

Attachment D

Cognitive Testing Findings and Recommendations

**CPS FOOD SECURITY SUPPLEMENT Final Findings and Recommendations
DRB Approval No. CBDRB-FY19-245**

Identifying information has been removed where appropriate.

This memo presents the results from three rounds of cognitive testing of the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS FSS). From June to October of 2019, thirty participants were interviewed at four locations including the Census Bureau Headquarters in Suitland, Maryland, a community college in the greater DC area, a library in the DC area, and a food pantry in a rural area outside of DC. We recruited participants from multi-person households with a household income of less than \$50,000. The recruitment was challenging and we had many last minute cancellations.

Interviewers administered the full CPS FSS and then asked retrospective probes at the end of each section. This document contains only questions that were 1) modified from the original production FSS instrument, 2) identified as problematic during cognitive testing, and/or 3) had a scripted probe question during at least one round of interviewing.

All 11 participants in Round 3 were currently experiencing food insecurity or indicated they had in the past. Nine participants out of 11 were currently on food stamps or had been in the past. All 11 participants lived with at least one child.

General Issues

One of the main modifications to the instrument at the beginning of testing was switching sections III and IV; this did not seem to introduce any issues or disrupt the flow of the instrument across all three rounds.

Adding the words “online” to 2A and 2B in Round 3 did not seem to introduce any issues for participants.

After our expert review, we recommended replacing the term “balanced” with “healthy,” because Google Trends revealed the term “healthy meals” was used more than “balanced meals.” However, after three rounds of cognitive testing we recommend reverting back to the original wording and not using the word “healthy.” The term “healthy” was confounded with unintended constructs including but not limited to “organic,” “more expensive name brands,” and “fresh vs. canned produce.” Further, the terms “balanced” and “healthy” do not appear to be measuring the same construct, which may be problematic for data trends. Almost all participants could interpret what “balanced” meant and the main theme of their interpretation was a variety of foods in a meal. The handful of participants who struggled to interpret “balanced” did not appear to have a clearer understanding of “healthy.”

We recommend moving forward with the new language in section IV including “Free groceries” and “Meals on Wheels.” Cognitive testing across all three rounds revealed that the new items encompass more types of free food services that people use than the current items do. While participants mentioned that anyone can obtain “free groceries” or “free meals,” no matter how much money they have, these questions are only asked of respondents who indicate food insecurity. The danger of “false positives” or people who do not have food insecurity saying “yes” is minimal. This change will help make the items more consistent with other surveys of food insecurity and may more accurately reflect the services people are utilizing.

| Qx # | Current Production Version | Round 3 Version | Findings and Recommendations | Final Wording Recommended by CBSM |
|----------|--|---|---|---|
| 1A (S1A) | <p>First, did (you/anyone in your household) shop for food at a supermarket or grocery store LAST WEEK?</p> | <p>First, did (anyone in your household) shop for food at a supermarket, grocery store, Walmart or Target superstore (for example Walmart or Target) LAST WEEK?</p> | <p>Findings: Dropping the word “superstore” did not seem to introduce any issues.</p> <p>One participant mentioned Dollar General and was uncertain whether they should include it or not; they decided to say “No” to item 1A, but then correctly reported their purchases at Dollar General under 2A and 2B.</p> <p>Breaking item 2A back out into a separate item worked well in Round 2 and 3.</p> <p>Recommendation: We recommend the following text move forward to split panel testing against current wording: First, did (anyone in your household) shop for food at a supermarket, grocery store, Walmart or Target LAST WEEK?</p> | <p>First, did [fill] shop for food at a supermarket, grocery store, Walmart or Target LAST WEEK?</p> |

| Qx # | Current Production Version | Round 3 Version | Findings and Recommendations | Final Wording Recommended by CBSM |
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| 2A (S1B) | <p>[Combined into one item with 1A for Round 1] Think about other places where people buy food, such as meat markets, produce stands, bakeries, warehouse clubs, and convenience stores. Did (you/anyone in your household) buy food from any stores such as these LAST WEEK?</p> | <p>Think about other places where people buy food such as dollar stores, pharmacies, club stores, farmers markets, or butcher shops online. Did (anyone in your household) buy food from any stores such as these LAST WEEK?</p> | <p>Findings: Breaking item 2A back out into a separate item worked well in Round 2 and 3.</p> <p>No one spontaneously mentioned online purchases, but they did not seem confused by the inclusion of the term.</p> <p>One participant struggled with whether she should include an independent health food store and decided not to. She reported this purchase correctly under 4A and 4B.</p> <p>The removal of “butcher shop” which we initially proposed to replace “meat markets” did not appear to introduce any issues. However under 4A “Any other places” a participant mentioned shopping at a “meat market” and reported their purchase there.</p> <p>Similarly a participant mentioned a “produce stand” and reported their purchases under 4A. We are concerned about the list becoming too long and burdensome for respondents if “produce stands” and “meat markets” are added back in addition to the new places of “dollar stores, pharmacies, and online.” We only had one participant, from a rural area, mention “produce stands” or “meat markets” across three rounds and numerous participants mentioned buying food at dollar stores or CVS.</p> <p>Round 3 had a more rural sample and it may be that “produce stands” and “meat markets” are still more common in rural areas. We still recommend moving forward with the new item below, but recommend carefully analyzing the split panel for any change in the amount reported under 2A. It should be noted that “produce stands” are a seasonal phenomenon and the production survey is in December when they may be less common.</p> <p>Recommendation: We recommend the following text move forward to split panel testing against current wording: Think about other places where people buy food such as dollar stores, pharmacies, club stores, farmers markets, or online. Did (anyone in your household) buy food from any stores such as these LAST WEEK?</p> | <p>Think about other places where people buy food such as dollar stores, pharmacies, club stores, farmers markets, or online. Did [fill] buy food from any stores such as these LAST WEEK?</p> |

