

FOOD GATHERERS

Nutrition Policy for Food Procurement and Distribution

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1. Statement of Purpose:

The purpose of this nutrition policy is to guide Food Gatherers' decisions related to food procurement and distribution, in order to support healthy food access and healthful diets of the clients we serve, and as part of our broader goals to alleviate hunger and improve access to nutritious food for all food insecure individuals in Washtenaw County.

Food Gatherers supports the health of our neighbors in need and will continue to:

- Prioritize the procurement and distribution of the following Healthy Picks:
 - **Fresh fruit and vegetables**
 - **Eggs, fish, meat, poultry, and plant-based protein**
 - **Whole grains**
 - **Milk, cheese and yogurt**
 - **Convenience foods** (e.g., ready-to-eat cereal, soup, stew, other mixed dishes) **that are whole grain, low in sodium, and low in added sugar**
- Limit resources used to procure and distribute¹:
 - Food and beverages that are high in sodium and added sugar
 - Sugar-sweetened beverages
 - Candy, sweet bakery items, and other foods of low nutritional quality
- Consider nutritional value, economic benefit, cultural food practices and taste preferences of the community we serve when weighing decisions about food procurement and distribution

¹ *When a Feeding America National Donor offers food that this policy otherwise guides us to decline, we will provide good service to the donor by accepting the donation, including using our resources to pick it up if necessary. We will try to identify other food banks with which to share these types of items rather than automatically incorporating them into our own distribution operations; however, in the event that no other food bank wants to use the items, Food Gatherers will include the items in our regular distribution operations.*



Food Gatherers values access to food as a basic human right and works to ensure that everyone in our community has consistent access to enough food for a healthy life. We continue to distribute a variety of foods to our community. In order to manage resources effectively, we prioritize items that ensure our neighbors have equitable access to foods that deliver important nutrients, prevent and control diet-related chronic disease, and support health and wellbeing.

2. Background, Rationale & Benefits:

Food Gatherers recognizes the increasing role that food banks play in providing healthy foods to those struggling with food insecurity and the significant relationship between hunger and poor health. One in seven residents in Washtenaw County struggles with hunger. Food insecure populations have a higher prevalence and risk of developing diet-related chronic disease, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and obesity. Poor nutrition is associated with adverse birth outcomes, iron-deficiency, and learning difficulties and behavior problems in children, as well as anxiety and depression at all stages of the life-cycle. Healthier food, such as fresh fruits and vegetables or whole grains (e.g., brown rice), is often much more expensive than less nutritious foods such as white rice or pasta.

As a leader in hunger-relief for 30 years, Food Gatherers demonstrates a broader commitment to nutrition through our organization's governing values and 10-year strategic plan as well as a variety of operating procedures, programming and strategic partnerships that build the capacity of our partner program network to store and distribute healthy food to neighbors in need.

- Food Gatherers is committed to **distributing safe, usable, nutritious, and appealing food** and maintains a strategic goal to **meet the need** of our community and **improve access to nutritious food for all food insecure individuals in Washtenaw County**.
- Our **current food procurement and distribution practices emphasize foods of high nutritional quality**, including fresh produce, animal and plant-based protein, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and convenience foods (e.g., ready-to-eat cereal, soup, stew and other mixed dishes) that are whole grain, and low in sodium and added sugar.
- More than **60% of food distributed to our partner programs is fresh produce and protein**. Food Gatherers actively encourages the **client choice model as a best practice** for partner programs so that clients can choose which foods best meet their needs. To further support the willingness of our partner programs to distribute healthy food to clients, including large quantities of perishable produce, **Food Gatherers does not charge a shared-maintenance fee for distributing donated food** to our partner programs, typically calculated on a per-pound basis, and absorbs the cost of food storage and distribution.



