

# **Feeding the Hungry**

## **Organizing and Operating a Food Pantry**

*A Publication of the  
Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance*



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About the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance

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## Hunger in the United States

In 2010, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimated that 17 million households, approximately one in six, were food insecure. Food insecurity means that at some point during the year, the family will not know when or from where their next meal will come. Four million households became food insecure in 2008, the largest increase ever recorded. About one-third of food-insecure households, 6.7 million households or 5.7 percent of all U.S. households, had very low food security. In 2007, 15.8 percent of households with children were food insecure at some time during the year. For Arkansans, it is even worse. According to a more recent report by Feeding America, Arkansas is the ninth most food insecure state in the country. Nearly 25 percent of Arkansas children live in poverty. Three quarters of those are under the age of 12, which means they are unable to do anything about the situation for themselves.

For many Americans this is simply unbelievable. At first glance, food appears plentiful or even all too available in our society. Obesity is prevalent. In our culture the symptoms of hunger – from vitamin deficiency and failure to thrive to irritability, lethargy, and inability to concentrate—are not readily apparent to a casual observer.

However, food insecurity is a very real problem in our country, brought on by factors such as:

- low wages
- unemployment
- high costs of groceries
- high costs of housing, utilities, gas, and medicine
- lack of transportation to food sources
- lack of supermarkets in low-income areas
- cultural pressures to make poor nutritional choices
- poor distribution of foods
- lack of locally grown foods

Certain age groups may be especially vulnerable to food insecurity. For instance, children depend on having a competent adult around to prepare their meals. Elderly people who do not drive or walk long distances must rely on others to take them to the grocery store or deliver their meals at home. Sadly, it is children and senior citizens who most critically need the vitamins, minerals, proteins, and life-giving energy of nourishing meals.

By starting a food pantry, you are joining a more-or-less organized network of emergency food agencies around the country that give canned, frozen, fresh, and dry goods to the needy. Such pantries, long present in our society in the form of food basket aid or other charity, rapidly proliferated in response to the welfare cutbacks of the 1980's. They have continued to increase in number and in the amount of food given away. Many are faith-based; some operate out of a

single church and others out of an ecumenical effort. Almost all food pantries obtain food from food banks as well as private donors. A food bank is a larger distribution point for purchased, donated or surplus food. It may serve a section of a state or have certain policies for determining membership.

You are performing an invaluable service in distributing emergency food. Nothing can take the place of food's life-giving energy. As you work in the emergency food system, however, keep in mind that long-term, systemic change is needed to improve conditions so that people will not fall into such dire need. In other words, your mission should be to put yourself out of business!

As you work to alleviate the suffering of hunger, keep food security as your ultimate goal. In other words, can you pave the way for people to be part of the solution to their own problems? "Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach a man to fish, and he eats for a lifetime."

If you live in Arkansas, the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance is one association that works on the root causes of hunger. Other states have similar "hunger task forces." Joining these organizations allows emergency food workers to let their united voice be heard.



*Food Security can be defined as  
the state in which all persons obtain  
a nutritionally adequate,  
culturally acceptable diet  
at all times  
through local non-emergency sources.*

*Food Security  
broadens the traditional concept of hunger,  
embracing a systemic view  
of the causes of hunger and poor nutrition within a  
community  
while identifying the changes necessary  
to prevent their occurrence.*

*Food Security programs  
combat hunger and poverty.*

## Organizing a Successful Pantry

No food pantry program will ever duplicate another exactly. Successful pantries represent a community's unique response to the problem of hunger as it is felt locally. Whether a pantry serves clients who are predominantly senior citizens or young families, or whether it accepts walk-ins, takes self-referrals, or sends volunteers out to visit homes, the following seven components are crucial to success:

1. A steering committee or organizing committee
2. Paid or volunteer staff
3. A site, materials, and transportation
4. Food
5. Clients and referrals
6. Funds
7. Community outreach or public relations

### 1. THE STEERING COMMITTEE

In organizing a food pantry, one person's energy and commitment may get the ball rolling, but any enduring effort requires broad-based community involvement and support. Not only is there a great deal of work to be done, but there are also a great number of decisions to be made. Involving several churches and or civic clubs gives a broader perspective and a broader base of support to the work of your pantry, and helps lighten the workload for all. Also, including representatives from various public and private social service agencies will link your pantry with other members of the assistance network. Think, too, of the kinds of expertise the pantry may need to draw on and try to include people who will bring that knowledge or experience.

