



Taking Stock: A survey of food pantries in the Ozarks Food Harvest region

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Hodgson Mill located in eastern Ozark County

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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 region.

Within the Ozarks Food Harvest region, 56 food pantry directors completed the survey. This represents a total of 27% of all food pantry directors who completed the survey and 68% of all directors within the region.

Ozarks Food Harvest survey participants were generally female (80%) with an average age of 60.9. Sixty seven percent have some schooling beyond high school, and 33% have completed high school or received their GED.

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

Demographics	Ozarks	All Regions
Total Respondents	56	204
GENDER		
Male	11 (20%)	45 (22%)
Female	44 (80%)	156 (78%)
AGE		
Average Age	60.9	59.8
EDUCATION		
High School/GED	18 (33%)	61 (30%)
Beyond High School	37 (67%)	140 (70%)



Service areas of the six regional food banks associated with Feeding Missouri. Photo courtesy of Feedingmissouri.org.



The Weekend Backpack Program provides food-insecure children with a backpack of food to take home. Photo courtesy of ozarksfoodharvest.org.

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 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.

Ozarks Food Harvest member food pantries participating in the survey serve an average of 345 households or 867 individuals each month. Directors from these pantries average seven years of experience.

Compared to the average for food pantries from all food bank regions surveyed in Missouri, member pantries in the Ozarks Food Harvest region utilize more volunteers per month (40 vs 32) and are open more days per month (9.3 vs 8.5).

Pantry Characteristics	Ozarks	All Regions
Total Respondents	56	204
NUMBER SERVED		
Average monthly households served	345	295
Average monthly individuals served	867	755
PANTRY STAFFING		
Average director experience (years)	7	7.1
Average number of monthly volunteers	40	32
Average days open per month	9.3	8.5
TREND (compared to prior year)		
Serving more people	43%	47%
Serving about the same	43%	39%
Serving fewer people	14%	14%

Like food pantries across the state, most Ozarks Food Harvest member pantries are serving more people than the previous year (43%). Forty-three percent are serving about the same number of people, and 14% 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 Ozarks Food Harvest 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.

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)

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

Ozarks Food Harvest Region

By comparison, seven of the top 10 activities identified by food pantry directors in the Ozarks Food Harvest region are also found in the All Regions Top 10. Most of these activities involve asking for support in the form of money, time, or food.

Three items (highlighted in the table below) differ from the overall group. These include *hosting, sponsoring, or supporting a community garden; having enough refrigeration; and having reliable computer software.*

Notably, two of these activities are related to facilities, a broad category that was not part of the All Regions Top 10. Hosting, sponsoring, or supporting a community activity is also unique to the region's top 10. This activity is ranked 12th in the All Regions Top 10.

Rank	Ozarks - Top 10 Activities (Category included)
1	Grant writing (Financial)
2	Soliciting cash donations (Communications)
3	Offering educational programs in-house (Programs & Partnerships)
4	Being prepared for emergencies (Planning)
5	Recruiting people for leadership roles (Operations)
6	Telling your pantry's story to the public (Communications)
7	Fundraising (Financial)
8	Hosting, sponsoring, or supporting a community garden (Programs & Partnerships)
9	Having enough refrigeration (Facilities)
10	Having reliable computer software (Facilities)

* 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 Ozarks Food Harvest member 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 picking up/receiving food from the food bank

Facilities

Having reliable internet access and computer hardware

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:

- Ozarks Food Harvest member 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, Ozarks Food Harvest member directors indicate that grant writing is an important activity, yet it is not done well within their pantry.
- The need to increase financial resources features highly in the Ozarks Food Harvest region. Enhancing human resources, especially recruiting people for leadership roles, is ranked highly as well.
- Improving key features of pantry facilities, including refrigeration and computer software, ranked high on the list. While not in the top 10, improving office space ranked in the top 15.
- Two activities dealt with programs and partnerships – offering educational programs in-house and hosting, sponsoring, or supporting a community garden. Additional highlighted activities include telling your pantry's story to the public and being prepared for emergencies.

