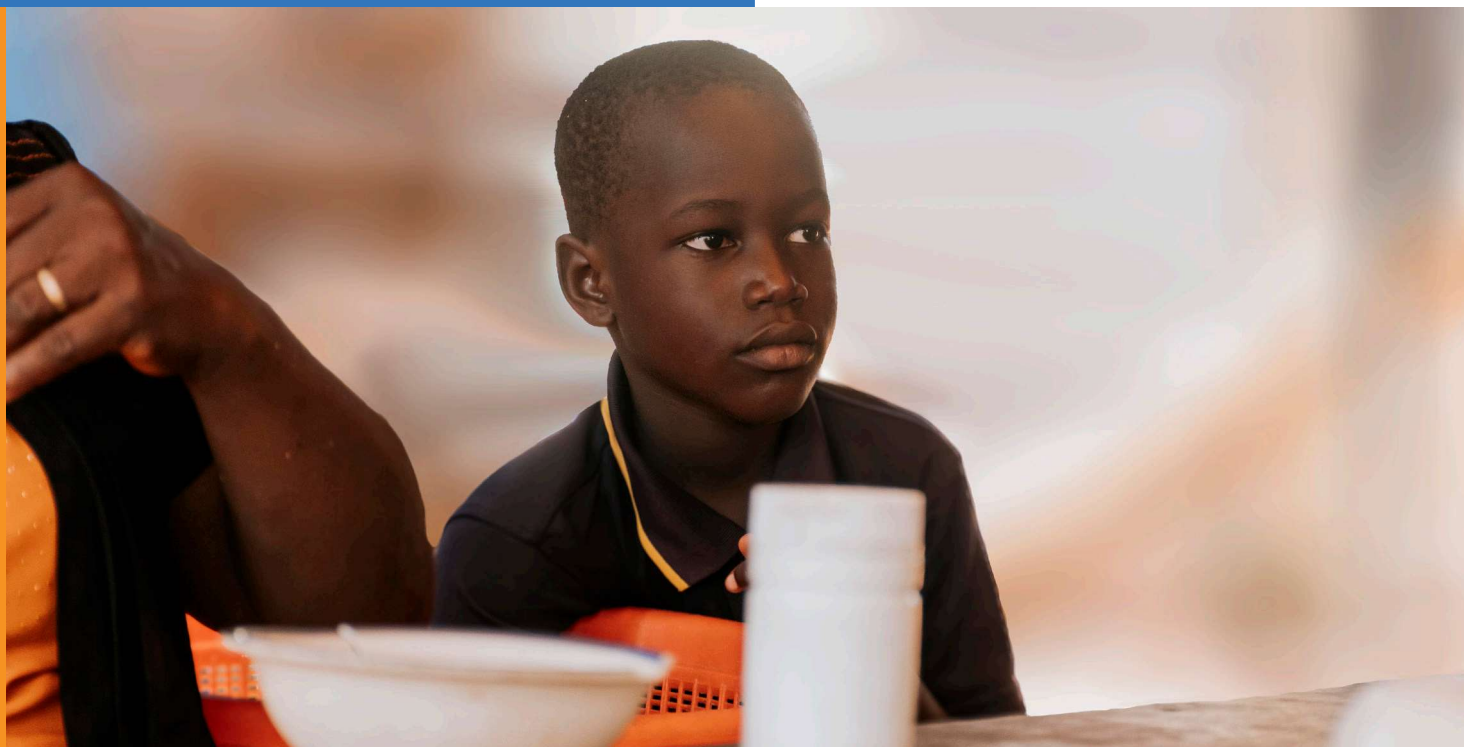


The Child and Adult Care
Food Program (CACFP)
in emergency shelters in
Philadelphia County

2023 Meal Guest
Survey Analysis



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks to identify trends from all seven Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal sites in Philadelphia using survey data collected by the Office of Homeless Services (OHS). In total, over 200 meal site attendees completed the survey at the seven different sites. Results indicate that OHS has made progress in one of its key missions: reducing food insecurity and increasing Philadelphians' access to healthy and delicious food. The data also shows, however, that there is room for improvements and the agency will utilize community feedback when addressing meal times, menu creation, and enforcement of CACFP policies to best serve the needs of meal guests. Conducting this survey has provided OHS with valuable insights, and the agency hopes to build on this with future projects outlined at the end of this report.

