

Greens, Gains, and Growing Pains: Benefits and Barriers of Senior Farmers Market Program

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BACKGROUND

Food insecurity is the limited and/or uncertain access to food that is sufficient to meet one's needs.^{1,2} In 2023, more than **47 million Americans** lived in food insecure households.³ Nearly **6.9 million older adults** experience food insecurity.⁴ Nearly **1 in 6 older adults** struggle with hunger.⁵

Why is this an issue with older adults?

- Generally have lower vitamin and nutrient levels and intake, and more chronic illnesses regardless of the availability of food.⁶
- Nearly **30%** of older adults have mobility limitations with **21.4%** indicating severe limitations.⁷
- Often depend on others for mobility issues.⁷
- **In Allegheny County:**
 - Persons below poverty line: **11.2%**⁹
 - Persons below 150% poverty line: **17.1%**¹⁰
 - Families below poverty line: **7.1%**¹¹
 - In Pennsylvania, **65,000 older adults** (age 65+) had incomes **50%** below the poverty line⁵
- **Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP)**
 - \$1,111,500 worth of vouchers provided¹²
 - Utilization rate of 76% in Allegheny County
 - Utilization rates at the JCC were 80.2% (Squirrel Hill) and 54.3% (South Hills).

OBJECTIVE

To highlight the benefits and areas of improvement of the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP).

SITE INTRODUCTION

The **Jewish Community Center (JCC)** is a community center working to build community by offering programs focused on physical, intellectual, and spiritual well-being **for people of all ages**. Rooted in Jewish values and principles, the JCC offers these programs and helps any and all individuals that steps through its doors.

AgeWell at the JCC is tailored to supporting Pittsburgh's older adults by providing them with resources to age **healthily** and **independently**.

SENIOR FARMERS MARKET NUTRITION PROGRAM (SFMNP)

U.S. Department of Agriculture program aims to address food insecurity in older adults by providing low-income older adults with vouchers to access locally grown produce at local farmers markets. Two-sided benefit to older adults and local farmers¹⁴

Table 1. Participant demographic characteristics (N=72)

Demographic characteristic	n (%) or Median (IQR)
Age	
60-69	15 (20.8)
70-79	31 (43.1)
80-89	24 (33.3)
90+	2 (2.8)
Female gender	54 (75)
Race	
White (Non-Hispanic)	56 (77.8)
White (Hispanic)	4 (5.6)
Black or African American	4 (5.6)
Asian	7 (9.7)
American Indian or Native American	1 (1.3)
Number of meals eaten in a day	
1 meal	4 (6.1)
2 meals	28 (42.4)
3 meals	31 (47)
More than 3 meals	3 (4.5)
Ideal number of meals to eat	
1 meal	8 (14.3)
2 meals	22 (39.3)
2-3 meals	2 (3.6)
3 meals	23 (41.1)
5 meals	1 (1.7)
Received vouchers	36 (58.3)

