

Hunger Free Mountain Empire: 2022 Community Food Survey

The Hunger Free Mountain Empire project was launched in 2021 as part of the countywide Hunger Free San Diego initiative to improve food services in each community using a data-informed and community-driven approach. The nonprofit organizations and community clinics that are part of Hunger Free Mountain Empire include San Diego Hunger Coalition, San Ysidro Health, Mountain Empire Unified School District, Southern Indian Health Council, San Diego Food Bank, Feeding San Diego, the Mountain Empire Collaborative, and other partners.

In summer 2022, San Diego Hunger Coalition worked with San Ysidro Health, the food banks, and other Mountain Empire Collaborative partners to develop and disseminate a survey to hear from community members about food needs and availability in the Mountain Empire region. This summary report will be shared with the Mountain Empire residents who participated in the survey, as well as other Mountain Empire stakeholders. Members of the Hunger Free Mountain Empire initiative will utilize this information to better plan food services in the region. All survey respondents were entered into a drawing for three \$50 VISA gift cards, which were mailed in December. A special thank you to San Diego Hunger Coalition's summer MPH intern, Malia Morgan, for her help in developing the survey.

Summary of Findings

The survey included 22 questions about food access and affordability and was available in English and Spanish both online and hard copy. It was completed by 85 individuals between September 19, 2022 – October 28, 2022. Most respondents were from the communities of Potrero (26 respondents), Campo (20 respondents), or Tecate (15 respondents). Of the respondents, 85% were female, and the average size of household was 4 people.

The first food-related questions asked about household nutrition security:

- 70% of respondents said that they were not able to afford as many fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats as they'd like.
- 73% of respondents also said that within the last 6 months, their self-purchased food ran out and they did not have money to get more.
- 41% said that at some point in the last 6 months they or someone in their family ate less or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food.

When asked which types of food are hard to get locally:

- 68% of respondents said meat.
- 62% said fresh vegetables.
- 63% said fresh fruit.
- One person noted that the quality of the fruit and vegetables available to them was "horrible."
- Another noted that, *"Water is sometimes out of stock and dairy doesn't last very long before expiration. Obviously everything is also very expensive."*
- Another respondent said, *"In the area where we live, prices are very high and if we want to save and go to a store, it is impossible since the distance does not help and what one wants to save goes automatically in gasoline! It really is very complicated!"*

Several questions asked respondents about their utilization of different food assistance programs:

- 65% of respondents are currently receiving food from food pantries or distributions.
- However, 67% of these respondents indicated that the food pantries and distributions are not sufficient in getting what their household needs.
- Only 30% of respondents are enrolled in CalFresh despite the 65% currently obtaining food from food distributions.
 - When asked why they aren't enrolled in CalFresh:
 - 43% indicated that they need application assistance, were worried about immigration status, or needed more information about the program. 26% indicated that they applied but were not approved.
 - One person said that haven't applied for CalFresh because they *"don't want to take away from people that need it more than we do."*
- Of those that are not receiving any type of food assistance:
 - Only 9 out of 37 people reported not needing food assistance. The remaining 28 people (76%) indicated that they don't access food assistance because they were either not eligible, did not have enough information about the programs, didn't want others to know they needed it, were concerned about immigration status, or reported that the programs are too difficult/inconvenient to use. Additionally, 26 out of these 37 respondents were in either Potrero (13), Campo (9), or Tecate (4).

When asked to write what food assistance information would be most helpful for them and their neighbors, and what they think is the best way to support people experiencing hunger in their community:

- Most respondents stated that they need more accessible and easier to find information and access to food assistance in their community.
- Common suggestions for better information sharing included:
 - Posting flyers around town, on local bulletin boards, or on Facebook.
 - More pop-up food distribution locations.
- A detailed list of all responses can be found at the end of this report.

The last question asked where they generally get information about their community:

- Word of mouth was the most common response as to where people get their information, followed by Facebook and then schools.

