

INDEX

- 1. Executive Summary
- 2. Methodology and Demographics
  - A. Methodology
  - B. Demographics
- 3. Survey Results
- 4. Conclusion
- 5. References

# How Useful Are Food Box Deliveries for Veterans in Los Angeles?

Last updated July 7, 2023

HIGHLIGHTS || ● ○ ○ ○ ○

We surveyed 92 veterans who receive regular food box deliveries about their experiences to find out how the service can be improved.



## Executive Summary

Village for Vets, a nonprofit organization in Los Angeles, Calif., delivers food boxes to food insecure veterans in permanent supportive housing. A-Mark Foundation funded research by UCLA graduate students into how Village for Vets could improve its nutritional assistance program for low-income veteran participants in the Greater Los Angeles area. The researchers surveyed 92 veterans living in Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH), with the assistance of case managers at three buildings. One of the major findings was that 85.9% of veterans said they had to ration food prior to receiving the food boxes, and 98.9% said the boxes have improved their nutritional health.

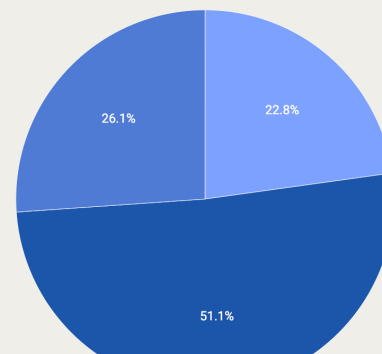
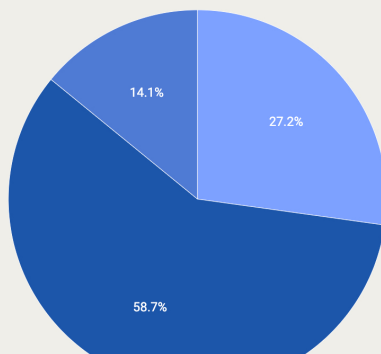
The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that there are 17,431,290 veterans in the United States; 1,467,026 veterans live in California, including an estimated 242,668 in Los Angeles County.<sup>[1]</sup> According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, 1.5 million veterans live in poverty.<sup>[2]</sup>

Food insecurity is defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations as the lack of “regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. This may be due to unavailability of food and/or lack of resources to obtain food.”<sup>[3]</sup>

According to a report published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), between 2015 and 2019, 11.1% of working-age veterans<sup>[4]</sup> suffered from food insecurity, with rates increasing among disabled (33.6%), unemployed (20.0%) and female (13.5%) veteran populations.<sup>[5]</sup> Working-age veterans were also found to have a 7.4% greater risk of suffering from food insecurity than their non-veteran counterparts.<sup>[6]</sup>

### Percentage of Veterans Who Rationed Food or Missed Meals Prior to Receiving Village for Vets Food Boxes

Often Sometimes Never



Source: A-Mark Foundation • [Get the data](#) • [Download image](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

To analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on military and veteran families' food security, the Military Family Advisory Network (MFAN) fielded its fourth Military Family Support Programming Survey in 2021. MFAN found that 1 in 5 respondents, or 20%, suffered from food insecurity; up from 1 in 8 (12.5%) in 2019.<sup>[7]</sup>

Village for Vets, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 2016, works to "fill critical gaps in key services for homeless and at-risk veterans" in the Greater Los Angeles area.<sup>[8]</sup> One of their programs, run in partnership with the Westside Food Bank in Santa Monica, provides a weekly food box delivery service to veterans living in permanent supportive housing. The boxes contain pantry staples, produce and other items.<sup>[9]</sup> The boxes do not contain meat, dairy or other perishable items because the organization's delivery trucks are not refrigerated.

To analyze the impact of this program and find suggestions for any improvements in the service, we partnered with the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs to conduct a survey of recipients of the boxes. Four master of public policy students, Jingyi Xu, Jessee Espinosa, Lehan Wang and Jeffrey Soria, conducted the survey of 92 veterans under the supervision of their advisor, Professor Kenya L. Covington, PhD.

The survey asked people about their food security levels prior to receiving the boxes and how they feel their nutritional health has improved since receiving the boxes. Follow-up questions asked about the challenges of using the food in the boxes, how their experience of the service can be improved and what they would like to see included in future boxes.

