

National Trends: The Future of Food Pantries in the United States

Updated 01/2023

Executive Summary: Food security agencies in America are facing an urgent concern as the ongoing need for food security coincides with an obesity epidemic and population growth. Incorporating a “client choice” model and nutritional policies will be essential. Increasingly, cultural sensitivity will be a crucial element in the delivery of services and achieving intended outcomes.

Major Issues & Sources

An Urgent Concern

From the [Northwestern University Institute on Policy Research](#)

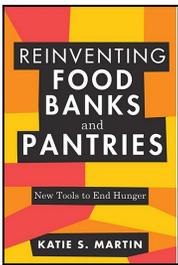
- Some 13.7 million households, or 10.5% of all U.S. households, experienced food insecurity at some point during 2019, according to data from the USDA.
- For about a third of these households, access to food was so limited that their eating patterns were disrupted and food intake was reduced.
- The coronavirus pandemic has only worsened the problem. Food insecurity more than doubled as a result of the economic crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, hitting as many as 23% of households in 2020.



“Client Choice” Service Models

From the book [Reinventing Food Banks](#) by [Katie S. Martin](#)

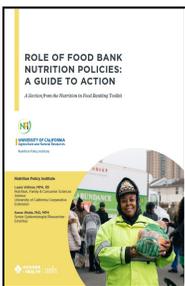
- The current food pantry model fails to recognize the influence of *self-efficacy* (belief in oneself) on a person’s food security.
- A food pantry model with client-choice, motivational interviewing and targeted referral services can increase self-efficacy of clients.
- Prioritizing the self-efficacy of clients over the efficiency of pantry operations is required to increase food security among disadvantaged populations.



Incorporating Nutritional Policies

From the UC Nutritional Policy Institute’s [ROLE OF FOOD BANK NUTRITION POLICIES: A GUIDE TO ACTION](#), A Section from the [Nutrition in Food Banking Toolkit](#)

- A formal, written nutrition policy can be a commitment made by an agency to their stakeholders to provide food that protects and supports individual and community health.
- A policy can be a living document, evolving to include changes to goals and intent over time.
- The most important user group of a food bank nutrition policy is the management and staff of a food bank/food pantry; to guide food procurement decisions by the agency and to promote consistent decision-making by staff to acquire and distribute more healthful foods.



Cultural Awareness Needed

From The [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#)

- Households with children where children were not eating enough because food was unaffordable by race and ethnicity in the United States
- The percentage of households with children 0-17 who reported that in the past seven days that children sometimes or often were not eating enough because the household could not afford enough food by race and ethnicity.



From the book [How The Other Half Eats](#) by [Priya Fielding-Singh, Ph.D.](#)

- Inequality in America manifests in many ways, but perhaps nowhere more than in how we eat.
- Food has symbolic meaning. Often, the same food carries different meanings across socioeconomic lines.