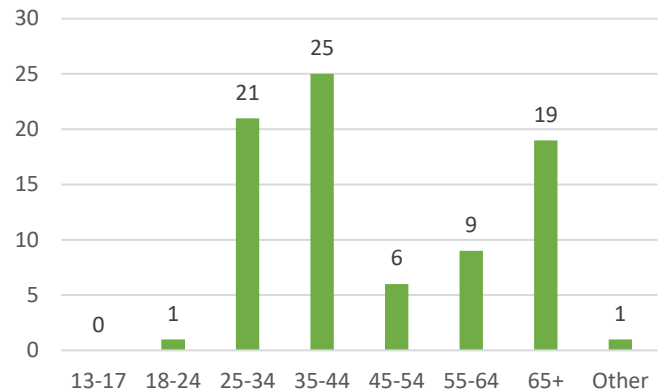
Survey Data

Demographics of Survey Respondents

Question 1: What is your age?

The survey was completed by 85 people in the Mountain Empire region between September 19, 2022 – October 28, 2022. The most common age range among respondents was between 33-44 with 25 within this range. See the graph to the right for the distribution across the age ranges from all respondents.

Age of Respondents



Question 2: What is your gender identify?

Of those who reported their gender, 85% identified as a female, totaling 64 female responses and only 11 male responses.

Female	64
Male	11
Prefer not to say	2

Question 3: Including yourself, how many people live in your household?

The average household size among respondents was 4, and the most common size of household was 4 as well with 21 responses. The second most common was 5 with 17 responses. Of note, 67% of respondents had a household of 4 or more, with 6 respondents reporting a household size of greater than 6.

1 person household	9
2-person household	7
3-person household	9
4-person household	21
5-person household	17
6-person household	7
7+ people household	6

Question 4: What race/ethnicity do you identify yourself with?

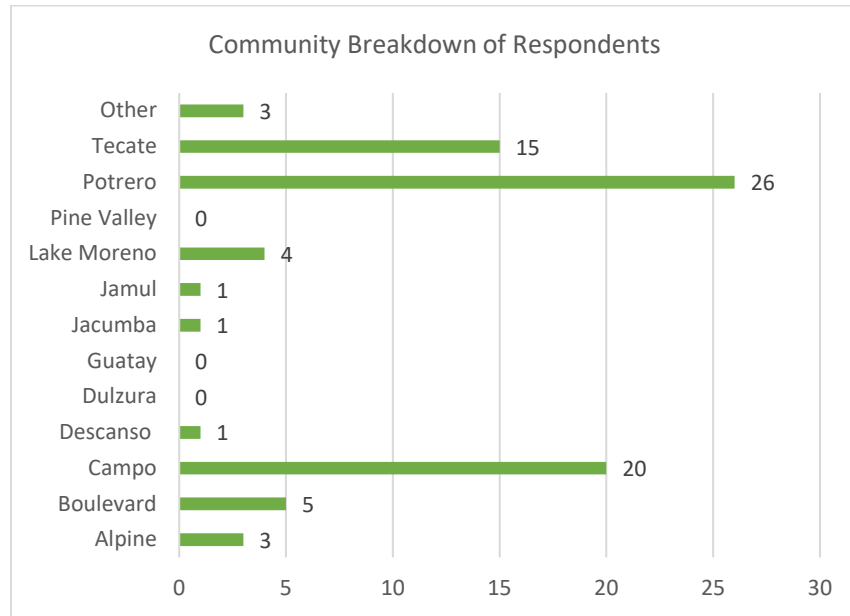
The racial breakdown of respondents shows that 69%, or 62 total respondents, identified as Hispanic/Latino. 21 respondents identified as White, 3 as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 2 Black/African American.

American Indian or Alaskan Native	3
Asian	0
Black or African American	2
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0

Hispanic/Latino	62
Middle Eastern	0
White	21
Other	2

Question 5: In what community do you live (or spend nights, if you are homeless?)

When asked where they live, the most common responses were Potrero (26 respondents), Campo (20 respondents), and Tecate (15 respondents). See the bar chart below for a breakdown of all respondents.



