

Vermonter Poll 2007

Hunger and Food Security in Vermont

Prepared by Michele C. Schmidt
The Center for Rural Studies, University of Vermont
November 2007

Introduction

The Vermonter Poll is an annual public opinion survey of Vermont residents who are 18 years of age and older, conducted by the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont, to gauge Vermonter's opinions on current issues of interest to non-profit agencies, government officials, and researchers. On the 2007 Vermonter Poll, five questions were asked of residents to understand their food security, barriers to providing nutritious food, nutrition programs and resources used in Vermont, and suggestions for improving these programs. (See Appendix A for a complete list of questions).

Methodology

The data used in this report was collected by the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont as part of the annual Vermonter Poll. The survey was conducted between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. beginning on February 26, 2007 and ending on March 8, 2007. The telephone polling was conducted from the University of Vermont using computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI). The sample for the poll was drawn through random digit dialing and used all of the telephone exchanges in the state of Vermont as the sampling frame. Only Vermont residents over the age of eighteen were interviewed. The poll included questions on a variety of issues related to public policy in the state of Vermont. There were 595 respondents to the 2007 Vermonter Poll (Version II). The results based on a group of this size have a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percent at a confidence interval of 95 percent.

Because food security with or without hunger is closely tied to income level, the researchers decided to weight the Vermonter poll data using the 2006 U.S. Census income estimates for the state of Vermont to make the data as accurately representative of lower income Vermonters as possible. Table 1 shows the percentages received by the Vermonter poll for each income category, the actual census percentage, and the weight used in the dataset. Only data collected in quantitative format is weighted, as indicated.

Table 1. Vermonter Poll Data Weight Figures

	VT Poll	Census 2006	Weight
<\$20,000-\$34,999	27.1%	35.4%	1.306273
\$35,000-\$49,999	18.5%	16.6%	0.897297
\$50,000+	54.5%	47.9%	0.878899

Demographics

The average age of respondents was 53.2 years (Std. = 14.9) with a median age of 53 years. The youngest was 18, and the oldest 93. Males comprised 49% (283) and females 51% (298). Education data was collapsed into three categories as follows: 30% (173) attained a high school diploma or GED certificate, 17% (97) completed some college but did not pursue a degree, and 53% (303) completed a degree from an associate's to a post graduate/professional degree. Examining household income by median income in

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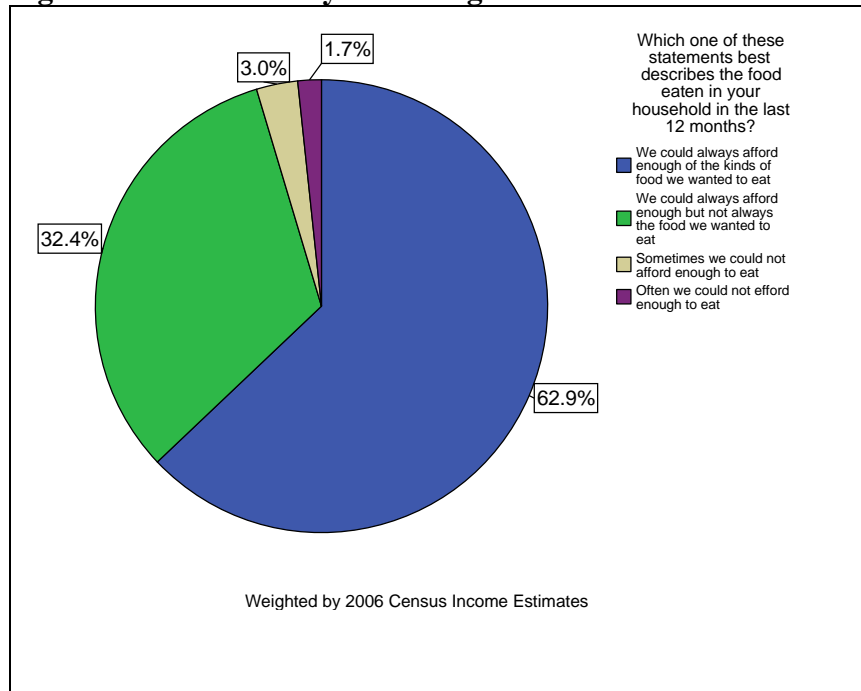
Vermont (\$50,000), 46% (237) of respondents earn less than the median income in Vermont and 54% (283) earn at or above the median income. Respondents had a median household size of two, with a range of one to seven members in one's household. An analysis of family composition showed that 67% (385) of households had no children, while 34% (188) had children in their household. The number of children in households ranged from 1 to 5 with a median of two children and mode of one child. In looking at region of residence, 21% (122) live in Chittenden county (compared to 24% reported by the 2005 Census), 9.5% live in Washington county (compared to 9.5% reported by the 2005 Census) and the remaining 69.5% live throughout the rest of the state.

