

Food Security in The Columbia River Gorge: 2025 Food Security Assessment Report

Written and Prepared by:
Lauren Kraemer, MPH
Associate Professor, Oregon State University

Contributing Authors:
Sandi Phibbs, PhD, MPH
Evaluation Manager, Oregon State University

Grace Wesson
RARE AmeriCorps Member (2023-2025), Oregon State University

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Executive Summary

Columbia Gorge Food Security Assessment 2025

Background

Food security, the ability of all people to access sufficient, safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food, is a foundational determinant of health and well-being. In 2015, a regional food security assessment identified significant barriers to food access across the five-county Columbia Gorge region and helped inform a decade of collaboration, programming, and investment among food system partners. The resulting data supported grant applications, community initiatives, and policy efforts that generated substantial resources for food access and food system resilience throughout the region.

Recognizing the profound impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, rising food costs, housing instability, and changing community needs, regional partners launched the 2025 Columbia Gorge Food Security Assessment to better understand current food security conditions and identify priorities for future action. The assessment was conducted through a broad collaboration of public health agencies, food assistance organizations, healthcare providers, Tribal partners, schools, community organizations, and residents.

Methods

Between May and November 2025, a regional survey was administered across Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Klickitat, and Skamania counties. The assessment collected 1,298 usable responses from community members representing a wide range of ages, incomes, occupations, and cultural backgrounds. In addition to the survey, community focus groups and stakeholder engagement activities provided deeper insight into residents' lived experiences and priorities.

The assessment was available through multiple formats and languages and was distributed through trusted community partners to increase participation among populations most affected by food insecurity.

Key Findings

Food insecurity remains a significant challenge.

Nearly half of survey respondents reported worrying about running out of food before they could afford to buy more, and more than four in ten respondents reported that the food they purchased did not last as long as they needed it to. These findings suggest that food insecurity continues to affect a substantial portion of households across the Columbia Gorge region.

The cost of food is the most significant barrier to food access.

Respondents consistently identified high food prices as the primary obstacle to obtaining adequate food. Additional barriers include transportation challenges, travel distance, limited time, and other logistical constraints that make access to food more difficult, particularly for rural residents. Many respondents reported spending considerable time traveling to obtain groceries and other food resources.

Residents rely on multiple food sources.

While most respondents obtain food from traditional grocery stores, many also utilize food pantries, community gardens, restaurants, and other informal or supplemental food sources. These findings highlight the importance of maintaining a diverse and interconnected local food system capable of supporting households through different circumstances and seasons.

Community members value fresh, nutritious, and affordable food.

When asked what matters most when choosing food, respondents prioritized food that is fresh, nutritious, and budget friendly. This finding suggests that residents are not simply seeking enough food but are striving to access food that supports health, cultural preferences, and quality of life.

Strong interest exists for food-related education and skill building.

Many respondents expressed interest in learning opportunities related to cooking, gardening, food preservation, and other practical food skills. While awareness of community programs was relatively high, participation rates varied, indicating opportunities to improve accessibility, outreach, and program design.

Implications

The assessment demonstrates that food insecurity remains a widespread concern throughout the Columbia Gorge despite significant investments and community efforts over the past decade. Economic pressures—particularly the rising cost of food and living expenses—continue to strain household budgets and limit access to nutritious food.

At the same time, the assessment highlights important regional strengths. Community partners have built a strong collaborative network, residents show interest in food-related learning opportunities, and communities continue to support innovative approaches such as community gardens, food preservation programs, mobile food access efforts, and culturally responsive food initiatives.

Opportunities for Action

Based on assessment findings, partners identified several opportunities to strengthen food security across the region:

- Increase access to affordable, nutritious food through coordinated community and policy approaches.
- Reduce transportation and geographic barriers that limit food access in rural communities.
- Expand opportunities for gardening, food preservation, cooking education, and local food production.
- Strengthen outreach and enrollment support for available food assistance programs.
- Continue investing in collaborative regional approaches that connect health care, public health, education, agriculture, food assistance organizations, and community members.
- Use assessment findings to inform future funding priorities, strategic planning efforts, and policies that support food access and food system resilience.

Limitations and Context

Data collection for this assessment was completed prior to and during the implementation of major federal policy changes enacted through H.R. 1 (signed July 4, 2025). As a result, findings reflect conditions that existed before these changes began affecting households and communities.

- Subsequent changes to SNAP, including expanded Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) work requirements, revised eligibility criteria, and other program modifications, may affect food assistance access and are not reflected in these findings.
- Changes to Medicaid eligibility and funding, along with other federal policy shifts affecting low-income households, may influence future food security conditions in the Columbia Gorge. Findings should therefore be interpreted as a snapshot of conditions at the time of data collection.
- **Bottom Line**: There is a high likelihood that food insecurity has worsened across the Gorge since the survey closed. Interpretation of the results presented here should take this context into account. The Columbia Gorge Food Security Assessment provides a snapshot of experiences while creating a foundation for collective action. The findings will guide regional partners as they develop strategies to improve food access, increase community resilience, and create a food system in which all residents can obtain the food they need to thrive. Through continued collaboration and community engagement, the Columbia Gorge region can build upon the progress of the past decade and work toward a future where every household has reliable access to healthy, affordable, and culturally meaningful food.

"When you're looking at how much you receive money wise, you know you have all these bills and the bills are still constantly growing.
And then whatever's left is food.
That number of what's left is getting less and less and less and less."

-Focus Group Participant, Columbia Gorge Community College



2025 Food Security Assessment Report

Background and Timeline

In 2014, a regional Community Health Needs Assessment identified food insecurity as one of the top social and economic needs in the Columbia River Gorge region's Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). In 2015, the Columbia Gorge Health Council and One Community Health, the region's Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), conducted a survey specific to food insecurity—the inaugural Columbia Gorge Food Security Assessment. With more than 2,000 responses from throughout the region, this survey demonstrated that one in three residents worry about running out of food, and one in five miss meals. Furthermore, the 2015 Food Security Assessment identified significant barriers to food access across the five-county (Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Klickitat, and Skamania) Columbia Gorge region and helped inform a decade of collaboration, programming, and investment among food system partners.

In 2016, Governor Kate Brown officially designated this effort as an Oregon Solutions project. The Oregon Solutions process included six months of facilitated meetings that helped establish and formalize the creation of the Columbia Gorge Food Security Coalition (Coalition). The Coalition included over 40 food producers, food distributors, social service agencies, health care providers and community members and began working to

cooperatively decrease hunger and increase access to quality food throughout the Columbia River Gorge.

The data from the 2015 assessment supported Coalition members in writing successful grant applications, developing new community initiatives, and working toward new policy efforts that generated substantial resources for food access and food system resilience throughout the region. Over $25 million in grant funding was generated with the data from the 2015 assessment to support food access programs. New programs launched included several different Veggie Rx programs, community gardens at low-income housing sites, Oregon State University Extension Service "Seed to Supper" courses and hundreds of food preservation and cooking classes, gleaning programs, new mobile market routes, a food access volunteer training program called "Food Hero," a community meal program, and food sovereignty and land succession efforts.

The Columbia Gorge Food Security Coalition has continued to meet for the last 10 years, responding to local needs and issues as they arise including addressing local natural disasters, funding challenges, and pandemic crises, etc. as well as hosting film screenings and regular convenings. In 2019, partners expressed interest in repeating the assessment; however, the COVID-19 pandemic upended those plans as well as many local and regional food access programs.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, federal, and state governments stood up numerous financial support programs and emergency food access opportunities. It was decided by the Coalition that with so many programs in flux, it was not a good time to assess food access in the Gorge. Additionally, the 'hand fielding' of hard copy surveys was not possible during the early phases of the pandemic when social distancing was required.

In 2021, renewed interest kicked off the assessment planning process once again, and partners began meeting regularly to develop assessment tools and processes. Recognizing the profound impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, rising food costs, housing instability, and changing community needs, regional partners launched the 2025 Columbia Gorge Food Security Assessment to better understand current food security conditions and identify priorities for future action. The assessment was conducted through a broad collaboration of public health agencies, food assistance organizations, healthcare providers, Tribal partners, schools, community organizations, and residents.

Between May and October 2025, the regional survey was administered across Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Klickitat, and Skamania counties. The assessment collected 1,373 total responses from community members representing a wide range of ages, incomes, occupations, and cultural backgrounds. Following a data cleaning process, 1,298 survey

responses were deemed usable and were included in analysis. In addition to the survey, six community focus groups were held along with stakeholder engagement activities, which collectively provided deeper insight into resident's lived experiences and priorities.

Why the Assessments Were Conducted

There are a number of primary and secondary data sources available to quantify regional food insecurity like program use rates for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program, Meals on Wheels, Medicaid and Medicare, Map the Meal Gap, food pantry use data, etc. However, there is a dearth of data documenting the food access experiences of minority populations in the Gorge, particularly Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers (MSFW), Tribal and Indigenous populations, and houseless and housing insecure community members.

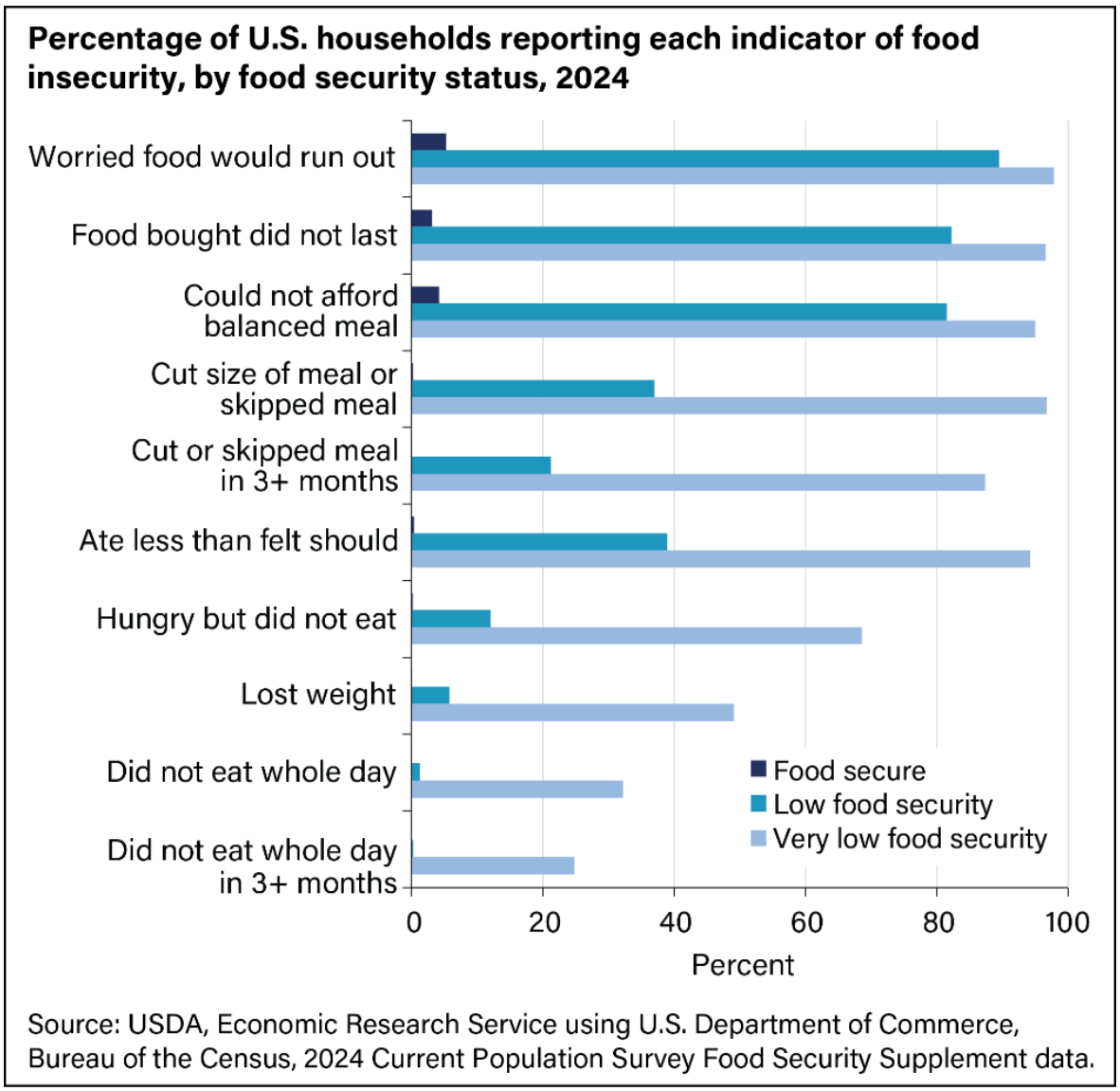
Both the 2015 and 2025 assessments were conducted to help deepen community partners' understanding of food insecurity across the region and especially across populations that aren't always counted in typical data sources or reports. It was particularly important to community partners engaged in the survey design process that the surveys reach groups that have been economically and socially marginalized, and groups experiencing a disproportionate impact of food insecurity.

Definitions and Conceptual Framework

Food security, food insecurity, and hunger are related concepts, but they are not interchangeable. Clearly distinguishing among them is important for understanding the findings of this assessment and the conditions that contribute to whether individuals and families have reliable access to adequate food.

Food security generally refers to having reliable access to enough food to support an active, healthy life. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations defines "Food security" as "a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." It is a foundational determinant of health and well-being. Within the U.S. household food security framework, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) describes food security along a continuum. *High* food security means there are no reported indications of food-access problems or limitations. *Marginal* food security occurs when households report one or two indications of difficulty, such as anxiety about whether food will be sufficient or shortages of food in the home, but there is little or no evidence of changes in diet or food intake. Both *high* and *marginal* food security are considered "food secure" on the continuum. **Figure 1** illustrates household food insecurity by food security status at the national level in 2024.

Figure 1
Percentage of U.S. Households Reporting Each Indicator of Food Insecurity, by Food Security Status, 2024 (USDA, 2026)



Food insecurity, in contrast, is defined by USDA as a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. The National Institutes of Health (NIH, 2025) defines food *insecurity* as:

> When households lack access to adequate food because of limited money or other resources," and notes it "is a leading health and nutrition issue in the United States…[and] is related to suboptimal and/or poor diet quality, which increases chronic disease risk among the socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Food insecurity also exists along a continuum of severity with both *low* and *very low* food security statuses considered "food insecure." Households experiencing *low* food security report reductions in the quality, variety, or desirability of their diets, generally without substantial reductions in the amount of food eaten. *Very low* food security is more severe and is characterized by disruptions in normal eating patterns and reductions in food intake.

Hunger is distinct from food insecurity. Following recommendations from the Committee on National Statistics of the National Academies, USDA distinguishes hunger as an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity. Because hunger refers to an individual's physical experience and requires different methods of measurement, USDA food security surveys assess food insecurity rather than hunger itself.

This distinction is particularly important when interpreting the findings of the Columbia Gorge Food Security Assessment. A household does not need to be experiencing hunger to be food insecure. Food insecurity can appear earlier through worry that food will run out, inability to afford a varied or desirable diet, or compromises in food quality. At more severe levels, those constraints may progress to skipped meals, reduced food intake, and hunger. This continuum helps capture experiences that might be overlooked if the assessment focused only on whether people were physically hungry. The USDA framework similarly differentiates between low food security, where dietary quality and variety are affected, and very low food security, where eating patterns and food intake are disrupted.

For this report, food insecurity is therefore the more useful overarching concept because it captures both the uncertainty of having enough resources for food and the compromises households make before reaching the point of hunger. This framework also reinforces an important theme of the assessment: **food insecurity is fundamentally an issue of access, not simply a measure of how much food exists within a community**. In an agriculturally abundant region such as the Columbia River Gorge, this distinction is especially important. A community can produce tremendous quantities of food while some households still have limited or uncertain economic and social access to adequate food.

Table 1, facing page, presents each of these concepts at a glance to help readers easily distinguish between food security, food insecurity, high food security, marginal food security, low food security, very low food security, and hunger. Notably, the entire continuum of food security statuses is measured at the household level, whereas hunger is measured at the individual level. Research has documented a pattern in which parents in food-insecure households, particularly mothers, reduce or compromise their own food intake in an effort to shield their children from hunger (Arlinghaus & Laska, 2021).

