



NUTRITION POLICY FOR FOOD PROCUREMENT

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of the Gleaners Food Bank of Indiana’s Nutrition Policy is to provide an official set of guidelines to maximize the nutritional value of foods acquired and distributed throughout our 21-county service area. This policy will serve as a guide for consistent decision making about the foods we acquire and distribute in order to increase the availability of a variety of health-promoting, culturally familiar foods that align with the *Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System*. *

*See Appendix for full details of the *Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System*

POLICY RATIONALE AND BENEFITS

Many neighbors facing food insecurity have limited access and resources to obtain the types of foods needed to support a balanced, healthy lifestyle. National and local survey data have shown that the most requested items from households visiting food pantries are fresh fruits and vegetables; meat, poultry, and fish; and dairy items.^{1,2,3} These foods provide the nutrients that many neighbors desire in their meals, but they are often not affordable or simply not available at local food outlets. Instead, calorie-rich, nutrient-poor foods – such as packaged snacks and sweets, fast food meals, and sugar sweetened beverages – are often the most accessible options. Consequently, food insecurity is linked to poor nutrition, poor health, increased risk for the development of chronic diseases, and impaired psychological and cognitive functioning.

As a leader in the fight against hunger since 1980, we recognize the important role that Gleaners plays in responding to these public health concerns and consistently providing foods of high nutritional value to our neighbors. Gleaners is committed to supporting the health and wellness of our neighbors and communities through nutrition education and programming, strategic partnerships with health care providers, and equitable access to health-promoting, culturally familiar foods.

Internally, this nutrition policy ensures that our food bank’s commitment to promoting health and nutrition is part of our institutional practice and memory, regardless of future staff and organizational changes. It also serves as a central reference point that staff from all departments can utilize for consistent decision making, communication, and tracking of

progress toward identified goals. Additionally, the policy can help our food bank build strong relationships with donors and partners who value nutrition and health, thus ensuring that this work is sustainable.

Externally, this nutrition policy communicates to agency pantries, community partners, donors, food suppliers, government entities, neighbors, and the community-at-large the details of our commitment to maximizing the nutritional quality of the foods we acquire and distribute. It serves as a model that our agency partners can use to assess the nutritional quality and cultural familiarity of the foods they supply. Most importantly, the primary benefit of this policy is that it has the potential to positively impact the health and well-being of the neighbors we serve.

1. Vincenti, M. (2018, June 22). *Three items most requested at Food Banks*. Feeding America. Retrieved November 9, 2021, from www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-blog/three-items-hungry-families-need.
2. Feeding America. (2021, March). *Nutrition in Food Banking Toolkit*, page 44.
3. Gleaners Food Bank of Indiana. (2021, October). *Gleaners Home Delivery Survey*.

FOOD INVENTORY SOURCES COVERED BY THIS POLICY

This policy applies to all of Gleaners' food inventory sources, including:

- **Purchased** – foods and beverages purchased by the food bank
- **Government** – foods and beverages obtained from government programs
- **Fresh Connect Central (FCC)** - foods and beverages acquired from the FCC cooperative for distribution to Gleaners' 21-county network
- **Donated items** – foods and beverages donated by food manufacturers, distributors, retailers, organizations, producers, growers, etc.

Each inventory source presents unique challenges and opportunities for maximizing the nutritional quality of the foods we acquire and distribute. As such, the Nutrition Policy Committee will set appropriate goals for each category in a staged approach. See the "Brief Overview of Policy Implementation and Review" section for further details.

FOODS TO INCREASE

In accordance with the *HER Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System*, Gleaners will actively seek and procure foods that are ranked "Green/Choose Often" and "Yellow/Choose Sometimes" whenever appropriate and possible. This includes, but is not limited to:

- **Fruits and Vegetables**
 - Fresh produce
 - Low-sodium or no salt added canned vegetables
 - Canned fruits packed in 100% juice
 - Frozen fruits and vegetables that are low in sodium and added sugars
- **Grains**
 - Whole grains and whole grain-rich foods (such as whole wheat bread and pasta, brown rice, oats, quinoa, barley, buckwheat, corn tortillas, etc.) that are low in sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars
 - Enriched grains (such as white rice, noodles, flour tortillas, etc.) that are low in sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars will also be sourced to meet the cultural preferences of many of our neighbors
- **Dairy and Non-Dairy Alternatives**
 - Dairy foods and beverages (such as milk, yogurt, and cheese) that are low in sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars
 - Plant-based milks, yogurts, and cheeses that are low in sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars
- **Protein**
 - Fresh and frozen meat, poultry, and fish that is low in sodium and saturated fat
 - Canned beans and meats that are low in sodium and saturated fat
 - Plant-based protein foods (such as beans, lentils, nuts, nut butters, seeds, and soy products) that are low in sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars

FOODS TO PRIORITIZE

Although this nutrition policy aims to increase all of the “Green/Choose Often” and “Yellow/Choose Sometimes” foods outlined in the *HER Nutrition Guidelines*, Gleaners will put considerable effort and emphasis on procuring:

- A diverse variety of fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables
- Meat, poultry, and fish that is low in sodium and saturated fat
- Dairy and non-dairy alternative foods and beverages that are low in sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars

These priority foods were selected because they are top-requested items by our neighbors; they meet a variety of cultural, religious, and dietary preferences and needs; and they can be made into nutrient-dense meals to promote overall health. To support the distribution of these perishable food items, Gleaners will work to increase cold storage and distribution capacity throughout our network of agencies and partners.

FOODS TO DE-PRIORITIZE

This policy does not ban any specific food items. However, to prioritize our resources and maximize the nutritional quality of our inventory, Gleaners will seek to limit the procurement of foods that are categorized as “Red/Choose Rarely” under the *HER Nutrition Guidelines*. Specifically, Gleaners will work to minimize the procurement of the following whenever possible:

- **Sugar sweetened beverages** – including, but not limited to soda, energy drinks, fruit drinks, sports drinks, sweetened coffees, sweetened teas, and shakes that are high in added sugars
- **Sweet snacks and desserts** – including, but not limited to bakery items (such as cakes, cookies, donuts, muffins, and other pastries), ice cream, fruit snacks, and candy that are high in added sugars and/or saturated fat
- **Savory snacks** – including, but not limited to chips and crackers that are high in sodium and/or saturated fat

FOODS THAT ARE NOT INCLUDED IN THIS POLICY

Under the *HER Nutrition Guidelines*, certain categories of food are not nutritionally ranked. These categories are still acquired and distributed by our food bank, but they do not fall within the scope of this nutrition policy:

- **Condiments and Cooking Staples** – Products such as dressings, sauces, jams, jellies, syrups, cooking oils, flours, herbs, spices, etc. are not typically consumed alone and they can encourage culturally familiar home cooking and meal preparation.
- **Miscellaneous Products** – These foods are either not able to be ranked because of the wide variety of product contents (such as totes of assorted donated items) or because they are intended for specific populations (such as infant formula, baby food, and dietary supplements).

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

- This policy was developed by the Gleaners Nutrition Policy Work Group and reviewed by external stakeholders from August-December 2021.
- The policy was approved by the Gleaners Board of Directors on February 24th, 2022 and took effect immediately.
- The Nutrition Policy Committee, consisting of key Gleaners staff members from various departments, will oversee implementation and review of the policy on a timeline agreed upon by the Committee. This includes:

- Disseminating and communicating the policy both internally and externally with support from the Marketing and Communications team
- Establishing staff training processes
- Determining benchmark goals and planning strategic steps to reach these goals
- Monitoring and reporting progress toward identified goals using inventory reports and other metrics
- Reviewing the policy at least annually and making updates as needed
 - All changes or updates to the policy must be reviewed and approved by the Board of Directors appointed Programs & Community Collaborations Committee
 - Date of last update: April 12th, 2023
- The Director of Community Collaborations will serve as the Chair of the Nutrition Policy Committee and will report progress to the Board of Directors appointed Programs & Community Collaborations Committee. Questions about the policy should be directed to the Director of Community Collaborations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to all the Nutrition Policy Work Group members and external reviewers who contributed to the formation of this nutrition policy. The work group members included two agency partner representatives and internal staff members from various departments: Community Collaborations, Food Strategy, Advancement, Information Technology, Hunger Relief, and Warehouse Operations. External reviewers included representatives from Indy Hunger Network, Purdue Extension Nutrition Education Program, Community Health Network, Eskenazi Health, Immigrant Welcome Center, Indiana Minority Health Coalition, and Indiana Department of Health Office of Minority Health.

