

Food Security/Emergency Food Resources:

Part of being a **community** is caring for the people who live there and helping each other succeed. Barron County has an organization whose purpose is to care about the neighbors in our communities, especially those who are facing the trials of poverty. The *Community Connections to Prosperity Coalition* (CCP) seeks to empower every one of our neighbors in Barron County with skills, resources and personal connections so that we may all enjoy lives free of poverty. Our goal is to bring organizations, businesses, and community members together to focus on helping those in poverty rise above it.

We have all had times in our lives when things have not gone right and we have found ourselves in a difficult situation. We could have used a helping hand or have been given information of where to turn. Community members/neighbors who are experiencing difficult times because of unexpected bills, losing their job or seeing an increase in their monthly and weekly bills, many times find it hard to let friends or others know about the situation they are experiencing. They find it hard to ask for help, then struggle to get through it on their own. Food security can become a challenge when life is disrupted, and money runs short.

Not having food security can be a traumatic situation. Lack of money to provide food to your family even if it is for a short time can affect other parts of your life. Emergency food resources are a valuable part of being a caring community! Emergency food resources take the form of Food Pantries, Community Food Drives, Community Gardens, TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program), Meals on Wheels for Seniors, Free & Reduced National School Lunch Program, USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/FoodShare), WIC, and others that may be community led. To find a listing of food pantries and other emergency food resources go online to [Barron County Food Resource Guide](https://barron.extension.wisc.edu/communitygarden/barron-county-food-resource-guide/) (control/click) at: <https://barron.extension.wisc.edu/communitygarden/barron-county-food-resource-guide/>

A food pantry can support clients in making the healthy choice the easy choice. Giving to your local food pantries/banks in the form of volunteering, money and/or food products is one of the easiest ways to share. However, donating the **correct foods** is very important to supplying nutritious food to keep a body healthy. Many community members that rely on food pantries are families with children. Children especially need healthy foods for the nutrients their bodies need as they grow; learning good eating habits to develop healthy bodies by selecting good food is important no matter where they get it.

What food can you donate? Here are some great healthy suggestions:

- **Applesauce**- Plastic jars of unsweetened applesauce provide a quick snack, fiber and vitamin C. Applesauce keeps well on food bank shelves.
- **Canned Beans**-Loaded with protein and fiber, canned beans provide an excellent, nutritious way to fill a hungry tummy. Opt for the low-sodium varieties whenever possible.
- **Canned Chicken**-It is simple to toss this non-perishable item into soups and casseroles or add it to a sandwich or cracker.
- **Canned Fish (Tuna and Salmon)**-Canned fish has vitamins, omega-3 fatty acids and protein, and it makes for a quick and easy meal. Food pantries are most in need of canned tuna and salmon.
- **Canned Meat (SPAM and Ham)**-Grab some SPAM or canned ham and drop it into a food donation bin. It's shelf-stable, does not require much prep or equipment to eat and delivers a quick hit of protein to keep individuals feeling full for longer.

- **Canned Vegetables**- Colorful, nutrient-dense and fiber-rich vegetables are always in high demand, and canned varieties last the longest on food pantries' shelves. Look for low-sodium options. Food pantries often hand out recipes using the items they have.
- **Cooking Oils (Olive and Canola)**-Food pantries rely heavily on these essential and pricier items being donated. Canola and olive oils are the best choices because of their monounsaturated fats and mild flavor.
- **Crackers**-Perfect as a snack or as a base for canned meats, crackers are shelf-stable and portable, making them ideal for snacks and lunches. Whole grain crackers are the best bet.
- **Dried Herbs and Spices**-It's hard to cook a tasty meal without herbs and spices, so drop some in your cart to donate. Stick to the basics, like oregano, basil, cumin, pepper, rosemary, thyme and cinnamon.
- **Fruit (Canned or Dried)**-Fruit, whether dried, canned or in plastic cups, makes excellent snacks for kids and adults and provide some nutrition and fiber. Choose those that are packed in water or fruit juice rather than sugary syrups.
- **Peanut Butter**-Kids and adults like it, and it is high in protein, making peanut butter one of the most popular items at food pantries. Look for varieties that are lower in sugar.
- **Granola Bars**-Food pantries are always in need of quick and easy items that families can toss into lunches or eat on the go, and granola bars are just the thing. Look for ones with less sugar made with oats or other whole grains.
- **Instant Mashed Potatoes**- Instant potatoes last longer and require minimal tools and ingredients to whip up. They are also a favorite of every age group, making them a popular item.
- **Meals in a Box**-An entire meal that's shelf-stable and in one package-dinner doesn't get easier than that, which is a plus for those without stocked kitchens. Look for pasta, rice and soup kits, especially those that are lower in sodium and higher in fiber and protein.
- **Pasta**-This is a staple since it is easy to turn into a meal. Whole grain varieties offer more fiber and nutrition than white pasta.
- **Nuts**-A handful of nuts provides protein and nutrients in a hurry and is perfect for snacks and lunches. Food pantries have a hard time finding them due to their higher price, so donations are essential. Opt for unsalted varieties when possible.
- **Rice**-It is filling, versatile and easy to prepare and store. Skip the white stuff and donate brown rice when possible, because it provides more fiber. Quinoa is also a great item to donate.
- **Shelf-stable and Powdered Milk**-Because no fridge is required to keep this milk fresh, it's accessible for everyone. Plus, it provides much-needed calcium and protein.
- **Soup, Stew and Chili**-These canned or packaged items acts as a warm and filling lunch or dinner and often come complete with protein (meat or beans), or they can be added, and veggies. If possible, try to find reduced sodium options.
- **Whole Grain Cereal**-Here is another popular item with all ages, since whole grain cereal makes a healthy breakfast or snack. Select varieties that are low in sugar and high in fiber.

What **shouldn't** you donate? Avoid:

- Junk food,
- Items with glass or cellophane packaging, which can be broken in transit,
- Items needing refrigeration,
- Expired food, food with packaging concerns,
- Baked goods,
- Leftovers, and

- Items that need can openers or special equipment (pop-top cans-whether for veggies, meat or fruit-are a plus).

Now all that is left to do is shop, donate and feel good knowing you have helped stock a home with nutritious and filling groceries.

Please consider being a part of our coalition to help those in our community in greatest need. We are a 501(c)3 nonprofit and all donations are tax deductible. We would love for you to get involved and see what a difference we can make to end poverty in Barron County. For more information on Community Connections to Prosperity, please contact: Lori Zahrbrock,, Coalition President, 715-736-2437

Save the date for May 3rd, 2022 when we will be hosting a first of its kind conference in Northern Wisconsin. We are excited to use this platform to present innovative ideas that can be shared between communities and have actionable items. Registration will be available later this year. If you are interested in presenting or sponsoring the Community Connections Conference, please contact: Lori Zahrbrock, Coalition President, 715-736-2437