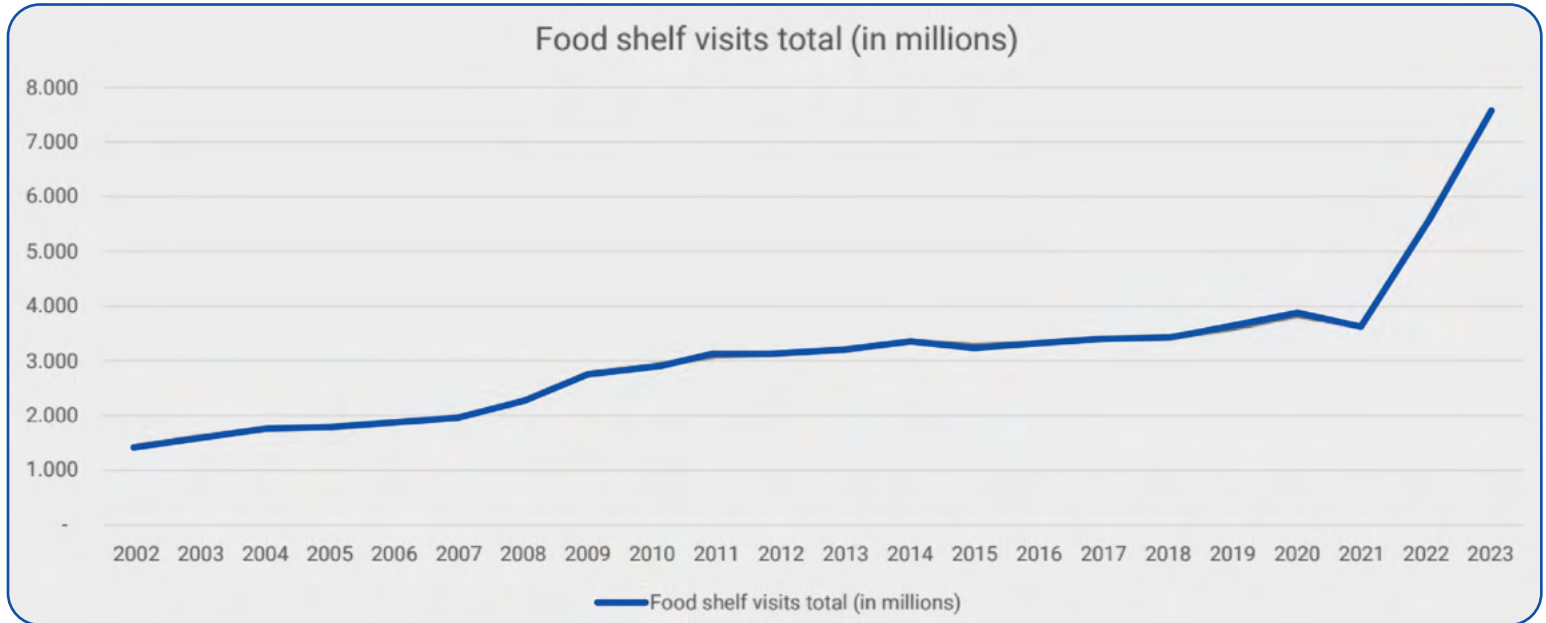
Every food shelf interviewed shared that every year they are serving clients from farther and farther away. To people not familiar with food access and food shelves the belief may be that the town food shelf just serves the residents of the town. The team soon learned that because of the rules of programs like The Emergency Food Access Program (TEFAP) and these organizations' commitment to helping those in need, they serve people far beyond the boundaries of their community.

This puts an additional strain on rural food shelves as they may only have the fundraising and volunteer connections from their immediate community, but they are serving households from outside their city and county boundaries. What used to be households coming from the next town over or within the county have become families driving over an hour to visit food shelves in the region. Some organizations shared that because of increased need and limited funding, they have had to reduce the amount of food each household gets by nearly 25%.

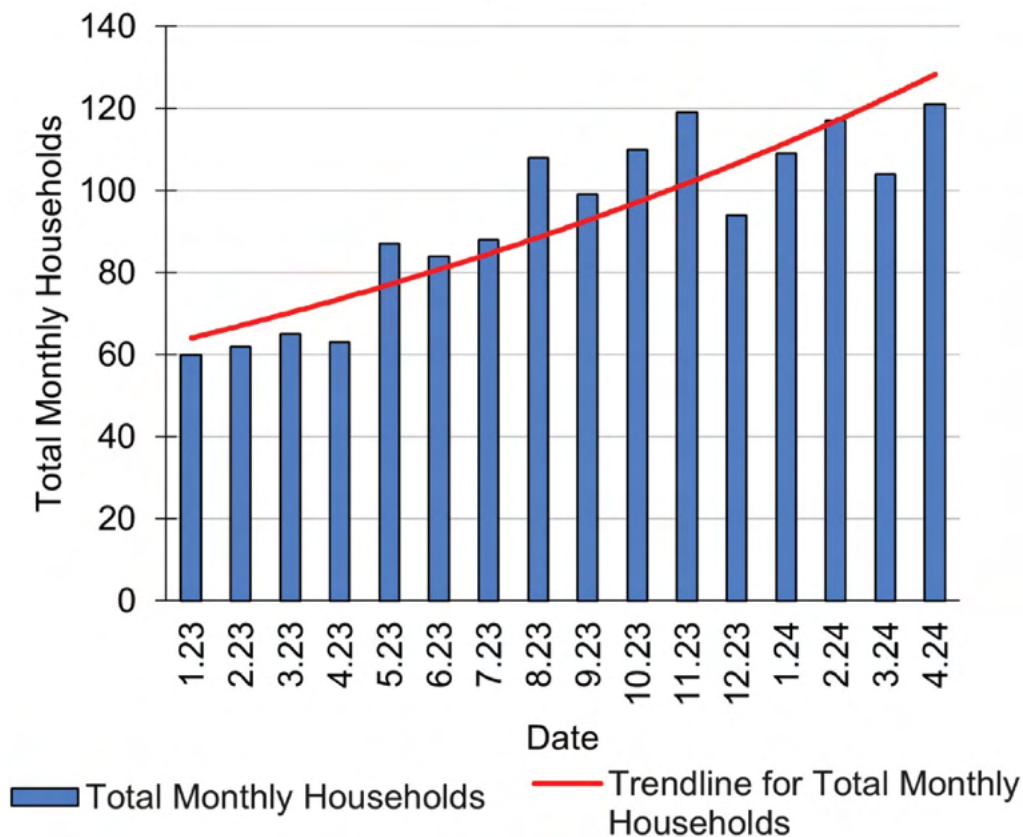
Another influence that increases the need for local food shelves is the migrant labor needed for many food processing facilities in the region, especially vegetable processing during the summer. Multiple communities shared that when summer comes around there is a large increase in Hispanic and Latino workers visiting the food shelf. In one small town, they shared that over that summer there were 70 individuals living in a church basement who are now utilizing the food shelf.

This immigrant labor also brings about a need for different kinds of products that are culturally relevant. These culturally relevant items aren't often available through the regional food banks. However, local food access partners work hard to make sure that these new community members are welcomed and feel at home. To address this some have created voucher programs with local Hispanic and Latino grocers so that these new community members could buy foods that were familiar to them.

Minnesotans made **7,551,147** visits to food shelves in 2023. 1.8 million more visits than in 2022



Springfield Area Food Shelf: Total Monthly Households from January 2023 - April 2024



CURRENT EXPERIENCES WITH FOOD SOURCES

Food Banks

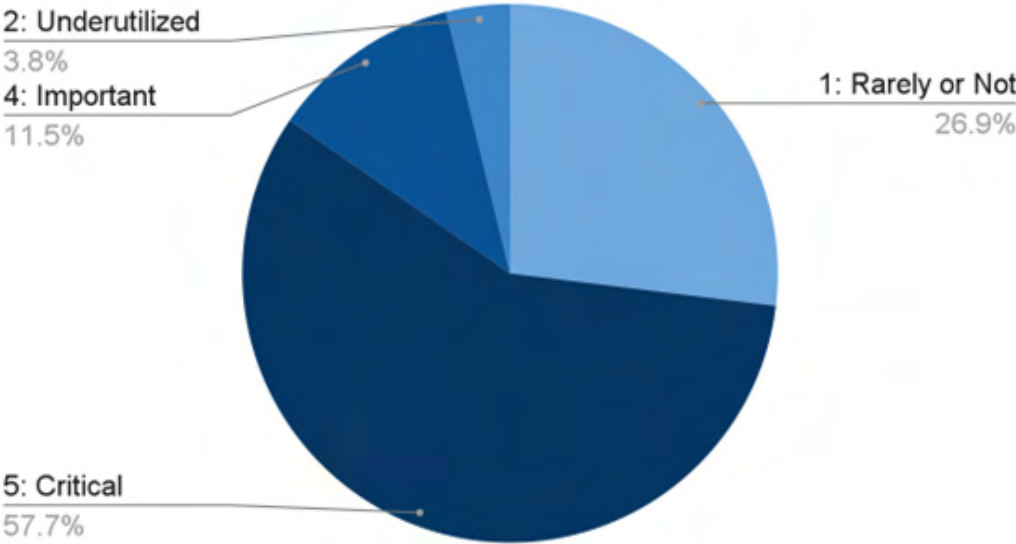
“The quality of produce that tends to come from our food bank isn’t in good enough shape to sit. Right now with twice a-month deliveries, it leads to very poor quality of produce for our clients”

-Sibley County Food Shelf Volunteer

Food access organizations across the region use a wide range of food sources to meet the needs of their communities. However, food banks are often the most visible due to the setup of the national food assistance system. For many food shelves, the Regional Food Bank is the first place they look for food because of how the system is structured, its steady flow of food, and well-developed infrastructure.

69.2% of the organizations interviewed shared that their Regional Food Bank was important or critical to their operations. However, this is offset by 30.7% of the organizations we interviewed stating that their food bank was underutilized or rarely used, if at all. As food banks are often one of the first places organizations try to access food, this highlights a strong need for additional food in the region to address this gap.

Food Bank (Second Harvest, Channel One, others)



Some communities did mention a difficult relationship with their food bank as they felt underserved by these organizations because of the distance and limited resources. One food shelf shared that just that morning a pallet of food they had ordered was not delivered and that this wasn’t the first time. One of the staff mentioned, “We are the last stop on their delivery route, and they really make us feel that.”

Another volunteer-run food shelf shared that they don’t have the time and capacity to always check the ordering platform and that because of their limited resources, they can’t order what they need. It was also shared that when things are available for cheap, they hear about them after but never have a chance to order them. This is because they are competing with larger food shelves with paid staff for whom this may be their full-time job.

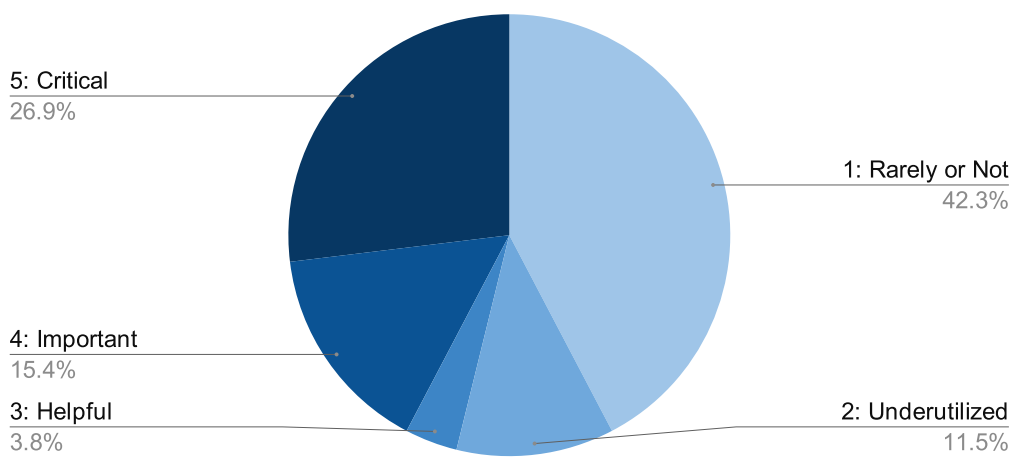
Retail Rescue

“Kwik Trip is a great source of rolls and ready-to-eat meals. McDonalds shares post-dated milk and veggie packs for kids. There are times when Walmart gives the Salvation Army more than they can handle and then they share with us.”

