

SNAP-Ed Toolkit

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Supporting Wellness at Pantries (SWAP) using the HER Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System

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Overview

Supporting Wellness at Pantries (SWAP) is a PSE intervention designed to promote the donation and selection of nutritious foods throughout the charitable food system. The program is based on the theory that categorizing food using simple, intuitive labels and communicating this information at each decision point while food travels through the system (donor, food bank, food pantry, & client) has the potential to transform the policy, systems, and environment of food banks and food pantries. SWAP consists of a suite of tools for food banks and food pantries to rank their inventory using a traffic light nutrition system. SWAP was developed in 2016 and revised in 2020 to align with and use the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System. These guidelines place foods into 11 categories and assign green=choose often; yellow=choose sometimes; and red=choose rarely based on levels of saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars. SWAP can be used as an intervention in multiple levels of the charitable food system to promote food justice and health equity.

Target Behavior: Healthy Eating, Food Insecurity/Food Assistance **Intervention Type:** PSE Change

Intervention Reach and Adoption

SWAP targets food pantries and similar food programs that serve adult populations of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. SWAP's traffic light system can be understood regardless of English proficiency or literacy level. In recognizing that many food pantries may not have computers or Wi-Fi access, SWAP includes posters and handouts so volunteers can rank food with or without the use of technology. To date, over 200 food pantries have implemented SWAP, and over 30 food banks are using the HER Nutrition Guidelines with SWAP. Once SWAP is implemented, volunteers and staff continue to rank foods, and new staff or volunteers can be trained by current staff/volunteers. **Setting:** Community, USDA program sites (not National School Lunch Program), Food Pantries, Other: Food Banks. **Target Audience:** Parents/Mothers/Fathers, Adults, Older Adults, Homeless/Food Pantry Clients, Other: Stakeholders and decision makers at every level of the charitable food system, from food pantry volunteers to food bank staff to food donors.

Race/Ethnicity: All

Intervention Components

Key intervention components for food pantries include training staff and volunteers to accurately rank food using SWAP, organizing shelves and ensuring the proper SWAP label is used for each item using shelf tags, and displaying SWAP posters so clients understand what each ranking means. Pantry staff use SWAP to solicit and order healthier food. Timing for implementation depends on the pantry and their capacity. Pantry staff can use creativity to design the layout and shelving with SWAP signage. For food banks, key components to implementation include training staff to rank food, ranking food using SWAP, entering SWAP rankings into the inventory system, and displaying those rankings when pantries order from the food bank. Implementation timelines vary and can range from two months to one year or longer. Food banks that have nutrition policies and strong leadership support often have the shortest timelines.

Intervention Materials

Materials include:

- How to Rank Foods Using SWAP Guide
- SWAP Calculator: Excel sheet with algorithm to aid with ranking food
- SWAP flyer for clients
- Healthy donation list
- HER Nutrition Guidelines (<https://bit.ly/34VoLZq>)
- SWAP Toolkit (<https://foodshare.org/swap-toolkit>)
- Using SWAP in Food Pantries Video (<https://bit.ly/3KqieGx>)
- Feeding America's Nutrition in Food Banking Toolkit (<https://bit.ly/3KitLY4>)
- Implementing HER Nutrition Guidelines in Food Banks

Intervention Costs

The intervention is available at no cost. Those interested can email swap@ctfoodshare.org. Kits including laminated posters, ranking guide and shelf tags can be purchased from the Institute for a nominal fee.

Evidence Summary

In the development of SWAP, focus groups of pantry staff/volunteers provided feedback on perceived benefits and barriers by using spotlight ranking to promote healthy foods. Then a sample of 230 clients were surveyed to learn about food preferences when at food pantries, the results of which showed demand for nutritious food. SWAP was pilot tested with 6 Connecticut pantries and feedback informed the messaging and implementation. In the 6 pilot pantries, a brief survey with food pantry staff and volunteers was conducted approximately 3 months after SWAP was implemented to measure their satisfaction with SWAP, ease of use, and perceived satisfaction among clients. The survey also included open-ended questions to gather qualitative feedback about suggestions for improving the system. Overall, the reaction to the new SWAP system was very positive and survey results helped develop additional training materials for future pantries. The HER Nutrition Guideline expert panel was purposefully created to include 50% nutrition experts and 50% experts/practitioners in the charitable food system. Then a Feeding America task force reviewed the provided feedback and adopted the guidelines. SWAP was then revised to completely align with the HER Nutrition Guidelines.

Research on SWAP shows that the availability of healthy food increases significantly when nutrition ranking is used, and it works at every level of the charitable food system. Food pantries order more nutritious food from the food bank when the food bank ranks their inventory using SWAP and displays that information in their online ordering system. Among the largest changes were increases in orders of fresh produce, brown rice, low-fat dairy and low-fat meats and decreases in orders of sugary juice drinks, canned fruit with added sugar, higher fat dairy and higher fat meats. After food pantries implement SWAP, the nutritional quality of their inventory supply improves, and food pantry clients selected more green items and fewer red items than before implementation.

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Evidence-based Approach: Research-Tested

Evaluation Indicators

Based on the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework, the following outcome indicators can be used to evaluate

intervention progress and success.

Readiness and Capacity – Short Term (ST)	Changes – Medium Term (MT)	Effectiveness and Maintenance – Long Term (LT)	Population Results (R)
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Individual

Environmental
Settings

[MT5](#)

Sectors of
Influence

- MT5a: Number and proportion of sites that make at least one change in writing or practice to expand access or improve appeal for healthy eating
- MT5f: Total potential number of persons who encounter the improved environment or are affected by the policy change on a regular basis and are assumed to be influenced by it.

Evaluation Materials

Evaluation materials include:

- Survey of client food preferences for planning to implement SWAP and understand client preferences.
- Survey of client feedback and satisfaction to assess client knowledge and attitudes around SWAP.
- Inventory snapshot worksheet for pantries to record inventory rankings and change over time.
- Inventory reporting for food banks to run reports, set benchmarks, and display change in their inventory nutritional quality over time.

Additional Information

The SWAP website, https://site.foodshare.org/site/PageServer?pagename=2017_programs_swap, includes more information regarding partner programs already using SWAP, and how to use SWAP in food banks. **Contact Person(s):** Brittney Cavaliere Email: BCavaliere@ctfoodshare.org Phone: 860.856.4309