

# ROUTE 1 LIVED EXPERIENCES REPORT

FOOD INSECURITY DURING THE  
COVID-19 PANDEMIC



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ARCADIA  
CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD & AGRICULTURE

## Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted inequities across the country – in healthcare, the labor market, and notably in food security. We saw mile-long lines at food pantries, and heard the statistics: 45 million Americans, including 15 million children, experiencing food insecurity in the richest country in the world.

In Fairfax County 58,000 residents were food insecure prior to the pandemic. That number is estimated to have doubled in the last year.

This report moves the focus from faceless statistics to the human stories behind those numbers in the Route 1 Corridor in Southeast Fairfax County, where many residents struggle with issues related to poverty.

It illustrates the complexity of the food insecurity crisis in order to inform solutions that can knit together employment, affordable health care, accessible child care, adequate transportation, and a more robust safety net to support families struggling to put food on their tables in Fairfax County, the third wealthiest county in the nation.

In this report, we chronicle the lived experience of 15 residents in the Route 1 Corridor who experienced varying levels of food insecurity because of the pandemic.

- Parents whose food budgets were overwhelmed because their children lost access to school meals
- Workers whose hours were cut because of the shut down order and could not afford food and rent
- Employees who had to quarantine because of COVID exposure without sick pay, losing income and hours
- Immigrants who lost their jobs but didn't apply for federal nutrition benefits as they feared imperiling their pending citizenship because of the "public charge" prohibition
- Immune-compromised people who had to give up careers to take less risky but poorly paid part-time jobs to protect their health
- Single parents who could not work because of the lack of affordable childcare, and cobbled together meals from public assistance and food pantries
- Residents without cars who had limited access to grocery stores

They told their stories to fellow members of their community, who conducted the interviews necessary to produce this report. All were compensated for their time.

Each of their stories is different. But they share a common narrative: the global COVID pandemic pushed Fairfax County families that were already economically vulnerable to the brink. They continue to struggle to put food on the table.

This report is a call to action for collaborative efforts that work toward building a food secure environment along the Route 1 corridor by identifying the systems that perpetuate food insecurity and working to dismantle and recreate them.

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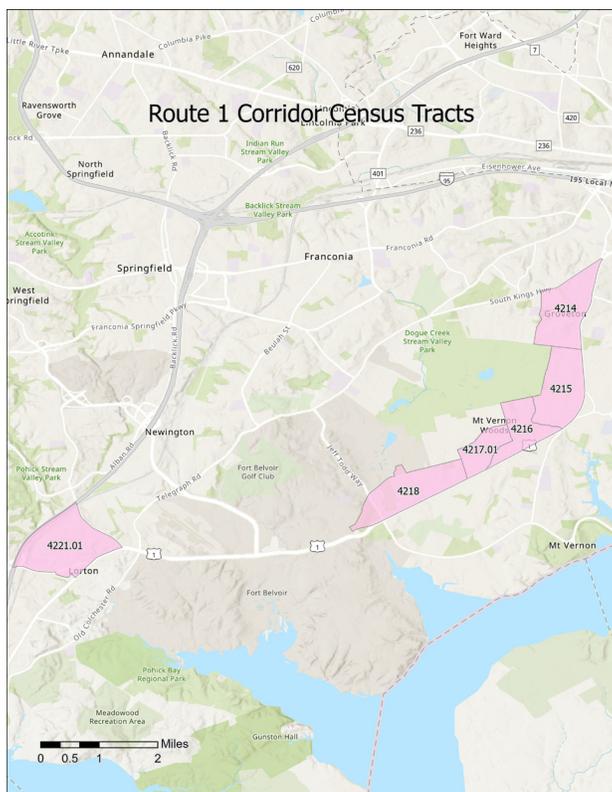
## Introduction & Background

This report stems from Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food and Agriculture’s “Live, Eat, Grow - Route 1” project that is supported by a grant from the Northern Virginia Health Foundation (NVHF). Grant efforts are focused on creating a more equitable and sustainable food system in the Route 1 Corridor through collaborative efforts with partner organizations aimed at improving food access, reducing food insecurity, and fostering better nutrition.

This report highlights the realities and struggles related to food access among those living along the Route 1 Corridor (Richmond Highway) in Fairfax County. While the report focuses on the 2020-21 Covid Pandemic, the issues discussed have broader implications beyond this crisis. This report is meant to supplement existing data, reports and work related to food access and equity in the area. Our intention is to provide another layer of understanding to the issue of food access by amplifying residents’ voices.

In 2017, a NVHF report by Virginia Commonwealth University’s Center on Society and Health highlighted the uneven opportunity landscape in Fairfax County, where life expectancy can differ by up to 11 years depending on one’s zip code/census tract. The report put forth constructive ideas to address the root causes and need for infrastructure investment. The Route 1 Corridor is one of the fifteen areas designated as an “island

of disadvantage,” clusters of census tracts where residents face multiple challenges, including poverty, poor education levels, unaffordable housing, and lack of health insurance. “People of color, who represent a disproportionate share of residents in these neighborhoods, face greater challenges to getting ahead ([Woolf et al., 2017, p. 2](#)).” Two years later, the Covid-19 pandemic substantiated the reality that certain areas of Fairfax County are disproportionately affected physically and financially in times of crisis.



*Route 1 Census Tracts*

This corridor is among the poorest in Fairfax County. Over half (52.6%) of the population in census tract 4214 lives below 200 % of the poverty level. The Route 1 corridor’s Healthy Places Index (HPI) score, which measures the health of a census tract on a scale of 0-100 with lower scores indicating health inequities, falls below 50 in multiple census tracts along Richmond Highway. These include census tracts 4214, 4215, 4216, 4217.01, 4218, with census tract 4214 & 4216 scoring the lowest with HPI’s of 41.5 and 42.1 ([NVHF, n.d.](#)). These areas tend to be more racially diverse. For instance, in census tract 4216, “40% of residents are African American, 39% are Hispanic, and 60% are recent immigrants (2000 or later)” ([NVHF, 2019](#)).

These census tracts also report median household incomes below the Fairfax County average of \$124,831 ([NVHF, 2019](#)). The median household income in these census tracts falls well below this number with census tract 4216 averaging \$41,859; the [Economic Policy Institute \(EPI\) \(n.d.\)](#) estimates that a family of four needs an income of \$114,105 to attain an adequate standard of living in Fairfax County. In this same census tract, over

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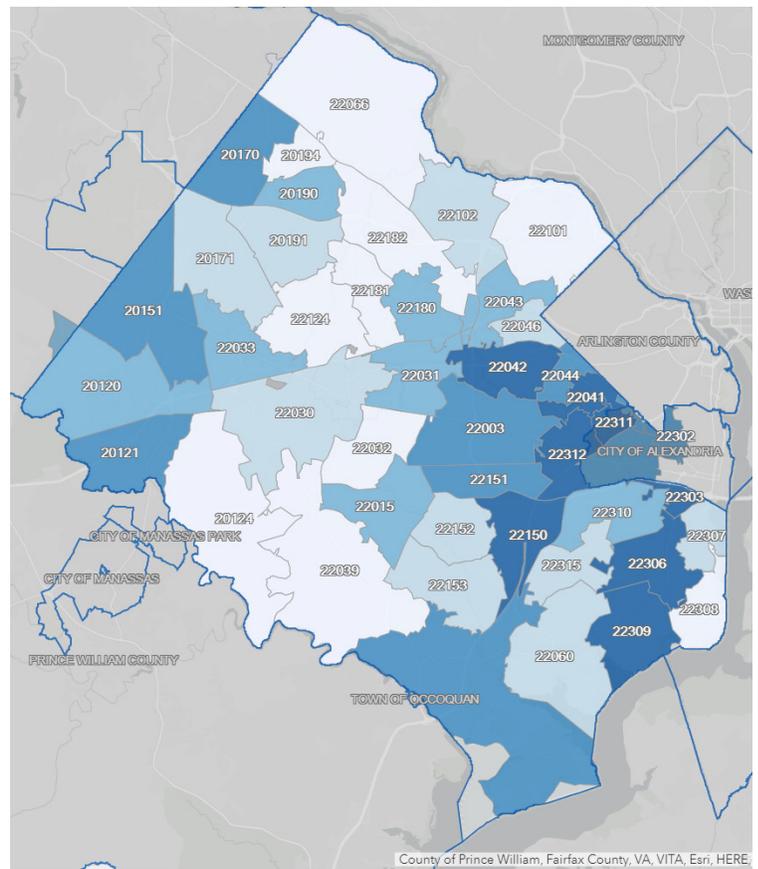
70% of households spend more than 30% of their household income on rent. On average, over half of the people living in this area of Route 1 spend over 30% of their income on rent. After accounting for other expenses such as transportation, utilities, childcare and healthcare, there is little left for food ([U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.](#)).

Another indicator of disadvantage is the number of requests for emergency food, housing, and utilities support to Fairfax County’s Department of Neighborhood & Community Services Coordinated Services Planning (CSP). CSP 2020 basic needs requests show the majority of requests in Fairfax County’s Region 1 originated from census tracts with low HPI scores along Route 1, including an area of Lorton’s 4221.01 census tract ([CSP, 2020](#)). With the onset of the pandemic, CSP saw requests for assistance increase by 65% in FY20 with housing payment and food assistance accounting for the bulk of requests ([CSP, 2020](#)). Calls for assistance from the zip codes of 22306 and 22309 along Route 1 increased throughout the pandemic, and ranked among the highest in the county alongside zip codes 22003 (Annandale) & 22041 (Bailey’s Crossroads) ([FCHHS, 2020](#)) (see appendix A).

