

Hope House Food Market Household Survey Results

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Background

Hope House is a non-profit organization offering services and programs that challenge the stigmas surrounding poverty, with a focus on dignity, choice, and skill development for long-term self-sufficiency. One such program is the Food Market, a choice-based pantry serving working and non-working individuals and families in Guelph, Ontario. The Food Market offers free food and hygiene products to supplement people's food needs, not cover them entirely. At the Food Market, they believe no one should have to choose between healthy food, a clean home, or necessary hygiene products.

Hope House is required to carry out an annual household survey as a part of the Prosperous People Grow Grant funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Hope House, in collaboration with the Community Engaged Scholarship Institute's Research Shop, expanded on the annual household survey by adding open-ended questions to learn more about how to better serve those who access the Food Market.

Research Goals

The purpose of this research is to better understand and demonstrate the impacts of the Food Market, with a specific focus on:

- Fruit and vegetable preference and consumption
- Current feelings about one's access to food
- Current feelings about one's mental health

Methods

Data collection was a collaborative process between Hope House and the research team. During the development phases of the study, the Research Shop team co-created the survey based on Hope House's requirements and their specific needs. Participants were registered Hope House community members (referred to from here on in as community members) who regularly access the Food Market. The survey was led interview style by the research team, and completed with community members during their regularly scheduled Food Market appointments or drop-in hours.

A total of 115 community members participated in the survey between October 4, 2022, and November 17, 2022.

Findings

The following sections summarize the results of the surveys. Results are categorized by fruit and vegetable preferences, exposure to new foods, food access, mental health status, fruit and vegetable consumption, and selection at the food market. A summary of the impacts, general feedback, and recommendations are also included.

Fruit and Vegetable Preferences

Community members were asked what their favourite three fruits and vegetables were. The following word clouds depict community members' fruit preferences (see Figure 1) and vegetable preferences (see Figure 2). The larger text corresponds to the fruits and vegetables that received the most responses. Responses are based on 115 community member replies.

Fruit Preferences

There were 24 distinct responses for community members' top three fruit preferences, with apples (71), bananas (57), and oranges (56) dictating the top three. All other responses range from 1 (seasonal fruit) to 25 (strawberries).

Figure 1. Community Members' Fruit Preferences.



Vegetable Preferences

There were 33 distinct responses for community members' top three vegetable preferences, with carrots (46), tomatoes (38), potatoes (38), bell peppers (21), and onions (21) rounding out the top three choices. The remaining responses range from 1 (bok choy) to 18 (lettuce).

Figure 2. Community Members' Vegetable Preferences.



Exposure to New Foods

Community members were asked if they tried any new food items for the first time after receiving them from the Food Market¹.

Just over half (53%) of community members reported not being exposed to new foods at the Food Market. Other community members (47%) reported 54 diverse food items that they tried for the first time, thanks to the Food Market. These food items were comprised of options from all food groups, prepared meals, and a variety of miscellaneous goods, including but not limited to:

- **Fruits:** Avocado, dragon fruit, kiwi, peaches, and plums.
- **Vegetables:** Beets, corn, kohlrabi, rutabaga, spinach, sweet potatoes, Swiss chard, turnip, squash, and zucchini.
- **Meat:** Corned beef, salmon, tilapia, duck, halal chicken, pork tenderloin, turkey, tuna, veal, and wagyu steak.
- **Grains or grain products:** Basmati rice, granola, olive bread, new crackers, and quinoa.
- **Sources of protein:** Almond milk, chickpeas, different butters, kidney beans, and tofu.
- **Prepared Foods:** Chinese, Greek, and Middle Eastern foods, butter chicken, hummus, pizza, salad, samosa, frozen foods for kids, T.V. dinners, and vegan shepherd's pie.
- **Miscellaneous:** Condiments, flavour boosters, green peas in a can, and tomato sauce.

