



Second Harvest Food Bank Healthy Food & Beverage Policy

Adopted February 2016

Executive Summary

Second Harvest Food Bank well understands that food is medicine and nutritious meals matter. The food insecure households served by the Food Bank can be caught in a vicious cycle of poverty, ill health, and food insecurity. Our clients have specifically asked for more healthy foods. Second Harvest Food Bank therefore will work to distribute the nutritious food that clients want and need to live healthy, active lives free from hunger. To this end, Second Harvest has developed a strong Healthy Food and Beverage Policy including long-term strategic goals for FY2017-FY2019 based on client surveys, the latest nutrition initiatives and research, and nutrition policies of other leading food banks.

The long-term goals to achieve by FY2019 include the following:

- Maintain a 50+% distribution of fresh produce
- Encourage and facilitate produce consumption through nutrition education and distribution of essential cooking ingredients
- Increase protein and dairy distribution to 24% of all pounds distributed
- Focus grain purchases on low-sugar whole grain options
- Distribute only healthy beverages
- Discontinue distribution of candy

Policy Rationale and Benefits

Our Mission: Lead our community to ensure that anyone who needs a healthy meal can get one.

Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties is the trusted leader dedicated to ending local hunger. Second Harvest is one of the largest food banks in the nation, providing food to nearly a quarter of a million people each month. One in ten community residents rely on Second Harvest for food every month and it is responsible for providing enough food for 56 million meals annually.

Since its inception in 1974, the clientele have changed from residents in need of short-term emergency food resources to those who are chronically food insecure. Today, clients receive assistance from Second Harvest 13 times a year on average, as compared to the 8 times per year national average. To best serve our clients, Second Harvest must approach its mission as providing food not only to end hunger, but also to promote and protect health to give clients the opportunity to pursue physically, financially, and emotionally healthy lives. Therefore, Second Harvest is increasing the focus on nutritional quality as well as quantity to contribute to health, which is particularly important in light of data about and strategies designed to address the obesity and diabetes epidemics.¹

Food Is Medicine

For Second Harvest clients, a nutritious meal is not only unaffordable, but also sometimes out of reach. Many clients live in “food deserts” where there is limited access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food.² Unfortunately, “food deserts” may also be “food swamps” where the area is flooded with high-energy and low-nutrient “junk.”³ In addition, clients may lack time or transportation. Given this environment, it is unsurprising that they may choose fast food or other cheap calorie-dense nutrient-poor foods to feed their families from the limited selection at local markets.⁴

Chronic hunger and disease intersect. Research has shown that poor nutrition significantly contributes to chronic diet-related diseases such as obesity, hypertension, and diabetes.⁵ Sixty-three percent of Second Harvest client households report a family member with high blood pressure, which is twice the national average, and 33% report that someone in the household has diabetes, which is three times the national average.⁶ In 2009, 55% of adults in Santa Clara County were overweight or obese⁷ and as of 2013, 77% of adults in San Mateo County were overweight or obese.⁸ Healthy food can help to prevent – as well manage – the chronic illnesses that are highly prevalent in the community.⁹ This is especially important for low-income families who have fewer resources to manage illnesses and obtain healthcare.

Considering that clients utilize Second Harvest food every month on average, Second Harvest is in a unique position to improve the health of thousands of clients in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties through providing nutritious food. It is crucial to offer foods that have not been shown to contribute to obesity and chronic disease in order to promote and protect health while addressing the hunger needs of the low-income families being served.

Clients Prefer Healthy Food

A nutrition-focused approach is also a client-centered approach. Clients generally know which foods are healthy and want them to feed their families. The 2012-14 Santa Clara University study of over 800 Second Harvest direct service members asked clients what foods they would purchase if they had more money. A review of this data as provided by SCU shows that protein/meat was the most requested category followed by fruit and vegetables. Moreover, of the 1,261 items mentioned, only 21 (less than 2%) were for sweet and salty processed foods (snacks, baked goods, pizza, candy and ice cream). No clients mentioned sugary drinks.¹⁰ These survey responses validate the anecdotal evidence supplied by Food Bank staff in the field as well as other national studies documenting that clients prefer to receive healthy foods.¹¹

Nutrition-Focused Food Banking is a National Trend

Food banks around the country have recently recognized the importance of defining their role as not just filling bellies with food, but focusing on nutrition to ensure that clients live healthy and happy lives.¹² The Food Bank of Central New York has developed and adopted a “No Soda and No Candy” policy. Bay Area food banks, including Alameda County Community Food Bank¹³ and SF-Marín Food Bank,¹⁴ have recently instituted nutrition policies to ensure that they purchase and distribute healthy options. On the national level, Feeding America has established a goal which includes providing access

Foods Covered By the Policy

The goal of the policy is to help clients have the opportunity to eat a diet as similar to the USDA MyPlate recommendations as possible. Therefore, Second Harvest seeks to encourage fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and lean proteins while seeking to reduce sugar-sweetened beverages and candy. For all food categories, locally-produced food (ideally from California, USA if California is not possible) should be prioritized, if possible.