-Heaven's Table Food Shelf Manager

Retail rescue is another source of food that plays an important role for food access organizations in our communities. Data collected from the interviews shows that **retail food rescue is important or critical to 42.3% of food access partners in the region.** On the other hand, **57.6% of food access partners rated retail rescue as helpful, underutilized, or rarely used.** Organizations shared that they often received retail rescue from national or regional grocery stores, regional convenience stores, and at a lesser scale, locally owned grocery stores. Some common names across the region were Cub Foods, Hy-Vee, and Kwik Trip.

Retail Food Rescue (smaller amounts of products rescued/made available by grocery stores or gas stations, etc.)



Organizations referenced past work with Casey's but that something had changed internally and they seemed unable to donate anymore. Partners also shared that convenience stores provided large amounts of baked goods which, although helpful, were at times overwhelming and unnecessary, ultimately requiring them to throw the food out. Meat and dairy items were common in retail rescue as they have shorter shelf lives, so they need to be moved quickly. Bananas were another common item, particularly from Kwik Trips.

For organizations that found retail rescue beneficial, they shared that the regular schedule of pick-ups and variety of products was helpful. They even shared that sometimes they received more than they could manage alone, particularly when it came to dairy products at the end of their shelf life. They also shared that their relationships are critical to the continued success of these partnerships. However, these relationships can change quickly as employees change positions or leave those businesses. These relationships can also be difficult to form as organizations may not have prior education on retail rescue, the benefits, and the process. Many food shelves who didn't have relationships with their local grocer expressed some discomfort around the idea of asking their local grocer to engage in food rescue. There was also misinformation shared about the liability for these retail organizations that donate food.

Market Purchases

"We ended our relationship with our regional food bank. Since then we have been able to start a partnership with our local grocery store and we get products at half the price of the grocery store shelves."

- Faribault County Food Shelf Board Member

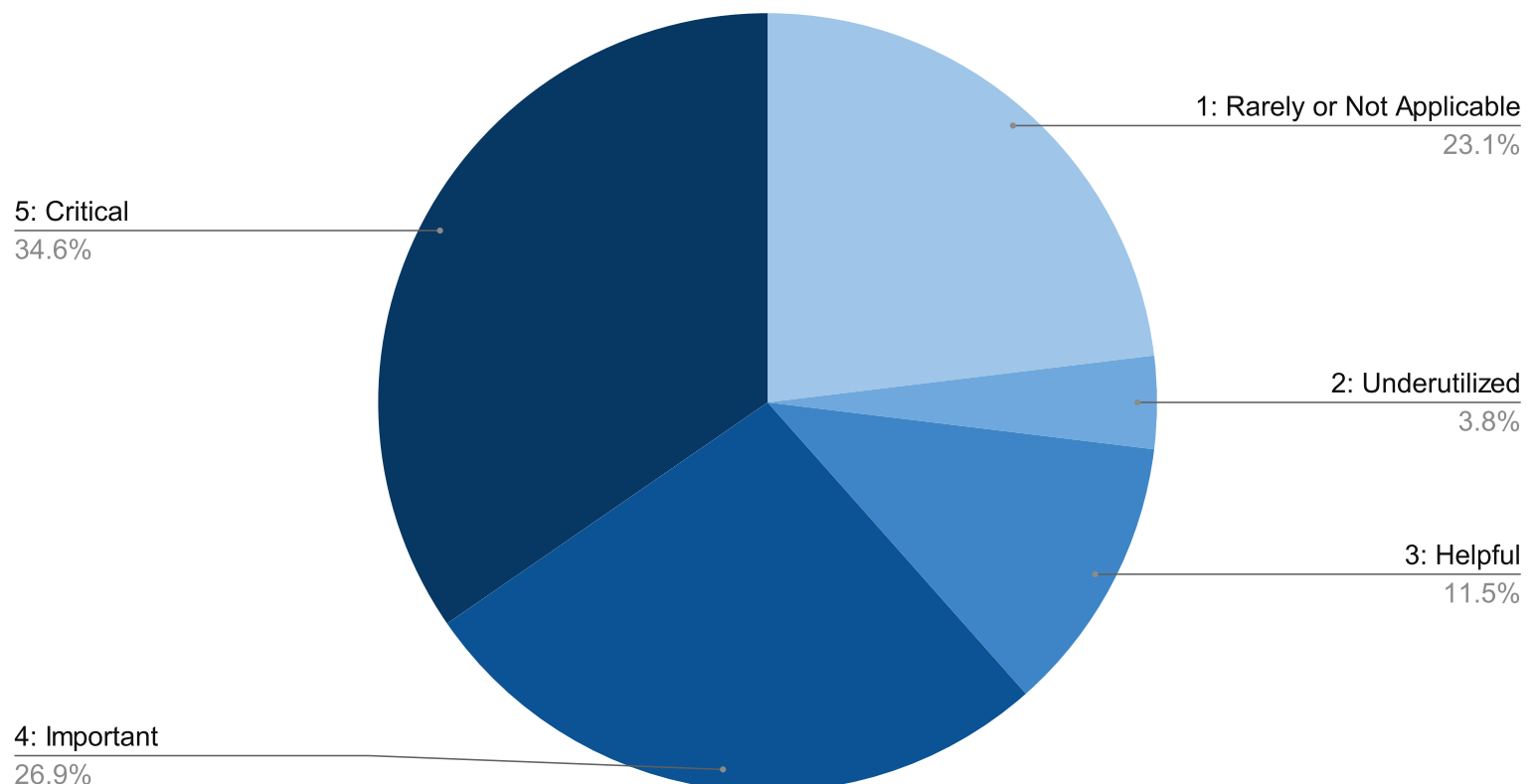
Purchases from the open market presented surprising issues and opportunities for regional food access partners. Although many assume food banks to be the most important sources for food access partners, interviews found that **61.5% of interviewees find purchases from the open market to be critical or important to meeting the needs of their community.**

The items purchased from the open market included staples such as milk, oil, bananas, flour, eggs, sugar, and meat. These were often items that either they couldn't get from their regional food bank, or the demand far outweighed what the food bank could provide. In this segment, many food access organizations shared that they were in continual conversation with local grocers about prices and any sales that might be coming up.

One interesting technique used by a food shelf was that they were able to order store brand or value brand products when their local grocer was placing an order, removing the need to grab stuff off the shelf and instead being able to guarantee amounts of a certain product at a cheaper price.



Purchases from the open market, retailer, or other third party



Commercial Food Rescue

"We don't always know where the loads come from. We get calls for everything under the sun. Bimbo Bakery, Tyson Chicken Trucks, pallets of ranch, Lunchables, and onions"

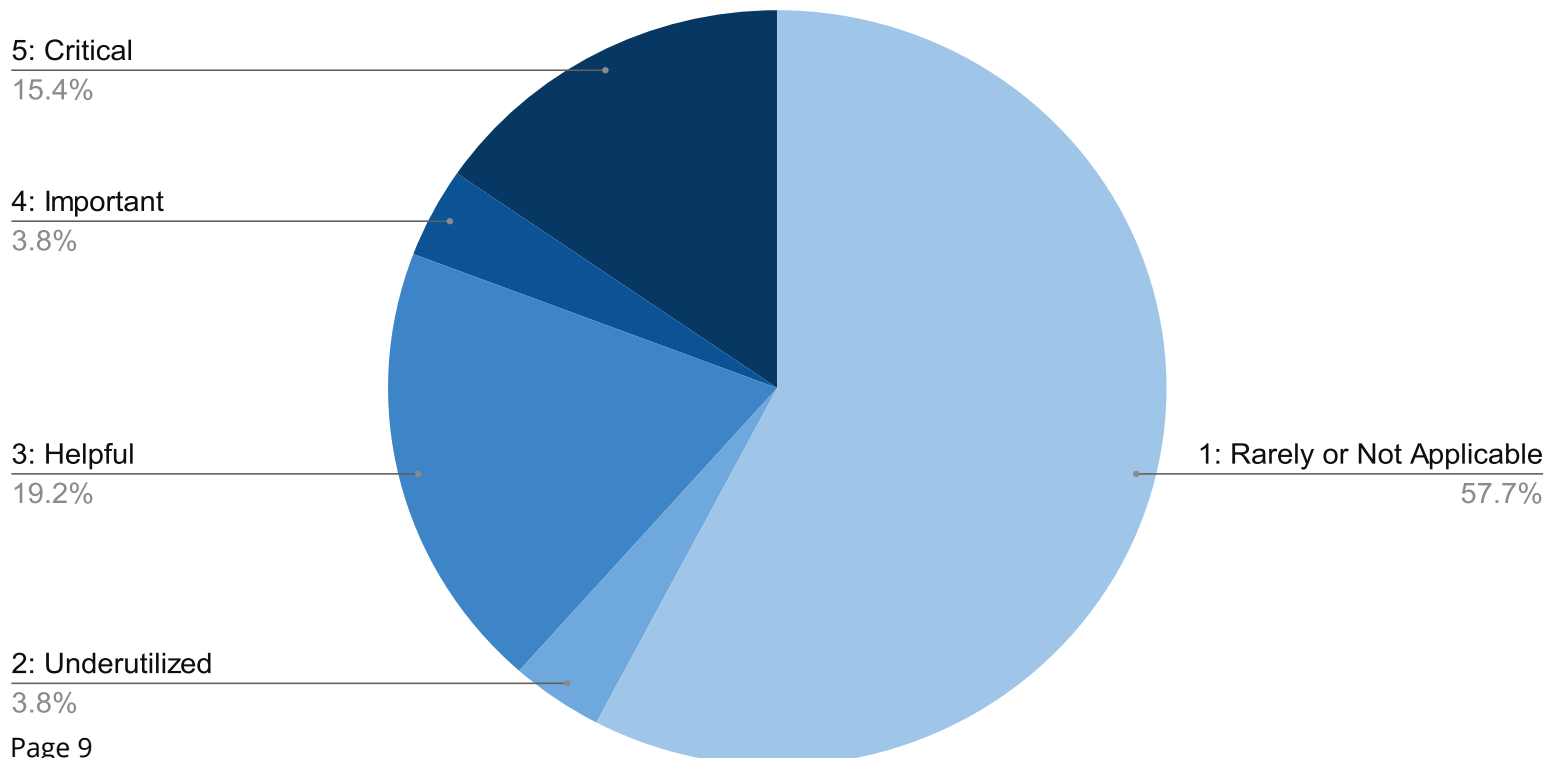
-FOCP Executive Director

Commercial-scale food rescue is the driving issue for this project because of the opportunities it presents in the quantity and quality of products. Research shows that **19.2% of interviewees said commercial rescue was critical or important to their operations** while another **19.2% said it was helpful**. However, **61.5% said it was underutilized or rarely or never used**. This shows that there are a significant number of organizations that leverage this food source but there are still many organizations that have not engaged in commercial rescue and could be a location for this extra food to flow.

The importance of commercial rescue for those who did utilize it was highlighted by comments about access to fresh food with a longer shelf life. Many interviewees mentioned that food coming from their regional food bank often only lasts one week and the truck may only come once or twice a month. This leaves them without fresh produce for the majority of the month. With a strong food processing industry in the region, organizations were hurt by seeing food from their local companies that are connected to regional food banks which they then have to pay to get back. One small food shelf shared that they see products from their local manufacturer that end up on the food bank website and they don't have the funds to order them.