| Qx # | Current Production Version | Round 3 Version | Findings and Recommendations | Final Wording Recommended by CBSM |
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| 3A (S1C) | <p>LAST WEEK, did (you/anyone in your household) buy food at a restaurant, fast food place, cafeteria, or vending machine? (Include any children who may have bought food at the school cafeteria)</p> | <p>LAST WEEK, did (you/anyone in your household) buy food at a restaurant, fast food place, cafeteria, deli, convenience store, or vending machine? [ONLY MENTION IF KIDS 18 AND UNDER]: (Include any children who may have bought food at the school cafeteria).</p> | <p>Findings: When asked what a convenience store means, the common themes in responses were similar across rounds in that participants thought of it as a food store separate from a grocery store that is easier to get to and buy food at. A few participants mentioned that the food sold there is more processed food and snacks. When asked about their purchases, participants described food that was already ready to eat and only a few took food home to eat. Across three rounds of testing, the item seemed to work fairly well. The only confusion was participants including children who receive free lunch and breakfast in school. However in 3B they did not increase the amount accordingly since they did not pay for the food. One participant in particular said “Yes,” but she reported \$0 for 3B because she did not buy any food at the other places and said she was only thinking of the free lunch and breakfast her son received. ERS, since the point of the initial items is just to remind participants of all the places they may have bought food, is it problematic for data estimates if they say “Yes” and then report \$0? Recommendation: We recommend the following text move forward to split panel testing against current wording: LAST WEEK, did (you/anyone in your household) buy food at a restaurant, fast food place, cafeteria, deli, convenience store, or vending machine? (Include any children who may have bought food at the school cafeteria).</p> | <p>LAST WEEK, did [fill] buy food at a restaurant, fast food place, cafeteria, deli, convenience store, or vending machine? (Include any children who may have bought food at the school cafeteria).</p> |
| 4A (S1D) | <p>Did (anyone in your household) buy food from any other kind of place LAST WEEK?</p> | <p>Did (anyone in your household) buy food from any other kind of place LAST WEEK?</p> | <p>Findings: In Round 3, four participants said “Yes” to item 4A, but only two actually ended up reporting a dollar amount and the other two participants reported all their expenses in 1B-3B. When asked what kind of places they were thinking of, one participant was thinking of “meat markets”, a second mentioned “produce stands,” and the third was thinking of a fall festival. The fourth participant mentioned they had reported the amount under 1B-3B for a store purchase. Recommendation: Across all three rounds, it appears “any other place” is being used as the catch all it is intended to be and we are not seeing evidence of double reporting. No changes recommended at this time.</p> | <p>Did [fill] buy food from any other kind of place LAST WEEK?</p> |

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| Intr o (SL EA D) | <p>Now I'm going to ask you about the ACTUAL amount you spent on food LAST WEEK in all the places where you bought food. Then, since LAST WEEK may have been unusual for you, I will ask about the amount you USUALLY spend. DOLLAR RANGES OR AMOUNTS ARE OKAY – JUST RECORD WHATEVER INFO THEY GIVE YOU.</p> | <p>Now I'm going to ask you about the TOTAL amount you spent on food LAST WEEK in all the places where you bought food. Then, since LAST WEEK may have been unusual for you, I will ask about the amount you USUALLY spend.</p> | <p>Findings: We did not observe any issues with modifying the word “actual” to “total” across three rounds of testing.</p> <p>Recommendations: We recommend the following text move forward to split panel testing against current wording: Now I'm going to ask you about the TOTAL amount you spent on food LAST WEEK in all the places where you bought food. Then, since LAST WEEK may have been unusual for you, I will ask about the amount you USUALLY spend.</p> | <p>Now I'm going to ask you about the TOTAL amount you spent on food LAST WEEK in all the places where you bought food. Then, since LAST WEEK may have been unusual for you, I will ask about the amount you USUALLY spend.</p> |
| 1B (S2) | <p>How much did (you/anyone in your household) ACTUALLY spend at supermarkets and grocery stores LAST WEEK (including any purchases made with <SNAPNAME1> or food stamp benefits)?</p> <p>How much did (you/your household) spend at stores such as meat markets, produce stands, bakeries, warehouse clubs, and convenience stores LAST WEEK (including any purchases made with <SNAPNAME1> or food stamp benefits)?</p> | <p>How much did (anyone in your household) spend in total at supermarkets, grocery stores, or superstores (like Walmart or Target LAST WEEK (including any purchases made with (SNAP/ Food Supplement Program) or food stamp benefits)?</p> | <p>Findings: Participants had no issue answering this item and those that received food stamps included it in the amount reported.</p> <p>Recommendations: We recommend the following text move forward to split panel testing against current wording: How much did (anyone in your household) spend in total at supermarkets, grocery stores, Walmart or Target LAST WEEK (including any purchases made with (SNAP/ Food Supplement Program) or food stamp benefits)?</p> | <p>How much did [fill] spend in total at supermarkets, grocery stores, Walmart or Target LAST WEEK (including any purchases made with (SNAP/ Food Supplement Program) or food stamp benefits)?</p> |

