

Daily Union Article

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Title: Food Pantry Tips

In a recent K-State Research and Extension Fact sheet, Dr. Londa Nwadike, Kansas State University Food Safety Specialist, addresses the need for safer and healthier food pantry systems across the nation. Food pantries provide the basic need of food to individuals and families due to situational poverty, lack of access to food, or any other variety of reasons. In the fact sheet, *Donating Safe and Nutritious Food to Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens*, Dr. Nwadike first provides an overview of the state of food pantry donations and use across the country.

"The United States has an abundance of food; yet many people in the U.S. still suffer from food insecurity and use food assistance such as food pantries and soup kitchens. Much of the food in the U.S. food supply is wasted but some of it could be utilized by hungry families. In fact, it is estimated that 30 to 40 percent of the food supply is wasted (not available for human consumption) in the U.S., with 31 percent food loss at the retail and consumer levels. Donations of safe and healthy food by food retailers and consumers to entities such as food pantries and soup kitchens can help provide food to hungry families and also reduce food waste."

Geary County food pantries have been experiencing a marked increase in the number of individuals and families that they serve. For example, Wheels of Hope mobile food pantry began providing food to eleven families in 2014. Today, just four years later, the number of families served by Wheels of Hope is over 80 and predicted to continue increasing as the colder winter months of Kansas arrive.

As the holiday season approaches, many organizations and individuals step up their efforts to provide donations to local food pantries whose service meet a critical need. As these efforts gear up, what can local communities do to help ensure that those served by food pantries have access to nutritious options?

Why is it important to be intentional about donating nutritious foods to local food pantries? Eating a healthier diet has many short term and long term benefits for both adults and children.

Children will learn and thrive when they consume foods that provide them with adequate nutrition. Families that depend on food pantries need to be able to access healthy foods through this service. As noted above, there has been a notable increase in food pantry use across the United States and in Geary County. By donating healthy food options, community members can promote health and wellness to the families needing this service. Research shows that as much as 19% of all donated foods to

pantries are of low-nutrient value (such as sugary drinks, dessert mixes, fried chips, etc.).

The Safe Food Pantries Project developed by University of Wisconsin's Extension program has developed a community toolkit that organizations and individuals can use to help design healthy and safe food drives.

As part of the toolkit, the Safe Food Pantries initiative promotes healthy food pantry donations by stressing the "Food Drive Five" which includes:

- 1) high protein foods
- 2) canned low sugar fruits
- 3) whole grains
- 4) colorful veggies and
- 5) low sodium soups with protein and veggies

This quick and easy starter list can help guide those desiring to donate to our food pantries to make intentional purchases that focus on healthier food options.

As local agencies, businesses and faith based organizations begin making plans for their seasonal food drives, using available planning resources can help them promote healthier food donations that will prove beneficial to the recipients of their efforts.

Dr. Nordike outlines the positive outcomes of these community led efforts.

"A community food drive is an excellent opportunity for donors to participate in a local service project and for recipients to obtain safe and nutritious food. However, it is important when organizing a food drive to encourage people to donate safe and healthy foods and foods that the food bank or pantry needs. Potential donors should be provided with the list of suggested nutritious and safe items that the food bank or pantry needs. Organizers could also make specific suggestions of food types to donate on different days of the week or another method to get a variety of healthy and safe foods that will benefit food pantry clients."

If you know individuals or families who are in need of emergency food sources, check out the [Emergency Food Resource Guide](https://www.livewellgearycounty.org/) posted on the Live Well Geary County website at <https://www.livewellgearycounty.org/>. You will find the guide under the Resources tab.

For an expanded list of suggested healthy foods to donate to your local food pantry, you can access a checklist on the Geary County K-State Research and Extension website at <http://www.geary.k-state.edu/health-home-family/>. You will find more information under the New Resources section.

Providing nutritional options to meet the very basic need for food for low-resourced families is a top priority for food pantries. Their ability to provide that resource is dependent, in part, on the donations they receive from their community. By educating people about how they can provide nutritious food to their local food pantry they are contributing to the overall health and wellness of their community. It's a win-win for everyone!

Stop by the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office to pick up a copy of Dr. Nordike's fact sheet to help you know more about supporting our local food pantries with nutritious food options. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!