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# INTRODUCTION

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Manitou Springs community has an ongoing interest in food and the role of food in health and well-being. *Plan Manitou*, Manitou Springs' community master plan-hazard mitigation plan, identifies a broad goal of enhancing access to affordable, healthy, local foods supported by policies that advocate for collaboration with local and regional food providers, support for production and sales of healthy, affordable food, and support for sustainable food practices. In 2013, City Council adopted Resolution No. 2213 committing the City to participate in the Livewell Colorado Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) initiative and implement strategies to increase access to healthy, local food (Appendix A). In 2019, City Council adopted Resolution 1919 establishing the commitment to a sustainable environment, including an action to complete a Food Assessment and Action Plan to increase food security.

The *Plan Manitou* implementation plan includes an action to “establish a baseline understanding of food access and security needs within the community.” In late 2019, the City embarked on this Comprehensive Food Assessment project. The overarching goal was to answer these questions:

- What elements comprise our local and regional food system?
- How do individuals obtain their food, and what barriers do they perceive to obtaining healthy, nutritious food?
- What demographic groups are most vulnerable to hunger, and how can we improve their food security?
- How can we improve access to healthy, local foods for all?

Manitou Springs' primary food-related goal is to: *Enhance access to affordable, healthy, local foods and promote public investment in a sustainable, resilient food system.* - *Plan Manitou*

A primary goal of this project was to document the City's food system and environment, and the many community partners and organizations that comprise the City's food insecurity support system. This assessment includes quantitative data collection and qualitative findings. Project staff interviewed staff/volunteers from organizations that serve the food insecure and families experiencing food insecurity, and convened stakeholder groups for Restaurant/Food Retail and Farming/Gardening/Sustainability. Each group was comprised of enthusiastic residents and professionals who provided important feedback. A Community Food Assessment Survey was distributed online and in paper format to Manitou Springs residents, with widespread distribution through print and social media, newsletters, churches, Manitou Springs School District, food pantries, and other civic entry points. 144 Manitou Springs residents of completed the survey. Gift cards were offered to food insecure families for sharing their time and experiences.

The assessment began with a Community Kick Off meeting on December 2, 2019 to discuss the project and receive initial feedback, which helped staff to compile the project stakeholder list (Appendix B). A Food Advisory Committee was convened to review information; advise on outreach; and provide local perspective and input to shape the project approach.

To ensure authentic public participation, two community meetings were proposed. The second community meeting was cancelled due to Covid 19 and social distancing requirements.

City Planning staff applied guidance from the International Association for Public Participation (IAPP) to develop a Public Participation Plan for the project (Appendix C). The IAPP identifies five levels of community engagement, and the project manager committed to reach level three - "Involve." A glossary of food policy terms is provided (Appendix D).

This document highlights community data that is vital to understanding barriers to accessing affordable, healthy food for residents in different demographic groups, particularly low-income, and their vulnerability to hunger, food insecurity, and ability to access healthy food. This assessment provides information on what residents are passionate about and contains a list of short-, mid-, and long-term actionable opportunities to improve the food security system for all residents. This project was completed in a compressed time-frame, and the second meeting to share recommendations was cancelled due to Covid 19. For these reasons, the mid- and long-term recommendations should be more fully vetted with the public.

**A key objective of this process is to help facilitate and strengthen partnerships that will be critical to implementation.**

This project is timely as partners at all levels of government are making food access a priority. Multi-sector stakeholders, state agencies, and the Governor's Office have endorsed the implementation of *The Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger* (endhungerco.org). Governor Hickenlooper appointed the Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council to strengthen healthy food access and local food systems. Locally, El Paso County recently completed a Phase 2 Food System Assessment. We expect that this activity will provide us with additional resources for plan implementation.

## **COVID 19 CRISIS AND FOOD INSECURITY**

As a result of the Covid 19 public health crisis, food insecurity has dramatically increased across the region, state, and nation. Local organizations have responded:

- St. Andrew's Church/Manitou Springs Community Food Pantry: the building is closed but volunteers are providing food bundles to people outside. Pantry volunteers expect the number of families in need to increase.
- Manitou Springs School District: Providing daily food deliveries to Ute Pass Elementary and High School; Friday food pantry bags; and deliveries to motels and mobile home neighborhoods.
- Care and Share Food Bank: Mobile food truck initiated monthly emergency food distribution on Tuesday, June 2, 11 am – noon, at the Pool/Fitness Center.

In addition, this situation has impacted supply chains and disrupted labor supply, resulting in shortages of fresh and shelf-stable foods.

## IMPACTS OF HUNGER

The impacts of hunger on individuals and families are far-reaching and affect communities across the State of Colorado. Being food-secure and having access to healthy foods positively impacts overall health and well-being at every stage of life. Academic research links hunger to negative health and behavioral health outcomes, and food security and access to healthy foods to positive health and behavioral health outcomes. The positive impacts of being food-secure include:

- Reduced obesity, diabetes and malnutrition;<sup>1</sup>
- Healthier babies;<sup>2</sup>
- Improved early childhood development;<sup>3</sup>
- Improved educational outcomes;<sup>4</sup>
- Reduced risk for heart disease and high blood pressure;<sup>5</sup>
- Decreased depression and stress;<sup>6</sup>
- Lower suicide rates for teens;<sup>7</sup>
- Improved graduation rates (by 18%); and<sup>8</sup>
- Lower rates of nursing home utilizations for seniors; greater independence<sup>9,10</sup>

Recent data show that health care costs resulting directly from food insecurity in El Paso County for adults only (\$6,840), was over \$90M per year. It is estimated that food-insecure adults in El Paso County spend \$1,556 more per year on health care than people who are food secure.<sup>11</sup>

Since the City of Manitou Springs values overall health and well-being, increasing food security in the community will enhance well-being across all demographic groups.

<sup>1</sup> Hickson M, Ettinger de Cuba S, Weiss I, Donofrio G and Cook J, "Too Hungry to Learn: Food Insecurity and School Readiness," *Children's HealthWatch*, 2012

<sup>2</sup> Foster M, Jiang M, Gibson-Davis C M, "The Effect of the WIC Program on the Health of Newborns," *Health Services Research*, Vol. 45, No. 4, August 2010: 1083-1104

<sup>3</sup> Hickson M, Ettinger de Cuba S, Weiss I, Donofrio G and Cook J, "Too Hungry to Learn: Food Insecurity and School Readiness," *Children's HealthWatch*, 2012

<sup>4</sup> Hickson M, Ettinger de Cuba S, Weiss I, Donofrio G and Cook J, "Too Hungry to Learn: Food Insecurity and School Readiness," *Children's HealthWatch*, 2012

<sup>5</sup> Ford E S, "Food Security and Cardiovascular Disease Risk Among Adults in the United States: Findings from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2003–2008," *Preventing Chronic Disease*, Vol. 10, 2013: 130244

<sup>6</sup> Whitaker R C, Phillips S M and Orzol S M, "Food Insecurity and the Risks of Depression and Anxiety in Mothers and Behavior Problems in Their Preschool-Aged Children," *Pediatrics*, Vol. 118, No. 3, 2006: e859-e868

<sup>7</sup> Alaimo K, Olson C M and Frongillo E A, "Family Food Insufficiency, But Not Low Family Income, is Positively Associated with Dysthymia and Suicide Symptoms in Adolescents," *Journal of Nutrition*, Vol. 132, No. 4, 2002: 719-725.

