



Agency Pulse Survey Results

COVID Impact and Food Demand 2021



December 2021

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Executive Summary

SecondBite's vision is to end hunger and food insecurity in Australia through the collection and distribution of food from donors to agency partners. The number of Australians going without access to quality, nutritious food is increasing, and events over the past two years, including bushfires and the COVID pandemic, have placed greater pressure on organisations such as SecondBite and its partners to support the increasing number of people impacted (SecondBite PWC Report, 2020).

During the last quarter of 2021, agencies who receive food assistance from our program were surveyed to obtain an understanding of current food demand, COVID impact and overall satisfaction with the SecondBite service.

Survey responses were collected from 239 agencies across five states. The majority of the responses came from Queensland (58 agencies), Victoria and Tasmania (56 agencies), New South Wales and the ACT (52 agencies). The results showed that compared to the same time last year, three out of four agencies (73%) experienced an increase in demand for food relief with 46% seeing a significant increase in demand. More than half saw demand for food increase among unemployed people, those experiencing homelessness, single parent families and the elderly, with the largest increase among the unemployed.

COVID has impacted agencies' ability to provide their usual food programs and meet demand. More than 60% of agencies' volunteer numbers were disrupted due to COVID, with one in three agencies (34%) still affected. More than 60% of agencies ability to meet demand was disrupted due to COVID, with one in three agencies (30%) still being affected. More than half (55%) of agencies ability to source food was disrupted due to COVID, with one in four agencies (25%) still being affected.

Eight in 10 agencies expected demand for food during Christmas 2021 to increase, with more than half of these agencies expecting demand to increase significantly. Four in 10 agencies were concerned about their ability to source enough food to meet demand this Christmas. Agencies were also concerned about being able to provide gifts and having enough volunteers to provide their services.

The Christmas demand is due primarily to the impact of COVID on employment and finances; reduced government support; agencies shutting down over the Christmas period and Christmas being a more expensive time for already stretched families.

Among SecondBite's service attributes, quality of communication from SecondBite was rated the highest by agencies, with nearly nine in 10 agencies satisfied with the experience. More than eight in 10 agencies were satisfied with SecondBite's staff and volunteer level of contact and service standard.

Three quarters of the agencies (75%) reported being satisfied with the food quality they received from SecondBite followed by almost seven in 10 agencies (69%) being satisfied with the consistency of food distribution. Almost 65% of the agencies were satisfied with both the food variety and food volume they received from SecondBite.

Ongoing, SecondBite will produce an annual survey to identify supply and demand for our food rescue services, with an aim to improve the Community Connect service model by ensuring a variety of good quality food, identify new producers for pantry items, dairy products, fresh meat and eggs, and ensure equitable distribution of food across the agencies.

Introduction

SecondBite is one of Australia's largest food rescue organisations, securing good quality, surplus food from growers, manufacturers and retailers and distributing it free of charge to around 1,400 charities and not-for-profit organisations. SecondBite supports food relief agencies by providing food directly from one of our metropolitan warehouse locations, connecting them to a local food retailer to make regular collections, or dropping bulk stock into regional hub locations.

SecondBite supports community food relief agencies across the nation. Agencies provide food hampers (83%), pantry services (53%), on-site community meals (48%), ready-to-eat take home meals (46%), food vouchers (30%) and other food provisions to people experiencing food insecurity (SecondBite Social Impact Report, 2019).

From its inception in 2005 from a single market collection point, SecondBite has grown such that in 2021 it secured almost 24 million KGs of food, enough for more than 48 million meals (SecondBite App Database, 2021).

Objectives of the report

We conducted an online survey of our partner agencies that received food from SecondBite during September 2021 for their food relief programs. The purpose of the survey was to gain insights about agencies' services and their experiences with SecondBite, especially in the following areas:

- to look at what food programs each agency runs and their beneficiaries
- to identify the significance and demand for different types of food
- to understand the sentiment and attitudes of the agencies towards the SecondBite service
- to understand how COVID has impacted the food/relief services of these agencies
- to explore if demand for food is expected to increase during the Christmas period

Methodology

The SecondBite's Agency Pulse Survey was sent to a total of 872 agencies as a survey sample considering 95% of confidence interval and 5% margin of error. The survey response was received from 239 agencies. The survey questionnaire has covered three main areas: agency respondent profile, demand for food, Christmas demand, COVID impact, and agency satisfaction. There were twenty-one (21) questions in the survey questionnaire. The agencies were contacted via email and invited to complete the survey online between 18th – 29th October of 2021.

