

Harvest News



A publication of

Food Bank of North Alabama

GOOD FOOD PROJECT PROVIDES HEALTHIER OPTIONS TO PEOPLE IN NEED

During the Food Bank's extensive 2014 Hunger Study, we found that 70 percent of resident households seeking food assistance in North Alabama have at least one member with high blood pressure.

According to the American Heart Association, high blood pressure can lead to heart attacks, strokes, kidney disease, loss of vision and angina. A key way to lower blood pressure, is to eat better, including reducing salt intake.

"When we saw the alarming rate of high-blood pressure among residents seeking food assistance, we were compelled to do more. We reached out to Kroger and UAB to create opportunities for people at risk of hunger and diet-related diseases to eat healthier," says Executive Director, Kathryn Strickland.

The Food Bank worked with nutrition experts from UAB to design a week's worth of food items and menus designed to lower blood pressure. When Kroger stepped in to donate these healthy food choices at no cost, the Good Food Project was launched!

The specialized menus include fruit and oatmeal, wheat toast, and wheat cereal with almond milk for breakfast. Dinners were composed of whole grains, lean proteins, and fibrous legumes and vegetables. The seven-day menu highlights use of spices like cinnamon and Mrs. Dash to help provide palate-pleasing seasoning in the absence of salt.

Registered dietician Kerri Pittman, who developed the menu, said she focused on non-perishable items that included lean proteins and reduced sodium and that would readily be available to anybody.

These healthier items not only help people with high blood pressure, but healthy habits set a sound foundation for younger generations. It's never too early to start healthy habits, she said.



"These chronic illnesses often get their start early in life, and we build on that," Pittman said. "This is food for a whole household. Making sure kids get really good fruit and vegetables not laden with sodium sets them up to not get these diseases down the road."

Along with the food, the Food Bank provides weekly menus and a presentation to help clients learn the relationship between food choices and lowering blood pressure. The materials explain why the Good Food recipes are better for people with hypertension and offers tips on how to make healthier choices.

In developing the menu, Pittman looked for less processed foods that could be used to build whole meals. A menu based on canned items can be healthy, she said, if you look for the proper foundations.

"We aren't raised to think about creating new menus. We go by what our moms or grandmothers fix. I tried to keep the menu familiar and somewhat interesting," Pittman said.

Seasonings were also key to the project's success. If food lacks flavor, few want to eat it, no matter its health benefits, Pittman said.

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Food Bank of North Alabama

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Good Food Project Continued...

The Food Bank worked with long-time donor Kroger to offer the food specifically selected for clients with high blood pressure. Kroger stores provided gift cards worth more than \$31,000 that allowed the Food Bank to order the healthy food. Some of the gift cards came from donations Kroger customers made during its Can Hunger campaign.

"Kroger is so excited to partner with the Food Bank of North Alabama on the Good Food Project, and we cannot wait to see what amazing results from this new, innovative program," said Erin Grant, with Kroger's Community Affairs Nashville Division

Martiel Mullis, manager of Share House, which provides emergency food boxes to 180 Madison families each month, said the people who received the Good Food Project items were thrilled.

"They felt that we were trying to really pay attention to what they needed, what their doctor had outlined for them but they couldn't afford," Mullis said.

With the help of our partners, the Good Food Project items provide healthy food choices to neighbors in need in 11 counties across North Alabama. Next, the Food Bank is considering designing options for people with diabetes.



Fresh Food Initiative



Many residents live in neighborhoods without a grocery store in its borders. As a result, residents who lack reliable transportation may end up buying meals and snacks from "fringe food" establishments like gas stations or quick stops that typically offer unhealthy food selections at high prices. The Fresh Food Initiative is designed to make fresh, healthy food choices accessible to all citizens.

