



Food Pantry Volunteer Information And Food Safety Procedures

Hygiene and Illness:

Hand Washing – Please wash your hands regularly and thoroughly with soap and warm water, especially after using the restroom. Remember that we are working with food, even if it is in packages, and we need to be careful not to pass along germs.

Illness – If you experience any of the following, please do not come in to work:

abdominal cramps, diarrhea, fever, prolonged loss of appetite (>3 days), jaundice, vomiting, pustular lesions (on hand, wrist, or exposed body part) such as boils and infected wounds, or exposure to typhoid fever, shigellosis, E.coli, or hep A, or Norwalk virus

Additional Instructions:

- a. Sore throat with a fever – You may not work with food
- b. Vomiting, diarrhea, or jaundice – You may not come in until you are symptom free for 24 hours or you have a written release from a medical practitioner (Food handlers with jaundice must be reported to the regulatory authority. They must have a written release from medical practitioner and approval from the regulatory authority before returning to work.)
- c. Diagnosed with HepatitisA, Salmonella Typhi, E.coli, Norovirus, or Shigella spp. – You must work with your medical practitioner and the local regulatory authority to decide when it is safe to return to work.

Shopping with Food Pantry Clients:

When clients get to the food pantry to shop, they will each have

1. A shopping number – This is like a deli number and indicates the person's position in the shopping order. Take the number, put it in the small number bin and cross off the corresponding number on the chart on the door.
2. Bags – We no longer provide plastic bags for shopping. If the person forgot their bags and is unable to shop as a result, send them to the office.
3. A client card. This card has 2 important pieces of information you will need to remember: The total number of people in the household and The USDA number.

Walk around with each client while he/she is shopping to help.

Most categories of food have a small, multi-colored sign taped to the shelf. The top row of the sign has numbers of people in the household. Find the number of people in the household for the person with whom you are shopping. Directly below the number of people is a number indicating how many items of that type of food the client may choose. Clients may choose not to get certain types of food or to get fewer than their allowed number of items, but they may not substitute other items. Occasionally an item is unavailable; clients may not substitute something else.

There are a few categories of food that do not have the small, multi-colored signs, and there are different limits for those items:

- USDA food – Some of our food comes from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. To qualify for this food, clients must fill out separate paperwork and meet certain income guidelines as determined by the USDA. If clients qualify, they will have a USDA number written on their client card. This is 1 for 1-3 people in the household, 2 for 4-6 people in the household, and 3 for 7 or more. As you come into the pantry, the USDA food is located in the first vertical section of shelving. It is marked by orange signs. Clients who qualify may have their USDA number of each type of USDA food we have available.
- Miscellaneous Items – Occasionally we get items which don't fit into any of our food categories, such as condiments. In this case, they are usually shelved on the Family Snack shelving unit.
- Individual Snacks – Generally, if we have small snacks (such as individual granola bars) clients may take 1 for each person in their household. Any unusual limits will be displayed next to the snack display.
- Refrigerated items – If we have eggs, each client may take one carton for their family. If we have other refrigerated items available, limits will be posted.
- Bread – The final vertical section of shelving usually has fresh bread on the lower shelves. Clients may take 1 loaf of bread per household, unless we have excess bread, and then a different limit will be posted. Occasionally, excess bread is frozen or refrigerated. Please distribute frozen bread directly from the freezer and refrigerated bread directly from the refrigerator. Instruct clients to refrigerate it when they get home. The reason for this is that frozen or refrigerated bread can have condensed moisture on the inside of the package. If this moist bread is kept at room temperature, it will mold more easily.
If we get bakery bread that is not labeled with nutritional information, please post the sign about allergens that says, "Bakery Bread May Contain: Tree Nuts..."
- Other exceptions – There may be other special limits or exceptions based on what we have available. Those will be posted on the shelf with the item and/or written on the Volunteer Information Board. The Volunteer Information Board is the white board on the shelf to your left as you enter the pantry.