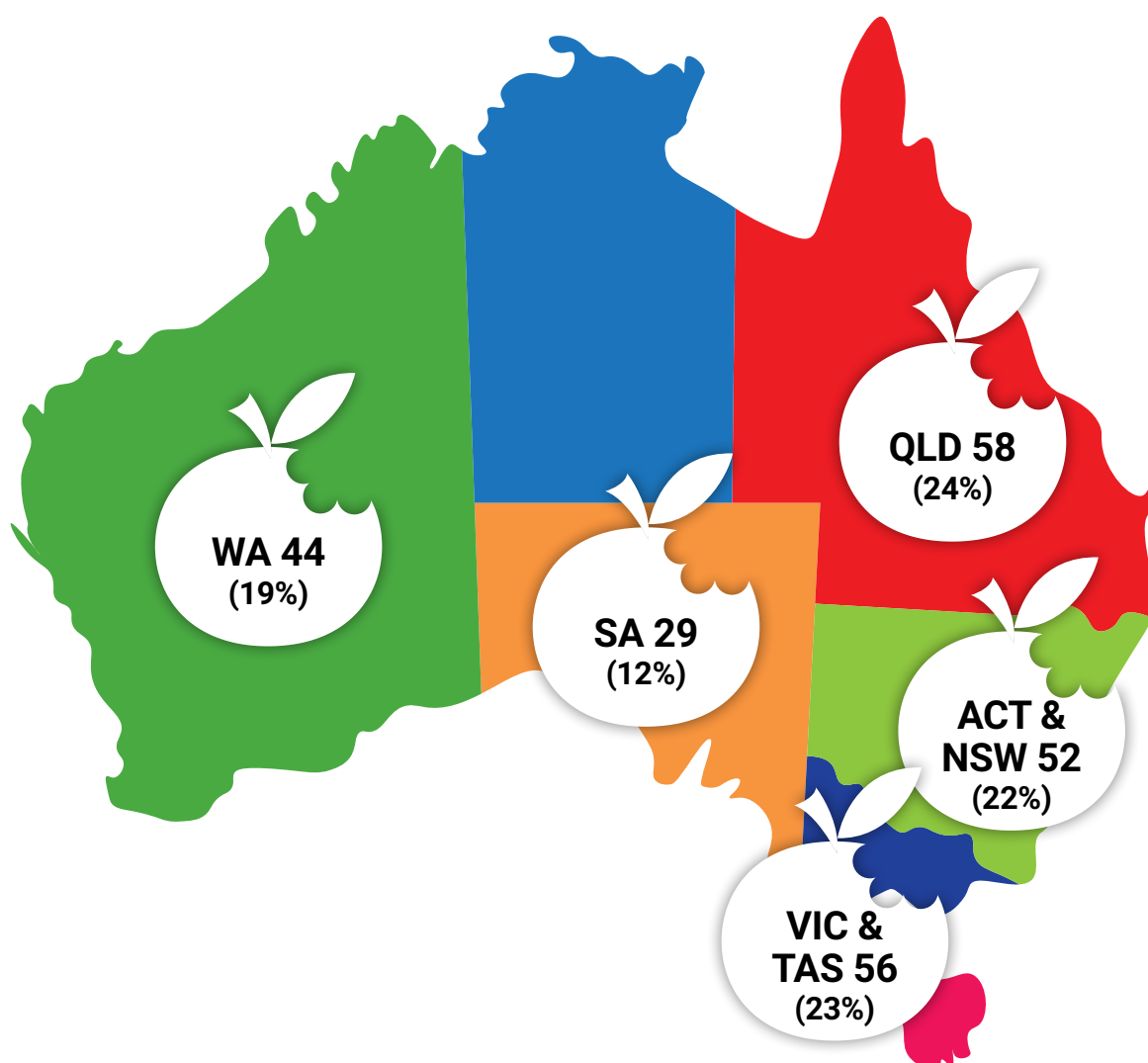


Analysis of the results

Respondent Agency Profile

Agencies by State

Majority of the agency responses came from Queensland (24%), Victoria (23%), and New South Wales (22%).



Type of food programs

About three in four of our agencies offer food parcels or hampers followed by more than 6 in 10 offer free food pantry or distribution services. Other most common services are cooked community meal services, food distribution services, low-cost grocery outlets¹, and school breakfast/lunch programs.

Most agencies offer more than one service to their clients with only 17% (or 41) of the agencies providing one service. Twenty-six percent or 62 agencies have two services followed by 19% or 45 agencies who offered 3 types of services to their clientele. Two of our agencies have more than 7 services.

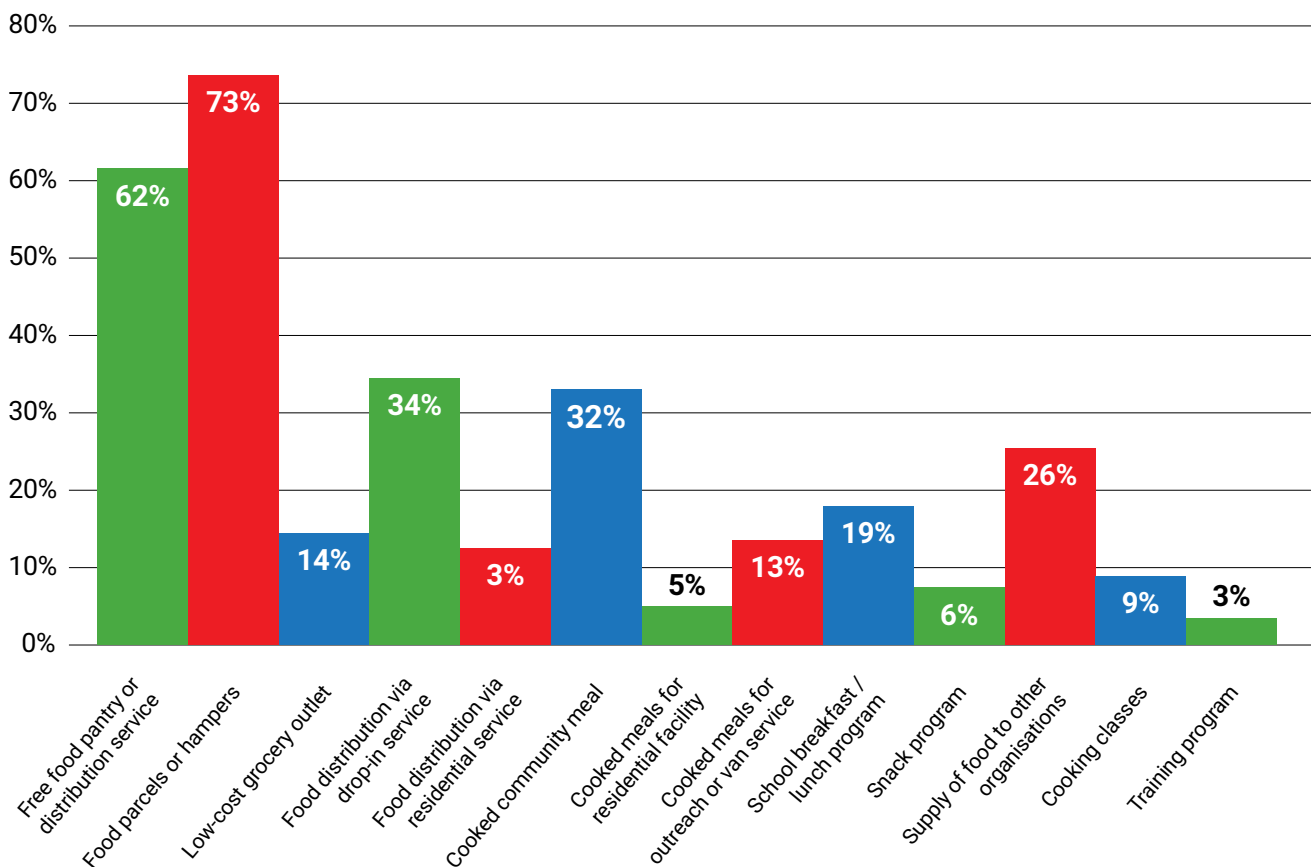
No. of services offered by the agencies	
No. of services offered	No. of agencies
1 Services	41 (17%)
2 services	62 (26%)
3 services	45 (19%)
4 services	37 (16%)
5 services	31 (13%)
6 services	11 (5%)
7 services	10 (4%)
More than 7 services	2 (1%)

1. Our agencies request for a small amount of donation for cost per item sale

There are some common patterns in the type of services that agencies offer at the same time. Agencies that offer free food pantry or distribution services are more likely to offer food hampers, supply food to other organisations, and low-cost grocery services. About 149 agencies provide free food pantry or distribution services. Of these 112 agencies also offer food hamper services, 61 provide cooked community meal services, 59 supply food to other organisations, and 23 run low-cost grocery services.

