

# Finding Healthy Food is Easy, but Food Deserts are a Concern, and Food Insecurity is a Serious Regional Issue

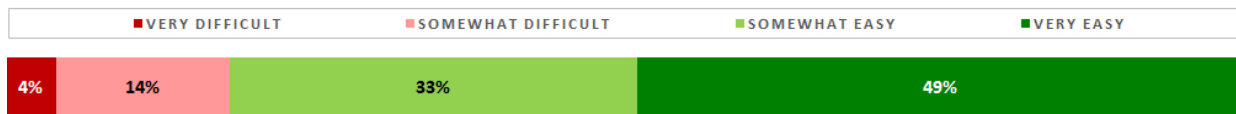
## More Blacks Desire Government Programs, But All San Diegans would Generally Pitch in to Help

The [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) has found 33.8 million Americans lived in “food insecure” households in 2021. The USDA defines “food insecurity” as: “At times during the year, these households were uncertain of having or unable to acquire enough food to meet the needs of all their members because they had insufficient money or other resources for food.” [Some estimates](#) place the number of Californians facing food insecurity at around 8 million. It’s a similar story in [San Diego County](#), and food insecurity remains elevated compared to [pre-pandemic times](#). Over the past decade, a growing body of research has linked poor nutrition to poor health outcomes. What do San Diegans want government to do to enhance food security and what are they themselves willing to do?

### Household Access to Nutritious Food

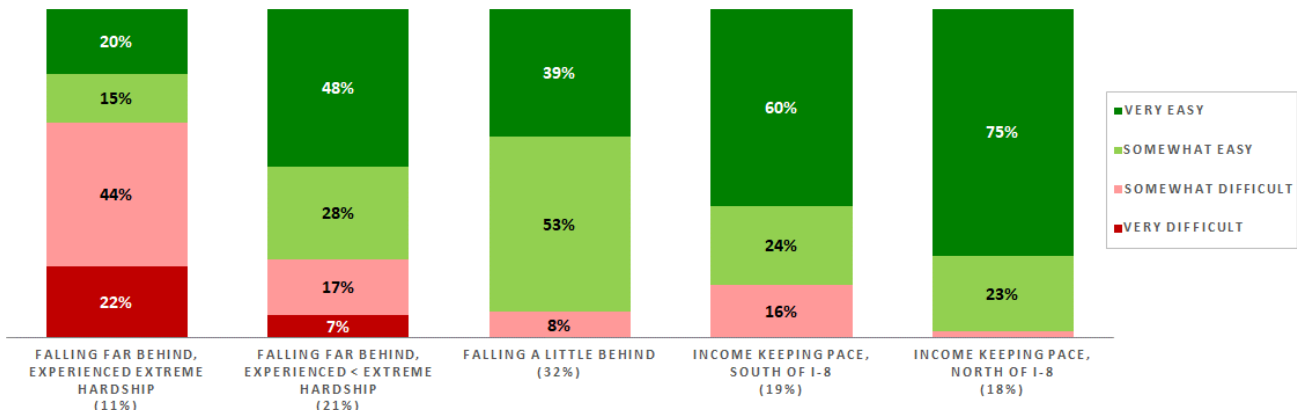
CERC’s survey shows 18% of county residents find it difficult to obtain nutritious food at a convenient location. Although easily accessing healthy food options isn’t a challenge for most, more than half a million San Diegans struggle with this.

FOR YOU AND YOUR HOUSEHOLD, IS OBTAINING NUTRITIOUS FOOD AT A CONVENIENT LOCATION...



Those straining to make ends meet often have a harder time getting good food. A whopping two-thirds whose incomes are falling far behind the cost of living *and* who also endure extreme financial hardship admit obtaining nutritious food at a convenient location is tough; 22% say that’s *very* difficult. This is the case regardless of where one lives in the county. Even when incomes are falling far behind, it’s easier to get healthy food if that person is *not* experiencing extreme hardship – though 23% still report some difficulty -- and less onerous still if rising costs are only a minor problem. For financially stable San Diegans, food access is no problem at all, with financially secure folks north of Interstate 8 almost never experiencing obstacles. Our data show access to nutritious food is primarily a financial issue: San Diegans struggling the most often can’t afford to get nutritious food.

