



Summary Report:

Wake County Comprehensive Food Pantry Study

May 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From February to April 2018, Capital Area Food Network (CAFN) conducted a study of food pantries in Wake County, NC to learn about their locations, operations, and challenges. This study yielded valuable information about local pantries including:

- The discovery of 99 active food pantry locations, requirements, and hours of operation
- High-need areas that lack access to food aid
- The presence of client-choice distribution model
- Unique challenges that university and college pantries face
- Solutions to common food pantry barriers

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
BACKGROUND	2
STUDY GOALS	2
DATA COLLECTION	2
SURVEY	3
FINDINGS	5
NEXT STEPS	13
CONCLUSION	14

BACKGROUND

The [2017-2020 Wake County Food Security Plan](#) aims to help hungry families with short-term food aid and it seeks to understand and address issues that cause food insecurity initially. There are many projects outlined in the Food Security Plan, however, that require specific, reliable data about food pantries in Wake County. Before this study, there were several lists of pantry locations available publicly online or used by referral agencies, but none of them were comprehensive or updated.

In November 2017, CAFN's AmeriCorps VISTA member wrote a project proposal requesting permission to conduct a study that would reveal each pantry's structure and resources, general operations, food recipients, distributed food, and their outreach, goals, and barriers. By February 2018, the survey questions were finalized and 10 volunteers were recruited, trained, and began contacting every organization that potentially had a food pantry. Two months later, the raw data was collected and the data was analyzed and distributed.

STUDY GOALS

1. Collect information about Wake County food pantries through a series of interviews.
2. Analyze collected data to identify barriers that food pantries face and highlight their most critical needs.
3. Create research-backed recommendations for local governments and nonprofits that will support Wake County food pantries.

DATA COLLECTION

Process

1. Project proposal with first draft of interview questions was developed for approval by CAFN leadership
2. All existing lists of Wake County food pantries were collected and combined with original research to create primary contact list
 - a. Sources of lists: FBCENC, IFFS, Wake County Cooperative Extension, Wake County Long Range Planning Department, Community Food Lab, YouthThrive, Wake Network of Care
 - b. 215 organizations are initially identified as potentially having a food pantry
3. Survey questions were finalized and email templates, an interview script, and volunteer interviewer training materials were created
4. Volunteers were recruited and trained to conduct interviews with food pantry managers
5. 11 volunteers interviewed food pantry managers via phone call
6. Data were aggregated and analyzed
7. Pantry locations and general information were posted publicly to Wake Network of Care

-
8. Summary report of the study was generated

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, a food pantry is an agency that distributes free, uncooked food to individuals from one location at least once a month.

With this definition in mind, the following agencies were not considered for this study: K-12 school food pantries, meal/food delivery services (i.e. Meals on Wheels, Backpack Buddies), and prepared-meal sites (i.e. soup kitchens, brown bag lunch distributors). Additionally, only pantries in Wake County were interviewed. Pantries located just outside of the county line were only used in the gap analysis portion of this project.

SURVEY

Most of the survey questions asked in the interview directly answered an information request outlined in one or more action items/indicators from the Food Security Plan. The rest of the questions were asked because the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina (FBCENC) and the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle (IFFS) have a vested interest in knowing how their partner agencies operate.

Implementation and Privacy

Trained volunteers interviewed food pantry managers via phone call. Each manager was informed that, beyond basic information like pantry location and hours of operation, specific information about their pantry would be kept private within CAFN. After the interview, the volunteers submitted the information they collected into a private, CAFN-owned Google Forms survey.

