



Taking Stock: A survey of food pantries in the Harvesters - Community Food Network region

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Kansas City, Missouri skyline

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Introduction

Food insecurity and hunger continue to be a major concern in Missouri. Nearly one million Missourians face the prospect of missing meals, reducing portions, compromising the quality of the food they eat, or worrying about where their next meal will come from.

Unfortunately, the number of people who lack resources to have enough to eat, and have enough of the right kinds of food, has consistently risen over the past decade and a half. Since 2000, food insecurity in Missouri has increased by 95%.

With reductions to publically funded, government programs, the private, charitable response to hunger has grown. Increasingly, more people rely on food pantries to provide a portion of the food they need.

Given the increasing role of food pantries in meeting the food needs of Missourians, it is important to better understand the ways in which the management and operations of food pantries can be enhanced. This report highlights areas for potential improvement, identified by those who operate food pantries, to help spur conversation, target resources, and develop tools to help food pantries better meet their goals.

This document describes the results of an online survey completed by Missouri food pantry directors in the fall of 2015. The survey was developed by researchers and staff with the Interdisciplinary Center for Food Security at the University of Missouri.



Survey Participants

Food pantry directors from four of the six regional food banks associated with Feeding Missouri participated in this survey. The two regional food banks that did not participate were invited but noted that they had plans to conduct their own, similar surveys.

Food pantry directors affiliated with Harvesters in the Kansas City region, Ozarks Food Harvest in Southwest Missouri, the Southeast Missouri Food Bank, and the Food Bank for Central & Northeast Missouri took part in the survey.

These regions serve 86 of the 115 Missouri counties and St. Louis City. They provide coverage to 75% of the state and include rural and metropolitan counties.

Of the 513 food pantry directors who received the survey link and message, 204 completed the survey, representing a 40% response rate. Of the 204 directors who completed the survey, 199

provided their zip code, allowing us to denote their subregion.

Within a subregion of the Harvesters region¹, 82 food pantry directors completed the survey. This represents a total of 40% of all food pantry directors who completed the survey and 33% of all directors within the subregion.

Survey participants from the Harvesters region² were generally female (78%) with an average age of 58. Eighty-three percent have some schooling beyond high school, and 17% have completed high school or received their GED.

The table below compares survey participants from the Harvesters region to those from the four food bank regions combined.

Demographics	Harvesters	All Regions
Total Respondents	82	204
GENDER		
Male	18 (22%)	45 (22%)
Female	64 (78%)	156 (78%)
AGE		
Average Age	58	59.8
EDUCATION		
High School/GED	14 (17%)	61 (30%)
Beyond High School	68 (83%)	140 (70%)



¹Harvesters-The Community Food Network serves agencies in 10 Missouri counties and 16 Kansas counties. Because this survey primarily centers on food pantries in Missouri, we solicited responses from food pantry directors in the 10 Missouri counties and two Kansas counties (Johnson and Wyandotte) considered a part of the Kansas City Metropolitan Area. In total, the survey was sent to 250 food pantry directors. Most respondents (89%) were from Missouri.

²Reference to the Harvesters region, area or members in this publication only includes the 10 Missouri counties and the Kansas counties of Johnson and Wyandotte that are a part of the Harvesters service area.

Food Pantry Characteristics

The average Missouri food pantry serves 295 households or 755 individuals per month. Pantry directors average approximately seven years of experience. Pantries averaged 32 volunteers per month and were open 8.5 days per month.

Most pantries are serving more people this year compared to last year (47%). Thirty-nine percent are serving about the same number of people, and 14% are serving fewer people.

The Harvesters member pantries that participated in the survey serve an average of 213 households or 525 individuals each month. Directors from these pantries have just over six years of experience.

Compared to the average for food pantries from all food bank regions in Missouri, Harvesters member food pantries utilize slightly fewer volunteers per month (26 vs 32) and are open slightly more days per month (9.1 vs 8.5).

