



COLORADO NUTRITION INCENTIVE PROGRAM (CNIP)

Program Assessment for 2020

Nourish Colorado

February 2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following a successful pilot of the program in 2019, the Colorado Nutrition Incentive Program (CNIP) was implemented again in 2020. The program was offered in 23 counties throughout Colorado, with a total of 41 growers participating to provide food boxes through their CSA shares. The program continued to serve locally grown produce boxes to participants of the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program and the Older Americans Act Congregate Nutrition Program from June to October.

Program Participation and Impact on Participants: For the 2020 summer season, Nourish Colorado purchased \$493,000 in produce boxes that were distributed to approximately 1,200 households (WIC and older adult), though the total number of participants is much likely higher as some households stopped participating at some point in the season and were replaced by another household. Each WIC household is estimated to include 4-5 people, 2-3 of whom are children. Older adult households typically have 1-2 members.

In 2020, 64% of the WIC participants who completed Nourish Colorado's post-program survey picked up their produce boxes for at least eight weeks during the program, and a majority of participants in both categories reported a moderate or high increase in their consumption of fruits and vegetables as a result of the program. Most participants reported satisfaction with respect to the variety, quantity, and quality of the produce received. Some participants expressed growing disinterest towards certain produce if they received it consecutively for multiple weeks or a disproportionately higher quantity of it in a week.

A notably high proportion of respondents, 91% of WIC participants and 81% of the older adult participants reported an increase in their food security during the period of the program. About 90% of the WIC participants and 86% of the older adult participants were eating most (at least 75%) of the produce they received every week. Some reasons for not consuming all the produce were unfamiliarity with the foods, higher quantity than they could consume, and having leftover foods from the previous week. Leftover food was largely being shared with others, while some families were freezing their extra food or making preserves at home. However, close to 17% of the WIC participants and 14% of the older adult participants also reported throwing away their leftovers. The pandemic made it harder for families to share their produce with others, aggravating the food waste outcome.

Impact on Growers: All 29 growers who participated in 2019 returned in 2020, with a total of 41 growers participating in 23 counties. For most of these growers (89%), it was their first time partnering with the WIC program, creating a new for their food shares. Most growers were able to provide eight-10 kinds of produce in their box, including fruits. Seventy-six percent (76%) of the participating growers were growing food on fewer than five acres of land and the program ensured access to new markets and financial resources at the beginning of the growing season.

Lessons Learned and Solutions: The program was carried out in its entirety in 2020 despite the challenges introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic, there were difficulties in managing acquisition and distribution of foods, challenges in logistics by the implementing agencies and the participating families, as well as constraints in carrying out activities like farm visits. However, counties and implementing agencies implemented measures to ensure the continuity of the program.

Some challenges that were highlighted across counties were inconsistent participation through the entire duration of the program and an unfamiliarity with the food received. In 2019, many counties and farms that set up a farmers market-like distribution system to allow participants to choose the produce. In 2020, these activities were not possible due to social distancing recommendations. To overcome this problem, many counties were communicating with the participants to match their preferences and were requesting regular feedback through emails and social media. Many counties and counties shared recipes, nutritional information, and visuals with the participants to inform them about the produce that participants were receiving each week.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Colorado Nutrition Incentive Program (CNIP) completed its second year of implementation in 2020 after being piloted in 2019. The program is a collaboration between Nourish Colorado, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), local public health agencies, and Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) throughout the state.

The program seeks to create sustainable partnerships between the local agricultural system with federal food assistance programs like the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the Older Americans Act Congregate Nutrition Program. CNIP focuses on increasing access to locally produced, fresh and nutritious fruits and vegetables to women, children, and older adults experiencing economic insecurities.

As in 2019, county WIC and AAA agencies were able to apply to coordinate the program in 2020. County staff committed to recruiting participants and finding local CSA partners, who were then paid directly by Nourish Colorado with state-allocated funds. A total of \$493,000 was available and spent in purchasing produce boxes in 2020, up from \$190,000 in 2019. Both years, the state's Healthy Food Incentive Fund contributed funding. Additionally, in 2020 Nourish Colorado was allocated \$300,000 from CDPHE's Maternal & Child Health Department for COVID response.

Produce was purchased from 41 growers in 23 counties throughout Colorado and distributed to approximately 1,200 households (WIC and older adult), though the total number of participants is much likely higher as some households stopped participating at some point in the season and were replaced by another household. Each WIC household is estimated to include 4-5 people, 2-3 of whom are children. Older adult households typically have 1-2 members.. Most CSAs in this program ran from June to October and provided a weekly produce box with fruits and vegetables, including enough food for a family of four.

In addition to improving food access and health of the participating families, the program also supports local farmers and growers by opening new and untapped local markets and partnerships for them. Being paid up-front through the program has allowed the growers financial stability at the start of the season and plan their production and purchase of inputs. The value to producers was validated when 100% of the pilot year growers (29) returned for the second year of the program.

The economic and health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic posed various challenges to many low-income households, among which were growing difficulties in affording food. Families struggled to afford adequate food, nutrition, and other basic needs for most of 2020, making federal and other food assistance programs more essential than ever. The pandemic also created challenges in procurement and distribution of produce for CNIP grower partners, who had to ensure that all food security and sanitation standards were met during the process to mitigate any risk of virus transmission. All local implementing

agencies as well as the growers coordinated their efforts to make sure that the program remained largely unaffected in its objectives and that the produce was delivered to the participating families as planned.

Nourish Colorado, formerly LiveWell Colorado, is a non-profit organization in Denver that works to transform Colorado's food system to ensure all Coloradans have equitable and abundant access to nutritious foods from sustainable sources. Through advocacy for better policies, statewide initiatives, and partnerships with communities, Nourish Colorado is championing a future-forward food system that nourishes ALL Coloradans.

Following the implementation of CNIP in 2020, this study was conducted as an evaluation of the program through surveys and discussions with participants, growers, and partner agencies.

2. OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH

2.1. Study Objectives

Following the second year of the program, the objective of the study was to evaluate the implementation of the program, participation, and response of the beneficiary households, impact on growers, and challenges that emerged in the process. The detailed objectives are as follows:

- i. To assess the participation of both the WIC and older adult participants in the program.
- ii. To understand the program outcomes in terms of increasing access to and consumption of fresh produce by the participants, and the impact on food security.
- iii. To ascertain program impact on the participating growers.
- iv. To gauge the challenges in program implementation for every stakeholder in the program and issues arising out of COVID-19 restrictions.

2.2. Study Approach

In order to understand the participation and impact of the program on the participants and growers as well as the logistics of implementation by the counties and participating agencies, primary data was collected following the completion of the program in 2020 using various survey tools. The specific tools used were:

- i. Household surveys were conducted to get responses from WIC and older adults participants with the help of a structured questionnaire that included both numerical and textual responses. This questionnaire was circulated in English and in Spanish, both online (using Qualtrics) and on paper for some of the older adult participants.
- ii. A structured questionnaire was also developed for the participating growers and their responses recorded. Interviews and group discussions were also conducted with some growers.
- iii. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with the county personnel, partnering agencies and Nourish Colorado, who were involved directly in implementing the program.

A total of 233 participants in the WIC category and 113 older adults across the 23 counties responded to the surveys, which forms the sample for evaluation in this study. Discussions were carried out with all 41 growers while 28 responded to the questionnaire. The responses are discussed in the following sections of the report.

3. DISCUSSION OF PROGRAM IMPACT

In the second year of implementation, CNIP facilitated the purchase of community supported agriculture (CSA) produce shares directly from local producers for the participants of the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program as well as the Older Americans Act Congregate Nutrition Program. The participants for the program were identified by the county team and the participating agencies, their willingness to participate established and expectations from the program made known.

City-wide lockdowns, closure of office spaces, substantially lower physical contact, job losses, and other logistical impacts resulting from COVID-19 had substantial impact in how the program was delivered in the summer of 2020. These are discussed in more detail in the subsequent subsections. Following the survey and discussions, the findings are presented below, divided into two sections for the two programs, respectively.