Questions

The survey questions are divided into the following categories:

- General Operation Information
- Food Recipient Information
- Food Information
- Pantry Structure and Resources
- Outreach, Goals, and Barriers

The interview questions are as follows:

- **General Operation Information**
 1. Name of pantry
 2. Name of host organization

-
3. Pantry address
 4. Pantry or host site phone number
 5. Website
 6. Hours/days of operation
 7. Pantry point of contact name and email
 8. Number of paid full or part-time employees
 9. Annual operating budget
 10. Estimated number of volunteers weekly
 11. Does your pantry use a client-choice model?
 12. Does your pantry compost?
- **Food Recipient Information**
 13. Requirements food recipients must meet (if any)
 - a. Geographic: _____
 - b. Number of visits limited: _____
 - c. Must have a referral
 - d. Meet certain income bracket
 - e. No requirements
 - f. Other: _____
 14. Estimated number of clients who receive food weekly AND/OR estimated number of people fed as a result of the food distribution
 15. Estimated pounds of food distributed annually
 - **Food Information**
 16. Does your pantry buy food? If yes, from where?
 17. Sources of food donations (please list donors)
 - a. Corporate: _____
 - b. Food Banks
 - i. FBCENC
 - ii. IFFS
 - iii. Other: _____
 - c. Community Gardens: _____
 - d. Other: _____
 18. Does your pantry offer clients fresh produce?
 19. Does your pantry distribute food that is past the marked expiration/use by date?
 - **Pantry Resources**
 20. Does your pantry have access to a refrigerator and/or freezer for produce, dairy, meat, etc.?
 21. Does your pantry or host site maintain a community garden? If no, is there interest?
 22. Does your pantry have the capacity to pick up, store, and distribute produce from nearby community gardens?
 23. Does your food pantry host gardening, cooking, or nutrition classes?

-
24. Does your food pantry offer any additional resources to food recipients?
(Example: prescription assistance, referral or case management services, free clothing, counseling, etc.)
 - **Outreach, Goals, and Barriers**
 25. Do you want your pantry's information posted on public food resource databases like Wake Network of Care?
 26. Does your food pantry have any interest in hosting gardening or nutrition classes/demonstrations?
 27. Do you have interest in attending webinars to learn about food pantry best practices?
 28. What are the most significant challenges your pantry faces on a regular basis?
(i.e. language barriers, lack of volunteers, funding, transportation, space, etc.)
 29. In theory, if your pantry were to receive a small grant, what would you spend it on?

FINDINGS

Pantry List

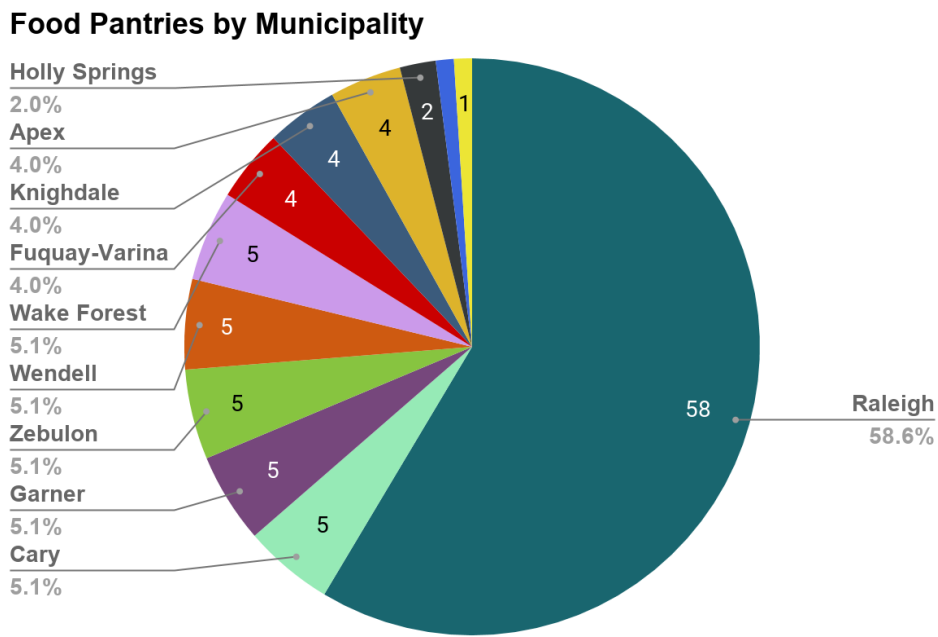
In total, over 215 organizations that potentially had food pantries were contacted. As of April 2018, 99 Wake County pantries were identified as open and 116 additional agency pantries were either closed, never existed, or did not meet the aforementioned food pantry definition.