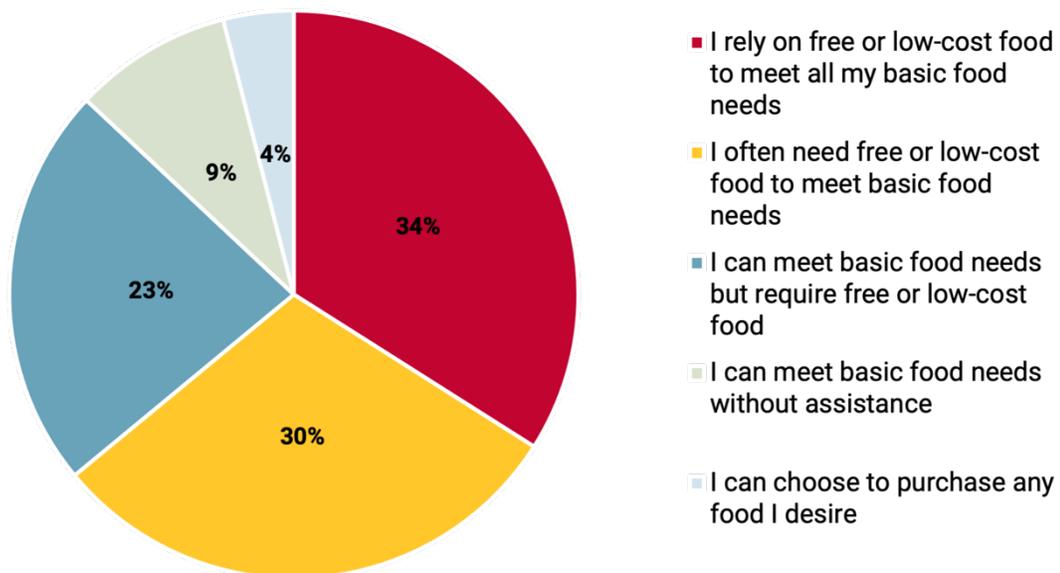
¹ All the percentages that follow are based on the number of people who responded to the question.

Current Access to Food

Figure 3 describes how community members feel about their current access to food. Each community member was asked to include the times that they access free food outside of the Food Market (e.g., at a food bank) as well². According to community members:

- 34% rely on free or low-cost food to meet all their basic food needs
- 30% often need free or low-cost food to meet basic food needs
- 23% can meet basic food needs but require free or low-cost food
- 9% can meet basic food needs without assistance
- 4% can choose to purchase any food they desire

Figure 3. Community Members Feelings About Their Current Access to Food.



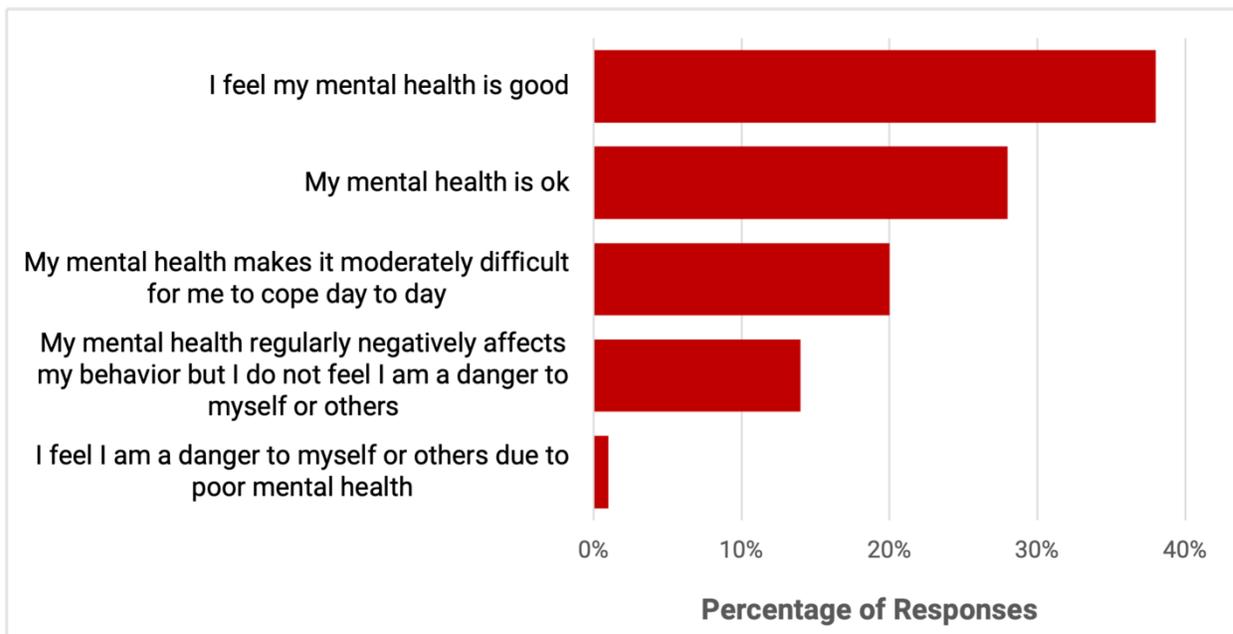
² This question was challenging for a lot of community members because it was hard to define the word “access.” As a result, we quantified each response with the number of times they need to access free food each month.

