

Programs, Produce & Farms: Survey Results 2016

Connecticut Food Bank Member Programs Have Little Issue Moving Produce, and They Want More, Especially from Local Farms

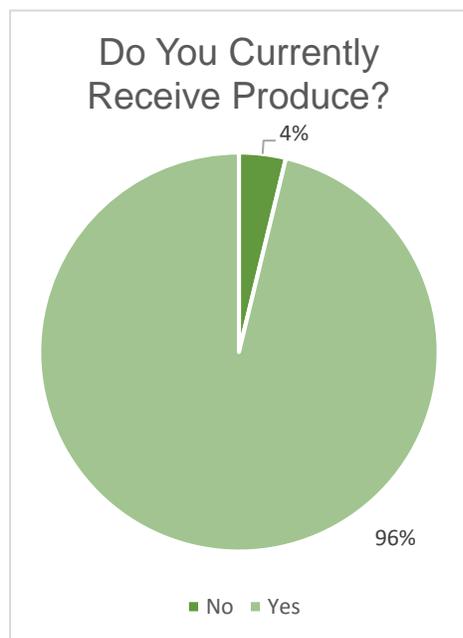


Figure 1

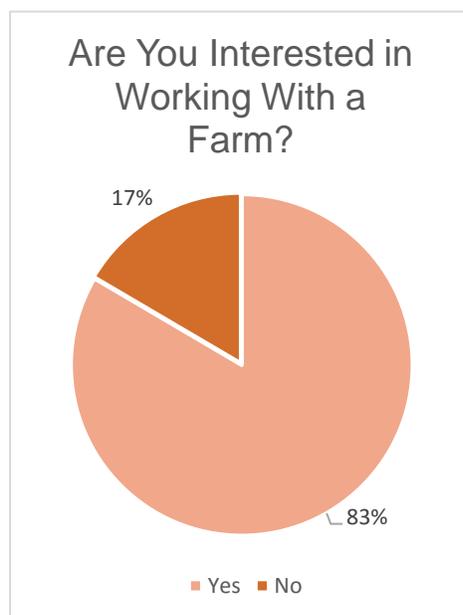


Figure 2

“If we have [produce] people will take it.”

Nearly all 132 programs that responded report receiving produce (Fig. 1), but only 36% get that produce from a farm donor.

Although 64% of responding programs do not currently work with farms, 84% said they would like to (Fig. 2).

The Connecticut Food Bank Farm-to-Pantry Program connects member programs with Connecticut farmers in their area who wish to donate produce in order to contribute to a robust food system in Connecticut that offers access to fresh, nutritious food, while reducing waste. In Fiscal Year 2016, Connecticut Food Bank partner programs moved **4,910,948 pounds** of fresh produce, or about **30%** of their total pounds moved. Of that, **500,288 pounds** of fresh produce came from local farm donations. To better understand the needs of our member programs and increase program participation, the Connecticut Food Bank surveyed 300 of its member programs. This report summarizes the trends and findings for the 132 programs that responded.

“Our most frequent request is for fresh produce.”

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As seen in Figure 3, most programs receive produce through multiple channels. Many work with local retail stores and growers, and quite a few purchase to ensure consistency and variety. Nearly all (89%) cite the Connecticut Food Bank as at least one source of their fresh produce. In fact, the food bank is the largest singular source of produce, supplying to 55 programs, either as a direct or mediated single source or as direct source with a Connecticut Food Bank mediated partnership as a second source.

