



# **Food insecurity in Massachusetts**

**Findings from a survey of food insecure residents of Massachusetts**

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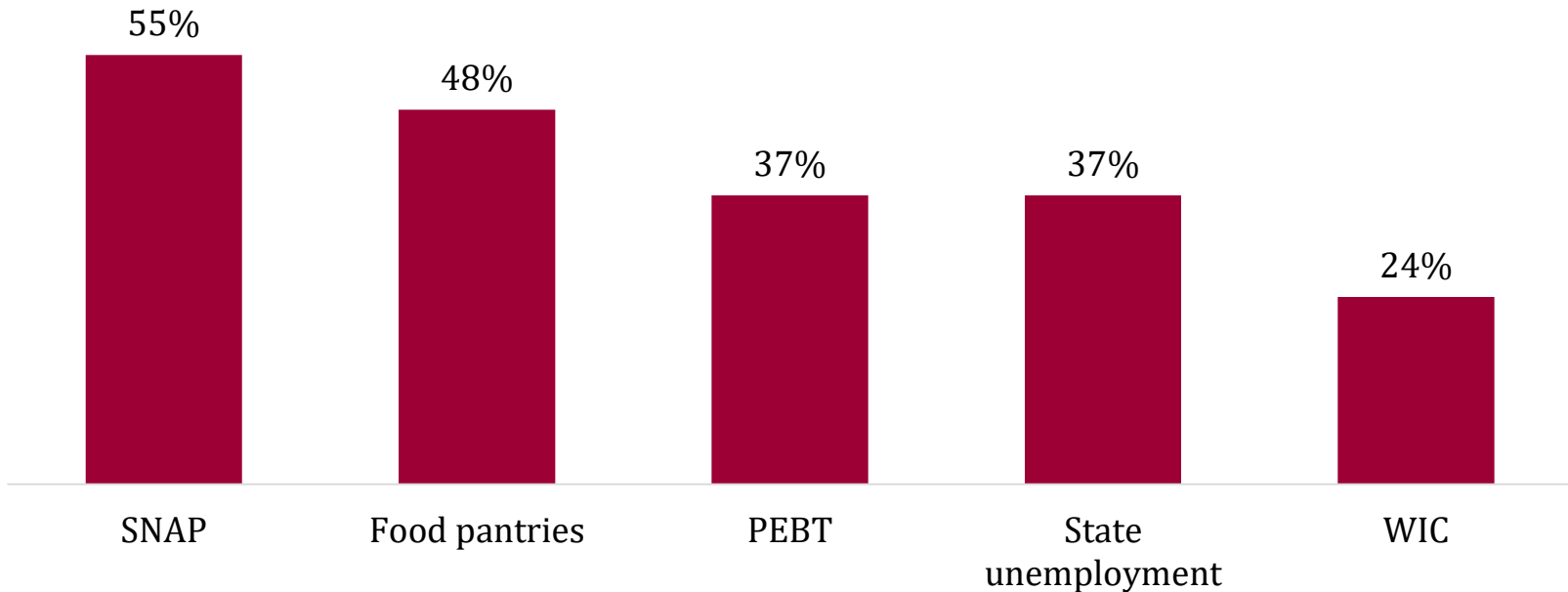
# Survey Background

- Results based on a statewide survey of 507 food insecure residents of Massachusetts.
- Food insecure residents were identified from a statewide general population survey of ~1,500 residents.
- The statewide survey was weighted to age, gender, geography, and education level.
- Conducted July 23 – August 3, 2021 via online interviewing.
- This project was sponsored by the Shah Foundation.

# Traditional benefits vary in usage

- There are large gaps in who uses current benefits. While many food insecure residents do use them, uptake varies considerably.

**Over half of food insecure residents report using SNAP, others used less**  
*% of the food insecure who said they have used each benefit type this year*

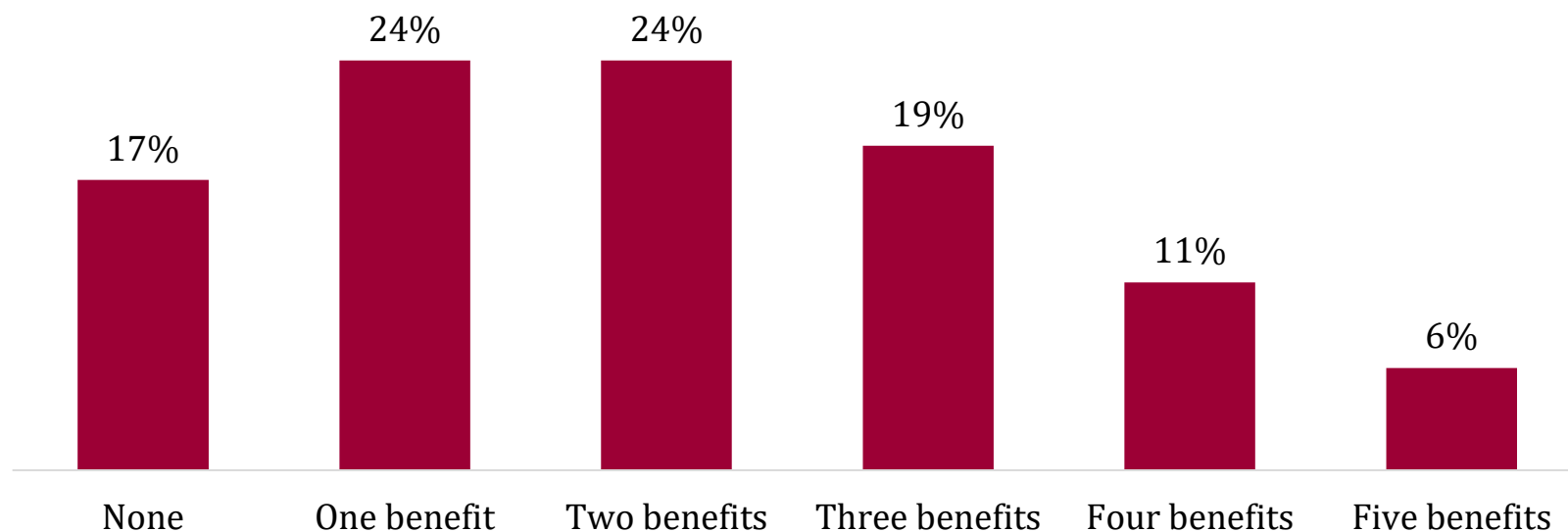


# Using multiple benefits

- The majority of food insecure residents (60%) use more than one type of benefit.
- Among those who only use one, SNAP is most common.

