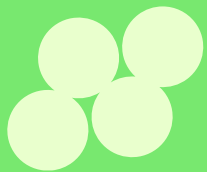




Cultivate *Food Rescue*



2025 Cultivate Cares Food
Network Partner Survey

Executive Summary





Overview

Cultivate Cares Food Network (CCFN) extends the mission of “No Neighbor Hungry, No Food Wasted” by directly supporting over 200 food pantries, shelters, and community organizations with rescued perishable food. When food arrives at Cultivate, it is inventoried, processed, and stored. At this point, the food becomes available via Cultivate’s online ordering platform. CCFN partners can see available stock, place orders, and set pick-up or delivery times right from their phones or computers.

The result is an easy way for local food relief agencies to address their cost, cold-storage, transportation, and bottleneck issues. By integrating logistical efficiency with community collaboration, CCFN amplifies the reach and impact of Cultivate’s food rescue efforts across a wide and diverse constituency.

In the spring of 2025, Cultivate sought feedback from its partner network in the form of a survey. The goal was to understand the current state of the pantry network, use this information to drive long-term operational strategy, and identify opportunities to strengthen collaborations to drive Cultivate’s mission forward.

Overall, the findings show a network of passionate, community-based organizations that share common challenges but also a strong willingness to collaborate on solutions. The 200+ organizations have wide-ranging needs, serve a variety of clients, and operate with varying degrees of complexity. The survey responses demonstrate a need for Cultivate to continue offering a flexible service model that appeals to and serves this patchwork of community resources.

Survey Process

Cultivate distributed an online survey of 27 questions to its 219 Cultivate Cares Food Network partners. These partners include food pantries, shelters, soup kitchens and other social service agencies across St. Joseph, Marshall and Elkhart Counties in northern Indiana. The response rate was 81% when sent by email in two waves (second wave sent one week after the initial email if the recipient hadn’t opened the first wave). The following is a summary of the findings from these survey responses.

Pantry Operations

Service models: Nearly half of respondents (~46%) now offer home delivery and a similar share (~46%) provide curbside pickup, supplementing traditional on-site distributions. Only about 16% run regular mobile pantry distribution (another 23% hold occasional mobile events).

Scale differences: Organizations that offer delivery tend to be larger (serving >200 people/month), while smaller ones (often <50 people/month) rarely offer delivery. Still, many rural sites stretch resources to reach homebound clients when needed.

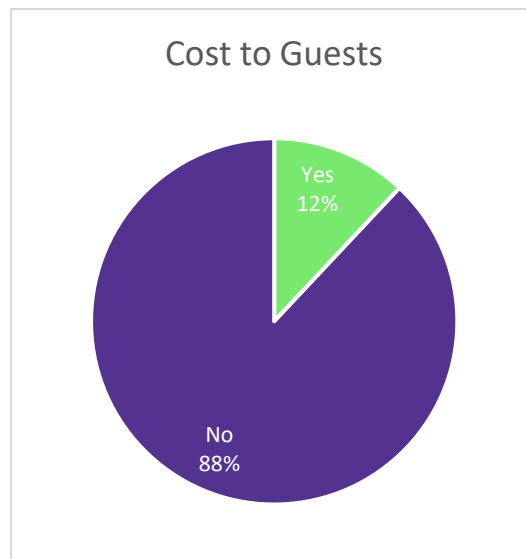
Collaboration: About one-third of respondents (36 organizations) share surplus food with peers. Most partners are eager to work together: ~76% would adopt new solutions (like mobile pantries or extended hours), 72% on joint volunteer initiatives, and 85% on collaborative grants/funding. This highlights a

strong culture of coordination and resource-sharing across the network.

Client Eligibility & Fees

Minimal requirements: Almost all organizations have exceptionally low barriers. Many report ‘no requirements’ or only require local residency. Very few require strict income documentation or program referrals.