3.1. Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides federal grants to states for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk (USDA WIC). The participating CNIP counties identified potential households from the larger pool of WIC participants to support them through this program.

Participation in the Program

Among the WIC households surveyed, the average household size is 4.4 members with an average of 2.3 children in each household. The respondents learned about CNIP largely through their local WIC office and coordinators, through emails and friend referrals, while some also heard about it through social media like Facebook, local health department, or through another family member. Due to a limited statewide budget, not everybody who expressed interest was able to participate in the program. County coordinators also created wait lists of potential participants in the event there was extra produce or if some participants dropped out of the program.

Close to 37% of the participants continued to participate in the program for over 13 weeks and up to the end of the program period, either by personally picking up the food boxes or having them delivered. However, more than a third of the participating households (about 36%) participated for less than eight weeks, or less than half of the duration of the program (Figure 1). This issue of household turnover during the program was reported in some counties, due to multiple reasons like inability to pick up food, high participation in other federal food assistance programs, losing interest in the program, forgetting to pick up produce, etc. These are discussed in detail in the following subsections.

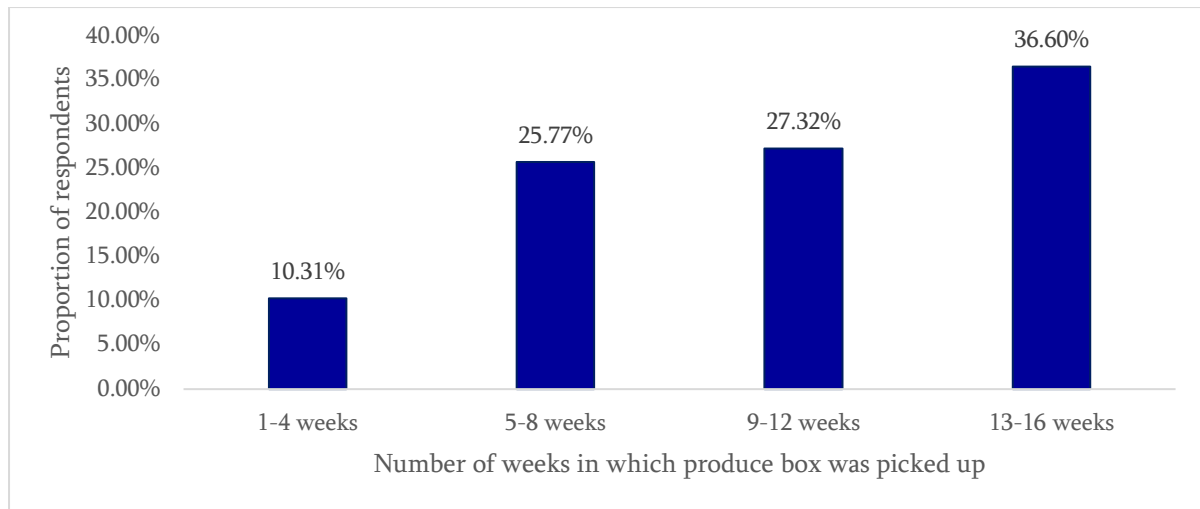


Figure 1. Weekly participation in the program

Some counties were able to home-deliver the produce for the duration program, which led to lower turnover of households. Other counties had waiting lists of other WIC households who they were able to contact and get onboard whenever a share was available. Though this process was cumbersome for the implementing agencies, they ensured that food shares were not wasted and were delivered to eligible households every week.

In addition to the produce box, the majority of participants reported getting their daily produce from the grocery store, (92%) whereas only about 23% purchase from the farmers market and another 13% through a CSA, during the summer and fall months (June - October) (Figure 2). In 2019, less than 4% of the participants had reported purchasing CSA shares. Following their participation in CNIP, households had expressed interest in considering getting CSA shares of their own. CNIP is expected to have played a role in increasing linkages of households with local producers which would mean that households buy more local and fresh produce.

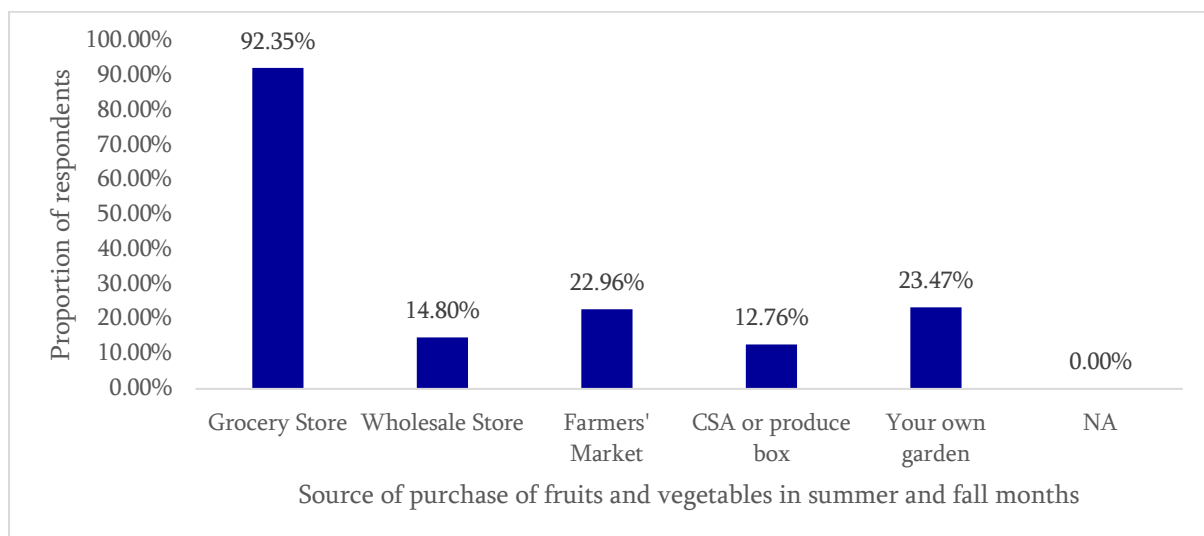


Figure 2. Common sources of fruit and vegetable purchases in addition to receiving the produce box.

Consumption from the Produce Box

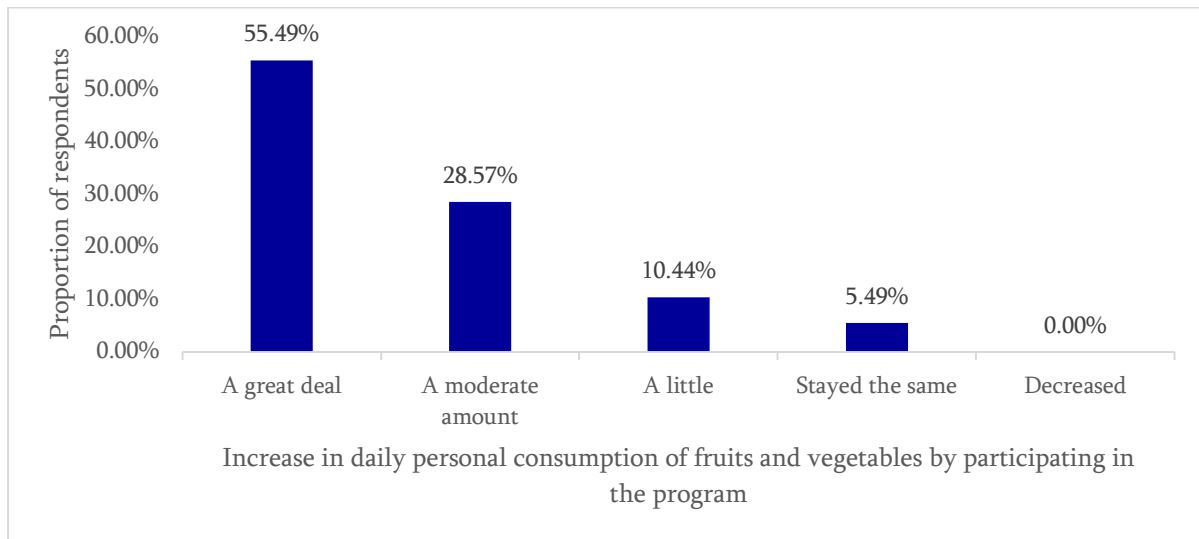


Figure 3. Change in daily personal consumption reported because of receiving the produce box.

