



# **Strengthening Ohio Communities Through Food, Learning and Health**

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A Glimpse into Nutrition  
Education and Food is Medicine  
in Ohio's Hunger Relief Network

# NETWORK



The Ohio Association of Foodbanks represents Ohio's 12 Feeding America Member foodbanks, and their 3,600 member hunger relief programs, serving food insecure Ohioans in all of Ohio's 88 counties.



The Ohio Association of Foodbanks has partnered with Ohio SNAP-Ed to deliver nutrition education across our network of foodbanks and food pantries. With SNAP-Ed funding eliminated under the federal reconciliation budget (H.R.1), also referred to as the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBA)”, foodbanks’ independently operated nutrition education initiatives will become even more critical.



Thank you to our partners at Ohio SNAP-Ed for your decades of dedicated service to Ohioans facing hunger.

# SNAPSHOT

**Three out of five (59.3%)** Ohio households who visit food pantries report that at least one member of their household has **a health condition**, including **42.9%** with a **diet-related health condition**. <sup>1</sup>

Among Ohio households who visit food pantries: <sup>1</sup>

**34.6%** 

**or nearly one-third** have a household member with **high blood pressure**.

**24.4%** 

**or nearly one in four** have a household member with **type 2 diabetes**.

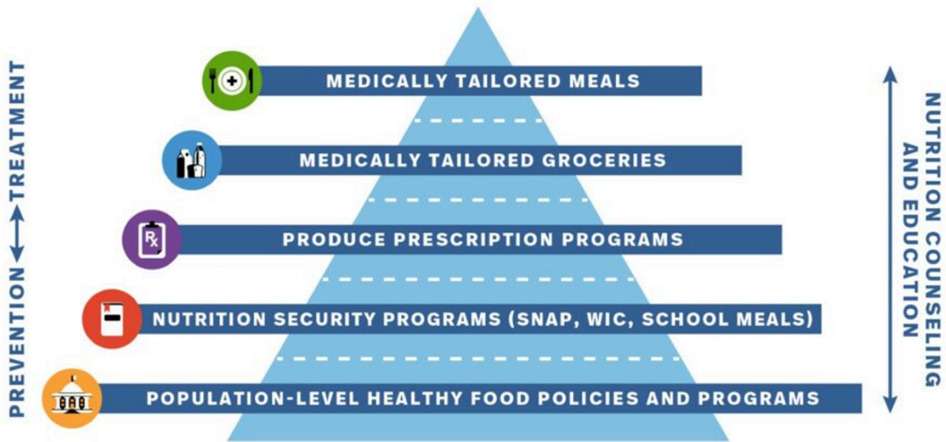
**57.8%**

**of food pantry visitors reported that they have been forced to choose between affording food or affording medicine or medical care,** including 25.6% that reported doing so every month, or almost every month over the last year. <sup>1</sup>

Diet related diseases can often be prevented and managed through the foods we eat. Ensuring food-insecure Ohioans have access to nutritious foods and meaningful nutrition education is critical for addressing diet-related chronic conditions and promoting better health outcomes.

# FOOD IS MEDICINE

The Ohio Food is Medicine Collaborative defines Food is Medicine as ***a continuum of services to provide nutritious foods to prevent, manage, or treat diet related health risks or conditions in a way that is integrated with one's healthcare.*** Interventions may include but are not limited to:



These interventions **all may** be accompanied by nutrition education materials to guide participants in preparing healthy recipes with the food they received from their Food is Medicine program. <sub>2</sub>





Grove City resident Mallory Wright was an early participant in Mid-Ohio Food Collective's Mid-Ohio Farmacy program after being referred by her doctor at Primary One Health. She says the program gave her a sense of community and shared purpose around healthier living, while providing fresh produce that has supported both her and her teenage daughter. ***"I feel more energized, and it's easier to make better choices when they are readily available,"*** Mallory says. ***"This has been a wonderful journey."***

