



Salem Food Assessment 2022

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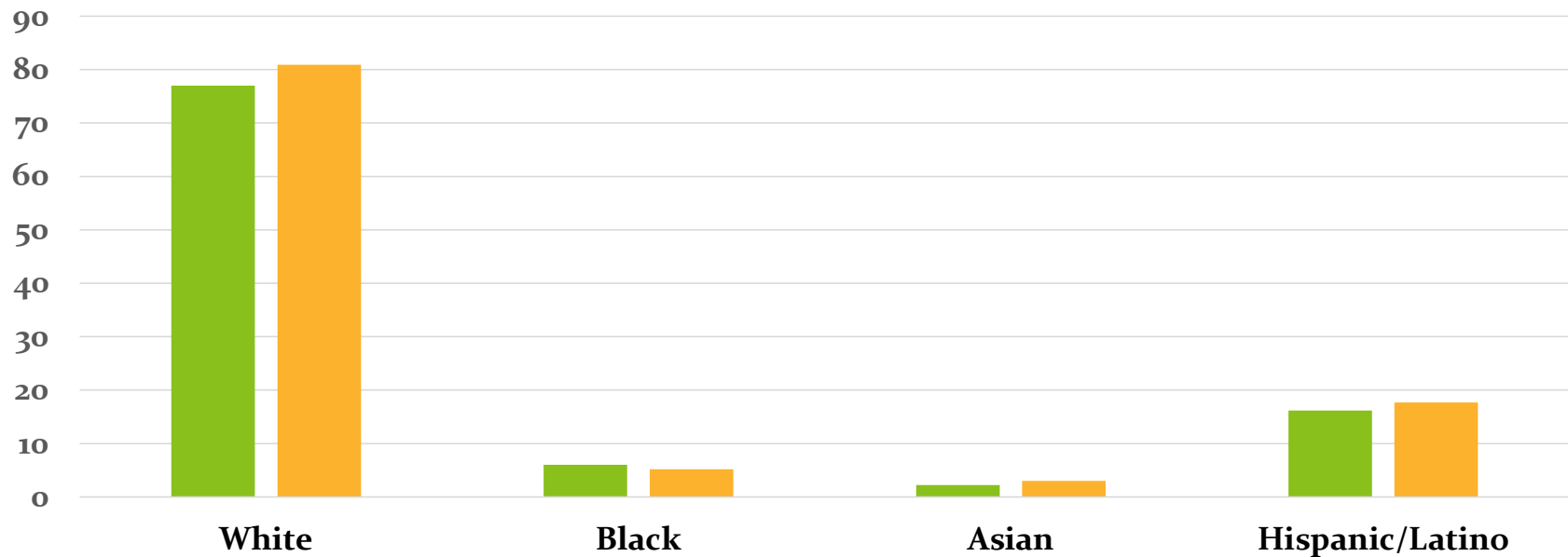
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Community Snapshot: Race and Ethnicity