- **We partner with local farms, individual and community growers** (e.g., Farmers Markets, Faith in Food, Plant a Row) to increase community knowledge and engagement with providing fresh produce to our neighbors in need.
- We currently provide **Carrot Credits** to select partner programs to purchase items from our inventory, including low-sodium canned goods, whole wheat pastas, or frozen fish. We utilize the **Go, Slow, Whoa nutrient labeling system** in our inventory database so partner programs can quickly identify healthy foods, and understand the nutritional quality of the items they are ordering for their clients.
- Direct-service programming, such as the **Healthy Pantry Conversion Project and CookStars Nutrition Ambassador Training Program and Community Cooks**, provide technical assistance, nutrition education and resources to partner programs to help improve the availability and promotion of healthy foods to pantry clients on-site during food distributions. Additionally, we offer training, outreach, and technical support to enable our partner programs to **connect clients to SNAP and other federal food programs**.
- Our **Shoppers Pantry** models Food Gatherers' healthy pantry strategies to promote healthy food choices, including displaying a variety of fresh produce at eye level and in produce containers, keeping healthier foods (e.g., whole grains) at eye level, and using point-of-choice prompts (shelf talkers) and labels to manage shelf inventory.
- Our **Healthy School Pantry Program** and more recent **Health Care and Food Bank Partnership Work** initiates strategic partnerships with schools and healthcare providers to improve access to healthy food, increase food insecurity screening and referrals, and train healthcare providers on food insecurity as a social determinant of health.

Food Gatherers' Nutrition Policy ensures that our organizational commitment to storing, distributing, and encouraging healthful foods is a part of our institutional memory and practices, and provides all staff with a basis for clear and consistent decision-making about the types of foods and beverages Food Gatherers will purchase, prioritize, and work to reduce. This policy also serves as a tool for management and accountability on moving towards the distribution of more healthful foods.

3. Food Inventory Sources Covered by this Policy

Food Gatherers procures product through a variety of FOOD IN streams, as detailed below. As of FY18, approximately 22% of food is purchased either directly through wholesale vendors (12%) or indirectly through USDA/TEFAP (10%). Approximately 78% of product that is distributed by Food Gatherers to partner programs is donated food, and received by the warehouse from the following sources: Retail pick-up, inter-affiliate shares, Food Bank Council



of Michigan (FBCM), Michigan Agricultural Surplus System (MASS), Michigan Farm to Food Bank, Value Added Product (VAP), Feeding America's Choice System and Individual Donors (Faith in Food, Farmers Market, Food Drives, Plant-a-Row, Walk-ins).

Food Gatherers' Nutrition Policy serves as a guideline to steer food purchasing and receiving decisions, and applies in the following ways to all purchased and donated food and beverages procured and distributed by Food Gatherers:

★ **PURCHASED FOOD:**

- **Wholesale: Food Gatherers' Nutrition Policy** (specifically sections 4 - 6: Healthy Picks, Foods to Reduce, and Foods to Prioritize) **applies to food and beverages purchased directly by Food Gatherers through wholesale vendors**, such as Value Added Food Sales and other vendors of perishable and non-perishable food.

- ★ **USDA/TEFAP:** Food Gatherers does not currently make purchasing decisions about USDA/TEFAP product that is brought into the warehouse. Food Gatherers will make every effort to share our Nutrition Policy with the partner food banks with whom we work, to ensure that most or all USDA/TEFAP product brought into our warehouse meet the criteria for Healthy Picks, and are not Foods to Reduce (complete list of Foods to Reduce listed in section 5 of this document).