As established food insecurity and anti-poverty experts and advocates, we invest in Food is Medicine services because we value:





- Interventions that improve health outcomes while addressing hunger
- Regional choice in service delivery
- Supporting local food systems
- Supporting local partners and reinvesting in local economies
- Catalyzing and supporting broader health-related social needs and efforts to address the social determinants of health



To learn about Food is Medicine programming happening across our network, scan the QR code, or visit [ohiofoodbanks.org/hungerandhealth/](https://ohiofoodbanks.org/hungerandhealth/)

# DIRECT EDUCATION

Ohio foodbanks provide nutrition education services such as:

-  Cooking Classes
-  Printed Recipes
-  Community Gardens
-  Implementation of Nutritional Guidelines at Pantries

Nutrition education serves as a vital link for foodbank neighbors, empowering individuals with the skills to make the most of the foods they receive, improving community health outcomes, and supporting efforts to address the root causes of hunger.

Staff at the Second Harvest Food Bank of Champaign, Clark and Logan Counties host a cooking class with local seniors in partnership with United Senior Services.

This class focuses on food items often found in the senior tailored box from the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and teaches local seniors how to prepare unique and healthy meals with their CSFP box.



At the Greater Cleveland Food Bank Community Resource Center, staff members conduct cooking demonstrations and taste tests for neighbors visiting the pantry.

These recipes use ingredients commonly available at the Community Resource Center market, helping neighbors discover practical ways to cook the foods they bring home from their pantry.



**Greater Cleveland  
Food Bank**

*"I have been to a few nutrition education classes, and they were so helpful in making sure I had all of the resources I needed. I can take what I learn home, make recipes healthier with less sodium, and prepare meals for myself."*

*"I have a disability, so being able to prepare meals that are easy, healthy, and last is very important to me. I focus on eating well at home, making sure to load up on vegetables, freezing them, and saving them for emergencies."*

Jamara, neighbor of the  
Mid-Ohio Food Collective



# CELEBRATE YOUR PLATE

**Celebrate Your Plate (CYP) is a digital marketing campaign, originally built and developed by Ohio SNAP-Ed, and adopted by the Ohio Association of Foodbanks.**

CYP helps Ohioans lead healthier lives by guiding them through the best ways to nourish their bodies with more center of the plate items. Ohioans can count on Celebrate Your Plate to help budget, plan, and create healthy, tasty meals.

On Celebrate Your Plate, you'll find:



Recipes



Cooking Tips



Shopping Tips



Tips on Growing  
Your Own Food

Scan the QR code or visit  
[www.celebrateyourplate.org](http://www.celebrateyourplate.org) to learn more!



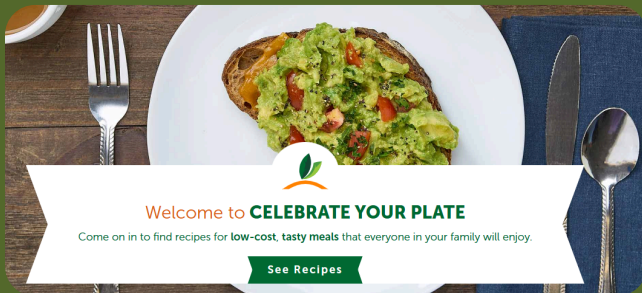
Find us on  
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@celebrateyourplate



@celebrateyourplate



## Welcome to **CELEBRATE YOUR PLATE**

Come on in to find recipes for **low-cost, tasty meals** that everyone in your family will enjoy.

[See Recipes](#)



### Buy foods in their simplest form

Buy vegetables and fruits in their simplest form. Pre-cut, pre-washed, ready-to-eat, and processed foods are convenient, but often cost much more than when purchased in their basic forms.



### Buy small amounts more frequently

Some fresh vegetables and fruits don't last long. Buy small amounts more often to make sure you can eat the foods without throwing any away.