Current Feelings About One's Mental Health

Figure 4 depicts how community members feel about their current mental health. According to community members:

- 38% feel their mental health is good
- 28% feel their mental health is okay
- 20% feel their mental health makes it moderately difficult for them to cope day to day
- 14% feel their mental health regularly negatively affects their behaviour but they do not feel they are a danger to themselves or others
- 1% feel they are a danger to themselves or others due to poor mental health

Figure 4. Community Members' Current Feelings About Their Mental Health.



Fruit and Vegetable Consumption

Community members were asked how frequently they ate fruits and vegetables in the previous month. Over one third (38%) reported they eat fruits and vegetables a few times per week, 36% said every day, 25% reported a few times per month, and 2% of community members reported they never eat fruits and vegetables.

The majority of community members (81%) reported that the Food Market increased their fresh fruit and vegetable consumption.

Selection at the Food Market

Community members were asked whether they found food items that they were *interested* in consuming at the Food Market across 6 different food categories: fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, meat, and other proteins. If community members said no, the research team asked why.

Four major themes arose across all categories for why community members did not find items that they were interested in. Themes include lack of variety/selection, they do not eat said food, the food goes bad too fast, and they do not have a place to cook. Table 1 depicts the percentages of community members who found food items they were interested in consuming, by food category.

Table 1. Percentage of Community Members Interested in Food Items Available at the Food Market by Category.

Category	Interested in Items Available (%)	Not Interested in Items Available (%)
Fruits	82%	18%
Vegetables	83%	17%
Grains	85%	15%
Dairy	88%	12%
Meat	78%	22%
Proteins	93%	7%

The following is a summary of why some community members did not find food they were interested in consuming in the respective food categories:

- **Fruit:** Community members noted a lack of variety/selection, that they do not eat fruit, and that the fruit goes bad too fast as reasons they do not find fruit that they are interested in at the Food Market. For example, community members said, *“What I like to eat is unavailable,”*; *“I want to see bananas, strawberries, and pineapples,”* and *“today, there was nothing. Usually, there’s only apples and on the rare occasion there is oranges.”*
- **Vegetables:** Community members noted all major themes as reasons they do not find vegetables that they are interested in at the Food Market. For example, one community member said there is *“not enough variety”* and that they *“would like to [see] things like lettuce, arugula, spinach, mushrooms, zucchini, and peppers.”*

- **Grains:** Community members noted a lack of variety/selection, and that they do not eat grains as reasons they don't find grains that they are interested in at the Food Market. For example, one community member said, *"I haven't been tested, but I might have allergies."* While another community member said no because *"they have dentures."*
- **Dairy:** Community members noted a lack of variety/selection, that they do not eat dairy, and that dairy products go bad too fast as reasons they do not find dairy products that they are interested in at the Food Market. For example, community members said they, *"want to see more yogurt, cheeses, and alternative milks."* And that there is *"not enough given to one person."*
- **Meat:** Community members noted a lack of variety/selection, that they do not eat meat, and that they do not have a place to cook as reasons they do not find meat that they are interested in at the Food Market. For example, some community members said, *"[I] do not consume pork, so I have special requirements,"*. Additionally, some mentioned they would like to see more variety of meats including more halal options and more chicken.
- **Proteins:** Community members noted a lack of variety/selection for reasons they do not find proteins they are interested in at the Food Market. Suggestions for improvement included offering alternative nut butters for those with peanut allergies, and more variety of beans. Some also suggested increasing the quantity of items available such as offering a dozen eggs, instead of just half.

