



# Youth Pantry Program Manual

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## Introduction

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Because of you, thousands of Oklahoma children receive not only food, but a reminder that they are loved and cared for. The Regional Food Bank is honored to join you in that vital work. One in four children in Oklahoma lives with hunger. The purpose of the Youth Pantry on campus is to provide supplemental food resources to chronically hungry middle and high pantry youth and their families and their families who do not have access to food at home. The Youth Pantry may fill a gap in a community where access to a regular food pantry is not available. The Youth Pantry Program began its pilot phase in 2022 at Rainbow Fleet Early Education Center and later added City Center, Edmond North High Pantry, Epic Charter Schools, Epic Charter Schools - Heritage Academy, Pierce Early Learning Center (Sunbeam), and The WHIRE. This program is an expansion of the School Pantry program that has the added benefits of serving youth and their families year round, and is offered to sites that do not fall in the traditional School Pantry category.

If you have questions after reviewing this information visit , or call Jhonhenri Lee, Food for Kids coordinator, at 405-600-3127 or [jlee@rfbo.org](mailto:jlee@rfbo.org). If you would like to schedule a meeting or call back with Jhonhenri, please use the following link: [calendly.com/jhonhenri](https://calendly.com/jhonhenri).

Thank you so much for joining us in our vision of an Oklahoma where no one goes hungry.

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## **Contacting the Regional Food Bank**

The primary Regional Food Bank contact is Help Desk. In order to offer you improved care, service, and assistance the Regional Food Bank has created a team dynamic that will be available to you through phone call, email, and text message Monday through Friday between 6am and 5pm. Standards for the Help Desk ensure that you will receive an initial response to text, email, and voicemail within one hour. Contact information for the Help Desk will also be provided in your Registration Confirmation email.

## **Section 1: Program Registration & Agreement**

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Pantries interested in partnering with the Regional Food Bank's Youth Pantry Program are required to attend at least one training session offered throughout the pantry year and held at the Regional Food Bank in Oklahoma City or virtual. These sessions will provide pantry staff with the tools and information needed to operate a Youth Pantry. After the training, pantries are officially partners with the Regional Food Bank. Training must be completed once a year to stay a partner of the Regional Food Bank.

### **Who needs to sign the documents?**

The registration, agreement, and training must be received and completed before a pantry will be recognized as a Regional Food Bank partner. The pantry coordinator should sign the Youth Pantry registration. The principal's signature is required on the agreement.

### **How long is the agreement valid?**

The registration, agreement, and training are valid for one pantry year as long as the information provided on the forms is current and up to date. This includes personnel information, location of the pantry, and pantry demographic information. If any of the information changes at any time during the pantry year, updates will need to be made to the registration and/or agreement. Updates can be submitted to the program coordinator Jhonhenri at [Jlee@rfbo.org](mailto:Jlee@rfbo.org). At the beginning of every pantry year, coordinators and principals will be asked to renew their program documents which can be done online. You will receive more information at the beginning of every pantry year.

### **Non-Compliance**

Any partnering pantry that fails to follow any policies and/or procedures mentioned in the program agreement may be at risk of their pantry's program being put on temporary hold until issues are resolved.

## **Section 2: Regional Food Bank Policy**

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Food and other materials from the Regional Food Bank are given to pantries at no cost to provide food to chronically hungry children. Food received by the pantry for the Youth Pantry Program can only be used for the purpose intended by the Regional Food Bank.

The food cannot be sold, used for other pantry programs, used for fundraisers, given to staff, or used for any other purpose other than to provide food to chronically hungry children.

The Regional Food Bank holds the right to request copies of all documentation, physically visits to the pantry to see programming and components related to the program (storage, food, and delivery). Visits could be made unannounced or scheduled. Failure to comply will result in a dismissal from the program.

Pantries who miss three consecutive months of deliveries without communication to the reasoning, will forfeit their placement in the Youth Pantry Program.

### **Training**

The Regional Food Bank hosts initial training either online or at our location in Oklahoma City for pantries starting in the program. Periodic training is offered during the pantry year covering topics such as nutrition education, the food ordering process, identifying chronically hungry youth and their families, and other related topics that may be useful for daily management of your pantry site. Training may be online or at periodic regional training. More information regarding training opportunities will be provided throughout the year by the Regional Food Bank.

