

River Bend Food Bank Nutrition Policy

Statement of Purpose¹

River Bend Food Bank strives to support the community in its desire for safe, high quality, culturally relevant, nutritious foods. We recognize the role that nutrition plays in achieving physical, mental, and social-emotional health for all ages and lifestyles, and in achieving health equity for its members. Food insecurity is linked to poor nutrition, poor health, an increased risk of developing chronic diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, impaired psychological and cognitive functioning and substandard achievement, and other diet-related conditions. We will work to educate our agency and community partners, our staff, and our volunteers on the integration of healthy and nutrient-rich foods into our work and will use this policy to guide our decisions about foods to procure and distribute. Using the [Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System](#), to acquire, purchase, and distribute nutritious foods, we commit to a long-term, evolving system that will eventually go beyond simply providing food and will seek to nourish those members of our community who utilize our services. This is subject to change based on River Bend Food Bank's ability to access proper resources and to adjust to unforeseen conditions; implementation will be gradual and ongoing.

Procedures

These procedures will guide the River Bend Food Bank's procurement, distribution, and partner and guest support practices to the best of our ability. Information on the development of these procedures is available in the appendix. Partners of River Bend Food Bank are encouraged to adapt this policy as a guideline for promoting healthful food choices for their pantries.

¹Badaracco, C. (n.d.). *Improving Health Equity through Nutrition*. ASA Generations. Retrieved July 22, 2022, from <https://generations.asaging.org/improving-health-equity-through-nutrition>
Food Insecurity - Healthy People 2030 | *health.gov*. (n.d.). Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Retrieved July 22, 2022, from <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/food-insecurity>
2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines | *health.gov*. (2021, August 24). Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Retrieved July 22, 2022, from <https://health.gov/our-work/nutrition-physical-activity/dietary-guidelines/previous-dietary-guidelines/2015>

This policy was developed in partnership with the Illinois Public Health Institute, made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and University of Illinois Extension Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education program funded by the United States Department of Agriculture.

Procurement

- Our below commitments are intended to align our purchasing and donation requests with the needs and preferences of our partner agencies and guests. While we prioritize healthier options, this policy will not preclude the use of any foods donated to River Bend Food Bank and may be amended at any time due to budgetary constraints.
- The River Bend Food Bank emphasizes food procurement from the below categories. Specific foods purchased and requested within these categories will be guided by the input we have received and will continue to receive from guests who access our food pantries and feeding programs, and our agency partners. We encourage our agency partners to be in continual dialogue with their guests, so they have a strong understanding of the foods they need and prefer. As much as possible, we will strive to acquire and distribute foods that are sized to be manageable by families.
 - Variety of fresh fruits and vegetables.
 - Foods that are categorized as “green,” or the most nutritious, in the [Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System](#) ranking system.
 - Low-sodium versions of typically high-sodium foods, including but not limited to canned and snack foods.
 - Snacks that appeal to children and align with “[Smart Snacks](#)” nutrition standards (the standards utilized by schools participating in the National School Lunch Program).
 - Certified gluten-free items.
 - Non-traditional milk products, including plant-based, shelf-stable, evaporated, and low-fat lactose-free milks.
 - Ready-to-eat and prepackaged meals. Other foods that arose through our 2021/22 data collection process. These foods will be updated as needed, as we continue to learn from our partners and guests.
- The River Bend Food Bank will strive to purchase foods that align with our guests’ cultural, religious needs and preferences.
- The River Bend Food Bank will seek to grow our partnerships with local farmers, especially those who produce foods requested by our guests and identify as a member of our priority populations.
- The River Bend Food Bank will explore opportunities to grow foods requested by our guests, especially those we experience challenges procuring.
- The River Bend Food Bank will explore opportunities to support partner agencies to fill the gaps they have in their food and/or equipment supply to meet their guests' unique needs.

Distribution

Our below commitments are intended to strengthen our distribution practices, so our partner agencies and their guests can better access the foods they need, when they need them.