Commerical Food Rescue (pallets or large quantities of food often from a distribution center or food manufacturer)



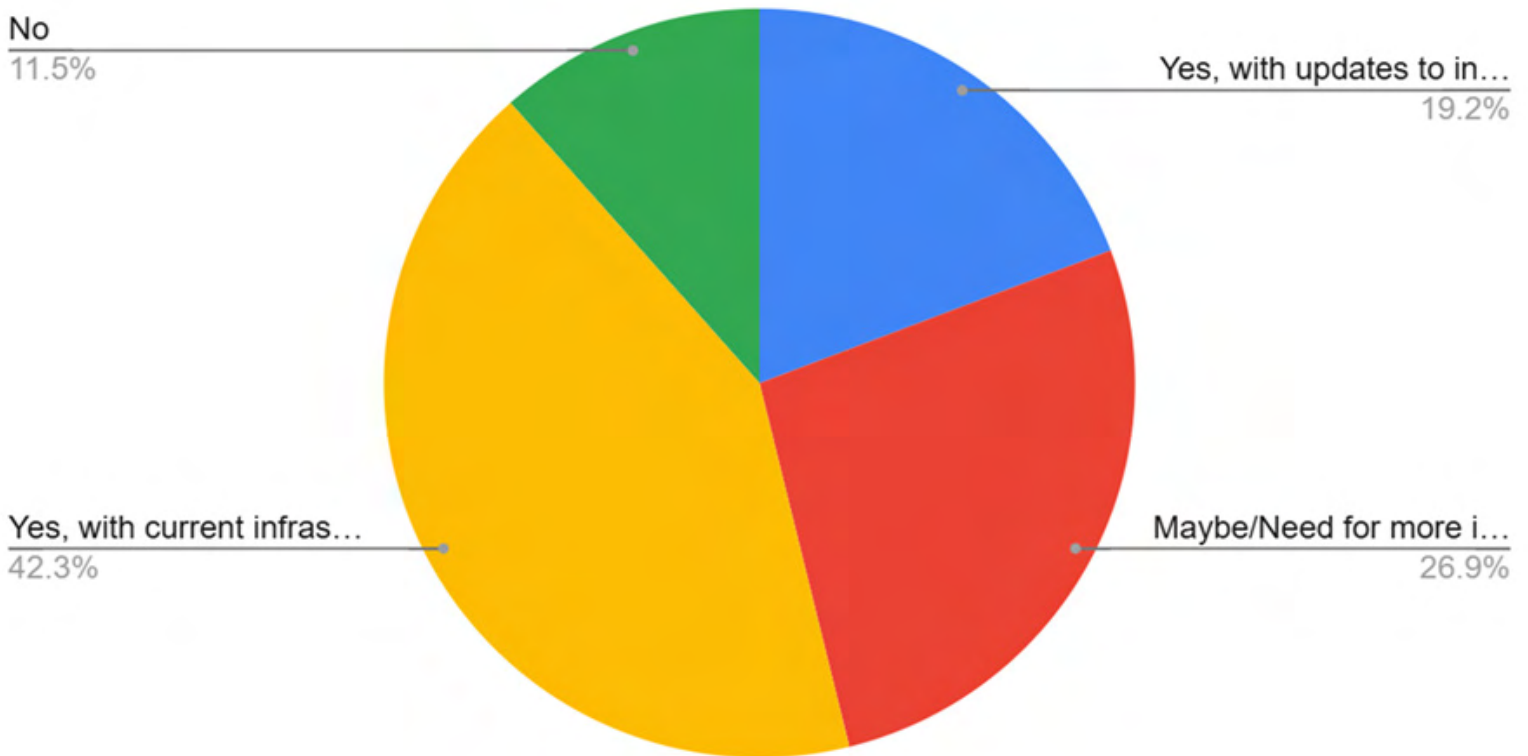
INTEREST IN ADDITIONAL RESCUED FOOD

Retail Rescue

As retail rescue was already an important and highly utilized segment of the food access ecosystem it came as no surprise that **42.3% of organizations were interested in having more retail rescue connections**. However, some organizations felt that the types of items provided by their retail partners were not needed in higher volumes. These unwanted items mostly included bread, candy, and other processed foods. Other organizations felt that they needed updates to infrastructure and programming to accept more retail rescue. Additionally, research showed that **26.9% of organizations said maybe or that they need more information**. Many of these were smaller food shelves that would appreciate support connecting with local grocery stores or convenience stores.



If there was additional retail scale rescuable food available for your community, would you like to be connected to it?



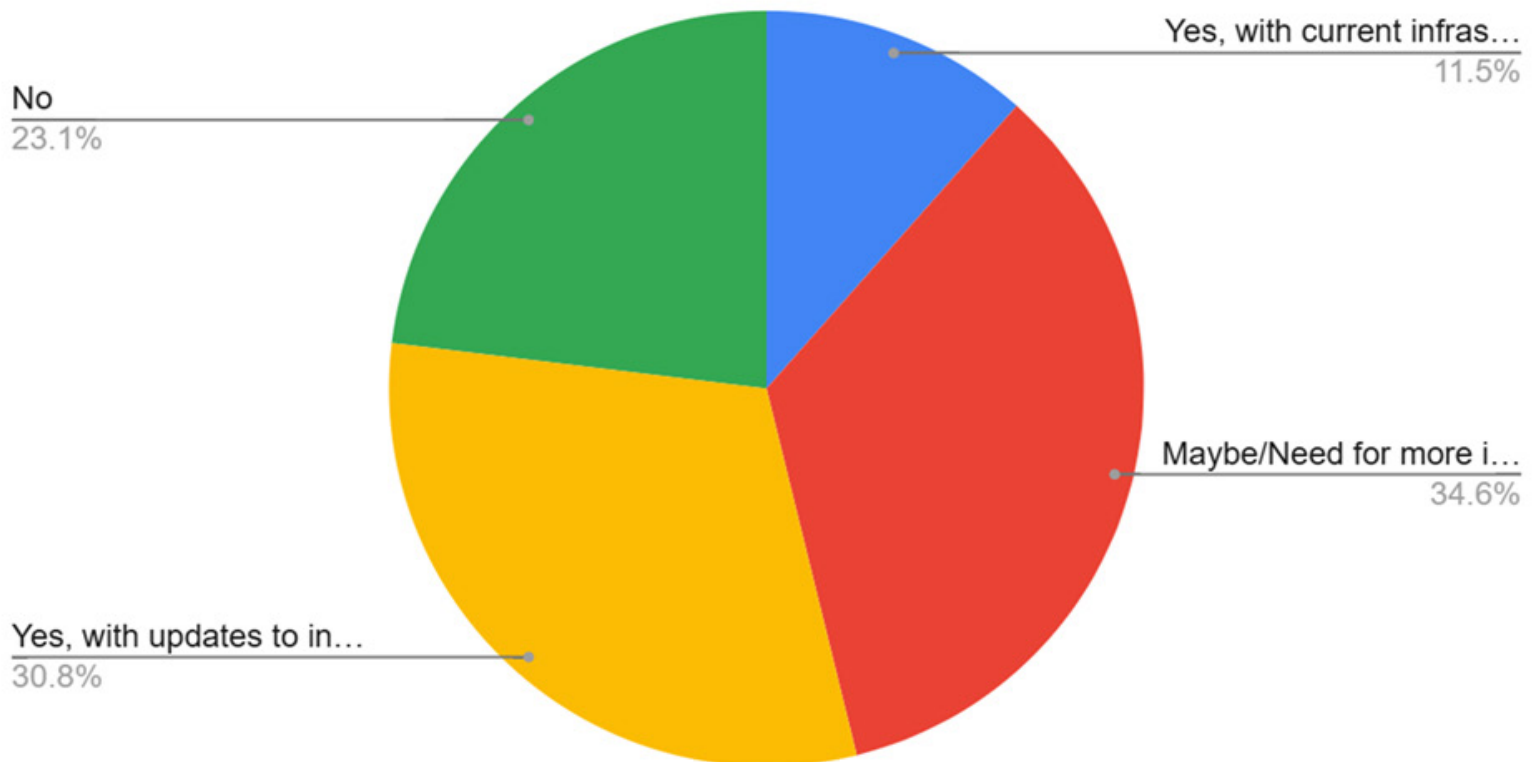
Interest in Commercial Scale Rescue

Interest in commercial-scale rescue highlights the barriers that persist to increasing capabilities on a regional scale. Only 11.5% of organizations interviewed said that they would be interested in additional commercial rescue with the current infrastructure and that 30.8% of organizations would be interested in additional commercial-scale rescue with updates to infrastructure and programming. On the other end of the food access ecosystem, 57.7% of organizations said they weren't interested or would need more information on commercial-scale rescue.

Although this may seem disheartening, it represents an important balance in the region. Not every organization needs to have the staff capacity and physical infrastructure to accept these amounts of food. Just as important are organizations that can take this food and get it to individual community members in an accessible manner.



If there was additional commercial scale rescuable food available for your community, would you like to be connected to it?

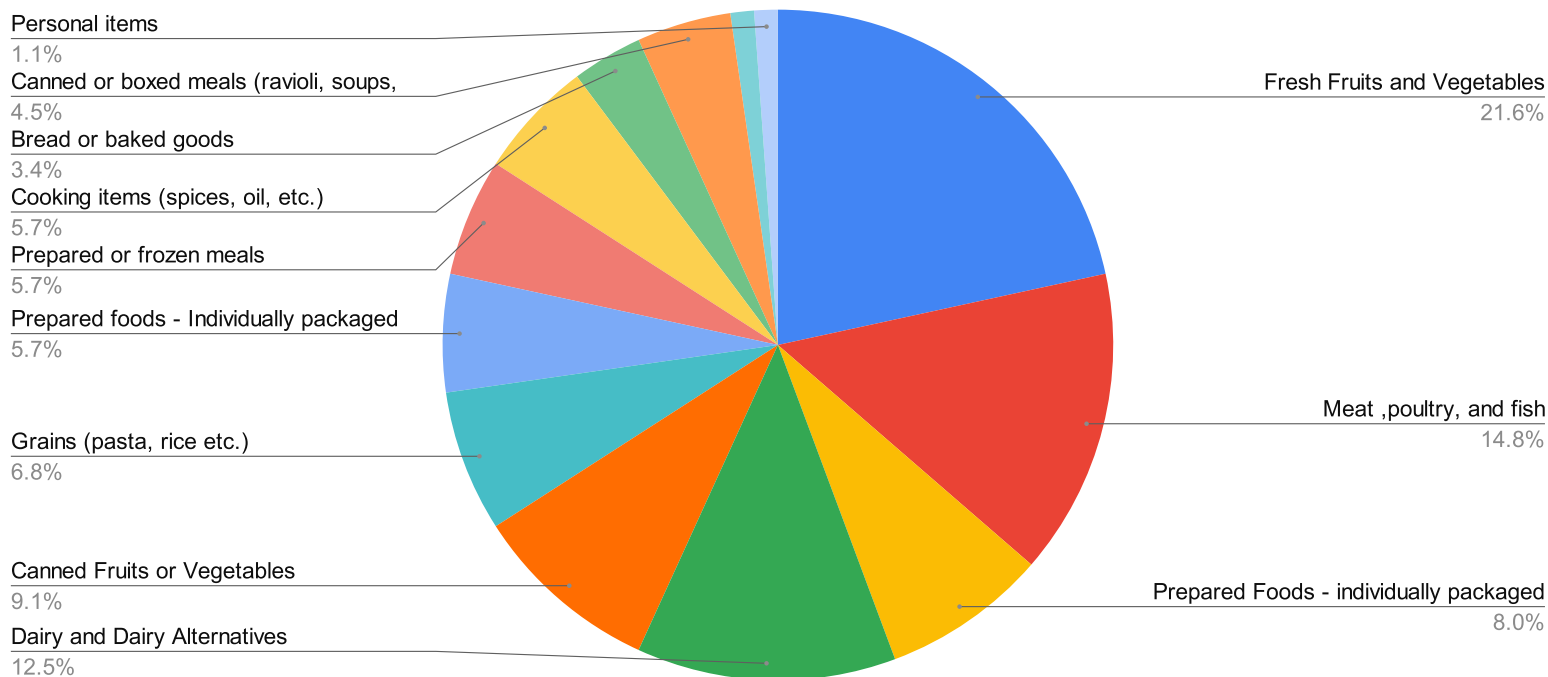


Products That Organizations are interested In

One of the most common answers to the question “What are the top five products you would like to receive?” was, “Can I say all of them?” For the purpose of this plan, organizations were encouraged to pick three to five items that really motivated them. This limit was important because rescuing large amounts of food is not easy and requires an elevated level of commitment to unload and manage these products. Unsurprisingly, food access organizations are interested in fresh fruits and vegetables first and foremost. After that, organizations were interested in a mix of meat and proteins, dairy and dairy alternatives, canned fruits or vegetables, prepared canned, frozen, and non-perishable foods, grains, and cooking items like oil and spices. All these foods are available across the region and can be captured on a more regular basis.