### Route 1 – Covid-19 Impact

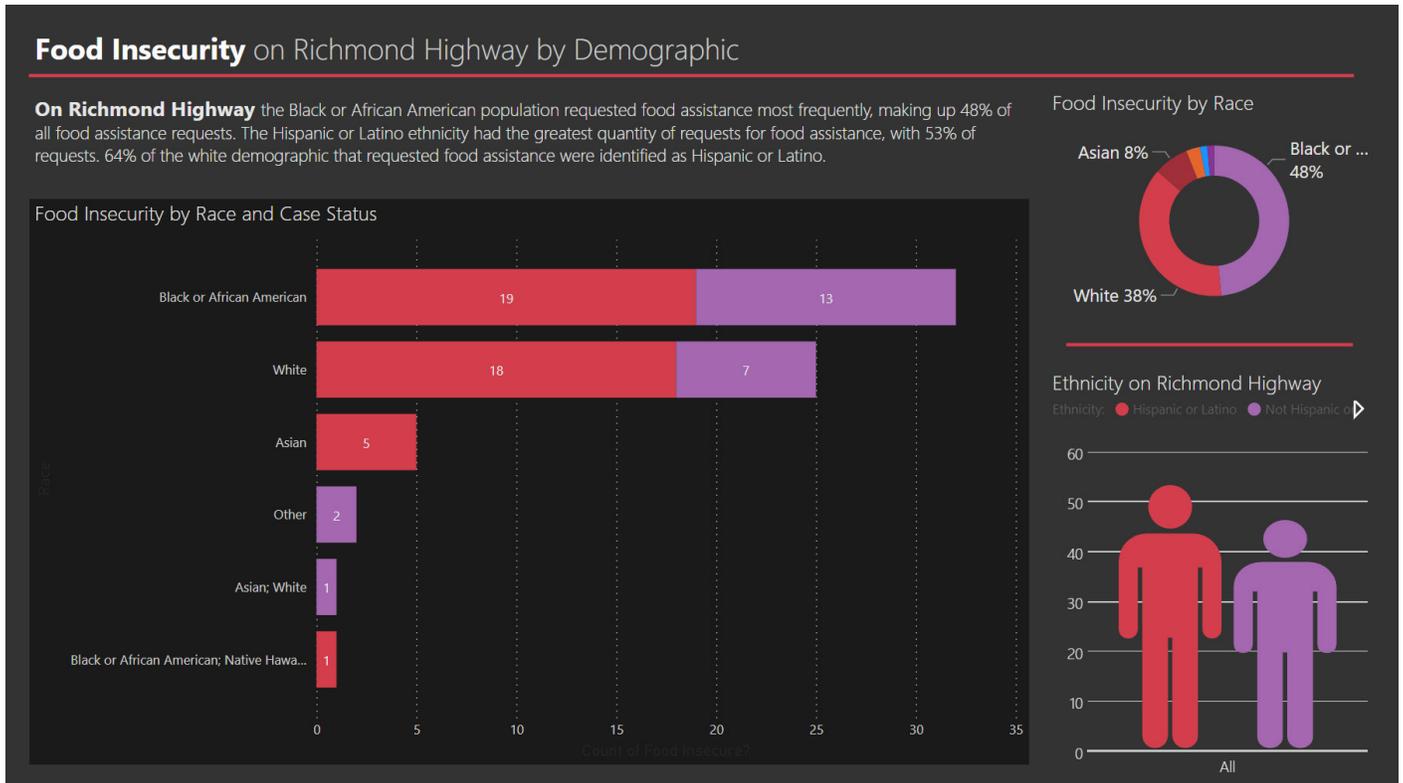
The [Fairfax County Health Department \(FCHD\) Covid-19 Case Data Dashboard](#) highlights Covid-19 cases by zip code. Zip codes 22306, 22309, and 22303 which encompass the Route 1 area are among the six zip codes hardest hit by the virus, with zip code 22306 topping over 10,186 per 100,000 infected people (accessed 3/18/21). These zip codes are indicated in dark blue on the adjacent map.

Covid-19 also disproportionately affects the Hispanic population compared to their overall representation in the county population. Hispanics represent 16.2% of the population in Fairfax County, but 31.8% of the Covid-19 cases in the county ([FCHD, n.d.](#)). A high percentage of Hispanics live in the Route 1 zip codes with high infection rates; census tract 4217.01, located in the zip code 22309, has the highest Hispanic population at 44.7% ([NVHF, n.d.](#)). 9.2% of Fairfax County’s population is Black with 8.6% of this population infected by Covid-19. In comparison, 51.6% of the Fairfax County’s population is White with 28.6% infected by Covid-19. ([FCHD, n.d.](#)) National data ([CDC, 2021](#)) indicates that people of color have higher rates of Covid-19 infection, hospitalization and death compared to White, Non-Hispanics. According to the CDC (2021), Black/African-Americans are 1.1 times more at risk for infection, 2.9 times more at risk for hospitalizations and 1.9 times more at risk for death compared to White, Non-Hispanic persons. Hispanics are 1.3 times more at risk for infections, 3.1 times more at risk for hospitalizations and 2.3 times more at risk for hospitalization.



Source: FCHD – COVID-19 Case Data for Fairfax Health District (accessed 4/30/21)

FCHD data representing August - December 2020 shows that 30% of Covid-19 cases (those infected needing to self-isolate) and contacts (those exposed and needing to quarantine) along Richmond Highway requested food assistance. By racial group, 48% of food assistance requests came from the Black or African American population. The Hispanic or Latino ethnicity represented 53% of requests for food assistance. The age group with the largest number of food requests was the 45-65 age group at 34.6% followed by those 35-44 at 22.7% (FCHD, 2020).



Source: Fairfax County Health Department (8/20-12/20)

Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB) projected a 40-60% increase in food insecurity in our region due to the pandemic. Federal food assistance programs saw increased enrollment as the months of the pandemic rolled on. Enrollment in the Women Infants & Children (WIC) program clinic totals from the Mount Vernon Office increased by 17.5% between January and December 2020. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) applications increased by 36.9% county-wide with a 29.1% increase in the Route 1 area zip codes. Overall in 2020, enrollment in SNAP along the Route 1 corridor jumped by 56%. (appendices B & C).

Nonprofit organizations serving Route 1 also saw a significant increase in requests for food. CAFB noted that among their partner network in the Washington metropolitan area, they saw increases from 30% to as high as 400% in people seeking food assistance (CAFB, 2020).

According to survey responses, United Community and Lorton Community Action Center (LCAC), the two anchor organizations serving opposite ends of the corridor reported dramatic increases for services. United Community estimated a 300% increase in new clients due to the pandemic. Smaller food pantries reported similar demand. Groveton Baptist Church Food Pantry reported numbers 4-5 times greater than 2019. Bethlehem Baptist had over 200 families retrieving food baskets weekly and Rising Hope UMMC saw new clients increase dramatically.

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## **Route 1 Community Feedback**

While the data shows the need along Route 1, it does not attempt to fully capture the complexities and root causes of the disparities that exist in this section of Fairfax County. This report explores and highlights some of these issues through the voices of Route 1 community members and organizations.

We used existing data, as well as survey input from government and nonprofit organizations working in the Route 1 area (extending from Alexandria to Lorton), to frame the current circumstances (see appendix D). We shared the survey link during the Fairfax County and Fairfax Food Council Work Group meetings as well as emailed the link separately to organizations working in Route 1. 23 responses were received.

We have also included insight from those living in areas of Route 1 where food insecurity is more prevalent to provide another layer of understanding. Arcadia received input from the Richmond Highway Food Insecurity Project team so that interviews were representative of residents struggling with food insecurity and access. We enlisted the help of Route 1 organizations in recruiting community members to interview, and hired and paid community members to conduct the interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and were recorded, transcribed and translated as needed. Arcadia gave Interviewees a \$50 gift card to Walmart or Aldi for their participation. We interviewed 15 residents from the Route 1 area using guiding questions developed to evoke conversation about their lived experiences during the pandemic with a focus on food access (see appendix E).

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## Route 1 Community Member Descriptions

We have provided short descriptions of each of the 15 interview participants below. Some names and some details have been changed to protect their privacy. Their voices are embedded throughout the report to frame themes that emerged from their input.

**Carlos**, a Hispanic male in his mid-thirties, owns a condominium along with his wife in the Sequoyah Community. Carlos works as a retail associate and his wife works in child care. Both saw their hours cut because of the pandemic. Their food costs increased when their children shifted to virtual learning and ate three meals a day at home. They do not qualify for SNAP assistance because their income puts them above the qualification threshold. Carlos and Diane rely on their credit card to help them with food costs.

**Kevin**, a white male in his mid-forties, rents an apartment in Colchester Towne. Kevin lost his full-time job in construction during the pandemic and took an entry level position at another company, earning significantly less to support his wife and three children. Food had never been an issue for the family until recently. The family now receives SNAP and accesses food banks to get through the month. The family does not own a car and walks or uses public transportation to get to food sources.

**Joanne**, an African American woman in her fifties, rents an apartment in the Creekside apartment complex where she lives with her two school-aged children. The retail store where Joanne works cut her hours. She had to quarantine because of an exposure at work, but did not get paid during this time. With reduced income, she wasn't able to afford her apartment and had to move to a complex with lower rent.

