

Healthy Food Policy for Emergency Food Programs

A guide by Healthy Eating Active Living Food System Partners

Background

We recognize that good nutrition is essential for good health and that all families should have equitable access to healthy food choices. People who are living on low income often have to make difficult decisions about what food to buy and where to get food from. Less healthy, processed food is often cheaper and more accessible while healthier, more nutritious food may not be accessible in some neighborhoods. Community members experiencing food insecurity who access food pantries have more health problems related to high blood pressure, heart problems, and diabetes.

Central Illinois pantry participants were surveyed about their preferences for available foods within feeding programs and pantries. They requested more lean protein/meat sources as well as fresh and canned fruit and vegetable options to help them eat healthier. Many surveyed also wanted access to recipes that will assist with healthier meal preparation.¹ Creating a healthy food policy for your organization can help you to meet the needs of those you serve. The HEAL team members, including food banks and growers, will partner with you so that you can stock and offer these preferred items to your pantry guests.

Purpose of a Food Policy

A food policy can help your pantry or feeding program describe what healthier food offerings will look like for you and those you serve. There are established guidelines for best practices related to how we request food donations, where we can source these donations, and how we can display, promote, and educate about healthier food options.

Suggested Considerations:

- Requesting healthier food items and limiting non-preferred foods items from donors, distributors, and other sources
- Promoting healthier food uptake by placement and signage
- Encouraging client's choice, especially with fruits and vegetables
- Sharing nutrition and recipe education on distribution days
- Offering culturally-rooted foods based on the wishes of the people you serve

Resources Available:

A list of resources is available by email or print. Contact Kaitlyn Streitmatter at 309-685-3140 or kaitlyns@illinois.edu to learn more and get the resources needed.

- Survey results on local preferences
- Policy development tools and templates

- Nutrition guidelines
- Local food vendors
- Healthy food survey results
- SNAP and WIC information

References:

- 1) Survey conducted by HEAL. Link to results: www.healthyhoi.org
- 2) <https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/>
- 3) Go Green Criteria (based on dietary guidelines, Foods to Encourage, ADA, and AHA)

Endorsements:

This food policy guide and resources have been funded by the Community Foundation of Central Illinois and endorsed by the HEAL Partnership:

Advocate Carle

Elevate Energy

HOI Food Pantry Network

Illinois Public Health Institute

Midwest Food Bank

OSF Garden of Hope

PCCEO Food Bank

Peoria County Sustainability and Resources

Regional Food Council

Tazewell County Health Department

Tazewell County Resource Center

UICOMP – UGME and GME Programs

U of I Extension SNAP Ed Tazewell, Peoria, and Woodford County

Woodford County Health Department