Nutrition Security in Mountain Empire

Question 6: Do you feel you're able to afford as many fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats as you'd like?

Of the 81 people that responded to this question:

- 70% of respondents said “No.”
- 19 people responded with “Yes,” indicating that they can afford these foods.
 - Of note, 7 out of the 19 respondents that can afford enough of these foods also responded that they are receiving CalFresh benefits.

Yes	19
No	57
Don't know	5

Question 7: How true was this statement for you and your household in the last 6 months: The food that we purchased did not last, and we did not have money to get more.

73% of respondents also said that at some point in the past 6 months, the food they purchased did not last and they did not have enough to get more. 21 out of the 79 (27% of respondents) said that this was often the case.

Often True	21
Sometimes True	37
Never True	20
Don't know	1

Questions 8 & 9: In the last 6 months, did you or anyone in your household cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there was not enough money for food?

41% of respondents reported that they or someone in their household cut the size of their meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food within the last 6 months.

Almost every month	11
Sometimes but not every month	22
Only 1 or 2 months	1
No	44
Don't know or refuse	4

Question 10: Do you use any of these resources to help your household get food?

The potential answers to this question are listed below, and respondents were asked to check all that apply. The most common form of food assistance among respondents was local food distributions with 38 responses, followed by CalFresh with 29, and then school meals with 12.

CalFresh	29
Senior Nutrition program	7
Local free food distribution	38
WIC	6
School meals for my children	12
Free Summer meal programs at schools, camps, or other community sites	6
Other	7

Question 11: If you don't use any of the resources listed in Question 10, what is the reason?

The potential answers are listed below, and respondents were once again asked to check all that apply. 37 people responded that they do not receive any sort of food assistance for varying reasons. The most common reason reported was that they do not need food assistance (9 responses), and the second most common that they do not know if they are eligible (8 responses). Of note, 28 of these 37 responses (76%) indicated that they don't access food assistance because they were either not eligible, did not have enough information about the programs, didn't want others to know they needed it, were concerned about immigration status, or reported that the programs are too difficult/inconvenient to use. Additionally, 26 out of these 37 respondents were in either Potrero (13), Campo (9), or Tecate (4).

I don't need food assistance	9
I don't know if I'm eligible	8
I don't qualify	5
I tried applying but was not successful	5
I don't want others to know I need/use food assistance	5
I'm concerned about my immigration status	2
I don't know where to find more information about these resources	2
These programs are too difficult to use	0
The locations are too far away	2
The days and times are not convenient for me	1
Other	4

Question 12: Do you have a place to refrigerate food?

Yes	81
No	1

Question 13: Do you have a place to cook food?

Yes	81
No	1

Question 14: Do you have a place to freeze food?

Yes	78
No	4

Question 15: How often do you get your food from these places?

The potential responses to this question are listed below. The most common place to obtain food for respondents was the supermarket with 61 respondents, 32 of whom said they often get food from the supermarket often, 18 reporting sometimes, and 11 reporting rarely. The second most common was local stores with 46 respondents saying they get food from stores, 24 reporting often, 13 sometimes, and 9 rarely. The third most common was food assistance, followed by convenience stores, restaurants/fast food, farmers markets, and gardens, which only 11 people reported ever using.

Food Assistance or Agency	Often	6
	Sometimes	19
	Rarely	8
	Never	18
Supermarket	Often	32
	Sometimes	18
	Rarely	11
	Never	10
Local store	Often	24
	Sometimes	13
	Rarely	9
	Never	3
Convenience Store/Minimart	Often	9
	Sometimes	10
	Rarely	11
	Never	13
Restaurant or Fast Food	Often	9
	Sometimes	6
	Rarely	14
	Never	10
Farmers Market	Often	8
	Sometimes	3
	Rarely	10
	Never	16
Garden	Often	4
	Sometimes	2
	Rarely	5
	Never	19

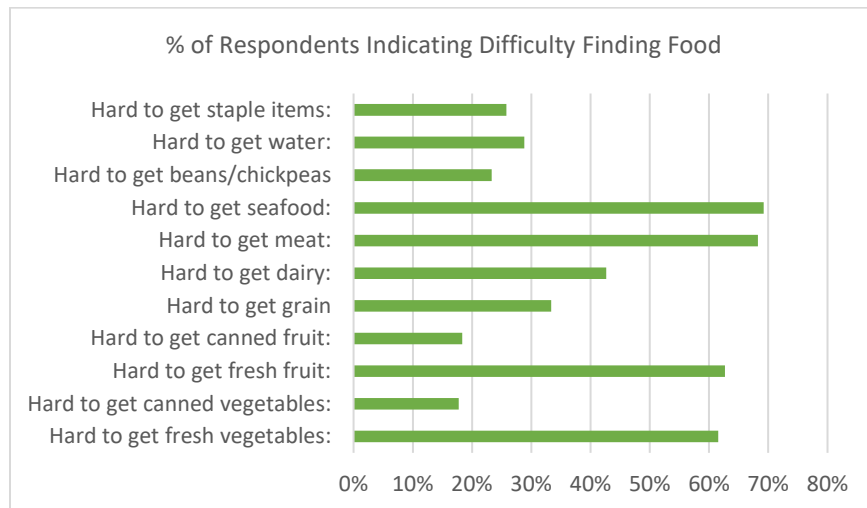
Question 16: How do you usually get food home?

Bus	2
Own Car	65
Ride/Carpool from Friend/relative, etc.	6
Bike	0
Walk	3
Other	0

Question 17: Which foods are hard for you to get locally and why?

The breakdown of responses is listed below. The most common responses to local food difficulty were that meat and seafood were too hard to get, with 43 out of 63 (68%) reporting difficulty with seafood and 45 out of 65 (69%) people reporting difficulty with meat. Both cost and distance were cited roughly the same number of times for the reason as to why they are hard to get locally. Fresh fruits and vegetables were right behind meat and seafood with 42 and 40 respondents reporting difficulty, both citing distance as an equal barrier for both. The percentage of respondents finding each food listed as difficult to get locally is below. A good summary of the feeling captured by respondents was given by one who said the following,

“In the area where we live, prices are very high and if we want to save and go to a store, it is impossible since the distance does not help and what one wants to save goes automatically in gasoline!! It really is very complicated!”



Reported Barriers to Access by Food Type:

Fresh Vegetables	Yes	40	Cost	15
	No	25	Too Far	17
			Transportation	1
Canned Vegetables	Yes	11	Cost	3
	No	51	Too Far	6
			Transportation	2
Fresh Fruits	Yes	42	Cost	19
	No	25	Too Far	15
			Transportation	1
Canned Fruits	Yes	11	Cost	3
	No	49	Too Far	4
			Transportation	1
Grains	Yes	20	Cost	5
	No	40	Too Far	8
			Transportation	1
Dairy	Yes	26	Cost	9
	No	35	Too Far	7
			Transportation	1
Meat	Yes	43	Cost	17
	No	20	Too Far	17
			Transportation	1
Seafood	Yes	45	Cost	18
	No	20	Too Far	17
			Transportation	1
Beans/chickpeas	Yes	14	Cost	3
	No	46	Too Far	3
			Transportation	1
Water	Yes	17	Cost	3
	No	42	Too Far	9
			Transportation	1
Staple items	Yes	16	Cost	2
	No	46	Too Far	5
			Transportation	1

Question 18: Are you receiving free food/food boxes from food pantries or distribution sites?

The potential responses to this question are shown in the graph below, and respondents were asked to check all that apply. Of those that responded, 65% (52 out of 80 total) said that they are receiving food. Of note, though, only 17 of these 52 (33%) reported that they get what their

household needs from these food distributions. The remaining 35 respondents indicated that they need more meat, fresh produce, or more food distributions. The breakdown of responses is provided below. 19 out of the 24 who are not receiving assistance live in either Campo (5), Tecate (6), or Potrero (8).



Question 19: What barriers do you face attending the food pantries or distribution sites in your area?

