ABSTRACT

FOOD INSECURITY FROM THE PROVIDERS’ PERSPECTIVE

by Lauren M. Schwab

This study examines food insecurity from the providers’ perspective in a Midwestern county. To understand food insecurity in this county, an interview of the county choice food pantries and its food bank supplier was completed. Data included descriptive demographic data about the county residents, as well as interviews with both a director and front-line worker from the food bank and five choice food pantries from different townships in the county. The study examined the providers’ perspective on how county residents experience food access and food insecurity barriers. The study focused on the process by which the food bank, food pantries and federal food assistance programs alleviate food insecurity and work towards self-sustained food security. I discussed study limitations and implications for practice, policy and research.
FOOD INSECURITY FROM THE PROVIDERS’ PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

Public Attention and Definition

According to the USDA, food security for a household means access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food and assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (USDA, 2011). Community food security refers to a situation where all residents in a community can access affordable and nutritionally adequate foods. When a community has difficulty accessing healthy and affordable food, it is an issue of community food insecurity; low income and urban communities experience this problem greatly (Bevis, 2010).

Food insecurity is often associated with hunger or starvation. According to a study conducted by the Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT), Food Insecurity and Hunger in the United States: An Assessment of the Measure, the United States is a country with plenty of food, yet not all households in America are food secure. Community food insecurity refers to an entire community’s lack of access to healthy and affordable food. Household food insecurity refers to a single household’s lack of access to healthy and affordable food (Bevis, 2010). Lack of monetary resources is a key factor in the ability to access and obtain an adequate and secure nutritional food supply. The study indicates part of the United States population experiences food insecurity at some time in a given year because of food deprivation and lack of access to food due to economic resource constraints (CNSTAT, 2006).

According to the CNSTAT, hunger first became a public issue in the late 1960’s, despite major federal assistance programs being in place. The CBS television documentary, “Hunger in America” brought recognition that hunger exists in the United States. This led to an increase of federal programs and projects to eliminate the effects of poverty. The term hunger continued to be used to reference people seeking food assistance until President Reagan established a task force to examine the food assistance programs in the 1984 (CNSTAT, 2006). The study concludes it is difficult to measure the number of people who are hungry because hunger is a physical symptom. CNSTAT credits the USDA for making the 1990’s as a period of transition in effectively defining and measuring food insecurity separate from hunger.

Food Bank and Pantry Network
Among the food assistance programs measured in the CNSTAT study of *Food Insecurity and Hunger in the United States*, are the nation’s charitable food bank and pantry network. Feeding America is the nation's leading domestic hunger-relief charity for a nationwide network of member food banks. According to Feeding America, a food bank is a charitable organization that solicits, receives, inventories and distributes donated food and grocery products to appropriate industry and regulatory standards. Feeding America said the food bank distributes the products to charitable human service agencies including food pantries, which provide the products directly to clients through various programs. A food pantry is a charitable distribution agency that provides clients with food and grocery products for home preparation and consumption (*Feeding America*, 2009).

According to a study conducted by Feeding America, as economic times change, the use of food banks and their agencies change as well. Food banks and pantries were created as an emergency network to provide food to people in short-term need. As the economy has changed, food banks and pantries have become a regular part of the coping mechanisms some clients use to secure access to adequate food. The change in how people view and use food banks suggest a different method of obtaining food security. This study will further explore and analyze how food banks and pantries provide food assistance to clients and describe the providers’ perspective on the change in use of food panties by clients for food assistance (*Feeding America*, 2009).

**Study Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to explore the ability to obtain and sustain food security in a Midwestern county from the food providers’ perspective. Numerous studies examine food policy and food insecurity from the client’s perspective (Bevis, 2010; Corrigan, 2010; Erskine, 2009; McQueary, 2008). I would like to know from the food providers’ perspective: What is the definition of food insecurity? How does one become food secure and sustain food security? By what means is it possible for food to be secureable to anyone? Through my research, I will explore what it means to be food secure, and explain the difference between food insecurity and hunger, in order to educate and raise awareness about food insecurity in the local community.

I conducted visits and interviews with the county food bank and choice pantries that provide food services to food insecure people in within the county. This study will explore what resources are available, by what means a person receives food services and how a person can self-sustain food security when they do not use services. In addition, the study will explore what
foods and quantity of foods are available, where is food being made accessible and to what level of accessibility is it (i.e. who can or cannot easily access this provider). I will obtain this information through interviews and personal observations with the food providers.

**Study Expectations**

The goal of this study is to serve as a resource to educate and raise awareness about food insecurity in the county and surrounding area. This study will specifically explore the choice food pantry’s perspective on the contributing factors to food insecurity in the county. Results from the study will educate about the providers’ perspective on negative consequences of food insecurity including health, psychological, social and overall community costs. Importantly, results may suggest possible solutions to food insecurity and ways to sustain food security from the providers’ perspective. The study will address if indeed it is possible, from the providers’ perspective, for food to be securable and whether the means by which one obtains food security differs depending on geographical location and situational or societal factors.

**Literature Review**

**Defining and Researching Food Insecurity**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has annually published statistics on food insecurity and hunger in households. The USDA bases these statistics on the U.S. Food Security Measurement Project, an ongoing collaboration among federal agencies, academic researchers, and private organizations. The project conducts surveys on the ability for households to secure food (CNSTAT, 2006). The Food Security Supplement (FSS) collects the data annually to the Current Population Survey (CPS). The results classify households into one of three categories: food secure, food insecure without hunger, and food insecure with hunger. The survey classifies this on the number of food-insecure conditions reported for monitoring and statistical analysis of food security in the population (CNSTAT, 2006).

The term food insecurity and hunger are used interchangeably in everyday reference to people without food. However, the USDA categories indicate it is possible to be food insecure, but not hungry. The USDA defines food insecurity as lack of access for a household by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food insecurity includes not ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food and assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways. The USDA defines hunger as the uneasy or painful
sensation caused by lack of food (USDA, 2011). It is important to note that food insecurity is in reference to a household and hunger to an individual symptom. A household can have food products available to them, but it may not always be nutritious food, rationed out, and may not be enough to keep an individual from feeling hunger. The USDA and CNSTAT consider food insecurity to be a separate concept from hunger.

**Evidence of Food Insecurity**

**Statistical and Social Evidence**

The USDA describes a reasoning to address food insecurity in the United States (Corrigan, 2010; USDA, 2011). According to the CNSTAT, a portion of the United States population experiences food insecurity at some time in a given year, however, food insecurity in the United States is not the same intensity as in some developing countries (CNSTAT, 2006).

The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 2011) provide extensive statistical reports on global food insecurity. The *State of Food Insecurity in the World 2011* highlighted the differential impacts that the world food crisis of 2006-08 had on different countries, most affecting the poorest countries. While some large countries were able to deal with the worst of the crisis, people in many small import-dependent countries experienced large price increases that, even when only temporary, can have permanent effects on their future earnings capacity and ability to escape poverty (FAO, 2011). This statistical report suggests large countries, like the United States, may have ability to deal with food insecurity and have ability to escape poverty.

A 2013 documentary, *A Place at the Table*, brought awareness to the rising food insecure rates in the United States and advocated for Americans to take political action to eradicate food insecurity as they nearly did in the 1970’s. The documentary agreed with CNSTAT that the United States experiences food insecurity, just in a different way from developing countries. According to the film, 50 million people in the U.S., one in four children, do not know where their next meal is coming from, despite the country having the means to provide nutritious, affordable food for all Americans. The documentary examined food insecurity through the lives of three people: a single Philadelphia mother who grows up in poverty and wants to provide a better life for her two kids. A Colorado fifth-grader who often depends on friends and neighbors for food has trouble concentrating in school. A Mississippi second-grader who has asthma and health issues that worsen from the large amount of empty calories her working mother is able to
afford (A Place at the Table, 2013). The film showed hunger poses serious economic, social and cultural implications for the country and argued the larger American public could solve hunger through political will power, as they did in the 1970’s. The film outlined the long-term medical costs for food insecure people to the short-term costs in funding food assistance and educational programs (A Place at the Table, 2013).

Food Insecurity Programs

A Place at the Table, noted the significant increase in charitable food providers. In 1980, there were 200 food banks; no partner agencies are noted. In 2011, there were over 40,000 food banks, pantries and soup kitchens (A Place at the Table, 2013).

Charitable food assistance programs in the United States are federally funded and intended to be short-term measures to address food insecurity. As the nation’s leading domestic hunger-relief charity, Feeding America’s network members supply food to more than 37 million Americans each year, including 14 million children and 3 million seniors (FA, 2011). According to their 2009 study, Food Banks: Hunger’s New Staple, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamp Program) helps alleviate the country’s struggle with hunger and suggests those benefits do not aid enough. The establishment of the first food bank in 1967 was to ensure food availability to people who have experienced a short-term crisis. Food banks intended to be an emergency source of food. However, due to the economic changes of increased unemployment and rising poverty, Feeding America member food banks have reported many clients no longer come to pantries only in emergencies (Feeding America, 2009).

The Ohio State University (OSU) Extension services provide information and resources on food insecurity at the state and local level. According to The OSU Extension, Ohio is sixth in the nation in food insecurity where one in six households experiences limited or uncertain access to safe, nutritious food. The OSU Extension works to help people eat nutritiously on a tight budget. The OSU Extension meets the needs via two federally funded programs. This education is to aid in prevention and elimination of food insecure households in the state. Ohio's Family Nutrition Program was developed to help families who go to choice pantries make healthy food choices and improve resource management skills in order to foster long-term health and food security. The program offers single lessons and a series of classes in the counties, targeting families who are eligible for food assistance. Staff members teach at sites including Job and Family Services, public housing, libraries, health fairs, senior centers and food pantries. The
expanded Food and Nutrition Education program is a series of classes targeted to families below 185 percent of the poverty level with children at home. Graduates reported improved nutrition practices, food resource management, food safety practices and positive changes in physical activity (OSU Extension, 2011).

OSU Extension educators can also developed a "point" system to allow choice based on nutrition principles (OSU Extension, 2011). Education tools and resources are provided to establish community gardens to aid in addressing local food insecurity and nutritional education. County OSU Extension provides information and contributes to the development of “choice” food pantries. Choice food pantries differ from traditional pantries in that choice pantries allow families to choose food items based on preference and need rather than have food "handed" to them in a box or bag (OSU Extension, 2011). I expect the food providers in the Midwestern county to discuss OSU Extension services and programs in the choice pantries.