Table 1
Food Security Concepts and Meanings at a Glance

Concept	Meaning in the USDA framework	Level
Food security	Reliable food access, ranging from no reported access problems to some anxiety or occasional indications of difficulty without meaningful changes in food intake	Household
Food insecurity	Limited or uncertain access to adequate food because of economic and social conditions	Household
High food security	No reported indications of problems or limitations with food access.	Household
Marginal food security	Some indications of anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house; There is little or no change in diet or food intake	Household
Low food security	Reduced quality, variety, or desirability of the diet, with little or no indication of reduced food intake	Household
Very low food security	Disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake	Household
Hunger	A physiological condition that may result from food insecurity	Individual

The Six Dimensions of Food Security:
To further our understanding of food security, we are including "The Six Dimensions of Food Security," which were developed by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security. These six dimensions are a helpful framework for the Columbia Gorge community as we work to address and improve availability, access, agency, utilization, sustainability, and stability of our regional food system. The HLPE report shares these definitions, which have been included in full below. **Figure 2** illustrates the six dimensions mapped across the definition of food security.

Availability: Availability is the physical presence of food. Availability refers to individuals having enough quantity, sufficient quality, and nutritional food physically present in a person's environment. This includes the supply and distribution of food at stores, markets, gardens, and other places where individuals obtain food.

Access: Access is the resources and means to obtain food. Access refers to individuals or household resources and means needed to obtain appropriate and nutritious food. This includes both economic and physical resources. This dimension also considers the level of resources needed to ensure that access to food does not compromise satisfactory access to other basic needs like housing or health care.

Agency: Agency is the power to make decisions about food eaten and produced. As a dimension of food security, agency refers to individuals' and communities' capacity to make decisions and take action to shape their own relationships with food and food systems. This includes making choices about what they eat, the food they produce, and how they are produced, processed, and distributed.

Utilization: Utilization is the intake of sufficient and safe food. It refers to the intake of sufficient and safe food and water to meet nutritional needs. This includes individuals' knowledge, skills, and confidence in planning meals and buying, preparing, and cooking food. It also includes their access to food safety knowledge, skills, tools, and resources.

Sustainability: Sustainability is the food system's ability to provide long-term food security. It refers to the food system practices that contribute to the long-term regeneration of natural, social, and economic systems, ensuring the food needs of present generations are met without compromising the food needs of future generations.

Stability: Stability is the reliable supply of food over time. Stability in food security refers to maintaining adequacy in food availability, access, and utilization over time. Stability in these dimensions must be maintained during sudden, short-term shocks and cyclical or seasonal changes. For example, the ability to maintain food availability, access, and utilization during a seasonal job layoff, the onset of a health condition, periods of inflation, or natural disaster.

Figure 2
Definition of Food Security Mapped to the Six Dimensions of Food Security



Community Context: Food and Agriculture in the Columbia River Gorge

The Columbia River Gorge is both a nationally significant agricultural region and a place where food insecurity remains deeply rooted. Agriculture is a major industry throughout the region, supported by fertile valleys, diverse growing environments, and generations of agricultural knowledge and labor. The regional economy also relies heavily on seasonal employment and experiences an influx of migrant and seasonal farmworkers during the agricultural harvest season.

Tree fruit is particularly important to the Gorge's agricultural identity and economy. According to the Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers, the Columbia Gorge region has approximately 22,000 acres of tree fruit, producing about 450 million pounds of fruit annually and generating more than $200 million in revenue. The region is the second-largest producer of pears in the nation and the third-largest producer of sweet cherries, in addition to substantial apple production. The Gorge is also home to a number of small, diversified vegetable farms, ranches, and meat and dairy producers, which are dispersed across the five-county Gorge region, with the majority in Hood River, Wasco, and Klickitat counties. Wasco and Sherman counties are also home to thousands of acres of dryland wheat. Dryland wheat is one of Oregon's most important staple crops.

An abundance of food production does not translate into food security for the people who live and work where that food is grown. As the following pages of our report will illustrate, the 2025 regional Food Security Assessment found that 49% of surveyed households worried about running out of food before they could afford more, while 42% said the food they purchased did not last. Food insecurity was even more pronounced among some populations: 63% of surveyed households with children experienced food insecurity, and 68% of migrant and seasonal farm workers reported not having enough to eat.

This disparity highlights a central tension within the Gorge food system. The same agricultural economy that produces hundreds of millions of pounds of food each year depends on a workforce that can face substantial barriers to securing enough food for their own families. Recent reporting by the Oregon Capital Chronicle in July, 2026 describes immigrant farmworkers confronting rising food, housing, and transportation costs, with some skipping meals, even as growers themselves face significant economic pressures from crop losses, labor and fuel costs, and market conditions.

Food insecurity in the Gorge therefore cannot be understood simply as a shortage of food. Rather, it reflects broader economic and social conditions that shape whether people can reliably access and afford the food that is available around them. Assessment participants

identified food costs as the leading barrier to food access and described difficult tradeoffs between purchasing healthy food and paying for necessities such as housing and utilities.

For this assessment, that distinction is fundamental. The Gorge does not lack food; there are deep inequities in who can access the region's abundance. Understanding food insecurity therefore requires looking beyond food production and emergency food assistance to the interconnected conditions of income, housing costs, transportation, employment, and the structure of the regional food economy. In an agricultural region of such extraordinary productivity, the persistence of hunger, particularly among agricultural workers, underscores the importance of building a food system in which the people who grow, harvest, process, prepare, and distribute food are also able to reliably nourish themselves and their families.

Methods

Survey Design

The Gorge Food Access Survey was designed to assess household food access and food insecurity among residents of the Columbia River Gorge. The survey defined the study area as Hood River, Wasco, and Sherman counties in Oregon and Klickitat and Skamania counties in Washington. Eligibility questions at the beginning of the survey confirmed that respondents agreed to participate and lived within the defined study area.

The survey included both closed- and open-ended questions organized around several dimensions of food access. Respondents were asked about the places and sources from which their households obtained food; travel time and distance to obtain food; awareness and use of food assistance and community food programs; experiences of food insecurity during the previous 12 months; seasonal difficulties obtaining food; factors influencing food choices; barriers to accessing food; and interest in food-related programs, classes, and other supports. Open-ended questions provided opportunities for respondents to describe seasonal challenges, desired educational resources, and other experiences related to obtaining food.

To assess household food insecurity, the survey incorporated the Hunger Vital Sign™, a validated two-item food insecurity screening tool developed by Children's HealthWatch and based on the U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module. The two questions assess whether, during the previous 12 months, households worried that food would run out before they had money to buy more and whether purchased food did not last and there was not enough money to obtain more. Households responding "often true" or "sometimes true" to either question are identified as being at risk for food insecurity (Hager et al., 2010).

The survey also examined factors that may shape access to food in the Gorge. Questions addressed food cost; access to and comfort using food benefits; transportation; distance to food outlets; time and hours of operation; availability of preferred foods and foods needed for dietary or medical reasons; and access to adequate cooking and food-storage facilities. Respondents also reported the time and mileage required to obtain food and their awareness and use of food assistance programs and community food resources.

The survey concluded with demographic and household questions intended to describe the population reached by the assessment. These included year-round versus seasonal residence, migrant or seasonal agricultural worker status, housing situation, age, household size and composition, veteran status, racial and ethnic identity, and household income. The survey did not request respondents' names, and respondents were informed that they could skip questions or stop participating at any time. Contact information for the gift-card raffle was collected separately from survey responses.

The survey was developed to balance comparability with the 2015 Columbia Gorge Food Security Assessment, use of validated measures, and accessibility for community respondents. Wherever possible, questions from the 2015 assessment were carried forward to allow comparison over time, with updates made to reflect current programs, resources, terminology, and conditions in the region.

Survey development was also informed by local expertise and community input. Draft versions were reviewed by community partners participating in the Food Security Assessment Advisory Board, and the survey was pilot tested with community members prior to distribution. Feedback was used to improve the relevance, clarity, and accessibility of the instrument. The survey was reviewed and edited for plain language by a plain-language expert and translated into Spanish to increase accessibility for Spanish-speaking community members.

Data Collection and Recruitment Approach

The 2025 Columbia Gorge Food Security Assessment builds on prior regional data collection efforts and was designed to examine both the extent of food insecurity among respondents and the lived experiences of people facing challenges accessing food. Data collection occurred between May and October 2025 across the five-county assessment area: Hood River, Wasco, and Sherman Counties in Oregon and Klickitat and Skamania Counties in Washington.

Data were collected using a multitude of complementary approaches intended to reduce barriers to participation. As **Figure 3** illustrates, paper surveys were made available through community partner organizations and community locations that receive a good amount of

public foot traffic, like food pantries, adult and senior centers, and resource navigation centers. The survey was also hand-fielded by community health workers and community partners at these locations, allowing for direct outreach through trusted organizations and community networks. This was particularly helpful for some of our limited literacy audiences as community partners could read questions aloud and have participants respond to the questions while sitting in a waiting room.

Figure 3

Hard Copy and Hand-Fielded Survey Distribution Channels



Survey links were distributed through dozens of partner newsletters (e.g. City, County, Community College, and School Districts), local newspapers that reach various communities throughout the region, and paid social media ads on Facebook as well as links and stories on our Extension Instagram pages. As **Figure 4** illustrates, partners provided our survey beav.es web link to their readers and viewers across the region.

Figure 4

Digital Qualtrics Survey Link Distribution Channels



Recruitment used a purposive, community-based sampling approach designed to elevate the voices of people likely to experience food insecurity, meaning that we intentionally recruited people from the community who had experiences relevant to understanding food insecurity. Local organizations recruited respondents directly from among their clients, contacts, and communities. This targeted recruitment was complemented by broader regional outreach through advertisements, social media, newsletters, and community networks. Together, these strategies were intended to reach a broad cross-section of community members while intentionally increasing participation among people most affected by food access challenges.

The Assessment was not designed to produce a statistically representative sample of the broader Columbia Gorge population, and results should not be interpreted as population-level prevalence estimates. Participants who were more likely to experience food insecurity were intentionally recruited so that the Assessment could better characterize the depth and complexity of food-access challenges. Consequently, the level of food insecurity observed among survey respondents should not be interpreted as the prevalence of food insecurity in the Gorge as a whole. Rather, the findings provide insight into the experiences of people affected by food insecurity and the barriers, resources, and conditions that shape their access to food. At the same time, responses were received from community members representing a range of income levels, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and age groups, providing important context for understanding food access experiences across different segments of the community.

The timing of data collection is also important for interpreting the findings. Data collection concluded on October 31st, 2025 and therefore preceded subsequent changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), including changes associated with H.R. 1. Because the policy and economic environment affecting food access continues to change, the findings represent conditions experienced by respondents during the assessment period rather than current conditions. Reductions in benefits or changes in eligibility may further affect food access after the study period; therefore, the 2025 findings should be considered a baseline against which emerging conditions can be interpreted. Furthermore, it is likely that the data underrepresent current levels of food insecurity as many conditions have worsened since the survey closed.

Data Analysis Procedures

Survey data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Our team calculated frequencies and percentages of survey responses which are presented in numerous tables and figures throughout the report. Descriptive analyses were used to summarize respondent characteristics, experiences of food insecurity, food access

practices, barriers, and use of and familiarity with food assistance programs. Open-ended survey responses were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach with assistance from Microsoft Copilot. Specifically, the data analysis team used Oregon State University's Microsoft Copilot environment, which provides enterprise data protection. Responses to open-ended questions were provided to Copilot and reviewed for recurring topics, patterns, and related concepts. Copilot was used to support the initial organization of responses into potential themes and subthemes and to identify illustrative responses associated with those themes. The data analysis team then reviewed the resulting themes against the original survey responses, refined and consolidated overlapping categories, and interpreted the findings within the context of the Columbia Gorge Food Security Assessment. The final themes and conclusions presented in this report reflect the research team's interpretation of the data rather than automated analysis alone.

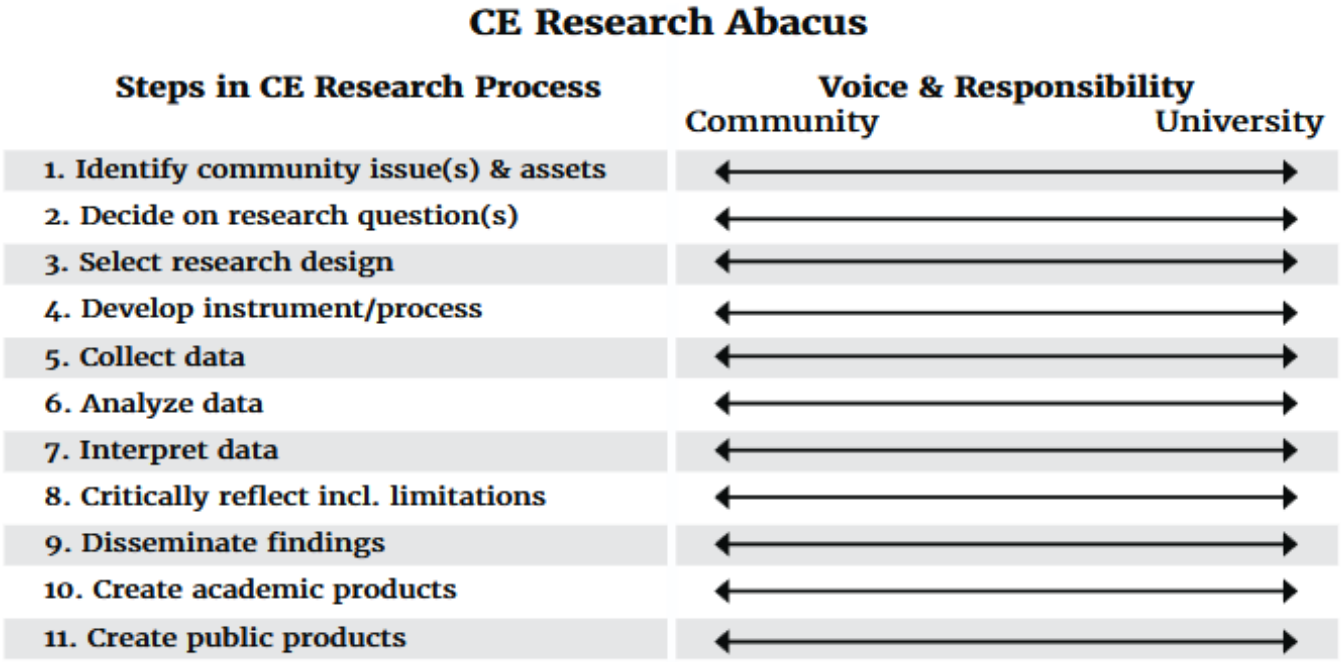
Open-ended responses were analyzed in the language in which respondents provided them, including English- and Spanish-language responses, and findings were synthesized across responses to identify common experiences related to food affordability, access, transportation, food assistance, household circumstances, and desired resources and skills. Representative quotations were selected to illustrate major themes and preserve participants' voices. The qualitative findings were used to provide context and depth to the quantitative survey results rather than to estimate the prevalence of individual themes within the broader population.

Community Engagement and Stakeholder Interviews

Community engagement was an integral component of the 2025 Columbia Gorge Food Security Assessment. A Food Security Assessment Advisory Group was convened to bring community perspectives and organizational expertise into the assessment process. The group included a variety of community stakeholders and met six times over the course of the project. Members of this diverse, cross-sector Advisory Group included Lauren Kraemer of Oregon State University Extension Service, Grace Wesson AmeriCorps RARE Member serving with Oregon State University Extension Service, Dawn LeMieux of The Next Door Inc., Lissette Rivera Juarez of the Columbia Gorge Health Council, Breen Goodwin, Executive Director of Columbia Gorge Food Bank, Sarah Sullivan Executive Director of Gorge Grown Food Network, Claire Rawson Wagner of Hat Creek Consulting, Lexi Stickel of PacificSource, and Neil Friedrich of Oregon Department of Human Services. Advisory Group members contributed to the design, review, planning, and implementation of the survey process, helping ensure that the assessment reflected local priorities, experiences, and conditions.

The engagement approach was informed by the Degree of Collaboration Abacus Tool, developed by Doberneck and Dann (2019) as a framework for making collaboration in community-engaged projects more explicit. The tool recognizes that terms such as *participate, collaborate,* and *partner* do not, by themselves, communicate who has voice, decision-making authority, or responsibility for action. Instead, the framework provides a way to consider and describe how responsibility, voice, and authority may differ across stages of a community-engaged project. The Assessment Advisory Group used The Degree of Collaboration Abacus Tool (see **Figure 5**) as a guide for thinking intentionally about how community partners could participate meaningfully at different stages of the assessment, rather than approaching engagement as a single or uniform activity.

Figure 5
Community Engaged Research Degree of Collaboration Abacus Tool (Doberneck and Dann, 2019)



Advisory Group meetings also incorporated participatory facilitation strategies to encourage discussion and shared decision-making. Tools such as "Fist to Five" were used to gauge the level of support for ideas and decisions and to create opportunities for participants to identify concerns, questions, or areas requiring additional discussion. These approaches helped the group move beyond simply providing feedback toward an iterative process of reviewing options, identifying priorities, and refining components of the assessment together.