★ **DONATED FOOD:**

- **Retail Pick Up:** Food Gatherers prioritizes vendors that donate Healthy Picks and does not actively solicit donations of candy, sweet bakery items (e.g., sheet cake, Twinkies), sugar-sweetened beverages, and other Foods to Reduce listed in section 5 of this document.
- **Inter-Affiliate Shares:** Food Gatherers does not actively accept shares of candy, sweet bakery items, sugar-sweetened beverages, and other Foods to Reduce, or expend resources to collect and store these products unless bundled with significant pounds of Healthy Picks, specifically fresh produce.
- **Food Bank Council of Michigan (FBCM)**
 - MI Farm to Food Bank: Source of fresh, high-quality, locally-grown produce
 - Michigan Agricultural Surplus Systems (MASS): Currently using donated FBCM dollars to procure fluid milk and protein for our partner programs
- **Value Added Product (VAP):** Significant source of fresh produce, especially the Hard 7 (i.e., apples, cabbage, carrots, onions, oranges, potatoes, and sweet potatoes), which represents the primary items of focus for the National Produce Program due in part to their relative high durability, availability, and nutritional value).
- **Feeding America's Choice System:** Food Gatherers works with Feeding America's choice system of donated product to actively procure Healthy Picks. In



recent years, the choice system has been used primarily to procure meat and dairy items. Food Gatherers does not expend resources (including freight charges) on candy, sweet bakery items (e.g, twinkies), sugar-sweetened beverages, and other Foods to Reduce (see section 5).

- **Individual Donors:** Food Gatherers accepts all donations of food and beverages from individual donors if they comply with Food Gatherers' Food Safety Standards, as outlined in our FSP Food Acceptance Guidelines. Donations from Faith in Food, Plant a Row, and Farmers Markets are 100% fresh, locally-grown produce.
 - Faith in Food
 - Farmers Market
 - Food Drives
 - Plant a Row
 - Walk-ins

4. Healthy Picks

Healthy Picks are based on the Dietary Guidelines for America, Feeding America's Detailed Foods to Encourage (F2E) framework and Food Gatherers' data about client food preferences. In accordance with this nutrition policy, we aim to actively seek, procure, and distribute the following foods when appropriate and possible:

★ **FRUITS AND VEGETABLES** - including:

- **Fresh produce:** Prioritize a variety of deeply colorful produce
 - Why colorful? Each color or pigment in produce carries specific vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that support a healthy body.
 - Aim to procure a variety of type *and color* of fresh fruit and vegetables: Red, Orange/Yellow, Green, Blue/Purple, White/Brown
- **Frozen fruits and vegetables:** Packed without syrup or sauces
- **Canned fruit:** Packed in water or 100% natural juices
 - Lite syrup is permissible but not prioritized due to high added sugar content
- **Canned Vegetables:** Low sodium or no salt added

★ **WHOLE GRAINS AND WHOLE GRAIN-RICH PRODUCTS** - including:

- **100% whole grains:** Such as brown rice, quinoa, wild rice, whole rolled oats
- **Whole grain-rich bread, pasta and tortillas:** Contains whole grain and/or the word "whole" (e.g., whole wheat, whole corn) as first ingredient
- **Whole grain-rich cereals:** Contains whole grain as first ingredient
 - Prioritize whole-grain cereal with < 6 g of sugar per serving

★ **DAIRY FOODS AND DAIRY SUBSTITUTES** - including:

- **Milk:** Plain and low in fat



- **Plant-milk beverages:** Such as soy milk, almond milk, hemp milk
 - Prioritize unsweetened / unflavored plant-milk beverages
- **Yogurt:**
 - Prioritize plain, unsweetened when available
- **Cheese**

★ **PROTEIN** - including:

- **Eggs**
- **Meat, fish, and poultry**
 - Limit meat, poultry and fish that is fried and/or breaded
 - Limit protein (especially chicken) that is brined in sodium solution
- **Beans and lentils:** dried or canned with low or no salt added
- **Nuts and seeds**
- **Nut and seed butters:** Such as peanut butter and sunflower seed butter
 - Prioritize nut and seed butters with no added ingredients, when possible i.e., unsalted, unsweetened with no additional oil.
 - The majority of FG peanut butter comes from USDA/TEFAP, which does not currently offer a product with no added sugar, salt or oils.
- **Meat substitutes,** such as seitan, tempeh, textured vegetable protein (TVP), tofu
 - Prioritize meat substitutes with less than 20% Daily Value mg sodium per serving
 - Prefer low-sodium (< 10% Daily Value mg sodium per serving)

