



Frequently Asked Questions

“Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System”

1. **Why is Feeding America, with network engagement, updating its nutritious food framework, currently Foods to Encourage (F2E)?**
 - From F2E’s creation, the framework was expected to be updated periodically to adjust to new nutrition knowledge.
 - The new guidelines are a response to food bank requests for a more appropriate framework that aligns with the latest nutrition guidance and a tracking approach that results in more accurate and intuitive data.
 - There is a desire to create a common and standardized measure for evidence-based nutrition guidelines tailored to the unique needs and capacity of the charitable food system.

2. **How were these new guidelines created?**
 - In 2019, Healthy Eating Research (HER), a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, convened a panel of experts from the charitable food system, nutrition, and food policy sector; the majority have experience with food banking.
 - The HER panel reviewed and analyzed numerous existing guidelines, including F2E, SWAP, CHOP, and industry standards.
 - The panel met nine times between February 2019 and January 2020; between meetings, panel members provided regular feedback via email and surveys.
 - The panel asked for feedback from the Nutritious Food Revisioning Task Force convened by Feeding America and comprised of 11 food bank representatives. The HER panel incorporated feedback from the Task Force into the final guidelines.

3. **How is this new framework different from Foods to Encourage (F2E)?**
 - F2E classifies food bank inventory based on 31 product categories, 13 of which are considered F2E: cereal, dairy (30%), fruits, juice, meat/fish/poultry, non-meat protein, pasta, fresh produce, rice, vegetables, beverages (10% to reflect plain water), mix (60%), and salvage (39%).
 - The new framework, while still using the 31 product categories, will find ways to alternatively measure a smaller number of category groupings: (1) fruits and vegetables, (2) grains, (3) protein, (4) dairy, (5) non-dairy alternatives, (6) beverages, (7) mixed dishes, (8) processed and packaged snacks, (9) desserts, (10) condiments and cooking staples, and (11) other miscellaneous items. The framework ranks products as Choose Often, Choose Sometimes, or Choose Rarely based on category-specific thresholds for saturated fat, sodium, and sugar.

4. **Will product from all source streams need to be ranked?**
 - Food banks may choose to apply these guidelines to a variety of product streams depending on your implementation level and strategic plans.
 - Product in Non-Food categories (i.e. Cleaning, Health and Beauty, Paper-Household, Paper-Personal and Non-Food), Pet, and Baby will be “Not Ranked.”
 - Product in Salvage/Reclamation product will be “Not Ranked,” though food banks with the capacity to do so may choose to sort and rank food product from this stream.

5. Are Feeding America network members required to adopt this new framework?

- No, the new guidelines are not a network requirement, and they are not part of the Feeding America member contract.
- We hope members will find benefit in the new guidelines and will be encouraged to adopt them. Having a common set of guidelines will allow for greater peer-learning across the network and can avoid food banks needing to create their own systems.
- Some food banks are already ranking food nutritionally and they can elect to continue using their existing ranking system or to adopt the new guidelines.
- Multiple implementation onramps will be available, and we aim to include some current systems such as SWAP (Supporting Wellness at Pantries) and Nourish as resources to help train and support other food banks to implement the new guidelines.

6. How soon will members implement this new framework?

- This is not a requirement, and a flexible implementation approach will be offered to support full network adoption. Our hope is that members will adopt, with Feeding America and peer support, the framework over the next five years.
- We envision a phased implementation strategy with varied levels of implementation. For example, *basic implementation* may start by ranking their government commodity and purchased food only, *proficient implementation* would rank and track all bulk food in their inventory, and *advanced implementation* would not only rank and track all bulk food, but may also adopt a nutrition policy and/or promote the use of the ranking system for their partner network to adopt as well.

7. With this new framework, what data will members need to report to Feeding America? How will members report differently if they choose not to implement this framework?

- The current plan from Feeding America National Office (FANO) is that food banks will still be required to report poundage through the Quarterly Poundage Report (QPR), including data by the 31 product categories. The default right now is no change in reporting, and the goal for the future is to require as few changes as possible to the QPR.
- Feeding America will continue to publish the current F2E report so the poundage will reflect the current F2E guidelines until we add the necessary questions in the QPR that will factor in the HER guidelines. If/when questions are added to the QPR, they would only be applicable to those food banks who have elected to adopt the new HER guidelines and are able to report such data.
- Over time, FANO will likely co-develop a new metric for Choose Often, Choose Sometimes, and Choose Rarely that will be added to the QPR in addition to overall pounds. We may also track the number of participating food banks, the system they are using to follow the guidelines, and other data beneficial to network interests.

8. What tools will be available to members to support the implementation of this new framework?

- The Nutritious Food Task Force is partnering with national partners to develop a “Nutrition in Food Banking Toolkit.”
- The Toolkit will include information for communicating with stakeholders, training staff, ranking and tracking food, developing procurement strategies, running reports to monitor the rankings, and addressing challenges.
- The HER panel “sought wherever possible to create guidelines that could be implemented in food banks and food pantries across the U.S. regardless of capacity, training, philosophy, and culture. As such, the goal was to create guidelines that were adequately flexible to allow for multiple on-ramps, adaptation, and phased implementation depending on local needs.”

9. What training will be available to member staff implementing this framework?

- We plan to provide trainings regarding both *why* and *how* to rank foods using the new guidelines. The trainings will be tailored to various departments within a food bank such as communications, operations, procurement/sourcing, and partner programs.
- In addition to the “Nutrition in Food Banking Toolkit,” FANO anticipates offering a variety of training supports including webinars, video assets, peer-to-peer learning, and individual technical assistance.

10. Will grant funding accompany the implementation of this new framework?

- Feeding America plans to have seed money available to assist with implementation, phased in throughout the network depending on the level of implementation planned by the food bank.

11. How will this framework be optimized for existing inventory and ordering systems used by members (e.g., Ceres, Primarius, and Agency Express)?

- Training will include details and strategies for entering the nutrition ranking information (Choose Often, Choose Sometimes, or Choose Rarely) into inventory management systems.
- Food banks that currently use ranking systems (e.g., SWAP) and who use Primarius, Ceres, or other platforms will be encouraged to share their best practices and lessons learned with other food banks.

12. Who should I contact for more information?

- We welcome your thoughts and questions to this important, optional change for the network. Please email nutritionteam@feedingamerica.org and we will connect you with the appropriate subject matter expert.

Acknowledgements

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