Eighty-nine pantry managers said they wanted their pantry's information to be listed on a public database. This public list can be found under the food resource category on [Wake Network of Care](#), a county-funded online resource directory. The 10 other managers said they did not want their pantries to be listed online because they did not have the capacity to serve additional clients. Of the 99 pantries that were confirmed to be open, 75 pantry managers agreed to complete a 15 minute interview with one of the CAFN volunteers.

Locations

Municipalities

Every municipality in Wake County, except Morrisville, has at least one food pantry - including unincorporated Willow Springs.



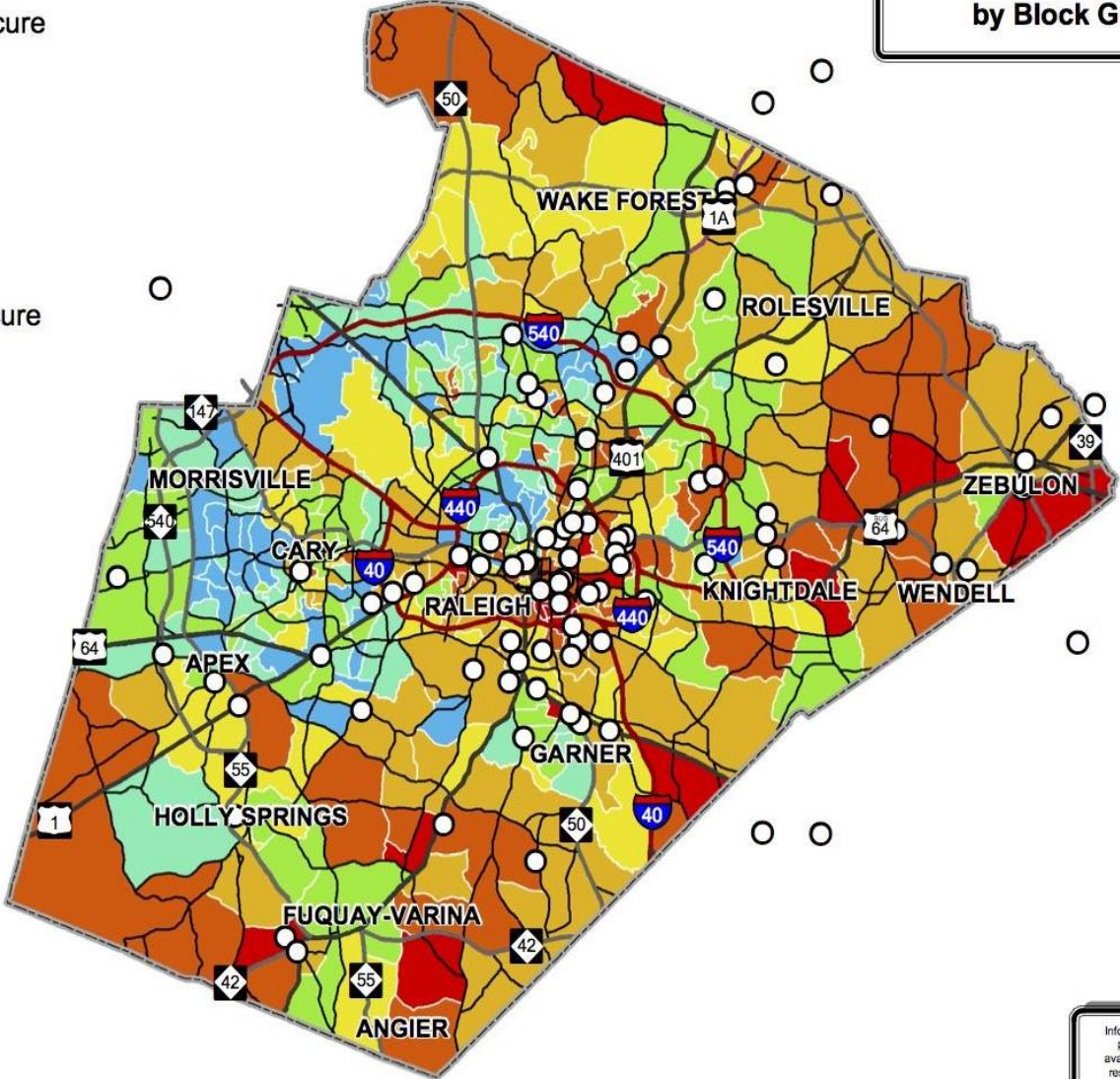
Food Security and Gaps in Service

Page 7 contains a map generated by the Wake County Long Range Planning Department that displays the pantry locations over data that shows a weighted food security score by block group. This Low Income-Low Access dataset displays the level of food access according to: proximity to a retailer accepting SNAP, vehicle ownership, and poverty rate.

There are several block groups in the north and southwest sections of the county that are extremely food insecure, yet lack food pantries. This includes areas in North Raleigh, Wake Forest, Rolesville, Fuquay Varina, and Holly Springs.

- Food Pantries
- Food Insecurity**
- More Food Insecure
-
-
-
-
-
- Less Food Insecure

**Food Pantries and
Relative Food Insecurity
by Block Group, 2018**



Information depicted hereon is for reference purposes only and is derived from best available sources. Wake County assumes no responsibility for errors arising from misuse of this map.