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| 1C (S3 A) | How much of the (1B ANSWER) was for non-food items, such as pet food, paper products, alcohol, detergents, or cleaning supplies? | How much of the (1B ANSWER) was for non-food items, such as pet food, paper products, alcohol, detergents, or cleaning supplies? | <p>Findings: As in Round 2, one participant in Round 3 reported what percentage of their food amount was for non-food items.</p> <p>When asked what items are non-food items, participants across all three rounds listed valid non-food items, such as hygiene products, toothpaste, and clothes, in addition to the examples provided. They were very clear what non-food items means and that the question wants them to separate that amount out of their food purchases. We do not recommend adding additional examples to the list.</p> <p>Recommendations: No changes recommended.</p> | How much of the [fill] was for non-food items, such as pet food, paper products, alcohol, detergents, or cleaning supplies? |
| 2B (S4) | [Added back in Round 2] | How much did your household spend at stores such as dollar stores, pharmacies, club stores, farmers markets, or online LAST WEEK (including any purchases made with (SNAP/ Food Supplement Program) or food stamp benefits)? | <p>Findings: Participants had no issues answering this item.</p> <p>Recommendations: We recommend the following text move forward to split panel testing against current wording: How much did your household spend at stores such as dollar stores, pharmacies, club stores, farmers markets, or online LAST WEEK (including any purchases made with (SNAP/ Food Supplement Program) or food stamp benefits)?</p> | How much did [fill] spend at stores such as dollar stores, pharmacies, club stores, farmers markets, or online LAST WEEK (including any purchases made with (SNAP/ Food Supplement Program) or food stamp benefits)? |
| 2C (S5 A) | | How much of the (2B ANSWER) was for non-food items, such as pet food, paper products, alcohol, detergents, or cleaning supplies? | <p>Findings: Participants had no issues answering this item.</p> <p>Recommendations: No changes recommended.</p> | How much of the [fill] was for non-food items, such as pet food, paper products, alcohol, detergents, or cleaning supplies? |

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| 3B (S6) | <p>How much did (you/your household) spend for food at restaurants, fast food places, cafeterias, and vending machines LAST WEEK, not including alcohol purchases?</p> | <p>How much did (your household) spend for food at restaurants, fast food places, cafeterias, delis, convenience stores, and vending machines LAST WEEK, not including alcohol purchases (including any purchases made with (SNAP/ Food Supplement Program) or food stamp benefits)?</p> | <p>Findings: Participants with kids said they included the kids in their answer, but most of them received free and reduced lunch so it did not seem to change the amount reported. One participant mentioned she was including money she gives her kids for vending machines. ERS, since the point of the initial items is just to remind participants of all the places they may have bought food, is it problematic for data estimates if they say “Yes” and then report \$0?Recommendation: We recommend the following text move forward to split panel testing against current wording: How much did (your household) spend for food at restaurants, fast food places, cafeterias, delis, convenience stores, and vending machines LAST WEEK, not including alcohol purchases (including any purchases made with (SNAP/ Food Supplement Program) or food stamp benefits)?</p> | <p>How much did [fill] spend for food at restaurants, fast food places, cafeterias, delis, convenience stores, and vending machines LAST WEEK, not including alcohol purchases (including any purchases made with (SNAP/ Food Supplement Program) or food stamp benefits)?</p> |
| 1D (S8 A) | <p>Let's see, (your household) spent about (SUM OF 1B+2B+3B-1C) on food LAST WEEK. Now think about how much (anyone in your household) USUALLY spends. How much (does your household) USUALLY spend on food at all the different places we've been talking about IN A WEEK? (Please include any purchases made with (SNAP/ Food Supplement Program) or food stamp benefits). Do not include non-food items such as pet food,</p> | <p>Let's see, (your household) spent about (SUM OF 1B+2B+3B-1C) on food LAST WEEK. Now think about how much (anyone in your household) USUALLY spends. How much (does your household) USUALLY spend on food at all the different places we've been talking about IN A WEEK? (Please include any purchases made with (SNAP/ Food Supplement Program) or food stamp benefits). Do not include non-food items such as pet food,</p> | <p>Findings: Participants interpreted “usually” to mean “normally,” “consistently,” or “on average” across all three rounds. Participants’ spontaneous comments made it apparent they were thinking of their usual purchase behavior the last few weeks/months when answering this question. During probing we asked if participants included any food stamp money in their totals for this section and they all said “yes.”Recommendation: No changes recommended.</p> | <p>Let's see, [fill] spent about (SUM OF 1B+2B+3B-1C) on food LAST WEEK. Now think about how much [fill] USUALLY spends. How much [fill] USUALLY spend on food at all the different places we've been talking about IN A WEEK? (Please include any purchases made with (SNAP/ Food Supplement Program) or food stamp benefits). Do not include non-food items such as pet food, paper products, detergent or cleaning supplies.</p> |

