



# NUTRITION POLICY



## I. Statement of Purpose

The purpose of Three Square's Nutrition Policy is to guide decision-making around the sourcing, procurement, and distribution of wholesome, nutritious foods to promote healthy diets while continuing to alleviate hunger and food insecurity across Southern Nevada. This policy helps ensure that the foods we prioritize are nutritious, safe, and reflective of community needs. We recognize that food is not only essential for health and well-being, but it also connects people, reflects culture, and supports dignity and personal choice.

## II. Policy Rationale and Benefits

Many individuals experiencing food insecurity face barriers to accessing the types of foods that support a balanced, healthy lifestyle. These barriers increase the risk for inadequate nutrition, poor physical and mental health, and increased risk for the development of chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.<sup>1</sup> Research consistently shows that fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy products, and protein-rich foods are among the most requested items at food pantries. Yet, these nutrient-dense options are often more expensive or less accessible in communities with limited food access, while less nutritious foods are more widely accessible and are sometimes the only options.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

As the largest hunger-relief organization and only food bank in Southern Nevada, Three Square acknowledges its responsibility to align our food sourcing and distribution practices with evidence-based nutrition guidance and evolving community needs. Prioritizing nutritious food strengthens our role in promoting overall health and reduces barriers to healthy food access for those we serve. By adopting this policy, we strive to promote health equity, improve access to nutritious food, ensure food safety, and reaffirm our commitment to a food system that is equitable, inclusive, and responsive. The policy also sets a framework for aligning internal practices with community expectations and fostering continuous improvement through data and feedback.

The Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines serve as the foundation for this policy and are directly informed by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The HER Nutrition Guidelines provide a framework to categorize food and beverages into three groups: Choose Often (green), Choose Sometimes (yellow), and Choose Rarely (red), based on saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar content. While Three Square uses the HER Nutrition Guidelines to guide internal sourcing and inventory decisions, some of our agency partners utilize Supporting Wellness at Pantries (SWAP), which applies the same nutrition guidelines through a neighbor-facing, color-coded system. Together, the HER Nutrition Guidelines and SWAP offer an evidence-based framework that promotes dignity, transparency, and shared alignment across our food bank network.<sup>5</sup>



# NUTRITION POLICY



## III. Guiding Principles

Our approach is shaped by the following principles:

- **Health Equity** – We aim to reduce nutrition-related health disparities
- **Dignity and Choice** – We support the autonomy of those we serve
- **Evidence-Based Practice** – We follow public health and nutrition guidelines informed by data and research
- **Practicality** – We embrace progress over perfection
- **Community Voice** – We value lived experience and local context
- **Collaboration** – We align with partners across the hunger-relief network

## IV. Scope of Policy

This policy applies to all Three Square's food inventory sources, including:

- **Government** – Foods and beverages obtained from government programs (e.g., The Emergency Food Assistance Program [TEFAP])
- **Purchased** – Foods and beverages purchased by Three Square
- **Donated** – Foods and beverages donated by food manufacturers, distributors, retailers, organizations, producers, growers, etc.

Each food inventory source presents unique challenges and opportunities for ranking and maximizing the nutritional quality of the foods we acquire and distribute. The Nutrition Policy Committee will set appropriate goals for each category in a staged approach.

This policy does not apply to the following product categories as defined by the HER Nutrition Guidelines:

- **Miscellaneous Products** – Includes items such as infant formula, medical nutrition products, dietary supplements, pet food, and emergency or disaster relief items. These products are excluded from ranking because they often consist of highly varied contents, like totes of assorted donated items, or are intended for specific populations or urgent-use contexts, making standardized classification impractical
- **Condiments and Cooking Staples** – This category includes items such as oils, vinegars, sauces, salt, spices, and seasonings. While these products are not ranked under the HER Nutrition Guidelines, they are essential to preparing nutritious meals and contribute to the flavor and variety of meals and reflect diverse cooking practices that help increase the likelihood that nutritious foods will be consumed



# NUTRITION POLICY



This policy also excludes certain products that Three Square does not accept or distribute due to food safety, regulatory, or organizational considerations. These include:

- Alcohol
- Cannabis-infused products (including CBD and THC)
- Over-the-counter medications, such as pain relievers, cough medicines, allergy medications, etc.
- Diet products containing appetite suppressants
- Any items that have been tampered with or otherwise compromised. Sealed products without labels may be accepted if they can be safely identified and processed by our team.
- Expired infant formula
- Homemade food items

## V. Priority Foods to Increase

Three Square prioritizes foods that support a balanced, nutrient-dense eating pattern. These foods fall into the HER “Choose Often” and “Choose Sometimes” categories and reflect alignment with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Priority foods to increase are those that not only promote health but are also widely requested by our partners and community members.