Of the 92 surveys returned, we found that prior to receiving the food box service, the majority of participants had to ration food due to budget constraints and missed meals. After receiving the boxes, all but one of the respondents felt that their nutritional health had improved with the boxes playing an important role in their meal preparation.

When asked about the specific challenges to using the food in the boxes, food preference, insufficient recipes and ideas and insufficient cooking equipment were the main obstacles to using the box contents. When asked how to resolve this, participants noted more kitchen tools, more variety of items and cooking classes would help.

The survey results are explored below. The UCLA team's presentation of their results and policy analysis is titled, "[Village for Vets: Improving the Nutritional Assistance Program Targeting Low-Income Veteran Participants in Greater Los Angeles.](#)"

## Methodology and Demographics

### Methodology

In February 2023, the UCLA team asked veterans living in Department of Housing - Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing who receive Village for Vets food boxes to fill in an anonymous survey. The veterans were informed of the study's purpose, procedures and potential risks and benefits, as well as their right to withdraw from the study without any negative consequences. All data collected was kept confidential, and participants were assigned a unique identification number to ensure anonymity. As an incentive to participate, the veterans were given a \$30 Target gift card.

The survey contained ten questions relating to the food box service and three questions about demographics. Our goal was to find out what impact receiving the food boxes have on the veterans' food security and nutritional health and what improvements could be made to the service to further benefit, or meet the needs of, the veterans. [Click here to view the full list of survey questions.](#)

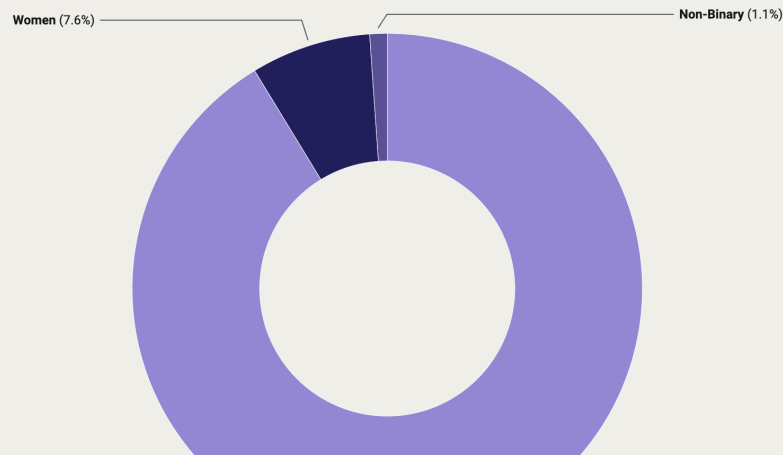
### Demographics

**Gender:** Men accounted for 91.3% of the participants; 7.6% were women and 1.1% non-binary.

**Age:** 72.8% of the participants were aged over-50, 23.9% were aged between 30 and 50, and 3.3% were under 30.

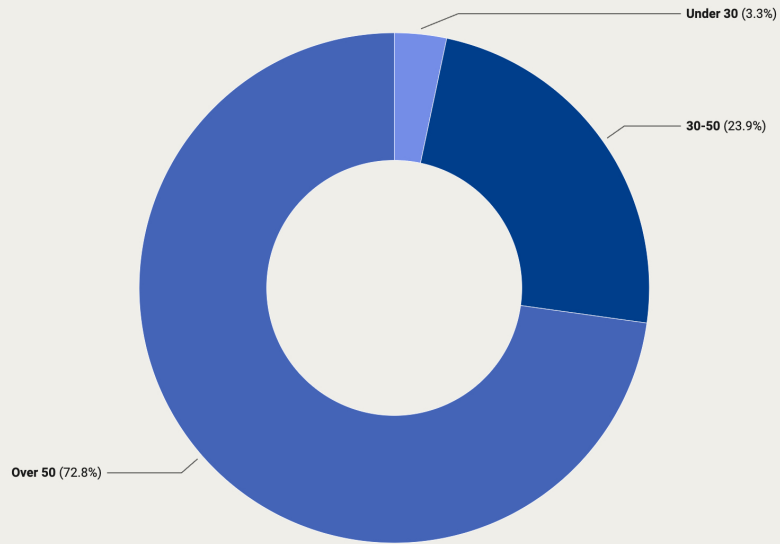
**Length of time receiving the food boxes:** The length of time participants reported having received the food boxes ranged from one month to four years.