The basic functions of a steering committee are:

- Conduct a needs assessment to determine who is hungry, what other agencies in your area offer food assistance, and where the pantry should be located
- Mobilize the resources to find a location, recruit volunteers, raise seed monies, stock the shelves, and spread the word
- Set policies and operating procedures, determine the hours of operation, and draft a budget
- Decide whether the pantry will operate under the sponsorship of a church or existing agency, or whether it should incorporate and seek its own 501(c)(3) nonprofit status (contact the IRS to apply for this tax-related designation)

### 2. STAFF

Committee volunteers hold the key to any pantry's success. Even those programs that can afford to hire a pantry manager or coordinator rely heavily on the regular assistance of dependable volunteers to do the following:

- Shop and pick up food
- Stock and maintain the pantry
- Prepare food boxes
- Assist with food and fund drives
- Do client intake and referral

On-site volunteers staff the pantry during regular hours. Home-based volunteers are on call during assigned hours and are prepared to go to the pantry or pay a needy family a visit. Youth groups, civic organizations, churches, and senior citizens' organizations are good sources of volunteers.



It also becomes essential for the pantry to seek training for its volunteers in interviewing techniques, the use of intake forms, and making referrals to other assistance agencies. (Because the goal of most pantries is to provide needy families with food for a short period of time, it is important that provisions be made to refer clients to other agencies for more permanent solutions to their needs.) The issue of personal safety should also be addressed in volunteer sessions.

Whether a pantry hires for the position or chooses to remain a totally volunteer effort, having a coordinator is essential. Someone must take responsibility for day-to-day operations; scheduling, training, and supervising volunteers; acting as liaison with the community; bookkeeping; compiling monthly reports; and maintaining inventory control. The coordinator should be comfortable dealing with people directly and speaking before large groups. Organizing talents are invaluable, as are contacts within the local civic and church communities.

### **3. SITE, MATERIALS, AND TRANSPORTATION**

Most pantries are located in a low-traffic area of a church or neighborhood civic center where the rent and utilities are donated. Having refrigeration is not essential; however, many foods available from food banks may require refrigeration such as fresh fruits or vegetables, eggs and meats. Also, the room(s) must be safe, sanitary, and secure. Regular pest and rodent control is necessary, as is shelving to keep food off the floor.

When searching for a location, consider its accessibility to the clients or referring agencies the pantry will serve. Consider, too, the need for a vehicle to transport food. Aside from office supplies, the materials most frequently used by pantries are grocery bags and small cardboard boxes. Asking a congregation to save these items can keep a pantry well supplied.

### **4. FOOD**

Having a relationship with the nearest food bank is invaluable, but in order to stock and distribute a variety of well-balanced foods, pantries must also run occasional food drives and purchase foods. When several congregations support a single pantry, they frequently take turns passing the collection plate and putting out a receptacle for food donations. Other food drive

ideas include raffles, hunger walks, or bake sales. Some pantries report that they watch local supermarket sales flyers for food purchases. (For more ideas and information, see the section on Food Resources.)

Content-guides for food boxes should be posted in the pantry so that the boxes can be tailored to fit a family's size and needs. Pre-sorting the foods as they are stocked will save time later.

A simple inventory system, which adds food as it goes on the shelves and subtracts it as it goes into emergency boxes, will provide a check on the system and ensure that the food is going to those who need it.

For safety's sake, store food off the floor and away from walls to keep it dry and free from infestation. Segregate food from non-food items. Check cans for leaks, bulges, rust, and big dents, and when in doubt, discard suspicious items. Contact the local health department, Cooperative Extension Service, or food bank for training in food handling and safety.



### 5. CLIENTS AND REFERRALS

Pantries that are dependent on volunteer staff may want to have other agencies or churches to do all initial intake and referral work. In this instance, the pantry needs only to obtain basic information about the clients and their food needs for record-keeping and statistical purposes. Referring agencies should be kept up-to-date on the pantry's procedures and hours of operation.

In some communities, the lack of referring agencies may necessitate a pantry's accepting self-referrals, walk-in clients, and/or further screening referrals from other kinds of agencies. In that case, the pantry must develop an intake procedure and determine who will be eligible, under what circumstances, and how frequently individuals can return for food.

However it serves its clients, every pantry must keep records of who, what, and how many it serves. These figures will document the causes and extent of the local hunger problem and will be invaluable in gathering support. Coordinating with other pantries will minimize misuse by repeat users.