Across the six meetings, Advisory Group members helped design and vet survey content, consider approaches for reaching priority populations, inform recruitment and distribution strategies, identify community partners and opportunities for outreach, and support implementation of the survey process. Community input also complemented pilot testing with community members, and the plain-language and Spanish-language accessibility work incorporated into survey development.

This collaborative approach was particularly important because the Assessment intentionally sought to better understand the experiences of people affected by food insecurity. Engaging local partners throughout the process helped connect the technical components of assessment design with knowledge of community context, populations, services, and barriers to participation. The Advisory Group therefore served not only as a source of feedback, but as an important mechanism for incorporating community knowledge throughout the Assessment process.

Community engagement was treated as an ongoing process rather than a single step in the Assessment. By engaging partners across multiple stages of design, planning, review, outreach, and implementation, the Assessment sought to combine rigorous data collection with the knowledge and perspectives of organizations and communities across the Columbia Gorge.

Additionally, we met with 19 local partner organizations representing public health, social services, emergency food assistance, schools, and healthcare to co-design and refine the assessment plans. During this process, we learned about the importance of a trauma-informed approach due to the history of university research as an extractive and harmful practice. As a result, we prioritized data sharing and transparency, brevity and clarity of the survey to reduce survey fatigue, and securing funding for Spanish-language and culturally appropriate focus groups/listening sessions.

We shared the following statement with our Advisory Group in our first meeting to ground our efforts in inclusive, reciprocal, and collaborative community-engaged research:

> As we embark on this work, it is essential to acknowledge the long and troubling history of research and data collection that has often exploited marginalized communities. For too long, these practices have extracted knowledge and experiences without giving due recognition, ownership, or benefit to the people and cultures from whom these data were gathered. This legacy of harm has contributed to deepening inequities, reinforcing systemic barriers, and perpetuating mistrust between researchers and the communities they study. In response, this work is grounded in a commitment to ethical, inclusive, and

> reciprocal research practices. We seek to honor the lived experiences and wisdom of historically marginalized populations by engaging them as equal partners in the research process. This means not only collecting data, but also listening, co-creating knowledge, and ensuring that the benefits of this work are shared with the communities involved. We aim to shift from extractive research toward models of self-determination, collaboration, and respect, recognizing that true knowledge cannot be separated from justice. We have a responsibility to continuously reflect on our methods, remain accountable to the communities we engage with, and work toward a future where research uplifts, rather than exploits, the voices of those who have long been silenced.

Excerpted from *Gunter, K.B., Garcia, J., Harvey, M., Hein, W., Jackson, J., Kraemer, L., Lipscomb, S., Mojica, C. (2024). Recognizing Community-Engaged Scholarship in Faculty Periodic, Promotion, and Tenure Reviews: Recommendations to COH and OSU Extension*. Full report available upon request.

Survey Results

Respondent Demographics: Who Responded to the Survey:

A total of 1,298 respondents agreed to participate in the survey and met criteria of living in the Columbia River Gorge. Total responses to individual questions also varied, as respondents could opt out of answering any question and data from incomplete surveys were recorded and used in the analysis.

Geographical Representation of Respondents

More than 1/3 (38%) of respondents were from Hood River; Wasco County residents accounted for 29% of respondents and Klickitat County for 23%. Skamania County and Sherman County contributed 5% and 4% of survey responses, respectively. **Figure 6** illustrates the proportion of respondents from each county.

Ninety-three percent of survey respondents (93.47%, n=1,131) reported living in the Columbia Gorge year-round. Respondents who reported living in the region seasonally were largely migrant and season farm workers, however a handful of folks also indicated working in forestry, seasonal fishing, or outdoor recreation.

Figure 6

Geographical Representation of Respondents



Race/Ethnicity

Table 2

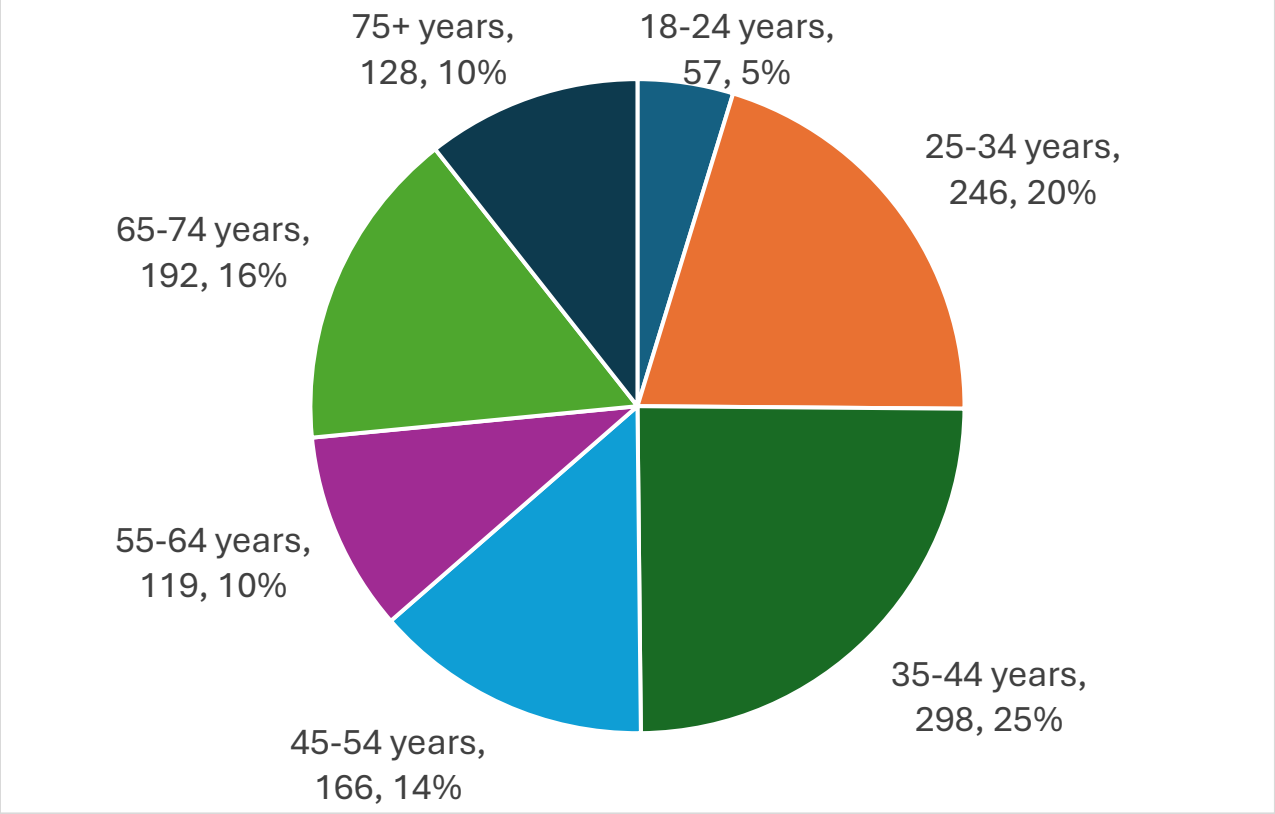
Race and Ethnic Identity of Survey Respondents (Self-Reported, Multiple Answers Allowed, n=1,190)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
American Indian or Alaska Native	117	9.8%
Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	29	2.4%
Black or African American	67	5.6%
Hispanic, Latino, Latina, Latinx, or Latine	210	17.7%
White or Caucasian	810	68.1%
Other	41	3.4%

Age

A total of 1,207 respondents provided data about their age, represented in **Figure 7**.

Figure 7
Age of Survey Respondents



Household Composition

Household size ranged from 1 to 15, with an average of 3.15 (SD=1.72, n=1,169) people per household. A little over half of respondents had at least 1 child living in the household (52%, n=598).

Household Income

The survey collected data about household income, however, because household income does not reflect the number of people supported by that income, we adjusted income based on household size using household income-to-poverty ratios (IPR). Income was collected in nine ordinal categories (<$15,000; $15,000–$24,999; $25,000–$34,999; $35,000–$49,999; $50,000–$74,999; $75,000–$99,999; $100,000–$149,999; $150,000–$199,999; ≥$200,000). Because income was measured categorically rather than continuously, each bracket was assigned a representative dollar value using the bracket's

midpoint (e.g., the $25,000–$34,999 bracket was assigned $30,000). The lowest bracket (<$15,000) was assigned a midpoint of $7,500, and the open-ended top bracket (≥$200,000) was assigned a value of $250,000 (See Hest, 2023 for methods for calculating IPR based on income categories).

Household income-to-poverty ratio was computed by dividing each household's assigned income value by the 2026 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) federal poverty guideline corresponding to that household's reported size (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2026). For households of one to eight people, poverty thresholds ranged from $15,960 (household size = 1) to $55,720 (household size = 8), increasing by $5,680 per additional household member; households larger than eight followed the same per-person increment. The resulting ratio expresses household income as a percentage of the federal poverty level (FPL) (e.g., a ratio of 1.00 indicates income at 100% of the FPL; a ratio of 2.00 indicates income at 200% of the FPL.

The continuous income-to-poverty ratio was then categorized into six groups, selected to align with federal program eligibility thresholds relevant to food assistance: less than 100% (below the FPL), 100–129% (above the poverty line but below the SNAP gross-income eligibility limit), 130–184% (the SNAP/WIC eligibility range), 185–199% (above the WIC and reduced-price school meal threshold), 200–399% (moderate income), and 400% or greater (high income, historically the ceiling for Affordable Care Act premium tax credit eligibility).

Table 3

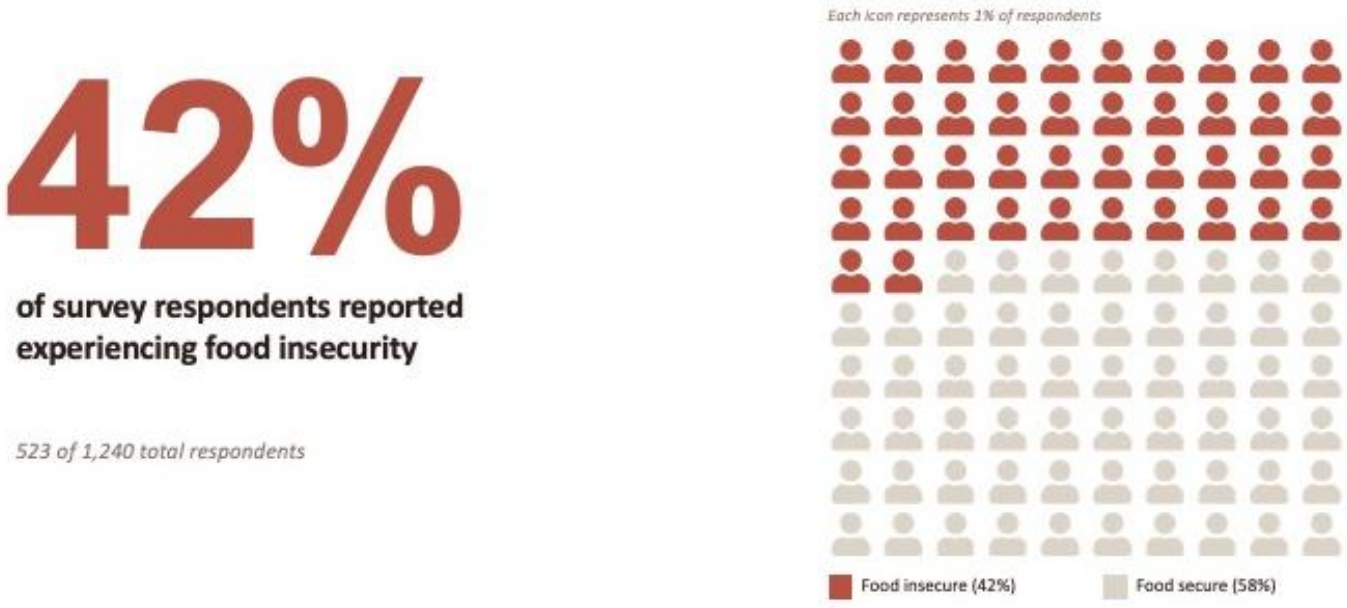
Income-to-Poverty Ratio (IPR) Categories Aligned to Federal Program Eligibility Thresholds Relevant to Food Assistance Programs

Income Range for a Household of 4	IPR Category	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Less than $33,000	Less than 100% (below the federal poverty line)	30.29%	325
$33,000 - $42,899	100–129% (above the poverty line but below the SNAP gross-income eligibility limit)	8.95%	96
$42,900 - $61,049	130–184% (the SNAP/WIC eligibility range)	7.36%	79
$61,050 - $65,999	185–199% (above the WIC and reduced-price school meal threshold)	8.39%	90
$65,000 - $131,999	200–399% (moderate income)	23.30%	250
$132,000 or more	400% or greater (high income, historically the ceiling for Affordable Care Act premium tax credit eligibility)	21.71%	233
	Total	100.00	1073

Food Insecurity

The percentage of respondents who reported food insecurity varied in different groups. Across the entire survey population, 42% of survey respondents reported experiencing food insecurity (**Figure 8**). Among households with at least one child, the percentage of food insecurity was 54%. Among households with at least one older adult, the percentage of food insecurity was 34%, however, it would be a mistake to view households with older adults as a uniform population group. Among all households with older adults, almost half (47%) of them have incomes consistent with less than 200% of the federal poverty threshold and more than half of this group (53%) were food insecure.

Figure 8
Food Insecurity Across All Respondents



The Assessment was designed not only to measure food-access challenges, but also to center the experiences of people living those challenges. Recruitment efforts were intentionally structured to reach individuals and families at greater risk of food insecurity, including populations often underrepresented in traditional surveys.

The resulting subsample summaries should not be interpreted as representative of the Gorge population as a whole; however, it can be viewed as a successful representation of the voices the Assessment sought to engage. The high prevalence of food insecurity among respondents is therefore best understood not as an estimate of regional prevalence, but as evidence that the Assessment successfully reached community members experiencing the greatest barriers to food access. This approach provides a deeper understanding of the conditions, tradeoffs, and systemic challenges associated with food insecurity.

Housing Insecurity

Twenty-seven percent of respondents (n=315) indicated that they have an insecure housing situation (i.e., worried about losing their housing; staying with friends or family; staying in a shelter; staying in a car, trailer, RV, tent, or on a street; living on tribal lands or in-lieu sites). Among individuals who indicated an insecure housing situation, 72% (n=222) were also food insecure. Housing insecurity and food insecurity are closely connected forms of economic hardship, as households with limited resources must often balance the costs of housing, utilities, food, health care, and other essential needs. Because housing expenses tend to be relatively fixed, households experiencing high rent or mortgage costs may reduce food spending or rely more heavily on food assistance to remain housed. Research has found that housing cost burden is associated with increased risk of food insecurity, particularly among renters (Seo & Park, 2021). The relationship can also work in the opposite direction, as households may delay rent or utility payments in order to purchase food, increasing the risk of housing instability. This overlap is substantial: a meta-analysis of 40 U.S. studies estimated that 57% of people experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness also experienced food insecurity (Jackson et al., 2025).

Figure 9

Housing and Food Insecurity



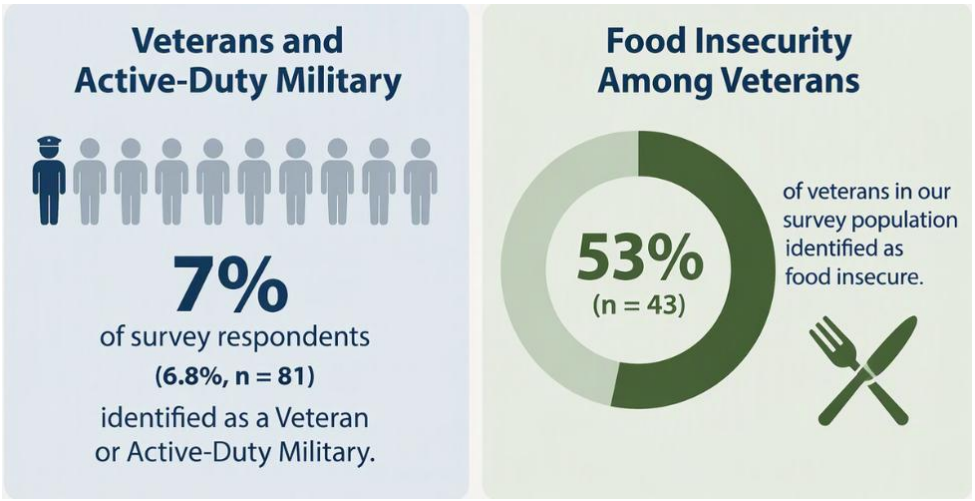
Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers

Fifteen percent of survey respondents (14.6%, *n* = 174) identified as migrant or seasonal agricultural workers. Among these respondents, 68% screened positively for food insecurity, a significantly higher proportion than among respondents who did not identify as migrant or seasonal agricultural workers. This finding is consistent with national research documenting disproportionately high levels of food insecurity among farmworker populations. A scoping review of studies conducted primarily in the United States found that estimates of food insecurity among temporary foreign farmworkers ranged from 28% to 87%, with contributing factors including low and variable income, seasonal employment, limited transportation and access to food retailers, inadequate housing or food preparation facilities, and immigration or legal status (Al-Bazz et al., 2022). Earlier research among migrant and seasonal Latino farmworker households in North Carolina found that 47% were food insecure, with even higher prevalence among households with children (Quandt et al., 2004). Farmworkers may also encounter language barriers, uncertainty about eligibility, stigma, and immigration-related concerns that limit participation in nutrition assistance programs, even when household members qualify (Rockler et al., 2024). These findings underscore a fundamental inequity in the regional food system: workers who play an essential role in growing, harvesting, and distributing food may themselves face substantial barriers to obtaining enough nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food. Although the Assessment findings should not be generalized to all migrant and seasonal agricultural workers in the Columbia River Gorge, they align with the broader literature.