### Participants in the Village for Vets Veteran's Food Box Service, by Gender



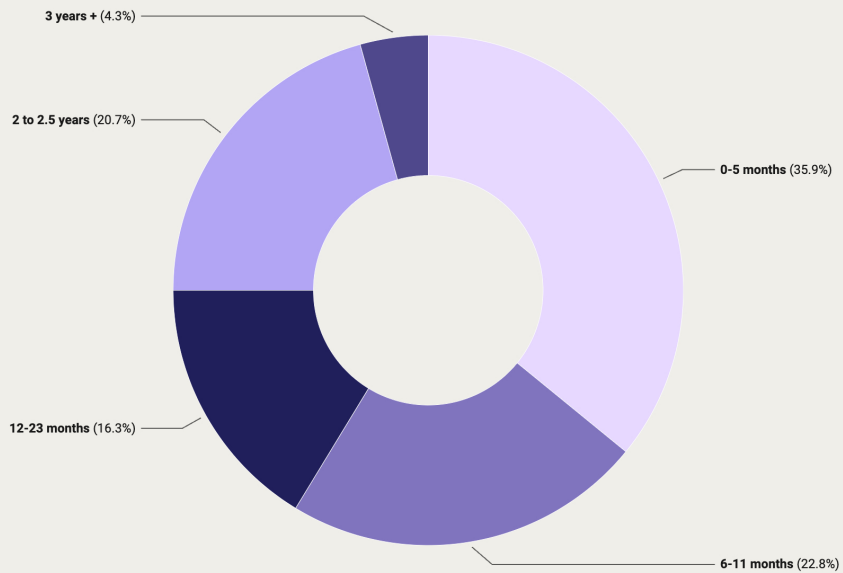
Source: A-Mark Foundation • [Get the data](#) • [Download image](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

### Participants in the Village for Vets Veteran's Food Box Service, by Age Range



Source: A-Mark Foundation • [Get the data](#) • [Download image](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

### Participants in the Village for Vets Veteran's Food Box Service, by Length of Time Received



Source: A-Mark Foundation • [Get the data](#) • [Download image](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

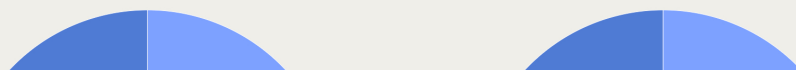
## Survey Results

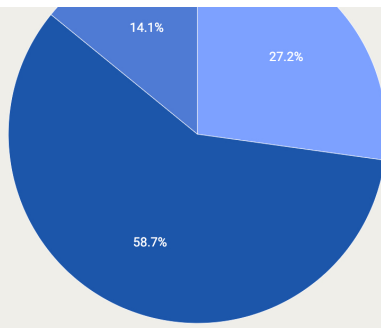
Of the 92 surveys returned, we found that, prior to receiving the food box service, 85.9% of respondents had rationed food due to budget constraints, and 73.9% said they often or sometimes missed meals during a regular week. After receiving the food box service, 98.9% of respondents felt that their nutritional health had improved, with 32.6% saying that it improved greatly, 40.2% saying it improved moderately and 26.1% saying it improved slightly.

Of the 91 respondents to the question, "How important is the food box that you have been receiving to your meal preparation?," all but one of the respondents said that the box is important, with 27.5% saying it is extremely important, 48.3% saying it is very important and 23.1% saying it is slightly important.

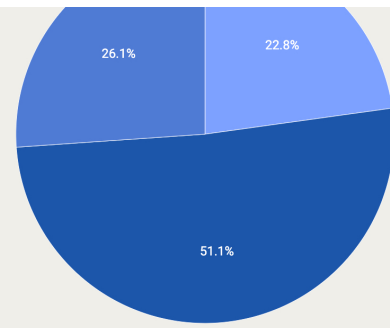
### Percentage of Veterans Who Rationed Food or Missed Meals Prior to Receiving Village for Vets Food Boxes