### Buy in bulk when items are on sale

For fresh vegetables or fruits you use often, a large size bag is the better buy. Canned or frozen fruits or vegetables can be bought in large quantities when they are on sale, since they last much longer.

### Celebrate the season with fresh foods

Use fresh vegetables and fruits that are in season. They're easy to get, have more flavor, and usually cost less. Your local farmer's market is a great source of seasonal produce.



#### How to Start a Vegetable Garden

Video provided via Utah State University Extension

[▶ Play Video](#)



#### What is Container Gardening?

Video provided via North Carolina EFNEP

[▶ Play Video](#)



#### Keeping Your Vegetable Garden Healthy

Video provided via The Ohio State University Extension

[▶ Play Video](#)



#### Growing a Perfect Tomato

Video provided via University of Missouri System Extension

[▶ Play Video](#)

# SUPPORTING WELLNESS

## What is SWAP?

Developed by Feeding America member organization, the Connecticut Food Share, Supporting Wellness at Pantries (SWAP) is a nutrition ranking system designed to make identifying healthy options easy.

The goal of SWAP is to educate foodbank visitors about foods that can improve their health, and help them make informed decisions.

## How does SWAP work?

SWAP nutrition rankings align with the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System. <sup>3</sup>

**SWAP ranks foods based on their levels of:**  
**1.) Saturated Fat - 2.) Sodium - 3.) Sugar**

Scan the QR code to learn more about the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Guidelines for the Charitable Food System.



## How to use SWAP

Look for these colors when picking out foods:

Green

**Choose Often** - Low in saturated fat, sodium, and sugars. Supports health.

Yellow

**Choose Sometimes** - Medium levels of fat, sodium, and sugars. Can contribute to good health.

Red

**Choose Rarely** - High levels of fat, sodium, and sugars. Limited health benefits.



# AT PANTRIES (SWAP)

The Ohio Association of Foodbanks has completed a ranking of the following food programs using the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Guidelines:

- 🍏 Ohio Food Program (OFP)
- 🍌 Local Food Purchase Agreement (LFPA)
- 🍓 Agricultural Clearance Program (ACP)



**50%** of Ohio's member foodbanks have begun successfully implementing SWAP, as of FFY 2026



## Why SWAP?

- **Public Health Impact:** SWAP helps combat diet-related chronic conditions by promoting healthier options.
- **Procurement Impact:** SWAP helps food banks understand the level of nutritious food available to neighbors, and advocate for the procurement of more healthy foods.
- **Neighbor Choice:** SWAP allows neighbors to identify and access the foods that are right for them, supporting neighbors dignity and choice.

# HEALTHY HARVEST

The Ohio Association of Foodbanks operates various national service programs to support Ohioans living in or near poverty. In 2025, OAF launched a new AmeriCorps State and National (ASN) Program called the Healthy Harvest Corps.

AmeriCorps State and National members serving in the Healthy Harvest Corps program work to prioritize investments in scaling and sustaining Food is Medicine initiatives through direct service activities. Members support new, emerging and expanding services that address hunger as a social determinant of health.

In the first year of  
program operations,

**50%**

of Ohio's member  
foodbanks have placed  
Healthy Harvest Corps  
members



Greater Cleveland  
Food Bank



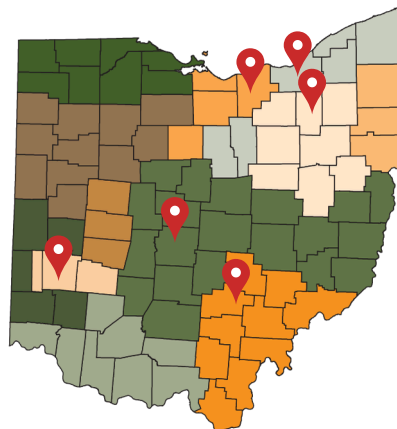
SE OHIO  
FOOD BANK  
A HAPCAP PROGRAM



mid-ohio food  
collective



The Foodbank



Healthy Harvest Corps members may be placed in one of the following positions:

## 1) Implementing Healthy Eating Research (HER) Guidelines at foodbanks & pantry partners

- ✓ Increase knowledge of staff/volunteers on HER/SWAP Guidelines and implementation
- ✓ Increase presence of SWAP in food pantries
- ✓ Increase percentage of 'green' foods procured/distributed through the foodbank network

## 2) Building and strengthening referral partnerships with healthcare providers

- ✓ Improve health knowledge of neighbors looking to access services
- ✓ Improve access to data for evaluating the effectiveness of referrals from healthcare providers to food banks

## 3) Implement evidence based pre-packaged healthy food box programs

- ✓ Provide significant direct service support to medically-tailored grocery box programs




# CHALLENGES

Despite strong commitment to providing nutrition education programming across Ohio's hunger relief network, foodbanks face significant obstacles that make it difficult to expand these services.



9 out of 12 of Ohio's food banks say '**limited staff capacity**' is a primary barrier for implementing and expanding nutrition education programming



7 out of 12 of Ohio's food banks say '**lack of training or expertise**' is a primary barrier for implementing and expanding nutrition education programming



6 out of 12 of Ohio's food banks say '**funding limitations**' is a primary barrier for implementing and expanding nutrition education programming

# AND GAPS

## Limited Staff Capacity

Most foodbanks lack dedicated nutrition educators or trained personnel to conduct classes. Of those who do operate direct cooking classes, the staff teaching classes are often also working on core operations such as food sourcing, distribution or grant management.

## Insufficient Funding and Resources

Very few funding streams exist for dedicated nutrition education programming. This is why many foodbanks lean on trusted partners to provide nutrition education services to neighbors.

Although the loss of Ohio SNAP-Ed partners presents challenges, each foodbank remains dedicated to offering neighbors nutrition education and resources, working within the capacity and resources available to them.

## Lack of Adequate Facilities or Infrastructure

Few foodbanks have full size kitchens, teaching space, or adequate cooking equipment to conduct full scale cooking demonstrations.

## Accessibility Challenges

Foodbank neighbors may face transportation barriers, fixed work schedules or time constraints that prevent them from participating in full classes. Rural areas may experience more significant transportation barriers.

# LOOKING FORWARD

Investing in food-is-medicine and nutrition education is an efficient, upstream approach to improving patient outcomes, strengthening household well-being, and reducing health care costs. With up to **80%** of health outcomes driven by Social Determinants of Health, and an estimated **\$71.8 billion** in annual costs linked to food insecurity, addressing access to healthy foods is essential.<sup>4</sup> Food insecurity is complex, shaped by affordability, time constraints, transportation barriers, and limited access to nutritious options, especially for those with dietary restrictions. Ohio's foodbanks are well-positioned to help close these gaps and support healthier communities.

The State of Ohio can invest in this work by pursuing policy options that integrate healthy foods access and nutrition interventions into Ohio's healthcare system, leveraging Next Generation Medicaid and MyCare managed care contracts to support evidence-based food is medicine interventions, and better aligning services for Ohioans dually eligible for Medicaid, SNAP or WIC.

**Ohio's hunger relief network stands ready to partner in advancing a Food as Medicine and Nutrition Education model statewide.**

1 Ohio Association of Foodbanks (2024), Hunger in Ohio 2024; A Data-Driven Profile on Ohioans Facing Hunger

2 Mozaffarian, D., Blanck, H. M., Garfield, K. M., Wassung, A., & Petersen, R. (2022). A Food is Medicine approach to achieve nutrition security and improve health. *Nature Medicine*.

3 Schwartz, M., Levi, R., Lott, M., Arm, K., & Seligman, H. (2020, March). Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System. *Healthy Eating Research*.

4 Analysis by Feeding America based on prior work. See: Berkowitz SA, Basu S, Gundersen C, Seligman HK. State-Level and County-Level Estimates of Health Care Costs Associated with Food Insecurity. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2019;16:180549.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd16.180549>