These foods include but are not limited to:

- **Fruits and Vegetables**
  - A wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables
  - Low-sodium or no salt added canned vegetables
  - Canned fruits packed in 100% juice or water
  - Frozen fruits and vegetables that are low in sodium and added sugars
- **Grains**
  - Whole grains and whole grain-rich foods (such as whole wheat bread, pasta, brown rice, oats, quinoa, barley, buckwheat, corn tortillas, etc.) that are low in sodium, saturated fat and added sugars
  - Enriched grains (such as white rice, noodles, flour tortillas, etc.) that are low in sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars to meet the cultural preferences of many of our neighbors
- **Dairy and Non-Dairy Alternatives**
  - Dairy foods and beverages (such as milk, yogurt, and cheese) that are low in sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars
  - Plant-based milks, yogurts, and cheeses that are low in sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars



# NUTRITION POLICY



- **Protein**

- Fresh and frozen meat, poultry, and seafood that are low in sodium and saturated fat
- Canned beans, meats, poultry, seafood that are low in sodium and saturated fat
- Plant-based protein foods (such as beans, lentils, nuts, nut butters, seeds, soy product, etc.) that are low in sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars

- **Mixed Dishes**

- Prepared or packaged meals that combine multiple whole foods, such as frozen meals, canned soups and stews, and packaged entrees, that are lower in sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars, and that contain nutrient-dense ingredients like vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins
- These items are evaluated using the HER nutrition guidelines where applicable and may be prioritized when they support balanced meals and increase access for neighbors with limited time, equipment, and/or mobility

- **Unsweetened beverages**

- Water, tea, coffee, 100% juice, etc.

While many of our programs serve a general audience, others are designed to meet the unique nutritional needs of specific populations, such as children, older adults, individuals managing chronic conditions, those experiencing homelessness, etc. Nutrition standards for these programs are tailored accordingly by the Registered Dietitian, but all efforts reinforce our broader commitment to prioritizing nutrient-dense foods across our network.

## VI. Foods to Deprioritize

Three Square does not generally ban specific food items, and we affirm our belief that foods are not inherently “good” or “bad.” All foods can fit within a balanced diet, and eating patterns are shaped by culture, preference, circumstance, and choice. However, to maximize our resources and better meet the nutritional preferences of the communities we serve, we will seek to limit the procurement of items categorized as “Choose Rarely” under the HER Nutrition Guidelines. These items are typically high in added sugars, sodium, and saturated fat, and are less frequently requested by our partners and neighbors. Specifically, Three Square will work to minimize the procurement of the following whenever possible:

- **Sugar-sweetened beverages**

- Including, but not limited to soda, fruit drinks that are not 100% juice, sweetened teas, sweetened coffee, sports drinks, and similar products high in added sugars



- **Highly processed, packaged snacks and desserts**

- Including but not limited to candy, chocolate, bakery items (such as cakes, cookies, pastries, etc.), ice cream, chips, flavored crackers, and other packaged snacks that are high in added sugars, sodium, or saturated fat.

These products may still enter our inventory through donations or food recovery. We believe in supporting client choice and maintaining flexibility in how we manage and distribute food. However, our focus remains on prioritizing storage and sourcing strategies that align with nutritional quality and community demand.

## **VII. Brief Overview of Policy Implementation and Review**

This policy was developed by the Nutrition Policy Committee, approved by the Three Square Board of Directors on August 15, 2025, and formally adopted on October 1, 2025. It will be reviewed annually, or as needed, to reflect emerging evidence, operational capacity, and evolving community needs.

The Nutrition Policy Committee, chaired by the Registered Dietitian and composed of staff from across departments, will oversee implementation and evaluation of the policy.

Responsibilities include:

- Communicating the policy internally and externally
- Establishing staff training to support consistent, nutrition-informed decision-making
- Setting nutrition benchmarks and identifying strategic steps to achieve them
- Monitoring and reporting progress using inventory data, food ranking metrics, and partner feedback
- Providing training and education to support implementation of the Nutrition Policy, including familiarizing partner agencies with the policy and tools such as SWAP, and supporting nutrition education across programs and populations we serve
- Incorporating culturally important foods to strengthen inclusivity and reflect the diverse traditions and preferences of the communities we serve
- Considering food safety as part of broader efforts to support food quality and health outcomes across our network, while aligning with existing practices and future planning
- Reviewing the policy annually and recommending updates as needed

This policy lays the groundwork for improving the nutritional quality of our inventory over time. We acknowledge that as implementation progresses, our strategies and success metrics may evolve. Future efforts may include integrating measurable targets, strengthening partner engagement, and refining procurement practices to further support community health and equity goals.



# NUTRITION POLICY



## References

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3. Feeding America. (2021, March). Nutrition in Food Banking Toolkit, page 44.
4. Cooksey-Stowers, K., Martin, KS, & Schwartz, M. (2019). Client Preferences for Nutrition Interventions in Food Pantries. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 14(1-2), 18-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2018.1512929>
5. Healthy Eating Research. (2020). Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System. [https://healthyeatingresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/her-food-bank\\_FINAL.pdf](https://healthyeatingresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/her-food-bank_FINAL.pdf)