<sup>8</sup> Executive Office of the President of the United States, "Long-Term Benefits of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; December 2015

<sup>9</sup> Ziliak J and Gundersen C, *Food Insecurity Among Older Adults*, AARP Foundation, August 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel L J, Szanton S L, Cahill R, et al, "Does the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Affect Hospital Utilization Among Older Adults? The Case of Maryland," *Population Health Management*, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> <https://public.tableau.com/profile/feeding.america.research#!/vizhome/TheHealthcareCostsofFoodInsecurity/HealthcareCosts>

## FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE FOOD INSECURITY

Many factors contribute to equitable access to food and food security in communities. The most important indicators are income, family size, and cost of living. Access to healthy, nutritious, and affordable foods in local communities is also contingent on many factors, such as proximity to fresh food retail and the ability to procure and produce food. This section will present an overview of available demographic data, income and self-sufficiency information, and other information that influences food insecurity.

### INCOME AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

When considering local food insecurity and ability to access fresh, nutritious foods to meet household needs, it is critical to understand how financial pressures may impact affordability and accessibility for all residents. This is particularly true in areas where the average income to meet all needs is much higher than the national average. In Colorado, the cost of living is 21.1% higher than the US average.<sup>12</sup> In Manitou Springs, the cost of living is 17.6% higher than the national average.<sup>13</sup>

Data shows a wide variation in income among in Manitou Springs (MS) residents. While the median income is \$65,396, the per capita income is just \$42,495. As of January 1, 2018, Manitou Springs has an estimated population of 5,346 representing 2,497 households.<sup>14</sup>

As shown in Table 1, there is a wide gap in income in MS, with a large group of residents (18%) earning less than \$25,000 a year, while nearly 36% earn over \$100,000 annually.<sup>15</sup>

**Table 1: Annual Household Income in MS, 2018**

Annual Household Income	Percentage of Manitou Springs Residents
Less than \$25,000	18%
Between \$25,000-\$35,000	13.7%
Between \$35,000-\$50,000	10%
Between \$50,000-\$75,000	12.7%
Between \$75,000-\$100,000	10%
More than \$100,000	35.6%

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.bestplaces.net/cost\\_of\\_living/state/colorado](https://www.bestplaces.net/cost_of_living/state/colorado)

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.bestplaces.net/cost\\_of\\_living/city/colorado/manitou\\_springs](https://www.bestplaces.net/cost_of_living/city/colorado/manitou_springs)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.incomebyzipcode.com/colorado/80829>

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>

Table 2 below addressed household financial constraints. The Self-Sufficiency Standard for El Paso County shows that in order to pay for housing, food, transportation, childcare, health care, taxes, and miscellaneous costs, households must make twice the federal poverty rate, shown in Table 2, below.<sup>16</sup>

The income information from Table 1 and the Self-Sufficiency Standard in Table 2 indicate that a significant portion of MS residents live at or below the area Self-Sufficiency Standard.

**Table 2: El Paso County Self-Sufficiency Standard, 2018**

Family Make Up	Annual Income
1 adult	\$22,815
1 adult and 1 infant	\$47,135
1 adult and 1 preschooler	\$46,790
1 adult, 1 preschooler and 1 school age child	\$57,711
2 adults, 1 infant and 1 preschooler	\$72,267
2 adults and 2 school age children	\$58,358

## POVERTY

The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is a measure of income defined by the federal government to determine who is eligible for food subsidies, programs, and benefits. However, the FPL does not take into account the cost of living and livable wage for a specific geographic area. The Department of Health and Human Services updates the poverty guidelines each January. The Federal Poverty Level varies based on number of people in a household and is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Federal Poverty Level (FPL), 2020<sup>17</sup>**

Federal Poverty Level (FPL)		48 States & DC (Excludes Alaska and HI)		
# of People in Household	100% FPL	130% FPL	200% FPL	
One	\$12,760	\$16,588	\$25,520	
Two	\$17,240	\$22,412	\$34,480	
Three	\$21,720	\$28,236	\$43,440	
Four	\$26,200	\$34,060	\$52,400	
Five	\$30,680	\$39,884	\$61,360	

<sup>16</sup> <https://cclponline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/el-paso-county-factsheet.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>

In 2017, the poverty rate in Manitou Springs was 9.2%.<sup>18</sup> In 2018, approximately 485 Manitou Springs residents (9.22%) were living at or below the federal poverty level. The demographic group in Manitou Springs with the highest percentage of individuals living in poverty is females ages 18-24, followed by females age 25-34, and then males 55-64 years of age.

Of the 4,750 White residents in MS, 9% are living at or below the poverty level; of the 27 Black/African American residents in MS, 100% are living at or below the poverty level; of the 75 Asian residents, 20% are living at or below the poverty level; and of 233 Hispanic/Latino residents, 19.7% are at or below the poverty level. The higher poverty level for minority groups indicates that equity issues and racial disparities in poverty rates and potential food insecurity exist in MS, as in many communities across the country.<sup>19</sup>

Census income data also identifies residents living at or below 130% and 200% FPL, as they may qualify for certain government programs. In 2016, when the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility threshold was 130% FPL, 1,041 MS residents were eligible, or 19.7% of the population. That same year, 1,359 residents of zip code 80829<sup>20</sup> were at or below 200% FPL and eligible for Medicaid<sup>21</sup> (24.5%), with 1,188 enrolled. This 87% participation rate is much lower than the State average.

As mentioned previously, the Self-Sufficiency Standard and Federal Poverty Level income thresholds are dramatically different. Using the Self-Sufficiency Standard, one adult living in MS would need to make nearly double the poverty level to make ends meet; for families with children this gap widens even more. Even when residents' incomes are twice the federal poverty rate (200% FPL), they are still eligible for Medicaid. Just over 25% of Manitou Springs residents are eligible for Medicaid.<sup>22</sup>

## AGE

The City's senior population is not the demographic group with the highest percentage of low-income individuals; however, other factors experienced by seniors may lead to food insecurity, such as: mobility issues, physical and mental health issues, proximity to services, communication challenges, and isolation.

## FOOD INSECURITY IN EL PASO COUNTY

Feeding America, the nation's largest anti-hunger organization, states that "food insecurity describes a household's inability to provide enough food for every person to live an active, healthy life. Food insecurity is one way we can measure and assess the risk of hunger. In the United States currently, 1 in 9 (11.1%) people struggle with hunger."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> US Census: <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/manitou-springs-co>

<sup>19</sup> As MS has a relatively small population, there is a larger than usual margin of error due to small sample size.

<sup>20</sup> Zip code 80829 also includes residents of Crystal Hills Subdivision in El Paso County.