Veterans and Active-Duty Military

Seven percent of survey respondents (6.8%, n = 81) identified as a Veteran or Active-Duty Military. Among current or former members of the U.S. Armed Forces, Reserves, or National Guard in our survey population, 53% identified as food insecure. Although the Assessment was not designed to estimate the

Figure 10
Food Security by Veteran Status



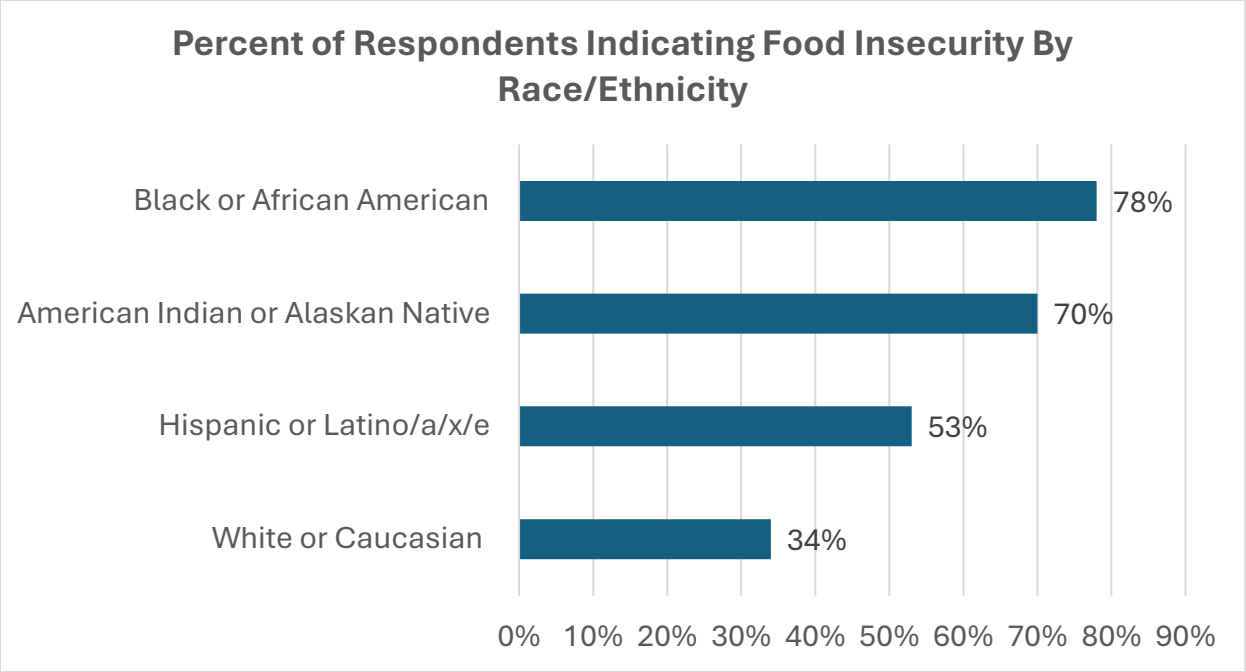
prevalence of food insecurity specifically among Veterans in the Columbia River Gorge, veterans are an important population to consider when examining barriers to food access and opportunities for targeted outreach. A 2023 RAND analysis estimated that approximately 7.5% of U.S. veterans, nearly 1.4 million people, experienced food insecurity, based on data from 2015 through 2020 (Dubowitz et al., 2023). Earlier research from the U.S. Department of Agriculture found that 11.1% of working-age veterans lived in food-insecure households during 2015–2019, including 5.3% who experienced very low food security (Rabbitt & Smith, 2021).

Race and Ethnicity

Among different racial and ethnic identity groups, food insecurity was higher among those who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native (70%, n=81), Black or African American (78%, n=52), Hispanic, Latino, Latina, Latinx, or Latine (53%, n=108), and lower among those who identified as White or Caucasian (34%, n=274) (see **Figure 11**).

Figure 11

Percent of Respondents Indicating Food Insecurity by Race/Ethnicity



Note. Racial and ethnic identity was self-reported. Percentages represent the proportion of respondents within each identified group who screened positive for food insecurity. Respondents may have selected more than one racial or ethnic identity; therefore, categories may not be mutually exclusive. Findings represent Assessment respondents and should not be interpreted as population-level estimates for racial and ethnic groups in the Columbia River Gorge.

Food Assistance Program Use

Our results indicate that food assistance programs are not fully addressing food insecurity. Among respondents who report receiving SNAP and WIC benefits, more than two-thirds remained food insecure (69% and 67% respectively). More than half of households in the eligibility range for SNAP and WIC remained food insecure. Moreover, almost 40% of households in the 185-199% FPL category and 30% of moderate-income households (which are ineligible for food assistance programs like SNAP) were food insecure in our survey.

Figure 12

Food Assistance Programs and Food Insecurity



Food sources

Households of the Columbia Gorge get their food from a variety of places, however patterns differ by food security status. Bolded rows indicate a statistically significant difference between groups. There was no difference between food insecure and food secure respondents in their use of small community or small specialty grocery stores and fast-food restaurants.

Table 4
Where Respondents Get Food by Food Security/Insecurity Status (n=1,235)

	Food Insecure (n=520)		Food Secure (n=715)	
	%	Freq	%	Freq
Large grocery stores like Safeway, Fred Meyer, or Walmart	**87%**	**453**	**91%**	**653**
Food pantry or food bank	**46%**	**238**	**15%**	**110**
Small community or small specialty grocery stores	44%	226	48%	340
Stores outside of the Columbia River Gorge like Costco, Winco, and Sam's Club	**39%**	**205**	**55%**	**392**
Farmers market	**36%**	**186**	**46%**	**326**
Dollar stores	**36%**	**184**	**16%**	**113**
Fast-food restaurants	31%	162	35%	253
Convenience stores or gas stations	**25%**	**131**	**10%**	**74**
Home garden	**23%**	**119**	**42%**	**301**
Donations from Friends and Family	**18%**	**94**	**9%**	**62**
Farm stands	**18%**	**92**	**24%**	**170**
Sit-down restaurants	**17%**	**89**	**50%**	**354**
Community garden	**9%**	**47**	**2%**	**12**

What Makes It Difficult to Get Food

While almost one-third (32%) of respondents indicated that it is not hard to get food, two-thirds (68%) highlighted a number of barriers or challenges when accessing food.
A significant percentage of respondents reported the high costs of food being their number one barrier. Across all respondents, 59% reported high food costs as a barrier while 83% of food insecure respondents reported high food costs as their most challenging barrier.
Table 5 illustrates the percentages of responses to the question "What Makes it Hard to Access Food" based on various demographic statuses.

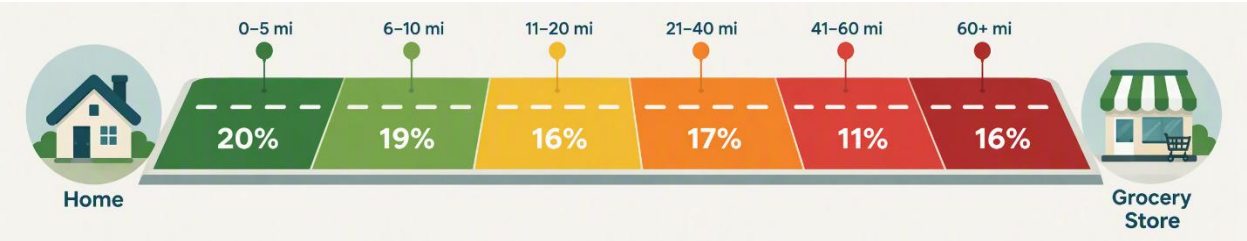
Table 5
What Makes it Hard to Access Food (n=1,192)

	Food Insecure	Older Adults	Hispanic/ Latino	All Respondents
Food costs are high	**83% (416)**	**48% (207)**	**75% (149)**	**59% (702)**
Foods I want or prefer are not available	22% (109)	10% (42)	12% (24)	13% (151)
Not able to access or use food benefits	20% (103)	11% (49)	15% (30)	13% (150)
Store or pantry is too far away	19% (98)	8% (35)	10% (19)	10% (115)
Foods I need (for medical condition or allergies) are not available	16% (504)	9% (40)	11% (21)	11% (130)
I do not have space, power, or kitchen facilities to cook or store food	13% (67)	8% (35)	9% (18)	7% (82)
Cannot go to store or pantry when they are open	13% (65)	3% (15)	7% (14)	4% (53)
Do not have time	12% (60)	7% (30)	6% (12)	7% (83)
Do not have transportation	11% (53)	4% (19)	7% (13)	8% (96)

Distance

Some individuals within the Columbia River Gorge must travel significant distances to get food. **Figure 13** illustrates 44% of respondents travel more than 20 miles to access food. For rural Gorge households, food access depends not only on how many miles they must travel, but also on whether transportation routes are reliable and accessible. Weather, crashes, wildfire, landslides, and construction can disrupt travel on I-84, the Gorge's primary east-west transportation corridor. It is not uncommon for road hazards and closures to impact WA-14, HWY-35, and HWY-97 as well. For households already traveling substantial distances to purchase groceries or access food assistance, even temporary highway closures, hazardous driving conditions, or significant delays can compound existing transportation barriers.

Figure 13
Distance Traveled to Get Groceries

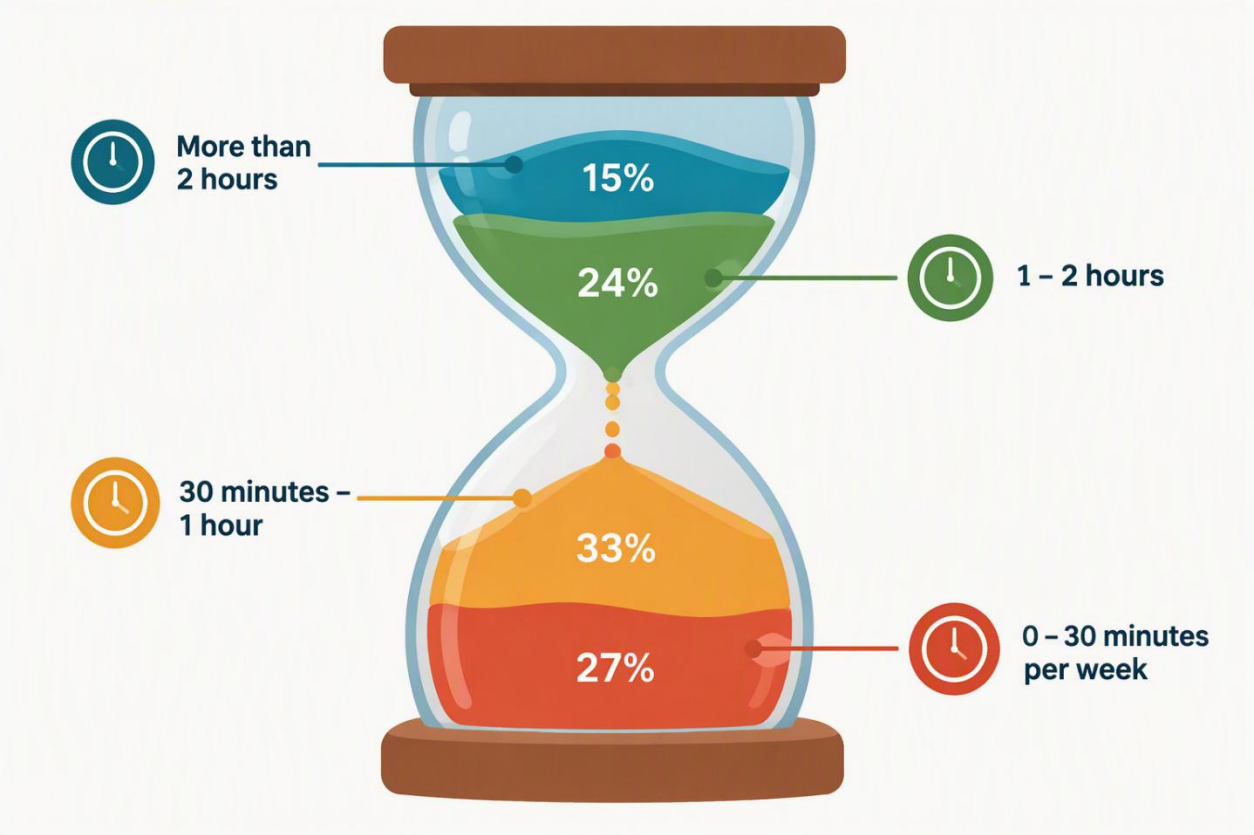


Time

Over half (57%) of the residents of the Columbia River Gorge spend about an hour a week accessing food. **Figure 14** illustrates how much time respondents spent accessing food.

Figure 14

Time Spent Accessing Food

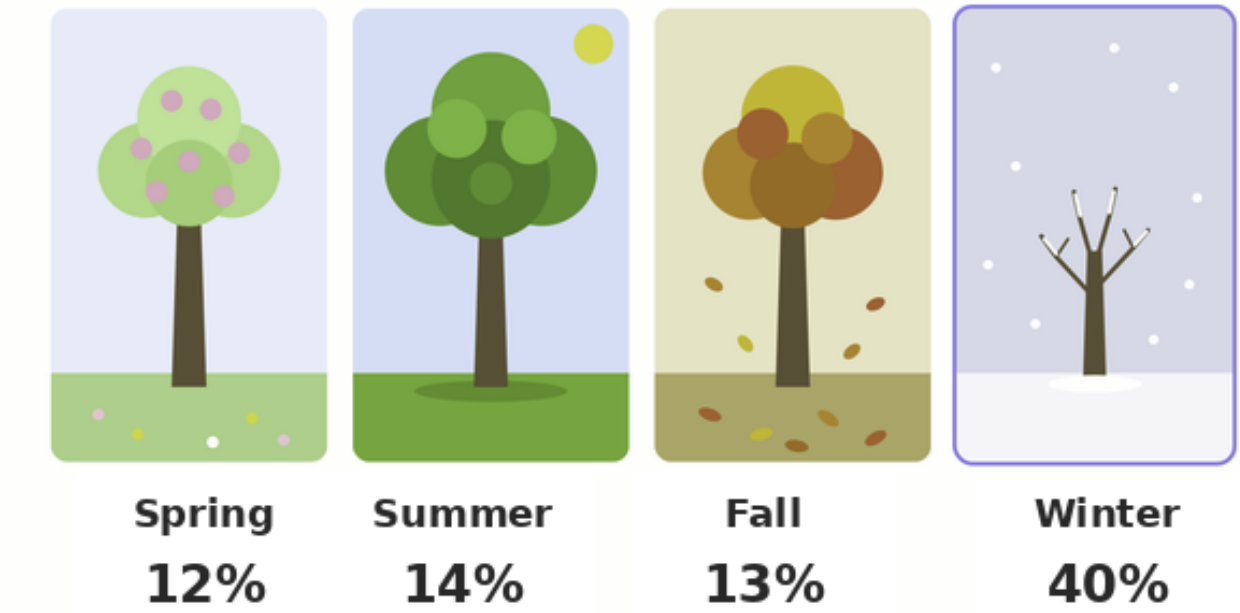


Seasonal Challenges

Shifts in seasons can also contribute to difficulties in getting food. Over half (51%, n=626) of all respondents indicated that they experienced seasonal difficulties in accessing food. Among food insecure respondents, 89% (n = 456) experienced difficulty accessing food during at least one season. Forty percent of all respondents indicated that they experienced difficulties obtaining food during winter (**Figure 15**, following page). Respondents indicated that the extra difficulties of winter food access were related to everything from travel challenges and road conditions to seasonal availability of fruits and vegetables, less work or underemployment during the winter months, extra pressures and costs of the holiday season with expectations of preparing a large holiday meals (e.g. Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanza, etc.), school being out of session for two weeks and families unable to access free and reduced cost breakfasts and lunches for their children, and higher utility costs related to home heating.