**Alice**, an African American woman in her seventies, lives alone and rents an apartment in Creekside Village. Alice, who is retired, receives Social Security and SNAP assistance. She suffers from diabetes. She contracted Covid-19 and had to self-isolate. She rarely leaves the house to go to the store because she is afraid of contracting Covid-19 again. She relies on the local food bank and her church for food assistance. Alice is dependent on others for her transportation needs, because public transportation is not easily accessible from her neighborhood.

**Yasmin**, a West African woman in her forties, rents an apartment in the Stony Brook community. A single mother of three, Yasmin's retail employer cut her job hours due to the pandemic. With her children home from school, her grocery costs increased significantly. Yasmin prefers to cook at home and prides herself on raising her children to like healthy food. Yasmin rarely asks for help, preferring to rely on her credit cards to buy groceries when she is short on cash.

**Kofi**, a West African man in his forties, rents an apartment in the Stony Brook community with his wife and four children. He lost his job right before the pandemic hit and supported his family by working for a ride-sharing company. When the pandemic hit, he shifted to online food delivery. His wife maintained her job in senior care. Preferring to cook traditional African food at home, Kofi's family does not actively seek out items from food pantries. The family will sometimes pick up food if offered at the community center in his neighborhood. While he helps at his local church to deliver food to those in need, he does not take advantage of this service for himself. Credit is an important source for buying food when funds are low.

**Manuel**, a Hispanic male in his forties, lives with his wife and three children in the Hybla Valley community where he owns a home. Manuel worked full time as a taxi driver pre-pandemic, but saw his hours cut

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significantly and currently works two to three days a week. The family does not receive SNAP assistance and relies heavily on local food distributions. They use canned items from food distributions to supplement the food they buy to make it last longer.

**Maria**, a Hispanic woman in her forties, lives in the Audubon community with her husband and daughter. They pay rent on the land they lease for their mobile home. During the pandemic, Maria lost her job as a child care provider. Her husband also lost his job, but was able to find part-time work to support the family. The family contracted Covid-19 in April and then again in January. While the family used to receive SNAP benefits, they removed themselves from the program because they were fearful that their participation might affect their ability to obtain citizenship. The family takes advantage of all food distributions in the area.

**Teresa**, a Hispanic woman in her late twenties, lives in the Sequoyah neighborhood. She rents a townhouse with her husband, two children, her mother, and her three adult brothers. The pandemic hit the family hard when the whole family tested positive for Covid-19 in January 2021. While no one in their household was hospitalized or died because of the virus, the family suffered financially. Teresa saw her hours cut then lost her job in food retail at the end of the year. The rest of her family, who work either in construction or food service, lost their jobs because of the pandemic. The family does not qualify for SNAP assistance and relies heavily on local food distributions to supplement their food purchases.

**Camilla**, a Hispanic woman in her forties, lives in the Harmony Place neighborhood with her school-age child. She leases land for a mobile home she owns. She and her husband contracted Covid-19. Her husband saw his hours in construction reduced significantly. Recently, he left Camilla and is no longer providing support to the family. Camilla is unable to find work and has zero income. Over the past few months she sold household items to make rent. She relies solely on free food distributions and pantries to feed herself and child.

**Marina**, a Hispanic woman in her late forties, lives in the Hagel Circle area of Lorton. She and her husband own a townhouse where they live with their four children. Her family contracted Covid early in the pandemic and her husband was unable to work. When he returned to work, his hours were cut. The family does not qualify for SNAP. They rely heavily on the programs and food provided by the local food pantry. She was able to walk to the nearest grocery store before it permanently closed, but now must wait until her husband or son are home to drive her to the nearest grocery store.

**Jose´**, a Hispanic man in his thirties, rents an apartment with his wife and two children in the Fairfax Woods area of Lorton. Jose´ works in construction. Before the pandemic, he was working six 10-hour days per week, but due to the pandemic, his hours have been cut. He typically only gets work for 3 days a week (8 hours a day) and travels outside the state to find work. His wife, who worked full time as a nursing assistant, also lost her job when she had to quarantine because of a Covid-19 exposure. His family relies on his income and food assistance from local pantries and the school.

**Kanisha**, an African American woman in her mid-thirties, rents an apartment in the Lorton area with her partner and three teenage children. Kanisha worked full-time pre-pandemic as a childcare provider. Concerned about health risks due to diabetes, she left her full-time job and now works part-time from home earning less income. She receives SNAP benefits, but occasionally runs out of food and needs to utilize the local food pantry.

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**Marissa**, a Hispanic woman in her thirties, is a single mother of three children. She rents a townhouse in the Lorton area. She had a job at a major online distributor leading up to the pandemic, but quit her job when the schools closed to take care of her children. Her children have struggled with mental health issues related to the pandemic. One of her children receives disability assistance. While the children’s father has provided financial assistance in the past, she recently stopped receiving support. SNAP is a critical component of her food budget. A self-proclaimed deal finder, Marissa uses discount and reward programs to maximize her budget. She also credits her local food pantry for its food and social support assistance.

**Sherry**, a white female in her mid-thirties, lives in a rented townhouse with her five children in the Lorton area. She lost her job as a manager at a retail store due to the pandemic. While she recently qualified for unemployment benefits, Sherry would like to return to work. However, she can’t afford childcare for her five children while schools are closed and jobs have been hard to find. She is now receiving SNAP benefits and relies heavily on the local food bank for weekly assistance. She does not have a car and relies on public transportation or ride-shares to get to stores. There is no walkable grocery store near where she lives.

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## Community Perspectives & Themes

### **Job Loss and Work Opportunities**

Those with lower wage jobs – including those working in the service industry, retail, and construction – were disproportionately affected by job loss or reduction of hours due to the pandemic. While Fairfax County is known as one of the most highly educated counties in the country, the area along Route 1 does not reflect this demographic. In census tract 4214, only 66% of residents have a high school degree and in census tract 4216, only 19% have a bachelor’s degree or higher ([Live Healthy Fairfax, n.d.](#)). Many in this part of the County are working in low-paying industries that were unable to shift to an online platform during the pandemic. Among those interviewed, all (with the exception of a retired individual) worked in some type of service industry, retail or construction job. Each experienced either job loss or a change in hours due to the pandemic.

Joanne’s hours in retail became inconsistent, forcing her to move during the pandemic to an apartment with lower rent.

*Joanne: You know, it would just go on. The hours would fluctuate back and forth, back and forth. I didn’t know at one point how I was going to pay my rent because one week I [was] working 48 the next week I’d work 35.*

Kofi had already lost his job leading up to the pandemic and had shifted to driving for a ride share service. The pandemic then forced him to pivot to food delivery to make money to support his family.

A third of the people we spoke to had some tie to the construction industry. As mentioned in CAFB’s Hunger Report, “Construction workers in the District, Maryland, and Virginia, 50% of whom are immigrants, were also heavily impacted by COVID-related project cancellations, and shortages of equipment and materials. Those who still have opportunities to work are faced with the question of whether to risk exposure for a paycheck” ([CAFB, 2020](#)).

Kevin worked as a full-time project manager for a construction company pre-pandemic, but he lost his job and was forced to take an entry level job for another company making significantly less. Teresa’s husband and brothers also lost their jobs in construction. While Camilla’s husband did not lose his job, his hours were significantly cut. Jose’ who used to work six days a week for 10 hours at a time for a construction company was forced to travel outside the state to find work. At the time of our interview, Jose’ was only able to find consistent work three days a week.

*Teresa: More support is needed, because there are many people in need, there are many people with Covid, you know that everything has changed, there is less work, they work less hours, everything is very difficult, they work by the day. We don’t work on Saturdays like we used to.*

Residents in this area of Fairfax County also suffered higher Covid-19 infection rates. In many cases, the nature of their jobs put them at higher risk for exposure. In addition to having her hours cut in her retail job, Joanne was forced to quarantine without pay when a coworker tested positive. Like many we interviewed, she did not have savings to sustain her during her job loss.

Maria’s family contracted Covid, impacting her, her adult son and her husband’s ability to work. This caused stress about their ability to pay their bills.

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*Maria: We have had to be late with the rent, I have had to be calling so that they could wait for the payment, I have had to call the electricity company for our bills, the water so that they wait for us a little bit to be able to make the payments because there are so many payments, the bills are not going to wait for us.*

For those with hourly jobs, quarantine or isolation due to COVID meant a loss of income. Marina shared how this affected her family of six,

*Marina: It [Covid-19] definitely affected us when my husband wasn't working and at the beginning when he was sick they didn't pay him, we don't have a regular immigration status, we don't have insurance, so our income was reduced to pay the bills, you also know how it is, the house payment and all that.*

Others, like Kanisha, who is diabetic and worked full time as a childcare provider, left their jobs out of fear of contracting the virus, significantly reducing their income stream.

### **Child Care & Single Parent Households**

This area of Fairfax County has many single-parent households. On average, 19.3% of Fairfax County households consist of a single parent. In comparison, Route 1 ranges from 30-40% with a rate of 45.8% in the Mount Vernon area (tract 4216) ([NVHF, 2019](#)). According to Pew Research Center, most single parent households are mothers (81%) and they are twice as likely to be poor and food-insecure ([Livingston, 2018; Bread for the World, 2016](#)).

For Camille, whose husband left the marriage during the pandemic, the impact was immense. She had zero income.

