

From welfare state to caring society

Investigating Food Security Issues and Responses

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**Master Organic Agriculture
Consumer and Market**

**Student: Jana Dietershagen
900902-183-090**

**Supervisor: Dr. Henk Oostindie
Examiner: Prof. Dr. Han Wiskerke**

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Content

Abbreviations & Acronyms	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Dankwoord	ii
Abstract	iii
Abstract (dutch).....	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Literature review.....	6
1.1. Discussion around the work of the food bank	7
1.2. Behind the scenes: Insights from the work of food banks	8
1.3. Food poverty	9
Chapter 2: Theoretical framework	11
Concept of food security:	11
Chapter 3: Methodology	14
3.1. Method	14
3.2. Location and Units of Analysis.....	14
3.3. Data collection.....	14
3.4. Data analysis.....	15
3.5. Ethics	16
Chapter 4: Case study description: Food bank and Food Sharing	17
4.1. The food bank.....	17
4.1.1. History of food banks in the Netherlands	17
4.1.2. How a food bank operates	20
4.1.3. Developments of the food bank Nederveluwe from 2007 to 2015	22
4.1.4. Where does the food come from?	23
4.1.5. Food Safety and future plans	23
4.2. Food sharing	24
4.3. Actors.....	24
4.4. Various causes of food poverty in food aid users	26
Chapter 5: Perceptions of food bank users: Diverging opinions about contribution to household food security.....	28
5.1. Food access.....	29
5.2. Food availability.....	31

5.3. Food utilization.....	33
5.4. Communication difficulties and diverging opinions about the food bank.....	36
5.5. Summing up.....	38
Chapter 6. Perceptions of volunteers and social workers.....	40
6.1. Food access.....	41
6.2. Food availability.....	42
6.3. Food utilization.....	43
Chapter 7. Separation of food bank and food sharing initiative	44
Chapter 8: Conclusion and Discussion.....	48
References	52
Appendix	54

Abbreviations & Acronyms

FAO Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

UN United Nations

FLW Food Loss and Waste

USAID United States Agency for International Development

WFP World Food Program

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Dankwoord

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Abstract

Purpose: With the start of the European economic crisis in 2008, the risk of increased food insecurity and food poverty has become a widely discussed topic, mostly because of the doubts about the capacity of the food system to ensure the right to access and availability of food to people. In this context, the need of public involvement in the food sector has become imperative in order to correct its maladjustments. Food banks are a parade example of citizen driven involvement in food security. The present study aimed at looking at the real achievements regarding food security derived from food bank initiatives and to hear the voice of those making use of the food aid.

Methods: Interviews with volunteers, social workers and food bank recipients were conducted as minimum of 30 minutes in-depth interviews as well as 21 short interviews with a questionnaire. Policy documents, scientific articles and food bank related documents (yearly and other statistical reports) were analyzed.

Results: Job loss, divorce, health issues, unexpected children and difficulties with handling own economic situation and a few amount of money was the most prominent reasons of becoming client at the food bank. Alarmingly 67% of the interviewees stated that without the help of the food bank they couldn't buy enough food to feed themselves and/or their family. Food security can only prevail if access, availability and utilization of food are guaranteed. From a food bank users' perspective, the analysis and discussion showed that the achievements of food security in the food bank are only partly reached. The minority of the respondents were making use of all products, this is due to the fact that people are struggling with a) lack of proper storing facilities at home (as most of the products come frozen); b) lack of knowledge on and planning of cooking, as well as c) organizing household budget in a sustainable way.

Conclusion and Recommendation: Those results shall stimulate the debate around the role of the state and some possible improvements in the process of public food procurement in order to better match it with the needs of those that have economic problems. Included into the food security discussion should be the facts, that better advise and eventual training in coping with economic difficulties and improving food utilization is very important in order prevent or to make a step out of food poverty and ensure food security in an European setting.

Keywords: Food security, Food poverty, Food banks, Food Sharing, societal initiatives

Abstract (dutch)

Doel: Met de start van de Europese economische crisis in 2008, is het risico van toenemende voedselonzeekerheid en voedsel armoede uitgegroeid tot een veelbesproken onderwerp, vooral vanwege de twijfels over het vermogen van het voedselsysteem om voor het recht op toegang en de beschikbaarheid van voedsel voor mensen te zorgen. In deze context is een publieke betrokkenheid in de food sector noodzakelijk geworden om onjuiste afstelling te corrigeren. Voedsel banken zijn een parade voorbeeld van burger initiatieven bij voedselzekerheid. Deze studie is gericht om naar de werkelijke prestaties met betrekking tot de voedselveiligheid binnen voedselbank initiatieven te kijken en de stem van voedselhulp gebruikers te laten horen.

Methoden: Interviews met vrijwilligers, maatschappelijk werkers en voedselbank gebruikers zijn uitgevoerd in het kader van minimaal 30 minuten durende interviews, evenals 21 kortere interviews met een vragenlijst. Beleidsdocumenten, wetenschappelijke artikelen en voedselbank gerelateerde documenten (jaarlijks en andere statistische rapporten) zijn geanalyseerd.

Resultaten: Baan verlies, echtscheiding, gezondheidsproblemen, onverwachte kinderen en problemen met de eigen economische situatie zijn de meest prominente redenen om klant bij de voedselbank te worden. 67% van de ondervraagden verklaarde dat zonder de hulp van de voedselbank zouden ze niet genoeg voedsel kunnen kopen voor zichzelf en / of hun familie.. Voedselzekerheid kan alleen bestaan als toegang, beschikbaarheid en het juiste gebruik van voedsel zijn gegarandeerd. Vanuit het perspectief van een voedselbank gebruiker en de analyse bleek, dat voedselzekerheid in de voedselbank slechts ten dele wordt bereikt. De minderheid van de respondenten maakt gebruik van alle producten, dit is te wijten aan het feit dat mensen problemen hebben met a) ontbreken van een goede faciliteiten voor de opslag van voedsel in huis (omdat de meeste producten bevroren komen); b) het gebrek aan kennis over, en planning maken oor het koken, alsmede c) het organiseren van huishoudelijke begroting op een duurzame manier.

Conclusie en aanbeveling: Deze resultaten zullen het debat rond de rol van de staat en een aantal mogelijke verbeteringen in het proces van openbare aanbestedingen aan voedsel te stimuleren, om beter aan de behoeften van degenen die in voedselarmoede zijn te voldoen. Inbegrepen in de voedselzekerheids discussie zou het feit moeten zijn, dat beter advies en eventuele training in het omgaan met economische moeilijkheden en voedsel gebruik zeer belangrijk is om voedselarmoede te voorkomen of om een stap te maken naar meer voedselzekerheid in een Europese setting.

Trefwoorden: Voedselzekerheid, voedsel armoede, voedsel banken, food sharing, maatschappelijke initiatieven

Introduction

Problem statement

“Despite millennia of advances that have brought human civilization from the Stone Age to the present age, one of our greatest scourges – hunger- remains as entrenched a problem as it was in ancient times” (Peacock, 2012). As hunger prevails one of the most important unsolved problems – if not the most important one- almost one-third of food produced for human consumption – approximately 1.3 billion tons per year – is either lost or wasted globally (HLPE, 2014). The very extent of food losses and waste invites to consider them not as an accident but as an integral part of food systems and as a result of our behavior. Food losses and waste are consequences of the way food systems function, technically, culturally and economically (HLPE, 2014). While over the last decades food production has increased considerably, the amount of people being in poverty and undernourished stayed almost the same (See figure 1).

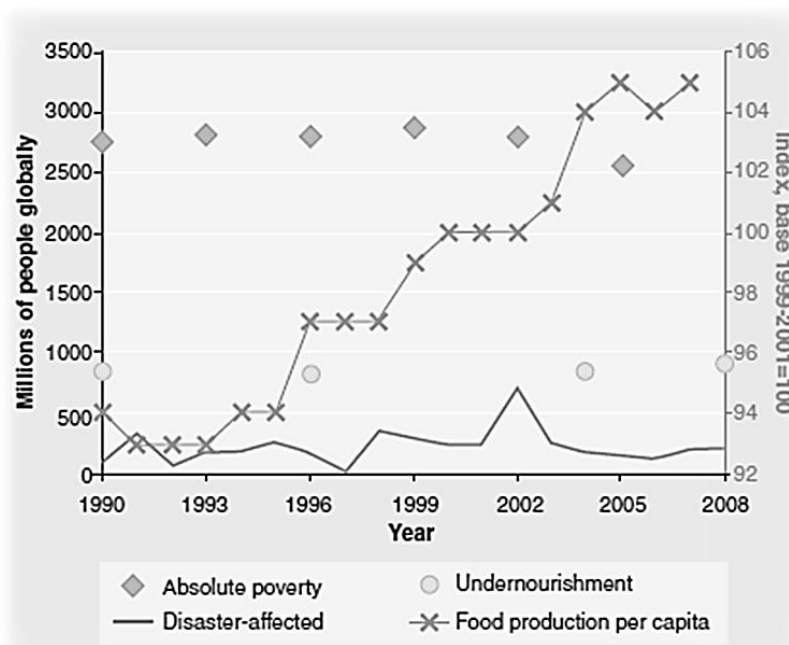


Figure 1: Food production per capita was highly increasing between 1990 and 2008, while absolute poverty (<2\$ per), and undernourishment changed minimal. Undernourishment is greater than those affected by disasters, but less than those living in absolute poverty. Food production series to be read against right-hand vertical axis; all other series against left-hand vertical axis. (Barrett,2010)

The literature research revealed that 5.2 million people in Europe (HLPE, 2014) and 85 000 individuals in the Netherlands (Neter et al., 2014) weekly depend on food aid. They receive food that is otherwise thrown away from supermarkets. In the EU up to 50% of edible and healthy food gets wasted in households, supermarkets, restaurants and along the food supply chain each year (Voedselbanken.nl, 2015) In The Netherlands 37.000 food packages are given through food aid to people in need, but 1.1 million are food insecure and live under the poverty line. Still every year 3 million tons of food is wasted in the Netherlands and only 0.3% of that goes to the food banks (Voedselbanken.nl, 2015).

The appearance of food banks is an indicator that in the first-world food poverty is prevalent and that the welfare state and the public safety net or income support programs have failed (Riches, 2002). That is why it is important to shed light on the issue in industrial countries.

Food security

Taking a step back and looking at one of the first definitions of food security made by the UN in 1975, food security was defined as the “availability at all times of adequate world supplies of basic food-stuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices” (Maxwell, 1996). Later the view on food security shifted away from a supply focus to an individual access- and active participation in society focus by the World Bank in 1986: “Food security is access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life” (Maxwell, 1996). While a definition of food insecurity goes even further to include food safety and sufficient nutrition: “Food insecurity can be defined as the lack of availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the lack of ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways” (Neter et al., 2014).

What most authors share about the definition of food security is, that they base it on three pillars: Availability, access and utilization. Only when all three occur, the population is considered to be food secure (Peacock, 2012). Peacock (2012) gives an example: “If a country has plenty of rice but it is under guarded storage and not distributed to those who need it, that population lacks of food security. [As well as in the case that] people have enough rice, but their diet lacks essential nutrients.” Additionally, the author states that food insecurity can range from occasional malnourishment to severe famine. “Food insecurity means that people not only need to be fed, but they also need the economic means to procure food over the long term for themselves and their families” (Peacock, 2012).

Recognizable is when doing literature research, there is much research done about food security in developing countries but limited research is done regarding food insecurity in high income countries, like some countries in Europe. Neter et al. (2014) which have done the only food aid study in the Netherlands, found out that a lower intake of fruit and vegetables among food insecure people is happening. The consequences in the long term may be health problems, which makes it also a public health issue.

According to the national foundation of food banks in the Netherlands (voedselbanken.nl), 400.000 children, 768.000 not retired and 87.000 elderly (above 65 years old) are living in poverty in The Netherlands. In total 190.000 households lived more than four years in poverty in 2013, almost half of those households have to fully rely on social assistance (Armoedesignalement, 2014).

Starting from these problems, the focus of the study lies on food aid, with a special focus on the work of food banks and food sharing initiatives. A case study in the region Neder Veluwe has been carried out.

Food waste

"All of us - farmers and fishers; food processors and supermarkets; local and national governments; individual consumers -- must make changes at every link of the human food chain to prevent food wastage from happening in the first place, and re-use or recycle it when we can't," said FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva (FAO, 2014). Food aid and food waste are closely interlinked, without the food that otherwise would be thrown away, food banks could not provide its recipients with a

weekly package. Food security is a motive to also reduce food waste: Reducing wastage can increase food security of people in need of food (Tielens & Candel, 2014).

Food aid

Nowadays production is increasing and supermarkets can provide fruits and vegetables all year round. Food can be produced cheaper and cheaper and there is more than enough available, even so much that a certain percentage is thrown away every day. Some agreements have been made between food aid organizations and supermarkets, so they can pick up the leftovers and give them to people in need. This is the basic principle of the way the food bank works.

Food poverty

The definition of poverty by the European Council in 1984 says that: “The Poor shall be taken to mean persons, families and groups of persons whose resources (material, cultural, social) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the Member State in which they live” (Dowler, 1997). People living in food poverty are often excluded from the minimum acceptable way of life, because they are not able to buy sufficient food for the month, for who food shopping a stressful and humiliating experience is and who may not provide a proper packed lunch for their children to bring to school. Food represents who we are, what we are worth and how we socially exchange. Food also contributes significantly to our health and mental and physical well-being (Dowler, 1998).

Research

Food security, Food waste, Food aid and Food poverty are all concepts which are closely interlinked with each other. In this research I am going to study those concepts; the emphasis lies on food security; by investigating two initiatives: *Food Bank* and *Food Sharing*. I will focus mainly on the perceptions of and interactions between the people that are involved with these initiatives, either by being a recipient, volunteer or social worker.

Structure

First, the research aim and research questions will be presented. Second, a literature review aims to shed light on the current discussion on food security from the production and distribution side, to present the reader the different viewpoints and opinions about the topic. It is important to make the discussion on food security clear in order for the reader to know where the discussion around food aid can be placed. Additionally it will be zoomed in to the discussion around food poverty and food aid, especially food banks in relation to the current food security debate. In the following chapters, the conceptual framework, the research methodology (with details about location and study population) will be shown. Lastly, hypothesis, problems, data analysis and ethics are described.

My research is mainly intended for food policy makers and everyone else that is interested in the current debate around food security and in more detail on issues regarding the role of *food aid* and *food sharing* and the people (volunteers and recipients) that are part of this institution.

Research aim

"I mean it looks nice on paper... how it physically touches people's lives, they don't understand, they don't even get into communities to talk to somebody... statistically speaking it's perfect, but not physically and emotionally... what they are doing to people" (Statement from a food bank recipient, Perry et al. 2014)

The statement of a food bank user from a study conducted by Perry et al. (2014) is about what this person thinks about how policies working in 'reality' from a food aid user perspective. In order to make efficient policies, opinions of those directly affected should be taken into account. Therefore, the goal of the research is to gain a better understanding of people dealing with problems of food insecurity. Further, I want to contribute to the understanding of the work and functioning of food banks and food sharing initiatives regarding the help of food aid users, by analyzing the perceptions of food aid users and providers and their characteristics. Moreover the aim is to gain insight into a possible overlap between the food bank and the food sharing initiative.

Research questions

General research question:

How are the food bank and the food sharing initiatives being perceived by users and providers regarding food security and what is the difference between them; what are the main characteristics of food aid users and how can food aid programs contribute to food security in place-based circumstances?

Specific research questions:

1. In which different ways do food aid users think, do food banks and food sharing initiatives contribute to their own household food security?
2. In which different ways do food bank volunteers think they contribute to food security of food bank users?
3. How far is there overlap between the usage of the food bank and the food sharing initiative? And how far both of the organizations could work together?

Objectives

The general objective of the present study is to address the different perceptions of users and providers about the work of the *food bank* and *food sharing* in relation to food security. Furthermore it is aimed to shed light on a possible cooperation between the two initiatives.

1. Identify in which different ways food aid users perceive the help of food banks regarding their own household food security
2. Identify how food aid providers perceive their work of contributing to food security
3. Identify the key differences/similarities between the food sharing initiative and the food bank and in how far they could work together.

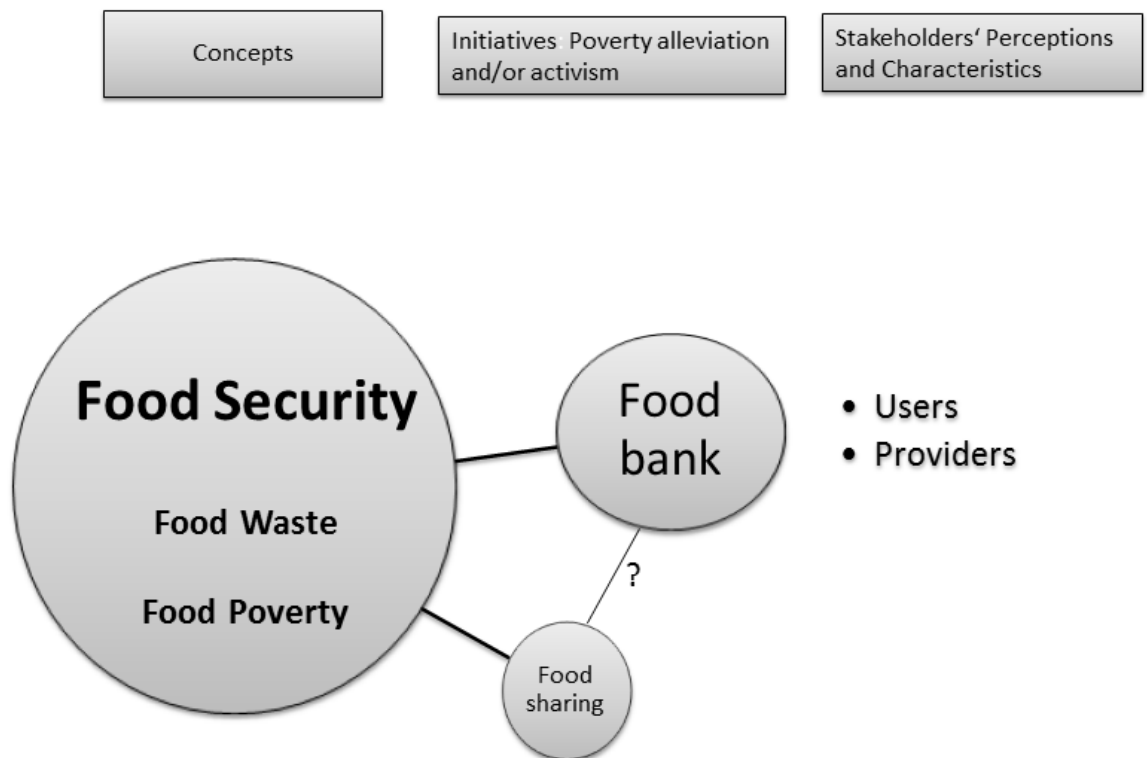


Figure 2: Concepts and research objectives (Own elaboration)

I compare the food bank with the food sharing initiative, also because the ones that are allowed to go to the food bank are under official guidance by the government's social support program and to make use of food sharing this prerequisite is not necessary. I wanted to get insight into this new citizen movement and to know more about its drivers: Is it just an ideological reason: No food waste? Or are also other families living food insecurity making use of the food sharing initiative, but are not eligible to receive a food package or do not want to get a food package from the food bank (e.g. feel ashamed)? As an article of Lambie-Mumford et al. (2014) suggests, not everyone that lives in food insecurity also turns to food aid. For example in the US only 1 out of 5 families that are food insecure actually turn to food aid (Lambie-Mumford et al. 2014). I want to see if the same phenomenon could be present in the Dutch society as well.

Chapter 1: Literature review

There is a worldwide discussion going on about food security with diverging opinions about how to reduce food insecurity. In this chapter first different viewpoints on how to combat the global food security issue are summarized, in order to get a broader picture about the whole debate and where food aid can be placed. After that it will be more closely reported on the work of the food banks and on the food poverty issue.

Within the global discussion on food security, one group of actors thinks that food security can only be achieved if crop failure is eliminated and harvest will be increased (Muir et al., 2010). Advocates of the so called 'sustainable intensification' argue that more food can be produced on the same agricultural area while reducing environmental impacts. However, other actors think that food security can only be combated when losses at post-harvest stage are reduced. They argue that reduced losses in that stage would increase the amount of food available for poor smallholder food producers and would increase the general food availability at community and or regional level and therefore is considered to be beneficial for poor consumers. Tielens & Candel (2014) further argue that "improving the efficiency of the food supply chain could help to bring down the cost of food to the consumer and thus increase access". One more viewpoint is that it is a matter of distribution of food, which is a web of political (e.g. subsidies and reforms), environmental (CO₂ emissions) and economic factors (e.g. trade) (Peacock, 2012). And then a fourth group of actors that can be distinguished sees a direct link between food waste prevention and food security by collecting food mainly from retailers who would otherwise throw it away and therefore redistribute it to food insecure people (see figure 3). They see food redistribution through food aid as the most efficient way to combat food waste, after food loss and waste prevention itself (in production and distribution stage). In this way people who live in food poverty can be helped (Tielens & Candel, 2014). This is the group that I will focus on within the whole food security debate.

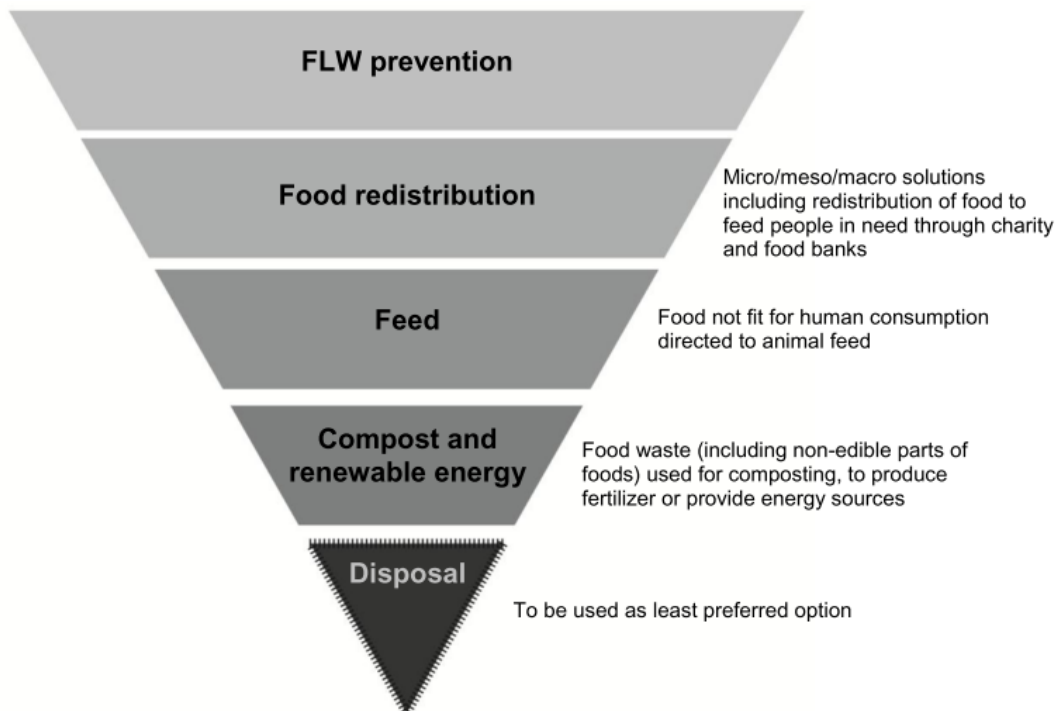


Figure 3: Food-use-not-waste hierarchy to minimize FLW (Food Loss and Waste) (HLPE, 2014). Food redistribution (through food banks) comes after FLW prevention and therefore is seen as a major factor in reducing food waste and most preferred. After that, food that is not fit for human consumption can be used as animal feed. Also Compost and renewable energy can be a way of minimizing food waste. The least preferred option is disposal.

Maxwell (1996) summarizes: “The multiple uses of the term “food security” reflect the nature of the food problem”. The food system is a web of relations and interactions and there is not a single solution to the problem of food insecurity.

In the next section I will focus therefore on one aspect of food security at stage the consumer level: The discussion around achieving food security with food redistribution through food aid. In the following chapter I will shed light on the debate around food aid and its role in fighting food poverty. Also I want to find out about the challenges that appear during the daily work at the food bank.

1.1. Discussion around the work of the food bank

“Food banking emerged as non-governmental initiatives in the form of associations collecting food to distribute it to people in need. In the model of food banking, processors, wholesalers and supermarkets donate food that has little commercial value (over-runs in production, excess supplies, past sell-by or stock that does not move on the shelves), but is good and healthy for consumption.” (HLPE, 2014). Since 50 years food aid is developing across Europe. Food aid providers have learnt how to match surplus food with those who need it most (Stuart, 2009). Since the early 1980s a steady growth of food banks can be reported, which is an indicator that food poverty and inequality are increasing (Riches, 2002).

For example, in the Netherlands someone is considered to live in food poverty if he or she as an individual has less than 180€ per month to spend solely on food. Complying with this requirement, the person can apply for a package from the food bank, which he or she has to pick up once a week in one of the distribution centers. This package is aimed to supplement the regular dietary intake for 2

to 3 days per week (Food bank, Personal Communication). The work of the food bank helps to decrease food insecurity in short term, but Lambie-Mumford et al. (2014) criticize that “food aid has a limited impact on overall household food security status”. However, to gain a better understanding about the issue, the following part will provide a closer look to the actual work of the food bank and the critique on their work.

The initial goal of food banks was to dispose surplus food. A major turning point in the food aid regime emerged during the World Food Conference of 1974 (Hopkins, 1984). After that, food aid institutions have evolved towards a development-oriented regime, which was a result of understanding the effects of food aid and which after became more organized and politically oriented (Hopkins, 1984).

While food banks are considered to be crucial in providing food aid to those in need, some authors criticize food banks and how they are operating. Some authors argue that food banks fail to assure a healthy and nutritional diet (Pinstrup-Andersen, 2009; Starkey et al. 1999). Additional arguments are, that food banks fail “to address people’s inability to acquire or consume an adequate or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so” (Riches, 2002). Riches (2002) also criticizes the failure of governments to address food poverty in the right way. As for him the emergence of food banks are “significant indicators of the prevalence of food poverty and the failure of the welfare state and the public safety net or income support programs in first-world societies”. In his opinion the state should respect, protect and fulfill the right to food (Riches, 2002).

Other authors claim that food banks are an excuse, while not addressing the actual problems that push people into food poverty. The root causes of people living in poverty could for example be the absence of a minimum wage in some European countries, low social assistance and non-affordable housing (Wakefield et al. 2012).

1.2. Behind the scenes: Insights from the work of food banks

Despite all the critics about the work of the food banks, for some people it is the only way to get enough food. Also, if we look into the daily work of those initiatives, volunteers are confronted with mainly monetary or logistical problems.

Over-purchased products or those that are before the expiration date are among the most suitable kinds of food for charitable redistribution, because it is still in a good condition. Food banks are picking up the food in their own vans. The food they get is mostly unsorted (Food bank, Personal Communication). This is also a win-win situation for the supermarkets as they normally have to pay a certain amount per kg or tons of waste they produce in landfill taxes and disposal costs. Stuart (2009) argues that the supermarkets themselves should pay to redistribute their own surplus food and therefore make the work easier for the food banks. He further argues that: “higher taxes on waste disposal would make more companies willing to pay redistribution charities in order to avoid it and the harder they would try to avoid making food waste in the first place. Nonetheless, supermarkets claim that taxes would also make food more expensive for the consumer. But it is also known that for retailers only understocking is a loss of money, not overstocking (Stuart, 2009).

The functioning of food banks requires a joint effort of all stakeholders involved, to share information about the existence of surplus food and to separate and transport this food to a common redistribution point). It also relies on the voluntary involvement of other specialties that have a secondary role in the food chain, such as logistics, information technology and legal services (HLPE, 2014).

However, food bank volunteers provide more than just a package of food. Volunteers regard the non-food support they are able to offer, like building trust, listening to problems and therefore also supporting recipients psychologically and building bridges between them and other supportive agencies (work agency, social support agency), as a particularly important aspect of what they do. Cooperation both between different food aid providers and other agencies was seen as key to their functioning and success. Two further important issues are playing a role in the work of the food banks: “The vulnerability of food aid provision in being able to meet existing or rising demand, when dependent on donations and volunteers; and the appropriateness and value of using volunteer energy and skills on this kind of activity (collecting, sorting and distributing food for people’s immediate needs)” (Lambie-Mumford et al., 2014).

A study of Tarasuk and Eakin (2005) revealed that during the work of the food bank, problems of a different kind are encountered. They analyzed the daily activities that are happening in the food banks and identified elementary problems like handling of unsealed products which is very labor intensive. This kind of problem is also encountered by the volunteers of the food bank. They have the problem that it takes quite some time for the volunteers to figure out how to properly store the goods, questions like: “Does this has to go into the fridge or the freezer?” are addressed frequently (Food bank, Personal Communication).

The most limiting factor in food charity is not the availability of food – nor the availability of volunteers - but the lack of funds for re-distribution. It costs money to store food, manage the food depot or buy refrigerated vans (Stuart, 2009). The same problem has also appeared in Wageningen. The food bank needs a new cooling van, double of its current size, to efficiently re-distribute the food boxes to Rhenen and the other towns. There is a lack of money to buy such a van, whose prices start from 40.000€ and onwards.

1.3. Food poverty

In the Netherlands, someone is considered poor and thus eligible for a package from the food bank if the following situations occur:

- A Single person adult household has < 180€ available for food per month
- For every additional adult member of the household this amount can be added with 60€
- For every additional child (under 18 years old) of the household this amount can be added with 50€

For example a family consisting of 2 adult persons and two children under 18 years old who have less than 340€ per month to spend for food, could apply for a weekly food package. In this case the calculations would be made as:

1st adult	180
2nd adult	+60
1st child	+50
2nd child	+50
	340€

Often the focus of food security lies on the developing world. In order to get a picture about the differences in reasons of food poverty between the developing and the developed countries I made a table. Table 1 summarizes the main underlying theoretical assumptions presented in the literature on how to get into food poverty in developing or developed countries:

Table 1: Difference in causes of food insecurity between developed and developing countries. (McIntyre, 2003 & Riely et al. 1999, own elaboration)

Reasons for food poverty in developed countries are mainly	In developing countries food poverty is often caused by these factors
(Unexpected) birth of (additional) child	Chronic poverty
Change in number of parents in household	Rapid population growth
Job loss	Declining per capita food output
Health problems	Poor infrastructure
Misplaced policies	Ecological constraints
	Limited arable land
	Inappropriate policies
	Health problems
	Poor water and sanitation
	Inadequate nutritional knowledge
	Civil war and ethnic conflicts.

While the reasons for food poverty in developed countries tend to lie more within the household itself (sudden unemployment, health problems etc.) the reasons for food poverty in developing countries tend to lie outside the household and are mainly caused by political, natural or society issues within the country (see table 1). Furthermore, it seems that the causes for food poverty in developing countries are more researched and therefore more specific.

According to McIntyre (2003) there is only one real possibility out of food poverty: “Mother or father gets a full time job that earns enough money to feed the family”. Her additional policy recommendations are:

1. Incomes must rise, whether from minimum wage or social assistance
2. Affordability of healthy foods, particularly food staples must be protected
3. Affordability of housing
4. Day care for households with children, where the mother otherwise could work
5. Better health services
6. Hunger or food insecurity monitoring system

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

This framework is meant to provide a theoretical baseline, which is critical for successfully interpreting food security indicators.

Concept of food security:

USAID, WFP and FAO share the same definition about food security:

“People are considered food secure when they have all-time physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life” (WFP,2015).

The USAID also includes the social dimension in their definition:

“Access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life and the ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways and a sustainable food system that maximizes self-reliance and social justice without resorting to emergency food sources”. (Van der Horst et al. 2014)

Thereby 3 main inter-linked dimensions are important:

- 1) **Food availability**: Food should be consistently available in sufficient quantities to all individuals within a country. Such food can be provided through peoples’ own household production, other domestic output, commercial imports, or food assistance.
- 2) **Food access**: Adequate quantities of food should be accessible for all individuals to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet through purchase, home production, barter, gifts, borrowing or food aid. Access to the food depends on available income per household, on the distribution of income within the household, and on the price of food.
- 3) **Food utilization**: The proper biological use of food, requiring a diet providing sufficient energy and essential nutrients, potable water, and adequate sanitation should be ensured. In order to gain a positive nutritional impact, food utilization depends in large measure on knowledge within the household of food storage and processing techniques, basic principles of nutrition and proper child care, and illness management.

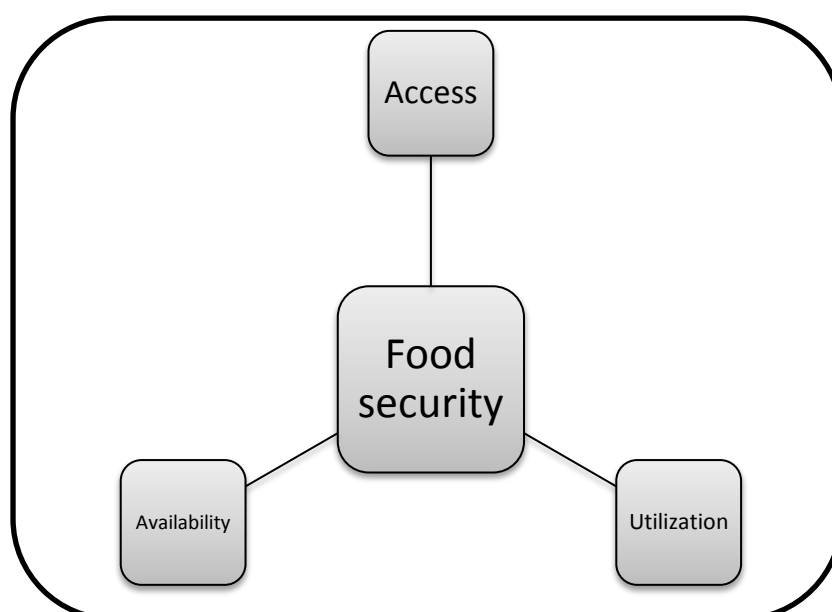


Figure 4: Concept of food security with its three dimensions (Own elaboration)

Food availability, as indicated in Figure 4 above, is a function of the combination of production, distribution and exchange. The term *availability* is for this study in reference to food supplies at the national, regional and food bank level.

Food access is further determined by the ability of households to obtain food from their own production and stocks, from the market, and from other sources. It is influenced by the aggregate availability of food through the latter's impact on supplies in the market and, therefore, on market prices. These factors are, in turn, determined by the resource endowment of the household which defines the set of productive activities they can pursue in meeting their income and food security objectives.

Food utilization, is defined by USAID as: "Food is properly used; proper food processing and storage techniques are employed; adequate knowledge of nutrition and child care techniques exists and is applied; and adequate health and sanitation services exist." (USAID, 2015) General poor infant care and feeding practices, inadequate access to, or the poor quality of, health services are also major determinants of poor health and nutrition. While important for its own sake as it directly influences human well-being, improved food utilization also has feedback effects, through its impact on the health and nutrition.

Stability of those three concepts is a must in insuring long-term food security. Drastic changes in these conditions, such as job loss or severe health problems, may seriously threaten the ability to gain money and the food access of affected households. To the extent that shocks often lead to more problems and therefore have austere implications for the stability for long-term food security of the household. In order to cope with those shocks and minimize potential declines in food access, households typically adjust their consumption patterns, reducing their dietary intake and market purchases to meet their immediate food needs (FAO, 2003).

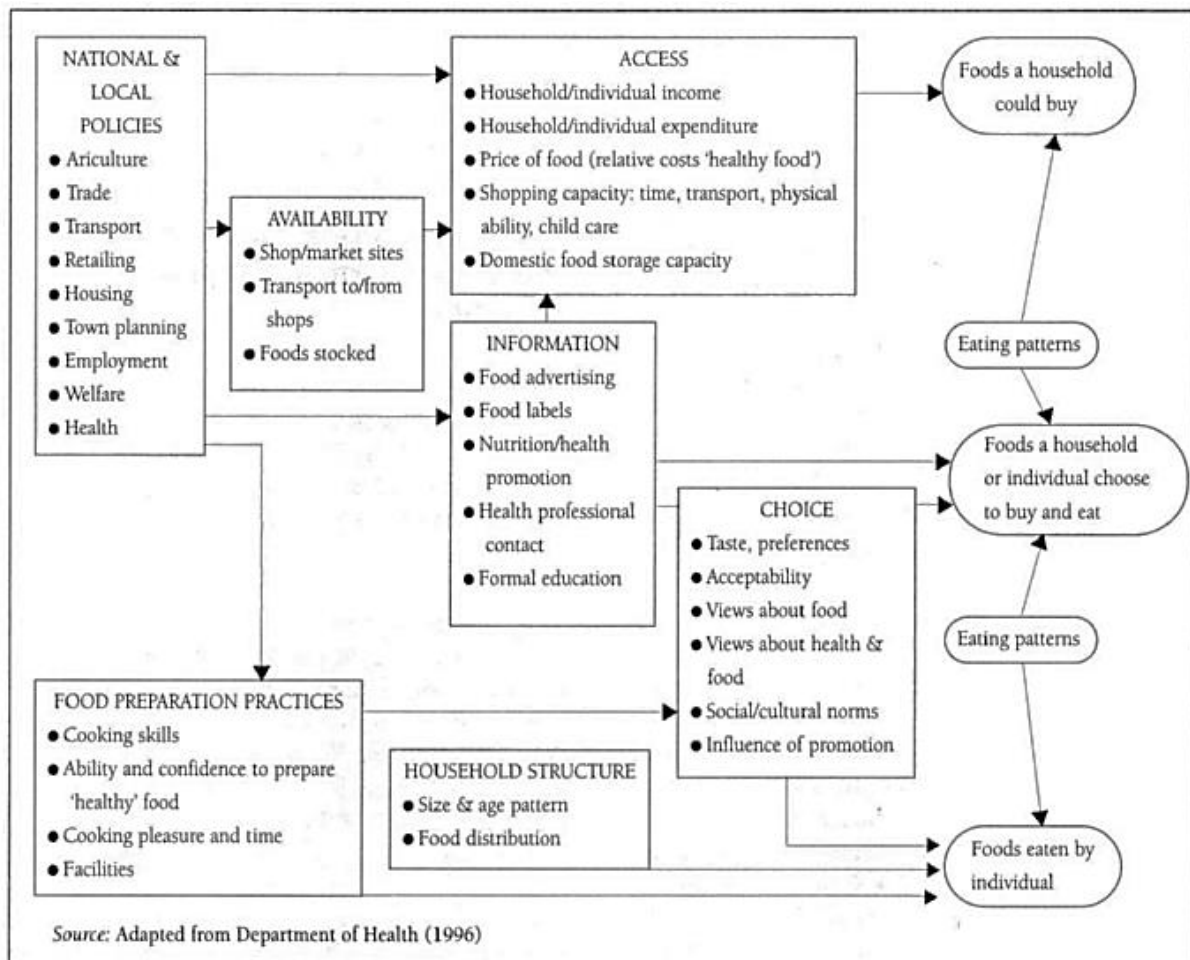


Figure 5: Source: Dowler 1997 3 dimensions of food security seen in a wider policy context. (Utilization is 'Food Preparation Practices')

(Utilization is 'Food Preparation Practices')

Figure 6 by Dowler (1997) shows the concept of food security in a wider policy context. Access to food is influenced by national and local policies, availability of food and information about food (labels, nutritional value etc.). While availability of food and utilization (here 'food preparation practices'), according to the figure are only influenced by policies. Foods that a household could purchase depend mainly on access to food (price, shopping capacity, income etc.). Whereas foods, that a household chooses to buy and eat depends on information, eating patterns, and choice (taste, views about food, social/cultural norms). Foods that are finally eaten by the individual person within the household depend most on the factors like eating patterns, choice, household structure and utilization. This means food choices are made by the individual and that is where I focus on during my research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Method

A mixed research method has been used; both qualitative and quantitative research instruments contributed in answering my research questions. Observation and contact making were done continuously during the research process. The different data collection methods complementarily strengthen each other. Furthermore, when different approaches to one phenomenon are used and they provide the same result, the result is strengthened with greater evidence (called corroboration) (Sahu, 2013).

3.2. Location and Units of Analysis

1) Location:

The research has been carried out within the food banks that belong to the region Neder-
Veluwe in the Netherlands.

2) Unit of Analysis and Sampling:

The study population has been divided as followed:

1. Receivers of food packages also referred to as 'clients' or 'users'
2. Volunteers of the food bank, also referred to as 'providers'
3. Initiator of the food sharing initiative
4. Social workers

The priority of this research lies on the case study of the food bank, while the case study about *Food sharing* can support to investigate the main topic on food security. *Food sharing* is a recently evolved institution, built up by solely citizens, without any relation to the state, just like the food bank. To investigate this case also a bit closer can help to understand recent social citizen needs and citizen movements. Additionally it helps to understand the stakeholders' perceptions about the food bank and food sharing.

3.3. Data collection

Three main steps were followed during the data collection:

[1] Documents have been analyzed to gather knowledge about the research topic and previous research that has been done in this field.

[2] 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews with the duration of at least 30 minutes were done with volunteers of the food bank, the food sharing initiator, clients of the food bank and social workers.

[3] From those interviews, questionnaires were constructed for the clients of the food bank with a response of 21 interviewees from different food bank locations within the food bank region Neder-
veluwe.

[1] Documents:

Scientific literature, policy documents and other relevant documents like (annual) institutional reports, newspaper articles and interviews have been analyzed.

[2] Interviews:

For the semi structured interviews snowball sampling was used. First the volunteers of the food bank and the initiators of food sharing were interviewed. The volunteers of the food bank helped to provide making contact with the food bank users in order to conduct the in-depth-interviews. Since there was a lack of information about the diversity of food bank users, it was difficult to use a probability sampling design. The interviews with the food bank users were structured in general questions about their overall experience at the food bank, specific questions about the food packages and interactions with other clients. I did not stick persistently to this structure, but asked additional questions if it was applicable to the situation. I led the respondents' space to tell their own stories and often additional topics came up. However, because the interviews were quite long I was able to come back to my questions and cover them in the end.

[3] Questionnaire:

The questionnaire that has been prepared in cooperation with volunteers consisted of 17 multiple-choice questions. On suggestion of several volunteers and the 'at the field situation', questionnaires were filled in by myself, ending up in 21 small interviews, which turned out to be more informative, because it was more of a small interview/conversation than just handing out the questionnaires and asking to fill it out by themselves. The situation at the handouts of the food packages was rather difficult, the majority of the people did not want to participate, because they were in a hurry, did not had time or just refused without reason. The spatial situation was crucial for the success of getting respondents. When clients were queuing and one said no, others followed. A different situation occurred when clients were either leaving the facilities or packing in the food that was when most of the people responded. The possible participants were approached by me and without interference of volunteers. This sampling method was therefore quite different from the one of the in-depth interviews.

Observation

I made use of the research instrument observation because it helped me to understand the interaction within or between the groups (e.g. volunteers and recipients) and study the behavior of different people. It especially helped me in situations when respondents were not co-operative and an interview or questionnaire could not happen. It also helped me to understand the working processes going on in the food bank and therefore fostered my understanding of those. Depending on the situation I used *participant observation* (active participation in activities e.g. food packaging) or *non-participant observation* (passive observation, just watching and listening) (Kumar, 2005).

3.4. Data analysis

Coding

The obtained data through the semi-structured interviews is descriptive by nature. First I made use of the process called *content analysis*, whereby I identified main themes from my own food bank

study and related them to the conceptual framework. Thereby I used the three interlinked dimensions of food security: Access, Availability and Utility (See table 2 below).

Table 2: Food security dimensions and corresponding identified themes

Food security dimensions	Identified themes at food bank level
Food access	Feeling of shame Economic situation Time of being in food poverty Working on own situation or not Accepting own situation or not Inability to comply with agreements
Food availability	Changing amount of foods -> too big -> too small
Food utilization	Cooking skills Knowledge Handling of unknown food Usage of Sweets Lack/availability of means : internet access, storage capacity Food safety (freezer, cooling capacity, correct handling of products)

The next step I took was integrating the themes in the text to support or contradict for example the findings from the questionnaires. Additionally I made use of verbatim responses, to keep the feel of the situation or highlight some outcomes.

The outcomes from the questionnaire were entered into excel. For each answer option a specific number has been assigned. Like this simple graphs could be made which compare different outcomes.

Validation

In order to reduce the subjectivity of the research, validation of interpreted data by the participants has been done as far as possible. Before this paper is made available to the public, respondents were asked whether data from the interviews were correctly interpreted and if it is what they really meant. In this way, bias could be alleviated.

3.5. Ethics

The first step to gather data in an ethical way is to obtain the respondents' informed consent. I needed the respondents' agreements to ask them questions and represent their answers in the way they meant it to avoid my own bias which could be unfavorable for them (making use of their validation before handing over the report to the readers). It was important that I informed the respondents about the type of information that I wanted from them, why I wanted this information, what is the purpose of gathering the information and how it might directly or indirectly affect them. I gave them this information prior to each interview and I also asked permission to record the

interviews. In order to protect the identity of all respondents including food bank users, volunteers and social workers, no names, age or gender are mentioned.

Chapter 4: Case study description: Food bank and Food Sharing

4.1. The food bank

4.1.1. History of food banks in the Netherlands

The couple Sjaak and Clara Sies (picture 1 to the right) are the founders of the first food bank in the Netherlands in 2002. When Sjaak lost his job at the end of the 90's, he did not have enough money to provide food for his family anymore. Therefore, at the end of each day, he went to a local bakery and asked if they had some bread left. The baker gave him a lot of bread, which was actually even too much for his family.

His wife and he started to distribute the bread to other neighbors that were also poor. More and more shops gave their food to Sjaak and Clara and therefore different kind of food was added. When they found a location from where they could hand out the food, the first food bank had emerged. (Klokhuis, December 29, 2013)



Picture 1: Sjaak and Clara Sies, the founders of the first food bank in the Netherlands (Source: Voedselbanken.nl)

Nowadays (stand December 2014), there are 37.000 food packages distributed every week, but in total 1.1 million people in the Netherlands live under the poverty line. While in the same time 3 million tons of food is wasted in the Netherlands and only 0.3% of that goes to the food banks (Klokhuis, 2013) Only 40% of all 157 food banks receiving support from the local governments. 55% of those applying for a package are women. One fourth of those making use of a Dutch food bank leave after 3 months, another fourth stays the full three years and half of all clients is leaving again within a year (voedselbankennederland.nl).



Figure 6: Timeline of food bank development in the Netherlands

4.1.2. How a food bank operates

The food bank Voedselbank Neder Veluwe, with the municipalities: Wageningen, Oosterbeek, Renkum, Rhenen and Doorwerth, is part of the national organization Voedselbanken Nederland. The food bank Wageningen is active since December 2007 for residents of the municipalities of Wageningen and Renkum and since 2013 also in Rhenen. Their basic idea is to help people in need and prevent food waste. They are an independent foundation that runs solely on sponsors and volunteers. They mainly collect food from businesses that would otherwise be thrown away and make it available to people in need who cannot afford to buy enough food. Those people can receive a weekly food package. The packages are closely matched with the family situation, but they are always dependent on the provision of voluntary contributions from suppliers and donors. In addition - through various actions - incidental food and / or money are collected for the food bank. The food bank is dependent on companies that provide products and is also supported by funds, companies and individuals. All work is performed by individuals who offer themselves as volunteers.



Picture 2: Inside the food bank. The package station, where food packages are being prepared for the hand out on Fridays



Picture 3: The transport van of the food bank with a built-in cooling system

Table 3: Example of a weekly plan with the amount of packages and persons belonging to each locations. With the help of this table and specific tables belonging to each location (see Table 2 underneath), drivers are able to locate the right amount of packages into the car (stand March 2015)

Location	Food packages	Persons
Wageningen	73	166
Renkum	66	169
Doorwerth	27	74
Oosterbeek	14	20
Rhenen	33	102
		Food packages at all locations: 213
		Total amount of persons: 531

Table 4: Specific table Rhenen (stand March 2015)

Amount of packages	Household size	Percentile share of each household size
12x	1 person	33,3%
4x	2 persons	11,1%
10x	3 persons	27,8%
2x	4 persons	5,6%
4x	5 persons	11,1%
1x	6 persons	2,8%
2x	7 persons	5,6%
1x	8 persons	2,8%
Total	100 persons	
		42% adults
		58% children

4.1.3. Developments of the food bank Nederveluwe from 2007 to 2015

The food bank Nederveluwe started in 2007 with 3 people out of the will to contribute something valuable to society. “The first six months nobody came and the municipality didn’t really help, they were skeptical but now we have around 130 volunteers” says one of the co-founders. They started off with one room and a small fridge and nowadays they have a big storehouse area with all kind of facilities like kitchen, toilet, storage rooms and big fridges and freezers and they expect to keep on growing the coming years.

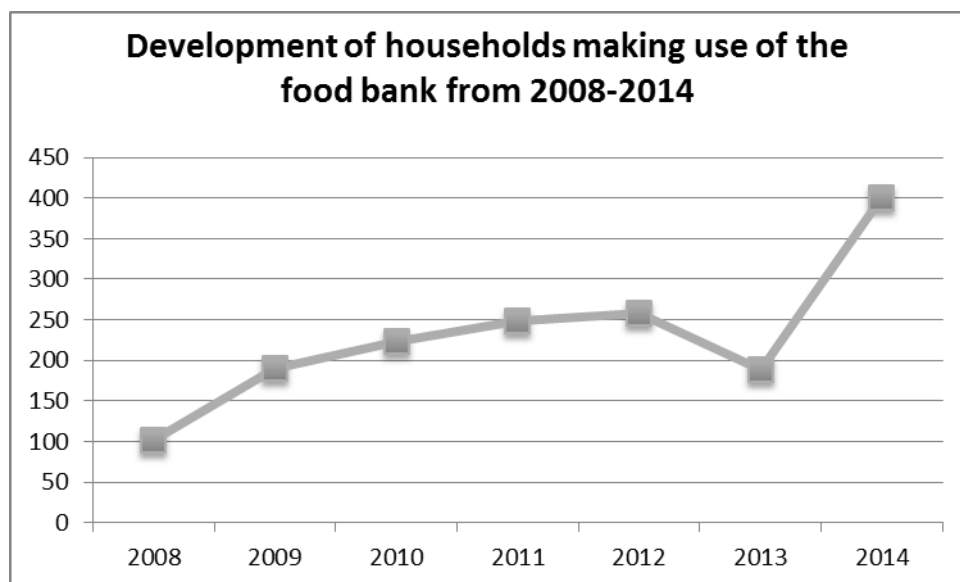


Figure 7: The total number of households that made use of the food bank Nederveluwe for each year. (Source: Food bank Neder-Veluwe, yearly reports from 2008- 2014 own elaboration)

The amount of households making use of the food bank in 2014 is four times bigger than the amount in 2008 (Figure 7 above). In 2008 102 households made use of the food bank. On average the households made 10 weeks use of the food bank. In 2009 a total of 190 households made use of the food bank. 80 clients from the previous year left. Half of the households are single person households. In 2010 the number of total households raised to 223, which is equal to around 600 persons. The number of households had therefore already doubled from the year 2008. Those that left in 2010 had made use of the food bank an average time of 9.5 months. The amount of single person households dropped to one third of the total households. In 2011 the total number of households increased to 248. There is a big group of households that used the food bank just for a short period of time (until 3 months), the second biggest group makes use from 3 months to one year and the smallest group need the maximum amount of help, up to 3 years. In 2012 the amount of households kept growing to a total of 258. The average amount of food bank usage time had risen to 1.5 years compared to the previous years. In 2013 the total amount of households had dropped to 189 households (approximately 360 persons). On average the “clients” of the food bank (That is how they are called by the volunteers) stayed 1.5 years, just like in 2012. 40% of the households are 1-person-households; most of those households consist of single men.

2014: The amount of people that were going to the food bank increased by 20%, compared to the amount of people in 2013. In total 400 households made use of the food bank in that year for shorter or longer periods, this represents around 1.000 individuals. This means that the number of households from 2008 had quadruplet. Alarming is that a bit less than half of the 1.000 individuals

were children under 18 years old. Around 30% of the households are one-person-households and within the category families are half of the them single-parents.

4.1.4. Where does the food come from?

Around 30% of the food that is distributed at the food bank Nederveluwe comes from one of the 7 distribution centers of the food bank organization Netherlands. The other 70% are coming from local supermarkets and actions. With the van of the food bank they go to the supermarkets with fixed appointments, collect the food and bring it to the storage facilities of the food bank where it is kept until handout.

There are two small organizations that support the food bank on a regular basis. One is the so called 'Stichting Voedselhulp Rhenen' (Foundation food aid Rhenen) which buys on average one product per week that is added to each food package, like a good piece of meat or a healthy vegetable. The other is the 'Voedsel estafette' (food relay) which holds local actions where citizens bring food to them.



Figure 8: Logo
Stichting
Voedselhulp Rhenen

4.1.5. Food Safety and future plans

Food safety plays a big role at the food bank. Without being able to guarantee some degree of food safety, supermarkets would not be willing to give food to the charity organization and the 'Voedsel – en - Warenautoriteit' (VWA) wouldn't allow them to further operate.

“We are very precise in which products we are going to deep freeze and which ones go to the fridge and also the VWA is controlling us in that.”
(Volunteer)

By guaranteeing that the cooling chain is secured from the supermarket to the freezer of the food bank, supermarkets are willing to give more fresh food like vegetables, meat and dairy products.

“The retailers were also always reserved in delivering products because they did not know how we would handle the food here. If we can proof that we handle the food in the correct way then we will also get more food from them, because their name is written on the package” (Volunteer)

Furthermore, a food aid recipient can only take perishable food home from the food bank if they carry a cooling bag with them. A cooling bag is provided for free the first day someone comes to the food bank.

One goal of the food bank Nederveluwe was to get a green label for food safety from the VWA, which they have achieved in June 2015. The green label means that supermarkets can deliver all their perishable products to the food bank, because it is a kind of guarantee system that the right cooling capacities and facilities are provided. The VWA created a handbook for food safety, the food bank that complies with all of the expectations written in that book, will get a green label. Having a green

label as a food bank, supermarkets are more likely to donate more food. To the food bank this is a very important aspect for its future operation.

4.2. Food sharing

Food sharing is a worldwide initiative that has evolved in the year 2011 first in the USA and then spread over to Germany and the UK and recently all around the globe. It is an initiative to bring people together, save food from all kind of sources and to spread the idea of combating food waste all around the world. The primary goals of the head organization are to give attention to food waste, to reduce it and therefore to save natural resources. According to the organization it is not a main goal but a side effect that the saved food can contribute to the food security of those in need and that projects that are valuable to society will be supported.

Beginnings of food sharing Wageningen

In Germany the main initiator was Raphael Fellmer, who used to dumpster-dive (climbing into a trash container of a shop without permission of the owner and taking food that has been thrown). He could live only from the food that has been thrown away from one specific shop. One day he went to talk to the owner and explained that he was living already 2 years from the trash of the shop. The shop owner started to think about it and together they started this food saver movement. Raphael needed no longer to climb into the trash bin, but could pick up the food provided by the owner, that he would otherwise throw away. He would then make it available via internet to others that are interested in picking up some of the food. The same way the food sharing initiative in Wageningen came to life.

“I thought I don’ t want to support this system anymore. They are throwing too much food away and there I really managed to live from dumpster-diving. I thought I don’ t want to buy food if I see how much is wasted! Then I came across food sharing. I knew already some shops and I talked with them, they liked the idea and now we are working together.” (food sharing initiator)

Shop profiles

Those shops that agreed to give food to the food sharing initiative are in general small local shops that do not belong to big chains and which have also a certain ideology e.g. organic, or sustainable etc. If one wants to do this initiative with big chains, they ask them to pick up big amounts of food on several days of the week which would be a task for several people that also requires bigger transport facilities. The idea of food sharing is to pick up everything from the shop, on specific days of the week so the shop does no longer need to pay for the trash, which is also an advantage for them.

Food sharing users

Approximately 7 households per week make use of the food sharing initiative. Some of them are coming regularly while other just pass by occasionally. Under the people are a high number of students but also non-students who really need the food are coming. Some of those that are really in need of food are also recipients of food packages at the food bank. The other part of those in need, are not eligible for a package at the food bank, because they are above the minimum amount of money.

4.3. Actors

Receivers of packages at the food bank

People that receive a package from the food bank are in financial trouble, for all kinds of different reasons. The food bank does not distinguish between religion, color or nationality. A careful process ensures that only people who really need it get a weekly food package. These are people who, after payment of fixed charges, have too little money to support themselves or their family with enough food (see for calculations section 1.3 on page 13).

All of these people have their own story, each a different one. It is always about people who for whatever reason have got stuck. They are not (anymore) able to provide for themselves or for any eventual children and that undermines their self-esteem. They express this in many different ways, from being 'very grateful' to 'society did this to me'. In this thesis I picture these different opinions in regard to their own household food security.

"In 2013, we were confronted several times with clients whose financial situation has not improved sufficiently after more than 3 years for help. Although it feels like a hard decision, we terminate -in line with the national appointments- the assistance. On one side we do this to stimulate the customer and the social workers to look for alternatives and also to prevent that the customer base grows close with a solid core." If after one year the social workers submit a new application for a certain household, this will be assessed by the board of the local food bank. In deciding whether to re-accept a household, the presence or absence of children plays a major role.

Volunteers

The first tasks of the volunteers are to pick-up food, transport it, re-pack it, store it and prepare the final food packages. However, dealing with customers remains a very important part of the work of the volunteers as well, but is not always easy. The food bank Neder-Veluwe alone counts around 130 volunteers. The volunteers consist in majority of elderly and retired citizens that want to contribute something good to society while still being active. Both women and men in a relatively equal ratio spend on average two days per month helping at the food bank. Other volunteers are students and part-time workers (mainly women) that spend some of their free time as a volunteer, because they want to help people in need and they have heard about it through friends, family members or neighbors and decided to join. A small percentage of the volunteers used to be food package receivers by themselves. In general the volunteers can be filed to the middle to upper class and have received higher education levels.

Initiator of food sharing initiative

The initiator of food sharing Wageningen communicates with members through social media, which is one of the differences with the food bank Wageningen. Another difference is that the initiator intends to mainly rescue the food in order to prevent food waste and not to necessarily help people in need.

Social workers

The tasks of the social workers are to help and give advice to those citizens that are in financial troubles. The social workers are employed by the government. They help to get an overview of income and expenditures and if necessary advise about administrative tasks and shopping behavior. In regard to the food bank, they are the ones that send people which comply with the requirements

(read more in depth about the relationship between the food bank and the municipality in regard to referral of people in need, in section 5.1. *Food access*).

4.4. Various causes of food poverty in food aid users

The literature gives a broad picture on how people become food insecure in industrial countries. Throughout my research I had the chance to discover more about these causes. McIntyre (2003) and Ryley et al. (1999) listed general reasons for getting into food poverty (see table 5). However, during my research I could get a more specific picture. Some food package receivers revealed by themselves how they ended up in this situation and volunteers and social workers also gave insight into the most prominent reasons of ‘slipping’ into food poverty. Table 5 reflects the specific reasons for getting into food poverty which I found out during my research. During my interviews some of the below mentioned causes of the literature, were also mentioned, however it seems like that often the causes are more specific and (inter-)personal. The below mentioned reasons for poverty are mental health problems, not being able to deal with money, not admitting to have problems and therefore not seeking for help which leads to a reinforcement of (food) poverty (see table 5).

Table 5: General causes of food poverty, because of increased economic pressure on the household income or expenditures from the literature compared with specific reasons from my research

General reasons (by McIntyre (2003) and Ryley et al. 1999)	Specific reasons derived from this study
(Unexpected) birth of (additional) child	An extra mouth to feed, in some cases unable to go to work but need to care for children
Change in number of parents in household	Divorce Death of a partner
Job loss	Working fewer hours (Work contract change) From full-time to part-time job Having only seasonal jobs
Health problems	Psychiatric problems Drug addiction Diseases
Misplaced policies	Problems with unemployment benefits Problems with handling/understanding Dutch law and rules
	High costs for basic expenses (electricity, gas, water, taxes) in relation to own income
	Destructive purchase behavior: Being trapped by offers in the stores, while the money is in shortage and would be needed for food
	Having trouble with administration of own household expenditures and income
	Not seeking for help or seeking too late when debts are already very high

For the duration of its existence, the food bank has had hundreds of clients coming in and out. Each one has his/her own reasons. Often interpersonal problems can be the cause, but also the industrial systems we live in nowadays do not allow failure and state safety nets are getting thinner, especially in times of economic crisis. The effects are getting more visible. One of the many indicators of the effects of the economic crisis is the growing number of people seeking for food assistance. A

volunteer explains what he/she knows about the reasons why people need support from the food bank.

“They are all different stories. But the most similarity is that they have debts. And this is sometimes bad luck, because benefits get in too slow. But it is also the incomprehension of how to handle money and the rules in the Netherlands. It is terribly complicated. It is not being able to handle everything that is offered in the store. It is alcohol- and drug addiction. Psychiatric problems. Many different things through which you can get into poverty. And many things in the Netherlands are very expensive. Energy for example is a big part of that. And then all those wrong purchases are happening. And people often seek help very late, when the debts are already very big, this is a pity.” (Volunteer)

A social worker adds to that:

“Mostly it is a combination of low income and not being able to handle your expenditures, but also the administrative part, having no overview, still spending money, while it is actually not possible. And what I see often is that people take small loans, with high interest rates. I also see often that once debts are accumulating, people lose control. Nowadays more and more people lose their jobs, therefore their income drops drastically.”

Most of the interviewees within the group of food assistance receivers stated that job loss or divorce was the main reasons of getting into poverty. Others reported that either themselves or their partner having a severe sickness, contributed to their bad financial situation.

“The last months my partner became sick, she has cancer, I take over to care for our five children. Therefore it is actually very difficult for me to work now.” (Food bank client)

The majority of the people I interviewed were without job, but even those who had a job reported that the money they get wasn't enough to feed a family. Especially those having part-time or short-term contracts told that they were struggling to make ends meet. Like this client who is working in the hospitality industry and whose husband is sick and not able to work:

“My husband is diabetic and he has problems with his heart, he cannot work at the moment. I work in the hospitality industry and January and February is all dead, not busy. So I get a job for maybe one day a week, but you need to eat 7 days a week.”

Chapter 5: Perceptions of food bank users: Diverging opinions about contribution to household food security

In which different ways do food aid users think does the food bank contribute to their own household food security?

The answer is: Food bank users have very diverging opinions about the contribution of the food bank towards their own food security in topics like: food quantity, perceived healthiness of the package, contribution to economic situation and food utility. An overview over the main findings gives the following table (table 6). The detailed analysis can be found in the next sections.

Table 6: Users perspectives regarding food security concepts

Users' perspective			
Analyzed concepts of food security	Determinants	Aspects that hinder being food secure	Aspects that facilitate being food secure
Food access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Feeling of shame › Location of food bank › Economic situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Feeling ashamed › Location of food bank is too central › Not being able to handle economic situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Overcoming feeling of shame › actively improve own situation › Location of food bank is in an anonymous place
Food availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Changing amount of foods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Inability to handle weekly differences › Inability to plan ahead 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Able to handle weekly differences › Able to be creative in cooking and planning the food for the week
Food utilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Cooking skills › Handling of unknown food › Lack/availability of means : internet access, storage capacity › Food safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Find no use in (new) food › Not having enough storage capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Being able to adapt to new food and cooking needs › Being able to cook food that they haven't known before › Do some extra effort to look for recipes

In the Framework part, I explained the three interlinked concepts (Food access, Food availability, Food utilization) that are used to assess food security. Furthermore, I included the USAID definition and I analyzed the respondents' opinion about aspects of the definition of the USAID like 'ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways'. In order to answer the research questions, I analyzed the interviews and questionnaires according to these concepts in relation to the food bank. Therefore, this chapter analyzes the responses of food bank users and volunteers according to their opinions about the aspects of food security and the contribution of the food bank to it. During the analysis of the interviews, different themes were identified regarding the perception of users and volunteers about the contribution to household food security by the food bank.

5.1. Food access

Food access consists of: "physically and economically, social mechanisms that ensure the access to food" (USAID). The following section analyzes the responses of food aid users towards their perception of 'access' at the food bank. The physical access hereby represents the importance of the location of a food bank. The economic access represents the amount of money that makes one eligible to receive a food package and the social mechanism is mainly represented by feelings of shame.

Easy access but shame factor remains important

Social workers and volunteers reported that some people wait up to six months or longer until they take the step to finally go to the food bank. The steps from getting into food poverty until realizing that they have much fewer money to spend and until finally accepting it, often causes a quick accumulation of debt, which makes their situation even worse. The reasons for waiting so long mainly have to do with not accepting the situation, not being willing to go to charity, not realizing what is financially going on and the biggest factor: the feeling of shame.

"In the beginning I really had to cross a border. Food bank, that means you need help. There is a lot of shame." (Food bank user)

Another respondent said:

"When I came there, after the first time I didn't feel ashamed anymore. I was just very thankful for the help. They are very nice people, who are behind this." (Food bank user)

Several respondents also explained that the location of the food bank is very important to them. It plays a big role if the food bank is located either in the city or a bit outside, due to the feeling of shame that they might be seen to go there. Especially when going there the first time the location of food distribution centers play a big role in order to reduce the anyway present shame factor. According to them the location in an industrialized area is favorable, because it is quite anonymous and away from supermarkets and other shops which represent social areas and where the risk to be seen is much higher..

Receivers also stated that the whole process from applying and receiving the first food package is quite uncomplicated and takes a maximum of 2 weeks. Most respondents reported that social workers, social counselors or social assistance (unemployment benefit) referred them to the food bank. They also added that the whole process is uncomplicated and well organized.

“A social worker advised us to apply for a package at the food bank because we did not have enough money left at the end of the month to pay all fixed costs and get food” (Food bank user)

Struggling with own economic situation

Access to food is - next to the above mentioned physical and social mechanisms - determined by an economic mechanism. Often the cause for living a long time in food poverty is the inability to deal with one's own income and expenditures. However, the interviews revealed how difficult it really is to get through the month and therefore have access to enough and nutritious food, when there is only very little money to spend. Interviewees were sharing their stories and how they deal with their economic situations. It gets clear how hard it is to live with a very low amount of money and keeping up with a 'typical modern lifestyle'. Factors like smoking or having a pet, which are a part of our way of life and very common in today's society, are becoming very big burdens when struggling with little money, as this interviewee explains:

“You have to see how you can make ends meet with very few money. I live with around 180€ per month and that with a pet and also I am smoking. Very bad actually, I should stop smoking, cause it costs a lot of money.”

Even buying a bus ticket, is something one has to think about well. Every cent that will be spent has to be calculated. The following statement is from a food bank recipient who lives on a part time job and from unemployment subsidies:

“Yesterday I got paid and it was 231€ for the whole month. You have to pay rent, hydro, cable, bus pass from and to work, there goes your salary. My rent is 431€. Then I get the benefits on the 15th of each month based on what I need and have earned the previous month. When I got my salary today (6th of the month), I paid my rent and I got 29€ left in the bank, that's what we have until the 15th or maybe until the end of the month. We don't drink, we don't go out to the bar, our expenses go to medicine.”

A change in health policies throughout the years also had an impact on the overall household expenditures as this food bank client explains:

“The healthcare for us is about 200€ per month, I remember in 2003 our healthcare was 33€ per month and in 2006 it went to 186€ up to now 200€. And you also have now extra charges for own risk, before there was no own risk (dutch: eigen risico).”

Other respondents explained that they were buying for around 50-60€ extra food per week for their family with kids. Another person stated that they save around 100-150€ per month because of the food bank.

5.2. Food availability

“Food availability is achieved when sufficient quantities of food are consistently available to all individuals.”(USAID) In this study I have applied this definition of food availability to the food bank. Therefore the following part will show how food availability at the food bank has been researched according to users’ responses. To most respondents, food availability is mainly associated with the amount of food in the package. The following part also analyzes what kind of food is available to food bank users, because the type of food was also one of the respondent’s main concerns.

Content of the food package differs from week to week

Most of the respondents complained that the amount of food differs greatly from week to week. At times when they go home with only a few things or fewer things than the previous time they feel very disappointed.

However, many respondents are unsatisfied not only about the fact that the difference in amounts of food from week to week is very big but also that some products were too often (almost every week) in the package like peanut butter, buttercups, sweets, cakes and canned chicken soup etc. They reported to feel sad, because coming home with only sweets or ‘not useful’ foods might cause disappointment within their families.

“Sometimes there are many things of the same kind, especially with the holidays, with Santa-Claus there were a lot of chocolate letters and gingerbread cookies in the package. Normally I am happy with everything, but these are the less practical things when you have to feed many mouths.”

(Food bank user)

Others were reporting that there are often big amounts of fresh food like apples and that they couldn’t handle this big amounts if they were not trying to make them last longer e.g. making apple mousse or give it to other people.

“You get so many apples, this week apples, next week apples and so on.”

(Food bank user)

When respondents were talking about the food package, they were often also explaining how they integrate the food package in their weekly eating and cooking habits. This respondent who has a wife and five kids, explained how they see the package and how they include it into their weekly shopping:

“We make use of the package for the whole week, we buy extra food per week at the cheapest supermarkets, a bit basis and a good planning is needed.”

(Food bank user)

Other respondents said that they could not make it through the whole week and that they thought that the package was meant to fully live from that. A social worker explains the diversity of opinions quite well in this statement:

“I also hear from people that say that they find the food package useless and that there are only old things inside and on the other hand there are people that are very enthusiast about the food bank.” (Social worker)

Another client who is a long term user of the food bank explains that through the food bank more food is available to him than before he was going to the food bank:

“If you have little money to spend then you don’ t really eat varied and therefore the food bank is really good, to still get the vitamins you need “. (Food bank user)

He also knew about previous food bank recipients which were going to the food bank some years ago. He was telling that back then the food in the package was way less and that the food bank had improved on that very much.

Healthiness of food package is perceived as average to low but sweets are claimed to contribute to social life

When talking about the type of available food in the package, some of the respondents wish to see more fresh fruits and vegetables rather than luxurious cookies, sweets or chips. While other respondents made clear that they appreciate the little extras per week that they otherwise couldn’t afford.

I asked how they perceive the healthiness of the food package and 10% of the respondents answered that they perceive it as high, 52% as average and 38% as low (see figure 9).

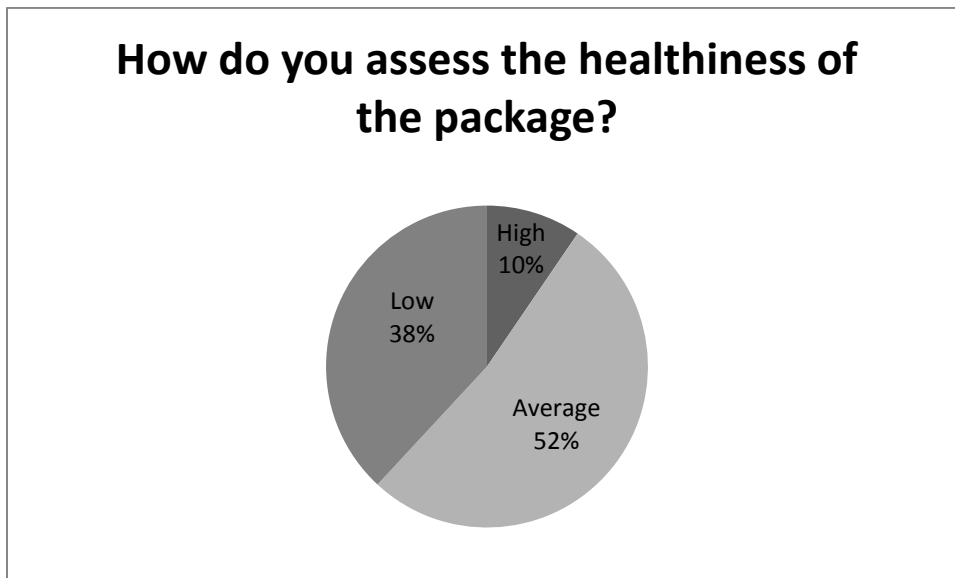


Figure 9: Answers of food bank users about the perceived healthiness of the products in the food package (answer options: High, Average, Low, None) presented in percentages (N=21).

Yet as mentioned above, there is another group that does not bother about the sweet stuff in the package and is rather happy about the nice extras:

“Chips and cookies are normally a luxury which we cannot afford.” (Food bank user)

During the interviews an interesting aspect came up about the usefulness of the sweets in the package. According to some of the interviewees, the impact of giving these sweets is reaching much further than just giving it as a simple extra. In some cases respondents say it would help to prevent social isolation, especially in children.

“The sweets are something that the parents normally could not buy. But if they get some sweets from here, parents can give some to their children to take it to school and share it with other kids. They can also invite kids at home if they have some chips or something, which they can offer to their child’ s friends. These small things can make a big difference for children, they get less excluded.” (Food bank user)

5.3. Food utilization

The USAID definition of food utilization: *“Effective food utilization depends in large measure on knowledge within the household of food storage and processing techniques, basic principles of nutrition and proper child care, and illness management.”* Food utilization is also determined by food quality, food consumption and food safety

Food preparation practices are an important skill when being food bank client

The food handed out at the food bank differs from week to week and depends on what supermarkets are willing to give away. Before the day that food bank clients receive the food package it is not possible to make a planning of what they would like to eat and to shop accordingly, like most of us are probably doing. One has to adopt to the rhythm of getting food from the food bank, checking what is inside and thinking about what to cook with it and what else one needs to buy in order to create meals for the next week from it. The packages are not necessarily filled with food items that make up several complete meals, but are instead a random mix of food items. The following three statements from different food bank recipients are explaining this situation:

“You never know what is in the package. Sometimes there is a meal inside for 3 days and sometimes for only one day. But you can save a lot of money even if you wouldn’ t have bought those products by your own in a store. You also become very creative, because you put different things together. First I went to pick up the package and then bought additional food for the week”
(Food bank user)

“I learned how to cook with what you get here and I think how to make a recipe out of it.” (Food bank user)

“If you are a bit creative with cooking, then you can make all kind of different sauces with vegetables or meat inside” (Food bank user)

When talking about food utilization the interviewees often referred to the behavior of other food bank users. Like this interviewee, she explains that others are incapable of processing some product while she finds herself capable of doing so:

“I can make apple mousse, but some people can’ t” (Food bank user)

This respondent explains how clients of the food bank that have access to internet deal with unknown products:

“Some people have computers to find a recipe for a certain ingredient on how to use it.”

Often lack of storing facilities

To guarantee food security is not only a matter of how to process it but it also depends on the storage facilities that persons have. The food bank hands out quite some amounts of deep frozen food. They deep freeze some products that otherwise would be out of date on the food package hand-out day, but because it is frozen it can still be given to the clients, even after the expiry date. Therefore it allows the food bank to hand out more food which they otherwise had to throw away. This is a favorable situation for those that go to the food bank, but what if you do not have the ideal storage facilities to keep the products frozen? You have to eat them as soon as possible, give them to others or throw them away. One food bank client explains this dilemma:

“I have only a very small freezer at home, so I cannot handle much deep frozen stuff and this is what you also get here a lot. So I have to eat these things fast and I am on my own, so that doesn’ t work out all the time and I have to throw some things.” (Food bank user)

Change in shopping and cooking behavior after becoming client

Many respondents described a change in cooking and shopping behavior, which is first of all a result from being poor but apart from that, being client at the food bank also changed respondents’ behavior. This is expressed differently for people that recently became poor and those that are poor for a longer period of time. Those that recently slipped into food poverty stated that they are eating less and more economical. Those that have been poor for a longer period of time reported the opposite, namely that they could eat more varied now that they are at the food bank.

“When I wasn’ t client of the food bank yet, I was eating very often only rice, with a sliced onion and a bit of sauce. Further I couldn’ t buy anything.” (Food bank user)

The following statement is from a person that has been living in food poverty for a longer period of time. The person reported how the influence of the food bank is on food intake and what long term food poverty does to ones cooking abilities and facilities:

“At one point all your herbs and spices are finished and fresh vegetables or fruits are very expensive in the supermarket. I was for example going at four o’ clock to the open market, cause then it’ s cheaper. You have to think what you are going to do. And now I also get nice cookies and chocolate, things that I normally cannot afford to buy” . (Food bank user)

Minority of recipients is making use of all products

On food packages there are two different types of expiration dates: either a best *before date* or a *use-by date*. A best before date is on products that do not spoil quickly. After the best before date, the product quality may deteriorate. It is often still safe to eat. A use-by date is on highly perishable products. After the use-by date the product should be discarded. According to the NVWA the use-by date is the last date on which it is still safe to eat the product (voedingscentrum.nl).

Respondents have been asked how they are handling the two different dates; if they have been informed by the food bank and if they handle the dates in a different way now, being a food bank user. Most of the respondents claimed that they have not received any direct information from the food bank and were often referring that there must be an official letter posted somewhere at the food bank. Some of the respondents said that they would throw any product as soon as it has outreached the expiry date and others said that they throw only certain products away that are on the expiry date, while they gained good experiences with other products that can last longer. During the survey respondents were asked if they use all the products from the packages. No one said: “I never use all the products.” Almost half of the total respondents claim that they make ‘sometimes’ use of all products, one third said that they regularly use all the products and around one fourth said that they always use all the products in the food package (See figure 10 below).

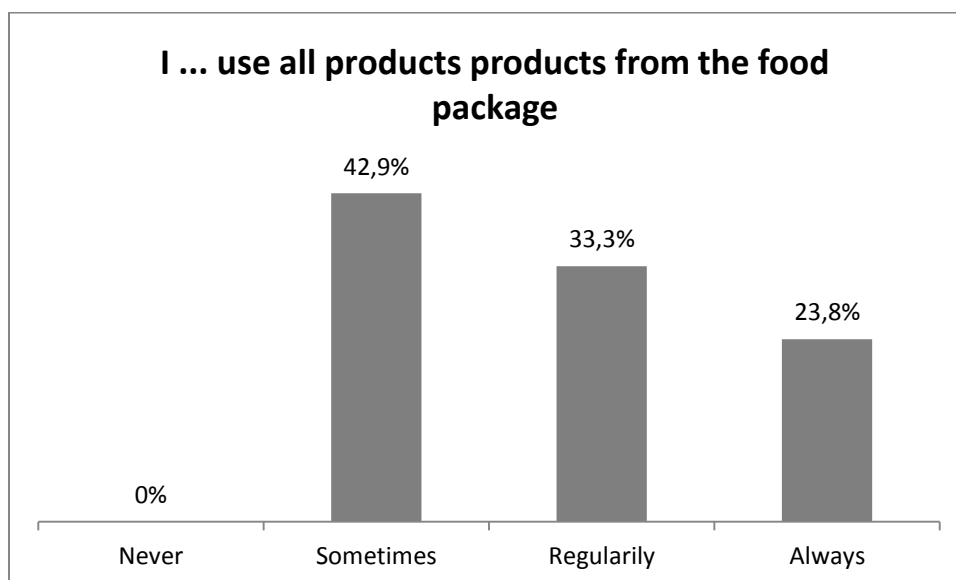


Figure 10: Frequency of the usage of all products (N=21)

The usage of the amount of products has to do with the attitude one has towards outdated products. Some respondents said that they experienced that yoghurt for example is often still edible until one week after the expiry date. But this user sees it different:

“In general it is ok, but sometimes there are too many products that are too close to the expiry date. So I look at things at the expiry date and I think, ok if it is good for a week it is ok. But sometimes you get things that are good until the next day or even on that day. Then I don’ t use it.” (Food bank user)

Several respondents believe that their opinion about the usage of products that are out of date has been changed after getting to the food bank.

“When in fact before I threw away minced meat because it was out of date, now I first have a look and smell it before I throw something” (Food bank user)

“After being in this situation you get to know that meat actually can last longer than it is written on the package. The same with dairy products. You get behind that faster if you are client of the food bank because actually all the products that you get are good on that day or are already over the expiry date.” (Food bank user)

Even after realizing that perishable food is often also good after the expiration date, the same food bank user also made clear how different he/she is behaving as a consumer in the supermarket, when he/she has the choice between products that have different expiration dates:

“If you buy things in the shop and you look at the expiry date and you see that other products last longer then you put that one back in the shelf.” (Food bank user)

Respondents revealed that there are more issues that play a role when it comes to products which are out of date. One woman complained that once some of her children got food poisoning after eating a product from the food bank and that now they refuse to eat things if they know it is from the food bank. She said that her children lost trust in her regarding those products and she further elaborated that this makes her really sad.

5.4. Communication difficulties and diverging opinions about the food bank

During the research it became clear that there are some misunderstandings between volunteers and clients and also for the perception of clients, which is a result of inefficient communication.

The food bank has many foreign clients, which mostly do not speak Dutch and sometimes not even English. That makes it more difficult to communicate between the volunteers and the clients. When there is a problem or an unclear situation the two parties are not able to communicate clearly. For example if a client brings back vegetables, some volunteers might think that they don’t like the product, but often it could also be that they do not know the product and do not have access to internet or other means in order to look it up.

At the food sharing initiative some clients of the food bank were complaining that sometimes the packages are filled with a lot from one and the same kind of food, like a portion of 10 breakfast cakes. The clients were further telling to them that if they leave some food behind that the

volunteers think that they can afford to buy food. While the reason from their side is that they do not want to eat so much of one kind of food.

Some clients wished to get more recipes in order to get ideas for cooking. This is because they may get one product very often (like peanut butter) or sometimes there are products in a metal tin which are not labelled or some vegetables they don't know. And many people do not have access to internet on a regular basis.

The food bank states that: "Customers who have long been in the emergency circuit may be thinking they have the right to have a package with a certain composition because they confuse the food bank with official assistance. A clear explanation that the food bank is a volunteer organization and that the composition of the packages depends on what they get from others usually helps to change attitudes." From my interviews it showed that yet there are still people who do not see them really as volunteers.

Another point that has been discussed previously was, for how long the weekly package can last. Some clients were confused and thought that the intention was to rely on the package the whole week, while others saw it as an addition to their weekly shopping. The latter also represents the opinion of the food bank.

"It's not enough for one week, this is also what we say, it is good for a few days and they also have to buy for themselves". (Volunteer)

Also how to handle the different dates on the food packaging is unclear to many clients. This is a problem, because most of the products handed out are very close to the expiry date or are already out of date. Food bank users claimed that they haven't received (any) clear information from the food bank on how to handle this issue, while volunteers on the contrary claimed that they hand out an information leaflet in the beginning when someone comes for the first time. Many users still think that products should strictly be thrown away. However experience has shown that certain products can still be used after the expiry date when stored properly.

I asked respondents (food bank users) with which statement they can identify themselves most (several answers were possible). The majority (67%) identified themselves most with the statement: "Without the food bank I couldn't make it". 19% are seeing the food bank as a "last resort", 9% as a "good addition" to their food consumption and 5% as a "help over a short time" (see figure 11 below).

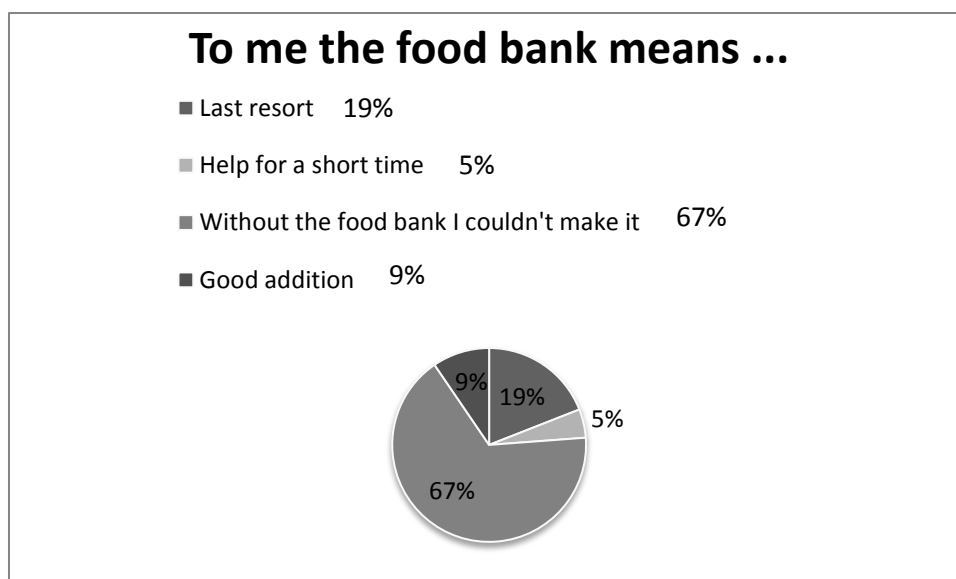


Figure 11: Opinions of recipients about the meaning of the food bank in relation to themselves (N=21)

5.5. Summing up

If a person meets the requirements of the food bank it is an easy, fast and un-bureaucratic process to become client of the food bank. However, this can only work, if one is also willing to improve his or her own situation and actively works together with the social workers. Nevertheless, the feeling of shame is one of the biggest barriers one has to overcome. Then after the first time most of the anxiety is gone and the overall experiences at the food bank are reported to be positive. Struggling with finding a balance between a low income and/or allowance and expenditures is the biggest challenge for those living in poverty. Trying to keep up with the modern 'normal lifestyle' makes things even more difficult. Things like smoking, going out, buying the latest technology or having pets, which are all part of our lifestyles are not possible for someone that has to live with less than 180€ per month.

Despite easy access, the availability of food differs from week to week and also between seasons of the year. This makes it more difficult for food bank clients to plan their expenditures and weekly menu. Also correct food utilization seems to be a problem. Some of the recipients do not have the right facilities to store bigger quantities of frozen food or they lack of knowledge about the right way of storing different kinds of food. Furthermore some clients find it difficult to handle the weekly differences in amounts of food or big quantities of one type of food. They do not know or do not have the ability to process it.

The healthiness of the food is by the majority of users perceived as average to low. Some people wish to see more fruits and vegetables and find no use in the 'sweet stuff', while others say that this is the extra 'little pleasure' they cannot afford. Other recipients were convinced that the sweets that they receive from the food bank could make them participate more in social life. They are able to invite friends for their birthdays to come over and have a little snack or give sweets to their children to school so that they can share it with other kids; this gives them the feeling of being less excluded.

Another issue that came up is the uncertainty on how to handle the two types of expiration dates on the products. Recipients are sometimes not sure for how long the product is still edible. The majority

of the respondents state that they sometimes make use of all the products, but that this is not the norm.

There are clear differences in long term food insecure people and those that just recently became food insecure. The ones that are insecure for longer periods claim that they eat more varied with the food bank and the other ones say that they eat less varied.

Chapter 6. Perceptions of volunteers and social workers

To get an overall picture and gather ideas and knowledge from other involved stakeholders of the food bank, the opinions of the volunteers and social workers have been analyzed according to the concept of food security and will be presented in this chapter.

In which different ways do food bank volunteers think they contribute to food security of food bank users?

Volunteers do not have as much diverging opinions about the food banks contribution to food security as the users have. An important viewpoint of the volunteers is that, if the user is actively working on improvement of his/her own situation and complying with the arrangements, their food security is safeguarded. A short summary of the findings gives table 7 below, each concept is analyzed in more detail hereafter.

Table 7: Perspectives on food security from volunteers and social workers

Volunteers and social workers perspective			
Concepts of food security	Determinants	Aspects that hinder being food secure	Aspects that facilitate being food secure
Food access (regarding clients)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Shame factor › Time of being in food poverty › Working on own situation or not › Accepting own situation or not › In/ability to comply with agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Not accepting fact of needing help › being for longer time in food poverty while making use of food bank but not trying to improve own situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Seeking for help › Actively trying to improve own situation
Food availability (regarding the work of the food bank)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Reaching food safety standards › Available amount from the different food suppliers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Seasonal changes in availability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Green label › Enough and proper storage facilities
Food utilization (regarding clients)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Cooking skills › Handling of unknown food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Find no use in provided food › Not being able to handle (new) food 	

6.1. Food access

The food bank makes clear that it does not matter to them how someone ends up at the food bank nor where they come from or what they are doing.

“We don’ t look at color, race or origin, nothing at all. We don’ t care about that at all. We don’ t judge about that and we don’ t say something about that. And sometimes we have people here in the neighborhoods who say that clients come to pick up the package by car and we say: yes, maybe the car is from the neighbor, I don’ t know.” (Volunteer)

In order to receive a food package from the food bank, the money left should not only be less than 180€ per month (amount for one adult, see for other calculations in chapter 1) but one also has to participate in a social program. From both sides it has been said that the communication between the food bank and the social workers is very good. The food bank itself does not look at the finances of applicants; they fully rely on the judgement of the social workers which send the people to the food bank.

“All the applications are made through social workers, Salvation Army or the municipality and those people have insight into their finances and they also help those people to improve their situation, we don’ t do that. But always someone is needed to look after the improvement of their situations.” (Volunteer)

Food access at the food bank only guaranteed if actively improving own economic situation

The food bank also explicitly states that their help is bound to a time limit and depends on the willingness of the one that seeks for help. If the persons that want to get help from a social institution and the food bank does not show that he or she wants to improve his or her own economic situation the assistance can be stopped.

“We also give a package over a time of maximum of 3 years. This is a trigger to get active. We are not continuing endlessly to fill shopping bags. Sometimes people want to get a food package but they don’ t want the help and then we say no. Thus it has an interaction and that is nice.” (Volunteer)

The food bank claims that because they are not bound to the state they can also react very fast and in urgent cases a package can be made even within the next day.

The social workers explained that half of the people are sent to them by another institution (doctor, unemployment agency etc.) and that the other half comes there by their own. On average households make use of social assistance - thus the food bank - for six months. Some stay shorter and some stay longer. Approximately 80% of the households complete the help successfully which means that they can go on their own without more help. The other roughly estimated 20% are the more problematic cases.

“Sometimes it has to go worse with them until they really go for the help and some people can keep a certain level but cannot get above that. But this group is a small group within the 20% and this is what it is and this is what they can reach in their life” (social worker)

Only 25% of those that seek help at a social institution also go to the food bank. Actually around 40% of those that seek help could be eligible to get a package from the food bank but because they spend the money they have on things that are not necessary and do not contribute to their own wellbeing they are excluded from the benefits of the food bank as long as they are not willing to change behavior (personal communication, social worker).

6.2. Food availability

The volunteers explain that they thrive to make the food package as varied and as full as possible. They try to follow the ‘schijf van vijf’ (English: disk of five) with 1) vegetables and fruits, 2) potatoes, bread, pasta and rice etc., 3) meat, fish and dairy products and 4) fat and oil (Voedingscentrum, 2015). As mentioned in the previous chapter by food bank users, the amount of food in the package differs greatly from week to week and also within seasons of the year. Volunteers see those differences and the differences between seasons:

“The last months they were quite well filled, but last summer it was way less. It also depends on family size how big the package will be.”
(Volunteer)

Food availability depends on food safety and differs per season

However we have to keep in mind that the food bank has to rely on the food that is donated to them. If a food bank can get the green label, situations where big differences in the amount of food supply occur, should change and become more stable, because supermarkets are then willing to deliver more food.

While food bank users in some cases appreciate the sweets and also see some social benefits in it, according to the volunteers there is clearly too little healthy food inside the packages but too many snacks and sweets, which they regard as useless. One of the volunteers talks about the disappointment regarding the amount of unhealthy food in the package:

“We like to fill the package with nutritious things. But that often does not work out. We still get a lot of cake and sweets.” (Volunteer)

But volunteers also have recognized the different views on sweets by the clients and that some clients like the little extras’:

“Some clients are not happy about that and others are happy about that. They say that they can buy basic food stuff but these are the extras we don’ t have money for” (Volunteer)

Nevertheless volunteers think that if the clients make use of the package as good as possible, by buying additional healthy and nutritional food from the supermarket, they can make several good meals from each package. Therefore volunteers say that with the adequate usage of the package, enough food is available to the clients.

6.3. Food utilization

When it comes to utilization of the food and its expiry dates, it is clear to the volunteers that the expiration date on perishable and non-perishable products does not say that the product cannot be consumed anymore. In fact the food that they hand out is often out of date and perishable foods are then given deep frozen.

“I think people should handle the expiration date easier. There are people that say: “milk on that day I am going to throw it “, but sometimes you can even use it until 10 days after the expiration date” .

Failed food utilization is widely happening

A consequence at the food bank is that - food which has been saved previously - is still thrown away. Volunteers know that many people are not aware of the fact that food, when stored correctly is often still good after the expiration date. A volunteer says:

“People live according to the expiration dates written on the packages and think that they cannot use the product afterwards.”

Checking the product by looking and smelling, gives good indications about the edibility of the product, according to some of the volunteers and users, which use products according to their own judgment and not necessarily according to the expiration date.

In the previous chapter I showed that some people seem to have difficulties in preparing a meal with the products they get from the food bank. Volunteers complain about the fact that some people give back e.g. vegetables which are in perfect conditions. However, this seems to be a kind of misunderstanding. There seems to be no institution that can really advise food bank users on what ingredients to use and how to plan dishes. The social work advises them how much to spend and on what, but not how to exactly handle the food.

“There is someone that gets a food package and if I see all the things that she doesn’ t use, she gives it away to other people but she is also someone that cannot care for herself and does not cook. I also tell her it’ s better to leave it at the food bank so some other client can take it, but she says that she just looks at it at home” (Social worker)

Chapter 7. Separation of food bank and food sharing initiative

How far is there overlap between the usage of the food bank and the food sharing initiative? And in which way both of the organizations could work together?

The answer is that the only overlap the two initiatives have is the goal to prevent food waste, further overlap couldn't be detected. Also a future collaboration seems quite unlikely as both initiatives have different perceptions about the way of working together. The food bank thinks that the food sharing initiative could bring food to the food bank while the food sharing initiative thinks that they on the other hand could pick up the leftovers from the food bank. The food bank is 'by law' not allowed by the supermarkets to give food to others than those that fulfill the criteria of the food bank. Supermarkets are concerned cause often their name is written on the packaging and they also want to prevent losing potential customers.

Another aspect that makes working together more difficult is that the food bank - in this specific case study - has one fixed day of handing out food with a timeframe, which is on Fridays between 15:00-17:00. While the food for food sharing is picked up on Friday evenings after 18:00 and in the weekends. So the food from the food sharing initiative should stay good for one more week, if they would want to provide it to food bank clients.

“I know that the food bank is handing out their food on Fridays. That is a bit a problem, 'cause the food should stay good for several days. If this is not the case they are not allowed to give it away. But I can go to the shop and get it today, and today I give it away.” (Food sharing initiator)

In both cases, supermarkets are involved. But it seems that the relationship that each has to the supermarket differs quite a lot. While food sharing stays in close and open contact to the supermarket owner, and most supermarkets are local stores and rather small, the food bank has a rather distanced relationship to them and also gets food from the 'big chains' only.

One more important side outcome of this study is that food sharing as an act itself is happening on smaller scale between food bank users. When I asked food bank users if they knew food sharing the initiative, the majority either said that they have never heard of it or that they have heard of it but never use it, they rather share food with other users, relatives, friends or neighbors.

Food Sharing' or 'Sharing food'?

Only few of the respondents knew about the initiative 'food sharing', but the majority of the respondents shared or is sharing food on a regular basis with either other clients, family, friends or neighbors. Here are some of the responses and experiences food bank users shared with me:

This food bank user explains how food sharing happens on the spot inside the food bank when packing in the food they just got:

“Two weeks ago there was a guy (other user) who did not like leek and he asked me: 'Do you like it?' and I said: 'Yes, I am going to make leek-potato soup. What would you like? Something that I have?' He said: 'Well you have marshmallows.' I said: 'Anyway I am not going to eat these; you

can have them of course.’ But if nobody needs a product that I won’ t use then I give it back to the volunteers.” (Food bank user)

Food sharing is a social activity, because it also leads to making contact with others:

“Normally I don’ t share products with other clients but once I exchanged something with another guy, he became a social contact after. He also gave me several things from his cooling bag” (Food bank user)

The following food bank user also knew about the food sharing initiative and also made use of it once; he explains what in his opinion, is the benefit of making use of the food sharing initiative:

“This initiative is good for people who are a bit above the requirements for a food package here. This initiative is really a good example and a source of inspiration.” (Food bank user)

Food waste issue at the food bank

A secondary goal of the food bank is to eliminate food waste but in the same time they are ‘living’ from the supermarkets’ food waste. If the overall food waste would be reduced, the food banks would also get less. The following statement explains this twofold situation:

“Maybe if producers and supermarkets would realize how much they are wasting they would purchase sharper, then the food bank would get less, but it is one of our goals to combat food waste. That would be nice. But meanwhile if you see how many people need the food bank and how high the threshold is for many people to finally come here, then I think well, continue overproducing for a while” (Volunteer)

When it comes to the topic of preventing food waste, I could recognize different viewpoints in volunteers and social workers. Some of the volunteers and social workers think that food bank users are throwing food away:

“I don’ t think they use the complete package. I don’ t know but I think quite some food is thrown away or given away. Hopefully it is given away.” (Volunteer)

“I think that many things are thrown away, because you get it for free and some people cannot handle it.” (Social worker)

Volunteers that have been working at the food bank for several years reported that they have noticed a change in waste management of supermarkets, throughout time.

“Some supermarkets improved a lot their waste management over the years; their purchase is much sharper nowadays, when compared to some years ago. But we didn’ t see that change in all supermarkets” (Volunteer)

The volunteer continued to explain how much of the ‘rescued’ food waste from the supermarkets can actually be used in the food bank.

“From the food that we get from our biggest supermarket supplier, we have to throw 30–40% away because it is totally not edible anymore. The other 60–70% we can use for the preparation of food packages” (Volunteer)

The participants were also asked to choose with which statement they can identify themselves the most regarding the question: “When do you throw food from your package?” (See figure 12 above) Almost 50% could identify themselves with the statement that ‘the product is over the date’. I double checked with the respondents understanding of the question, and throwing a product when being over date did not mean to them that the product was not edible anymore, but that according to them it was not good to eat something that is out of date. The other half either identified themselves with ‘the product is rotten’ or ‘I never throw food from the package’. Within this half, a small amount of respondents couldn’t identify themselves with any of the given statements and they gave another answer in the category ‘different’. The answer ‘different’ means that they would either throw food from the package because they cannot eat the product because of health reasons or if it was about frozen dairy products.

