

Food Security Unit: A COVID-19 Response

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The Following Report Contains:

Summary

Guiding Principle 1: Food to People

Guiding Principle 2: Complex Needs Require Multiple Access Points

Emergency Food Pack Deliveries

Large-Scale Food Distribution Events

Fare For All

Small-Scale Food Distribution Events

Communications

Summary

Organized in April 2020, the Washington County Food Security Unit has been charged with identifying and executing strategies that respond to COVID-19 related impacts that reduce consistent access to high-quality, nutritious food. This focus is two-fold, as the Unit's efforts are intended to respond to individuals experiencing food insecurity because of the pandemic's seismic economic impact, as well as to individuals for whom previous access points to food are either no longer available or highly limited.

Central to the Food Security Unit's efforts has been the operationalization of two guiding principles:

- **Guiding Principle: Connect People to Food**. Food waste recovery is an integral part of the County's *Waste Management Master Plan*. Recognizing multiple food waste challenges, the Unit advanced solutions that actively recovered food that would otherwise be wasted, and strategically increased the quantity of healthy food available to individuals and families in need.
- Guiding Principle: Complex Needs Require Multiple Access Points. The Unit has leveraged opportunities among public, nonprofit, and private sector partners. Harnessing these disparate skill sets, resources, and networks, these partnerships have yielded multiple access points through which people can effectively connect to high-quality food.

Operationalizing these two principles, the Food Security Unit's initiatives have included:

- Launching Emergency Food Package Deliveries: Through a partnership with local food shelves, Met Council, and the Met Council's Transit Link contracted provider, the County has facilitated no-cost, no-contact deliveries to 2,230 individuals in 625 households, as of July 31, 2020.
- **Deploying Large-Scale Food Distribution Events**: Washington County staff sorted, packaged, and distributed approximately 109,340 pounds of fresh produce and other high-quality food to 11,270 individuals in 3,313 households through four events in May and June, 2020. Second Harvest Heartland provided and transported the food at no-cost to the County with invaluable support provided by Oakdale-based Christian Cupboard Emergency Food Shelf.
- Mobilizing Fare For All: With funding provided by the Saint Croix Valley Foundation, Washington County staff
 delivered 400 high-quality combo packs, door-to-door, to low-income working families, older adults, and
 persons with disabilities living in Cottage Grove, Newport, Oakdale, and Forest Lake. Sourced by The Food
 Group, each Fare for All pack was comprised of 13 pounds of produce and 7 pounds of frozen meat.
- Initiating A Food Security Phone Line: Recognizing that many of those most likely to be challenged by food
 access were among those with the fewest options to connect digitally, a dedicated County phone line was
 created. County staff assisted those without access to the Internet to request an emergency food package
 delivery, outlined opportunities for food, and provided critical support and contact for individuals who were
 isolated.
- Using Targeted, Small-Scale Food Distribution Events: In a partnership with Valley Outreach, Christian
 Cupboard Emergency Food Shelf, Second Harvest Heartland, the Food Group, UNFI, Allina Healthcare, Family
 Means, and community residents, the Food Security Unit executed small-scale food events at Landfall and
 Cimarron, both manufactured housing communities. These events provided, approximately 35,000 pounds of
 high-quality food to 258 Washington County households, comprised of 1,056 individuals, as of July 30, 2020.
- Leveraging Multiple Communications Channels: The Food Security Unit has worked closely with the County's Joint Information Center (JIC), the Essential Services Unit, the Community Services and Public Health and Environment Departments, and multiple community partners to ensure information on access points was communicated accurately and broadly. Targeted mailings, including both English and Spanish-language, were provided to older adults, persons with disabilities, residents of CDA properties, those living in manufactured housing communities, and others have been used to highlight options. Community partners distributed multiple informational pieces created by the JIC through their activities and shared information on social media.

Summary: By The Numbers

Data current through July 31, 2020

Total Individuals Served



14,556

Emergency Food Partnership: 2,230

Large-Scale Events: 11,270 Small-Scale Events: 1,056

Total Households Served



4,596

Emergency Food Partnership: 625

Fare For All: 400

Large-Scale Events: 3,313 Small-Scale Events: 258

Total Pounds of Food Distributed



152,340

Fare For All: 8,000 pounds

Large-Scale Events: 109,340 pounds

Small-Scale Events: 35,000

Guiding Principle: Food Waste Recovery – Food to People

Food waste recovery is an integral part of Washington County's Waste Management Master Plan. By addressing the increase in food waste during the pandemic, we have been able to further our work to "continue to improve food waste management based on best practices such as through food waste prevention, support food-to-people partnerships, and including but not limited to, continued support for local food donation programs." (Source: Washington County Waste Management Master Plan)

During the pandemic, the Food Security Unit has identified multiple food waste challenges and have addressed each strategically and aggressively.

Challenge: Consumer Demand Changed

 Consumers moved to purchasing shelf stable goods over fresh produce during the pandemic, leaving a huge supply of produce available for recovery.

Solution: Launch Large-Scale Food Distributions

• Second Harvest Heartland (SHH) received larger than normal donations of produce from grocers due to the change in consumer demand, the surplus of food left as restaurants closed, and adjustments to the school nutrition programs. SHH offered these donations to food shelves at no cost, as emergency food systems faced sharp increases in demand, while simultaneously grappling with COVID-19 related reductions in staff and volunteers. The Food Security Unit leveraged this unique opportunity by harnessing the willingness of County staff to sort and package this available produce and distribute it during four Large-Scale Food Distribution events.

Solution: Minimize Waste, Increase Reach of Food Distribution

• Traditionally, there is an estimated 10-15% waste rate from recovered produce efforts. During the county's produce distributions, however, 9.3% of produce that could not be distributed was diverted to recycling and organic collections with less than 1% (0.4%) added to the waste stream.

Challenge: Stay at Home Order Left Restaurants With Coolers Full of Food

• When the Stay at Home order was put into place, restaurants were left with coolers full of product that they wouldn't be able to use, cook, or sell. Many were scrambling to find outlets before it perished.

Solution – Connect Restaurants With the Minnesota Central Kitchen

Charged with inspecting County restaurants, the Washington County Food, Pools and Lodging Team
leveraged their existing relationships to ensure that restaurants were aware that they could donate
excess food, cooked or uncooked, to the Minnesota Central Kitchen via MealConnect. The Minnesota
Central Kitchen used food that might have otherwise been wasted to create prepared meals that
were delivered to individuals and households experiencing food insecurity.

