



COLORADO
Department of Human Services

Colorado Department of Human Services Food Pantry Assistance Grant Program

HB20-1422 Final Report

April 26, 2021



Executive Summary

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Gov. Jared Polis signed House Bill 20-1422 to assist Coloradans in need with food relief. This bill provided \$600,000 for the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) to administer grants to food banks and food pantries across the state. The need for food banks and food pantries has risen exponentially during the pandemic, with recent polls showing that food insecurity has nearly tripled since the start of the pandemic across the state of Colorado.

Grant requests totaled more than double the funds available, making it possible for 123 hunger relief organizations serving nearly every county to participate. As one client wrote, “Our family couldn't have made it through the week without this food bank. Thank you.” This program demonstrates the positive impact of these funds on our hungry neighbors.

The legislation also intended to create and expand market opportunities for Colorado’s agricultural products. At least 62% of total dollars were spent directly with local producers. Purchasing locally grown, raised or produced goods proved to be more difficult for small pantries than anticipated, due to the vast increase in the number of clients, pantry staff not having the time to search out new markets, availability and distance to reach local products, and other factors such as the growing season in Colorado. While the goal was for 100% of funds to be spent on Colorado grown, raised, produced or packaged goods, many pantries had to purchase food at retail grocery stores. Retail receipts made it impossible to verify which foods were local and which were non-local. Therefore, this report does not include any retail food as local. An important finding showed the value of Colorado goods — 77% of clients prefer Colorado agricultural products and have a desire for fresh foods.

Other notable findings include:

- One-third of all households visiting pantries had never been to a food bank or pantry before the pandemic. One client stated, “I never thought it would be me.”
- 77 % of survey respondents agreed that it was “Very Important” or “Somewhat Important” that the food they received was produced in

Colorado; however, one-third of the food purchased by pantries was not produced in Colorado.

- Reduced hours at work (54%) and lost jobs (41%) were the top two impacts experienced by households that participated in the client survey.
- Clients report that food banks and pantries need to expand the days of the week they are open, as well as hours of operation.
- Food items purchased by pantries include fresh/frozen meat, fresh veggies, fresh fruit, milk, butter, and cheeses, eggs, grains and beans. Fresh/frozen meat was the food purchased most often (24% of all pantries).
- Pantries reported four sources of where food was purchased: producers, retailers, wholesalers, and food banks. Half of the grant funding was spent directly with producers, and 38 % of funding was spent with retailers.
- Food banks and pantries reported that the grant funding increased their capacity to serve more people and meet a significant increase in need. One urban pantry stated that they “served over 44,000 people and provided over 1.2 million meals in 2020.” A frontier community pantry shared that they were “able to purchase a whole cow and provide steaks, stew meat, and hamburger to clients while supporting a local rancher.”



Grant Process

The CDHS Food Distribution Programs staff administered the Food Pantry Assistance Grant using existing internal resources. The bill funding the grant was signed into law on June 22, 2020. The RFP was published on July 10, 2020, with responses due on July 21, 2020. Award notifications were sent on Aug. 5, 2020, and a webinar explaining the grant requirements was conducted for potential grantees.

Client surveys were translated into all languages requested by pantries (Spanish, Russian, French and Vietnamese), and paper copies were mailed to each grantee with a return envelope. Final reports were due on Dec. 30, 2020.

The most time-consuming pieces of administering this grant include assisting small nonprofits in registering for the state's complex vendor system, providing ongoing technical assistance, and collecting reports and receipts. Administrative costs incurred include salaries, translation services, printing, mailing, data analysis and report writing.

Grantee Expenditures

Food Purchased

Seven categories of food were purchased by pantries with funds from the Food Pantry Assistance Grant Program funding. There were clear trends in the categories of purchased food. Miscellaneous food items included honey, salsa, coffee, tea, jams and jellies.

Purchased Food by Category	%
Meat	24%
Vegetables	18%
Miscellaneous	12%
Fruit	10%
Beans	10%
Dairy	9%
Eggs	9%
Grains	8%

Meat was consistently the number one food item purchased by pantries. Pantries in all communities purchased several unique meats. Frontier communities purchased lamb and veal. Rural communities purchased yak,

whole pigs and goats, and urban communities purchased bison, rabbit, frog legs, and crab cakes.

Fresh vegetables were the second most frequently purchased food. Beans were purchased more often by pantries in rural communities. Eggs were more commonly purchased by urban pantries, and a few urban pantries supported local producers by purchasing shiitake and oyster mushrooms. General variations in items purchased across urban, rural and frontier communities were minor.

