

Daily Union Article

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Holiday Help

November 1 marks the beginning of the holiday season and with it comes the celebrations and food preparations that require careful planning. For many in Kansas there are little, if any, resources to celebrate this festive season.

"A new study by the Kansas Food Bank and Feeding America shows that 1 in 7 people, or an estimated 215,300 people, in the Kansas Food Bank's service area turn to food pantries and meal service programs to feed themselves and their families. This includes 68,900 children and 19,900 seniors. Among all these clients, 14 percent are black, 37 percent are Latino, and 42 percent are white. Eleven percent of adult clients (23,683) are students. Additionally, 14% of households include someone who is a veteran or who has ever served in the military."

Source: <http://www.kansasfoodbank.org/hunger-statistics/>

These figures, in part, are the reason so many organizations and community agencies strive to help stock food bank pantries during the holiday season, as well as throughout the year. While these efforts are critical to the ability of food pantries to provide such resources to individuals and families, there is a greater awareness needed for what can and should be donated.

What NOT to donate

If donating from a home's family pantry, it is important to check the "use-by" or expiration date on the canned or packaged food items. Most food banks will not give out food that is past the use-by or expiration date printed on the container. (Note: "use-by" and expiration dates refer to the quality of the food not the safety.)

Avoid foods in glass containers or damaged packaging. Glass can easily chip or break during stocking or distribution. For the safety of volunteers working in the food bank, as well as for the safety of the clients who are served by the food bank, many food banks will not accept items packaged in glass. They also won't accept damaged or open paper or plastic containers. They cannot guarantee the safety of these foods and therefore must dispose of them.

Some food banks do not have the ability to store and distribute perishable foods. It is important to know where the food is going and find out in advance (in the planning stages of a food drive) if they have ample refrigerator or freezer space for donated perishable foods.

Plan Ahead

Whether donating as an individual or organizing a group food drive, it is important to plan ahead and do a bit of research. In addition to finding out where the food will be housed before distribution, find out what the specific needs of the food bank are. Sometimes what is given may not be what is needed. Check the website for the food pantry or call their contact number to find out what they need. There are some staples that most food pantries like to receive. Review the chart provided when planning to donate to a food bank.

Consider who the clientele of the food bank are. Are they experiencing homelessness? If so, they probably don't have storage space or refrigeration. Selecting food to donate that is easy-to-prepare or ready-to-eat is an important consideration. Look over the container to evaluate how easy it is to open. Foods that require a can-opener may prevent the food item from being accessible to those experiencing homelessness. Perhaps ask the food bank if they would like can-openers to be listed on the food drive list provided during event.

Add some creativity to the food drive. As part of the planning process, consider requesting donation by meal or by recipes. If the food drive is a multi-week effort, request breakfast items one week and lunch items the next week. The needed food items could be requested by a recipe. Attach a recipe to the list of desired foods and ask donors to provide all the ingredients for that food.

Thanksgiving often kicks off the giving season. If planning to contribute to a local food drive, consider the clientele, the needs, and the resources to help reach those who will benefit from the food bank. In next week's article, look for more ideas on how to prepare for and contribute to a healthy food drive. If you are looking for healthy holiday recipes or other helpful tips for safe holiday food preparation, contact me at the Geary County Extension office at 785-238-4161.

Until next time, keep living resourcefully!

Common Food Pantry Staples

100% fruit juices	Peanut butter
Canned vegetables and fruits	Chunky soups and beef stews
Canned tuna, salmon and canned chicken	Spaghetti sauce
Mixed nuts, peanuts, sunflower seeds, almonds	Canned beans and refried beans
Pasta and rice	Granola bars and popcorn
Breakfast cereal and oatmeal	Cash – to buy food for the pantry
<i>Source: Nubites No. 241 at www.numatters.com</i>	