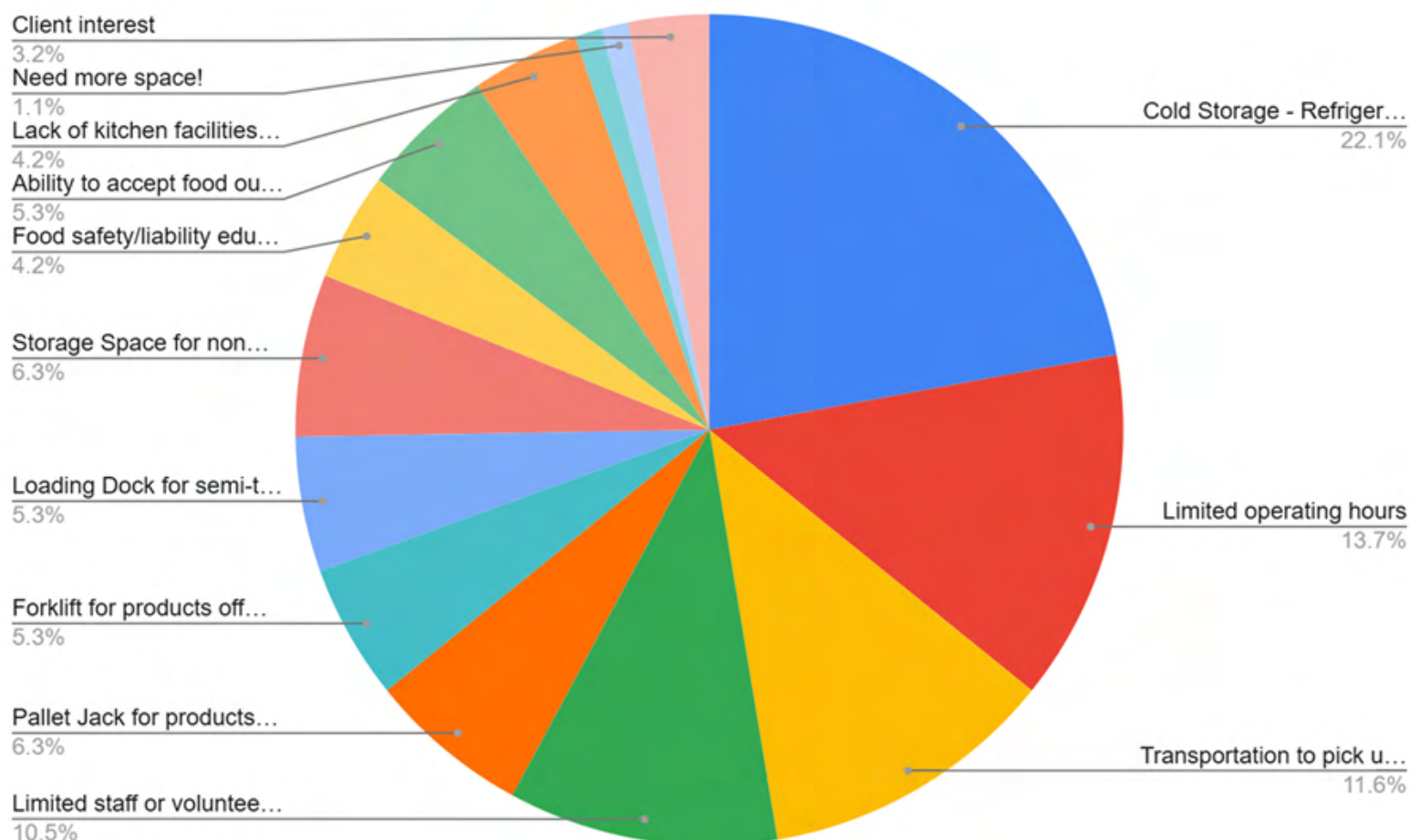


What food would you like to receive?



Barriers to Accepting More Food

With this planning process, it was also critical that barriers to accepting more food were addressed. The largest barrier that organizations shared was both fridge and freezer space. The second biggest issue was limited operating hours and limited staff and volunteer capacity. Transportation to get the food was also critical. Farther down the list, organizations want some help unloading food with pallet jacks, forklifts, or a loading dock. Ultimately these investments vary across each organization and what products they are interested in so these investments will need to be made on a case-by-case basis per organization. Despite few organizations needing a loading dock or forklifts, these investments will be needed at select organizations across the region.



PHASE 2: OUTREACH TO FOOD SOURCES

Outreach to sources of food was a less structured but equally rewarding and informative process. We started by developing lists of organizations that are involved in the production, packaging, distribution, and sale of large amounts of food across the region. This included a list of all organizations in the region with an MDA wholesale food handlers license, organizations with an MDA food distributor license, trucking companies in the region, as well as warehouses, truck stops, and truck repair companies. RNDC developed a survey for organizations to answer but quickly found that these organizations and their staff would not have the time or interest to fill out a survey. Phone interviews were conducted instead. The main questions were if these organizations ever had extra food products, how they currently managed those extra products, any issues with that current system, and what would make it easier or possible for them to connect that food to communities in need. In total, there were conversations with 24 different sources of food across the region which spanned the categories mentioned before and more.



Food Manufacturers

“We donate small amounts locally and for larger amounts of about 2,500 pounds or more the regional food bank will pick it up, but we don’t have anyone lined up for extra product between about 200 pounds and 2,000 pounds of chicken that we have because it’s too small for the food bank to bother and too big for our small food shelf to manage.”

-Shipping and Receiving Director of Regional Food Manufacturer

The major takeaway from talking to food manufacturers was that there is a bureaucracy to navigate especially as many are now owned by multinational corporations like Conagra, Smithfield, and Seneca. However, local employees are dedicated to their local community, and they have found ways to make excess food available in the past but not in a continued and systemized manner. Through reaching out to organizations it seemed like shipping and receiving was the department to talk to and they were given freedom to operate in a way that made their lives and the company operate smoothly. As long as raw ingredients are coming in, finished products are going out, and waste is disposed of, they have the freedom to connect extra food with communities in need.

Some food manufacturers have also established relationships with the regional food banks of Second Harvest Heartland and Channel One which allows them to donate larger amounts of food to those organizations. However, there are limits to this as the food banks prefer to accept large amounts of food more in the range of a full semi-truck load. This means that some organizations like the Walmart Distribution Center will save food to send to Second Harvest Heartland. For other organizations like a trucking company, they would need to run a refrigerated unit for months on end to collect enough food to send their way which wouldn’t be effective or efficient.

Food Manufacturer Conversations List

Name	Products	Notes
Brakebush Brothers Inc.	Chicken	Can donate up to 10 boxes at a time to the local food shelf or more than 250 boxes to the regional food bank. They need a place to take care of the amounts in between.
Michael Foods	Egg and potato food service products	They donate excess products locally and regionally.
European Roasterie	Coffee	Does not have much excess product but is interested in participating if the product becomes available.
Birds Eye - Waseca	Vegetables	No edible waste, any waste they have is transferred to feed animals/livestock.
Chippewa Packaging	Raw bulk flour, grains, flax, etc.	They donate extra packaged items to 2nd Harvest but have leftover bulk products that could be donated locally.



Potential Food Manufacturers

Name	Products	Location - County
Fairmont Foods	Frozen entrees, soups, fully-cooked meat	Fairmont - Martin County
Seneca Foods Corp.	Variety	Blue Earth - Faribault County Glencoe - Sibley County Montgomery - Le Sueur County
Downs Food Group	Meat, canning, frozen	Madelia - Watonwan County Mankato - Blue Earth County (Office)
Hormel Foods	Variety	Fairmont - Martin County Waseca - Waseca County
Kraft Heinz Co.	Cheese	New Ulm - Brown County
Conagra	Variety	North Mankato - Nicollet County
Premium Iowa Pork LLC	Pork	Mankato - Blue Earth County
Link Snacks Inc.	Protein Snacks	Mankato - Blue Earth County
Smithfield Foods	Processed meat products	St. James - Watonwan County
AMPI	Butter	New Ulm - Brown
Butterfield Foods	Chicken	Butterfield - Watonwan County
Dianne's Fine Desserts	Desserts and baked goods	Le Center - Le Sueur County

Trucking Companies

“We have donated locally, but we called a few times in the past and they said it was too much for them to take so we haven’t called in a while.”

-Local trucking company staff

Trucking companies are another important type of organization in the food system that were interviewed. Through conversations with food access organizations during the first phase of this plan, RNDC heard stories of local food access partners who got calls from trucking companies when they had extra products and that this had been a positive experience. To pursue this further, staff searched to find all the trucking companies in the region and started making phone calls asking them if they had extra products and how they managed them. Many of them were happy to discuss their extra food although their schedules were busy so the conversations were short. They did share that when they have extra food they try their best to get it to local partners. However this isn’t always possible because of staff capacity. Some also shared that sometimes they have asked organizations multiple times if they could take the food and when they can’t take it multiple times, then the trucking company stops asking. They shared that this occurred mostly because of the large quantities of food that they manage and that a lot of food shelves are volunteer-run so then it’s up to their staff to unload a couple hundred to a couple thousand pounds of food. This can be especially difficult with older volunteers who can only help so much and sometimes rely heavily on the trucking company’s staff to unload the food when the food shelves don’t have the proper equipment.

The main takeaway has been that there’s a great opportunity to create deep relationships with trucking companies because they are committed to their communities but that they need help through improved infrastructure at food access organizations.



Trucking and Transporting Companies

Name	Products	Notes
Viking Transit - New Ulm	Variety of foods	Has donated items to the local food shelf. Needs a dock and people to unload the trailer.
America Midwest Trucking - Courtland	Meat, eggs, potatoes	Has product 7-12 times a year. Donates items to local food shelves. Needs volunteers to help unload the trailer.
F2 Trucking - Waseca	Variety	Does not have much product but is interested in connecting people who do with us as a resource.
Waletich Transportation	Canned and dry goods	Has donated locally but sometimes the amount needing to be donated is too much for the local resource to receive it all at once.
Volk Transfer	Variety	Takes to the local food shelf, does not have excess food often.
Kato/Mayflower Moving	Variety	Often have a reefer truck in their parking lot that could be used to store products. Have offered use of that unit, their forklift, and loading dock as their staff availability allows.



Potential Transporters

Name	Products	Location - County
Estes	LTL and destinations without docks	Mankato - Blue Earth County
MVT	Reefer trailers and warehouse	New Ulm - Brown County
D&A Truckline	Reefers, LTL & vans	New Ulm - Brown County
Gary Aschenbrenner Trucking	Reefers & local drops	New Ulm - Brown County
J&R Schugel	Reefer, LTL, vans, local	New Ulm - Brown County
Waletich Transportation	Reefer and vans	Kasota - Le Sueur County
Runge Trucking	Reefer for Smithfield	St. James - Watonwan County



Individual Truckers

“Just last week I had to get rid of a pallet of ground beef, it happens more often than you want to know.”

-Truck driver interviewed at truck wash in North Mankato

Individual truckers were another key demographic that was interviewed during this process. It was important to understand their experiences because although they are part of a company, it is ultimately their responsibility to manage the remaining food on their truck, whether that is getting it to food shelves or a dumpster. It should come as no surprise that these trucks arrive in Region Nine communities from across the country bringing a wide range of food in and out of the region and to areas beyond. Drivers who work for food companies regularly run routes that take them to the same places week after week. Other drivers who were independent operators may come to Mankato with lettuce one week and the next week they are delivering mail in Indiana. Both categories represent a clear opportunity for more awareness, education, and relationship building.

A vast majority of the truckers interviewed had stories of having rejected loads and extra products that had to either be taken to a food shelf or thrown away. Drivers shared that the reasons for rejection varied depending on the types of products that they had and the different suppliers that they were taking it to. Some shared that, for example, the Walmart Distribution Center, was in their eyes very picky about what they take. Some examples of rejected loads included a box being ripped at the bottom of the pallet or the location already having too much of a product. They also shared that if there is one squash or tomato that is moldy then they may reject the whole pallet or a large segment of the product.

One driver from Pennsylvania shared that his route brings him to Minnesota every week and that he delivers to Costco in the Twin Cities and the Distribution Center in Owatonna. He also shared that when a product is rejected, he has to call his dispatcher to let them know what product was rejected and the amount so they decide how he should handle the product. Sometimes he is told to bring it back

to Pennsylvania with him because they have local connections there. However, sometimes if it's too small of an amount then it's deemed not worth it to run the refrigerator unit back to Pennsylvania, so he is told to throw it out if a local connection can't be made.

Another trucker that we spoke with shared that he has rejected loads every two to three months but these numbers really vary based on the trucker. Some said “I haven't had any rejected loads” others said “I've had a few” while still others said “once in a blue moon”. Despite these varying numbers, it was clear that this does happen and with the sheer amount of truckers and trucks driving through the region, there's a large amount of food that can be captured. The same driver who said that he has rejected loads every two to three months shared that now he'll only take stuff to a place with a dock and a forklift because there was one time when he had seven pallets of lettuce which he had to unload all by hand he said he would never do that again.

The main takeaway from talking with individual drivers was that they want the extra food to go to people in need. However, the food is not at the top of the decision chain. The top decision maker is their company and dispatcher who says whether this food is allowed to be donated. The second position on the decision tree is the need to pick up their next load so they don't lose income. When put between their next job and waiting for an organization to rally volunteers over a few hours the decision is often made for them.