Free services: Approximately 88% charge no fees, providing food entirely free to clients. The remaining ~12% have only nominal costs in special cases (e.g., small membership dues for certain youth or rehab programs). This underscores the charitable, need-based approach of the network.



Volunteer & Staffing Capacity

Volunteer-reliant: The median pantry has about twelve regular volunteers. About 25% of respondents operate with seven or fewer volunteers, indicating very lean teams at many sites.

Paid staff rare: Only ~25% of respondents report having paid staff (typically 1–3 part-time people). The vast majority are entirely volunteer run. Many partners note that limited volunteer availability is a key constraint on their ability to expand services.

Service Volume & Capacity

Size distribution: Distribution varies widely. Roughly 22% of organizations serve 1–50 people/month, 16% serve 51–100, 17% serve 101–200, and ~30% serve >300 people/month.

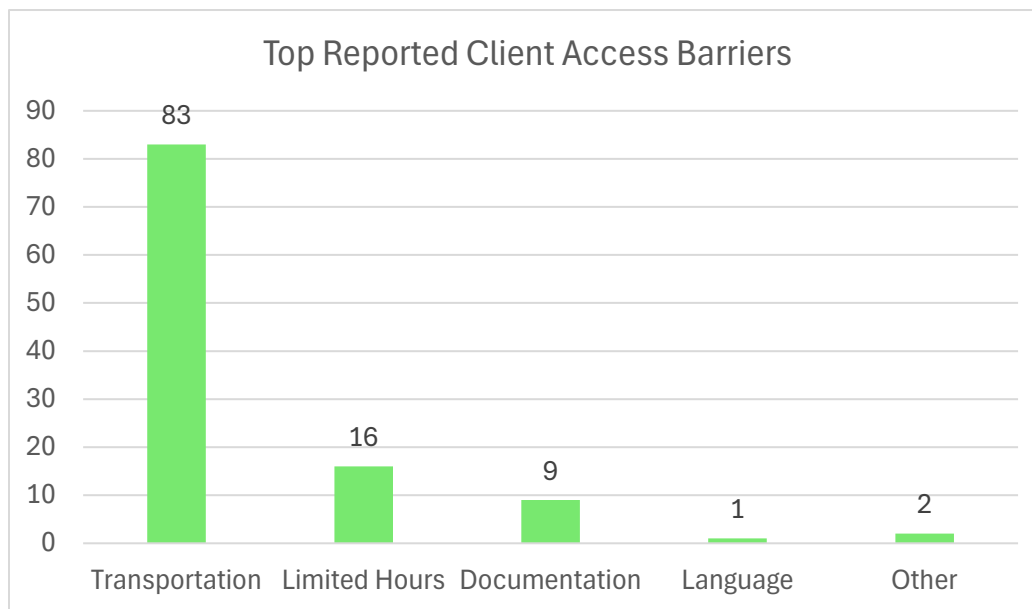


Large vs. small: Smaller partners (serving <100/month) tend to be neighborhood anchors with trusted local reach, but they often face limits on space, equipment, and funding. Larger partners handle much higher volumes but report challenges in maintaining volunteers and a consistent food supply. Both types are critical: one provides intensive community service, the other volume- scale distribution.

New vs. returning clients: On average, ~13.5% of monthly clients are new (about 1 in 7). Notably, ~15% of respondents had *zero* new clients last month, suggesting a stable base of repeat visitors. Tracking spikes in new-client numbers can signal rising need in a community.

Capacity constraints: About 27% of respondents (31 organizations) report they are at capacity and cannot take additional clients. The top barriers are lack of physical space (especially refrigeration/freezer capacity), insufficient food/funding, and too few volunteers). In other words, many “maxed out” partners simply need more storage, supplies, or hands. The remaining ~73% say they could serve more if needed, indicating some untapped capacity.