Fruits and Vegetables

Second Harvest is proud that fresh produce accounts for more than 50% of the food distributed to clients, more fresh produce than any other food bank in the country. Not only does this meet and exceed USDA MyPlate recommendations, which suggest making “half the plate” fruits and vegetables, but it is also aligned with client requests. Because of this, SHFB will work to maintain the amount of fresh produce as 50% or more of all food distributed.

Numerous client and Second Harvest staff accounts have revealed that the produce distributed is not always consumed by clients due to multiple factors including client preferences, lack of preparation knowledge, time, or resources. To address this issue, this policy proposes the following multi-pronged approach to encourage consumption of produce:

- Increase distribution of essential cooking ingredients, like cooking oil and spices.
- Increase distribution of the most-requested fruits and vegetables where feasible
- Increase nutrition education, especially food sampling of unfamiliar produce items

Protein and Dairy

Protein is a key component of the USDA MyPlate, highly desired by clients, and often prohibitively expensive. In addition, protein was the most requested item by clients. Second Harvest will increase protein to 24% of distributed food by FY2019. While dairy is considered a separate category on the USDA MyPlate, it is high in protein and thus will be considered protein in this policy. Second Harvest will focus on continuing to provide unsweetened low-fat dairy and dairy replacement options, such as soy milk, to provide clients with culturally appropriate protein foods.

Grains

USDA MyPlate recommends that one quarter of the plate be grains, of which half should be whole grains. Refined grains are widely available and generally affordable for clients.¹⁵ However, whole grain

options are not as widely available or affordable so Second Harvest will maximize the whole grain options available through a goal of purchasing only 100% whole grain (whole grain as the first ingredient) low-sugar (less than or equal to 6 g per serving) options. The only exception will be rice in order to best serve Asian clients.

Candy

Candy is defined as (but not limited to) the following food items: hard candy (lollipops, Jolly Ranchers), gum, chocolate bars (not including meal replacement bars or dietary supplements), and soft candy (caramels, wrapped chocolates, taffy, licorice, gum products, gummy bears).¹⁶ Candy has minimal to no nutritional value and can contribute to diabetes and obesity because it is very high in sugar. Clients and staff know that candy is unhealthy. Therefore, it is inconsistent with the values of providing nutritious food to provide candy to any client. Because of this, Second Harvest will not distribute candy by FY2019.

Beverages

Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) are the single largest source of added sugar in the US diet.¹⁷ SSBs include soft drinks/sodas, fruit drinks, sports drinks, sweetened tea, coffee drinks, energy drinks, and sweetened milks or milk alternatives.¹⁸ Consumption of SSBs contributes to mortality from type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.¹⁹

By the end of FY2019, Second Harvest will only distribute healthy drinks. These healthy drinks include the following: combinations of water and 100% juice, unsweetened dairy and soy milks; plain, carbonated, and essence-flavored unsweetened water, and unsweetened coffee and tea. In addition, Second Harvest will stop purchasing juice since even 100% juice is very high in sugar and low in fiber so it can potentially contribute to diabetes, obesity, and dental caries. Moreover, our clients are likely already receiving juice since studies show that low-income parents are more likely than high-income parents to provide juice for their young children at home.²⁰ Instead of using purchasing dollars to buy juice, we will collaborate with our programs to determine how to re-direct juice funds to healthier beverages like shelf stable milk boxes.

Overall, these beverage changes would result in a loss of up to 1.5 million pounds (half of which can be substituted with healthier options at no additional cost), and a significant health benefit of reducing the sugar distributed to clients and creating increased awareness of the health impacts of sugary beverages. It is worthy to note that other food banks that have instituted healthy beverage policies have slowly seen donations of SSBs decrease as the policy is publicized.²¹

Conclusion

Second Harvest Food Bank believes that clients deserve the nutritious food they want and need to live healthy active lives free from hunger. To this end, the Food Bank has formalized a Healthy Food and Beverage Policy with concrete milestones to be implemented over the next three years. Incorporating sound nutrition into the mission of Second Harvest will not be without challenges nor will it be overnight. However, it is critical for promoting community health and continuing the role of Second Harvest as a policy leader among food banks.

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