### 6. FUNDS

Even an all-volunteer pantry housed in a church will have a few bills to pay. Food is expensive, and telephone service and utility costs must be considered. Some businesses will donate office supplies and equipment, and services such as printing. The key to both raising money and getting donated services is simple: ASK! Talk up the pantry. Prepare a brief presentation that describes the people involved with the pantry (steering committee members, volunteers, and clients). Enthusiasm is infectious; tell people about the pantry and ask for their help. Today's "no" could be tomorrow's "yes"; so don't give up.

Special events can be good money-raisers as long as they don't take more in the planning, staffing, and staging than they add to the cash box. Pantries have made money holding bake sales, dances, raffles, auctions, potluck dinners, and much more. The staff at the Alliance can provide additional suggestions or "how to" information. (Please note: food received from food banking organizations may not be used in fundraising efforts.)

As ongoing sources of support, however, churches have no equal. A \$6,000 annual budget breaks down to \$500 per month. Five churches taking monthly collections of \$100 each could support a pantry.

## 7. COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Public relations might best be described as an organized and systematic way of keeping a community informed. Before people will volunteer or give money to any program, they have to know about it. Here are a few tips:

- Use statistics and anecdotes to bring the problem of hunger to life. Print brochures.
- Provide supporting churches and civic clubs with brief updates for their Sunday bulletins or newsletters.
- Cultivate the local media. Send regular public service announcements to the radio stations and local newspapers or when a special activity is planned.
- Start a mailing list of the names of supporters, volunteers, donors, and contacts.
- Publish (type and copy) a monthly newsletter—nothing fancy or lengthy, just interesting and informative.
- Unless they prefer anonymity, thank everyone publicly for anything they do. This can be done in the newsletter or in some special cases through the local press.
- Take pictures and put a slide show together.

## 8. OTHER DECISIONS TO MAKE

- What geographical area will your pantry serve? Where is "local" need? How far away are other pantries?
- How many families will you help each month? What is realistic in terms of your resources? How much time do committee members have to volunteer?
- What will your referral policy be? Can you accept referrals from other hunger-related groups? If so, how many referrals will you accept each month? Will you take referrals from any other sources? Will you have enough food?
- What criteria will you use to determine who you serve? How often can someone receive assistance? Will you help only in emergencies or can you assist those with more chronic needs?
- How will you distribute food—as need occurs, or on regular distribution days? Do you want people to come to the pantry? Will you deliver to everyone or just those without transportation?

- What will be your hours of operation? Will there be certain times (for example, three mornings each week, or every afternoon) that someone in your group can be reached with requests to relay to those who distribute food? Will you have a designated distribution day?
- What types of food will you provide—dry and canned goods only, fresh and/or frozen items or non-foods? What do your facilities and budget allow?
- Will other organizations be encouraged to participate in your work? Can you benefit from more hands, more resources? Can you establish workable channels of communication? Can you focus on the work and not on differences?
- By what means will you maintain the pantry? Are food drives enough? Is there an existing fund or will one be established? Will you join a food bank? Will you purchase any food? Will you seek donations from businesses?

### Operating a Successful Pantry



Malnutrition and hunger go hand-in-hand. Encourage the collection of wholesome foods as opposed to highly processed foods, which are often less expensive. Also, encourage the collection of foods low in sugar, salt, and fat and high in nutrients and vitamins.

As you decide what items to stock in your pantry, be sure to bear in mind all the needs of your typical clients—not only what nutritional content will serve them best, but also what sort of packaging and food preparation they will be able to manage.

Packaging sizes and styles should be specific to the client population. Should you stock pop-top cans? Is the clientele composed of single individuals, elderly persons, families, or transients with no cooking facilities? Consider, too, that some non-food items are necessary but expensive for your clients.

The following suggestions for stocking a food pantry may be useful as a guide for preparing emergency food boxes. Most pantries post this type of information for the benefit of their volunteers.

#### 1. DETERMINING WHAT GROCERIES TO DISTRIBUTE

The questions you ask the person requesting help will be a good source of information for determining his or her food needs.

- Size and composition of family. How many people are in the household? Keep in mind that teenagers eat more than small children.

- Special dietary needs. Religious beliefs, health conditions, and age—all of these may affect what foods a client needs.
- Living situation of person needing help. Is refrigeration available? Are cooking facilities working? Is the person mentally or physically challenged in any way that affects his or her ability to prepare simple meals?
- Logistics. Will the person be walking, riding a bus, or traveling by car? How much can he or she carry?