Many of them run weekly routes which can lead to opportunities for long-term relationships with their trucking companies back home and community Outreach can follow them back to their states of Indiana, Iowa, and Pennsylvania. A trucker from Oregon brings products to Minnesota regularly so there is an opportunity to make their company aware that there's a place for their products to go if any product is ever rejected in south central Minnesota.

Truck Stops and Gas Stations

"We have 10 - 15 trucks every month who abandon their product while getting repaired. I've called people before and begged them to come take the food but they never can. So I don't really know why you're calling."

-Highway 19 Truck Stop and Repair Shop staff



Truck stops, truck washes, gas stations, and repair shops are other locations that food access organizations mentioned having gotten rescued food from before. These are organizations that are all inextricably linked with the trucking industry and so they present a great opportunity for stronger relationships and strong opportunities to capture and rescue food. For example, one gas station in Mankato that often has trucks waiting outside overnight shared that for the past couple of weeks they've been getting tomatoes from drivers who stopped by but they weren't connected with any local food shelves. They would just distribute the food to staff and customers who came in because they didn't know where else it could go.

One example of a truck stop and repair shop with a lot of extra food was in Winthrop, Minnesota. When they were contacted, they said that they have 10 to 15 trucks per month that have to abandon their product as they're getting repaired because there's nowhere for it to go. She reported having begged places to come and get the product but that nobody ever can because they don't have a refrigerated truck, or they don't have the time. She felt quite distressed and possibly like nothing would ever change because it hadn't yet.

On the other hand, the Mankato Trucking Center which is right across the highway from the Walmart Distribution Center has a list of places that trucks can call including ECHO Food Shelf, the Four Seasons Truck Wash in lower North Mankato, Feeding our Community Partners, and South Central Minnesota Food Recovery. Through this list of resources, they're able to connect trucks to possibilities although it doesn't take into account volunteer capacity and where people have space to store extra food.

Despite this they have mentioned there are times when they come in the morning and all of their garbage cans are filled with extra product from truckers because they didn't know where to take it or there wasn't staff or volunteers available or because the trucker didn't ask where this product could go. This seems to represent a clear opportunity for further engagement, education, and relationship-building with these organizations. Ultimately these organizations are still going to be connected to these truckers they're still going to be trying to help them deal with this extra product so that their industry can keep moving.

Name	Products	Notes
4 Seasons Truck Wash	Storage for excess food	Commonplace for truckers to unload extra product and are happy to continue.
Kato Moving	Storage for excess food	Offered refrigerated storage on site and has forklift and loading docks.
Mankato Truck Center	Variety of refrigerated foods	Two employees shared that at least once a week trucks have about a pallet of food that needs to be donated or disposed of. When they can they guide them to ECHO or Four Seasons Truck Wash. However, food is still left in the garbage often. They explained awareness and a list of resources would be helpful.
Mankato Shell Gas Station	Variety of foods, many tomatoes lately	In the past they have distributed excess food to employees or customers, otherwise it gets disposed of in the trash. No prior connections to food shelves.
Minnesota 19 Truck Wash & Repair	Variety of foods	While trucks are getting repaired, many times the food becomes abandoned and there is no place for it to go. Most of the time it is offered to local food banks, but they need help to pick it up and transport it.
Fairmont Speedway Gas Station	Products from drivers along I-90	Have directed products to Heaven's Table in the past. Need to follow up.



Potential Truck Stops & Gas Stations

Name	Products Transported	Location - County
Primo Truck Wash & Repair	Truck wash and repair	Gaylord - Sibley County
Casey's	Truck stop (St. James) & designated diesel area	St. James - Wantonwan County Sleepy Eye - Brown County
Speedway	Truck stop	Fairmont - Martin County
Shell	Designated diesel area	Blue Earth - Faribault County
Kwik Trip	Designated diesel area	Mankato - Blue Earth County New Ulm - Brown County St. Peter - Nicollet County Glencoe - Sibley County Blue Earth - Faribault County Fairmont - Martin County
Fill Me Up - BP	Designated diesel area	Gaylord - Sibley County Winthrop - Sibley County
Arnoldt Truck Wash	Truck wash	Janesville - Waseca County
Exit 87 Truck Wash	Truck wash	Sherburn - Martin County



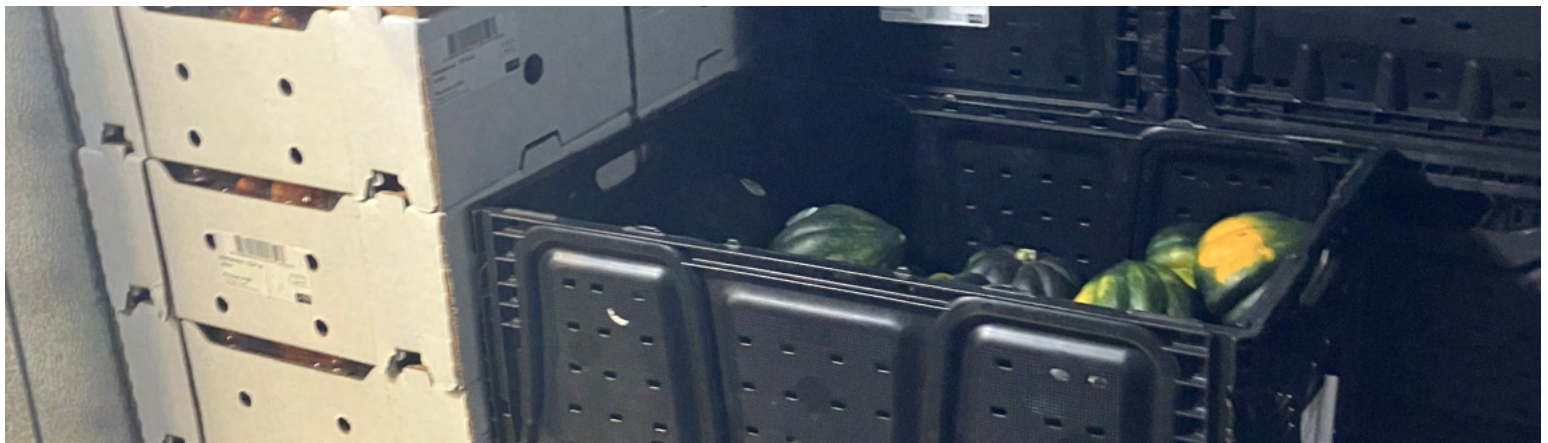
Food Distributors and Warehouses

"We don't own the products, so if the manufacturer calls and says they want the product destroyed we have to take it to the landfill and submit proof of paperwork from the landfill that the food has been destroyed."

-General Manager of food distribution company

Food distributors play an important role in the middle of the supply chain and represent a key opportunity where extra food is often lost or forgotten about. One major example in the region is the Walmart Distribution Center, which serves over 100 Walmart Stores and Sam's Clubs across the upper Midwest. However, they often do not own the food and are just a link in the supply chain. This means that the decision about how they manage the food is not theirs and is still controlled by the manufacturer or end retailer.

Name	Products	Notes
Walmart Distribution Center	Variety of perishable foods for 130+ Walmart and Sam's Club locations	Food that enters the facility but cannot be sent out is then picked up by Second Harvest. Food that is rejected at the door is not claimed by them and the transport company/supplier has to find a solution for it.
Americold/Versacold	Variety	They do not own the product going through their system, so if the company that owns it wants it destroyed, they have to show proof that it was sent to the landfill. If possible, they send it to homeless shelters or food shelves. At times, the quality of food can be of concern. In the past they've partnered with hog operations to take inedible food.
Minnesota Reload & Freight	Variety	Currently they send abandoned food to the landfill because there is no one available to take the product. Typically the food is in a refrigerated trailer which is expensive to keep running while they wait for someone to get the product. It would be easiest if someone could come and pick up the product.
Hermel	Processed foods, soda, and snacks	Typically they supply items in vending machines and if the product is past the expiration date, they assume it can no longer be eaten and is then thrown away.



Potential Distributors and Warehouses

Name	Products/Facility	Location - County
MVT	Refrigerated warehouse	New Ulm - Brown County
Bridge Street Enterprises	Refrigerated warehouse	Mankato - Blue Earth County
Agropur Inc.	Distribution warehouse	Le Sueur - Le Sueur County
Link Snacks Inc.	Protein snacks/warehouse	Mankato - Blue Earth County
Old Dutch Foods	Multiple warehouses	Multiple
WIS - PAK	Distribution warehouse	North Mankato - Nicollet County
The Candyman Inc.	Point of sale products/ warehouse	New Ulm - Brown County
Locher Brothers	Distribution warehouse	Green Isle - Sibley County



SUGGESTED INVESTMENTS

During visits to food access organizations, RNDC was constantly learning about the systems and infrastructure being used that allowed them to effectively rescue food. Because of this staff was able to see what was already working and develop recommendations for potential investments. This section will outline these possible investments and where they may be well suited.

Powered Stacker/ Electric Pallet Stacker

This piece of equipment was only seen at one location but seemed to provide a great opportunity to help with unloading products from trucks. The one organization that had an electric pallet stacker said it only cost them \$5,500. Similar models can be found online in the price range of \$5,000 - \$10,000. It is recommended that the largest food shelf in each region invests in one of these as a critical piece of equipment.



Incline Conveyor

Some organizations were in buildings with limited storage space but which had the possibility of basement storage. One organization was able to overcome the barrier of their basement stairs by having a powered conveyor belt that makes it easier to move heavy food boxes up and down their stairs.

Convertible Dolly

These dollies or some form of cart has proven very helpful for moving food through small spaces in an efficient and safe manner. As many organizations have older volunteers who may struggle to move boxes of food, having proper carts can make a big difference.



Walk In Coolers and Freezers

These larger units were already present in several larger food shelves and represent a good investment in safe storage for large amounts of food. Although not necessary for every food shelf, these would represent a good investment for the largest food shelves in each county.

Dual Temperature Cooler Freezer Combo

These types of units were present in a few food shelves and seemed like a great idea for organizations that are taking in many different types of products which could either require freezing or refrigeration. However, the organization may not have the space for a permanent walk-in set up.



SUGGESTED ACTIONS

Action	Partner
Establish protocol for how the Regional Coordinator will accept and direct calls to food access organizations and storage locations.	RNDC, FOCP, ECHO, SCMNR, Second Harvest Heartland
Establish storage partnerships and protocols with organizations.	Regional Food Rescue Coordinator, Kato Moving, Mankato Area Public Schools, Regional Distributors
Develop and manage system for tracking storage capacity across the region.	Regional Food Rescue Coordinator
Develop outreach materials for all gas stations and truck stops across the region directing them to the Regional Food Rescue Coordinator.	Regional Food Rescue Coordinator, Second Harvest Heartland
Establish relationships with Trucking Companies across the region, connecting them with local food shelves, and larger storage opportunities.	Regional Food Rescue Coordinator
Develop a comprehensive list of funding needs for regional organizations.	Regional Food Rescue Coordinator
Connect food shelves and local grocery stores with retail rescue education and resources through their Regional Food Bank.	Regional Food Rescue Coordinator, Second Harvest Heartland, Channel One
Establish partnerships to rescue additional food from food manufacturers.	Regional Food Rescue Coordinator, Second Harvest Heartland, Channel One
Support food access organizations with volunteer recruitment.	Regional Food Rescue Coordinator, Minnesota State University Mankato, Second Harvest Heartland, Channel One
Develop and distribute contact materials to base communities of truckers.	Regional Food Rescue Coordinator
Write grants for physical and social infrastructure improvements.	Regional Food Rescue Coordinator, RNDC



Action	Partner
Install a walk-in cooler and freezer at the largest food shelf in each county.	Regional Food Rescue Coordinator, RNDC, Food Shelves
Partner with area farmers to use inedible food waste or products that are not rescued in time for human consumption, to prevent it from going to landfills.	Regional Food Rescue Coordinator
Develop a system to capture excess food all year.	Food Rescue Partners, Regional Food Rescue Coordinator, RNDC
Establish program and funding to buy extra food from local farmers.	RNDC, MDA, Mayo, Mankato Clinic

CONCLUSION

Over the year-long process of developing this Regional Food Rescue Plan, it has been inspiring to learn about the work already being done to ensure that community members across south central Minnesota have access to healthy food. It is clear that local food shelves and other food access partners benefit greatly from the generosity of their community members and volunteers. However, through the research conducted to understand the food rescue landscape and identify opportunities to rescue additional food it became clear that there isn't enough being done. The conversations made it clear that there are greater issues facing food access partners in the region. With underfunded food access programs and increasing costs of food and living expenses, changes are needed to ensure that food access organizations are well equipped to serve their communities.