Food Market Impacts

Immediate Benefits

Below are the immediate benefits of the Food Market that community members identified.

Increased Food Access

Community members noted that they were able to eat more often and didn't need to skip meals. For example, one community member shared *"It's a lifesaver, without I would starve. It's been beneficial, since I don't have access to much, it's helped out with the amount I eat."*

Improved Consumption and Diet

Community members have identified that the Food Market has also helped them eat a healthier and more balanced diet. For example, a few community members noted that the Food Market has increased their consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, which helps supplement their daily needs. For example, one community member shared *"It has made me get fruits and vegetables because when I had no money, absolutely nothing, I didn't buy fruits and vegetables."*

Provided Financial Support

Community members identified that the Food Market has also helped them alleviate costs and live more comfortably. Specifically, community members identified that given the increase in costs of living, the Food Market has helped reduce their grocery bills and save money for other necessities, such as rent. For example, one community member shared *"It means everything. It's a life changer. Being able to access the food market during this recession when things are so expensive is super helpful."* Additionally, community members have identified that the Food Market has helped them during times of financial stress, such as during unemployment and eviction. For example, one community member shared *"I'm 62 and was evicted from home and*



wasn't prepared. [It's] taken stress off financially [and] been [a] huge stress relief. [I'm] able to work again, but [am] still catching up."

However, several community members have indicated that even though the Food Market has helped increase food access and provide financial support, it is not enough on its own. For example, one community member shared *"You get a variety of everything, it's not a lot but it certainly helps a lot. Well, I'm here once a month, so it means you get 30 to 40 dollars of food supplemented."* Oftentimes, community members noted, they need support from additional community organizations to meet all of their needs.

Indirect Impacts

Listed below, are the indirect or subsequent impacts that the Food Market has had on the community and on community members.

Improved Health

Community members identified that the Food Market has allowed them to eat healthier, and that they feel healthier and stronger.

Improved Mental Wellbeing

Community members identified that their overall mental wellbeing improved due to the Food Market:

- **Decreasing Stress:** Community members identified that the Food Market has helped them relieve their worries and anxiety.
- **Increasing Security:** Community members identified that the Food Market provides "peace of mind" knowing that it is there to support them when needed. For example, one community member shared *"It makes all the difference in the world. Without it I don't know what I would do. If I didn't have access, I'd be sitting in the soup kitchen waiting for food. Without the Food Market, I wouldn't really have any other options, because I don't have money to get through the month."*
- **Improving Mindsets and Self-Esteem:** One community member shared *"It means a lot. Even when you don't feel well, we make sure to make it... Because it means all the difference because it brightens you."* Community members additionally identified that the Food Market has helped them feel more confident and improve their self-esteem.

Fostered Independence

Additionally, community members identified that the Food Market has helped them gain more independence in their lives, such as:

- Getting out of their homes and connecting with others
- Preparing, cooking, and growing the food themselves
- Becoming more creative with how they use the food



Social Impacts

Additionally, community members also identified the broader social impacts of the Food Market, such as:

Supporting Families

Several community members identified that the Food Market has helped them support their family. One community member, for example, shared they have a child they are supporting through university and that the Food Market has helped them provide more for their family.

Supporting those from Vulnerable Populations

Community members disclosed belonging to several vulnerable groups that are impacted by food accessibility, such as:

- **Low income:** A few community members identified that they experienced difficulties meeting their basic needs due to limited financial means. However, the Food Market has helped them increase their consumption of foods (and specifically fresh foods), as well as live more comfortably.
- **Houseless population:** A few community members identified that the Food Market has provided access to food and other necessities (such as hygiene products).
- **Aging population:** One community member described that as a senior, the Food Market has helped them feel secure knowing that they have support when they needed it.
- **Single Parents:** One community member disclosed that as a single mom, the Food Market helped support them and their family.
- **Immigrants:** One community member identified how the Food Market helped increase their access to food as they had recently relocated here from another country.

Food Market Feedback

Listed below is the feedback community members have of the Food Market:

Strengths

Several community members often shared appreciation for the program. In addition to expressing their general appreciation for the Food Market, community members also identified several aspects of the program that they liked.