OBTAINING NUTRITIOUS FOOD BY FAMILY INCOME/EXPERIENCED HARDSHIP/LOCATION



## A Closer Look at San Diego's Communities of Color

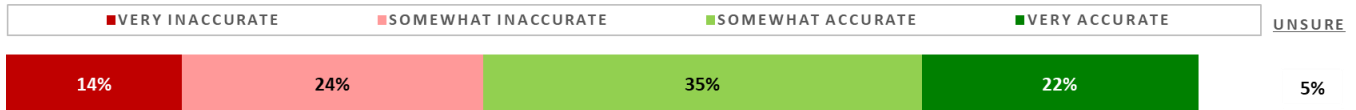
- ✓ Access to nutritious food at convenient locations is less easy for Blacks
- ✓ Access among Asians and Latinos is no different than it is for the overall population

Obtaining nutritious food at a convenient location		White	Latino	Black	Asian	All
	Very difficult	3%	3%	12%	1%	4%
	Somewhat difficult	12%	13%	18%	11%	14%
	Somewhat easy	28%	40%	20%	43%	33%
	Very easy	57%	43%	50%	45%	49%

### Food Deserts

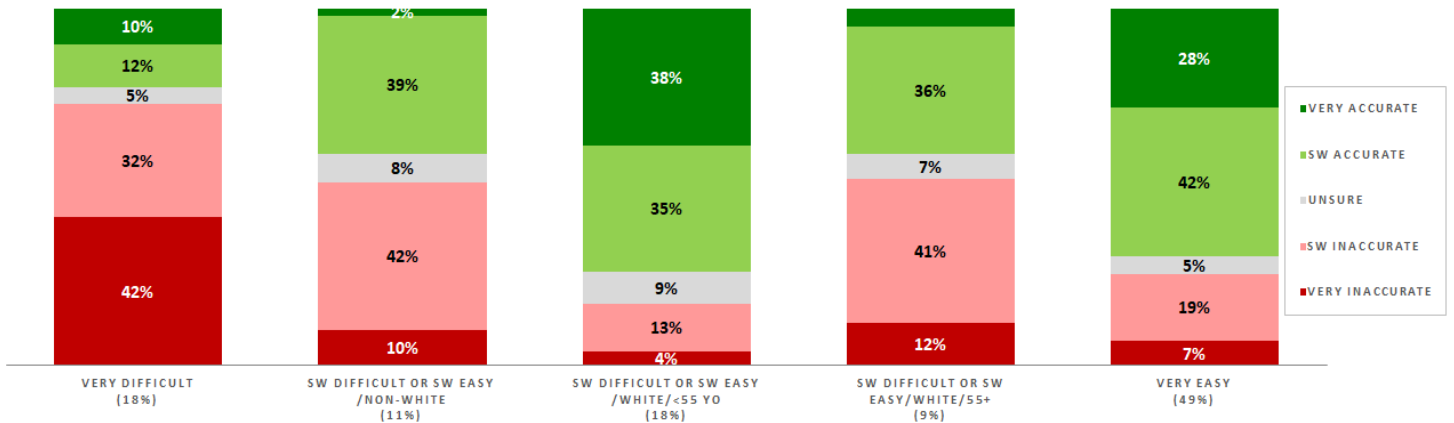
Most – 57% – say it’s accurate that most people in their community can access affordable food that is healthy and nutritious, although just 22% regard the statement as *very* accurate. On the other hand, 38% feel this characterization is inaccurate. San Diegans are not of one mind when it comes to community access to healthy food, also known as “food deserts.”

“MOST PEOPLE ARE ABLE TO ACCESS AFFORDABLE FOOD THAT IS HEALTHY AND NUTRITIOUS.” THINKING OF YOUR COMMUNITY IS THAT STATEMENT...



Whether one lives in a food desert is largely driven by personal experience. Those who have trouble getting food generally disagree that most people in their community can access affordable, healthy food. A huge 73% of those who say it is very difficult for them to get nutritious food believe their community lacks access. Those with fewer personal hurdles are more divided on this question, although non-Whites, as well as older Whites, tend to take issue with the claim more often than younger Whites do. So, for San Diegans having trouble getting good food, the resident’s age and race play a role in perceptions of whether she/he is relegated to a food desert. Those with minimal-to-no personal access barriers agree their neighborhoods aren’t food deserts.