The kinds and amounts of food that you distribute will vary with your food supply. Make an effort to provide for well-balanced meals. Some groups include an information sheet suggesting recipes and menus that can be made from certain food items. For instance, creamed soup, rice, and tuna together with a can of green beans could make a nice casserole.

Foods that are good sources of protein are important to have on hand. These not only include meat, eggs, and fish (which generally are perishable) but also dried beans, peas, and lentils. You can get a protein value equivalent to that of meat by combining grain products with peas, beans, and lentils.

The best guideline is your own knowledge of meal planning and grocery shopping. Use your common sense as well as the USDA website [www.ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://www.ChooseMyPlate.gov).

## 2. SUGGESTED FOODS TO STOCK IN FOOD PANTRIES

Here are some suggestions for what types of products your pantry may wish to stock:

baby foods, infant formula	canned meats and stews
cereals, oats and grits	milk (dry and evaporated)
coffee, tea	pancake mix
cooking oils and solid shortening	pasta (macaroni, spaghetti, etc.)
cornmeal and cornbread mix	peanut butter
crackers	potatoes (fresh and instant)
diet foods (low in sugar or salt)	pork and beans
dried beans, peas and lentils	rice
flour	salt, sugar
fruits (canned and dehydrated)	soups (canned and dehydrated)
honey, syrup and jelly	spaghetti sauce and tomato sauce
juices (canned and dehydrated)	tuna and canned chicken
mayonnaise, mustard and ketchup	canned vegetables

If refrigeration or freezer space is available, you can add:

bread	fresh fruits
cheese	fresh vegetables
eggs	frozen juices
margarine	meats, poultry or fish

Non-foods to stock, if space is available include:

soap and shampoo	diapers, tampons and sanitary napkins
toothpaste and denture cleanser	detergent and cleaning supplies
toilet paper	foil or film wrap

Have plenty of grocery bags on hand and some boxes. Bags with handles are better for people who will need to carry them for a distance.

### 3. PREPARING EMERGENCY FOOD BOXES

The following is a suggested guideline for how much food to distribute to households of different sizes, using different food choices to show the variety of foods it is possible to use. These lists are intended to provide a three day supply of food. Remember to consider each family's special needs such as baby foods, diapers, low-sugar foods for diabetics, and so forth.

#### ONE PERSON

1 loaf of bread	1 can stew
1 jar peanut butter	1 can ravioli
1 jar jelly	1 box macaroni & cheese
1 can tuna or chicken	3 cans fruit
3 cans soup	1 can juice
1 can pork & beans	1 box cereal

#### TWO PEOPLE

1 loaf of bread	1lb. spaghetti
1 jar peanut butter	1 jar spaghetti sauce
1 jar jelly	1 box macaroni & cheese
1 can tuna or chicken	4 cans fruit
4 cans soup	1 can juice
4 cans vegetables	1 box cereal or oats
2 cans meat or stew	1lb. cheese
1 can chicken & dumplings	1 can evaporated milk

**THREE PEOPLE**

- 1 loaf bread
- 1 jar peanut butter
- 1 jar jelly
- 6 cans soup
- 6 cans fruit
- 1 can juice
- 1 box cereal or oats
- 6 cans vegetables
- 1 lb. pasta or rice
- 1 box crackers
- 1 lb. cheese
- 1 box tea
- 2 cans pork & beans
- 1 lb. margarine
- 1 lb. dry milk
- 1 can stewed tomatoes
- 3 cans meat, chicken, or stew
- 1 box pancake mix
- 1 bottle pancake syrup

**FOUR PEOPLE**

- 2 loaves bread
- 1 jar peanut butter
- 1 jar jelly
- 6 cans soup
- 6 cans fruit
- 1 can juice
- 2 boxes cereal or oats
- 1 box tea
- 1 lb. margarine
- 1 lb. dry milk
- 1 jar spaghetti sauce
- 4 cans meat, chicken, or stew
- 1 bottle cooking oil
- 6 cans vegetables
- 1 lb. pasta (macaroni or spaghetti)
- 1 lb. rice
- 1 box crackers
- 1 lb. cheese
- 1 dozen eggs
- 1 lb. flour
- 1 lb. sugar
- 1 lb. dried beans
- 5 lbs. potatoes

**4. MENU SUGGESTIONS**

The USDA recommends the following guidelines for a well-balanced meal:

**MEAT OR MEAT ALTERNATIVE**—Two servings per day of one of the following, or a combination of any of these items to give an equivalent in quantity to:

- 2 oz. lean meat, poultry or fish
- 2 oz. cheese
- 2 large eggs
- 8 oz. cooked dry beans or peas

4 T. peanut butter

**VEGETABLE OR FRUIT**—Four servings per day of vegetables or fruits or both to equal a per serving total of:

4 oz. vegetables, fruits or fruit juices

**BREAD OR BREAD ALTERNATIVE**—Four servings per day of bread or bread alternate, or four servings of each of the following:

1 slice whole grain or enriched bread

½ hamburger bun, hot dog bun or English muffin

4 oz. cooked rice

4 oz. cooked macaroni, spaghetti or noodles

4 oz. breakfast cereal, oats or grits

**MILK**—Four servings per day of milk or milk alternate:

8 oz. milk

8 oz. pudding or custard

8 oz. cottage cheese

8 oz. yogurt



Basic suggested menus using this guideline are as follows:

**BREAKFAST**

2 eggs  
fruit juice  
2 slices toast  
milk

**BREAKFAST**

pancakes w/ syrup  
fruit juice  
milk

**BREAKFAST**

cereal w/ milk  
sliced fruit  
milk

**LUNCH**

1 can vegetable soup  
2 slices cheese  
1 orange  
crackers  
milk

**LUNCH**

peanut butter sandwich  
1 apple  
milk

**LUNCH**

Tuna sandwich  
1 apple  
milk

**DINNER**

canned stew  
tossed salad  
1 slice bread or toast  
tea or coffee

**DINNER**

spaghetti w/ meat sauce  
tossed salad  
green beans  
tea or coffee

**DINNER**

cooked beans  
rice  
cooked carrots  
tea or coffee

## 5. SAFETY TIPS FOR PANTRY VOLUNTEERS

If your pantry is located in an area of high need, it may also be in an area of high crime. Develop good safety habits, follow them yourself, and teach them to all new volunteers and employees in the pantry. Prevention is easier than recovery!

### PROPERTY

1. Have a permanent sign on the pantry door indicating exact hours and days the pantry will distribute food.
2. Have a wide-angle viewer installed in the door to the pantry. Before opening the door, be sure there aren't more people than you expected.
3. Have a deadbolt and chain on the main entrance to the pantry.
4. Have all windows bolted or nailed to prevent entrance by intruders.

### PRACTICES

1. Have one or two other people at the pantry during indicated hours the pantry gives out food. If alone, arrange the pick-up times to be when someone else will be with you at the pantry.
2. Never invite referrals or "walk-ins" to accompany you into the pantry. You do not want to be in an isolated place with an unknown person.
3. When speaking on the phone to those needing help, be cautious about telling them you are alone, or when you will be leaving the pantry. Give no indication of your routine arrival and departure times, or information about your home address, phone number, etc.
4. Keep a cell-phone handy, and call the police at the slightest infringement of your rights as a person. Give the police accurate information as to what is happening in order that they may respond rapidly. This is another good reason to work in pairs.
5. Whether you are at work or at home, always let someone know where you are going. Even if you live alone, leave a note, so that in case of an emergency, someone will know where to find you.
6. NO MATTER HOW NICE OR INNOCENT A PERSON MAY APPEAR TO BE, NEVER TAKE ANY CHANCES WITH YOUR PERSONAL SAFETY!

## 6. KEEPING PANTRY RECORDS

Record keeping is important so that you can document how many people you are serving, who they are, how often they need help, and the reasons for hunger in your area.

### SCREENING RECIPIENT CLIENTS

Screening potential recipients is also an important part of your work. Sadly, on occasion you may run across an unscrupulous person. Be ready to deal with the problem effectively, and don't let it discourage you from your work. The vast majority of food pantry clients are honest and in genuine need.

Ask for the following basic information:

- Name, address, phone number
- Number and ages of people in household
- Unusual circumstances (i.e., broken stove or refrigerator)
- If anyone in the household is handicapped or disabled
- If special dietary needs are required by any family member
- The source of the referral to you

This information can be taken over the phone or in person. If you have criteria limiting eligibility, it is better if you tell people they are ineligible before they come in to pick up food. Check their identification to verify walk-in people. Refer to the SAMPLE INTAKE FORM for a guideline in compiling your initial information on the client.

### **PERMANENT CARD FILES**

Basic permanent information can be recorded on an index card and arranged alphabetically in a file box. Record on the card the assistance provided and the date. Although documenting your program is important, peoples' names and specific information about their lives and problems should be confidential and accessible only to appropriate people. Refer to SAMPLE CLIENT PERMANENT RECORD CARD on page 16 as a guide.