Food Sources

Pantries reported the main types of food sources: producers, retailers, wholesalers and food banks. Food receipts were submitted and tallied; a few pantries did not specify food sources and these dollars have been reported as unspecified.

Producers: \$238,937 (52%)

Retailers: \$173,646 (38%)

Wholesalers: \$23,435 (5%)

Unspecified: \$11,497 (3%)

Food banks: \$11,201 (2%)

For urban, rural and frontier communities, the number of instances in which pantries purchased at least one food item from these five sources is as follows:

Urban		Rural		Frontier	
Producers	31	Producers	24	Producers	10
Retailers	32	Retailers	17	Retailers	6
Wholesalers	10	Wholesalers	3	Wholesalers	1
Food Banks	0	Food Banks	0	Food Banks	1

Non-Food Items

A total of 47 of 115 food banks and pantries reported spending \$15,874 on non-food purchases. The categories of items that qualify as non-food are transport, storage, delivery, fuel, staff wages, gift cards for volunteers and “other.” The other category includes cleaning products, folding tables, masks, gloves, utilities, staff lunches, and Ziploc bags. The breakdown of grant funding spent on non-food expenses is:

Staff wages: \$3,952 (25%)

Other: \$3,325 (21%)

Delivery: \$2,447 (15%)

Storage: \$2,910 (18%)

Fuel: \$1,838 (12%)

Transport: \$902 (6%)

Gift cards: \$500 (3%)

Locally Produced

A total of \$244,594 was used across the state to purchase locally grown, produced or packaged foods directly from producers. Pantries spent \$158,970 on food which could not be verified whether it was local or non-local — such as peanut butter with a non-specific brand on the receipt. Forty-seven of the 115 pantries exclusively purchased locally produced foods. Frontier pantries supported local food at a much higher rate than their urban counterparts.

This was due to a few factors, rooted in the realities of the food system in Colorado. That includes the growing season, animal life cycles, availability of food processing facilities and the foods that can grow in the Colorado climate.

Urban		Rural		Frontier	
Locally Produced	68%	Locally Produced	79%	Locally Produced	88%
Unverified	32%	Unverified	21%	Unverified	12%

Ability to Provide Food

Food banks and pantries reported that the Food Pantry Assistant Grant supported organizations in preparing or responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in various ways. Grant recipients shared that the grant funding supported their organizations specifically in the availability of healthier foods for recipients, providing holiday baskets for older adults, and supporting local farmers and ranchers.

Here are some of the comments they shared:

We used grant funding to purchase meat from a Colorado Proud member. The meat allowed us to round-out our nutritional offerings and supplement the fresh produce, dairy, and shelf-stable foods we were already providing to families in need.

Due to the pandemic, we served over seven times more people in 2020 than we did in 2019, and this grant funding helped us to meet this increase in need. Grant dollars supported the purchase of Colorado meats for our brick-and-mortar food pantry and our new mobile food pantry that launched in response to the COVID pandemic. We served over 44,000 people and provided over 1.2 million meals in 2020. This grant has also helped AICS to support Colorado food producers through purchasing local food products, which may not otherwise have been a priority. Thank you for your generous support!

Normally, we can count on much of our weekly food sourcing from grocery store donations or other sources that supply grocers. During much of the year we received considerably less from either of these sources. Being able to move quickly and directly to purchasing Colorado products from wholesale providers was very helpful in providing enough healthy food options for our clients.

We were glad to have the opportunity to support local farmers and distributors by paying a fair price for produce in bulk. This food was delivered to No Cost Grocery Programs (NCGPs), food distribution points housed in residential spaces and led by community members who live in those communities.

This grant funding helped us meet an increased need for food for people living with HIV, while prioritizing local Colorado vendors and diversifying the fresh produce and meat options available to low-income clients.

We were able to purchase \$10,000 of Colorado grown produce. Specifically, we were able to purchase corn, watermelon, cantaloupe, and chiles from our partners in Pueblo, Colorado. As an organization, we prioritize distribution of highly nutritious food. The funding from this grant has helped us acquire fresh, nutritious produce and distribute it to neighbors during challenging times. These items have helped nourish hundreds of neighbors across Southern Colorado.

We typically are only able to provide clients with milk if it is received as a donation via our grocery rescue program. These donations are always near expiration and have a limited shelf life, which means clients must either use the product immediately or they will be forced to dispose of it if they cannot use it quickly enough. This funding enabled us to provide fresh milk with a longer shelf life to clients.