Salem Population by Race/Ethnicity

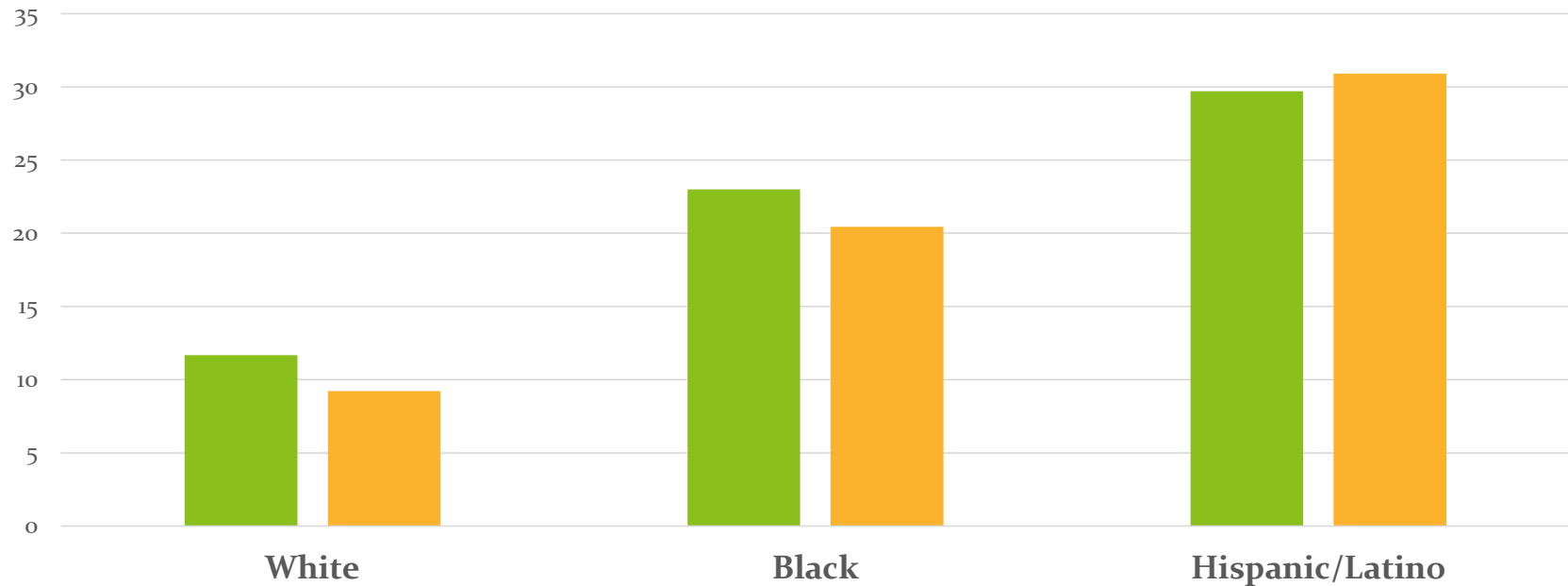


Source: American Community Survey

■ 2012-2016 ■ 2017-2021

Community Snapshot: Race, Ethnicity, and Poverty

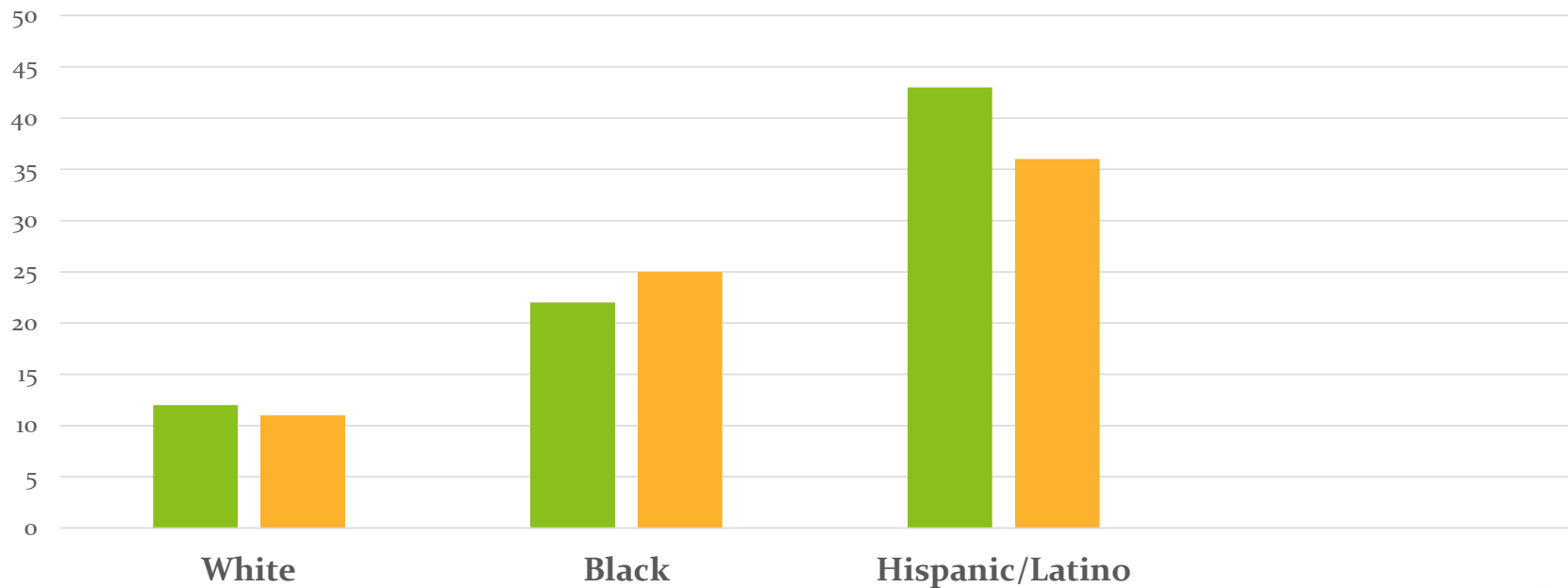
Salem Poverty Level by Race/Ethnicity



Source: American Community Survey ■ 2015-2019 ■ 2017-2021

Community Snapshot: Race, Ethnicity, and SNAP Usage

SNAP Participants by Race/Ethnicity



Source: American Community Survey ■ 2015-2019 ■ 2017-2021



Salem Food Assessment 2018

Research Methods

- Resident Food Survey
- Emergency Food Provider Survey
- Convenience Story Survey
- Restaurant Survey
- Resident Focus Groups
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Existing Data



Salem Food Assessment 2018

Findings

- Resident experiences
 - Residents have a hard time finding affordable fresh produce and lean meats close to home
 - The biggest barriers to healthy eating are family schedules, food preferences, and food costs
 - Larger stores with more affordable food options are hard to get to without a car
- Emergency food providers
 - There is a lack of collaboration among emergency food providers
 - Emergency food providers don't always have appropriate foods
 - Culturally appropriate
 - Medically appropriate



Salem Food Assessment 2018

More Findings

- Community agriculture
 - Salem has many community gardens
 - Residents are interested in growing their own food
- Food waste
 - Food waste isn't an issue for many local restaurants
 - Food waste reduction efforts are uneven in local institutions like Salem Public Schools and Salem Hospital



Salem Food Assessment 2018

Outcomes

- Greater collaboration among emergency food providers
- Events like community meals and the Salem Food for Thought Festival
- Expanded community gardens
- [Mack Park Food Farm](#)
- Farm-to-school advocacy
- Revision to Salem's Urban Agriculture Ordinance



Salem Food Assessment 2018

Limitations

- White non-Hispanic people were overrepresented
 - 70% of the population, but 90% of the respondents
- People with high household incomes were overrepresented
