



# STARTING A SCHOOL FOOD PANTRY

## What is a School Food Pantry?

A school food pantry is a space on the grounds of the school which provides food directly to those with limited resources. School pantries generally offer shelf-stable/non-perishable foods, fruits and vegetables to students, faculty and staff at no cost.

### Tips for Starting a School Food Pantry:

- **Discuss** your plan with school administrators to ensure there is support for the project.
- **Identify a safe location** for the pantry that will allow for food to be distributed easily and discreetly.
  - Ensure there is adequate storage (i.e. shelving, refrigerator, cart, scale).
  - All food must be stored at least six inches off the ground on a pallet, shelf, desk, etc.
  - The storage area should be dry, clean and free of pests.
  - The storage area should be locked when not in use.
  - Inventory should be rotated. Always check the label on the box to make sure you are using the oldest dates first.
- **Identify individuals** who will be charged with receiving donated food, purchasing food, ensuring safe storage, distributions, record keeping, rotating inventory, etc. It is recommended that at least one person involved with the pantry receive annual ServSafe Certification training.
- Make a **distribution schedule**.
  - What days and times will food be distributed?
  - It is recommended that food be distributed at a minimum of once per month while school is in session.
  - Will bags be provided or are participants asked to bring bags? Tip: some local businesses may be willing to donate bags.
- Consider who will be the **intended beneficiaries** of the pantry. Will your school have any requirements for those receiving food?



*This institution is an equal opportunity provider.*

**Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services**  
**Nicole "Nikki" Fried, Commissioner**



- Develop a **notification plan** to let students, parents and staff know about the emergency food available on campus (i.e. flyers, posters, staff meetings, parent letters, etc.) Consider whether parent permission will be need for a child to receive food from the school pantry.
- Begin **sourcing food** for the pantry.
  - Contact your local food bank to learn more about food availability in your area. If you're not sure who to call, please contact the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services for assistance at 850-617-7400.
  - Reach out to local civic organizations (i.e. Rotary Clubs), to request support for your pantry (i.e. monetary donations for the purchase of food and/or equipment, food donations, volunteers, etc.)
  - Contact business to request donations (i.e. grocery stores).
  - Identify teachers, staff, parents and other community members who may have connections in the community that can support the food pantry (i.e. those working in grocery stores may be able to provide over-stocked items).
  - Engage students, parents and school staff in fundraising events and/or food drives.
  - When possible, prioritize food items that the students will enjoy eating and can be cook with limited appliances (i.e. peanut butter and jelly, crackers, canned tuna or chicken, cereal, shelf-stable milk and juice, canned soups and pasta, apple sauce, canned fruit, granola bars/fruit bars, string cheese, etc.).
- Consider storing something from each of the following categories:
  - Fruits and Vegetables
  - Dairy
  - Grain
  - Protein
- For liability purposes, it is not recommended that school food pantries accept expired products.
- **Keep records.**
  - How many pounds were received and distributed?
  - How many individuals were served during a distribution?
  - Which items are popular, and which are not?
  - Track the expiration dates of foods.