- The River Bend Food Bank follows the [Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System](#) ranking system to enable our partner agencies to see the nutritional value of the foods they order.
- The River Bend Food Bank will strive to share occasional updates and health benefits of new items that are available for order with our agency partners.
- The River Bend Food Bank will strive to survey, as needed, our partner agencies to inform improvements in our and our agencies' distribution practices for perishable items, especially fresh produce, meats, and ready-to-eat meals.
- The River Bend Food Bank will strive to explore ways to facilitate food sharing and redistribution among our partner agencies. This may take place via a forum that enables agencies across our network to share their food surpluses and deficits.
- The River Bend Food Bank will strive to encourage our partner agencies to deliver food to their guests who experience transportation barriers.
- The River Bend Food Bank will strive to offer bags to ease transportation of groceries.

Agency Partner and Guest Support

The commitments below are intended to support partner agencies and guests' needs and preferences by promoting nutritious foods and by leveraging local, regional, and statewide partnerships.

- The River Bend Food Bank works to support the health of our guests by leveraging partnerships to provide the below at our partner agencies:
 - Nutrition education classes
 - Cooking demonstrations
 - Breast/chest feeding promotion and support
 - Training on nudges and other environmental strategies
 - Health screenings
 - SNAP resources
- The River Bend Food Bank will work towards being able to provide recorded and/or written nutrition education for partner agencies, especially related to the [Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System](#) (food bank level) and [Supporting Wellness at Pantries \(SWAP\) Nutrition Guidelines](#) (food pantry level).
- The River Bend Food Bank will offer training to our staff and our partner agencies, when it is available, on a variety of topics including, but not limited to:
 - Cultural foods

- Gathering and incorporating guest feedback into policies and practices
- Food safety
- The River Bend Food Bank will, when available, provide nutritious, culturally responsive recipes based on items from food bank inventory. We will leverage our community partners to support this.
- The River Bend Food Bank will distribute resources available for low-income residents for partner agencies to share with their guests as they are made available to us by our community partners.
- The River Bend Food Bank will strive to partner with agencies that operate the client choice model. We will also promote and provide information on client choice, including by leveraging our community partners, to our existing partner agencies.
- The River Bend Food Bank will revise partner agency onboarding processes to encourage SWAP Guidelines.
- The River Bend Food Bank will seek to expand our understanding of emotional health, mental health, and trauma-informed best practices for potential education of agencies. We will leverage our community partners to support this.
- The River Bend Food Bank will explore the establishment of an Advisory Committee comprised of guests to inform the Nutrition Committee on desired ideas and outcomes. We will explore ways to compensate participants for their time.

Communications

In order to ensure the River Bend Food Bank community, including our staff, volunteers, agency partners, donors, guests, and more, have the information they need, we will utilize the below communications strategies.

- Share this policy publicly, including by posting it at the food bank, and making it available on our website.
- Provide this policy to our Board of Directors, volunteers, Nutrition Committee members, and partner agencies.
- Ensure all staff have the information they need to execute this policy. Methods to accomplish this may include but are not limited to:
 - Present on this policy for all relevant staff and volunteers. The presentation would be recorded, and shared with any staff and volunteers who were not able to attend and incorporated into onboarding practices for new staff and volunteers.
 - Provide an in-depth training for any staff directly involved in the implementation of one or more aspects of this policy, to ensure they have the information and support they need.
- Send a condensed version of this policy with relevant information to our partner agencies to distribute to their guests.

- Share a condensed version of this policy with relevant information to donation partners, including retail partners, food drive partners, etc., to increase their awareness of the foods our partner agencies and their guests are asking for.

Our policy will be initially shared with all key parties by December 30th, 2022. When updates to our policy or strategic plan are made, those updates will be shared with all impacted parties in a timely fashion.

The President and CEO of River Bend Food Bank is responsible for the oversight and execution of our communications strategies, with support from the Director of Programs, the Director of Agency Partnerships, and the Resource Manager.

Monitoring

The implementation of all aspects of this policy will be conducted annually, in alignment with our annual work plan development process, with any updates to this policy made at that time. The audit will include a review of the policy by key partners, potentially including but not limited to the Nutrition Committee, Advisory Committee, the River Bend Food Bank President and CEO, and the Board of Directors. Additional input will be sought from our partner agencies, who we encourage to be in continual dialogue with their guests. This process will be led by the River Bend Food Bank's Director of Agency Partnerships, Director of Programs, and Food Sourcing Manager.

Endorsements

This policy is approved for implementation by Nancy Renkes, President and CEO, at River Bend Food Bank, and is effective as of signature date.

Nancy Renkes
President and CEO
River Bend Food Bank

Date