Figure 1. Participants' perceived program benefits

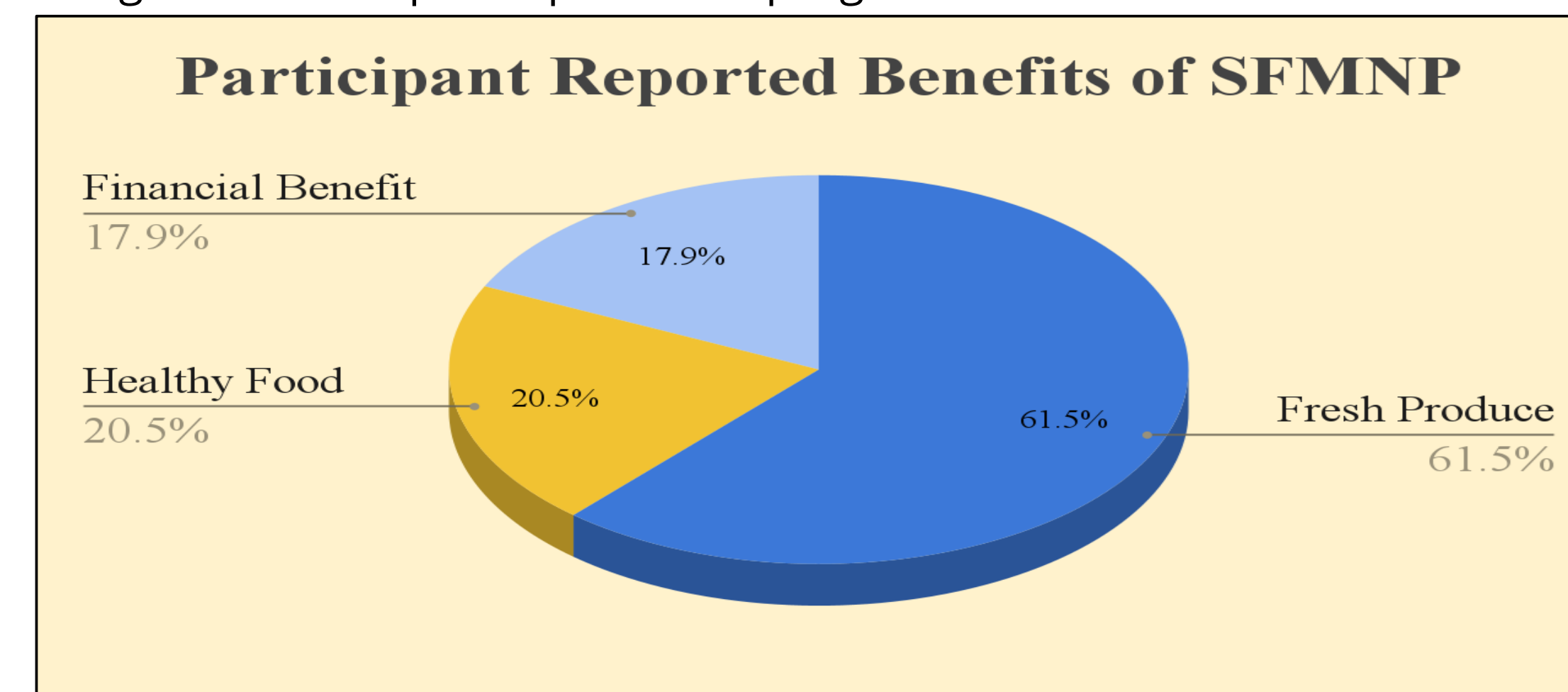


Figure 3. How participants described the SFMNP



Figure 2. Participants-identified program improvements

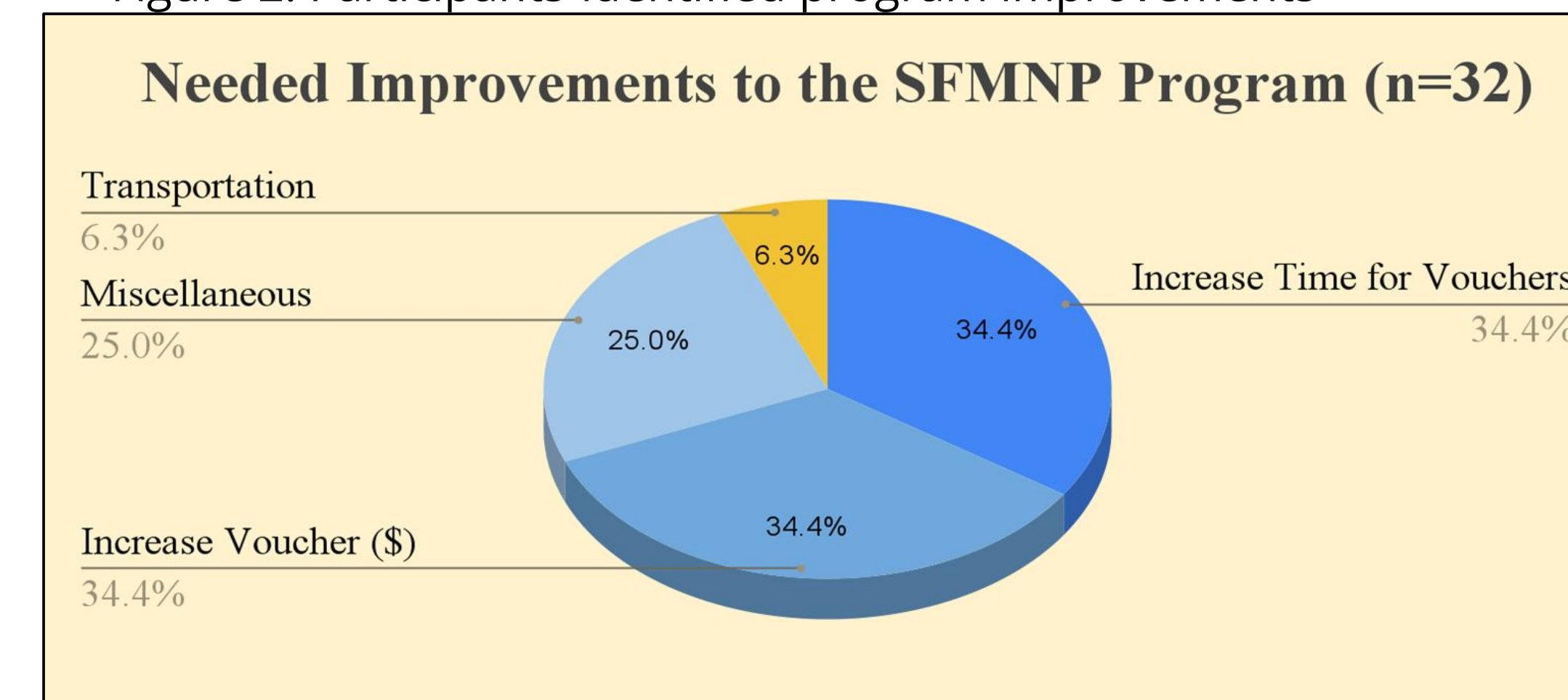
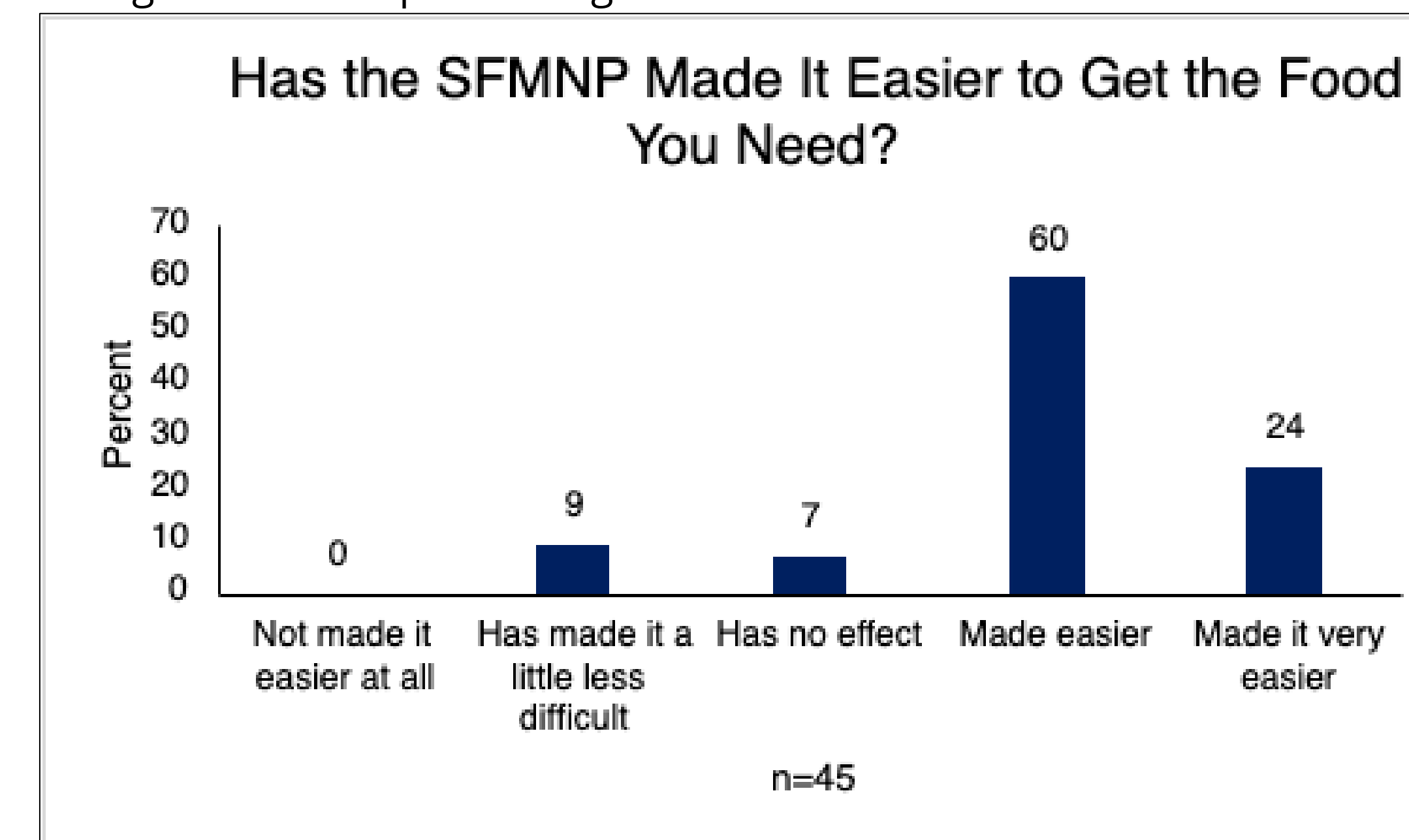


Figure 4. Participant ratings of ease of food access



CONCLUSION & PUBLIC HEALTH SIGNIFICANCE

Food insecurity is pervasive and affects all corners of a community. Older individuals face unique challenges that compound the effects of hunger and food insecurity. The SFMNP alleviates the burden on individuals who are eligible, however that help only goes so far. The program, while beneficial, lacks the financial weight to make long-term impact if these individuals are not in other food assistance programs. Additionally, the results show that thoughts on the "growing pains" are often more abundant than the "greens and gain."

From long lines and limited time windows for voucher distribution, to low produce purchases and widespread miscommunication, the process has led to frustration. Both the community seniors managing the distribution and the government agencies at all levels must work to improve the system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Jewish Community Center
 - Implement a Post-Voucher Survey
 - Provide participants who need extra assistance recommendations for other food assistance programs
- Allegheny County
 - Expand the time to receive vouchers
 - Participant Tracking System
 - Record
 - Number of Proxies
 - Utilization by Race and Sex
 - First time participant/ Repeat

REFERENCES



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