

Valley Council Food Security Task Force

Nutrition Guidelines

Nutrition Statement/Mission:

The Valley Council Food Security Task Force (FSTF) is a coalition of food pantries and other non-profit providers, organizations, and community residents committed to working together to address food hardship, and its impact on health and well-being in the Lower Naugatuck Valley region. The Food Security Task Force recognizes that those faced with food insecurity have limited resources to buy the nutritious foods critical to good health, and that food insecurity is linked to increased risk for developing many chronic diseases. The FSTF seeks not only to end hunger in our community, but to also address our client's health needs – by providing health promoting food and resources, on-site health screenings, and referrals to other service agencies as needed. The following nutrition guidelines will serve to promote healthy food and nutrition practices for our participating food pantries.

Nutrition Guidelines:

The foundation of a healthy lifestyle includes a diet based on nutrient rich foods and beverages in moderation, and physical activity. The FSTF strives to reduce food insecurity and to provide foods that promote health. The purpose of these guidelines is to support and guide food purchasing, procurement and distribution to reach that goal, and to promote nutrition education among staff, volunteers, clients and donors.

These guidelines apply to all acquired food items – both purchased and donated.

The FSTF members will consider the nutritional value of all donated food and beverage items in the context of these guidelines and the CT Food Bank Consumption Guidelines (attached). Donations that are accepted but cannot be distributed according to these guidelines will be recycled, composted, or redirected to preapproved organizations (i.e. local farms) for repurposing.

In accordance with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the FSTF emphasizes foods that promote healthy living and decrease diet related conditions/diseases. As such, the FSTF will emphasize the purchasing, acquisition/donation, and distribution of the following food and beverage types:

Encouragement of Healthy Foods:

1. Fresh fruits and vegetables
2. Frozen and canned fruits – packed in its own fruit juice or in water
3. Frozen and canned vegetables – no salt added or low-sodium
4. Whole grains
5. Dairy and milk products (no-fat or low-fat), including low-fat or reduced-fat cheese
6. Milk substitutes (unsweetened) (almond milk or soy milk)
7. Poultry, Seafood, and extra/lean meat (Lean meat: contain less than 10 grams of total fat, less than 4.5 grams of saturated fat, and less than 95 milligrams of cholesterol.

- Extra lean: contains less than 5 grams of total fat, less than 2 grams of saturated fat, and less than 95 milligrams of cholesterol)
8. Plant-based protein - beans (no salt added or low-sodium), lentils, seeds, legumes, soy products such as tempeh, tofu, chia, quinoa, nuts
 9. Plain water
 10. 100 % juice
 11. Food to promote whole cooking (oils, spices, flours, etc.) Healthy oils such as extra virgin olive oil, canola oil

Less Healthy Foods to Avoid:

1. Candy
2. Beverages sweetened with sugar (i.e., soda, energy drinks, fruit drinks, etc.)
3. Heavily processed foods with high sugar content and low fiber, such as baked goods, cakes, cookies, donuts, pop tarts, pies, white bread, certain cereals, etc.
4. Sweet desserts (ice cream, etc.)
5. Calorically dense/low nutritional value snack foods such as chips and crackers
6. Foods made with refined grains, solid fats, , excess sugar , added sugars (i.e. high fructose corn syrup)
7. Processed and high fat meats – deli meats, bacon, etc.

The FSTF members are committed to eliminating foods that are high in calories and low in nutrient density from our donated food stream. Specifically candy, soda, and energy drinks have been targeted for their exceptionally high sugar content and role in displacing nutrient dense food. These foods contribute no substantive nutrition and do not promote the nature of our work as over consumption of these particular items contributes to diet-related health issues.

The FSTF is not implying that there is no room for these items in a well-balanced diet, rather it seems that there is plenty of available access to less healthy foods by our client base. Therefore, we will focus our efforts on procuring products that contribute greater nutritional value and that are more difficult to access.

Additionally, the FSTF will:

- Take into consideration the cultural preferences and special dietary needs of our clients
- Provide nutrition information, recipes, cooking demos, tasting, and other resources to help clients prepare healthy, nutritious and delicious meals.

Further, to demonstrate our commitment to providing healthy food, the FSTF has adopted the ***Guidelines for Offering Healthy Foods at Meetings, Seminars & Catered Events*** developed by The School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota (attached) and will use those guidelines to inform food choices/offerings at FSTF-sponsored meetings and events.