Pantry Characteristics	Harvesters	All Regions
Total Respondents	82	204
NUMBER SERVED		
Average monthly households served	213	295
Average monthly individuals served	525	755
PANTRY STAFFING		
Average director experience (years)	6.2	7.1
Average number of monthly volunteers	26	32
Average days open per month	9.1	8.5
TREND (compared to prior year)		
Serving more people	51%	47%
Serving about the same	37%	39%
Serving fewer people	12%	14%

Like food pantries across the state, most Harvester member food pantries are serving more people than the previous year (51%). Thirty-seven percent are serving about the same number of people, and 12% are serving fewer people.

Survey Design

To better understand the potential areas for improvement within Missouri food pantries, an online survey was created for food pantry directors*. The survey included 50 food pantry activities (such as fundraising, recruiting new staff and volunteers, and being prepared for each food distribution). For each activity, pantry directors were asked to answer two questions:

1. How important is the activity to the success of your pantry?

2. How well does your pantry perform the activity?

Using the responses from these two questions, each activity was ranked from one to 50. A rank of one meant the activity had the greatest difference between Question 1 (importance) and Question 2 (performance).

In other words, for activities with a high rank, directors indicated that the activity was generally very important, yet they believed they did not perform the activity very well.

Higher ranked activities (with one being the highest) indicate potential areas for improvement and areas where resources can be targeted.

To better understand the broader implications of the pantries' needs, each activity is grouped into one of seven categories. The categories include finances, operations, communications, planning, programs & partnerships, facilities and governance.

* The survey was designed using the Borich Needs Assessment Model. Please contact the report authors for more details.

Results

The following section provides a look at the combined results from all four food bank regions, followed by the results for the Harvesters region. In order to simplify the results, only the top 10 activities are shown. Complete survey results are found in the Appendix.

All Regions

Many of the activities identified center on reaching out to others for support, whether the support needed is in the form of money, food, or time.

As a whole, the top 10 activities include items from five of the seven broad categories. The only categories not represented are facilities and governance. See all regions table below.

The top 10 activities are areas for potential improvement where resources can be targeted.

Harvesters Region

By comparison, nine of the top 10 activities identified by food pantry directors in the Harvesters region are also found in the All Regions Top 10.

As noted, most of these activities involve asking for support in the form of money, time, or food. In part, the Harvesters list is similar to the All Regions list because of the large number of respondents from the Harvesters region.

For Harvesters, *recruiting board members*, which is included in the broad category of governance, is the only activity that differed from the combined All Regions Top 10 list (where it received a rank of 16).

Rank	All Regions - Top 10 Activities (Category included)
1	Grant writing (Financial)
2	Recruiting people for leadership roles (Operations)
3	Soliciting cash donations (Communications)
4	Being prepared for emergencies (Planning)
5	Offering educational programs in-house (Programs & Partnerships)
6	Recruiting new staff or volunteers (Operations)
7	Fundraising (Financial)
8	Soliciting food donations (Communications)
9	Soliciting produce donations from local gardeners/farmers (Programs & Partnerships)
10	Telling your pantry's story to the public (Communications)

Rank	Harvesters - Top 10 Activities (Category included)
1	Grant writing (Financial)
2	Recruiting people for leadership roles (Operations)
3	Soliciting food donations (Communications)
4	Soliciting cash donations (Communications)
5	Recruiting new staff or volunteers (Operations)
6	Being prepared for emergencies (Planning)
7	Soliciting produce donations from local gardeners/farmers
8	Offering educational programs in-house (Programs & Partnerships)
9	Fundraising (Financial)
10	Recruiting board members (Governance)

* Highlighted activities are those that do not appear in the All Regions - Top 10.

Strengths

While this survey is designed to uncover needs and areas for potential improvement, it also uncovers the strengths of food pantries. Before moving further into the discussion, we want to share those activities that Harvesters member food pantry directors feel are important and being performed well. We have selected one or more activities from each broad category.