Client Demographics & Access Barriers



Access solutions: Recognizing these gaps, >75% are interested in mobile/outreach partnerships. Addressing transportation (e.g. via delivery vans, mobile pantry events, or volunteer shuttle programs) is critical. Likewise, extending or staggering pantry hours/days (so clients have more opportunities to visit) could alleviate access issues.



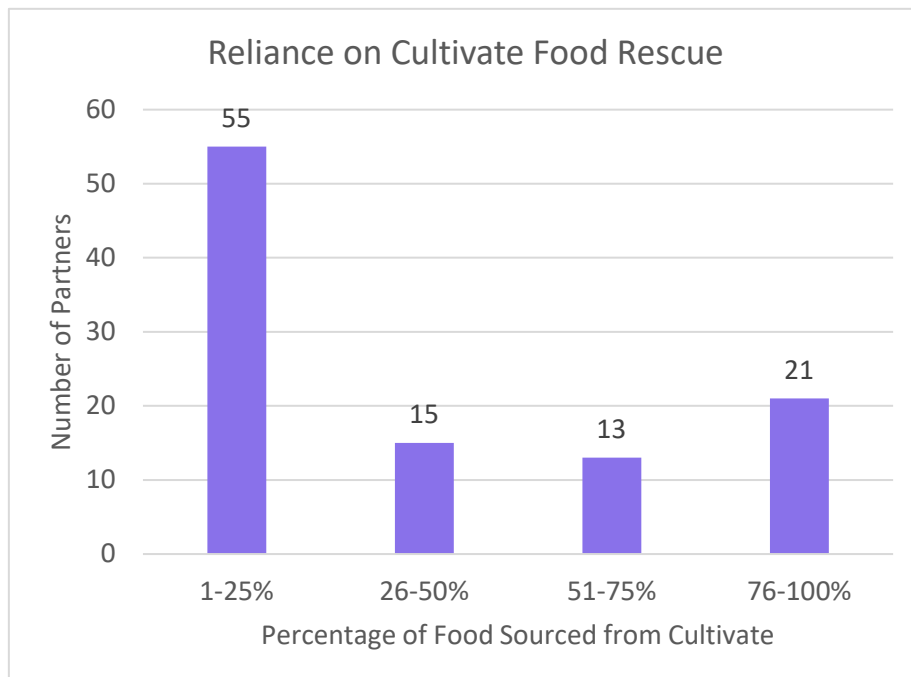
Food Sourcing & Financial Realities

Cultivate’s role: For most partners, Cultivate is a supplementary source. Only ~19% get 76–100% of their food from Cultivate; nearly half (49%) get only 1–25% of their food from Cultivate. The rest of their inventory comes from food banks, grocery donations, churches, purchases, etc. This means Cultivate’s rescued food is valued but usually complements other sources.

Purchasing food: About 70% spend money on food each month. The median spending is roughly \$500–\$600 per month (about \$3 per person served). However, spending varies widely: several large agencies reported \$6k–\$12k monthly to meet demand. A few (~24%) spend nothing, relying entirely on donations. In general, about three-quarters of partners must fundraise or buy food to fill gaps.

Supply sufficiency: Roughly 25–28% of respondents feel that donated food is not fully meeting client demand. Among those, ~93% end up purchasing extra food. Even those who report being mostly sufficient still buy certain items to ensure variety. When supply falls short, it imposes financial strain.

Variety & satisfaction: About 54% of respondents are satisfied with the variety of food from Cultivate with ~33% are neutral, and ~12% are dissatisfied. Many specifically request more fresh produce and protein (meat, dairy). In terms of quantity, ~48% say Cultivate’s shipments are mostly/completely sufficient, ~27% are neutral, and ~25% find them insufficient. In summary, roughly half of respondents are content with Cultivate’s support, but about a quarter clearly need more food, especially in key categories.