APPENDIX

[Healthy Eating Research \(HER\) Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System, March 2020](#) – see next page

Nutrition Guidelines for Ranking Charitable Food

Source: Schwartz M, Levi R, Lott M, Arm K, Seligman H. Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System. Durham, NC: Healthy Eating Research; 2020. Available at <https://healthyeatingresearch.org>.

| Food Category* | Example Products | Choose Often | | | Choose Sometimes | | | Choose Rarely | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|----------|----------------|---|------------|----------------|---------------|---------|----------------|
| | | Saturated Fat | Sodium | Added Sugars** | Saturated Fat | Sodium | Added Sugars** | Saturated Fat | Sodium | Added Sugars** |
| Fruits and Vegetables | Fresh, canned, frozen, and dried fruits and vegetables, frozen broccoli with cheese sauce, apple sauce, tomato sauce, 100% juice, 100% fruit popsicle | ≤2 g | ≤230 mg | 0 g | All 100% juice and plain dried fruit | | | ≥2.5 g*** | ≥480 mg | ≥12 g |
| | | | | | ≥2.5 g*** | 231-479 mg | 1-11 g | | | |
| Grains | Bread, rice, pasta, grains with seasoning mixes | First ingredient must be whole grain AND meet following thresholds: | | | ≥2.5 g*** | 231-479 mg | 7-11 g | ≥2.5 g*** | ≥480 mg | ≥12 g |
| | | ≤2 g | ≤230 mg | ≤6 g | | | | | | |
| Protein | Animal (beef, pork, poultry, sausage, deli meats, hot dogs, eggs) and plant proteins (nuts, seeds, veggie burgers, soy, beans, peanut butter) | ≤2 g | ≤230 mg | ≤6 g | 2.5-4.5 g | 231-479 mg | 7-11 g | ≥5 g | ≥480 mg | ≥12 g |
| Dairy | Milk, cheese, yogurt | ≤3 g | ≤230 mg | 0 g | 3.5-6 g | 231-479 mg | 1-11 g | ≥6.5 g | ≥480 mg | ≥12 g |
| Non-Dairy Alternatives | All plant-based milks, yogurts and cheeses | ≤2 g | ≤230 mg | ≤6 g | ≥2.5 g | 231-479 mg | 7-11 g | ≥2.5 g | ≥480 mg | ≥12 g |
| Beverages | Water, soda, coffee, tea, sports drinks, non-100% juice products | 0 g | 0 mg | 0 g | 0 g | 1-140 mg | 1-11 g | ≥1 g | ≥141 mg | ≥12 g |
| Mixed Dishes | Frozen meals, soups, stews, macaroni and cheese | ≤3 g | ≤480 mg | ≤6 g | 3.5-6 g | 481-599 mg | 7-11 g | ≥6.5 g | ≥600 mg | ≥12 g |
| Processed and Packaged Snacks | Chips (including potato, corn, and other vegetable chips), crackers, granola and other bars, popcorn | None | | | If a grain is the first ingredient, it must be a whole grain AND meet following thresholds: | | | ≥2.5 g | ≥141 mg | ≥7 g |
| | | 0-2 g | 0-140 mg | 0-6 g | | | | | | |
| Desserts | Ice cream, frozen yogurt, chocolate, cookies, cakes, pastries, snack cakes, baked goods, cake mixes | None | | | None | | | All desserts | | |
| Condiments and Cooking Staples | Spices, oil, butter, plant-based spreads, flour, salad dressing, jarred sauces (except tomato sauce), seasoning, salt, sugar | Not ranked | | | | | | | | |
| Miscellaneous Products | Nutritional supplements, baby food | Not ranked | | | | | | | | |

* Definitions of food product categories are included in the text of the full report.

**Use the added sugars value when available on the Nutrition Facts Label. If it is not available, use the total sugars value. The thresholds are the same for all categories except fruits and vegetables and dairy. For both fruits and vegetables and dairy, the thresholds for total sugar are ≤12 grams for the “choose often” tier, 13 to 23 grams for the “choose sometimes tier,” and ≥24 grams for the “choose rarely” tier.

*** The threshold for saturated fat is the same for the “choose sometimes” and “choose rarely” categories. All saturated fat values ≥2.5 grams should be ranked as “choose sometimes.” The overall ranking is based on the lowest tier of any nutrient. Thus, a grain with 3 grams of saturated fat (“choose sometimes”), 300 milligrams of sodium (“choose sometimes”), and 13 grams of added sugars (“choose rarely”) would fall into the “choose rarely” tier, while a grain with 3 grams of saturated fat (“choose sometimes”), 300 milligrams of sodium (“choose sometimes”), and 10 grams of added sugars (“choose sometimes”) would fall into the “choose sometimes” tier.

Notes: Tiers can be communicated as “choose often,” “choose sometimes,” and “choose rarely,” or with green, yellow, and red visual cues, according to local preference. Overall food product rankings are determined by the lowest tier of any nutrient. For example, a product that is ranked green (“choose often”) for saturated fat, yellow (“choose sometimes”) for sodium, and red (“choose rarely”) for added sugars would receive a final ranking of red (“choose rarely”).