<sup>21</sup> Data from CO Departments of Health Care Policy and Financing (HCFP) and Human Services (CDHS)

<sup>22</sup> Medicaid eligible residents as a portion of the total population

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/food-insecurity>

In 2017, El Paso County had a food insecurity rate of 11.8%, representing 79,560 individuals, and a food insecurity rate of 14.6% for children (24,450 food insecure children).<sup>24</sup> Of the children experiencing food insecurity in El Paso County, over 63% are income eligible for federal and child nutrition programs such as SNAP (formerly food stamps), WIC (a supplemental food and nutrition education program for pregnant women and children 0-5 years of age), Free/Reduced School Meals, Summer Meals, and others.<sup>25</sup>

## PARTICIPATION IN FEDERAL FOOD PROGRAMS

The two primary federal food programs are Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Women's, Infants and Children Nutrition Program (WIC).

### Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP is the largest anti-hunger program in the country and provides enrolled Colorado families with about \$128<sup>26</sup> per person per month to



assist them in purchasing groceries. In 2016, 1,041 residents were eligible for federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP—formerly known as “food stamps”) benefits, yet only 431 residents were enrolled, a 41% enrollment rate.<sup>27</sup> The low SNAP

enrollment has a profound impact on their ability to purchase nutritious foods and negatively impacts the local economy. In 2016, over \$640,000 in SNAP benefits were issued to residents of 80829, representing \$1.15M in potential local economic development. Since the SNAP enrollment rate in the City is so low, there are untapped resources for low-income families that could bring in an additional \$936,960<sup>28</sup> to be spent in local grocery stores and create an additional \$1.7M<sup>29</sup> in economic development. Since MS has limited fresh food retail where these benefits could be spent, these federal SNAP dollars (and subsequent economic development) are supporting nearby communities instead.

#### SNAP Enrollment

- 41% of eligible Manitou Springs residents are enrolled in the program
- 66% of eligible El Paso County residents are enrolled
- 73% of eligible people nationally are enrolled

### Women, Infants and Children Nutrition Program (WIC)

The Women, Infants and Children Nutrition Program (WIC) provides nutritional support for several categories of women, infants, and children. This program is managed by El Paso County Human Services Department. In early 2020, approximately 26 MS residents participated.

<sup>24</sup> <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2017/overall/colorado/county/el-paso>

<sup>25</sup> <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2017/overall/colorado/county/el-paso>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/avg-monthly-snap-benefits>

<sup>27</sup> [Gapmap.org](https://www.gapmap.org)

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/avg-monthly-snap-benefits>

<sup>29</sup> SNAP \$1.80 multiplier [https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/44748/7996\\_err103\\_1\\_.pdf](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/44748/7996_err103_1_.pdf)

## Approaches to Increase Participation

The low enrollment rates in these programs in Manitou Springs are most likely caused by the absence of the places and spaces where families and individuals typically obtain the information and assistance to enroll in them. Most outreach and enrollment for SNAP and WIC takes place in County Offices, Family Resource Centers, Medicaid provider offices, health and hospital systems, large food banks, or in partnership with other nonprofits. These providers do not have a physical presence in Manitou Springs.

Access to federal food programs in Manitou Springs could be improved through partnerships with Care & Share of Southern Colorado and Hunger Free Colorado. Care & Share has a dedicated SNAP Enrollment Team that provides outreach, education, and application assistance to residents who are likely eligible. Additionally, the statewide Hunger Resource Hotline, run by Hunger Free Colorado, will assist likely eligible individuals to enroll in SNAP and WIC over the phone. Promoting these resources and providing enrollment assistance will be key to improving enrollment rates. All children enrolled in SNAP are automatically enrolled in the Federal Free and Reduced School Meals Program.

## MANITOU SPRINGS' FOOD ENVIRONMENT

A community's food environment encompasses the physical presence of food that affects a person's diet. This includes the distribution of and proximity to food stores and how they are accessed, and the interconnected system that allows people to access food. The food environment includes everything from retail food, to direct food purchase from farmers, to community food venues such as food markets.<sup>30</sup>



**The Manitou Springs Community Food Pantry at St. Andrews's Church provides a variety of fresh food choices.**

There are currently no full-service grocery stores or fresh food retail establishments within Manitou Springs. According to the MS Community Food Assessment Survey section below, the majority of residents shop at one of two large groceries, Safeway (68%) or King Soopers (65%). Safeway is 2.2 miles from Manitou Springs City Hall, or about a 7-minute drive. For residents who do not have a private vehicle, it may take 17-23 minutes by bus, depending on whether one is on the east or west side of the City, in which case a transfer is required. However, depending on one's location, a short to long walk is required to reach the transit route. The nearest King Soopers is 4.5 miles from City Hall and takes at least 11 minutes by car, or 35 minutes by bus with a one-mile walk. The only consistent source of food retail in City limits is convenience stores that carry a limited inventory of fresh food, at a higher cost.

Some Manitou Springs residents participate in *Community Supported Agriculture* (CSA's). CSA shares are locally-grown, pesticide-free produce boxes delivered weekly to Manitou Springs residents. CSAs support

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypplaces/healthtopics/healthyfood/general.htm>

local farmers while increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables for members. These can be expensive options for low- and middle-income households, although SNAP recipients can access “Double Up Bucks” that make the boxes half-price. Expanding subsidized CSAs for all low-income/food insecure residents would help support local farmers and area residents needing additional fresh food.

Although the community survey data represents a small percentage of the Manitou Springs community, we can surmise that for most Manitou Springs residents, their food environment is primarily tied to the large grocery stores in Colorado Springs. During the local growing season, the food environment becomes more diverse as people can access other local fresh food venues, such as gardens and farmers’ markets.

## COMMUNITY SURVEY FINDINGS

The project team prepared and distributed a survey to learn more about how and where Manitou Springs residents obtain their food; participation in federal food programs; how they adapt when their household food budget is inadequate; use of alternative food options; and basic demographics. The survey was widely distributed through various channels: the Plan Manitou email list, Pikes Peak Bulletin, Pool/Fitness Center newsletter, and to School District families. Food pantry clients also participated (Appendix E). The survey yielded 144 responses of which 136 were complete. The demographic characteristics of survey respondents were fairly consistent with overall community demographics for age, race/ethnicity, income, and number of households with children.

### HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

As shown below, two-thirds of survey respondents were in a household with no children (18 years of age or younger). Two-thirds of respondents reside in a household with two adults. Regarding gender, 63% of respondents were female, 31% male, and 6% preferred not to state.