Often Sometimes Never





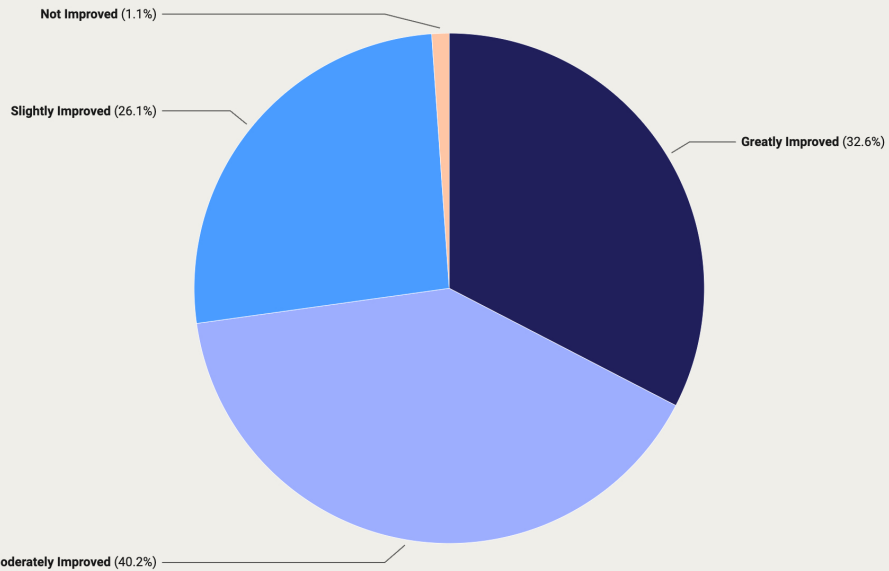
Percentage of Veterans Who Rationed Food



Percentage of Veterans Who Missed Meals

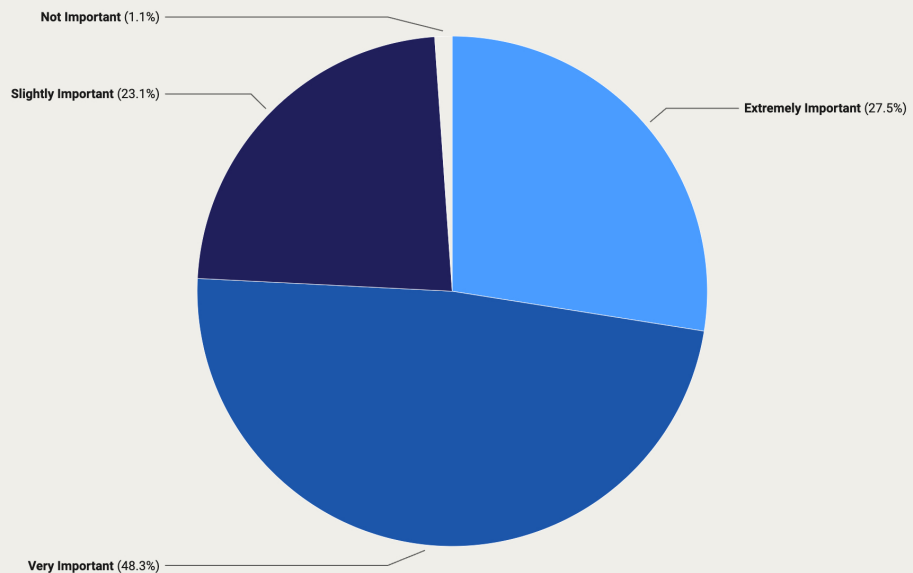
Source: A-Mark Foundation • [Get the data](#) • [Download image](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

### Percentage of Veterans Who Say Their Nutritional Health Has Improved Since Participation in the Village for Vets Food Box Program



Source: A-Mark Foundation • [Get the data](#) • [Download image](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

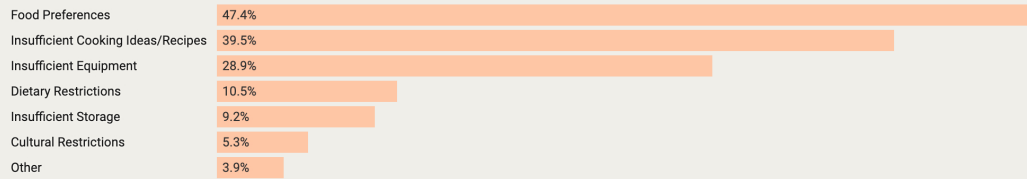
### Percentage of Veterans Who Say That the Village for Vets Food Box Is Important to Their Meal Preparation



Source: A-Mark Foundation • [Get the data](#) • [Download image](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

When asked to identify specific challenges to using the food in the food boxes, the most checked option by the 76 respondents who answered this question<sup>[10]</sup> was food preferences (47.4%), followed by insufficient cooking ideas or recipes (39.5%) and insufficient cooking equipment (28.9%). Dietary restrictions (10.5%), insufficient safe food storage (9.2%) and cultural restrictions (5.3%) were also listed as concerns. Three veterans listed other challenges, including lack of teeth, fruit flies in the produce and challenges in transporting the boxes home.

