

# COVID-19 New Orleans Food System Assessment

## What We've Lost, What We've Gained, And What Remains

### Survey Description

The COVID-19 New Orleans Food System Assessment described the shifts and changes in the city's food environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We collected data from 57 New Orleans-based organizations from several sectors of the city's food system (food production, food waste and recovery, small business, food access, and emergency feeding) starting from New Orleans's first city-wide lockdown beginning on March 15, 2020. As the landscape of the food system changed drastically throughout this period, food organizations and businesses also had to quickly adapt to survive and to continue meeting the growing needs of their communities. The survey's goal was to track the results of these changes and to highlight what was lost, what was gained, and what remained during this crippling period.

### Findings

Our findings from this assessment highlight our food system's resilience but also multiple areas for improvement, assistance, and collaboration. Many New Orleans small food business respondents saw losses during the COVID-19 pandemic. 35 percent of participants representing small businesses reported losing at least half of their business since the first lockdown on March 15, 2020. As a result, 15 percent of participants reported having to close their business in 2020, while 39 percent of participants were unsure if they will be able to stay open if the COVID-19 crisis persists. In addition, 39 percent of small businesses reported losing specific client bases. Much of that clientele were related to large event services and celebratory events. When asked what was needed from the city government, 53 percent of respondents reported needing relief funding, financial assistance, and increased investment into local small businesses by city government. The same needs were voiced by food production and food waste and recovery participants who, although made progress in growing their community partnerships, faced multiple hardships in 2020 due to the pandemic.

Many participants reported that an increase in volunteers and community connections helped their business continue operations during the pandemic. Food pantries and emergency feeding organizations were most integral to the resilience of our city's food environment; feeding thousands of families, homeless, and service workers in need. Respondents reported facing multiple barriers to resources and assistance from the government. All reported needing more financial assistance and funding from local government. They unanimously reported that community partnerships were the most helpful to continue operations. Through these partnerships, many were connected to new distribution opportunities, food resources, and funding opportunities.

### Needs

Since this data has been collected, we have only seen the need for community partnerships grow. As vaccination rates continue to increase, our communities will be recovering from the effects of the pandemic for many years to come. Respondents were very clear on what is needed to build a more resilient and sustainable food system: increased connections with community partners and mutual aid groups to allow for organizations to find innovative ways and helpful resources to stay in business; more small business funding from our governments; and an increased dedication to local food business from local institutions and government.

### Recommendations

- **Create and fund a City Food Coordinator that assists in connecting food organizations, businesses, and community partners in order to better coordinate food system needs**
- **Increase funding and promotion for local farmers to grow and sell fresh food to strengthen the local food chain and increase healthy food consumption**
- **Increase relief programming for local businesses through more equitable licensing and permitting fees and procedures**
- **Increase technical assistance and grantmaking to small businesses**



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**100%**

100% of participants representing Food Pantry and Emergency Feeding organizations as well as Food Waste and Recovery organizations found community partnerships to be most helpful during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**44%**

44% of participants representing Small Businesses found community partnerships to be most helpful during the COVID-19 pandemic. 20% of those participants gained new community partnerships.

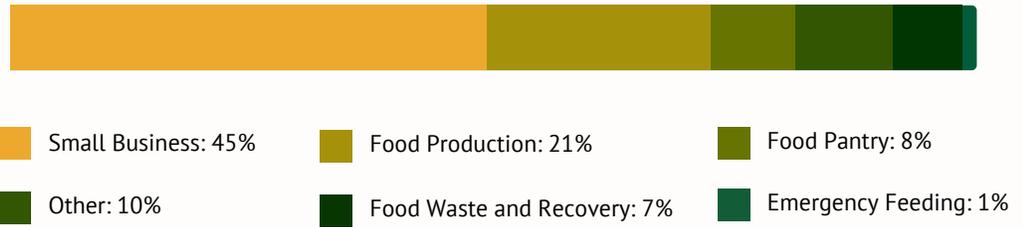
**80%**

80% of participants representing Food Waste and Recovery organizations gained new community partnerships during the COVID-19 pandemic.

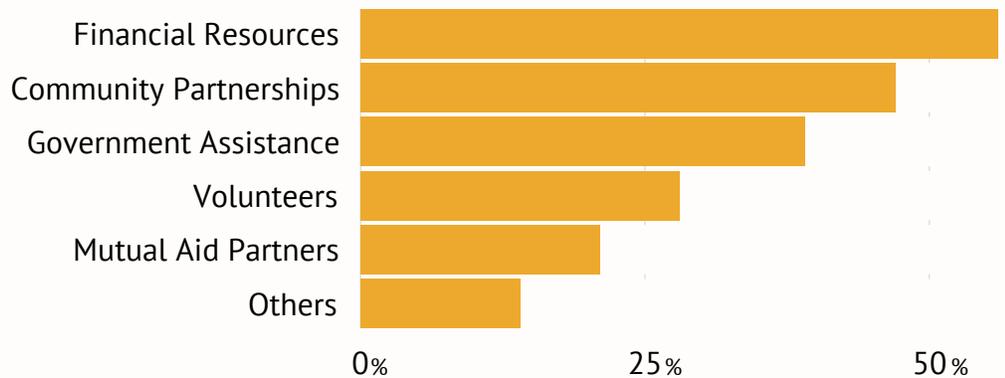
**67%**

67% of participants representing Food Production (including Food Waste and Recovery) organizations found community partnerships to be most helpful during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Categories of Food Survey Respondents



### What resources have helped you the most during COVID-19?



### Community partnerships were identified as a key resource during the COVID-19 pandemic



"Working as a unit and a community has been the only way to make it through this pandemic."

"I have connected with several like minded businesses and folk via social media to share ideas and discuss innovative ways to move forward with these challenges."

"We were able to mobilize quickly because of our existing relationships and find more creative solutions before funding or other resources came into play because of those partners."

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