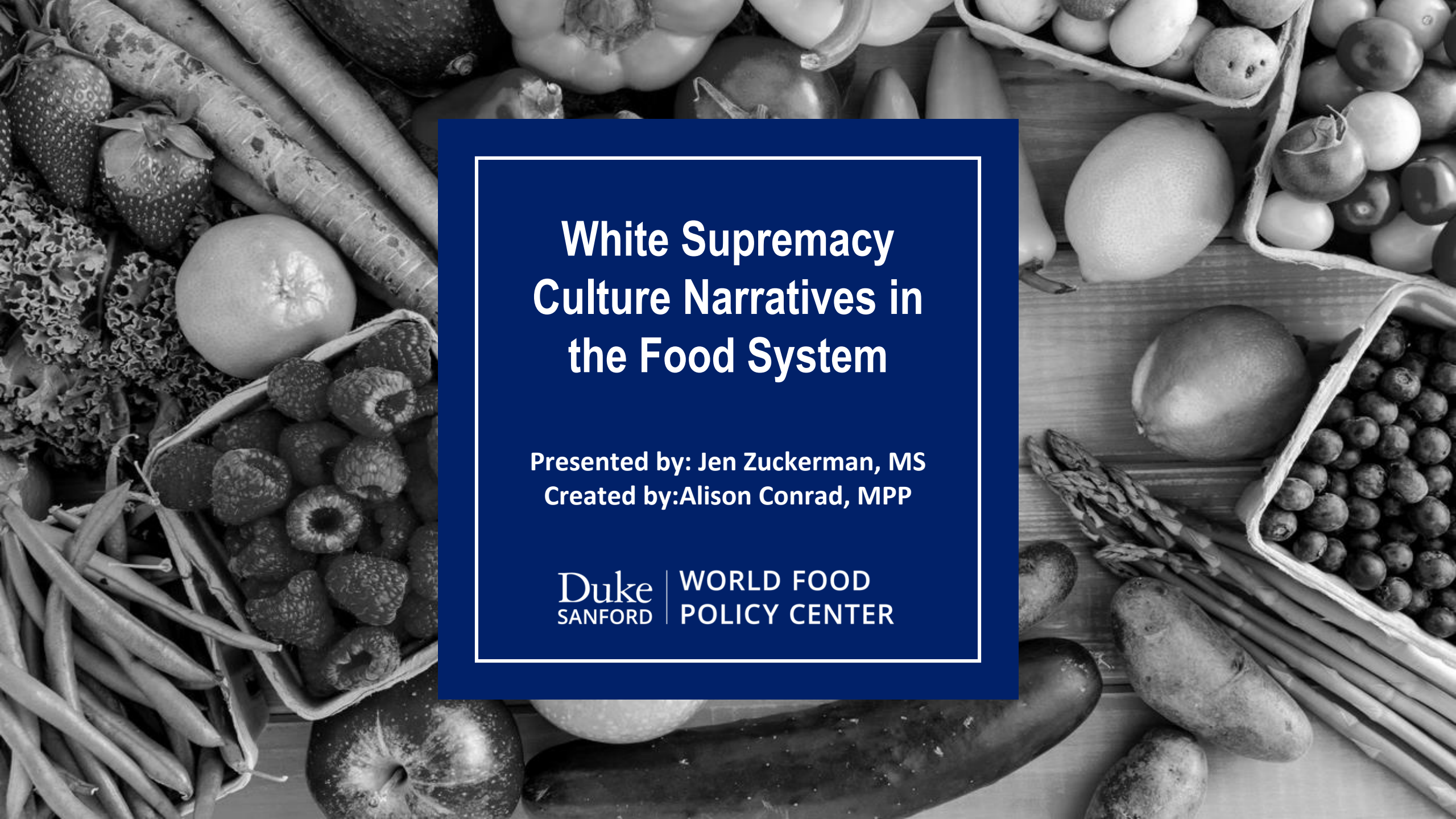

White Supremacy Culture Narratives in the Food System

Presented by: Jen Zuckerman, MS
Created by:Alison Conrad, MPP

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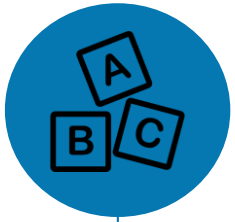
Research Framing



Definitions

White Narratives

What's Next?