Partner Engagement & Collaboration

Ordering patterns: A review of a 7-week period (Mar–Apr 2025) shows heavily skewed orders from Cultivate. About 28% of partners ordered *no* food; 25% ordered <1,000 lbs.; 29% ordered 1,001–5,000 lbs.; 12% ordered 5,000–10,000 lbs.; and 6% ordered >10,000 lbs. This 80/20-like pattern means a few large users account for most of the volume.

Engagement vs. usage: Partners who use Cultivate more tend to be more enthusiastic collaborators. Among the highest-volume users, ~93% said they would partner on new initiatives (vs ~72% of low/non-users) Similarly, 96% of heavy users want to collaborate on funding (vs 81% of light users) and 86% on volunteer programs (vs 72%). In other words, the most active partners (often large organizations) are the most “bought-in” and open to joint efforts.

Collaboration interest: Overall, most partners express willingness to collaborate in many areas. For example, ~76% are open to mobile or extended-hour programs, 72% to volunteer-sharing, and 85% to co-applied grants. This collective mindset is a major asset for network-wide initiatives.

The Bright Spots: Positive Feedback Organized by Theme

Mission Impact – Changing Lives

"Cultivate offers us the opportunity to make a difference in our communities and we appreciate it."

"We love the backpacks for all our families that we deliver to."

"We've been so blessed by Cultivate. Our pantry has doubled the families we serve."

"Free food for pantries is great. We can offer more to people because of Cultivate."

"We're grateful for the food donations for our community center."

"We love getting the fresh and frozen food, as well as items for snacks."

"Cultivate provides 3 meals per week for our families at RMHC. The prepared meals are vital when our day services are closed."

Meals & Food Quality

"The frozen meals are always popular."

"One of our primary suppliers of fresh produce — frozen meals are impactful for disabled families."

"Pre-packed meals are great — veterans, seniors, and homeless can't cook."

"Meals, online ordering, and cold storage have been a tremendous benefit."



"Being able to get bread every week is a very important resource."

"We love the prepared meals families can use when our kitchen is closed."

Ordering System

"The ease of online ordering. The ease of pick-up."

"Easy online ordering and scheduling a pick-up time."

"I appreciate the online order form and weekly delivery schedule!"

"Ordering system is user-friendly. Setting up pick-up is convenient."

"I love that you can check the storefront and add on to existing orders."

"Online ordering works well. Canceling is easy. Pickup is great!"

"Ordering and pickup process is without flaws."

Delivery & Pickup Experience

"Pickup is super simple at the new location!"

"Delivery is always helpful when requested."

"Delivery times are reliable."

"The friendly, helpful staff loads up my vehicle and asks how to better serve us."

"We get deliveries for large events and communication is excellent."

Communication & Staff

"The communication through Jon has been top notch."

"Communication, respectfulness, desire to help others."

"The staff is very easy to work with."

"Very friendly, competent staff."

"The staff in the warehouse is very friendly and helpful."

"Your team is excellent through email and telephone."



"Staffing is amazing. We're new, but we've been well instructed."

Variety, Inventory & Selection

"Variety of items and delivery option."

"The amount of food we get and the selection is great."

"Website and inventory are helpful. Weekly options are appreciated."

"Frozen goods, drinks, and even special requests (hot dog buns) are appreciated."

"The inventory list and delivery option work well."

Convenience & Efficiency

"The convenience of picking up items is excellent."

"Pickup hours and ordering process are great."

"The website is easy to navigate."

"Everything works well."

"Everything seems to be working well."

"Honestly, I've never had an issue. I like how it's run."

Gratitude & Endorsements

"You're doing a great job— very respectful and considerate."

"We love Cultivate!! Everything has improved since your move."

"You have a 5-star with us."

"We are grateful for the partnership."

"We appreciate being able to order frozen meals and look online each week."

Facility, Equipment & Future Goals

"Talking with Jon, he helped us identify a freezer issue and we're working with Whirlpool now."

"I'm going to apply for the refrigerator freezer program to help more families."