We help families access fresh foods from local farmers by promoting the use of SNAP (formerly known as Food Stamps) at farmers markets. **For every SNAP dollar spent at a participating farmers market, the Initiative will double the value up to \$20.** It's a win for families trying to eat healthy on a limited budget, a win for local farmers and a win for the local economy.

The Food Bank is partnering with Greene Street Market at Nativity, Terry Heights Farmers' Market and Latham Farmers' Market to support this initiative to make healthy food choices more accessible to everyone. We welcome the involvement of other farmers' markets which accept EBT/ SNAP benefits.

Partner Agency Highlight:

Alabama Credit Union Secret Meals Backpack Program

Thousands of school-age children in north Alabama qualify for free or reduced price meals at school. The fact that nearly one in four children in north Alabama is hungry exposes critical gaps in our food system and the consequences will affect everyone. These meals sustain children during the week, but what happens when students go home for the weekend? What happens during long holiday breaks?

Alabama Credit Unions developed the Secret Meals for Hungry Children program with the objective to address the issue of hunger facing our elementary school children. Secret Meals fills the gap children experience over the weekend and holidays with vitamin-fortified and nutritional meals that are discretely slipped into the backpacks of children at multiple schools in the Madison, Decatur, Huntsville, and Cullman school districts. The program started in 2008 with just 18 children at one elementary school and now provides weekend food packs to approximately 2,500 children across the state of Alabama. "The Secret Meals program has grown tremendously over the years and we're thankful for the community members that have supported the program and ultimately, changed the lives of these children for the better." - Steve Swofford, Alabama Credit Union President/CEO.



The Food Bank has partnered with Alabama Credit Union since 2011, and together we have provided over 145,000 pounds of food to hungry kids in north Alabama! In the 2014-2015 school year, the Secret Meals program served children with food packs at 17 schools in three different counties with expansion already underway for the 2015-2016 term. Alabama Credit Union pays all administrative and operational costs for the program so 100% of all donations to Secret Meals go directly to the purchase of weekend food packs. Visit www.secretmeals.org to learn more and contribute to this vital program!

Agency/Community Relations Manager Transition



We would like to announce that our Community/Agency Relations Manager, Claire Griffin, has recently stepped down from the Food Bank because she will be having her first child soon! She thoroughly enjoyed working with all of the Food Bank's partners and donors. We are excited for Claire and her growing family- and expect

that the Food Bank may gain its youngest volunteer yet! We will miss Claire, but rest assured, she is entrusting her role to very capable hands.

We are very excited to welcome Laura Fincher on board. Laura is a recent Huntsville transplant who moved to the area from Lexington, Kentucky. Laura comes with a wide-ranging background from agricultural policy to many years of involvement with an inner-city congregation in Lexington. Before coming to the Food Bank, Laura worked as a program manager at Blessed Earth, helping dozens of churches and faith communities understand the important call to care for the Earth. Laura is passionate about healthy food access for all North Alabama residents. She looks forward to meeting and working with partners to realize the vision of a hunger-free North Alabama.

Family Fit Fest

On Friday July 17th, the Farm Food Collaborative/Food Bank and the Heart of the Valley Downtown Early Childhood Center hosted the 2nd annual Family Fit Fest at the Martin Luther King Service Center in downtown Huntsville. Neighborhood children participated to try out fresh produce provided by local farmer J.B. Turner who brought tasty tomatoes, squash and corn for the children to take home. Of course the tomato sandwiches were a big hit-always a summer classic!

In addition to the fresh produce samples, there were prizes of fresh produce bags awarded at the end of the event. We are so happy that the kids got to taste healthy, delicious food and learn about the importance of a healthy lifestyle! Thanks to everyone involved, especially our local farmer donor, the YMCA and the HPD West Precinct!



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In 1984 a small group of volunteers started the Food Bank of North Alabama from a borrowed desk at the Huntsville Madison County Senior Center. Today we feed over 80,000 people in North Alabama through a network of over 200 partner feeding programs. We are also a proud member of Feeding America.