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| | paper products, detergent or cleaning supplies. | paper products, detergent or cleaning supplies. | | |
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| 1E (S8A) | Let's see, it seems that (your household) did not buy any food LAST WEEK. If that is because you shop for food infrequently, how much would the weekly average be over several weeks? | Let's see, it seems that (your household) did not buy any food LAST WEEK. If that is because you shop for food only once in a while, how much would you say you spend in total in a month? | <p>Findings: Every participant indicated that they had bought food in the last week. However, we administered some probes to get feedback from participants on this question. When asked how they would calculate their monthly food expenses, they mentioned a variety of tactics, but most mentioned multiplying their weekly amount by 4. Some participants had unusual response strategies. For example, one participant thought about one time she had bought all of her food for the month at the same time (this seemed to be unusual for her) and would use that number. Another participant said it was too difficult to figure out beyond a week.</p> <p>Recommendation: All participants across three rounds of testing were skipped past this question since they had bought food in the last week. When asked probing questions, most participants could come up with a monthly amount but the response strategies they used varied and may introduce error. It is still important to offer a way to report monthly food expenditures for the population that does not purchase food weekly. We also agree with ERS's concerns about the current wording placing too much burden on respondents to calculate an average, when we can perform this calculation for them. For these reasons, we still recommend the following text move forward to split panel testing against current wording: Let's see, it seems that (your household) did not buy any food LAST WEEK. If that is because you shop for food only once in a while, how much would you say you spend in total in a month?</p> | Let's see, it seems that [fill] did not buy any food LAST WEEK. If that is because you shop for food only once in a while, how much would you say you spend in total in a month? |

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| 5A (S8B) | <p>In order to buy just enough food to meet (the needs of your household), would you need to spend more than you do now, or could you spend less?</p> | <p>In order to buy just enough food to meet (the needs of your household), would you need to spend more than you do now, or could you spend less?</p> | <p>Findings: Participants in Round 3 appeared to struggle to paraphrase the question more than in previous rounds. However, most were able to ultimately correctly paraphrase the item. Several participants mentioned they could spend less on food by preparing more at home and eating out less. One participant volunteered they don't need to spend more or less. One participant was confused by the question and seemed to think it was asking if she needed to spend more of her own money in addition to food stamps to get enough food for her family. She said that she usually spends more out of her own pocket.</p> <p>ERS brought up a concern that participants are including their food stamp money in their answer. While we did not directly ask them if including food stamps in their answer for 5A, several participants indicated, through spontaneous comments, that they were including their food stamp allocation when they answered 5A. (We did ask about including food stamp money for Section I and participants indicated they included it in the amounts reported).</p> <p>Despite the one participant misunderstanding, we do not recommend modifications to this question. All other participants were able to correctly interpret and answer the item.</p> <p>Recommendation: No changes recommended at this time.</p> | <p>In order to buy just enough food to meet (the needs of your household), would you need to spend more than you do now, or could you spend less?</p> |