## Most food insecure residents say they have used more than one benefit

*% of food insecure residents who use...*

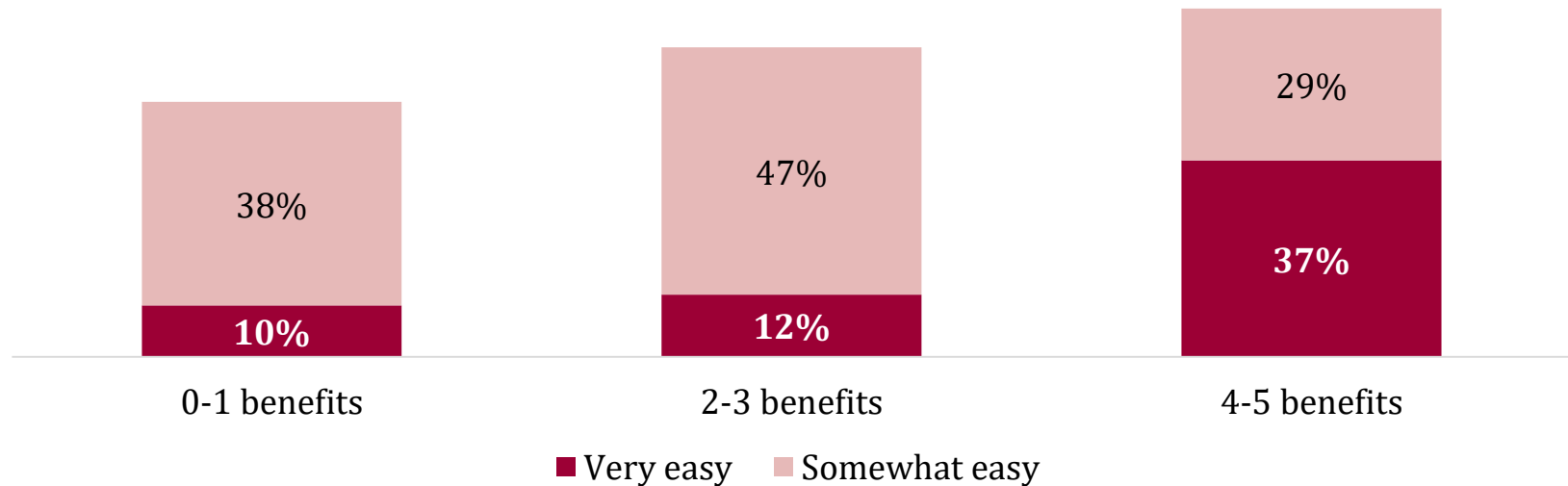


# More benefits = easier to get food

- The more benefits people use now, the easier they say it is to get food. This suggests there would be value in focusing on getting people the benefits that already exist.

## People who use 4-5 benefits already say getting food is easier

*% of food insecure residents who use each number of benefits who say it is \_\_\_ to get food*

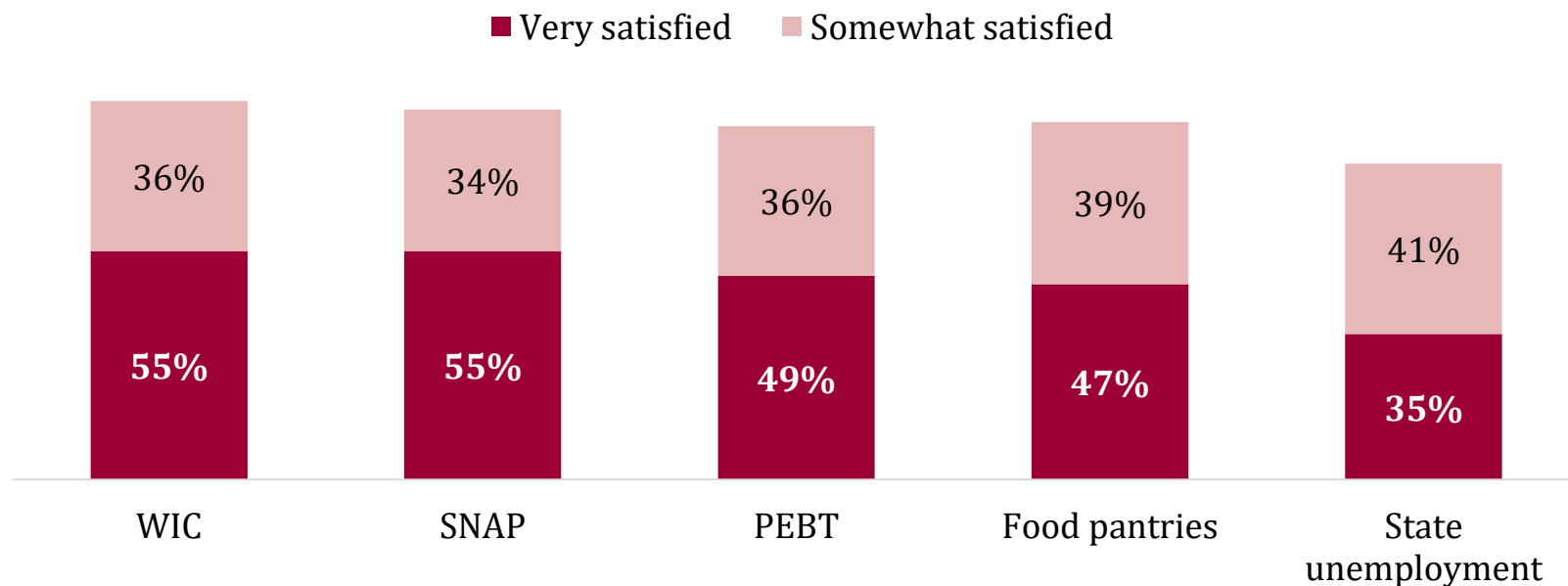


# Satisfaction with existing benefits

- Majorities who use each food access program are satisfied with existing benefits, especially WIC and SNAP.

