



OHIO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

2011

WIC NEW FOOD PACKAGE FOCUS GROUPS



SEQUENCE #	WIC ID #	PARTICIPANT NAME	EXPIRES AND CHILD
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Underuse of Fruit & Vegetable Vouchers.

Changes to the Food Package.

Promoting healthy eating habits.

51	SEQUENCE #	WIC ID #	BOYER	# of items	NOT TO EXCEED	SEP/01/08	TRANSACTION DATE
DOZEN EGGS -							
160Z BAG OF DRIED EGGS							
OR MORE AUTH CEREAL UPTO 30							
PLEASE UPTO 160Z EACH PKG							
ACTUAL AMOUNT							
WIC VENDOR STAMP HERE							
PAYMENT WILL BE DENIED							
WITHIN 30 DAYS OF THE LAST DATE OF USE	WITHIN 30 DAYS OF THE LAST DATE OF USE	WITHIN 30 DAYS OF THE LAST DATE OF USE	WITHIN 30 DAYS OF THE LAST DATE OF USE	WITHIN 30 DAYS OF THE LAST DATE OF USE	WITHIN 30 DAYS OF THE LAST DATE OF USE	WITHIN 30 DAYS OF THE LAST DATE OF USE	WITHIN 30 DAYS OF THE LAST DATE OF USE
DATE OF PARTICIPANT OR ALTERNATE SHOPPER							

FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Acknowledgements

WIC Local Contacts

Melissa Alfano
Clark Allen
Ada Amburgey
Deborah Bailey
Kathy Boersma
Diana Brook
Betsy Buchanan
Susan Conover
Barb Deepe
Tessa Gossett
Gretchen Koch
Barbara Riley
Tami Ruhl
Laurie Sabel
Sharon Schaeffer
Tracey Waller

**Ohio Department of Health, Bureau of Nutrition Services
Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program
State Level Staff**

**RAMA CONSULTING GROUP, INC.
LEAD CONSULTANT
Mataryun “Mo” Wright, M.P.A.**



ASSOCIATES & FACILITATORS

Margaret Hiermer
Anita Maldonado
Hibo Noor
Jonathan Ross
Marshall Shorts
Quentin Taylor



Table of Contents

	Page #
I. Introduction and Research Process	3
II. Participant Profile	5
III. Overview of Key Findings	9
IV. Recommendations	12
V. Appendix	14



Executive Summary

Background

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH), Bureau of Nutrition Services, WIC Program is a supplemental nutrition program regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), that helps income-eligible pregnant, postpartum, and breast-feeding women, infants and children who are at health risk due to inadequate nutrition. WIC provides supplemental, highly nutritious food and/or formula items, nutrition education, breastfeeding support and referral to prenatal and pediatric health care and other maternal and child health and human services programs. WIC is available in approximately 235 clinics in Ohio's 88 counties and currently serves approximately 280,000 participants on a monthly basis.

Based upon Institute of Medicine recommendations, USDA mandated that new WIC food packages be implemented nationwide in 2009. Ohio WIC's new food packages went into effect on October 1, 2009. The new food packages align with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for American and infant feeding practice guidelines of the American Academy of Pediatrics. The new food packages better promote and support the establishment of successful, long-term breastfeeding, provide WIC participants with a wider variety of food including fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and provide Ohio WIC greater flexibility in prescribing food packages to accommodate the cultural food preferences of WIC participants.

Since the implementation of the new food packages, Ohio WIC has witnessed a decrease in the redemption of some food items, low redemptions of other food items, and underuse of vouchers for the purchase of fruits and vegetables. Ohio WIC desired to research the reasons for:

- decrease in the redemption of some food items
- lower redemption of other food items (some of which are new or expanded options)
- underuse of vouchers to purchase fruits and vegetables

WIC "New Food Packages" Planning Project

RAMA Consulting Group, Inc. was engaged by ODH to undertake this research project to discover why Ohio's WIC participants had not been optimizing the use of their WIC vouchers. RAMA designed a highly participative process that included the recruitment and facilitation of key consumer focus groups, collecting and analyzing survey data, conducting cultural specific focus groups and preparing city, regional and this statewide report.

WIC New Food Packages Focus Groups Final Report



Specifically our research project included:

1. Designing focus group question protocols, agenda, and any supporting handouts to collect data and complete analysis
2. Producing a final approach and plan for recruitment, coordination, facilitation and documentation of the 25 focus groups in the five targeted regions of Ohio
3. Developing a contingency plan for Focus Group rescheduling due to inclement weather or emergencies
4. Developing a communication plan outlining scheduled meetings and communications between RAMA and ODH
5. Producing of five summary reports (one for each region) including information regarding focus group statistics, analyzed data, and necessary conclusions, where possible
6. Preparing the final report and presentation that synthesize all findings and research activities along with appropriate recommendations

Our Approach:

The WIC “New Food Packages” Focus Group project was designed to hear the real needs from real people. It included capturing the insights from urban and rural, as well as culturally specific populations that make up the population of WIC consumers. The project included a multi-city, multi-perspective process that could provide insights into the general perspective of particular communities and/or cultural groups. RAMA was assisted by local project WIC directors in the recruitment of the participants to ensure that the focus group participants were good representations of the target population. Each focus group participant was required to sign an informed consent to acknowledge the intent of the focus group and their agreement to participate. A pre-focus group survey was designed to collect anonymous data on each participant that included demographics and profile information.

Caveats about Accuracy

RAMA Consulting Group has been careful in collecting, aggregating, analyzing and presenting data from a variety of sources to prepare the “*2011 WIC New Food Packages Focus Group Project Final Report*”. Although RAMA has judged its data sources to be reliable, it was not possible to authenticate all data. If readers of the report discover data or typographical errors, RAMA welcomes this feedback and will incorporate corrections into future updates of the report.



2011

Ohio Department of Health
WIC NEW FOOD PACKAGE FOCUS GROUPS

Participant Profile



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Focus Group Overview

Focus Group City	Number of Focus Groups	Type of Focus Group
Ashtabula, Ohio	1	Rural
Athens, Ohio	2	Urban
Cincinnati, Ohio	2	Urban
Cleveland, Ohio	2	Urban
Columbus, Ohio	3	Urban
Columbus, Ohio	1	Somali
Danville, Ohio	1	Rural
Dayton, Ohio	2	Urban
Hillsboro, Ohio	1	Rural
Lima, Ohio	1	Rural
Lorain, Ohio	2	Latino/Hispanic
Marietta, Ohio	2	Rural
Millersburg, Ohio	1	Amish
South Point, Ohio	1	Rural
Toledo, Ohio	2	Urban
Vermillion, Ohio	1	Rural

WIC New Food Packages Focus Groups Final Report

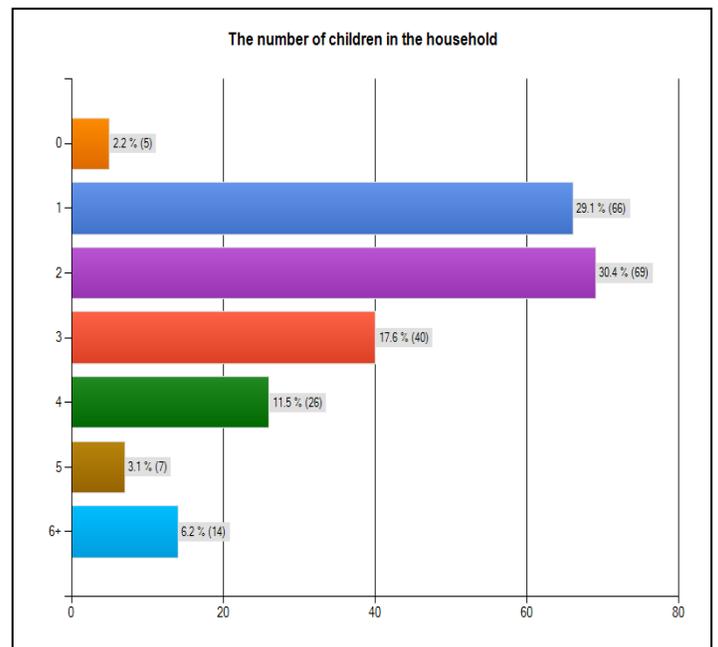
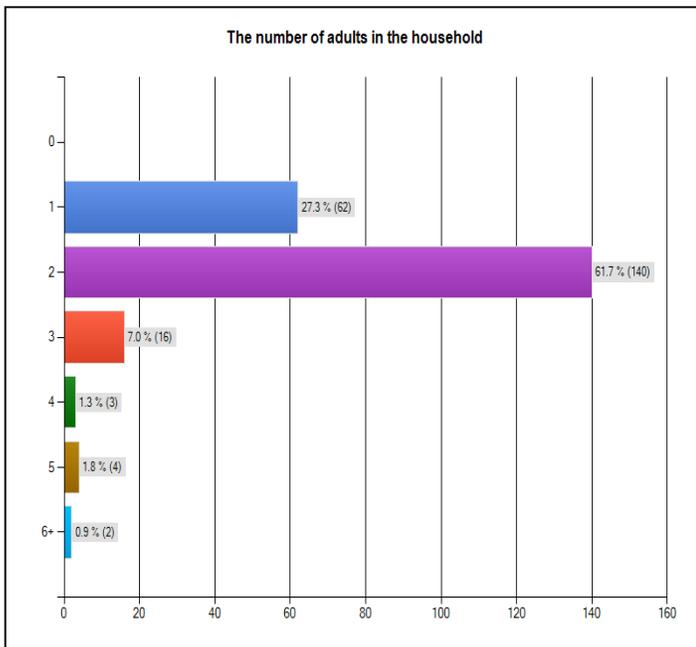
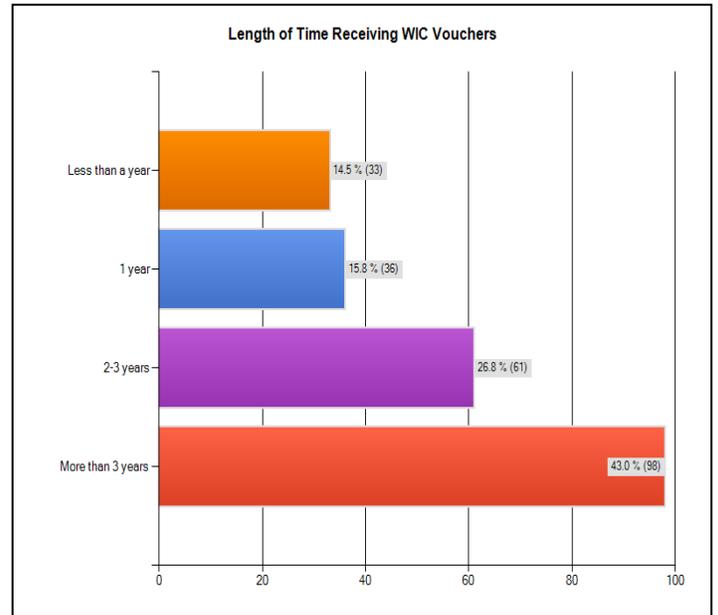
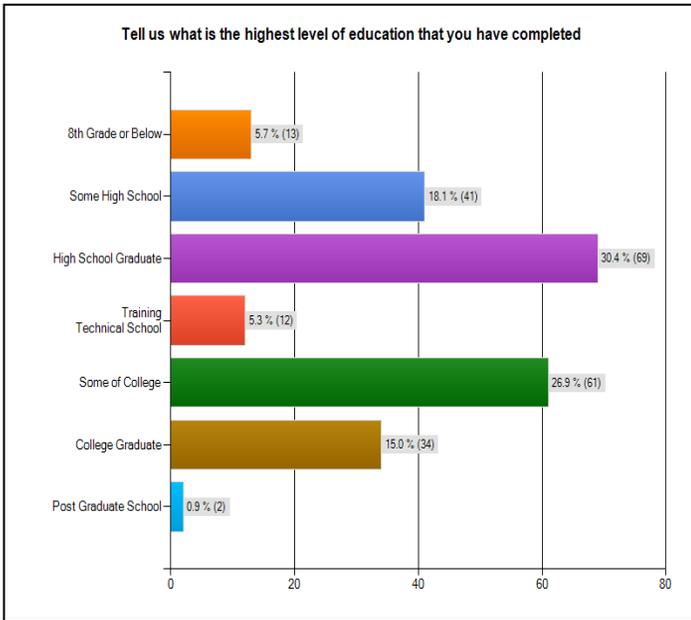