**Food Insecurity Studies**

Studies of food insecurity tend to focus on the community residents’ perspective (Bevis, 2010; McQueary, 2008) Other studies tend to focus on perspectives primarily from policy makers or clinical physicians (A Place at the Table, 2013; CNSTAT, 2006; FAO, 2011; Feeding America, 2009; USDA, 2011). Many studies have shown there are a variety of factors that contribute to the problem of food insecurity for low-income and urban communities (Bevis, 2010). Kelly Bevis’ study, Healthy and Affordable Food in Low-Income Neighborhoods: A Community Food Security Assessment of Smith Hill, assessed community food insecurity at the local level in Smith Hill neighborhood of Providence, RI. Bevis’ research focused on food insecurity at the community level and its role in the social work field. Bevis noted that there are a number of researcher perspectives on these contributing factors.

Brandy McQueary’s study, Cincinnati Food Security: A Community Assessment, investigated food insecurity in Cincinnati, Ohio to determine if residents have adequate access to nutritional food. Similar to Bevis’ study on barriers contributing to community food insecurity, the study noted contributing factors and explores the concept of food deserts in urban communities. McQueary’s research examined the relationship between food systems and social character in Cincinnati (McQueary, 2008). McQueary found a correlation could exist between economic, family, and ethnic characteristics and the incidence of food deserts (McQueary, 2008). These correlations were in line with national data, and identify Cincinnati as an urban area whose
residents face a food security problem based on characteristics. The data indicated none of the fifty-two neighborhoods within the Cincinnati study area are completely food secure. Some part of each neighborhood fell outside of the grocery service area, and could be defined as part of a food desert (McQueary, 2008). McQueary’s study is important to take into consideration because it is similar in geographical location, food availability and economical status to the Midwestern county assessed in my study.

**Contributing Factors of Food Insecurity**

To prevent and eliminate food insecurity, research assesses the contributing factors of food insecurity. The following section discusses suggested factors that contribute to food insecurity and the ability for a person to become food secure.

**Poverty**

The Ohio State University International Poverty Solutions Collaborative (IPSC) ([IPSC](http://www.ipsc.org), 2011) indicates poverty as a main contributing factor to food insecurity. IPSC provide extensive research, resources, statistical reports and initiative efforts towards food insecurity to bring information and awareness to public and political attention. These resources include data and studies on poverty levels, consumer price index, poverty measurements, demographic resources and more ([IPSC](http://www.ipsc.org), 2011).

According to *A Place at the Table* documentary, the reason people are food insecure is not because of a shortage of food. Economist and author, Raj Patel, believes the real cause of hunger is poverty. In recent years, there has been an increase in the working poor (*A Place at the Table*, 2013). While a person may have a source of income, it may not be enough to purchase an adequate nutritional food supply along with other living expenses. This leaves the person seeking food assistance from food banks and pantries to complete their necessary food supply (*A Place at the Table*, 2013). I expect the food providers in the Midwestern county to discuss poverty as a contributing factor to food insecurity within the county.

**Food Accessibility**

Research indicates that while poverty is a direct cause of food insecurity, it is just one contributing factor to barriers of food security. Poverty contributes to accessibility and affordability of food. According to Bevis, the low accessibility to food in low-income urban neighborhoods demonstrated an important additional factor (Bevis, 2010). In comparison to people in more affluent areas, these residents have very limited access to high quality food, enjoy
fewer options in the variety of food available and pay higher prices for their groceries (Bevis, 2010).

Kendall Erskine’s study, *Assessing Food Security Across Connecticut Towns for 2009*, assessed food security across Connecticut towns and reported how food items should be both available and affordable. People should have access to a variety of foods at affordable prices in order to lead healthy and active lives. Erskine found in many Connecticut communities this is not the case, and people depend on convenience stores or bodegas with little to no fresh produce to meet their food needs. A town could have a wide variety of food items, but not be affordable to low-income households such as a food store like Whole Foods. On the other hand, a food store may lack variety but be affordable for community residents (Erskine, 2009).

Bevis found one major reason for this limited access to food is the lack of supermarkets in urban communities. A PolicyLink study, *Healthy Food, Healthy Communities: Improving Access and Opportunities through Food Retailing*, reported there are fewer supermarkets in low income and minority communities compared to wealthier, white communities (PolicyLink, 2005). Residents in low-income urban and rural areas also face transportation barriers in their access to food. Those living in poverty are least likely to own cars, so many rely on public transit to get to a supermarket or they walk to the neighborhood corner stores to buy groceries (Gottlieb et. al, 1996). Residents often shop at the corner stores, which may cause another food access problem: “these small stores…generally offer fewer healthy foods, are poorly maintained, and charge higher prices” (PolicyLink, Pg. 30, 2005).

Research indicates that low-income and urban communities encounter significant barriers that cause difficulty accessing healthy and affordable food (Bevis, 2010). Recent USDA studies show 14.9 percent (17.9 million) of U.S. households were food insecure at some time during 2011, this percent is essentially unchanged from 14.5 percent in 2010 (USDA, 2011). Individuals and families most likely to be food insecure are low income, minority groups and female-headed households with children. A primary reason for food insecurity is accessibility to affordable nutritious food (Bevis, 2010). Studies show these various barriers include lack of access to supermarkets, transportation barriers, reliance on corner stores, the influence of food assistance programs, and the influence of food policies (Bevis, 2010; Bolen & Hecht, 2003). The food providers in the Midwestern county may discuss food accessibility as a barrier to food security in within the county.
Food Deserts

The USDA defines a food desert as an area with limited access to affordable and nutritious food. The Ohio State University (OSU) Extension services provide information and resources on food deserts as a contributing factor in food accessibility. In a published presentation, The OSU Extension states their initiative is to identify food deserts in urban and suburban areas, then develop community projects to address these deserts. Identification of deserts would improve access to fresh produce through development of community gardens, farmers markets and choice pantries (OSU Extension, 2011). The USDA food desert locator shows the Midwestern county has an estimated 19.2 percent of residents have low access to food (USDA, 2011).

A Place at the Table, conveys the problem of food deserts in America where residents of lower-income communities, both rural and urban, do not have access to sufficient healthy, nutritious food. Residents must travel long distances to buy items such as fresh fruit and vegetables because suppliers and business owners have determined it is not cost-effective to make them available in their local stores. Most residents go without fresh produce for this reason (A Place at the Table, 2013).

A number of research studies have been conducted on food deserts in urban and rural communities (Bevis, 2010; Corrigan, 2010; Erskine, 2009; McQueary, 2008). These studies found that similar barriers to food insecurity including transportation and food deserts exist in both urban and rural communities. The studies found that urban communities rely more on walking and public transportation, while rural communities rely on vehicle transportation or delivery from someone they know. Residents in both urban and rural communities stock up on food supplies due to transportation barriers, so both communities experience difficulty in accessing adequate nutritional food for economic reasons. The food providers in the Midwestern county may discuss food deserts in connection to food insecurity in both urban and rural communities within the county.

Government Assistance Programs

It has been debated within the literature if the use of food stamps, which has been recently renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or the use of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) is associated with food insecurity (Bevis; 2010; Frazao, Andrews, Smallwood & Prell, 2007; Wiig & Smith,
2008). Bevis (2010) indicates that although food stamps are not the direct cause of food insecurity, many food stamp recipients have few or no places to spend their food stamps on nutritious food (Bevis, 2010). Bevis concludes, even if there is a nutritional basis to the program, if there is no access to nutritional food, households may still be insecure. Some people argue that recipients do not receive sufficient benefits that allow them to purchase the foods necessary for a healthy diet during the entire month (Bevis, 2010).

*A Place at the Table* documentary indicates inadequate governmental funding for food assistance programs, including food stamps, is a direct cause of food insecurity. According to the film, food stamp recipients receive less than $5.00 a day for food. This amount is determined as insufficient for adequate nutritional food causing recipients to purchase the cheapest highest calorie source deriving from nutrient dense processed food products (*A Place at the Table*, 2013). According to *A Place at the Table*, inadequate governmental funding is a direct cause of food insecurity and demonstrates the definition of food insecure as lack of access to adequate nutritional food, not just any type of food source. The film explains how SNAP benefits and the income requirements to even qualify for them, a maximum of $29,000 for a family of four, do not compare with the cost of living today. According to Bill Shore, founder of Share Our Strength, there are 44 million Americans receiving SNAP benefits and one out of every two kids at some point in their childhood will be on food assistance if funds do not become adequate to the cost of living (*A Place at the Table*, 2013). I expect the food providers in the Midwestern county to discuss governmental food assistance in connection to food insecurity.

**Nutritional Education**

Bevis (2010) noted other barriers contributing to food insecurity in low-income communities include the high number of fast food restaurants in low income areas, the societal perceived high cost of healthy food, the lack of education about nutrition, and the lack of culturally appropriate foods (Bevis, 2010; Bolen & Hecht, 2003).

Bevis noted one study used the USDA’s Thrift Food Plan to determine the cost of healthy food and found it to be more expensive, which suggests, “The higher cost of healthier foods could be a deterrent to eating healthier among low-income consumers” (Bevis, p.16, 2010). Lack of knowledge about a healthy diet reportedly contributes to food insecurity. Lack of nutritional education has been a debated barrier, since other studies have shown that low-income populations are aware of what constitutes a healthy diet (Bevis, 2010). Some research has also
found that low-income individuals do want to buy healthy foods such as fresh produce, but are unable to for financial or geographic reasons (Bolen & Hecht, 2003).

Food availability and affordability are further explored in *A Place at the Table*. The film examines the connection between hunger and obesity in the United States. Mississippi has the highest rate of food insecurity in the U.S. and the highest rate of obesity. Ken Cook, President, Environmental Working Group, and Marion Nestle, author of *Food Politics* and an expert in nutrition and intersection of nutrition and commerce, explain the change in farm subsidies and how subsidies directly affect the prices of processed foods. The documentary noted the cost of fruits and vegetables increased in the 1980’s. In contrast, the cost of processed foods decreased just as the obesity epidemic began. This makes processed foods an affordable choice for those with limited means. The film also shows children telling their parents they prefer processed foods to fresh produce. This food preference is what their minds and taste buds tell them they desire since it is all they know as a food staple (*A Place at the Table*, 2013). I expect the food providers in the Midwestern county to discuss food availability and affordability’s connection to food insecurity within the county.

**Agricultural Production and Policies**

Studies have shown there is a food barrier in the transportation, availability and affordability of local food to certain communities. Michelle Corrigan’s study, *Growing What You Eat: Developing Community Gardens and Improving Food Security*, suggested agricultural production and distribution may limit the accessibility and affordability to certain types of nutritious food such as fresh produce and organically grown food products. Corrigan studied community gardens in Athens, Ohio and noted the relatively easy manner in which food is accessible in the United States prevents many Americans from experiencing firsthand how the food system works. Corrigan added, no federal department focuses solely on urban food security and city planning departments often do not perceive urban hunger as a pressing issue (Corrigan, 2010).

