



# Colorado WIC and Older Adult Produce Box Program

## 2024 END OF SEASON REPORT



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# OVERVIEW

The [Colorado Nutrition Incentive Program](#) (CNIP), more commonly known as the WIC and Older Adult Produce Program, increases access to and consumption of Colorado-grown produce by parents, young children, and older adults experiencing economic insecurity. The program has a simple design: farmers and food aggregators provide fresh locally grown food to community members through WIC and Older Adult agencies. The farmers and the agencies work together to design a distribution plan that will work in their communities.

Since its inception in 2019, Nourish has seen tremendous interest in this program from small farmers and aggregators, community organizations and advocates, and WIC and Older Adult Agencies. In 2024, Nourish was able to partner with less than half of those who were interested in participating in the program due to budget constraints. Additional challenges included a mismatch in where interested food producers are located and where the largest food insecure populations are located. There is tremendous potential for this program to continue to be refined to address food insecurity by investing in local agriculture and community connections.

## Program Goals

- Integrate partnerships with local agriculture into federal food assistance programs.
- Increase access to and consumption of Colorado-grown produce among food insecure Coloradans with a focus on women, children, and older adults.
- Support local farmers and growers by opening up new, untapped local markets and buyers.

## Program Values

- **LOCAL:** the heart of this program is locally grown food reaching local people. We will continue to move this program in a direction that supports local farmers as well as the folks in their communities. The program will work to support local relationships on the ground and to connect agencies to farmers within the smallest distance possible.
- **EQUITY:** we will work to make sure resources are distributed equitably through this program, which in turn increases equity in the food system across the state. This means taking a hard look at where inequities currently exist in the food system and planning accordingly to effect change in those areas. We will ensure that BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) farmers and BIPOC communities are served through this program.
- **GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION:** we will work to make sure we are reaching communities across the state where food access is difficult and food insecurity is high.
- **SYSTEMIC CHANGE:** both through policy advocacy efforts and intentional distribution of resources, Nourish Colorado is aiming to effect systemic change through this program.
- **FLEXIBILITY:** the program will be designed so that local communities can tailor it to the needs and realities of their communities; the application and reporting requirements will be kept as simple as possible. We will remain open to innovation and dialogue!



# HISTORY

**2018:** Nourish works with the State of Colorado to develop the Healthy Food Incentive Fund

**2019:** Nourish partners with CDPHE to launch the Colorado Nutrition Incentive Program to fund produce boxes to WIC families and Older Adult community members across the state. Nourish partners with 29 growers to offer the program in 10 counties in the first year of the program.

**2020:** After the successful first year, the program grows with a one-time infusion of \$300,000 from CDPHE to address food insecurity at the beginning of the pandemic. Nourish partners with 41 growers to serve 23 counties.

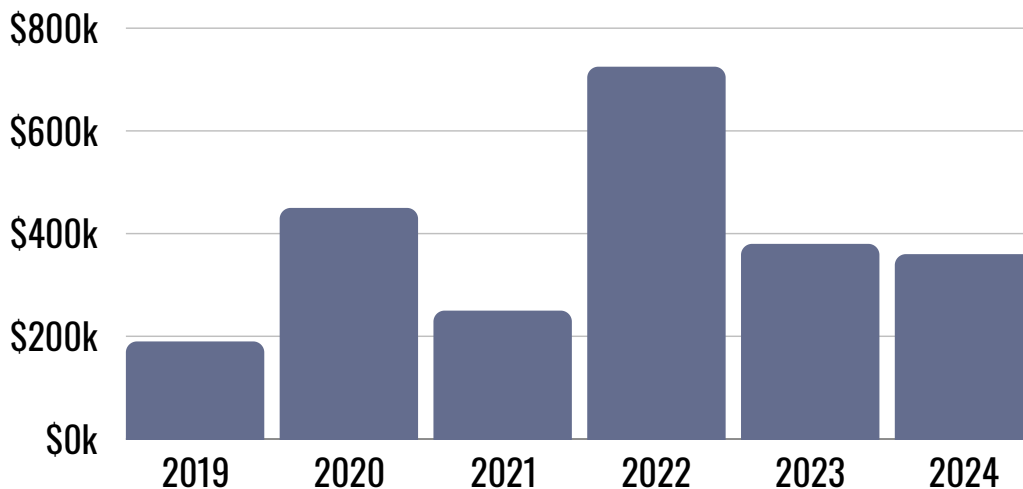
**2021:** Nourish continues the program with the initial 2019 state budget plus the addition of some philanthropic dollars. Partners with 45 growers to serve 10 counties.