### **INVENTORY RECORDS**

It is also important that you keep a simple inventory record so that you can keep up with your monies spent in supplying your pantry as well as pounds distributed to the needy. Documenting your history will give you a foundation and guideline for future efforts.

## **7. FOOD RESOURCES**

### **DONATIONS**

Businesses are often receptive to requests for support. If your group is registered with the federal government as a 501(c)(3) organization (tax-exempt charitable), donors may receive tax deductions for their donations following the guidelines set forth by the IRS.

### **FOOD BANKS**

Arkansas has six regional food banks that are members of Feeding America. Get in touch with the food bank closest to you to learn about its membership policies and how to acquire food from its central warehouse. The Feeding America food banks may charge a nominal fee to help meet the costs of transportation, storage, and administration. Food pantries that use this resource are able to stock their shelves for much less than they would at retail prices.

## FOOD DRIVES

A great way to kick off your pantry program is with a food drive. This makes people aware of your work and helps everyone feel part of it. As the pantry begins to serve the needy the witness of its good work can inspire continual support. A food drive can be connected with a social event or a religious service, in which a donation would be the “entrance fee” or an offering, or it can be directed outward to include the larger community.

Make a list of food drive needs to share with your donors. Suggested items include:

- Peanut Butter
- Macaroni and Cheese
- Canned Tuna
- Canned Meats
- Canned Vegetables
- Canned Fruits
- Rice
- Soups and Stews
- Personal care items, such as soap, shampoo, toothpaste and toothbrushes



## Feeding the Hungry

### SAMPLE

#### Client Information Form

Name:	Referred by:
Address:	Name of Nearest Relative:
City, ZIP:	Relationship:
Phone:	Address:
	City, ZIP:

#### Members of Household (related and unrelated)

Name	Relationship	Age	Comments

Date and Interviewer's Signature	Record problems and needs identified by the client and approximate comments of interviewer. Note any assistance given, vouchers provided (to whom issued, amount, and purpose), and any referrals made to other agencies or organizations. If client is helped with food, use food voucher.

I need food for \_\_\_ days.

The Information given on this application is true to the best of my knowledge and belief. My signature authorizes ( ) to share necessary information with organizations or agencies for the purpose of collecting data and determining my eligibility. I understand that if I am denied assistance, I have the right to appeal the decision.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ (Applicant or Authorized Representative)

Date of Interview	Approved	Denied	Agency Representative

### SAMPLE CLIENT PERMANENT RECORD CARD

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ NO. IN FAMILY \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

DATE ASSISTED	DAYS HELPED	POUNDS DISTRIBUTED

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### SAMPLE INVENTORY RECORD CARD

CURRENT INVENTORY BALANCE	ACTIVITY DATE	POUNDS	IN/OUT	BOUGHT	RECEIVED FROM OR DISTRIBUTED TO

Be creative in thinking of your food drives. Some youth groups like to gather food in a competitive way—to see which high school class, for example, can bring in the most cans. Your local library might set aside a week during which it would accept canned goods on your behalf in lieu of fines for overdue books. Tie the food drives to certain holidays: baby food can be collected between Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, for instance. One food pantry in Arkansas has assigned the local churches regular, long-standing items to collect— and this has become ingrained in their community life.

A word of caution: be alert for out of date cans, damaged or rusted cans, or cans with bulging ends. They may contain contaminated foods. Some people “clean house” for a food drive. For more information on identifying potentially hazardous foods, contact your local city or county health department.

### **PURCHASES**

Sometimes, needed items that are not obtainable through donations must be bought. You can get discounted food from many sources. Co-ops often have a special bulk-buying rate for volume purchases. Farmers’ markets are a good source for fresh produce. Sometimes grocers or local restaurant owners can be persuaded to order a few extra cases of a needed food item and pass it along to you at cost.

### **DONATED PRODUCE**

Gardeners often have a seasonal over-supply and are happy to donate their peppers, tomatoes, and squash to a good cause. You can encourage such giving in your community by posting signs at garden supply stores or by joining an organization called Plant-a-Row for the Hungry ([www.gwaa.org/par](http://www.gwaa.org/par)).

### **FOOD RESCUE**

Some food banks and larger agencies secure donations of prepared foods from restaurants and grocery stores. One agency, *Potluck*, in North Little Rock, specializes in food rescue. Some food banks receive prepared food from local supermarkets. Because of the complexity of laws, storage and transportation, new pantries are not encouraged to engage in food rescue. However, information regarding food rescue can be obtained from the Feeding America food bank that services your area.