In addition to that, agencies that offer food hampers are more likely to do food distribution via drop-in services. Agencies that provide cooked meal services are more inclined to offer other type of food distribution services such as cooking classes/trainings, cooked meal for outreach or van services, snack program, school breakfast/ lunch program, and cooked meal for residential facilities.

Type of food programs

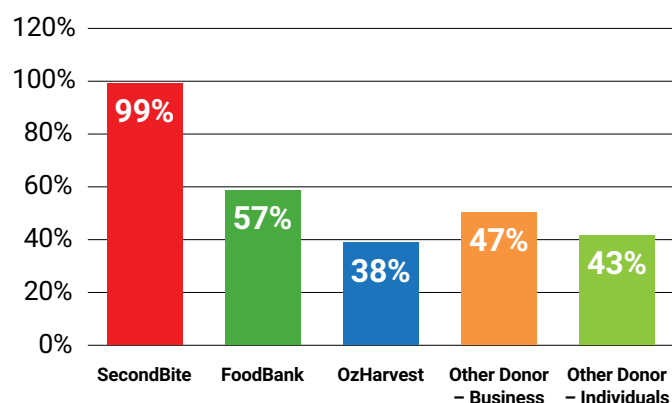


Sources of food

Our agencies were twice as likely to receive food and drinks and fresh fruits, vegetables, and bakery goods from SecondBite than any other charity organisation in the country.

Four in ten (41% or 97 agencies) agencies rely on SecondBite for 50% or more of their food & drinks with one quarter (26% or 62 agencies) receive 75% or more of those items from us. About 9% (22 agencies) of our agencies receive 100% of their food & drinks from SecondBite.

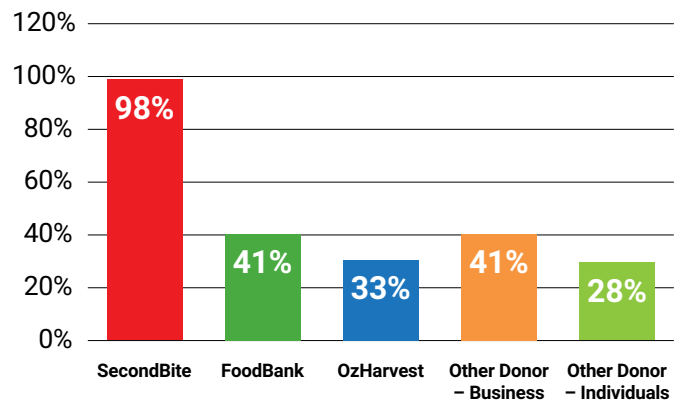
Sources of food and drinks



More than half (54% or 128) of our agencies rely on SecondBite for 50% or more of their fresh fruit, vegetables, & bakery items followed by one-third (35% or 84 agencies) who depend on SecondBite for 75% or more of those items. Twenty-nine or 12% of our agencies are completely (100%) relying on SecondBite for fresh fruit, vegetables, & bakery food items.