**2022:** Program continues to expand with an increase in the annual state contribution through the Healthy Food Incentive Fund (from \$200k to \$500k) as well as additional funding from Kaiser Permanente, Telluray Foundation and NextFifty. Nourish partners with 76 growers to offer the program in 28 counties.

**2023:** The State HFIF contribution shifts to support Double Up Food Bucks, but with the release of the USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA) funding, the program was decentralized and several partners leveraged LFPA awards to offer produce boxes to WIC and Older Adult community members across the state, collectively investing over \$1.2 million dollars in the Colorado food economy while providing food to low income community members.

**2024:** Nourish utilizes LFPA+ continued funding as well as private philanthropic dollars to continue to run the program. Many other partners continue to run similar programs independently. Data in this report is only related to Nourish's program for 2024. The collective impact of partners running similar programs is much more robust than Nourish's data alone.

**BUDGET** Since the program started, it has been well received across the state. The graph below shows the total program budget each year which has fluctuated due to available funding.



# 2024 HIGHLIGHTS

- Through this program, food was provided to over **1,876 unduplicated WIC and Older Adult households** throughout Colorado.
- Nourish directly partnered with **27 farmers and aggregators**.
  - In total, over **111 farms** were impacted through this program either by directly contracting with Nourish or partnering with one of our aggregators.
- WIC and Older Adult community members served through **27 Agencies** in **21 counties** and the **Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Nations**.
- Invested over **\$340,580** into the Colorado food economy through hyperlocal food purchases. The vast majority of the food provided through this program was grown and distributed within the same county or within neighboring counties.
- In total, over **63,546 pounds** of food were distributed through this program.
- Over **80% of participants responding said they ate more fruits and vegetables** because of the program.

# SEASON OVERVIEW

End of season surveys were distributed to WIC and Older Adult Agency staff, farmers and aggregators participating in the program, and folks receiving the produce. The following data and reflections are offered from the results of that survey.

## Survey Successes

- This year, Nourish offered the participant survey in Spanish and English and in both online and written formats for participants of the program.
- Agencies and Farm Partners also received a post season survey, which was a mandatory program requirement.
- All but one farm partner completed the survey.
- Significant numbers of written responses were received from participants, increasing the participation rate from 2023.

## Survey Limitations

- The survey relies on both partner agencies and farmers (whoever is the point of contact for folks picking up food) to make sure participants receive the survey, which results in low participation numbers overall for a number of reasons.
- Older Adults who are receiving their produce through a Senior Center who may be offering multiple food programs don't necessarily distinguish this program from another, sometimes resulting in skewed data.
- Participants, especially older adults, may benefit from an in person conversation rather than a written survey to share their experiences with the food.
- Data entry for written surveys takes significant amounts of time, although written surveys are a key way to collect more feedback.
- Despite making the surveys mandatory for all partners, there are major gaps in the data based on which partners promoted the survey to participants and which didn't.
- Not all agency partners completed the survey, resulting in limited data.

## Program Models

The WIC and Older Adult Produce Program is **flexible**; with time we are seeing innovation of the program to truly meet the needs of communities across the state.

- Partners choose how long they will run the program and when it starts and ends. In 2024, partners ran the program from 10-21 weeks over the peak Colorado growing season.
- Both agency and farm partners generally reported that 75-100% of folks who were signed up to receive food picked it up each week. The program model needs to be changed in places not reaching that pick up rate. All partners reported plans for leftover foods including: giving them to other programs serving food insecure community members, or having a back up list of people to call to pick up leftovers.
- This year, many agency partners chose to offer the food to two groups of people on a rotating basis (ie every other week).
- Two aggregator partners operated independently of an agency partner based on pre-existing and culturally specific relationships.
- The way community members receive the food varies:
  - Some pick up at the farm
  - Some receive deliveries
  - Some pick up at an agency
  - Some pick up at a different location
- Responses to demographic questions were included on all surveys: there is a mis-match between the agency representatives administering the program and the people receiving the program.