Research Framing

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Unpacking Whiteness is Necessary

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Whiteness is used to justify the unequal distribution of **power, ownership, and decision-making** in systems

Whiteness is the dominant culture, setting the norms and **rendering white supremacy invisible to those who benefit from it**

It takes ***unlearning*** to recognize how we've been socialized in white supremacy and ***relearning*** about history and racial equity

Margaret Marietta Ramírez, "The Elusive Inclusive: Black Food Geographies and Racialized Food Spaces"; Alison Hope Alkon and Christie Grace McCullen, "Whiteness and Farmers Markets: Performances, Perpetuations … Contestations?"; and Kelly Moore and Marilyn Swisher, "The Food Movement: Growing White Privilege, Diversity, or Empowerment?"

Policy Question

(1)

How do white supremacy culture narratives show up in food insecurity and food access work?

Whiteness and the Food System

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Whiteness **permeates the food system** in the ways it "articulate(s) white ideals of health and nutrition, offer(s) whitened dreams of farming and gardening that erase the past and present of race in agriculture, mobilize(s) funding to direct programming toward non-white beneficiaries, and create(s) inviting spaces for white people."

Rachel Slocum, 2006

Rachel Slocum, "Anti-Racist Practice and the Work of Community Food Organizations," quoted in Margaret Marietta Ramírez, "The Elusive Inclusive: Black Food Geographies and Racialized Food Spaces."

Key Definitions

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White Supremacy Culture

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- White supremacy culture is an ideology that **treats white people** and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions **as [inherently] superior to People of Color** and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions
- Society holds characteristics of white supremacy culture as the norm and standard, so **attitudes and behaviors stemming from it can be found in any individual, group, or organization**
- It is **present in all institutions** in our society

Showing Up for Racial Justice, "White Supremacy Culture," and Tema Okun, "White Supremacy Culture."

Structural Racism

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- Structural racism **encompasses the entire system of white domination**
- It involves the reinforcing effects of multiple institutions and cultural norms, past and present, **continually reproducing old and producing new forms of racism**
- It is the **most pervasive form of racism** and basis for all other forms of racism

Racial Equity Tools, "Glossary."

Food Desert vs. Food Apartheid

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"Food desert" is a misnomer of what is really going on in communities because it implies that:

- Food access and insecurity issues are a **natural phenomenon** rather than something **created by a history of disinvestment**
- **Communities are lacking** when they are filled with life and resilience

"Food apartheid" looks at food system as part of the larger culture, broadening the conversation to **include social and racial inequalities**

- Recognizes that **policies, practice, and systems that created these inequalities**

Janae Ridge, "Food Apartheid | Why We Should Change the Way We Talk About Food Deserts"; Isabel Lu, "Food Apartheid: What Does Food Access Mean In America?"; and "Food Desert vs. Food Apartheid."

History of Inequity

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History of Discrimination in the Food System

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Inequities in the food system are **rooted in racist policies and practice** throughout our history, so we **need intentional policy to unwind inequities**

Land Appropriation

Appropriation of Native American lands forced tribes to abandon sustainable tradition foodways

Racist Urban Planning

Uneven economic development, shaping systemically unjust urban environments

Immigration Laws

Immigration and labor laws block immigrant farmers and workers from participating in agribusiness

Housing Segregation and Concentrated Poverty

Discriminatory lending created food apartheid, impacting access to food

Racial Wealth Gap and Access to Capital

Employment discrimination, disparities in intergenerational wealth, less assets to raise capital

Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*; Michael Omi and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*; and Marlysa Gamblin et al, Applying a Racial Equity Lens to End Hunger.

White Supremacy Culture Narratives

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White Supremacy Culture Narratives

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What Do The Narratives Have in Common?