### **Media**

Occasionally, the Regional Food Bank, our associates or the media may contact pantries about the Youth Pantry Program. If you are asked by any Regional Food Bank staff or associates we contract with (e.g., True Sense Marketing), you, as the Food for Kids pantry coordinator, are responsible for following the media policies of both your pantry and district. While we appreciate your participation very much, at anytime you may refuse to do an interview. You may also contact the Regional Food Bank to confirm the interview or ask questions. While we realize that each pantry district has distinct policies and procedures that must be followed to protect your youth and their families, we cannot keep track of all of the different policies across our service area and therefore expect the pantry coordinator to take responsibility for any decisions regarding media.

Pantries will also be asked to provide photos of their Youth Pantry. Pantries are encouraged to take photos of food distributions to be used for internal Regional Food Bank materials. Photos to be used for external purposes will need to be approved through a parental consent form. Media release forms and parental consent forms will be provided by the food bank.

## **Section 3: Identifying Participants**

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## **Identifying Chronically Hungry Youth and their families**

Chronically hungry youth and their families are those who have little to no access to food at home.

### **Signs and Symptoms of Chronic Hunger**

There are several signs and symptoms that a student may be suffering from chronic hunger. The Regional Food Bank provides pantry staff with vital tools for identifying the most vulnerable youth and their families.

#### **Signs**

Observation of chronic behaviors and/or patterns will set them apart:

- Anxious for meals to be served.
- May rush to the cafeteria line or show up early for breakfast.
- Will eat anything placed before them.
- Extreme hunger every Monday morning.
- Lingers around food and asks for seconds.
- May try to “stash” or “pocket” food on Fridays to store up for the weekend.
- Excessive absences (unexcused or due to sickness).
- Difficulty in forming friendships.
- Hyperactive, aggressive, and irritable, or withdrawn, distressed, and passive.
- Excessive sickness—sore throat, common cold, stomachache, ear infection, fatigue.
  
- Short attention span, inability to concentrate.

**TIP:** If you have an increase in the number of youth and their families you are serving, wait to add them until you place your next order to make sure you have enough food for the new youth and their families. By adding youth and their families too early, you run the risk of running out of food before your next delivery.

#### **Symptoms**

There are certain physical features which are indicators of a vitamin and/or food deficiency:

- Very thin, bones protruding (calorie deficiency)
- Redness around the lips, cracked lips, dry and itchy eyes (can be a sign of vitamin A deficiency)
- Puffy and swollen skin (protein deficiency)

#### **Signs a child is not chronically hungry**

There are several signs that coordinators and staff can look for when determining if a child is truly chronically hungry. If a student is referred to the program but chooses not to participate, you may want to meet with the student to ask them a few questions.

- Has the student ever visited the pantry? How often?
- Does the student leave the food at the pantry?
- If you are using reusable bags, does the student fail to return bags?

- Does the student discuss what he or she has eaten over the weekend?

\*Please note that the weight of a child is not always an indicator of chronic hunger. Some obesity can be caused from extremely poor nutrition in the child's diet.

### **Referral Process**

Before a student can access your pantry-based pantry, he or she must be referred by the coordinator or other pantry staff. Not all referrals need to be approved, but the coordinator is responsible for collecting and keeping a record of all referrals. You can find a copy of the referral form at [rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp](http://rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp).

### **Parent permission forms**

The Regional Food Bank does not require parent permission forms for participation in the Youth Pantry Program. It is up to the pantry to decide whether forms will be used.

### **How long should youth and their families participate?**

Because chronic hunger could be temporary, there are several indicators that help staff determine how long a student should participate in the program.

- **Short Term**
  - Parents in financial trouble due to crisis event
  - Family evicted from home
  - Other temporary situations
- **Long Term**
  - Family consistently lacks resources for food
  - Family is homeless
  - Child is on his/her own

### **What if a student no longer needs help?**

If a student has demonstrated signs of no longer needing the program or if the family's situation has changed, the coordinator may choose to remove the student from the program. Do be aware that while a family's situation may have changed, food resources may still be limited. We recommend talking to the student about your decision. You will want to make sure that the student has enough food at home on a consistent basis before you make a final decision regarding removal from the program.

