

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

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Local Coalition Works with Food Pantries and Food Banks to Increase Healthy Food Inventory

When your grocery shopping is limited to food pantry selections, eating healthy can be a challenge. A local coalition, [Healthy Eating Active Living–Food System Partners \(HEAL-FSP\)](#), understands the need for additional healthy food options within the charitable food system. The coalition's most recent project to address this need was an extensive survey that garnered insights on cultural and nutritional needs, as well as food preferences and resources needed at our local food banks and food pantries. In turn, the coalition provided training that further supported local food pantries' abilities to offer healthier food.

"The [surveys](#) helped us to better understand if foods provided to food pantries met the needs of food pantry guests. We gained a better understanding of both cultural and nutritional needs and preferences," stated Kaitlyn Streitmatter, Extension SNAP-Education educator and active member of the HEAL-FSP coalition.

The group partnered with Midwest Food Bank– Peoria Division and the Peoria Area Food Bank to survey 418 food pantry guests and 168 food pantry managers and volunteers.

Both food pantry guests and food pantry managers identified lean meats, fruits, and vegetables as the three most desired foods. Both groups also expressed interest in nutrition education and recipes at the food pantry. With the survey insights as a guide, a team of local stakeholders hosted three, 90-minute nutrition policy trainings for food pantry leaders.

The training drew 100 participants, mostly food pantry managers and volunteers. The participants learned more about Midwest Food Bank and Peoria Area Food Bank's plans to adopt a nutrition policy at each food bank. Both food banks reiterated the importance of hunger and health and their goals to procure healthier options. Additionally, Illinois Public Health Institute (IPHI) and University of Illinois Extension SNAP-Education (SNAP-Ed) partnered to provide a nutrition policy training on how to write and implement a nutrition policy. Attendees were provided with templates to help guide the process of writing and adopting their own food pantry nutrition policy.

Following the training, five food pantries applied for equipment to help support the distribution of nutritious foods at their facility. Each organization agreed to adopt a nutrition policy of their own. Additionally, 20% of pantries who attended the nutrition policy training expressed interest in receiving one-on-one assistance to help implement their own nutrition policies. SNAP-Ed, IPHI, and Midwest Food Bank-Peoria continue to support the area food pantries and provide technical assistance.



Through the local HEAL-FSP coalition, SNAP-Education staff partnered with food banks and food pantries to conduct a survey and provide training to help increase healthy food options within the charitable food system.

Learn more about Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) and the Partnership For Healthy Community

Healthyhoi.org

Kaitlyn Streitmatter

SNAP-Education
Extension Educator
kaitlyns@illinois.edu

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, CONSUMER AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

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