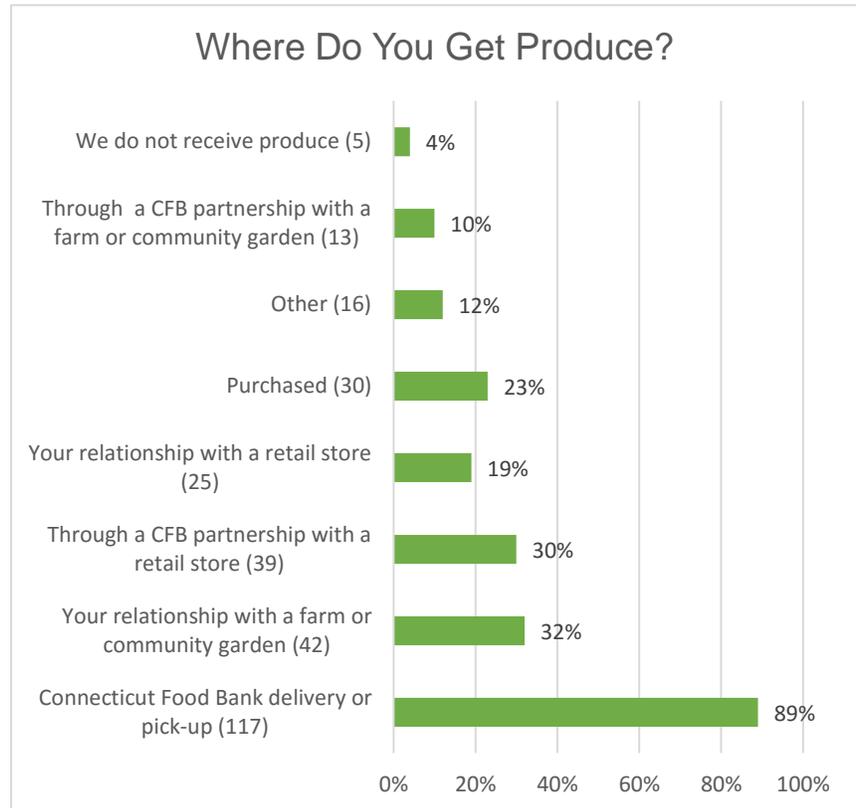


Figure 3

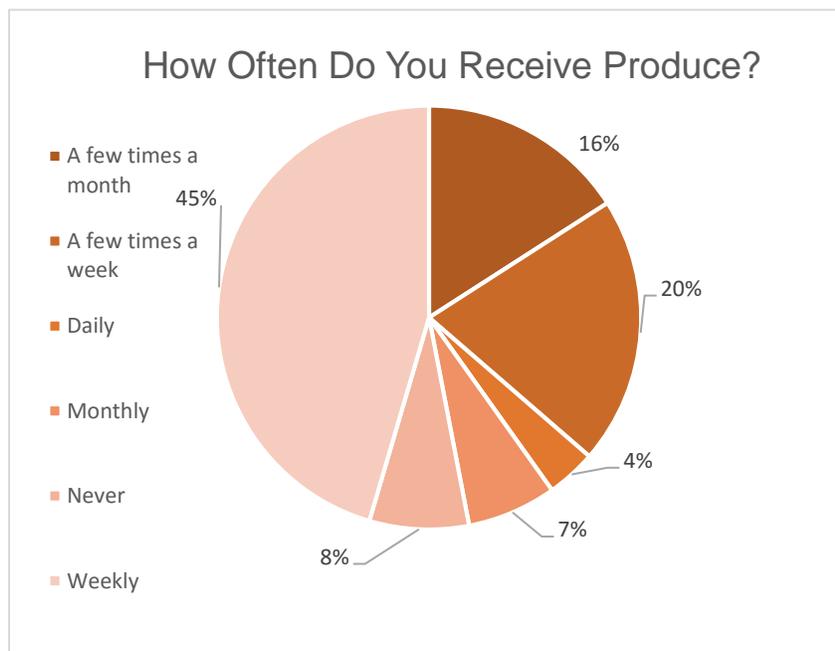


Figure 4

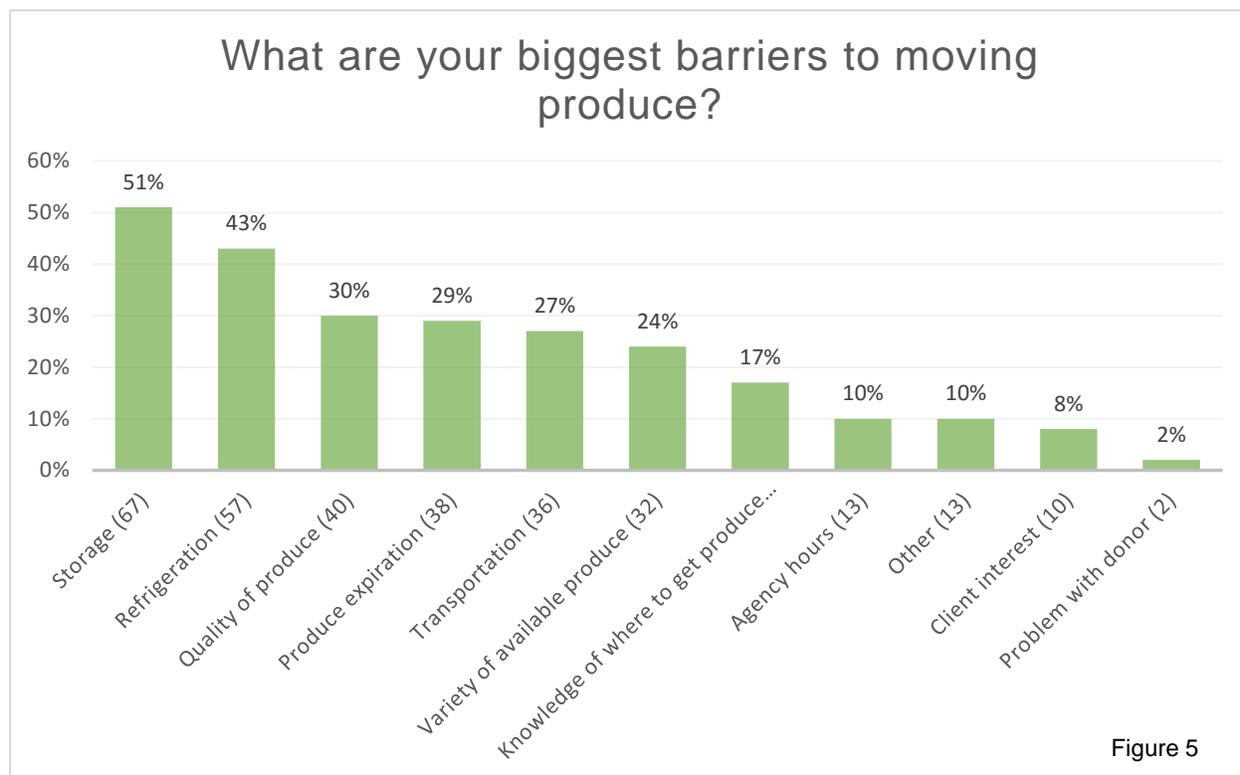
Figure 4 shows that most programs (81%) receive produce regularly – ranging from multiple times per week to every other week. In fact, 73% of programs surveyed said they did not have any issues moving produce relating to their clients' interest.

“[Our clients] will never complain about having too much produce – sometimes not enough; whatever we are provided with we are able to distribute.”

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“We would love to take as much produce as we can but at the present time, storage and refrigeration is our issue.”

For programs, most problems moving produce are logistical – where to source, how to secure good quality and good variety, how to store and transport – rather than related to client interest or knowledge (see Fig. 5). The majority cited storage (51%) and refrigeration (43%) as their biggest barriers to moving produce.



Many programs said they were interested in working with a farm if delivery were an option; and 27% of responders listed transportation as one of their biggest barriers to obtaining more