4/25/2018

Author: Danny Makaravage

Affiliations and Partnerships

The 99 open pantries are operated by the following types of organizations:

- Places of worship (churches, mosques): 70 pantries
- Religious nonprofits: 10 pantries
- Non-denominational nonprofits: 11 pantries
- Colleges and Universities: 8 pantries

Operations

Staff and Volunteers

59% of pantries reported having no paid staff and 32% have 1-2 full or part time paid staff. Each pantry has an average of 12 volunteers each time the pantry is open.

Budget

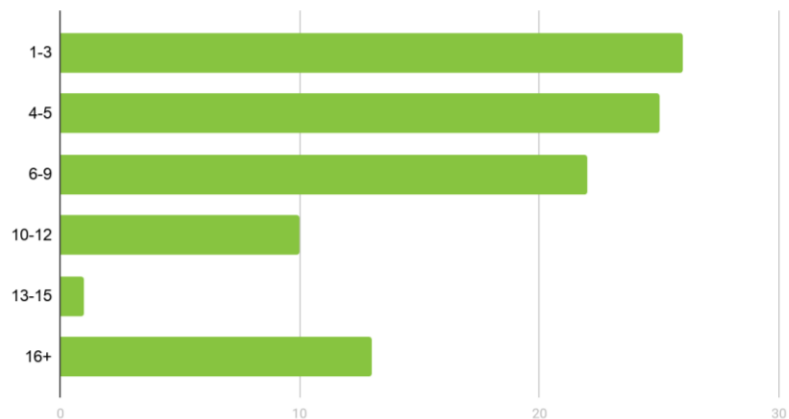
When asked about annual operating budgets, 25 of the 75 pantry managers interviewed either did not know what their budget was or did not want to disclose this information. 9 pantries reported having no budget at all. The other 41 pantries have budgets that range from \$500 to \$780,000 per year. The average annual budget for these 50 pantries is \$52,932.14.

Hours of Operation

Many food insecure families have at least one household member that works full time,¹ yet 50% of Wake County pantries are exclusively open during weekdays between 9am and 5pm. These hours can be a significant barrier to food aid access if a person who needs food works semi-regular hours during the week. Pantries

may maintain these restrictive hours due to their host organization's building policies or because their few volunteers are available to work late afternoons or weekends. Despite these barriers, food pantries ought to consider expanding or modifying their food pick up hours so working families in need can access these resources.

