

After the Harvest's Outcomes Study

"Measuring Our Impact to Make a Difference"



After the Harvest rescues nutritious fruits and vegetables from going to waste and donates them to agencies that serve hungry people, primarily in Greater Kansas City. Our volunteers glean *after the harvest*, picking what's left in farmers' fields and picking up already harvested leftover produce. The majority of the funds we raise helps secure semi-truckloads of donated produce that might otherwise end up in landfills. After the Harvest, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, is the largest local produce donor to Harvesters—The Community Food Network. Learn more at aftertheharvestkc.org.

This outcomes study project, submitted December 2018, was made possible through funding from the Hall Family Foundation and directed by Dr. Cheryl Gibson, PhD with assistance from Kathryn Wolff, MS, RD; Heather Valentine, MS, RD; and Rebecca Mount, MS, RD, LD, all from the University of Kansas Medical Center.

The project involved many individuals who gave their time to share their views and insights and we are especially thankful for their participation. What follows is the Executive Summary of the 122-page study.

FOOD AGENCY CLIENTELE

Clientele from local food agencies in the Kansas City metropolitan area were surveyed at 10 sites that receive produce directly from After the Harvest (ATH) or indirectly via produce donations through Harvesters. Agency clients completed a demographic questionnaire and a dietary screener. In addition, skin carotenoid status was measured as a proxy for fruit and vegetable consumption. Fifty-seven questionnaires were completed.

Participants were primarily female and on average about 53 years old. Most reported either living alone or with one other person and not having children living in their household. The majority of participants reported total household incomes of less than \$20,000 for the previous year. Most had completed high school or received a post-secondary degree. Retirees, homemakers and the unemployed comprised the majority of survey participants.

An overwhelming number of participants could be classified as food insecure (80%). Consumption of fruits and vegetables among the participants was very poor in comparison to dietary guidelines. Food agency clientele's fruit intake of 1 cup per day fell below the recommended level of 1.5-2 cups per day and their vegetable intake of 1.4 cups per day fell below the recommended level of 2.5-3 cups per day. In addition, many participants indicated frequent poor physical and mental health but most reported that the food assistance they received had improved their family's overall health. Many received other food assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commodity boxes or other food pantries. Food agency participants were receptive to volunteering for gleaning.

FOOD AGENCY PERSONNEL

Both online surveys and telephone interviews were used to gain feedback from different food agencies that receive donations from ATH. Personnel from 20 agencies, located primarily in Johnson County, Kansas and Jackson County, Missouri, responded to the questions. Most food agencies were faith congregations that were open to clients on a few days during the week and not typically open on weekend days.

The number served by these agencies ranged from 24 to over 5,000 per month, with most serving at least 500 clients per month through the pantry portion of their organization. Primary sources of food donations were food banks, food drives, foods purchased through cash donations, and

FOOD AGENCY PERSONNEL (CONT.)

local farmers. Clients most commonly received standardized boxes or bags of food items that are shared with everyone, with larger amounts given to families. The amount of food distributed ranged from a single meal provided in a kitchen setting to roughly enough food items to provide a family of four with three meals per day for up to a week.

All agencies reported adequate equipment to meet their clients' needs. The greatest challenge to the food agencies were the availability of consistent volunteers and lack of funding. Most food agency personnel were not aware that ATH is Harvesters' largest local produce donor. An overwhelming majority indicated the produce donated by ATH to be of good to excellent quality. Clients indicated a preference for potato donations, although food agency personnel reported that their clients are happy to receive any fresh produce donations. Most of the donated produce is fully distributed to clientele but if there is produce not given away, redistributed to other agencies, or given to farmers for animal feed, it is discarded. Barriers at the food agency sites that prevent them from receiving more produce included lack of space and manpower.

Most food agency personnel did not have suggestions for improving the relationship between their organization and ATH. They expressed much appreciation for the donations, shared they know how much work is required by ATH staff to receive their produce donations, and stated how positive they felt about their relationship with ATH. Suggestions included a desire for larger quantities of produce and improvements to the timing of the produce delivery to their agency. Not all food agency personnel were aware of the option of picking up the produce themselves instead of having it delivered by ATH.

FARMERS

Farmers who have donated to ATH

Eighteen farmers who have donated to ATH were interviewed. Most farmers who were interviewed were male, Caucasian and on average about 60 years old. Of those interviewed, most farmers reported farming 20 years or less but almost one-third of those interviewed indicated farming for 40 or more years. One-third of the farmers reported that income derived from their farm or orchard amounted to less than \$10,000 annually while about 40% indicated annual incomes of greater than \$90,000. The income derived from farms or orchards is related to acreage available for growing produce with the majority of those interviewed farming 10 acres or less. Farmers learned of ATH from many sources, including ATH mailings, the Great Plains Growers Conference, trade shows and farmers markets.