A little over half the participants (55%) reported their daily personal consumption of fruits and vegetables to have increased a great deal because of participation in the program. Another 29% reported an increase by a moderate amount (Figure 3). In addition to increasing personal consumption of the respondents, the produce delivered also led to an increase in the consumption of all other members in the household. Over 85% of the participants had reported that everyone in their household was eating the produce they received through the program. It was reported by 53% of the participants that the increase in consumption by other members in the household was by a great deal, while another 28% reported an increase by a moderate amount (Figure 4).

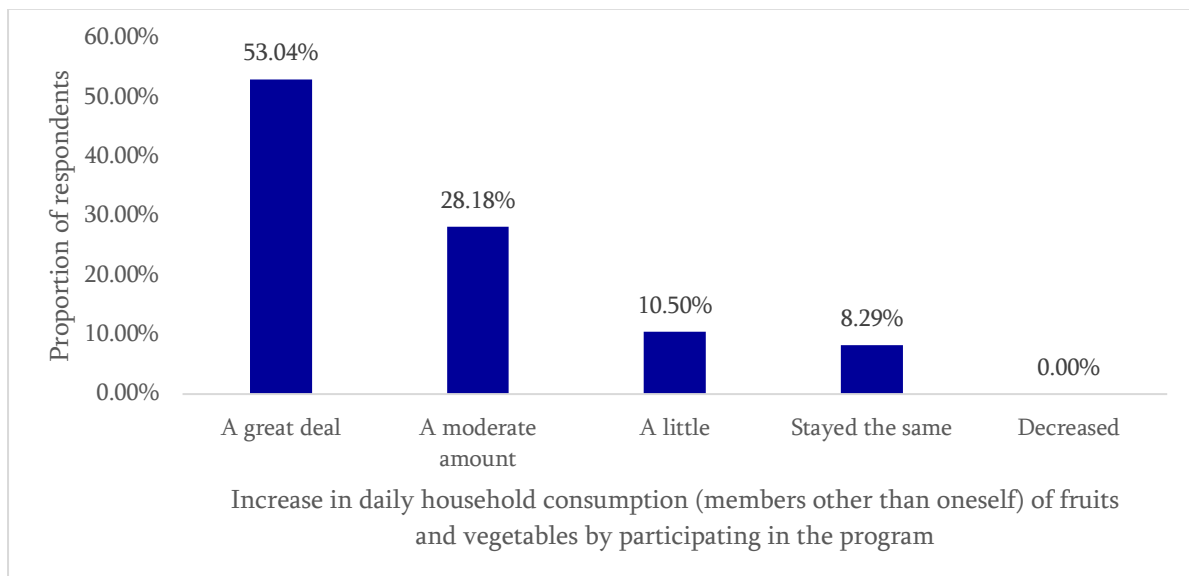


Figure 4. Change in daily consumption of other members in the household reported because of receiving the produce box.

Only about a third of the participants (34%) reported consuming all the produce they received in the box every week. Another 56% reported consuming most of the produce (at least three quarters of it), while less than 10% reported consuming half or less than half of the produce they received in a week (Figure 5). There were many reasons for not consuming all the food they received, as discussed below.

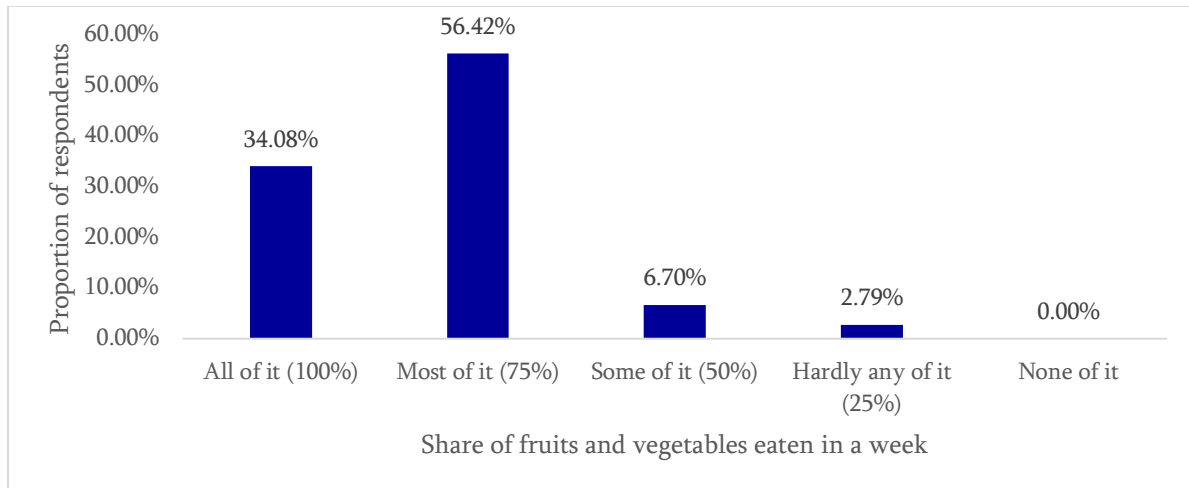


Figure 5. The share of the produce box that was being consumed every week.

With reference to vegetables, the two major reasons reported for not consuming all the produce received were that the households were not aware of how they could prepare the produce (45%) or they were unfamiliar with the produce (24%), the latter challenge also spilling over into the former. Another major reason reported for lower consumption of produce was out of fatigue of receiving the same produce consecutively for many weeks or disproportionately too much of one item, also leading to leftovers every week. Close to 7% of the households reported receiving vegetables that were not of great quality, they were reported to be wilting or already too ripe to be eaten (Figure 6). Some households reported allergies as a reason for their inability to consume certain produce.

Most households reported giving away their leftover produce to others when they could (67%), while another 38% reported freezing fresh produce for future consumption. Leftover food being thrown away was reported by 17% of the households, which is higher than food being thrown away in 2019 by eight percentage points (Figure 7). Some reasons reported for throwing away the produce were households' inability to preserve or store food for longer, difficulty in giving away to others due to COVID-related restrictions, being unable to consume the foods before they over ripened or because they had too much produce at home at any point in time. Additionally, under "other" ways of handling leftovers, some households reported composting the food, while some reported feeding it to their chickens.

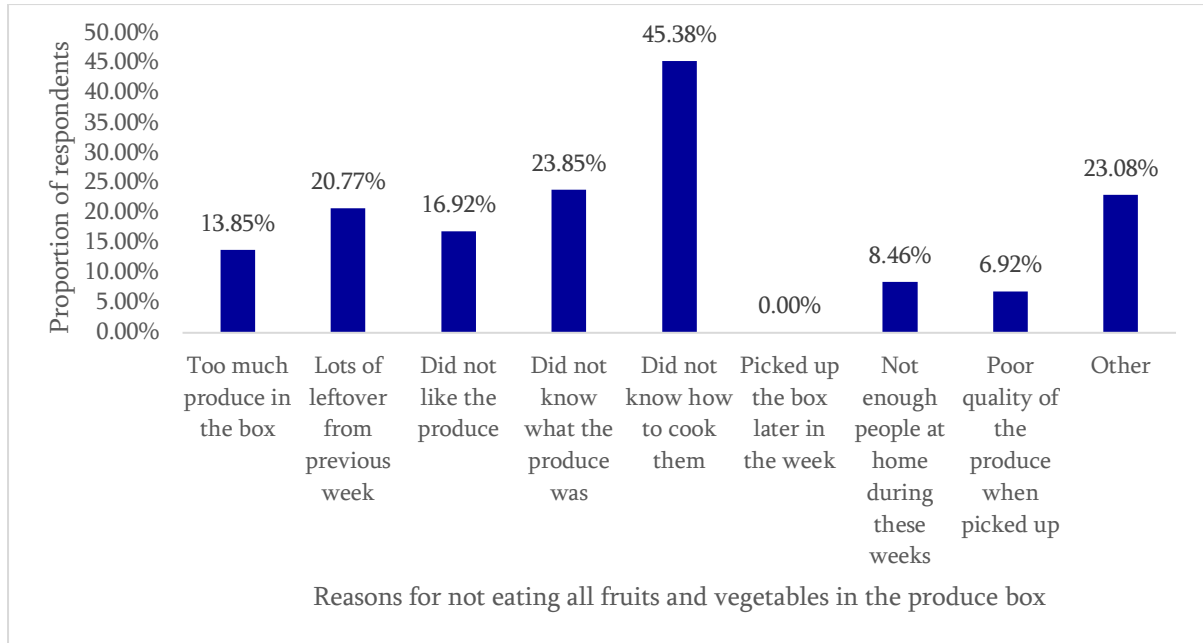


Figure 6. Reasons reported for not eating all the contents in the produce box received every week.