Agricultural distribution is shown to be a contributing factor to food insecurity in Alaska. Charles Caster’s study, *Assessing Food Security in Fairbanks, Alaska*, assessed community food security in Fairbanks, Alaska and found the transportation of food largely influenced food security in the community. Caster noted in recent years, a movement toward eating locally produced foods has developed throughout the United States, with an emerging movement in
Alaska as well (Caster, 2011). Currently, among state and federal agricultural agencies, agricultural producers, and the general public, a consensus on the definition of “locally” produced food does not exist. The disagreement appears to be regarding the distance between the grower and consumer (Caster, 2011).

According to Caster, the term “local” is defined by the geographical distance an agricultural product grows from the consumer (Caster, 2011). The Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (Farm Act, 2008) defines locally produced food to be, “Any agricultural food product that is raised, produced and distributed in … the locality of region in which the final product is marketed. The total distance the product is transported is less than 400 miles from the origin of the product; or the state in which the product is produced (Caster, pg. 5, 2011).” Caster noted concerns over the distance that most food travels, relating in part to the carbon footprint, as well as to issues of food insecurity, illustrate only a couple reasons for the growing interest in local foods (Caster, 2011). I expect the food providers in the Midwestern county to describe food distribution to pantries as a contributing factor to the type of food available to clients.

**Community Costs of Food Insecurity**

Food accessibility and affordability as a barrier contributing to food insecurity contribute to the overall community costs in health care for food insecure residents. According to Bevis, the inability to access healthy and affordable foods makes low-income populations more at risk for diet-related diseases including obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, high-blood pressure and cancer (Bevis, 2010). Bevis noted food insecurity also has a negative effect on psychological and social well-being of the household provider, leading to depression and stress about the inability to provide for their family. Compared to food secure children, food-insecure children tend to have poor cognitive development, poorer ability to learn, poorer concentration, exhibit disruptive behavior and lack social development. In turn, these psychological and social effects from food insecurity may waste money for the government and residents through poor work performance and potential income to affect the economic productivity of the community (Bevis, 2010).

*A Place at the Table*, showed the food preference of food insecure subjects to be high sugar and high sodium content. Medical research indicated high sugar and high sodium processed foods increase taste bud sensitivity creating a positive reaction. This positive reaction causes people to prefer these foods to fresh produce when there is a choice and affordability and
shelf life are a determining factor. The film suggests the limiting of funds and restricting of qualifications for food assistance programs will lead to a higher medical cost for food insecure communities and nation long term (A Place at the Table, 2013). I expect the food providers in the Midwestern county to discuss the health and economical costs of food insecurity in the county.

A thorough search of journal articles and research studies, found no studies with focus on food insecurity from the providers’ perspective nor a focus on choice food pantry director and worker perspectives. The literature review demonstrated the need to examine food insecurity from the food providers’ perspective, particularly at the local level in the county as a means to identify the contributing factors of food insecurity in the county. By examining the first-hand perspective from those who are providing food products to food insecure people in the choice pantry model, there is potential progress towards identifying the contributing factors of food insecurity to increase self-sustained food security in the county and similar areas.

Research Design

Expectations

Consistent with the literature review, I expect the providers’ perspective to note similar barriers and contributing factors to food insecurity. Second, I expect the providers to describe how these factors directly influence the food they receive and make available to their clients. Thirdly, they will describe how these factors influence the ability of their clients to obtain and sustain food security. Lastly, I expect the providers’ perspective will provide a new view of local food insecurity in the Midwestern county.

Methodology

I used qualitative methods to research food insecurity in the county from the food providers’ perspective. I used a template analysis to look for common themes in the perspectives I gather. I collected the data in interview audio recordings and transcribed to insure accuracy. I have developed a priori coding method to code the statements and themes identified as important in a data set and organize them in a useful manner. The most reoccurring perspectives appear near the top of a hierarchy of themes with sub-themes below them to exemplify different aspects, types or interpretations of the major themes (Bazeley, 2009; Cassell & Symon, 2004; Creswell, 2009).
In the *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*, Cassell and Symon explain the use of templates in thematic analysis of text that I have used to organize and analyze my data. This method works particularly well to compare the perspectives of different groups within a specific content as I am doing in my research study. I developed conceptual themes among the data and clustered them into broader groups. I then proceeded to create my master themes with sub-themes. This method allowed me to connect the data results with the literature review for a thorough data analysis and discussion (Cassell, 2004).

**Selecting Subjects and Recruitment**

I chose my participants based on who makes food accessible and sustainable for those who are food insecure in a Midwestern county. The county food bank collects, warehouses, transports and distributes contributions of wholesome surplus food and other grocery style products to food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters and similar non-profits in the county and surrounding counties, which provide either hot meals or bags of groceries to people in emergency need. The food bank distributes to over 30 non-profit providers in the county, nine of which are choice pantries (Food Bank, 2011).

I interviewed the director and a front-line worker from the food bank and a choice pantry in each available city of the county to examine how the perspectives compare and contrast at different levels in the organization. There is one choice pantry in each of four cities. There are five choice pantries in another city; I selected the pantry serving the largest population of that city. In all, I interviewed the food bank and five choice pantries. The range of providers will allow me to gain perspective from different demographics within the county. All contact information was available on the food bank website and from the food bank director.

To recruit the directors, I contacted the director from the food bank and each choice pantry with the contact information provided from the food bank website and food bank director. During this recruitment discussion, I arranged a time for an interview. To recruit the front-line worker, I requested the director to nominate three to four names of front-line workers at their facility. Of these nominated, one worker volunteered to participate.

**Research Location(s)**

The interviews took place at the providers’ facility or a site of preference by the director and worker. All directors and workers preferred their facility during pantry hours.
Data Collection and Procedures

Methods/Instrumentation

All information for safeguarding confidentiality was in the consent form. All participants signed the consent form and agreed to be audio recorded. The consent forms were securely stored for the duration of the research. I informed the participants that my advisor and I will only have access to the data. The interview data (noted and audio recording) are treated as confidential, stored in a secure location for the duration of the study, accessed only for referring back to during my data analysis, and destroyed after the data has been analyzed.

If the subject at any time discussed information non-related to the interview questions and subject matter, I stopped audio recording and only resumed when they discussed related information. If the participants choose to withdraw from the study after the interview, I destroyed all of the data collected during the interview, did not use it in the analysis or in the report of the findings. No participants have withdrawn from the study by this date.

The participants’ names are not used and each provider name has a pseudonym. I do not mention the county name as the location of the study; instead, “a Midwestern county” is the description of the location. A master key chart is the only document linking the provider and subjects to their identity. This master key is stored separately from the consent forms in a secure location for the duration of the study, accessed only for referring back to during my data analysis, and destroyed after the data has been analyzed.

Results and Findings

Participant Identification Table

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Job Title</th>
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<td>Food Bank Director</td>
<td>FBD</td>
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<td>Food Bank Worker</td>
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How the Provider Defines Food Insecurity and Hunger

Definition of Food Insecurity

Participants were asked how they define food insecurity or a food insecure person. Each participant had their own thoughts and perceptions about food insecurity, hunger and access to nutritious food in the county, but shared several common themes among them.

The food bank director defined food insecurity different from the USDA. The director defined the term food insecurity as a label for hunger.

“It’s a way for the general public to talk about something that’s going on in this country that nobody wants to talk about, so we change the language to make it easy. Food insecurity means hunger. If you ask somebody if they are food insecure, they are not going to know what you are talking about. If you ask someone if they are hungry, they will understand. Most people can empathize with being hungry because everybody has felt hunger pains. Food insecurity is just a way to sanitize how we talk about this. It kind of relieves the burden of addressing the situation,” FBD said.

The food bank worker described how a food supply brings food security to a food insecure individual. The worker runs the backpack program that provides food to school children on the weekends that use the school free and reduced lunch programs during the week.

“We are providing meals for them on the weekend. So they’re food security is the knowledge that come weekend they are going to have something to eat and they won’t have to wait till Monday when they go back to school to get something to eat,” FBW said.

The following are how pantry directors defined food insecurity:

“A person not having enough food in their supply to last a month. The person is on food stamps and has to visit the food pantry to supplement their food supply. The reason for food insecurity is job loss,” PD1 said

“Society has tried to soften how we speak about food insecurity and the poor. Poverty can result in the loss of a job, loved one or divorce. Food insecurity means they have difficulty meeting their food needs because of poverty,” PD2 said
“Someone who doesn’t have access to food on a regular basis, is unable to feed their family and have adequate nutritional food at all times. People do not recognize food insecurity unless they work with it. There are many people who do not think there are hungry people in the township,” PD3 said.

“Food assistance is an aid in food insecurity. Food insecure people do not know they will have resources to provide food tomorrow, this week, next week and so forth due to economical status and loss of employment. Food insecure people have to struggle to meet basic food needs, they are not sure if they are going to have access to adequate food for their household,” PD4 said

“Food insecurity is a person who has difficulty feeding themselves and their family. Food insecure does not mean you are not working or have a family to provide for. Challenges can happen medically,” PD5 said

The following are how pantry workers defined food insecurity:

“A person who does not know where their next meal is coming from or if they will have enough to provide for their family, not knowing if you will have enough food in their supply for the month and not being sure where to go for food assistance,” PW1 said

“A person who does not know if they can afford food or have the ability to access enough food every day. The community is becoming more aware of food insecurity because of the recession causing job lay-offs. It brings attention to the issue and closer to home because more people know someone who lost their job,” PW4 said

Other pantry workers defined food insecurity as not having access to enough food at all times.

The food bank director defined food insecurity from a political point of view and through personal experience with clients. The food bank worker and all of the pantry participants defined food insecurity through their personal experience working with clients. Pantry directors and workers all defined a food insecure person as someone who does not have access to food at all times to feed themselves and their families. For this reason, the person must turn to food assistance. The physical symptom of hunger continues to be associated with the term food insecurity by all participants.

Pantry directors had more depth in their definitions of food insecurity and how it causes a person to seek food assistance. The directors noted poverty or the economy as a cause of food insecurity in their definitions. The food bank worker and pantry workers had less depth in their definitions of food insecurity, but noted food assistance programs to be a form of food security. I found all participant definitions do not fully align with the USDA definition of food insecurity since they do not define hunger separate from food insecurity. In addition, only director 3
mentioned access to nutritional food being part of food insecurity. The other participants only mentioned access to enough food with or without the use of food assistance programs to be part of food insecurity.

**How Clients Define Food Insecurity**

The food bank director explained how clients do not define their condition as food insecure; their focus is on obtaining food for survival. The following is the director’s comment on how the client defines food insecurity:

“When you are facing a crisis like not having food on the table you are not thinking about defining this. You are thinking about, ‘where am I going to go to get the food that I need to feed myself and my kids?’ This whole discussion about food insecurity does not matter when you are facing empty cupboards, it’s not about the terminology or the definitions or even the political will. It is the crisis you are in at that time and the steps you have to take to make sure your kids have enough to eat. I do not think they think about it for any great length of time because once that crisis is solved there is another crisis you are going to have to deal with,” FBD said.