★ **BEVERAGES** - purchase / solicit ONLY the following:

- **Water:** Plain, unsweetened
- **100% fruit juice:** No added sugar
- **Coffee and tea:** Unsweetened
- **Nutrition formulas designed for special populations:** Such as Glucerna, Ensure, Boost, Similac, Enfamil

★ **CONVENIENCE FOODS** - for example:

- **Soup, stew, pasta sauce, boxed meals and sides, miscellaneous mixed dishes**
 - Prioritize low sodium (< 10% Daily Value mg sodium per serving)
 - Prioritize whole grains
 - Prioritize low or no added sugar

5. Foods to Reduce

Food Gatherers does not actively purchase or solicit these products from vendors, nor do we expend resources to procure and store these foods unless they are bundled with significant pounds of Healthy Picks (complete list in section 4 of this document). Food Gatherers will continue to minimize the distribution of the following foods as appropriate and possible:



★ CANDY**★ SUGAR SWEETENED BEVERAGES - including but not limited to:**

- **Soda:** sugar-sweetened carbonated water or regular soft drinks
- **Energy drinks:** Red Bull, Mountain Dew Energy
- **Fruit drinks:** fruit-flavored drink, fruit punch, sweetened coconut water, lemonade, cranberry cocktail, pre-sweetened powdered drink mixes
- **Sports drinks:** E.g., Gatorade, Powerade
- **Sweetened coffee and tea:** blended iced coffee drinks, pre-sweetened powdered coffee mix, presweetened ready-to-drink coffee, presweetened ready-to-drink tea (includes iced tea), presweetened tea mix
- **Sweetened shakes and smoothies:** ready-to-drink milkshakes, eggnogs
- **Vitamin-enhanced waters:** E.g., Propel Fitness, Glaceau

★ SWEET BAKERY ITEMS - including

- Cakes, cinnamon rolls, cookies, donuts, pastries, snack cakes

When a Feeding America National Donor offers food that this policy otherwise guides us to decline, we will provide good service to the donor by accepting the donation, including using our resources to pick it up if necessary. We will try to identify other food banks with which to share these types of items rather than automatically incorporating them into our own distribution operations; however, in the event that no other food bank wants to use the items, Food Gatherers will include the items in our regular distribution operations.

6. Foods to Prioritize

Food Gatherers recognizes that food pantry clients have expressed a preference for healthful foods, particularly more fresh fruits and vegetables and protein. Although our policy aims to increase distribution of all Healthy Picks listed in section 4 of this document, we will continue to put considerable effort and resources to procure and distribute the following for our partner programs and clients:

★ FRUITS AND VEGETABLES: Fresh and colorful

- Why colorful? Each color or pigment in produce carries specific vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that support a healthy body. Aim to procure a variety of type *and color* of fresh fruit and vegetables: Red, Orange/Yellow, Green, Blue/Purple, White/Brown

★ PROTEIN: Eggs, fish, meat, poultry, and plant-based**★ MILK:** Plain, low in fat**7. Additional Strategies to Encourage Healthy Food Consumption**

Food Gatherers continues to assess and respond to our clients' dietary preferences and considers nutritional value along with economic benefit, cultural food practices and client taste preferences when making decisions about food procurement and distribution.

Food Gatherers provides ongoing education to our partner programs, volunteers, individual donors, and greater community on the importance of consistent access to enough nutritious food for health and wellbeing. We encourage healthy food donations and food drives; present in university classrooms and local and national conferences; precept dietetic interns and graduate students in social work, nutrition and public health; and incorporate talking points on hunger and health as part of our external communication strategy.

Food Gatherers maintains an active leadership role on the Washtenaw County Food Policy Council to increase and preserve access to safe, local and healthy food for all residents of Washtenaw County.