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| LEA D (SS1_ LEA D) | <p>The next questions are about the food eaten in your household in the last 12 months, since December of last year, and whether you were able to afford the food you need.</p> | <p>The next questions are about the food eaten in your household in the last 12 months, since MONTH OF INTERVIEW of last year, and whether you were able to afford the food you need.</p> | <p>Findings: At the sponsor’s request, we probed participants on what “afford the food you need” means across all three rounds. Almost every participant mentioned a variation on the theme that it is the ability to afford the food you need to survive, there was a little bit of variation if this meant to be healthy, or simply to not go hungry. Recommendation: No changes recommended at this time.</p> | <p>The next questions are about the food eaten in your household in the last 12 months, since MONTH OF INTERVIEW of last year, and whether you were able to afford the food you need.</p> |
| 7 (SS1) | <p>V1: Which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household—a) enough of the kinds of food (we) want to eat, b) enough but not always the <u>kinds</u> of food (we) want to eat, c) sometimes not enough to eat, or d) often not enough to eat?</p> <p>V2: Which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household—a) (We) could always afford to eat healthy meals. b) (We) could always afford enough to eat but not always healthy meals. c) Sometimes (we) could not afford enough to eat. d) Often we could not afford enough to eat.</p> | <p>V1: Which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household—a) enough of the kinds of food (we) want to eat, b) enough but not always the <u>kinds</u> of food (we) want to eat, c) sometimes not enough to eat, or d) often not enough to eat?</p> <p>V2: Which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household—a) (We) could always afford to eat healthy meals. b) (We) could always afford enough to eat but not always healthy meals. c) Sometimes (we) could not afford enough to eat. d) Often we could not afford enough to eat.</p> | <p>Findings: As mentioned in previous rounds, V1 and V2 are not measuring the same constructs. Multiple participants selected different answers for each version. In Round 3, we still randomized which version participants received in order to gather more information about how they are interpreting the items. Most participants in this round preferred “kinds of food.” (V1: Which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household— a) enough of the kinds of food (we) want to eat, b) enough but not always the <u>kinds</u> of food (we) want to eat, c) sometimes not enough to eat, or d) often not enough to eat?) As in previous rounds, the main theme of participants’ comments was that “kinds of food” might mean healthy or it might just mean something expensive and unhealthy because that is what a person wants to eat. Several participants mentioned that the two versions are not asking the same thing: “I think depending on exactly what you’re looking for, they are asking two different things. One is specifically asking whether the person can or can’t afford to eat healthy food. The other one is asking what kinds of food that we want to eat. The [kinds of food] is more so related to the person and their preference, the [healthy one] is more so related to ‘Can you afford healthy food consistently... Like in general, are you able to get enough food, then I would go with the [Kinds of food].’” While we hoped to improve upon the current version, the alternative is measuring a very different construct and the original wording was not difficult for participants to interpret, as we feared during the expert review.</p> <p>Recommendation: No changes recommended at this time, we recommend keeping the current production wording.</p> | <p>Which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household—a) enough of the kinds of food (we) want to eat, b) enough but not always the <u>kinds</u> of food (we) want to eat, c) sometimes not enough to eat, or d) often not enough to eat?</p> |

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| 10A (SS4) | <p>"(I/we) couldn't afford to eat balanced meals." Was that OFTEN, SOMETIMES or NEVER true for (you/ your household) in the last 12 months?</p> | <p>"(We) couldn't afford to eat healthy meals." Was that OFTEN, SOMETIMES or NEVER true for (your household) in the last 12 months?</p> | <p>Findings: One participant brought up the fact that the “fresh produce” near her was often old and she was afraid it would make her kids sick, so she would buy “less healthy” packaged food to make sure it was safe. Another participant brought up organic and brand name being healthier, as we heard in Round 1.</p> <p>There was a consistent theme among participants that healthy food is more expensive. One participant brought up processed food being less healthy and gave the example of buying lunch meat instead of fresh chicken and vegetables.</p> <p>When asked if “balanced” meant the same thing as “healthy,” participants generally said yes, but then seemed to contradict this by giving examples of meals that are “balanced” but not “healthy”. For instance, they mentioned a meal that may have a protein and vegetables, but be fried; they said this would be balanced, but not healthy. This occurred in Round 2 as well. The themes that come up for “balanced” include the pyramid or chart, and having a protein and carbohydrate/starch. Generally the term conveys an idea of a variety of food types. One participant said they did not know what “balanced” meant. They also did not seem to know what “healthy” meant but they thought it was more expensive than not healthy food.</p> <p>Recommendation: Given the confusion some participants had thinking that organic and brand name equates to healthier food, we don’t recommend implementing the change from “balanced” at this time. The divergence between the meaning of “balanced” vs “healthy” could lead to the item measuring a different construct. We initially recommended using the words “healthy meal” because the term is more commonly used than “balanced meals,” according to Google trends. All but one participant seemed to have an idea what “balanced” meant. We recommend no changes at this time and keeping the original wording.</p> | <p>"[Fill] couldn't afford to eat balanced meals." Was that OFTEN, SOMETIMES or NEVER true for (you/ your household) in the last 12 months?</p> |

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| 11A(SH2) | In the last 12 months, did (you/ you or other adults in your household) ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food? | In the last 12 months, did (you/ you or other adults in your household) ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for money for enough food? | Findings: We did not probe on this item in Round 3. No issues came up with reverting to the original wording “there wasn’t enough money for food.” Recommendation: Reverting back to the original wording of “enough money for food” seems to be working well. No changes recommended at this time. | In the last 12 months, did (you/ you or other adults in your household) ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food? |
| 17A(SS5) | “(I/we) relied on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed (the child in (my/our) household/the children) because (I was/we were) running out of money to buy food. Was that OFTEN, SOMETIMES or NEVER true for (you/ your household) in the last 12 months? | “(I/we) relied on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed (the child in (my/our) household/the children) because (I was/we were) running out of money to buy food. Was that OFTEN, SOMETIMES or NEVER true for (you/ your household) in the last 12 months? | Findings: All 11 participants in Round 3 had at least one child in the household. Six participants reported it was “sometimes true,” one reported it was “often true,” and the other four reported it was “never true.” When asked what kinds of food they relied on, participants who said “sometimes” or “often” true mentioned examples like noodles, hot dogs, beans, canned food such as spaghetti o’s, frozen processed food (generic brand) such as French fries, fish sticks, chicken nuggets, mini frozen pizzas, rice, tomatoes, peanut butter and jelly, and macaroni and cheese. Participants also brought up tactics like buying food in bulk, shopping at Costco and Aldi, buying whatever was on sale that week, and buying pre-packaged lunch meat instead of meat from the deli. A major theme among participants was that processed food is cheaper than fresh food. One participant spontaneously lamented they felt bad they could not afford organic food for their children as they seemed to think it was healthier. Among the participants who said it was “never true”, one participant mentioned they had heard of people using things like tuna fish, oatmeal, and cat food, and having to shop at the dollar store. Participants who reported it was “never true” mentioned the same kinds of low cost food and tactics of buying in bulk, on sale, etc. Across both groups, there was a general theme that low cost food is less healthy, but it is what you have to eat to feel full. Recommendation: No changes recommended. | “(I/we) relied on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed (the child in (my/our) household/the children) because (I was/we were) running out of money to buy food. Was that OFTEN, SOMETIMES or NEVER true for (you/ your household) in the last 12 months? |