# SEASON OVERVIEW

## Relationship Building

In order to truly change food systems and foster communities of care, Nourish realizes the most important relationships are on the ground. Our role as a remote statewide organization is to support those relationships. Oftentimes we see farmers, agencies, and community members very separated from one another. Through this program we can support connections that will hopefully bolster long-term community based efforts to build equitable food systems. In this vein, we asked all stakeholders who participated in the survey about the relationships they built through the program. The following percentages represent the number of respondents who said they built relationships with that specific group of people.

- PARTICIPANTS BUILT RELATIONSHIPS WITH:
  - WIC staff: 46%
  - Senior Center staff: 30%
  - Farmers or Food Hub Staff: 16%
  - Community organizations and advocates: 25%
  - **70% said that if they had left over food they shared it with friends and family, representing a significant community impact that is not reflected in the data here.**
- AGENCIES BUILT RELATIONSHIPS WITH:
  - Farmers: 83%
  - Community Organizations: 41%
  - Community Advocates: 20%
  - Community members receiving the food: 58%
- FARM PARTNERS BUILT RELATIONSHIPS WITH:
  - WIC staff: 52%
  - Older Adult Agency Staff: 40%
  - Community Organizations: 41%
  - Community members receiving the food: 55%

## Future of the Program

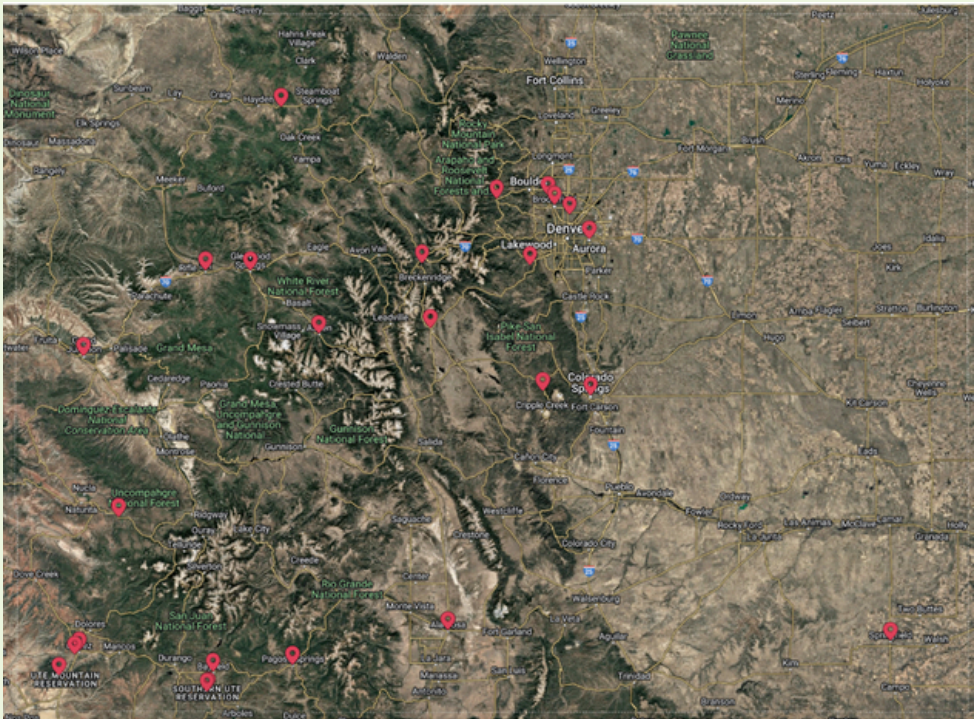
Without stable funding or a future for this program, we asked agencies and farm partners what they would do without Nourish being able to fund their work and if they would continue with the relationships they currently have. They said:

- AGENCIES SAID:
  - 79% gave a 5/5 that they would continue to work with their farm partner
  - 70% said they would NOT continue to run the program if Nourish cannot fund it
  - 25% said they'd look for their own grant funding
  - 54% said they will partner with other local organizations to look for funding together
- FARM PARTNERS SAID:
  - 96% gave a 5/5 that they would continue to work with their agency partner
  - 37% said they will NOT run the program if Nourish is not able to fund it
  - 38% said they'd look for their own funding to continue to run the program
  - 30% said they will partner with other local organizations to look for funding together
  - 18% had other answers including: working with local partners to change the model to better meet the needs in their community, and that this would be a team decision to discuss before responding.
- Despite overall positive relationships and willingness to continue to work together, we see varying ideas about how to move forward. It is clear that farmers and agency partners have limited capacity to pursue funding on their own for this program.