INTRODUCTION

CACFP is a federally funded program that provides nutritious meals and snacks to 4.2 million children and 138,000 adults each day across the United States by providing reimbursements to participating child and adult care centers and facilities.¹ CACFP also contributes to the wellness and development of young children in the United States by reimbursing children meals served in participating after- school care programs and emergency shelters. Since July 1, 1999, public and private nonprofit emergency shelters that provide residential and food services to youth experiencing homelessness may participate in CACFP.² This means that CACFP-eligible shelters can be reimbursed for serving up to three meals per day to children who reside there. While these shelters do not have to be licensed to provide day care, they must meet state and local law pertaining to any health and safety codes.³

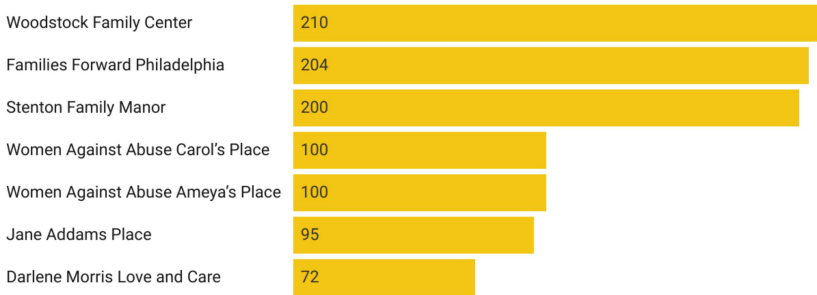
While the CACFP program is mostly operated in day care centers and afterschool programs nationally, Philadelphia is unique in that it offers the program in emergency family shelter, which is not often done nationally. It is important to

¹"Child and Adult Care Food Program | Food and Nutrition Service."

²"Implementation of PL 105-336 | Food and Nutrition Service."

³Requirements et al., "The Child and Adult Care Food Program."

Maximum occupancy across CACFP meal sites



Source: Philadelphia's Office of Homelessness • Created with Datawrapper

note that there are key differences in how CACFP is administered in emergency shelters, as opposed to other types of centers. Shelters have the highest rate of reimbursement of all types of CACFP centers.⁴ Emergency shelters are able to claim three meals per day, including any three of the following; breakfast, lunch, dinner, and/or snack, for each child, every day. Most other CACFP centers only receive reimbursement for one meal, typically lunch or snack, daily. Typically, this is restricted to individuals under the age of 18, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretary of Agriculture was authorized to reimburse emergency shelters for meals and snacks served to people under the age of 25.⁵ Persons with disabilities, regardless of their age, may also receive CACFP meals at the shelters where they reside.

On the administrative side, emergency shelters are distinct because there are no application forms for parents or guardians to fill out and shelters are not required to keep free and reduced meal applications on file.⁶ As previously

mentioned, these sites do not necessarily have to offer formal childcare, but they are required to stay current on inspections and permits certifying that all health and safety standards from the state and city government have been met. Also, as many residents live on site, attendance data for emergency shelters is collected differently than other CACFP programs.

The seven sites that were surveyed by OHS were Stenton Family Manor, Women Against Abuse Carol's Place, Women Against Abuse Ameya's Place, Jane Addams Place, Darlene Morris Love and Care, Families Forward Philadelphia, and Woodstock Family Center. All seven sites are part of the OHS partner network which is made up of nearly 60 housing and social service providers.⁷ OHS leads, coordinates, plans, and mobilizes resources to achieve its mission of making homelessness rare, brief, and nonrecurring. Guided by a housing-first approach, the homeless provider network supports people in their journey to long term housing security. The agency prioritizes a person-centered and trauma-informed approach to ensure that people can receive the services, both housing and otherwise, that they need. In Fiscal Year 2022 (July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022), the agency and partner network served 17,693 unique persons (13,478 households) and reduced the number of unsheltered persons by 27% from 2018-2022.⁸

⁴Meals in Emergency Shelters | Food and Nutrition Service.”

⁵Implementation Guidance for State Agencies on Reimbursement for Meals and Snacks Served to Young Adults in CACFP | Food and Nutrition Service.”

⁶Meals in Emergency Shelters | Food and Nutrition Service.”

⁷Housing: Love in Action 2022 Annual Report | City of Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services”

⁸FY2022 Data Snapshot | City of Philadelphia - Office of Homeless Services’

METHODS

In order to understand how OHS was meeting the needs of the community it seeks to assist, the agency conducted a brief survey of mealsite attendees at all seven CACFP family sites. OHS sought information to guide decisions concerning any changes to the existing meal sites. Through meetings with various partners, OHS developed a survey with accessible language to allow OHS to capture appropriate data to understand the strengths and weaknesses of meal services at CACFP sites in Philadelphia.