- Survey responses didn't give us enough information
 - “Would you be interested in participating in a community nutrition education program?”
- Limited social networks for survey distribution, focus groups, and interviews



The 2022 Approach: Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)

- Community-based participatory research engages the **community** to conduct **research** for the purpose of **action**
 - Democratic and equitable process
 - Entails power-sharing and co-learning
 - Respects individuals' knowledge, experiences, and perspectives
 - Allows for disagreement
- What do researchers get out of CBPR?
 - A better understanding of the opportunities and challenges that exist in their own community
 - An opportunity to learn new skills
 - An opportunity to play an active role in improving conditions in their community
 - Partnerships for future research and action



Salem Food Assessment 2022

- Used some of the same tools as the 2018 assessment
 - Existing data from local hospitals and community partners
 - Convenience store observations
- Integrated elements of community-based participatory research
 - Focus groups with community members and service providers facilitated by community health researchers hired by the city
 - Additional community engagement efforts via bulletin board prompts
 - Salem Public Library
 - Salem YMCA
 - Salem CultureHouse



The Research Process

(November 2021-August 2022)

- Held bi-weekly research team meetings with “homework” in between
- Participated in human-subjects research training at Salem State University and submitted the research proposal to the university’s Institutional Review Board
- Determined the research methods and research instruments to be used
- Collected data via community focus groups and bulletin boards that asked for community members’ opinions about barriers to healthy eating
- Analyzed data using the process of qualitative coding
- Reported findings (ongoing)



The Research Question

What are some of the social, cultural, environmental, and economic barriers low-income Salem residents face when it comes to accessing nutritious food?



