



Media Release
September 24, 2013

Food Banks Working to Provide More Healthful Food to Hungry Families

Food Banks are working to make improvements to the nutritional quality of foods they distribute, but there is still work to be done. Researchers at the Atkins Center for Weight and Health (CWH) at the University of California Berkeley conducted a study of nutrition policies and practices at food banks. Research findings together with discussion of their implications were released in a series of four articles in a special edition of the September issue of the *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition*. The study was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Healthy Eating Research Program, which supports research on policy and environmental approaches to preventing obesity.

The first article by Campbell reports the findings of a survey of over 200 US Feeding America food banks about their organizational views, policies and practices relating to nutrition, particularly the nutrition quality of foods distributed. Most food bank managers were supportive of nutrition in food banking practices, and indicated having the intent to improve the nutritional quality of foods. This is a significant shift from the traditional view that food banks' only mission is to address hunger and not necessarily health. Few food banks had written nutrition policies. Many food banks did not actively discourage donations of less healthful foods such as soda and snack foods, and most did not specifically track the nutrition quality of the foods in their inventory.

The second article by Ross is based on a more in-depth study conducted with 6 California food banks between 2007 and 2010. An analysis of their inventory data over four years showed promising trends. Most notably, there was a very substantial increase in fresh produce procured and distributed, and a decline in sugar-sweetened beverages and snack foods. Despite the decline in donations of these items, they still contribute significant calories to the diets of the low-income families who use emergency foods. The food bank with the largest supply of donated sugar-sweetened beverages distributed over 1 million pounds of these drinks in 2010 or the equivalent of 208 million (liquid sugar) calories. In the same year, the food bank with the largest quantities of donated savory snack foods (i.e., chips, crackers, etc.) distributed 164,000 pounds or approximately 370 million calories from these foods, a potential contribution to weight gain and obesity among

emergency food clients. Other areas highlighted for improvement included the need for procuring lower fat meats and dairy foods, and whole grains, and more nutrient dense varieties of fruits and vegetables.

The third paper describes a meeting, convened by California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA), at which emergency food network leaders considered and discussed the study results. From this meeting, CFPA and the CWH research team developed recommendations for public and organizational policies that could improve the nutritional quality of food distributed by food banks and other emergency providers. Among the recommendations was a call for organizational policies establishing nutrition goals and guidelines for local, regional, and national agencies throughout the emergency food network.

An editorial in the same issue by Webb, a CWH researcher, points to a growing movement among the emergency food network towards a commitment to a combined effort to address food insecurity AND to protect the health of the clients they serve. Linkages between food banks and community health programs and personnel are showing promise as a valuable partnership.

To access the journal articles directly, go to
<http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/when20/current#.UjkMyxZUBTM>.

For more information about the study, contact Karen Webb at
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The Atkins Center for Weight and Health at UC Berkeley, founded in 1999, conducts evaluation of obesity prevention strategies and works with policy advocates and practitioners to translate research evidence into effective action. The Center works to address factors that will reduce (and reduce harm from) chronic health conditions including diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. The center links the University with varied community partners in order to better understand and modify nutrition, physical activity patterns and other environmental factors in a way that will improve the health of children and their families in diverse settings, including schools, childcare, after-school settings, the workplace, and neighborhoods. <http://cwh.berkeley.edu>

CFPA is a non-profit policy advocacy organization committed to increasing low-income Californians' access to nutritious, affordable food at home, at school, and in settings across the community. CFPA employs an evidence-based, problem-to-solution methodology to advance an advocacy agenda that draws together the anti-hunger, nutrition, and health movements. Working as both a policy leader and supportive policy ally, CFPA continues to build on its more than twenty-year history of trust and success. <http://cfpa.net>

Suggested FB Post

Food banks are working to provide more healthful food to hungry families but there is more work to be done. The Atkins Center for Weight and Health at UC Berkeley recently published four articles in the Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition (JHEN) reporting on the views and progress of nutrition practices and policies in food banks. To access the articles go to

<http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/when20/current#.UjkMyxZUBTM>

Suggested Tweet

Food banks provide healthful food-more can be done. CWH @ UC Berkeley published 3 articles in JHEN

<http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/when20/current#.UjkMyxZUBTM>