Planning

Being prepared for each food pantry distribution

Finances

Short-term budgeting and accounting

Communications

Letting people in need know you are there to help

Operations

Distributing food and sorting, shelving, and storing food

Facilities

Having enough parking

Governance

Having a clear mission/mission statement

Programs and Partnerships

Providing referrals to services offered by outside agencies

When making comparisons between all seven of the broad categories, survey results show that food pantries are strongest in the area of operations.



Discussion

General impressions from the survey results include the following:

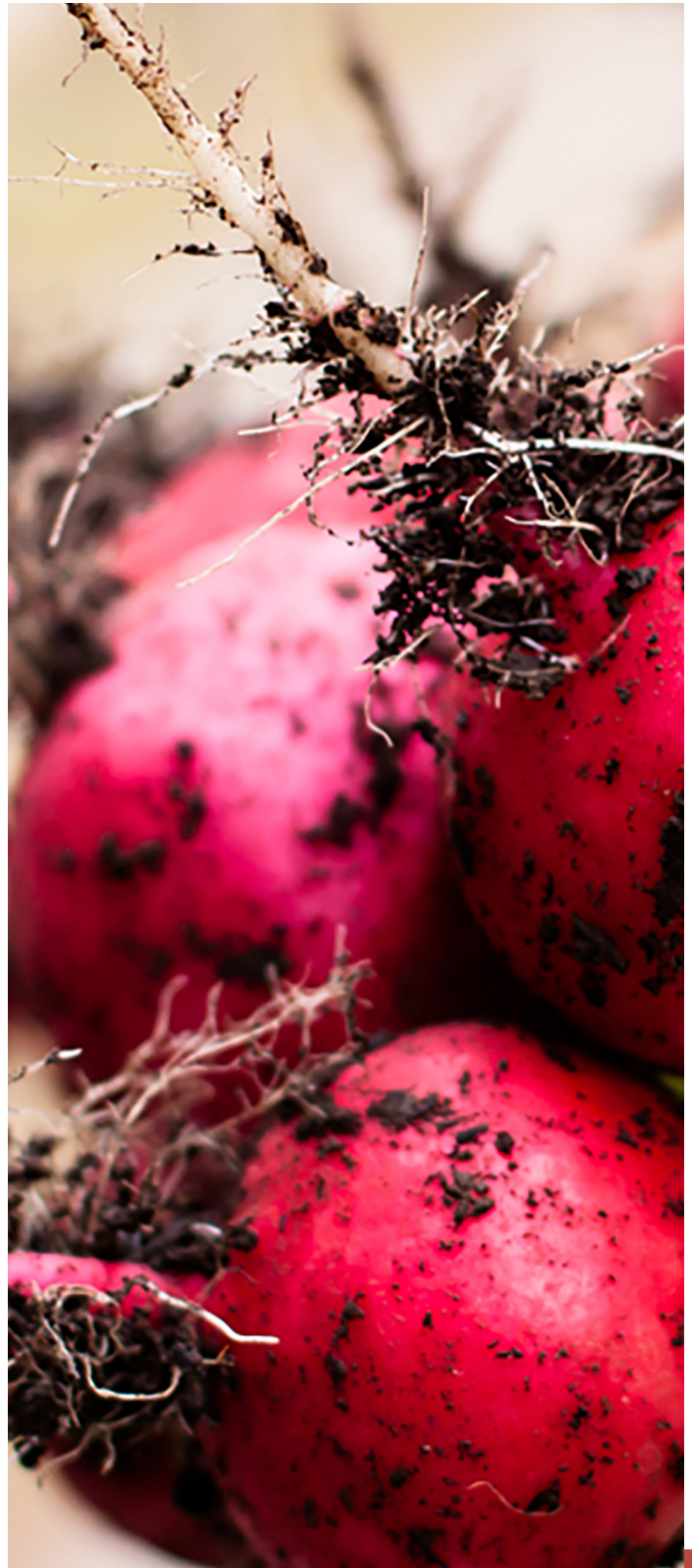
- Harvesters member food pantry directors have a good handle on the basics. They do well at performing those activities that are most essential to getting food to people in need.
- As with food pantry directors across the state, Harvesters member directors indicate that grant writing is an important activity, yet it is not done well within their pantry.
- Three of the top 10 activities include recruiting people. Pantry directors indicate there is a need to have new people involved both in the operations and governance of their food pantries.
- Four of the top 10 activities involve asking for or obtaining material support in the form of food, money, or locally grown produce.
- Additional highlighted needs include being prepared for emergencies and offering educational programs in-house.