# PARTNER SPECIFICS

## Agencies

In 2024 Nourish partnered with the 27 WIC and Older Adult Agencies in 21 counties and the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Nations noted on the map below. WIC and Older Adult Agencies are the backbone of this program, connecting the people in their programs to the farmers and aggregators offering food. There is no compensation for this critical role.



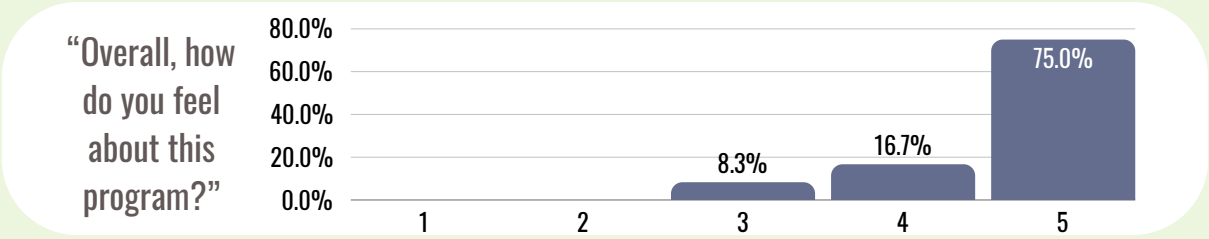
## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### RESPONDENT REPRESENTATION

- 79% self-identified as women
- 66% self-identified as white
- 58% were providing food to WIC families; 33% were providing food to older adults; 8% provided food to both WIC and Older Adults

### OVERALL SATISFACTION

- In general, there is a positive feeling toward the program from agency partners. (1= it was a bad experience; 5= it was a great experience)





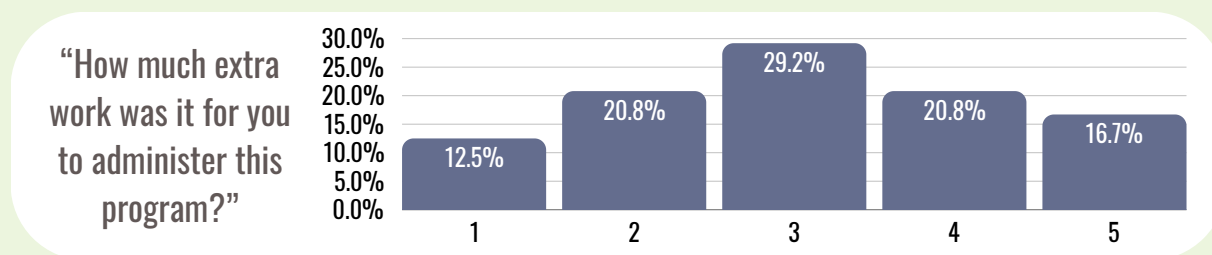
# PARTNER SPECIFICS

## Agencies

### KEY TAKEAWAYS (cont.)

#### OVERALL SATISFACTION (cont.)

- Given that there is no compensation for agencies running the program, it's important to look at the work load they are taking on. Depending on the model, some agencies invest significant amounts of uncompensated labor in order for the program to run. (1= not too much work; 5= a significant amount of extra work)



#### FEEDBACK FOR NOURISH

- 95% of agency partners said communication from Nourish was clear and easy to understand (Either 4 or 5 on a scale from 1-5)