8. Brief Overview of Policy Implementation and Review

Food Gatherers Nutrition Policy was drafted with oversight from the Director of Community Food Programs, Director of Warehouse Operations and the Chief Executive Officer. The document was approved by Food Gatherers Board of Directors on **January 21, 2019**

The policy will be reviewed 6 months after initial implementation and annually thereafter by the **Nutrition Policy Working Group** (Nutrition Projects Manager, Program Evaluator, Director of Community Food Programs, Director of Warehouse Operations), Manager of Food Donor Relations, and CEO.

Food Gatherers Nutrition Policy will be effective January 21, 2019 and integrated into official policies and procedures by **September 30, 2019**

The policy will be communicated and disseminated to all stakeholders by **September 30, 2019**.

- Leadership is responsible for oversight of initial communications of this Nutrition Policy to all staff, donors, partner programs and volunteers as follows:
 - **Director of Community Food Programs:** Staff and Partner Programs
 - **Chief Development Officer and CEO:** Donors
 - **Manager of Volunteer Programs:** Volunteers

The **Director of Warehouse Operations** (with support from the Community Food Programs team), is responsible for training warehouse staff regarding identification of items that do and do not meet policy criteria for Food Gatherers' Healthy Picks and identifying new sources of priority foods, as needed.

The **Director of Warehouse Operations** will share the Food Gatherers Nutrition Policy with partner food banks with whom we work, to ensure that most or all USDA/TEFAP products



brought into our warehouse meet the criteria for Healthy Picks, and are not Foods to Reduce (complete list of Foods to Reduce listed in section 5 of this document).

The **Director of Community Food Programs** and the **Director of Warehouse Operations** will work together to review inventory of purchased and donated product every 6 months to ensure adherence to the policy, and to make changes to procurement and distribution practices as needed.

The **Program Evaluator** is responsible for reporting progress toward policy goals to the **Nutrition Projects Manager** and **Director of Community Food Programs**

Questions and comments about the policy should be directed to the Director of Community Food Programs, Markell Miller: markell@foodgatherers.org or 734-761-2796



Frequently Asked Questions:

This document is really long. What specifically is our Nutrition Policy?

Food Gatherers will:

- Prioritize the following foods (aka “healthy picks”):
 - **Fresh fruit and vegetables**
 - **Eggs, fish, meat, poultry, and plant-based protein**
 - **Whole grains**
 - **Milk, cheese and yogurt**
 - **Convenience foods** (e.g., ready-to-eat cereal, soup, stew, other mixed dishes) **that are whole grain, low in sodium, and low in added sugar**

- Limit resources used to procure and distribute:
 - Food and beverages that are high in sodium and added sugar
 - Sugar-sweetened beverages
 - Candy, sweet bakery items, and other foods of low nutritional quality

- Consider nutritional value, economic benefit, cultural food practices and taste preferences of the community we serve when weighing decisions about food procurement and distribution

When did we adopt our Nutrition Policy? Food Gatherers’ Nutrition Policy was officially adopted on January 21, 2019 following board approval.

What are HER Nutrition Guidelines and how do they align with our Nutrition Policy? The HER Guidelines are a 3-tiered nutrition ranking system currently used by Food Gatherers and implemented into our P2 inventory management system in 2022. HER can be used to assess the nutritional quality of individual food products based on g sat fat, mg sodium and g added sugar per serving, across 11 unique food categories. The HER guidelines do not override our board-approved Nutrition Policy. HER is a tool to support policy-guided decision making around food procurement.

Are whole milk and whole-milk dairy (cheese, yogurt) ok to purchase? Yes. Whole milk contains slightly more grams of saturated fat per serving compared to low and no-fat milk, but still aligns with our nutrition policy. We also know that many pantry guests have shown a strong cultural preference for whole milk. Cheese is a perfectly good calcium source in moderation. Whole milk products (milk, cheese, yogurt) are absolutely ok to purchase and prioritize.

- HER nutrition guidelines rank whole milk as “yellow-sometimes” and low and no-fat milk as “green-often.”



What kinds of meats “meet” our nutrition policy? Our nutrition policy prioritizes a variety of protein sources, including eggs, nuts and seeds, nut and seed butters, plant-based meat substitutes, as well as meat, fish and poultry.

