



School Food Pantry Guide

A school food pantry is an on-campus resource for students and their families that provides regular access to shelf-stable foods and fresh produce. These pantries can help ensure children receive nutritious meals outside the school day.

Are you aware of Arkansas' Good Neighbor Act?

On April 21, 2025, Governor Sanders signed The Good Neighbor Act into law.

It provides liability protection to food donors, including cafeterias, who donate food such as items approaching their expiration date that are unlikely to be used in time or surplus food from breakfast, lunch, or a special event.

18.9%

of Arkansans
are facing
hunger.

1 in 4

children in
AR are at risk
for going
hungry.

1 in 6

Arkansans
struggle to
provide enough
food for their
family.

Hunger Facts from <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/arkansas>



10 Steps to Consider When Starting a Food Pantry

1. Seek Support from School Administration
2. Establish a Planning Committee
3. Define the Goal(s)
4. Assign Roles & Responsibilities for Committee Members
5. Select a Location
6. Plan Distribution
7. Identify Potential Food Sources
8. Plan Marketing & Outreach
9. Track Community Impact
10. Provide Opportunities for Community Service Learning Hours (LEARNS)

Have You Considered Partnering with Farm to School?

[Arkansas Farm to School](#)

[Getting Started and Action Plan](#)

[Farm to School Committee](#)

Note: The ideas and recommendations shared here are meant to serve as guidance. Use them as a flexible starting point in your planning process.



Why Establish a School Food Pantry?

In Arkansas, 567,110 people are facing hunger - and of them, 168,430 are children.



1 in **5** people face hunger



1 in **4** children face hunger

Feeding America - <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/arkansas>

Seek Support from School Administration

It is important to consult with school administration to determine if there are...

- any relevant policies that must be considered
- an approval process that may be required
- any preferred or available locations on campus
- an existing program that this initiative could build upon
- data that should be considered when setting goals
- potential funding opportunities or resources

Define Your Goals

Set goals that address the needs in your community. Clearly outlining what the pantry aims to achieve helps guide decisions about how food will be distributed, how often, and who it will serve.





Develop a Planning Committee

Establishing a planning committee is an important step in launching a successful school initiative. The committee creates a shared ownership of the project and offers various perspectives when representatives from the school, parents, students, and community members are included. This encourages greater buy-in and strengthens overall effectiveness.

Committee Member Roles & Responsibilities

Meeting Coordination

Organize agendas

Outreach

Promote the pantry and manage community engagement

Operation

Communicate with food sources and manage storage

Volunteers

Recruit student and community volunteers

Tracking

Track usage and impact



Choose a Location

The area should support proper storage conditions to house both perishable and non-perishable items safely.



Scan to view
[Food Storage Guidelines](#)



Distribution & Operation

Determine whether it best serves your area to distribute backpacks to students in need each week, provide supplemental food for families, or both. The decision will impact logistics, staffing, and inventory. Remember to offer privacy to ensure discretion.

- Student backpacks - Offer student-friendly items for weekends and holidays.
 - Example: peanut butter, fruits, vegetables, cereal, soup, cereal bars, etc.
- Supplemental Food for Family Pick-up
 - Weekly or monthly items for one or more meals





Potential Food Sources

School Cafeteria:

Items approaching their expiration date and surplus food from meals served

Community Donations:

Food drives, local grocers, faith groups

School Garden:

Engage students in growing fresh produce, taking into account the needs of the pantry

Partnerships:

Food banks, local farmers,
Future Farmers of America, 4-H

Marketing and Outreach

Outreach is essential for increasing participation in the school food pantry and building strong community support. Flyers, newsletters, and social media help spread the word and ensure families know the pantry's services and operating hours. To further engage families, simple, family-friendly recipes and cooking tips can encourage healthy and creative use of the food provided.



Community Impact

Tracking impact will assist with making informed improvements over time. Keeping inventory logs helps ensure supplies are managed efficiently. Collecting usage data, such as the number of students and families served, provides a clear picture of the pantry's reach and growth. Seeking feedback through surveys allows organizers to hear directly from those who use the pantry, helping to identify unmet needs.



Resources



[Feeding America - Backpack Program](#)
[Feeding America - Arkansas](#)



[Arkansas Cattlemen's Association](#)



[Arkansas Food Bank](#)



[Arkansas Farm Bureau](#)



[Agricultural Council of Arkansas](#)



[Farm to School](#)



[Arkansas 4-H](#)



[Arkansas Grown](#)



[Arkansas Rice](#)



[Arkansas Hunters Feeding the Hungry](#)



Resources



[Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance](#)



[Future Farmers of America](#)



[Farm Voice](#)



[Food Bank of North Central Arkansas](#)



[Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas](#)



[Harvest Regional Food Bank](#)



[Northwest Arkansas Food Bank](#)



[River Valley Regional Food Bank](#)



[The Poultry Federation | Arkansas,
Missouri, & Oklahoma](#)