Many of these farmers have donated a variety of produce to ATH multiple times and have had gleaners come to their farm to harvest the excess produce. Farmers stated that they enjoyed having gleaners at their farms and anticipated having ATH gleaners in the future. Most farmers indicated it was not challenging to donate to ATH because ATH staff were organized, had sufficient numbers of volunteers, and supplied boxes or bags for the produce. Communication between the farmers and ATH was rated as very good or excellent. Farmers have recommended ATH to other farmers and stated they will continue to do so.

Farmers who have not donated to ATH

Sixteen farmers or orchard growers who have not donated to ATH were interviewed. Urban farms and raised bed community gardens were included in the sample. Median size of

FARMERS (CONT.)

farms/orchards was 2.5 acres. Raised bed community gardens included one garden with 11 raised beds and another garden with 40 raised beds. A variety of fruits and vegetables were grown at the farms and raised bed gardens. Nine of the farmers indicated that they have excess produce and are willing to donate the excess. Most farmers reported knowing about ATH and would be willing to have gleaners come to their farms.

GLEANING VOLUNTEERS

Seventy-three gleaning volunteers completed surveys, which included sociodemographic questions and information about their experiences with ATH. Volunteers were primarily Caucasian, female, college-educated, currently employed, and had earned incomes of \$100,000 or more annually. Of those who responded, volunteers resided primarily in Johnson County, Kansas. Most gleaners reported volunteering on a yearly basis.

When asked about motivations to volunteer their time to ATH, most reported altruistic reasons, including wanting to help the community and helping the needs of others. To volunteer more of their available time, gleaners indicated a need to better accommodate schedules for those who have children or inflexible jobs by offering more opportunities in the evenings or weekends. Additionally, others mentioned prior notification by email and having gleaning opportunities closer to the Kansas City metropolitan area would facilitate their ability to volunteer more.

Barriers to volunteering for gleaning activities included the travel distance, conditions being less than ideal, timing of the gleaning events, and negative impact on their health conditions. When asked if they are aware that ATH is Harvesters' largest local produce donor, most reported that they had not known this. Most comments included expressions of appreciation for the work that ATH is doing and enjoyment of the gleaning experiences afforded by ATH.



INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Internal Stakeholders

Four ATH staff members and eight ATH board members completed an online survey about the organization's strengths, weaknesses, and overall performance. Of these 12 internal stakeholders, respondents viewed ATH's mission as being centered around rescuing produce and reducing food waste. Reported internal strengths included ATH's staff as well as the established relationships with growers and other agencies in the community. Conversely, staff and board members felt that a lack of diverse funding sources was an internal weakness for the organization.

Reported external opportunities included identifying new sources of funding, creating new partnerships within the community, and an increasing public awareness of food waste. Potential external threats included competition with other organizations, changes to government policies, and lack of available funding. Internal stakeholders reported that diversifying funding sources and increasing the amount of product moved are the most important goals that ATH should work towards over the next five years.

Key Informants

Seven external stakeholders were identified as key informants to be interviewed about ATH's strengths and weaknesses as well as to share other feedback about the direction of the organization. Key informants reported that ATH is known for providing nutritious food and for its gleaning program. Interview participants felt that ATH has performed well and achieved a great deal over the last three years.

Reported external opportunities included expanding funding streams and getting out into the community more. ATH's internal weaknesses as perceived by key informants included the need to have a stronger overall plan for long-term goals and that the organization name is often confused with Harvesters. Increased fundraising was identified as a goal that ATH should consider for its next strategic plan.

External Stakeholders

An online survey was sent to additional external stakeholders to understand their perceptions of ATH. The online survey was completed by 20 external stakeholders. External stakeholders reported that ATH's mission is to feed hungry people and found ATH's mission to be a strength of the organization. External stakeholders also felt that ATH having strong leadership, staff members, and board members is an internal strength. Reported weaknesses included staff capacity and the need for greater recognition within the community.

External opportunities mentioned by external stakeholders included working with more organizations in the community and increasing public awareness of ATH. Changes to taxes or trade policies and competition with other organizations were perceived as external threats to ATH. Increasing funding and community awareness of ATH were identified as issues that ATH should work on over the next five years. External stakeholders reported the amount of produce gleaned/moved as the main criteria they would use to judge After the Harvest's performance and felt that ATH currently performs very strongly within this measure.