Number of Times a Pantry is Open Each Month



¹ More information on food insecurity and employment in Feeding America's report [From Paycheck to Paycheck: Hunger in Working America](#)

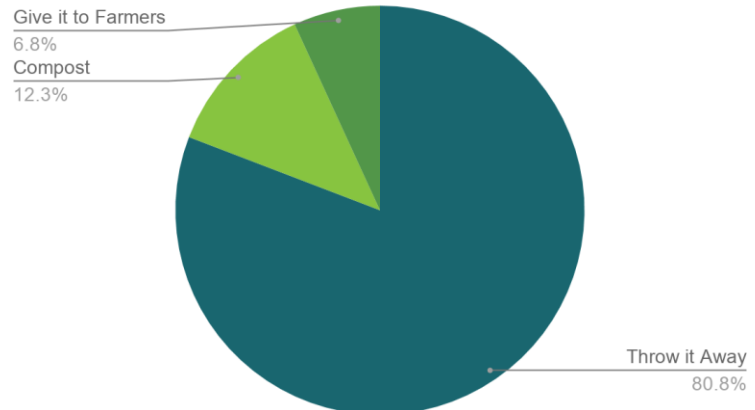
Structure

Food pantries can be designed to administer food in a variety of ways; this usually depends on volunteer capacity, storage space, parking, and time constraints of the host organization. CAFN and the local food banks were specifically interested to know which pantries use the client choice model. This means a pantry allows clients to select the food they want to receive (as opposed to receiving a pre-packed box of food). This distribution method can reduce food waste, bring dignity to clients, accommodate dietary restrictions, and can save food pantries money. Before this study, it was widely believed that only three pantries in the county used the client choice model, but it is now known that thirty-two pantries in Wake County provide their food recipients with at least some options in what they receive. Although each pantry set up is slightly unique, this variety of active client choice models can serve as examples and inspiration for managers considering switching their pantry's distribution tactics.

Food Waste

Additionally, about 1 in 5 pantries have the infrastructure to either compost any food waste or give it to a local farmer. Food waste is almost inevitable considering that the food is often recovered at a retail grocery store, transported to a local food bank, and then distributed through a food pantry.

What Pantries Do with Food Waste



Additional Resources

Families that face food insecurity may also face other financial hardships - like having trouble paying bills, buying new clothes, or paying for prescriptions. Over half of Wake County's food pantries offer additional services to clients after they receive food. For example:

- 21 pantries offer free, donated clothing
- 14 pantries refer clients to additional community services
- 10 pantries host nutrition classes
- 7 pantries provide some kind of physical health care or prescription vouchers
- 6 pantries offer utility assistance or financial aid
- 4 pantries host job readiness classes
- Other pantries have services that include distributing hygiene products, prepared food, school supplies, holiday gifts, and baby items.

Food Recipients

Client Requirements

Some food pantries require food recipients to produce certain documents in order to receive food. This may be due to donor or host site regulations or tracking. Thirty-three pantries have no requirements that clients must meet. The rest of the pantries have one or more requirements including:

- Show photo ID: 35 pantries
- Live in a particular service area: 24 pantries
 - This usually means the client must have proof of residence.
- Limit on the number of times someone can receive food: 16 pantries
- Current university student or faculty status: 7 pantries
- Meet an income requirement: 4 pantries
 - In some pantries this is self-reported. Others require a pay stub.
- Must have a referral from a pre-approved organization: 3 pantries

Clients Served

Depending on their reporting methods and food donors, some food pantries track the number of households they serve. Other pantries may track the number of individuals in the households they serve. Five pantries do not track the number of households or individuals at all. The average Wake County food pantry serves 80 households per week. It is important to note that pantries are not necessarily serving 80 unique families from week to week. Many pantries have a group of families that they serve each week (or month) in addition to families that may only visit once or twice. Because of this, it is difficult to accurately determine the amount of families or individuals that receive food assistance each year.

Food

Sources

Most local food pantries source food from multiple sources. This includes:

- Donated or purchased at a discount from FBCENC: 55 pantries
- Donated or purchased at a discount from IFFS: 17 pantries
- Purchased at full-price from food retailers: 24 pantries

- Donated from nearby food retailers: 32 pantries
- Donated cooked food from restaurants: 10 pantries
- Reliant almost entirely on food drives: 8 pantries
- Buying from wholesaler: 5 pantries
- Produce from a community or pantry garden: 5 pantries