## Majorities say they are “very” satisfied with WIC and SNAP benefits

*% of food insecure residents who use each program who are \_\_\_\_\_ with each of the following benefits*

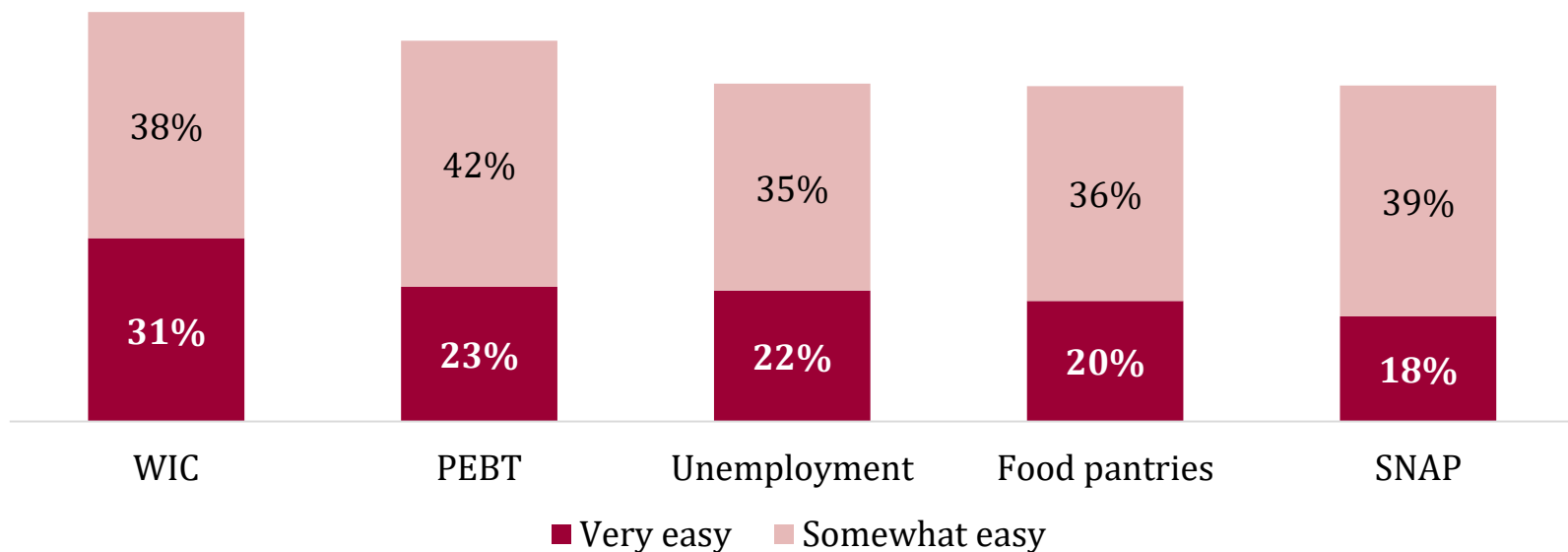


# Which benefits help most?

- Users of certain benefits report an easier time getting food overall. WIC and PEBT are the most closely tied to easy access.

## WIC and PEBT users report the easiest time getting enough food

*% of food insecure residents who use each benefit who say it is \_\_\_ easy to get food*



# Open end responses – what would help?

- More residents called for food-specific solutions (e.g., affordable food programs, additional money to spend on food).
- Others said general economic solutions like better jobs and better pay. Some felt people need to take more personal responsibility for saving / making more money.

*Q: Beyond existing programs that help you get or buy food, if you were starting from scratch what would be most helpful to you in order to provide enough food for your household?*

*\*Results may add to more than 100% because responses could be coded into multiple categories*

## What would be most helpful policies / actions?

*% of food insecure residents who said each of the following would be helpful to them to get enough food\**

	Total
Affordable food programs (grocery programs, work programs, healthy food, staple foods, etc.)	22%
More food funds (cash, gift cards, SNAP, EBT, etc.)	21%
Access to information (resources, local community food, etc.)	18%
Better jobs (livable wage, more work, etc.)	12%
Already works well / good / great	10%
Personal responsibility (people need to work harder, save money, etc.)	7%
None / N/A / not sure	12%
Other	7%



# Quotes on key themes

“A delivery truck at my building. I don’t have a car nor a driver’s license, picking up food and carrying it home, or having to walk to a bus stop is too much.”

“Posting on social media (or somewhere commonly viewed) with resources on how to access assistance programs and locations and times where a person can receive assistance.”

“Being able to pick foods I can have as food pantry workers do not know my allergies and give me things I cannot eat due to allergies.”

“One centralized place for additional food and signing up for government assistance.”

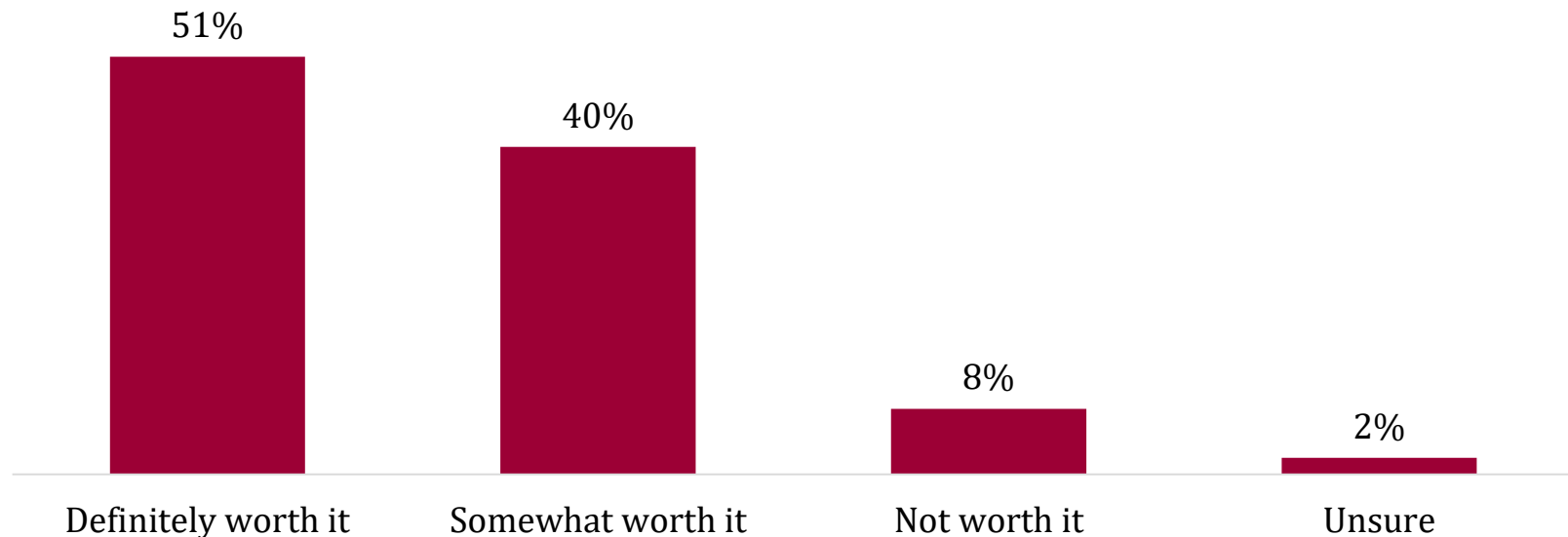
“If the SNAP program normally provided a little more money per family member, not just during the PEBT program.”