produce. However, more programs cited quality of produce (30%) and the quick expiration of produce (29%) as bigger barriers than transportation. Comments suggest that the Connecticut Food Bank has gotten much better about delivering good quality produce, but that it is far from consistently perfect, and programs are worried about quality in relation to food bank and farm donations.

“We have seen a great improvement in getting more fresh produce from the Food Bank. Also, the quality of produce is much higher than it was at one time.”

“When we receive product near the end of its life cycle, it’s difficult to do much with it.”

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This raises an important question: How can the Connecticut Food Bank ensure programs receive good quality excess and number 2s (produce that is good to eat but does not make it to market for aesthetic reasons), especially from farmers who may provide produce directly to member programs?

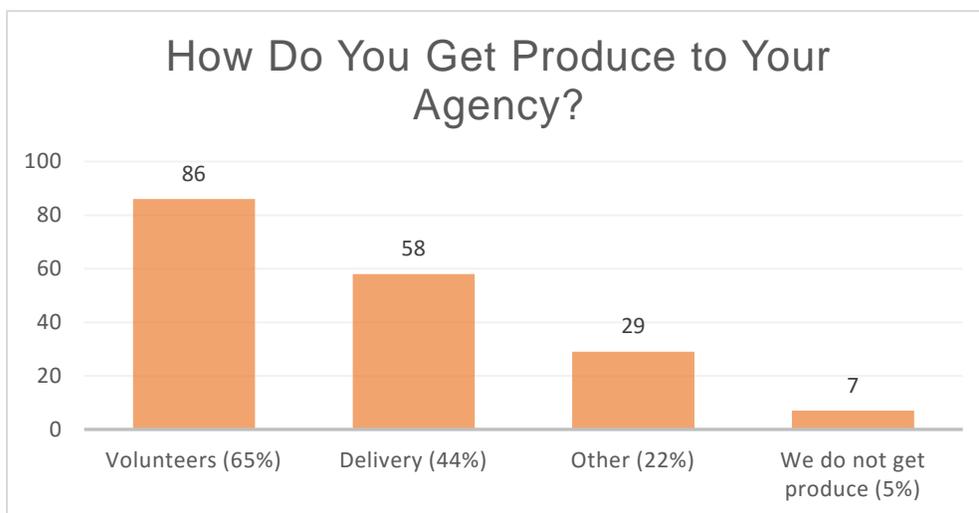


Figure 6

“[Produce is] completely perishable and the time frame is critical. While new sources are great, you must put a lot of thought into how programs will get it. It is a logistics nightmare!”