## Challenges Faced by Respondents in Using the Food in the Village for Vets Boxes, by Percentage of Veterans

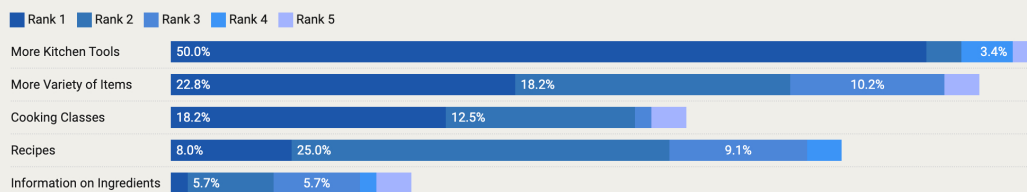


In response to the question: "What challenges have you had in utilizing the food boxes? Check all that apply."

Source: A-Mark Foundation • [Get the data](#) • [Download image](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

When asked to rank which options would be most helpful to improve their experience of the food box service, the top-ranked option for the highest percentage of respondents who answered this question<sup>[11]</sup> was more kitchen tools (50.0%), with more variety of items (22.8%) and cooking classes (18.2%) as the second and third options. Providing recipes was declared as potentially helpful by 44.3% of respondents, but only ranked first by 8.0%. Information on ingredients was deemed most helpful by the fewest respondents.

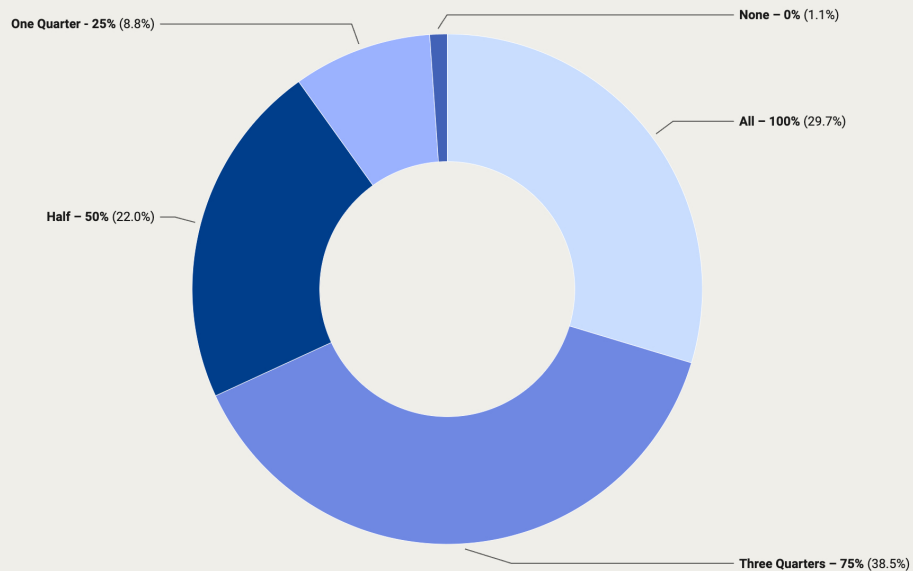
## Options for Improving the Village for Vets Food Box Program, Ranked by Importance by Percent of Veterans



In response to the question: "Rank the five options you would find most helpful for improving your experience of food boxes from (1) most helpful, to (5) least helpful."

Source: A-Mark Foundation • [Get the data](#) • [Download image](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

## Amount of Food Used from the Village for Vets Food Boxes, per Percent of Veterans



In response to the question: "How much of the food do you use from the food boxes?"

Source: A-Mark Foundation • [Get the data](#) • [Download image](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Of the 91 respondents to the question, "How much of the food do you use from the food boxes?," 27 people (29.7%) said they used 100% of the box. Of those, 15 picked more kitchen tools as their first choice need for improving their experience with the food boxes, eight wanted more variety in the boxes, three wanted a cooking class and one answer was left blank.

