

Addressing food insecurity with non-market solutions

Sam Bliss, Ph.D.

Testimony to House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry

January 19, 2024



The University of Vermont

1. Food security

- a. 2 in 5 Vermonters experienced food insecurity between spring 2021 and 2022

2. Non-market solutions

- a. Non-market food is food that's not for sale
- b. Vermonters report getting 14% of their food via non-market means
- c. At least 78% of Vermonters acquire some food via non-market means
- d. Gardening, hunting, fishing, and foraging contribute to food security
- e. Distributing food as a gift produces co-benefits that selling it does not

3. Policies and programs for non-market food

- a. Vermonters Feeding Vermonters
- b. Vermont Everyone Eats

2 in 5 people in Vermont

are experiencing hunger.



hungerfreevt 5d

January is

#NationalPovertyinAmericaAwarenessMonth, and the most recent Census data shows the largest-ever one-year increase in poverty levels. It's clear that affording food is becoming much harder, as so many of our neighbors in Vermont are experiencing firsthand.

Right now, 2 in 5 people in Vermont are experiencing hunger. Hunger Free Vermont is here to help.

There are many programs available to help you bridge the gap. From 3SquaresVT to Meals on Wheels to WIC, there are food resources available to you.



17 likes

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- Emily Belarmino- Assistant Professor
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- Janica Anderzen- Postdoctoral Fellow
- Zach Kunicki- Statistical consultant
- Students:
 - Maegan Perrault, Kayla Parsons





A 2022 Assessment of Food Security and Health Outcomes during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Emily Belarmino^{1,2}, Sam Bliss^{1,2},
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Figure 1. Prevalence of food insecurity in the last 12 months and in the last 30 days as measured by the USDA six-item household food security survey module

U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form
Economic Research Service, USDA
September 2012

The first statement is, “The food that (I/we) bought just didn’t last, and (I/we) didn’t have money to get more.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months?

- Often true
- Sometimes true
- Never true
- DK or Refused

HH4. “(I/we) couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months?

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AD2. In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?

- Yes
- No
- DK

AD3. In the last 12 months, were you every hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

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2 in 5 people in Vermont

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Scientific rigor doesn't have the same ring:

“2 in 5 Vermont web survey respondents experienced household food insecurity between spring 2021 and spring 2022.”

But that's still *a lot* of food-insecure folks.

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NON-MARKET FOOD PRACTICES DO THINGS MARKETS CANNOT:
WHY VERMONTERS PRODUCE AND DISTRIBUTE FOOD THAT IS NOT FOR SALE

A Dissertation Presented

by

Sam Bliss

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Specializing in Natural Resources

January, 2024

Defense Date: September 8, 2023
Dissertation Examination Committee:

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V. Ernesto Méndez, Ph.D., Chairperson
Teresa M. Mares, Ph.D.
Rachelle K. Gould, Ph.D.
Daniel Tobin, Ph.D.
Holger Hoock, DPhil, Dean of the Graduate College

Non-market food practices

Markets = buying and selling

Market exchange is trading money for food

Markets for food ...

... direct food toward money, not need

... force actors to prioritize financial viability

Non-market food practices

Production that is not for sale

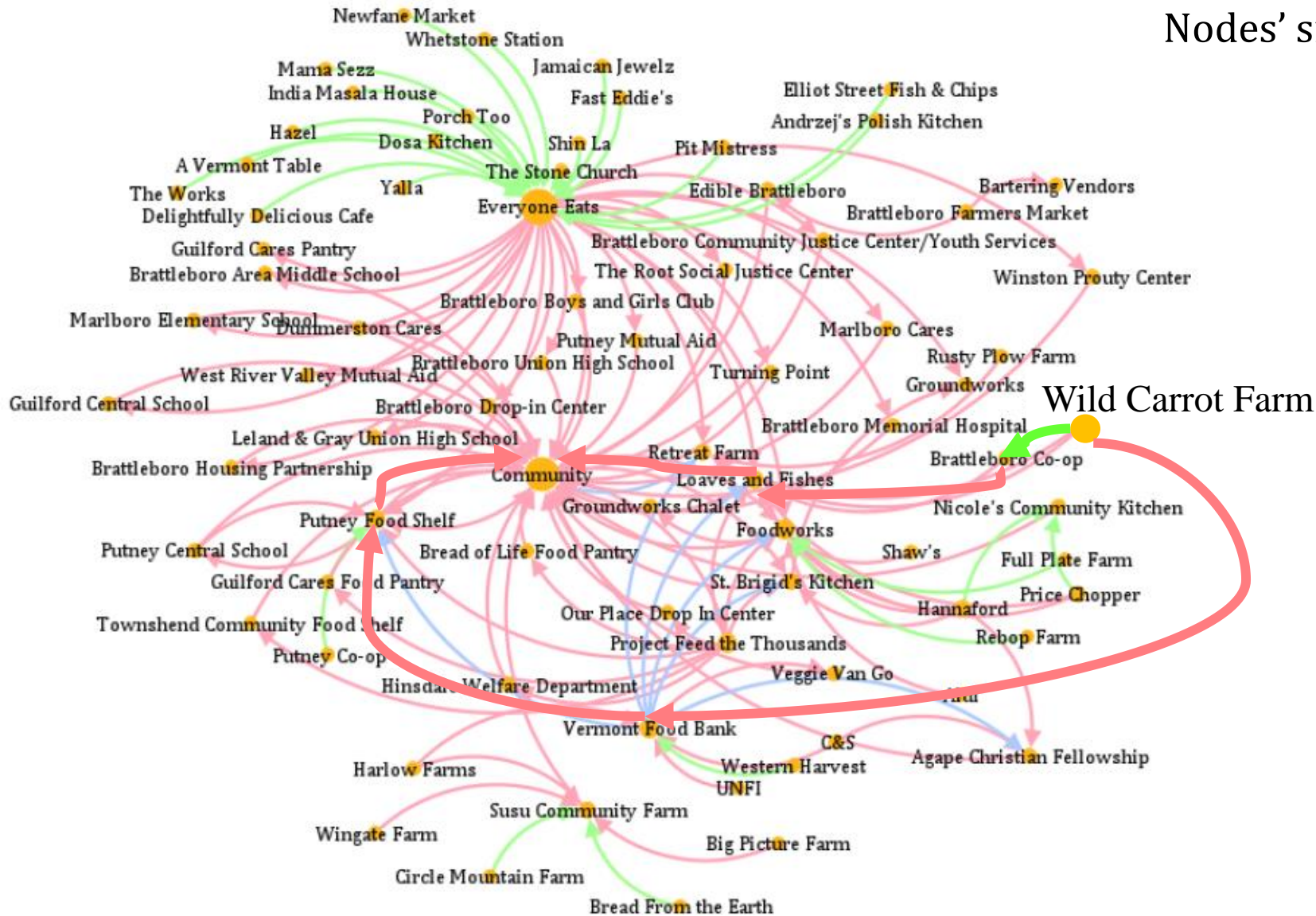
like gardening, fishing, foraging, hunting, trapping

Transfers without buying and selling

like gifts, barter, food pantries, soup kitchens

Non-market food flows in Brattleboro area.
Each node is a farm, business, organization, etc.
Each arrow, or edge, is *food* moving.
Nodes' size corresponds to # of connections.

→ Market sales
→ Non-market transfers
→ Both



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- b. **Vermonters report getting 14% of their food via non-market means**
- c. At least 78% of Vermonters acquire some food via non-market means
- d. Gardening, hunting, fishing, and foraging contribute to food security
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3. Policies and programs for non-market food

- a. Vermonters Feeding Vermonters
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In Vermont, non-market food practices are mostly ignored

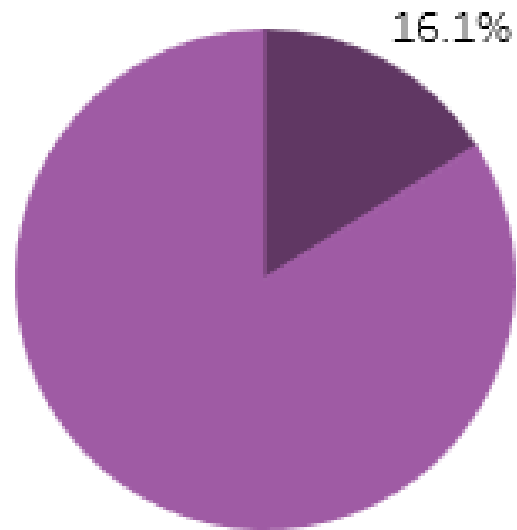
Academia: “food systems” = commercial food systems

Government: Agency of Agriculture, Food and **Markets**

Total Local Food Purchases

■ Non-Local Food Purchases ■ Local Food Purchases

2020



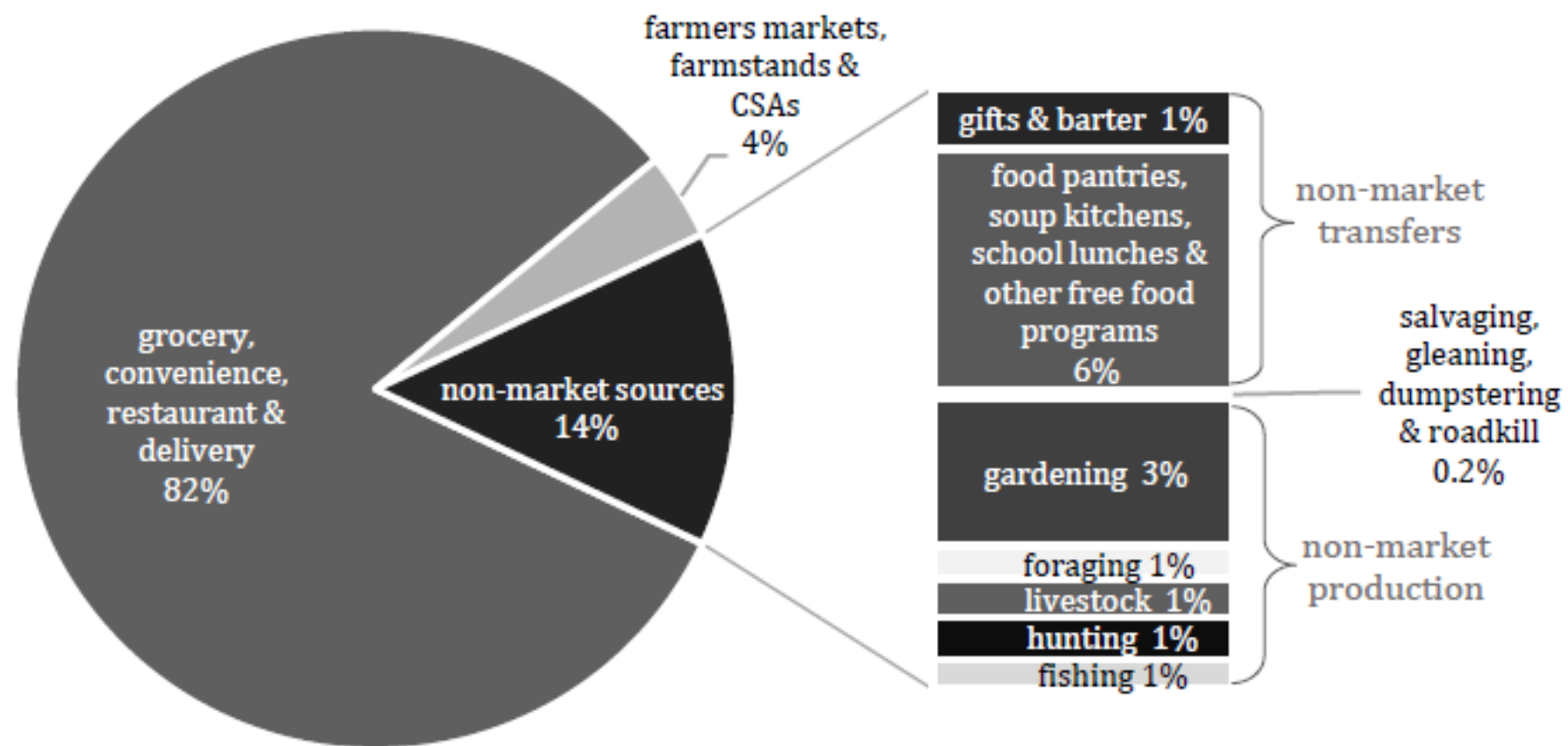


Figure 3.5 Share of Vermonters' food consumption from different market and non-market sources

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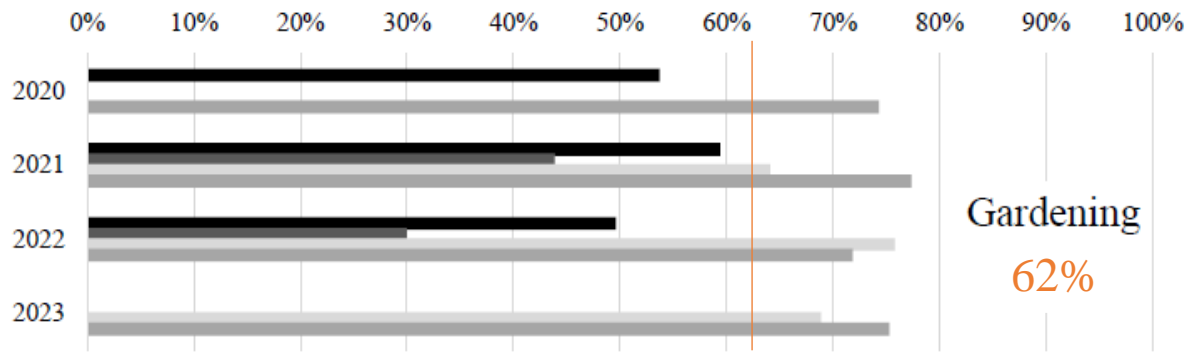


Figure 3.1 Share of Vermonters whose households engaged in non-market food acquisition, 2020–2023

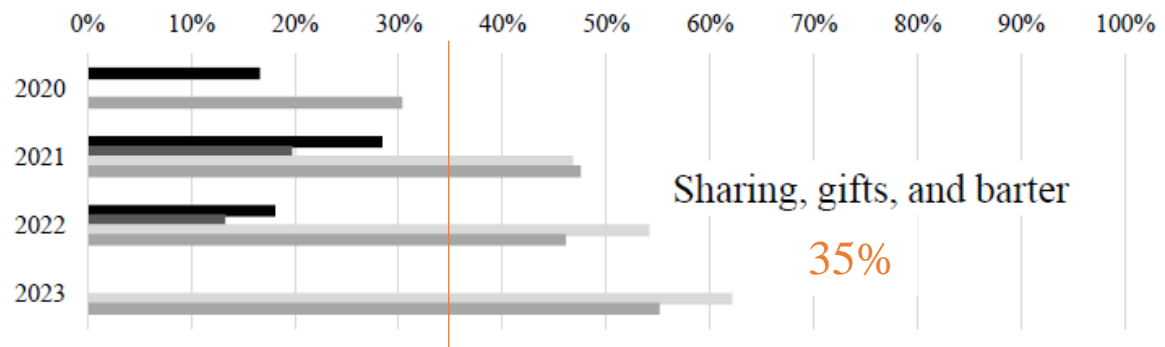


Figure 3.1 (cont.) Share of Vermonters whose households engaged in non-market food acquisition

**Non-market Food
Production**



**Food
Security**

Production of food that is not for sale
gardening, fishing, foraging, hunting...

a.k.a. home & wild food procurement

Pillars of food security:

Availability
Access
Stability
Utilization
Agency
Sustainability

The 5 As of food security:

Availability
Access
Adequacy
Acceptability
Agency

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26 interviews with...

- Game wardens
- Avid hunters and foragers
- Rural healthcare practitioners
- Gardening educators
- State deer and fish biologists
- Hardcore homesteaders

...

Table 5.2 Pathways through which non-market food production can enhance food security

Dimension	Non-market food production can...	Example quote
Availability	...make additional food available.	"Apples ... now just grow in a feral state and just carpet the place." -Anthony
	...make substantial dietary contributions.	"I don't think I've eaten red meat that didn't come from venison that I or my family harvested in 10 years." -Nate
Access	...provide foods that are expensive to purchase.	"There's not many times in my lifetime that I've ever been to the grocery store to buy meat. ... Which is nice because meat is super expensive." -Cooper
Adequacy	...provide protein, vitamins, and minerals.	"The meat itself is highly nutritious. ... It's a good protein source." -Agnes
	...provide foods perceived safer than purchased equivalents.	"You're less likely to be ingesting pesticides that were used in the food production process." -Nancy
Acceptability	...provide foods people prefer.	"If you want something particular, you will have to raise it yourself ... because [you] might not get it at the grocery store, it just might not be there. " -Carl
	...provide culturally important foods.	"Types of tomatoes that people don't have access to in the market. The garden can play a really important role in access to some culturally specific crops." -Tania
	...provide food that aligns with people's values.	"A lot of people get into hunting for food to know where their food came from, and know that it's healthy, free range, whatever terms you want to use. " -Nate
	...provide foods that taste better than purchased equivalents	"This is a chicken we buy at the store; this is a chicken we grow on our own. There's a difference." -Paul
Agency	... give people control over their food sources.	"We know where our food comes from, which is really nice. I don't have to worry about what kind of preservatives have been put in it." -Jill
	... generate feelings of self-efficacy in one's food provisioning.	"It feels good to have a meal that you completely foraged, grew, hunted, fished for. ... You're a provider. Yeah, you did it with your own skill." -Eli
Stability	...provide food through periods of low access to market food.	"Recessions ... don't affect the people around here as much because ... they still grow their own food, they hunt, and they have chickens." -Patty
	...provide food through periods of low availability of market food.	"We both had gotten deer the year before. ... My freezer was full. ... For us there was just never worry about what happens if the store is out of hamburger." -Jill
	...provide food year-round.	"I'm leaning toward storage crops. ... Food insecurity in the wintertime is not a good feeling." -Judith
Sustainability	...provide food in low-impact ways.	"[Foragers] are very, very conscientious of how much you can safely take to not be destroying the ecosystem, and they go out of their way to be responsible." -Ryan
	... generate environmental values.	"I think it helps people to see themselves ... within a larger ecosystem. ... They in turn, inherently, probably would be more open to making sure that that community thrives." -Shawn

Food self-provisioning generates **long-run, skills-based, resilient food security**

“The ability to forage, even if it's for something like the false Solomon's seal berries—yeah, not that tasty but edible ... but you could in a pinch, if there's a massive power outage and every grocery store in town has to throw out all their food—**I'm not going to starve. And neither are the people I care about.**” -Ryer

“My mom to this day, she's 87, she's canning my tomatoes, 100+ jars of tomatoes. 50 jars of pickles. 200 jars of jams and jellies. Frozen jams and jellies. ... Her freezer is just full of vegetables. **It is a security thing. It gives you that peace of mind that if anything gets tight we're not gonna starve.**” -Jody

“People we talk to in the garden have this sense of, let's get this, **let's get into doing this. Because someday we might need it.**” -Patty

“Those are going to be the skills I think that are really needed, and really called upon in my apocalyptic vision of the future.” -Sally

Non-market food practices

Production that is not for sale

like gardening, fishing, foraging, hunting, scavenging

Transfers without buying and selling

like sharing, gifts, **food banks, soup kitchens**

25 interviews with...

- Church soup kitchen volunteers
- Food shelf workers
- Mutual aid organizers
- Gleaning coordinators
- and the like....

...in Greater Brattleboro

Non-market food distribution

strengthens relationships,

fosters resilience,

puts edible-but-not-sellable food to use,

aligns with an alternative, non-market vision for a
desirable food future, and

is magical,

according to our interviewees.

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Vermonters Feeding Vermonters

Farmers get paid (at locked-in price and quantity),
food still distributed for free.



Recipients get restaurant meals for free, do not have to go to a soup kitchen.

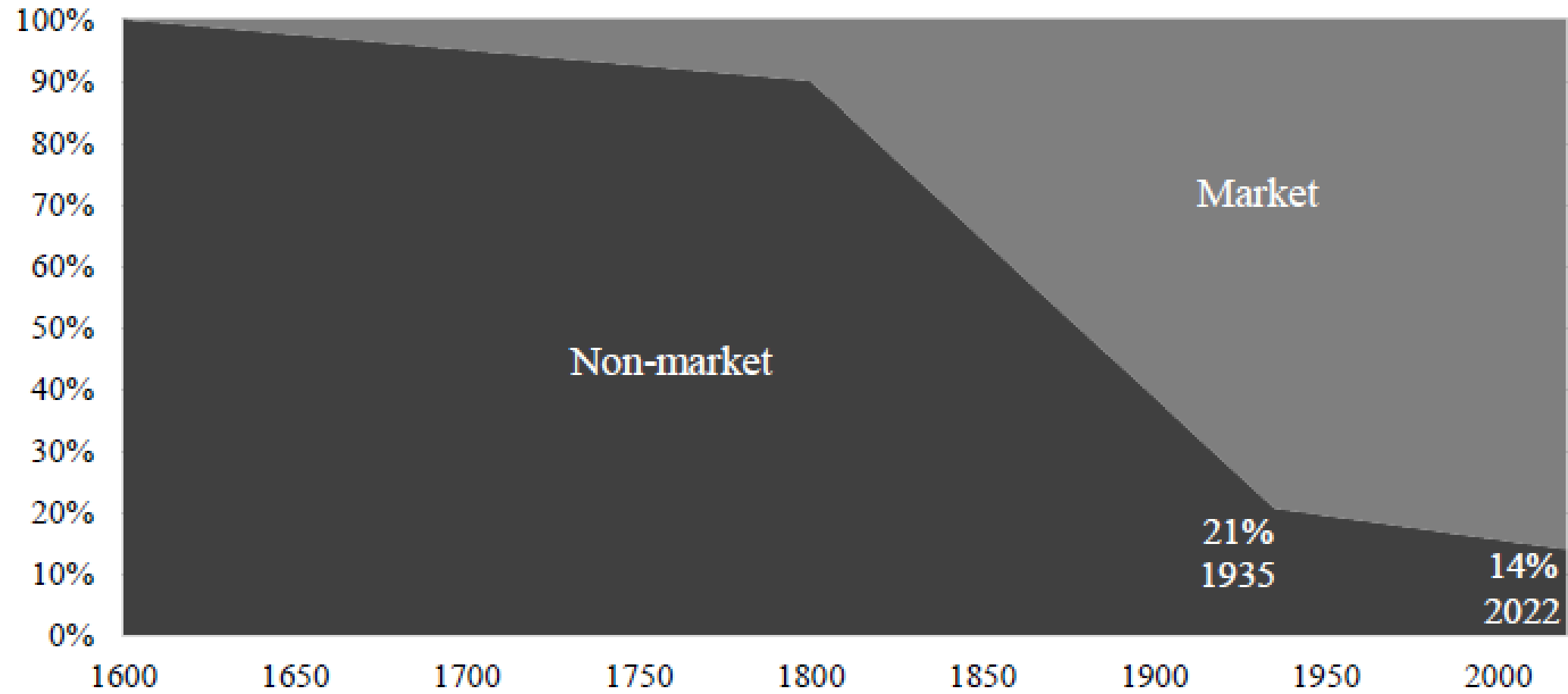


Figure 7.1 Share of Vermonters' food consumption from market and non-market sources, 1600–2022

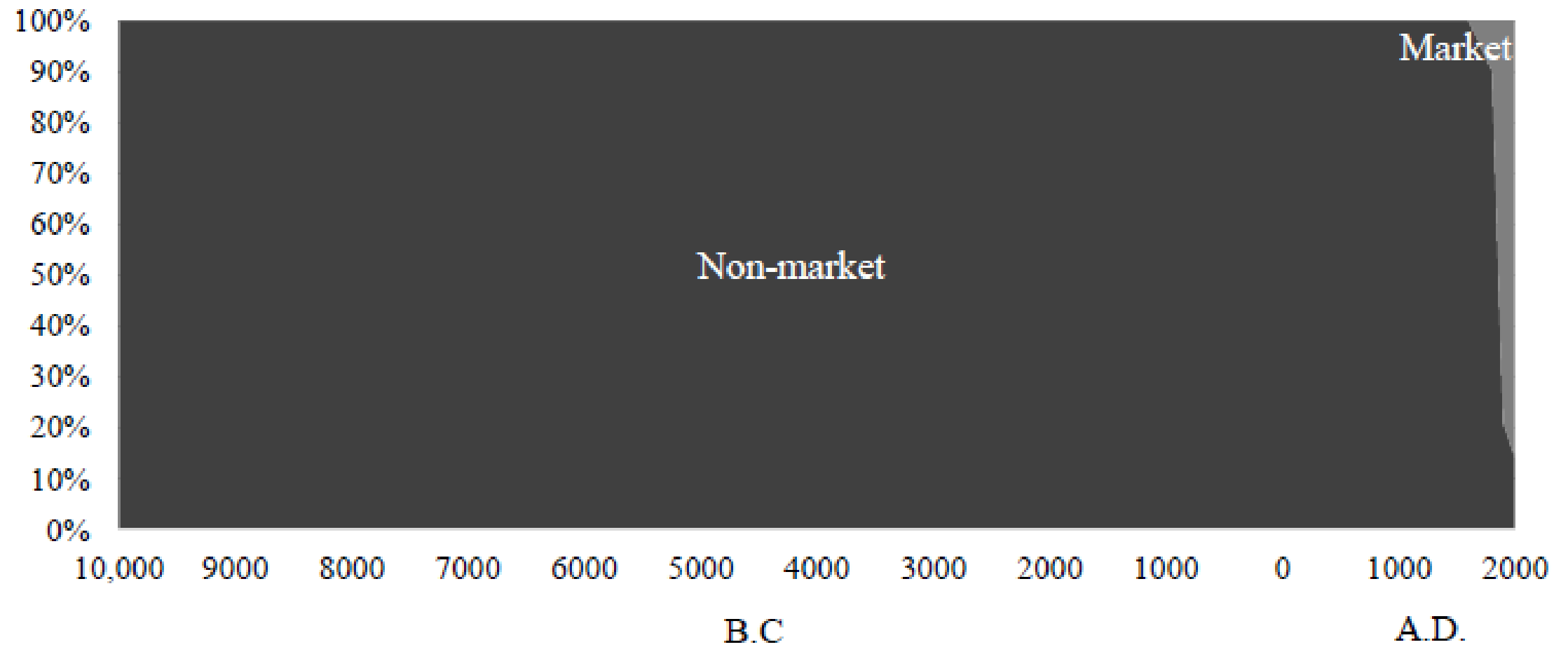


Figure 7.2 Share of Vermonters' food from market and non-market sources, 10,000 B.C.–2022 A.D.

thank you!



NFACT

National Food Access and COVID Research Team

Find our team's policy briefs at <https://www.nfactresearch.org/vermont-policy-briefs>

Work referenced:

Bliss, Sam, Alexandra Bramsen, Raven Graziano, Ava Hill, Saharay Perez Sahagun, and Flora Krivak-Tetley. 2023. "Non-Market Distribution Serves Society in Ways Markets Cannot: A Tentative Defense of Food Charity from Small-Town New England." *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 13 (1): 281–312. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2023.131.016>.

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Non-market food practices do things markets cannot: Why Vermonters produce and distribute food that is not for sale

Sam Bliss

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Specializing in Natural Resources

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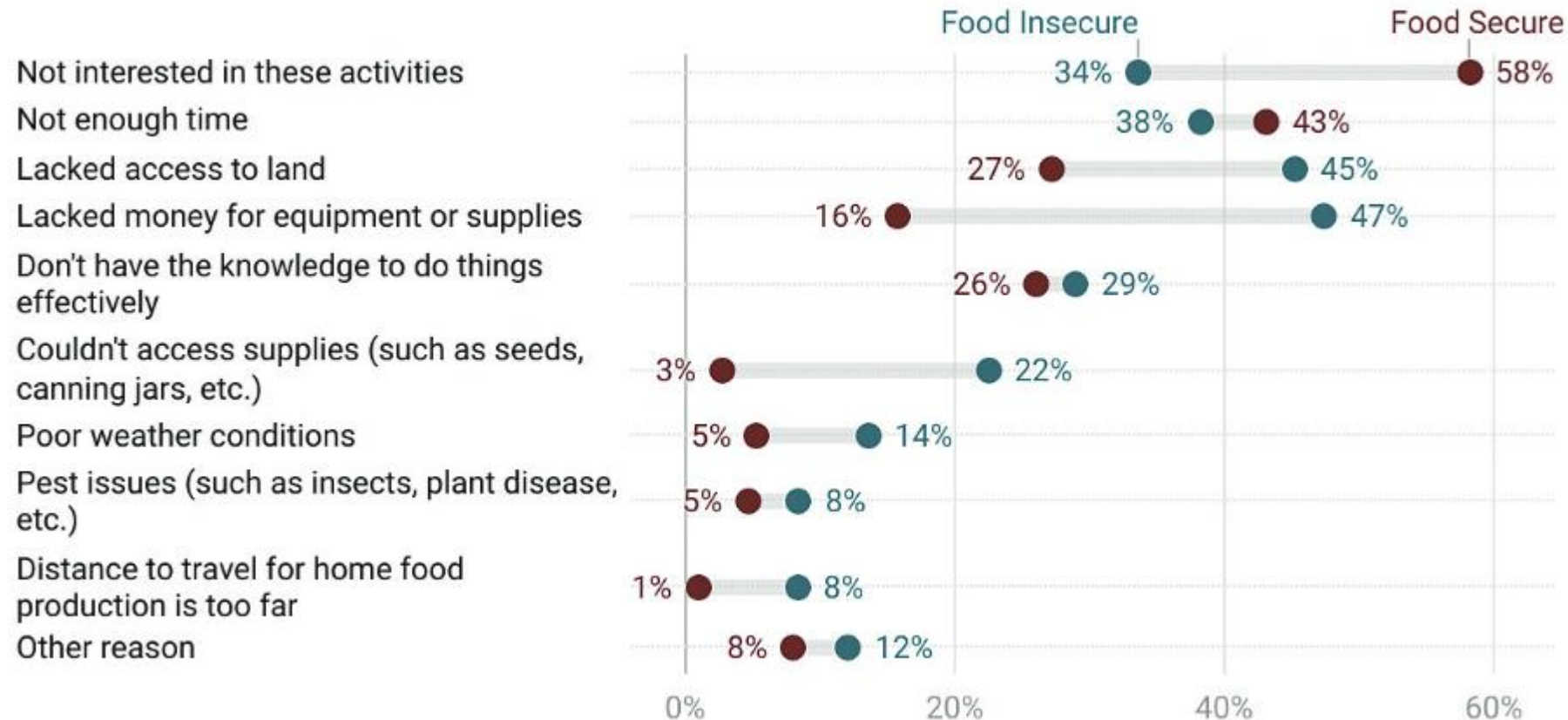
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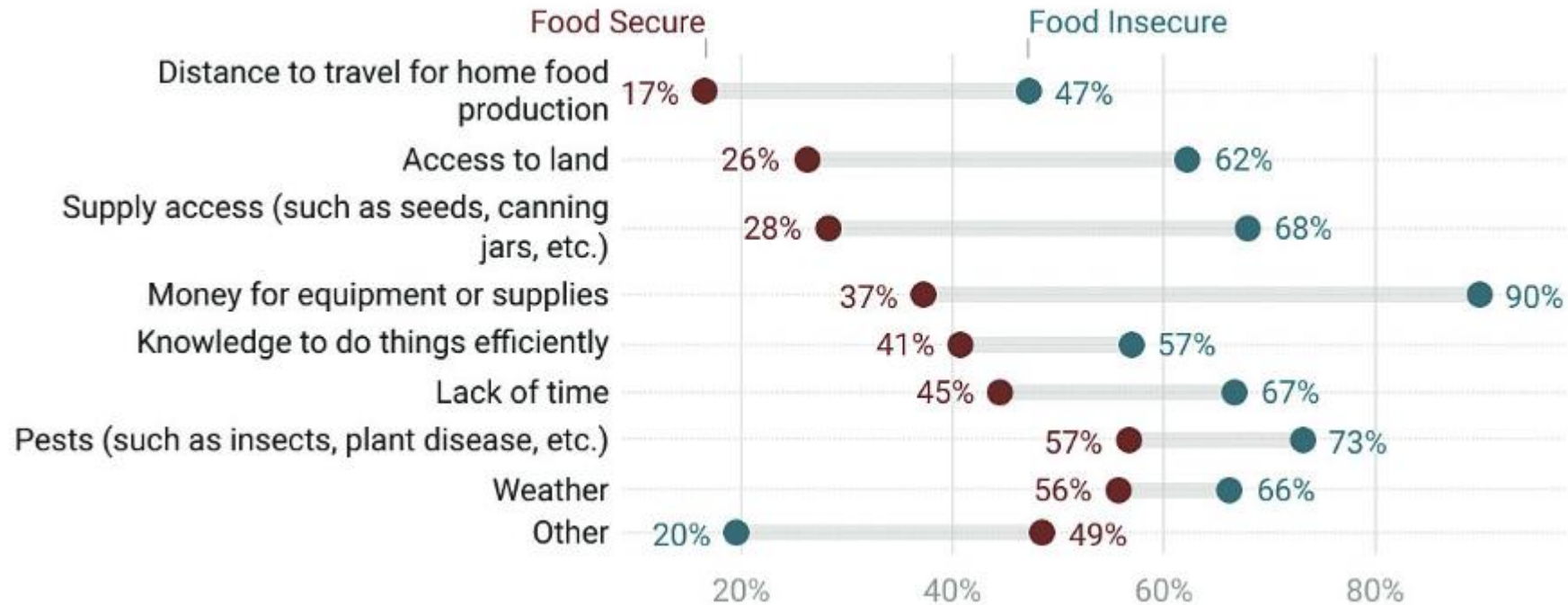
Holger Hoock, DPhil, Dean of the Graduate College

Policy for overcoming barriers?



Reasons for not engaging in home & wild food procurement,
by food security status

Policy for overcoming barriers?



Difficulties faced by those who did engage in home & wild food procurement, by food security status