This grant helped us be more responsive to the needs of our families during the pandemic. First, it allowed us to shift funds in order to hire an additional temporary, bilingual advocate to help us connect better with our monolingual Spanish-speaking population. This advocate helped with intake during all outside food distribution hours in October and November. This funding also allowed us to offer more fresh food to families, which is something they asked for in surveys we distributed over the summer. We used funds to purchase produce, eggs, and meat so that families could make healthy meals.

Ninety % of the grant funding was used to purchase 3,000 pounds of pinto beans. We estimate that this supply of pinto beans will last six months and will be distributed on a weekly basis at our food bank. The community we serve is faced with food insecurity, a preexisting disparity that is exacerbated by the COVID-19 policies. In the last six months of the year, the need for food at our facility has increased by 300% as we now distribute food to up to 1,300 individuals a month. The remaining 10 % of the funding went toward administrative costs.

This grant funding allowed us to purchase fresh, local produce and food goods to include in the 400 boxes we distribute each week. Our distribution program includes home deliveries to older adults, individuals who are self-quarantining, and those without access to transportation. Each box includes fresh produce, milk, meat, and dry goods.

We were able to buy high quality, Colorado Proud beef and bison.

Funds helped us to respond to a 400% increase in demand for food resources in our community. We spend about \$6,000 on food per week, feeding between 3,700-4,000 people. Our operating costs are \$85,000 per month. We estimate we provided 970,000 meals from March-October. Grant funds were used to purchase Colorado produce. In particular, we were able to purchase 10,000 lbs. of dried pinto beans at an incredible price during a time when we were not able to access beans (a client favorite!).

We purchased a new freezer which helps with holiday turkey and ham drives.

Since the onset of the pandemic, we have experienced a 400% increase in monthly visitors and demand for food assistance. Currently, we serve more than 150 households per day, an increase from approximately 40 per day prior to the pandemic. Funds from the Food Pantry Assistance Grant allowed our pantry to purchase additional fresh produce, meat products, eggs, and milk from Colorado Proud vendors to distribute to thousands of people impacted by the pandemic. Clients have benefited by having access to culturally appropriate foods that meet their individual dietary needs and fresh produce that they cannot afford to purchase at retail prices through the grocery store.

This funding has aided us in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic by allowing us to provide nutritious food to our homeless youth that is easy to transport and consume. During the pandemic, homeless youth have been couch-surfing and being able to provide their households with food has helped them maintain housing. In addition, some of our youths have been camping or staying in hotels and offering them access to food helps sustain them through these difficult times.

This program allowed us to provide much-desired meats to our clients, while affording us the opportunity to support local ranchers. We otherwise could not justify the cost of purchasing local foods.

Purchasing directly from local farmers can often be more expensive, and this grant allowed us to purchase locally, support our local farmers, and offer the freshest produce and dairy to the residents that visit our pantry. In addition to the funding, the Colorado Market Maker website and tutorial were helpful in that it connected us to farms that we wouldn't otherwise know about.

Additionally, funding was used for additional supplies and materials such as masks and gloves.

We were able to purchase a whole cow and provide steaks, stew meat, and hamburger through our food pantry to our clients while supporting a local rancher. This was a win-win for all of our community.



Grantee Adherence to Requirements

Client Survey Requirement

The Food Pantry Assistance Grant Program prescribed grant recipients administer a client survey equal to 1% of their grant. Most food banks and pantries submitted the required number of surveys; however, various pandemic-related circumstances prevented some pantries from meeting this survey requirement.

Colorado Agricultural Products Requirement

The Food Pantry Assistance Grant Program provides that the food purchased by grant recipients using grant money must be designated as a Colorado agricultural product. According to the final grant reports received, 62 % of total dollars were spent on locally produced foods directly from producers. Of the food purchased at grocery stores, it was difficult to verify what products were local or non-local from the receipts. Technical assistance calls demonstrated the difficulties some pantries had with purchasing local foods, due to the food system and growing realities in Colorado, the lack of value-added processing or preserving facilities, the increase in need, and the short grant period. It may help pantries and producers to identify the obstacles that prevented or inhibited the purchase of Colorado agricultural products.

Non-Food Items Allowed

Grant recipients were allowed to use up to 10% of their grant awards to cover direct and indirect costs associated with the implementation of their missions. A total of 3% of grant funds were spent on non-food items.