AGREE COMMUNITY CAN ACCESS NUTRITIOUS FOOD BY EASE OF OBTAINING FOOD/RACE/AGE



## A Closer Look at San Diego's Communities of Color

- ✓ For each ethnicity, perceptions of community access to healthy, affordable food reflect those of the broader population

"Most people are able to access affordable food that is healthy and nutritious." Thinking of your community is that statement...	White	Latino	Black	Asian	All
	Very inaccurate	17%	12%	19%	9%
Somewhat inaccurate	21%	27%	17%	27%	24%
Unsure	5%	4%	11%	9%	5%
Somewhat accurate	34%	39%	28%	37%	35%
Very accurate	24%	18%	25%	18%	22%

### How Serious is Food Insecurity?

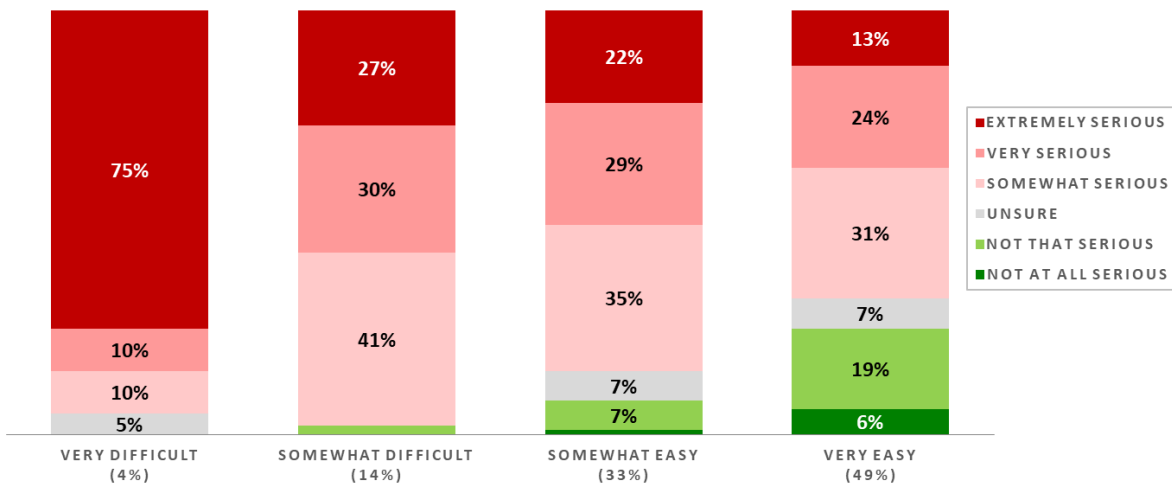
A wide majority think food insecurity is a problem locally, with nearly half – 46% – saying it is very or extremely serious. Just 15% believe it is not that serious or not serious at all.

FOOD INSECURITY PROBLEM SERIOUSNESS IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY

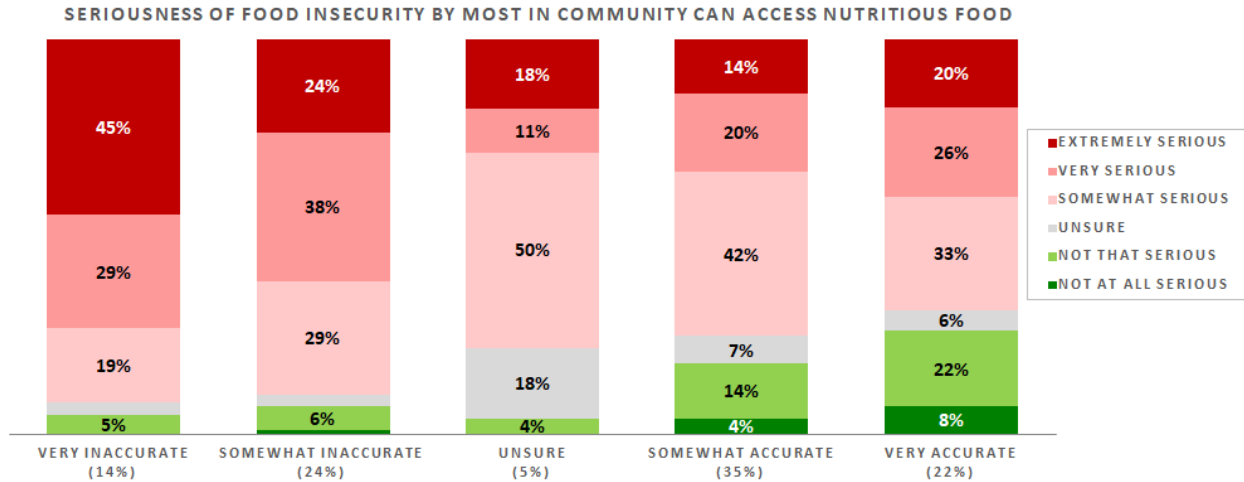


The problem's severity mainly comes down to personal experience. The easier it is for a resident to get healthy and affordable food, the less likely they are to see food insecurity as a serious problem. Those experiencing challenges in getting healthy food overwhelmingly view the issue as serious. In fact, three-quarters who find it very difficult to get nutritious food at convenient locations think food insecurity is extremely serious.

SERIOUSNESS OF FOOD INSECURITY BY EASE OF OBTAINING NUTRITIOUS FOOD



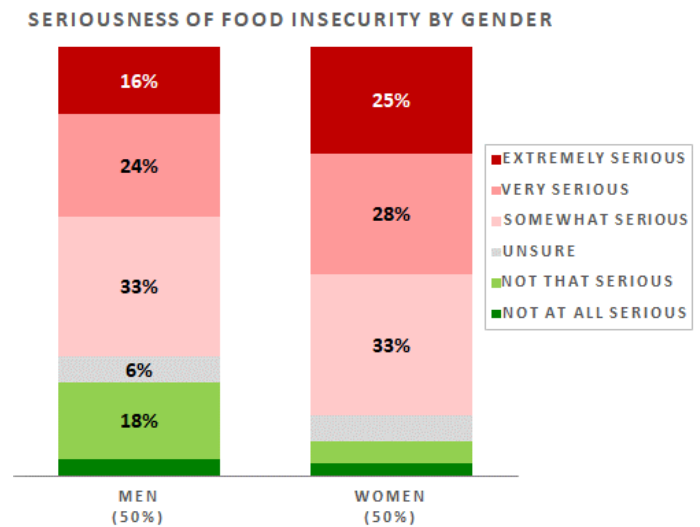
Perception of community food access also plays an important role. Residents who sense they're in a food desert believe food insecurity is at least a *very serious* countywide problem. Even those who believe their neighbors do have easy access to nutritious food think food insecurity is a problem, but their sentiment is much less intense.



Gender is another factor. Women are far more likely to feel food insecurity has reached critical levels, while most men don't see it that way.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) and Whites, also tend to hold views different from those of other racial and ethnic groups. Majorities across the board believe food insecurity is a problem, but Whites and AAPI residents think it is less severe in nature and are half as likely as members of others to say it's *extremely serious*.

Among those identifying the cost of living as the county's most important issue, a large 43% say it is *extremely serious*. Residents naming other issues also think it's a problem, but only 18% consider it *extremely serious*. This reinforces the conclusion that food insecurity tends to flow from financial insecurity.



Finally, registered voters typically think this is a bigger problem. Eighty-two percent feel food insecurity is at least somewhat serious, whereas only 68% of non-voters feel that way. This is an issue that the electorate is more energized to tackle.

### A Closer Look at San Diego's Communities of Color

- ✓ **The AAPI community regards food insecurity as less serious**
- ✓ **African Americans see food insecurity as more serious**
- ✓ **Perceptions among Latinos are in-line with those of the larger population**

Food insecurity seriousness		White	Latino	Black	Asian	All
	Extremely serious	18%	12%	27%	13%	21%
	Very serious	27%	26%	34%	28%	26%
	Somewhat serious	31%	42%	25%	31%	33%
	Unsure	7%	5%	5%	9%	6%
	Not that serious	14%	14%	4%	4%	12%
	Not at all serious	2%	1%	5%	16%	4%

### What Can Government Do?

Federal, state, and local government proposals to address food insecurity have been discussed and implemented. When asked about five government plans to reduce food insecurity in San Diego County, 74% want action via at least one proposal, while 14% don't think any of the proposals would work, and another 12% are unsure or equivocate. So, substantial support exists for doing *something*, and even 59% of Republicans approve of at least one of the government solutions we asked about.