#### MANITOU SPRINGS DEMOGRAPHICS (American Community Survey, 2018)

**Population** (July 1, 2019) 5,390

**Households:** 2467

- With people under age 18: 24%
- Persons per HH: 2.1

#### Age

- Persons under 18 years: 16.3%
- Persons 65 years and older: 20.9%

**Median Household income:** \$67,055

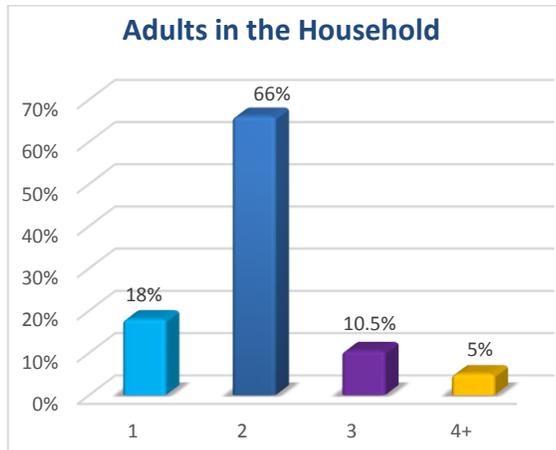
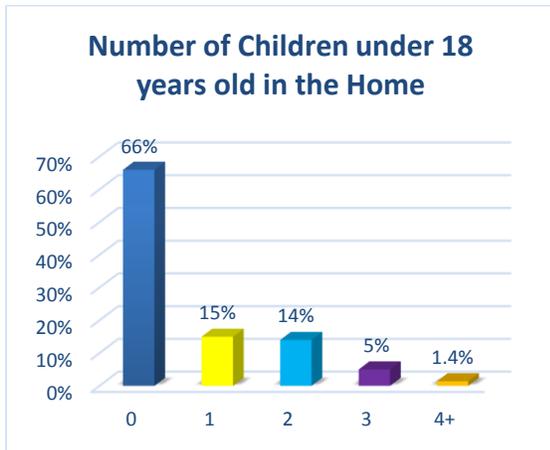
**Percent of population living in poverty:** 9.4%

#### Race and Hispanic origin

- White alone: 93.7%
- Black/African American alone: .2%
- Asian alone: 1.2%
- Two or more races: 4.3%
- Hispanic or Latino: 3.7%
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino: 91.3%

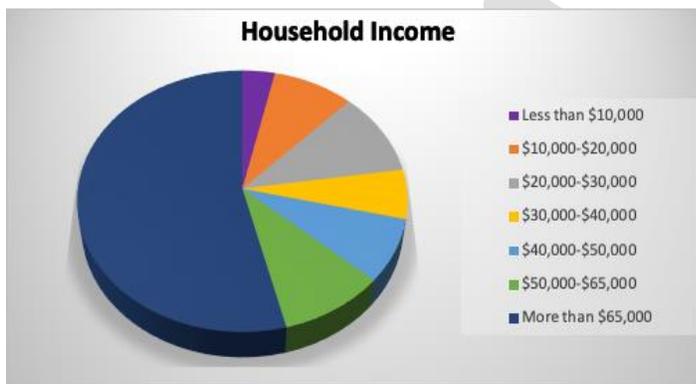
**Veterans:** 762 (14.1%)

**Median gross rent:** \$939



Regarding race/ethnicity, the majority of respondents were Caucasian/White (81%); 2 individuals identified as Hispanic/Latino; 1 as Asian/Pacific Islander; 13 did not wish to answer; and 5 stated “other.”

The highest percentage of respondents were over age 60 (30%), followed by ages 30-39 and 50-59 at 19% each. 17% were aged 40-49, and 8% were aged 18-29. The income distribution for survey respondents is shown in the chart to the left. 63% of respondents have income above \$50,000 per year. There is good representation across other income categories.



The majority of respondents (54%) stated their health is “very good” or “excellent;” 38% said that their health was “good.” Only 4% responded that their health was “fair” and 2% responded they were in “poor” health.

## PARTICIPATION IN FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Survey respondents were asked whether they have used the following food assistance programs:

- 87% used none
- 6% used SNAP
- 2% used WIC
- 9% used a Food Bank/Food Pantry
- 5% used Free/Reduced School Lunch
- 1% used Senior Food Program
- 5% used Free Community Meals
- 4% stated “other”

Respondents were asked if they are eligible for programs; seventeen individuals stated that they are eligible but do not participate, and 22 were unsure if they were eligible. The high number

for “unsure” indicates that with increased outreach, education, and enrollment support, there is potential to enroll additional households in federal food programs.

Survey respondents who “felt that food is unaffordable” (104) have taken the following actions:

- Limited the size of their meals (38%)
- Skipped a meal (27%)
- Worried about having enough to eat (21%)
- Gone to a food bank/pantry (22%)
- Shopped for the least expensive food (83%)

## ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS

The majority of respondents have three or more serving of fruits and vegetables a day (60%).<sup>31</sup> When asked what affects their ability to eat healthy food, respondents said:

- Not enough time - 37%
- It is too expensive to eat “healthy” - 28%
- Encounter transportation barriers to accessing healthy food - 15%
- Do not enjoy and/or are not skilled in cooking healthy foods - 13%

According to survey respondents, eating healthy, nutritious food is very important; however, the factors of convenience (access to fresh food) and affordability (ability to pay for it) are key factors in household food choices.

When asked what the three most important factor are in making food choices, rankings were as follows, with a weighted percentage based on ranking:

- |                              |                        |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Healthy/Nutritious (82%)  | 5. Locally Grown (37%) |
| 2. Price/Affordability (48%) | 6. Convenience (35%)   |
| 3. Taste (44%)               | 7. Brand Name (2%)     |
| 4. Certified Organic (39%)   |                        |

Respondents were asked to rank what the most important factors would be for them to shop at a local food store (in Manitou Springs). The factors were ranked in this order:

- |                                |                  |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Fresh fruits and vegetables | 5. Bulk foods    |
| 2. Competitive prices          | 6. Parking       |
| 3. Locally grown food          | 7. Ethnic foods  |
| 4. Organic foods               | 8. Prepared food |

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<sup>31</sup> The US Department of Agriculture's Dietary Guidelines recommend adults eat anywhere from 5 to 13 servings of fruits and vegetables per day depending on age, gender, physical activity, and overall health.

## IMPACT OF COST OF LIVING ON ABILITY TO PURCHASE HEALTHY FOODS

Nearly two-thirds of respondents reported annual income above \$50,000. When asked if the cost of living in Manitou Springs affected their ability to purchase healthy foods, 24% answered yes, 59% responded no, and 17% indicated maybe. Respondents were asked to rank six issues relative to cost of living and how they affect their ability to purchase healthy food. Respondents identified the following issues, in order of importance:

1. Income is too low;
2. High mortgage;
3. Unemployed/underemployed (to note, no one indicated they were unemployed in previous question, meaning that underemployment is the issue);
4. High rent;
5. Transportation costs; and
6. Childcare or eldercare expenses.