| Qx # | Current Production Version | Round 3 Version | Findings and Recommendations | Final Wording Recommended by CBSM |
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| 18A (SS6) | "(I/we) couldn't feed (the child in (my/our) household/the children) a balanced meal, because (I/we) couldn't afford that." Was that OFTEN, SOMETIMES or NEVER true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months? | "(I/we) couldn't feed (the child in (my/our) household/the children) a healthy meal, because (I/we) couldn't afford that." Was that OFTEN, SOMETIMES or NEVER true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months? | Findings: Unlike the previous round, not all participants felt that healthy was the same for adults and children. Four participants said it was different. Generally they said kids needed more nutrients because they are growing. Another difference mentioned was in the portion sizes and the types of food adults eat versus kids. Two participants spontaneously mentioned that it was more important their children eat healthy than that they eat healthy as adults. Recommendation: We recommend reverting to the original survey wording. "Healthy" seems to be confounded with organic, more expensive, etc. Our initial fear that people are no longer familiar with the term "balanced" does not appear to be an issue. We recommend keeping the current production wording: "(I/we) couldn't feed (the child in (my/our) household/the children) a balanced meal, because (I/we) couldn't afford that." Was that OFTEN, SOMETIMES or NEVER true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months? | "(I/we) couldn't feed (the child in (my/our) household/the children) a balanced meal, because (I/we) couldn't afford that." Was that OFTEN, SOMETIMES or NEVER true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months? |
| 24A (SP1) | In the past 12 months, since MONTH OF INTERVIEW of last year, did (you/anyone in this household) get (SNAP/ Food Supplement Program) or food stamp benefits? | In the past 12 months, since MONTH OF INTERVIEW of last year, did (you/anyone in this household) get (SNAP/ Food Supplement Program) or food stamp benefits? | Findings: Five participants reported they are currently on food stamps. Four participants said they have been on food stamps in the past. Two participants had never been on food stamps. Recommendation: No changes recommended. | In the past 12 months, since MONTH OF INTERVIEW of last year, did (you/anyone in this household) get (SNAP/ Food Supplement Program) or food stamp benefits? |
| 25 (SP6) | During the past 30 days, did any children in the household (between 5 and 18 years old) receive free or reduced cost lunches at school? | During the past 30 days, did any children in the household (between 5 and 18 years old) receive free or reduced-price lunches at school? | Findings: Eight of the 11 participants with kids were currently receiving free or reduced lunch. They had no issues answering the reduced-price version. They all seemed very familiar with the program even if they were not currently receiving it. Recommendation: We recommend the following text move forward to split panel testing against current wording: During the past 30 days, did any children in the household (between 5 and 18 years old) receive free or reduced-price lunches at school? | During the past 30 days, did any children in the household (between 5 and 18 years old) receive free or reduced-price lunches at school? |

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| 26 (SP7) | During the past 30 days, did any children in the household (between 5 and 18 years old) receive free or reduced cost breakfasts at school? | During the past 30 days, did any children in the household (between 5 and 18 years old) receive free or reduced-price breakfasts at school? | <p>Findings: Seven of the eight participants whose children receive free lunch said “Yes” to free breakfast. The eighth participant was not sure if her child got free breakfast or not since they did not eat breakfast by their own personal choice.</p> <p>Recommendation: We recommend the following text move forward to split panel testing against current wording: During the past 30 days, did any children in the household (between 5 and 18 years old) receive free or reduced-price breakfasts at school?</p> | During the past 30 days, did any children in the household (between 5 and 18 years old) receive free or reduced-price breakfasts at school? |
| 27 (New) | New question. | During the past 30 days, did any children in the household (between 5 and 18 years old) receive a free or reduced-price meal or snack at an afterschool program or day care? | <p>Findings: Only one participant across all three rounds said “Yes” and they incorrectly thought the question was asking about Head Start or some kind of preschool. They then qualified their answer and said their child doesn’t go to Head Start, but they go there for the parenting classes and because there is a snack for the child. Another parent also thought the question was asking about daycare for young children, but she said “No” since she pays for the daycare and snacks are included in that price.</p> <p>In Round 2, one participant also mistakenly thought the question was asking about day care or Head Start for young kids; she correctly said “No”.</p> <p>In Round 1, we did not probe and all participants said “No.” Despite qualifying that the question is asking about children between 5 and 18 years old, parents of young children as still assuming it is asking about daycare or Head Start. It may be that the word “day care” being the last thing they hear is confusing them, especially since this question is before the survey asks about snacks at Head Start and daycare.</p> <p>Recommendation: If ERS wants to continue using the new item, consider dropping the words “day care” after “After school program”, to help further differentiate that the question is asking about school age children. We recommend the following text move forward to split panel testing against current wording: During the past 30 days, did any children in the household (between 5 and 18 years old) receive a free or reduced-price meal or snack at an afterschool program?</p> | During the past 30 days, did any children in the household (between 5 and 18 years old) receive a free or reduced-price meal or snack at an afterschool program? |