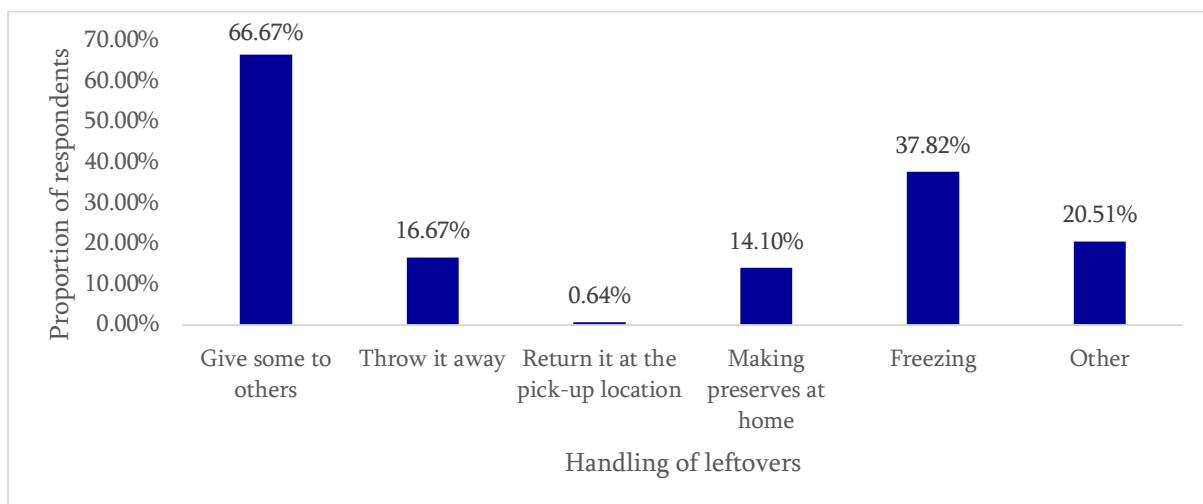


Figure 7. Different ways in which leftover food from the produce box was used.

Most participants reported that they were extremely satisfied with the variety, quantity as well as quality of the produce they received each week (Figures 8, 9, 10). However, some also reported a certain level of dissatisfaction with each the variety, quantity, and quality of the produce. Dissatisfaction in variety of produce was due to the lack of it over time and some participants expressed their growing disinterest in receiving the same produce for multiple weeks at a stretch. With respect to quantity, discontent was expressed for overall quantity of the produce being more than what they could consume in a week, as well as for disproportionately higher quantities of certain produce in the box in a week of which they couldn't consume in its entirety or were not interesting in consuming so much. Some

households reported having received produce that was already beginning to wilt or was very ripe for their own preference to cook.

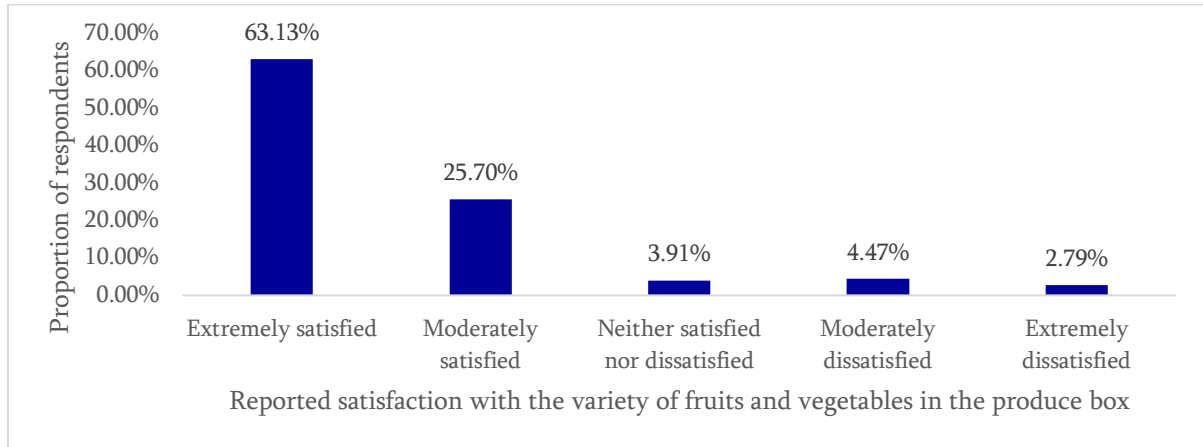


Figure 8. The levels of satisfaction reported with the variety of the produce.

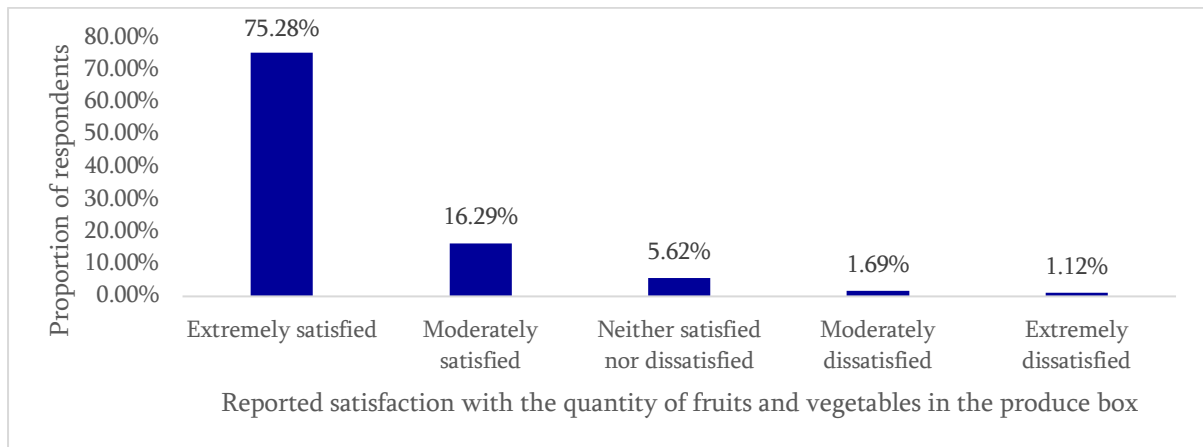


Figure 9. The levels of satisfaction reported with the quantity of the produce.

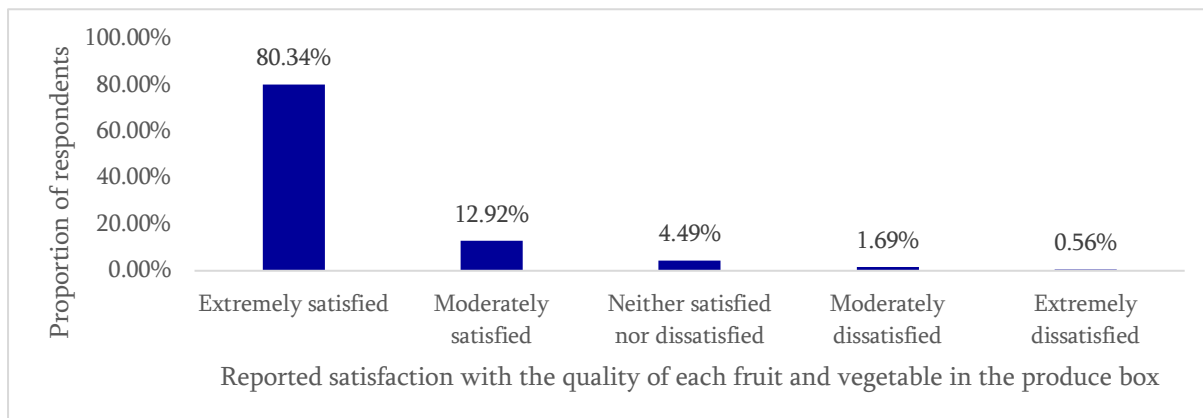


Figure 10. The levels of satisfaction reported with the quality of the produce.