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These narratives focus on funding programs that **emphasize individual actions** and behaviors **instead of fixing systems and structural issues**

They also involve the **unequal distribution of power, ownership, and decision-making** in food policy and programming

Communities Can't Take Care of Themselves

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Belief that low-income and/or BIPOC communities and individuals cannot provide or make decisions for themselves and therefore **pathologizes people, blaming the individual for the outcomes of systems**

Based in **negative racial and class stereotypes** that reinforce inequitable power dynamics in the food system

Organizations prescribe solutions to the community without consulting them, **assuming they know better than community members**

Margaret Marietta Ramírez, "The Elusive Inclusive: Black Food Geographies and Racialized Food Spaces"; and Confidential Interviews for Master's Thesis by Alison Conrad

Communities Can't Take Care of Themselves

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Example: White-Led, BIPOC-Serving Mobile Produce Market

- Often a white-led organization is **launching an initiative on behalf of majority BIPOC neighborhood** without consulting the community
- Repeats the pattern of **white-led institutions receiving funding to address issues in BIPOC communities** instead of investing directly in the community
- Can **ignore existing community-led solutions** to food issues

Cheryl Dorsey, Peter Kim, Cora Daniels, Lyell Sakaue, and Britt Savage, "Overcoming the Racial Bias in Philanthropic Funding."

Focus on Food Charity

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Rooted in the idea that **hunger and poverty are an issue of individual responsibility and work ethic**

Focuses solutions to hunger as food distribution, not providing economic assistance or increasing wages

Portrays hunger as a problem that can be solved by individuals "doing good," **instead of focusing on structural factors that created a system where hunger is so prevalent**

Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, "How Hunger Persists in a Rich Country Like America"; and Confidential Interview for Master's Thesis by Alison Conrad.

Focus on Food Charity

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Example: Attacks on SNAP

- SNAP has been under near constant attack by politicians who attempt to **restrict access** through stringent work requirements and eligibility criteria, **increasing the difficulty for households to enroll and stay enrolled in SNAP**
- **Shifts the moral responsibility to care for the most vulnerable** among us from the government to **over 60,500 emergency food providers**
- Treats food distribution as the solution to hunger, **ignoring the root causes of hunger**

Rachel Louise Moran, "Why American Policy is Leaving Millions Hungry"; and Jessica Powers, "Special Report: America's Food Banks Say Charity Won't End Hunger."

What's Next?

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How to Start Unpacking Biases

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Understand **the work has to happen at multiple levels**: individual, organizational, and structural

Recognize this is a **process of unlearning and relearning** history and beliefs

Understand that **building relationships and trust** with community members and **listening to their wants and needs** is essential for creating better policies and programs

Hold yourself and your peers accountable to change course and do better when you make mistakes

Check out our Research Brief for more detailed information

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September 2020

Research Brief

Identifying and Countering White Supremacy Culture in Food Systems

Executive Summary

Whiteness dominates policy and practice in food systems. Whiteness permeates the food system in the ways it "articulate(s) white ideals of health and nutrition, offer(s) whitened dreams of farming and gardening that erase the past and present of race in agriculture, mobilize(s) funding to direct programming toward non-white beneficiaries, and create(s) inviting spaces for white people."[1] Whiteness helps perpetuate "existing structures of power and privilege within food spaces," enabling white activists and organizations to assume their ideals and emotions are shared by all."[2] Whiteness is an unnamed presence that shapes the discourse and focus of food system reform.[3] Consequently, many historically white-led organizations find that their policies and programs fail to resonate with Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

As a result of whiteness, white supremacy culture narratives function to reinforce systemic inequity across the food system in the United States. This paper identifies eight messages from food insecurity policies and practice stemming from broader white supremacy culture and whiteness.

This research centered on the question: How does white supremacy culture play out in the food insecurity and food access space in the United States? To become anti-racist, food system actors must understand how white supremacy culture narratives function to center whiteness across the food system, effectively reinforcing systemic racial inequality and by extension disadvantaging BIPOC people. We discuss how whiteness holds white ideals as universal, how whiteness fuels power in decision-making, and how whiteness defines foods as either good or bad.

Project methodology included document and literature review, seven interviews with leaders and members of food justice, food sovereignty, and anti-hunger organizations, and qualitative analysis to identify themes and findings.