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| 28 (SP7A) | During the past 30 days, did any children in the household receive free or reduced-cost food at a day-care or Head Start program? | During the past 30 days, did any children in the household (under 6 years old) receive free or reduced-price food at a day-care or Head Start program? | <p>Findings: The participant who said “Yes” to 27 also said “Yes” to 28. She was thinking of a snack they give her daughter while she takes a parenting class. The other participants who had children under 6 said they either provide the snacks themselves or it’s included in the tuition they pay for daycare.</p> <p>No issue came up with using the word “price” instead of “cost.” However no one had kids under 6 in Rounds 1 and 2.</p> <p>Recommendation: We recommend the following text move forward to split panel testing against current wording: During the past 30 days, did any children in the household (under 6 years old) receive free or reduced-price food at a day-care or Head Start program?</p> | During the past 30 days, did any children in the household (under 6 years old) receive free or reduced-price food at a day-care or Head Start program? |

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| 32A (SC3) | <p>V1: In the last 12 months, did (you/you or other adults in your household) ever get emergency food from a church, a food pantry, food bank, or other place that helps with free food?</p> <p>V2: During the past 12 months, have you or anyone in your household gotten free groceries from a food pantry, food bank, church, or other place that helps with free food?</p> | <p>V1: In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in your household ever get emergency food from a food pantry, food bank, church, or other place that helps with free food?</p> <p>V2: In the last 12 months, did (you/you or other adults in your household) ever get free groceries from a food pantry, food bank, church, or other place that helps with free food?</p> | <p>Findings: Starting in Round 3, every participant was asked the “free groceries” version during the interview and the “emergency food” version was only asked during probing. The order of options in the “emergency food” version was re-ordered to match the “free groceries” version. The verb in the “free groceries” version was changed to “did” instead of “have” so the versions were consistent.</p> <p>Two participants said “yes” to the “free groceries” version and then “no” to the “emergency food” version. Both said they saw “free groceries” as more of a regular routine thing they did, as opposed to a dire situation where you need food on a sudden and temporary basis.</p> <p>Other participants agreed with the theme that “free groceries” conveys less urgency to get food:</p> <p>“We don't get emergency food, just food we get every single month to help out if we need it. We go most months.”</p> <p>For this round, probing questions focused less on participant preference and more on their interpretations of the difference between “free groceries” and “emergency food.” It appears that these two terms are measuring different constructs, with “free groceries” being interpreted more broadly and participants being more likely to say that they received free groceries.</p> <p>ERS has expressed a desire to bring the question more in line with other surveys that ask a similar question, even if it increases the number of affirmative responses.</p> <p>Recommendation: We recommend the following text move forward to split panel testing against current wording: In the last 12 months, did (you/you or other adults in your household) ever get free groceries from a food pantry, food bank, church, or other place that helps with free food?</p> | <p>In the last 12 months, did (you/you or other adults in your household) ever get free groceries from a food pantry, food bank, church, or other place that helps with free food?</p> |

| Qx # | Current Production Version | Round 3 Version | Findings and Recommendations | Final Wording Recommended by CBSM |
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| 33 (SC3A) | <p>V1- Is there a church, food pantry, food bank or other place in your community where you could get emergency food if you needed it?</p> <p>V2- Is there a food pantry, food bank, church or other place in your community where you could get free groceries if you needed it?</p> | <p>V1- Is there a food pantry, food bank, church or other place in your community where you could get emergency food if you needed it?</p> <p>V2- Is there a food pantry, food bank, church or other place in your community where you could get free groceries if you needed it?</p> | <p>Findings: As with question 32 in Round 3, all participants were asked this question with the “free groceries” version first and then the “emergency food” version during probing. The order of options in the “emergency food” version was re-ordered to match the “free groceries” version.</p> <p>There was no issue with this item other than a few participants mentioning they were not sure there was such a place in their community. This included at least one participant who was taking the survey at a food pantry and said they were “not sure.” This also happened in Rounds 1 and 2.</p> <p>Participants reiterated that the “free groceries” was less of a dire thing than the “emergency food” version.</p> <p>One participant thought “free groceries” was a better wording because it was a prideful thing and that some people would not want to look like someone who could not afford groceries for their home. They may be more likely to say “no” even though they did go to a food pantry if it said “emergency food.” Recommendation: We recommend the following text move forward to split panel testing against current wording: Is there a food pantry, food bank, church or other place in your community where you could get free groceries if you needed it? We recommend the wording to be consistent with question 32.</p> | <p>Is there a food pantry, food bank, church or other place in your community where you could get free groceries if you needed it?</p> |

