

Helping Hands Pantry

Guidelines for Food Drives

Thank you for your interest in conducting a food drive to benefit Helping Hands Pantry! Support from members of the community like you make it possible for us to serve the needy. Since opening in December of 2003, we have furnished over 17,000 shopping carts full of food to our clients, with an estimated "street value" in excess of 1 million dollars.

Helping Hands Pantry (HHP) welcomes nearly all food donations unconditionally. However, for those that want to make sure that their donation provides the maximum "bang for the buck" while at the same time minimizing the disruption and workload for our all-volunteer staff, we offer these guidelines:

1. Before you embark on the task of collecting food items, consider this alternative: Cash! HHP purchases most of its food from Northern Illinois Food Bank (NIFB). This food is available to us at a deep discount. For example, the 15-ounce can of corn that you might purchase at your local grocer for 79 cents (or more) is typically available to us from NIFB for about 40 cents, sometimes much less. If the person that drove to the store, purchased a can of corn and then donated it to us had instead simply given us the 79 cents, we could have purchased 2 or more cans of corn from NIFB. **Your gift goes further when you donate cash for us to spend at NIFB.** We don't have to sort it or store it and it never spoils!
2. If you have considered - and rejected - the idea of a cash donation, no problem! We understand that for many different reasons, groups like to conduct food drives. Please read on.
3. Please encourage your donors to not use this as a time to discard severely aged items from their kitchen at home. Most "expired" canned goods have nothing wrong with them and are fully suitable for our use. Indeed, a fair amount of the product we purchase from NIFB is expired. However, products that are FAR beyond expiration date (2 years, 3 years and beyond) are something that you probably don't want to consume - and neither do our clients. When such items are donated to us, we have little choice but to discard them.
4. Please encourage your donors to furnish "mainstream" food items. A can of baked beans; a jar of peanut butter; a can of coffee; a bag of flour. These are items useful to most all households. Not many people are looking for rutabaga, succotash, turnip greens, pickled pigs feet, water chestnuts, sauerkraut juice, etc. Keep in mind that when it comes to taste, most of our clients are just like you. Ask yourself: Would I have guests over to my home and serve this? If the answer is "no", please consider donating a different food item.
5. Open products or products that have been partially used/consumed cannot be distributed to our clients. Likewise, we can't use any product that you buy in bulk from an open container in the store. For example; bulk peanuts, candy, donuts, various types of dry beans. Health department regulations stipulate that all products that go on our shelves must be in factory sealed packaging.
6. No perishables (fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, etc.) unless you have made prior arrangements with HHP.
7. Please consider sorting your donations before delivering them to us. Our volunteers put in many hours sorting boxes of assorted items. Any pre-sorting you can do will be greatly appreciated!
8. When you are ready to deliver the proceeds from your food drive, please contact HHP at 815-633-1504, or get in touch with the HHP representative that is working with you to coordinate your drive to make sure someone is there to receive your donation. Remember that HHP is an all-volunteer organization. Generally, no one is there except on dates when we are open to the public and actively distributing food. On *those* days, the pantry is a "hustle and bustle" zone, with our volunteers scrambling to serve 100-150 clients. A food delivery at that time, while still welcome, is very disruptive to the operation of the pantry. If at all possible, please avoid making your food delivery when HHP is actually open (or about to open).

Helping Hands Pantry

Guidelines for Food Drives

“Traditional” Canned and Dry Goods Drive

If you decide to conduct a “traditional” food drive, we ask that your donation would primarily consist of the following items:

- Applesauce - sweetened or unsweetened – 16 to 24 ounce cans or jars
- Baked beans or pork and beans - #300 size cans, typically 15 to 17 ounce
- Cake frosting - ready to use - chocolate or white - 12 to 16 ounce container
- Cake mix - chocolate, devils food, white or yellow – 15 to 22 ounce boxes
- Cereals – prefer boxed cereals to those in bags - 9 to 20 ounce boxes
- Chicken - 10 to 12 ounce cans
- Chili, ravioli, spaghetti & meatballs - #300 size cans, typically 15 ounces
- Coffee – regular or decaf - unflavored – no unground beans – 10 to 12 ounce bags or cans
- Cookies – 10 to 20 ounce package
- Crackers - Saltines, Ritz, Triscuit or Wheat Thins or generic equivalents – 8 to 16 ounce boxes
- Flour and sugar - 4 to 6 lb. bags
- Fruit - peaches, pears, apricots or fruit cocktail - #300 size cans, typically 15 ounces
- Fruit Juice - apple, orange, grape or fruit punch - 64 ounce bottles or cans
- Granola bars – 6 bars to a package
- “Hamburger Helper” type boxed meals – assorted - typically 4 to 8 ounce boxes
- Instant mashed potatoes - 12 to 18 ounce box
- Jelly - grape or strawberry - 18 to 22 ounce jars or squeeze bottles
- Macaroni and cheese - 5 to 8 ounce box
- Pancake mix – 2 lb. boxes
- Pancake syrup – regular or lite – 24 ounce bottles
- Peanut butter - plain, not crunchy - 13 to 18 ounce jars
- Pineapple - slices, chunks or crushed – 20 ounce cans
- Pinto beans – 16-ounce bags
- Rice - 7-16 ounce boxes or 16-ounce bags
- Salmon - 14 to 15 ounce cans
- Soups - chicken noodle, tomato, cream of chicken, cream of mushroom - 10.5 ounce cans
- Spaghetti - 1 lb. packages
- Spaghetti sauce - 14 to 26 ounce jars or cans
- Spam – 12-ounce cans
- Tuna - 5 to 7 ounce cans
- Vegetables - corn, green beans, sweet peas, carrots - #300 size cans, typically 15 to 17 ounces

Helping Hands Pantry

Guidelines for Food Drives

Alternatives to the “Traditional” Canned and Dry Goods Drive

“Paper Goods” Drive

While NIFB usually has a decent selection of staples (such as canned fruit and vegetables, pancake mix, instant potatoes, boxed meals, etc), there are some items that we rarely or never are able to purchase from the food bank. The following items fall into that category and are great items to donate:

Toilet paper – 4 rolls to a package (not 6, 8, 12 and larger)
Paper towels – single rolls, not multi-roll packages
Garbage bags – 13-gallon tall kitchen size – 10 to 30 per package
Paper plates – plain round - paper or Styrofoam - 50 to 150 per package
Aluminum foil – 25 to 75 square foot rolls
Sandwich bags – self-sealing zipper type - 50 to 150 per package
Lunch bags – 50 per package
Dinner napkins – 100 to 200 per package
Facial tissue – 100 to 200 per package

“Bread and Dairy Goods” Drive

Bread and dairy products are nearly impossible to get from NIFB. Consequently we are rarely able to provide them to our clients. A food drive aimed toward providing these items would be welcome. BUT, before you begin such an effort you MUST closely coordinate this with the HHP staff to make sure that we have adequate freezer/refrigerator space available to accept your donation and that the timing of your donation would allow us to distribute the products while still within freshness limits. This is VERY important.

Butter or margarine – “old fashioned” one lb. packages of 4 sticks
Eggs – one dozen per container
Milk – white or chocolate - 2%, 1% or skim - half-gallon jugs
Sour cream – regular or “lite” – 16-ounce containers
Ice cream – chocolate or vanilla - 1.5 quart to 2.0 quart (half gallon)
Bread – 1 to 1 ½ lb. loaf - white or wheat
Buns – hamburger or hot dog – 6 to 12 buns per package

“Baby Goods” Drive

Wipes
Diaper rash ointment
Baby wash
Baby shampoo
Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3 Baby foods