The director agreed with the literature in further explaining poverty as a cause of food insecurity. The following is the director’s comment on hunger and poverty:

“Hunger is just a symptom of poverty. Poverty has a whole host of challenges. Food is among those challenges, but so is when a tire blows out on your car, the utility bill comes and you are not expecting it to be so high, somebody breaks a window, somebody gets sick and you have to go buy medicine. It is a whole raft of things, so poor people are generally reeling from crisis to crisis and they don’t have a lot of time to think about how they got there and what they can do to keep themselves from getting there again. It’s about going after the food they need so they can deal with the next crap that’s about to hit the fan,” FBD said.

The food bank worker did not comment on the clients’ perspective of food insecurity. The pantry directors and workers made general references to how clients do not think about the term food insecurity, they just think about obtaining food to relieve hunger. In terms of how client’s define food insecurity, I found the food bank director was the only participant to provide an in depth direct answer to how he or she thinks the client defines food insecurity. The food bank director said clients think about obtaining a sufficient food supply and ability to eliminate the physical symptom of hunger in terms of survival and obligation to provide a secure and sufficient food supply for themselves and their families. All study participants suggested that food insecure clients do not define their self or household as food insecure or do they recognize defining their ability to access affordable nutritious food at all times without food assistance as food security.
Providing Services and Food Supplies to Clients

According to the director, the food bank is part of a national network Feeding America. Feeding America set the standards for food banks. There are two hundred similar food banks in the country. In addition to other system requirements, the food bank must have a certain amount of square feet and ability to pick up and deliver food. The food bank developed the way they distribute overtime. The following is the food bank director’s description of the change in structure:

“The food bank started as a mobile food bank, distributing food out of a van, to having a warehouse and serving 12 member agencies in the county in one year with 300 thousand pounds of food. The food bank now has 80 agencies that draw food from the bank in five counties and distribute 10 million pounds of food. The food bank tracks the food supply through software programs. This determines how the food is distributed since it is based on the number of families that each agency serves. The food is distributed so everybody gets a fair share of food available. The inventory is online so the agency director can look and see what is available, place an order, and pick it up at the food bank or request a delivery,” FBD said.

The director then explained how the food supply has changed over time:

“The industry’s response to the food we want has also changed the food they donate to us. We have had to change how we manage that food. 2.5 million pounds of food a year come from retailers. We are running routes to grocery stores picking up dairy, meat and bakery products that have to move in and out very quickly, not like the old shelf stable model we were 25 years ago. We still have shelf stable foods, but much of what we deal with now is frozen and fresh. That has caused change in how our food pantries distribute food because they have to move it quickly too. As the sources of food change for us, it causes us to change the whole infrastructure. What we have done in the past will not work in the future given the food lines that are now coming in,” FBD said.

The food bank director said there is always a concern about the food supplies’ ability to meet the growing need of food insecure clients. There has been a decrease in the food bank’s supply. The bank used to carry a million pounds of food in inventory month to month. The bank now carries 400 to 600 thousand pounds of food because it is distributing more. The food bank director is concerned about having less food in the supply because if the food bank is not able to generate enough donations during a month it will not have enough in inventory to meet the need the coming month. The food bank has become reliant on donations to complete the supply from USDA foods.

The food bank director further explained how food is limited and rationed to each pantry. The following is the director’s response to charitable food distribution:
“There is never enough food and charitable food distribution is only a part of the puzzle to address food insecurity. We should be the last resort after all of the programs that are provided for nutrition assistance like food stamps, free and reduced lunch at school, the WIC program, meals on wheels and senior nutrition program. All of these programs are governmental federally funded nutrition programs. Even with all we are investing in that, people are still not able to access the resources they need to put food on the table every night. This is where charitable food comes in, there is never enough,” FBD said.

The director then described how the number of clients has changed since the 1970’s. This description is similar in the CNSTAT literature review.

“The number of clients is always increasing overtime. In the 70’s with the oil embargo, was really when charitable food distribution began. It was there only for emergency need. Someone may come into a food pantry and get charitable groceries and you may never see them again or only once or twice. In the 80’s there was a huge spike because we were going through a recession. People were not earning enough and the cost of food was inflated. More people had to decide if they were going to buy food or pay their utility bills and put gas in their car. It leveled a little bit in the 90’s and since the year 2000 we have seen a steady increase. We have more than doubled since the recession since 2008. In 2007, we distributed four million pounds of food. Last year, it was nearly 11 million,” FBD said.

The food bank worker said the food bank focus is food pantries. The worker is responsible for tracking inventory and distribution. The worker explains:

“There is a process before food received officially becomes part of the inventory and put it on the website. I set limits on highly demanded items so each pantry gets a fair share. There is a restriction because some agencies would take the entire inventory if they were serving more clients than another pantry. The pantries receive a two or three day supply of food. Pantries used to receive weeks of food, but there is not that much available. When I conduct inventories, I see how much food is there. If there is a large amount of food in the pantry, it shows they are not feeding as many clients or clients are not selecting a particular item,” FBW said.

The following are descriptions of the pantry food supply by pantry directors:

“Agricultural production does affect the food products we receive from the USDA, the food bank and retail grocery stores. There is so much set aside from agricultural production for food pantries in the effort to fight food insecurity. The Feeding America national network makes food items available to people in need. In a period of economic downturn there has to be initiative to provide services to hungry people. Twice a week we get sell by date produce, baked goods, dairy and meat from Wal-Mart and other grocery stores,” PD2 said

“The pantry is fortunate to be part of a church and receive donations from church members. I will announce to the congregation when we are in need of a certain item and people will donate it. The budget to purchase additional food is flexible,” PD3 said

“The pantry receives USDA food from the food bank and donations. This pantry receives a high volume of donations from churches, civic organizations and the local university. A family
can visit this pantry every 14 days; while at most pantries it is once a month because there is a sufficient supply because of access to many financial and food resources. The pantry also receives grants and donations for new freezers and other supplies to upkeep the pantry. This provides adequate access to food in the community. I donate extra supply to other county pantries in need of food for their supply,” PD4 said.

“The pantry rations its food supply to ensure everyone receives food to meet the family needs. The pantry receives food from the food bank and grocery store donations of sell by date items. The budget is not enough to meet the need of product to purchase. In one day, the pantry distributes 7 to 9 thousand pounds of product,” PD5 said.

The following are descriptions of the client base by pantry directors:

“There is an increase in clients, last month the pantry had over 700 returning families come in and over 100 new families. Unemployment benefits are ending for many people and there is low availability of jobs. The numbers have increased every year since I have been here. The pantry cannot do anything to decrease it because it is the economy,” PD1 said.

“The number of clients has been increasing since 2007 and beginning to level off. There are about 340 registered households. The number of clients depends on the economy, but there are some families in medical situations that may always be dependent on pantries. The pantry considers 55 to 65 percent of clients the working poor. The pantry serves as a safety net for some people. There have only been a few times where clients are taking advantage of the resources and not giving accurate information. When we engage with the clients and build a relationship, it does reduce this because the clients respect the resources and staff here. Some clients give back to the pantry when they do become self-stable,” PD2 said.

“The number of clients has increased and we keep a record of numbers on file. The pantry has doubled the number of clients since 2001. An average of 800 people and 200 families a month visit the pantry. I think it will continue to increase because of the economy. In recent years, there has been an increase in the working poor, or people who have lost their jobs and need help for a shorter period until they are self-stable again,” PD3 said.

The following are descriptions of the pantry supply and client base by pantry workers:

“There are many people saying it is the first time they have been to a pantry. The number of clients in the future will depend on if the job market picks up. I encourage people to shop in the city to build up its economy to create more jobs. There have been times of almost panic that there will not be enough food to provide. I express the need to the pantry board and churches to receive donations,” PW1 said.

“The pantry receives donations from area restaurants. Every Panera Bread is supposed to have someone they give their leftover breads and bagels to because they bake it fresh every day. The pantry receives one-day worth of food from Panera Bread once a week. This donation includes four garbage bags full of bagels, three bags of bread and a box of baked goods. The pantry also receives donations from Starbucks, Caribou Coffee and Bob Evans once a week. The
worker thinks food pantries are a resource for the restaurants to not be throwing so much food away,” PW3 said

“All people with medical conditions may always rely on the pantry, but there are others in unemployment or low income that can become sustainable without the pantry. I do not see a decrease, in the immediate future, but long-term thinks combining services can help clients become economically sustainable,” PW4 said.

All pantry workers expressed difficulty in maintaining a personal care item supply. Since it is not available on food stamp assistance, these items are in high demand in the food pantry.

The food bank director and pantry directors provided more depth in the description of the food bank supply and provided number of clients. Some pantry directors described the additional services they provide to clients. The food bank worker focused on their role in managing the food bank supply and inventory. The pantry workers provided less depth of the food supply and number of clients, but knew the inventory well. The workers noted an increase in the client base, but did not provide a number of clients.

There is concern about the volume of the food supply by all participants except for two pantry directors who note community support through donations with the food supply. The concern derives from an increase in clients, while food supply remains relatively the same. There is dependency on donations to come in when the pantry expresses need. There is dependency on local grocery stores to donate extra supply of sell by date items. The food bank director noted Feeding America works with food chains to donate sell by date items. Only the food bank director and one pantry director noted agricultural production as a reason for a change in the types of food in the supply, but not the volume in the supply.

Client Qualifications and Guidelines

The food bank and pantry directors all explained the basic qualifications and requirements of eligible clients. All directors said at minimum, a client must show a picture ID and proof of residency like a current utility bill showing their address on it. The client signs a self-declaration of income saying they fall at or below the income levels at 200 percent of poverty. Depending on family size, they can qualify on the week, month or year. Some agencies may require more qualifications for other services. All directors described The Virtual Case Manager (VCM) as a system used to store an electronic photograph of the client. The VCM tracks the pantries each client visits and when they visit using the bar-coded pantry ID card to scan and bring up a clients record at each pantry before they receive food.
The following is the food bank director’s description of the benefits to using the VCM:

“The food bank is able to track the services clients are using and have an idea of how many people it is serving. Prior to VCM, the food bank was only able to get duplicated reports, so if one person went to two pantries in the same month they were counted as two people. The food bank has an unduplicated count of clients, knows how many people are first time users in the system and is able to hot map with Google where people are coming from. In addition to tracking clients, VCM accesses how the bank is distributing resources and pantry locations. The tool makes it easier for clients to access food without having to re-complete paper qualifications each time they visit a pantry,” FBD said.