Figure 15

Seasonal Challenges in Food Access Among All Respondents



Food values

Table 6

What is Important to You When Choosing the Food You Eat (n=1,226)

	Food Insecure	Households with Children	Households at 200% or more FPL	All Respondents
Fresh	**69% (350)**	**74% (444)**	**83% (399)**	**77% (944)**
Nutritious	**61% (309)**	**68% (408)**	**80% (385)**	**72% (883)**
Budget-friendly	**75% (384)**	**73% (437)**	**63% (306)**	**70% (857)**
Easy to cook	52% (264)	52% (312)	52% (251)	50% (612)
Easy to get	47% (241)	47% (278)	43% (209)	45% (555)
Variety	40% (204)	43% (256)	46% (224)	45% (549)
Local	33% (170)	33% (198)	46% (222)	40% (491)
Sustainable	32% (164)	34% (204)	39% (189)	35% (430)
Fits my dietary needs, for instance, allergies, diabetes, or other chronic conditions	34% (175)	30% (181)	33% (161)	34% (415)
Food that I am used to and is a part of my culture or traditions	31% (156)	32% (190)	22% (111)	28% (343)
Kid Friendly	31% (160)	49% (295)	22% (107)	27% (332)
Fun to get, cook, or eat	19% (99)	22% (133)	24% (116)	22% (275)

We all have different values when approaching what we eat, however as **Table 6** illustrates, across all respondents, the most important values when choosing food are fresh, nutritious, and budget-friendly. Depending on a household's food insecurity status or whether they have children in the home, these values might shift places across the top 3, for example, among food-insecure households, budget-friendly (75%) was identified as the most important value.

Program awareness and use

Table 7
Awareness of Food Assistance Programs (n=1,132)

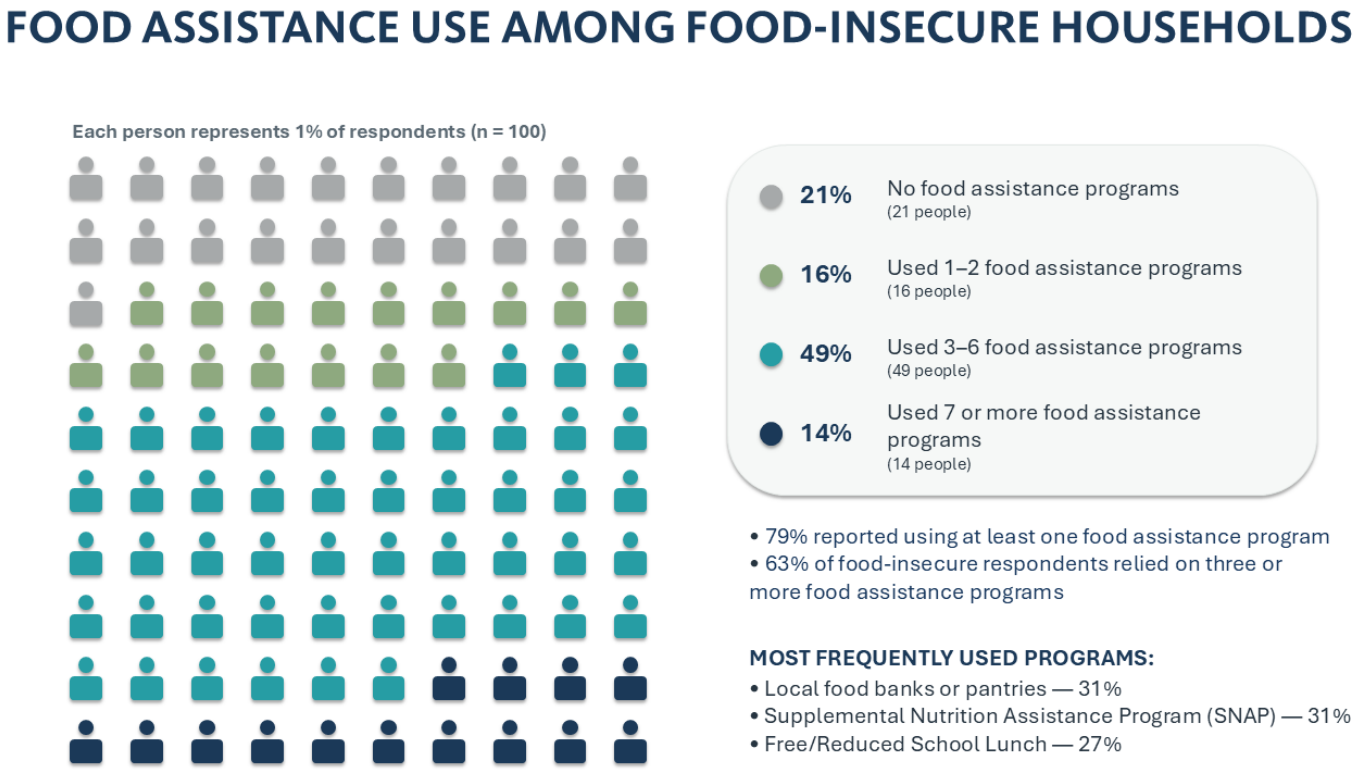
Name of Program	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
WIC, which stands for Women, Infants, and Children	78%	888
SNAP, which is also called EBT, food stamps, Oregon Trail, Washington Quest, or FAP	75%	845
Meals on Wheels	70%	793
Local food bank or food pantry	69%	777
Free or Reduced School Lunch during the school year or summer	68%	773
WIC and senior benefits or vouchers for farmers markets and farm stands. This is also called Farm Direct Nutrition Program (FDNP), WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP).	66%	741
Head Start	58%	659
Local Adult or Senior Center	54%	614
Double-Up Food Bucks, SNAP Market Match, or other SNAP market incentive program	53%	597
Gleaning programs like Windy River Gleaners, Skamania Gleaners, White Salmon Gleaners, Gorge Gleaning	50%	566
Church or community organization	48%	549
Food boxes	46%	517
Veggie Rx	41%	466
Client-based food pantry at an organization where I get other services like One Community Health, ODHS, Helping Hands	41%	464
Community Backpack Program	41%	461

Table 7 highlights *awareness* of food assistance programs. The survey also asked whether the respondent's household gets food through the programs listed. As **Figure 11** illustrates, among all programs, the most frequently used were local food banks or pantries (31%),

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (31%), and the Free/Reduced School Lunch program (27%). Among food insecure respondents, 21% reported using NO food assistance programs. Additionally, roughly 27% of food insecure households who are income eligible for SNAP benefits are NOT using or accessing SNAP benefits. Respondents cited lack of comfort using food benefits and inability to access or use food benefits as some of the reasons for lack of program use.

Most households (79%) with food insecurity reported using one or more food assistance programs: 16% used 1 or 2 programs; about half used between 3 and 6 programs; 14% used 7 or more programs. This suggests that many households depend on multiple sources of support to meet their food needs and that they are often juggling a number of different programs with a variety of enrollment and eligibility timelines and processes as well as use restrictions and limits.

Figure 16
Food Assistance Use Among Food-Insecure Households



Desired programs/services

Survey results demonstrate substantial interest in food and nutrition education programs across the region (see **Table 8**). More than half of respondents (51%) expressed interest in food preservation classes, while approximately four in ten respondents reported interest in cooking classes (42%), gardening education (41%), and healthy eating classes (40%). More than one-third (35%) wanted assistance learning to shop on a budget. Collectively, these findings suggest that community members seek practical skills that can help stretch food budgets, increase self-sufficiency, reduce food waste, and support long-term health outcomes.

At the same time, these results highlight an important mismatch between community demand and the current capacity of local organizations to provide these services. Many of the educational programs identified by respondents have historically been delivered through SNAP-Ed and related nutrition education initiatives. In many communities, SNAP-Ed served as the primary provider of nutrition education, cooking demonstrations, food preservation workshops, gardening education, healthy eating classes, and budget-conscious food purchasing programs. Recent federal policy changes and funding reductions implemented during the Trump Administration have significantly reduced support for these efforts. The budget reconciliation law, H.R. 1, enacted in July 2025, reduced federal nutrition spending and eliminated SNAP-Ed as it previously operated.

As a result, many community organizations across the Gorge that used to provide food and nutrition education have experienced staffing reductions, program cuts, or the loss of grant funding needed to sustain outreach activities. While the survey findings indicate strong public interest in learning how to preserve food, cook healthy meals, grow food, and manage food budgets, the organizations that historically delivered these services may no longer have sufficient capacity to meet that demand. Such is the case for Oregon State University SNAP-Ed educators, who historically represented the primary source of nutrition education programming locally.

These findings suggest that rebuilding community food security will require investments that extend beyond food assistance alone. Respondents are expressing a desire for knowledge, skills, and resources that can improve household food resilience over the long term. Expanding support for nutrition education, gardening programs, food preservation training, and benefits navigation could help address these needs. However, doing so will likely require new funding sources, partnerships, and workforce capacity to replace programs and services that have been reduced or eliminated in recent years.

Table 8
Interest in Classes and Resources (n=903)

	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Classes on how to preserve food, like how to can, dry, pickle, or freeze food	51%	464
Cooking classes	42%	379
Classes on how to grow food in a garden	41%	368
Classes on healthy eating, like ways to cook veggies, or how to manage chronic illness	40%	361
Learning to shop on a budget	35%	320
A place to go for free or low-cost meals	29%	261
Classes on how to cook cultural food	28%	252
Space to grow a garden or a community garden plot	22%	196
Help signing up for resources	17%	149
Transportation to get food	13%	121
A place to cook	4%	40

Thematic Analysis of Open-Ended Questions:

Across all of the open-ended questions in the survey, six major cross-cutting themes emerged:

1. Affordability is the dominant food-access challenge.
2. Geography and transportation compound the cost of food.
3. Access to healthy, fresh, preferred, and dietary-appropriate food is unevenly distributed across the region and across population groups.
4. Food assistance is essential, but does not always align with people's needs or circumstances.
5. Time, health, caregiving, and daily life create additional access barriers.
6. Residents are interested in practical skills that increase household food resilience, especially food preservation, gardening, healthy cooking, and stretching food budgets.

Open-ended survey responses illustrate that food insecurity in the Columbia Gorge is not driven by a single factor. Rather, respondents described an interconnected set of economic, geographic, transportation, health, time, and food-availability barriers that shape their ability to obtain the foods they need and want. High food costs emerged as a recurring concern, but affordability was often compounded by the distance required to

reach lower-cost stores, the cost or availability of transportation, limited local selection, work and caregiving schedules, health or mobility limitations, and gaps in eligibility for or access to food assistance programs.

Respondents also distinguished between having access to food and having access to fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally preferred, and dietary-appropriate food. Residents of some communities described traveling outside their immediate area for greater variety or lower prices, while others described difficulty obtaining fresh produce and other preferred foods locally. Respondents also identified barriers within the emergency food and benefit systems, including limited food-bank hours, benefit eligibility, transportation, food variety, and the ability to use particular benefits in their communities. At the same time, many respondents expressed appreciation for food banks, SNAP, WIC, farmers market programs, public transportation, gardens, and other community resources that help households obtain food.

Responses also highlighted considerable interest in strengthening household and community food resilience. Respondents expressed particular interest in food preservation, gardening, healthy and budget-conscious cooking, and strategies for making food and household food dollars last longer. These comments suggest that residents value not only additional food resources, but also practical opportunities to build skills that help households make use of seasonal and locally available food, reduce waste, prepare affordable meals, and increase their capacity to provide food over time.

These challenges and barriers compound one another. Respondents did not describe food access simply as whether food was geographically available. Their comments describe the combined effects of price, distance, transportation, time, health, benefit eligibility, food quality, and household circumstances.

Barriers to Getting Food:

Theme 1: Affordability and insufficient household resources

Cost emerges very clearly as a central barrier. Open-ended responses reinforce the quantitative result showing that 706 respondents selected “Food costs are high.” Respondents wrote about limited funds and income, high local prices, and the challenge of balancing food with other expenses. One respondent described stretching the budget after an unexpected car repair, while another noted that high food prices were difficult when income was limited. Household food access is sensitive to the overall household budget and unexpected expenses.

Theme 2: The intersection of transportation, distance, and cost

Transportation problems included not having a vehicle or ride, lacking money for gas, living significant distances from town, and depending on friends or family. Importantly, transportation was sometimes a problem even when a vehicle was available because respondents could not afford the cost of driving frequently. This makes transportation both a physical-access and economic-access issue.

Theme 3: Limited local availability

Respondents described challenges obtaining fresh, affordable, or desired foods in their local stores. Examples included limited fresh-food selections, concerns about produce quality, and having to leave one's community to obtain food that met household preferences or values. Specific concerns were raised about local options in Cascade Locks.

Theme 4: Health and physical-access barriers

Several comments described physical limitations, chronic pain, fatigue, being homebound, difficulty shopping in person, and needing foods appropriate for particular health conditions. This is an important nuance for our local food system: food may technically be available but still inaccessible to someone who cannot easily travel, shop, carry groceries, prepare food, or obtain foods compatible with a health condition.

Theme 5: Gaps in benefit access

Some respondents reported not qualifying for SNAP or WIC despite experiencing affordability challenges. Others described concerns about how benefit amounts were calculated, uncertainty about where to obtain assistance, or discomfort using food banks because they believed someone else might need the food more. These responses demonstrate that eligibility and availability do not necessarily equal utilization.

Community interest in food skills and education:

Theme 1: Food preservation is a particularly prominent interest

Respondents repeatedly requested education on canning, freezing, drying/dehydration, pickling, safe preservation methods, preserving meat, and extending the life of garden produce. Some comments specifically connected preservation to seasonal abundance and reducing waste. There is a strong DIY interest paired with a food sovereignty dimension here. Respondents were not just asking how to prepare tonight's dinner. They described wanting skills that help households extend seasonal food availability and make food last longer.

Theme 2: Growing food and making better use of gardens

Gardening responses ranged from introductory gardening to highly practical questions about growing in small spaces, raised beds, containers, seasonal planting, crop timing, improving yields, and choosing fruits and vegetables appropriate for the area. One particularly revealing need was learning how to stagger production so that a garden provides food throughout the season rather than producing more than can be used at once.

Theme 3: Healthy eating that is practical and affordable

Respondents requested guidance on healthy eating and nutrition, but their descriptions were usually practical rather than abstract. They asked about healthy meals on a budget, using food obtained from pantries or discount stores, kid-friendly meals, vegetarian dishes, cooking vegetables, and making nutritious meals that meet particular health needs.

Theme 4: Basic, quick, and family-friendly cooking skills

Some respondents wanted foundational cooking skills, including how to combine ingredients, cook meat or vegetables, use appliances, prepare multiple portions, make freezer meals, and prepare quick healthy meals. Others identified themselves as inexperienced cooks. This suggests a potential programming principle: education is likely to be most useful when food access, affordability, convenience, nutrition, and cooking skills are addressed together rather than as separate topics.

Theme 5: Stretching limited food resources

Budgeting appeared repeatedly alongside cooking, gardening, and preservation. Respondents wanted to stretch food dollars further, make food last longer, preserve inexpensive or seasonally available foods, and cook healthy meals within a limited budget.

Broader experiences of food access:

Theme 1: The high cost of food shapes household choices

Respondents repeatedly described high or rising food prices. Several discussed shopping primarily around sales, coupons, discount retailers, or lower-cost foods. Others described traveling outside their local communities to shop at lower-cost stores in places such as Portland. Some comments explicitly contrasted the price of healthier or fresher food with cheaper alternatives. This theme is especially powerful because affordability was described by people with varied economic circumstances. One respondent explicitly reported a relatively high household income while still describing difficulty operating within a food budget, and others described working or earning too much to qualify for assistance while still struggling with local costs.

Theme 2: Rural geography creates unequal food environments

Responses describe considerable geographic variation in food access. Respondents mentioned communities including Cascade Locks, Goldendale, White Salmon, Odell, Parkdale, Bickleton, and Mosier while describing limited grocery choices, distance to affordable stores, transportation challenges, or desire for additional local food resources. Several respondents explicitly used the term "food desert." Others described the same underlying issue without using that label: few nearby stores, limited selection, high local prices, or traveling elsewhere for affordable groceries.