Food Security

Over two-thirds of the participants (67%) reported a high level of food security during the summer months when they participated in the program, whereas another 30% reported a medium level (Figure 11). A significant majority (91%) reported that participating in the program had led to an increase in their food security, with many suggesting the program continue over the winter too. It was the consistent access to fresh foods which was highly valued by the participants and which set CNIP apart from other federal food assistance programs.

Close to 60% of participants reported participating in other food assistance programs. Among these, 61% accessed benefits of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and 51% reported participating in the Free & Reduced School Meals program, all of which together contributed to overall household food security.

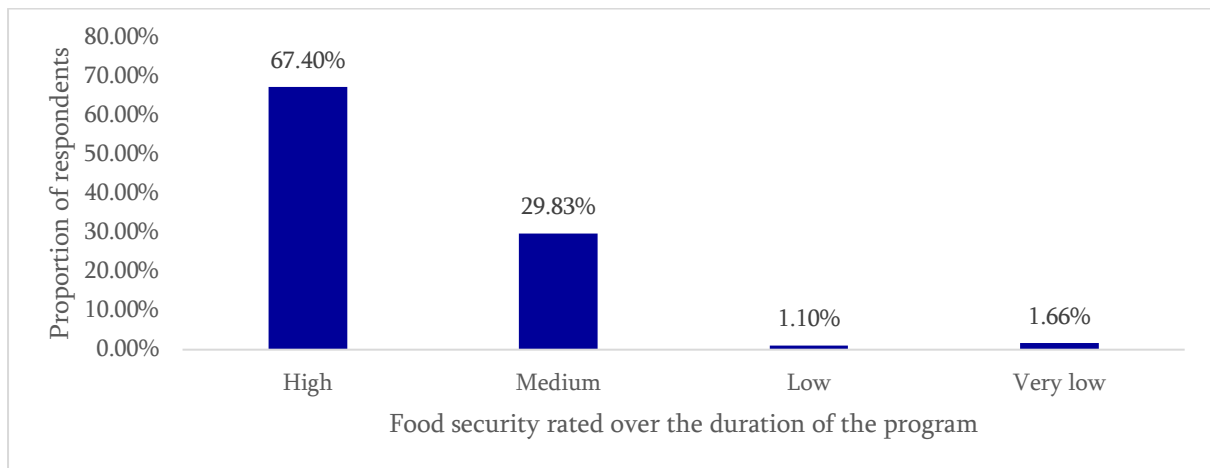


Figure 11. The extent of food security reported during participation in the program.

3.2. Older Adult Congregate Meal Program

The Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Programs, part of the Administration on Aging within the Administration for Community Living, provide grants to states to help support nutrition services for older people throughout the country. The programs provide health-promoting meals in a variety of group settings, such as senior centers, and faith-based settings, as well as in the homes of frail, isolated homebound older adults (AOA)¹. The counties implementing CNIP with the Older Adult Meal Plans ensured delivery of the food procured from the growers to multiple centers and homes on a weekly basis.

¹ The Administration on Aging (AOA) in the Administration for Community Living (ACL) within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) administers the Nutrition Services Program.

Participation in the Program

Fewer than half of the participants (44%) reported receiving produce from the program for up to eight weeks, whereas 30% and another 26% reported receiving produce for 9-16 weeks and 17-24 weeks, respectively (Figure 12). Unlike with the WIC program, local AAAs tend to work with individual older adults and customize how much and how often produce would be beneficial.

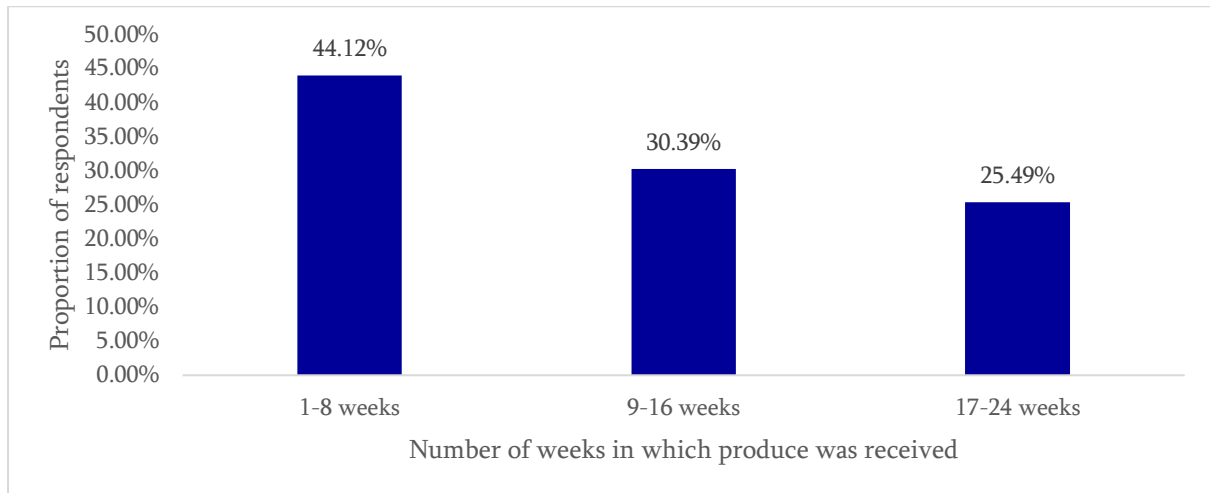


Figure 12. Total weeks of receiving produce.

Consumption of the Produce Received

A little over one-third of the participants (35%) reported an increase in personal consumption of foods daily by a great deal by participating in the program, whereas another 39% reported a moderate increase (Figure 13). Very few respondents were responsible for feeding other members of the family.

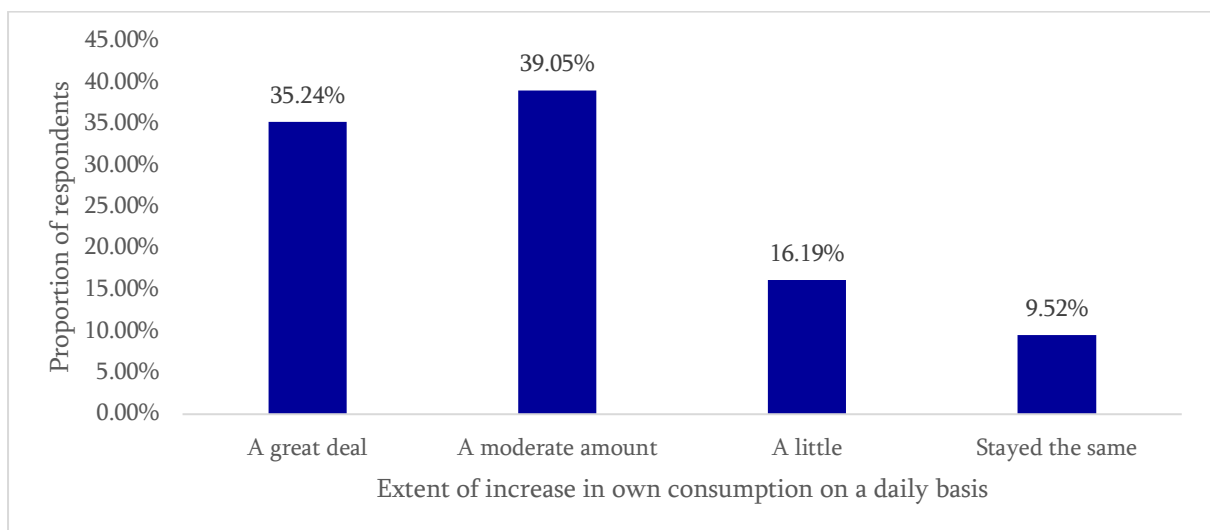


Figure 13. Change in daily personal consumption reported after receiving the weekly produce.