The following is a worker’s comment on client qualifications:

“The contract with the food bank allows the pantry to only to feed people in the school district. The school also has a food pantry. People can visit any pantry in the country, unless the pantry has certain criteria,” FBW said.

The food bank worker and other pantry workers did not comment on the VCM or client qualifications.

All directors agreed the Virtual Case Manager (VCM) is an efficient method of registering and tracking clients’ pantry use in the county. In addition to computer filing and tracking clients, the VCM is an evolving technological resource to study rates of food insecurity in county households. All pantries, except for pantry 4, allow clients to visit once every 30 days. Pantry 4 allows clients to visit every 14 days because they have a large food supply from community donations. Pantry 3 has specific qualifications for clients to live in the pantry school district. Other pantries only accept clients from the Midwestern county. Pantry directors said it is common for a client to visit more than one pantry a month.

**Distribution Structure of Services Provided**

**Choice Pantry Model and Client Food Preferences**

The food bank director and pantry directors described the choice pantry model for charitable food distribution according to how the state extension describes. The choice model allows clients to choose food items off the shelves with the help of a volunteer instead of receiving a prepackaged bag. A choice pantry organizes its food supply in a color-coded system designed by the extension. The colors reflect the five food groups on the My Plate USDA model for eating. Pantries display vegetables on green shelves and proteins on purple shelves. Clients shop using a selection card that allows a certain number of choices per food group based on the
number of family members. All pantry directors said this system encourages clients to choose a variety of different foods their family consumes and provide education on nutrition.

The following is the food bank director’s perspective on choice pantries:

“Choice pantries have gone beyond their minimum standards and worked more hours to provide better services, so they have access to foods other pantries don’t see in our online inventory. The choice pantries came out of a hunger forum we held in 2002 where we called together pantries, clients, social workers, government members and donors. We asked, ‘If we could deconstruct how charitable food distribution is handled, what would it look like?’ Out of this grew this idea for people to select their food instead of a prepackaged model that is still prevalent in other pantries. It is a way for us to share information about clients. It involves nutrition education and receives benefits they may be entitled to, but are not receiving like food stamps. The choice pantry model is based on the people who fund, provide and receive the service said it should be,” FBD said.

The food bank director described the interaction between volunteers and clients:

“Before volunteers just stocked shelves and packed bags. Now there is more a feeling of interaction between the volunteers and the clients. It builds more of a community that way. It does not feel like you are waiting in a parking lot, it feels more like you are part of it and is the reason we built the choice pantries. Since we are not giving away gold and because we are all human beings it gives us a way to interact with each other in a less judgmental way,” FBD said.

The food bank worker explained how the choice pantry model allows the client to feel dignified. The following is the food bank workers perspective on choice pantries:

“It gives the client more dignity, so they are preparing what is good for their family instead of you just boxing up a package for them and hoping there is something in it that is good for their family. The client knows their family better than anyone and the food they like to eat. That gives the client more choice and freedom to choose what they want,” FBW said.

The following are descriptions of the choice pantry model and food preferences of clients from pantry directors:

“We call the pantry a “choice market” as an upgrade from pantry to dignify. This is a market like any other store that you can come to and feel dignified. In addition to the pantry, there is a job readiness program to stabilize the clients with emergency food, get job skills and get back to work. We want to engage clients to access their skills and present them with opportunities. Poverty causes people not to be as conscious about nutritional needs. If the person is at a store the sign said ‘10 for 10’, the first thought is cheap and inexpensive, not nutrition. Extension comes in and demonstrates a recipe with a food product people would not normally choose as a staple in their diet to show them new and creative ways to prepare it with things they would not usually consider to expand their diet,” PD2 said.

“The choice pantry is a place where clients can shop in food different categories. The pantry bases the amount of food on family size. There is someone here from the food bank to sign
up eligible clients for food stamps. People are not going to eat anything given to them, they have likes and dislikes too. Clients sometimes bring in food from another pantry they were given and do not want, to donate back to this pantry. The extension calls the pantry to ask if there is a certain product, we would like to have used in a cooking demonstration. It is usually an item there is an excess amount of or people are not familiar with to show clients how they can use it in a meal. Volunteers can make recommendations and educate clients on how they can use the food that is available to them. The Hispanic population is growing in the city, about a third of our pantry clients are Hispanic. Hispanic clients like to come here because there are items available for them to make their food from scratch,” PD3 said.

“The choice pantry model provides a dignified a shopping experience with a shopping cart. The clients get a card telling them they can make color-coded selections from each food group based on the USDA My Plate guide. The pantry provides nutritional education and food preparation demonstrations through extension using items clients may not normally consider because they have not tried it, like lentils and figs. Our optimal health intake should consist of grains, fruits and vegetables. Shopping volunteers educate clients about the nutritional value of foods. The benefit of a choice pantry is there is less waste of food because clients are choosing foods, extension research prior to choice pantries showed waste and less education. As families attempt to become less dependent on food resources, there is need to address social and emotional needs as well. There is perception this community is affluent, many people do not recognize there are hungry people here and outside of town in the rural surrounding areas,” PD4 said.

“A choice pantry model allows someone to choose food, where other pantries give clients a pre-package. Pre-packed food creates more waste because the client may not eat the foods unless they are starving. The extension comes to demonstrate food recipes with food clients do not prefer to take. Many people do not want to take figs, lentils and rice. Someone may not take something because they do not know how to prepare it or is easy to eat. People will not take steaks because it takes work to prepare; they would rather eat something quick out of a can or fast food. Many people do not know how to cook because no one teaches them and it is difficult further down in generations,” PD5 said.

The following are descriptions of the Choice Pantry Model and food preferences of clients from pantry workers:

“People who live in this area tend to prefer fast food that is within walking distance. This would be a food desert It would be so great to have a fruit and vegetable stand and would love to see bigger chain grocery stores willing to open a smaller version of their store in poor neighborhoods, so people can have good food at a discounted price. There perhaps would be a decrease in the number of clients or at least they would have additional choices. The clients choose foods that will last longer in their system, such as high calorie, high carbohydrate, processed foods. This affects their food choices when they go through the pantry. Despite healthier options being available, such as whole wheat bread, the clients prefer white bread.” PW1 said
“The pantry receives food from the food bank and church donations. I will keep track of trends like baking products, sometimes sugar will fly right off the shelves and the flour will sit there. Food from the food bank is free there are processed products such as Mac and Cheese and peanut butter. Usually clients get those items in a non-choice pantry bag, so they are not looking for it when they come here. The pantry tries to provide a variety of items including foods like beans and tortillas. The worker noted clients are mindful of wasting food. Clients can visit once a month. In a world where there is little control, they may feel for this little bit of time they are controlling the things they have a choice in,” PW3 said.

“The benefit to a choice pantry is clients do not receive pre-packaged food. When people shop for themselves they know what they like and need. They may already have a particular item at home and do not need anymore or they may be out of a particular item at home and need more of it. They may have dietary issues such as diabetics, with no sugar added or low in sodium. The pantry provides a personalized shopping experience. When there are varieties of produce, volunteers can educate clients about its nutrition and use in recipes so they can consider different food choices. Most preferences are by personal taste and name brands labels. There is difficulty getting rid of foods clients do not recognize. Sometimes volunteers will open a package and allow people to try it. Not everyone likes the fresh produce, some people are not used to cooking from scratch or do not want to spend time preparing food. Many people prefer convenience, but the majority of reactions are positive to fresh produce, some local farmers donate as well,” PW4 said.

Other pantry workers also mentioned the difficulty in getting rid of dried fruit, figs and lentils because clients often have not tried these items, do not recognize or do not know how to prepare these items because they have not been introduced to it.

In terms of client food preference, all study participants promoted the choice pantry program model for food pantries because they provide clients with nutrition educational and a sense of dignity. Pantry directors and workers observed clients’ food preference and think the extension services play an important role in the ability to educate clients about nutrition and influence clients to select a variety of foods for their household’s diet. Pantry workers encourage and suggest clients to try new foods and recipes. This education, encouragement and suggestion promote the value and role choice pantries play in a client’s ability to secure and serve a variety of nutritional foods to their household. This also inquires some clients do not already have this education, encouragement and suggestion prior to visiting a choice pantry.

Pantry directors 1 and 3 thought the choice pantry model meets the food needs and food preferences of culturally diverse clients. The shopping cards provided to clients are in both English and Spanish. Pantries try to provide a variety of foods for Hispanic clients. Meeting these food needs and preferences reduce food waste and conserve the pantry’s food supply in
order to provide food to more clients and reduce the dependence of additional donations to 
supplement their food bank supply.

Some pantries provide additional services to clients. Pantry director 4 expressed the idea 
of a central location for several service agencies to provide assistance in all areas of life that 
cause food insecurity. Study participants indicated that providing food assistance alone does not 
eliminate long-term food insecurity, only short-term. Providing job training and educational 
resources lead to self-stability and sustained food security. The pantries that currently have this 
system in place report a decrease in unemployment rates and need for food assistance among 
clients.

**Obtaining Food Security from Food Providers**

The food bank director explained how the food bank and pantries provide food 
assistance, but do not provide food security. The following is the food bank director’s 
perspective on the choice pantry model to educate clients and no longer need to rely on 
charitable food services:

“Self-sufficiency is another terminology. I like to use self-sustaining because in order for 
someone to be self-sufficient you have to have a living wage job. We are not giving out living 
wage jobs at choice pantries, but we encourage people to visit food pantries before they run out 
of food, so they can go and select what they can from the pantry and use the resources they have 
to go to the grocery store and fill it out. There has been a flip in how we ask people to get food 
from the food pantry. Do not wait until we need to provide 100 percent of what you need because 
we can’t do that. Go first to us then to the grocery store. This helps them be more self-sustaining 
and less dependent on charitable food distribution,” FBD said.

The food bank worker commented on concerns of county pantry directors:

“I hear concerns when I go to the pantries to do inspections about people who abuse the 
system. I tell them, ‘if you are serving a hundred people and you feel two people are abusing the 
system, and you let those two people get to you to ruin your day, just think about the other 98 
people you are serving who need the services you are providing,’” FBW said.

A pantry director commented on clients receiving food security from food pantries:

“There are judgmental people that think there are clients taking advantage of the system, 
but it is a very small percentage. It takes a lot of humility to come to a pantry and sign in to get 
food and have someone shop with you,” PD3 said.

The following are comments made by the pantry workers on clients receiving food 
security from food pantries:
“If a client is able to increase their income, they can become food secure without the pantry. For some clients, the pantry is a temporary measure. However, many people accept this as their lot in life. They are on disability or they are poor. The worker tries to change the mindset in clients that this is how it is and is going to be like this forever, but it is a hard barrier to break, especially if they are generationally poor. Their grandparents and parents lived this way, so they think they will live this way. I encourage them to get an education and a job,” PW1 said.