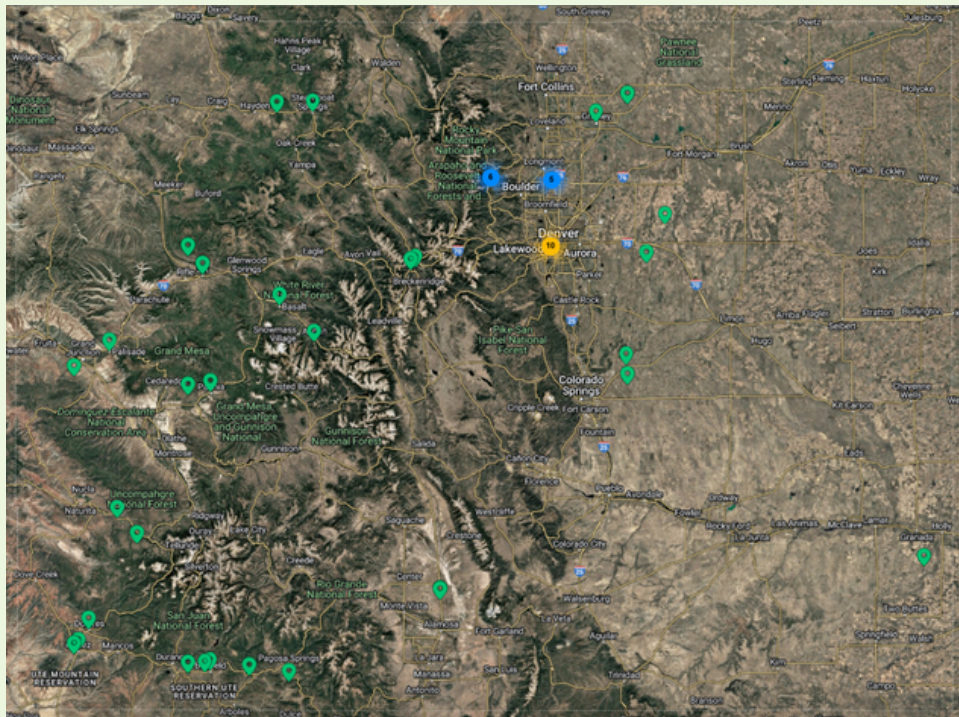
#### WHAT AGENCIES SAID IN THEIR OWN WORDS

- “Clients were very thankful for how this helped their food budget and also loved the quality of the foods provided.”*
- “It is a fair amount of work to reach out to clients to let them know they are selected and then that is all WIC really had capacity for this year. I don't have a good solution- we basically participate as a "passion project" to get our clients more local, fresh food.”*
- “Delivery seems to work best for our population. When we had home delivery in previous years, the program was much more successful, families got the food and participated throughout the season. Without home delivery, pick-up was low, families dropped out, and recruitment of new families was ongoing throughout the season. Sending email reminders, text, calls and back and forth communication to recruit new families was very time consuming.”*
- “We felt very disconnected from our participants who had their food delivered; we didn't get any feedback because we didn't see them picking up their food each week.”*
- “Lots of our families are amazed that the food is grown here in Summit County. Our farmers and families are amazing!”*
- “The senior folks that participated in the program greatly appreciated the ease of getting fresh produce in their hand.”*

# PARTNER SPECIFICS

## Farmers & Aggregators

Partnering with local farms and aggregators who are interested in providing food to folks who otherwise might not be able to afford local produce is what makes this program run. In 2024, Nourish directly partnered with 27 farmers and aggregators (noted on the map below). In total, over 111 farms were impacted through this program either by directly contracting with Nourish or partnering with one of our aggregators. The financial impacts of this program for small farmers and food businesses can be very significant.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### RESPONDENT REPRESENTATION

Our farm & aggregator partners are all different. This year, we partnered with 13 farms, 3 community owned farms, 2 food hubs and 9 community based aggregators.

Of the partners responding on the survey:

- Over 70% are located rurally; about 12% are urban based
- Over 27% distribute to urban locations while 66% distribute in rural locations. During pre-season planning, Nourish struggled to get food from rural areas to urban areas with higher demand without an adequate transportation budget and due to lack of refrigeration to make distribution times more flexible.

# PARTNER SPECIFICS

## Farmers & Aggregators

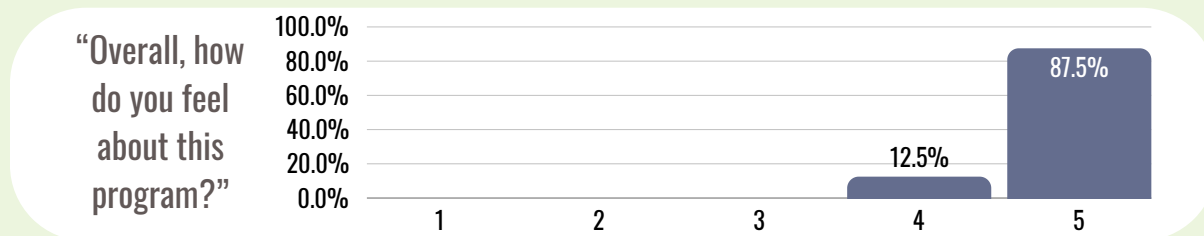
### KEY TAKEAWAYS (cont.)