Fortunately, through this process, many opportunities to increase the food security of communities across the region were identified. By connecting with food access partners, food sources, and resource providers across the region RNDC was able to hear what was working well for them for volunteer retention, fundraising, and food rescue.

By compiling this data and these stories ideas can now be shared across the region to help identify clear investment and action opportunities. These investments include more cold storage capacity to keep food safe, investments in unloading equipment to protect volunteers and staff when dealing with large amounts of food, and investments in personnel and relationships to ensure that we know where extra food is needed. In a world where food is being wasted while others are hungry, the region has the power to do something collectively and that is what this plan has set the region up to do.

APPENDIX

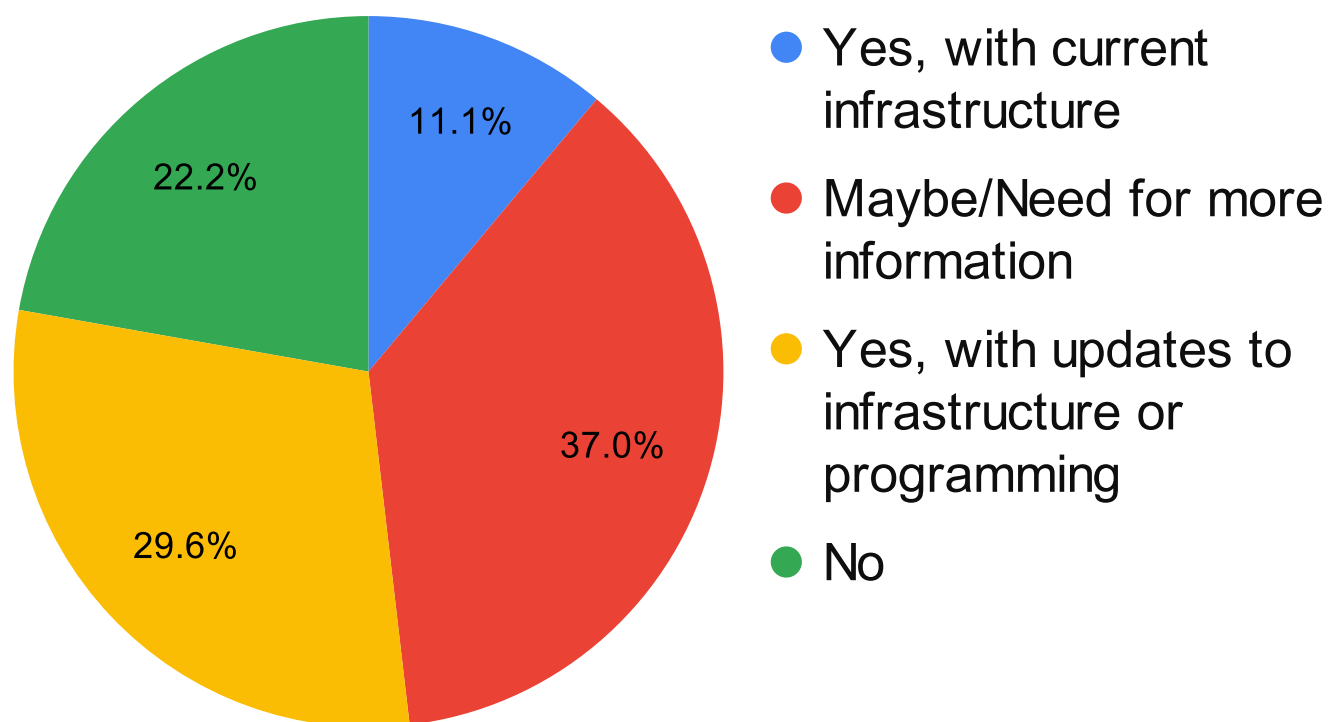
Food Access Organization Interview Questions

1. Organization Name: Provide the name of your organization
2. Name and Title: Provide the name and title of the person completing this interview or survey
3. Location: What county are you located in?
4. Service Area and Target Population: What is your service area and target service populations? (families, children, BIPOC, ethnic communities, seniors, etc.)
5. Current Reach and Impact: What is your organization's current community impact? You can utilize measures such as pounds of food, meals distributed, or individuals/families served. Feel free to also add how often you are serving that many people (weekly, monthly, yearly).
6. Operations: Share your organization's hours and days of operation.
7. Importance of Food Sources: Rate these food sources on current importance to your organization. 5 being critical to daily operation and 1 being very rarely utilized.
8. Other Food Sources: If you answered other for food sources please list them below.
9. Sources of Rescued Food: If you receive or have received rescued food, please list specific sources where it comes from, how much you get, and how often you get products from these sources.
10. Experiences with Rescued Food: Could you share some experiences when you have received rescued food? Share if it was a positive or negative experience, what products you got, and if there is any way it could have been improved?
11. If there was additional retail scale rescuable food available for your community, would you like to be connected to it?
12. If there was additional commercial scale rescuable food available for your community, would you like to be connected to it?
13. Food You Would Like to Receive: If space and infrastructure was not a barrier, what kinds of rescued products would you like to receive? Select your top 5
14. Additional Demand for Food: If space and infrastructure was not a barrier how much more demand for food is there in your organization and community?
15. What barriers would need to be addressed for your organization to accept more rescued food? Select your top 3 barriers.
16. Food Rescue Ideas: Do you have any other thoughts on how your organization or our community can rescue more food?
17. Final Comments: Questions or comments on the survey or planning process.

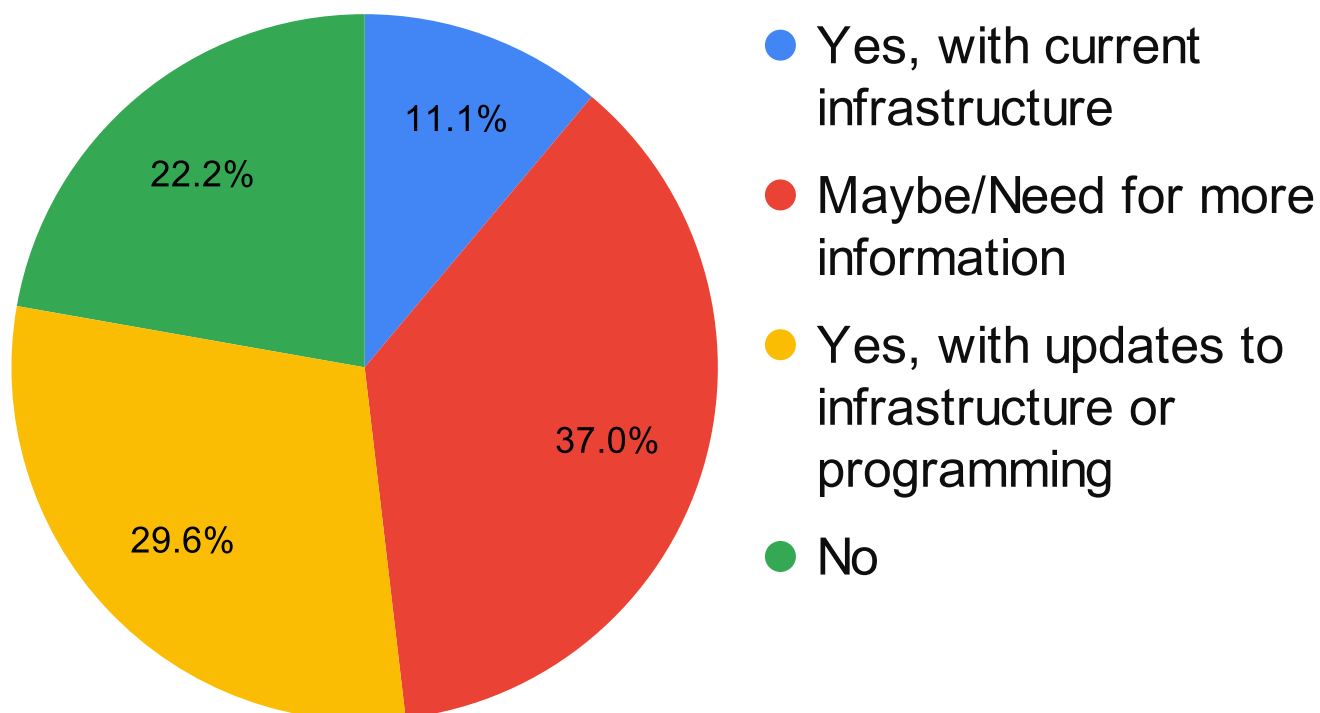
Food Source Interview Questions

1. Name, Title, and Organization of Interviewee (you can also remain anonymous)
2. What category of organization does this interviewee represent
3. Location(s) - Where you are located or locations you travel to
4. If you have excess food how do you usually manage it?
5. If you don't donate food, is there a specific reason that stops that? Please explain
6. Additional information on how excess food is managed
7. If you have made excess food available to community partners in the past, how did that relationship begin?
8. Do you have any thoughts on how we can ensure those relationships continue into the future?
9. Can you list partners or communities who you have made food available to?
10. How has your experience with food rescue and recovery been? Describe barriers and successes
11. What products do you often have excess of? Select all that apply
12. How much of these products do you have and at what intervals?(seasonally, events, etc.)
13. Food Rescue Ideas: How can we make this easiest for you? Do you have any other thoughts on how your organization or our community can rescue more food?
14. How would you like to be included in this process and food rescue moving forward?
15. Final Comments: Questions or comments on the survey or planning process.

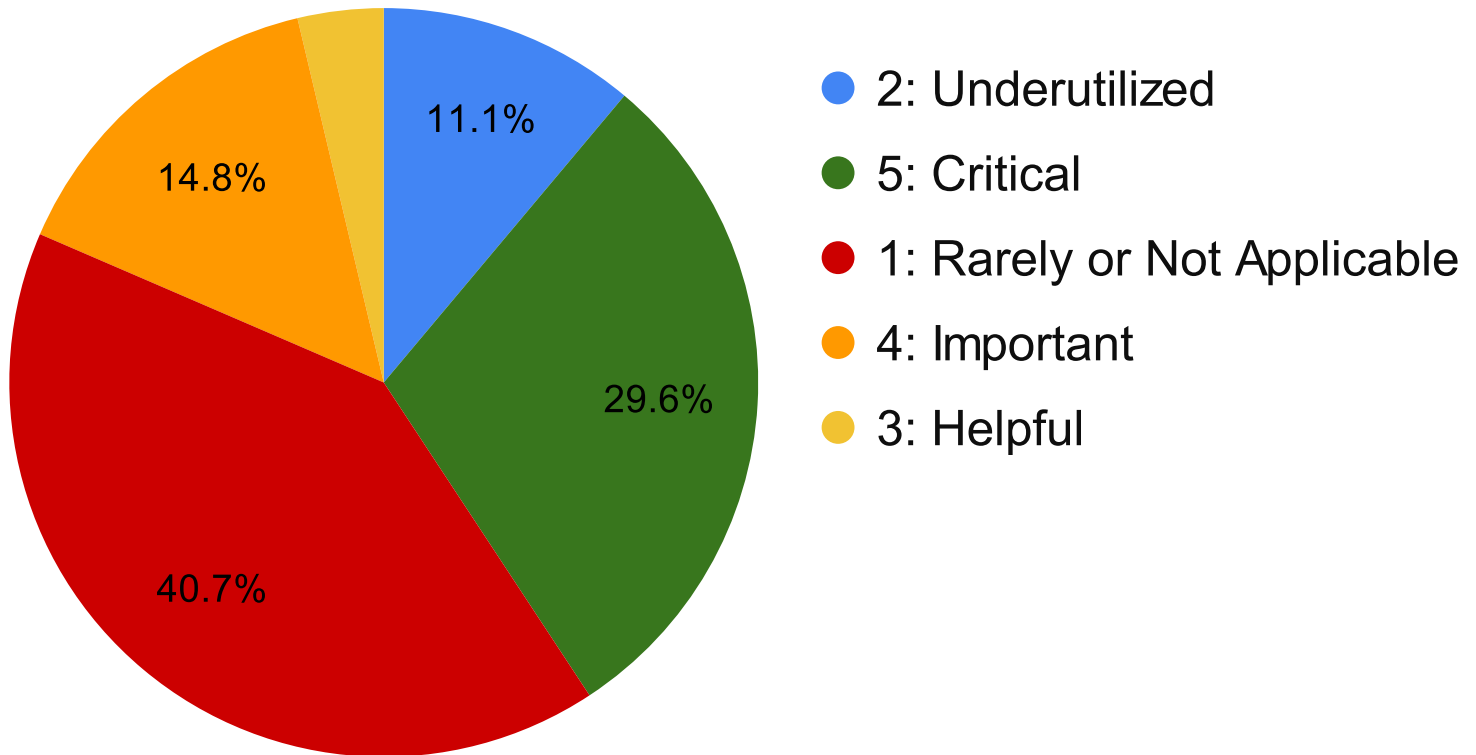
If there was additional commercial scale rescuable food available for your community, would you like to be connected to it?



