



Kids Summer Food Club and Cash Assistance

2020 REPORT



SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

The past six summers, Northwest Harvest ran the Kids Summer Food Club program that targeted children in rural areas without access to school meals or summer meal sites. In 2019, Kids Summer Food Club served 17 food programs, which provided families with bags of groceries for eight weeks in July and August.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented new challenges for Northwest Harvest's typical food procurement and food distribution model. These challenges, such as statewide food shortages, disrupted supply chains, increased purchasing costs, and a doubling in demand for food forced Northwest Harvest to re-evaluate and adapt our Kids Summer Food Club program.

In alignment with Northwest Harvest's transition away from traditional food distribution models and towards more equitable approaches to achieve food justice, we explored the idea of providing grocery store gift cards in place of grocery bags. Not only was this cost effective for the organization, but gift cards help stimulate the local economy and provides dignity and respect to food insecure households.

SECTION 2: CASH ASSISTANCE

Providing cash assistance in place of food has numerous benefits to both food distributors and the communities they serve. Additionally, research shows that it is a more effective and efficient way to reduce food insecurity. A good example of this is looking at the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), a federally funded cash assistance program.

SNAP provides food insecure households with electronic debit cards to purchase groceries and is one of the most effective forms of economic stimulus.¹ Every \$1 spent in SNAP benefits generates \$1.70 into the economy.² A 2010 study also showed that an increase in \$1 billion in SNAP funding creates between 10,000- 17,000 jobs.¹ In addition to generating economic activity and creating jobs, SNAP delivers nine times more food to people than all food banks in the country.³ Increases in SNAP benefits allow for food insecure households to meet more of their needs by purchasing food at the grocery store compared to getting it from food banks.⁴

With no transportation or storage costs, cash-like assistance is a more cost effective and effective way for food insecure households to receive food. SNAP and other cash-like assistance programs also reduce food waste,⁵ as food from food banks often get wasted if it is not culturally or dietarily appropriate for specific households. SNAP is also linked with healthier and improved diets, lower caloric intake, improved health outcomes, and reduced health care costs.⁶

Cash-like assistance, like SNAP, invests in communities by supporting the local businesses and allowing households the opportunity and choice to purchase what they want. Allowing people to purchase the food they need and want creates a sense of normalcy and allows for less stigma than utilizing food banks. Cash-like assistance provides dignity and respect to food insecure households.

SECTION 3: 2020 KIDS SUMMER FOOD CLUB

For the 2020 Kids Summer Food Club program, Northwest Harvest provided two food banks with grocery store gift cards to distribute to families instead of grocery bags. Through outreach, needs assessments, and reviewing survey responses, we identified Cashmere Food Bank and Othello Food Bank as the two food banks Northwest Harvest would serve for the summer. Othello Food Bank received \$30,000 of Walmart gift cards and Cashmere Food Bank received \$10,000 of Grocery Outlet gift cards and \$10,000 of Martin's Market, a local grocer, gift cards. All gift cards purchased were in \$20 increments.



1 "Understanding SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program," Feeding America (Feeding America), accessed January 30, 2021

2 Dottie Rosenbaum, "SNAP Is Effective and Efficient," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 11, 2013)

3 Dan Charles, "Food Banks Say SNAP Is A Better Way To Get Food To People," NPR (NPR, May 21, 2020)

4-5 Jennifer Otten et al., "Food Waste Prevention and Recovery Assessment Report" (Seattle, WA, 2016)

6 Steven Carlson and Brynne Keith-Jennings, "SNAP Is Linked with Improved Nutritional Outcomes and Lower Health Care Costs," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, January 17, 2018)

OTHELLO, WA



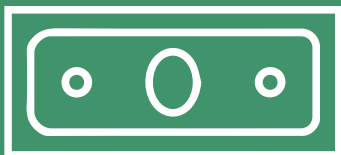
- **19%** Food Insecurity Rate
- **14%** increase in food insecurity due to COVID-19
- **28%** of population below Poverty Level
- **20%** of households receiving SNAP
- **79%** Hispanic/Latino, **69%** White

OTHELLO FOOD BANK



- **Serves: 80%** White households, **20%** Hispanic/Latino households
- **Due to COVID-19:** increases in numbers, seeing many new families, having to use additional resources to serve the increased need

KIDS SUMMER FOOD CLUB IMPACT



- Served roughly **860** households and **2,168** children
- Distributed **1,500** Walmart gift cards

CASHMERE, WA



- **20%** Food Insecurity Rate
- **15%** increase in food insecurity due to COVID-19
- **13%** of population below Poverty Level
- **5%** of households receiving SNAP
- **84%** White, **79%** Hispanic/Latino

CASHMERE FOOD BANK



- **Serves: 60%** White households, **40%** Hispanic/Latino households
- **Due to COVID-19:** the need has quadrupled, food sources dwindling as more people become unemployed

KIDS SUMMER FOOD CLUB IMPACT



- Served roughly **1,056** households and **1,686** children
- Distributed **1,000** Grocery Outlet and Martin's Market gift cards

SECTION 4: RESULTS

Due to circumstances relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were only able to receive survey responses from Cashmere Food Bank. Random recipients of the gift cards were asked to complete a survey developed by Northwest Harvest. Survey questions included demographic, household information, and questions to gain programmatic feedback. We created surveys in both English and Spanish.

Overall, survey respondents were incredibly grateful for the gift cards. The program was very popular and well received by the Othello and Cashmere communities. People have been calling Othello Food Bank asking for more since it ended “what happened to the gift cards?!?!” Pam, from Othello Food Bank recalled one woman who came through the food bank and received a gift card and told she could use it for food, or school supplies for the kids, or whatever they need she was so happy. She said she was going to go buy her family dinner right then.

