

Executive Summary

WHO'S HUNGRY? LOUISA COUNTY SURVEY OF FOOD INSECURITY AND UNMET NEEDS

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Survey Purpose

The Center for Survey Research (CSR) at the University of Virginia conducted a multi-year, multi-faceted survey of residents of Louisa County, Virginia to understand the needs of disadvantaged citizens, primarily concerning those who have difficulty securing adequate food to feed themselves and their families.

The survey was designed and conducted in partnership with the Louisa County Resource Center (LCRC), supported by a generous grant from the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation. The Resource Council is the primary source of supplemental food for disadvantaged citizens in Louisa County. The survey was specifically designed to:

- Locate those who need but are not receiving services from the Resource Council
- Uncover specific geographic areas in Louisa County that need more focus.
- Learn more about how LCRC Community Cupboard clients use the food assistance

- Understand other unmet needs of low-income or food-insecure Louisa residents
- Gather opinions from cross-section of Louisa residents on important local resource needs.

Louisa County, Virginia is a primarily rural county located between Charlottesville and Richmond. According to the US census, it has 35,860 residents comprising 13,146 households. The County population is 18.0 percent African-American and 2.7 percent Hispanic. According to 2017 estimates from the United States Census Bureau, 12.2 percent of residents fall under the Federal Poverty Level, while 30.6 percent are below 200% of that threshold.

Impact

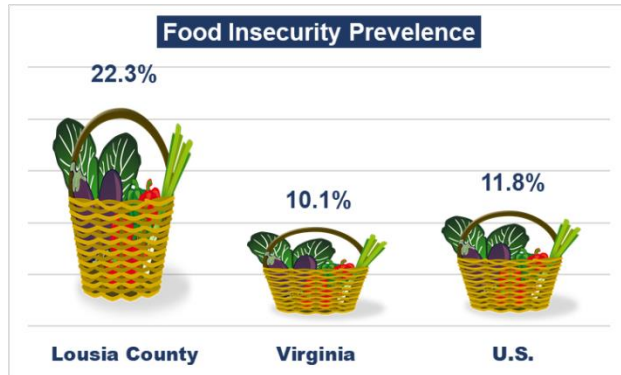
This lengthy and complex project provides a rich source of information about food issues in Louisa County as well as providing some thoughts about other, non-food needs in the County.

This study was unique in its use of probability-based, general population survey methods to directly assess food insecurity in a sizable rural area. The use of multiple survey modes and sampling from multiple survey frames, including a small number of additional interviews using non-probability methods, proved crucial to the study's success.

The survey successfully identified unmet needs for food assistance in the county. As a result, LCRC has initiated a satellite food service in the Green Springs area of the County, and plans are under way for a similar service that will better address food needs in the County's eastern end.

Major Findings

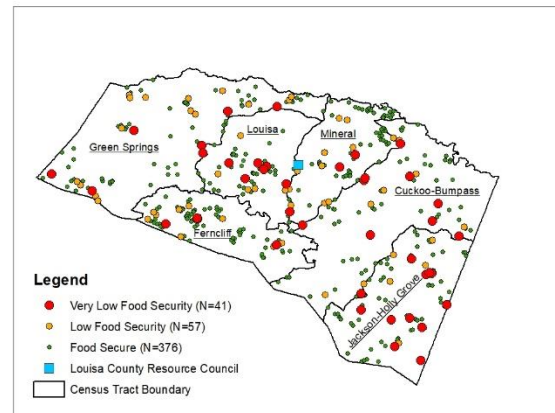
Prevalence rates for food insecurity in 2017 were much higher for Louisa (22.3 percent), than measured by USDA for the United States (11.8 percent).¹ Louisa was also atypical for Virginia. Results for Virginia (covering 2013-15) reported by USDA suggest that about 10 percent of households were food insecure.



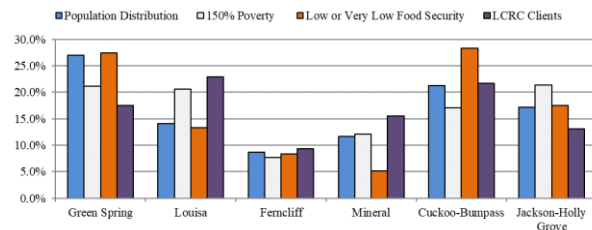
Household characteristics also influence the degree of food insecurity. In Louisa, non-white households were somewhat more likely to experience food insecurity than white households, and families with children were more likely to experience food insecurity than were families without children.

Louisa Poverty, Population, and Food Security Distributed Unevenly Across the County

Contrary to intuition, poverty alone cannot be a proxy for food insecurity. Both Louisa and Mineral census tracts had lower concentrations of food insecurity even though they had higher concentrations of poverty. Conversely, Green Spring and Cuckoo-Bumpass had a higher concentration of food insecurity than poverty rates alone would suggest.



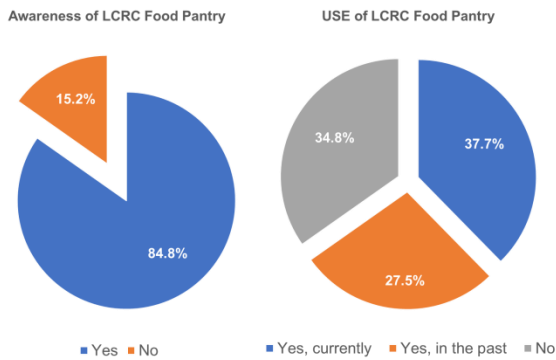
Comparing the distribution of LCRC clients with the distribution of food insecurity, we can see that Green Spring, Cuckoo-Bumpass, and Jackson-Holly Grove are potentially underserved by LCRC. These three areas are more distant from the food pantry’s location than are the other census tracts.