Substitutions – Generally we do not allow clients to substitute items in one category for those in another. This is due to the sometimes vast difference in cost between different categories of food. However, we do make exceptions for people who do not have access to cooking or refrigeration facilities (homeless, etc.). These people may substitute roughly equivalent amounts and kinds of food which do not need to be cooked for those that would require cooking, for instance substituting canned tuna/chicken for frozen raw meat or substituting cereal or bread for dry pasta/rice. Volunteers may use their discretion in these cases or ask the Food Programs Coordinator or Director for assistance.

Gluten Free – Some clients (or people in their households) need gluten free foods. If we have these foods available, they are usually stored separately from the general pantry foods. People who need these foods may substitute them for an equivalent number of foods they are unable to eat (grains, breakfast items, etc.)

Contamination and Client Complaints:

If you see any evidence of insects or other pests having access to the food, or if you see any evidence of contaminated food (water damage, foreign material in food, etc.), please report it to the Food Programs Coordinator or Executive Director.

If any client reports getting ill from our food, please ask the person to report it to the Food Programs Coordinator or Executive Director. We have a Foodborne Illness form to fill out, and a procedure to follow in these cases.

Cleaning:

The Pantry shelves, refrigerators/freezers, carts, and storage shelves should be cleaned regularly. Sponges, paper towels, and cleaning sprays are available.

Periodically, we have “Cleaning Days” where we try to clean all the shelves, refrigerators/freezers, carts, storage shelves, etc. However, if you have extra time or notice something is dirty, cleaning on other days is always appreciated. The produce carts and bins in particular need to be cleaned frequently.

Re-stocking Food Pantry Shelves:

As the pantry shelves get depleted, please re-stock as needed. First, move any remaining food to the front of the shelves, filling in any gaps. Try to keep food with food of the same kind. For example, in the tomato section, there may be diced tomatoes, whole tomatoes, and tomato sauce. Keep each type of tomato together to make it easier for people to see what is there when they are shopping.

Next, re-stock the shelves from the back to make sure the oldest food gets used first. Again, keep food with food of the same kind. We have additional food of most categories in the storage room. If we run out of a particular category of food or have extra space in a section, do not fill it with food from a different category; just leave it empty. We usually only stock 1 shelf of each kind of food (i.e. one shelf of spaghetti rings in the prepared food section). This ensures that the food cycles through relatively quickly. We sometimes make an exception for very popular food or food categories that have little or no variety, such as milk.

Make sure no food is stored on the floor! All food must be stored on shelves or pallets to keep it away from water and pests.

In the storage room, for the most part, food of a particular type is shelved together to make it easier to see what we have available. For instance, all the vegetables are shelved together. (There may be exceptions to this rule. Our storage space is tight, and occasionally we have to store something in an atypical location due to space constraints. If you don't see something where you think it should be, look around to see if it may have been put somewhere else or ask.)

Use the oldest food first! Each case of food in the storage room should have a date on it. When you are re-stocking, use the food with the oldest date first. If you find an unmarked package, assume it is older than marked packages. The exception to this rule is if we get food that is near or past the expiration date. Then, even if we got it recently, it should be used first. (See the information about expiration dates posted on the walls of the food pantry. Most non-perishable food can be distributed at least 6 months beyond the expiration date.) Also, boxes of assorted food are generally used before factory-packed cases because they contain items with a variety of expiration dates, and some of the items may be near date. When choosing which food to put out, consider two different brands of the same type of food as the same food. For instance, if we have two different brands of diced tomatoes, use the older one first. If we have diced tomatoes and whole tomatoes, put some of each out.

Bread – See the information on bread in the “Shopping with Food Pantry Clients” section

USDA Food - Keep USDA food separate! Cases of USDA food will usually (but not always) either have a large orange circle sticker on the box or packaging, or they will be marked “USDA” on the box. We are required to shelve USDA foods separately from non-USDA foods. For instance, a case of canned corn with an orange sticker would be shelved with the USDA corn, but a case of canned corn without an orange sticker would be shelved with the starchy vegetables in the non-USDA area. Look before you unpack the carton! The individual cans or packages are not marked. Sometimes, the cases have been coming from the RI Community Food Bank unmarked. In this case, the Food Programs Coordinator will know which foods are USDA. It is also indicated on the RICFB invoices. In the storage area, the USDA food should be on the orange pallets under the orange signs, NOT on the shelves. Any donated food (even if it is a brand that is sometimes USDA) is shelved with the non-USDA food because it did not come to us directly as USDA food.

