

Children's Perceptions of the Ontario Student Nutrition Program's Farm-to-School Initiative



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Acknowledgements

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Background

- ▶ Poor nutrition is a principle contributor to the rising rates of obesity, type-2 diabetes, and other diet-related diseases
- ▶ Most Canadian children do not consume the recommended servings of fruit, vegetables, and other nutrient-dense foods, limiting potential health benefits (Garriguet, 2004)
- ▶ School nutrition programming may be an effective method to promote healthy eating, aid in reversing declining nutrition levels, and ultimately improve the overall health of children (Colley, 2019)



Objectives

- ▶ My research investigates children's perceptions of OSNP's Farm-to-School program
- ▶ The Farm-to-School program provides weekly deliveries of fresh fruit, vegetable, and supplementary food group snacks directly to elementary schools



Methods

- ▶ Child focus groups were conducted to gain a better understanding of their experiences with and perceptions of the program
- ▶ A total of 38 focus groups were completed at 22 schools receiving the program in Southwestern Ontario
- ▶ Focus groups were comprised of 4 to 6 students in grades 4-6 and 7-8



Focus Group Questions

1. When do you usually get your snacks from the program?
2. Before you get your snack are you usually hungry?
3. What snacks did you like /dislike?
4. Did you eat all of your snacks?
5. Did the snack program change the way you eat?
6. If you were in charge of a healthy snack program, what would you do?
7. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the snack program?