### **Are there resources for the entire family?**

There are resources for the entire family should they need it. If a student and his or her family needs more help, you can direct them to 405-972-1111 or our website where you will find resources for some of our emergency pantries in their area. All you must do is type in their zip code and a list of agencies will be provided. Go to [rfbo.org](http://rfbo.org) and click on the '[Get Help](#)' link.

## **Section 4: Program Management**

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## **Coordinator's Role**

Pantries need at least one point person at the pantry who manages certain elements of the program. This is generally the pantry director, a staff member or in some cases a dedicated community member. Non-pantry staff wanting to coordinate the program must pass a national background check conducted through the Regional Food Bank.

The pantry coordinator serves four main functions in the pantry:

### **Identifying/referring youth and their families**

Section 3 discusses signs to look for when identifying program participants. The lead coordinator is the main point person for identifying and referring chronically hungry youth and their families to participate in the Youth Pantry program. The coordinator will want to verify that referrals received and approved are for chronically hungry youth and their families. Referral forms can be found [here](#).

**TIP:** Documentation should be kept in a safe place to keep all papers confidential. Documentation is to be kept on site at your pantry. **A separate distribution log should be created for every month of the pantry year.**

### **Program Liaison**

While this role may seem daunting at first, coordinators are encouraged to utilize other pantry staff to help ensure this program is reaching youth and their families in need. The pantry coordinator will be responsible for acting as the program liaison to staff and youth and their families. Your pantry may choose to use fliers, send out an all-staff email, share information at a staff meeting, p.a. announcement, etc. to make sure everyone is aware that the program exists at your pantry.

### **Record Keeping/Documentation/Reporting**

The pantry coordinator is responsible for keeping track of **program referrals** and the **Link2Feed data input**. Maintaining referral forms is the sole responsibility of the coordinator. We encourage other staff to assist in identifying youth and their families who qualify for the program.

However, before youth and their families can participate, referrals must be approved by the main coordinator.

What is Link2Feed?

Link2Feed is a web-based software platform designed to help food banks and other hunger relief organizations efficiently manage and track their food distribution efforts. Its purpose is to streamline the process of collecting and analyzing data related to food distribution, enabling organizations to better understand and address hunger in their communities.

**Use of the Link2Feed is required** as it will help the coordinator to keep track of how much food has been distributed at your pantry. This is done by keeping track of the number of youth and their families and the total visits to the pantry each week. The coordinator will report these figures to Regional Food Bank staff for purposes of reporting the value of this program to our donors.

**When recording your number of visits in the report, please remember:** Number of visits is the total number of times the pantry was visited that month. The number served is the number of individual youth and their families who used the pantry that month. The number of visits should always be equal to, or higher than, the number of youth and their families.

It is recommended that a binder with this information be kept in a safe place either in the coordinator's office or in the Youth Pantry. Documentation does not need to be submitted to food bank staff, but you will be asked to report program numbers for each month when periodic surveys are sent out. A copy of the distribution log can be found [here](#) or on [rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp](http://rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp).

### **Storing and Distributing Food**

The Youth Pantry has been set up so that youth and their families can come by and select the food that they need once a week. The pantry can be a closet, an unused classroom or a cabinet.

The pantry should be in a secure location. You can refer to our storage guidelines in Section 5 for information about proper food storage. The coordinator should work with pantry staff when selecting a suitable location for the pantry. The coordinator is also responsible for placing monthly food orders and weekly food distributions.

### **Reporting**

The Regional Food Bank requires periodic reports that will be collected online. **You will be required to report in August, November, February, and End of Year.** It is imperative that you keep all your records to ensure accurate reporting. You will receive an email containing the report link and the due date. The information that you provide in these reports is important to people who are interested in the value of the program, such as the media, our investors, and Feeding America, the nation's network of food banks. We ask that you keep good records of your program as Regional Food Bank staff may periodically ask you questions regarding the program at your pantry.

Please remember that we are only able to offer this program free of charge to pantries due to the generosity of many donors, supporters, and volunteers. Without these reports, we are unable to provide these groups with information important for sustaining the program. Missing reports result in an underrepresentation of the program's impact and reach in our state and your community.

