

Give a Gift of Food

By Janet Hackert, Nutrition Specialist

With the holiday season in full swing, many are thinking about the festive dinners and bulging potluck meals they will prepare or be invited to. Others are thinking about where their next meal will come from. In northwest Missouri and northeastern Kansas 52,000 people live with the reality of hunger daily. In Harrison County, for example, over 150 families utilize the services of the local food pantry. Consider making a gift of food for those who are struggling.

When donating food, be sure that items are of good quality. Consider what groceries you would share with a friend or family member if they were needed. Think too about what foods taste good or work well together in a meal. And keep in mind good nutrition, mixing foods from various food groups. Alternatively, give a large quantity of a food that can go with many things or stand alone, like peanut butter or cereal.

Another thing to think about is the capabilities of the local food pantry. Most can accommodate dry goods such as crackers, pasta, dried beans, canned goods, foil-wrapped meats, and the like. Some also have refrigeration and/or freezer storage space so frozen fruits and vegetables, even meat can be accepted. Check with the local food pantry staff to see what types of food they are able to receive.

Timing can also make a difference, especially if the donated food is fresh or frozen. Some pantries are open twice a week, like Harvest House in St Joseph and the Harrison County Food Pantry in Bethany, MO. These sites can accept fresh, frozen, and nonperishables and have the traffic flow to distribute them while they are still in good shape. But some are only open a few days per month. The pantry in Chillicothe, for example, only distributes food once a month.

Make sure food is safe as well. Watch for dented or rusted cans, ripped boxes or bags, or other signs that the food would not be safe or fresh to eat. Check the 'sell by' or 'use by' date also and discard if out of date.

Consult the local pantry for more ideas of specific items that may be of particular need at that location. In visiting the Harrison County Food Pantry recently, for example, I discovered that canned fruit, cereal, and hamburger or tuna helper are items that are in low supply just now.

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