When taken as a whole, Harvesters member food pantries face similar challenges to food pantries across the state. In essence, these challenges center on increasing human and financial resources.

While there is likely no easy or single fix to address these challenges, the following options are offered for consideration. First, enhancing communications could prove beneficial. By increasing awareness about the activities and needs of food pantries, they may be able to attract new volunteers, donors, and other forms of assistance. Likewise, a focus on both creating new partnerships and enhancing existing partnerships could lead to new forms of support that only come from cooperation and collaboration.

We commend food pantry directors for their awareness of the value of offering educational programs in-house. These programs can take many forms and cover a range of topics

including cooking, nutrition, finances, or fitness. They may also help people develop new skills to enhance employment opportunities. Regardless of the specific details, food pantries can often partner with other agencies or professionals in the community to bring a variety of programs to their customers.



Appendix: Complete Survey Results

Appendix A: Includes the activity rankings for all 50 activities from the Harvesters region. The activities are ranked from one to 50. A rank of one means that the activity has the greatest difference between importance and performance. In other words, the activity is not performed as well as it could be relative to its importance. Activities with lower ranks are performed relatively well by the food pantry staff and volunteers. In total, 82 food pantry directors from the Harvesters region completed the survey.

Appendix B: Includes the activity rankings for all 50 activities from all participating food bank regions (Harvesters, Ozarks Food Harvest, Southeast Missouri, Central and Northeast Missouri). The activities are ranked from one to 50. A rank of one means that the activity has the greatest difference between importance and performance. In other words, the activity is not performed as well as it could be relative to its importance. Activities with lower ranks are performed relatively well by the food pantry staff and volunteers. In total, 204 food pantry directors completed the survey.

Appendix C and D: Includes the full survey results for all 50 activities from the Harvesters region (Appendix C, 82 respondents) and all participating food bank regions (Appendix D, 204 respondents). The table includes the following:

- **Category Rank:** The categories are ranked from one to seven based on the average of the activity scores for a given category. A rank of one means that when taken as a whole, the activities included in a particular category have the greatest difference between their importance and performance. Higher ranked categories are not performed as well as they could be relative to their importance.
- **Within Category Activity Rank:** The activities are ranked within each category. A rank of one means that the activity has the greatest difference between importance and performance. In other words, the activity is not performed as well as it could be.
- **Overall Activity Rank:** Similar to Appendix A and B, this column includes the activity rankings for all 50 activities.
- **Average Importance:** This is based on a scale from one to five. One equals “Not important” and five equals “Very important”. Values closer to five indicate activities that are very important to the success of food pantries, based on the responses from food pantry directors.



Appendix A:

Activity Ranking - Harvesters Region

Activity	Rank
Grant writing	1
Recruiting people for leadership roles	2
Soliciting food donations	3
Soliciting cash donations	4
Recruiting new staff or volunteers	5
Being prepared for emergencies	6
Soliciting produce donations from local gardeners/farmers	7
Offering educational programs in-house	8
Fundraising	9
Recruiting board members	10
Having enough refrigeration	11
Giving referrals to educational programs hosted by outside agencies	12
Strategic planning	13
Having enough freezer space	14
Managing social media	15
Telling your pantry's story to the public	16
Hosting, sponsoring, or supporting a community garden	17
Sponsoring, hosting, or supporting food drives	18
Maintaining a website	19
Having enough staff or volunteers on hand	20
Long-term budgeting	21
Offering related services in-house	22
Having reliable computer software	23