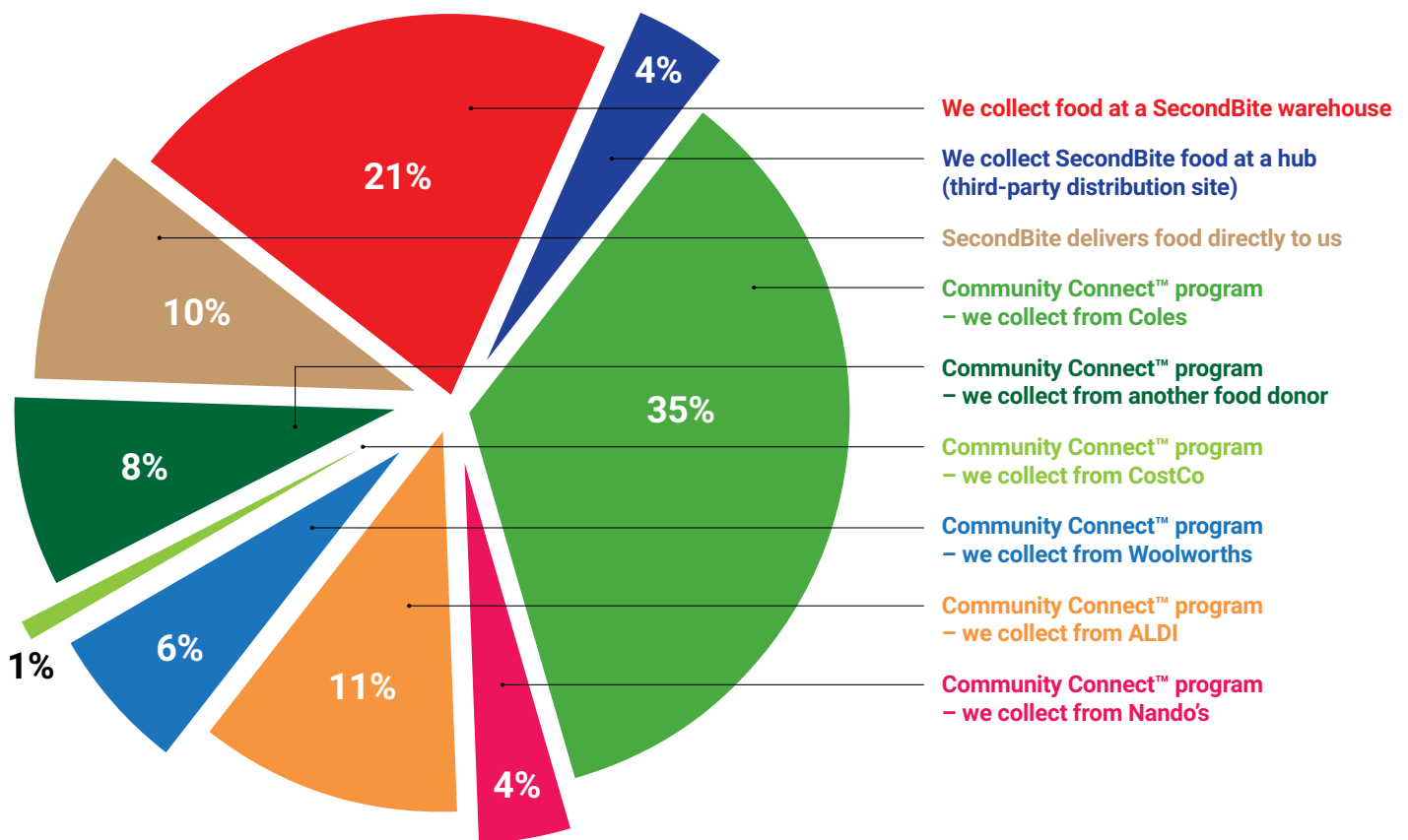


Sources of fresh fruit, vegetables and bakery goods



Modes of collecting SecondBite donation

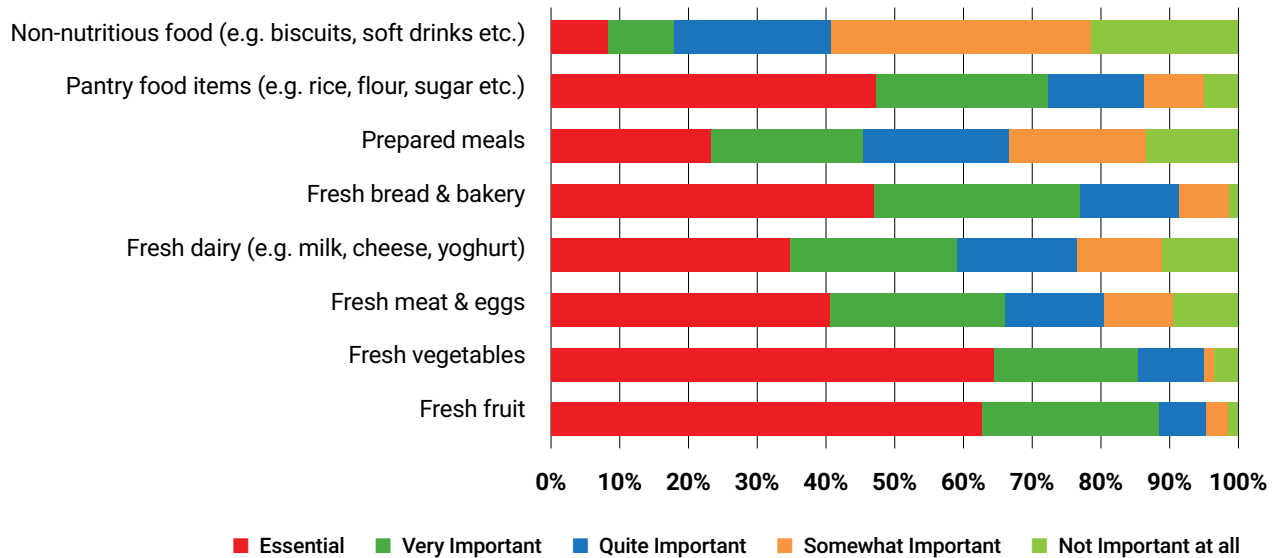
- More than half (56%) of the agencies collect donated food through the Community Connect program followed by SecondBite warehouse collection (34%).
- One in ten agencies receive food from SecondBite's direct delivery program with just 4% collecting from SecondBite hub distribution services².



2. A 'hub distribution service' is where SecondBite delivers food to a centrally located agency for other agencies to collect

- Nearly 9 in 10 agencies believe that fresh vegetables and fruits are essential or very important for their food programs.
- Other significant food items were Pantry items, fresh bread and bakery items, fresh meat and eggs, fresh dairy items (e.g., milk, cheese, yogurt), and prepared meals.

Importance of different food items

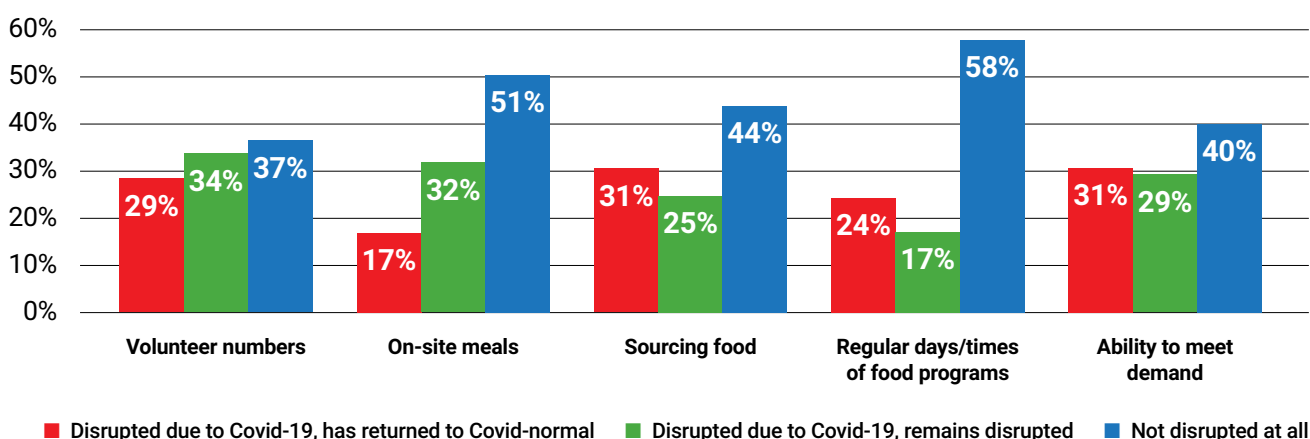


Overall Demand

COVID Impact

- One (1) in 3 agencies reported disruption in volunteer numbers due to COVID which remained the same.
- Three (3) in 10 agencies reported disruption (due to COVID) in on-site meal service and the ability to meet client demand with one quarter reporting disruption in sourcing food.
- More than half of the agencies reported that they have not experienced any disruption to their on-site meal programs and regular program schedules due to COVID.
- Three (3) in 10 agencies said they initially experienced disruption in volunteer numbers, sourcing food, and their ability to meet client demand but now returned to COVID normal.