Dented Cans - Cans with small dents along the sides can be distributed. However, any can with a dent that affects the top or bottom seal of the can must be discarded because the seal could have been broken, allowing the contents to be contaminated with bacteria. Also, dents that cause sharp creases or corners in the can are unacceptable because they may cause the inner coating of the can to tear, exposing the food to contamination by contact with the can’s metal. If a can appears to be swollen or bulging outward, this is a sign that contamination is present (bacteria release gas when they feed on canned food); discard the can. For more detailed information and pictures, see the information from the RICFB Salvage Handbook posted in the Food Pantry.

Food4Kids - The food on the small shelf units next to the USDA food is for the Food4Kids program ONLY. It MUST be kept separate from regular pantry food. Do not stock this food on the food pantry shelves. The food on the yellow rolling shelves is also for the Food4Kids program.

Donations - Most of our food comes from the RI Food Bank, but we also get donations from community members or organizations. These donations generally consist of individual cans or packages of food rather than cases. We usually shelve these individual items before the cases of food from the storage room. **Always check expiration dates on these items! We can hand out most items beyond the marked expiration date, but not indefinitely.** We follow USDA guidelines to determine how long beyond the expiration date it is safe to continue to distribute items. The USDA guidelines regarding expiration dates are posted on the walls of the Food Pantry. If a can or package of food is beyond the date considered safe by the USDA guidelines, discard it. Also discard it if the can is rusty or badly dented (See information on dents above), or if the packaging has been opened or torn (unless there is an intact

package under the outer package as there could be in the case of cereal or crackers), or if it looks contaminated or unsafe in some other way.

We are no longer allowed to accept donations of refrigerated food from any individual or organization unless they are adhering to food safety guidelines, have a food business license, and can be monitored by the Department of Health. In practice, this means that we usually only accept perishable food donations from the RI Community Food Bank. Any other donors of perishable foods must be cleared by the Food Programs Coordinator. Please note that whole, uncut produce does NOT fall under this rule. We CAN accept whole, uncut produce from farms, individuals, etc.

Banana Boxes – We often get assorted food from the RI Community Food Bank packed in banana boxes. They take these boxes back and re-use them. They request that we stack them in the following way: Take the top off one box and put it upside down. Inside the top, stand 2 box bottoms up vertically. Put the second top on top of the two bottoms. Put the boxes in the Thrift Shop intake room, in the northeast corner, between the empty pallets and the Pump Room door or on the empty pallets. DO NOT BLOCK the PUMP ROOM DOOR! In case of a fire, the fire department needs easy access to the Pump room!

Recycling – All plastic shrink wrap, plastic bags, cardboard, and other recyclables are recycled. The plastic shrink wrap and plastic bags should be put in the large plastic bags either on the back of the food storage area door or in the Thrift Shop Intake room. The cardboard should be flattened and stacked next to the garbage can in the Thrift Shop Intake room. Other recyclable items should be put in the recycling bins in the Thrift Shop Intake room.

RICFB Food Delivery:

On Thursday mornings, we get a food delivery from the RI Community Food Bank. They deliver the food on pallets wrapped with plastic, and they take back any pallets and banana boxes from the previous week. The food is dropped off in the Thrift Shop Intake room, but it must be removed from that room and stored properly before close of business, and preferably as soon as possible. The Food Bank brings us 4 categories of food: Refrigerated/Frozen Food, Non-perishable Food, Produce, and Bread. If possible, a different volunteer or group of volunteers can put away each type of food.