Throughout the survey creation process, the team highlighted four main goals to guide the project. First, the survey aimed to gather information on how OHS can make meal experiences satisfying, culturally relevant, and dignifying for all participants. Second, survey results would allow OHS to cater menu planning and recipe development to the requests of guests. Third, it would inform how OHS procures and purchases food products. Fourth, the survey would ideally reduce food waste by minimizing unwanted and uneaten meals.

After working through four different variations of the survey, OHS staff administered the survey at the seven CACFP sites during dinner services from October to December 2023. Meal site attendees — both children and adults — completed the surveys on paper with provided writing utensils. With the exception of surveys

fielded at Darlene Morris, as they were the pilot site and had a more complex set of questions that were combined and fine tuned for future surveying, the questionnaires consisted of 25 questions and had the following message at the top of the first page:

OHS' role within the larger Philadelphia community is to garner information as to how we can best make meal experiences satisfying, culturally relevant, and dignifying for all participants. We hope that this survey will allow us to cater toward meal service participants in a more thoughtful manner. Within the survey you will find four sections which total to 25 questions.

The complete survey and questions can be found in the appendix of this report. Respondents were able to work with OHS representatives present at the site with any questions about the survey or how to answer particular items. Respondents were compensated for their participation with a five dollar gift card to Dunkin Donuts or Wawa. In total, 210 meal site attendees turned in completed surveys. The responses were manually entered into a spreadsheet in order for them to be analyzed.

RESPONDENTS WERE COMPENSATED FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION WITH A FIVE DOLLAR GIFT CARD.

RESULTS

Before highlighting the results for the survey, it is important to note that this was not a random sample of all meal guests in CACFP, so these findings should not be generalized for the entire population of Philadelphians who attend CACFP meal sites. Instead, these results can demonstrate trends and areas of concerns that can be addressed within the CACFP participating population in Philadelphia.

Attendee demographics

First, it is important to understand the background of the respondents that filled out the survey. All but four of the survey respondents report that they live in Philadelphia. Nearly 24% said that they have lived in the City for less than a year.

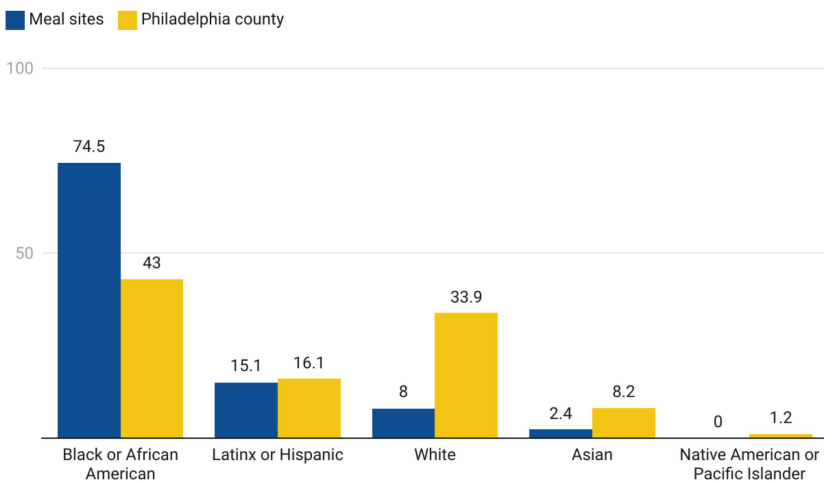
The survey was available to meal site attendees of any age. 46% of respondents were under the age of 18, 28% were between 18 and 32 years old, 23.5% were between 33 and 49 years old, and 2.5% were 50 years old or older. These findings illustrate how many young people attend and rely on CACFP meal sites.

Next, survey results highlight that Black Philadelphians disproportionately are in attendance at meal sites when compared to the overall Philadelphia population. 74.5% of survey respondents identified as Black, which is over 30 percentage points more than the percent of Philadelphia residents that are Black (43%) according to 2023 U.S. Census estimates. On the other hand, significantly less Asian and white people attend meal service compared to Philadelphia's demographics. 2.4% of respondents said

they were Asian and 8% of respondents said they were white compared to Philadelphia's 8.2% Asian population and 33.9% white population. The percentage of respondents that said they are Hispanic or Latinx is similar to their city-wide proportion (15.1% vs. 16.1%, respectively). Overall, this emphasizes that issues such as homelessness and food insecurity affect marginalized communities more frequently.