Demographic Data

WIC Region/ # of Participants	Race	Employment Status	Gender	Age
Northeast/49	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American - 36.7% (18) • Hispanic/Latino - 20.4% (10) • Multi-racial - 2%(1) • White - 40.8% (20) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part-time -12.2% (6) • Full-time -16.3% (8) • Do Not Work - 71.4% (35) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Females -7.9% (48) • Males - 2.1% (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under 18 - 2% (1) • 18-34 -83.7% (41) • 35-44 - 8.2%(4) • 45-64 - 6.1% (3)
Northwest/34	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American - 18.2% (6) • Asian - 6.1% (2) • Hispanic/Latino - 3% (1) • White - 72.7% (24) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part-time - 26.5% (9) • Full-time - 14.7% (5) • Do Not Work - 58.8% (20) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Females- 97% (33) • Males- 3% (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18-34 - 56.9% (19) • 35-44 - 35.3% (12) • 45-64 - 8.8% (3)
Central/39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American - 36.7% (12) • Hispanic/Latino - 20.4% (2) • Multi-racial - 2%(1) • White - 40.8% (17) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part-time - 15.8% (6) • Full-time -21.1% (8) • Do Not Work - 63.2% (24) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Females - 94.7% (36) • Males - 5.3% (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under 18 - 2.6%(1) • 18-34 - 74.3% (29) • 35-44 - 17.9% (7) • 45-64 - 5.1% (2)
Southeast/48	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American - 4.2% (2) • Multi-racial - 2.1% (1) • White - 93.8% (45) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part-time- 18.8% (9) • Full-time- 14.6% (7) • Do Not Work - 66.7% (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Females - 94% (45) • Males - 6% (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under 18 - 6.3%(3) • 18-34 - 64.6% (31) • 35-44 - 25.4% (12) • 45-64 - 4.2% (2)
Southwest/54	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American - 35.2% (19) • Multi-racial - 3.7%(2) - • White - 61.1% (33) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part-time - 20.4% (11) • Full-time - 16.7% (9) • Do Not Work - 63% (34) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Females - 88.9% (48) • Males - 11.1% (6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18-34 - 74.1% (40) • 35-44 - 20.4% (11) • 45-64 - 5.6% (3)
Overall/222	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American - 26.1% (58) • Asian - 0.9 % (2) • Hispanic/Latino - 6.3% (14) • Multi-racial - 2.7 % (6) • White - 64% (142) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part-time - 18.4% (42) • Full-time - 16.7% (38) • Do Not Work -64.9% (148) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Females - 94.3% (215) • Males - 5.7% (13) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under 18 2.2 % (5) • 18-34 - 71.2% (163) • 35-44 - 21.0% (48) • 45-64 - 5.7% (13)

WIC New Food Packages Focus Groups Final Report

Demographic Data





2011

Ohio Department of Health
WIC NEW FOOD PACKAGE FOCUS GROUPS

Overview of Key Findings



WIC New Food Packages Focus Groups

Final Report

Overview of Findings and Emerging Themes

The following findings represent an overview of major themes derived from the focus group process. They are not, however, the only conclusions or themes that one might extract from the entire project. It is suggested that the entire report be reviewed in order to gain a broader view of themes derived from this research.

Finding #1

Most WIC participants are consistently able to articulate the major benefits and components of WIC.

Participants consistently articulate that WIC is a supplemental nutritional food program focused on ensuring the health of expecting mothers, breastfeeding mothers, and children within our state. Many participants view WIC as a “financial assistance” program designed to defray the rising cost of feeding their families. This insight may prove valuable in developing key messages and reframing the program to other stakeholders in the future. Participants often voiced a sincere appreciation for the education and support received from WIC staff and the level of dignity and respect they experience as participants in the program.

Finding #2

The majority of WIC participants are satisfied with the content of the current food packages.

The most popular items in the current WIC food packages are: milk, fruits and vegetables, cereal, formula, juice and eggs. The least popular items in the current WIC food packages are dried beans/peas, with the exception of the Somali special population focus group (who cited them as the most popular item). The elimination of cheese was cited as the major disappointment with the current package. Yogurt was by far the most requested additional food item to consider for inclusion in the package, followed by more variety in flavors and types of cereal, as well as additional forms of protein.

Finding #3

Opinions vary regarding the adequacy of the amount of food the WIC program provides on a monthly basis, and on the specific items that are either “too much” or “too little.”

The majority of participants agree that the current food packages are adequate in size and item proportion when considering it is designed to be a supplemental food program. The one exception was with peanut butter, where participants in all regions of the state except southeast Ohio expressed the notion that the program offers too much of that item. In addition, the Amish special population focus group overwhelmingly voiced that there is not too much of *anything*, and there is too little of *everything*. This is likely due to their traditional method of cooking which includes making many meals from scratch.

WIC New Food Packages Focus Groups

Final Report

Finding #4

Redemption of food package items is occasionally affected by a lack of store level education and support processes for WIC participants.

Many participants cited an overall lack of education and training on WIC at the store level as the major difficulty in the WIC food purchase process. This situation manifests itself in several consistent ways - participants being denied purchase of WIC-approved items, along with inconsistency and added levels of bureaucracy during the checkout process. In addition, participants noted a lack of WIC-eligible items and/or appropriate quantities (bread, in particular) as the predominant store level support issue. Many participants also cited difficulty locating WIC-approved items in the store and likewise applauded vendors who have implemented the “WIC Approved” signage. In a few cases, participants observed a perceived stigma toward WIC participants in some stores which was likely attributable to the extra “process” necessary for redemption of vouchers. Nearly all participants who use Food Stamps (SNAP) find those programs to be much easier to use than WIC. Convenience and ease of checkout were the most cited reasons.

Finding #5

The basis for low redemption of Fruit and Vegetable Vouchers is still inconclusive based on participant feedback.

Focus group participants were surprised and shocked to learn that the Fruit and Vegetable vouchers redemption is low across the state. Nearly all participants stated they desired more fruit and vegetable vouchers. Participants hypothesized ideas for the low redemption rates were 1.) The selection process – a need to weigh/compute price for fresh fruits and vegetables, along with the time involved in the shopping process and 2.) The purchase process – a lack of convenience in using the vouchers. Roughly three-quarters of the focus group participants do not find the vouchers hard to use. Of those who do the selection process, check-out process and availability of items were cited as the predominant reasons. Opinions were split on the fruit and vegetable chart in use by some other states. Some participants found it to be a beneficial aid while others were quite ambivalent about it altogether.

Finding #6

There is an opportunity to strengthen local participant peer to peer learning and education activities to better support WIC operations.

The research process discovered that participants often serve as the best means of learning about the “informal” rules regarding the use of WIC vouchers. Facilitators observed that there was a lack of program understanding for some participants in every focus group conducted and encouraged cross-education through group discussion and individual anecdotal sharing. Topics most often explored included confusion over WIC-approved items and quantities along with tips for navigating the local stores in a particular focus group location.



2011

Ohio Department of Health
WIC NEW FOOD PACKAGE FOCUS GROUPS

Recommendations



WIC New Food Packages Focus Groups Final Report

Consultant Recommendations

In addition to the Key Findings, the following represent some consultant recommendations and potential areas of program refinement.

Education and Support of WIC participants

- ❖ Many participants suggested that the new text-based list of approved WIC items was not as helpful as the previous version which included pictorials of the approved items. Recognizing the need to be cost-effective as well as timely, we suggest going back to a picture based format that is non-color (black and white) and able to be reproduced “in-house” through simple copying means. This should minimize confusion on some WIC approved items.
- ❖ Enhance program awareness and understanding by encouraging local sites to sponsor participant-led information sharing sessions. This would entail participants engaging in informal dialogues and orientation events to assist in dissemination of best practices in areas such as voucher redemption, where to shop, and food preparation. Other suggestions include: providing recipes and cooking demonstrations for items that are currently under-utilized or less desirable (e.g. dry beans, vegetables).