“Many clients depend on this food for their food security. Food security from the pantry is taken for granted. Many people rely on these services and continue down the same path. It is difficult to help them not rely on these services because they know nothing else unless someone teaches them. There is someone helping people receive food stamps and job training. I think there are people that have the resources to help the food pantry, but choose not to. The problem of hunger is getting worse,” PW2 said.

Pantry director 5 and Pantry worker 1 and 4 said there are clients with medical conditions that may always rely on the pantry, but there are others in unemployment or low income that they can help become sustainable without pantry assistance. Pantry worker 5 did not comment on this question.

The study participants provided less depth in their perspectives, but acknowledged how some clients may view the pantry as a form of food security. Overall, study participants think the clients’ view of food assistance for food security differs. There are clients who still view the pantry as an emergency and temporary food source, while there are clients who view the pantry as a secure food source and choose to rely on its assistance. All but pantry worker 3 thought the clients who choose to depend on charitable food assistance for long-term food security make this choice based on learned generational behavior and poverty about acceptable ways of acquiring sufficient food and budgeting.

**Operation of Services**

According to the food bank director, the food bank has 16 staff: there are two staff members at choice pantries to help clients apply for benefits. One staff member for communications and reports, one member who finds food, three truck drivers to pick up donations and deliveries, three members in warehouse pulling orders and one member with the backpack program. One staff member manages special projects and volunteers, one member with agency relations, one member as a business manager, one member with the senior program and one member in salvage who sorts through all the food drive donations.
The food bank has 60 to 70 volunteers that come in once a month to sort through donations and assemble senior packages and backpacks. The following is the food bank director’s description of volunteers:

“The food pantries are volunteer driven and there is always a need for more volunteers. There is usually a core group of volunteers that are faithful and come in routinely, then people who volunteer on occasion. Traditional ways of getting volunteers are through college, church and organization civic engagement programs,” FBD said.

The following is the food bank worker’s comment on the need for volunteers:

“We take advantage of everyone’s good heart at Christmas time through food drives and donations because come June 1st; people think there aren’t hungry people. Need goes up in the summer because children who received free and reduced lunch in the school year, are home now. There aren’t enough summer food programs available especially in rural counties. So parents are faced with feeding their kids 10 more meals a week with no more food in the budget,” FBW said.

The following are comments by pantry directors on the volunteer base:

“We are fortunate to have a large volunteer base in their church can express a need for additional volunteers. The pantry needs six people to help run the pantry each day and most people only work once a month,” PD3 said

“There are 70 to 80 community resident volunteers and about 50 to 60 university students volunteer for community engagement. Student groups and organizations volunteer on Saturdays to stock and clean the pantry. The pantry needs 5 to 6 volunteers when it is open,” PD4 said.

The following is a comment by pantry workers on the need for volunteers:

“Due to an increase in clients there is always a need for committed volunteers. If there is not enough volunteers to shop with clients, they will have to wait longer. Some weeks there is more food in the supply than others, so the shoppers need to tell them how much they can take based on the size of their family. It is economically better to get food from the food bank because the pantry can obtain more food with money than donations. The food bank sells the food for less than a grocery store, but the basis of their food supply is government funding and donations,” PW1 said.

The food bank director and food bank worker thought individuals only volunteer on occasion and tend to forget about the need in summer months when it is needed most due to summer break from school for families with children. The pantry directors and pantry workers both explained the pantry is mostly volunteer-driven. All study participants, except for pantry directors 3 and 4, expressed there is a concern and need for committed volunteers with skills to
work with clients on a regular basis. Pantry directors 3 and 4 did not have a concern because there are always volunteers available in the local community. This concern for volunteers by the food bank participants and other pantry participants could reflect the level of public awareness about food insecurity in the county.

**Evaluation of Performance and Future Projection**

The food bank director explained the process of evaluation:

“The food bank staff spent the last year collecting data to evaluate how their services are doing and the potential for growth. Based on potential growth the food bank will determine the need for more space and staff in the warehouse. A consultant is helping the food bank evaluate how they will make these changes, how much it will cost and how we will launch a plan,” FBD said.

The following is the food bank worker’s comment on evaluating services provided:

“Many people live from paycheck to pay check. We have done surveys over years; one is a no name survey. The last question asks, ‘how did you get into this predicament? Tell us a little about why you are here.’ Common answers are they lost their job, but one of the highest answers to the questions is they had some type of atrophic illness, accident, or injury that wiped out their savings. So we are a millisecond away from being in the same position,” FBW said.

The following are pantry director comments on evaluating services provided:

“I would like to expand our services to provide food assistance to more clients. The church the pantry is located in is part of an alliance of other churches, so other churches will support the pantry. If there were a point where the pantry could not handle the numbers of clients, another church may open up a pantry as well. The pantry contract requires them to provide food to clients one time a month. The only reason the pantry does not allow more visits is to protect its resources. If other churches ran the pantry on different days, clients could visit more often. This is a long-term goal. The short-term goal is to go paperless and remodel the pantry to make it more user-friendly. I send in a report every month to the food bank. It is more important to know if the pantry is meeting the needs of the client base. The only way to know is to ask them. On occasion, we will survey clients to see if we are providing the foods, they need and want,” PD3 said.

“We want to make sure we are feeding hungry people, but there is a bigger problem. The people are hungry because they do not have money to buy food. They do not have money because they do not have the job. The reason the church started Tuesday night dinners is to do more than just feed people, it wants to help them make changes in their lives so they do not have to come to the pantry anymore. We would like a way to track how long a client has been coming and the reason when they stopped coming such as getting a job. I talk about expanding, but only if there is a need. I would love not to have a pantry. That should be our ultimate goal, not to have a pantry, but there are so many variables to approaching that problem. It’s a system problem, economic problem, it’s all kinds of problem,” PD3 said
“The pantry gives surveys to clients about their shopping experience and considers their feedback. The pantry wants to make a positive impact on the health of the community; if clients eat healthy, it will have a positive impact on their well-being. Besides needing financial resources for food, clients need resources for adequate housing. There are also issues of substance abuse and domestic violence in the community that need addressed as well. The long-term plan and vision is to co-locate the pantry with other agency services including job preparation, financial education and clothing. The client can benefit from an integrate service system where they can hear consistent messages educating them on how to make healthy choices and become more self-sufficient or stable economically and socially in the community. The one-stop service center would be involved in the school system and work to minimize economic class division among people. With a one-stop center, you have access to the resources families need, but it does not have the same stigma with it as a pantry alone. I remind the community the clients are our neighbors and need support if they are going to get to a place where they are self-sufficient, food secure and have optimal health,” PD4 said.

Other pantry directors mentioned the possibility of expansion, but did not describe evaluation of services in depth. The following are pantry worker comments on evaluating services provided:

“If there are more jobs a disabled person can do, perhaps more people would not have to go on disability and receive our services. Donations should be money or products. There is a shelter nearby to provide services to people by giving them a safe place, food, help for substance abuse and finding a job. These services all tie into the pantry,” PW1 said

“The VCM can tell the pantry how often they come here, but if they have not been here in a month or two months, we do not know why that is. Did they start going to another pantry or get a job? We could try to call and track people, but do not. Some people tell us why they stopped coming, so I do not think people just come to come. For the most part, people are here because they have to be here,” PW3 said.

“I think the one-stop service center is a good idea. Many clients are also using other community services, so to provide one central location would make things more efficient and helpful. The VCM could further help because it allows the pantry to track what services a person uses and how often. Based on this, we could determine is a person could benefit from budget counseling or there are other issues going on and the pantry can connect them with resources they need such as medical benefits. We currently provide information about other resources at our registration people if people mention they are in a certain situation. The volunteers do make a difference. Clients can be in vulnerable situations that require additional resources to food. We can connect them with all the services they need,” PW4 said.

Other pantry workers thought getting more grocery stores and restaurants to publicize their donations to food pantries will conserve resources, create a reliable food supply in addition to food provided by the food bank, and make the public more aware of food insecurity in the county.
In conclusion, pantry directors 3 and 4 provide depth in sharing their perspective to the process of evaluating services and future projection. The directors focused on the idea of integrating services to better meet the needs of clients and work towards self-sufficiency. The workers focused on the idea of using the VCM for continued research and tracking of clients. The food bank is conducting a study in the community put on by Feeding America every four years to gather information about people who receive emergency food assistance such as how often they use the services and how their home life and personal struggles affect them. They are asking the volunteers to administer these surveys to the clients at the pantries.

Several pantries mentioned the importance of conducting surveys and having the ability to know how long a client uses particular services. Knowing why clients no longer use services, would allow the pantries to be more effective in meeting the needs of clients in the future. Surveys are a tool to evaluate the performance of choice pantries and its ability to assist clients in obtaining a secure and sufficient food source. Further evaluation of this performance may determine the role a choice pantry plays in a food insecure household’s ability to obtain and sustain food security without food assistance.

Only pantry director 3 agreed with *A Place at the Table* in setting a particular goal to not have a pantry anymore and express the possibility of eliminating food insecurity. The other study participants expressed the impossibility in ending food insecurity entirely, only decreasing it through economics and funding.

**Public Awareness and Political Attention**

The food bank director agreed with *A Place at the Table*, in the political will power to recognize food insecurity in the United States. The following is the director’s comments:

“My experience has led me to learn hunger is a simple problem to solve, we just don’t have the political will to do it. We have the resources, there is certainly enough food grown in the country. The problem is not the amount of food that is available, the problem is the distribution mechanism and the political will to get resources into the hands of people so they do not have to turn to charitable food distribution to put food on their table. So my experience has determined we are not ready politically to address the real reason why people go hungry, it’s easier to change the language,” FBD said.

The following is the food bank director’s perspective on public awareness of food insecurity:

“In regards to the public having a general understanding of hunger, the best thing that could have happened to hunger is the recession because everybody knows somebody that has
been affected. Everyone knows someone who has gone to stand in line at a food pantry. It is not so far away anymore, it has become personal. The best thing that has come out of this recession is the beginning of the dialog that will change the direction. I think people understand hunger better now than they did before the recession. We have a slogan in one of the campaign’s we run, ‘Hunger is not a choice, giving is’ and I think people understand now that no one chooses to be hungry. Things happen in your life that causes you to go stand in line at a pantry. I often ask people, ‘how many pay checks away are you? How long could you go without any income before you find yourself standing in line?’ It is surprising people will say maybe two weeks or a month, we have people unemployed now because of the recession for two years,” FBD said.