Thirty-five people (38.5%) said they used 75% of the box. Of those, 16 picked more kitchen tools as their first choice need for improving the usefulness of the box, suggesting they couldn't use all the items due to lack of equipment, 11 picked either a cooking class or recipes indicating they don't know what to do with some items; and seven wanted more variety of items. One answer was left blank.

Twenty people (22.0%) said they used 50% of the box - eight wanted a cooking class or recipe, seven needed more kitchen tools, and five wanted more variety in items.

Eight people (8.8%) said they used 25% of the box - four needed more kitchen tools, one wanted more information on ingredients, and one wanted a cooking class. One answer was left blank.

One person said they used 0% of the box; they said they needed more kitchen tools and recipes.

When asked "What items do you prefer to have in future box deliveries?," 30 respondents wanted more perishable items such as fresh

fruit and vegetables, milk, eggs and meats, 22 wanted more non-perishable items including cereals, noodles, canned food, microwaveable food and snacks, and 30 people wanted a mix of the two.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to understand the impact of a food box program on veteran's food insecurity and find suggestions for improvements to the service, if needed. We asked veteran recipients for their opinions, and received answers from 92 survey participants.

We found that, prior to receiving the food boxes, 85.9% of the veterans we surveyed had to ration food due to budget constraints. And while it is clear that the food box service is of tremendous importance to the veterans who receive them - 98.9% of veterans felt that their nutritional health had improved due to participation in the program - there are some improvements that can be made.

Food preferences was the biggest challenge to using the food box contents, followed by insufficient cooking ideas or recipes and insufficient cooking equipment. For the highest percentage of veterans, more kitchen tools would be most helpful in improving the usefulness of the boxes, followed by more variety of items and recipes. Cooking classes were also rated as helpful by a third of the respondents.

We hope that this survey will be helpful to policy makers and non-profit groups working to improve services for veterans and those vulnerable to food insecurity.

Cite This Page

## References

- 1 United States Census Bureau, "Quick Facts: United States; California; Los Angeles County, California," census.gov, July 1, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US,CA,losangelescountycalifornia/PST045222>
- 2 Matthew P. Rabbit and Michael D. Smith, "Food Insecurity Among Working-Age Veterans," usda.gov, May 2021, [https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/101269/err-829\\_summary.pdf?v=9807.3](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/101269/err-829_summary.pdf?v=9807.3)
- 3 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Hunger and Food Insecurity," fao.org, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>
- 4 According to the USDA, three quarters of the 17.4 million veteran population in the United States are of working age, i.e. between the ages of 18 and 64. See: Matthew P. Rabbit and Michael D. Smith, "Food Insecurity Among Working-Age Veterans," usda.gov, May 2021, [https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/101269/err-829\\_summary.pdf?v=9807.3](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/101269/err-829_summary.pdf?v=9807.3) for more information.
- 5 Matthew P. Rabbit and Michael D. Smith, "Food Insecurity Among Working-Age Veterans," usda.gov, May 2021, [https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/101269/err-829\\_summary.pdf?v=9807.3](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/101269/err-829_summary.pdf?v=9807.3)
- 6 Matthew P. Rabbit and Michael D. Smith, "Food Insecurity Among Working-Age Veterans," usda.gov, May 2021, [https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/101269/err-829\\_summary.pdf?v=9807.3](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/101269/err-829_summary.pdf?v=9807.3)
- 7 Military Family Advisory Network, "Food Insecurity Among Military and Veteran Families During COVID-19," mfan.org, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.mfan.org/research-reports/food-insecurity-among-military-and-veteran-families-during-covid-19/>
- 8 Village for Vets, "About Village for Vets," villageforvets.org, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.villageforvets.org/about>
- 9 Village for Vets, "Village for Vets Food First Programs," villageforvets.org, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.villageforvets.org/foodfirst>
- 10 16 respondents left this answer blank
- 11 Four respondents left this answer blank.

## Stay informed: Sign up for our weekly FactLetter

Submit

550 Wilshire Blvd Ste 201  
Santa Monica, CA 90401  
info@amarkfoundation.org

© 1997-2024 A-Mark Foundation.  
This website is available for Fair Use.  
Site by Loyal