# NUTRITION POLICY



## Appendix A – Health Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines

| Food Category*                 | Example Products                                                                                                                                      | Choose Often                                                        |          |               | Choose Sometimes                                                                            |            |               | Choose Rarely |         |               |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|---------------|---------------|---------|---------------|
|                                |                                                                                                                                                       | Saturated Fat                                                       | Sodium   | Added Sugar** | Saturated Fat                                                                               | Sodium     | Added Sugar** | Saturated Fat | Sodium  | Added Sugar** |
| Fruits and Vegetables          | Fresh, canned, frozen, and dried fruits and vegetables, frozen broccoli with cheese sauce, apple sauce, tomato sauce, 100% juice, 100% fruit popsicle | ≤ 2 g                                                               | ≤230 mg  | 0 g           | All 100% juice and plain dried fruit                                                        |            |               | ≥2.5 g***     | ≥480 mg | ≥12 g         |
|                                |                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                     |          |               | ≥2.5 g***                                                                                   | 231-479 mg | 1-11 g        |               |         |               |
| Grains                         | Bread, rice, pasta, grains with seasoning mixes                                                                                                       | First ingredient must be whole grain AND meet following thresholds: |          |               | ≥2.5 g***                                                                                   | 231-479 mg | 7-11 g        | ≥2.5 g***     | ≥480 mg | ≥12 g         |
|                                |                                                                                                                                                       | ≤ 2 g                                                               | ≤ 230 mg | ≤ 6 g         |                                                                                             |            |               |               |         |               |
| Protein                        | Animal (beef, pork, poultry, sausage, deli meats, hot dogs, eggs) and plant proteins (nuts, seeds, veggie burgers, soy, beans, peanut butter)         | ≤ 2 g                                                               | ≤ 230 mg | ≤ 6 g         | 2.5-4.5 g                                                                                   | 231-479 mg | 7-11 g        | ≥5 g          | ≥480 mg | ≥12 g         |
| Dairy                          | Milk, cheese, yogurt                                                                                                                                  | ≤ 3 g                                                               | ≤ 230 mg | 0 g           | 3.5-6 g                                                                                     | 231-479 mg | 1-11 g        | ≥6.5 g        | ≥480 mg | ≥12 g         |
| Non-Dairy Alternatives         | All plant-based milks, yogurts and cheeses                                                                                                            | ≤ 2 g                                                               | ≤ 230 mg | ≤ 6 g         | ≥2.5 g                                                                                      | 231-479 mg | 7-11 g        | ≥2.5 g        | ≥480 mg | ≥12 g         |
| Beverages                      | Water, soda, coffee, tea, sports drinks, non-100% juice products                                                                                      | 0 g                                                                 | 0 mg     | 0 g           | 0 g                                                                                         | 1-140 mg   | 1-11 g        | ≥1 g          | ≥141 mg | ≥12 g         |
| Mixed Dishes                   | Frozen meals, soups, stews, macaroni and cheese                                                                                                       | ≤ 3 g                                                               | ≤ 480 mg | ≤ 6 g         | 3.5-6 g                                                                                     | 481-599 mg | 7-11 g        | ≥6.5 g        | ≥600 mg | ≥12 g         |
| Processed and Packaged Snacks  | Chips (including potato, corn, and other vegetable chips), crackers, granola and other bars, popcorn                                                  | None                                                                |          |               | If a grain is the first ingredient, it must be a whole grain AND meet following thresholds: |            |               | ≥2.5 g        | ≥141mg  | ≥7 g          |
|                                |                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                     |          |               | 0-2 g                                                                                       | 0-140 mg   | 0-6 g         |               |         |               |
| Desserts                       | Ice cream, frozen yogurt, chocolate, cookies, cakes, pastries, snack cakes, baked goods, cake mixes                                                   | None                                                                |          |               | None                                                                                        |            |               | All desserts  |         |               |
| Condiments and Cooking Staples | Spices, oil, butter, plant-based spreads, flour, salad dressing, jarred sauces (except tomato sauce), seasoning, salt, sugar                          | Not ranked                                                          |          |               |                                                                                             |            |               |               |         |               |
| Miscellaneous Products         | Nutritional supplements, baby food                                                                                                                    | Not ranked                                                          |          |               |                                                                                             |            |               |               |         |               |

\* Definitions of food product categories are included in the text.

\*\*Use the added sugar value when available on the Nutrition Facts Label. If it is not available, use the total sugar value. The thresholds are the same for all categories except fruits and vegetables and dairy. For both fruits and vegetables and dairy, total sugar thresholds are ≤ 12 grams for the “choose often” tier, 13 to 23 grams for the “choose sometimes tier,” and ≥24 grams for the “choose rarely” tier.

\*\*\* The threshold for saturated fat is the same for the “choose sometimes” and “choose rarely” categories. All saturated fat values ≥2.5 grams should be ranked as “choose sometimes.” The overall ranking is based on the lowest tier of any nutrient. Thus, a grain with 3 grams of saturated fat (“choose sometimes”), 300 milligrams of sodium (“choose sometimes”), and 13 grams of added sugar (“choose rarely”) would fall into the “choose rarely” tier, while a grain with 3 grams of saturated fat (“choose sometimes”), 300 milligrams of sodium (“choose sometimes”), and 10 grams of added sugar (“choose sometimes”) would fall into the “choose sometimes” tier.