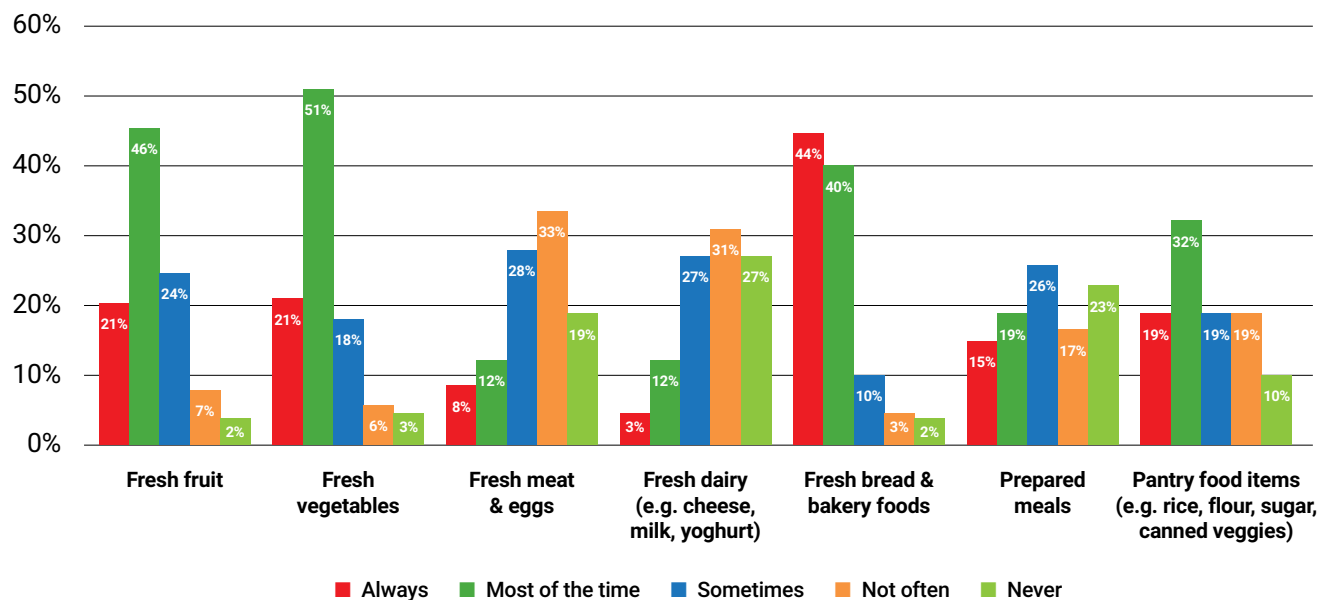
Covid impact on different food programs



Meeting client demand for different food products

- Eight (8) in 10 agencies reported that they can meet client demand always or most of the time for fresh bread and bakery foods followed by almost three quarter of the agencies meeting client demand for fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Half of the agencies can meet client demand always or most of the time for pantry food items (e.g., rice, flour, sugar, canned veggies) with three in ten agencies reported being able to meet the client demand for prepared meals.
- Two (2) in 10 agencies reported that they always or most of the time can meet client demand for fresh meat and eggs with only 15% of the agencies who can meet the client demand for fresh dairy (e.g., milk, cheese, yogurt).
- Most agencies can always or most of the time meet client demand for fresh bread and bakery goods with least meeting the client demand for fresh dairy products (e.g., milk, cheese, yogurt).

Meeting client demand for the following food products



The survey revealed that 95% of the agencies said pantry food items are important with almost half of them identified it as an essential item. However, almost half of the agencies are unlikely to meet the client demand with 10% who can never meet the demand for pantry food items. Perhaps there is an increasing need of the pantry food items that even reflected on the suggestions came from the survey. Several agencies have expressed their interest in receiving more pantry food items from SecondBite to meet their increasing client demand. A very similar picture can be observed for fresh meat and eggs, dairy food items, and prepared meals across the states.

More than 90% of the agencies believe fresh meat & eggs are important yet only 20% can meet the client demand. Nearly 90% of the agencies said dairy products are important but almost two-third (66%) are unlikely to meet the client demand and 30% can never meet the demand. Similarly, 86% of the agencies reported prepared meals are important however, only half (51%) are most likely to meet client demand.

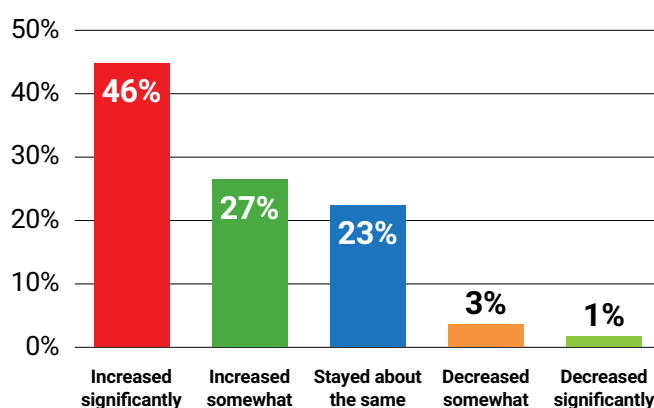
Our agencies cannot meet the client demand for fresh meat & eggs, dairy products, and prepared meals most of the time, and therefore, they request more of those items from SecondBite.

Some agencies were not happy with the quality of the fresh produce especially the products they received through the Community Connect. Some agencies claimed that food they received is sometimes inedible (rotten or moulded). The variety of the food items is also noted by some agencies as they continuously receive the same food items for weeks.

Demand compared to last year

- Almost 3 in 4 agencies believe demand has increased compared to this time last year with 46% believing that the demand has increased significantly.
- Almost a quarter (23%) of our agencies believe that the demand has remained the same compared to this time last year.
- Only 4% of the agencies believe that the demand has decreased.

Food demand



Increase in demand from different demographics

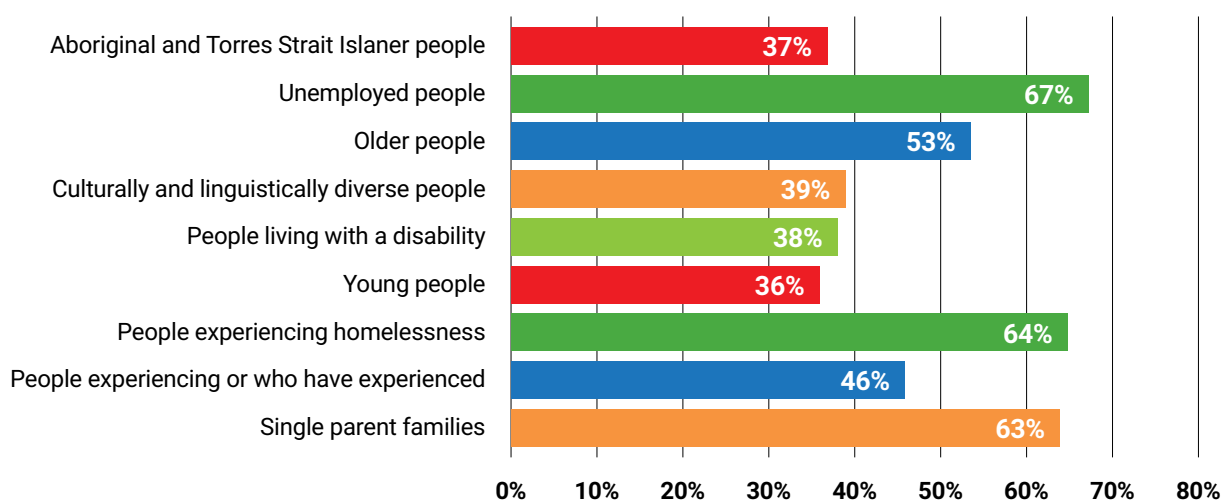
- Agencies have noticed an increase in demand from the following demographics:

Unemployed people (67%), people experiencing homelessness (63.5%), single parent families (63%) and older people (53%).