Training staff or volunteers	24
Having an opportunity for customer feedback	25
Having reliable computer hardware	26
Training board members	27
Writing newsletters	28
Having a clear vision for what pantry wants to accomplish in the future	29
Retaining staff or volunteers	30
Letting people in need know you are there to help	31
Having an effective board of directors	32
Providing referrals to services offered by outside agencies	33
Having a sound building	34
Having good office space	35
Having reliable internet access	36
Customer intake/registration	37
Picking up/receiving food from other sources	38
Retaining board members	39
Having a clear mission/mission statement	40
Being prepared for each food distribution	41
Having enough parking	42
Short-term budgeting	43
Handling food safely	44
Purchasing food from other sources	45
Ordering food from the food bank	46
Picking up/receiving food from the food bank	47
Accounting	48
Sorting, shelving, and storing food	49
Distributing food	50

Appendix B:

Activity Ranking - All Regions

Activity	Rank
Grant writing	1
Recruiting people for leadership roles	2
Soliciting cash donations	3
Being prepared for emergencies	4
Offering educational programs in-house	5
Recruiting new staff or volunteers	6
Fundraising	7
Soliciting food donations	8
Soliciting produce donations from local gardeners/farmers	9
Telling your pantry's story to the public	10
Having enough refrigeration	11
Hosting, sponsoring, or supporting a community garden	12
Having reliable computer software	13
Having enough staff or volunteers on hand	14
Strategic planning	15
Recruiting board members	16
Giving referrals to educational programs hosted by outside agencies	17
Having enough freezer space	18
Having enough parking	19
Long-term budgeting	20
Training board members	21
Sponsoring, hosting, or supporting food drives	22
Offering related services in-house	23

Having good office space	24
Managing social media	25
Having reliable computer hardware	26
Maintaining a website	27
Writing newsletters	28
Training staff or volunteers	29
Having a sound building	30
Having an opportunity for customer feedback	31
Letting people in need know you are there to help	32
Having an effective board of directors	33
Retaining staff or volunteers	34
Having reliable internet access	35
Having a clear vision for what pantry wants to accomplish in the future	36
Providing referrals to services offered by outside agencies	37
Retaining board members	38
Having a clear mission/mission statement	39
Being prepared for each food distribution	40
Picking up/receiving food from other sources	41
Customer intake/registration	42
Short-term budgeting	43
Purchasing food from other sources	44
Ordering food from the food bank	45
Handling food safely	46
Accounting	47
Picking up/receiving food from the food bank	48
Sorting, shelving, and storing food	49
Distributing food	50

Appendix C:

Full Survey results - Harvesters Region

Category	Activity	Category Rank	Within Category Activity Rank	Overall Activity Rank	Average Importance
Programs & Partnerships	Soliciting produce donations from local gardeners/farmers	1	1	7	3.61
	Offering educational programs in-house		2	8	3.41
	Giving referrals to educational programs hosted by outside agencies		3	12	3.8
	Hosting, sponsoring, or supporting a community garden		4	17	3.24
	Offering related services in-house		5	22	3.73
	Providing referrals to services offered by outside agencies		6	33	4.17
Communications	Soliciting food donations	2	1	3	4.61
	Soliciting cash donations		2	4	4.03
	Managing social media		3	15	3.04
	Telling your pantry's story to the public		4	16	4.21
	Maintaining a website		5	19	3.52
	Writing newsletters		6	28	2.89
	Letting people in need know you are there to help		7	31	4.66
Planning	Being prepared for emergencies	3	1	6	3.89
	Strategic planning		2	13	4.35
	Having enough staff or volunteers on hand		3	20	4.74
	Being prepared for each food distribution		4	41	4.87
Financial	Grant writing	4	1	1	3.59
	Fundraising		2	9	3.99
	Long-term budgeting		3	21	4.62
	Short-term budgeting		4	43	4.49
	Accounting		5	48	4.61
Facilities	Having enough refrigeration	5	1	11	4.51
	Having enough freezer space		2	14	4.63
	Having reliable computer software		3	23	4.11
	Having reliable computer hardware		4	26	4.14
	Having a sound building		5	34	4.73
	Having good office space		6	35	4.08
	Having reliable internet access		7	36	4.27
	Having enough parking		8	42	4.49
Governance	Recruiting board members	6	1	10	3.8
	Training board members		2	27	3.68
	Having a clear vision for what the pantry wants to accomplish in the future		3	29	4.68
	Having an effective board of directors		4	32	4.17
	Retaining board members		5	39	3.86
	Having a clear mission/mission statement		6	40	4.65
Operations	Recruiting people for leadership roles	7	1	2	4.19
	Recruiting new staff or volunteers		2	5	4.43
	Sponsoring, hosting, or supporting food drives		3	18	3.95
	Training staff or volunteers		4	24	4.7
	Having an opportunity for customer feedback		5	25	4.33
	Retaining staff or volunteers		6	30	4.78
	Customer intake/registration		7	37	4.79
	Picking up/receiving food from other sources		8	38	4.4
	Handling food safely		9	44	4.93
	Purchasing food from other sources		10	45	3.88
	Ordering food from the food bank		11	46	4.78
	Picking up/receiving food from the food bank		12	47	4.72
	Sorting, shelving, and storing food		13	49	4.85
	Distributing food		14	50	4.94