***If you do not complete these reports by the due date, your account will be placed on hold and deliveries may be cancelled until the report is completed and the next delivery is***

*scheduled.*

### **Regional Food Bank Data Collection**

In addition to periodic reporting, Regional Food Bank staff will be in contact with you regarding other useful information that we supply to our donors. These can include:

#### **Monitoring Visits**

Staff from the Regional Food Bank will occasionally pay announced and unannounced visits to your pantry to make sure things are operating according to the program guidelines.

#### **Stories**

Donors for the Youth Pantry Program rely heavily on client stories to demonstrate the value of the program. Partnering pantries are strongly encouraged to provide stories of how the program has helped their youth and their families. There will be opportunities to submit stories with your report, but staff at the Regional Food Bank will accept stories at any time.

## **Section 5: Logistics**

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### **Site Approval**

For new sites, before your site can be recognized as a Regional Food Bank partner, you must first pass a pre-site approval visit. Upon initial training, a Food for Kids staff member will be in contact with you to discuss setting up a visit. A new site is a site that has not participated in the program within a year.

### **Pantry Set up**

As stated in Section 4, the pantry can be a closet, an unused classroom or a cabinet. You will want to make sure that your pantry is in a secure location. Shelving may be useful if you choose to select the client choice method of distribution, but shelving is not a requirement for participation. To increase the variety and types of food you offer, pantries can utilize refrigerators and/or freezers. All food should be stored at least 6 inches off the floor, on pallets or shelves.

### **General Storage**

- All Regional Food Bank products must be stored in a location that has been visited and approved by an employee of the Regional Food Bank. Contact the Regional Food Bank if your location changes.
- Order no more food than you can properly store, use and/or distribute in one month.
- Non-food items must be stored separately from food items. Cleaning supplies and other chemicals must never be stored above or near food.
- Secure all storage areas to protect against theft and vandalism.



### Dry Storage

- Keep dry-storage areas cool and dry.
- Keep the temperature of the dry-storage area between 50°F and 70°F to keep food at its highest quality and to assure food safety.
- Store dry food on pallets or shelves away from walls and at least 6 inches, off the floor.
- Make sure dry-storage areas are well ventilated to help keep temperature and humidity constant throughout the storage area.

### Refrigerated and Frozen Storage

- Set the temperature of coolers to keep the internal temperature of food at 41°F or lower.
- Set the temperature of freezers at or below 0°F to keep products frozen.
- Monitor food temperatures regularly. Randomly sample the temperature of stored food to verify that the cooler is working.
- Place a thermometer inside each cooler and freezer. Check temperatures a minimum of once prior to distribution. Daily or weekly checks are recommended.
- Do not overload coolers or freezers. Storing too many food items prevents airflow.
- Keep freezers and cooler lids/doors closed when not in use.
- Use open shelving. Lining shelves with aluminum foil, sheet pans or paper restricts circulation of cold air.

### Pest Management

- Deny pests access to the facility. Screen all windows and vents and keep all exterior openings tightly closed. Seal all cracks in floors and walls.
- Deny pests food and shelter. Throw out garbage quickly. Clean up food and beverage spills immediately. All areas including cleaning tools and supplies should always be kept clean and dry.
- Work with a licensed pest control operator to eliminate pests that do enter the facility.

### **Program Budget**

Each pantry will be allotted a monthly budget with which to order food. **This budget is on a month-to-month basis and cannot be rolled over.** If you exceed your budget while placing your food order, the system will not allow the order to be submitted until the order falls within your budget.

### **Ordering**

There will be an online training familiarizing the coordinator with our ordering system. **The primary coordinator is responsible for placing food orders once a month.** We recommend that the backup coordinator also be trained if the lead coordinator is not available to place orders, the backup coordinator can step in to make sure your pantry doesn't miss the order deadline. Often you may have a surplus of food from the previous month, but you will want to use your best judgment on whether you have enough food to last the entire month.