*Camille: I had to sell some things. I haven't been worrying about food because, thank God, now wherever you go they give you food. What has been difficult for me is to raise the rent. I had savings that helped me the first month. Then I had to sell some things. This month I haven't been able to pay it yet, I'm getting it together. But I'm trying to keep up.*

The shift of public schools to online learning also put an additional burden on single mothers. With young children home and no access to daycare, these women were left with few opportunities to work outside the home. Sherry, who worked in a retail management position when the children were at school explained that she would like to get a job, but daycare for her five children is not feasible.

*Sherry: Some of us are just barely dragging on through this, but I would love to go back to work. And there's this stigma around like, 'Oh, well people can go back to work now. They just don't want to go back to work.'*

Marissa also discussed the challenges of going back to work with children at home. While two of her children qualified for Fairfax County's Supporting Return to School (SRS) program in September, one of her children's mental health worsened during the pandemic, preventing her from going back to work.

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*Marissa: I mean, given my [child] is in the hospital, but they are linked with the County. And that has prevented me from being able to work, because I've been called to pick up my son, or he couldn't be at school and it's just really exhausting, and I couldn't afford to go back because... I just didn't know when I'd be available to even go into work with that.*

### **Impact of School Closures on Food Expenses**

While income loss was a common theme among those we interviewed, many families with children also saw their food expenses increase due to school closures. Yasmin, a single mother of 3 school-aged children, was working fewer hours at her retail job, but spending more on groceries.

*Yasmin: [The children] being home really does have an impact on me. Because... before they went to school, I'm going to say I could do like a week... for less than \$100 for groceries. But since they are home now, I can do more [money] for groceries . . and they're in the house eating 24/7.*

Similarly, Marissa did not realize how much her food expenses had increased until she was at a checkout counter and realized that she didn't have enough money to purchase the food in her basket.

*Marissa: ...I always mapped out how much money I was going to spend, and I didn't realize that I was spending more money because they [children] were eating at home, opposed to going to school when they first shut down ... I remember going to a store and it was embarrassing, because I swiped my [SNAP] card and there was nothing on it, and I'd had no idea. And I was like, I guess I've just been using it, and I'm usually very good, but I overlooked that they were staying home more. But then when they gave the PEBT, that helped out a lot. But I've also been scared, so I'm very paranoid [about] spending the money, because I just don't want to be in that situation again. It kind of had me a little paranoid, and I've been visiting the food pantry a lot more to supplement things.*

For Yasmin, the pandemic not only affected her job, but increased the amount of money she was spending on food. Her children qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch (NSLP) and before the pandemic, were eating breakfast and lunch at school, which helped with expenses. With the children home from school, Yasmin found that she had to spend significantly more on groceries because the children were home all the time and eating throughout the day. Her children initially were picking up school meals from the drop off site, but she stopped them from going because they weren't eating the food.

During the pandemic, Fairfax County Public Schools provided school meals at designated bus route stops and school sites. All the families we spoke to were aware of the availability of this additional food, but for many, like Yasmin, it was not a direct replacement for the food students were used to getting at school. While Maria collected meals regularly from the FCPS pick up site and found it extremely helpful for her family, a few families said their children did not like the foods given out, causing them to pick up food only on occasion.

For a few respondents, the pick-up sites were difficult to get to or the time did not work for their schedules. Sherry said that without a car, the food distribution at her children's school was not feasible; that delivery of food at the bus stops would have been easier for her.

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*Sherry: That's [the pick-up site] not really walkable in the middle of a school day. When you have five kids, where, by the time I get there and get back, it's probably a good 30-minute walk there, at least, like a swift walk would be about 30 minutes there, 30 more minutes back. But then I'm waiting in the lines to get the food. So I'm away from my kids an hour and a half, two hours before they actually can eat their lunch. So, for me, it's not worth it.*

Camila also does not have access to a car and noted,

*Camilla: I can rarely go, it's really hard for me because I don't drive and the school is far away. But when I can find someone to go with, someone to take me, then I can go. Because it does help a lot.*

While not everyone we interviewed discussed the receipt of the PEBT card for their school-aged children, those that did, like Marisa, said it greatly impacted their ability to purchase food. For Sherry, the PEBT money allowed her to stock up on bulk food from places like Costco for her children.

### **Managing Food Costs & Expenses**

As described, Fairfax County has a higher cost of living compared to other areas of the United States. Community organizations working in impacted Route 1 areas noted that the cost of rent and utilities often leaves little money for food. Some families live in shared housing or with extended family to save money. The pandemic exacerbated the situation, leaving no income for food.

Interviewees consistently highlighted the resourceful ways they made their food dollars stretch further. Price was a major determining factor on where people shopped for their food. The majority of those interviewed mentioned that Aldi, Shoppers Food Warehouse and Walmart had the best prices on food. Megamart was popular for ethnic foods, but considered more expensive than the major grocery chains. Costco was accessed for bulk items like paper products, milk or juice. Joanne shared that she is constantly looking for sales and deals on food. Comparison shopping for the best prices takes considerably more time and planning. Yasmin noted that she usually shopped on her day off, going to multiple stores to get different items.

*Marina: At Aldi the eggs are cheaper, the eggs, the milk, the butter, and at Walmart the juice, the cheese, the tortillas, because Walmart sometimes has more things for Latinos. At Aldi there is a lot, but Walmart has a lot of things too.*

Marissa uses multiple savings apps on her phone as well as bonus reward programs at grocery stores.

*Marissa: And then there's other reward things - there's this Fetch app that you scan your receipts, and it's certain items that you're buying from the grocery store. So there's so many things on it that I buy anyways for the kids. Some name brand things like Ben and Jerry's or like fruit roll-ups. So, you scan a receipt and you get points, and a thousand points equals a dollar. Right now, I'm up to 48,000, so which would be equivalent to \$48. I'm going to cash out when I get \$50.*

Home cooking was a consistent topic mentioned among interviewees as a way to save money. This was especially evident among immigrant families.

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*Kofi: You know, that's the most ideal thing that helps with Africans. Had it not been that, we couldn't have been [in] this country... We always cook at home. We always prepare our meals like the way we used to do back home. And when we do that, it helps us a lot and it reduces the cost, makes us reduce the costs.*

*Maria: What I do is, for example, the beans I buy the 5 Lbs bag, that lasts up to 2 to 3 months, the rice also the same, I buy the big bag. To make my food last, we follow a diet, we try to eat ... for example, if on Monday I made a bean soup, I made rice, the next day if I have beans left over, it won't be soup, but I chop tomatoes, onion, chili as a way to change the menu a little bit but always eat the same. So it always varies the same because with the beans you can make them ground, stewed, have them in soup, well, Us from El Salvador have bean soup and we add rice to it, there are people who put a hard-boiled egg, they put an egg like that in the hot soup the next day you can make them blended, stews that last practically a week if you cook a whole pot of beans. I try to put beans in everything, rice or beans and meat and salad and thus, you save a lot of money.*

Many families will use items from the food pantry to supplement their meals and extend the amount of time between food purchases at stores.

### **Importance of Government Assistance**

Carlos shared that his family makes an income that is above the poverty line, but not enough to cover the cost of living. He doesn't qualify for SNAP assistance because his family income is just above the qualification guidelines.

*Carlos: You know they [Federal assistance programs] have a certain income, you know that you got to make, but they got to also look around you - know how much they pay for certain things, how much their paychecks come out to, how much you know they got to look at that stuff... they can't just look at the income. You know, yeah, you could be making a big income, but then, when it comes down to paying your mortgage. You know - how much you pay for mortgage - how much you pay for condo fees plus your car. And, plus the car that you need to go to work and back... , plus you got kids. They [Federal assistance programs] got to think about all that...*

Like Carlos, Joanne's household income exceeded the SNAP qualification threshold. For those that qualify for SNAP, the program has been extremely helpful in offsetting food costs, and in the flexibility it offers. Kevin and Sarah, who began receiving SNAP benefits when he lost his job, were able to make a large shopping trip at the beginning of the month and supplement the food they bought with free food available in the community.

*Kevin: I mean jeez when the first of the month [comes], it feels so good to go and put... a good amount of food in your fridge and know you're okay for the upcoming week or two. We'd be in bad shape if we didn't have that help.*

For Alice, who is retired, SNAP is very important. She notes that the extra money for food is a "blessing." While she receives "Meals on Wheels," she doesn't always like the taste of the food and will share the meals with her 90-year old neighbor instead. Sherry also relies on SNAP for her food purchases, but notes that it is not enough to cover food for the entire month and relies on free food distributions from her local pantry to supplement.

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However, nine of the fifteen people interviewed either did not qualify for SNAP because of their immigration status or chose not to enroll over fear of the “public charge” threat. Maria discussed being in “limbo” because she can’t receive federal medical or food services.

*Maria: I had that SNAP help, but because of that situation [fear over public charge] I decided to cut it because if in the future my husband or I want to fix that [immigration status], it will affect us and I was one of the people who decided to leave that help, and I really regret it to this day because in this pandemic not having that help has affected us a lot.*

Most interviewees, despite their immigration status, received WIC when their children were young. None were currently enrolled because their children were beyond the qualification age. Undocumented workers exist without the traditional safety nets offered to those with citizenship.

Credit was a frequent strategy for covering the cost of food when funds were low. Yasmin, Carlos, Kevin and Kofi specifically mentioned that they use credit cards to pay for groceries. This creates additional debt for families already struggling to pay bills.