Appendix D:

Full Survey results - All Regions

Category	Activity	Category Rank	Within Category Activity Rank	Overall Activity Rank	Average Importance
Programs & Partnerships	Offering educational programs in-house	1	1	5	3.47
	Soliciting produce donations from local gardeners/farmers		2	9	3.89
	Hosting, sponsoring, or supporting a community garden		3	12	3.22
	Giving referrals to educational programs hosted by outside agencies		4	17	3.76
	Offering related services in-house		5	23	3.77
	Providing referrals to services offered by outside agencies		6	37	4.18
Planning	Being prepared for emergencies	2	1	4	4.16
	Having enough staff or volunteers on hand		2	14	4.85
	Strategic planning		3	15	4.41
	Being prepared for each food distribution		4	40	4.92
Communications	Soliciting cash donations	3	1	3	4.17
	Soliciting food donations		2	8	4.55
	Telling your pantry's story to the public		3	10	4.52
	Managing social media		4	25	3.1
	Maintaining a website		5	27	3.32
	Writing newsletters		6	28	3.04
	Letting people in need know you are there to help		7	32	4.78
Facilities	Having enough refrigeration	4	1	11	4.76
	Having reliable computer software		2	13	4.25
	Having enough freezer space		3	18	4.81
	Having enough parking		4	19	4.65
	Having good office space		5	24	4.24
	Having reliable computer hardware		6	26	4.3
	Having a sound building		7	30	4.81
	Having reliable internet access		8	35	4.23
Financial	Grant writing	5	1	1	3.92
	Fundraising		2	7	4.16
	Long-term budgeting		3	20	4.62
	Short-term budgeting		4	43	4.53
	Accounting		5	47	4.65
Governance	Recruiting board members	6	1	16	4.05
	Training board members		2	21	4.06
	Having an effective board of directors		3	33	4.45
	Having a clear vision for what the pantry wants to accomplish in the future		4	36	4.77
	Retaining board members		5	38	4.22
	Having a clear mission/mission statement		6	39	4.71
Operations	Recruiting people for leadership roles	7	1	2	4.36
	Recruiting new staff or volunteers		2	6	4.52
	Sponsoring, hosting, or supporting food drives		3	22	4.14
	Training staff or volunteers		4	29	4.79
	Having an opportunity for customer feedback		5	31	4.36
	Retaining staff or volunteers		6	34	4.83
	Picking up/receiving food from other sources		7	41	4.63
	Customer intake/registration		8	42	4.86
	Purchasing food from other sources		9	44	3.98
	Ordering food from the food bank		10	45	4.84
	Handling food safely		11	46	4.96
	Picking up/receiving food from the food bank		12	48	4.81
	Sorting, shelving, and storing food		13	49	4.92
	Distributing food		14	50	4.96

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