



June 21, 2016

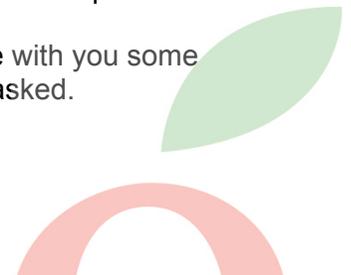
Dear Partner Agency,

I am writing to let you know that effective July 1, 2016, the Food Bank of the Southern Tier will not distribute soda, energy drinks and candy to partner agencies and through its direct service programs such as Mobile Food Pantry. The Food Bank made this decision after researching healthy food policies and initiatives from other Food Banks and receiving feedback from agency representatives, Food Bank staff and the Food Bank Board of Directors.

The Food Bank believes this is right decision to make for the following reasons:

1. This policy supports the Food Bank's vision statement: *"the Food Bank of the Southern Tier is committed to creating a future without hunger where access to healthy food by all is recognized as fundamental to the well-being and success of individuals and the foundation of a strong, vibrant society."* To achieve this vision, the Food Bank will leverage its resources to acquire and distribute more healthy foods such as fresh produce, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products. For example, we are aiming to increase our produce distribution this year by 500,000 pounds, for a total of close to 1.9 million pounds.
2. Soda, energy drinks and candy provide a high amount of added sugars with little or no nutrition. These products, especially soda, can lead to negative health consequences such as obesity, diabetes and dental cavities.
3. Many of the households we serve have members that struggle with chronic illnesses, especially diabetes. According to the Hunger in America 2014 Study, 22% of households served by the Food Bank have at least one member with diabetes.
4. Soda, energy drinks and candy are inexpensive and readily available at grocery stores. In contrast, healthy foods, especially fresh produce, are comparatively more costly and less accessible for many households we serve.
5. The Food Bank historically has distributed a very small amount of soda, energy drinks and candy compared to nutritious foods. However, sorting, casing, storing and transporting them is a time consuming process for both Food Bank staff and volunteers. Removing these items from bulk donations instead of processing them will require less time. Staff and volunteers can use this time packing healthy food such as produce, cereal and whole wheat flour. This policy will also open up more Food Bank warehouse space for healthy foods.
6. This policy supports healthy eating habits and the positive health messages of the Just Say Yes to Fruits & Vegetables (JSY) Program, Cornell Cooperative Extension and other health partners.

In addition to the Food Bank's rationale for this decision, I would also like to share with you some questions that partner agency representatives, Food Bank staff and others have asked.



Can partner agencies still distribute soda, energy drinks and candy received from sources other than the Food Bank?

Yes. This policy is limited to Food Bank distribution.

Why enact this policy now?

Feeding America estimates that today over 70,000 people in our six counties do not have regular access to enough food to lead a healthy and active life. The Food Bank is choosing to direct its staff, volunteers, space, trucks and other resources toward improving access to healthy foods, such as fresh produce.

The Food Bank's mission is to build and sustain hunger-free communities. How does this policy, which is restricting food, support the mission?

The Food Bank feels that the costs for distributing soda, energy drinks and candy outnumber the benefits. These costs include negative impacts on community health, taking staff time and warehouse space away from healthy food acquisition, and the presentation of an inconsistent message with our JSY program and the efforts of our community health partners. It is our hope that improving healthy food access will help children grow and thrive, families maximize their food sources, and seniors extend their ability to live independently.

Who made this decision and who provided input?

Food Bank staff met over a four-month period and made a decision in late April to put the policy into effect on July 1. The Food Bank sent a survey to partner agencies to receive their feedback on the policy proposal. Over 40 agency representatives responded, and a large majority favored enacting the policy. The Just Say Yes to Fruits and Vegetables Nutritionists, Paddy and Elisa, also presented the policy to the Food Bank's Board of Directors. There was unanimous support for it.

What will the Food Bank be doing with the soda, energy drinks and candy it receives?

The Food Bank is informing food donors of its new policy. As a result, some donors will reduce or cut back altogether donations of these items. The Food Bank will be disposing any of these donations it receives.

Isn't throwing out soda, energy drinks and candy an expensive decision for the Food Bank?

No, the slight rise in disposal fees will be more than offset by productivity savings. The Food Bank will be able to dedicate greater staff and volunteer time, in addition to warehouse and truck space for distributing more nutritious foods.

Do other Food Banks have a similar policy?

Yes, other Food Banks have enacted a similar policy. For example, here in New York, the Food Bank of Central New York has had a No Soda, No Candy policy since 2004; and City Harvest, a food recovery program in New York City, does not accept sugar-sweetened beverages and candy.

I hope this letter gives you a good picture of the Food Bank's new policy, its commitment to community health and its efforts to gather partner feedback to inform decisions. As always, feel free to contact me with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,



Matthew Griffin
Director of Agency Services & Nutrition