Grant Funding Received and Expensed

One final observation regarding the funding received by pantries is that not all pantries spent down their entire grant award. Two pantries sent dollars back to the State and two declined grants after they were awarded due to being unable to find local products to purchase or not having the capacity to store perishable food. These dollars were then re-granted to other pantries. A few pantries did not turn in a final report and receipts and some reports had incomplete receipts. CDHS staff did a thorough follow-up, but in some instances there was no response.



Client Survey Findings

Demographics

In October and November 2020, 3,912 clients of food banks and pantries that received the Food Pantry Assistance Grant responded to a client survey to identify food preferences and current needs. Surveys were conducted in English (3,424), Spanish (450), Russian (30), French (4) and Vietnamese (4).

Of the food banks and pantries that administered client surveys, 57 percent were conducted in urban communities (2,230 surveys), 31 percent in rural communities (1,213 surveys), and 12 percent in frontier communities (469 surveys).

Pantry Visits

When asked if they had ever visited a food pantry before March 2020, 2,582 respondents responded yes and 1,278 responded no. Based on these numbers, one-third (33%) of people receiving assistance from food pantries in October and November 2020 had never visited a pantry before the pandemic.

The survey asked respondents if they had received food at *this particular food pantry* before — 3,139 said yes and 718 said no. Based on these numbers, 81 percent clients surveyed had visited the pantry before and 19 percent had not.

Food Received More Than Normal

Survey respondents were asked to name the foods that were available *more often than normal* on the day they completed the survey. Fifty-eight percent of respondents reported more fresh vegetables; 52 percent reported more fresh/frozen meat; 48 percent reported more fresh fruit and more dairy products; 41 percent reported more eggs; and 35 percent reported more grains.

Food Needed More Than Received

Clients were asked what foods they ***need more than received*** on the day they completed the survey. Almost half of respondents (49%) reported that they need more dairy products; 45 percent reported they need more meat, more fresh fruit, and more fresh veggies; 42 reported the need for more eggs; and 23 percent reported they need more grains.

Locally Produced Food

Clients who completed the survey were informed that the food pantry they were visiting had received a grant to buy Colorado products. They were asked how important it was that some of the food they received was produced in Colorado. Seventy-seven percent of survey respondents (2,948 out of 3,816 people) stated that it was “Very Important” or “Somewhat important.” The majority of clients choosing these two responses completed surveys in English and Spanish. Ten percent of respondents decided that the purchase of locally produced food was “A Little Important” and 14 percent chose that it was “Not At All Important.”

In response to this survey question, one respondent shared that “It doesn't matter where the food comes from if you're hungry!”

Barriers

Over 50 percent of survey respondents (54%) shared that the number one barrier to visiting the food pantry is the hours the pantry is open. Forty-seven percent of clients reported barriers to the days the food pantry is open (32% of clients), and the location being hard to get to (15% of clients). Speaking a language different from pantry staff and volunteers was identified as a barrier for 10 percent of clients, and 9 percent of clients cited stigma as a barrier. The majority of people who reported stigma as a barrier (76%) completed the

survey in English. Only 3 percent of clients reported identification or documentation as a barrier to receiving food.

Barriers in Urban, Rural and Frontier Communities

As mentioned earlier in this report, 3,912 client surveys were conducted across Colorado. The majority of clients reported the hours the pantry is open as the biggest barrier to visiting the pantry. Looking at different communities, 48 percent of clients in urban communities noted that hours the pantry is open were the biggest barrier compared to 57 percent of rural and 54 percent of frontier communities.

Whether residing in urban, rural or frontier communities, one-third of clients reported the days the pantry is open as a barrier to visiting the food pantry. Twenty-eight percent of Spanish speakers across all communities (urban, rural and frontier) cited language as a barrier.

Urban			Rural			Frontier		
Barrier	English	Spanish	Barrier	English	Spanish	Barrier	English	Spanish
Hours	288	46	Hours	217	22	Hours	50	0
Days	196	30	Days	126	16	Days	29	1
Stairs	51	6	Stairs	9	4	Stairs	3	0
Stigma	49	13	Stigma	28	5	Stigma	6	0
Location	115	18	Location	45	6	Location	10	0
Language	52	31	Language	21	10	Language	3	4

Impact of Pandemic

Survey respondents were asked to select the *impacts experienced by households* since March 2020. Options included work hours cut, lost job, health issues/sickness, loss of benefits (such as health care or unemployment), lost housing, lost childcare, and death of family member.