Other major population groups were people experiencing domestic violence (46%), culturally and linguistically diverse people (39%), and people living with disability (38%).

Other demographics with an increase in demand were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) (37%) peoples and young people (36%).

Increase in demand from different demographics



Agencies from both NSW and VIC said the demand has increased compared to this time last year. In NSW, the demand has increased due to COVID as people are losing their jobs, facing more financial hardships, and homelessness. Some of the main cohorts who are seeking support from our agencies in NSW are unemployed people, single parents, people experiencing homelessness, people experiencing domestic violence, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people, and elderly people.

Similarly, in Victoria the demand has increased due to COVID as people are losing their jobs (some due to the existing vaccine mandates and lockdowns), lack of government supports, and increasing unemployment rate. People who are seeking support from our agencies in Victoria are mainly unemployed, single parent families, elderly people, and people who are experiencing homelessness.

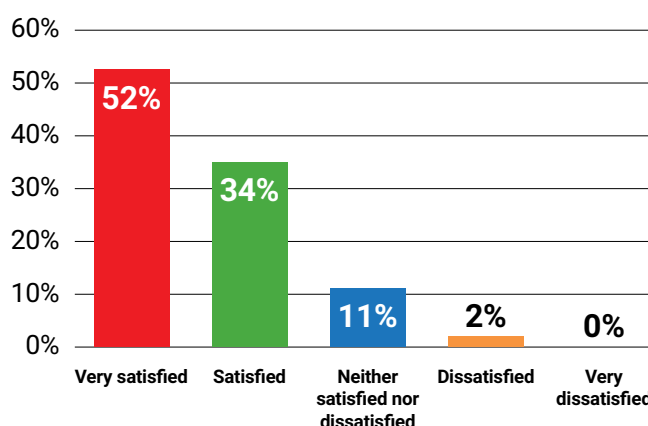
Two thirds of the respondent agencies in Queensland think the demand has increased due to Christmas period and few indicated COVID as the main reason of this burgeoning need. People accessing food relief services from our agencies in Queensland are mainly homeless, unemployed, single parent families, and people who are experiencing domestic violence.

Satisfaction with SecondBite Services

Satisfaction with SecondBite

- Almost 9 in 10 (87%) agencies were satisfied with SecondBite and more than half (52%) were very satisfied.
- A little more than 1 in 10 (11%) agencies were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with SecondBite and only 2% of the agencies were dissatisfied.

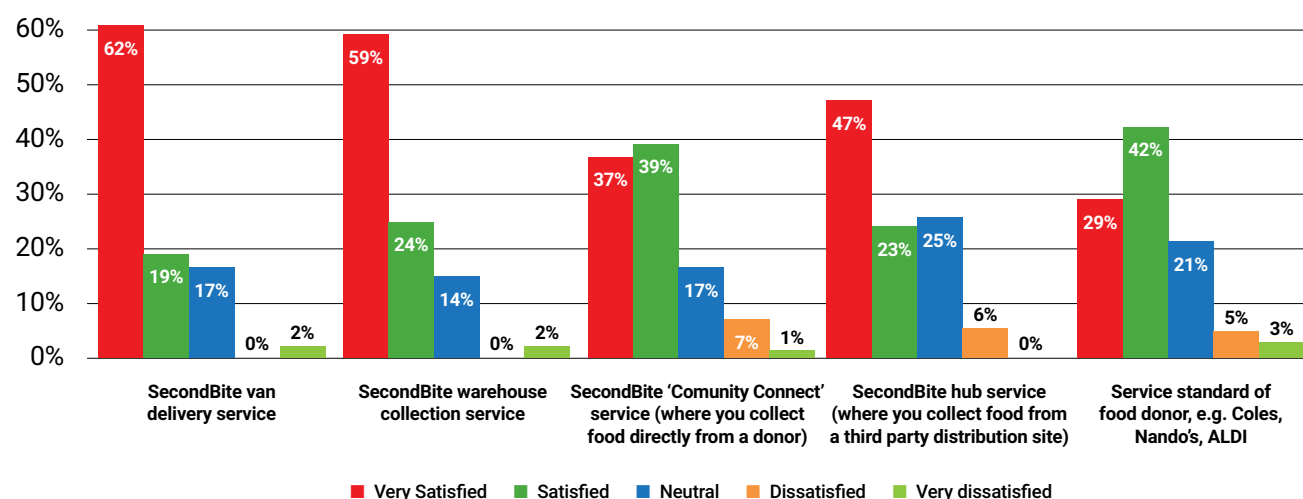
Satisfaction with SecondBite



Satisfaction with SecondBite services

- SecondBite warehouse collection and SecondBite van delivery services were the most satisfactory services. About 6 in 10 agencies were very satisfied with both the services.
- Other popular services were SecondBite Community Connect service with 37% of agencies being very satisfied.
- SecondBite Community Connect service and service standard of food donor had the highest dissatisfaction rates (both at 8%) followed by SecondBite hub service at 6%.