Ethnic identity of meal site attendees and Philadelphia residents

Numbers represent percentage of respondents in each racial or ethnic category



Philadelphia county data from 2023 Census estimates. Meal site attendees were able to select more than one category.

Source: Philadelphia's Office of Homeless Services • Created with Datawrapper

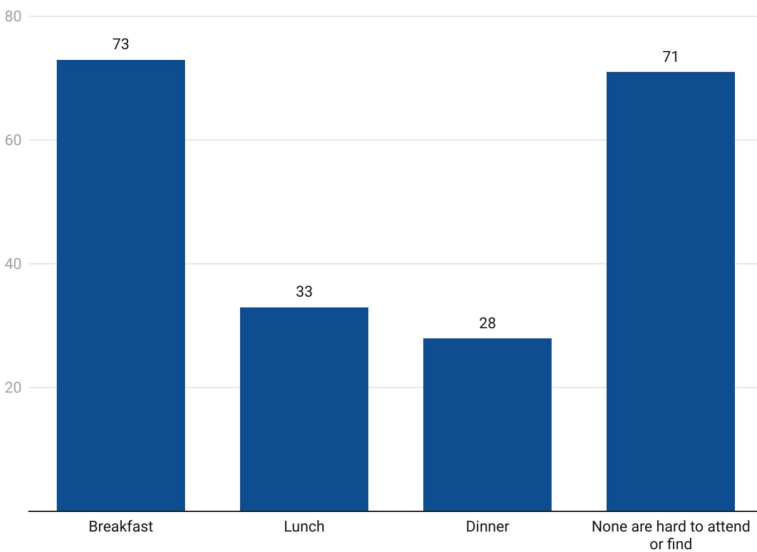
NEARLY 24% SAID THAT THEY HAVE LIVED IN THE CITY FOR LESS THAN A YEAR.

Meal availability

It remains critical to understand how regular meal service guests feel about the timing and availability of service. A large portion (34.6%) of respondents said that they do not have any problems attending any meals. However, out of the three meals, most people (54.5%) said that breakfast is the meal that is the most difficult to attend. Families at the sites expressed that they are often getting children ready for school during the scheduled breakfast meal time. Other guests said that they prefer breakfast at 11 a.m., but this later service time is too close to lunch time and excludes people who attend school.

Many guests (41.5%) said that they attend meal services multiple times in one day, but large portions also said that they only attend meals one-three times per week (32.7%) or four-seven times per week (25.7%).

What is the hardest meal to attend or find?



Source: Philadelphia's Office of Homeless Services • Created with Datawrapper

How often do you purchase your own food?

Respondents were asked of often they used cash, SNAP, WIC, etc. to buy their own food.



Source: Philadelphia's Office of Homeless Services • Created with Datawrapper

The survey also asked respondents how often they used cash, SNAP, or WIC to buy their own food. The results from the survey demonstrate how essential these services are. Nearly half of respondents (43.8%) said that they have to purchase their own food multiple times per week. About 25.2% said that they use these services to purchase food once a week and 22.4% said they purchase food once a month.

Meal preferences

The survey also asked respondents about their opinions about the types of foods served across the seven sites. Responses revealed a diverse range of perspectives, so it is important to understand that no meal site menu will be perfect for all guests. Instead, the goal of the questionnaire was to discern if there were trends among the surveyed population to ensure that menu creation was reflective of attendees' general sentiments. For the majority of these questions, respondents were able to choose more than one answer to best capture their overall opinions or write in another option if their preference is not represented in the answer choices.

First, when asked about which protein they preferred being served during meal times, the largest share of respondents (34.5%; 163 respondents) said that they preferred being served chicken. Pork, on the other hand, had the smallest share of respondents (7.2%;

Do you think that free meal sites serve culturally diverse foods?



Source: Philadelphia's Office of Homeless Services • Created with Datawrapper

34 respondents) reporting it as a favorite — this is likely in part due to religious restrictions barring certain meal site guests from eating pork. The share of responses to other provided options were 23.2% for beef, 19% for fish, 16.1% for turkey.

When asked about their preferences regarding vegetables, guests said that they like salad and corn the most. With only 30 respondents selecting them, peas were the vegetable that respondents least preferred.

Many of the response options for fruit preferences were relatively popular. Most attendees said they preferred tree fruits, including apples and bananas, and berries. The least popular group was citrus fruit. Multiple attendees also wrote in pineapples, mangoes, grapes, peaches, and plums as other fruits that they enjoy being served at meal sites.

