



# Meeting the Needs of Immigrant Communities with Customized Food Packs

*Results from a research  
project by Wayside  
Food Program*

June 8, 2021

# *Addressing Food Insecurity in Immigrant Communities*

Between March 25 and April 2, 2021, 7 focus groups were held to identify and understand food insecurity, what foods are desired (or NOT desired) to help Wayside better tailor its offerings.

We met with 33 community leaders from these communities:

- Somali
- Arab
- Africans (Central)
- Angolan
- Serb/Croatia/Russia/Albania
- Asian
- Hispanic/Latinx

## **General Cooking Habits**

- How many meals per day
- Eating within your culture vs “American Foods”

## **Shopping for Food**

- Local groceries vs specialty stores
- Meats, vegetables, spices, pantry staples

## **Food Insecurity and Pantry Offerings**

- Foods made available
- Foods not used
- Foods desired

1. **Racially and ethnically diverse groups have more in common than not** around the use of key ingredients, patterns and timing of daily meals and patterns of cooking.
2. Cooking traditional dishes and **eating traditional foods is equally valued by older and younger immigrants**, but older family members and those who came to the United States later in life are likely to stick more closely to a traditional, cultural diet.

3. **Younger adults and families** with children born in the United States appreciate and desire traditional foods, but **may not have the time or the experience to cook traditional meals** as part of their everyday lives.
4. **Food insecurity varies by community** and can be related to how long ago a particular community began immigrating to the United States.

5. **Much of the food made available from food pantries** or via USDA food packs **is not useable** due to cultural and/or religious traditions.
6. There is **a lot of overlap in key, basic ingredients**, which will make customizing food boxes by community easier than originally thought.
7. **Participants in the groups were very appreciative of the effort** and felt the communities they represented would view customized food packs in a very positive and culturally-affirmative way.

*Based on what we learned, what are the recommendations?*

1. Create a foundation of **“basic ingredients” food packs** for specific communities that can be the same.
2. Add **1-3 uniquely individual/custom items** for each community from their lists of preferred items.
3. Pay specific **attention to the importance of foods based on religious traditions and basic preferences**, which for most communities transcends ethnicity and financial status.

*Based on what we learned, what are the recommendations?*

4. Include **educational information and recipes** to make traditional foods more accessible to younger immigrants and families
5. Establish an **advisory group from the focus group participants** to use as a sounding board on final plans for customized community food packs.
6. Create a **community education and awareness campaign** so that community members are aware of availability of customized food packs.



1. **Prepare specific lists of foods for customized Food Packs** by community, showing what can be the same and what will need to be different.
2. **Determine budgets** for ability to customize food packs.
3. **Review** these lists **with an advisory group of participants** to reinforce their “partnership” with Wayside.
4. **Host Community Meals.**
5. **Use public relations** to get the word out.

Thank you!

**Questions?**