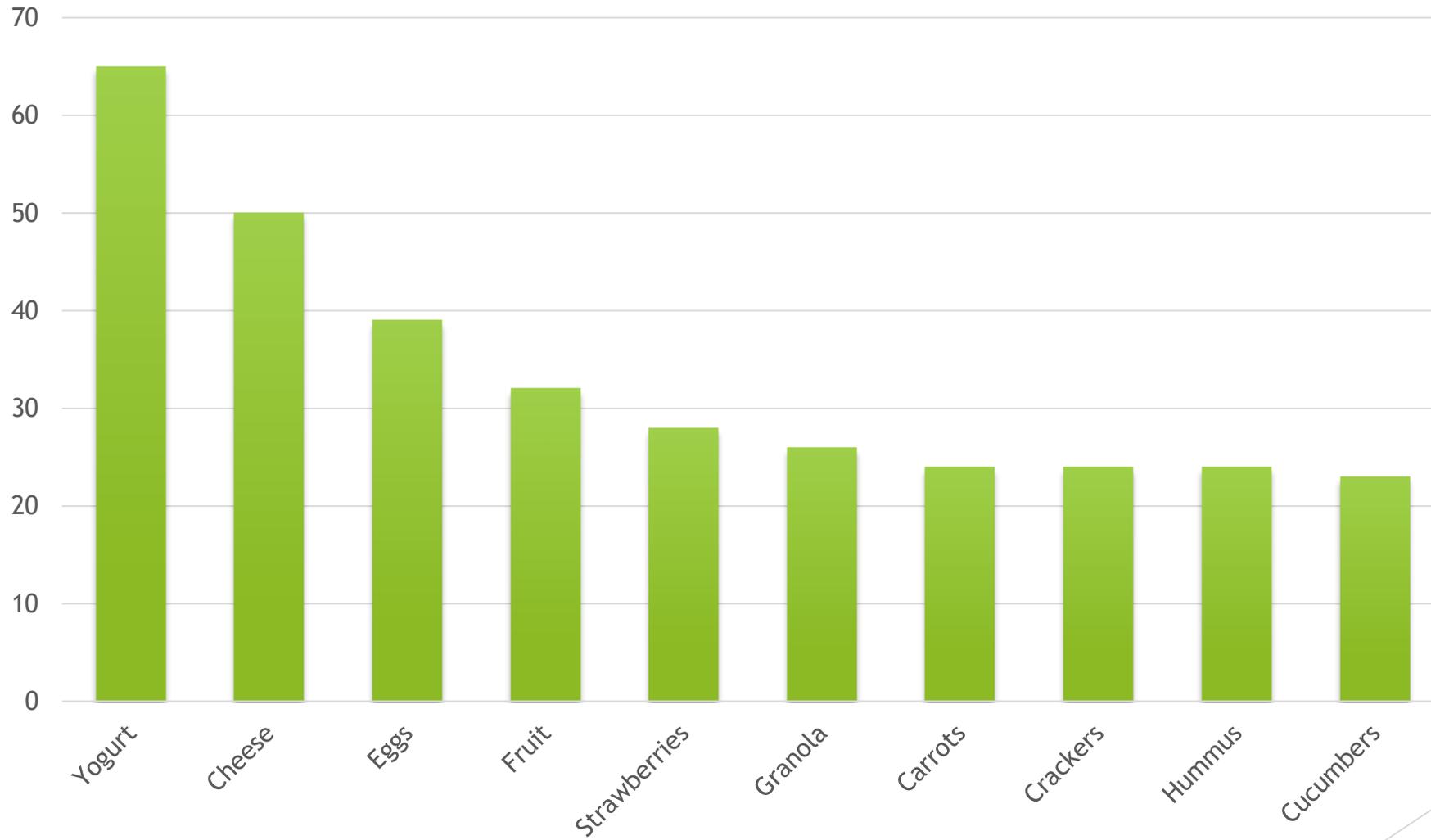
Preliminary Results

Impact of the Program

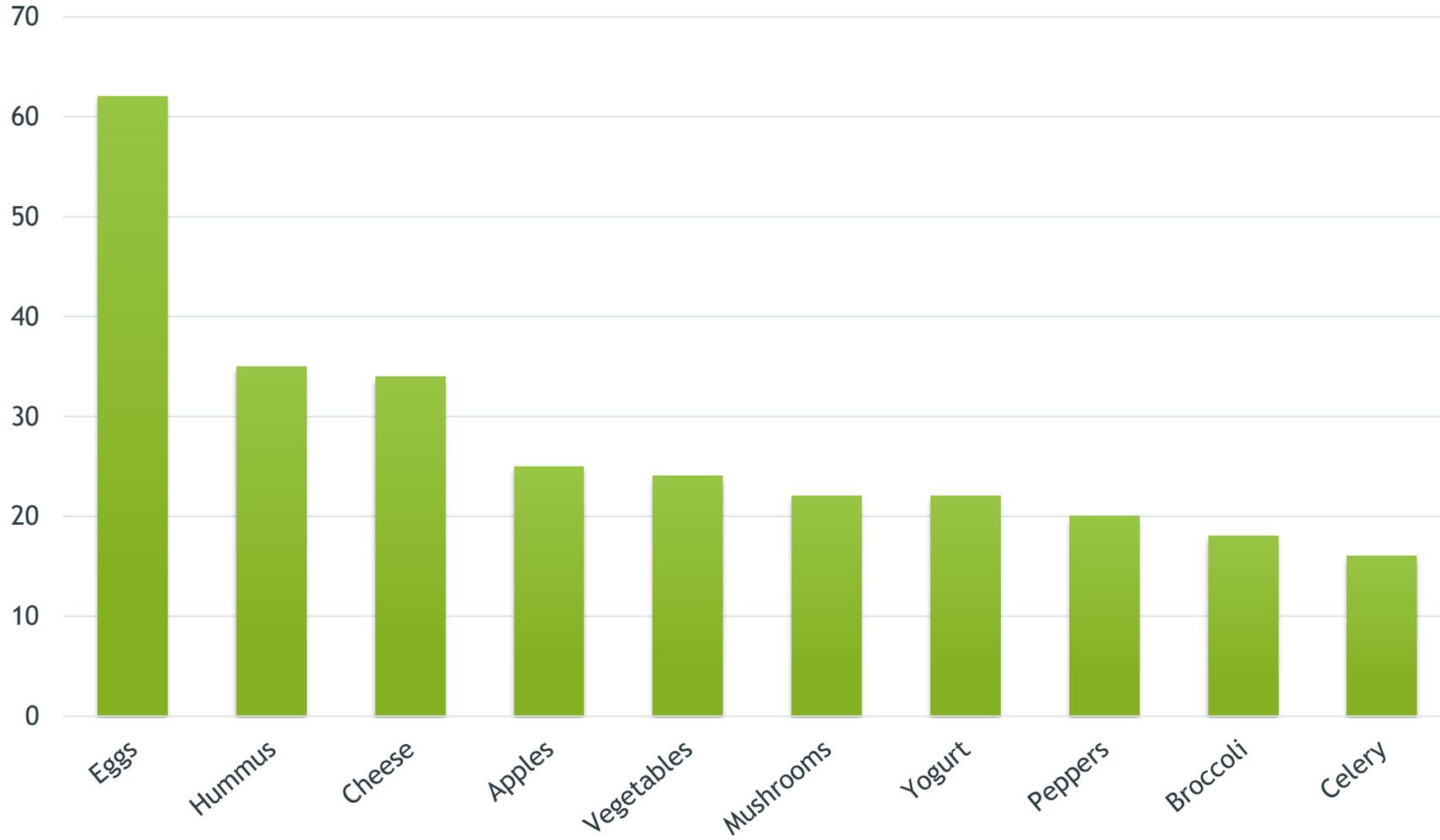
- ▶ **Participants had positive impressions of the program**
 - ▶ “I think it gives an opportunity for a lot of students to not be hungry.” female, 7-8
 - ▶ “It fuels the rest of our day, the snack program, because they have all the stuff that gets our energy going.” male, 5-6
 - ▶ “It’s kind of the things like this, I think that kind of keep kids’ nutrition up” male, 5-6
 - ▶ “I know it takes a lot of work and a lot of us are very thankful for that ‘cause it does help out a lot of students” female, 7-8
 - ▶ “I would make sure every school in Ontario gets the snack program.” male, 4-5