| Qx # | Current Production Version | Round 3 Version | Findings and Recommendations | Final Wording Recommended by CBSM |
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| 34A (SC4) | <p>V1- In the last 12 months, did (you or other adults in your household) ever eat any meals at a soup kitchen or shelter?</p> <p>V2- During the past 12 months, have you or anyone in your household received a free meal from a church, shelter, home-delivered meal service like Meals on Wheels, or other place that helps with free meals?</p> | <p>V1- In the last 12 months, did (you or other adults in your household) ever eat any meals at a soup kitchen or shelter?</p> <p>V2- During the past 12 months, have you or anyone in your household received a free meal from a church, shelter, home-delivered meal service like Meals on Wheels, or other place that helps with free meals?</p> | <p>Findings: The two versions were still randomized in Round 3. As in Round 1 and 2, all participants said “No” to both versions. Nine participants preferred the “free meal” version, one preferred the “soup kitchen” version, and one saw no difference. Ten participants said that the “free meal” version was broader and more people would say “yes” to it. They also said it was good it had more options like “Meals on Wheels.” Several participants said that “soup kitchen” is not as commonly used anymore, but everyone was familiar with the term. Participants easily interpreted both versions, but the “free meal” version appears to encompass more situations and ways people can obtain a free meal. If ERS wants to capture more types of free meals that people are obtaining, we recommend that version.</p> <p>Recommendation: We recommend the following text move forward to split panel testing against current wording: During the past 12 months, have you or anyone in your household received a free meal from a church, shelter, home-delivered meal service like Meals on Wheels, or other place that helps with free meals?</p> | <p>In the last 12 months, have you or anyone in your household received a free meal from a church, shelter, home-delivered meal service like Meals on Wheels, or other place that helps with free meals?</p> |
| 35 (new) | <p>Is there a church, shelter, home-delivery meal service like meals on Wheels, or other place in your community where you could get free meals if you needed it?</p> | <p>Is there a church, shelter, home-delivery meal service like Meals on Wheels, or other place in your community where you could get free meals if you needed it?</p> | <p>Findings: Seven participants reported they were “not sure” but all 11 participants easily understood what the question was asking. When probed about the difference between this question and question 33, they were able to say that a “free meal” is something that is already prepared, whereas question 33 is about “free groceries” that they would have to cook or prepare.</p> <p>Recommendation: We recommend the following text move forward to split panel testing against current wording: Is there a church, shelter, home-delivery meal service like Meals on Wheels, or other place in your community where you could get free meals if you needed it?</p> | <p>Is there a church, shelter, home-delivery meal service like Meals on Wheels, or other place in your community where you could get free meals if you needed it?</p> |

| Debriefing Question | Round 3 Findings |
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| <p>1. [IF THEY SAID THEY ARE NOT CURRENTLY ON FOOD STAMPS] Have you ever been on food stamps? Have you ever struggled to buy enough food for you or your household? [IF YES] What did you do to buy food or cope?</p> | <p>Findings: Tactics used to buy enough food or cope included buying nothing else but basic food in bulk. This included no snacks or “goodies,” and buying only needs, no wants. Participants also mentioned cutting down on food intake, working extra side jobs, using food pantries, asking family for help, and praying. One participant said the following about how they coped: "Spread apart the food we currently have, and don't eat as much for lunch, save it for dinner. Or go to cheaper grocery stores, use coupons, wait for deals, fast." Recommendations: No changes recommended.</p> |
| <p>The questions I asked you today were about you and other members of your household. 2. Who do you consider to be a part of your household? [SHOW THEM ROSTER] Do you consider everyone on this list to be part of your household why or why not?</p> | <p>Findings: Most participants only lived with immediate family so they considered them to be part of the household. One participant mentioned that everyone they live with and share food with is part of their household. All participants considered everyone on the roster to be part of their household. Across all three rounds participants generally did not include purchases unrelated household members made, because the person bought food independently of the household. Recommendations: No changes recommended.</p> |
| <p>3. Would you consider a relative staying temporarily to be part of your household? What about a roommate?</p> | <p>Findings: Participants were split on whether they would consider someone staying temporarily or a long-term roommate to be part of the household. This was true across all three rounds. Recommendations: No changes recommended.</p> |
| <p>4. Do you think other members of your household would answer the questions the same way you did? [IF NO]: Tell me more about that.</p> | <p>Findings: Participants generally said other members of the household would answer differently. The most common reason was because the participant was the one who did the grocery shopping. Only one participant mentioned they were not the person who bought groceries and someone in their household would know more. Recommendations: No changes recommended.</p> |