

Policy Blog: Wait Times and Pantry Distribution Models in Centre County

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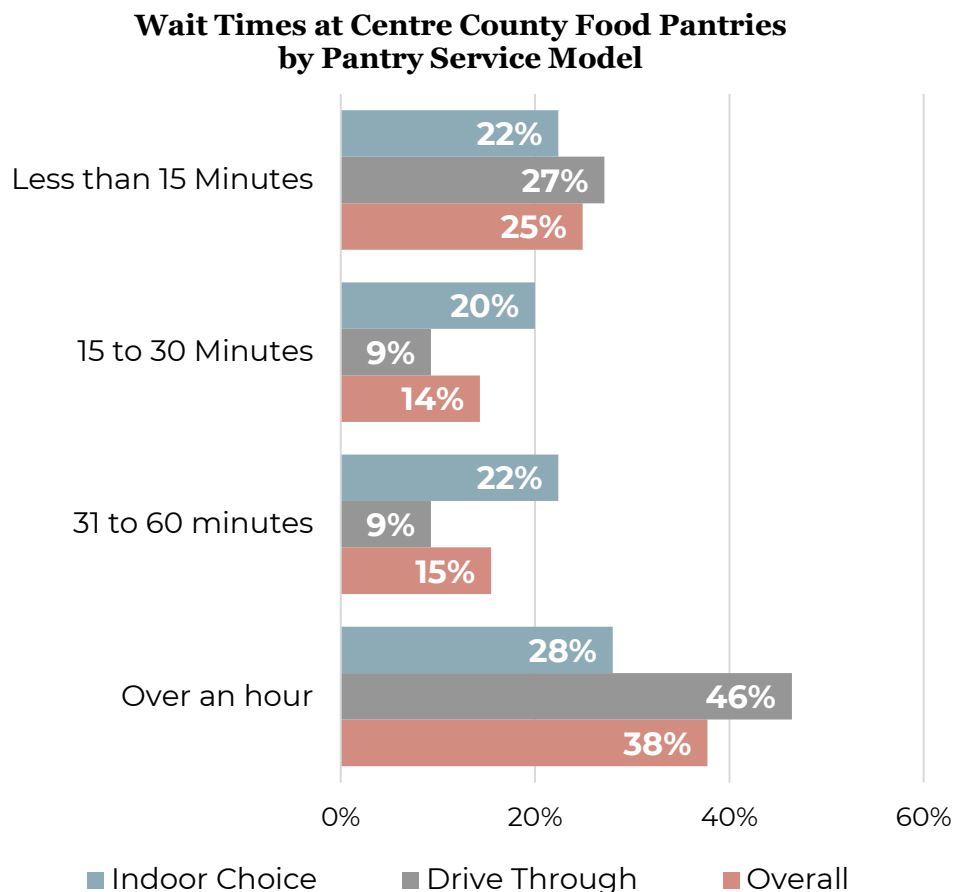
On Thursday, October 22, CPFB Impact and Policy Research will publish their ninth Community Hunger Mapping report. Focused on Centre County, the report is the result of a year-long project that sought to understand the experiences of food insecure residents of the county and the local charitable food system's response to hunger. The full report contains not only an array of research findings, but also specific, actionable recommendations that can help Centre County's food pantries and other stakeholders improve services while also making progress toward a community where no one must worry about where or how they will get their next meal.

This policy blog previews a key finding from the report: wait times at food pantries vary significantly across Centre County, with the distribution model in use at the pantry having an important effect on the length of time a service may take.

Wait times result from the intersection of several elements, including each neighbor's individual decision-making, pantry-level policies, program design choices including and beyond distribution models, and external factors like weather, travel time, or distance. Because wait times are a major component of the overall neighbor experience at food pantries, it is important to understand them and to work to reduce them where possible, despite the complexity of underlying factors.

As shown in the chart at right, two in five neighbors (38%) who participated in surveys as part of Centre County Community Hunger Mapping stated that they wait an hour or more to receive services after arriving at the food pantry. However, a quarter (25%) of all neighbors waited less than 15 minutes.

The pantry's distribution model plays a role in determining wait time; around half of neighbors who visited a drive-through pantry (46%) waited an hour or more for service, compared to under a third of those who visited an indoor choice distribution (28%).



Intake practices likely also play a role, with more complicated intake processes taking up more time; eliminating extensive documentation or referral requirements could therefore help decrease wait times while simultaneously increasing accessibility and better aligning pantry

practices with United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) compliance rules.

Additionally, CPFEB researchers have found across several Community Hunger Mapping projects throughout central Pennsylvania that neighbors recognize when the food given out by a pantry differs from the beginning of a distribution to the end, which incentivizes some neighbors to arrive early in hopes of receiving more desirable foods. This means that working to ensure items will be similar or the same across the entire distribution as much as possible and building an environment where neighbors trust that the foods they need and want will be available regardless of what time they come to the pantry is also an important means of beginning to reduce wait times.

To learn more about this finding and many more, please join our launch event, which will be held from 1:30 to 2:30 PM on October 22 at the American Philatelic Society in Bellefonte. To attend in person, [please register here](#). We also welcome those who cannot be present in person [to join us virtually via Zoom](#).