### **COMMODITIES**

Through the USDA commodity program, surplus agricultural products such as cheese, butter, and canned fruit are distributed to the hungry and to public school meal programs. To find out more about commodity foods, contact the food bank in your area.

## **WILD GAME**

An innovative program in Arkansas is Hunters Feeding the Hungry, which gives away many pounds of commercially processed game—usually venison—to those in need. The lean, ground meat, can be used like hamburger. To learn more, go to [www.arkansashunters.org](http://www.arkansashunters.org).

## **Steering Clients to Additional Help**

As a food pantry, your organization is a point of contact with a household in crisis—whether that crisis is temporary, such as a natural disaster or the loss of a job, or chronic poverty. Learn what other services are available in your community for battered women, the homeless, the jobless, the mentally ill, people with debilitating medical conditions, or those with substance abuse. Keep current information on these agencies in your office. Be in touch with their staff, and refer clients to them as needed. You may be a client’s only connection to service providers and because of the crisis situation, your client may not be in a position to check into available services.

In particular, stay informed about additional food assistance for your clients—for instance, the help they are entitled to from the government. By guiding them toward this support, helping them apply, and following up on their use of the programs, you are maximizing your pantry’s own resources and steering client households toward a more stable and self-sufficient footing. Please be sure that your clients check their eligibility for the following programs:

### **1. SNAP (SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM)**

SNAP, formerly known as food stamps, has offices that are commonly located in county offices of DHS (Department of Human Services). However, people can receive an application through the mail or go online without having to go to a SNAP office. For more information on getting an application, clients should call 1-800-221-5689 or go to [www.aces.arkansas.gov](http://www.aces.arkansas.gov).

SNAP benefits are a nutrition support system—usually issued in the form of an EBT or “electronic benefits transfer” card that looks like a credit card—intended to help families who need help buying groceries.

The SNAP program has undergone many changes in recent years. Encourage clients to re-apply even if they were once turned down. Renewing or extending benefits is easier, and certain legal immigrants who were once ineligible may now receive benefits.

## 2. WIC

WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) is a nutrition program for pregnant women and mothers of children under age five. Like SNAP, it is a federal program administered through the states. It was started in 1964 by physicians who were seeing a lot of undernourished children and mothers. WIC also provides nutrition and cooking education and advice on breast-feeding. In many counties WIC vouchers can be used to buy vegetables and fruit at local farmers' markets. The number in Arkansas is 501-661-2473 or 1-800-482-5400.



## 3. SCHOOL BREAKFAST AND LUNCH

School-age children can get free breakfast and lunch at school. Some after-school programs also provide free, federally subsidized snacks. Inquire at the office or cafeteria of your public school, or call the state office of Special Nutrition Programs at 501-682-8867.

During the summer, check with your local Department of Human Services office or City Hall to see if Summer Feeding, a USDA meal program for children and youth, is offered in your community. Information on free summer meal feeding sites is available online at [www.dhs.arkansas.gov/dccece/snp](http://www.dhs.arkansas.gov/dccece/snp).

## 4. MEALS ON WHEELS

Many Area Agencies on Aging provide a hot lunch that is brought to the home of elderly shut-ins five days a week. For many people, this program is the crucial element that allows them to remain at home rather than moving into a nursing home. For more information call your food bank or the Alliance.

## 5. OTHER SERVICES YOUR PANTRY CAN PROVIDE

Depending on the number, interest, and energy of your volunteers, your food pantry might develop corollary services to help struggling households get back on their feet. For instance, Cleburne County Cares in Heber Springs, Arkansas, noticed among its clients a lot of young parents who for various reasons had left school. They developed a scholarship award program that helps students get a college education and monitors their progress. Now, in addition to the food pantry, the scholarship program is a major focus of Cleburne County Cares. By helping young parents finish their education, this all-volunteer organization is making a permanent difference in its clients' lives.

Many pantries run thrift shops so that families in need can buy low-cost secondhand clothes and household items. Thrift shops may help distribute things that are needed at special times such as school supplies and car seats. Helping Hand of Greater Little Rock and Mercy Mall in Mountain Home and Harrison are examples of food pantries with large thrift shops.

Sometimes a food pantry decides not only to give out food staples, but also to serve hot meals at a certain time each week, or even to open a shelter. This kind of service fills an immediate need for comfort and security. In some cities, soup kitchens are run like cafés. Imagine the pleasure in ordering from a menu if you are a hungry child or adult!