Guiding Principle: Complex Needs Require Multiple Access Points

Recognizing that those individuals and households experiencing food insecurity were not monolithic, the Food Security Unit focused on creating multiple access points that would respond to the complex challenges that the pandemic created or surfaced. Leveraging multiple partners, the Food Security Unit identified multiple obstacles to high-quality food and have addressed each strategically and aggressively.

Challenge: COVID-19's seismic impact on employment sharply increased the demand for food support in Washington County - and these impacts may not be short-lived. Approximately half - 51% - of those who requested an emergency delivery through June 30, 2020 had not previously requested assistance from a food shelf prior to the pandemic. In a follow-up survey to those who requested and received an emergency delivery, roughly three in five (59%) indicated that they were "extremely likely" (41%) or "very likely" (18%) to need an emergency food delivery, again.

Challenge: COVID-19 social distancing precautions, particularly for those with underlying health conditions over the lifespan, limited access to high-quality food. For some, the viability of accessing groceries via public transportation and community circulators was limited by its supply or concerns over exposure. For others, living in senior living facilities, family or friends who would either take an individual to the store for shopping or bring groceries to the individual pre-COVID were similarly constrained and unable to provide this informal support as they, too, sought to limit exposure and remained at home.

Solution: Leverage partnerships to create multiple access points for high-quality food

- Emergency Food Package Delivery: In a partnership with the Met Council and its contracted Transit Link provider, Washington County developed an emergency food delivery structure that linked three critical elements: Individuals who needed assistance, local food shelves, and Transit Link as the vehicle for no-cost, no-contact delivery.
- Leverage the Willingness and Support of County Staff to Distribute Food Directly to Residents:

 Second Harvest Heartland (SHH) received larger than normal donations of produce from grocers as consumers shifted to shelf-stable foods, rather than fresh produce. SHH offered these donations at no cost, provided food shelves and communities had the volunteer capacity to repackage and distribute these items. The Food Security Unit leveraged this unique opportunity by harnessing the willingness of 206 County staff to sort, package, and distribute produce during four Large-Scale Food Distribution events in May and June. Similarly, in a partnership with the Washington County Community Development Agency (CDA), County staff delivered 400 boxes of high-quality produce and frozen meat to multiple CDA properties in a unique partnership with The Food Group's Fare for All program and the St Croix Valley Foundation. In a partnership with multiple food shelves, community partners, community residents, and County staff, the Food Security Unit executed 2 small-scale food distribution events targeted to support residents of Cimarron and Landfall, both manufactured housing communities.
- Provide real-time information on available resources to as wide an audience as possible: The Food
 Security Unit developed multiple resource sheets and guides approved by the Joint Information Center
 to highlight other options for accessing nutritious foods, including Loaves and Fishes sites, instructions
 on placing an online grocery order with Transit Link providing no-cost, no-contact delivery, and overview
 of County services and supports. In May, the Unit deployed a dedicated Food Security Unit Phone Line
 with County staff available Monday- Friday to provide individualized, real-time information, referral, and
 trouble-shooting to individuals across Washington County.

Emergency Food Delivery Partnership: Challenges and Solutions

Challenges presented by COVID-19: Demand on food shelves dramatically increased. Just as demand increased, compliance with COVID-19 protections required dramatic changes in food shelf operations. Seeking to limit exposure, food shelves reduced the number of volunteers, a critical "workforce" that performs many essential, labor-intensive tasks. Whether using their own vehicle, riding with friends or family, or using public transportation, individuals traditionally travel *to* and enter a food shelf to pick up food. However, in observance of COVID-19 precautions, food shelves shifted exclusively to a no-contact, drive-through option. Finding new ways to connect people to food, particularly for those without reliable access to a vehicle, emerged as a significant challenge.

Challenges presented by COVID-19: In compliance with the COVID-19 Stay-At-Home Order, the Met Council and the Council's contracted Transit Link provider offered only essential trips. Even with the significant reduction in passengers and safety precautions taken by the Council to limit exposure, many, particularly those with underlying conditions, were uncomfortable or unwilling to leave their homes, even for essential grocery trips. While nocontact deliveries were available for online orders from certain retailers and through third-party services, many older adults, persons with disabilities, and low-income residents were unable to deploy these options.

Solution: Emergency Food Delivery Partnership

Leveraging Met Council's willingness to fund no-contact, no-cost deliveries of groceries and household essentials through its Transit Link contract provider, the Food Security Unit agreed to serve as an active connector between those who need food, those who can provide food, and Transit Link. With Memoranda of Understanding completed with five participating food shelves, individuals were able to request an emergency food pack delivery through a County online form or call the County's Food Security Phone Line to request assistance. Food shelves filled the food requests and provided dry goods, fresh produce, dairy, eggs, and meat in the emergency pack. With the County providing the address, the Met Council's contracted Transit Link provider picked up packs from participating food shelves and made a no-contact, no-cost delivery to the household. Emergency packs and no-contact deliveries are provided at no charge to the household or to the County.

Solution: Sharing Information with other communities and counties

COVID's unique challenges highlight the importance of learning from others and sharing information on best practices. On May 6, Washington County Commissioner Lisa Weik led a well-received statewide presentation to the Minnesota Department of Health and others on the "Washington County Model," an overview of the Emergency Food Delivery Partnership.