The food bank worker told how many people in society know hunger exists because they receive information about it through media outlets, but they do not recognize it exists around them because they do not personally work with food insecure people. The worker also explained how some food providers receive more media attention because they are in a media district. The following is the worker’s comments:

“I have been involved for 11 years now and before I have never dealt with it (hunger) up close and personal. I read it in the paper and had conversations, but never dealt with it up close and personal. It gives you a different perspective of your life and on the lives of others, especially when you are answering the phone and a mother tells you she does not have any food and she has four kids and asks ‘can you help me?’ You just stop and think, that is five people that are hungry and that are only a drop in the bucket. You do not have the full spectrum on seeing what is out there. It comes in all shapes, sizes and neighborhoods. I said a long time ago, ‘it’s a war that will never be won, but you always fight a battle,” FBW said.

The following are comments by pantry directors on public awareness of food insecurity:

“People do not really know how much food insecurity exists or connect with it unless someone works with food insecure people. Many people do not think there are hungry people in this township,” PD3 said.

“The pantry reaches out to community organizations and groups to raise public awareness and meet the needs of clients. The pantry holds additional holiday drives and a summer harvest program to provide food to families with children who are not in school to receive the free and reduced lunches or backpacks of weekend food. Churches host community meals. This provides increased access to food for families,” PD4 said.

“The pantry hosts special holiday programs and spring festivals to create a community among clients. We want clients to get to know each other so they can help one another through bartering and so when they visit the pantry, they can recognize one another. There are many people in the community not aware their neighbor may be in need,” PD5 said.

The following is a comment by a pantry worker on public awareness of food insecurity:
"I do not think many people are aware about food insecurity because they do not choose to recognize it. I think it is important to make grocery stores aware they can donate food they are going to get rid of. The stores can make other stores, restaurants and people aware of the need in the community," PW2 said.

Other pantry workers said the pantries reach out to local grocery stores and restaurants to raise public awareness on the pantries need. The pantry workers think if more grocery stores publicize their donations it will raise public awareness.

The food bank director continued to take a political point of view on public awareness of food insecurity. The food bank worker thought the public and government choose to ignore the problem of food insecurity. All other participants thought there is a lack of general knowledge about food insecurity, but residents are becoming more aware since there is an increase in the “working poor” and more residents now know someone who needs food assistance. The stigma of food banks is decreasing for this reason. Pantry directors expressed the benefits of creating a community among clients and holding community events. Pantry workers agreed the publicity of grocery store and restaurant donations will bring more awareness to the public. Participants agreed it is difficult to have a full understanding of food insecurity until you are in the situation, know someone who is food insecure, or work with food insecure clients.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study focused on the food providers’ perspective of food insecurity in a Midwestern county. Interview assessments with the county choice food pantries and its food bank supplier was completed and evaluated. This study data included descriptive demographic data about the county residents, as well as interviews with both a director and front-line worker from the food bank and five choice food pantries from different townships to gain different perspectives within the organization and parts of the county. The study brought these perspectives together to create a new understanding of how county residents experience barriers to food security.

The study also focused on the process by which the food bank, food pantries and federal food assistance programs are able to alleviate food insecurity and assist food insecure households in obtaining self-sustained food security. The food bank perspective took a political approach with policy makers to alleviate food insecurity through governmental funding and acknowledgement. The pantry perspective took a hands-on approach with the clients to work towards self-sustained food security through nutritional education, financial assistance and job
Training. Learning these different perspectives and approaches to food insecurity can create societal awareness and empower social welfare change.

**Study Limitations**

The study was limited to current definitions, research and data collected by the USDA and CNSTAT. The status of food insecurity may have changed since recording this information. Future alterations to the definition of food insecurity and further research will be may differ from the current available data.

The study is limited to the perspective of five choice food pantries in this particular Midwestern county. This data only represents the opinion of participants, so the results may vary if the study was open to all food pantries and other counties. The study is limited to qualitative research. I was additionally limited to the voluntary director and front-line worker. If I had used other participants, the data may have varied.

The study is limited to the providers’ perspective of how the client perceives food insecurity, so the next step would be to talk with clients in a follow-up study to learn the entire perspective of food insecurity in the county within the choice pantries.

**Governmental Funding**

The food bank director’s perspective indicates there is a lack of governmental funding and acknowledgement of food insecurity put in place for food assistance programs, nutritional education, financial assistance and job training. The pantry perspective suggests clients who are on disability are not able to self-sustain because they cannot work to create the necessary income for food and therefore rely on food assistance programs.

These perspectives support Bevis’ research in suggesting how the government spends more money on long-term medical costs associated with food insecurity when more funding could be in place for food assistance programs to prevent these long-term costs. Food insecurity is a factor in poor work performance and potential income, which affects the economic productivity of the community.

Due to the increase in governmental costs of medication and disability for health problems or diet-related disease, policy makers would need to radically change social welfare in order to fulfill the one pantry director’s goal for the pantry not to be in business because the community would no longer need it. Without radical change in social welfare, this goal is unrealistic and perhaps why only one pantry stated this potential goal. The food bank perspective
provides insight to how governmental policy affects food assistance programs and the system by which they operate to provide services to food insecure households. The role of governmental funding is important in the ability for the food bank and pantries to alleviate food insecurity and assist food insecure households in obtaining self-sustained food security in the county.

**Community Health Cost**

While the food bank director connects to governmental perspective on food assistance, the pantry directors and workers closely connect to their clients’ perspective. The study participants foresee a long-term cost to the community and country due to increased medical costs associated with food insecurity, these costs include both physical and psychological health care.

Physical health care costs of food insecurity are a result of the inability to access and consume a sufficient amount of nutritional food sources. The county choice pantries provide a sufficient amount of fresh produce, grains, baked goods, meat and dairy to meet nutritional needs of clients in the county. A large amount of the food supply is shelf-stable and processed foods because these foods store for a longer period. The pantry directors and workers did not determine food insecurity or lower income to be a factor in clients’ food preference. However, the pantry directors and workers observed clients’ food preference for easy to prepare shelf-stable and processed foods. This observation of food preference supports the literature claims in Bevis’ research and *A Place at the Table* that food-insecure populations experience health and nutritional problems in result of their food insecurity. This food preference suggests food insecure clients tend to prefer higher sugar, higher sodium, canned and processed foods for their taste, shelf stable life and affordability. Food preference can also be a result of the clients’ consumption of similar food products prior to receiving charitable food assistance.

Psychological health care costs of food insecurity are a result of the inability to secure food for one’s household and use food assistance programs. The pantry directors and workers suggest clients need emotional support and stress the importance of making the client feel dignified and comfortable. A choice pantry dignifies the client and plays an important role in the client’s psychological ability to accept charitable food assistance. This perspective assumes the psychological acceptance of the food is required in order to meet the needs of the household in securing an adequate food supply and increases the ability of a client to obtain and sustain food security. The choice pantry model normalizes food assistance with a grocery store set up to
create a dignified shopping experience. This also supports expert statements and food insecure subject emotions exhibited in Bevis’ research and *A Place at the Table* on the mental effects of food insecurity including depression and stress about the inability to provide for their family.

The literature and food providers’ perspective agreed food insecurity causes more than hunger pain; it causes physical, emotional and psychological problems leading to a less productive member of society and long-term health costs to the community.

**Implications for Practice and Policy**

The results from this study provide implications for practice and policy work by learning the food providers’ perspective of food insecurity and food assistance in a Midwestern county. The advantage of qualitative research is learning a range of perspectives. The food providers defined food insecurity through their personal experience of working with food insecure clients that do not have access to enough food at all times to feed their household. The provider believed the cause of food insecurity to be the poor economy and poverty. Food insecurity affects both urban and rural parts of the county. Food providers, social workers, policy makers and community residents should be aware and educated about the physical and psychological effects of food insecurity, as well as the potential community health costs.

This study is one example of bringing together different perspectives to the issue of food insecurity in the United States. By understanding the food providers’ perspective, we can learn from people who directly provide a secure food source to food insecure people. We can learn from the providers’ perspective, the reasons clients are experiencing food insecurity and how it effects their wellbeing. Research should continue in local communities to examine the possible causes and solutions to food insecurity. The connection of poor economy and poverty to food insecurity narrows the search for the root cause of food insecurity in the county. It is important to not only look at food insecurity from the global, national, and state level, but the local level as well. Each community faces similar, but different barriers to obtaining food security based on geographical location, educational systems, governmental systems and economic status.

Policies in place at federal, state and local levels influence food accessibility and affordability to federal and emergency food assistance programs. Food providers should be educated on food policies to meet the needs of their clients and long-term goal of helping clients obtain and sustain food security without food assistance.
Maxine Jacobson’s study, *Food Matters: Community Food Assessments as a Tool for Change*, noted the tendency to treat hunger and food problems as, “Individual, short term problems easily addressed through emergency food assistance alone (Jacobson, 2007).” The results from my study agree with Jacobson’s view that food assistance alone cannot sustain food security. The providers’ perspective supported the Feeding America study on how food assistance has become a new staple for hunger (*Feeding America*, 2009). Clients in generational poverty may view the food pantry as a secure food source. However, based on the USDA definition of food security, the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food and assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (*USDA*, 2011), the food pantry is not considered a secure food source.

Uniting the food providers with other service agencies could enhance self-sustained food security in the county by creating healthier lifestyles through nutrition education and decreased dependency on food assistance through financial assistance and job training. The food providers promoted the choice pantry model to serve as both a nutritional educational tool and a dignifying environment to promote self-sufficiency. Choice pantry models provide a choice of nutritional foods for clients, while other pantry models provide clients with only a prepackaged bag of shelf-stable food products. Choice pantries combined with other agency services including financial assistance, budgeting and job training, reported a higher success rate of clients becoming self-sufficient and food secure without the pantry.

The choice pantry model is ideal for addressing food insecurity in the county to meet the needs of each individual client through personal attention. The pantry perspective indicates meeting the needs of the clients also means meeting the needs of diverse clients. The shopping cards provided to clients are in both English and Spanish. Pantries try to provide a variety of foods for Hispanic clients. The growth of minority populations may require food providers to be culturally competent of clients and become more educated about the food accessibility and food assistance policies that effect low income and minority populations.

Researching the ideal model for food insecure clients in the county could allow for further implications in practice and policy work to address food insecurity through food assistance programs.

**Personal Future Expectations for Study**
The study results contribute to the existing knowledge base of food insecurity by presenting the food providers’ perspective on food insecurity in a Midwestern county. The study adds to the body of literature that examines food assistance programs and charitable food services to food insecure households in the United States. My purpose in conducting this study is for it to be an educational tool to increase awareness and improve viewpoints on food insecurity. This research will benefit the county and similar communities in addressing the needs of people who are food insecure. It not only assessed how to obtain and sustain food security from the providers’ perspective, but how to educate and raise awareness about food insecurity at the local level.