# Effort required is “worth it”

- Among those who use SNAP or WIC, nearly all say the effort required to apply for and spend food benefits is at least “somewhat” worth it.

## Nearly all those who have used SNAP, WIC say effort required is worthwhile

*% of those food insecure residents who use SNAP or WIC who say the required effort is \_\_\_\_\_*

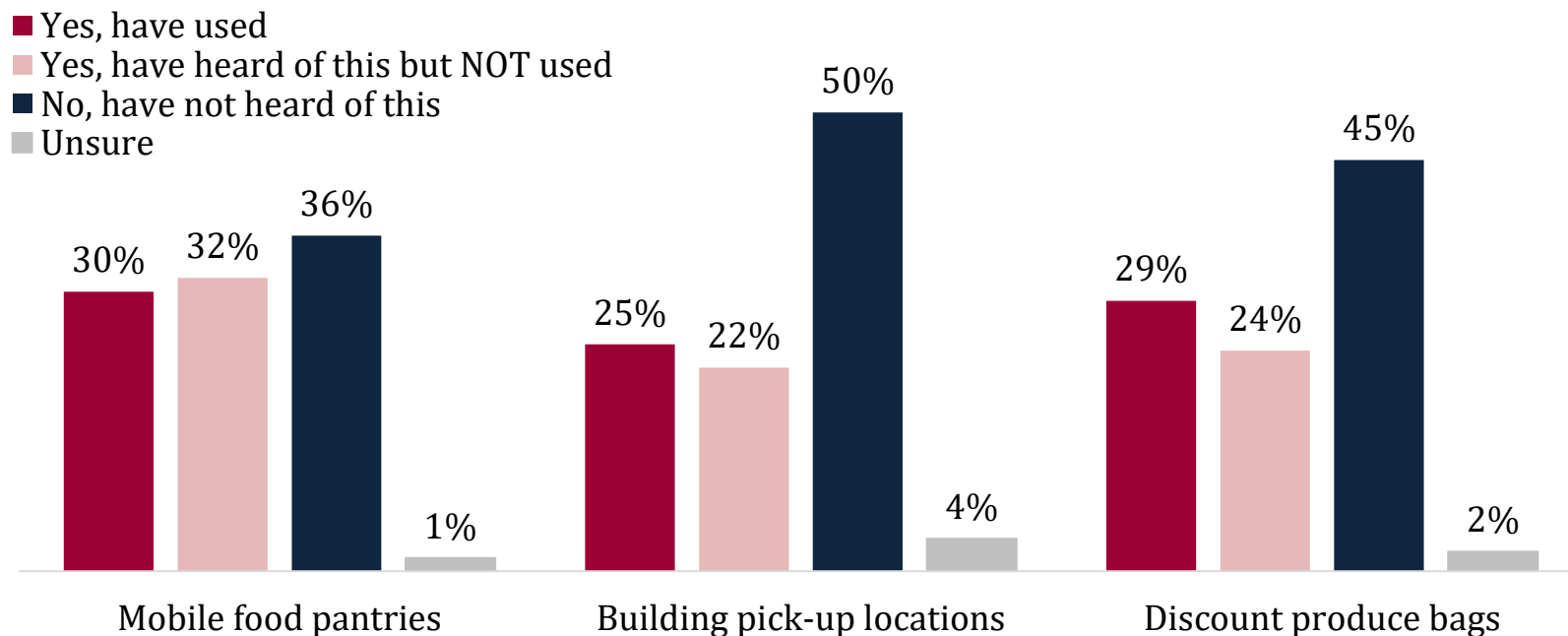


# Familiarity with “new” programs

- Mobile food pantries, pick-up locations at central neighborhood buildings, and discount produce bags are familiar to many, with some already using them.