Community Member Focus Groups and Interviews



Participant Demographics (Community Members)

- 68 people participated in focus groups
- Participants were much more diverse compared to those in the 2018 assessment
- Participants were diverse in terms of age
 - 7% ages 18-24
 - 17% ages 25-34
 - 17% ages 35-44
 - 8% ages 45-54
 - 17% ages 55-54
 - 34% 65 or older



Participant Demographics (Community Members)

- 80% of participants identified as female, 20% as male, and 1 participant identified as non-binary/gender non-conforming
- Most participants who specified their race identified as white (38%) though 18% of respondents chose not to specify race at all
- 60% of participants identified as Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin, with Spanish and English being the languages spoken most frequently at home



Respondent Demographics (Community Members)

- Most participants reported being permanently housed in a home they own (5%) or rent (74%), though 3 participants reported being temporarily housed
- In terms of employment, many participants work either full-time (22%) or part-time (21%), though 18% reported being unemployed and 34% are retired
- Most respondents live in households with other people, with the mode being two people; fewer households included people under the age of 18 or over the age of 65
- More than half of all participants had household incomes less than \$20,000 per year (53%), with 32% having household incomes between \$20,000 and \$35,000
- No participants reported a household income over \$75,000



Food Insecurity Among Participants (Community Members)

- 25% of participants reported they or someone in their household ate smaller meals or skipped meals in the last year because there was not enough money for food
- Of those participants, 10 reported having to do so only one or two months, and 9 reported having to do so some months, but not every month
- Participants reported having used several supplemental nutrition programs in the last year
 - SNAP: 65%
 - WIC: 12%
 - Salem Summer Meals Program: 2%
 - Community and congregate meals: 1%
 - Food pantries: 40%



Findings: Knowledge about Nutrition and Food Preparation

- Some participants reported having difficulty determining what's healthy and what isn't
 - Some people lack knowledge about what's considered healthy, especially given all the conflicting information about carbohydrates, fats, etc.
 - Some people are unable to read and evaluate nutrition labels because of language barriers
- People generally want to prepare healthy meals, but they don't always know how to do that
 - For Hispanic and Latino families, they want to incorporate American foods into their diet, but with flavors that appeal to them
 - Participants want to learn how to cook foods in new and healthier ways
 - Participants want pantries to provide information about how to prepare the foods they're distributing



Findings: Knowledge about Food Assistance Programs

- Participants get information about food assistance programs from many different places
 - Friends, family, and neighbors
 - Salem Public Schools
 - Council on Aging and other social service agencies
- Participants reported that many community members, including themselves, do not know about food assistance programs
 - Pandemic EBT cards
 - Community meals programs
- Some community members don't realize they're eligible for food assistance program; service providers want to better collaborate to build awareness of these programs



Findings: Affordability of Nutritious Foods

- Participants reported food is getting more and more expensive, which results in their buying less
- Some participants use coupons, but those coupons are often for unhealthy foods
- Participants would like to be able to purchase organic foods, but they are often much more expensive
 - Participants prefer organic fruits, vegetables, milk, eggs, and meat
 - Some people still choose to buy organic foods, but their money doesn't go as far



Findings: Food Access and Transportation

- Participants cited transportation as an issue when it comes to grocery shopping
 - People tend to make big grocery shopping trips 2-3 times a month, though some reported going weekly
 - Market Basket is a popular destination for shoppers due to its affordability and grocery items being in one place, but it's only accessible via car or bus
 - Some participants shop in convenience stores or bodegas as an alternative, but recognize their SNAP or WIC benefits won't go as far as they would in stores like Market Basket
- Some participants reported having to pay for taxis to get around town, which limits their ability to regularly access affordable grocery stores or food distribution sites



Findings: Accessing Food Assistance Programs and Other Resources

- Participants reported various personal reasons for not wanting to use food assistance programs
 - Shame about needing food assistance like SNAP and WIC
 - Stigma about using food pantries
 - Language barriers when applying for assistance or accessing resources
- People's schedules don't always allow for access to food pantry distributions or community meals
- The pandemic changed the food assistance landscape
 - Highlighted the need for robust food assistance programs
 - Brought more people to food pantries, which may have destigmatized pantry use somewhat



Findings: Culture and Family Life

- Participants reported many food distribution sites are not offering foods community members traditionally use
 - Among the items participants are looking for are white rice, red beans, plantains, and cooking oils they are familiar with
 - This could be addressed by sharing information about how to substitute or prepare pantry foods
- Parents find it difficult to find foods their children and families will eat
 - They sometimes eat out rather than cook, which can be more expensive
 - Preparing nutritious meals can be time consuming and not everyone has the time to spend cooking
 - When people cook at home, they tend to cook healthier foods



