

Northwest Harvest's Nutrition Policy:

Deconstructing "Nutritious" in "Equitable Access to Nutritious Food for All in Washington"

1 in 9 Washingtonians has limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate food (otherwise known as being food insecure). **The health effects of food insecurity are alarming:**

- Those who experience food insecurity are more likely to have high blood pressure, obesity, depression, and asthma.
- Adults who are food insecure are 50% more likely to develop diabetes than adults who have plenty of nutritious foods available to them.
- The rate of diabetes is related to the amount of food insecurity: The greater the food insecurity, the more likely someone living in that household will have diabetes.
- Both food AND medication are required to properly treat diabetes. Poverty often requires that one is chosen over the other. This means that people with diabetes who live in poverty are often unable to manage their disease well, leading to complications like nerve damage, cardiovascular issues, and eye and kidney problems.

Most of these conditions can be improved by eating nutritious food. Northwest Harvest is in a unique position to offer more healthy choices that positively affect what food insecure Washingtonians eat every day.

"Let food be thy medicine..." – Hippocrates

Based upon the USDA's MyPlate, Northwest Harvest's goal is to distribute:

- A variety of fruits and vegetables, both fresh and canned - The canned items that are purchased will be low in sodium and sugar.
- Whole grains - At least half of the grains that are purchased will be whole.
- Lowfat and nonfat dairy foods - Only unsweetened milk and yogurt with limited added sugar will be purchased.
- A variety of protein foods from both animal and plant sources - Emphasis will be placed on purchasing lean, unprocessed meats.
- Cooking oils containing healthy fats
- Dried herbs and spices
- All canned and shelf stable foods that are purchased will be low in sodium and sugar.
- Donors will be educated on which foods to donate to help improve food bank customers' health.

Northwest Harvest commits to the following guiding principles for the foods that are distributed to partner programs throughout Washington state:

1. Align food inventory with our mission to lead the fight for hungry people statewide to have access to nutritious food while respecting their dignity and promoting good health.
2. Focus on variety and nutrient density across and within all food groups to help ensure that nutrient needs are met without providing excess "empty" calories that contribute to weight gain.
3. Limit the distribution of foods high in added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium since high intakes of these are associated with diet-related health concerns.
4. Help food bank participants shift to healthier food and beverage choices by providing education and information on healthy food.
5. Take ethnic and cultural preferences into account when purchasing and distributing foods. Provide choices that are not only nutritious but familiar and comforting.