Findings

Prevalence of Food Security and Hunger in Vermont

When the Vermont Poll data is weighted by the state Census data by income levels, Figure 1 shows that 63% (326) of Vermonters reported that they could always afford enough of the kinds of food they wanted to eat, indicating that they have not food insecurity issues. However, 37% of respondents in total indicated that they have some level of food insecurity. Specifically, 32% (168) could always afford enough food, but not always the kinds of food desired and 3% (15) could sometimes not afford enough to eat. Finally, almost 2% (9) of respondents reported having food insecurity with hunger or they could often not afford enough to eat.

Figure 1. Food Security and Hunger in Vermont



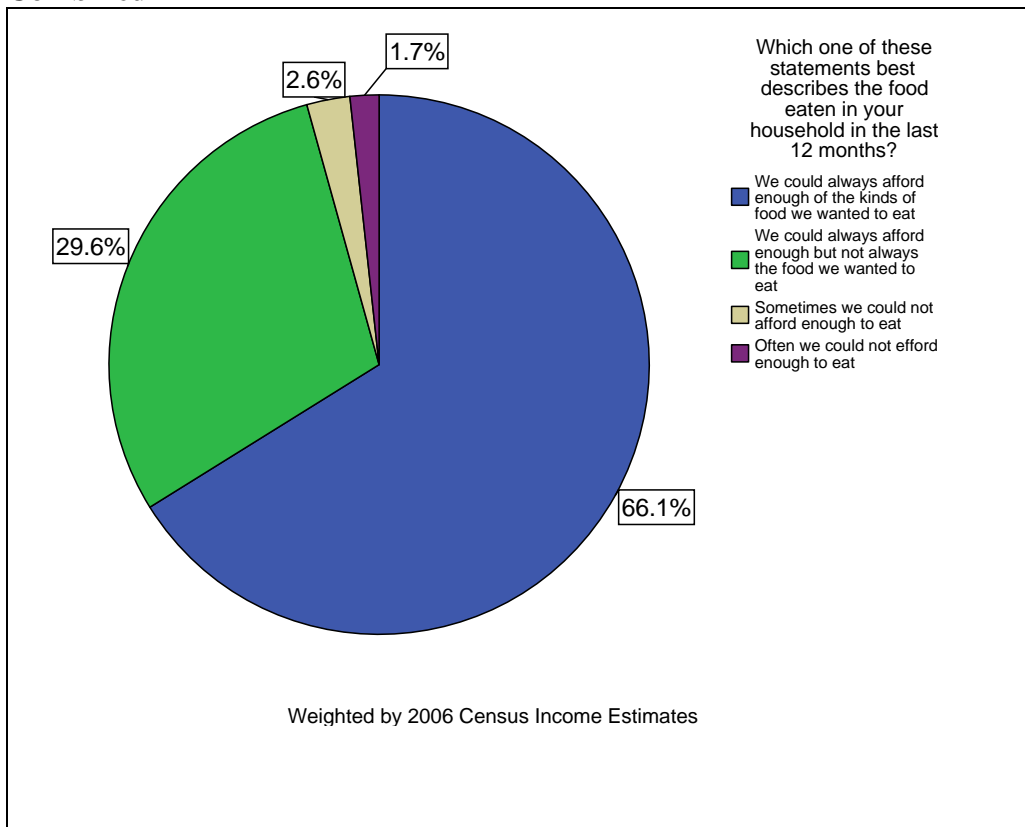
Vermont Poll 2007

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Looking specifically at food security and hunger issues in Chittenden and Washington counties, Figure 2 shows that 66% (100) reported no issues with food security as they could always afford enough of the kinds of food they wanted to eat. Whereas, 34% of respondents collectively indicated that they have some level of food insecurity. Specifically, 30% (45) could always afford enough, but not always the kinds of food desired and 3% (4) could sometimes not afford enough to eat. Finally, almost 2% (3) of respondents reported having food insecurity with hunger or they could often not afford enough to eat. Overall, the data suggests that in Chittenden and Washington counties, food insecurity seems to be slightly less of an issue compared to the entire state.

Figure 2. Food Security and Hunger in Chittenden and Washington Counties Combined



Vermont Poll 2007

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Barriers to Providing Nutritious Food for Self or Family

In total, 38% (214) of respondents indicated that they did not face any barriers to providing nutritious food for themselves or their family members. While, 62% (344) indicated one or more barriers, as categorized in Table 2. This data is not weighted because it was collected and analyzed in open-ended format. The most commonly noted barriers were cost, time and accessibility/availability of fresh, organic, food/produce. Other less common barriers were the influence of family member preferences, convenience, health issues, and lack of education, knowledge and skills.