In conducting this study, I found education and awareness to be important for county residents to understand food insecurity. Prior to conducting this study, I thought the main contributing factor of food insecurity in the United States to be agricultural production. After conducting the study, I agree with the study participants and literature that indicates poverty, poor economy and food inaccessibility to be the main causes of food insecurity in the United States. The change in my perspective is important to note because other United States citizens could perceive agricultural production to currently be the main cause of food insecurity. If more United States citizens were aware that poverty, poor economy and food inaccessibility are contributing factors to food insecurity, food assistance programs may receive more financial support, donations and volunteers from the local community.

This study provides research on food insecurity from the providers’ perspective to create dialogue and collaborative action among practitioners, researchers, policy makers, food providers, clients and community residents to increase the rate of sustained food security and self-sufficiency. The process of collecting and analyzing the data provided opportunity to receive guidance, direction and constructive criticism from my thesis committee to make my research study the most effective and impactful it can be. I want to publish a condensed journal article of this study to serve as a workable resource in media, journals and academia. I now have confidence to enter the field with a specific purpose to achieve an outcome that will not only serve to the benefit of others, but also to myself in making me see food insecurity from the eyes of the provider.
References

Note: the county name, food bank name and web address have been removed from citations to protect the identity of study participants.


Creswell, John W.. Qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five approaches. 2nd


Appendix A

Research Consent Form

Dear _director subject:_

I am Lauren Schwab, a family and child studies graduate student at Miami University. I am conducting research on food security for my graduate project in the form of a thesis or journal article to be published upon my graduation.

You are invited to participate in a research study of how one becomes food secure and by what means is it possible for food to be securable for anyone. I am interviewing food providers in the county that provide services to food insecure people. To protect your identity, your name and the providers’ name will not be used. The county name will not be mentioned as the location of the study, instead “a mid-western county” will be given as the description of the location.

The interview may last 60 to 90 minutes and may take place at the food bank or pantry’s facility, or a location of your choosing. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study during the interview or after the interview at any time. You may decline to answer any questions by verbally saying you do not wish to answer a question or do not wish to continue with the interview, I would then thank you for your time and leave with no questions asked regarding the reason why you wish to terminate the interview.

I will take noted and audio tape the interview. All information will be treated as confidential, stored in a secure location on the Miami University server for the duration of the project (expected date May, 2013), accessed for referring back to during my data analysis, and destroyed after the data has been analyzed. The audio recording is for accuracy purposes only and will not be transcribed. All interview questions will be about the services and perspective of the provider. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all of the data collected during the interview will be destroyed and will not be used in the analysis or in any report of the findings.

The benefit of the study is to help me understand more about how people obtain and sustain food security. My purpose in doing this study is to provide a positive educational tool to improve how food insecurity is viewed and addressed. At the end of the study, I will make a summary of the results available to you in the form of an executive report. The publication date is expected to be before my expected graduation in May, 2013. You may keep this portion of the page.

Cut at the line, keep the top section and return the bottom section.

I agree to participate in the study of food insecurity in the county. I understand my participation is voluntary, I may withdraw at any time, and that my name will not be associated with my responses. By signing below, I acknowledge that I am 18 years or older. I also acknowledge and agree to this interview being audio recorded and know it will be treated as confidential, stored in a secure location for the duration of the project, accessed only for accuracy purposes during data analysis, and destroyed after the data has been analyzed.

Subject’s signature __________________________ Date: __________

I agree to participate in the study of food insecurity in the county. I understand my participation is voluntary, I may withdraw at any time, and that my name will not be associated with my responses. By signing below, I acknowledge that I am 18 years or older. I do not wish to be audio recorded and acknowledge the data collected will be stored in a secure location for the duration of the project, accessed only for accuracy purposes during data analysis, and destroyed after the data has been analyzed.

Subject’s signature __________________________ Date: __________
Research Consent Form

Dear _worker subject_:  

I am Lauren Schwab, a family and child studies graduate student at Miami University. I am conducting research on food security for my graduate project in the form of a thesis or journal article to be published upon my graduation. You are invited to participate in a research study of how one becomes food secure and by what means is it possible for food to be securable for anyone. I am interviewing food providers in the county that provide services to food insecure people. To protect your identity, your name and the providers’ name will not be used. The county will not be mentioned as the location of the study, instead “a mid-western county” will be given as the description of the location. Your name, along with several other names, was nominated by the director to participate in this study because of your regular work involvement with the services provided by the pantry. Your participation would be strictly voluntary and the director will never know whether or not you agree to participate or later withdraw from the study.

The interview may last 60 to 90 minutes and may take place at the food bank or pantry’s facility, or a location of your choosing. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study during the interview or after the interview at any time. You may decline to answer any questions by verbally saying you do not wish to answer a question or do not wish to continue with the interview, I would then thank you for your time and leave with no questions asked regarding the reason why you wish to terminate the interview.

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The benefit of the study is to help me understand more about how people obtain and sustain food security. My purpose in doing this study is to provide a positive educational tool to improve how food insecurity is viewed and addressed. At the end of the study, I will make a summary of the results available to you in the form of an executive report. The publication date is expected to be before my expected graduation in May, 2013. You may keep this portion of the page.

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Subject’s signature ___________________________________        Date: __________

I agree to participate in the study of food insecurity in the county. I understand my participation is voluntary, I may withdraw at any time, and that my name will not be associated with my responses. By signing below, I acknowledge that I am 18 years or older. I do not wish to be audio recorded and acknowledge the data collected will be stored in a secure location for the duration of the project, accessed only for accuracy purposes during data analysis, and destroyed after the data has been analyzed.

Subject’s signature ___________________________________        Date: __________
Appendix B

Script of the invitation to participate to director

Dear _director_:  

I am Lauren Schwab, a family and child studies graduate student at Miami University. I am conducting research on food insecurity in the county for my graduate project in the form of a thesis or journal article to be published upon my graduation. I am advised by Dr. Sherrill Sellers, associate professor, family studies and social work at Miami University.

I want to invite you to voluntarily participate in my research study to explore how one becomes food secure and by what means is it possible for food to be securable for anyone. My purpose is to learn about food insecurity from the providers’ perspective.

I want to interview the director and a front-line worker from the food bank and the choice pantries in the county. As a director, I would request you nominate two or three individuals who work and are regularly involved in the services you provide and have one individual volunteer.

Please confirm you received this letter. I will follow-up this email with a call during the next business day to discuss details of the study further and answer questions. Each interview will be conducted privately. The interview may last 60 to 90 minutes. The interview may take place at the food bank or pantry’s facility, or a location of your choosing.

The information you provide about your services and programs will aid in education and awareness of food insecurity in the local community and how it is being addressed. My purpose in doing this study is for it to be a positive educational tool to improve how food insecurity is viewed and addressed.

If you have further questions about the study, please contact me at (513) 706-1741 or schwablm@miamioh.edu. You may also contact my adviser, Dr. Sherrill Sellers, at (513) 529-2323 or slsellers@miamioh.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, please call the Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship at (513) 529-3600 or email: humansubjects@muohio.edu. I look forward to hearing back from you and appreciate you taking time to consider participating.

Sincerely,

Lauren Schwab  
Graduate Student, Miami University  
schwablm@muohio.edu  
(513) 706-1741
Script of the invitation to participate to worker

Dear _worker_: 

I am Lauren Schwab, a family and child studies graduate student at Miami University. I am conducting research on food insecurity in the county for my graduate project in the form of a thesis or journal article to be published upon my graduation. I am advised by Dr. Sherrill Sellers, associate professor, family studies and social work at Miami University.

I want to invite you to voluntarily participate in my research study to explore how one becomes food secure and by what means is it possible for food to be securable for anyone. My purpose is to learn about food insecurity from the providers’ perspective. I want to interview the director and a front-line worker from the food bank and the choice pantries in the county. Your name, along with several other names, was nominated by the director to participate in this study because of your regular work involvement with the services provided by the pantry. Your participation would be strictly voluntary and the director will never know whether or not you agree to participate or later withdraw from the study.

I will follow-up this email with a call during the next business day to discuss details of the study further and answer questions. Each interview will be conducted privately. The interview may last 60 to 90 minutes. The interview may take place at the food bank or pantry’s facility, or a location of your choosing.

The information you provide about your services and programs will aid in education and awareness of food insecurity in the local community and how it is being addressed. My purpose in doing this study is for it to be a positive educational tool to improve how food insecurity is viewed and addressed.

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Sincerely,

Lauren Schwab
Graduate Student, Miami University
schwablm@muohio.edu
(513) 706-1741
Appendix C

Interview Script Note any follow up questions will relate to these questions I will be asking:

Services Provided:

➢ How do you, as a provider, define food insecurity?
➢ What systems do you use to define food insecurity?
➢ How do your clients define food insecurity?
➢ What services do you provide to clients?
➢ How did the organization select and develop its services to offer?
➢ How does the organization provide its services (e.g. employees, volunteers)?
➢ How does the organization function/operate and meet its resource needs in order to maintain providing services (i.e. Where/how is funding and/or food resources received)?

Clients:

➢ What qualifications do people need to meet to be served by the organization (e.g. background or income check, identification)?
➢ How many clients are provided services by your organization each month and year?
➢ Is there an umbrella organization that serves to oversee clients receiving services by more than one organization (i.e. limitations to services or items one client and receive)?
➢ Where/How do clients receive food when they no longer receive services from your system of organizational providers?
➢ Is there a limited time duration clients may receive the services provided?

Demand for Services Provided:

➢ How have the needs of clients changed over time (e.g. types or quantity of services needed)?
➢ How are the needs expected to change in the future (e.g. types or quantity of services needed)?
➢ Are there any resources difficult to maintain/obtain for the organization? (e.g. supplies, employees, volunteers)

Projection for the Future:

➢ Is the number of clients expected to decrease or increase with time?
➢ Is the demographic of clients expected to change? Why and how?
What are the future goals of the organization?

How is progress expected to be made towards meeting the goals (e.g. steps or measures that will be taken so goals are met, timeline or projected date of meeting goals)?

What does the organization think to be the clients’ perspective of food insecurity?

How much public awareness is there about local food insecurity?

**Nutritional Value of Food Provided**

What types of food in what quantities is received to provide to clients?

How is the food received?

When is it received?

How long is it kept before it is provided or discarded?

How do clients receive or select certain foods and in what quantities?

How do the types of food provided change on a daily, weekly, monthly, seasonally or yearly basis?

Does agricultural production or transportation influence the types of food provided?

How do other service providers, grocery stores or other donators influence the types of food provided?

Do the types of food provided determine a client’s state of food security?
Appendix D

Additional Resources


www.mercycorps.org/topics/hungernutrition


mid-2008., downturn, c. w., poverty, p. m., 2010, h. D., year, b. f., & volatile., v. (2011). FAO: