

Wells Area Food Shelf SuperShelf Transformation Case Study Report



FMW SHIP

Fostering Healthy Communities in
Faribault, Martin & Watonwan Counties!



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Report Methodology

Data Sources

This case study report compiles information gathered through a site visit, a survey of food shelf volunteers, a survey of food shelf shoppers, key informant interviews, and a document review.

Twenty-two Wells Area Food Shelf shoppers completed a survey during a site visit in late April 2025. The survey asked about their experiences and opinions about shopping at Wells Area Food Shelf. Surveys were available in English and Spanish. Shoppers were offered a \$10 incentive for taking the survey as a thank you for their time. Most shoppers that chose to complete the survey did so while they were waiting for their turn to shop at the food shelf.

Nine Wells Area Food Shelf volunteers completed a volunteer survey during the same site visit. The survey focused on volunteers' opinions, experiences and observations related to food offerings, shopping experience and impact of SuperShelf changes.

Two Food Shelf Coordinators and the FMW SHIP Coordinator participated in separate key informant interviews to share about the Wells Area Food Shelf transformation. These interviews took place before, during and after the site visit, and focused on the process for Wells Area Food Shelf becoming a SuperShelf site.

This report also draws on a Food Sourcing Analysis Report created by Foundation for Essential Needs (FFEN), which compiles service and sourcing statistics for Wells Area Food Shelf between January and June 2024. Additional documents analyzed include the Wells Area Food Shelf Statewide Health Improvement Partnership survey.

Data Analysis Methods

An external evaluator from NorthStar Data Partners analyzed quantitative data using descriptive statistics through Microsoft Excel. The evaluator also analyzed qualitative data from interviews, observations, and surveys using content and thematic analysis methodology.



About Wells Area Food Shelf



History of Wells Area Food Shelf

Wells, Minnesota is a town located in eastern Faribault County with a population of just over 2,300 residents. Founded in 1983, Wells Area Food Shelf serves community members facing food insecurity. Initially, the volunteer-run food shelf operated out of United Methodist Church, now Open Doors Methodist Church. The food shelf eventually relocated to Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Wells to accommodate additional space needs. At Good Shepherd, they were able to use four rooms and a hallway for weekly food distributions. Eventually, the food shelf outgrew Good Shepherd's capacity and moved into their current location in 2020.

Now, Wells Area Food Shelf is housed in a rented space on First Avenue Southwest. When they first moved, the space was owned by Covenant Life Church and it has since been purchased by a private owner. Their new home offers a large registration area and waiting area, a large shopping area, two storage rooms, and an office.

Wells Area Food Shelf Operations

Wells Area Food Shelf operates between the hours of 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesdays. Wells Area Food Shelf is categorized as a sustaining food shelf, which means that it provides reliable and consistent food access to individuals that face food insecurity. To ensure the food shelf equitably serves all who need their services, shoppers are allowed one visit to the food shelf every four weeks. Between January to June 2024, Wells Area Food Shelf served a duplicated count of 443 households with 1,381 individuals, meaning some households visited the food shelf multiple times. **This averages out to 17 households with 53 individuals served each week.**

Food Sourcing

Wells Area Food Shelf receives food from a variety of sources. Between January to June 2024, about 10% of their food distributed came from The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), a federal program that provides low-income individuals* with U.S. Department of Agriculture foods, including dairy, fruits and vegetables, and protein. During that same time period, 34% of foods distributed at Wells Area Food Shelf came from donations and 56% of foods distributed were purchased. Wells Area Food Shelf's regional food back is Channel One, based in Rochester, Minnesota. Volunteers shared that they are often the last stop on Channel One's distribution route, as they are on the geographic edge of Channel One's service area. Volunteers reported that in the past year, the variety of foods offered through Channel One has declined, and as a result they have had to purchase more foods at the local grocery store to provide the products that shoppers need.



*TEFAP serves individuals who self-report that their income is 300% or below the federal poverty level.



Governance and Leadership

Wells Area Food Shelf is overseen by a 12-member volunteer Board of Directors that meets monthly to govern the food shelf operations. The food shelf is volunteer-run with six to nine volunteers that staff the food shelf distribution on Tuesday afternoons, and volunteers taking additional roles to keep the food shelf operating smoothly throughout the week. Key leadership roles are held by Donna Weckwerth, Pat Mills, Steve Linde, Tobi Baker, Denise Radtke and Marlene Wegner. Donna, Pat and Steve serve as Food Shelf Coordinators. They are a consistent presence at Food Shelf distributions and together, they support the food shelf in a variety of ways from grant writing and reporting to processing large food donations. Tobi serves as Board President and had a lead role in painting during the SuperShelf transformation. Denise stocks shelf stable foods and places orders from Channel One Regional Food Bank. Marlene places orders for perishable items from grocery stores when they are unable to procure those products from donations or the Channel One regional food bank.

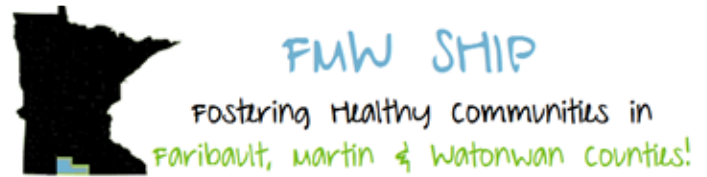


Partnership with Faribault Martin Watonwan SHIP and SuperShelf

About the External Partners

In 2024, Wells Area Food Shelf partnered with the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership of Faribault, Martin and Watonwan Counties (FMW SHIP) and SuperShelf to create an even more welcoming, positive, grocery store-like experience for shoppers.

With support from the Minnesota Department of Health and funding from the Minnesota Health Care Access Fund, **FMW SHIP** helps community partners across the tri-county area to create long-lasting changes that improve resident health and wellbeing. FMW SHIP supports community-driven, evidence-based programs that tackle the root causes of chronic disease, with a particular focus on improving access to healthy foods, opportunities for active living, mental health and wellbeing supports, and preventing commercial tobacco use.



SuperShelf is an organization that supports food shelves in creating welcoming environments for communities to access appealing, healthy food. SuperShelf was developed in Minnesota by four founding partners:



- **Health Partners (an insurance and health care organization),**
- **Valley Outreach (food shelf in Stillwater, Minnesota),**
- **The Food Group (nonprofit organization addressing food access and hunger), and**
- **The University of Minnesota Extension and Department of Family Medicine and Community Health.**

SuperShelf strategies help make the healthiest choice the easiest choice, while honoring food shelf shoppers' individual preferences. Results from pilot programs show SuperShelves are sustainable, well-received by shoppers and volunteers, practical and scalable, and increase access to a variety of healthy and culturally appropriate foods.

Deciding to Becoming a SuperShelf Site

Between 2022 to 2025, the **Minnesota Department of Health** initiated a statewide effort to increase the number of Certified SuperShelf sites across Minnesota. In 2023, Kaley Hernandez, FMW SHIP Coordinator, reached out to local food shelves to gauge interest in becoming a SuperShelf site. Kaley connected with Donna Weckwerth, Wells' Food Shelf Coordinator. Donna had originally heard about SuperShelf at a regional Channel One meeting, and was excited to learn more about how SuperShelf practices could be implemented in Wells. From what Donna had learned prior, SuperShelf sounded like a good way to organize their food offerings. Donna and Kaley helped convene an in-person, sit-down meeting with Wells Area Food Shelf leadership to learn more about the program from Kaley Hernandez and Minnesota Extension staff that represent SuperShelf.



While Donna was excited about the prospects of becoming a SuperShelf site, some leaders at the food shelf expressed reluctance in making the change. Wells Area Food Shelf has been operating successfully for decades and some leaders didn't want to change a system that was working for the community. The FMW SHIP Coordinator and Minnesota Extension staff shared about the supports that SuperShelf and FMW SHIP could provide Wells Area Food Shelf in a SuperShelf transformation, including technical assistance and funding. Donna's enthusiasm for this project helped the leadership team move to the next step of bringing the proposal to the Wells Area Food Shelf Board of Directors.

Kaley attended the next Board meeting to share about the SuperShelf opportunity and field questions from the full board. After the discussion, the Board elected to move forward with SuperShelf certification, with Donna as the liaison to FMW SHIP and SuperShelf.



SuperShelf Transformation

Transformation: Leveraging SHIP and other Funding

SuperShelf staff from Minnesota Extension supported Wells Area Food Shelf during their food shelf transformation. The Food Shelf Coordinator shared that working with SuperShelf was a great experience. SuperShelf staff shared ideas for incorporating SuperShelf best practices at Wells, and they were also willing to listen to volunteers' ideas and tailor suggestions to Wells' existing operations.

The transformation included reorganizing shelves to group all like-products together and ensuring they had enough shelf space for the rearranged goods. Then, Wells Area Food Shelf replaced wooden and fiber tables with stainless steel commercial tables, funded through a \$7,500 grant from Hunger Solutions. After the tables were installed, they started picking out new signage, funded by SHIP, to designate different food types and other products available within the food shelf (for example, fruits and vegetables, proteins, etc.). The signs were translated into Spanish, to help make the space more inclusive and welcoming for all shopBefore the transformation, the backs of the pantry shelving units were open. They covered the shelves with pegboard and which allowed them to attach the descriptive signage to the pegboard instead of attaching PVC pipe, which had been used in the past. Decorative signage depicting fresh, healthy foods was purchased and installed throughout the shopping and waiting areas. Donna shared that the signage is beautiful and it makes the whole room pop. Their final upgrade was painting the room, which helped bring everything together. The sunny yellow paint, attractive wall hangings, and descriptive signage help make the food shelf a welcoming space for all shoppers.

Transformation Photos



BEFORE



AFTER

Before the SuperShelf transformation, produce was displayed in produce boxes atop wooden banquet tables. Now, produce is displayed in uniform bins atop commercial stainless steel tables, purchased through a grant from Hunger Solutions.

The “after” photo also showcases the side-by-side commercial fridge and freezer units purchased with SHIP funds that display dairy and protein options. A fresh coat of paint and attractive wall decals further freshens up the space.

Transformation Photos



BEFORE



AFTER

Before the SuperShelf transformation, shelf stable goods were displayed on wire shelving units. The “after” photo shows that Wells Area Food Shelf kept the same shelving units during their SuperShelf transformation. The transformation included grouping products by category, labeling the categories in English and Spanish, clearly displaying the choices shoppers have within each category, and placing the healthier items first for shoppers. Shoppers select their fresh and canned fruits and vegetables, meats and protein, dairy and then grains and baking items, with juice and snacks being the very last selections. This uses behavioral science principals to help shoppers make the healthiest choices. SHIP funds paid for the attractive, bilingual signage.

Transformation Photos



BEFORE



AFTER

Before the SuperShelf transformation, household goods and personal products were displayed on wooden and other shelving units.

The “after” photo shows that personal and household goods are now displayed on wire shelving units that match the rest of the shelf stable goods. The items are labeled with signage paid for through a SHIP grant, and the sunny yellow paint is on full display.

Site Description

The Wells Area Food Shelf is located in downtown Wells, nestled among local businesses. The entrance of the dark brown building is marked by a bright white door flanked by two windows that advertise the operating hours and a phone number to contact for emergency food needs. Several exterior windows to the right of the entrance are decorated with attractive decals that depict food products on shelves.



Site Description

After entering the foods shelf, shoppers are met with a clean, spacious, brightly-lit waiting area. The waiting area includes seven chairs, a welcome sign in English and Spanish, and a small table with coloring books and crayons to occupy children while their parents shop. The bulletin board below the welcome sign displays some artwork created by children.



The walls are painted a sunny yellow with bright blue trim. Throughout the waiting and shopping areas, the food shelf is decorated with large wall hangings depicting people preparing and eating fresh and healthy foods, prominently featuring produce.

Site Description

As shoppers move from the waiting area to the shopping area, they walk through a section of the building which displays advertisements in English for other programs and services that may benefit food shelf shoppers, including:

- **Minnesota Food Helpline**
- **A 24/7 tiny food pantry housed at the Open Doors United Methodist Church in Wells**
- **Job Corps Training Program**
- **LawHelpMN.org**
- **Lutheran Social Services for Runaway or Homeless Youth**

This area also includes a posted notices in English of food shelf beneficiary rights and of the right for shoppers to make a complaint. The food shelf's antidiscrimination policy is posted in English and Spanish.



Site Description

When facing the entrance from the back of the building, the shopping is divided into three main sections: shelf-stable foods and pantry items on the right, perishable items on the left, and personal care and household goods in the back left corner.

Shelf-stable foods are neatly organized and grouped by type, with attractive signage in English and Spanish. They are divided into the following sections:

- **Fruits & Vegetables**
- **Protein**
- **Grains**
- **Cooking & Baking**
- **Meals & Sides**
- **Snacks & Beverages**

Within each section, there are signs displaying the limit per family per shopping trip for each type of item. For example, shoppers may select up to three canned or boxed vegetable products, one bag of flour, two cans of beans, two baking mixes, and one jar of condiments.



Site Description

Perishable items, including produce, meat, dairy, frozen and bakery items, are on the left side of the shopping area. The shopping area includes two large commercial refrigerator and freezer units with glass doors, which display and store dairy, produce, and meat items. Frozen items, including bakery goods and meat, are also stored in one of several chest freezers. Produce is displayed in uniform bins arranged on a stainless steel table.



Site Description

Personal care and household items are displayed on two large shelves. Available products include dish soap, laundry soap, household cleaners, diapers, tissues, paper towels, toothpaste, deodorant, shampoo and conditioner. This section also houses any pet care products available.

After selecting personal care and household items, shoppers head to the stainless steel weighing area to have all their groceries weighed before heading home. The volunteers also provide grocery carry out service.





Volunteer and Shopper Feedback

About Wells Area Food Shelf Volunteers

Wells Area Food Shelf has a dedicated, long-term volunteer base. Most volunteers surveyed have been consistently volunteering at Wells Area Food Shelf for over five years and have seen the food shelf through multiple sites and transitions. All volunteers have a role in helping shoppers that visit the food shelf, with others taking on additional roles. Of the nine volunteers surveyed:

- **Three volunteers help pick up food from vendors and donors,**
- **Three volunteers help stock food,**
- **Two volunteers provide coordination,**
- **One volunteer orders food from the Channel One Regional Food Bank and the grocery store, and**
- **One volunteer completes grant applications.**

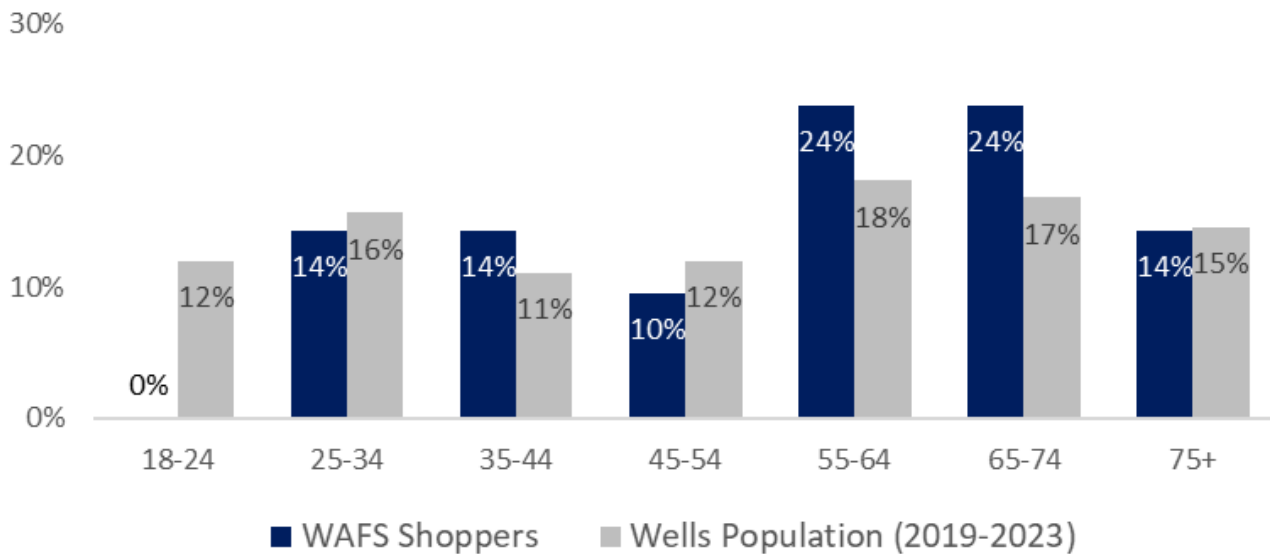
On the day of the food shelf site visit, there were seven volunteers supporting shoppers. One volunteer checked in shoppers at the registration desk, two volunteers helped provide selected perishable food items to shoppers, two volunteer helped weigh and carry out food for shoppers, one volunteer helped with perishable food packing and Spanish translation when needed, and one volunteer floated around as needed.



About Wells Area Food Shelf Shoppers

Wells Area Food Shelf serves individuals from Wells and the surrounding area. Shoppers surveyed for this report come from Wells, Albert Lea, Alden, Kiester, New Richland and Waldorf. Food shelf volunteers said they serve many repeat shoppers alongside some shoppers who come for shorter-term needs. This aligns with survey results, which show that more than two-thirds of shoppers (68%) have been visiting Wells Area Food Shelf for over a year. Shoppers' household size ranged from 1 to 7 people, with an average of two or three people per household.

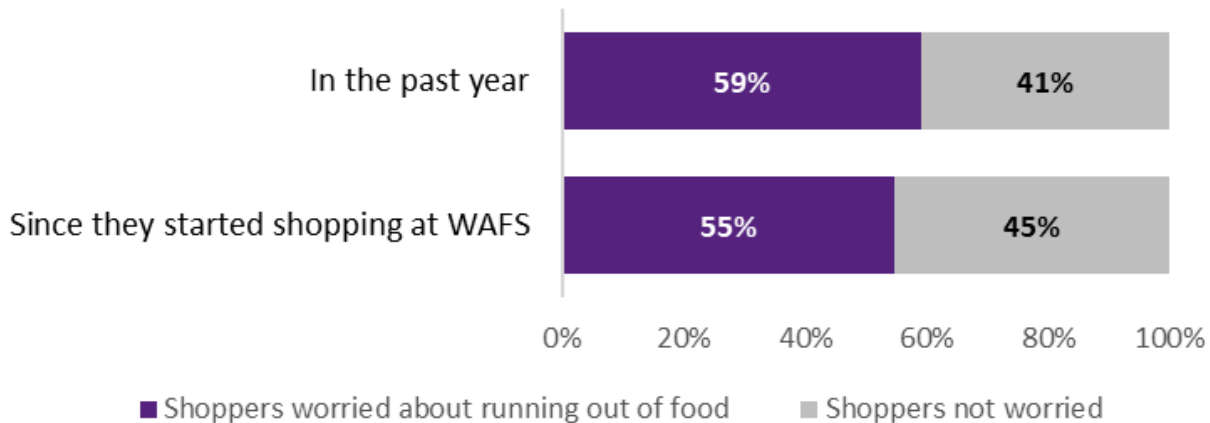
When compared with all adults in Wells, Wells Area Food Shelf Shoppers surveyed are more likely to be older (55+)



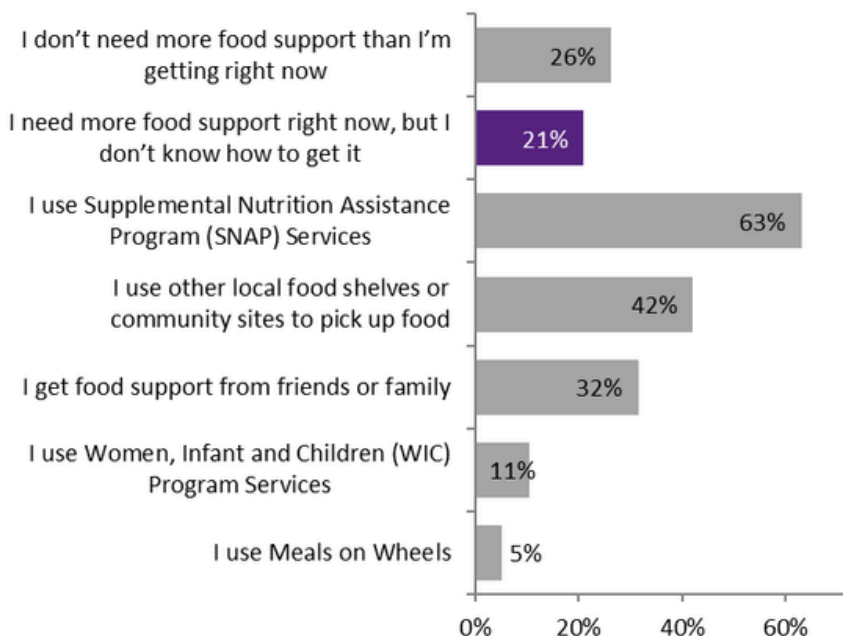
Wells Area Food Shelf shoppers shared their dietary preferences and needs. The most common food preferences include diabetic friendly diets (33% of shoppers surveyed), followed by low-sodium diets and vegetarian foods (19% of shoppers surveyed).

About Wells Area Food Shelf Shoppers

More than half of shoppers surveyed have been worried they would run out of food before they had money to buy more in the past year, and since they started shopping at the food shelf



Most Wells Area Food Shelf shoppers receive additional food support outside of their monthly visit, but **some shoppers need more help and don't know how to get it.**

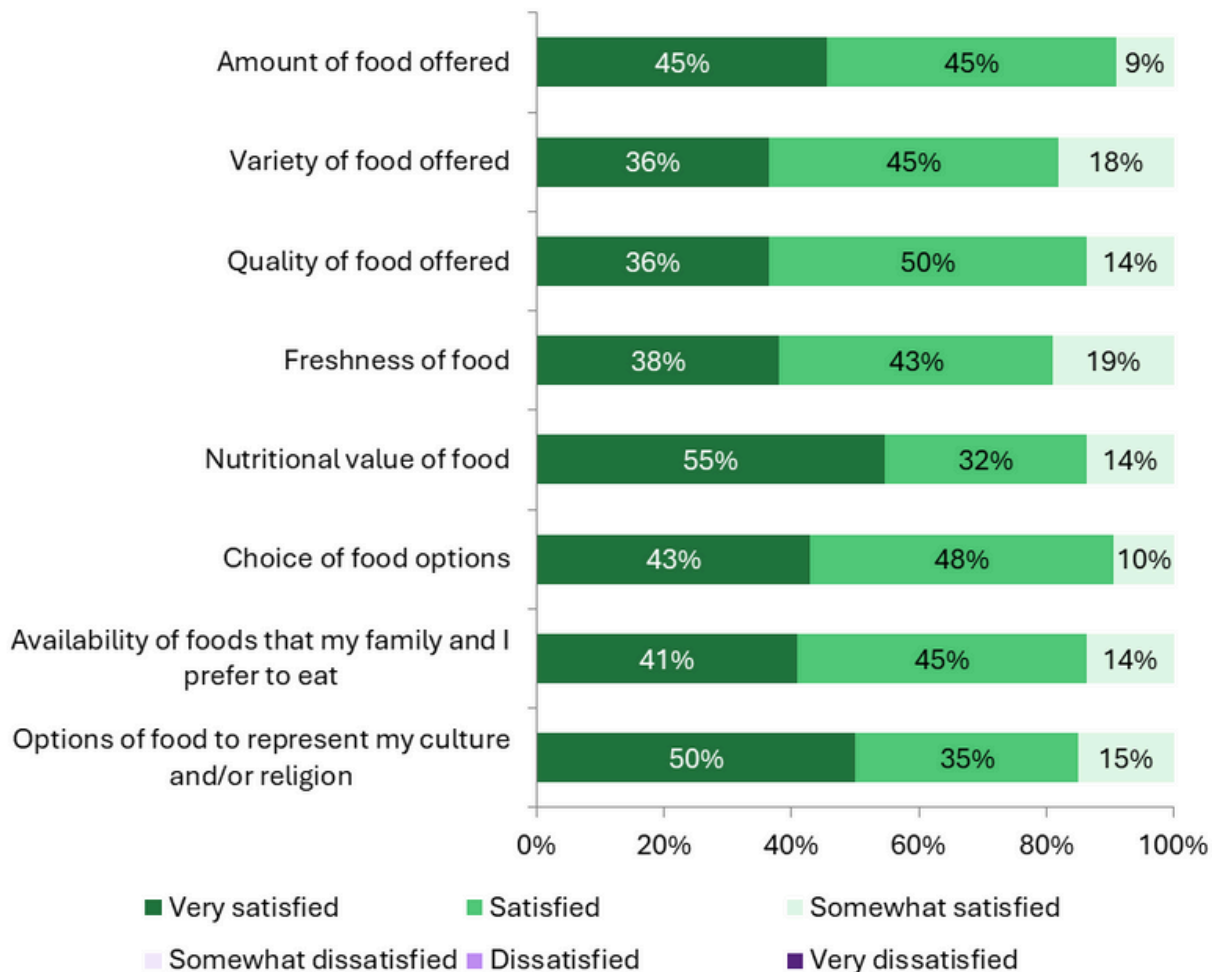


Wells Area Food Shelf is not the only source of food support for most shoppers surveyed. However, four respondents (21%) reported they need more help and don't know how to get it. Of these four shoppers, two were already receiving additional support services (SNAP) and two were only receiving food support from Wells Area Food Shelf.

Volunteer and Shopper Feedback: Food Offerings

Every shopper surveyed reported satisfaction with the food offered at Wells Area Food Shelf, ranging from the amount, variety, quality, and freshness of food, and the availability of preferred foods. All repeat shoppers shared they were able to use some, most or all of the foods that they received the last time they shopped at Wells Area Food Shelf, with 85% of shoppers reporting they were able to use most or all of the food they received.

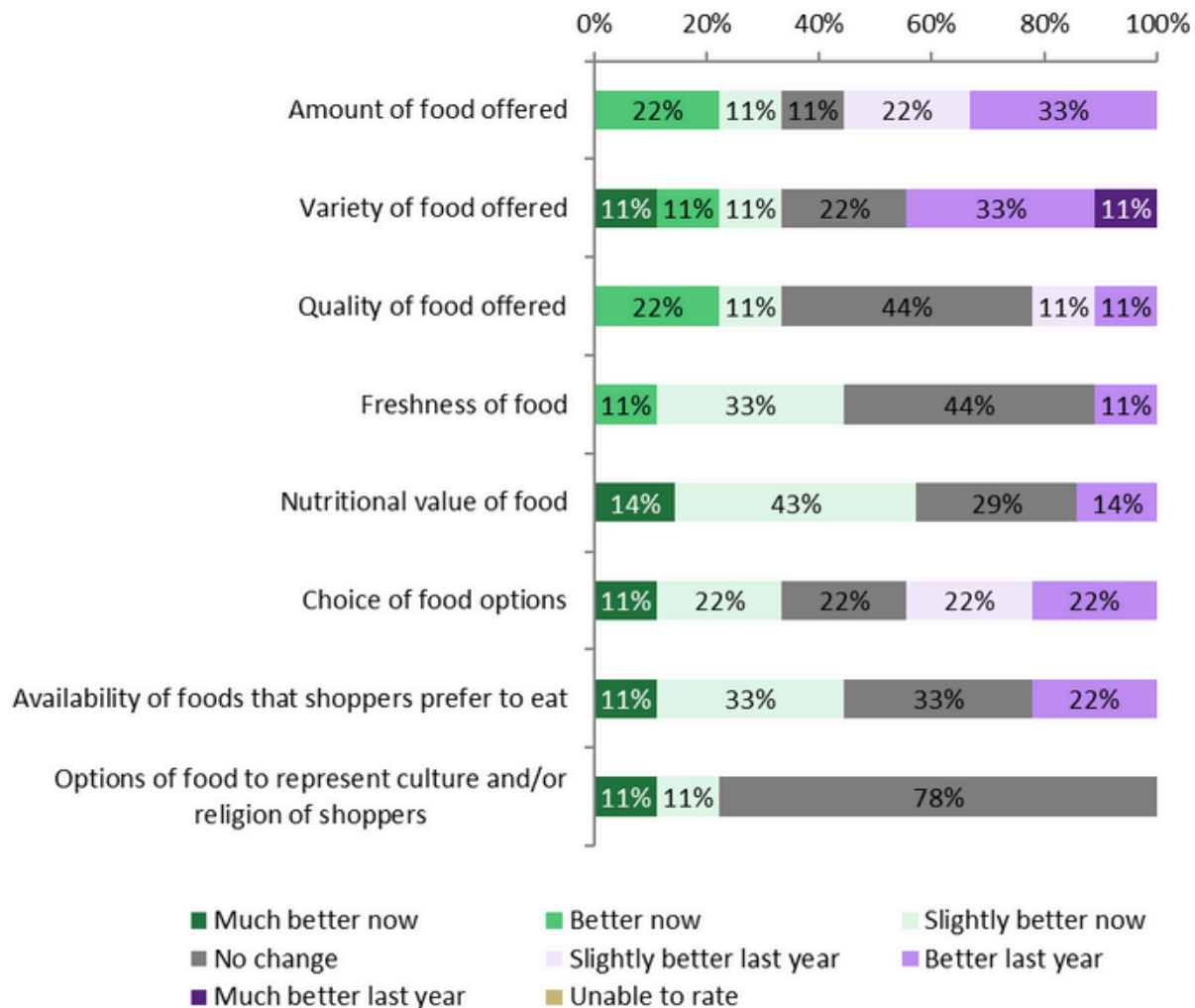
Shoppers expressed **satisfaction** with the food available at Wells Area Food Shelf



Volunteer and Shopper Feedback: Food Offerings

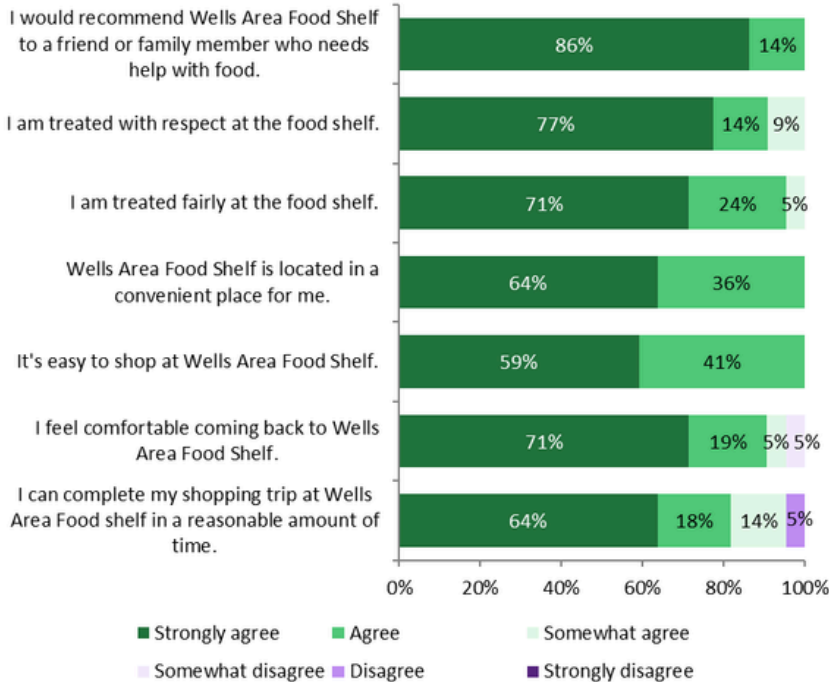
Volunteers were asked to reflect on how different characteristics of food offered have changed, for better or worse, over the course of the past year. Several volunteers reported that the food offerings have remained stable, and others noted improvements and declines during this timeframe. In interviews, volunteers shared about the reduction in foods available from Channel One regional food bank, which has led to a reduction in the amount and variety of foods available.

Volunteers reported that the **nutritional value of food and freshness of food improved the most over the past year, with **variety and amount of food declining** during this same time frame.**



Volunteer and Shopper Feedback: Shopping Experience

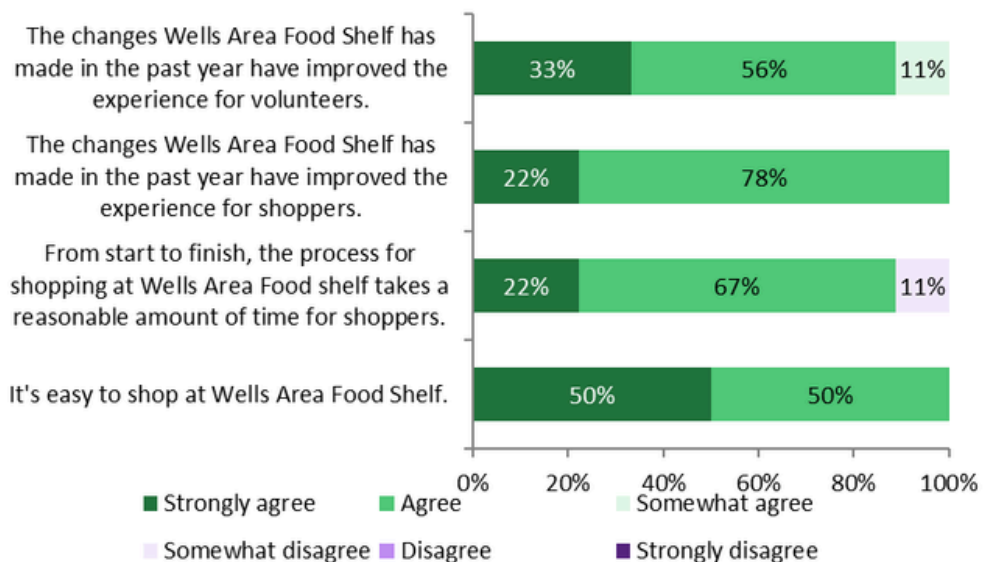
Shoppers report a **predominantly positive shopping experience** at Wells Area Food Shelf.



The chart to the left shows that Wells Area Food Shelf shoppers overwhelmingly reported positive experiences at the food shelf. All shoppers agreed they would recommend Wells Area Food Shelf to a friend or family member needing help with food. They reported they were treated fairly and with respect, that the food shelf is conveniently located and easy to navigate for shopping. Most (95%) report that they feel comfortable coming back to shop and they are able to complete their trip in a reasonable amount of time.

Volunteers were also asked to rate agreement with statements about the shopping and volunteering experience. Volunteers shared that SuperShelf changes have improved the food shelf – both for volunteers and shoppers.

Volunteers agree that the SuperShelf changes have **improved the shopping experience** for volunteers and shoppers.





Reflections on Wells' SuperShelf Transformation

Reflections on Wells' SuperShelf Transformation

In October 2024, Wells Area Food Shelf became the second Certified SuperShelf site in the tri-county FMW SHIP region, and the first SuperShelf site in Faribault County. When asked what made Wells Area Food Shelf a good candidate for a SuperShelf transformation, FMW SHIP Coordinator Kaley Hernandez shared a few characteristics that led to their success:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, food shelves across Minnesota worked to support families in new ways that allow for social distancing. Statewide, there was also an increased demand for food support services as food prices increased. Wells, and other local food shelves, temporarily transitioned to a pre-packaged food distribution system, where shoppers did not select their foods. Some food shelves have maintained that distribution system, but Wells quickly returned to a shopping experience where shoppers select their own foods. **A core tenant of SuperShelf is shopper choice, and so some minor tweaks to their existing food distribution system brought Wells Area Food Shelf in alignment with SuperShelf best practices.** This would be a more intensive task for a food shelf that is still distributing pre-packed food shares.

Wells Area Food Shelf has a strong leadership base that was willing to consider a SuperShelf transformation, and core members of leadership, Donna Weckwerth, Pat Mills, and Steve Linde, were on board to support the food shelf through this process.

Finally, SuperShelf best practices can be implemented in many types of spaces. Wells Area Food Shelf rents their space, and their landlord was willing to **accommodate the cosmetic changes** (like updated paint) to make the space more welcoming.



Reflections on Wells' SuperShelf Transformation

The SuperShelf transformation was a positive experience for both FMW SHIP and for Wells Area Food Shelf. Donna Weckwerth, Food Shelf Coordinator shared that several shoppers were complementary about the Food Shelf's new look:

"Our food shelf looks cleaner and more inviting. There are several types of paneling along with plastered walls that now look more compatible. The stainless steel tables are more sanitary then the wooden ones. The containers are better and cleaner then the boxes we used to line the shelves or display the produce. The shelves are more organized and easy to access."

Kaley Hernandez, FMW SHIP Coordinator, shared that working with Wells Area Food Shelf was a great experience, with excellent results.

"Through this project, the food shelf was able build upon the great work that they were already doing before we partnered. Donna was always willing to work with us and made it fun and upbeat at the same time. Donna just ran with the idea of becoming a SuperShelf, and was really excited about the process. Watching everything come to fruition has been amazing. It's a totally transformed space! I feel really grateful for all the work that the Wells Area Food Shelf has done for the community. We hope having this really welcoming space helps break down the barrier when someone needs to access the food shelf." - Kaley Hernandez, FMW SHIP Coordinator

The SuperShelf transformation has been well received by shoppers and volunteers alike, and will serve the Wells Area Food Shelf for years to come.

If you need Food Support in your area, contact Minnesota's Food HelpLine at 1-888-711-1151.

For more information about Faribault Martin Watonwan SHIP, contact SHIP Coordinator, Kaley Hernandez at 507-238-4757 or visit tinyurl.com/FMWship

For more information about Wells Area Food Shelf, visit www.wellsareafoodshelf.com