Other services are less ambitious but equally rewarding to provide. For instance, if your staff notices that people don't seem to know how to cook with the ingredients they're given, consider staging a cooking demonstration. The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance offers assistance through programs like Cooking Matters™ and Shopping Matters™. These programs are designed to teach nutrition and food safety, as well as how to cook inexpensive, nutritious, and easy to prepare meals and how to shop. Also, Cooperative Extension agents in your area are probably more than willing to come and teach food preparation or preserving techniques. If you notice that you have a lot of pregnant women among your clients, start a prenatal nutrition class. Ask the Health Department if a breastfeeding consultant can come and meet with the pregnant moms. If many of your clients have children, start a regular story time in conjunction with your peak food pick-up hours. Public librarians are a wonderful resource to tap; many feeding agencies around the country are connecting with literacy programs. Any of these measures will attract attention to your pantry and strengthen your clients' home lives.



## Food Banks in Arkansas

Remember, food banks are the larger collection and distribution centers of donated food within the state—as opposed to individual food pantries.

The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance represents six Feeding America food banks around the state. These food banks have the privilege of supporting many agencies, programs, local agencies, food pantries, and individuals with food. The Alliance is a non-profit collaborative network of hunger relief organizations in Arkansas and can be reached at 501-399-9999 or [www.arhungeralliance.org](http://www.arhungeralliance.org).

### FEEDING AMERICA FOOD BANKS

Arkansas Foodbank  
4301 W. 65<sup>th</sup> St.  
Little Rock, AR 72209  
501-565-8121  
877-565-8124  
[www.arkansasfoodbank.org](http://www.arkansasfoodbank.org)

Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas  
3406 S. Culberhouse St.  
Jonesboro, AR 72404  
870-932-3663  
[www.foodbankofnea.org](http://www.foodbankofnea.org)

Harvest Texarkana Regional Food Bank  
3120 East 19<sup>th</sup> St., P.O. Box 707  
Texarkana, AR 75504  
870-774-1398  
[www.harvesttexarkana.org](http://www.harvesttexarkana.org)

Northwest Arkansas Food Bank  
1378 June Self Drive  
Bethel Heights, AR 72764  
479-872-8774  
[www.nwafoodbank.org](http://www.nwafoodbank.org)

Food Bank of North Central Arkansas  
14215 Hwy 5 South  
Norfolk, AR 72658  
870-499-7565  
[www.foodbanknca.org](http://www.foodbanknca.org)

River Valley Regional Food Bank  
1420 North 32<sup>nd</sup> Street  
Fort Smith, AR 72914  
479-785-0582  
[www.rivervalleyfoodbank.com](http://www.rivervalleyfoodbank.com)



## About the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance

The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance is an association of hunger relief organizations, advocates and state/federal food programs that seek to reduce hunger through a unified effort to provide hunger relief, education and advocacy.

The Alliance was formed in 2004 with 6 founding members. Today the organization includes food bank members, local hunger relief agencies, state level hunger programs and hunger advocates from around the state that work daily to reduce hunger in Arkansas. The Alliance network covers all 75 counties of the state. Additionally, the Alliance works with local farmers to provide fresh vegetables and fruit for food pantries through the gleaning program. The Alliance is the lead partner for Cooking Matters and Shopping Matters in Arkansas, and partners with the Governor's Office and the Department of Human Services on the No Kid Hungry Campaign.

The Alliance seeks to reduce hunger in four specific ways.

- By building reliable and continuing sources of nutritious food for the hungry.
- By securing food and funding to assist its members in meeting the needs of less fortunate people.
- By promoting hunger relief organizations and stimulating planning for effective and efficient hunger relief programs.
- By conducting advocacy, networking, research, education and awareness activities surrounding the issue of hunger.
- Because of this life-bringing work, more and better food can get to more people more quickly. Our state is already seeing signs that their efforts are paying off. Alliance food bank members provided more than 40 million pounds of food in 2011 and The Alliance granted \$982,385.90 to local hunger relief organizations and regional food banks.

To learn more about the statewide impact and activities, visit [www.arhungeralliance.org](http://www.arhungeralliance.org).

*The mission of the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance  
is to reduce hunger through a unified effort to provide  
hunger relief, education and advocacy.*

### **The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance**

1400 W. Markham, Suite 304 Little Rock, AR 72201 501-399-9999

# NOTES:

