

WINTER IS HERE!

Our Winter Solstice arrives on December 21, 2021 marking the official start of winter. In the Northern hemisphere, that date is our shortest day and longest night of the year. Its opposite being our Summer Solstice. Interestingly, our counterparts in the Southern Hemisphere will simultaneously be anticipating the arrival of their summer months.

The surest way to observe the local signs of the Winter Solstice is the colder temperatures and the beautiful and usually bountiful snow that we experience in Wisconsin. I find a lot of joy and amusement in observing neighborhood children (and my own) finding so much happiness in snow play. You can also check your noontime shadow around the time of the solstice. It will be your longest noontime shadow of the year!

For the Farm Link team, it's time to begin planning the next growing season. As a member of the Farm Link team from the Medical College of Wisconsin, we are thrilled to creatively think about how we can provide nutritious high-quality produce for all as pathway to optimal health and wellness. All is abuzz with the promise of what a new growing season will bring in just a few short months.

HAPPY WINTER SOLSTICE!

— Leslie Ruffalo, Associate Professor, Family and Community Medicine, MCW

The *Healthy* HUNGER RELIEF Issue



THE FOOD

Farm Link provides a holistic framework for thinking about the nourishing foods we can provide our community members.



THE PARTNERSHIPS

Farm Link brings together diverse groups of experts and stakeholder groups committed to healthy hunger relief.



POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

Farm Link is leading changes in our charitable food systems that center nutritious food in policies and programs.

THE FOOD

Fresh fruits and vegetables are an important part of any nutritious diet. At the heart of Farm Link's farm to food bank work is increasing access to these nutrient dense foods. Offering yearly growing contracts to local farms and a fair price for farm surplus is also creating important new market opportunities for Wisconsin farmers.



In 2021, Farm Link produced nearly **250,000 POUNDS** of fresh Wisconsin produce.



Benefits of a diet rich in vegetables and fruits

- Can lower blood pressure
- Reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke
- Prevent some types of cancer
- Lower risk of eye and digestive problems
- Have a positive effect upon blood sugar which can help keep appetite in check and help you maintain a healthy weight



PARTNERSHIP FOR A HEALTHIER AMERICA



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PHA

, we will bring the health and well-being of the children and adults we serve to center stage. By choosing to distribute more nutritious foods and beverages, we have committed to solving hunger with healthy meals and advancing health equity for food insecure people.

HERE'S HOW WE'LL DO IT:

- First, we will take inventory. We want to know what's on our shelves.
- From there, we will increase the amount of nutritious foods and beverages in our inventory.
- We will expand educational resources that promote the consumption of nutritious foods.
- We will assist agency partners in creating pantry spaces that encourage healthy choices.
- At every step along the way, we will have access to a health or nutrition professional.



THE PARTNERSHIPS

Farm Link is also part of a much larger effort at our food bank to support healthy hunger relief.

In 2020, the Farm Link team brokered a three-year partnership agreement between Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin and Partnership for a Healthier America (PHA). PHA is a national nonprofit supporting food banks in the transition towards offering healthier options for those they serve.

PHA BY THE NUMBERS



5
MILLION

People reached through access to healthy food



66
MILLION

Pounds of healthy food **INTRODUCED** to the system



12
MILLION

Pounds of low nutrition food **REMOVED** from the system

Both PHA and Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin acknowledge that for many people a major impediment to eating healthier is a lack of access to healthy foods. We know that many food-insecure people are disproportionately affected by diet-related illnesses and want to do all that we can to ensure the foods we distribute support our community's health and wellbeing. Food banks play an increasingly important role in providing nutrient-dense foods to community members in need.

PROUD HEALTHY HUNGER RELIEF PARTNER

Together, we can improve the lives of 5 million Americans.



FOOD BANKS play an increasingly important role in providing nutrient-dense foods to community members in need. We are therefore committed to distributing healthy, nutritious foods.



THE POLICY

To formalize our long-term goals of healthy hunger relief work, Farm Link team members, along with Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin leadership and staff, member pantries, healthcare professionals and donors, came together to craft our food bank's first nutrition policy.

Our policy reflects our food bank's commitment to informed, community-led change that improves the health and wellbeing of the people we serve. It is a living document that we will continue to improve upon as we implement it together:

Our nutrition policy will guide food bank decisions related to the sourcing and distribution of foods and beverages that will contribute to more healthful diets of our clients, as well as alleviate hunger and health disparities in the communities we serve.

Our policy solidifies our organizational commitment to distributing healthier foods and beverages and provides us with a basis for clear and consistent decision making about the types of items we procure, encourage, and prioritize in our work.