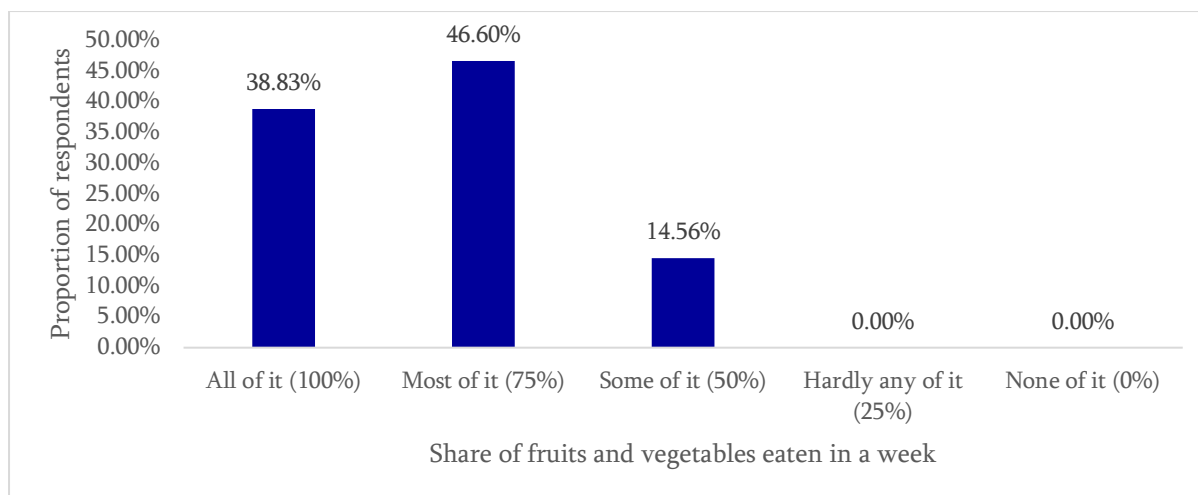


Figure 14. The share of the produce that was consumed every week.

Close to half (47%) participants reported consuming most of the produce they received, while about 39% of the participant were consuming all the produce they received (Figure 14). Major reasons reported for not consuming the food they received were having too much produce to consume in a week (27%) or being unfamiliar with the produce received (25%) and having leftovers from the previous week (18%) (Figure 15).

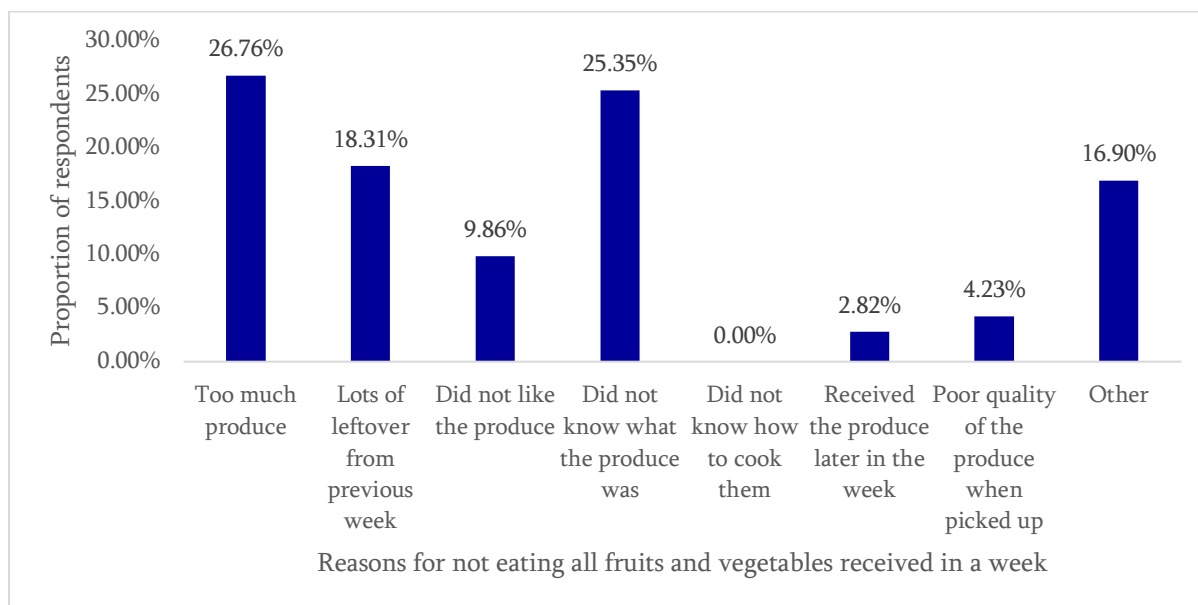


Figure 15. Reasons reported for not eating all the produce received in a week.

Most participants (65%) were giving away leftover food to others (like neighbors, or family members), while 27% also reported freezing leftovers. The proportion of participants who reported throwing away leftover produce was 14%, which is higher by 11 percentage points compared to the proportion in 2019, likely due to restrictions in sharing with others during COVID (Figure 16). Some participants also reported dehydrating the produce for future consumption, while some reported composting the leftovers.

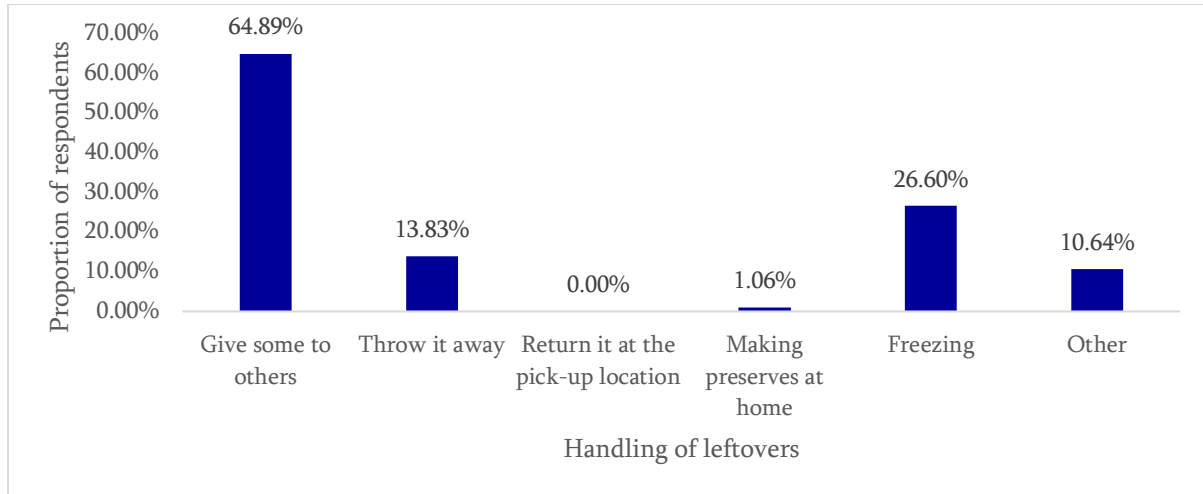


Figure 16. Different ways reported in which leftover produce was being used.

Most participants were extremely satisfied with the variety (63%), quantity (70%), and quality (70%) of the produce they received (Figures 17, 18, 19). While some reported that the quantity of food they received was more than what they could consume, others also felt that the variety could have been increased, either in every box or across weeks.