Theme 3: Affordable food and healthy food are not always perceived as the same thing

Respondents repeatedly distinguished between simply obtaining enough food and obtaining fresh, nutritious, high-quality, culturally preferred, organic, or dietary-appropriate foods. Examples included concerns about accessing fresh and local produce, dietary combinations such as gluten-free and vegan food, ethnic food choices, school-meal quality, and the comparative affordability of fast or processed foods. This supports an important finding: Food security is not experienced only as having enough calories or enough food. Respondents also described food access in terms of quality, freshness, nutritional value, variety, cultural preference, and suitability for health and dietary needs.

Theme 4: Food assistance is both essential and imperfect

Many comments expressed appreciation for food banks, SNAP, WIC, farmers market benefits, and other community resources. At the same time, respondents identified limitations including food-bank hours, waiting lists, food quality or variety, foods incompatible with dietary needs, inability to use particular benefits locally, perceived shortcomings in benefit calculations, and benefit amounts that did not last throughout the month. This is a nuanced theme worth highlighting. Respondents did not simply characterize assistance programs as either successful or unsuccessful. Community food resources were described as deeply valuable while also having gaps in accessibility, adequacy, flexibility, and fit.

Theme 5: Time is a critical dimension of food access

Several responses connect food access with work schedules, school, parenting, food-bank operating hours, travel time, and the time required to prepare healthy food. One respondent described juggling school and work and relying on inexpensive fast food rather than cooking; another working in food production described having healthy food available but sometimes lacking time to prepare it. This is a useful insight because time scarcity functions alongside financial scarcity.

Theme 6: Community resources and self-reliance strategies are important assets

The comments are not only about deficits. Respondents described gardening, sharing or trading food with neighbors, preserving and freezing produce, using sales and digital coupons, shopping collaboratively or outside the area, farmers markets, public transit, community pantries, food banks, and interest in expanding gleaning. These responses reveal a parallel story of community resourcefulness and informal food-support networks.

Table 9

Key Themes from Open-Ended Survey Responses on Food Access, Barriers, and Community Needs

Theme	Summary of findings	Representative Quotes:
Affordability and household resources	High food prices, limited income, competing household expenses, and gaps between assistance eligibility and actual financial need were recurring concerns. Respondents described changing what or where they purchased to make limited food dollars stretch.	"I just want to be able to afford it." "Everything is just so expensive."
Geography and transportation	Distance to affordable grocery stores, transportation availability, fuel costs, and limited options in some rural communities made obtaining food more difficult and expensive. Some respondents traveled outside their communities for lower prices or greater selection.	"I live in a food desert and it takes effort to stock my refrigerator." "Sometimes it's hard to get to stores because I don't have reliable transportation."
Healthy, fresh, and appropriate food	Respondents distinguish between having food available and being able to obtain fresh, nutritious, high-quality, culturally preferred, or medically appropriate foods. Cost and local availability often constrained these choices.	"Prices of healthy options junk is a lot cheaper." "I most appreciate fresh produce."
Food assistance: valued but not always accessible	Food banks, SNAP, WIC, farmers market benefits, and other programs were described as important supports. Respondents also identified barriers related to eligibility, benefit adequacy, operating hours, transportation, waiting lists, food	"How grateful I am for the food bank…" "Many of the food banks are not open before or after 'work hours'…"

	variety, and where benefits could be used.	
Time, health, and household circumstances	Work and school schedules, caregiving demands, physical limitations, chronic health conditions, and limited time for shopping and cooking created additional barriers to obtaining and preparing food.	"I work three jobs and have a school aged child. It is difficult to find time to shop or cook." "Unable to shop in person, due to disability."
Practical food skills and household resilience	Respondents expressed interest in food preservation, gardening, healthy and budget-friendly cooking, meal preparation, and strategies for making food last longer. Preservation through canning, freezing, drying, and pickling was especially prominent in responses about desired education.	"How to make the food last longer." "How to cook healthy meals on a budget, How to preserve food… Basics of home gardening…"
Community assets and informal supports	Gardens, food sharing and trading, gleaning, community pantries, food banks, public transportation, sales and coupons, and other community resources were described as strategies that help households access food.	"We have a good garden and share/trade with neighbors." "Community is wonderful."

Quotes are presented in respondents' own words; minor spelling or punctuation edits may be made for readability.

Focus Group Findings: Lived Experiences of Food Access and Food Insecurity

Focus group discussions were held with Spanish-speaking community members, older adults, Tribal and Indigenous community members, and community college students. These discussions provided additional context for understanding food insecurity in the Columbia River Gorge. Across groups, participants described food access as shaped by an interconnected set of economic, geographic, health, household, and policy conditions. Although experiences varied, common themes emerged around the affordability of healthy food, tradeoffs among basic needs, transportation and geographic access, health and dietary needs, capacity to prepare and store food, access to assistance, and uncertainty about the future. *Quotes are presented in respondents' own words; minor spelling or punctuation edits may be made for readability.*

1. Healthy food is available, but not always affordable

Food access is not simply whether food is available, but whether households can consistently afford food that meets their nutritional needs, preferences, and values.

Core theme: The high cost of food was a consistent concern across focus groups. Participants frequently distinguished between being able to purchase food and being able to afford the fresh, healthy, local, or preferred foods they wanted for themselves and their families. This distinction was particularly apparent when participants discussed organic and locally produced foods, which were often perceived as financially out of reach.

"It seems like the locally available or healthy is more expensive than the affordable and cheap. So you don't really get access to organic or local if you're on a budget."
Tribal and Indigenous community focus group participant

Spanish-speaking participants similarly described wanting to purchase healthier foods but being constrained by local prices:

"I would love to eat organic but it's so expensive I can't, especially here in Hood River the cost is a lot."
Spanish-language focus group participant

Older adults expressed uncertainty about whether they would continue to be able to afford the foods they wanted:

"With the way prices are going, there's a fear in the back of my mind, how long can we sustain this, of what we want to eat versus what's available?"
Older adult focus group participant

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2. Food competes with other basic needs

Core theme: Participants described food expenses within the context of the entire household budget. Housing, healthcare, clothing, transportation, and other necessities compete for limited resources, requiring some households to continually decide which needs can be met and which must be postponed.

A Spanish-speaking participant described this tradeoff particularly clearly:

"Give priority to either food or housing. Rent is very important. If the costs of food are very high and the rent is also what I am going to sacrifice, good food or a house?"
Spanish-language focus group participant

For another participant, the tradeoff involved food and medication:

"When you can't buy the food, you can't buy medication. I need heart burn medication right now, but I had to buy milk."
Tribal and Indigenous community focus group participant

Community college students described a similar dynamic as other household expenses increased:

"When you're looking at how much you receive money wise, you know you have all these bills and the bills are still constantly growing. And then whatever's left is food. That number of what's left is getting less and less and less and less."
Community college student focus group participant

These comments reinforce the connection between food security and broader economic security. Participants' experiences suggest that interventions addressing food access alone may not fully alleviate food insecurity when households are simultaneously struggling with other essential expenses.

3. Distance and transportation shape access to affordable food

Core theme: Rural geography adds another layer to food access in the Gorge. Some participants traveled beyond their communities to find less expensive groceries, even when doing so introduced additional fuel and transportation costs.

"I'm always trying to go to the stores that are not very expensive, in Hood River I only buy milk or vegetables. I go to the Winco and the Costco, although it costs me in gasoline it is much cheaper."
Spanish-language focus group participant

For Tribal and Indigenous participants living near in-lieu sites, closer food outlets could be more convenient but more expensive and provide fewer choices:

"Gas stations are more expensive than the stores. But they are closer to the in lieu sites and are closer to get to. And they don't have everything at the gas station. They don't have eggs for example."
Tribal and Indigenous community focus group participant

These experiences illustrate a recurring tension between proximity, affordability, and selection. A food outlet may be geographically close but still fail to provide affordable access to the foods a household needs.

4. Food affordability has implications for health

Core theme: Participants closely connected food access with health. Some described cheaper processed or prepared foods as more financially feasible than fresh foods, while others discussed the difficulty of following dietary guidance when recommended foods cost more.

"Processed food is going to be eaten more and it will affect health much more…especially children it is easier to give them cereal and maruchan [ramen] than something fresh."
Spanish-language focus group participant

Another participant highlighted the disconnect between healthcare recommendations and household resources:

"You go to the doctor and they tell you that you have to eat vegetables and you have to eat organic but you can't buy it at the price."
Spanish-language focus group participant

Older adults identified another dimension of this challenge. Managing multiple health conditions can result in complex and sometimes competing dietary requirements:

"When you've got, you know, 5 things wrong with you and they all require special diets…it's like rocket science. Can I eat anything? Is there anything I can eat?"
Older adult focus group participant

These comments demonstrate why food security has relevance for healthcare and public health. Advice about healthy eating may have limited practical value when households lack the financial resources or other supports needed to follow that advice.

5. Obtaining food is only one part of food access

Core theme: Focus group conversations broadened the concept of access beyond purchasing or receiving food. Participants also described the time, energy, storage, cooking facilities, and other resources needed to turn available food into meals.

For some older adults, decades of meal preparation contributed to fatigue around cooking:

"I'm just tired of [cooking]. You know, you're a senior citizen and you cook dinners and make food for over 50 something years…it's like, one more time. One more time."
Older adult focus group participant

Storage infrastructure also mattered:

> *"In Lone Pine, we don't have coolers so no way to keep it cold and fresh."*
> *Tribal and Indigenous community focus group participant*

A community college student who had experienced homelessness described the limitations associated with preparing and storing food without stable housing:

> *"A couple of years ago, I was homeless…what can I buy that I'm going to be able to, like somehow cook or somehow heat up in the microwave or fresh."*
> *Community college student focus group participant*

These experiences reinforce a broader understanding of food access. Households must not only be able to obtain food; they also need the time, energy, equipment, storage, and facilities necessary to safely prepare and use it.

6. Assistance does not always align with household need and the 'cliff effect'

Core theme: Participants also identified gaps between household need and eligibility for food assistance. Increasing income could result in the loss of benefits even when household expenses remained difficult to manage.

> *"I have two children and I used to work in [fruit] packaging, then I switched to a better job and now I don't qualify for anything, and it was more difficult for me to get ahead."*
> *Spanish-language focus group participant*

A community college participant similarly observed that food assistance had not kept pace with rising expenses:

> *"I don't think food stamps have matched the level of what things have gone up. The amount that was enough to feed us a year or two ago hasn't grown at the same rate that the costs have."*
> *Community college student focus group participant*

These experiences point to the importance of considering not simply whether assistance exists, but whether eligibility, benefit levels, and household circumstances align sufficiently to support reliable food access.

7. Fear, language, technology, and policy can become access barriers

Core theme: Spanish-speaking participants identified additional barriers associated with fear, technology, and access to understandable information. Some described avoiding stores because of immigration-related concerns, while online shopping was not necessarily an adequate alternative for people unfamiliar with the technology.

"There is a lot of fear in the community because of what is happening and they cannot access food for fear of going in person and not knowing how to use technology."
Spanish-language focus group participant

Participants also described difficulty finding accessible information in Spanish about policy changes:

"There is not much information in Spanish, and it is hard to understand."
Spanish-language focus group participant discussing H.R. 1

Tribal and Indigenous participants also expressed concern about the potential consequences of policy change for households relying on multiple forms of support:

"It's hard to wrap my mind around the impacts of this on my family. It's just more stuff being taken away that we have to adapt."
Tribal and Indigenous community focus group participant discussing H.R. 1

These comments suggest that access to food and assistance depends partly on whether people can safely engage with services and obtain understandable, culturally and linguistically accessible information about them.

8. Food insecurity requires continual adaptation

Core theme: Perhaps the strongest theme across the focus groups was the amount of continual adjustment required to make household resources stretch. Participants described traveling to cheaper stores, monitoring sales, using coupons and apps, purchasing cheaper foods, changing meal choices, prioritizing bills, and adjusting to changing eligibility and benefits.

One participant described this constant planning:

"I'm grabbing the coupons and downloading the apps and grabbing everything that's on sale, and I get the budget for each day, if it's cheap meat I'll buy it and keep it."
Spanish-language focus group participant

Taken together, the focus groups depict food insecurity not simply as a moment of having too little food, but as an ongoing process of calculation, adaptation, and tradeoffs. Households continually balance food with housing, healthcare, transportation, children's needs, and other necessities while navigating differences in price, distance, availability, assistance eligibility, and household capacity.

Key Findings: 2015 to 2025

Food insecurity remains widespread, with little evidence of major improvement

While food insecurity was already a significant concern in 2015, the intervening decade included major disruptions that likely increased vulnerability for many households, including the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, housing cost increases, labor shortages, and reductions in pandemic-era food assistance benefits. Nationally, 13.7% of U.S. households experienced food insecurity in 2024, remaining above pre-pandemic levels (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service [USDA ERS], 2026).

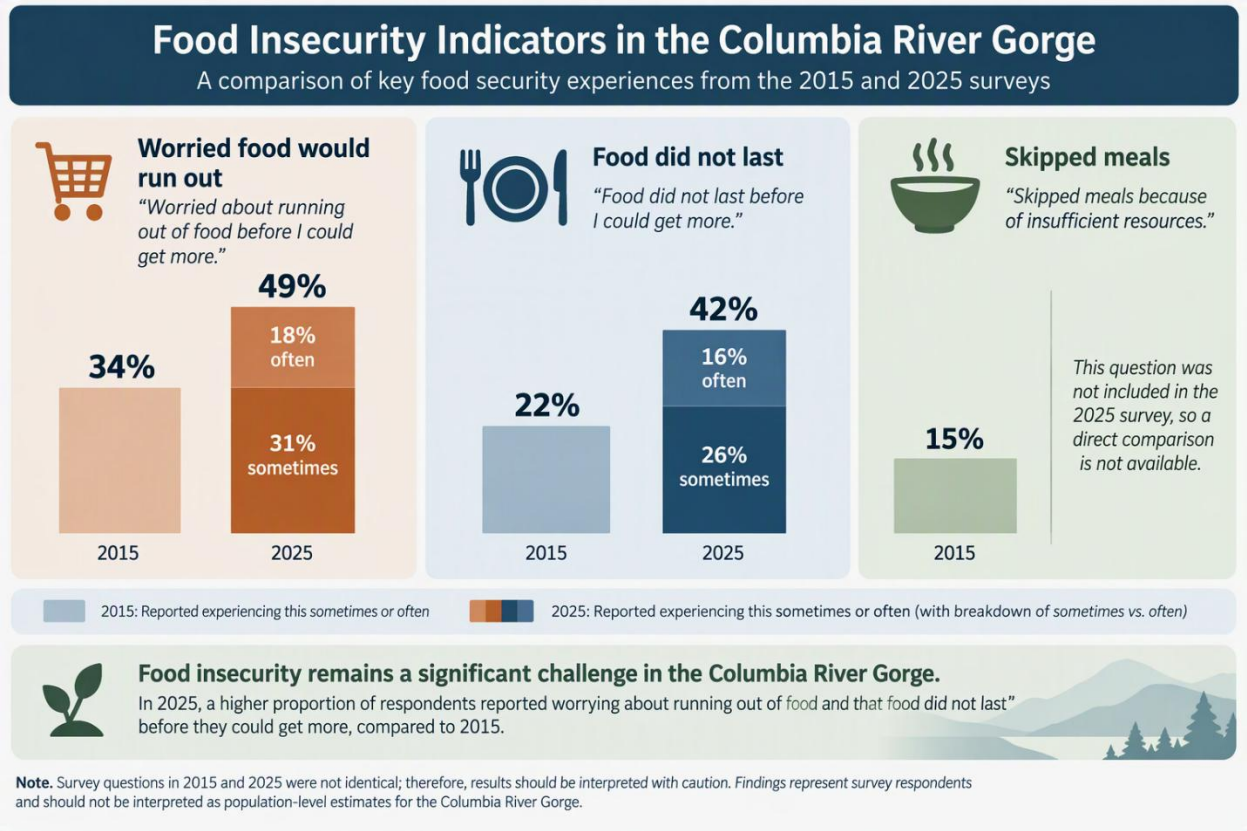
The 2015 Gorge Food Security Survey found that 34% of respondents worried about running out of food, 22% reported that food did not last before they could get more, and 15% skipped meals because of insufficient resources. By comparison, in 2025, 49% of respondents reported that they sometimes (31%) or often (18%) worried their food would run out before they had money to buy more, while 42% reported that food sometimes (26%) or often (16%) did not last and they lacked money to purchase more. These findings suggest that food insecurity remains a significant challenge across the Gorge despite a

decade of investments in food access programs. Addressing food insecurity will require coordinated strategies that address both immediate food needs and the conditions that contribute to food insecurity over time, backed by sustained and adequate investment at multiple levels.