Figure 6 reveals that most programs surveyed rely on volunteers to transport produce. The Connecticut Food Bank recognizes that programs tend to struggle with labor resources, hours, and reliable transportation. This, coupled with the perishable nature of fresh produce, drives home the struggle programs encounter as they work to receive and distribute produce.

Overall, most programs (111 of 132 surveyed) expressed interest in working with a farm for greater access to fresh, healthy produce, possibly more often.

Out of those who were not interested in working with a farm, eight programs stated their own existing farm partnerships, while seven cited logistical barriers like transportation, timing and storage.

A number of programs also mentioned the significance of culturally appropriate options. Suggestions include an educational class for pantry organizers, a list of culturally appropriate foods and increased “availability of some root items for Hispanic audiences.”

“With a variety of ethnic groups including refugees, perhaps a list of edible food and/or restricted food for each group might be helpful.”

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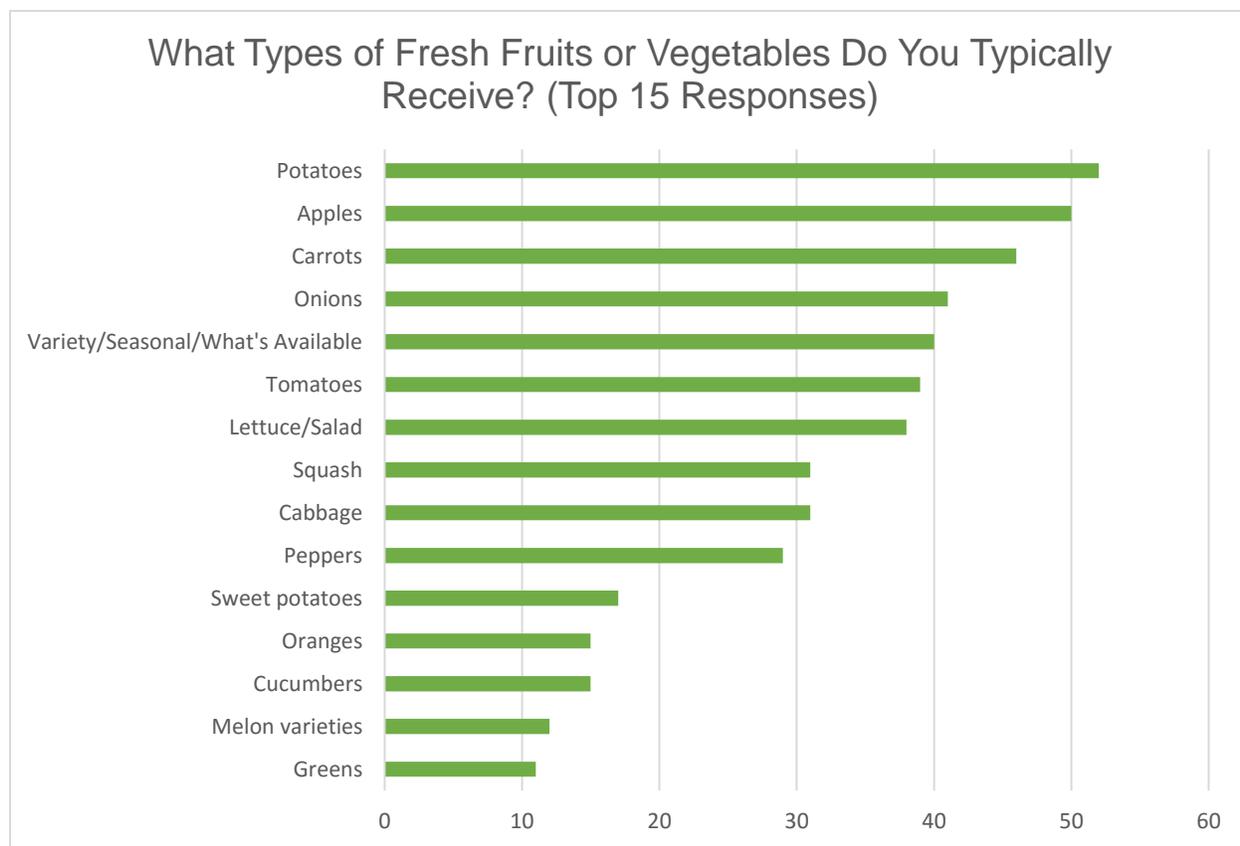