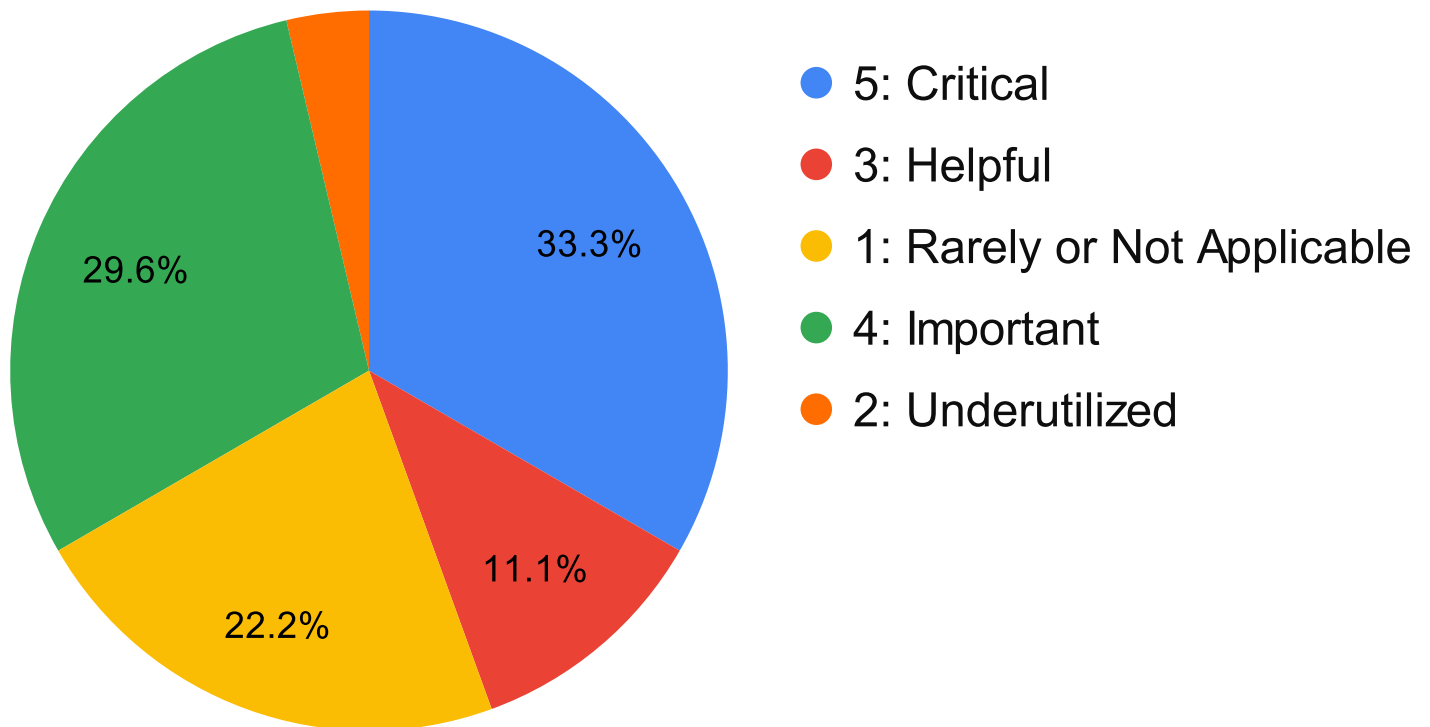
If there was additional retail scale rescuable food available for your community, would you like to be connected to it?



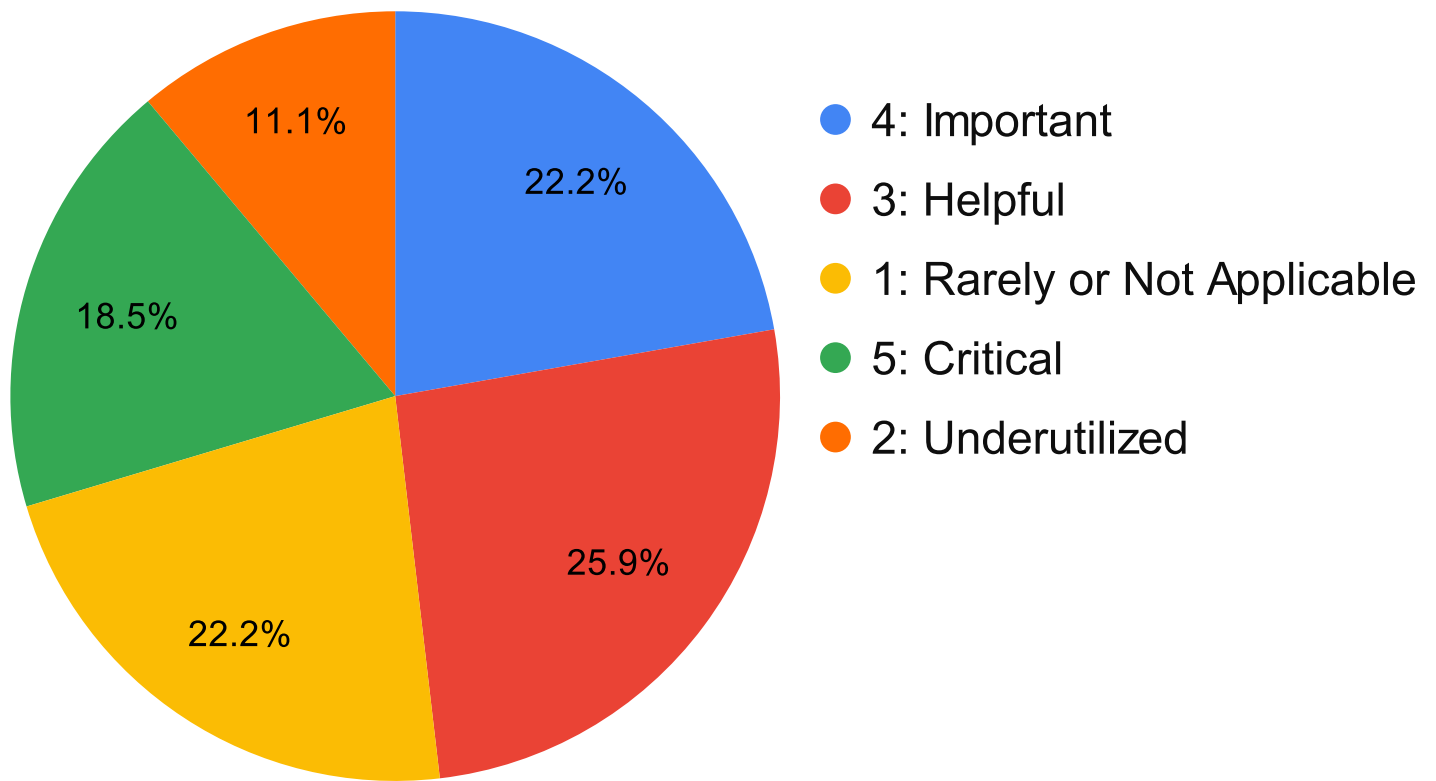
Importance of retail food rescue (smaller amounts of products rescued/made available by grocery store or gas stations, etc.



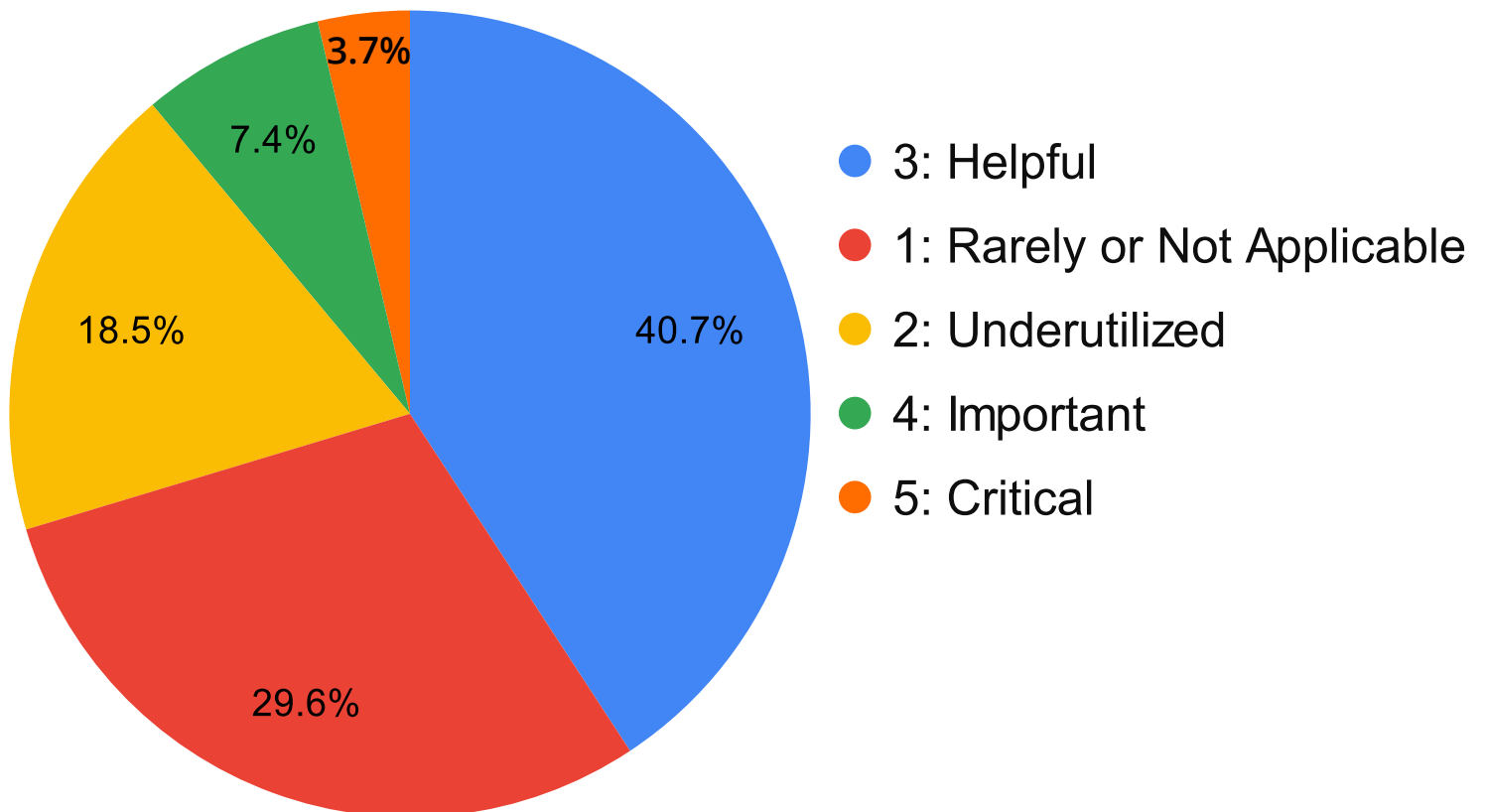
Importance of purchases from the open market, retailer, or other third party.