Emergency Food Delivery Partnership: By The Numbers



625

Individuals Served

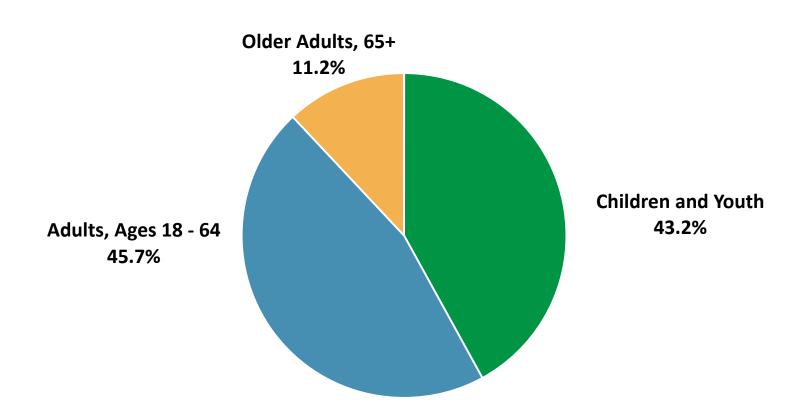
Households Served



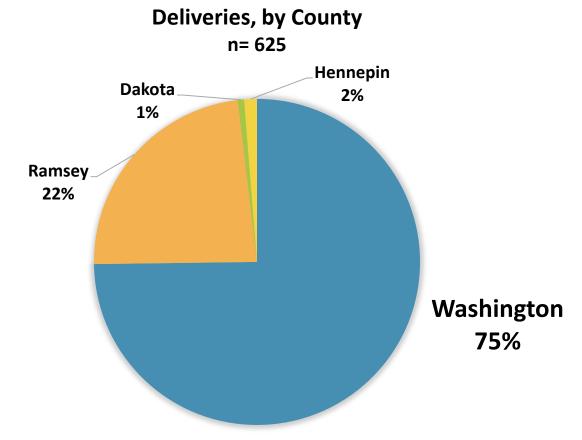


Data current as of July 31, 2020

Emergency Food Partnership Deliveries (n = 2,230 individuals)



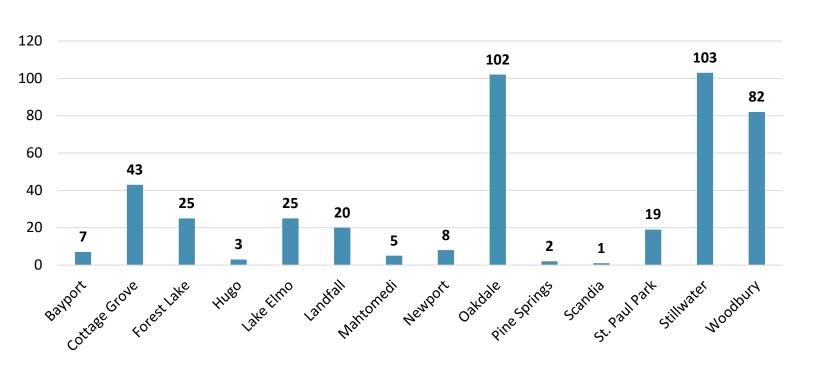
Emergency Food Delivery Partnership: By The Numbers



^{*} Some Food Shelves' service areas expand beyond the County lines. Many serve anyone who seeks their services. The food and delivery are provided free of charge- for the County, and the recipient.

Emergency Food Pack Deliveries, by Cities in Washington County n= 455 households

Data current as of July 31, 2020



Large-Scale Food Distribution Events: Challenge and Solutions

Challenge: Responding to the Scale of Food Insecurity in Washington County

Washington County food shelves were confronted by unprecedented demand for high-quality, nutritious foods.

Solution: Launch Large-Scale Food Distributions

With the approval by the County's Unified Command, the Food Security Unit executed four large-scale food distribution events through which approximately 109,340 pounds of high-quality fruit, vegetables, dairy, and other products were provided to 3,313 households. Second Harvest Heartland provided the food and its delivery at no cost to the County. Local food shelves and community partners provided critical input, shared their facilities and resources, and broadened outreach. Observing COVID-19 precautions, County staff provided essential support, including planning and mapping the events; setting up and breaking down each event; sorting and packaging donated products; providing intake; loading food; and managing the safe, efficient flow of traffic.

Forest Lake: May 8, 2020 Location: Forest Lake YMCA

Local Food Shelf Partners: Christian Cupboard

Emergency Food Shelf; Family Pathways

Local Community Partners: Forest Lake YMCA, City of Forest Lake Police Department, City of

Forest Lake Public Works

Pounds of Food Distributed: 12,000 Number of Households Served: 682 Number of Individuals Served: 2,464



Cottage Grove: May 14, 2020 Location: Oltman Middle School

Local Food Shelf Partners: Christian Cupboard

Emergency Food Shelf

Local Community Partners: South Washington Schools, SoWashCo CARES, City of Cottage Grove Public Safety, City of Cottage Grove Public Works

Pounds of Food Distributed: 37,500 Number of Households Served: 1,042 Number of Individuals Served: 4,164



Large-Scale Food Distribution Events

Stillwater: June 10, 2020

Location: Washington County Fairgrounds **Local Food Shelf Partners:** Christian Cupboard

Emergency Food Shelf; Valley Outreach Local Community Partners: State Farm

Insurance

Pounds of Food Distributed: 34,340 Number of Households Served: 780 Number of Individuals Served: 2,440