#### RESPONDENT REPRESENTATION (cont.)

- 67% self-identified as women
- The majority self-identified as white (81%); or Black (9.5%). Again we see a demographic mismatch between who faces the highest levels of food insecurity and who is providing the food for the program.

#### OVERALL SATISFACTION

- In general, there is a positive feeling toward the program from farm partners. (1= it was a bad experience; 5= it was a great experience)



#### COMPENSATION & REPORTING

- Over 79% said they felt they were fairly compensated for their produce and labor through this program.
- Over 82% said the invoicing process was manageable, though some noted that it was cumbersome and difficult to navigate with a CSA model. It is important that the reporting required by funding sources align with the program design (wholesale, retail, CSA model, etc).
- 95% of farm partners said a 60% advance was a good amount to be able to run the program.

# PARTNER SPECIFICS

## Farmers & Aggregators

### KEY TAKEAWAYS (cont.)

#### WHAT FARMERS AND AGGREGATORS SAID IN THEIR OWN WORDS

- *“One of our favorite part of this program was running into the recipients of food boxes. Beyond a cooking class and the occasional early pick up, we did not get to see the recipients very often. At the grocery store and hardware store we had many instances where recipients identified themselves and expressed their gratitude. Sometimes they share how they prepared our food. It is in these small interactions that community bonds are strengthened and food culture is revitalized.”*
- *“We were able to provide classes and demos along with our distributions. These gatherings gave families time to share stories about foods we were preparing and enjoy each other's company with laughter and shared experience. We heard several people talk about how they remembered how grandparents and parents prepared and harvested these foods. We also heard stories about families getting back into harvesting foods and medicines themselves. Families also talked about how much healthier they were eating and having more meals as a family around the table. Children talked about how they were learning to cook on their own and experimenting with foods they had never seen before. A true sense of connection was made through this program.”*
- *“This program was so enriching and rewarding for everyone involved. The connections formed over the produce we were providing were immeasurable. People would share with us and each other every week about the things they had done with the produce in the past week. From canning tips, to sharing recipes, to memories of how they used to eat and prepare certain vegetables as a child. There was even talk of skill shares put on by program participants as well as putting together a cookbook of everyone's favorite recipes. Program participants consistently talked about the variety of produce and receiving items they hadn't eaten for decades. They also commented on how fresh everything was and how long it lasted compared to what was available in stores. Another participant talked of not having to plant a garden next year with the produce she was getting. The labor involved was becoming too much for her with her age and failing health, but before the program was afraid of not having the produce she'd come to depend on.”*



# PARTNER SPECIFICS

## Participants

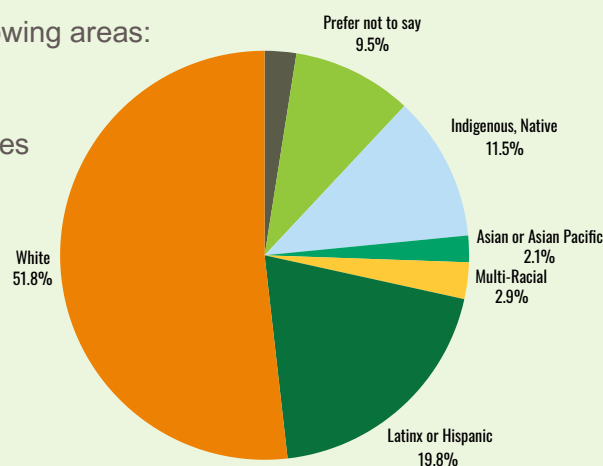
Over 257 participants responded to the end of season survey to provide feedback about the WIC and Older Adult Produce Program. The methods to collect participant feedback need to be improved in order for more representative feedback to be received.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