Respondents expressed support for all three “grains” options — cereal, rice, and bread — that they were asked about. Cereal, however, had the highest share of respondents saying that it was their preferred grain.

34.5% SAID THAT THEY PREFERRED BEING SERVED CHICKEN.

The survey also asked respondents about what beverage they like to be served with the meal. Overwhelmingly, the majority of respondents said that they most like juice. When asked more specifically about their juice preferences, 50.2% of respondents said they prefer apple juice, 26.7% prefer orange juice, and 23.1% prefer grape juice. Other beverages that meal guests expressed support for included water, tea, and coffee. Only 5.3% of respondents said that they preferred oat milk as a beverage during meal time.

In addition to asking about specific types of food, the survey also asked respondents if they feel that meal sites, generally, serve culturally diverse foods. Responses to this question were split with 33.5% of respondents saying yes, 35.6% saying sometimes, and 30.1% saying no. While these results indicate that free meal sites are doing well and maintaining a level of diversity in their menus, there is definitely room for improvement. When asked what types of cuisines people would like to see at meals more frequently, the top response — in order of popularity — were Hispanic food, soul food, Jamaican food, Italian food, Chinese food, African food, and Indian food.

33.5% SAID THAT THEY FEEL THAT MEAL SITES SERVE CULTURALLY DIVERSE FOODS.

DISCUSSION

As previously mentioned, these results are not inherently representative of all meal site guests in Philadelphia. Although these findings can help inform future decisions regarding these sites and their menu choices, the data cannot single-handedly dictate how these sites should be run.

Recommendations based on findings

Understanding the preferences and opinions of meal site guests is the first step, but the next step is using the information to create changes to policy and practice. OHS has created six initial recommendations based on the survey results, but it is important to note that this is an ongoing process that requires continued feedback from guests and workers at the CACFP sites.

- 1 First, OHS will work to increase collaboration and communication between guests, meal providers, and those working in the warehouse. To ensure that the City is best serving its citizens, we will ensure that each person involved in the process has the opportunity to share their concerns or suggestions.
- 2 Second, OHS will prioritize procuring preferred products and high quality food. The results show that guests have diverse opinions when it comes to the food that they want to see served at meal sites, but there are some fruits, vegetables, and proteins that most guests want to see more or less of in their meals. For example, many respondents said that their favorite beverage is juice, so we can work with food providers and warehouse staff members to ensure that juice is regularly available at sites across Philadelphia.
- 3 Third, OHS will convert popular food choices into CACFP approved recipes. Given that a significant portion of respondents said that they do not feel as if they are served culturally diverse at meal sites, there is room to improve the scope of menu options. OHS has previously worked with meal providers to turn suggested meals into recipes regularly served at sites — including General Tso' chicken wings and beefy macaroni. OHS will work with meal providers to see the feasibility of creating new recipes based on the cuisines that respondents requested.
- 4 Fourth, OHS will facilitate taste tests to introduce unfamiliar foods to children and families. This will allow guests to expand their palettes and try new dishes that may be less common. The survey indicates that meal guests enjoy a diverse array of options at meals, so this practice will ensure that sites continue to offer diverse meals to their guests.

5 Fifth, OHS will explore the possibility of moving mealtimes to accommodate school-aged children and working parents. Although many people said that they do not have any difficulties with the timing of meals at sites, the meal that the largest share of respondents expressed difficulty with attending was breakfast. Speaking with respondents, some said that families with younger children are unable to make it to breakfast because they are getting their kids ready for the school day. By adjusting meal times, sites would be better equipped to serve the people who rely on them.

6 Sixth, OHS will sponsor staff to attend regularly scheduled community meetings at sites to communicate requirements directly with guests. During these meetings, staff members can answer any questions or concerns from guests to better understand the problems that may be overlooked. Also, this will allow guests to have a direct line of communication to OHS and better understand the guidelines that the meal sites must follow.

Limitations and future of survey

The work summarized here only represents the start of what will be a much longer process. OHS hopes to continue to survey guests at the seven CACFP meal sites along with guests at single adult sites and emergency shelters to best understand the people we serve. Lessons learned from the CACFP iteration of surveying were the importance of incentives to thank guests for their feedback and encourage maximum participation, ensuring that the survey is translated into languages other than English so all participants can provide feedback whether they speak English or not, and lastly, offering to assist guests with completing the survey if they do not have the reading and comprehension skills to complete it on their own. Future surveys will build off this work and the findings will allow us to adjust our recommendations and success of surveying.