Education and Support for Vendors

- ❖ Increase program efficiency at the store level by providing a cashier "WIC Program Quick Facts" guides to participating stores. The idea is that something laminated can be hung at each register that lists the top 10 FAQ's or program rules (e.g. Fruit and Vegetable Vouchers are for fresh, frozen and canned, the vouchers do not need to be used on just one type of item).
- ❖ Where possible, WIC should work close with merchants to ensure proper training and understanding of the current food packages. It is suggested that WIC could utilize actual participants for this “job” as a requirement of participation in the program or simply on a volunteer basis.

Food Package Changes

- ❖ Due to the overwhelming demand we would suggest exploration of adding yogurt and alternative protein options to the food packages. Participants cited additional low cost protein options such as sardines, canned salmon/mackerel, or lean meat items. Additionally, expansion of appropriate cereal options that are “approved” is encouraged.



2011

Ohio Department of Health
WIC NEW FOOD PACKAGE FOCUS GROUPS

Appendix



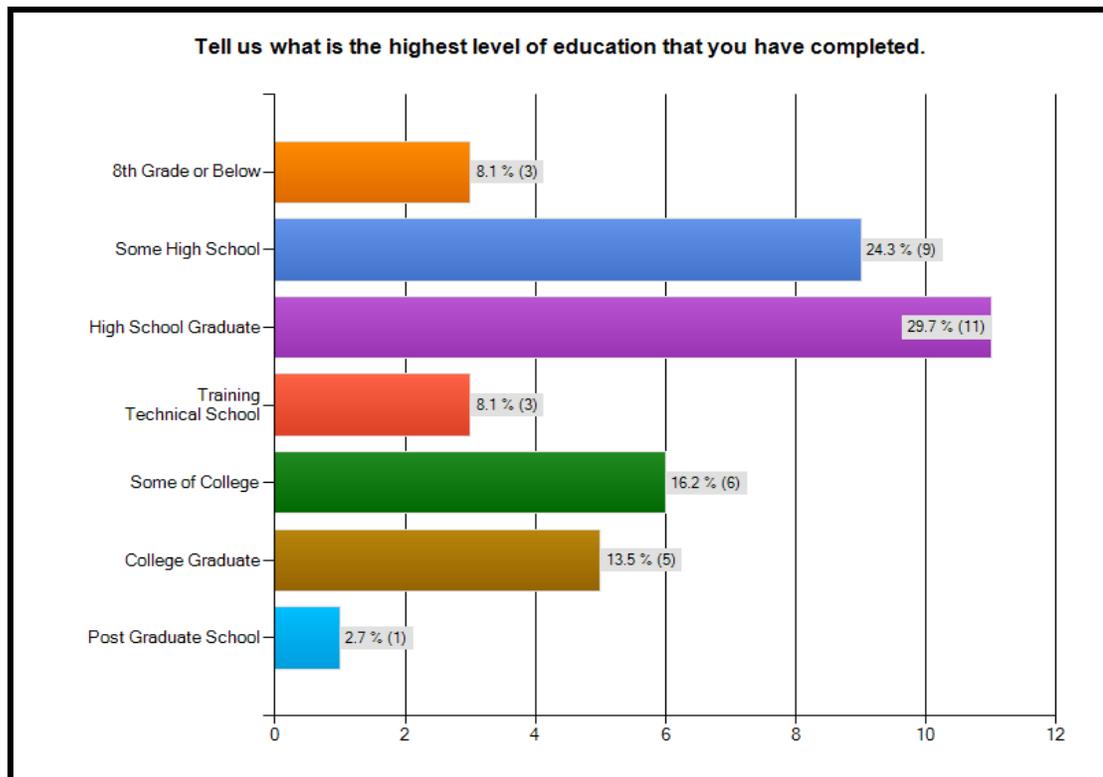
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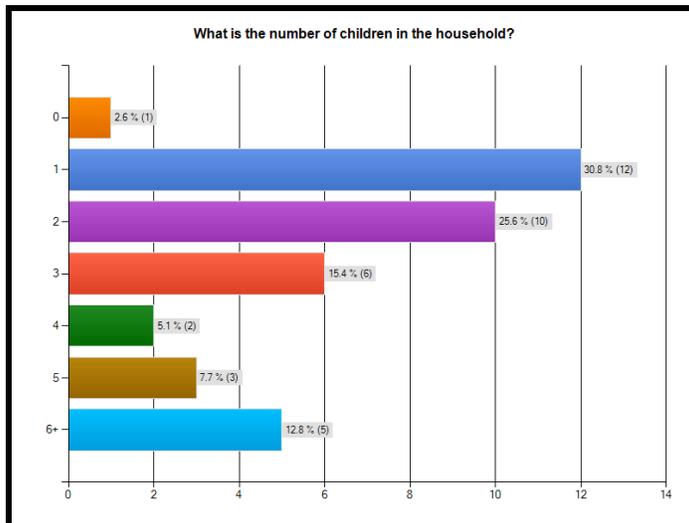
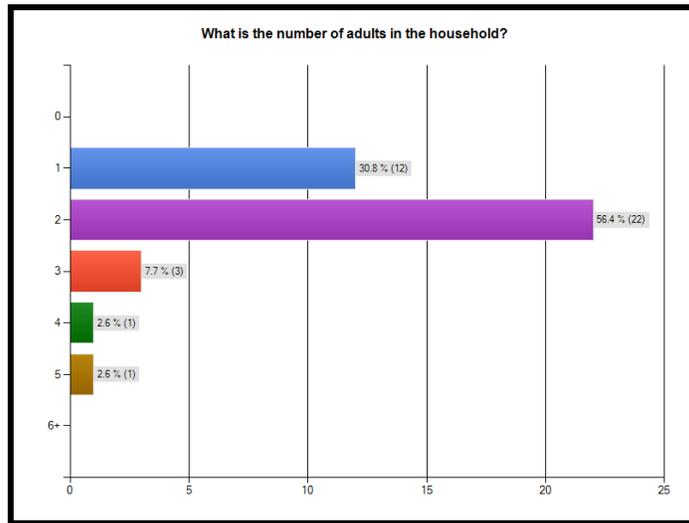
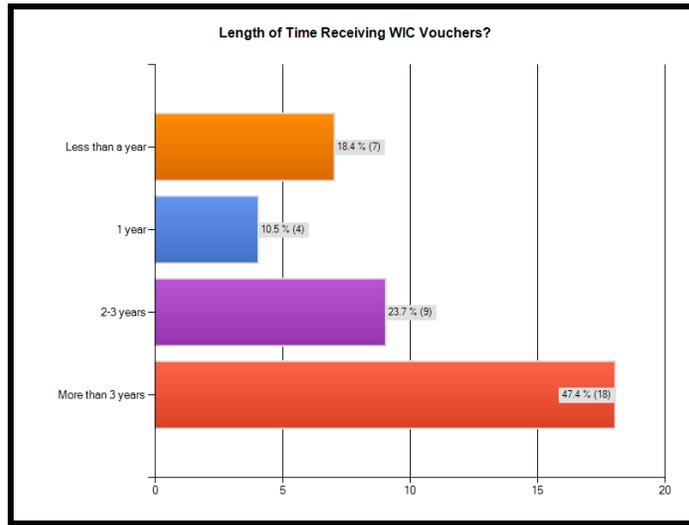
Central Ohio Regional Report
Columbus, Somali and Danville

Demographic Data

Survey Quick Facts

- **Race of Respondents:** Out of the total survey respondents (39) that took the survey 40.8% (17) of the respondents are white, 36.7% (12) are African American, 20.4% (2) are Hispanic/Latino and 2%(1) are multi-racial.
- **Gender of Respondents:** Participants were asked to give their gender and females represent 94.7 % (36), while males represent 5.3% (2).
- **Age of Respondents:** Respondents from survey data from 18-34 years of age 74.3% (29), from 35-44 years of age 17.9 % (7), 2.6% (1) under the age of 18 and from 45-64 years of age 5.1% (2).
- **Employment Status of Respondents:** Out of the total respondents 63.2 % (24) do not work at all, 15.8 % (6) work Part-time and 21.1% (8) have Full-time employment.





Regional Findings

The regional findings that follow are arranged by focus group question and represent the collective voice of participants in the Central region of Ohio. Focus group summary reports for each specific location are provided in an appendix at the end of this report.

1. Let's suppose I didn't know anything about the WIC program or using the WIC food vouchers. What would you explain to me are the major benefits of the program and why it exists?

a. Participants were well able to articulate the rationale for the program and the direct benefits garnered from participation in WIC.

- Participants expressed that the benefits of the WIC program include: being informed about breastfeeding benefits, being a great asset for new mothers who may need assistance with food purchases and fostering healthy living for mothers and children.
- The most cited reasons for the existence of the WIC program is to provide valuable information on nutrition counseling and resources/referrals to facilities for healthcare/financial needs for mothers and children.

2. What items from the WIC food program are most popular to you/your child? Which items are not as appealing for you to purchase under the program?

a. The most popular items:

- Fruit, vegetables, milk, formula (new mothers) and juice
- Dry beans (Somali)

b. The least popular items:

- Beans followed by generic cereals

3. For those of you who were on the WIC program or were familiar with it prior to the 2009 changes to the food items you can purchase, how would you describe the current food packages, i.e., Is it an improvement, not as good, or better?

a. Most participants were on the program or familiar with the WIC food packages prior to 2009.

Mostly all stated that the program was an improvement from the 2009 packages and no one disagreed with this statement.

- Participants articulated that they saw an improvement because you are now allowed to purchase fruits and vegetables, the packages have more of a variety than prior to 2009 and that the program was a little stricter than it is now.
- Participants stated that the only thing that they wished were still in the "Food Packages" is cheese.
- Participants, Somali, felt that the current program is not as good as it was prior to 2009 in terms of WIC food item selection information I.e., no brochure.

b. Items for inclusion into the food packages:

- Cheese, juice (baby), meats (chicken and turkey), jelly and yogurt
- Potatoes bread and tuna fish (Somali only)

c. Specific varieties or flavors participants would like to see added to the WIC food packages:

- Cereals: with dried fruit and/or nuts e.g. Raisin Bran
- Milk: chocolate, whole (some participants are not issued), soy, etc.
- Regular rice
- Yogurt
- Juice: grape fruit,
- Mango (Somali only)

d. Most Participants reported that they are currently purchase other food items with SNAP, cash, or manufacturer coupons.

e. Half of the participants reported having difficulty finding the foods where they shop. The major insights included:

- WIC-approved signage would greatly assist in locating items in the store
- Unclear about specific approved brands, e.g., apple juice
- The blue papers (Authorized Food List) did not do a good job in distinguishing food items
- Participant substitutes for items in which the store is temporarily out of
- Kroger, Walmart and Save- A -Lot were mentioned as being stores where people struggle the most when; Meijer was said to be doing a good job
- Most Somalis stated they have difficulty shopping due to language barriers and understanding food container sizes in the store.

4. How would you describe the amount of food that WIC provides on a monthly basis considering that it is a supplemental program not designed to provide your total food needs (adequate, too much)? If too much, which foods?

a. The majority of participants felt the amount of food provided was adequate.

- Some participants expressed that they want more formula and breakfast items
- A few participants expressed that they received too much baby food and milk (pregnant and nursing mothers only)

5. One of the trends we have observed is that the number of fruit and vegetable vouchers being used by WIC participants is low. Explain to me why you think this is the case?

a. Participants do not understand why FVV are not being utilized in high numbers. Reasons for low redemption may be:

- The education process – there clearly was a lack of education on what fruits and vegetables you can and cannot purchase e.g. frozen, canned, fresh.
- The purchase process – many stores are frustrating because personnel are not educated and/or not patient to know what items are WIC approved.
- The amount on the fruit and vegetable vouchers is not enough and they have to pay the overage.
- Somali participants stated that the majority of their population does not use fruit and vegetable vouchers because their children do not eat fruits and vegetables.

b. Most participants reported they purchase fruits and vegetables with cash and food stamps.

c. The majority of participants did not find the FVV's hard to use.

d. Some in the group were being educated in the session on what they can and cannot obtain through WIC vouchers.

e. The “fruit and vegetable chart” was well received in the rural area but in the urban area (Columbus) that majority felt that the charts would not be used. One suggestion was to give everyone a pocket calculator to assist in the shopping. For the Somali population, the majority felt that the use of the chart would not be helpful due to the language barriers.

6. For those of you who might be using food stamps/SNAP do you find that program easier to use than WIC? In what ways?

a. It was unanimous that the food stamps/SNAP program was much easier than that of WIC:

- Convenience and ease –it is difficult to separate WIC items from non WIC items at the register with children in tow. Participants do not generally go to the store just for WIC shopping. EBT would expedite shopping.

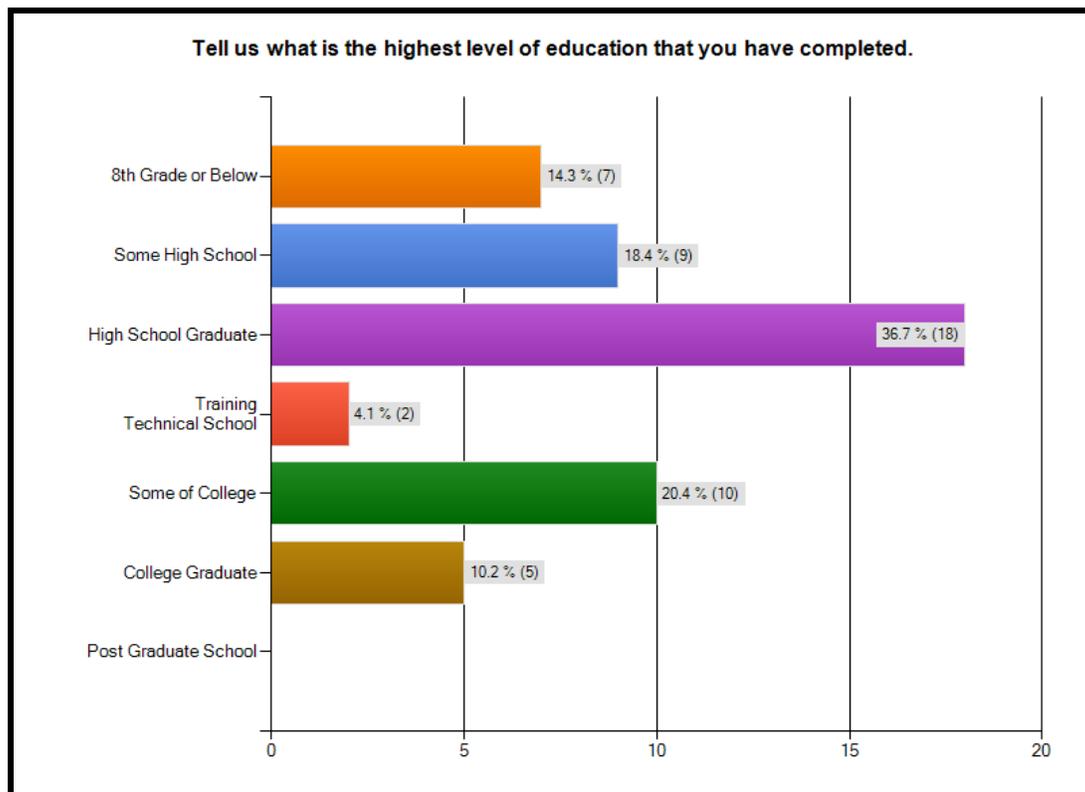
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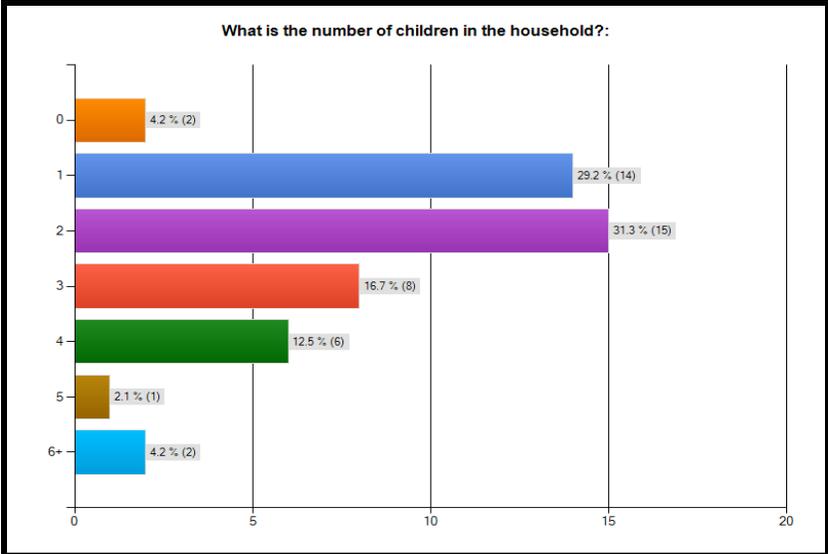
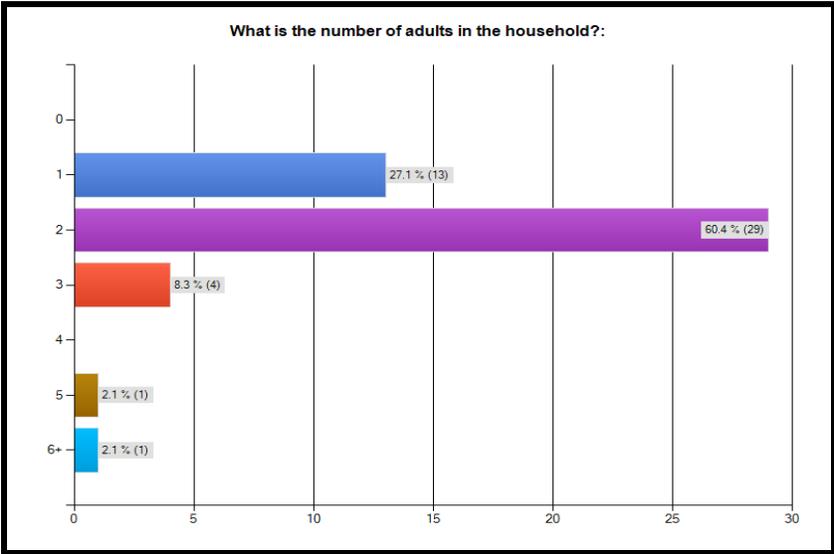
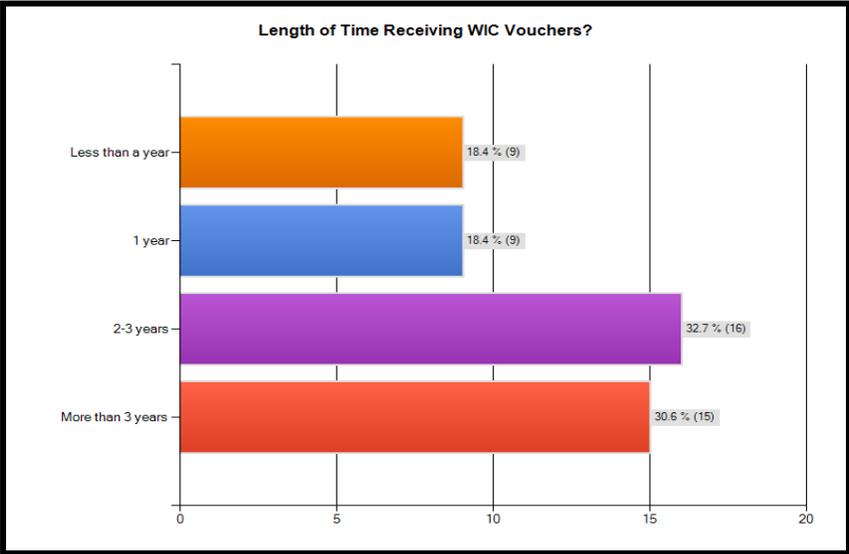
Northeast Ohio Regional Report
Ashtabula, Cleveland, Lorain and Millersburg

Demographic Data

Survey Quick Facts

- **Race of Respondents:** Out of the total survey respondents (49) that took the survey 40.8% (20) of the respondents are white, 36.7% (18) are African American, and 20.4% (10) are Hispanic/Latino, and 2%(1) are multi-racial.
- **Gender of Respondents:** Participants were asked to give their gender and females represent 97.9 % (48), while males represent 2.1% (1).
- **Age of Respondents:** Respondents from survey data from 18-34 years of age 83.7% (41), from 35-44 years of age 8.2 % (4), 2% (1) under the age of 18 and from 45-64 years of age 6.1% (3).
- **Employment Status of Respondents:** Out of the total respondents 71.4 % (35) do not work at all, 12.2 % (6) work Part-time and 16.3% (8) have Full-time employment.





Regional Findings

The regional findings that follow are arranged by focus group question and represent the collective voice of participants in the Northeast region of Ohio. Focus group summary reports for each specific location are provided in an appendix at the end of this report.

1. Let's suppose I didn't know anything about the WIC program or using the WIC food vouchers. What would you explain to me are the major benefits of the program and why it exists?

a. Participants were well able to articulate the rationale for the program and the direct benefits garnered from participation in WIC.

- The most cited benefits to participants and their children were access to healthy and nutritious food as well as breastfeeding assistance and promotion.
- The most cited reason for the existence of the WIC program was that it assists low income families.

2. What items from the WIC food program are most popular to you/your child? Which items are not as appealing for you to purchase under the program?

a. The most popular items:

- Cereal, milk, and formula, followed by fruits, vegetables, juice and eggs

b. The least popular items:

- Dried beans/peas

3. For those of you who were on the WIC program or were familiar with it prior to the 2009 changes to the food items you can purchase, how would you describe the current food packages i.e., Is it an improvement, not as good, or better?

a. Many were on the program or familiar with WIC food packages prior to 2009. Nearly all felt the program was an overall improvement.

- Participants cited the addition of fruits, vegetables and bread, along with having a wider variety and more options as the major improvement, to the program.
- Participants who felt the current program is not as good cited the elimination of cheese as the major downfall with the current WIC food packages.

b. Items for inclusion into the food packages:

- Yogurt, potatoes and more cereals were the most requested new food items.

c. Specific varieties or flavors participants would like to see added to the WIC food packages:

- Cereals: those with dried fruit, fruit flavors or spices, with Honey Nut Cheerios as the most requested specific cereal.

d. Participants reported they are currently purchasing other items with SNAP or cash.

e. Two-thirds of the participants reported they are having difficulty finding the foods where they shop. The major issues cited:

- Lack of availability of WIC items in general and inadequate stock of WIC items carried at the store level (bread, in particular).

4. How would you describe the amount of food that WIC provides on a monthly basis considering that it is a supplemental program not designed to provide your total food needs? (adequate, too much) If too much, which foods?

a. Over half of the participants felt the amount of food provided was adequate. Discussion around “too much/too little” was more individualized and varied across the groups, however:

- The amount of milk provided by the program was considered by over half of the participants to be too much.

5. One of the trends we have observed is that the number of fruit and vegetable vouchers being used by WIC participants is low. Explain to me why you think this is the case?

a. Many participants indicated that they utilize the FVV’s. Ideas about low redemption rates were:

- The selection process – availability of items and a lack of understanding about what can be purchased with the fruit and vegetables voucher (frozen/fresh, etc.).
- The purchase process – a lack of understanding, by both user and vendor, on about how to use and transact the FVV.

b. Most participants reported that they purchase fruits and vegetables using other methods.

c. Roughly half find the FFV’s hard to use. Reasons cited included the availability of items, cashier education on both program requirements and checkout process.

d. Approximately half of the participants found the “fruit and vegetable chart” to be a beneficial aide in the shopping process. The chart did not resonate with the remainder of the group.

6. For those of you who might be using food stamps/SNAP do you find that program easier to use than WIC? In what ways?

a. Nearly all participants found SNAP easier to use than WIC. Reasons cited included:

- Convenience and ease – the SNAP EBT card is easier to use than WIC vouchers and SNAP food items are less restrictive.

b. None of the participants in the Amish focus group utilize this type of government assistance program. Participation in WIC, however, is permitted as a nutritional benefit.

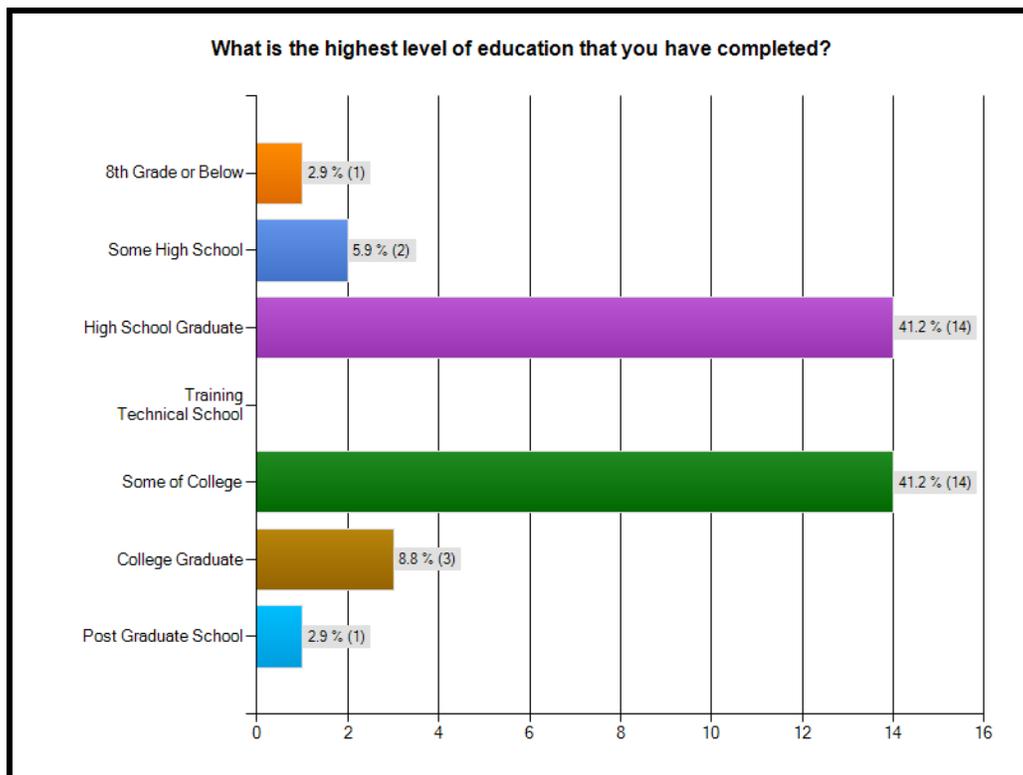
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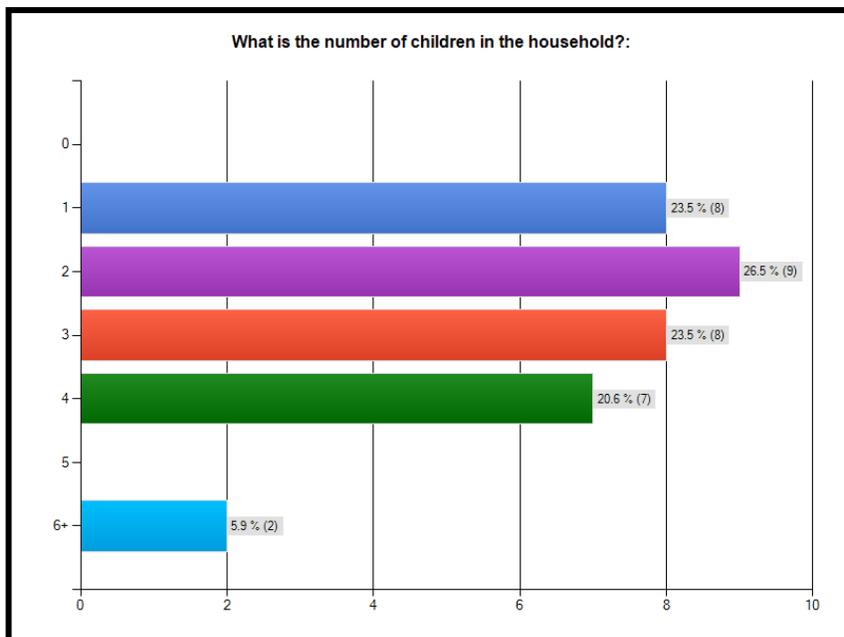
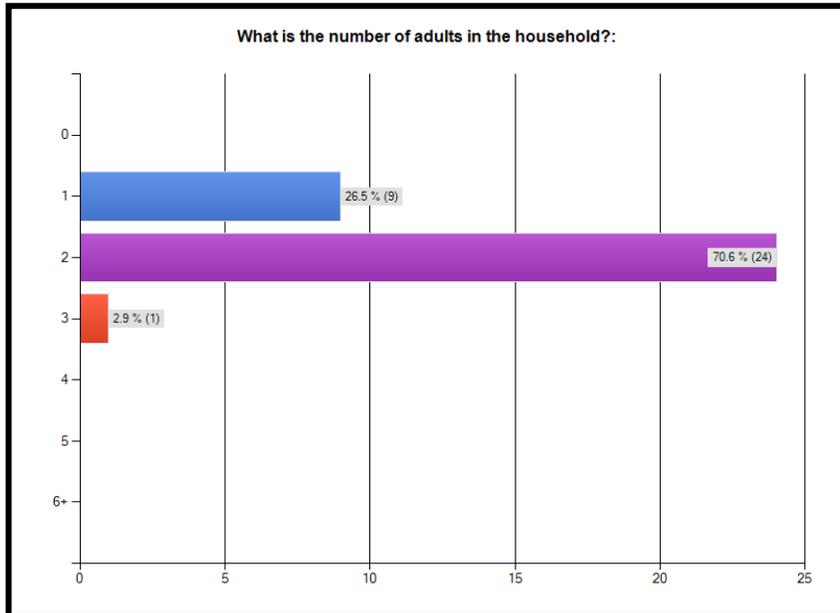
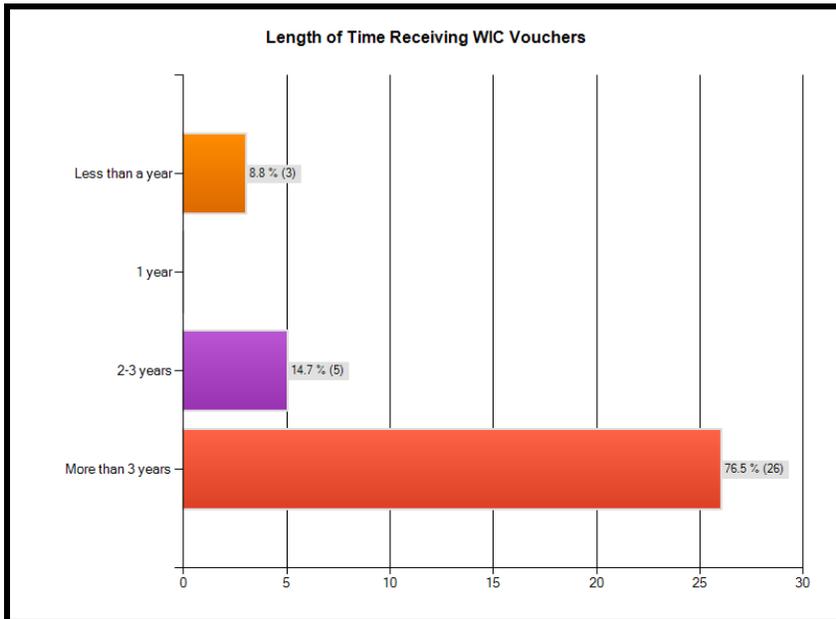
Northwest Ohio Regional Report
Lima, Toledo and Vermillion

Demographic data

Survey Quick Facts

- **Race of Respondents:** Out of the total survey respondents (34) that took the survey 72.7% (24) of the respondents are white, 18.2% (6) are African American, 6.1% (2) are Asian and 3% (1) Hispanic/Latino. *(1 person skipped the question)
- **Gender of Respondents:** Participants were asked to give their gender and females represent 97 % (33), while males represent 3% (1).
- **Age of Respondents:** Respondents from survey data from 18-34 years of age 56.9% (19), from 35-44 years of age 35.3 % (12) and from 45-64 years of age 8.8% (3).
- **Employment Status of Respondents:** Out of the total respondents 58.8 % (20) do not work at all, 26.5 % (9) work Part-time and 14.7% (5) have Full-time employment.





Regional Findings

The regional findings that follow are arranged by focus group question and represent the collective voice of participants in the Northwest region of Ohio. Focus group summary reports for each specific location are provided in an appendix at the end of this report.

1. Let's suppose I didn't know anything about the WIC program or using the WIC food vouchers. What would you explain to me are the major benefits of the program and why it exists?

a. Participants were well able to articulate the rationale for the program and direct benefits garnered from participation in WIC.

- The most cited benefits to participants and their children was access to healthy and nutritious food as well as cost savings from the financial assistance.
- The most cited and discussed reasons for the existence of the WIC program was education. The education topics ranged from nutrition and breastfeeding to medical.

2. What items from the WIC food program are most popular to you/your child? Which items are not as appealing for you to purchase under the program?

a. The most popular items:

- Fruits, vegetables, milk, and formula, followed by eggs, cereal and natural peanut butter

b. The least popular items:

- Dried beans/peas

3. For those of you who were on the WIC program or were familiar with it prior to the 2009 changes to the food items you can purchase, how would you describe the current food packages i.e. Is it an improvement, not as good, or better?

a. Most participants were on the program or familiar with the WIC food packages prior to 2009.

Approximately two-thirds felt the program was an overall improvement.

- Participants cited the addition of fruits, vegetables along with baby food and new cereals as the major improvements to the program.
- Participants who felt the current program is not as good cited the elimination of cheese as the major downfall with the current WIC food packages.

b. Items for inclusion into the food packages:

- Yogurt was the most requested new food item, along with additional sources of protein, specifically meats.

c. Specific varieties or flavors participants would like to see added to the WIC food packages:

- Cereals: those with dried fruit, fruit flavors or spices

d. Participants reported that they currently purchasing other items with SNAP, cash, or using manufacturer coupons.

e. Most participants reported having difficulty finding the foods where they shop. The major citations were:

- WIC-approved signage would greatly assist in locating items in the store.
- Lack of availability of items in general and inadequate stock of WIC items carried at the store (bread in particular, along with specialty milks)
- Lack of education and training on WIC at the store level was reported as a difficulty during the WIC transaction. This situation manifests itself- when participants are denied the purchase of WIC-approved items, along with inconsistency and added levels of bureaucracy during the checkout process.

4. How would you describe the amount of food that WIC provides on a monthly basis considering that it is a supplemental program not designed to provide your total food needs (adequate, too much)? If too much, which foods?

a. The majority felt the amount of food provided was adequate.

- The amount of peanut butter offered was considered by most to be too much. One group also mentioned dried beans.

5. One of the trends we have observed is that the number of fruit and vegetable vouchers being used by WIC participants is low. Explain to me why you think this is the case?

a. Participants were surprised to learn that the FVV redemption is low across the state. Nearly all participants stated they desired more FVV's. Reasons for the low redemption were:

- The selection process – the need to weigh/compute and track purchase price
- The purchase process – lack of voucher knowledge by both the user and store

b. Most participants reported they purchase fruits and vegetables with cash and SNAP.

c. The majority of participants did not find the FVV's hard to use.

e. Approximately half of the participants found the Fruit and Vegetable Chart to be a beneficial aide to the shopping process. There were some participants, though, who were clearly ambivalent about the chart.

6. For those of you who might be using food stamps/SNAP do you find that program easier to use than WIC? In what ways?

a. Nearly all participants find food stamp/SNAP programs easier to use than WIC. Reasons cited included:

- Convenience and ease – the SNAP EBT card is easier to use than WIC vouchers and SNAP food items are less restrictive.

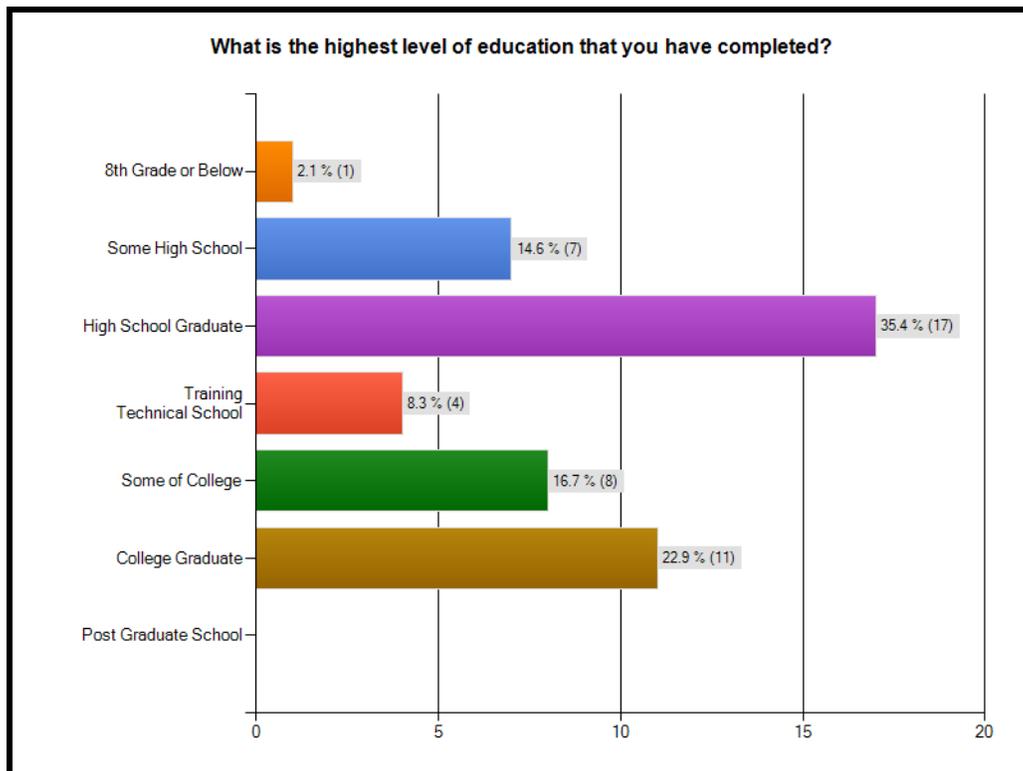
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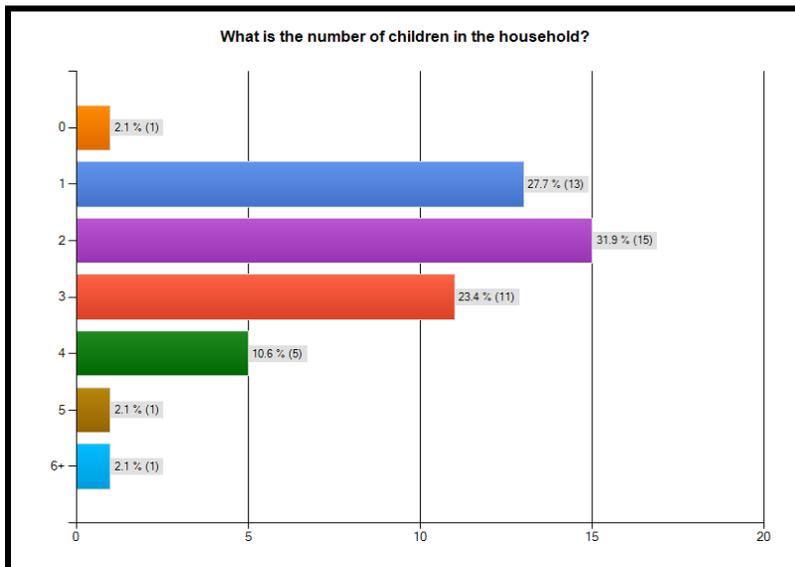
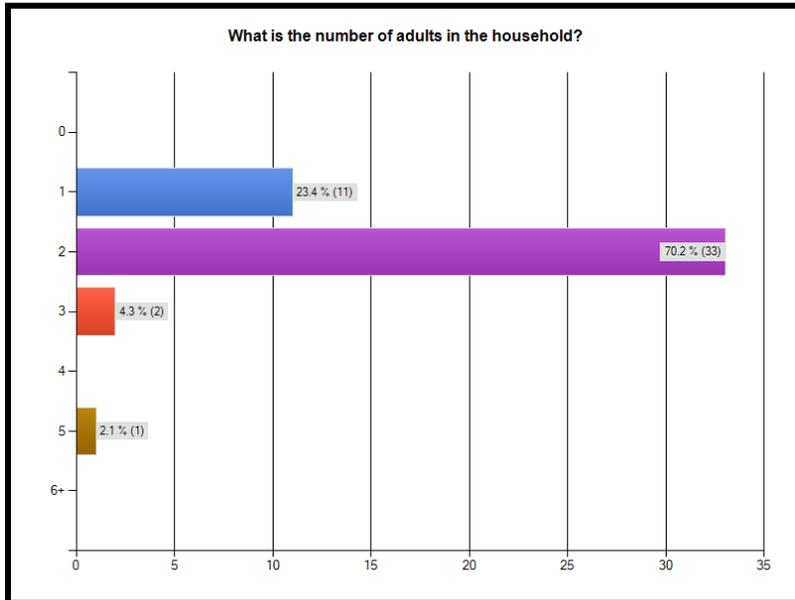
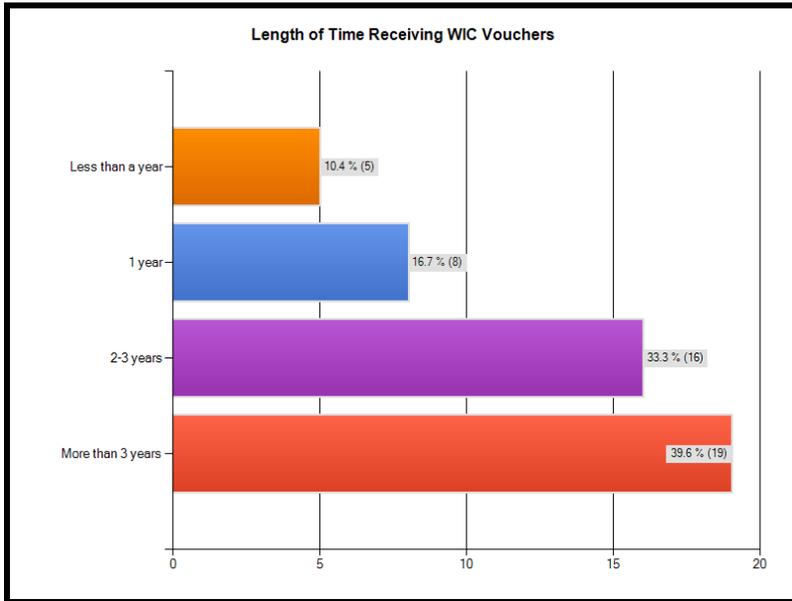
Southeast Ohio Regional Report
Athens, Marietta, South Point