Findings: Food and Water Safety

- Some participants reported expired food being distributed at some food distribution sites
 - Participants reported this is especially the case for meat, which may have been frozen prior to distribution, but also for canned goods
 - This makes residents feel they are not respected or being afforded the dignity they deserve
- Water issues
 - Participants perceive tap water as less healthy than bottled water, but buying bottled water is expensive
 - Parents reported their children are not given access to water in schools (though this may be an issue about access to refillable bottles)



Additional Insights from Community Bulletin Boards

- Prompt in English and Spanish: What are some of the barriers Salem residents face when it comes to accessing healthy food?
- Locations: Salem Public Library, Salem YMCA, Salem CultureHouse
- Responses
 - Affordability of good quality foods
 - Too many cheaper but unhealthy options available
 - Lack of time to plan, shop, and cook
 - Affects of climate change on food systems
 - Limited transportation, especially for big shopping trips
 - Lack of knowledge about how to prepare foods in a healthy way
 - Nutritional information on packaging is usually only in English
 - Meal delivery services are expensive but necessary for many people who can't leave their home
 - Lack of appliances and materials to prepare food more healthily



production walkable delivery desert
pay expensive enough meals cheap availability
access high climate areas store healthy
methods understanding carefully time affects
fruits information vegetables grocery food english
unhealth nutritional fresh risk prepare people
brand location fryer cost foods cooking
change new unhealthy often alternatives
spoils shop crop transporting quickly
trying



Emergency Food Provider Focus Groups and Interviews



Organizational Challenges

- Providers face several challenges when it comes to providing emergency food services
 - Reliable access to food
 - Increasing costs of food, especially nutritious food
 - Limited availability when it comes to culturally appropriate foods
 - Transportation issues



Community Knowledge about Food Assistance Programs

- Salem has a robust network with multisector partners who share information and resources
- Collaboration and soliciting clientele feedback helps bridge the knowledge gap
- Many residents have little knowledge about programs until they are faced with the need to access them
- Knowledge gaps persist
 - Eligibility
 - Types of services and support available
 - How to access services



Perceived Barriers Community Members Face When Trying to Access Food Programs

- Cultural and language barriers
- Post-COVID emotional barriers
- Days and times pantries are open, which often conflict with work schedules
- Stigma and feelings of personal failure
- Physical barriers
 - Accessibility
 - Parking
 - Utilities such as a cart for those who walk



How COVID Changed How People Eat and Access Food

- Many pandemic resources were given to food assistance organizations
- The pandemic raised people's awareness of food insecurity and fostered empathy in terms of how food insecurity affects residents
- Generated more unique partnerships between organizations that are addressing food issues
- More people started eating at home and engaging in bulk buying when items are on sale
- More people began seeking food assistance and accessing assistance more regularly
- Encouraged the City of Salem, Salem Public Schools, and local organizations to share information about food programs



What Can Food Assistance Organization and Community Leaders Do?

- Continue to work, collaborate, advocate, listen, and adapt
- Build and expand partnerships
- Share resources and knowledge about community demographics to ensure all efforts are equitable and inclusive, especially in terms of culture, age, and ability
- Collect feedback from clients about how to best meet their needs
- Strengthen efforts to reduce stigma
- Explore ways to reduce shared barriers like transportation, language, and knowledge about programs
- Continue to publish a monthly multilingual calendar that describes what resources are available and where



Recommendations and Next Steps

- Continue to develop the municipal Food Policy Council
 - Food Policy Council (Salem Food for All) established December 2022
 - Obtained grant funding to hire consultants for the purpose of strategic planning
 - Increased focus on health equity and food justice
- Expand urban agriculture education and opportunities
 - Salem’s urban agriculture ordinance was revised in Summer 2022
 - Plan community events focused on resources, education, and support for backyard growers



More Recommendations and Next Steps

- Develop programs and opportunities for community members to learn more about food assistance options
- Build awareness about water safety and availability in Salem



Thank you!

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- CultureHouse
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- The Salem Pantry
- Salem Public Library
- Salem YMCA
- Salvation Army

For questions or comments, contact Salem Health and Wellness Coordinator, Kerry Murphy at kmurphy@salem.com