

HARVEST LEADER PROGRAMS: AN INNOVATIVE FOOD & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

In partnership with CSU Extension and CSU-Pueblo

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PROJECT INTRODUCTION

- Each year, billions of pounds of edible produce are left behind on fields for reasons that are outside of a producer’s control.
 - If rescued, this produce would considerably reduce nutrition insecurity and greenhouse gas emissions.
 - To rescue this produce, UpRoot Colorado participates in a practice called gleaning which is the act of harvesting donated produce. After harvesting, this produce is taken to a local hunger relief organization.
- UpRoot has grown substantially as an organization and has harvested more surplus produce in 2022 than ever before. As a result, it has become necessary to create a more robust volunteer program.
- Creating a more robust volunteer gleaning program involves establishing new roles such as “Harvest Leaders.” Harvest Leaders would be qualified volunteers who can lead gleans without staff needing to be present.
 - This would reduce the strain on staff when gleans have overlapping schedules during the busy harvest season. Harvest Leaders would allow more gleans to be hosted and thus more food to be rescued.

INTERNSHIP GOALS

- 1.) **Develop a Harvest Leader program that can mobilize and engage community members to address food recovery and equity in Colorado.**
- 2.) **Discuss potential solutions to current food system issues in the Arkansas Valley region.**
- 3.) **Learn the elements of successful community outreach strategies.**

EDUCATIONAL APPLICATIONS

Through the course of my internship, I have found it satisfying to be working toward a more sustainable and equitable food system in Colorado. This internship has offered me many opportunities to learn new skills and to connect with people working toward the same goals. I was able to visit several farms, gardens, and hunger relief organizations during my internship to learn about how our food is grown and distributed.

As I finish up my bachelor’s degree in Health Science, I am reassured that I am following the pathway that I set out to follow. I chose Health Science because I want to improve the health of our population. Nutritional security is perhaps the biggest factor that can affect a person’s health.

COMPLETED OBJECTIVES

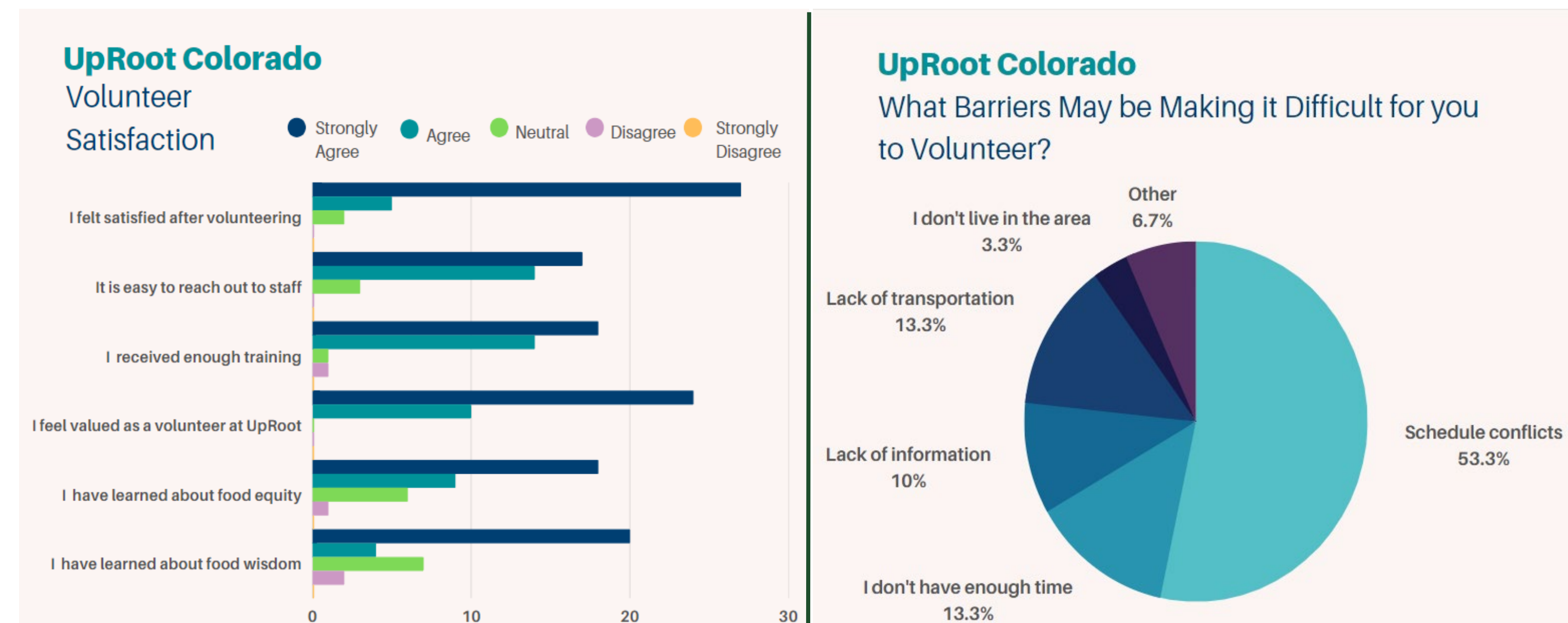
In order to achieve my three primary goals, I spent a lot of time getting connected to people who are involved in the food system in Colorado.

- To develop the Harvest Leader program, I visited farms in Boulder to glean and to learn about the duties that Harvest Leaders would likely be tasked with.
 - My experience with gleaning improved the training materials that I created.
 - I also interviewed gleaning organizations that already have established Harvest Leader programs. I was able to learn what worked well for these organizations and how their programs worked.



Early in the internship, I involved myself with the Pueblo Food Project to discuss potential solutions to current food system issues. I attended monthly meetings to address food access issues in our area.

A major project that I worked on was the creation of a volunteer satisfaction survey. We wanted to find ways to improve our volunteer program and learn insights from their feedback. We discovered that some volunteers struggle with transportation so we have begun looking into ways to incorporate carpooling into our program.



TAKEAWAYS

This experience has been exceedingly helpful for me in many ways. It has introduced me to a vocational pathway that I have a lot of interest in and provided me with important learning and professional development experiences. I was able to create and distribute surveys, create volunteer training materials and learn how to network.

My internship has taught me about where our food comes from and how our food system works. I visited food banks, food pantries, gardens, and farms to learn how they operate. After gleaning for the first time, I gained a deep appreciation for our farmers who are working hard to provide food for their community.

While designing the Harvest Leader program, I learned the importance of partnering with other organizations to work towards a common goal. I connected with four other gleaning organizations that already have Harvest Leader roles in place and their suggestions have greatly benefitted the program that I worked on.



NEXT STEPS

This fall, I will be continuing my work with UpRoot. I have been connecting with farmers in the Arkansas Valley region and recruiting volunteers to work towards starting a gleaning program in Pueblo. As of now, Pueblo County has a higher rate of food insecurity than the average rate of food insecurity in Colorado. I have also been working to find ways to reduce nutritional insecurity in Avondale. Avondale residents only have direct access to a single convenience store and, as a result, 90% of the Avondale community has difficulty accessing fresh produce.