## Some already using new food programs, more have heard of them

*% of food insecure who are familiar with each of the following programs*

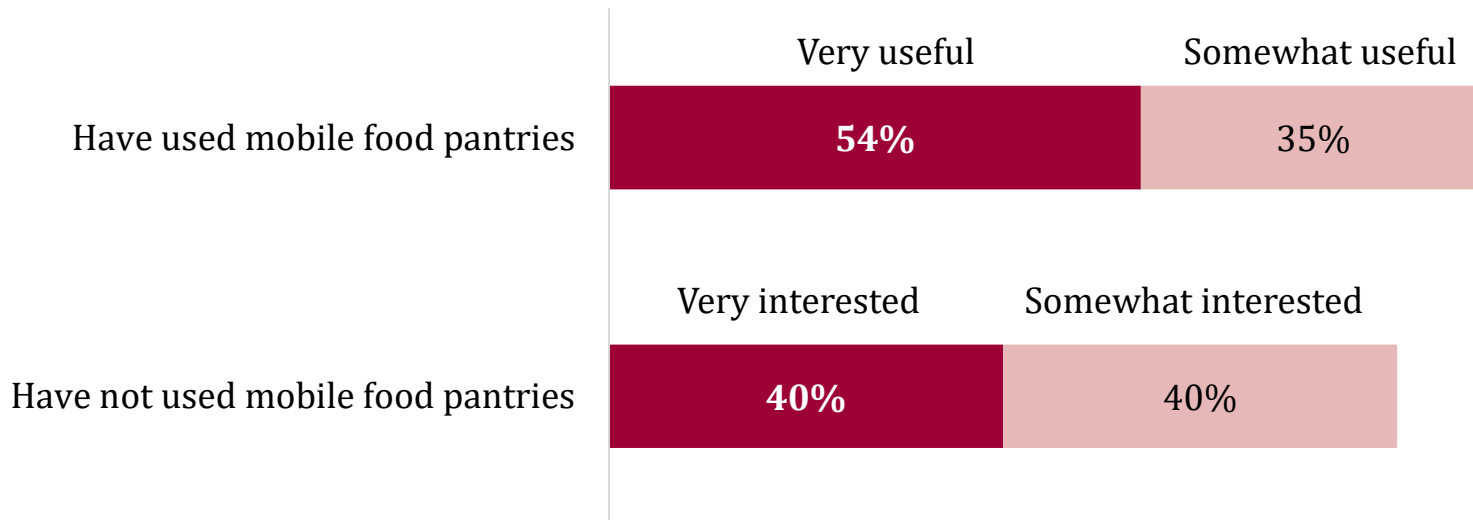


# Satisfaction / interest: mobile food pantries

- Those who already use mobile food pantries almost universally call them useful.
- Those who have not used one before are interested to do so.

## Satisfaction and interest in using mobile food pantries are both high

*% of those who \_\_\_\_\_ who say they are very / somewhat \_\_\_\_\_*

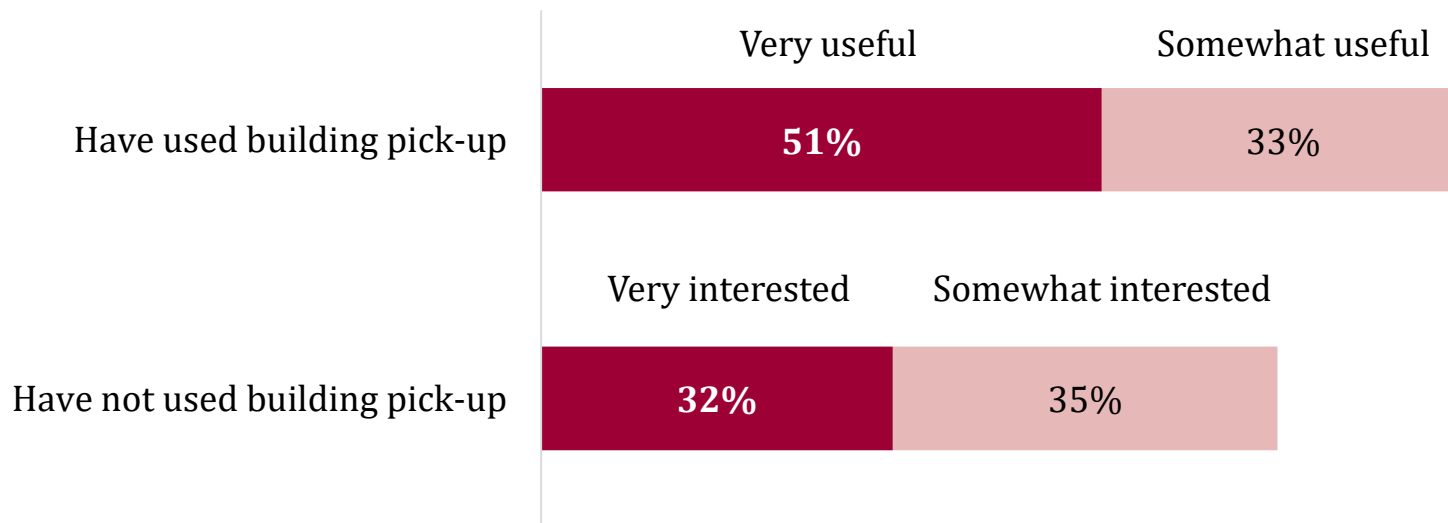


# Satisfaction / interest: building pick-up

- Those who have already picked up food from centrally-located buildings find it very / somewhat useful.
- Those who have not are interested in doing so.

## Pick-up from a centrally located building is useful; many interested

% of those who \_\_\_\_\_ who say they are very / somewhat \_\_\_\_\_



*Q: You mentioned you picked up groceries from the lobby of a nearby apartment building. How useful was this service to you?*

*Q: You mentioned you have NOT picked up groceries from the lobby of a nearby apartment building. If this service were available to you, how interested would you be to use it? If there are not large, centrally located apartment nearby to you and this type of service would not apply, please say so.*

# Satisfaction / interest: discount produce

- Discount produce bags are popular among those who have bought them before, and of high interest to those who have not.

## Discount produce bags are a popular idea

% of those who \_\_\_\_\_ who say they are very / somewhat \_\_\_\_\_



Q: You mentioned you have bought discounted bags of produce before. How useful was this service to you?

