



# Disaster Preparedness, Food, and Food Safety Issues among Limited English Proficient Immigrants

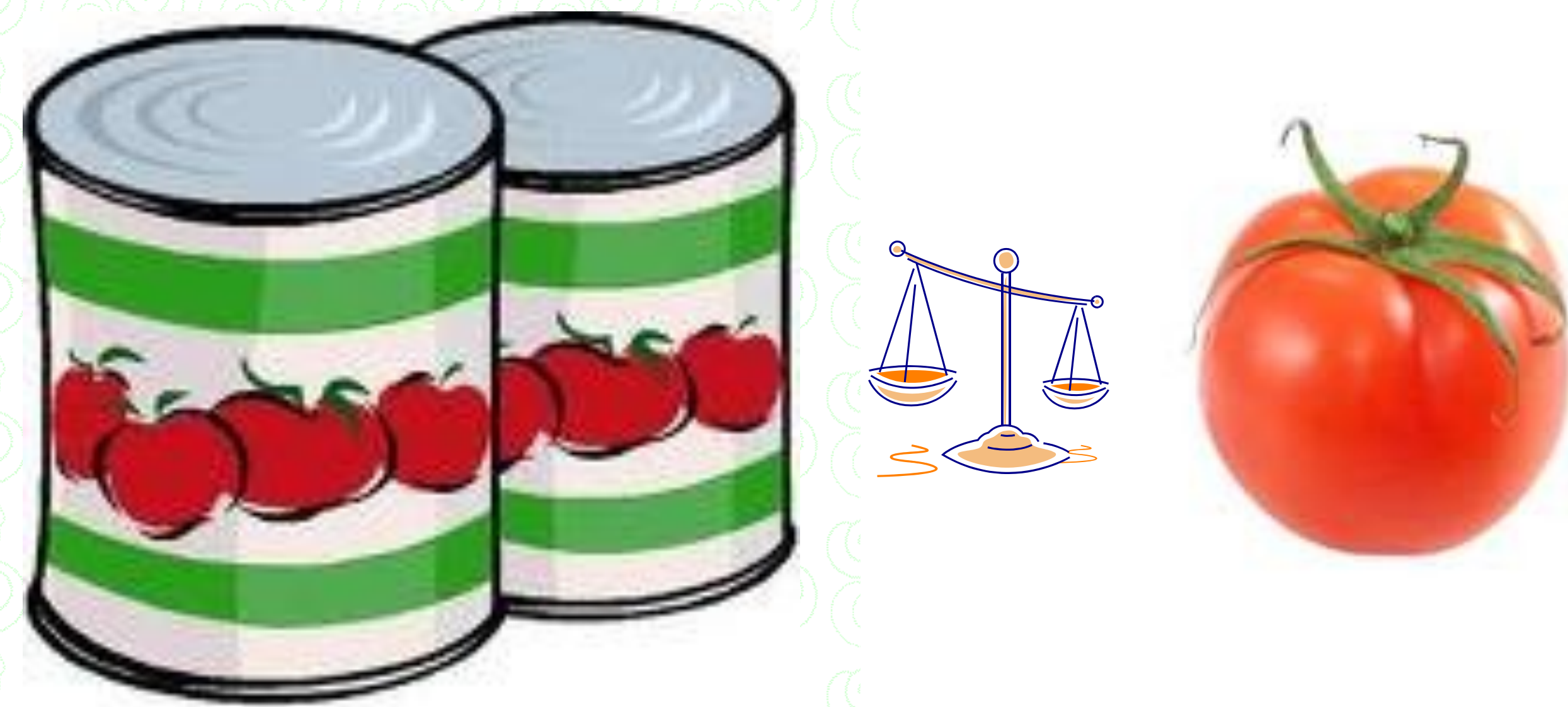
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## Background

Current disaster preparedness plans may not adequately address the needs of the immigrants with limited English Proficiency (LEP). Information about food related concerns of LEPs during disasters may provide valuable information for disaster preparedness planners.



## Method

City of Houston Department of Health and Human Services conducted sixteen focus group discussions and an equal number of key informant interviews among Chinese, Vietnamese, Spanish and Somali speaking immigrants after the Hurricane Ike of 2008. We examined food supply choices and food safety related concerns of the immigrant LEPs as they relate to disaster preparedness.

## Results

Four key themes emerged from the discussions regarding securing adequate food supplies and practicing safe food handling during disasters:

1) **Perception about canned food** (e.g. many LEP immigrants considered canned food inferior in quality compared to fresh food).

*"I did not have a lot of money, but suddenly I had to buy so many things and then throw them away. Why? Because after the storm, nobody wanted to have canned food."*

*-Vietnamese Speaking Participant*

*"..we stored drinking water, dried foods, instant noodles and so forth, which are easy to cook in case of power outages."*

*-Chinese Speaking Participant*

2) **Limited food choice** (e.g. bread and water, because grocery stores were closed during disasters or because of impassable roads or lack of transportation to markets).

*"We had to drive and keep driving, looking for any open store which may have food. And then wait in very long lines."*

*-Spanish Speaking Participant*

3) **Lack of information** (e.g. Many were unaware of where to get ice and water during hurricane relief efforts because information was not provided in their native language or through familiar communication channels).

*"I didn't prepare water or drinks. I thought that the storm would end quickly, but it turned out that it lasted much longer."*

*-Vietnamese speaking participant*

## Results...

4) **Worries of viabilities of food** (e.g. some threw away food that was probably safe to eat, but were worried about its viability).

*"..electricity went off for few hours but we needed to dump all the food piled in refrigerator because our people thought it's bad"*

*-Chinese Speaking Participant*

## Implications

• Disaster preparedness communication plans targeted to LEPs should address perceptions about canned food and other concerns, such as food safety and shelf life of foods.

• Such information should be communicated in specific languages using familiar channels, such as local community leaders and local radio channels.

• Disaster preparedness plans targeting all citizens should address concerns related to limited food choice and worries of viability of food.



## Limitation

• The conclusions drawn in this study are based on the information collected from interviews and focus groups with LEP immigrants representing only a few language groups.

## Acknowledgement

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