Increase in demand from different demographics

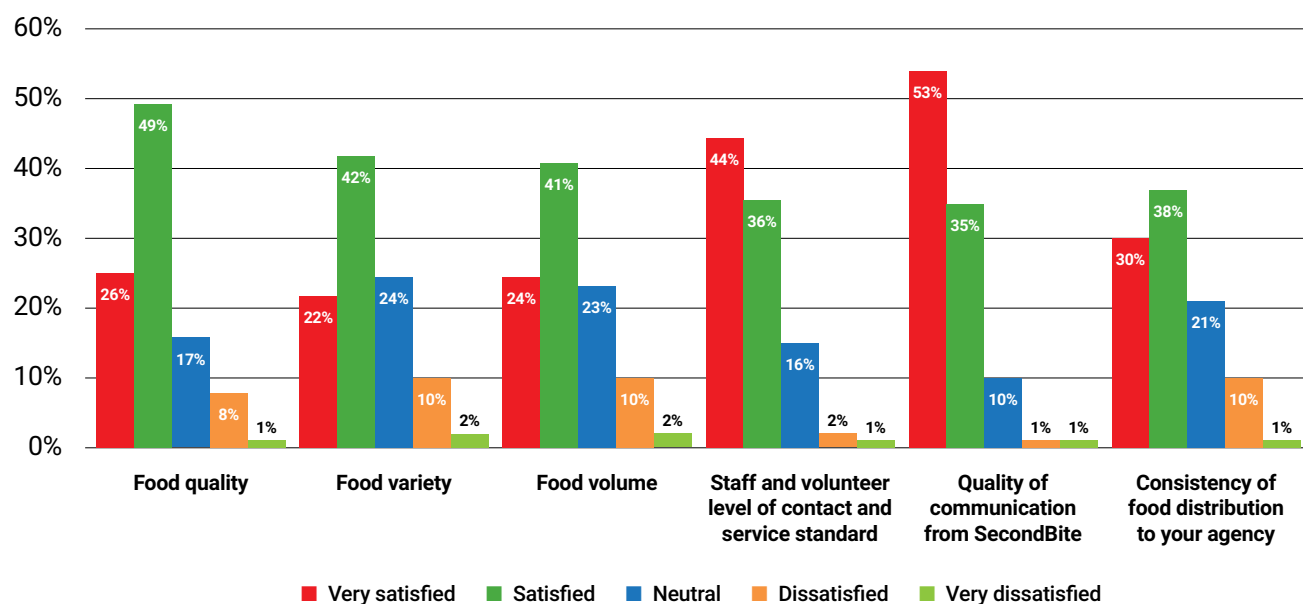


Thinking of your agency's experience with SecondBite in 2021, how satisfied are you with the following services?

- The highest number of agencies were satisfied with the quality of communication from SecondBite with more than half rated the service as being very satisfactory. Nearly 9 in 10 agencies were satisfied with the experience of the quality of communication by SecondBite in 2021.
- More than 8 in 10 agencies were satisfied with SecondBite's Staff and volunteer level of contact and service standard.
- Three quarter of the agencies (75%) reported being satisfied with the food quality of SecondBite followed by almost 7 in 10 agencies (69%) being satisfied with the consistency of food distribution.
- Almost 65% of the agencies were satisfied with both the food variety and food volume they received from SecondBite in 2021.
- A little more than 1 in 10 agencies were dissatisfied with the food variety, food volume, and consistency of food distribution to their agency. Around 9% of the agencies were dissatisfied with the quality of food they receive from SecondBite.

There are no significant differences in the agency satisfaction across the country. Majority of the agencies reported satisfied with SecondBite services except for only 2 agencies from ACT & NSW, 3 agencies from VIC & TAS, and 1 agency from WA who reported as dissatisfied.

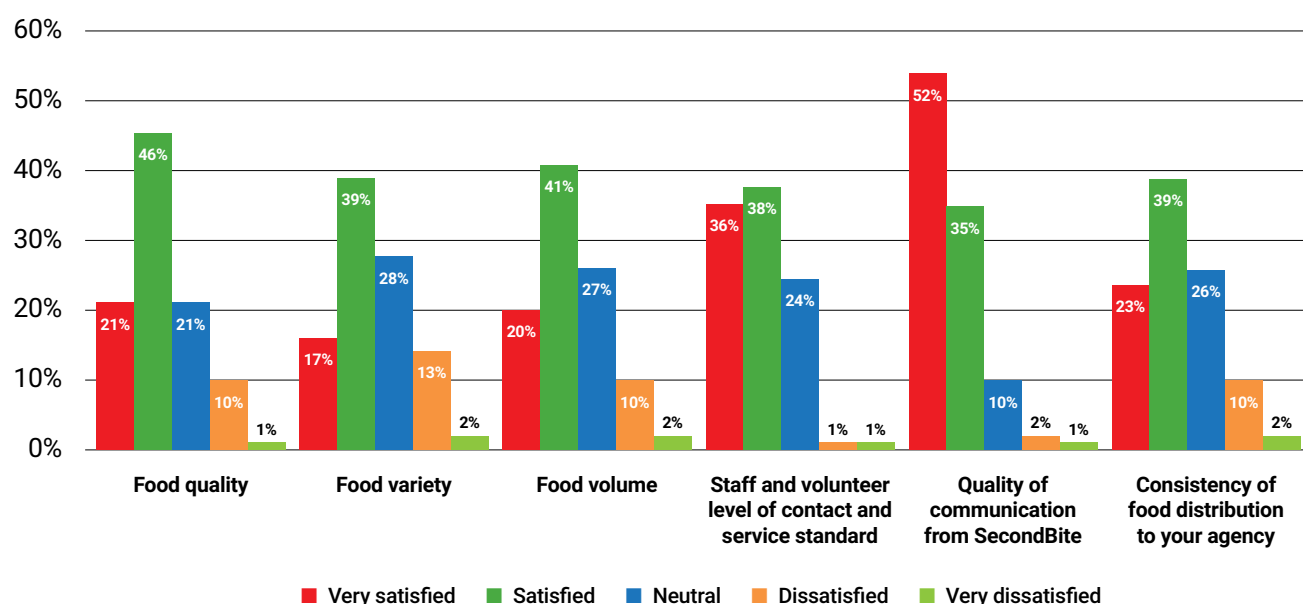
Satisfaction with the following SecondBite Services



When looking at the responses from agencies who only collect donations from **Community Connect programs**, a very similar picture can be observed.

- Three-quarter (75%) of the agencies were satisfied with the quality of food followed by 6 in 10 with the volume of food they receive from Community Connect programs.
- Overall, more than one in 4 agencies remained neutral about their satisfaction with food variety, food volume, consistency of food distribution, and food quality. About 1 in 10 agencies (who collect food from the community connect program) were not satisfied with the food quality, food variety, food volume, and consistency of food distribution.

Satisfaction of agencies collecting donation via Community Connect program



Expectations/Complaints about overall SecondBite services

In response to the question of 'what can SecondBite do better?' the following major issues were raised:

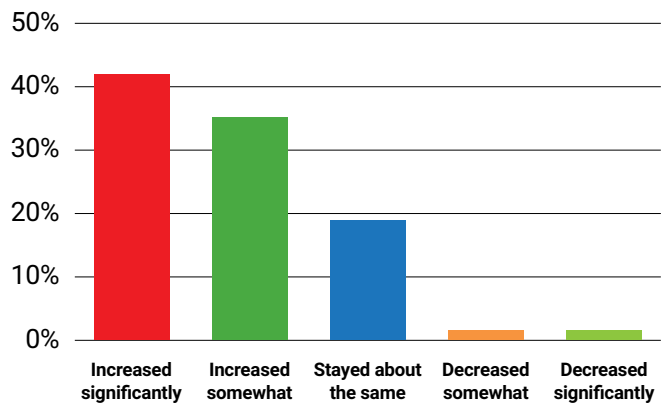


Christmas Demand

Christmas demand compared to last year

- About 8 in 10 agencies expected an increase in demand during this Christmas period compared to last Christmas with 42% expecting a significant increase in demand.
- A little less than 2 in 10 agencies (19%) think that the demand has remained the same for this Christmas with nearly 1% said that the demand has decreased.

