INCLUDE HEALTHY FOODS IN YOUR BACKPACK PROGRAM

If your food shelf supports a backpack program for children, you likely face the challenge of choosing healthy foods that may be packed in advance and are also low-cost, kid-friendly, and shelf-stable. Here are some ways to meet all those criteria.

Tips for Success

• **Include protein.** Good options include individual cups of peanut butter, plain nuts, tuna or chicken in foil packets, and small cans of beans. If you include prepared foods, remember that thin soup is not particularly filling. Aim for chunkier varieties or other types of prepared foods. Chicken-based options are often lower in sodium and saturated fat than beef-based options.

• **Aim for whole grains** over refined grains. Good options include whole grain cereal, such as Cheerios, Total, and Wheaties, as well as plain oatmeal, graham crackers, and popcorn.

• **Include shelf-stable fluid milk or a milk substitute.** Plain white milk that's skim, 1%, or 2% is best. There's no need to provide chocolate milk. If you're unable to provide fluid milk, consider adding pudding, hot chocolate mix, Carnation Breakfast Essentials, or milk vouchers to a backpack.

• **Include fruit.** Fruit options include unsweetened applesauce cups, diced fruit cups (packed in juice, not syrup), and fruit puree tubes. If you can distribute anything fresh, consider oranges and apples. If you include juice, make it 100%. Because juice is not filling, however, consider dedicating your limited resources to foods that will keep kids' tummies full, like other fruit products or milk.

• **Include veggies,** if possible. Good options include cans of carrots or green beans. Be mindful of the weight canned food can add.