Woodbury: June 19, 2020 Location: East Ridge High School

Local Food Shelf Partners: Christian Cupboard

Emergency Food Shelf, Valley Outreach

Local Community Partners: South Washington

Schools, SoWashCo CARES, State Farm Insurance, City

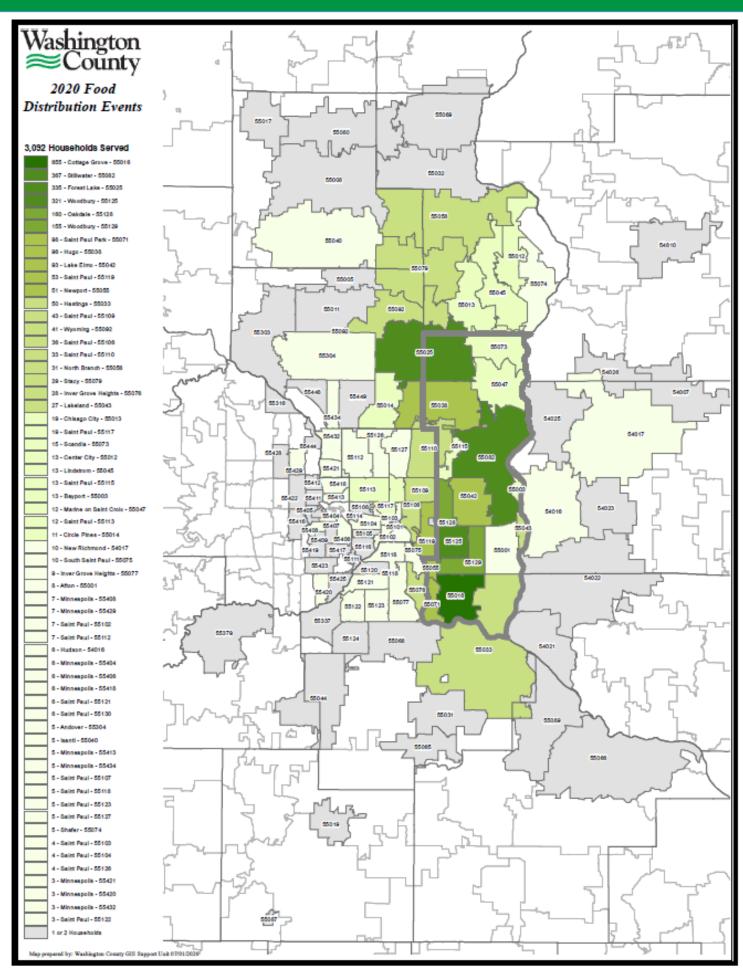
of Woodbury, City of Woodbury Emergency

Management

Pounds of Food Distributed: 25,500 Number of Households Served: 590 Number of Individuals Served: 2,202



All Large-Scale Food Distribution Events: By The Map



All Large-Scale Food Distribution Events: By The Numbers



Total Individuals Served



Total Households Served



109,340

Total Pounds of Food Distributed



\$246,487

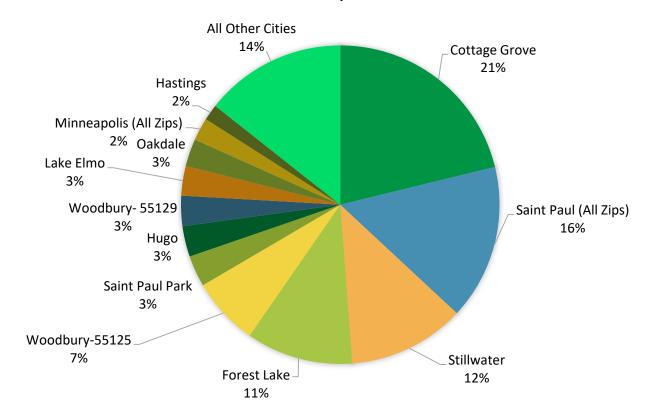
Estimated Value of Food Distributed



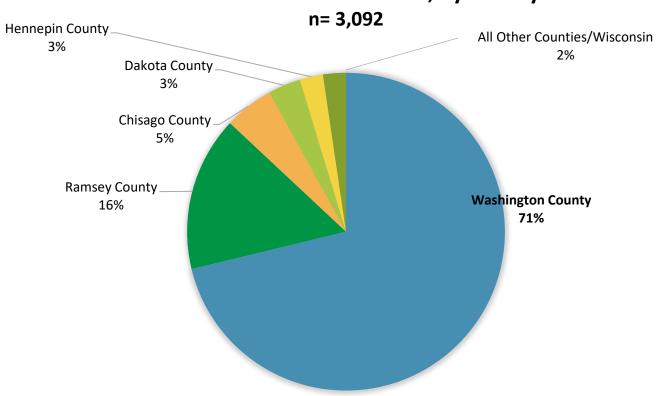


All Large-Scale Food Distribution Events: By The Numbers

All Food Distribution Events, by City n= 3,092



All Food Distribution Events, by County



Fare For All: Challenges and Solutions

Challenge: Responding to Residents Most Deeply Affected by Food Insecurity

Recognizing that older adults, persons with disabilities, and low-income working families, particularly with children, were among those most deeply affected by COVID-19 related food insecurity, the Food Security Unit sought to provide no-cost, high-quality food to these households.

Solution: Fare For All

With funding from the Saint Croix Valley Foundation, the Food Security Unit partnered with The Food Group to secure 400 Fare For All Combo Packs. Each Combo Pack is comprised of approximately 13 pounds of fresh produce and 7 pounds of frozen meat.

Seeking to support individuals and families in greatest need, the Food Security Unit worked with Washington County Community Development Agency (CDA) and others to identify properties with significant need. With each pack containing information on available food resources, County staff made no-contact, door-to-door deliveries of 400 Combo Packs on May 12 and May 19.

May 12, 2020 Locations: Woodland Park- Cottage Grove The Groves- Cottage Grove

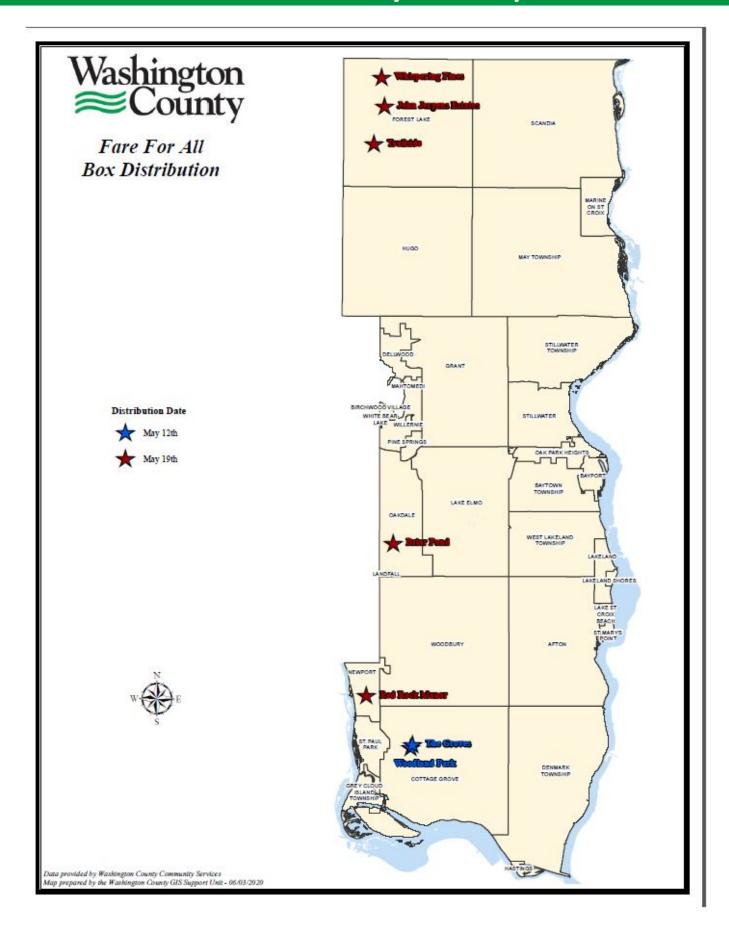


May 19, 2020 Locations:

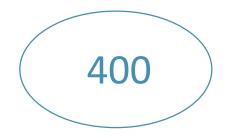
Red Rock Manor- Newport
Briar Pond- Oakdale
Trailside- Forest Lake
Whispering Pines- Forest Lake
John Jergens Estates- Forest Lake



Fare For All: By The Map



Fare For All: By The Numbers



Total Households Served





Total Pounds of Food Distributed





Saint Croix Valley Foundation Grant To Fare For All



Small-Scale Food Distributions: Challenges and Solutions

Challenges presented by COVID-19: Demand on food shelves dramatically increased. Just as demand increased, compliance with COVID-19 protections required dramatic changes in food shelf operations. Seeking to limit exposure, food shelves reduced the number of volunteers, a critical "workforce" that performs many essential, labor-intensive tasks. Whether using their own vehicle, riding with friends or family, or using public transportation, individuals traditionally travel *to* and enter a food shelf to pick up food. However, in observance of COVID-19 precautions, food shelves shifted exclusively to a no-contact, drive-through option. Related, seeking to connect individuals to food, the County's large-scale food distribution efforts also used a no-contact, drive-through option.

Solution: Targeted Small-Scale Food Distribution

While drive-through models offer a COVID-19 compliant mechanism, the Food Security Unit sought new ways to connect people to food, particularly for those without reliable access to a vehicle, through small-scale food distributions. Seeking to offset the mobility gap, the Food Security Unit brought high-quality nutritious food *to* Cimarron and Landfall, both low-income, diverse manufactured housing communities.

Seeking to partner with each community, both food events were planned in a close collaboration with community members, nonprofit partners, food shelves, and others. Residents identified culturally-appropriate foods for distribution, served as messengers to their neighbors about the event, and provided translation services. Bilingual County staff and food shelf volunteers from Valley Outreach provided real-time, on-site information and support about food, economic, and employment supports. Sentenced to Serve Crew Leaders provided door-to-door delivery of food to participants who did not have reliable access to a car and/or walked to the event.

Food distributed at these events included pre-packaged dairy and produce boxes donated by Second Harvest Heartland and shelf-stable foods donated and delivered by UNFI, one of the state's major grocers. In a unique partnership, Allina Healthcare provided funds to Christian Cupboard Emergency Food Shelf to purchase culturally-appropriate foods, including masa flour, dried beans, fish sauce, soy sauce, and other products that are not generally available through food shelves. The Food Group provided critical sourcing support for these items.

These events provided high-quality food to 258 households comprised of 1,056 people.

Small-Scale Food Distributions: By The Numbers



Total Individuals Served



Total Households Served





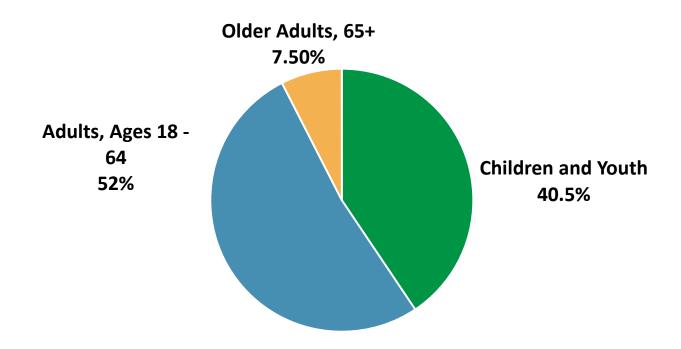
35,000

Total Pounds of Food Distributed



Small-Scale Food Distributions: By The Numbers

Distribution By Age of Residents (n = 1,056 individuals)



Data current as of July 31, 2020

Communicating Food Security Options: A COVID-19 Response

Communications

- The County opened a Food Support phone line, staffed by a Community Service employee, to answer
 questions and assist individuals with completing the online request form
- Food shelves assist with communication, sharing this opportunity with residents who receive their services.
- Targeted communications reached residents via:
 - Washington County Facebook posts
 - Emails from local food shelves
 - Communication from Women Infants, and Children and Public Health Nurse staff
 - Fliers shared at community events
 - Mailing to more than 5,000 persons with disabilities and older adults

Food Security Phone Line

- Recognizing that many of those most likely to be challenged by food access were among those with the
 least options to connect digitally, a dedicated County phone line was created. County staff assisted those
 without access to the Internet to request an emergency food package delivery, outlined opportunities for
 food, and provided critical support and contact for individuals who were isolated.
- The phone line manager also provides outgoing calls to individuals without email addresses, to notify them of their scheduled delivery and to confirm that individuals have received their food delivery
- Incoming phone calls consist mostly of individuals calling to inquire about the free grocery delivery system and to request assistance in signing up for the free emergency food pack delivery

Comments from the Community

"Thank you so much! The quantity and variety of items far exceeded my expectations. It really lifted our family's spirits and made the month easier having the food and personal supplies available."

- Resident

"This has been life saving for me. Thank you so much and I hope to use your services again soon."

- Resident

"Thank you so much! This was such a great treat and surprise in an uncertain time."

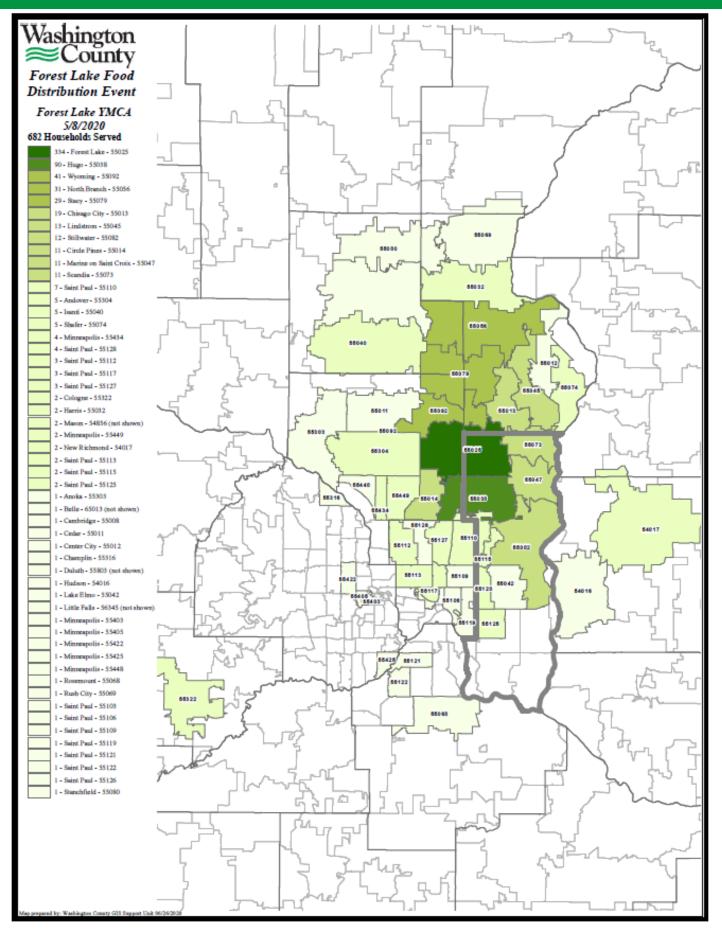
- Resident

"Washington County is stepping up to support the Nutrition Assistance Program for Seniors (NAPS) deliveries. It is a welcome relief to our team, knowing we can safely and reliably get food to those who most need it."

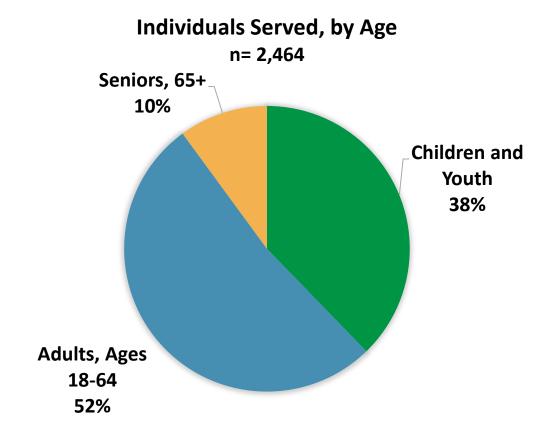
- Tracy Maki, Chief Executive Officer of Valley Outreach Food Shelf

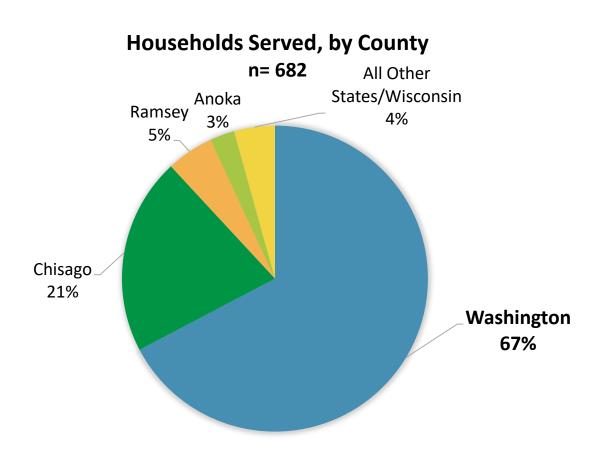
Appendix A: Large-Scale Food Distribution Events

Forest Lake: By the Map



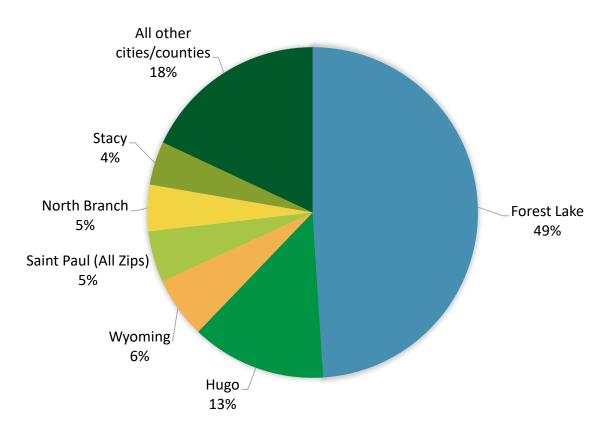
Forest Lake: By The Numbers



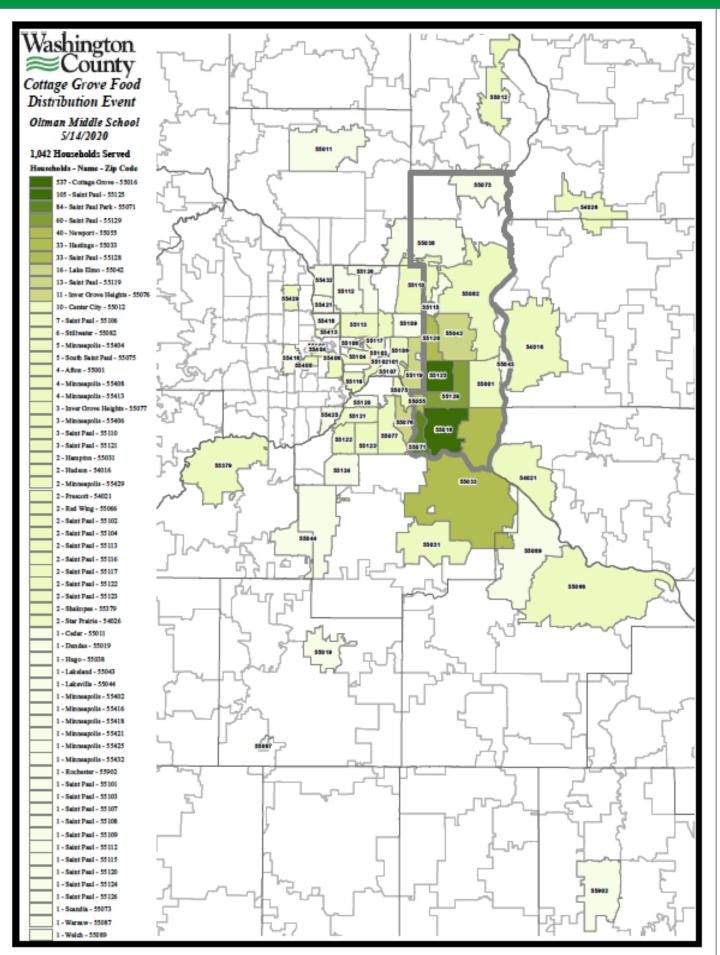


Forest Lake: By The Numbers

Households Served, by City n= 682

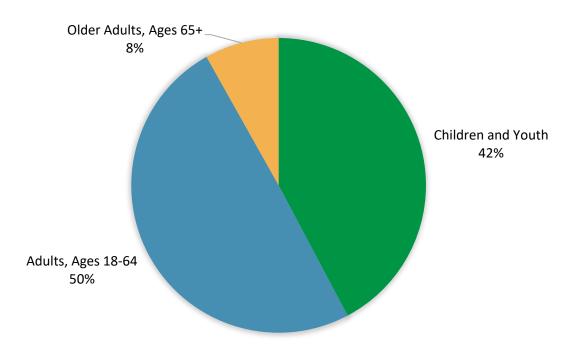


Cottage Grove: By The Map

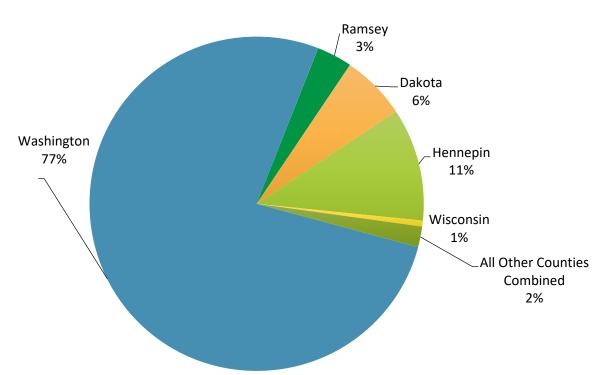


Cottage Grove: By The Numbers

Individuals Served, by Age n= 4,164

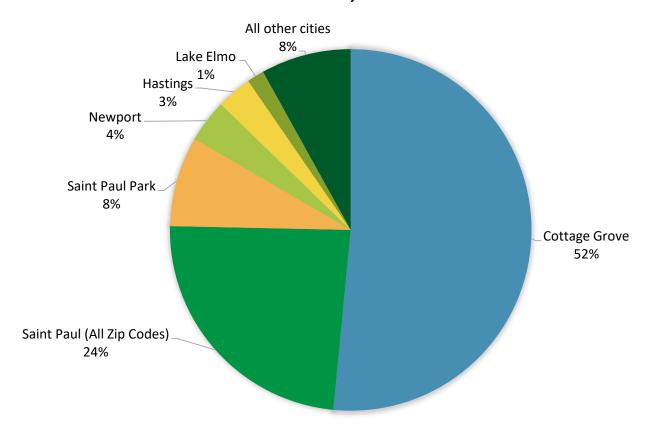


Households Served, By County n = 1,042

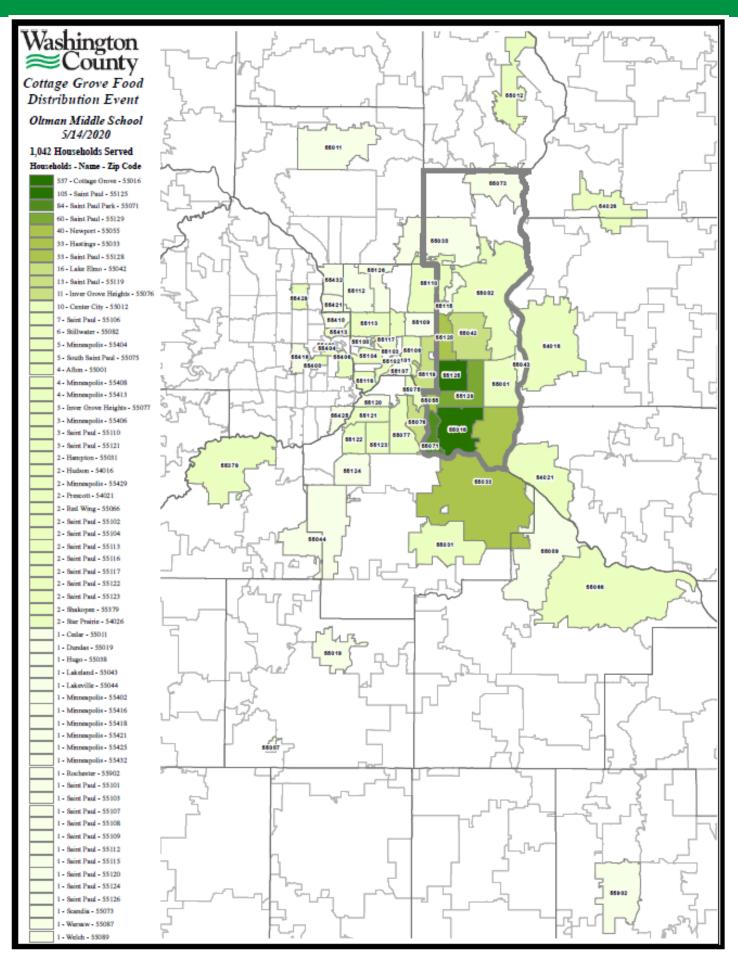


Cottage Grove: By The Numbers

Households Served, by City n= 1,042

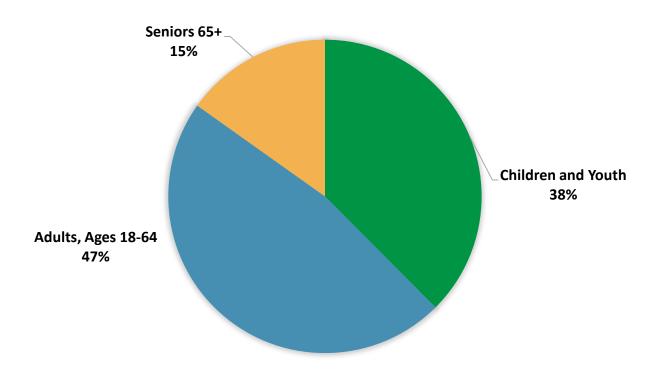


Stillwater: By the Map

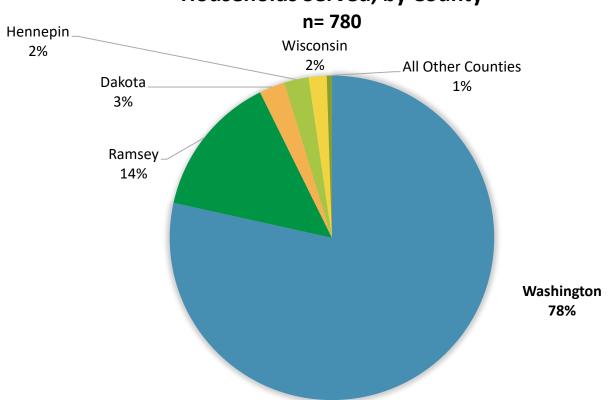


Stillwater: By The Numbers

Individuals Served, by Age n= 2,440

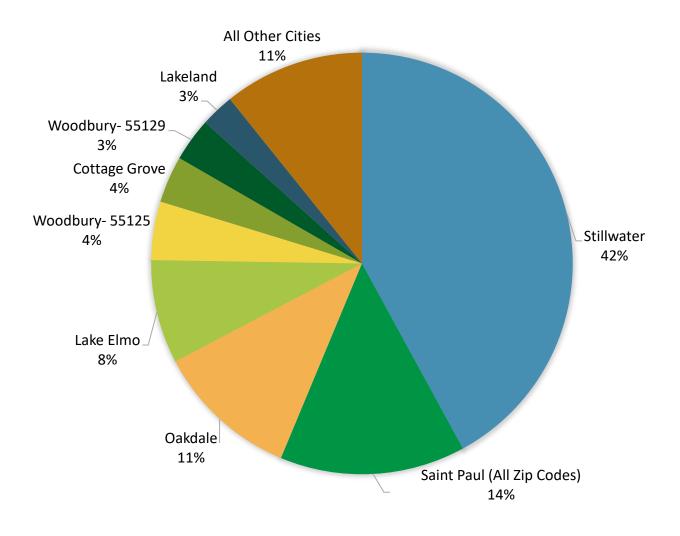


Households Served, by County

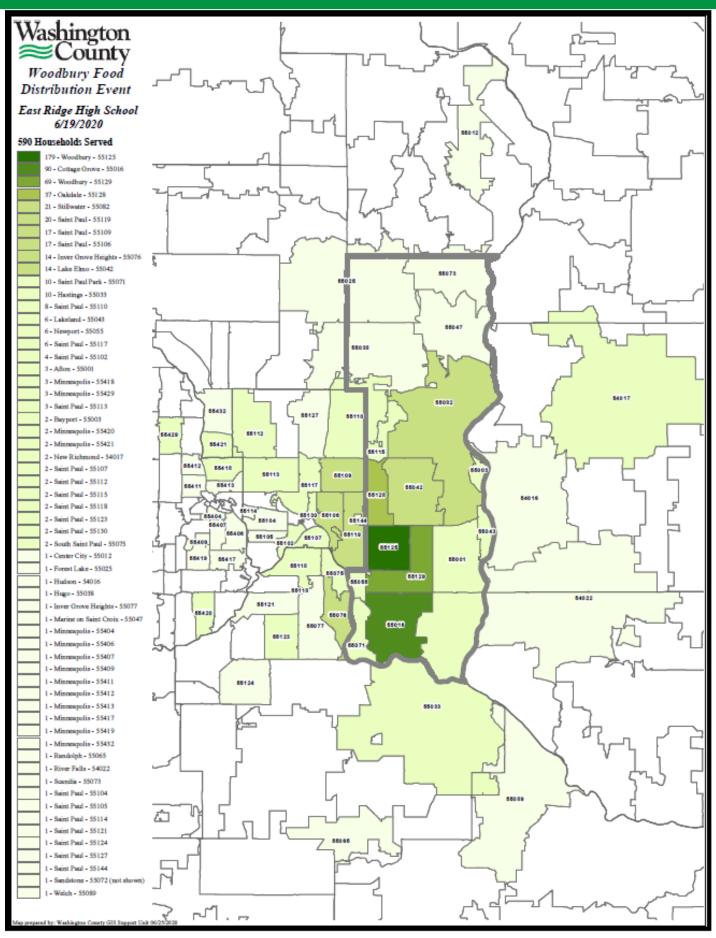


Stillwater: By The Numbers

Households Served, by City n= 780

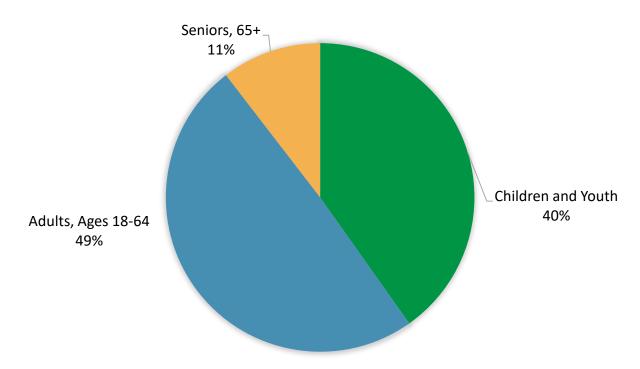


Woodbury: By the Map

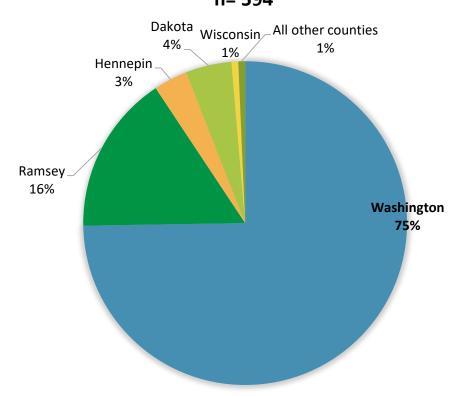


Woodbury: By The Numbers

Individuals Served, by Age n= 2,202



Households Served, by County n= 594



Woodbury: By The Numbers