- Our Nutrition Policy does not highlight g sat fat (“lean meat”) in protein purchasing decisions, and instead recommends that mg of sodium and g added sugar be considered first.
 - This nuance leaves room for us to consider minimally-processed 80% ground beef perhaps a better protein choice compared to an ultra-processed turkey sausage with lower g sat fat but 450 mg sodium and 9 g added sugar per serving.
- HER Nutrition Guidelines consider g sat fat (“lean meat”), mg sodium, and g added sugar when ranking protein as green/yellow/red. Therefore, the following minimally-processed (i.e., unbreaded, unseasoned, uncured) cuts of uncooked meat will rank as follows, assuming to added mg sodium or g sugar:
 - Fish and white-meat poultry (breast, wings, back) have the fewest g saturated fat per 4-oz serving and will rank as green
 - Dark-meat poultry (chicken thighs, legs, ground turkey) have slightly more g saturated fat per 4-oz serving and may rank as either green or yellow.
 - Red meat (80% ground beef) has the highest amount of g sat fat per 4-oz serving and will rank as red per HER guidance.

Why does Food Gatherers need a nutrition policy? Our nutrition policy ensures that our organizational commitment to storing, distributing, and encouraging healthful foods is a part of our institutional memory and practices, and provides all staff with a basis for clear and consistent decision-making about the types of foods and beverages Food Gatherers will purchase, prioritize, and work to reduce. This policy also serves as a tool for management and accountability on moving towards the distribution of more healthful foods.

Does this mean we no longer accept Girl Scout Cookies? We absolutely accept Girl Scout cookies, halloween candy and similar items as walk-in donations. Food Gatherers continues to accept all donations of food and beverages from individual donors if they comply with Food Gatherers’ Food Safety Standards, as outlined in our FSP Food Acceptance Guidelines. However, with a few exceptions, Food Gatherers does not actively purchase or solicit these products from vendors, nor do we expend resources to procure and store these foods unless they are bundled with significant pounds of Healthy Picks.

But people like cake - doesn’t everyone have the right to eat whatever food they like? Food Gatherers values access to food as a basic human right and works to ensure that everyone in our community has consistent access to enough food for a healthy life. We continue to distribute a variety of foods to our community. In order to manage resources effectively, we prioritize items that ensure our neighbors have equitable access to foods that deliver important nutrients, prevent and control diet-related chronic disease, and support health and wellbeing.



These foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and protein are those that are also the most expensive to purchase at a grocery store.

How does this policy affect Birthday Bags or other specialty items, like Lunches with Love? Food Gatherers continues to solicit birthday bags as part of our gathering goodness activities, and is honored to be the stewards of such gifts to our community. We have modified our requested items list for Lunches with Love to provide additional guidance to donors wishing to pack more healthful lunches.

Will we reject or throw out food donations from individual donors if they are not healthy? No. We view the food, money and time donated by our community members as generous gifts. Food Gatherers continues to accept all donations of food and beverages from individual donors if they comply with Food Gatherers' Food Safety Standards, as outlined in our FSP Food Acceptance Guidelines. Additionally, we continue to engage and educate our community on healthy food donations and the significant relationship between hunger and health.

What happens when a Feeding America National Donor offers us a truckload of candy and soda? When a Feeding America National Donor offers food that this policy otherwise guides us to decline, we will provide good service to the donor by accepting the donation, including using our resources to pick it up if necessary. We will try to identify other food banks with which to share these types of items rather than automatically incorporating them into our own distribution operations; however, in the event that no other food bank wants to use the items, Food Gatherers will include the items in our regular distribution operations.

How does this Nutrition Policy align with our 2016-2026 Strategic Plan? Food Gatherers is committed to distributing safe, usable, nutritious, and appealing food and maintains a strategic goal to meet the need of our community and improve access to nutritious food for all food insecure individuals in Washtenaw County.