*Kofi:... You have to look into your account [for money for food] and then thank God, the credit card is there, so we are just using the credit card.*

*Yasmin: Most of the time I use my credit card if I don't have [money].*

### **Increased Need for Emergency Food Assistance**

For many suffering income loss, especially in the Hispanic community, food pantries and food distributions are the main source of food for their families. They supplement it with smaller food purchases at the grocery store. While everyone interviewed was aware of at least a few free food distributions and where to find resources in the area, some Spanish speaking interviewees mentioned the importance of resource sharing within their communities. Maria, Camilla and Manuel rely on the community’s “WhatsApp” group, a free messaging application, to find the latest information about local food distributions and also who may have extra food to share.

*Maria: I take advantage of everything they give me from there, from the food bank. Lately they have been giving chicken, meat, fish. I take advantage of everything. I cook everything that comes from there. To buy, I buy the most basic, the most necessary.*

Those living in the Alexandria area of Route 1 tended to seek out multiple sources of free food visiting more than one pantry or food distribution site weekly. Those living in the Lorton section of Route 1 relied primarily on LCAC for emergency food. For many, this was not a new experience as they had relied on emergency food prior to the pandemic, but the frequency of visits and the amount of food needed amplified.

Organizations serving Route 1 felt the increased need for food. Surveys indicated that significant demand, a reduced volunteer base, and Covid-19 restrictions prompted groups to pivot from traditional models of distribution to more creative solutions. Distributions shifted to outdoor locations, prepackaged food bags/boxes to reduce contact, mobile pantries, and direct delivery.

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United Community created mobile distribution sites in community neighborhoods. Lorton Community Action Center shifted distributions to twice weekly with direct delivery to high-risk clients. FAME Community Development Center started mobile pantries during the summer months, including a stop in Lorton. Enterprise Community Development started food distribution on-site at Stony Brook Apartments. Fairfax County’s Neighborhood & Community Services (NCS) began delivery of congregate meals and Meals on Wheels for the senior population.

Organizations that traditionally did not provide food, leveraged resources for pop-up food distributions and delivery. Capital Area Food Bank saw a significant rise in temporary partners that began food distributions. NCS collaborated with a larger number of agencies, nonprofits, and houses of worship in an effort to provide support and resources to the community. Local schools, like Hybla Valley Elementary PTO and staff, actively gathered donations of food, clothing, and furniture for families.

Organizations partnered with government, nonprofits, and private entities in creative ways. For instance, Arcadia and Britepaths shifted grant funds toward distribution of produce boxes at Gum Springs and direct delivery of produce boxes to community members affected by Covid-19 with the help of the Fairfax County Health Department and community groups. Neighborhood Health partnered with United Community to deliver food to those affected directly by Covid-19. The USDA Farmers to Families food boxes were distributed throughout the county, including at the Gerry Hyland South County Government Center in conjunction with Supervisor Lusks’s office, DeLune Corp, United Community and other partners. In addition, Fairfax County, Frontier Kitchen and ICNA Relief distributed culturally, ethnically and religiously reflective prepared meals and grocery staples to Muslim families along Route 1 and provided funding to small food businesses impacted by COVID.

The County’s Food Access Group organized weekly calls to discuss food needs and leveraged food resources for distribution. With donations down, CAFB purchased more food for distribution. They shifted to an all delivery model to partner organizations during the height of the pandemic rather than having organizations pick up food from their warehouse. Pantries also saw a decrease in donations forcing them to engage in outreach to community organizations and neighborhood civic associations for food drives and fundraising. Many pantries tried to include eggs, meat, dairy, and fresh vegetables in their distributions if possible. Some were able to hand out gift cards to grocery stores as well.

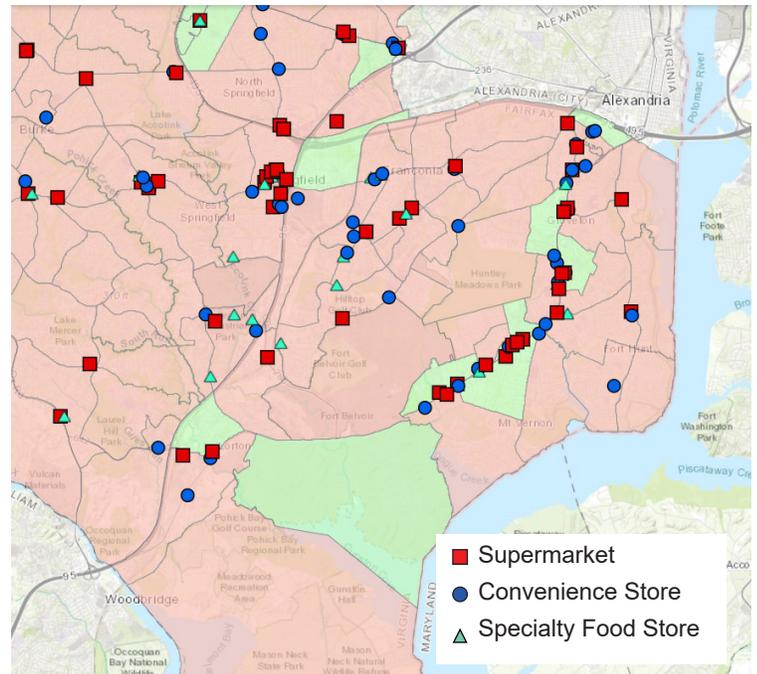
### **Access to Food Resources - Transportation**

The Route I area has many supermarket, convenience and specialty stores along Richmond Highway. According to the USDA, a “food desert” is an area of low income and low food access (more than 1 mile from a supermarket or large grocery store in urban areas, and more than 10 miles from a supermarket or large grocery store in rural areas) ([Dutko et al., 2012](#)). The term “food dessert” can often mask the underlying or root causes of decreased access to healthy foods ([Sevilla, 2021](#)). The issue in this area of the county is less about whether the area is classified as a “food dessert” or lacking stores, but more about the structural and systematic issues that have contributed to lower wages, lack of transportation, and the affordability of food ([Sevilla, 2021](#)).

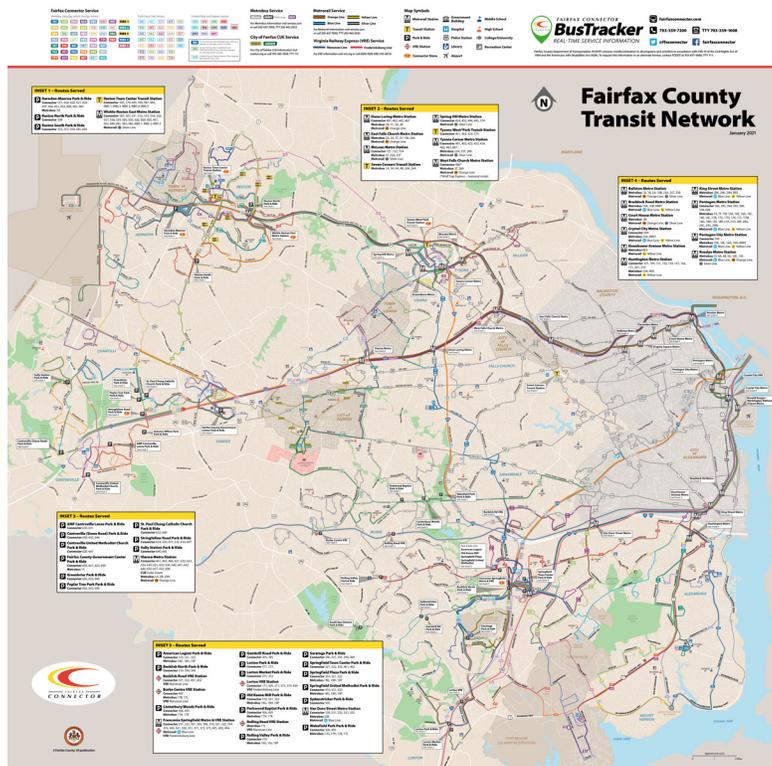
Six census tracts (excluding Fort Belvoir) are more than ½ mile from a full-service grocery store (see appendix F). This is important because this area has higher percentages of residents without access to a vehicle compared to other parts of Fairfax County (see appendix G). Not having access to a car severely limits where, when, and how often residents can access food.

While Route 1 has Metrobus and Fairfax Connector service, the majority of transit stops are along the busy stretch of Richmond Highway with few easily accessible stops within neighborhood communities off the highway. This requires residents to walk longer distances to stops. Community members with access to a vehicle had significantly more flexibility in where and when to shop. Conversely, community members without private transportation faced more challenges.

Kevin and his wife are fortunate to live in Colchester Towne which is walking distance to Safeway and Walmart. At the beginning of the month when they receive their SNAP distribution they conduct a large shopping trip and bring their children along to help carry the groceries home. They sometimes borrow a shopping cart to transport groceries home or meet each other halfway to help carry items home.



Low Income & Low Access by census tract  
 Source: <https://fairfaxcountygis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=04315bbe606d4f2fb2345cd6ac2544e3>



Source: Fairfax County Department of Transportation (2021)

Kevin noted that not having a vehicle has been an issue since some of the food distributions want to put the food box directly in your car and won't allow you to walk up in person.

*Kevin: Food drives that we go to they all want you to have a car and we don't have a vehicle. That's kind of a major thing... You can't walk up now so that's been a little bit of pain.*

Camilla, who lives in Harmony Place, relies on neighbors for transportation to stores and pantries. Alice, who is in her seventies, also relies on neighbors for transportation and is therefore dependent on others' schedules. Others share a car, or do not drive and must wait for their spouse to drive them to the store or pantry. This poses challenges because food distributions have limited hours of operation.