You will be sent a reminder via text message when your ordering window is open 8 days prior to your delivery date. **If you do not submit your order by 8:30 am 2 business days prior to your delivery date, then your order will not be accepted.** You must contact the Help Desk immediately to look into options for you to receive food. Late orders will not be accepted.

### **Agency Express**

Agency Express is the Regional Food Bank's online ordering system. Once the program is set up at your pantry and staff has completed the required online training, you will receive your login information. This will allow you to see the Regional Food Bank's inventory and select foods to use in your Youth Pantry. You will receive more information about Agency Express from Regional Food Bank staff.

### **Delivery**

All participating pantries receive deliveries once a month. There are two types of delivery: direct delivery and drop site delivery.

For direct delivery sites, the driver will drop the order just outside the front entrance of the building and the site coordinator or office staff will be asked to sign off on the order. **Per the "Direct Delivery Policy," drivers are not permitted to bring orders into the pantry for any reason. This policy follows Regional Food Bank Safety Regulations and no exceptions will be considered.** Upon agreement by the pantry and your regular driver, it may be possible to declare a different door for the driver to drop your order in front of. *This is considered a courtesy* and is only possible if it is agreeable to both the regular driver and the pantry. Upon receiving a substitute driver, please note that due to additional routes and time constraints, this driver will not be able to accommodate dropping your order at any door other than the front entrance to the building. Once the order is dropped off, it is then the coordinator's responsibility to ensure the order is put in your pantry's designated Youth Pantry or storage area.

Please set aside any pallets you would like to return for the following month's delivery.

For drop site deliveries, a designated delivery point will be assigned to your pantry. These are often a local church, fair grounds, large parking lot, etc. Pantry representatives meet at the same location every month to receive their food delivery. For these deliveries, the pantry representative is responsible for being prompt to every food pick up as the food bank drivers often have multiple deliveries to make. **If a pantry arrives late at a drop site, this will result in the order being returned and you will have to pick it up from the Regional Food Bank warehouse.** Call the Help Desk immediately to determine the next step.

You will be notified during registration about which delivery system applies to your pantry. You will want to consider your pantry's holiday and break schedules. If you notice any conflicts with your delivery date because your pantry has a scheduled break, please contact the Help Desk as soon as possible so we can address any discrepancies with your delivery. Accommodations are approved on case-by-case basis. Please see the registration for a list of Regional Food Bank celebration closures. Once food is delivered to your pantry, it cannot be returned to the Regional Food Bank for any reason. If there are any issues with your delivery or food, please contact the Help Desk for instructions on how to proceed.

Notice: All invoices are REQUIRED to be signed upon delivery. Invoices can be signed by administration, office staff, or program staff.

### **Boxes**

Please bring boxes to your delivery site or set them at the front entrance of your pantry on your designated delivery day. The Regional Food Bank reuses and recycles boxes to cut down on costs, which allows more of our funding to go towards food costs. The best way to store and transport the empty boxes is to combine them as shown in the photos below. Leave one box open and place several flattened boxes on end in the other box. If you stack them well, you can get approximately 20 flattened boxes into one open box. Once full, place another open box over the top. This will keep them from scattering in your building or vehicle and makes them easy to pick up together for transport. Please notify the driver during your food deliveries if you have boxes that need to be returned.



## **Section 6: Food**

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### **Potential Items**

The Youth Pantry may provide a variety of foods that can be easily prepared by youth and their families, depending on the equipment and facilities available at the pantry. Foods may be shelf-stable (dry goods) or perishable (frozen). Some foods will be ready-to-eat, while others require preparation. You will receive an ordering guide with item details and descriptions to assist you while placing your order. Please note that items will change throughout the year as they are available.

### **Maximizing Your Budget**

Your monthly allotted budget is formulated to allow you to balance more expensive items with less expensive items while maintaining enough quantity. Please note that the “assorted” items listed on the shopping list will provide a variety of items commonly found on the list (and then some) at a much lower cost than ordering each individual item. For those looking for a wider variety of items and / or if your pantry allows youth and their families to shop for themselves, this will be beneficial.

### **Safety**

To provide youth and their families with healthy nutritious foods, we want to ensure that food safety is a priority. Damaged food should be disposed of immediately. If there are any foods that were contaminated by the damaged products, you will want to throw those away as well. If you find pests in the boxes, contact the help desk immediately. We have provided a document from the USDA on the [rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp](http://rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp) describing the shelf life of perishable food items and information concerning safe distribution.