While methodological differences prevent a perfect one-to-one comparison, the persistence of high rates of food-related anxiety indicates that economic pressures continue to affect a substantial portion of households (**Figure 17**).

Figure 17

Comparison of Food Insecurity Indicators from 2015 to 2025



Note. Survey questions in 2015 and 2025 were not identical; therefore, results should be interpreted with caution. *Findings represent survey respondents* and should not be interpreted as population-level estimates for the Columbia River Gorge.

Cost remains the dominant barrier to food access

In both assessments, food affordability emerged as the primary obstacle to obtaining food. Cost was identified as the primary barrier to food access in the 2015 assessment and remains a central concern in 2025. However, today's affordability challenges occur within a substantially different economic environment characterized by increased food prices, higher housing costs, and increased competition for household resources. National food prices were approximately 37% higher in 2025 than a decade earlier, placing additional strain on low- and moderate-income households (US Inflation Calculator, n.d., In2013dollars.com, n.d.).

In 2015, approximately 69% of respondents identified food costs as a barrier. In 2025, "Food costs are high" was again the most frequently selected challenge, identified by 706 respondents, substantially exceeding transportation, benefit access, scheduling, or availability concerns. Respondents repeatedly cited inflation, rising grocery prices, and difficulties affording healthy foods in open-ended comments. The consistency of this finding is notable because the economic environment has changed dramatically since 2015. The intervening decade included:

- The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic disruptions.
- Significant food-price inflation beginning in 2021.
- Rising housing and transportation costs throughout the region.
- The expiration of temporary pandemic-era food assistance expansions.

Many 2025 respondents specifically described traveling outside the Gorge to shop at Costco, WinCo, or Portland-area stores because local prices were unaffordable.

Food access is increasingly shaped by housing and broader economic pressures

A major difference between the assessments is the growing recognition of housing instability as a food security issue. The 2025 survey found that 214 respondents reported having housing but being worried about losing it, while additional respondents reported living in shelters, vehicles, employer-provided housing, tribal lands, or other unstable arrangements. Respondents frequently described rent increases, mortgage strain, and fixed incomes limiting their food budgets.

This reflects a broader shift in food security research over the past decade, where housing affordability and food affordability are increasingly understood as interconnected challenges. For many Gorge households, rising housing costs are reducing the money available for food purchases.

The food system has diversified substantially

Compared with 2015, households now report obtaining food through a much wider range of sources. In 2025, common food sources included:

- Traditional grocery stores (1,152 respondents)
- Farmers markets (530)
- Home gardens (422)
- Food pantries and food banks (362)
- Dollar stores (306)
- Hunting, fishing, and foraging (212)
- CSA memberships and local cooperatives (105)
- Gleaning programs (80)
- Bulk purchasing programs (78)
- Online food marketplaces (66)

This suggests that over the last decade households have increasingly adopted multiple food acquisition strategies to manage costs and improve access. This also suggests that the region has developed a stronger regional food infrastructure with food being sourced from multiple new and different programs such as Double Up Food Bucks, Veggie Rx, gleaning networks, and client-choice pantries, many of which were only emerging or recommended strategies in the 2015 report.

Rural food access barriers persist

The Gorge remains a geographically large rural region where travel distances can significantly affect food access. Transportation and distance remained important concerns in both assessments. Responses to the 2025 assessment suggests growing recognition that transportation, fuel costs, and travel time are important components of food security, particularly in smaller communities.

In 2025, nearly half of respondents reported traveling more than one hour round-trip each week to obtain food, and a substantial number reported traveling more than 40 miles weekly. Respondents from Cascade Locks, White Salmon, Goldendale, Bickleton, and other rural communities frequently described needing to travel to reach affordable grocery options.

Unlike 2015, respondents increasingly framed food access not only as a matter of distance but also as one of affordability. Many reported bypassing local stores because prices were significantly higher than stores outside the region. This indicates a shift from simple geographic access toward concerns about economic access.

Seasonality is a defining feature of food security in the Gorge

One issue absent from the 2015 analysis but highlighted in 2025 is seasonal variation.

Winter was overwhelmingly identified as the most difficult season for obtaining food (490 respondents), followed by summer and fall. Respondents cited:

- Weather and road conditions.
- Seasonal employment fluctuations.
- Reduced farm-stand availability.
- Increased heating and utility costs.
- Limited fresh produce availability.

This finding is particularly relevant in an agricultural region where employment, food production, and transportation conditions fluctuate seasonally.

Interest in food self-reliance appears strong

The 2025 survey found substantial interest in:

- Food preservation
- Cooking classes
- Gardening
- Healthy eating education
- Budget shopping strategies

Open-ended responses repeatedly requested training on canning, freezing, dehydrating, gardening, and stretching food budgets. This suggests continued interest in household-level resilience strategies, potentially reflecting concerns about rising food prices and economic uncertainty.

Cultural and dietary needs have become more visible

The 2025 survey explicitly measured dietary restrictions, culturally preferred foods, kitchen access, and food preferences. Respondents discussed:

- Diabetes-friendly foods
- Gluten-free diets
- Vegetarian and vegan needs
- Access to culturally familiar foods
- Desire for more ethnic food options

This represents a broader and more inclusive understanding of food security than was common in assessments conducted a decade earlier, which tended to focus primarily on quantity of food rather than cultural appropriateness and dietary suitability.

Although the core drivers of food insecurity identified in the 2015 assessment remain evident in 2025, the context surrounding food access has become considerably more complex. Cost continues to be the dominant barrier to obtaining food, but affordability challenges now intersect with housing insecurity, transportation costs, inflation, seasonal employment, and changing food assistance systems. At the same time, the regional food system has expanded through the growth of community-based food access programs, gleaning networks, farmers markets, produce incentive programs, and alternative food acquisition strategies. Nevertheless, our findings suggest that many Gorge households continue to experience significant food-related hardship. The persistence of food insecurity despite increased program availability indicates that broader structural factors, including housing affordability, wage stagnation relative to living costs, and geographic isolation, remain critical determinants of food security in the Columbia Gorge.

Priority Opportunities for Action, Funding, and Policy

Food insecurity is a complex issue. It will take a number of both formal and informal programs and interventions to address food insecurity in the Columbia Gorge. Respondents described interconnected challenges related to food costs, transportation, geographic access, food quality and availability, benefit access, health, and time. At the same time, respondents identified important community assets, including food banks and pantries, gardens, gleaning, public transportation, food assistance programs, food sharing, and interest in developing practical food skills.

Immediate Actions:

Actions that can strengthen food access using existing programs, partnerships, and resources.

- **Increase awareness and navigation of existing food resources.** Strengthen multilingual outreach and referral pathways connecting households with SNAP, WIC, food pantries, farmers market benefits, gleaning, senior resources, school food programs, and other available assistance. Respondents reported both reliance on these resources and challenges knowing about or accessing them.
- **Reduce practical barriers to emergency food access.** Explore expanded or alternative food pantry hours, delivery or other accommodations for people who are homebound, and strategies that make services more accessible to people working traditional hours. Respondents specifically identified pantry hours, transportation, disability, and inability to shop in person as barriers.
- **Increase access to fresh, healthy, and preferred foods through existing food programs.** Respondents valued fresh produce and nutritious foods while identifying limitations in quality, variety, dietary fit, and culturally preferred foods.
- **Expand practical food education.** Prioritize food preservation, gardening, healthy cooking on a budget, quick family meals, and strategies for making food last longer. These topics were prominent in respondents' descriptions of desired education.
- **Strengthen multilingual and culturally relevant approaches.** Spanish-language responses and requests for culturally relevant foods and instruction reinforce the value of providing information and programming in ways that reflect the communities being served.

Medium-Term Strategies:

Actions requiring deeper coordination, investment, and partnership across the Gorge.

- **Improve transportation connections between people and food.** Food access strategies should consider transportation availability, distance, fuel costs, and the ability to physically transport groceries, particularly in rural communities. Respondents described traveling significant distances or outside their communities for affordable food.
- **Strengthen food access in communities with limited retail options.** Explore locally appropriate ways to increase availability of affordable fresh food in communities where respondents described limited selection, high prices, or substantial travel to larger grocery stores.
- **Expand local food-to-community connections.** Strengthen mechanisms that connect locally grown and gleaned foods with households, food pantries, schools, and other community food programs. Survey respondents expressed interest in gleaning, local foods, gardens, food sharing, and greater access to locally grown food.
- **Expand community food resilience infrastructure.** Consider investments in community gardens, food-preservation opportunities, shared food resources, and other approaches that help households grow, store, preserve, share, and make better use of food.
- **Improve coordination among food-access partners.** Strengthen regional communication and referral networks among food assistance providers, health and human services, schools, community organizations, transportation providers, agricultural partners, and other organizations addressing food access.
- **Regularly identify gaps in benefit accessibility.** Monitor where otherwise available benefits cannot easily be used locally, such as corners stores, and online food distribution companies and retailers. Identify opportunities to improve their geographic reach. Respondents provided examples of benefits that were difficult or impossible to use locally.

Long-Term System Changes

Changes aimed at the underlying conditions that produce food insecurity.

- **Address food insecurity as an economic issue, not only a food-supply issue.** Respondents repeatedly connected food access with food prices, income, household bills, housing costs, transportation, and the difficulty of qualifying for assistance despite financial strain.
- **Advance a regional food system in which agricultural abundance translates into community food access.** Develop stronger pathways connecting the Gorge's agricultural resources with affordable access to healthy food for the people who live and work in the region.
- **Address rural food-access inequities through planning and investment.** Transportation, food retail, food assistance, local markets, and other infrastructure should be considered together rather than as separate issues. Survey responses illustrate how distance, transportation, price, and limited retail options compound one another.
- **Address the underlying conditions affecting household economic security.** Food-security strategies should be connected with broader efforts addressing housing affordability, wages and income, transportation, healthcare, childcare, and other essential household expenses.
- **Center people experiencing food insecurity in regional decision-making.** Continue involving people with lived experience, including agricultural workers and residents of geographically isolated communities, in identifying priorities and designing solutions.
- **Build a resilient and equitable regional food system.** Long-term planning can move beyond emergency food provision toward a regional system in which residents have consistent access to affordable, nutritious, culturally relevant food while strengthening local agriculture and community resilience.

Mutual Aid Strategies

Mutual aid strategies leverage community knowledge, relationships, and local resources to help residents meet immediate food needs while strengthening community resilience. Survey findings suggest that many households already rely on informal support networks, food sharing, home gardens, hunting and fishing, and community-based resources. Expanding and coordinating these efforts could help address gaps that formal food assistance programs cannot always reach.

- **Develop neighborhood and community food-sharing networks.** Support local efforts to connect residents with excess garden produce, home-preserved foods, harvested fish and game, and other food resources through community food exchanges, online groups, or neighborhood hubs.
- **Expand gleaning and food recovery programs.** Collaborate with orchards, farms, grocery stores, and farmers markets to increase the recovery and redistribution of surplus food, particularly fresh produce.
- **Create and continue community-based food exchange events.** Organize regular produce swaps, seed exchanges, and food-sharing events that allow residents to share excess food, gardening knowledge, and preservation skills.
- **Support peer-to-peer transportation assistance.** Establish volunteer ride programs or community coordination systems to help residents access grocery stores, farmers markets, food pantries, and meal programs, particularly in rural and frontier rural communities.
- **Strengthen "neighbors helping neighbors" networks**. Encourage faith communities, civic organizations, schools, and neighborhood groups to identify and support households facing temporary food shortages before experiencing a crisis.
- **Increase awareness of existing mutual aid resources.** Develop a centralized list or online hub that connects residents with food-sharing groups, community fridges, gleaning opportunities, free meal sites, and local assistance programs.
- **Support community kitchens and shared food preparation opportunities.** Partner with schools, churches, and community centers to provide spaces where residents can collectively prepare, preserve, and share food while building social connections.
- **Build volunteer capacity for food distribution.** Recruit and train volunteers who can assist with food deliveries, pantry operations, senior meal programs, and emergency food outreach, particularly during winter weather events or emergencies.

Implications and Opportunities for Partners:

Food insecurity is not the responsibility of the food-assistance sector alone. Assessment findings demonstrate that people's ability to obtain adequate food is shaped by interconnected factors including income, food prices, transportation, geographic location, health, time, benefit access, and the availability of foods that meet household needs. Addressing food insecurity therefore requires coordinated action across sectors, with different partners contributing according to their roles, resources, and areas of influence.

Table 10
Implications and Opportunities for Partners

Partner/Sector	Potential implications and opportunities
Local governments	Consider food access in transportation, land-use, economic development, housing, and community planning decisions. Support infrastructure that expands access to affordable food, particularly in rural and geographically isolated communities. Convene cross-sector partners around locally identified food-access gaps.
Public health agencies	Treat food insecurity as an important social and economic condition affecting community health. Incorporate food-security screening, referral, and monitoring into community health efforts where appropriate, and connect food access with work addressing housing, transportation, chronic disease, and health equity.
Food banks and emergency food providers	Continue strengthening access to fresh, nutritious, culturally familiar, and dietary-appropriate foods. Examine barriers identified by respondents, including operating hours, transportation, delivery for homebound residents, food choice, and awareness of available services. Participate in policy and advocacy efforts to reduce reliance on food banks. Respondents described food banks as essential resources while also identifying access and service gaps.
Healthcare organizations	Identify patients experiencing or at risk of food insecurity and strengthen referral pathways to food and nutrition resources. Build partnerships with community organizations addressing food access and consider how food insecurity interacts with chronic disease management and patients' ability to obtain appropriate foods. Advocate for funding and services that address food access as a social determinant of health with a focus on preventive care.

Schools and early childhood programs	Continue strengthening access to nutritious meals for children and families and connecting families with available food resources. Consider opportunities for school-based food access, nutrition education, gardening, summer food, and family resource navigation. Survey responses included concerns about both the affordability of feeding children and the quantity or quality of some school meals.
Community-based organizations	Continue serving as trusted points of connection for food assistance and resource navigation. Expand culturally and linguistically responsive outreach and create opportunities for people with lived experience of food insecurity to help shape programs and solutions. Support community-driven approaches such as gardens, gleaning, food sharing, and practical food education.
Agricultural organizations and producers	Explore additional opportunities to connect regional agricultural abundance with local food access through gleaning, farm-to-community partnerships, food recovery, direct markets, and other locally appropriate models. Engage farmworkers and agricultural communities in designing food-security initiatives. Explore diversifying products grown in the region to enhance local food resiliency.
Funders	Support both immediate food assistance and upstream approaches addressing the conditions that contribute to food insecurity. Consider flexible, multi-year investments that strengthen transportation, food distribution, community capacity, culturally responsive services, local food infrastructure, and collaboration across organizations. Support evaluation and continued monitoring of regional food security.
Policymakers	Consider the cumulative effects of food prices, wages, housing, transportation, healthcare and childcare expenses, and eligibility rules on household food security. Protect and strengthen nutrition assistance and reduce administrative and geographic barriers to accessing benefits. Include rural communities and people experiencing food insecurity in policy development.
Regional food-system partners	Strengthen coordination across agriculture, emergency food, healthcare, government, schools, transportation, and community organizations. Develop shared priorities and measures and use future assessments to monitor changes in food access over time.

The opportunity for the Columbia Gorge is not simply to provide more food, but to create the conditions in which everyone can reliably access the region's abundance.

Achieving that goal will require both strong immediate supports for households experiencing food insecurity and sustained attention to the economic, geographic, and systemic conditions that shape who has access to healthy, affordable food.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of the 2025 Columbia Gorge Food Security Assessment.

First, the survey used a nonprobability, purposive recruitment approach and was not designed to produce a statistically representative sample of the Columbia Gorge population. Recruitment intentionally emphasized people and communities more likely to experience food insecurity, including recruitment through organizations serving populations experiencing food-access challenges. Consequently, the proportion of respondents experiencing food insecurity should not be interpreted as a population-level prevalence estimate for the Gorge. Rather, the recruitment approach was designed to provide greater insight into the experiences, barriers, and needs of people most affected by food insecurity.

Second, participation was voluntary and relied on community-based recruitment, broad public outreach, and participant access to paper or online surveys. As with other voluntary surveys, selection bias is possible. People with particularly strong experiences or concerns related to food access may have been more likely to participate, while people who were not reached through recruitment efforts or who faced barriers to participation may be underrepresented. Although multiple modes of data collection were used to broaden access, the sample cannot be assumed to reflect all populations or communities in the Columbia River Gorge region.