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WIC and SNAP Participation

During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Carolyn Barnes
Sanford School of Public Policy
Duke University

Duke SANFORD | CENTER for CHILD & FAMILY POLICY

Funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, William T. Grant Foundation, Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of North Carolina, Winer Family Foundation, Pinetops Family Foundation, USDA

Recommendations

WIC

- Increased Vendor Management
- Communicating recent food flexibilities and policy changes to stores
- Peer Education on Shopping Experience
  - Social Media Campaign
  - Using peer breast feeding counselors to mentor new WIC shoppers

SNAP

- Grassroots information campaign about how to apply for benefits
- Grassroots information campaign on COVID-19 policy changes
- Advocate for additional funding to support DSS workforce expansion amidst pandemic

Key Questions

What are the barriers to accessing, maintaining, and using WIC and SNAP?

How has COVID-19 influenced access to WIC and SNAP?

Preliminary Findings: Barriers Pre-COVID-19

- Variation in quality of customer service
  - Reminders of appointments
  - Quality of clinic experiences
  - Poor Clinic Flow
- Transportation (in rural areas)
- Variation in outreach and information about the program
- Challenges using benefits in retail settings
  - Search for WIC friendly stores
    - Learning Curve
  - Difficulties identifying WIC approved food
  - App dysfunction and bugs

COVID-19 Policy Changes

- **WIC**
  - Remote appointments
    - Self reported anthropometric measures
  - Food Flexibilities
    - Substitute sizes of bread and juice
    - Whole and 2% milk in lieu of 1% milk

- **SNAP**
  - Remote interviews
    - Self-reporting income information
  - Extended Recertification Deadlines
  - Maximum benefits (Emergency Allotments)
  - Temporarily waiving time limits on work requirements
  - Pandemic EBT
  - Online purchasing at Walmart and Amazon*

Scope

- Counties: Person, Orange (Oct 2015- Aug 2018)*
  Edgecombe and Mecklenburg (Oct 2019-Present)
  Lenoir (Jan 2020-Present)
  Wake (June 2020-Present)
  Guilford (July 2020-Present)
  Davidson (Nov 2020-Present)

- 303 interviews
  - 74 Staff Interviews
  - 229 Participant Interviews

- Interviews conducted by a team of 6 interviewers

*Follow up interviews in progress

Sample Characteristics

Table 1 WIC participant characteristics (n=229)	
Average Age	33.7
Rural	55%
Suburban	15%
Urban	30%
Race	
Black/African American	67%
White	28%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0
Native American/Alaskan Native	0
Hispanic	12%
Employed	42%
Average number of children	2.4
Average years of WIC experience	5
Use of other Public Assistance programs	88%

Findings: WIC COVID-19 Experiences

- Remote Appointments more convenient
- Unaware of program changes
    - 27% of all WIC participants interviewed across all counties were aware of food flexibilities
- Most WIC participants still report challenges purchasing WIC approved foods despite flexible food options.

COVID-19WIC Policy Changes: Remote Appointments

Table 2. Positive Evaluations of Remote Appointments	
Davidson	64%
Edgecombe	100%
Guilford	75%
Lenoir	75%

COVID-19 WIC Policy Changes: Remote Appointments

"Well, when you go to the office sometimes you have to wait. Well, by doing it over the phone while they just let you know…it's much easier because then you don't have to run to the office, you don't have [inaudible]. It's much easier for everyone and safer."

28-year-old Black woman, with two children;1 year as WIC participant; Rural County

"Very quick. That's the main idea. Very quick call, set everything up. And that's it for the next three months…I don't have to really travel far to go to appointment. I can sit and wait at home for them to call me or for me to call and set up an appointment…I think overall I'm 100 percent satisfied."