### **Storage**

As previously mentioned, food should be stored in a secure location. Food should also be at least 6 inches off the ground and not flush against a wall for food safety purposes and to prevent pests. To keep food off the ground, pantries can use a closet, cabinet, table, or pallet. We recommend you adopt the “first in, first out” model. This is when you use the oldest dated items first to ensure that food is not sitting in your pantry for an extended period.

### **Nutrition Guidelines**

We encourage pantries to offer a variety of foods in the pantry. The USDA's My Plate is a good resource to use when promoting a healthy balanced diet. You can find more information about My Plate in the appendix and other nutritional resources on their website at [choosemyplate.gov/](http://choosemyplate.gov/).

### **Other food resources**

Pantries are encouraged to also utilize other food resources in addition to resources received from the Regional Food Bank. To help with this, pantries can continue their own food drives to collect items to supplement what they receive from our inventory. Some pantries also partner with local community groups to provide additional supplemental food items and support. If you need assistance obtaining additional community support, please contact the Help Desk and the Regional Food Bank may be able to connect you.

## **Section 7: Distribution**

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### **Methods**

Pantries may choose a distribution method that works best for your pantry set-up. We found that most neighbors preferred the client-choice model of the pantry. The client choice model

allows youth and their families to select their food items, much like the set-up of a grocery store. This method helps cut down on food waste as youth and their families tend to select food items they intend to use. Foods can be sorted according to category (i.e. fruits, vegetables, grains, etc.). If your pantry does not have the capacity for client-choice, you may choose to pre-pack sacks of food for youth and their families to pick up. If choosing the pre-packed sack method, you may inquire with youth and their families about which foods they would like before packing and distributing the sacks.

### **Quantity and Variety**

As a rule of thumb, we recommend that coordinators allow youth and their families to take enough food to fill their backpacks. If this amount is not enough to meet an individual student's needs, the student should be able to visit the pantry more than once a week. The coordinator should be aware of the youth and their families situation and use his/her discretion when selecting the appropriate amount of food to send home with youth and their families

**TIP:** Discuss your plans for how food will be distributed with staff. Get input from staff members so that everyone will be accommodating to your plan of distribution.

## **Section 8: Volunteer Recruitment**

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### **Finding Individuals to help with your pantry**

While having volunteers is not mandatory to participate in this program, coordinators are encouraged to utilize volunteers to help stock shelves or pack food sacks. Some good sources for recruiting volunteers to help with your pantry include:

- PTA/ PTO
- Community service groups
- Student groups
- Local colleges or universities
- Local businesses
- Volunteer recruitment websites
- Volunteer Match
- AARP

**NOTE:** Youth and their families are not allowed to distribute food.

For more ideas and information on how to recruit volunteers, please contact the Senior Director of Childhood Hunger.

### **Background checks for volunteers**

Any non-pantry staff volunteers that plan to have ongoing repetitive contact with youth and their families (i.e., assisting with distributions) are required to pass a national background check conducted by the Regional Food Bank. Volunteers should provide their information on

the form provided by the Regional Food Bank. Please contact the Regional Food Bank if your volunteers need to be background checked. If the volunteer simply wants to assist with stocking shelves or packing sacks, a backgroundcheck is not needed. Youth and their families may help stock shelves and/or prepare food sacks.

They are not permitted, however, to distribute food to other youth and their families participating in the program.

## **Section 9: Community Engagement**

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If you know someone who might be interested in making a gift in support of the Food for Kids Program in your community, please contact the Regional Food Bank or go online under “[DONATE](#).”

If you would like to host a Food and Fun Drive, please visit our [Students Against Hunger](#) page.

## **Section 10: Appendix**

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The documents included in this program manual are current as of the date of the publication of this document.

**For more information visit [regionalfoodbank.org/foodforkidshelp/](http://regionalfoodbank.org/foodforkidshelp/), [foodsafety.gov](http://foodsafety.gov), [fightbac.org](http://fightbac.org), call the program coordinator Jhonhenri at 405-600-3127.**