We have adopted the three-tiered ranking system based on nutrient content per serving to track our healthy food efforts and inform network partners about the nutritional value of the food they receive from our food bank.

Because of their linkages to increased risk of chronic diet-related illnesses, the foods outlined in our policy will be ranked based on 3 LEVELS:

- Saturated Fats • Sodium
- Sugars

NUTRITION PROGRAMMING MAKING A DIFFERENCE



To support healthy hunger relief at the local and national levels, Feeding America, PHA, UW-Extension offices and community foundations across Wisconsin are developing nutrition programming and resources for pantries and donors that have proven successful:

DONATIONS: Healthy donation guidelines have been created to make donating healthy food to pantries and food banks easy.

RESOURCES: Cooking classes and demonstrations, easy to prepare foods and recipe cards are made available to people who need them.

NUDGE ENVIRONMENTS: Nudge environments are low-cost changes that pantries can make that will increase the chances that healthier items are chosen, like placing vegetables in a prominent spot.

Together with our state and national partners, we are stronger and can continue to support and promote healthy choices!



ABOVE AND BEYOND

Community partnerships working to improve the health and well-being of Wisconsin communities.

**EAT WELL FOR
LIFE PROGRAM
OFFERS VITAL
EDUCATION**

Be Well
FOX VALLEY



The **EAT WELL FOR LIFE PROGRAM** is a unique collaboration across multiple food systems to implement proven strategies for diabetes treatment and prevention for food insecure individuals in the Fox Valley.

It is a part of a Be Well Fox Valley initiative.

Patients enroll in the Eat Well for Life course through their healthcare system. They must qualify for the program with a certain A1C level and also self-identify as facing food insecurity. EWFL is a 13-week program that integrates health education, health coaching, and free healthy meals (providing two to three meals per day) for themselves and their families to drive home the importance of a healthy diet for managing diabetes.

"The program may only last 13 weeks, but the lessons that they take away through education, food exploration and preparation will help them be successful in managing their diabetes long after the program is complete," said Alicia Ulrich, Food as Medicine Coordinator for Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin.

"I am grateful...I provide essentials, but not what we need because I can't afford it," shared a program participant. *"Thanks to you we are getting back on track."*

Participants will receive a weekly food distribution that includes a variety of lean proteins, whole grains, canned and frozen vegetables, beans and fresh produce. Once a person "graduates" from the EWFL cohort, they have access to diabetic-friendly food boxes through two of our food pantry partners, Oshkosh Area Community Pantry and St. Joseph's Food Program.

"I have never cared about me in my entire life, but now I do," shared another participant.

To learn more about how to get involved with the **EWFL** or the **DIABETES FRIENDLY BOX PROGRAM** contact:

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FILLING A SPECIAL NEED WITH THE DIABETIC-FRIENDLY FOOD BOX PROGRAM

Additional boxes can serve community members who did not enter into the Eat Well for Life program, but still face the same needs. Our goal is to offer diabetes-friendly food options for food insecure community members with diabetes or pre-diabetes.

In partnership with Be Well Fox Valley, this program will source and distribute 250 diabetic-friendly food boxes to local organizations each month.



Thanks to robust food sourcing relationships with local retailers and manufacturers, safe storage, sophisticated inventory systems and a healthy volunteer base, we have the ability to create and distribute these boxes efficiently and at a fraction of the cost to consumers or pantries. Our close relationships with our member food pantries, provides a thorough understanding of the needs of the community and effective methods of distribution. We have created three diabetic-friendly food box options that we will rotate each month and distribute to local organizations. These boxes include staples like peanut butter, meat, beans, fruits and vegetables.

These diabetic-friendly food boxes will be available to our food pantry network AND other community partners that serve populations managing a diabetes diagnoses and food insecurity. Each partner will distribute their food boxes at their own discretion. Some will require applications for the boxes, others will allow clients to self-identify.



"Be Well Fox Valley saw a need for a diabetic friendly food box and reached out to Liz Wollenberg, our Director of Development & Programs," shared Tim Farley, Purchasing & Government Commodities Manager for Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin.

"Liz contacted me and asked if I could source a variety of food items that would fit within a strict set of nutritional standards. Dietitians gave me parameters on sugar, sodium, fiber, and carbohydrates. Using their guidelines, I began asking vendors for nutrition labels and searching for box options. It's been challenging, but also rewarding and educational. This program has definitely provided a valuable segue into sourcing healthier food and complying with PHA standards."



To learn more about the Farm Link initiative and how you can get involved, contact:

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