Free school meals for all children are the most popular of the proposals, although it is not a clear-cut standout solution. Of the 330,000 food insecure San Diegans, 102,000 – nearly one-third – are children and one-quarter of residents think universal school meals would most effectively curb food insecurity. At 40%, free school meals for all children is a priority in the AAPI community.

Another 16% believe extending the pandemic-era Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the most effective approach. Latinos are bigger fans, as 26% feel that will have the most impact.

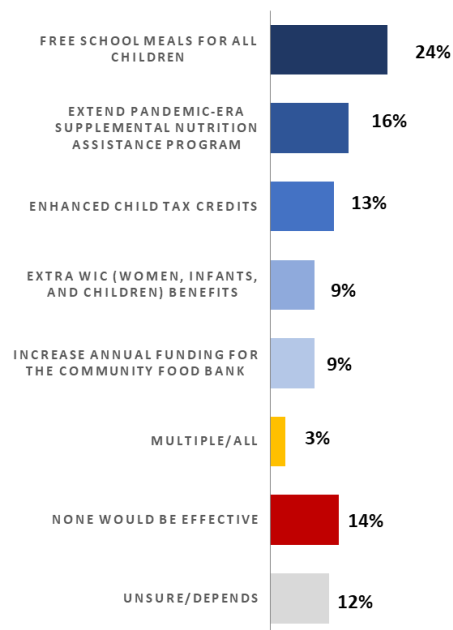
Enhanced child tax credits are the choice of 13%, but that rises to 20% among those 40 and younger. Residents positioned to benefit most from these tax credits like this option much more than older San Diegans do. Nine percent would like to see extra Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits. Twice as many residents in City Heights, the College Area, and La Mesa back this. Lastly, 9% feel increasing annual funding for food banks would be most effective. Residents of north central communities highlight this proposal more often, selecting it 23% of the time.

Non-Democrats dealing with serious financial hardship are twice as likely to reject all the proposals. This suggests that when less faith in government combines with dire need the result is pessimism tending toward hopelessness.

### A Closer Look at San Diego's Communities of Color

- ✓ **More Blacks see government programs to address food insecurity as effective**
- ✓ **AAPI folks disproportionately favor free school meals for all children**
- ✓ **Latinos are partial to extending SNAP benefits, but rarely feel funding for food banks is the best approach**

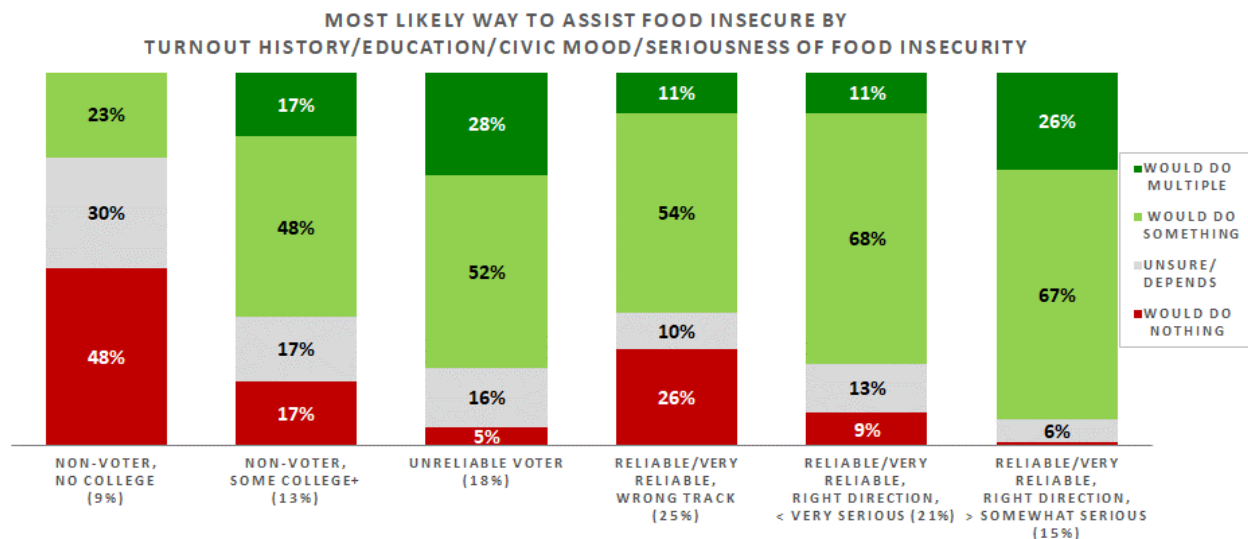
MOST EFFECTIVE PROPOSAL TO REDUCE FOOD INSECURITY