Feedback from the program was overwhelmingly positive and 13 of the survey respondents provided positive comments about the gift cards. Households appreciated being able to buy what they needed for their children, preferred the variety and selection at grocery stores compared to food banks, enjoyed the experience of shopping at the grocery store, and found the gift cards to be convenient.

SECTION 5: SURVEY RESPONSES

48 survey responses were received from households that participated in Kids Summer Food Club this summer. 90% of respondents lived in the 98815 zip code, while other zip codes included 98836, 98801, 98821, and 98891.

Almost 2/3 of respondents were unemployed and an additional 4% reported working limited hours. About 1/4 of survey respondents identified as White yet the majority of survey respondents identified as Latinx/Hispanic. The 2 multiracial respondents identified as Latinx/Black and White/Latinx/Native.

Household sizes ranged from 3 people to 12 people, with an average household size of 5 people, and the most common household size of 4 people. We asked survey respondents how much money they would need to feed their family for an entire week. While the responses ranged from \$50 - \$600, the average was \$265 per week. The most common answer was \$200 per week.

When asked what grocery store households preferred for gift cards the most common answers were Martin’s Market, Grocery Outlet, Fred Meyer, Safeway, and Walmart.

12 respondents preferred Martin’s Market because it is local, convenient, and nearby (located right in Cashmere). 8 respondents preferred Grocery Outlet, 6 preferred Walmart, 2 preferred Safeway, and 1 preferred Fred Meyers. Respondents indicated they preferred these larger chain grocery stores because of the lower prices and better deals, the variety of foods, the good produce, and the convenient locations.

The survey asked respondents to rate how helpful the gift cards were in providing food to their households throughout the summer. We provided a 1-10 scale, with 1 indicating not helpful and 10 indicating very helpful. The responses ranged from a 3 to a 10, but the average response was a 9 and the most common response a 10. While respondents indicated the gift cards were helpful in providing food to their families, most answered “No” when asked if the gift cards were enough money.

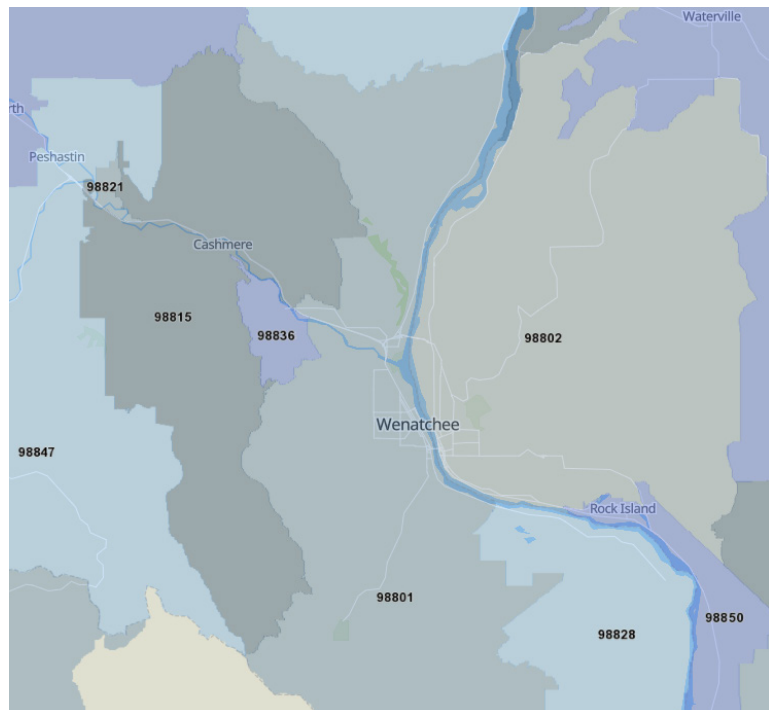


Table 1. Kid Summer Food Club survey responses (n=48)

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Average household size	5
Range of household size	3-12
Average amount spent on food	\$265
	<i>Percent (#)</i>
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	
Latinx/Hispanic	67% (32)
Multiracial	4% (2)
White (Non-Hispanic)	23% (11)
<i>Employment status</i>	
Employed	27% (13)
Unemployed	63% (30)
Working limited hours	4% (2)
<i>Food bank preferences</i>	
Prefer food bags	23% (11)
Prefer gift cards	63% (30)

30 respondents said they preferred gift cards over bags of food and 11 said they preferred food bags over gift cards. Of those surveyed, 8 respondents indicated they were very thankful for the gift cards and found them to be helpful in buying other essential items for their households. Some of the comments received included “I like shopping at the grocery store,” “the gift cards helped a lot,” and “I can buy what I need.”

SECTION 6: MOVING FORWARD

Despite the challenges that COVID-19 brought the participating food banks, the program was incredibly well received by both staff and food bank users. Kids Summer Food Club’s distribution of gift cards instead of food bags acted as a pilot to test out gift cards as an alternate and innovative form of emergency food support. Because only two food banks were selected to participate this year, next summer it would be useful to expand the number of participating food banks and involve a broader geographic scope. This would allow for Northwest Harvest to get a better sense of how communities across the state feel about this form of emergency food support.

Over the past couple months, Northwest Harvest has been looking at how to implement additional programs and strategies to incorporate cash-like assistance. If gift cards continue to be well received by communities, Northwest Harvest hopes to promote them and other similar mechanisms to reduce food insecurity and increase food justice across Washington state.

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