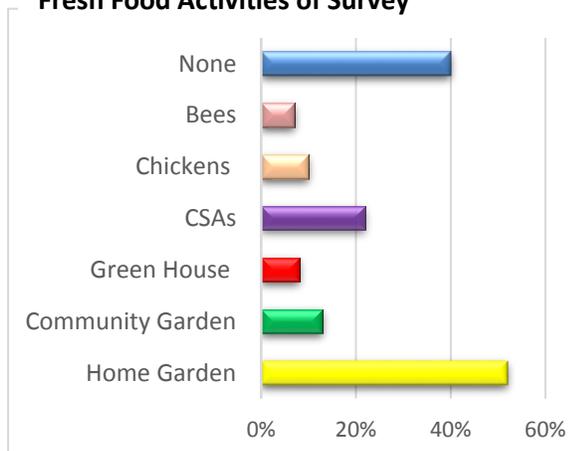
**33 (24%) of survey respondents indicated that the cost of living in Manitou Springs affects their household's ability to purchase healthy foods.**

## USE OF AND INTEREST IN OPTIONS FOR FRESH FOOD



Survey results indicate that many Manitou Springs residents are active in local agriculture and gardening. Respondents were asked about their use of gardening and animal husbandry. Respondents reported undertaking a range of different fresh food activities: 52% have a home garden, 22% use Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares, and 12% participate in a community garden. 40% do not participate in any gardening or animal-related activity.

**Fresh Food Activities of Survey**



As a follow-up question, residents were asked if they would be interested in any of these activities; 69% were interested, and 17% stated “maybe.” Only 14% were not interested. The survey revealed strong support for increased access to a variety of fresh food options.

When asked “What food programs would you like to see locally?” respondents indicated interest in all these programs as noted in the table below.

## Survey Respondents indicated support for these food programs

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Farm-to-School (local schools serving fresh, local produce)	72%
Community Greenhouse	63%
Community garden plots (affordable growing spaces for all community members)	60%
Additional Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) opportunities	52%
Affordable food cooking and processing classes	39%
Nutrition Education	35%
Community Kitchens (affordable processing space)	34%
Increased Food Bank/Food Pantry options	27%

The Project Team drew these conclusions from this feedback:

- There is interest in a high level of interest in Farm-to-School, Greenhouses, Community gardens, and Community Supported Agriculture;
- There is a moderate level of interest in nearly all of these activities; and
- Some residents will have the time and inclination to produce their own fresh food, whereas others may not; and the needs of both groups should be addressed.

The survey included a question to gauge the level of concern about food sourcing (where food comes from) and issues such as organic production. Respondents were most concerned about ethical farming practices and toxic residue.

Survey findings and conversations show that residents of Manitou Springs want increased access to fresh foods that are both affordable and convenient. Potential options include improving access via improved community markets and farm stands; utilizing local expertise to enhance a food hub presence; supporting increased community access to gardening; and garden plots and increasing support for local farms.

## QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

To learn more about the extent of food insecurity for Manitou Springs residents and experiences of populations most in need, the project team hosted meetings and conversations with organization representatives, stakeholder groups, and individuals and summarized the findings. The team also engaged with City staff and stakeholders involved in food-related businesses; economic development; and farming, gardening, and sustainable food systems.

## FOOD PROVIDERS

### Food Pantries

**St. Andrew's Church** hosts the Manitou Springs Community Food Pantry on Wednesdays, 1-2 pm.<sup>30</sup> The Church staff coordinates a team of dedicated volunteers who drive to the Care & Share Food Bank and select a wide range of fresh foods, including



**Michelle Tomasik is a regular volunteer at the Manitou Springs Community Food Pantry.**

fruits/vegetables, dairy, and some meats. The Pantry serves about 40-50 people a week. The number of participants has grown steadily since 2013 and

has shifted from transient individuals to more permanent residents. Participants must provide proof of Manitou Springs residency. Senior Lunch participants get first choice as the pantry was started to supply supplemental foods to seniors. This priority determined the operating hours of the pantry (1-2 pm) so seniors could pick up needed food items from the pantry before returning home from the Senior Lunch. Funds for the

pantry come from volunteers who organize a successful annual silent auction, write grants, and connect with other community events which contribute additional food and finances. All funds donated to the pantry are placed in a designated account for pantry use only. If it were established that additional pantry hours were needed, the Manitou pantry could also be available from 4:30 – 5:30 pm on Wednesdays to supply food for other Manitou citizens. Pantry volunteers come from all walks of life in Manitou. St. Andrew's freely hosts the space and provides the necessary management.

Community Congregational Church of Manitou Springs hosts a pantry on Fridays from 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm. In 2019, the pantry served 166 families comprising 349 people. Participants are asked to provide a voucher from Westside Cares, but in some cases will provide food without one. Pantry participation has increased in the last several years.

#### Manitou Springs has three food pantries:

- St. Andrew's Church – Manitou Springs Community Food Pantry
- Community Congregational Church of Manitou Springs
- Manitou Springs High School

## Congregate Meals

Free, hot meals for Manitou Springs community members are available at St. Andrews Church on Sundays at 11:20 am and at Sacred Heart Church in Old Colorado City on Sundays. The Silver Key Connections Café, the Manitou Springs Senior Nutrition Program, is also hosted at St. Andrews Monday through Friday, except holidays. St. Andrew's is an accessible, central location within walking distance for many senior residents. The lunch also serves as an important social function for seniors and may be their main meal of the day. According to Silver Key staff, they serve about 45-50 people on average, and believe they could accommodate more seniors, if needed. The Director notes that Meals on Wheels demand is low, with only 4-5 individuals in Manitou Springs served per day.



Geraldine Webb regularly participates in the Senior Lunch and Food Pantry.

The Project Team notes that for seniors, accessibility, resources, and personal safety are important factors for food access. With the City's growing senior population, food needs for this demographic group are likely to increase.

## Manitou Springs School District 14 Food Programs

Manitou Springs School District 14 (MSSD14) provides a range of food and human service assistance for students and their families. The District oversees the Free/Reduced Lunch Program, a federal program to ensure that low-income students can access healthy meals at school. "The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) operates in public and private schools, providing nutritionally balanced meals each school day. Federal child nutrition programs like NSLP address child hunger and promote good nutrition. With over 1 in 5 children in the United States living in a food-insecure household, NSLP plays a critical role in the healthy development and long-term health and educational outcomes for low-income children."<sup>32</sup> In 2019, Colorado passed legislation that provides the co-pay for students who qualify for "reduced" school meals, making all lunches free for students in households under 185% of the federal poverty level. According to MSSD14 staff, approximately 23-25% of District students receive free/reduced meals. Students whose family receives SNAP are automatically enrolled in the program. If Manitou Springs increases SNAP enrollment, more students will automatically be enrolled and receive nutritious, warm meals each school day. All meals are reimbursed by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service.

School District families experiencing food insecurity **really appreciate** how much support the District already provides: the school lunch program and snacks, holiday meal boxes, and \$50 holiday gift card are great!

<sup>32</sup> Feeding America: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/take-action/advocate/federal-hunger-relief-programs/national-school-lunch-program>

The District also hosts a food pantry during the school year with shelf-stable products for District students and families. Other food supports include snacks, holiday food boxes, and holiday family partnerships. In 2019, District staff noted that the food for their many programs is generated entirely by District families and students. Staff are currently preparing a Care & Share grant for a weekend and weekday snack programs. These efforts are supported by the District’s *Partners for Healthy Choices* program, which brings community partners and staff together to promote the “Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child” model for all district schools and community in supporting students to make healthy life choices.