Figure 7

Programs receive a large variety of produce from their various sources. As seen in Figure 7, Connecticut Food Bank staples like potatoes, apples, carrots and onions represent the majority of produce. Many programs expressed a preference for even more variety, with nearly 40 programs stating they go for seasonal produce and whatever is available. Connecticut Food Bank has a large variety of seasonal produce with a big uptick in availability during the summer, fall and early winter months.

Although 73% said client interest posed no issue in moving produce, many highlighted the importance of recipes and other educational resources.

“We definitely move more when we know what it is and how to prepare it.”

“We would like to be able to serve a larger variety of produce, or at least a larger variety of recipes for the produce we already stock.”

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Farm Partnerships: Most programs that work with a farm cited a positive relationship, with 94% reporting that their farm partnerships were going very or somewhat well (see Fig. 8). The majority of the issues with farm partnerships were due to the unpredictability of produce due to factors like seasonality and weather impacts on crops.

“Receiving produce [from farms] can be sporadic... sometimes abundance, other times very sparse.”

A certain amount of unpredictability is inevitable, too, when soliciting donations from farmers, since most are, first and foremost, businesses that need to sell as much as possible in order to survive.

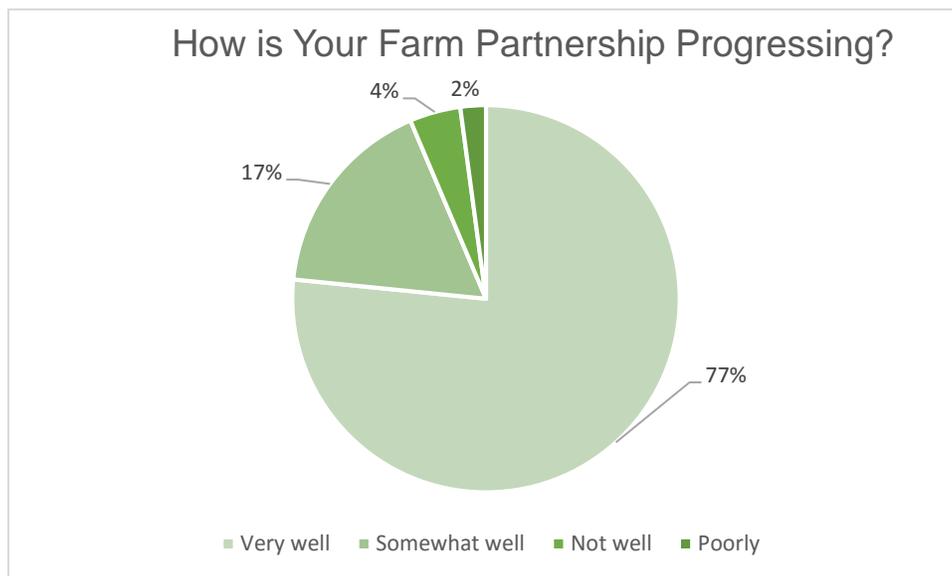


Figure 8

Fresh, nutritious food signifies an important, cost-effective way to improve people’s health, well-being and educational outcomes, specifically for vulnerable populations like children, seniors, veterans and low income populations. Despite the challenges, barriers, and logistical hurdles involved in moving fresh fruits and vegetables through the Connecticut Food Bank network, member programs move a significant amount of produce (4,910,948 pounds in Fiscal Year 2016). Programs value freshness, quality and variety, and most are interested in working with a farm to increase accessibility to quality fresh produce. The Connecticut Food Bank has succeeded in increasing the amount of produce it helps into the hands of families that need it, but the work is far from over: This survey demonstrates the necessity for growth in Connecticut Food Bank’s capacity to work with farmers and programs to move more produce to Connecticut residents in need. Such growth requires greater infrastructure e.g. volunteers, transportation and quality control to make it easier for programs to handle the fragile, perishable and nutrient rich asset that is produce.