Table 2. Categorized Barriers to Providing Nutritious Food for Self or Family (n=344)

	Frequency	Percent
Cost	112	33%
Time	78	23%
Accessibility/availability	55	16%
Influence of family members preferences	28	8%
Convenience	27	8%
Health issues	22	6%
Education/ knowledge/ skills	10	3%

Use of Nutrition Programs or Resources

Weighted data shows that 23% (116) or almost a quarter of Vermont households reported having ever used any nutrition programs or resources in Vermont. Similarly, 21% (32) of Vermont households living in Chittenden and Washington counties have ever used nutrition programs or resources in Vermont. Table 3 shows the frequency and percentage of respondents who have used the different types of programs, by the state and Chittenden and Washington counties combined. The most commonly used programs both statewide and regional are Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and Food Stamps. Almost two thirds of Vermont households reported receiving WIC, while fewer households or 26% in Chittenden and Washington counties combined reported receiving this resource.

Further, 13% of Vermonters reported receiving food stamps, which is slightly higher than the 2006 estimated figure from the U.S. Census Bureau of 9% (22,717). Looking at the county level, 12% of households in Chittenden and Washington counties combined reported receiving Food Stamps, which is also slightly higher than the 2005 estimated figure from the U.S. Census Bureau of 7% (6,124). School meals and summer food program meals were also resources used by 8% of Vermont households and 9% of county level households. Half of respondents indicated that they have used another program not indicated on the list provided to respondents. These resources included nutrition programs through medical professionals and weight loss or dietary programs.

Vermont Poll 2007

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Table 3. Nutrition Programs or Resources Used in Vermont

	Vermont	Chittenden and Washington Counties
WIC	32% (37)	26% (8)
Food Stamps	13% (15)	12% (4)
School meals/summer food	8% (9)	9% (3)
Meals on Wheels	3% (4)	7% (2)
Senior meals	1% (1)	0
Food Shelf	3% (4)	7% (2)
Other	50% (58)	58% (18)
Don't know	5% (6)	0
Refused	3% (4)	4% (1)