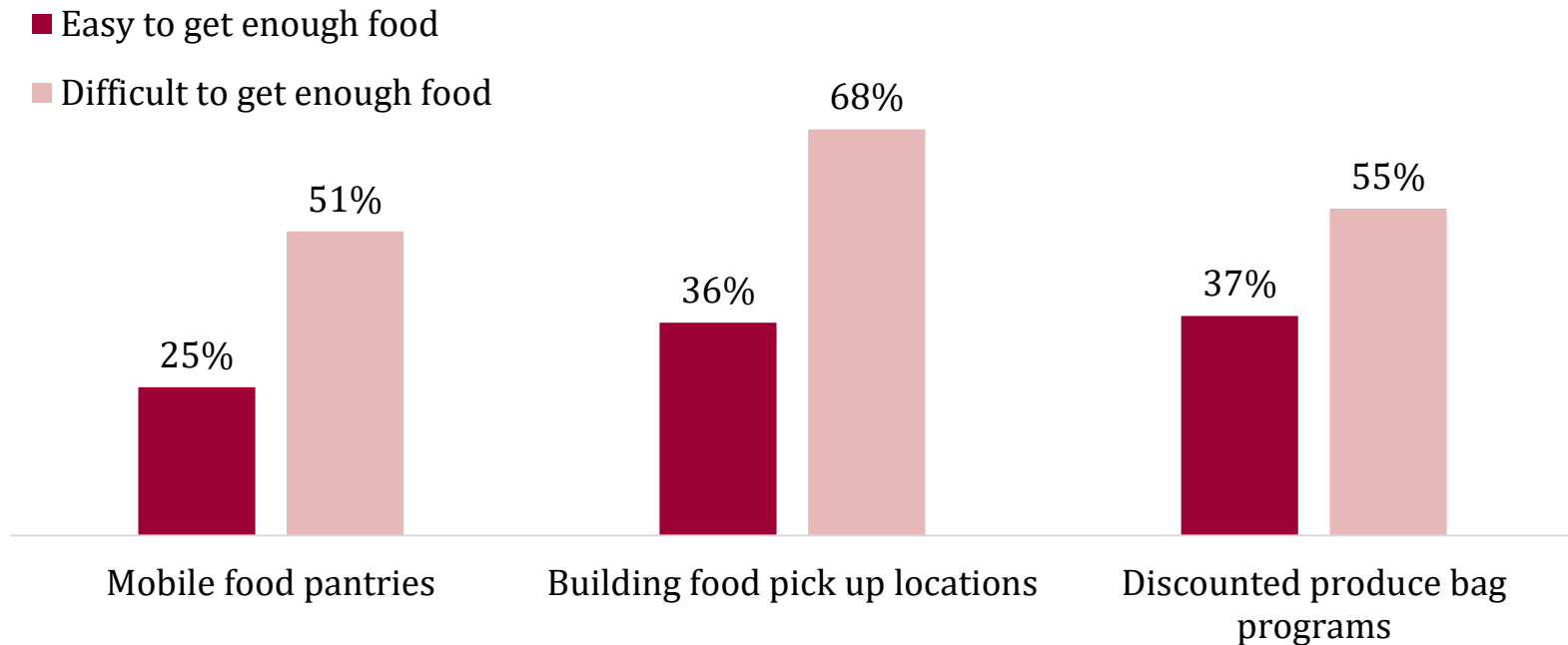
Q: You mentioned you have NOT bought discounted bags of produce before. If this service were available to you, how interested would you be to use it?

# Unfamiliarity with new concepts

- Those who are struggling to get enough food are also least familiar with the new programs.

## Those who need them most are least likely to have heard of new programs

*% who say it is \_\_\_\_\_ who have not heard of each of the following programs*

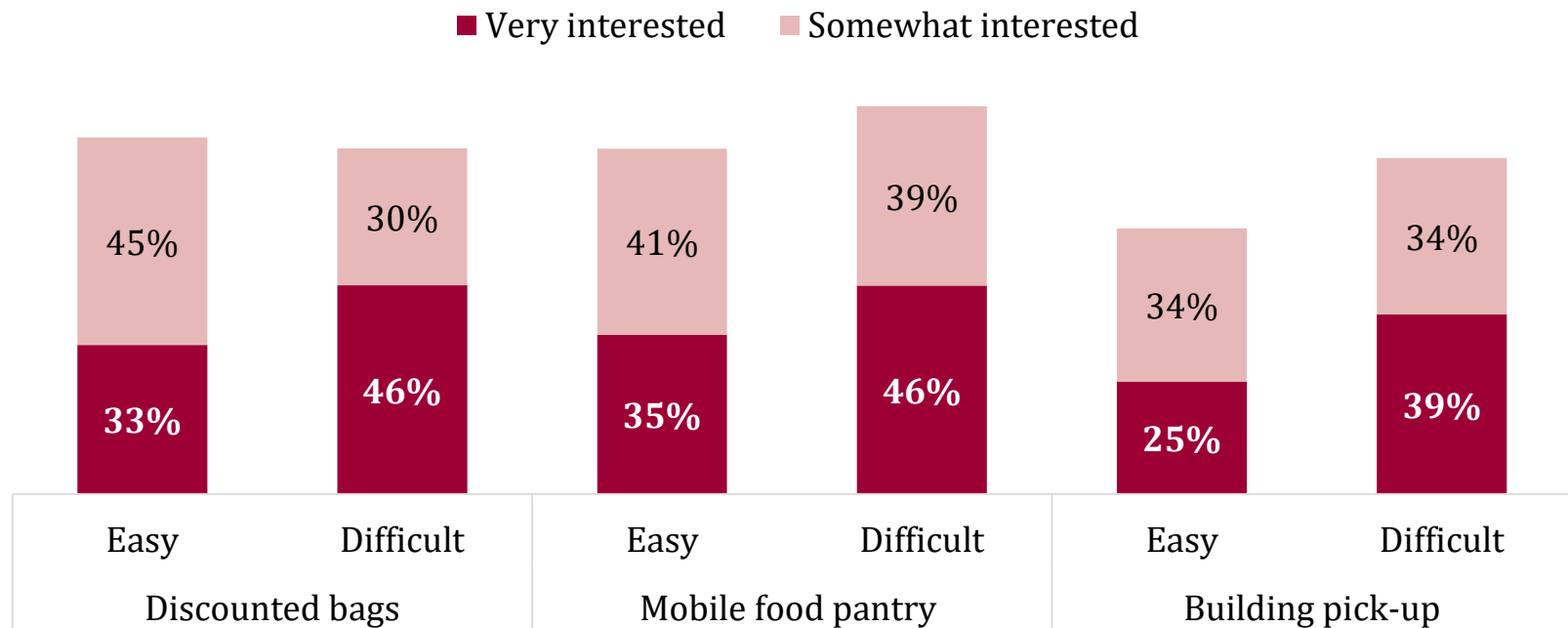


# New programs could reach neediest

- Those who are having the hardest time getting food are more likely to be interested in new program ideas.