APPENDIX



OHS' role within the larger Philadelphia community is to garner information as to how we can best make meal experiences satisfying, culturally relevant, and dignifying for all participants. We hope that this survey will allow us to cater toward meal service participants in a more thoughtful manner. Within the survey you will find four sections which total to 25 questions.

Section 1:

Family/Individual

1. Are you the legal guardian of any children (if no, please skip to question three)

1. Yes
2. No

2. If you answered yes, to the previous question, how many children are under your care

1. 1
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5
6. More than 5

3. Do you live in Philadelphia? (If no, skip to question five)

1. Yes
2. No

4. If you answered yes, how long have you lived in Philadelphia?

1. Less than 1 year
2. 1-2 years
3. 3-4 years
4. 5-6 years
5. 7-8 years
6. 9-10 years
7. More than 10 years

Section 2: Meal Services

5. How often do you attend meal services?

1. Always (multiple times in one week)
2. Often (once a week)
3. Sometimes (once a month)
4. Occasionally (every other month)

6. How many times a week do you attend meal services?

1. 1-2 times a week
2. 2-3 times a week
3. 3-4 times a week
4. 4-5 times a week
5. 5-6 times a week
6. 6-7 times a week
7. I attend meal services multiple times in one day

7. How long have you been attending meal services for?

1. Less than 1 month
2. 1-3 months
3. 3-6 months
4. 6-9 months
5. 9 months - 1 year
6. More than 1 year

8. What is the EASIEST meal to find/attend?

1. Breakfast
2. Lunch
3. Dinner
4. None are hard to find/attend

9. What is the HARDEST meal to find/attend?

1. Breakfast
2. Lunch
3. Dinner
4. None are hard to find/attend

10. How often do you purchase your own food (using cash/SNAP/WIC/ etc.)?

1. Always (multiple times in one week)
2. Often (once a week)
3. Sometimes (once a month)
4. Occasionally (every other month)

Section 3: Meal Preferences

11. Do you think that free meal sites serve culturally diverse foods (ie: traditionally African American, Asian, Latinx, etc. foods)

1. Yes
2. No
3. Sometimes
4. Other (please list below)

12. If you answered yes, or sometimes to the question above, please explain your answer.

13. If you answered no, is there a specific cultural dish that you would like to see served at



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14. What kind of meals do you prefer?

1. Hot meals
2. Grab & go meals

15. What kind of meat do you prefer to be served at meal services (please pick your top three choices)

1. Chicken
 2. Beef
 3. Turkey
 4. Pork
 5. Fish
 6. Other (please list below)
-

16. What kind of vegetables do you prefer to be served at meal services (please pick your top two options)

1. Beans
 2. Peas
 3. Salad
 4. Corn
 5. Other (please list below)
-

17. What kind of fruit do you prefer to be served at meal services (please pick your top two options)

1. Citrus (oranges, clementines)
2. Tree fruit (apples, bananas)
3. Melons (cantaloupes, watermelons,)
4. Berries (strawberries, blueberries)
5. Other (please list below)

18. What kind of dairy products do you prefer to be served at a meal service (please list your top three options)

1. Eggs
 2. American cheese
 3. Cheddar cheese
 4. Mozzarella cheese
 5. String cheese
 6. Yogurt
 7. Other (please list below)
-

19. What kind of grains do you prefer to be served at a meal services (please list your top choice)

1. Cereal
 2. Rice
 3. Bread
 4. Other (please list below)
-

20. What beverage do you prefer to be provided at meal services?

1. Water
 2. Juice
 3. Tea
 4. Coffee
 5. Oatmilk
 6. Other (please list below)
-

21. If you answered juice, what kind of juice do you prefer?

1. Apple juice
2. Orange juice
3. Grape juice
4. Other (please list below)

Section 4: Additional Information

22. What is your preferred language?

1. English
 2. Spanish
 3. French
 4. Mandarin
 5. Other (please list below)
-

23. If you answered with a language other than English, have free meal sites provided language accommodations (ie: translators)

1. Yes
2. No

24. What is your ethnic identity?

1. Black/African American
 2. Latinx/Hispanic
 3. Asian
 4. Native/Pacific Islander
 5. White
 6. Other (please list below)
-

25. What age range are you in?

1. Younger than 18
2. 18-22
3. 23- 27
4. 28-32
5. 33-37
6. 38-42
7. 43-47
8. 50 or older