Work hours cut (54%) and lost jobs (41%) were the top two ***impacts experienced by households*** responding to this survey question. The third

most common impact was health issues/sickness (33% of respondents). The breakdown of other impacts includes loss of benefits at 20 percent, death of a family member at 12 percent, lost housing at 11 percent, and lost childcare at 8 percent. Three hundred and six clients completing surveys in English and 42 clients completing surveys in Spanish reported the death of a family member.

Additionally, the survey asked **what would help families the most** by presenting services needed — in addition to receiving food. Categories included better pay, housing/rental assistance, unemployment benefits, a job, more work hours, improved physical health, improved mental health, health insurance, disability determination/SSDI, and reliable childcare.

Better pay (38% of respondents), housing/rental assistance (34% of respondents), a job (29% of respondents), and more work hours (28% of respondents) were ranked as the top four needs. Those services with 25 percent or less of responses include health insurance (23% of respondents), improved physical health (21% of respondents), improved mental health (17% of respondents), disability determination/SSDI (11% of respondents), and reliable childcare (8% of respondents).



Client Feedback

The survey's final question asked clients if there was anything else they would like to share about their visit to the food pantry. More than 20 percent of clients shared additional thoughts and comments. Hundreds of clients expressed gratitude and complimented the pantry staff and volunteers on their service.

Many comments were made in response to the final question, and a sampling of those comments is listed below. Please note that the following comments were made by clients completing surveys in English. Clients who completed surveys in Spanish, Russian, French and Vietnamese did not share additional comments.

- Our family couldn't have made it through the week without this food bank. Thank you.
- This pantry was very helpful and treated me with respect and very friendly. The experience was better than I expected.
- This was my first visit at this pantry, and it was a pleasant experience.
- Never thought it would be me.
- I hate having food go to waste, so the food bank makes a positive impact on our community.
- Everyone is so nice and helpful. They don't look down on you for needing a little extra help with food.
- Thank you. I get discouraged when I see a Porsche behind me in line though...like really?
- We are just general low income. I hope it is ok we are here.

- The executive director personally bought me shoes because I was barefoot! Thank you!
- I'm happy that you all are here. I'd starve if not for your help.
- Thank God for the food pantry. Living on social security and raising three grandkids — after the bills, there isn't much left for food.
- It was very hard to go to a food bank for the first time, but the people at this food bank made it so much better than expected.
- The food is better than it used to be.
- I don't have to choose between food and medicine or seeing a doctor. Thanks for all your help.
- The people are so friendly. I was scared to come so I went with a friend.
- A true blessing. I made my last meal last night. I'm very grateful. Thanks.
- My family and I are extremely grateful for the assistance of Open Arms food bank and all of their amazing volunteers. Knowing that my family will have a nutritious meal during these difficult times has been a real blessing. Thank you for all that you do!

Foods Needed/Not Needed

As part of their survey responses, clients shared the foods they want more of, less of, and the non-food items needed.

Want More Of	Want Less Of	Non-Food Items Needed
Foods that are easy to prepare Organic produce/products Juice Milk Nonperishable foods Canned goods, especially fruit Fresh, unspoiled produce Dairy Frozen food Fresh fruit Fish Hamburger Pinto beans Decaf coffee Protein shakes Ensure Spices Vegetarian and vegan options Gluten-free foods	Sugary foods Bakery items Frozen sandwiches Partisan politics Dry goods	Clothing Cleaning supplies Help with medical bills, medications and utilities Help with cleaning and yard work Housing and rental assistance Day shelter and showers for unhoused people Childcare while visiting the food pantry Personal care items and toiletries Toilet paper Diapers, baby food and formula Cat litter Gift cards for food and gas Motel room vouchers Legal services

Recommended Changes

Several clients responding to the survey commented on the *changes* they would like to see at the food pantry they were visiting. A few of these suggested changes include:

- Rules about people yelling or talking loudly on their cell phones while waiting in line
- Extended hours in the afternoon and on the weekends
- Transportation to/from the pantry
- Continuation of home delivery and drive-through pick-ups after the pandemic
- Shorter lines/less wait time
- Pre-check in online
- Phone appointments
- Going paperless
- More advertising of services available at pantry
- More support for local ranchers



Conclusion

In 2020, in response to the pandemic, Colorado food banks and pantries received Food Pantry Assistance Grants as part of the CARES Act. Grantees used funds to provide foods like fresh meat and produce, serve more people in need, and support local producers by purchasing Colorado agricultural products. Overall, the grant accomplished what it was created to achieve — increased capacity of food banks and pantries to purchase more food and meet an increase in need due to the pandemic.

Special Thanks

This report was authored by Denise Clark Inc.