Refrigerated/Frozen Food – This food is perishable and subject to time/temperature abuse and should therefore be put away first. Use the large orange cart to move the food into the Food Pantry, and drop it off near its final refrigerator or freezer. If possible, move any existing refrigerated or frozen food to the front or top and put the new food behind or underneath the older food. Group food of the same type together. We generally put eggs in the left side of the double-door refrigerator and cheese in the right side of the double door refrigerator on the top shelf. Other refrigerated items can be put in whichever part of the refrigerator has adequate room. We generally fill up the chest freezer first and the double door freezer second. If we have both frozen meat and frozen prepared foods, we generally put the frozen meat in the chest freezer and the prepared foods in the double door freezer. The single door refrigerator is used only for Food4Kids food. The Food Programs Coordinator will specify which, if any, of the food should be put there.

Non-perishable Food – The cases of non-perishable food can be loaded onto the orange cart and taken to the food storage room. If no more of a particular type of food is in the storage room, and there is room on the pantry shelves, the new cases can be taken directly to the pantry and put on the

appropriate shelves for volunteers to unpack later. However, if there is existing food of a particular type already in the storage room, it should be used before the newly delivered food.

The remaining cases of food should be **marked with the delivery date** and stored in the appropriate areas in the food storage area. Separate out any USDA food and store it on the USDA pallet. If there is USDA food of the same type already there, put the new food with it, preferably with the new food stored under the older food or next to it in a separate stack so that the older food is easy to retrieve first. All the USDA food **MUST** be stored on the USDA pallet. The USDA guidelines require that USDA food be separated from regular pantry food and distributed in addition to regular food pantry offerings. If there is any question about what is USDA food and what isn't, ask the Food Programs Coordinator or refer to the Food Bank invoice. Next, separate out any Food4Kids food and store it on the Food4Kids shelves. The Food Programs Coordinator can specify which food is intended for the Food4Kids Program. This food is funded by separate grants, so it must be kept separate from the regular Food Pantry food. Finally, store any remaining cases of food on the regular Food Pantry storage shelves. Food of the same type should be stored together (i.e. all spaghetti rings together, even if they are of different brands), and food of the same category should be stored together (i.e. green beans next to carrots since they are both non-starchy vegetables). This allows volunteers to quickly scan the food to see which food is the oldest and what the options are in each category. The exception to this is cereal. Since the cereal is light, it is generally stored on the top shelves rather than all together, but we still try to keep each type of cereal together to allow the oldest to be easily found and used first. Please remember that **ALL** cases of food must be marked with the delivery date! If any food is near its expiration date, please circle or mark that on the case so that volunteers will notice and use it first.

Personal Care supplies must be stored separately from food to avoid possible chemical contamination of the food. Since most personal care supplies do not go bad, it is not necessary to mark the delivery date on these cases.

Sometimes we get banana boxes full of assorted food or personal care supplies. These are often not sorted into the same categories we use. If time allows, please look through the boxes and sort the contents so that the box contains items from a single category or single type. (i.e. boxes of assorted protein should be sorted into separate boxes of peanut butter, meat, and beans) Then either put the food out on the shelves if there is room, or store the banana boxes in the appropriate area of the storage room. Banana boxes do not need to be dated since they are re-used and they should be used before whole cases of food anyway.

When all the food has been put away, please return the orange cart to the Thrift Shop Intake room. Also, double check to make sure that no food was left on the floor! All food must be stored either on shelves or up off the floor on pallets/milk boxes/etc. This helps protect the food from possible contamination by water or pests.

Produce – The produce usually comes in large bags or boxes. It needs to be sorted and put GENTLY into the metal wire produce racks. If it is something small, such as carrots that might fall through the openings, you can line the bins with cardboard or empty produce bags. Please be careful to sort out any spoiled or badly damaged produce as rotting produce can rapidly spoil good produce to too, and it can attract flies and other pests. Put any discarded produce in a cardboard box; we donate it to a local farmer to feed his animals. When all the produce has been put into the racks, roll the racks into the food pantry. No food can be stored in the Thrift Shop Intake room over night. If there is too much produce to fit in the racks, you can put it in the bushel baskets, or you can put extra bags of produce in

the shopping carts in the food pantry. Please remember that when you are finished, all the produce must be in the food pantry and OFF THE FLOOR.