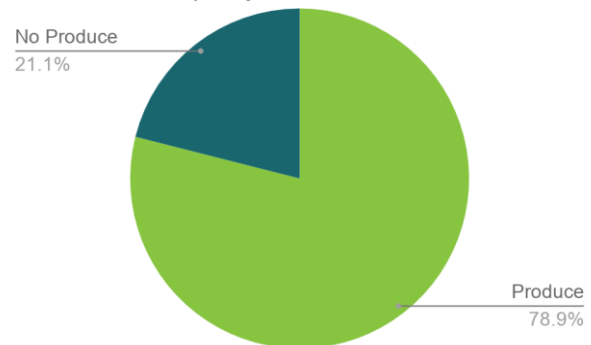
Pounds Distributed

Thirty-two pantries do not track how much food they distribute. The 35 pantries that reported their distribution numbers gave out a total of about 8,537,304 lbs. in 2017. This averages to 243,923 lbs. per pantry.

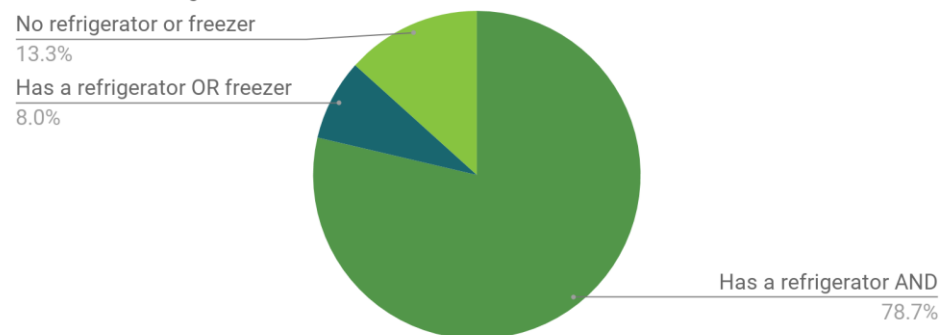
Types of Food

Because food pantries are often reliant on what retailers donate to local food banks, pantries rarely have significant control on what types of food they distribute. A pantry's ability to distribute produce and other products that do not have long shelf lives, however, depends on whether the pantry has a refrigerator and freezer. There are 16 local pantries that do not distribute produce - 12 of those pantries do not have refrigerators.

Pantries with Capacity to Distribute Produce



Pantries with Refrigerators and Freezers



Another supply chain-related decision a food pantry must make is if they will distribute food that has passed its indicated expiration/use by date. [Feeding America](#), FBCENC, and IFFS all condone the distribution of certain past-date food if it meets certain food safety regulations and

suggestions set by the FDA.² Even though they deem this food safe to consume, some pantries still refrain from giving it to clients. More specifically 41 pantries reported distributing food marked passed the expiration/use by date and 26 pantries said they do not do this. Five pantries reported setting the expired food aside and allowing clients to take it “at their own risk.”

Problems and Solutions

Reported Barriers

When asked about the most common issues their pantry faced, 8 managers reported having no problems at all. The rest of the managers revealed the following problems:

- Lack of operation and/or storage space: 22 pantries
- Lack of funding: 20 pantries
- Lack of volunteers/low volunteer retention: 13 pantries
- Transportation issues: 8 pantries
- Lack of quality/healthy food: 8 pantries
- Language barrier between clients and volunteers: 7 pantries
- Lack of staff capacity: 7 pantries
- Lack of marketing/not enough clients: 7 pantries
- Having consistent and adequate donations: 6 pantries
- Other reported barriers: issues working with food banks or host organizations, not enough hygiene products, building maintenance and decorations

Funding Priorities

More specific needs and priorities were revealed when managers were asked to report how they would use money from a “small grant” for their pantry:

- Buy more food: 28 pantries
- Invest in storage/shelving/tables: 13 pantries
- Buy a freezer: 9 pantries
- Buy a refrigerator: 9 pantries
- Expand programs other than food distribution: 6 pantries
- Pay staff: 5 pantries
- Buy a vehicle for pantry: 5 pantries
- Offer hygiene/household products: 4 pantries
- Renovate pantry: 3 pantries

University Pantry Issues

One unexpected result of this study was the discovery of unique issues that university pantries face. These pantries serve a very specific demographic and run through the university itself.

