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December 2021

MEMO

TO: Shared Harvest Foodbank Partners

FROM: Shared Harvest Foodbank

RE: Unattended Pantry or Blessing Box Position

These past couple of years have required us all to think outside of the box. Your innovated approaches and dedication to serving your community is admirable. We can not thank you enough for all you have done.

We are seeing an increase of outdoor pantries / "Blessing Boxes" / "Free Little Pantries" developing in some of our communities. The unattended outdoor pantries have brought questions and concerns from some of our partners, but we felt it was important to share guidance and information across our network broadly.

"Free Little Pantries" or "Blessing Boxes" are small, enclosed structures (wood box or shed) designed for an organization and/or the general public to leave food, and for others to pick up anonymously. Often located in common areas, such as in front of a church or the middle of a neighborhood, anyone can contribute items such as non-perishable food to toiletries and often out of their home inventory. One example of these unattended self-serve pantries can be found at [The Community Food Truck](#).

For food safety and regulatory compliance reasons, Shared Harvest Foodbank does not participate in this type of distribution model. Product provided by Shared Harvest Foodbank may not be used to supply this type of distribution for the following reasons:

- **Inadequate Safe Food Handling Practices:** Because the boxes are open for anyone to access and often outdoors, there is no assurance or confidence in the safe handling and storage of the product placed in the structure by an individual or organization. These food pantry sheds/cabinets have to be unlocked the majority of the time in order this concept to work. This allows for anyone to access at any time.
- **Increased Risk for Contamination:** Storage of the food is a concern as far as potential for pest activity, temperature abuse (even for shelf-stable), expiration dates, and other contamination. These boxes are often not monitored the entire time they are available to the public and are unlocked which elevates the food safety risk.
- **Organizational Liability:** Donations placed in the box by the general public, are not protected from the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act as they will not be receipted and inspected by an organization prior to their distribution. The organization or person operating the self-service pantry may also be liable for illness, injury, or damages that may occur in the operation of the program.

Memo: Unattended Pantry or Blessing Box Position continued

- **Food Safety Guidelines for our Network:** We are required to follow specific guidelines for the receipt, storage, and distribution of donated grocery products. An unmonitored, open access storage box would not meet the requirements of the IRS 170e3 Regulations or the Feeding America Contracts. In addition, any products received, stored, and distributed by Shared Harvest Foodbank and our partners must meet specific food safety and handling guidelines, in which these pantry models do not meet our guidelines.

We recognize that people operating these types of pantries have only the best of intentions. This was one of many emergent solutions in response to the pandemic to provide aid in their communities. As we work toward recovery from the pandemic, Shared Harvest Foodbank is committed to finding innovative programs that serve community members safely and equitably, while ensuring that food is safely handled and safely stored before it is distributed.

Some alternative approaches to outdoor distributions and community-based engagement are:

- Holding hours for outdoor shopping where product is monitored during pick-up and returned indoors to safe storage afterward.
- Outdoor food collection boxes that are inspected by partner staff or trained volunteers prior to be made available for distribution.
- Encouraging people who wish to support food security in their communities to volunteer their time and talents to meet the community's needs through safe distributions. Examples could include:
 - coordinating a food drive,
 - making home deliveries,
 - staffing pantry hours for expanded service

Please feel free to contact Nikki Jennings, Partner Relationship Manager or Terry Perdue, Executive Director with any questions or concerns. Thank you for your understanding.



OUR MISSION

To find, rescue, and distribute food to people living in poverty through an efficient network, to unite the public and private sectors, to raise awareness of the impact of poverty.