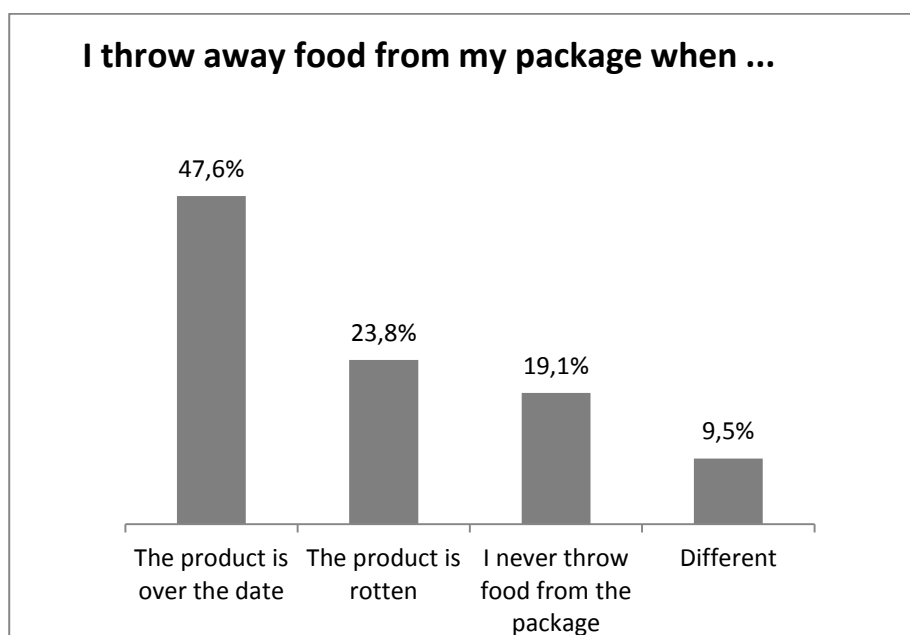


Figure 12: Reasons for food bank users to throw food away from the package (N=21)

There were also some respondents that are very conscious about food waste and they are trying to eliminate their own household food waste as much as possible, by either preventing it in the first place:

“I also don’ t want to waste any food, because there are so many people that are hungry. I don’ t throw anything away, when I make potatoes I even keep the peel on.” (Food bank user)

Or by sharing it with others:

“If we have too much of something, we are not going to throw that into the garbage bin. Then I am saying to my neighbor: “Hey, I got some bananas here, do you want some?” (Food bank user)

Chapter 8: Conclusion and Discussion

In this final chapter I want to discuss about volunteers', social workers' and recipients' perception about food poverty and food security at the food bank and partly at the food sharing initiative. Furthermore, I want to discuss the differences between those perceptions and the key elements we can take from those perceptions to give an idea about the current food security at the food bank. Based on this, suggestions for potential improvements were made (not only for food banks but especially for policy makers).

Overall I recognized that quite some of the recipients at the food bank have jobs. The problem is that those are only part-time. Without having a full-time job, it is not easy to get on their feet again. The most noticeable reasons for people getting into food insecurity are combinations of having a low income and not being able to handle expenditures in a self-sustaining way. Losing control over the budget and increasing debts, make it very hard to find a way out of this poverty circle. After having realized the need of getting help, the first step to take and actually going to the food bank is often hindered by the feeling of shame. A lot of changes are needed to work towards breaking the poverty circle; change in shopping and cooking behavior is needed, handling the expiration dates more easy is often a necessity as food is handed out on or beyond the expiration date, adopting to the food banks schedule (getting food on one specific day in the week and getting varying amounts of food each week) and trying to handle the social circumstances that come along with that. Many food bank users are afraid of how to explain that to their children, friends and family.

Volunteers' and Food bank Users' Perspectives

In general it can be said that volunteers do not have as much diverging opinions about food banks' contribution to food security as the users have. The recipients' view is determined by their individual expectations, needs and the size and composition of the household he or she lives in. 67% of the recipients stated that without the help of the food bank they couldn't buy enough food to feed themselves and/or their family.

In this discussion part, the answers of the two respondent groups are, as in the previous chapters, categorized in the three different themes within the food security concept: Food access, availability and utilization. After these sections, follows the discussion around the two concepts of food bank and food sharing. Methodological challenges as well as suggestions complete this thesis.

Food access

The most important determinant for food aid users in order to get access to the food package was to overcome the feeling of shame. For many respondents, going to the food bank felt like losing a piece of their dignity at first. But those that could overcome this feeling of shame and took the step of seeking help at the food bank, also reported that after the first day they have felt much better and less ashamed. Therefore the location of the food bank also plays an important role to them, because the risk to be seen from their neighbors increases the probability of not going to the food bank. The volunteers' most important viewpoint on food access is that - if the user is actively working on improving his/her own situation and complying with the arrangements - their food security should be guaranteed. Most of the volunteers and social workers are aware of the shame factor of the people

in need. However they may regard it not as the biggest obstacle in getting access to food. In their view the biggest obstacle might occur if a person is not willing to comply with the agreements between him/her and the social worker and food bank e.g. actively trying to improve own situation, pick up packages regularly and in time.

Another important fact that determines if food poor people can, and want to get access to the food bank, is the way they are dealing with their money. If they are able to show to the social workers (the first instance they have to approach if they want to get eligible for a food package), that they are trying to deal as best as possible with their problematic financial situation and not buying things above their own limits, then they should get access granted to the food bank.

Food availability

Food availability in the user's perspective depends on the amount of food at the food bank. According to the volunteers that amount depends to the greatest extent on what the distribution center in Arnhem. Additionally, it depends on how they are handling food safety, which determines what and how much food local supermarkets are willing to deliver. Other contributors to food availability are the two initiatives Voedselhulp Rhenen and the Voedsel Estafette. Food safety plays a big role here – without ensuring food safety, supermarkets would not want to deliver to the food banks, as their name is written on the products and they do not want to risk much. According to the users the amounts of food were changing a lot each week. From just getting the basics and having to buy fresh food by themselves to another week when getting so much that they were not able to store it at their houses. These changing amounts were especially difficult for those people that are having troubles to plan their weekly meals and were not able to cook more creatively, because this would make them use the food stuffs more efficiently. Seasonal changes in availability may hinder a constant food supply in the opinion of the volunteers. However food availability at the food bank cannot exist without food safety. No food safety means no guarantee to the supermarkets that the food is handed correctly (not breaking the cooling chain), which means they most likely will not deliver any food to the food bank. Any Dutch food bank can secure a steady food supply by earning a "green label", which guarantees food safety and is a quality proof for supermarkets for properly stored food at the food bank. Therefore a food bank needs enough and well-functioning storing capacities.

Food utilization

For a good utilization of the food that is handed out at the food bank, recipients reported that cooking skills and handling of unknown food is decisive. Additionally, the availability of means in the household is determining how good food can be utilized. Is internet access available? In order to find new recipes or look up what can be done with unknown food. How big are the storage capacities? At the food bank people receive big amounts of food at once, but some people do not have freezers and only small fridges. Can food safety be guaranteed? The availability of a freezer or enough cooling capacity plays a crucial role here. Most perishable products which are handed out are on, or close to the expiration date. What should one do with a lot of perishable food close to the expiration date, when the household resources do not allow a correct way of storing it?

According to the volunteers, cooking skills and handling off unknown food are success factors in achieving good food utilization in food bank users. However they reported that quite often users

would bring back food because they do not know it and thus that that it is useless, because they do not know how to prepare them.

Food bank and Food sharing

A common goal between the food bank and 'Food Sharing' is to prevent food waste; further collaboration seems difficult since both have a different understanding about each other. Food sharing is mainly happening between users or within their families, friends or neighbors, they do not necessarily participate in the initiative 'Food Sharing' itself, food sharing is rather a concept to them and is happening naturally. In fact only very few participants knew about the initiative but almost all the respondents were practicing food sharing in their own way.

Methodological challenges

There were some challenges I faced during the investigation of my research questions. Before conducting the questionnaire I thought that, in order to minimize intimidation by the asked question, it could be handed out through a box, so that the respondents feel less ashamed or less pressured to hand it in. While conducting the research I recognized that this was not as easy as I thought. First of all the volunteers repeatedly told me that they are quite sure that the food bank users would not return the questionnaire the following week and that I better should ask them right away. Secondly when I asked them to fill out the questionnaire by themselves on the location, the respondents came up with excuses and either said that they were not interested anymore or had problems with their hands and thus could not write. Therefore I decided to ask the questions in the questionnaire by myself. Out of this spontaneous change a new sampling method evolved, which turned out to be a sort of 'structured short interviews'. The other thing was that by doing small interviews, respondents gave much more extra information and I could also observe their reactions and asked confirming questions. I also ensured total anonymity to each respondent. However, a problem with this method was that I had less respondents than expected, because only those that were open to be asked about their own critical situation by another, unknown person were ready to answer the questionnaire. Sometimes it was also difficult to hold these short interviews, because of the local situation. Sometimes there was not a lot of space and people were not eager to talk while others may listen, or they were in a rush and were not able or were not interested to spare some time for an interview. However, this was different with the long in-depth interviews. Those were arranged beforehand and conducted in a small room which is separated from the locality where the food is handed out. This created a more relaxed atmosphere and respondents were opening up more by telling more personal details. Nevertheless, a certain bias was also involved here, because the interviews were arranged with the help of another volunteer. Arranging interviews with food bank users by myself was unwanted from the food bank. Even when I tried to arrange interviews by myself, people did not show up and therefore it was better to arrange them through some trusted person at the food bank.

Suggestions and ideas for further research

When access, availability and utilization are insured, food security occurs. The food bank I investigated could probably be a good example of how to work towards achieving better food

security in the frame of availability and access, by ensuring food safety. Other food banks could follow the same path and therefore secure enough food and minimize waiting lists for those in need. Respondents were complaining about the big changes in the amounts of food handed out each week, but this was before they got the green label. Interesting for further research would be to see, if such food safety label systems and improvements of facilities within food banks, can really reach better outcomes regarding food security; or if this system does not have any impact on food security. More availability of food for food bank clients can also be reached, by handing out food on several days, if possible. This means food is fresher, because it does not need to be stored for long times; less food will be thrown away at the supermarkets and at the same time more people can be fed.

Therefore, ensuring food availability and access does not seem to be too difficult to be reached by food banks – but ensuring adequate food utilization does seem to be a bigger problem, according to my case study. Giving people resources and knowledge regarding food, is almost as important as giving food by itself. A Chinese proverb says: “Give a man a fish; you have fed him for today. Teach a man how to fish and you have fed him for a lifetime.”

The management of own household economics is very important in order to make a step out of food poverty. Municipalities and food banks could work together on this issue and for example, give some free courses on budgeting. This would not only be necessary for those that already have a lot of problems but also for people that are interested, in order to prevent of getting into more problems.

Furthermore, municipalities and policy makers have to realize that the involvement of children in food aid needs to get more attention. In one town within my study, 58% of the food bank users were children. Negative effects of food insecurity on those most vulnerable should be considered. Also the current refugee crisis challenges the discussion which role the state and which one the caring society plays. I think this discussion should be left aside, a better discussion would be: How can they work better together in order to be more effective regarding food security.

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Appendix

Questionnaire Design for food bank clients

Beste mevrouw/mijnheer,

Deze enquête maakt deel uit van een onderzoek van een studente aan de Universiteit Wageningen in het kader van een afstudeer vak. De enquête is bedoeld om uw tevredenheid over de voedselbank en het voedselpakket te meten. De enquête is anoniem. Verder draagt deze enquête bij aan een beter begrip van uw voedsel behoeftes.

Aan het eind van het formulier is er ruimte voor op- of aanmerkingen over de voedselpakketten. Wij vragen u deze enquête in te vullen en vandaag of volgende week vrijdag in te leveren: er zal een doos klaar staan om de enquête in achter te laten.

Alvast bedankt!

Leeftijd: _____ Geslacht ☐ man ☐ vrouw

Burgerlijke staat:

☐ ongehuwd ☐ gehuwd ☐ geregistreerd partnerschap ☐ gescheiden ☐ anders, _____

Momenteel betaalde baan: ☐ Ja ☐ Nee

Duur van voedselbank gebruik in maanden ☐ 0-6 ☐ 6-12 ☐ > 12

Grootte van het huishouden	_____ Persoon /Personen Waarvan: _____ Kind(-eren) _____ Volwassene(-n)				
Participeert u naast de voedselbank bij een sociaal programma?	o Ja, bij _____ o Nee				
Als Ja: Wat vindt u van de eisen die aan u worden gesteld bij dit programma?	o Overdreven o Goed aan mij aangepast o anders: _____				
Tevredenheid met voedselpakket	Zeer ontevreden	Ontevreden	Neutraal	Tevreden	Zeer tevreden
	O	O	O	O	O

Tevredenheid totale voedselbeschikbaarheid	Zeer ontevreden	Ontevreden	Neutraal	Tevreden	Zeer tevreden
	O	O	O	O	O
Beoordeling gezondheid totale voedselbeschikbaarheid	<input type="radio"/> Hoog <input type="radio"/> Gemiddeld <input type="radio"/> Laag <input type="radio"/> Geen		Opmerkingen: _____ _____ _____ _____		
Gebruik van alle producten in het voedselpakket	<input type="radio"/> Nooit <input type="radio"/> Soms <input type="radio"/> Regelmatig <input type="radio"/> Altijd		Opmerkingen: _____ _____ _____ _____		
Het gebruik van bederfelijke voedingsmiddelen na vervaldatum (zoals yoghurt, vlees, kaas)	<input type="radio"/> Nooit <input type="radio"/> Soms <input type="radio"/> Regelmatig <input type="radio"/> Altijd		Opmerkingen: _____ _____ _____ _____		
Gebruik van niet-bederfelijke voedingsmiddelen na vervaldatum (zoals koffie, thee, pasta, rijst)	<input type="radio"/> Nooit <input type="radio"/> Soms <input type="radio"/> Regelmatig <input type="radio"/> Altijd		Opmerkingen: _____ _____ _____ _____		
In de volgende sectie zijn er stellingen opgevoerd, kruis aan waarmee u zich het meeste identificeert (meerdere antwoorden mogelijk):					
Ik gooi soms voedsel uit het pakket weg, want ... (Kruis de 3 belangrijkste redenen aan)	<input type="radio"/> Het product is over datum <input type="radio"/> Het smaakt mij niet <input type="radio"/> Ik heb er te veel van <input type="radio"/> Ik weet niet hoe ik het moet toebereiden <input type="radio"/> Het product is bedorven <input type="radio"/> Ik gooi nooit voedsel uit het pakket weg <input type="radio"/> Anders, namelijk _____ _____				
Ik weet wat 'Food Sharing' is....	<input type="radio"/> Ja, ik maak er ook gebruik van <input type="radio"/> Ja, maar ik maak er geen gebruik van <input type="radio"/> Nee, ik heb er nog nooit van gehoord				
Voor mij betekent de voedselbank.....	<input type="radio"/> Laatste toevlucht <input type="radio"/> Hulp over een korte termijn <input type="radio"/> Zonder de voedselbank zou ik het echt niet kunnen redden <input type="radio"/> Anders, namelijk _____				

Graag horen wij het als u nog verdere opmerkingen over de voedselbank en de pakketten heeft :