The potential answers are listed below, and respondents were asked to check all that apply. The most common barrier to food distribution access is not knowing about food pantries that are close, followed by difficulty of days/times and confusion as to which ones are open to the public. Of the 68 people that responded to this question, 72% were either from Potrero (22 respondents), Campo (14 respondents), or Tecate (13 respondents).

I don't know about food pantries that are close to me.	24
I'm confused as to which ones are open to special groups/open to the public.	13
The distribution days/times are not open when I am available	15
I don't have transportation.	4
Locations are too far away.	5
I can't get there during the hours they are open.	8
I am concerned about food quality, safety, and handling.	5
I don't like the foods they offer.	2
The food packages include items that are not culturally relevant to my family and/or do not align with our religious practices.	4
Other	4

Question 20: Are you currently receiving CalFresh?

Only 30% of respondents that answered (24 out of 79) are currently enrolled in CalFresh despite 65% of respondents using food distributions. When asked why they are not enrolled, the most common response was that they tried to apply but were not approved (11 responses), followed by not being familiar with CalFresh (10 responses). 43% of those not enrolled indicated that they need application assistance, were worried about immigration status of family members, or needed more information about the program. Another 26% indicated that they applied but were not approved.

Why not?	Yes, I am currently receiving Cal Fresh.	9
	I am not familiar with Cal Fresh.	10
	I don't want others to know I need/use them.	0
	I don't know where to get help to apply for Cal Fresh.	2
	I had problems with the application and didn't know where to get help.	1
	The Cal Fresh application process is too long for me.	2
	I tried to apply for Cal Fresh, but I was not approved.	11
	I am nervous about sharing my personal information when applying for Cal Fresh.	1
	I worry about how receiving Cal Fresh benefits will affect my family's immigration status.	4
	Other	9

Question 22: Where do you get information about community resources?

The most common information source was word of mouth, but Facebook proved to be the second highest with 31 responses. Better marketing for food assistance on Facebook pages and in schools look to be effective ways to increase awareness on food programs.

Local newspaper	2
Word of mouth	48
Instagram	1
Facebook	31
Clinic	7
School	22
Church	3
Library	10
2-1-1 San Diego	3
Other	5

Question 21: What food assistance information would be helpful for you and your friends/neighbors? What do you think is the best way to support your neighbors, friends, or family in Mt. Empire who may be experiencing hunger?

The answers to this question varied across respondents but included ideas such as more food pantries every week, sharing more information through effective sources of information such as local Facebook groups or in town local bulletin boards, food sites dedicated to allowing people to cook there, and enrolling in CalFresh. Respondents were clear that they would like more information on how they can better access food assistance in their communities most conveniently for them. All responses received are below.

More information and more times available.
More food pantries every week.
Posting around town and local Facebook groups.
I think more pop-up locations or friendly sites like schools.
Posted maybe on a local bulletin board when these sites, dates, and times are. Not everyone has social media, most times it's not posted on social media.
More local postings about food banks.
Set up cooking sites for people who are not able to cook in their living situations. Also opening a fully stocked grocery store would be nice. Something that isn't too expensive and has good quality food at an affordable price.
If the people handing out food would stop taking pictures and posting on Facebook.
They should make more publicity about these aids, there are many people who do not know. I barely found out because a lady told me at the clinic.
Maybe have bigger supermarkets.
Offer rides for those who can't go to the store or for water.
More food distributions.
Start a pantry together, sharing 1 or 2 cans per person in order to put together a food pantry.
Offer them something of the little that was in my home.
The help of CalFresh is really a great help personally and as a family it has helped us a lot!! The process is long and there are times when the interviewers make you feel slighted!! It's sad but it's reality. At least that's what I've discussed with several moms!!
A food bank near our area.
More food aid in this area.
Asking for extra to share.
Bringing food.
Share more information.
I share my food usually. But some people are moochers
Too much-starchy foods
Making the place known and giving them a ride or the telephone number of the place.
More distribution sites
Times are hard! Provide enough info for food resources and food distribution sights