#### RESPONDENT REPRESENTATION

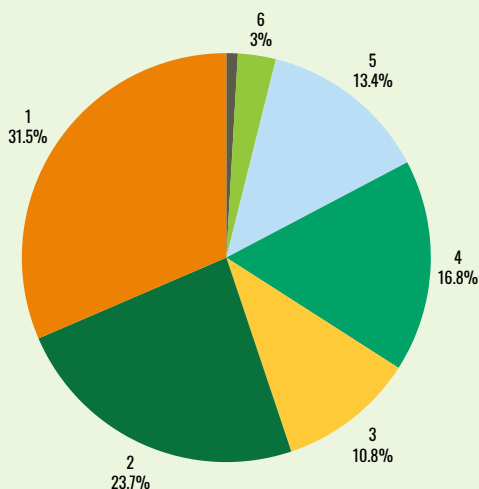
- The vast majority of survey responses came from the following areas:  
Ute Mountain Ute; Mesa, Archuleta, Broomfield, Baca, Adams, Grand, Summit, Boulder, La Plata, Garfield counties
- Over 85% of respondents self identified as women.
- Racial self identification:

“What race do you identify with?”



- Household size among participants varies. It is important to note that household size does not necessarily correlate to the number of people folks feed with the food they receive. Many respondents noted feeding more people than are in the household due to networks of community caregiving and extended familial relationships. This reality deserves more consideration in order to truly understand the community impacts of programs like CNIP in addition to the note above about participants sharing the food they received.

“How many people are in your household, including yourself?”



# PARTNER SPECIFICS

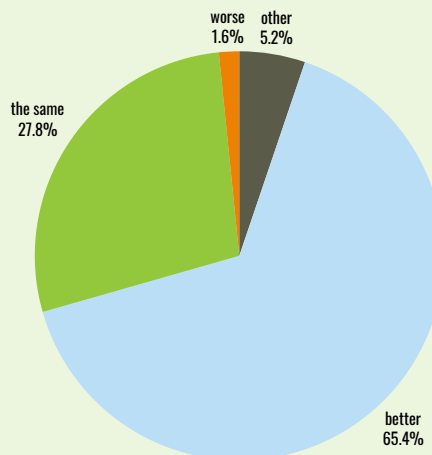
## Participants

### KEY TAKEAWAYS (cont.)

#### OVERALL SATISFACTION

- When asked how they felt about the program, (1= it wasn't helpful or useful to me, 5= I LOVE it!) 95% gave the program a 4 or 5.
- 97% said the program was easy to be involved with
  - Specifically, folks noted: well organized pick ups, friendly staff, convenient locations (especially pick ups at senior centers during meals times for older adults), and the availability of fresh food as things that made the program easy to be a part of.
  - Things that made the program challenging included: timing of pick ups, locations, transportation, variety of produce available, and long wait times.
- About 96% of respondents said they got "just enough" food
- When asked how the produce compared to what they could get at the grocery store, over 65% of respondents said that the produce was better than they could get at the grocery store

"How did you feel about the QUALITY of the food you got?"



- When asked about the variety of the foods they received, respondents said:
  - They got different things all summer long: 64%
  - They got the same things over and over: 16%
  - They were able to use everything they got: 44%
  - It was fun to try new things: 29%
- Over 80% of respondents said they ate more fruits and vegetables because of the program.
  - Many noted that they wished more fruit and meats were available through the program.

# PARTNER SPECIFICS

## Participants

### KEY TAKEAWAYS (cont.)

#### OVERALL SATISFACTION (cont.)

- Challenges in the program included:
  - Long wait times
  - Narrow windows to pick up food
  - Too much repetition in the foods offered
  - Nothing provided to help folks identify unfamiliar foods
  - Quantities offered were too small
- When asked what types of fruits and vegetables they eat most in their household, about half of all respondents mentioned things that aren't commonly grown in quantity like blueberries or raspberries, or can't be grown (without significant climate changing infrastructure) in Colorado like bananas, oranges, avocados. This represents a significant gap between what people are used to eating and what can be provided through the program.

#### WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAID IN THEIR OWN WORDS

- *"Texting was so helpful and bringing food out to my car was great when I had a sleeping toddler in there."*
- *"Staff was amazing friendly helpful!"*
- *"La atención de la proveedora y su paciencia con tantas preguntas para saber como utilizar cada cosa y sus recetas facilitadas, simplemente genial!...The attention of the provider and their patience with so many questions to know how to use each thing and the recipes provided, simply brilliant!"*
- *"Just wish it was more so the kids get more produce from farms."*
- *"The staff was professional and helpful. When I was not able to pick up my box they had people to give the box to."*
- *"When we got the meat, it was good and fresh."*
- *"I liked how we got recipes for certain items."*
- *"More inspired to use fruits and vegies in box compared to if I buy them myself."*
- *"The interaction with others and the good produce, the produce was sometimes better than the stores."*
- *"The food was really nice took off a stressor on buying it."*