24-year-old Black woman with one child, 1 year as a WIC participant, Suburban County

COVID-19 WIC Policy Changes: Shopping Challenges

- Continued Difficulties purchasing food with WIC
- Most participants unaware of food flexibilities
- Managing food shortages amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 WIC Policy Changes: Shopping Challenges

"Now, when it first -- about two months or three months into the virus, you could not find the one percent milk anywhere. It was like it was -- everybody wanted milk. Milk and eggs, you could not find. Then they changed it to where they allowed you to get whole milk, but it still wouldn't allow me to get whole milk"

39-year-old Black woman with three children, 2 years as a WIC participant; Rural County

COVID-19 WIC Take-Aways

- ***Remote appointments increase participants' satisfaction*** with customer service, but many still experience ***challenges redeeming benefits in stores.***

COVID-19 SNAP Policy Changes

- **Telework has not made workers more accessible**
  - 60% of sample reported negative interactions with DSS and SNAP workers
  - Chief complaint— difficulty contacting workers.
    - Most prevalent in urban counties
    - 75% of respondents report difficulties

COVID-19 SNAP Policy Changes

"We always get an automated service. That one was so frustrating. Oh my goodness. Because every time you call somebody, you're talking to a machine. You're not talking to an actual agent, none of the workers or anything."

Urban County

"I can say that I've had a lot of issues with the workers because they don't call you back. Like I was trying to add my niece at one point, I couldn't get anyone to call me back or you want to let somebody know that your benefits aren't working or something happens, like my benefits stopped working with no notice; it took me over a month to get somebody to call me back."

Suburban County

COVID-19 SNAP Policy Changes

- **Most SNAP recipients unaware of COVID-Policy Changes**
  - 25% aware of deadline changes
  - 20% aware of maximum benefits
  - 33.% aware of online purchasing
  - 80% aware of Pandemic EBT

COVID-19 Food Insecurity

- **62% report negative impacts of COVID on household food security**
  - Food insecurity **due job loss or shortened hours, food shortages**, and **remote learning**
  - Food insecurity was equally prevalent across urban and rural counties

COVID-19 Food Insecurity: Job Loss

"Yes. It's been hard, especially now since we have this virus going on. We -- you know, our **hours have been cut** so much…"

Rural County

COVID-19 Food Insecurity: Remote Learning

"Like when this COVID-19 first started and the kids were out of school, didn't have the extra food stamps so I had to provide a little bit more food for my daughter, because she was home and the baby, he was still home. So it was like I need to buy more stuff that I know that they'll eat....So that was a little bit of a struggle."

"My hours got cut and I needed to be home with my daughter and the baby, because no daycare and they weren't in school"

Rural County

COVID-19 Food Insecurity: COVID-19 Food Shortages

"When COVID first came out, and with everybody bulk buying groceries and toilet tissue, it was very difficult to go grocery shopping, to at least shop for a whole week in advance. Because there'll be so many restrictions or somebody will come in there and just grab a whole shelf of meats."

"....having people hoarding groceries also affected it, to where we would mostly eat some cooked meals, but with not having too many groceries we would have to go out eat fast food."

Rural County

COVID-19 Food Insecurity: Consequences

- ***Lower quality meals***

  I would say I probably buy things that are more filling and less expensive. What you would consider a little more junk food. Like, potato chips and that kind of thing.

  Suburban County

COVID-19 Food Insecurity: SNAP and WIC

- **Most respondents use SNAP and WIC to manage food insecurity.**
- **They use both programs to make food “stretch”**

COVID-19 Food Insecurity: SNAP and WIC

WIC

"[We] make sure that where the kids have breakfast, because after cereal and milk they periodically had juice and things like that. That helps out."

Suburban County

"I use it to make food stretch almost as a buffer, so if we run out of other stuff we know we have all that."

Urban County

SNAP

"Well, I just try and ration it out on a weekly basis. Whatever my benefit is, I will divide that by four and try not to go over that much every week."

Rural County

COVID-19 Food Insecurity: SNAP and WIC

SNAP

"Honestly, usually it lasts for about -- like the last week. Like right now we just ran out two days ago. So right towards the end of the month. And like I said prior to corona and prior to the children being home 24/7 usually it would last the whole month but with that little bit of a difference it does make a big difference. Because now as opposed to maybe making two meals for the children a day now, it's three."

Rural County

COVID-19 Key Take-aways

- Limited knowledge of new changes to programs
- Food insecurity prevalent but managed by relying on SNAP and WIC

Recommendations

WIC

- Increased Vendor Management
- Communicating recent food flexibilities and policy changes to stores
- Peer Education on Shopping Experience
  - Social Media Campaign
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- Grassroots information campaign about how to apply for benefits
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