Service

Community members found that the Food Market service was:

- **Reliable:** For community members, this meant that they could always get an appointment when needed. One community member shared *“there are a lot of times I’ve needed food, and I can just walk in and make an appointment.”*
- **Accessible:** Community members found the registration process to be easy, and the market to be efficient. As one community member described *“You’re in and out in 15 minutes, even on a busy day.”*



Staff and Volunteers

Community members often spoke about the friendly nature of staff and how they found staff to be supportive. One community member commented that *“the people here are wonderful. The people that volunteer here get to know you as a person and look out for you and are very considerate of everyone. I love coming here.”*

Food

Community members identified that the market offered a variety of foods, including foods that are fresh, healthy, and of high quality. One community member shared *“Having access to the Food Market helps when in time of need. It provides items that usually aren't at the food bank.”* Additionally, community members identified that they liked choosing their own food, because they could pick out foods that meet their dietary needs, as well as save food from going to waste. For example, one community member shared *“I look forward to the food that I choose and not what's put in front of me.”*

Dignity

Community members often described that they were treated with respect at the Food Market and were never judged for their situation or the amount of food needed. One community member described *“When you access Hope House there is no judgement. You can come as you are, with or without issues, and you feel seen and welcome.”* While another community member described *“It makes you feel dignified [...] Unlike, other food pantries, you don't feel like a number”.*

Mixed Feedback

Community members identified several aspects of the Food Market as both a strength and an area for improvement:

After Date and Expired Items

Some community members mentioned that they like that the food is never expired, while others mentioned that they do not like items that are after the best before date.

Supply/Stock

While some community members have identified that they can always find the supplies they need, others have mentioned that with the increase in demand the supply can be low.

Other Necessities

Some community members have noted that additional items beyond food is helpful to meet their needs (such as toothpaste, detergent, diapers, soap, and other toiletries). However, other community members have raised that additional cleaning and hygiene products are needed (such as adult briefs).

Areas of Growth and Recommendations

Community members also identified what they would do differently or change at the Food Market:



Service Supports

Community members identified several additional supports that the Food Market could offer:

- **Extending Hours:** Community members identified that hours of the Food Market are limited and one community member identified having to leave work early to access the Food Market.
- **Delivery Service:** Community members also identified barriers to accessing the Food Market, such as having limited mobility. In response, community members have suggested offering a delivery service. Given that Hope House offers delivery service already, this may indicate a need for advertising the service.
- **Appointment Reminders:** Community members identified that it can be difficult to remember when they have booked appointments, and one community member who belongs to the houseless population identified that it can be difficult to judge time.
- **Compensation for Transportation:** Community members identified barriers to accessing the Food Market by transportation, such as costs for bus fare.
- **Pre-packed Groceries:** Community members also suggested that Hope House volunteers could pre-select and pack up grocery carts so that community members could pick up groceries on demand.

Food Access

Increasing the Amount of Food

Community members identified that the amount of food from the market was not enough to meet all their needs. Ultimately, two suggestions were made by community members on how to increase the amount of food needed.

- Increase access to the Food Market from once a month to every 2 weeks.
- Lower the suggested prices on food at the Food Market, as community members are given a limited budget by the Food Market to spend while there.

Increasing the Options of Food

Community members also suggested that the Food Market can offer additional products, such as foods that:

- **Don't Require Cooking:** or that are easier to cook, as community members identified barriers to cooking, such as not having appliances to cook them.
- **Don't Easily Expire:** as some community members don't typically pick up foods that do easily expire.
- **Easy to Eat:** as community members might experience barriers to preparing and chewing foods.
- **Higher Quality:** products and those that would cost more, such as meats, cooking oils, spices, and complex carbs.
- **More Diverse:** such as more authentic and diverse variety of foods.



Conclusions

The Food Market has had several positive impacts on community members' lives. Community members shared many of the impacts of the Food Market, such as:

- Directly benefitting from food access, consumption, and finances.
- Indirectly improving health, mental wellbeing, and independence.
- Broadly impacting families and folks from vulnerable populations.

Community members also provided feedback on the Food Market. Overall, community members found:

- Service, staff and volunteers, food, and dignity were all strengths of the Food Market.
- Providing additional service supports and improving food access are potential areas of growth for the Food Market.