# POLICY TRAJECTORY

All of Nourish's programs are paired with a long-term policy strategy to institutionalize the work that we are demonstrating through our programs. The data and feedback collected is key to influencing these policy changes. The WIC and Older Adult Produce Box Program supports advocacy efforts for the following policy changes:

## State Policy Efforts

- One of Nourish's primary state policy priorities for 2025 is to protect the Healthy Food Incentive Program at the state level. The funds from HFIP could be used in the future for WIC and OA produce boxes, and when state budget allows, Nourish will advocate to increase the HFIP line item. In the 2024 legislative session, Nourish worked with the Joint Budget Committee of the State Legislature to make what was a footnote of a line item in CDPHE's budget to an actual program (HFIP) at CDPHE. HFIP in the past funded CNIP and is currently funding Double Up Food Bucks.

## Federal Policy Efforts

- Nourish will continue to partner with other Colorado and national organizations to protect the WIC federal benefit allocation for fruits and vegetables. By demonstrating the significant need and demand for more produce through the demand of the produce box program, Nourish can provide solid evidence for a continuation of the federal WIC benefit for produce, which was made permanent after a pandemic-era increase. Some federal legislators view the increase in the WIC fruit and vegetable benefit as a pandemic-only necessity and feel it should be decreased to pre-pandemic levels.
- Nourish will also continue to partner with local and national organizations to advocate for an expansion of vendors and retailers that can accept WIC benefits, especially direct market farming operations, so that an increase in WIC produce benefits can be spent at local markets, and will work with others to support new technologies and support farmers to use them.
- Nourish will also use data from this program to advocate for funding and expansion of other programs that increase access to local produce such as the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program which supports WIC families with vouchers to shop at participating farmers markets.
- Nourish will also use data from this program to advocate for funding and expansion of the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program which supports older adults with vouchers to shop at participating farmers markets.
- Nourish will continue to work with the Colorado Department of Human Services and national partners to ensure new Local Food Purchasing Agreement (LFPA) program funds are implemented in a way that advances equity and increases access to fresh, local produce for households that need it.

## Recent Success

- This program and others like it have been deeply supported by the funding through the USDA's Local Food Purchasing Agreement (LFPA). The funding opportunity was set to expire at the end of 2024, and due to national advocacy, in which Nourish played a role, the USDA released additional money into the LFPA funding stream. How that impacts Colorado and the future of this program is yet to be known.



# WHAT'S NEXT FOR 2025?

## Trend: Disinvestment in Food Work

Nourish, and many other food related partners, are experiencing a disinvestment in food funding overall from philanthropy and government sources. The impact is devastating as we cannot run programs like this without those outside investments. In 2025, Nourish will run an extremely scaled back CNIP program, the smallest it has been since its inception, with a focus in Southwest Colorado and a few other rural communities. While it's difficult to navigate these significant program set backs, we hope that the relationships developed through this program will support community based initiatives in operating independently.

## Recommendations

- As funding does become available:
  - Continue to refine the invoicing process to make it manageable for farmers and funders
  - Continue to invest in community led work
- The evaluation process for the program needs to be improved for more accurate data. Partners who do not participate in the mandatory components of the evaluation process should not be offered future contracts if representative data is a program priority.
- A guideline for pricing for farms and aggregators should be implemented to ensure fair pricing and distribution for all partners. This CSU resource could serve as a guide: <https://foodsystems.colostate.edu/market-prices-and-information/>
- Significant community innovation must be supported in communities where the current models aren't successful (ie less than 75% pick up rate on a weekly basis).
- Partners should be involved in the grant writing and program development process.
- Nourish must continue to advocate for federal and state investments into the local food economy, driven by community.
- Nourish struggled to get food from rural areas to urban areas with higher demand without an adequate transportation budget and due to lack of refrigeration to make distribution times more flexible. The program should be coupled with funds for transportation and infrastructure where needed. Even without house to house delivery, transportation from the farm to the distribution site can be a barrier on it's own.
- Programs should be led by the communities they serve. In areas where we see a significant mismatch between who is administering the program and who is receiving the program, the model should be reconsidered to ensure community leadership.