Third, survey findings are based on self-reported information. Responses may be affected by recall, interpretation of questions, willingness to disclose sensitive experiences, or social desirability. Questions asking respondents to reflect on experiences during the previous 12 months may be particularly subject to recall limitations. Additionally, some questions allowed respondents to select multiple responses or provide open-ended answers, resulting in variation in the amount and type of information available.

Fourth, the assessment provides a cross-sectional snapshot of respondents' experiences during a particular period and cannot establish causal relationships between food insecurity and factors such as income, transportation, housing, or other household characteristics.

Qualitative findings from open-ended survey questions should also be interpreted as descriptive and exploratory. Microsoft Copilot was used to assist with identifying and organizing recurring themes within open-ended responses, followed by review and interpretation by the research team. Because these responses were not collected through in-depth qualitative interviews and were not analyzed using a formal qualitative coding process with multiple independent coders, the thematic findings are intended to add context and participant voice to the quantitative results rather than represent a standalone qualitative study.

Finally, the policy and economic context affecting food access has continued to change since data collection ended in October 2025. The Assessment therefore reflects respondents' experiences during the data-collection period and should not be assumed to represent current conditions. Changes to food-assistance programs, eligibility, benefits, food prices, housing costs, employment, and other economic conditions may alter household food security over time.

Despite these limitations, the assessment provides valuable insight into how people experiencing or at risk of food insecurity navigate the Gorge food system, the barriers they encounter, and the resources and strategies they rely upon. The combination of quantitative measures and open-ended responses is particularly useful for identifying patterns and generating priorities for programs, partnerships, policy discussions, and future research.

Conclusion

The Columbia River Gorge is a region of remarkable agricultural productivity, community strength, and natural abundance. It is home to one of the nation's most important fruit-producing regions, a vibrant network of community organizations, and a long tradition of agricultural innovation and stewardship. Yet the findings of this Assessment demonstrate that abundance alone does not guarantee food security.

Survey responses, focus group discussions, and community engagement activities all point to the same conclusion: **food insecurity in the Columbia Gorge is fundamentally an issue of access.** Participants described challenges affording food, traveling to grocery stores, accessing culturally preferred and medically appropriate foods, navigating assistance programs, balancing food costs with housing and healthcare expenses, and finding the time, facilities, and resources needed to prepare healthy meals. Food insecurity emerged not as a single problem, but as the result of multiple, interconnected barriers that affect households differently across the region.

Importantly, the Assessment was intentionally designed to elevate the voices of people most likely to experience food insecurity. While the findings should not be interpreted as population-level estimates of food insecurity across the Gorge, they provide valuable insight into the realities faced by individuals and families experiencing the greatest barriers to food access. Participants shared stories of adaptation, resilience, and resourcefulness, but also of difficult tradeoffs between food and other basic needs. These experiences underscore the importance of ensuring that those most affected by food insecurity are included in future conversations about solutions.

The Assessment also highlights significant community assets. Residents identified food banks, meal programs, gardens, farmers markets, gleaning efforts, public benefits, schools, healthcare providers, community organizations, and informal networks of neighbors and family as important supports. Interest in food preservation, gardening, cooking, and other practical food skills reflects a strong desire among community members to strengthen household and community food resilience.

Addressing food insecurity in the Columbia Gorge will require action at multiple levels. Immediate efforts can improve awareness of and access to existing resources. Medium-term strategies can strengthen transportation, food distribution, local food infrastructure, and community partnerships. Long-term progress will require addressing the underlying economic and structural conditions that shape food access, including housing affordability, wages, transportation, healthcare costs, and the design of nutrition assistance programs.

At its core, this Assessment raises a fundamental question for the future of the Gorge: **How can a region known for producing food ensure that all who live and work here can access it?** The answer will require continued collaboration across sectors, sustained investment in community-driven solutions, and a commitment to centering the voices of those most affected by food insecurity.

The Columbia River Gorge has the assets, partnerships, and community commitment necessary to make progress. By building on those strengths and addressing the barriers identified in this Assessment, the region has an opportunity to move toward a future in which every resident has reliable access to affordable, nutritious, culturally meaningful food and the ability to thrive.

Acknowledgments

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For additional information about the 2025 Columbia River Gorge Food Security Assessment, including city- or county-specific data, survey methods, or future food security surveys and assessment efforts, please contact **Lauren Kraemer, MPH, Associate Professor of Practice, Oregon State University Extension Service**, at **Lauren.Kraemer@oregonstate.edu**. Questions from community organizations, agencies, researchers, and others interested in using these findings or collaborating on future food security efforts are also welcome.

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Appendix

Survey Instrument

Gorge Food Access Survey

Purpose and Benefits

This survey is from Oregon State University Extension Service and our partners. If you complete this survey, you can help create programs and get resources for our area. This survey will take about 20 minutes to complete. We will ask about what you eat and where you get your food.

To take this survey online, visit **beav.es/GorgeFoodSurvey** or scan the QR code.

Gift Card Raffle

As a thank you, 20 people will be chosen at random to receive a $50 gift card. You can still be part of the raffle even if you do not answer all the questions.

Your Data and Reports

We will not ask for your name. We will use the answers of all the surveys to look at trends. We will share results with the community and organizations that work on food access programs.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Lauren Kraemer. Email Lauren.Kraemer@oregonstate.edu or call her at 541-386-3343 extension 38258.

Agreeing to take the survey – To take this survey, you need to live in the Columbia River Gorge.

1. Do you agree to take this survey?
   - ○ Yes
   - ○ No

Administrative Use Only
Survey Data entered by (initials):
Date Completed:
Collection Site:

1

Section 1: What area do you live in?

We are asking this question to see what kinds of programs or services are needed in different places in the Gorge.

2. Do you live in the Columbia River Gorge?
For this survey, this means Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Klickitat, and Skamania Counties.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

3. Which county do you live in?

- ○ Hood River
- ○ Wasco
- ○ Sherman
- ○ Klickitat
- ○ Skamania
- ○ Other

4. What city, town, or community do you live in most of the year, or is closest to your home?

Hood River County
- ○ Cascade Locks
- ○ Hood River
- ○ Odell
- ○ Parkdale
- ○ Stanley Rock
- ○ Wyeth
- ○ Other: _____

Skamania County
- ○ Carson
- ○ Cooks
- ○ Mill A
- ○ North Bonneville
- ○ Skamania
- ○ Stevenson
- ○ Underwood
- ○ Wind River
- ○ Other: _____

Wasco County
- ○ Antelope
- ○ Celilo
- ○ Dufur
- ○ Lone Pine
- ○ Maupin
- ○ Mosier
- ○ Petersburg
- ○ Pine Hollow
- ○ Rowena
- ○ Shaniko
- ○ Simnasho
- ○ The Dalles
- ○ Tygh Valley
- ○ Wamic
- ○ Other: _____

Sherman County
- ○ Biggs Junction
- ○ Grass Valley
- ○ Moro
- ○ Rufus
- ○ Wasco
- ○ Other: _____

Klickitat County
- ○ Bickleton
- ○ Bingen
- ○ Centerville
- ○ Cloudsville
- ○ Dallesport
- ○ Georgeville
- ○ Glenwood
- ○ Goldendale
- ○ Husum
- ○ Klickitat
- ○ Klickitat Falls
- ○ Lyle
- ○ Maryhill
- ○ Murdock
- ○ Roosevelt
- ○ Trout Lake
- ○ White Salmon
- ○ Wishram
- ○ Other: _____
- ○ Prefer not to answer

Section 2: How do you get your food?

5. Please list the **top three** places where your household usually gets most of your food.
   For instance: grocery store, farmers market, home garden, food pantry, and more.
   When we say "your household", we mean you and the people you live with.

   _____
   _____
   _____

6. Please check **all** the places where your household gets food.

- ❑ Large grocery stores like Safeway, Fred Meyer, or Walmart
- ❑ Stores outside of the Columbia River Gorge like Costco, Winco, and Sam's Club
- ❑ Small community or small specialty grocery stores like Mosier Market, Maupin Market, McIsaac's Store, Grass Valley Country Market, Juanita's, Farm Stand, Feast, Grist Mill
- ❑ Convenience stores or gas stations
- ❑ Dollar stores
- ❑ Sit-down restaurants
- ❑ Fast-food restaurants
- ❑ Farmers market
- ❑ Farm stands
- ❑ Fish market or tribal fisher "over-the-bank" sales
- ❑ Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) or Local Co-ops like Gorge Farmer Collective
- ❑ Bulk buying like Azure Standard
- ❑ Meal Kits like HelloFresh or GreenChef
- ❑ Online Grocery Marketplaces like Misfits, Imperfect Produce, Thrive Market, Hungryroot
- ❑ Home garden
- ❑ Community garden
- ❑ Hunting, fishing or foraging
- ❑ Gleaning which means getting leftover food from farms, grocery stores, and restaurants
- ❑ I find leftover food in other ways like bin-diving, containering, D-mart, dumpstering, totting, skipping
- ❑ Food pantry or food bank
- ❑ Community Backpack Program
- ❑ Donations and gifts from friends and family
- ❑ Bartering
- ❑ Other: _____

7. In the **past week**, about how much **time** in total did you spend traveling round-trip to get food?

- ○ 0 minutes to 30 minutes
- ○ 30 minutes to 1 hour
- ○ 1 to 2 hours
- ○ More than 2 hours

8. In the **past week**, about how many **total miles** round-trip did you travel to get food?

- ○ 0 to 5 miles
- ○ 6 to 10 miles
- ○ 11 to 20 miles
- ○ 21 to 40 miles
- ○ 41 to 60 miles
- ○ More than 60 miles

9. Do you and the people you live with know about or get food through any of these programs? Please check all that apply.

Program	I have **heard of** this program.	My household **gets food** through this program.
SNAP, which is also called EBT, food stamps, Oregon Trail, Washington Quest, or FAP	☐	☐
WIC, which stands for Women, Infants, and Children	☐	☐
Free or Reduced School Lunch during the school year or summer	☐	☐
WIC and senior benefits or vouchers for farmers markets and farm stands. This is also called Farm Direct Nutrition Program (FDNP), WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP).	☐	☐
Double-Up Food Bucks, SNAP Market Match, or other SNAP market incentive program	☐	☐
Veggie Rx	☐	☐
Local food bank or food pantry	☐	☐

Program	I have **heard of** this program.	My household **gets food** through this program.
Client-based food pantry at an organization where I get other services like One Community Health, ODHS, Helping Hands	☐	☐
Food boxes	☐	☐
Local Adult or Senior Center	☐	☐
Meals on Wheels	☐	☐
Head Start	☐	☐
Church or community organization	☐	☐
Community Backpack Program	☐	☐
Gleaning programs like Windy River Gleaners, Skamania Gleaners, White Salmon Gleaners, Gorge Gleaning	☐	☐

10. If your household uses a food pantry or food bank, which one do you visit most often?

_____

Section 3: Food During the Last 12 months

When you read these next two sentences, think about you and the people you live with. During the past 12 months, were these sentences often true, sometimes true, or never true?

11. Within the past 12 months, we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.

- ○ Often true
- ○ Sometimes true
- ○ Never true

12. Within the past 12 months, the food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more.

- ○ Often true
- ○ Sometimes true
- ○ Never true

13. Within the past 12 months, these were the seasons that were the most difficult for us to get food. Please check all that apply.

- ❑ Spring
- ❑ Summer
- ❑ Fall
- ❑ Winter
- ○ It was not difficult to get food in the past 12 months.

14. If you checked any of the seasons above, why was it hard to get food during this season?

_____

_____

Section 4: Values, barriers, and support

15. What is important to you when choosing the food you eat? Please check all that apply.

- ❑ Easy to get
- ❑ Easy to cook
- ❑ Fresh
- ❑ Local
- ❑ Variety
- ❑ Budget-friendly
- ❑ Food that I am used to and is part of my culture or traditions
- ❑ Fits my dietary needs, for instance, allergies, diabetes, or other chronic conditions
- ❑ Nutritious
- ❑ Sustainable
- ❑ Fun to get, cook, or eat
- ❑ Kid-friendly
- ❑ Other:_____

16. Does anything make it hard for you to get food? Please check all that apply.

- ❑ Food costs are high.
- ❑ I am not able to access or use food benefits.
- ❑ I do not feel comfortable using food benefits.
- ❑ I do not have the time to get food.
- ❑ I do not have transportation.
- ❑ The store or pantry is too far away.

16. Continued. Does anything make it hard for you to get food? Please check all that apply.

- ❑ The foods I **want** or prefer are not available.
- ❑ The foods I **need** are not available. For instance, the foods I need for my medical condition, or because of allergies.
- ❑ I do not have enough space, power, or kitchen facilities like an oven, stove, or freezer to cook or store food.
- ❑ I can't go to the store or pantry while they are open.
- ❑ Other: _____
- ○ It is not hard for me to get food.

17. In the Gorge, there are some classes you can take and resources on many topics about food. Would any of these interest you? Please check all that apply.

- ❑ Learning to shop on a budget
- ❑ Cooking classes
- ❑ Classes on how to cook cultural food
- ❑ Classes on healthy eating, like ways to cook veggies, or how to manage chronic illness
- ❑ Classes on how to preserve food, like how to can, dry, pickle, or freeze food
- ❑ Classes on how to grow food in a garden
- ❑ Space to grow a garden or a community garden plot
- ❑ A place to go for free or low-cost meals
- ❑ Help signing up for resources
- ❑ Transportation to get food
- ❑ A place to cook
- ❑ Other: _____

18. If you want classes on how to cook, eat healthy, garden, or how to preserve food, what do you want to learn about?

_____

19. Is there anything else you would like to share about getting food?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Section 6: Questions about you.

We ask these questions to make sure we are hearing from as many different people as possible. You can skip any question or stop taking the survey at any time.

20. Do you live in the Columbia River Gorge all year?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

21. If you answered "No", what brings you to the Columbia River Gorge? Please check all that apply.

- ❑ I work on a farm or in an orchard.
- ❑ I work in forestry.
- ❑ I fish.
- ❑ I forage.
- ❑ I come for cultural events.
- ❑ I work in outdoor recreation, like rafting, windsurfing, or skiing.
- ❑ Other: _____

22. Are you a migrant or seasonal agricultural worker?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

23. Which of these best describes your housing situation today? Please check all that apply.

- ❑ I have housing, and I am **not worried** about losing it.
- ❑ I have housing, but I am **worried** about losing it.
- ❑ I do not have housing, and I am staying with friends or family.
- ❑ I am staying in a shelter.
- ❑ I am staying in my car, living in a trailer or RV, camping in a tent, or on a street.
- ❑ I am living on tribal lands or in-lieu sites.
- ❑ Other: _____

24. How old are you?

- ○ 14 to 17 years old
- ○ 18 to 24
- ○ 25 to 34
- ○ 35 to 44
- ○ 45 to 54
- ○ 55 to 64
- ○ 65 to 74
- ○ 75 to 84
- ○ 85 or older

25. How many people live in your household right now, including you? ____

26. How many people in your household right now are children under the age of 18? _____

27. How many people in your household right now, including you, are over age 65? _____

28. Are you serving, or have you ever served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, Reserves, or National Guard?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

29. What is your racial or ethnic identity? Please check all that apply.

- ❑ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ❑ Asian
- ❑ Black or African American
- ❑ Hispanic, Latino, Latina, Latinx or Latine
- ❑ Middle Eastern or North African
- ❑ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ❑ White or Caucasian
- ❑ Other or you did not list my identity _____

30. Which best describes the total annual income, before tax, for you and all the people you live with?

- ○ Less than $15,000
- ○ $15,000 to $24,999
- ○ $25,000 to $34,999
- ○ $35,000 to $49,999
- ○ $50,000 to $74,999
- ○ $75,000 to $99,999
- ○ $100,000 to $149,999
- ○ $150,000 to $199,999
- ○ $200,000 or more
- ○ I am not sure

Thank you for taking this survey!

If you want to see the results from this survey, please visit **beav.es/GorgeFoodSurveyResults** or scan this QR code.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Lauren Kraemer at lauren.kraemer@oregonstate.edu or 541-386-3343 x38258.

Do You Need More Food or Help?

If you live in Oregon, visit the links below or scan the QR code.

English: OregonFoodFinder.org
Spanish: AsistenciaAlimentariaOregon.org

If you live in Washington, check the link below or scan the QR code.

wagap.org/food-banks-nutrition

Raffle

If you would like to enter the raffle to win one of **twenty $50 gift cards**, please write your information below. Then tear off this section and bring it to the front desk staff.

Your information below will *not* be connected to your survey responses and is collected so we can reach you if you win.

Name (optional):_____

Phone number: _____

Email if you have one: _____