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In the Alexandria portion of Route 1 there are many organizations providing food distributions. United Community is the anchor organization; many churches also offer emergency food and, in some cases, hot meals. Toward the Lorton portion of Route 1, car access is even more critical. The local Shoppers Food Warehouse recently closed and the nearest grocery store is too far of a walk for many respondents. Public transportation is not easily accessible for some. Sherry was among those affected by the Shoppers Food Warehouse closure. She must get transportation to Giant or Food Lion. Giant is closer but she considers it more expensive than Food Lion.

*Sherry: So just on a regular daily basis, if I need a gallon of milk, I don't drive, so I have to get on a Lyft or an Uber and get all the way there. And then for a gallon of milk, it's costing me \$20 instead of the \$3.59, it will cost if I was able to walk to Shoppers like I used to be able to.*

Sherry can walk to a 7-Eleven and has used Amazon Fresh because they accept SNAP and offer free delivery for purchases over \$35. LCAC will drop off groceries for Sherry. Sherry noted the lack of resources in Lorton compared to the other end of Richmond Highway.

*Sherry: I think that this part of Northern Virginia is kind of lost. I know if you go up to Richmond Highway, there are so many resources. We started off there—when I was 18 years old, we had our first child and there was so much, there are different community action centers, there are recreational centers that get donations, there are even shelters that you can call and say I'm not in immediate need for a home but I need food this week, and there is a lot of that down there, but here, the Lorton Community Action Center is really the only resource immediately in this area.*

Marian also lives in the Lorton area and is affected by the closure of the local Shoppers Food Warehouse. No longer can she walk to the store for food; she depends on her husband or older son to drive her when they are home. Her family also relies heavily on the food provided by LCAC.

### **Food Preferences - Culturally Appropriate & Fresh**

For the Hispanic population, Megamart and other smaller Latin markets were popular for finding foods and condiments that reflected their cultural preferences. These families preferred to cook from scratch. They discussed the preference for fresh and whole foods versus canned foods which were often given out at food distributions.

*Teresa: They gave us canned food and you know we are not very used to eating those things, we prefer beans, eggs, and rice. Us as Hispanics like it better that they give us vegetables,... We like to cook things ourselves way better.*

*Manuel: When you go to the food banks, most of the food is canned. What is done is that before we used to buy food weekly, now it is mixed between the cans and the food that we buy so it lasts longer.*

*Maria: I am one of those people who is not a friend of cans and food in cans does not taste the same as fresh. As I said, most of us have children. Well my girl is already grown up, but there are many Latino people who have children that are 2 to 4 years old and those children drink a lot of milk. Eggs help a lot, because I believe that all Hispanic families consume the basics of a home -dairy, vegetables, fruits and vegetables.*

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Teresa explained that she prefers to cook traditional dishes at home, describing a typical breakfast consisting of eggs, ham, plantain slices and beans. She said she liked to cook with a lot of vegetables. Teresa volunteers at her local community food distribution and sees a lot of her community in need. She noted that sometimes there is not enough food for everyone that wants it at the distribution. She has received foods like vegetables, green and red chilies, oil, eggs and even chicken at the distributions, but certain things like Maseca (corn flour), meat, fresh vegetables and dairy are not as available.

*Camilla: [Right now] they only give us a bag with cans of beans, cans of tomatoes, cans of tuna, and they give us rice, sometimes beans, sometimes cereal, sometimes oatmeal. In the church they put them there and tell us that we can take one or two things from each space. But at UCM [United Community] they don't give us the option to choose, they give us the bag of food already prepared.*

Yasmin and Kofi are both from West Africa. They prefer home-cooked meals that reflect their native countries. Kofi mentioned that there are a couple African food stores that his family shops at in order to get the foods they prefer. Yasmin does not utilize food from the local pantries because in her opinion it is not fresh.

*Yasmin: I've raised my kids in such a way that they don't really like the junks, that like when you go to the food bank they give you, they really like their home food.*

*Kofi: You know, we Africans, we have so many ways to prepare our food, you know. . . we normally cook different types of food in our homes. And so one teaches the kids how to eat each foods...*

Regardless of ethnicity, all the respondents emphasized the importance of eating healthy and fresh foods. All interviewees expressed a preference for eating at home. Those that ate out did so on a limited basis to save money.

### **Farmers Markets**

While farmers markets were not a main source of food for those interviewed, a few individuals were familiar with them. Interviewees cited their limited hours, locations and higher prices as reasons farmers markets were not often used.

*Yasmin: I know there's a farmers' market that comes in every Tuesday, but I'm not often by the library. (interview note: Farmers market is on Wednesdays)*

*Maria: [I don't go] because [it] is expensive, yes it's more natural, more organic, but it's way more expensive. It's not very accessible. Sometimes with the cost of 5 peaches there are enough to buy 10 peaches at Mega Mart or Aldi, sadly.*

*Manuel:... I have been a few times. One because I think that by going to those places one can also support the people who are producing small producers and also the product there is fresh. [I don't go because] sometimes it can be the price, because a fresh product is more expensive than another that already has it a few days.*

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## Gardens

Several interviewees, especially those from Hispanic countries, expressed interest in growing their own food. Some residents, like Sherry, grow food in pots during summer in small areas of their yard. Others have grown food in their native countries and would welcome the opportunity to grow more food where they live.

Camilla, who lives in Harmony Place, grows her own tomatoes, chili peppers and sometimes beans. She believes residents would embrace a larger community garden.

*Camilla: Because a lot of us do that [grow food], well, I have a little bit of space in the back. But there are other people who plant in buckets or pots, there they have their little plants. They plant in very small spaces and there they have their tomato plants and whatever they can sow. If there was more space it would be even better. Because a lot of people plant.*

Before moving to the Route 1 area, Kevin's family lived in a community with a garden. He said the excess produce was given out to neighbors. He felt it was a great way to get to know neighbors and wishes there was something similar where he lives now.

Marina, who studied agriculture in Mexico, noted that LCAC used to have a small garden that her family helped maintain. She would like to see a new garden at LCAC after the renovations are completed.

*Marina: It would be perfect to have a place where we can grow our own food – tomatoes, carrots, zucchini.*

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## Strategies Moving Forward to Promote Food Security

Many of the themes highlighted in this report were present before the pandemic and stem from underlying systemic economic and racial disparities. In their presentation to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisor, the [Chairman’s Task Force on Equity and Opportunity](#) noted that “our health and social services systems were built on a deficiency model, not on a wellness model” (slide 31). The narrative for removing inequities in food access must focus on developing food security by addressing the root causes of disparities. This requires a multi-sector collaborative effort exploring infrastructure, economic development and educational opportunities using a racial and social equity lens. While emergency food assistance is critical to helping ensure that people are able to feed themselves and their families, it is a band-aid approach that provides only temporary relief. We also need to identify the systems in place that perpetuate food insecurity and work to dismantle and recreate them.

Below, we outline some suggestions to consider as we work toward building a food secure environment along the Route 1 corridor.

- Increase data collection efforts to help understand inequities and the root causes of food insecurity as well as the effectiveness of improvement efforts.
  - Promote adoption of the metrics identified in Capital Area Food Bank’s (2020) [A Playbook for Localities: Inclusion of Food Metrics into Strategic Planning](#). This recent document highlights strategies for incorporating food security metrics into strategic planning at the local level to better understand food access needs.
  - Expand demographic data collection and disaggregate data by race, ethnicity, immigration status, etc. in order to identify inequities
  - Amplify community voices by incorporating the lived experience of people, including specific ethnic/racial populations, in the Route 1 Corridor.
- Build on the innovative and unique collaborations among Route 1 organizations that emerged from this crisis.
  - Nonprofits/Community based organizations
  - Government agencies
  - Schools and educational institutions
  - Health providers
  - For profit businesses
  - Faith-based organizations
- Examine and support opportunities to build the community’s capacity to grow and produce food.
  - Community, school, and home gardens
  - Garden education and training
  - Urban farming opportunities
- Restructure our farmers markets to be more racially and socially inclusive and accessible.
  - Increase outreach and engagement to communities of color and farmers of color.
  - Advocate for WIC, WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program, and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program at all markets.
  - Promote broader implementation and utilization of Virginia Fresh Match (SNAP matching)
  - Consider development of a county-funded benefit program.

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- Develop a comprehensive Fairfax County Food Equity Plan that includes the county’s Emergency Food Assistance Response Plan (EFARP) and works toward long-term food security with attention given to:
    - Equity
    - Cost of living/opportunities for community + generational wealth building
    - Cost of food
    - Employment
    - Food Access (retail & food assistance)
    - Transportation
    - Housing
    - Education
    - Healthcare
    - Economic Development
  
  - Capitalize on the redevelopment of Route 1 as an opportunity to focus on the equitable renewal and restoration of resources for underserved communities.
  
  - Consider what an equitable public transportation and walkability plan for Route 1 would look like.
  
  - Facilitate increased community involvement in decision making and food equity planning.
    - Partner with organizations that are trusted within the community to create opportunities for inclusive, equitable and authentic engagement with and participation from the community.
    - Incorporate capacity building so that the community members can understand how systems and policies work and become change agents in their communities.

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## **Acknowledgments**

This project was funded by the Northern Virginia Health Foundation.