² More information about FDA food safety regulations can be found on the [FDA website](#) and under Feeding America’s [Food Donation Guidelines page](#)

The food pantry managers of Meredith College, North Carolina State University, Shaw University, St. Augustine's University, and Wake Technical Community College were interviewed and the following information was revealed:

- With the exception of Wake Tech, the pantries were in constant need of food that is appropriate for students living on campus - snacks, bottled water, and food that doesn't need to be cooked or stored in a refrigerator. Food banks are often not equipped to meet these specific needs.
- Students can be reluctant to visit a university food pantry for a variety of reasons. To make students feel more comfortable and anonymous, university pantries usually do not track which students visit or how much food they receive. The only requirement to receive food at most schools is showing a student ID. There are pros and cons to each type of pantry set up. For example, anonymity can be comforting to embarrassed students who need food, but the lack of client records leaves the pantry unable to become a Feeding America agency. It can also be hard to evaluate the effectiveness of a pantry (and apply for grants) if there are no records/numbers.
- Marketing is also a common issue for most of the higher education food pantries. The lack of awareness of pantries means fewer students receive the resources they need. If faculty and staff don't know about a pantry, they cannot refer students and their department misses out on an opportunity to help with food drives.

NEXT STEPS

Clearly, food pantries have a large impact on food security in Wake County. Through this study CAFN has identified specific needs, shortcomings, and deficiencies in the food pantry system of Wake County. Now that more in-depth information is available, CAFN and other interested organizations have more specific ways to help support these agencies and fight hunger.

Information Sharing and Maintenance

CAFN may not have the bandwidth to conduct a full food pantry study annually, but the public list of pantry locations, contact information, and client requirements will be maintained by Wake Network of Care. Every 3 months, Wake Network of Care will email the pantry point of contact asking them to confirm and update the listed pantry's public information. CAFN has shared this public list with over 60 local nonprofits and government agencies to ensure as many people as possible have access to this information.

Pantry Support

Food pantries across Wake County face a variety of problems, many of which can be addressed with the right support and collaboration. CAFN can educate and connect partners to help struggling food pantries including regional food banks, local governments, and other nonprofits with resources to share an interest in addressing food insecurity in Wake County.

Support from Capital Area Food Network

While CAFN is not a direct service organization, it can possibly provide support beyond researching local pantries and sharing the results with interested organizations and food insecure individuals. One of these services can be connecting pantries with other organizations that can help them. This may include:

- Providing the names and contacts of nutrition educators interested in hosting classes at food pantries
- Finding and sharing relevant grant opportunities
- Pairing pantries with volunteer recruitment services
- Work with local nonprofits and Cooperative Extension to develop webinars about overcoming common pantry challenges like marketing, language barriers, resource development, and food storage techniques
- Hosting an event to connect pantry managers with one another and with additional resources

Support from Food Banks

There are two food banks that provide support to over 50% of Wake County's pantries. Both FBCENC and IFFS actively collect and distribute food donations to the pantries. They also train pantry managers on food safety regulations and other Feeding America requirements. With this new, in-depth research about pantry barriers and priorities, the food banks could supplement their available trainings to include information about marketing, grant writing, switching to the client choice model, or volunteer recruitment.

The food banks could also modify their services and programming to help meet the specific needs of university pantries. This may include actively providing specific types of food based on the school's needs.

The food banks could also use the food pantry map and gap analysis (page 7) to identify underserved areas of the county. With that information in mind, they could possibly help expand the services of an overwhelmed pantry or approach strategically located churches or community groups that could start a new pantry.

CONCLUSION

The 99 food pantries in Wake County have a large impact on local families that face food insecurity; they are often the first line of defense to make sure no one goes to bed hungry. Even though these pantries are often underfunded and understaffed, they manage to simultaneously fight hunger and food waste by collectively distributing millions of pounds of food each year. Now that more detailed information is known about the operations strategies, locations, and needs of each pantry, organizations that prioritize local food security have a basis for more effectively and efficiently supporting them.