## Those who need help are most interested in new program ideas

*% of food insecure residents who say it is easy/difficult to get food who are \_\_\_\_ interested in each program*



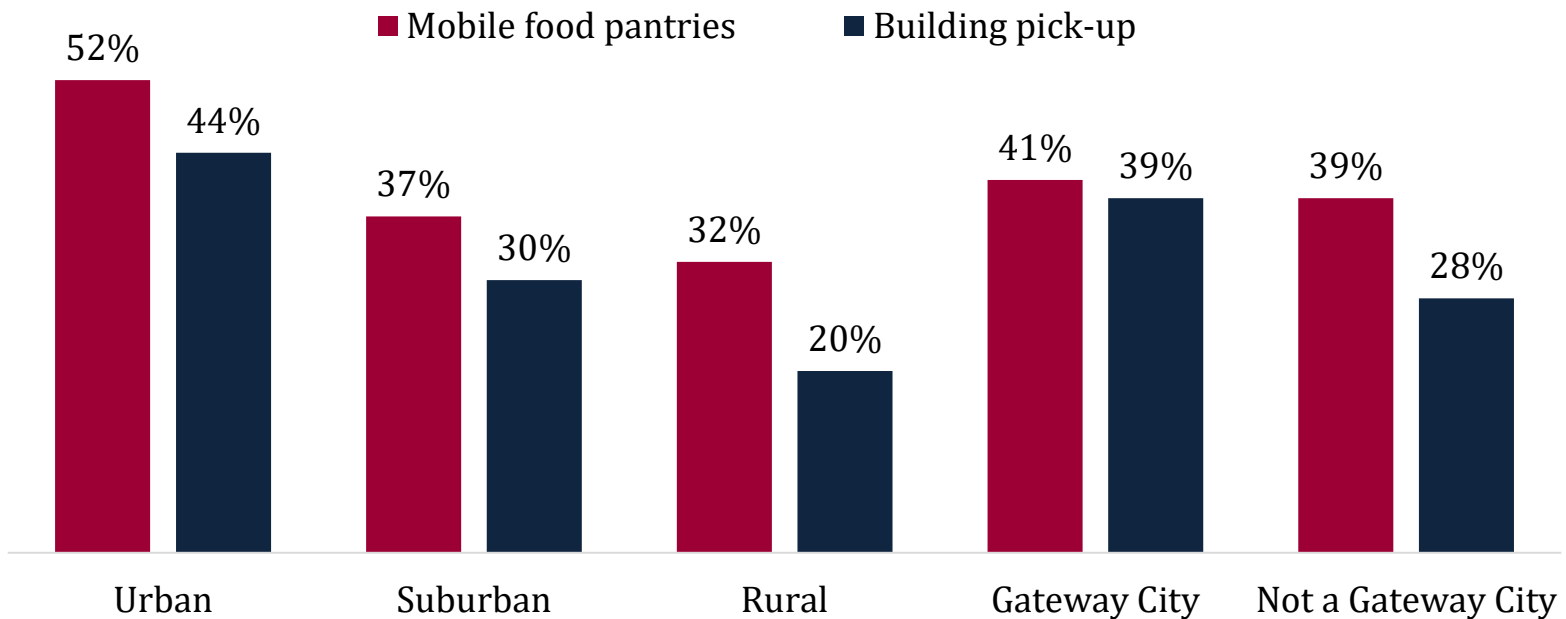


# New programs appeal to urban residents

- Those who live in urban areas or Gateway Cities are especially interested in mobile food pantries and pick-up at centrally located neighborhood buildings.

## Urban residents express more interest in specific programs

*% of food insecure residents who are “very” interested in mobile food pantries and building pick-up programs*

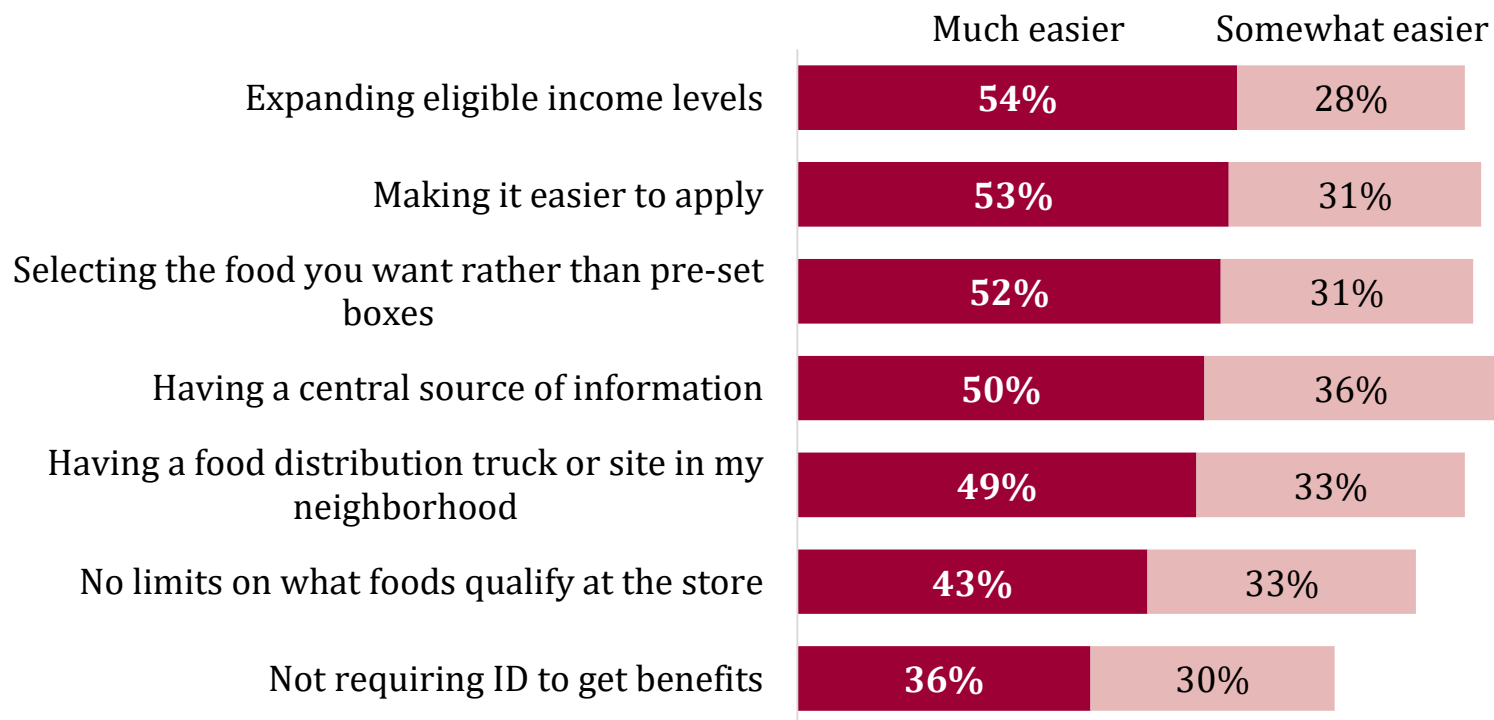


# Range of options to ease food access

- Expanding income eligibility, easier applications, and food selection top list of improvements to ease food access.