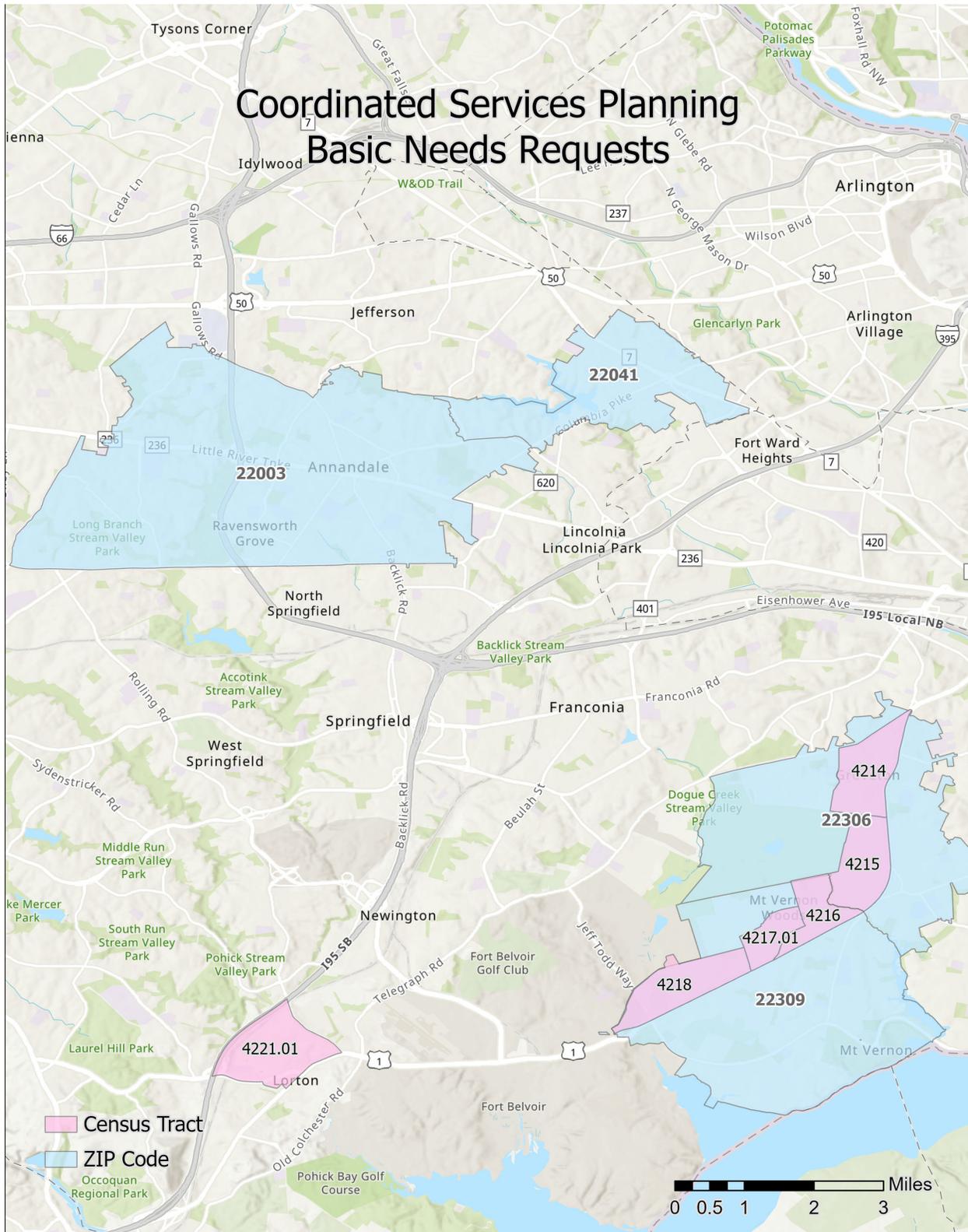
Special thanks to...

Britepaths; Enterprise Community Development; Fairfax County Health Department; Fairfax County Neighborhood & Community Services; Fairfax Food Council; Financial Empowerment Center; Inova; Lorton Community Action Center; One Fairfax, Office of the County Executive; Richmond Highway Food Insecurity Project; United Community; Virginia Cooperative Extension

Community Interviewers & Interviewees

# Appendix A

## Coordinated Service Planning – Census Tracts & Zip Code Reference Map



## Appendix B

### WIC Participation - Route 1 Area

Report Date: 03/01/2021

### VIRGINIA WIC PROGRAM

Data Updated: 3/1/2021

**Date Range: Jan 2020 - Dec 2020**

RDD: 1.1.12.1.13

<b>Clinic: 059V - MOUNT VERNON OFFICE</b>												
	<b>Jan 20</b>	<b>Feb 20</b>	<b>Mar 20</b>	<b>Apr 20</b>	<b>May 20</b>	<b>Jun 20</b>	<b>Jul 20</b>	<b>Aug 20</b>	<b>Sep 20</b>	<b>Oct 20</b>	<b>Nov 20</b>	<b>Dec 20</b>
Women - Total	647	648	696	666	657	661	697	719	736	753	772	810
Infant - Total	617	594	658	662	667	658	664	657	669	673	664	673
Child - Total	1,283	1,297	1,406	1,382	1,419	1,481	1,526	1,558	1,588	1,623	1,670	1,671
<b>Clinic - Total</b>	<b>2547</b>	<b>2539</b>	<b>2760</b>	<b>2710</b>	<b>2743</b>	<b>2800</b>	<b>2887</b>	<b>2934</b>	<b>2993</b>	<b>3049</b>	<b>3106</b>	<b>3154</b>

<b>Clinic: 059C - FORT BELVOIR</b>												
	<b>Jan 20</b>	<b>Feb 20</b>	<b>Mar 20</b>	<b>Apr 20</b>	<b>May 20</b>	<b>Jun 20</b>	<b>Jul 20</b>	<b>Aug 20</b>	<b>Sep 20</b>	<b>Oct 20</b>	<b>Nov 20</b>	<b>Dec 20</b>
Women - Total	28	22	15	11	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Infant - Total	34	25	16	10	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Child - Total	76	57	61	21	10	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Clinic - Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

**Note:**

- This report shows the number of active/enrolled WIC participants each month
- Dec 2020 was the most recent 'finalized' data at the time requested
- Fort Belvoir participants were scheduled at Mount Vernon Office due to program staffing needs. Therefore, numbers were combined when calculating percentage of change.

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## Appendix C

### SNAP Participation- Route 1 Area

	<b>Total # of SNAP Applications received</b>	<b>Total # of Applications Received in area of study</b>
<b>CY2019</b>	17,777	3,724
<b>CY2020</b>	24,329	4,806
<b>Difference</b>	<b>+6,552</b>	<b>+1,082</b>

Applications Received in zip codes 22060, 22079, 22303, 22306, & 22309

	<b>Total # of SNAP recipients</b>	<b>Total number of SNAP cases</b>	<b>Total # of recipients in area of study</b>	<b>Total # of households in area of study</b>
<b>CY 2019</b>	53,337	26,276	6,951	3,197
<b>CY 2020</b>	56,742	28,085	10,842	5,120

\*Area of study is Southern Fairfax County, specifically Rt 1 Corridor represented by zip codes 22060, 22079, 22303, 22306, and 22309

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## Appendix D

### **Survey Questions Asked of Community Providers**

- What communities or populations along the Route 1 Corridor do you serve or work with?
- What impact has Covid-19 had on the food security of the community members you work with?
- How has your organization changed or adapted to address the Covid-19 crisis (e.g. changed hours of operations, outreach efforts, etc.)?
- Please describe any differences in food accessibility among the different communities you work with? If none, please type “none.”
- What do you think are the biggest problems related to food security at the community level? Why do you think they exist?
- Have you or the communities you serve encountered local ordinances or other policies (state or local) that have negatively affected food access? If yes, describe.
- What transportation policies/issues affect food access in the communities you serve?
- Please describe any changes or upcoming changes in the community that may have an impact on food access (store or business closings, redevelopment, etc.)? If not aware of any, please state “none.”
- What could be done to improve the community’s problems with food insecurity? Note: Food Insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.
- Please feel free to share any other information that could help us understand the Route 1 community and issues related to food access.

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## Appendix E

### **Guiding Questions for Community Interviews**

Questions were adapted from USDA Food Security Toolkit ([Cohen et al., 2002](#)).

#### Overall broad questions

- How has Covid impacted you and your family?
- Has anyone in your family tested positive for Covid?
- Has anyone in your family had to quarantine?
- Has Covid impacted your ability to work or access income?
- How has Covid impacted your ability to obtain the food you need?
  - Have you lost your job?
  - Have your hours been cut?
  - Did you have to change jobs?
  - Are they still paying you the same amount?

#### Questions related to obtaining food

- I'm wondering about what you do if there isn't enough food. Let's start by discussing the things you might do to make the food you have last longer. What are some of these things?
- People sometimes go to different places to get enough food to go around when they are running short of money. What types of places have you gone to for food and how often? Probe: food assistance programs, food pantry, soup kitchen, other free resources.
  - Probe: Do you go to any fast food restaurants, corner stores, 7-11, etc. to try to save money?
- Which of these places works the best for you? Why? Do they each have a different role? Do you go to them at different times or use them differently?
- Do you feel like you know where to go to get food in your community?
- How important are food assistance programs to your household? What makes them important? Probe: WIC, SNAP, Free & Reduced lunch, etc.
- What are some problems you have had when using or trying to use food assistance programs?
- You also may have a less formal "help" network, that is, people you know who will lend you money, give you food, feed you, or let you buy on credit. Can you describe some of these networks? Do you ever provide this type of support for family members or friends?
- What would you say is most important in helping you cope with times when food or food concerns are a major problem?
- What do you think the community (government, business, people) could do to make it easier for people to get enough healthy affordable food? Think about how they could work to make food accessible, available, accessible and affordable.