MSSD14 staff identified these gaps and needs:

- The District would like to expand its food pantry inventory to include fresh foods which would require additional space and refrigeration capacity;
- MSSD14 would like to implement a robust backpack program where students are provided nutritious, non-perishable, easy-to-prepare food over weekends and holidays. The District would need funding and a partnership with Care & Share to have a sufficient back-pack program for low-income children.
- The District does not participate in the Free/Reduced meals program during the summer; however, students may participate in the program in Woodland Park or District 11.

Flying Pig Farm collaborates with the District to welcome students of all ages to programs, classes, workshops, and meals with the purpose of deepening knowledge and relationship with food and the roles of agriculture in our local ecosystems. Pikes Peak Permaculture is the fiscal sponsor and over 50 students a week participate. Students engage with a range of domestic and wild animals and plants. In the community survey, Farm-to-School programs such as this ranked highest for programs that residents would like to see locally.



Students help tend the Flying Pig Farm demonstration garden.

## RESIDENTS EXPERIENCING FOOD INSECURITY

Staff held conversations with five School District families currently experiencing food insecurity. Under the McKinney Vento Act, the School District is required to track and assist families experiencing homelessness. As of early 2020, the McKinney Vento case managers were serving approximately 60 homeless children and families. In Manitou Springs, many of these families reside in motels and hotels. They do not have a permanent address and are living in substandard conditions, with inadequate kitchen and sanitary facilities. Families cited the need for food that can be prepared in a microwave or crockpot.

Staff observed some commonalities among these families' experiences. The families who obtain SNAP benefits typically find benefits may cover only two weeks or so of food, so they need assistance in coordinating other resources and programs, primarily food banks. Accessing these programs and resources takes time out of their day, and lack of transportation further adds to these barriers. Several parents saw a need for education about portions, meal planning, and shopping to stretch their monthly food budget.

Access to grocery stores for affordable, fresh food can be a challenge. Families with transportation constraints may rely on local convenience stores that have higher prices and limited choices. There is a need for better access to fresh foods: meat, dairy, and vegetables. In terms of access to food pantries, the High School was the most convenient location for most, but can be challenging for families residing in the east area of town.

Families that are new to the area or in an urgent situation indicated the need for more accessible, comprehensive information on community food resources. In these situations, families stated that emergency food vouchers to grocery stores would be helpful.

Families and community members identified other gaps and barriers:

- Community food pantries are held during weekdays which is not convenient for working parents; evening or Saturday hours would be helpful;
- Children can access the free meals in the summer, but this program is not located in MS;
- Manitou Springs residents may have benefits such as supplemental Social Security, but if their income is too high for SNAP, they "fall through the cracks;" and
- Navigating the system is a challenge and support is needed to successfully enroll in benefits and access resources.

**The McKinney-Vento Act is federal legislation that requires all School Districts in the nation to address the particular needs of children in temporary housing so that they are able to continue their education, despite challenging circumstances.**

## **CONVERSATIONS REGARDING FRESH FOOD RETAIL**

There is broad community interest in expanding access to fresh, affordable, local food through a new, local food retail establishment. There have been recent efforts to launch food retail in Manitou Springs, and some acknowledged constraints:

- A limited number of smaller commercial parcels for new or redeveloped grocery retail;
- Limited tracts of land available and/or suitable for farming; and
- A rapidly diminishing number of farms in the Pikes Peak region.

Despite these constraints, many community members are determined to expand the City's fresh food choices. In addition, the community's strong sustainability values support this objective.

There have been several recent efforts to establish groceries in the downtown area featuring local produce and goods, but none proved sustainable; lack of parking and product diversity were cited. The City's Chamber of Commerce Director believes that a grocery focused on whole/fresh foods is needed and could be viable. The Urban Renewal Authority (URA) Director noted that food markets require substantial parking, and non-food items are more favored to boost URA revenues. Some successful smaller-scale efforts were cited. One business featured healthy, locally-made goods that sold well; the owners observed that a venue in the right location serving locals and visitors may be the most viable option. A food venue that offers healthy, local, and specialty foods seems to be most viable and could find strong community support, especially if the food is affordable. Manitou food advocates and entrepreneurs suggested a hub of eateries/food, and agreed a strong anchor is needed to make food hubs a success.

Manitou Springs may have a high number of "cottage food" preparers. Cottage food enterprises are generally defined as non-potentially hazardous foods such as baked goods, jams, jellies, and home-canned vegetables and fruits. It would be valuable to reach out to these local producers to understand their needs and develop a coordinated marketing/retail strategy to support this sector. An industrial grade community kitchen would support this sector.

## **FARMING, GARDENING, AND A SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM**

Manitou Springs has a contingent of dedicated, knowledgeable residents committed to advancing gardening, and particularly sustainable gardening. Planning staff convened a stakeholder group of farmers and gardeners to share their insights.

### **Farming**

Stakeholders shared that in the past several years, many area farms have closed or relocated out of the region. Manitou Springs currently has two farms, and both focus primarily on education. Flying Pig Farm on hosts a farm education class for Manitou Springs Middle School students. Activities include: building greenhouses, supporting an educational garden, tending bees, and a community garden plot. Smokebrush Farms focuses on education for growing diverse, native crops; composting; and farm-to-table activities. The City may wish to advocate for a sustainable, regional food system.

### **Gardening**

The Manitou Springs Garden Club hosts monthly meetings, plant sales, and training opportunities and provides grants to worthy projects. Some residents are experts in permaculture.

Education: Advocates see a tremendous need to educate citizens about gardening, nutrition and the benefit of fresh foods, and sustainable food systems. Groups such as the Manitou Springs Garden Club can share their knowledge and train others to garden.

Staff notes that different approaches are required for farming on private and public lands, and offer these considerations:

- Private land: Manitou Springs Garden Club or other City advocates could initiate workshops or training, identify educational materials, and generally help facilitate private gardening in the community.
- Public land: The City’s parks and open spaces are overseen by City boards and subject to management and master plans.
  - Identifying sites for demonstration gardens in parks may be a viable first step; staff will facilitate this discussion with the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and Open Space Advisory Committee. Demonstration gardens could be coordinated with pollinator plantings.
  - Staff will reach out to the Open Space Advisory Committee to discuss possible community gardens in unused open space in a neighborhood setting.

