

Food Bank Nutrition: Creating, Implementing, and Analyzing a Nutrition Ranking System for the Great Plains Food Bank

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Food banks are an essential asset for individuals and families confronting food insecurity. With a substantial portion of their food coming from food banks, the nutritional quality of food received by and distributed from food banks impacts clients' health outcomes. The purpose of the needs assessment was to identify the nutritional content of food items at the Great Plains Food Bank (GPFB) and compare it to the guidelines for charitable food systems established by the United States Department of Agriculture. All food items received by the GPFB over the past five years were organized and categorized into corresponding food groups (e.g., grains and protein) using Healthy Eating Research (HER) guidelines. Once sorted into food groups, the total weight of food in each group was calculated and each food item was assigned a red, yellow, or green ranking based on the amount of saturated fat, sodium, and sugar contained in the item. A frequency distribution identified the percentage of foods in each HER ranking. While the fruits and vegetables group was the most frequent food group received, totaling approximately 11 million pounds, 52.5% of the food received over the past five years fell under the red ranking, which was defined as the ranking with the lowest nutritional value. With the majority of GPFB food items falling in the ranking of lowest nutritional value, a need emerges for a program that would guide, based on the nutritional quality of food, donations to the food bank and distribution of food to food pantries.