## Which policy options food insecure residents say would be most helpful

*% of food insecure residents who say \_\_\_ would make it easier to get/buy food*



# How to expand benefits use

- Among those who use the fewest “traditional” benefits, perceived benefit thresholds, complexity, and open food selection would be most helpful.
- This echoes themes from the K-12 parent SNAP gap survey.

## What would make it easier for people who do not use many benefits now?

*% who use each number of benefits who say each would make it “much easier” to get food*

	Overall	COUNT OF BENEFITS USED		
		0-1	2-3	4-5
Expanding eligible income levels	54%	50%	55%	61%
Making it easier to apply	53%	46%	56%	60%
Selecting the food you want rather than pre-set boxes	52%	49%	51%	59%
Having a central source of information	50%	40%	54%	66%
Having a food distribution truck or site in my neighborhood	49%	37%	54%	67%
No limits on what foods qualify at the store	43%	32%	48%	57%
Not requiring ID to get benefits	36%	33%	35%	48%

# Impact of proposals varies by group

- Depending on the policy proposals, different groups are more likely to say it would make it “much easier” for them to get food.

## Each policy proposal would have biggest impact on different groups

Among food insecure, groups who say \_\_\_ would making getting food “much easier”

	Groups most likely to say “much easier”
<b>Expanding eligible income levels</b>	Lower-income, no degree, urban, dependents at home
<b>Making it easier to apply</b>	Urban, Gateway City, parents, use P-EBT, use unemployment
<b>Selecting the food you want rather than pre-set boxes</b>	Women, older adults, urban, not employed
<b>Having a central source of information</b>	Use food pantry, parents, dependents at home, employed full-time, degree+, higher-income
<b>Having a food distribution truck or site in my neighborhood</b>	Higher-income, degree+, urban, employed full-time, parents, dependents at home, use food pantry
<b>No limits on what foods qualify at the store</b>	Higher-income, Gateway City, employed part-time, parents, use P-EBT
<b>Not requiring ID to get benefits</b>	Younger adults, no degree, Gateway City, urban, parents, dependents at home, use WIC

# Key themes from the dissatisfied

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Among those who are not satisfied with the benefits they use:

“Getting food delivery in my apartment complex. We do not have that service at all and people with disabilities struggle to get more food for the month.”

“A higher wage at work and a system where people can buy food to put ‘on reserve’ at restaurants so that poorer people can be given those meals for free.”

“Enough information around the city so people can know where to go to get food when they need it...The need more food pantries that will provide food for more than 2 days worth...many people go hungry not knowing where to go after the food pantry food is over and they can’t get more until the next month.”

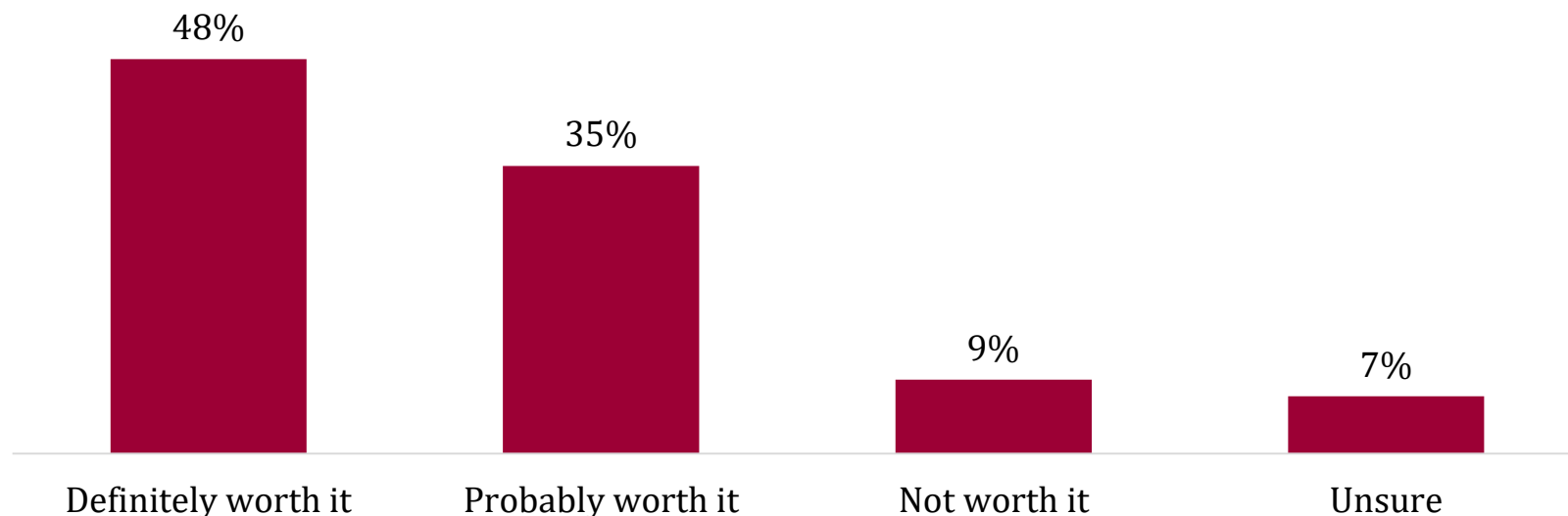
“Having transportation to pick up groceries would be the best to save time and money.”

# Increased flexibility “worth it”

- If the process to apply for and spend benefits was more flexible, the majority would consider the required effort more worthwhile.

## More flexibility on benefits would make it worthwhile for more residents

*% of food insecure residents who say more flexibility in food programs would make the effort \_\_\_\_\_*





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