**Permaculture: an agricultural system or method that seeks to integrate human activity with natural surroundings so as to create highly efficient self-sustaining ecosystems - Merriam Webster Dictionary**

## Community Gardens



**Westside Community gardeners use raised beds, lots of compost, and the “no till” gardening method**

Community gardens ranked high in the survey and appear to be a good approach for Manitou Springs. The decline in regional farms may signal the need for individuals and communities to build their own farming capacity. Westside Community Gardens (WSCG) in Old Colorado is in its second year of gardening. Staff met with the garden’s founder, and learned that establishing a locally sustainable food source is a compelling goal. Some additional background on WSCG includes:

- Pikes Peak Urban Gardens prepared the site and built the raised beds on a vacant park site;
- The garden is community-run by members based on a set of core values; this approach is intended to empower individuals to bring their unique contributions, while creating a resilient, interconnected community; there is no overarching organizational structure such as a 401 c (3)
- Members work on beds throughout garden rather than individual plots, sharing tasks and produce
- Fifty-three members provide an annual \$145 donation fee: \$7,685 budget covers annual expenses
- WSCG collaborates with Soil Cycle/Colorado Springs Food Rescue on compostables, and also receives materials and support from Colorado Springs Parks staff

Vermijo Community Gardens in Old Colorado City was renewed this spring. Westside Cares sponsors a Victory Garden on Ridge Road. Manitou residents can and do participate in these gardens. From a meeting with WSCG Founded Richard Mee, staff gleaned these principles:

- Select a site that provides full sun exposure, good soil, and even terrain, in a neighborhood-based location; in Manitou Springs, a valley site may yield better soil; available water is needed, with frost free faucets for winter;
- Pursue a City or private land donation, and City support for materials such as compost; and
- A resident “champion” or small group of committed gardeners is needed to lead the effort

It may be valuable to conduct additional research to learn what else is needed for local gardens to succeed.

### **Sustainable Food Systems**

Gardening advocates cite concerns about global warming and its impact on food supply chains and believe that Manitou Springs and other communities should dedicate more space to growing food. There is concern about negative health impacts of industrially farmed foods. Although the City’s terrain poses constraints, experienced gardeners believe this can be overcome by applying methods such as agroforestry, permaculture, and gardening with mixed crops.

### **Manitou Springs Community Market and other Fresh Food Venues**

The Manitou Springs Community Market (MSCM) has hosted food and craft vendors and entertainment on late Thursday afternoons since 2015. In fall 2019, the Market closed early for the season. MSCM Manager Chi Ito noted some key factors leading to the closure: unpredictable, severe afternoon weather; need for a suitable facility with appropriate access for vendors; difficulty recruiting farms on a consistent basis; and number of other farmers markets in our region. The loss of regional farms has been a factor; a steady, critical mass of producers is needed. Due to Covid 19, the Market will not continue in 2020. City staff will evaluate approaches to reinvigorate the market for 2021. Taking on the role of market manager is a significant commitment, and there are organizations that provide training, resources, and other tools.

Food advocates agree the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) approach seems well-suited to Manitou Springs - Ahavah Farms in Peyton has such a program – and ways to support this, such as community drop off points, should be identified. Residents have also suggested that community members could prepare ready-to-go meals, such as soup, for people in need.

## **REGIONAL PARTNERS**

### **Care and Share Food Bank of Southern Colorado**

Care and Share (C & S) is the “Feeding America” agency (food bank) serving El Paso County, and provided 170,191 southern Colorado neighbors with 15.2 million meals by distributing 18.3 million pounds of food in

2019. C & S collaborates with 267 partner food pantries and meal sites across the region. 83% of food provided by the organization is classified as “highly nutritious.” C & S has a high return on investment in acquiring additional food due to their scale and purchasing power.



Care and Share has a small presence in MS and expressed the desire to assist the community to improve food security. C & S is the state SNAP outreach partner, providing education and application support to likely-eligible SNAP households in southern Colorado. Their outreach team is willing to provide application assistance in MS through partnerships with the pantries and schools, and by increasing awareness of SNAP. Their model utilizes highly trained volunteers to serve as application assistors to help navigate this complex program. As MS has many volunteers working in food pantries, training one or two application assistors could help increase SNAP enrollment in MS.

Additionally, C&S is interested in creating partnerships with the School District and local pantries to explore ways to bring in more food resources and potentially a mobile food truck to provide local residents access to fresh foods (including meats, fruits and vegetables) once or twice a month. Options for further access include a backpack program for school-aged children to bring home food staples over the weekend. Creating such programs will require identifying additional funding for C & S. By creating clear partnerships and highlighting opportunities to local residents, MS residents could undertake fundraising to directly support these efforts.

### **El Paso County Department of Human Services**

This County department administers the SNAP program at the local level and enrolls residents in economic assistance programs. The SNAP enrollment process involves applications and federally mandated interviews that must occur in the office or by telephone. County eligibility staff assist residents in gathering essential information to finalize the application and issue benefits. El Paso County stands out for its timely SNAP processing and enrollment. El Paso County Human Services managers indicated they are open to exploring ways to reach out to SNAP-eligible residents. Their willingness to collaborate with MS resources, coupled by application assistance from C & S, are key to increasing access to SNAP benefits.

### **EL Paso County Department of Health**

Staff recently completed a Phase 2 Food Assessment. MS Staff reviewed the County recommendations and found that many are consistent with the recommendations in this report. The County Assessment includes implementation guidance that may be useful. The assessment emphasizes that neighborhoods should be involved in identifying and addressing their own needs.

## Westside Cares

Westside Cares (WSC) addresses multiple human service needs for Manitou Springs residents; staff estimate about 1,000 interactions with MS residents annually. WSC is located on W. Colorado Ave. 3.4 miles east of MS; they are open Monday-Thursday from 8:30 AM-12:30 PM and Thursday evenings from 4:30-6:30.

Westside Cares supports six Westside food pantries – one or more each weekday.<sup>33</sup> Participants receive food vouchers that allow them to access one of the six Westside food pantries up to six times a year, receiving a four-day food supply at each visit. Additionally, Westside Cares provides a weekly Lord’s Dinner at Sacred Heart Church every Sunday. Nine different faith communities rotate “hosting” the meals, providing a hot meal each to about 100 Westside residents.

WSC staff observe that current economic and housing conditions are having a big impact on food security, and that the number of individuals living on the margins is increasing exponentially. WSC encouraged MS to consider how food insecurity intersects with housing, such as at the City’s older motels. WSC asked the City to let them know how they can continue to be good partners.

## Manitou Springs Police Department

MSPD adopts a community policing approach. In 2020, the Department will focus on addressing social issues through assistance and community support, and engaging officers to be at the forefront of problem-solving. MS Police Chief Brian Churchill will be providing training for officers to accomplish this and is partnering with Westside Cares to obtain appropriate informational resources for officers to share with residents. This approach can help address existing gaps in communications and resources.

## Higher Education

The University of Colorado at Colorado Springs Nutrition Program faculty expressed interested in engaging students in community projects in Manitou Springs. Such projects could involve preparing communications material or engaging food insecure individuals to learn more about their needs.

## COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

### Food Advisory Committee

The City’s Project Manager convened a Food Advisory Committee (FAC) of eight stakeholders that met three times during the course of the project (Appendix F – membership, summaries). The role of this group is to represent diverse stakeholder groups, provide community perspective, guide public participation approach, and help shape recommendations.

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<sup>33</sup> Westside Cares food pantries: <http://westsidecares.org/what-we-do/food-pantries/>

At the Jan. 6, 2020 FAC meeting, the group provided suggestions for engaging hard-to-reach individuals. By the February 13 meeting, the group was comfortable that the Project Team had engaged a sufficient number of individuals that experienced food insecurity to provide meaningful input. At the February 13, 2020 meeting, the group confirmed that the community survey results had sufficient diversity across income groups and household types to be useful. The widespread use of mobile phones was effective for expanding community engagement.

