

Food Pantry Blog Post

Regardless of age, race, gender or ethnicity a person may experience hunger. Food insecure individuals may have to choose between food and other basic needs such as medical care, rent or utilities. In Alachua County, 1 in 4 children and 1 in 5 adults don't know where they will get their next meal. Food pantries and food banks exist to help those who can't make ends meet.

What are food pantries?

Food pantries are self-governed, independent community organizations that distribute food received from food banks. Food pantries usually operate out of churches or places where there are a lot of freezers, refrigerators and shelves. Food pantries become partners with food banks and make scheduled visits to the warehouse to pick up food. Food pantries are monitored by food banks on a regular basis to make sure that the food is safe and sanitary. A food pantry reaches out to the community.

Food pantries can receive, buy, store and distribute food to low-income families. Food pantries are not allowed to charge individuals for the food that they receive. They use the food they receive to turn it into nutritious, balanced meals and given to family at no cost. Food is usually distributed on a once-a-month basis.

What are food banks?

Food banks are non-profit organizations that distribute food to charities/organizations working in hunger relief. They operate out of large warehouses where they store and distribute food as well as solicit. The food comes from grocery stores and wholesalers that have food that needs to be distributed. Foods that are usually mislabeled, overproduced, are test market items or foods with short code dates are the foods that are usually given away. Salvageable products, dented cans and crumpled boxes are products that are usually pushed aside and given to food banks. After food is collected at a food bank, it is sorted and distributed to food pantries, soup kitchens, senior care, homeless shelters and emergency relief programs. Some food banks deliver food to the food pantries and food pantries contribute a shared maintenance fee of \$0.17 per pound for the majority of the food they receive. Produce and dairy products are free of charge.

Food Pantry Highlight: Catholic Charities

Catholic Charities can assist hungry people who are in immediate distress. Catholic Charities serves the five rural counties surrounding Gainesville. They have a program for Emergency Assistance and Rural Mobile Food Distributions. The Emergency Assistance program provides food packages that are nutritionally balanced to meet the needs of the individual or family and are tailored to the number of people in the household. These boxes include grains, vegetables, dairy, fruit and meat products. They go through about 850 pounds of food each month and serve over 1000 people a month. They provide food once a month to families that are struggling. A special food package is provided for those with diabetes. They also have special food bags for those who are homeless that are filled foods that may not need preparation and smaller sizes if they do not have access to a refrigerator. For their food distributions, volunteers bring food and personal care items to those in need who are unable to travel

into town to go to a store. This program is currently serving over 500 people per month over the five counties. Also, there is a backpack program to serve children who may be food insecure over the weekends where they are given backpacks full of food that a child can prepare.

UF Health partnered with Catholic Charities to create the Balanced Budget Cookbook, for those in need of budget-friendly meals. This cookbook is geared toward those who receive food from Catholic Charities and WIC clients. Ingredients are specifically marked as if they would be included in the food packages that both groups would receive at food pantries. The book also includes basic nutrition information to encourage a healthy diet. There are food safety tips to ensure food is prepared, cooked and stored safely. A Cooking Dictionary is also included in case there are terms with which the reader is not familiar. To get one of these cookbooks contact Ellen Bowser, MS, RDN, LD, RN, FAND, at UF Health or visit the Catholic Charities and inquire about it.

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