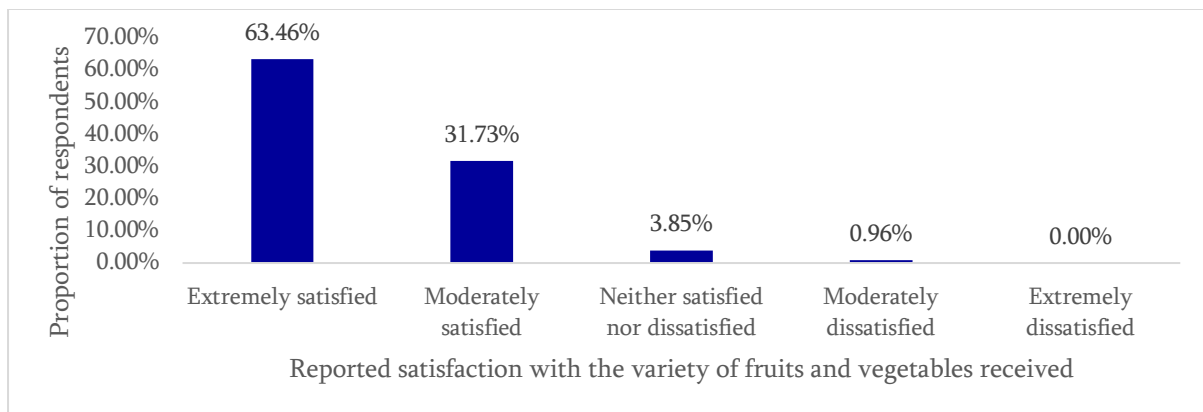


Figure 17. The levels of satisfaction reported with the variety of the produce received.

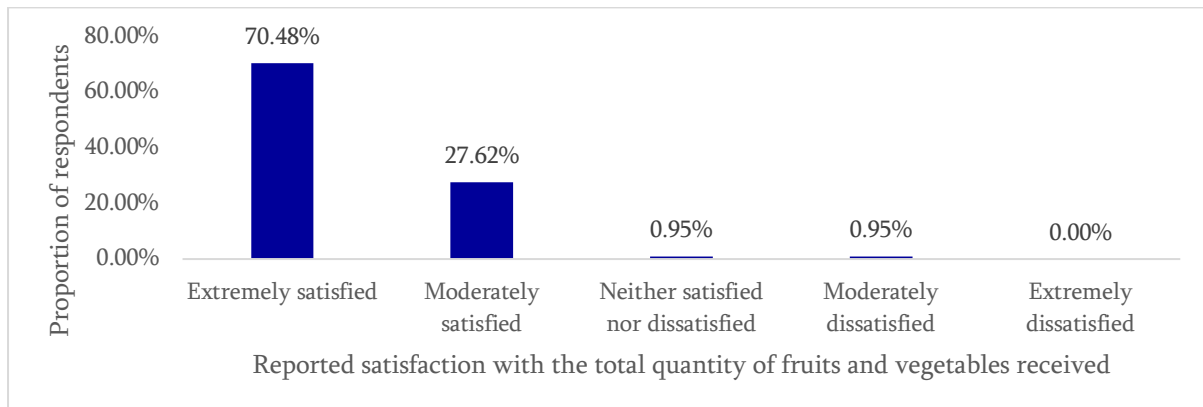


Figure 18. The levels of satisfaction reported with the quantity of the produce received.

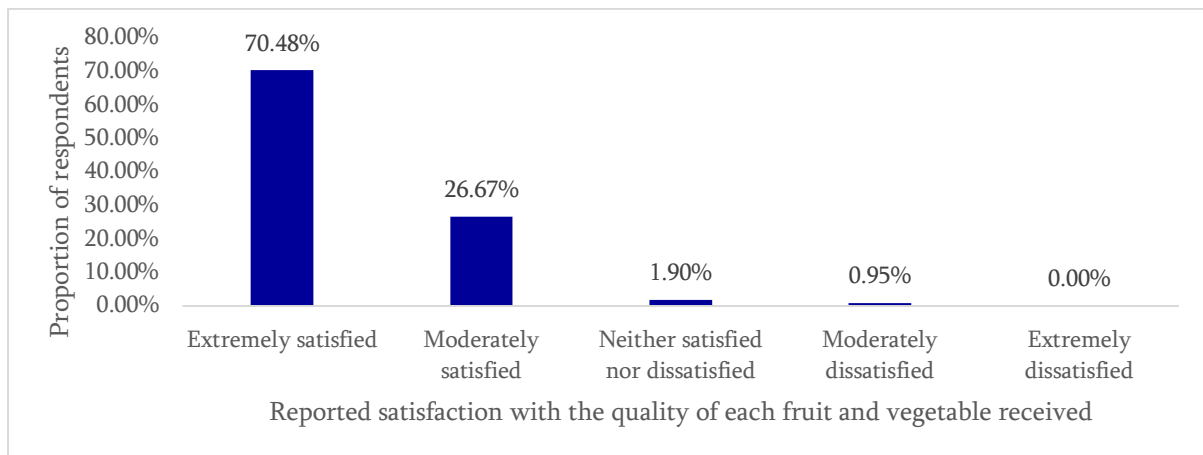


Figure 19. The levels of satisfaction reported with the quality of the produce received.

Food Security

Close to two-thirds (62%) of the participants reported a high level of food security during their participation in the program, while another 31% reported a medium level of food security (Figure 20). As an outcome of the program, 81% participants reported an increase in their food security. Like the participants in the WIC program, the older adults too were participating in other food assistance programs like SNAP (50%) and food banks (35%), which also contributed to sustained food access in the same period.

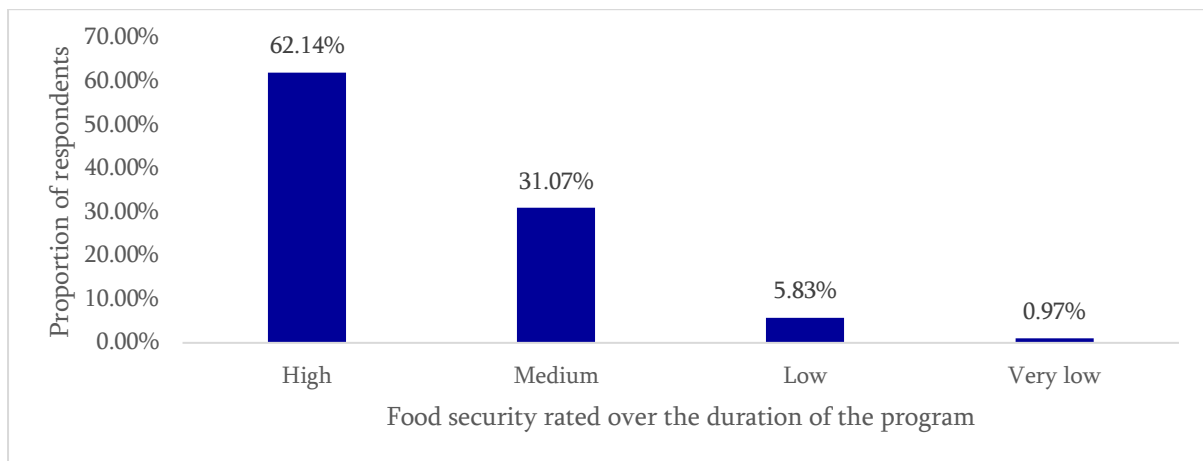


Figure 20. The extent of food security reported by the older adults during participation in the program.

3.3. Impact on Participating Growers

In 2020, 41 growers in 23 counties participated in the program, with all 29 growers from 2019 continuing in the second year. Most of these growers (89%) had not partnered with the WIC program before, making this a new market for them to sell their produce to. The program procurement was in the form of CSA which meant that the growers were paid up-front for their produce shares, on contrast to other food assistance programs like SNAP

where payments are made after sale. For the smaller growers, this assures market and financial capital at the start of the growing season.

More than three quarters of the participating growers (76%) cultivate less than five acres of land, some lower than an acre. While some growers were able to provide five to six different vegetables in the produce box every week, most growers were able to include eight-10 different kinds of produce, including fruits. Many growers were also giving shares to participants directly from their farm and faced the issue of irregularities in food pick-up by participants.

Unlike in 2019, many growers were not able to set up a farmers market-like produce delivery setup or conduct farm tours for the participants. These types of activities helped the participants learn more about the produce they were receiving and how they were grown. However, many growers tried to give more information about their produce and farms through social media, produce descriptions, and recipes. Some counties were still able to coordinate pick-up at farms and gardens, which helped participants choose the produce they could take.

The program helped growers connect with a new local market and local agencies for institutional support and associated programs. However, some growers felt that despite the program being a good financial and market support, shares purchased were few and there was uncertainty in continuity of the program in a consistent manner in the following years.

3.4. Lessons Learned and Solutions

Issues and challenges concerning a range of topics like produce quality, logistics, handling of leftovers, participant turnover, and restrictions imposed by the pandemic were discussed in the surveys, interviews, and discussions with all stakeholders. Unforeseen logistical issues pertaining to acquisition and distribution of produce due to the pandemic-induced restrictions affected all counties—some more than others. Measures were taken by implementing agencies, counties, and growers to ensure that the produce was collected and distributed every week.

Challenges pertaining to inconsistent participation and households dropping out before the end of the program, which was something that had been an issue in 2019 as well. However, this issue seemed to have also been accentuated due to the pandemic and the growing economic insecurity facing many participating households. Despite greater efforts to increase familiarity with the foods being distributed through descriptions and recipes, many participants reported lower consumption of certain produce resulting from a lack of knowledge how to cook them or their complete unfamiliarity with the produce.

These challenges are discussed in more detail below. Participating agencies and different counties recognized many challenges as they arose and took measures in their own capacity and judgement to overcome them and minimize any losses to the program.

Inconsistent Participation by WIC Households

Inconsistent program participation was reported as a major issue reported by many participating counties in 2019. In 2020, the consistency in program participation based on counties preparing for these challenges. The issue was almost non-existent in Jefferson County and other counties, where the produce was being home delivered for most of the season. In other counties, households had reported difficulty in managing transportation on certain weeks and were unable to pick up the produce. In the pre-program survey, 91% of respondents had reported that they would be able to pick up food boxes throughout the weeks it was being offered.

Another common reason for inconsistent participation by households was a loss of interest. Participants reported receiving too much of one produce on certain weeks or receiving the same produce every week for a few weeks as a major reason for losing interest. They were either not consuming those foods or giving it away. This was also leading to a higher incidence of food waste, which is a cause of concern for the program moving ahead. Many counties had planned farm and garden tours and farmers market-like setup for participants to select foods every week to deal with this issue. Many of these activities had to be canceled due to social distancing restrictions.

To address this challenge, Boulder County used Google Forms for participant sign up every week to pick up the produce. This ensured that the county could keep track of any household dropping out before the day of the pick-up as well as serve as a reminder for the households every week. This was particularly helpful as some households had reported simply having forgotten to pick up the produce on certain days. Similar ideas and the proposition of a program-wide application to manage the same was discussed in the FGD with the county teams and participating agencies. While it was relatively simple for the counties to manage leftover foods on any day, it was a bigger task for the growers who were offering pickups from their farms or gardens.

Unfamiliarity with the Food

Another issue which has carried forward from 2019 is an unfamiliarity with the produce or how to prepare them. This has contributed to higher leftovers, waste, and fatigue of the program. Activities like farm visits and pick-up by participating households could not be done as much in 2020, both of which help in familiarizing the participants with the produce and choose only what they would like to eat, instead of just receiving a pre-packed set of produce box every week. Participants also expressed interest in receiving more fruits in the boxes.

Many growers and participating agencies across counties were preparing and sending recipes and product descriptions every week with the produce. For example, Pueblo County created a Facebook page for all participants and used the page to share recipes, nutritional information, visuals. This also allowed for regular feedback from participants. Mesa County partnered with chefs to create and share cooking videos. Other participating counties addressed these challenges in other ways, though they were limited in their capacity. Counties suggested that a common platform could be created at the program level where all such recipes, nutritional information, videos, etc. could be shared. This would allow cross sharing across counties, growers, and participants.

A pre-program survey was conducted to ascertain households' interest in participating in the program, their availability in the upcoming season and whether they had participated in a produce-box program before. In discussions during program evaluation, it was suggested that households also be asked of their produce preferences, reservations, and allergies to help counties and growers better plan and customize the produce boxes. The survey respondents also suggested that growers provide a list of produce to better inform participants about the options that would be included in the produce boxes.

Nature of Program Funding

The program budget increased from \$200,000 in 2019 to \$500,000 in 2020 and supported more counties and more growers. However, restrictions on the fund required that the entire amount be spent to purchase produce. This means that there was no administrative support for the program. However, the program requires several hours of work by county staff as well as partnering agencies, and no additional staff could be hired. This became increasingly difficult and demanding due to additional logistical requirements resulting from COVID-19 restrictions. Many counties had to hire or coordinate delivery of produce every week since pick-up was not an option in 2020.

Despite a higher fund allocation in 2020, many households that had expressed interest in participating in the program were unable to participating and were added to the wait list. For some of the larger growers, the contributed shares to the program were too small and they expressed preference for the ability to supply a larger number of shares to earn substantial benefit from the program.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The Colorado Nutrition Incentive Program (CNIP) was carried out successfully in the summer of 2020 when produce boxes were procured from local producers in 23 counties in Colorado and delivered to food insecure WIC and older adult households. With a larger pool of funds to spend in its second year, the program served more households, and had higher a number of participating growers and produce shares. Restrictions imposed due to COVID-19 had an impact on logistics of the program as well as for participants in terms of food and economic insecurity. Despite the challenges, the program was carried out for the entire summer season of 2020 and supported participants with locally grown fresh produce every week.

5. PROGRAM TESTIMONIES

“We loved the weekly produce; how fresh it was and were able to come up with healthier meal options. This year they introduced eggs and potatoes; my son loves eggs so that helped us out a lot. I think this program is amazing not a lot of us can afford organic produce like this and it was nice to be able to enjoy what came each week. I hope in the future they continue this for other families. This year is our last year in the W.I.C. program and we could not be more thankful for the farmers and all their hard work to provide this for us.”

-WIC participant

“This is better than Christmas!”

-WIC participant

“Mountain Roots Food Project is honored to be a partner organization with the Nourish WIC and Older Adult Produce Box Program. Through this initiative we have been able to provide locally sourced, sustainably raised fruits and veggies all summer long to those who need it most here in the Gunnison Valley. Not only does this program give a boost to households with need, it also allows us to provide support to local producers who have also been negatively affected by the current pandemic. A true win-win!”

- Mountain Roots Food Project

“As a farmer, it means the world to me to be able to send food directly to people who need it most. That is why I farm. I’m so grateful that we were able to partner and that it worked out so well for everyone.”

-Participating grower

“The program was awesome for us - it fit in well with our existing business model and getting paid up front in a single lump sum helped our cash flow and made accounting easy. The clients in the program seemed to be very happy with the system and products - the feedback from them as they picked up their shares was frequently enthusiastic.”

-Participating grower

"I love this program! We are happy to be able to share organic vegetables to WIC members and it's fun to exchange recipes and tips with them and their families. I'm especially glad to be helping create a new generation of healthy eaters!"

-Participating grower

"As an Area Agency on Aging and this being our first year participating, we were unsure how this program worked, how we would reach out to our older adults, etc. Once the program started not only were we AMAZED to see those beautiful produce-filled boxes but the looks of gratitude in the faces of the older adults in receipt of these produce boxes. We are so appreciative and thankful to all the farmers participating, not only their hard work but for their care and concern to the people in NEED of healthy foods and do not have access because of costs!"

-Participating AAA

"Thank you so much for the wonderful organic produce this summer. I barely had to go to the grocery store! Please do it again next year or better yet every year! It has been so easy to pick it up with the fabulous senior center staff. It was fun to try new things and guess what they might be. Please do the grant again. It has been most appreciated."

-Older adult participant

"This program has encouraged me to try new produce, i.e. kale, turnips, and greens. My diet has always been heavy on fruits and veggies; this program has made it easier to eat well. This program is fantastic."

-Older adult participant