There are a Variety of Services Utilized by At-risk Louisa Residents

All at-risk respondents were asked whether they had received food, meals, or food assistance from any of a list of organizations, including Meals on Wheels, churches, and community organizations. Nearly 47 percent of these respondents said they had received help from community-based organizations (which would include the Louisa County Resource Council Community Cupboard), 20 percent received help from church or religious organizations, and 15.4 percent from WIC.

¹ See: [Household Food Security in the United States in 2017](#) for information on USDA measurement of Food Security.



There is a high level of awareness among at-risk residents of the Louisa County Resource Council food pantry. However, one-in-four of those with moderate, low, or very low food security did not use the food pantry. Awareness of the food pantry varied by the respondent's location in the County, with 97 percent of residents of Cuckoo-Bumpass saying they had heard of the pantry, while only 70 percent of residents of Jackson-Holly Grove said so.

Of All Aspects, Food Pantry Clients Appreciated Staff the Most

Most pantry users were satisfied with the services. No major barriers were identified that explain lack of pantry use. Instead, when explicitly asked why they do not use the pantry, most at-risk respondents reported either not needing it or feeling others were needier.

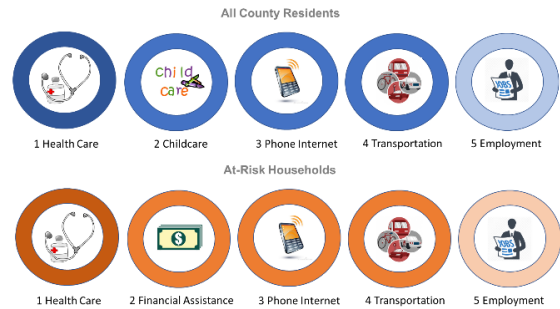
Louisa County Resource Council Has a Broader Mission Than Simply Providing Food

Healthcare was mentioned by more than half of the at-risk respondents as a pressing non-food need, followed by financial assistance, transportation, and phone and internet access. Among those indicating healthcare needs, paying medical bills was cited by nearly two-thirds, and over half reported needing help to attain health insurance.

All survey respondents, whether at-risk or not, were asked what they perceived to be the most pressing needs in Louisa County. Again, healthcare was identified as the most pressing need, while transportation and phone or

internet access were in the top four. Louisa's rural location exacerbates the problem of availability of health care, transportation, and high-quality cell and internet service, and that the financial burden related to each kind of service is an individual issue for needy residents in the county.

Top 5 Needs Identified by Louisa County Residents and At-Risk Households



Methods

A complex, multi-mode, multi-frame survey was designed to address challenges of collecting sensitive information about food security from rural residents. The process began with a series of focus groups designed to refine concepts and vocabulary, explore issues, and test the questionnaire. Three survey modes were employed: telephone interviews from the Center for Survey Research Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) lab; in-person, door-to-door interviews; and web-based, self-administered questionnaires. Face-to-face, intercept interviews were conducted at two selected locations in the County to fill data gaps in the probability survey.

Questionnaire development was a collaborative process between the Louisa County Resource Council and the Center for Survey Research. The LCRC specified topics to explore, and CSR drafted a questionnaire that was modified based on feedback from LCRC and several focus groups.

Three sampling frames were used for probability sampling. These included an Address-Based Sample (ABS) of postal

addresses; a cell phone sample; and a low-income household targeted “Consumer Cell” sample. The list of all addresses within Louisa County was divided into two strata, based on two aggregations of census block groups. Stratum 1 comprised seven block groups having the highest percentages of people under 100% of the Federal Poverty Level [FPL]. Stratum 2 encompassed the remaining 10 block groups in the county. The resulting ABS sample was then divided into four groups, based on the stratum and on whether the address was successfully matched to a phone number

Group number	Frame	Stratum	Phone num/addresses	Primary mode
1	ABS	Stratum 1—hi poverty	Both (matched)	Phone first
2	ABS	Stratum 2—low poverty	Both (matched)	Phone first
3	Cell phone RDD	Mixed	Phone numbers only	Phone only
4	Consumer cell	Low income (projected >\$25K)	Both	Phone only
5	ABS	Stratum 1—hi poverty	Address only (no match)	Direct to field
6	ABS	Stratum 2—low poverty	Address only (no match)	Direct to field

CSR planned and executed a full-scale pilot study, involving all three modes and all three sampling frames. The pilot study was highly successful, resulting in only a few minor questionnaire changes. The pilot study did however show that, given available study resources, non-probability methods would be needed to increase the number of disadvantaged households included in the survey data.

Several Steps Taken to Ensure Adequate Coverage and Representation

It was essential to oversample poorer parts of Louisa County to attain a sample size of sufficient size for studying food insecurity. This was achieved by stratifying Census blocks into two groups: those with higher and lower poverty rates. We then intentionally oversampled households in the higher-poverty stratum.

A weighting procedure was applied so that the final sample would more accurately

represent the population of interest. Cases from groups that were under-represented in the sample receive greater weight, while cases from overrepresented groups are given lesser weight. As a result, the final, weighted probability sample closely represents Louisa County adult population with respect to the percent Black or African-American, the percent under 200% of FPL, and the percent of adults aged 65 or more. The sample is also close to the proportion of Hispanic adults in the County due to the additional non-probability, local interviews.

A variety of techniques were applied in order to maximize response rates. For example, there was some local media and some social media coverage of the survey effort. Telephone interviewers made multiple attempts to reach respondents. An advance letter was mailed to sampled households and door hangers and informative handouts were prepared for use in the field. A web option was offered to all survey participants.