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## Questions related to the food environment

- What is most important to you in deciding what and where to eat?
- There are many different types of stores you can shop at for food – large supermarkets, medium or small neighborhood grocery stores, warehouse stores, specialty stores (bakeries, butchers, fish markets), and gas stations or convenience stores (like 711).
- What types of stores are near you and you can easily access?
- What types of stores do you use for the majority of your shopping?
- What are some of the reasons you choose to shop at these stores?
- Do the stores you shop at carry foods that reflect your culture, age, religion, ethnicity and health needs?
- Think about all the different stores that you shop at. Are you satisfied with the stores you use most frequently? (Probe for quantity and quality of goods and services, friendliness of staff, location, cleanliness, food cost, and variety)
- How do you get to the store? Is transportation for shopping a problem? How long does it take you to get there?
- Walk me through what a typical day looks like when you have to go to the store for food? Probe: Do you have to find child care? Transportation? Shop at a certain time of day? Etc.
- How often do you do a big shopping for food (not counting trips for just a few items)? How many “fill-in” trips do you make (that is, trips for one or two small items)?
- What influences the number of times you shop?
- Do you grow your own food in a home garden or fish or hunt for your food?
- If yes, how heavily do you rely on these foods in your regular food supply?
- Do you prefer to eat meals you cook at home or purchase already prepared meals? Why?
- Where are some of the places you eat if you are purchasing an already prepared meal? (restaurant, fast food place, etc.)
- Are there community gardens near you where you can grow food? If yes, do you use? If no, would you use if available?
- Are there farmers markets near you? Do you ever go to a farmers market to buy food? Why/why not?

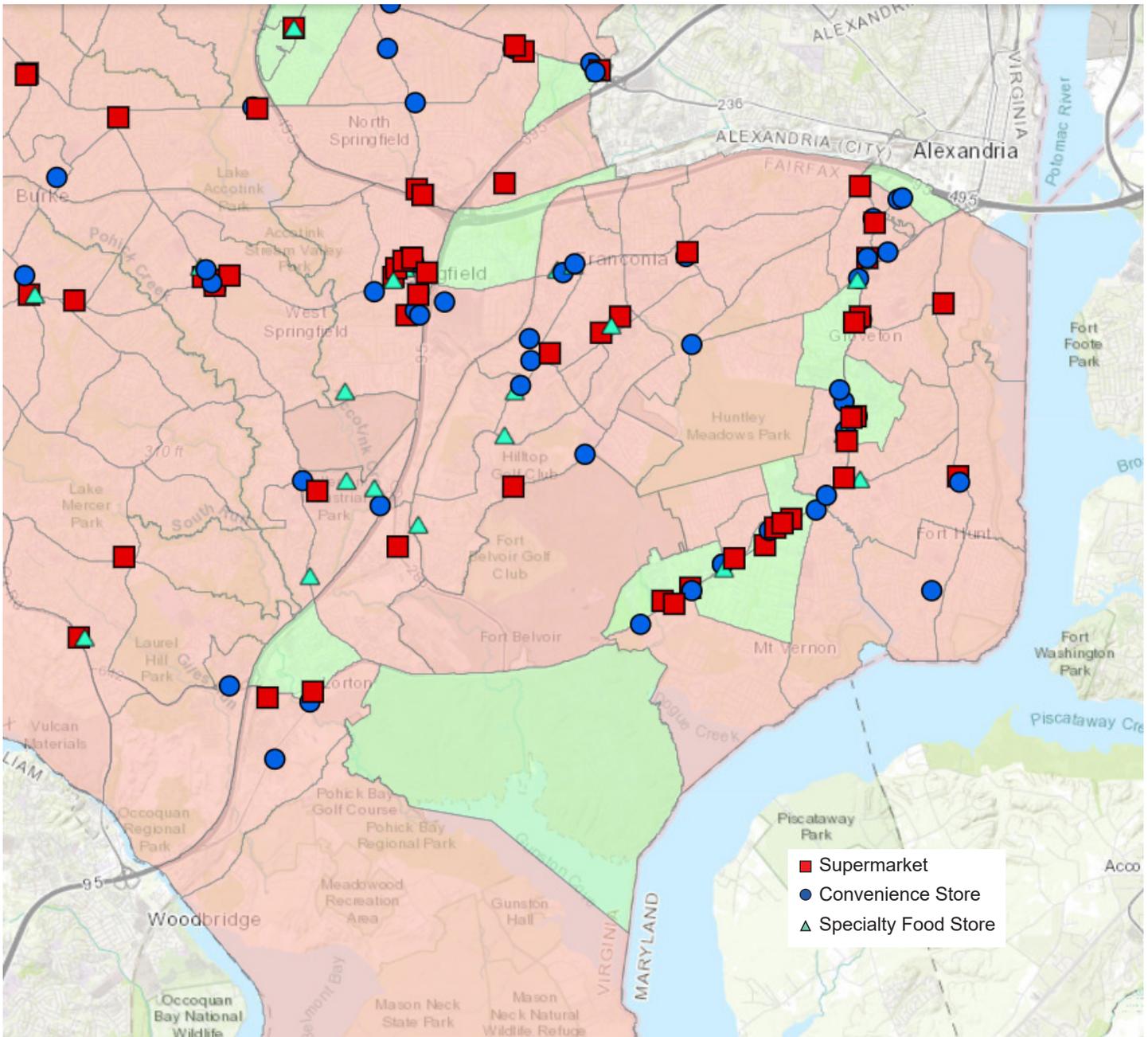
## Perspective on change

- Imagine that you have the opportunity to do something in the community to help people have an easier time getting the types of foods that they want or need. What would you do?
- Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Questions were adapted from USDA Food Security Toolkit ([Cohen et al., 2002](#)).

**Appendix F**

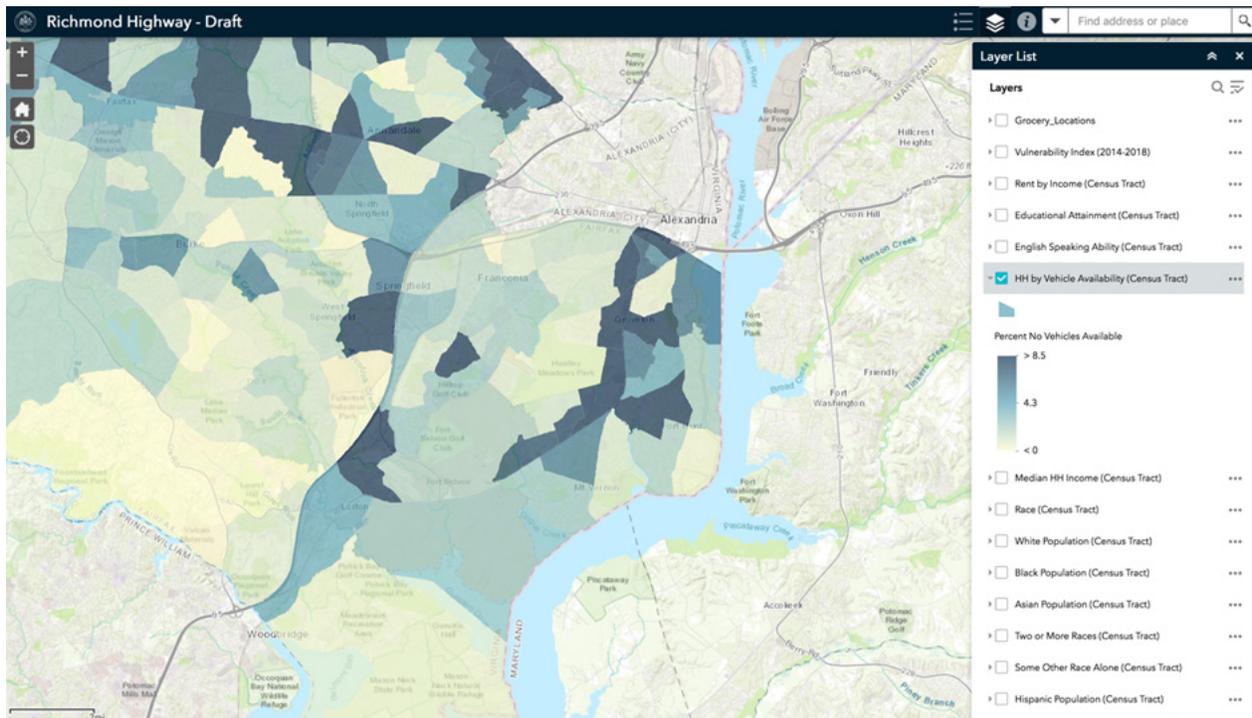
**Low income & Low Access by Census Tract**



<https://fairfaxcountygis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=04315bbe606d4f2f-b2345cd6ac2544e3>

## Appendix G

### Vehicle Availability in Route 1



\* Darker blue areas reflect higher percentage of households without a vehicle.

<https://fairfaxcountygis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=04315bbe606d4f2f-b2345cd6ac2544e3>

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