When taken as a whole, Ozarks Food Harvest member 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. The ability of pantries to tell their story to the public can help garner support for a variety of food pantry activities. 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.

In addition, by placing some emphasis on activities outside of the current core mission of food pantries, such as offering educational programs or being involved in a community garden, pantries may be able to better address the multiple challenges their customers face.

Educational 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.



Appendices: Complete Survey Results

Appendix A: Includes the activity rankings for all 50 activities from the Ozarks Food Harvest 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, 56 food pantry directors from the Ozarks Food Harvest 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 Ozarks Food Harvest region (Appendix C, 56 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 - Ozarks Food Harvest Region

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

Having enough parking	24
Giving referrals to educational programs hosted by outside agencies	25
Having an effective board of directors	26
Long-term budgeting	27
Having a sound building	28
Training staff or volunteers	29
Letting people in need know you are there to help	30
Having reliable computer hardware	31
Offering related services in-house	32
Having a clear vision for what pantry wants to accomplish in the future	33
Having an opportunity for customer feedback	34
Having reliable internet access	35
Retaining staff or volunteers	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
Customer intake/registration	41
Short-term budgeting	42
Picking up/receiving food from other sources	43
Handling food safely	44
Accounting	45
Sorting, shelving, and storing food	46
Ordering food from the food bank	47
Picking up/receiving food from the food bank	48
Distributing food	49
Purchasing food from other sources	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 - Ozarks Food Harvest Region

Category	Activity	Category Rank	Within Category Activity Rank	Overall Activity Rank	Average Importance
Communications	Soliciting cash donations	1	1	2	4.24
	Telling your pantry's story to the public		2	6	4.68
	Soliciting food donations		3	11	4.47
	Writing newsletters		4	12	3.16
	Maintaining a website		5	17	3.09
	Managing social media		6	19	3.14
	Letting people in need know you are there to help		7	30	4.89
Planning	Being prepared for emergencies	2	1	4	4.27
	Having enough staff or volunteers on hand		2	16	4.91
	Strategic planning		3	18	4.42
	Being prepared for each food distribution		4	40	4.98
Programs & Partnerships	Offering educational programs in-house	3	1	3	3.64
	Hosting, sponsoring, or supporting a community garden		2	8	3.16
	Soliciting produce donations from local gardeners/farmers		3	21	4.07
	Giving referrals to educational programs hosted by outside agencies		4	25	3.8
	Offering related services in-house		5	32	3.93
	Providing referrals to services offered by outside agencies		6	37	4.29
Facilities	Having enough refrigeration	4	1	9	4.93
	Having reliable computer software		2	10	4.2
	Having good office space		3	14	4.43
	Having enough freezer space		4	20	4.89
	Having enough parking		5	24	4.71
	Having a sound building		6	28	4.86
	Having reliable computer hardware		7	31	4.34
	Having reliable internet access		8	35	4.11
Financial	Grant writing	5	1	1	4.76
	Fundraising		2	7	4.71
	Long-term budgeting		3	27	4.77
	Short-term budgeting		4	42	4.38
	Accounting		5	45	4.21
Governance	Training board members	6	1	15	4.31
	Recruiting board members		2	22	4.2
	Having an effective board of directors		3	26	4.73
	Having a clear vision for what the pantry wants to accomplish in the future		4	33	4.86
	Retaining board members		5	38	4.51
	Having a clear mission/mission statement		6	39	4.73
Operations	Recruiting people for leadership roles	7	1	5	4.27
	Recruiting new staff or volunteers		2	13	4.45
	Sponsoring, hosting, or supporting food drives		3	23	4.09
	Training staff or volunteers		4	29	4.85
	Having an opportunity for customer feedback		5	34	4.23
	Retaining staff or volunteers		6	36	4.89
	Customer intake/registration		7	41	4.87
	Picking up/receiving food from other sources		8	43	4.69
	Handling food safely		9	44	4.98
	Sorting, shelving, and storing food		10	46	4.98
	Ordering food from the food bank		11	47	4.91
	Picking up/receiving food from the food bank		12	48	4.8
	Distributing food		13	49	4.96
	Purchasing food from other sources		14	50	3.71

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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