Demographic Data

Survey Quick Facts

- **Race of Respondents:** Out of the total survey respondents (48) that took the survey 93.8% (45) of the respondents are white, 4.2% (2) are African American and 2.1% (1) are multi-racial.
- **Gender of Respondents:** Participants were asked to give their gender and females represent 94 % (45), while males represent 6% (3).
- **Age of Respondents:** Respondents from survey data from 18-34 years of age 64.6% (31), from 35-44 years of age 25.4 % (12), 6.3% (3) under the age of 18 and from 45-64 years of age 4.2% (2).
- **Employment Status of Respondents:** Out of the total respondents 66.7 % (3) do not work at all, 18.8 % (9) work Part-time and 14.6% (7) have Full-time employment.





Regional Findings:

The regional findings that follow are arranged by focus group question and represent the collective voice of participants in the Southeast region of Ohio. Focus group summary reports for each specific location are provided in an appendix at the end of this report.

1. Let's suppose I didn't know anything about the WIC program or using the WIC food vouchers. What would you explain to me are the major benefits of the program and why it exists?

a. Participants were well able to articulate the rationale for the program and the direct benefits garnered from participation in WIC.

- The most cited benefits to participants and their children were access to healthy and nutritious food as well as cost savings from the financial assistance.
- The most cited reason for the existence of the WIC program was the education provided to help mothers make healthy choices as well as the direct care provided to mothers and children.

2. What items from the WIC food program are most popular to you/your child? Which items are not as appealing for you to purchase under the program?

a. The most popular items:

- Milk , fruits, vegetables, cereal, formula and eggs

b. The least popular items:

- Dried beans/peas

3. For those of you who were on the WIC program or were familiar with it prior to the 2009 changes to the food items you can purchase, how would you describe the current food packages i.e. Is it an improvement, not as good, or better?

a. Most participants were on the program or familiar with WIC food packages prior to 2009.

- Participants cited the addition of fruits and vegetables along with the variety of the new food packages as the major improvements to the program.
- Participants cited the elimination of cheese as the major downfall with the current WIC food packages.

b. Items for inclusion into the food packages:

- Yogurt was by far the most requested food item, along with additional sources of healthy protein, and more fruits and vegetables.

c. Specific varieties or flavors participants would like to see added to the WIC food packages:

- Cereals: those with dried fruit or fruit flavors. (e.g. Honey Nut Cheerios, Special K, Raisin Bran)
Most cited flavors were cinnamon, strawberry and blueberry.

d. Participants reported they are currently purchasing other items with SNAP, cash, through food pantries, or going without.

e. Most all participants reported having difficulty finding the foods where they shop. The major issues cited:

- Difficulty locating WIC-approved items in the store
- Lack of availability of WIC items in general and inadequate stock of WIC items carried at the store level (breads in particular)
- Many participants cited an overall lack of education and training on WIC at the store level as the major difficulty in the WIC food purchase process. This situation manifests itself in several consistent ways - participants being denied purchase of WIC-approved items, along with inconsistency and added levels of bureaucracy during the checkout process.

4. How would you describe the amount of food that WIC provides on a monthly basis considering that it is a supplemental program not designed to provide your total food needs (adequate, too much)? If too much, which foods?

a. A majority felt the amount of food provided was not adequate.

- The majority considered the amount of fruits, vegetables and milk provided were not adequate.
- The amount of cereal and baby food was reported by some groups as being too much.
- Southeast Ohio was the only region in the state that did not report the quantity of peanut butter as being too much.

5. One of the trends we have observed is that the number of fruit and vegetable vouchers being used by WIC participants is low. Explain to me why you think this is the case?

a. Participants were surprised to learn that the FVV's redemption were low across the state. Ideas for the low redemption rates:

- The selection process – a need to weigh/compute price for fresh fruits and vegetables, along with the time involved in the shopping process
- The purchase process – a lack of convenience in using the vouchers

b. Participants reported that they purchase fruits and vegetables with cash, SNAP, and with WIC farmer's market vouchers.

c. Roughly three-quarters the group found the FVV's hard to use. Among those who did, the reasons cited:

- The selection process: the weighing and math required as well as the time involved in the selection process.
- The checkout process: lack of store/cashier education and training along with the checkout time.

d. A majority of the participant found the "fruit and vegetable chart" to be a beneficial aide to the shopping process. There were some who were clearly ambivalent about the chart. Many participants like the idea of having the chart available for use in store.

6. For those of you who might be using food stamps/SNAP do you find that program easier to use than WIC? In what ways?

a. Nearly all participants found SNAP easier to use than WIC. Reasons cited included:

- Convenience and ease – the SNAP EBT card is easier to use than WIC vouchers because the aspect at check out is efficient and eliminates the requirement of multiple/separate transactions. Items can be purchased as needed instead of by the quantity requirements on WIC vouchers.
- Any edible food is allowable

b. Those participants who receive other benefits as well as WIC reported they purchase WIC eligible items predominantly with cash, and food stamps.

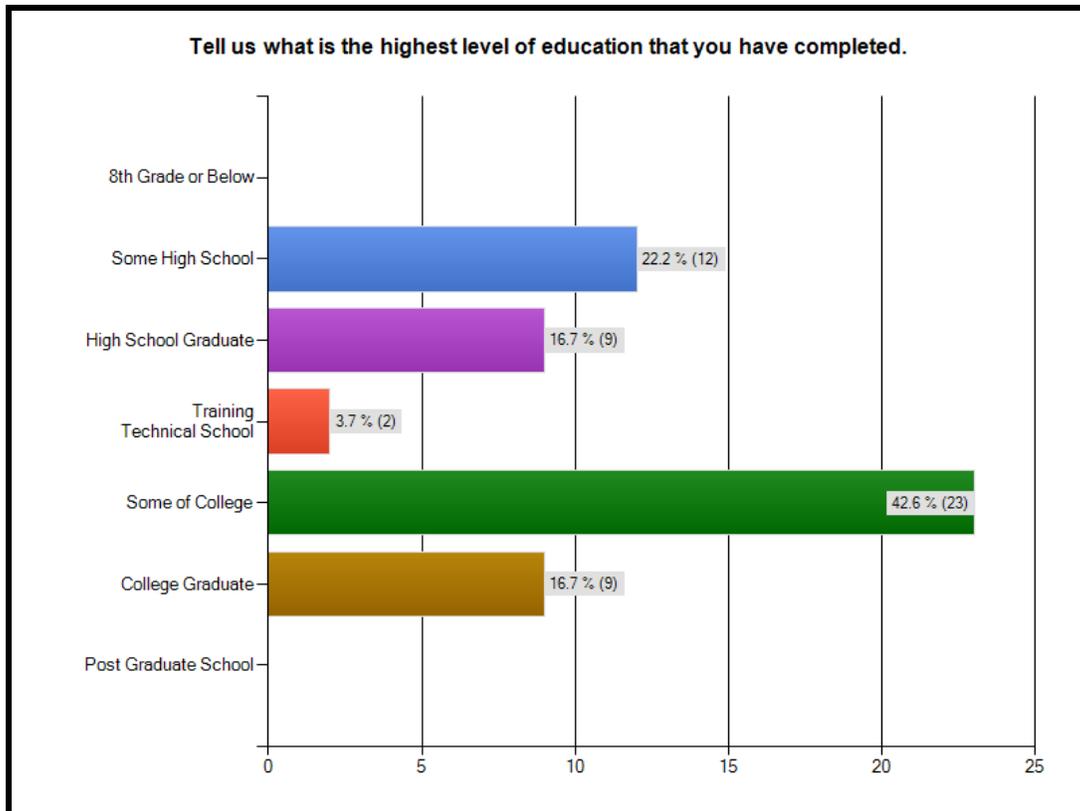
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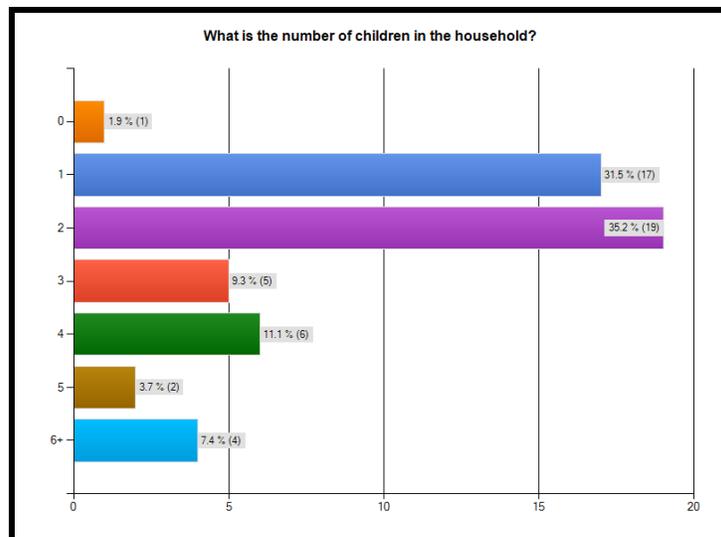
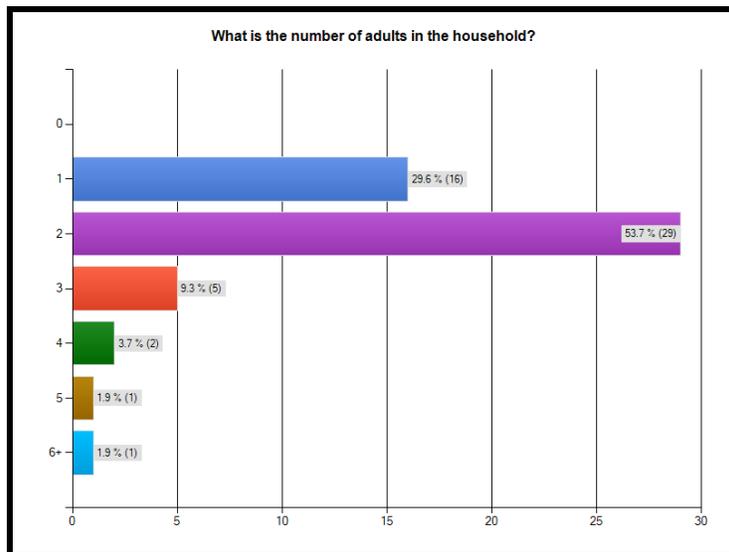
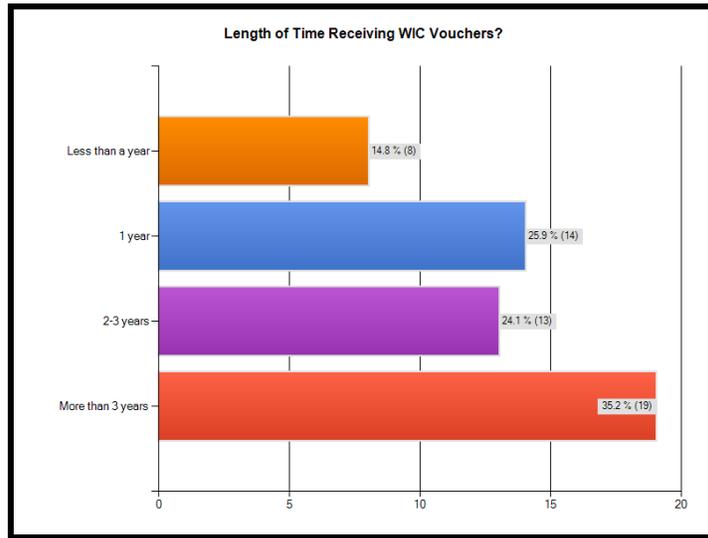
Southwest Ohio Regional Report
Cincinnati, Dayton and Hillsboro

Demographic Data

Survey Quick Facts

- **Race of Respondents:** Out of the total survey respondents (54) that took the survey 61.1% (33) of the respondents are white, 35.2% (19) are African American and 3.7 % (2) are multi-racial.
- **Gender of Respondents:** Participants were asked to give their gender and females represent 88.9 % (48), while males represent 11.1% (6).
- **Age of Respondents:** Respondents from survey data from 18-34 years of age 74.1% (40), from 35-44 years of age 20.4 % (11) and from 45-64 years of age 5.6% (3).
- **Employment Status of Respondents:** Out of the total respondents 63 % (34) do not work at all, 20.4 % (11) work Part-time and 16.7% (9) have Full-time employment.





Regional Findings:

The regional findings that follow are arranged by focus group question and represent the collective voice of participants in the Southwest region of Ohio. Focus group summary reports for each specific location are provided in an appendix at the end of this report.

1. Let's suppose I didn't know anything about the WIC program or using the WIC food vouchers. What would you explain to me are the major benefits of the program and why it exists?

a. Participants were well able to articulate the rationale for the program and the direct benefits garnered from participation in WIC.

- The most cited benefits to participants and their children were provides financial help and healthier eating habits for people who are in need of those essential things.
- The most cited reason for the existence of the WIC program was that it educates and helps mothers attain the necessary resources for healthy eating and nurturing habits for themselves and their child. Education topics ranged from nutrition and breastfeeding to medical.

2. What items from the WIC food program are most popular to you/your child? Which items are not as appealing for you to purchase under the program?

a. The most popular items:

- Milk, cereal, fruits, vegetables, and whole grain products

b. The least popular items:

- Dry Beans

3. For those of you who were on the WIC program or were familiar with it prior to the 2009 changes to the food items you can purchase, how would you describe the current food packages i.e. Is it an improvement, not as good, or better?

a. Most were on the program or familiar with WIC food packages prior to 2009.

There was a majority consensus that the program now is an overall improvement.

- Participants cited that the program now offers a variety of foods that are very tasteful and still nutritious.
- Participants stated that they wished cheese was still available in the Food Packages.

b. Items for inclusion into the food packages:

- Dairy products which the majority stated were cheese and yogurt. Many stated that they would like to have other options for protein.

c. Specific varieties or flavors participants would like to see added to the WIC food packages:

- Cereals: those with dried fruit and/or nuts (e.g. Honey Nut Cheerios, General Mills Brand.)
- Meats: chicken, fish, turkey, etc.

d. Participants reported that they currently purchase those other items with SNAP, cash, or manufacturer coupons.

e. Most all reported having difficulty finding the foods where they shop. The two stores that many participants in this region named were the Kroger and Wal-Mart locations. The major issues cited:

- WIC-approved signage would greatly assist in locating items in the store.
- Lack of availability of WIC items in general and inadequate stock of WIC items carried at the store level e.g. bread in particular, along with specialty milks.
- Some WIC items are specified by the ounce amounts and all coupons that WIC participants receive do not cover what the store usually carries. e.g. WIC approves bread for 16 ounces and most breads aren't 16 ounces in weight so WIC participants are feeling cheated because they have to settle for bread that is the lesser amount (for example 12 ounces in weight) with ounces still out there remaining that are not able to be used because of the ounces restrictive. Since you cannot combine vouchers for this reason, it is suggested to re-do the calculation of the breads that you can purchase.
- WIC aisles would be very helpful to assist in locating and store traffic
- An overall lack of education and training on WIC at the store level was reported as the major difficulty in the food purchase process. This situation manifests itself in several consistent ways - participants being denied purchase of WIC-approved items, along with inconsistency and added levels of bureaucracy during the checkout process.

4. How would you describe the amount of food that WIC provides on a monthly basis considering that it is a supplemental program not designed to provide your total food needs (adequate, too much)? If too much, which foods?

a. A majority felt the amount of food provided was adequate.

- Some expressed that they did not receive enough juice, fruit, vegetables and that the portions are not enough for children over 1 year old.
- A Few expressed that they received too much peanut butter, beans, and milk for pregnant women.

5. One of the trends we have observed is that the number of fruit and vegetable vouchers being used by WIC participants is low. Explain to me why you think this is the case?

a. Participants had been shocked to hear that the redemption of the FVV's were low across the state. Ideas for the low redemption rates:

- The education process – participants feel that many WIC participants that they know are not educated on the different types of fruits that can be purchased e.g. frozen, canned, fresh.
- The purchase process – many stores are frustrating to go to because store personnel are not educated and/or patient enough to know what items are WIC approved.
- The convenience- many people are using cash and/or food stamps to purchase these items simply because they are being held too long to get a bag of apples, when they can just swipe an Ohio-Directions card.

b. Most participants reported that they purchase fruits and vegetables with cash and SNAP.

c. The majority did not find the FVV's hard to use.

d. Probably half of the participants in this area felt that the “fruit and vegetable charts” would be helpful to the people who may be having difficulty computing the amounts for fruits and vegetables. The other half felt as though this would not be of benefit. They expressed that if people are forgetting to use their vouchers, which are looked at as money, then the charts will just be more junk in their pocket books.

6. For those of you who might be using food stamps/SNAP do you find that program easier to use than WIC? In what ways?

a. There was a unanimous decision that the use of SNAP was much easier than that of WIC:

- Convenience and ease – the SNAP EBT card is easier to use than WIC vouchers and SNAP food items are less restrictive. Participants even expressed the stigma that some people may not enjoy being tagged by and stated that the new use of the SNAP EBT card gives some people less anxiety when checking out foods. But, the most important aspect that was reiterated was the time they'll save using the SNAP EBT card versus WIC food vouchers.