Suggestions to Improve Programs/Resources

Almost half of respondents 49% (54) of the 110 who answered the question about suggestions to improve nutrition programs and resources indicated that they did not have any suggestions. The categorized suggestions of those who provided them (51%, 56) are indicated in Table 4 (this data is also unweighted as it was collected and analyzed in open-ended format). Almost a quarter of respondents (23%) desired more education on cooking food and ways to provide nutritious meals for themselves and their children. Several respondents also indicated that they would like more education on nutrition and diabetes. An overall 34% of respondents suggested changes to the food offered by programs, such as more variety (less starch and dairy), more fresh and local products, and improved overall quality and taste. Several responses fell in an overarching category of programmatic changes, such as expanding services, extending the time frame and eligibility requirements, and improving outreach to promote better awareness of programs.

Table 4. Suggestions to Improve Nutrition Programs and Resources (n=56)

	Frequency	Percent
Education on cooking and nutrition	13	23%
Provide more variety of food	11	20%
Expand programs	6	11%
Target deserving people	6	11%
Provide more fresh and local ingredients	5	9%
Extend time frame/eligibility	4	7%
Improve outreach and awareness of programs	4	7%
Improve quality and taste of food	3	5%

Vermont Poll 2007

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Conclusions

Responses from the 2007 Vermont Poll show that 63% of Vermonters surveyed are food secure, while 37% are considered food insecure with or without hunger (1.7% are food insecure with hunger). This is lower than the percentages provided by the Vermont Campaign to end Childhood Hunger, which states that 9% of Vermonters are food insecure with or without hunger and, specifically, 3.6% are food insecure with hunger. In Chittenden and Washington counties combined, 66% reported no issues with food security, while 34% of respondents collectively indicated that they have some level of food insecurity (1.7% are also food insecure with hunger).

Even though the residents polled were more likely to be food secure, they still reported facing barriers to provide nutritious food for themselves or their family. The most commonly given barriers were cost, time and accessibility/availability of fresh, organic, food/produce. Other less common barriers were the influence of family member preferences, convenience, health issues, and lack of education, knowledge and skills.

Furthermore, 23% of Vermonters reported having used nutrition programs or resources in Vermont, which could have been at the present time or in the past. At the county level, 21% of households in Chittenden and Washington counties have used nutrition programs or resources in Vermont. The main programs used both statewide and regionally were WIC and Food Stamps. Suggestions made to improve Vermont programs and resources fell into three overarching themes: 1) Provide clients with more education on cooking food and ways to provide nutritious meals for themselves and their children; 2) Change food program offerings such as more variety (less starch and dairy), more fresh and local products, and improved overall quality and taste; and 3) Change services, such as expanding services, extending the time frame and eligibility requirements, and improving outreach to promote better awareness of programs.

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Appendix A. Hunger Questions Asked on the 2007 Vermont Poll

Q: q34a *****

Which one of these statements best describes the food eaten
in your household in the last 12 months?

- 1 We could always afford enough of the kinds of food we wanted to eat
- 2 We could always afford enough but not always the food we wanted to eat
- 3 Sometimes we could not afford enough to eat
- 4 Often we could not afford enough to eat
- 5 Don't know [DO NOT READ]
- 6 Refused [DO NOT READ]

Q: q34b *****

What, if any, are barriers to providing nutritious food
for yourself or your family?

Q: q34c *****

Have you ever used any nutrition programs or resources in Vermont?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Don't know [DO NOT READ]
- 4 Refused [DO NOT READ]

Q: q34d *****

What programs have you used?
[INTERVIEWER PROMPTS: such as Food Stamps, WIC or meals on wheels?]

[DO NOT READ LIST. LISTEN AND SELECT ALL THAT APPLY]

1. Food Stamps
2. Local food shelf
3. School meals
4. WIC (Women, Infant, and Children)
5. Child care meal program
6. Summer food program
7. Senior meals
8. Meals on wheels
9. Other (Please specify)
10. Don't know
11. Refused

Q: q34e *****

What suggestions do you have for making this program better?