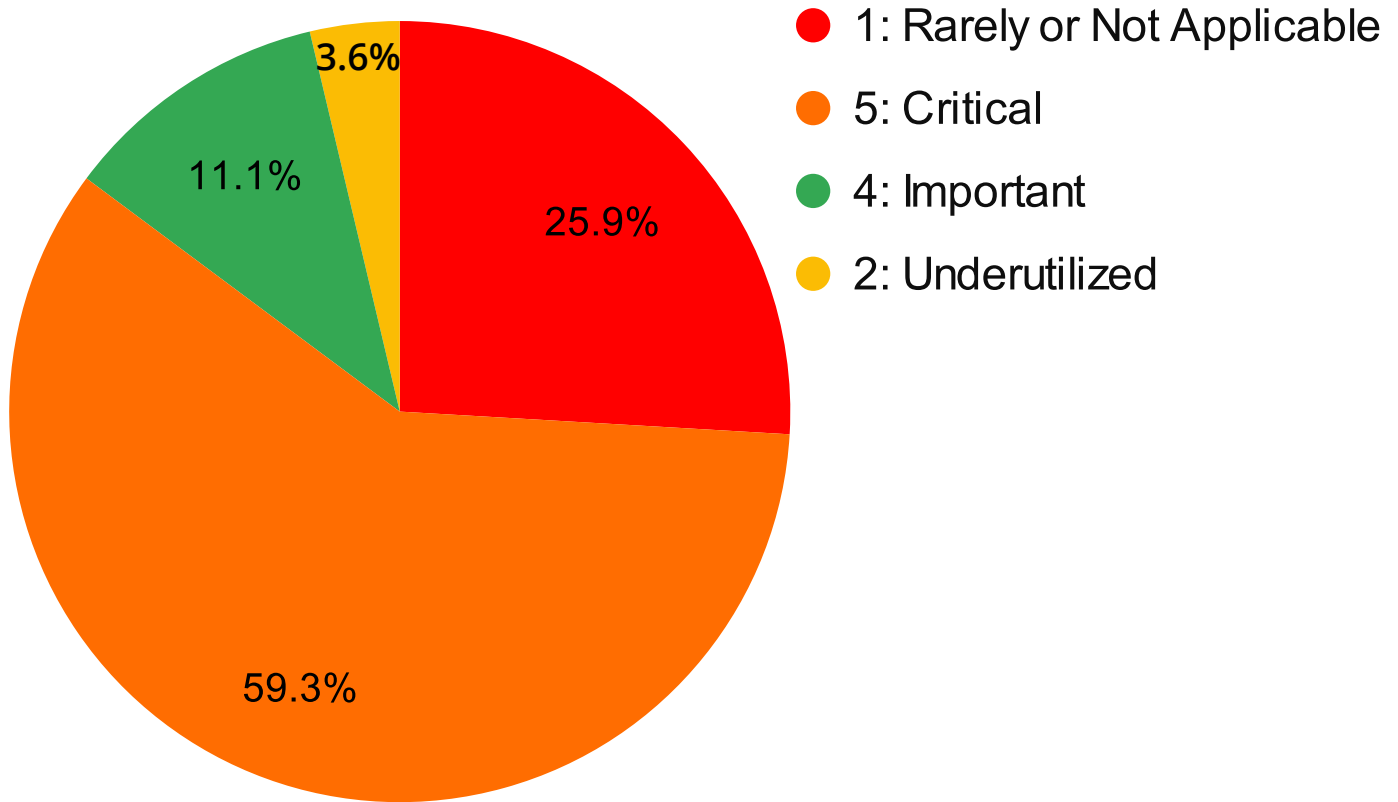
Importance of donations from individual residents



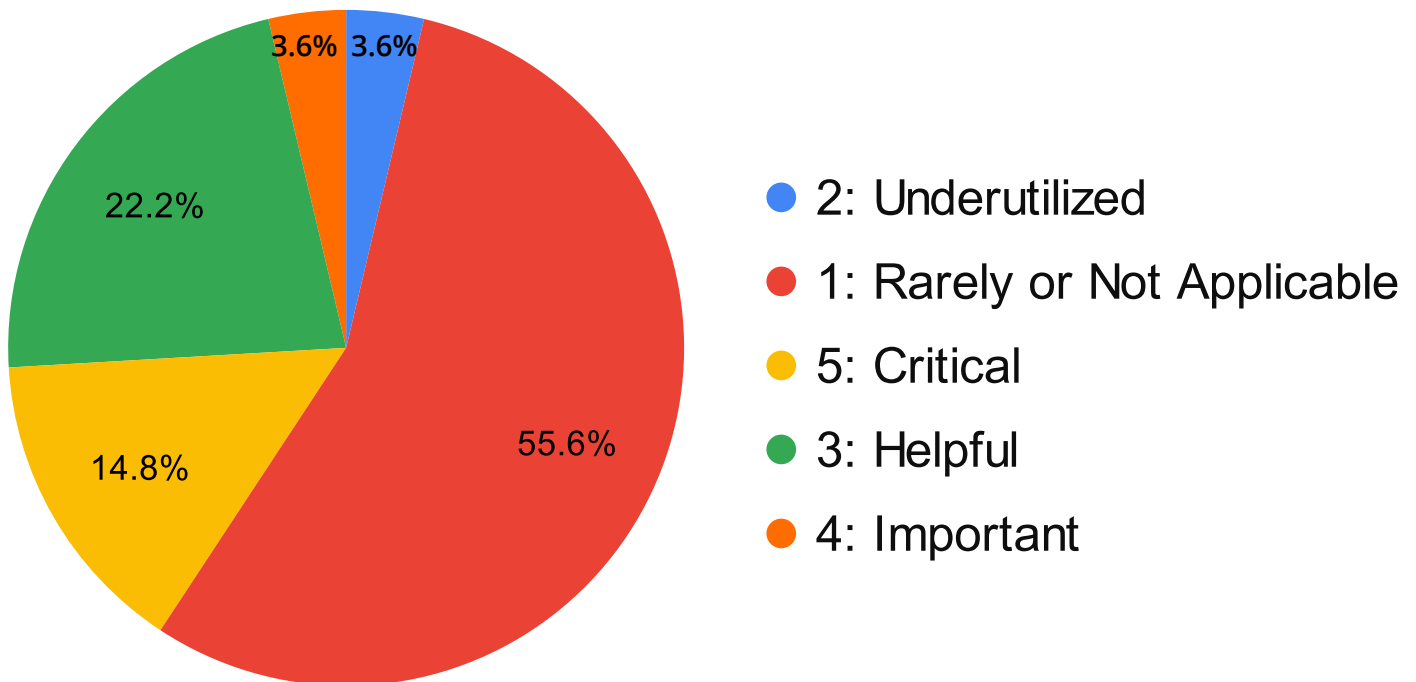
Importance of donations from farmers



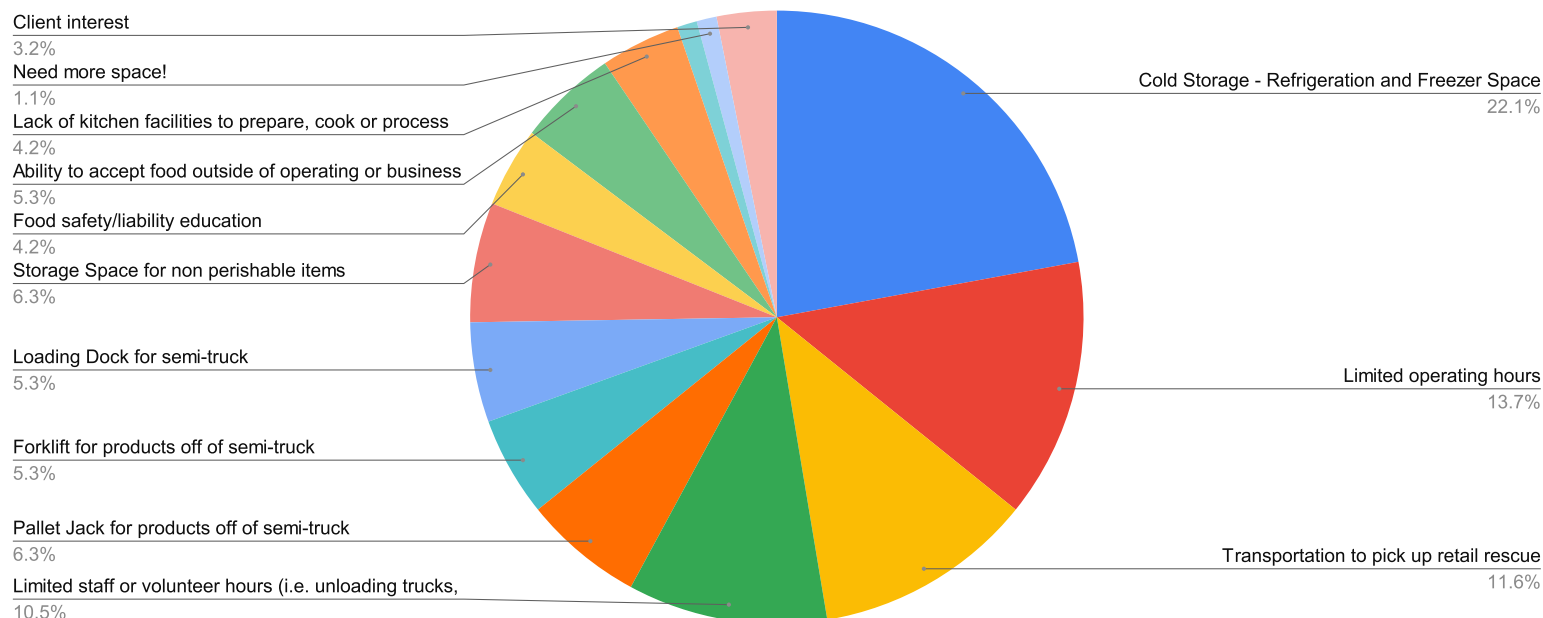
Importance of Food Bank (Second Harvest, Channel One, other)



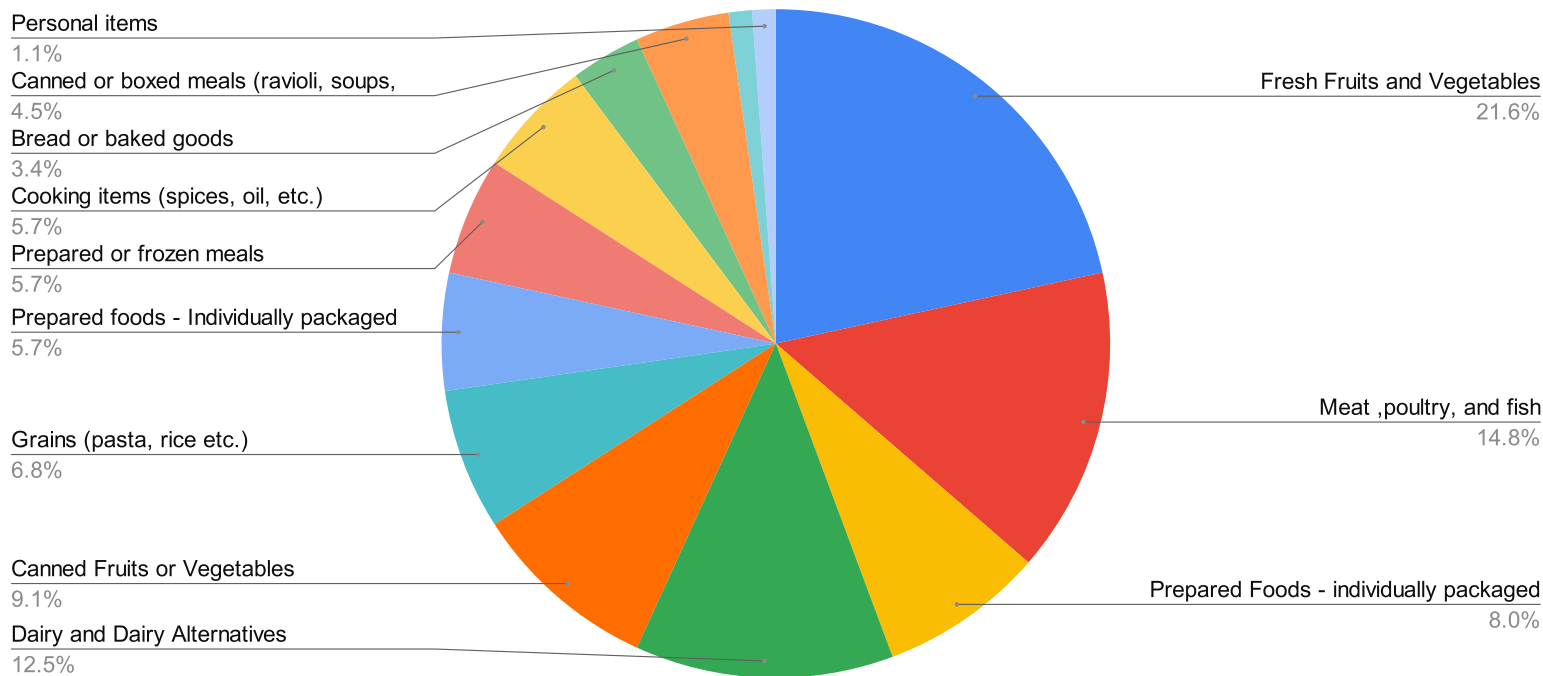
Importance of commercial food rescue (pallets or large quantities of food often from a distribution center or food manufacturer)



Barriers to accepting more food



Food you would like to receive



NOTES



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