Most effective proposal to reduce food insecurity	White	Latino	Black	Asian	All	
	Free school meals for all children	24%	20%	24%	40%	24%
	Extend pandemic-era Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program benefits	10%	26%	12%	11%	16%
	Enhanced child tax credits	11%	14%	12%	8%	13%
	Extra WIC (women, infants, and children) benefits	8%	11%	16%	4%	9%
	Increase annual funding for the Community Food Bank	14%	2%	18%	9%	9%
	Multiple/All	3%	2%	2%	2%	3%
	None would be effective	13%	15%	7%	22%	14%
	Unsure/Depends	17%	9%	10%	5%	12%

### What are San Diegans Willing to Do?

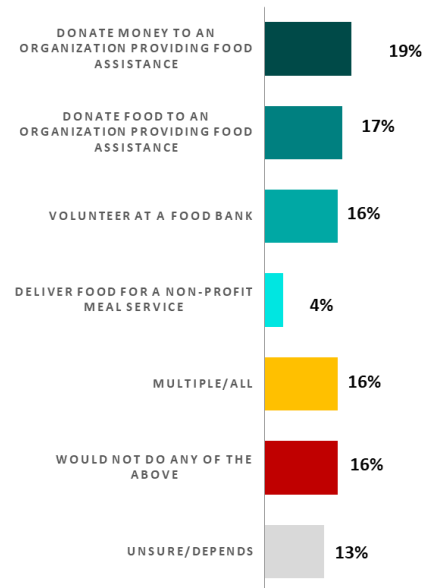
About the same percentage of San Diegans – 71% – would take it upon themselves to help their food insecure fellow residents. Embedded in this percentage are the 16% who would engage in multiple activities. That’s laudatory, but another one-in-six are on the other side of the scale, admitting they wouldn’t volunteer or donate, and 14% are unsure what they would do, or say “it depends.” Upbeat residents (in that they think things locally aren’t headed in the wrong direction) who take food insecurity very seriously and vote reliably are the most service-minded. This combination of civic duty, optimism and attention to the issue results in a group of San Diegans who would do something to battle food insecurity 93% of the time and take multiple actions 26% of the time. On the other hand, those not registered to vote and who did not attend college are unlikely to assist others.



Of the four assistance options in the survey, 19% would be most likely to donate money to an organization providing food assistance. Donating money can be done from home and requires no physical activity or presence, which is likely why seniors aged 74-plus select this option more than twice as often as others.

Donating food to an organization that provides food assistance (17%) and volunteering at a food bank (16%) are nearly as popular as monetary donations. Democrats frequently prefer the latter. Delivering food for a non-profit meal service requires the largest personal commitment and only 4% are attracted to that.

MOST LIKELY PERSONAL ACTION



**A Closer Look at San Diego’s Communities of Color**

- ✓ **Latinos are less inclined to donate money to food assistance organizations**
- ✓ **None in the AAPI community (in our survey) are inclined to deliver food**
- ✓ **Blacks are more likely than others to deliver food and 95% would likely take an action**

Most likely personal action to reduce food insecurity						
	White	Latino	Black	Asian	All	
Donate money to an organization providing food assistance	24%	14%	15%	14%	19%	
Donate food to an organization providing food assistance	16%	17%	18%	19%	17%	
Volunteer at a food bank	12%	21%	22%	21%	16%	
Deliver food for a non-profit meal service	5%	3%	14%	0%	4%	
Multiple/All	16%	12%	9%	17%	16%	
Would not do any of the above	12%	22%	5%	22%	16%	
Unsure/Depends	15%	13%	17%	7%	13%	