Promoting Healthy Eating at Food Shelves

- If your cold storage and hours of operation are limited, coordinate the timing and amount of your fresh food donations with your distribution so that food does not spoil before clients can take it.
- If your turnover is slower than average, prioritize acquisition of produce and other fresh foods with relatively longer shelf lives.

How Extension Can Help
- Connect with the food safety team to answer your food safety questions about safely storing produce and other fresh foods: extension.umn.edu/food/food-safety/program-team/

WORK WITH LIMITED STORAGE SPACE

Storage space is often a limiting factor for fresh food distribution, especially in smaller food shelves with limited operating hours, low product turnover, and infrequent deliveries.

What You Can Do Today
- Start tracking the typical fluctuations in client use so you can schedule fresh food deliveries at your busiest time of the month. This will limit your need to store food for longer periods of time.
- Identify a community partner with underused storage space. For example, many church kitchens have refrigeration and freezer capacity beyond what they regularly need.

Ideas in Action: Vouchers

A great option if you can afford it is to work with a local grocery store or farmers market to implement a voucher program. You can designate which foods the vouchers can be used for, such as fresh fruits and vegetables or milk. Here’s the process:

1. You distribute vouchers to your food shelf clients.
2. Clients take the vouchers to the grocery store or farmers market and get the fresh foods they want.
3. The grocery store or farmers market returns the vouchers to you for reimbursement (you pay them for the produce at this time).

Vouchers offer several advantages:
- Clients get to choose the specific fresh foods they prefer and will use.
- You don’t have to manage or maintain a fresh foods inventory.
- The local grocery store or farmers market benefits from the financial support.

One way to secure necessary funding for a voucher program is to work with existing community partners who donate food to you. They may be willing to donate money to support the voucher program instead, especially if they know doing so will help you provide healthy options.

How Extension Can Help
- Connect with a SNAP-Ed educator to identify recipes (for your clients) that use fresh foods with slower turnover: z.umn.edu/mnsnaped