Foods Liked



Foods Disliked



Hunger Level

- ▶ Participants often stated that they were hungry prior to receiving the snack program
 - ▶ “Usually I’m hungry. I kind of sleep in too much so I don’t get time to eat breakfast.” male, 7-8
 - ▶ “Yeah, but I don’t eat breakfast.” male, 6-7
- ▶ Some students were not hungry, which may be attributed to the time of day the program was delivered and whether they’ve had breakfast
 - ▶ “I’m not usually hungry when it comes. It comes like halfway through break but I still get stuff cause it’s like, good.” female, 7-8
 - ▶ “Not always because we have it at the end of lunch.” female, 5-6
 - ▶ “Depends what I ate for breakfast.” male, 5-6

Changed Eating Patterns

- ▶ Many children reported how the program has influenced their eating patterns at school and home
 - ▶ “I started packing my lunch a lot differently. A lot of the times I have no junk food in my lunch and more fruits and vegetables.” male, 5-6
 - ▶ “I started to eat a lot healthier because of the snack bin. I used to eat a lot of junk food, like packaged things but now like - the fresh fruits and vegetables - I started eating those a lot more.” male, 5-6



Changed Eating Patterns

- ▶ The snack program has also enabled children to try various healthy foods
 - ▶ “By letting us eat more healthier and figure out what we like.” female, 6-7
 - ▶ “There’s a lot of different food that I’ve never had before in the snack program so that kind of encouraged me to eat different foods.” female, 6-8



Recommendations

- ▶ More educational initiatives, such as healthy eating messaging, cooking classes, field trips, gardening
- ▶ Adding dips and spreads, meat products, salads, tropical/exotic fruits, and a greater variety of foods
- ▶ Conduct a survey and gather children's food preferences
- ▶ Greater child involvement with the preparation and delivery of snacks



Future Directions

- ▶ The Farm-to-School program was positively received by the children and it improved their dietary behaviours
- ▶ Findings from this study can be used to further improve the Farm-to-School program and make it more accessible to families in Ontario
- ▶ This research will aid in supporting the development of a nation school food program



References

- ▶ Garriguet D. Overview of Canadians' eating habits. Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada; 2006.
- ▶ Colley P, Myer B, Seabrook J, Gilliland J. The impact of Canadian school food programs on children's nutrition and health: A systematic review. *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research*. 2019; 80: 1-8.

Disclosure Statement

- ▶ I have no affiliation (financial or otherwise) with a pharmaceutical, medical device or communications organization.