Food demand during Christmas



Reasons for expected demand

Many agencies said that the demand will increase during for the Christmas 2021 period as a result of increased unemployment rates, lack of post COVID government supports for job seekers, family breakdowns, lack of housing, increasing price of food, reduced alternative services, travel restrictions, and usual increasing demand to celebrate Christmas in the best possible way with friends and family. Others believe the demand will remain the same and will not increase as their business will be closed during the Christmas time. Some of the comments we received from agencies relating to Christmas demand follow.

"Christmas is always a busy due to the fact that there is a big focus of our clients on Christmas and expenditure changes which means not as much money for food. Also, we provide approximately 200 Christmas Hampers to those in need prior to Christmas."

"The conversation we have been having from marginalised individuals and families tells us about their increased financial disadvantage. Families are especially worried about meeting costs over this period. They are already on hardship arrangements and barely managing to keep up with reduced payments, so Christmas will be extremely tough for them."

"Our client numbers and their needs during 2021 have increased significantly since last Christmas."

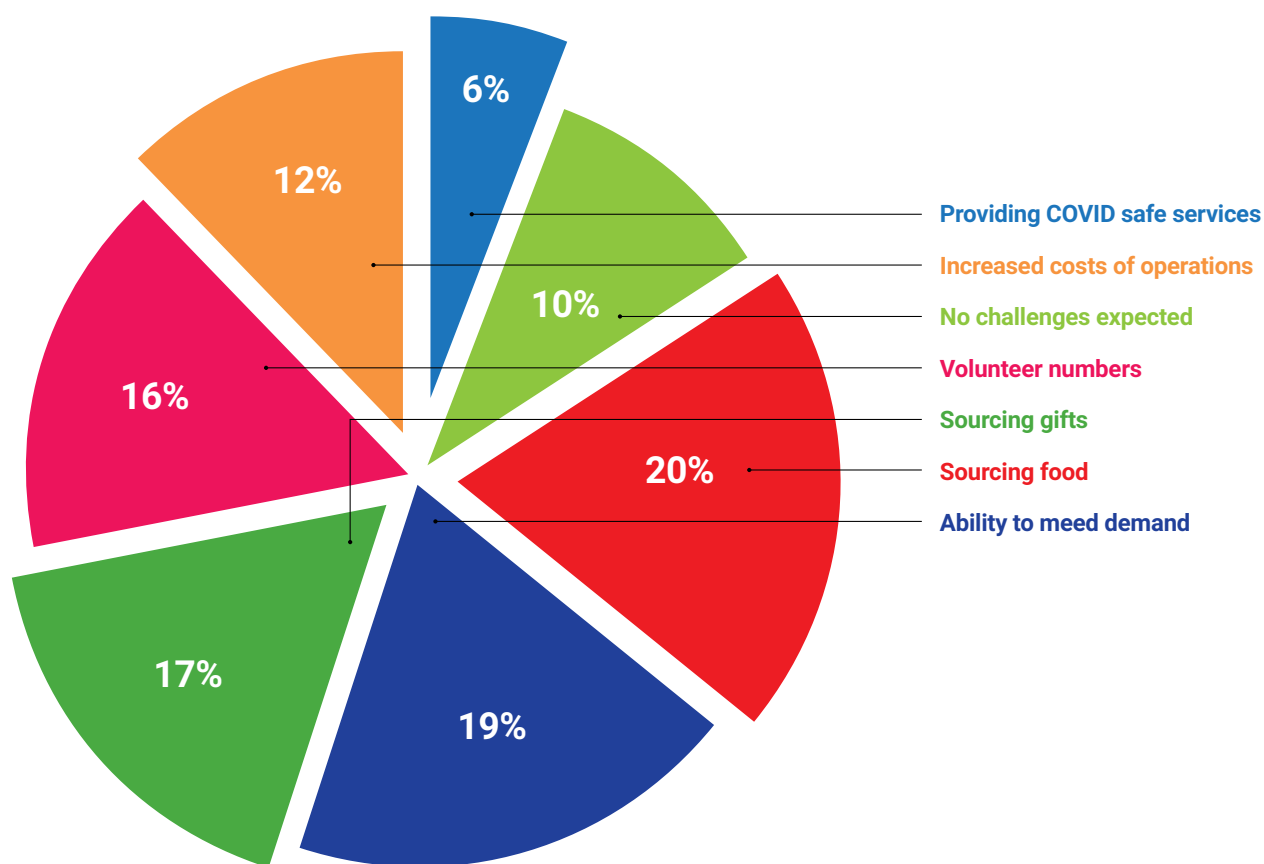
Expected challenges to the agency food relief programs

In response to the question of expected challenges in providing food relief programs during the Christmas period, most of the agencies raised concern about sourcing food (20% or 111 agencies) and ability to meet the demand (19% or 106 agencies).

Sourcing gifts (17% or 93 agencies) and volunteer participations (16% or 90 agencies) were also listed as challenges.

Other significant challenges were increased cost of operations (12% or 67 agencies) and providing COVID safe services (6% or 32 agencies).

Interestingly, about 10% or 53 agencies did not expect any challenges during Christmas.



Way Forward

This survey illustrated that overall client demand has increased especially in vulnerable communities who were most affected by COVID such as unemployed people, homeless people, and elderly people.

Agencies are very satisfied with most of the SecondBite services however, they want to see more variety and volume of food items and more consistency of food distribution. Some agencies stated that the amount of food they receive is not sufficient and they also believe that the distribution of food is not equal. Based on this discussion the following actions are recommended:

- Conduct in-depth interviews with a few agencies to obtain qualitative input on how to improve our services especially in the areas of current food demand, understanding demographics/needs of their clientele, organisational capacity, existing/future challenges, and expectations from SecondBite.
- Discuss with the partners/donors to ensure that the Community Connect program offers good quality, quantity, and variety of fresh produces to the agencies.
- Identify producers/donors for pantry food items, dairy foods, fresh meat and eggs and prepared meals to offer more of those foods to our agencies.
- Revise/revisit existing food distribution arrangements.
- Engage with Coles to ensure the supermarket staff who are involved in collections are adequately trained and understand the SecondBite partnership arrangement we have.
- Conduct an annual survey of agencies to better understand their changing supply and demand needs for food, trends in need areas (demographics, food supply, etc) and how our service is perceived so that we can continually adjust and shape our services to meet the changing needs of our partner agencies.

Reference

SecondBite App Database (Internal Resource)

SecondBite PWC Report 2020 (Internal Resource)



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