Bread – Occasionally we get bread from the Food Bank. Put it on the bread shelves in the food pantry (unless those shelves are needed for the Food4Kids program), and store the large plastic bread trays next to the pallets and empty banana boxes in the Thrift Shop Intake room. The Food Bank will take the trays back the next Thursday and re-use them.

Shopping with Food4Kids Clients:

Clients may shop for Food4Kids program items only during the designated Food4Kids shopping times. Clients should sign in just as they do for the Food Pantry, except they should use their Food4Kids sign-in sheet. These sheets are kept in a separate, labeled binder. We currently do not use shopping numbers for Food4Kids since there are far fewer people in this program, and the wait times have not been long.

The shopping process is very similar to the Food Pantry shopping process, but with a few key differences. For the Food4Kids program, clients are only shopping for the school-aged children in their household, and they must be separately registered for the program. If the client is registered for Food4Kids, the back of their card will say, “Food4Kids” with the current program year. It will also have the number of eligible kids and the signature of the volunteer or staff person who registered the family.

After determining the number of eligible children, bring the shopper into the food pantry. Only Food4Kids food is distributed at this time. The Food4Kids food is in the Food4Kids refrigerator, on the yellow rack, and in the designated produce bin(s). Each type of food has limits posted in the same format as for the food pantry, but on cards that have a different color theme and are marked with “Food4Kids” or “Food4Kids Weekend” in green at the top of the card. The limits are based on the number of kids rather than the number of people in the family. As with other programs, we ask shoppers to bring their own bags.

Helping with Fresh Food Fridays:

Fresh Food Fridays is a program that distributes fresh produce to clients on a weekly basis. It allows us to get produce to clients when it is still as fresh as possible from the Thursday Food Bank delivery. We also sometimes distribute bread, yogurt, or other perishable items that we cannot hold over until the following Wednesday pantry day. Occasionally we include other special items that do not fit well into our pantry program, such as sample sizes of personal care supplies.

At the beginning of the day, prepare the produce and other items for distribution. Remove any produce that was stored in the refrigerators, and load it into the produce racks. Put up signs to label any items that may be unfamiliar to clients, and post any special limits. Also put out any applicable recipes for the available produce. Load bread into the bread baskets. If we have bakery bread that is not labeled with nutritional information, post the sign that notifies clients about potential allergens. Move the produce racks and bread baskets out to the entry way. If the weather is nice, the food may be moved outside at 10:00 a.m. at the discretion of the person doing sign-in and monitoring the produce. If we have any food that needs to be kept cold (including refrigerated/frozen bread), this must be distributed from the refrigerator.

During the day, at least one volunteer needs to be monitoring the produce and signing in clients at all times. It is useful to have an additional volunteer with the produce, especially early in the day when it can be very busy. We generally do not have specific limits on the produce, but we ask people to take only what their immediate household will use during the coming week, and we ask people to be considerate of other shoppers and to take only a small amount of popular or limited items. Throughout the day, it is nice to have a volunteer who is available to check the supply of various items periodically and re-load if we have additional items available.

At the end of the Fresh Food Friday distribution, check the remaining food. If we still have bread, either restock it on the pantry shelves if it will still be fresh Wednesday or, preferably refrigerate or freeze it. Sort through the remaining produce and discard any items that are spoiled or badly damaged. If there is space, refrigerate produce that will keep better that way, such as greens, fruit, etc. Leave hardy produce such as potatoes and onions in the produce racks, and store the produce racks in the food pantry. If there is any produce that you have no way to keep in a distributable condition until Wednesday, dispose of it. Call the farmer to come pick-up any discarded produce. Before you leave, make sure that everything has been put away properly.

If you have any other questions about how we operate, ask one of our experienced volunteers, or ask Karen or Anita. Thank-you for volunteering your time and energy. We appreciate your help.