Advisory Committee members agreed it is critical to engage individuals with lived experience with food insecurity in developing solutions

The group identified these factors to guide implementation:

- Reinforce and strengthen how Manitou Springs organizations currently addressing food insecurity can “*work smarter, not harder*” together, and continue to narrow the focus to address needs. Be realistic; what is sustainable?
- Consider whether there is a community entity that can take on this coordination role.
- Issues of food insecurity and hunger in MS seem to “fly under the radar” – many residents appear to not know how many people are in need and affordable housing may not be apparent.
- The concerns of low-income people and more affluent folks are not mutually exclusive; all desire access to fresh, healthy food,
- There is a substantial array of Westside food programs, but some barriers exist. People with the most urgent needs are homeless or working poor and have difficulty navigating the different sites, hours, and transportation. Pantries with weekday hours only are not convenient for working people.
- Important to understand needs: how much additional food is needed?
- Existing food pantries could coordinate and consolidate volunteers and supplies at a single site to increase services and efficiency. This could be accomplished in a community center in MS that incorporated food in a centralized location (church has negative connotations to some), or some other type of food hub.
  - Churches that currently run their own one-day-a-week pantry could sponsor one-day-a-week at a central location.
  - A larger, centralized space with refrigeration for fresh food, in a central location would be ideal.
- Group expressed concern about living conditions for low-income families residing in short-term lodging. Most of these units are not approved for long-term lodging, and lack suitable cooking, refrigeration, and food preparation facilities. During the school year, up to 150 families may reside in such lodging. Given the absence of proper facilities, supporting these families for food security can be difficult. It may be timely to initiate a community conversation about this situation. Ideas included providing access to a community kitchen, providing crockpots to motel residents, and providing food resources that can be cooked using limited dry goods.
- Colorado Springs and El Paso County (EPC) are supported by a Food Policy Advisory Board and Manitou Springs could consider initiating its own board to implement recommendations from this

Food Assessment. The board brings members with diverse perspectives together to develop food related policies and implement Food Assessment recommendations.

### **Feedback from Feb. 19 Community Meeting**

The Project Team hosted a Community Meeting on February 19, 2020. XX people attended. Manitou Springs residents provided feedback that was consistent with both the findings from the survey responses and qualitative conversations. Participants provided some new ideas for addressing food insecurity and enhancing the food system in MS, including:

- Engaging a mobile food pantry to serve residents in the motel district;
- Creating private and public open-access “Food and Book Libraries” where residents could donate canned goods for open access;
- Retrofitting larger spaces such as classrooms with refrigeration and increased storage capacity for non-perishable goods;
- Supporting SNAP enrollment by training local volunteers as SNAP Ambassadors through Care & Share and hosting enrollment assistance events at the Recreation Center;
- Hosting additional summer and after-school meals at the Recreation Center; and
- Engaging with residents of low-income housing and motels to raise awareness of SNAP and local pantries.

Community members were equally interested in opportunities to increase local food production and fresh food access and suggested:

- Planting edible food in open spaces (including fruit trees);
- increasing opportunities for gardening by utilizing city space for a large community garden;
- Composting and planting orchards using local Urban Renewal Authority funds;
- Cooking and gardening education for residents; and
- Creating a non-profit grocery/coop.

Additional discussions focused on a desire for the City to re-invigorate the Community Farmer’s Market and farm stands; address transportation barriers; and fund subsidized Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares for low-income residents. There was support for a City ballot initiative to tax sugar-sweetened beverages to reinvest in food system solutions. This type of tax has been passed in many cities across the country generating significant funding for local food security efforts.

## FINDINGS SUMMARY

Staff summarized report findings to guide further planning and action. These three factors were used to develop the “opportunities” highlighted in the following Implementation Framework.

### PRIORITY AREAS OF NEED

- Cost of living has major impacts on food security and needs are widespread. Food insecurity is exacerbated in difficult economic times, such as the current COVID 19 pandemic.
- Low-income MS residents are significantly under-enrolled in federal food programs, which also lowers access for children to free/reduced school and summer meals.
- Strengthening partnerships with local, regional, and state resources is the most direct approach for addressing food insecurity.
- Survey identified a need for more accessible fresh food options: local fresh food retail, improved farmer’s market, and additional CSAs. To address the needs of low-income individuals, these need to include expanded affordable options.
- Improved access to information for individuals and families experiencing food insecurity on available resources and how to coordinate them.
- Community educational campaign to increase awareness of food insecurity in Manitou Springs.

### GAPS AND BARRIERS

- An absence of nonprofits, Medicaid providers, and health care practitioners serving low-income families within City limits, which makes it challenging to engage populations in need.
- Gaps in the days/hours of food pantry operations makes it challenging for working individuals and individuals with transportation barriers. Also, a lack of infrastructure (such as refrigeration and storage) at some sites limits offerings.
- Limited fresh food retail choices and available commercial sites within the City.
- Limited extent of private or public open space for farmland.
- Additional data and outreach is needed to clarify extent of food needs, including for seniors.
- Gaps for students and their families, such as emergency, weekend, and summer food needs - District is actively working to address these.
- “Hotspots” of food and human service needs, such as motels.

### STRENGTHS AND ASSETS

- An active, dedicated cadre of residents working to promote healthy eating and active living, and household stability.
- A highly functional network of faith-based organizations that work effectively to meet the food needs of many.

- The Manitou Springs School District oversees a range of programs and services to support low-income families' ability to access food and basic human needs.
- Effective regional providers – Westside Cares, Cares and Share, and El Paso County- which have all expressed a willingness to provide assistance to MS.
- The City's Police Department, which will be sharing human services resources with individuals in need and collaborating on a mental health initiative.
- A network of gardeners with expertise in innovative methods.
- The community's small scale; compact, walkable development pattern; and regular transit service, which afford convenient access to centrally located food venues for many residents; and
- Support for community-based solutions, sustainable practices, and innovation.

There are many efforts already underway in MS; by expanding what is already working and coordinating with local and regional resources, we can improve food security in our community in the near-term.

## **DRAFT GOALS**

Key goals for the community include:

- Address food insecurity for the City's residents;
- Increase local access and reduce barriers to affordable, fresh food retail for all residents;
- Promote local food production options;
- Educate the community about fresh food and nutrition;
- Raise community awareness regarding food insecurity; and
- Explore and apply community-oriented solutions that involve bring people working together to address the problem

These goals align with statewide efforts identified in the Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger<sup>34</sup> and the Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council.<sup>35</sup> However, both initiatives encourage local communities to identify local priorities and solutions.

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<sup>34</sup> Endhungerco.org

<sup>35</sup> <https://cofoodsystemscouncil.org>

## APPENDIX

Appendix A: Healthy Eating, Active Living Resolution

Appendix B: Project Stakeholder List

Appendix C: Public Participation Plan

Appendix D: Food Policy Terms

Appendix E: Survey Distribution

Appendix F: Food Advisory Committee – Membership, Summaries