



## Visiting a Food Pantry Myth vs. Reality

**Myth:** You have to be unemployed or your children receiving free or reduced lunch to be eligible for pantry services.

**Reality:** Eligibility for our services is based on your self-attested need. You do not need to have a referral, and income is not a factor to receive food. You may be asked questions about how many people live with you or where you live. This data is collected for statistical purposes only and will not impact your eligibility to receive services.

**Myth:** You have to be eligible for SNAP (food stamps) in order to be eligible for food pantry services.

**Reality:** You do not need to be receiving other assistance to visit a food pantry. SNAP is an 'entitlement program' based on your income eligibility that is not capped at a particular number of participants. While SNAP is based on income, it often only covers the first two weeks of a family's food needs. We encourage our neighbors in need to utilize SNAP and other community resources to ensure your needs are met. Pantries may ask if you receive SNAP to ensure that you have access to available services. SNAP Outreach Coordinators are available by phone to help 844-600-7627 or email; [snap@northernilfoodbank.org](mailto:snap@northernilfoodbank.org).

**Myth:** You have to be homeless to qualify for food pantry services.

**Reality:** We recognize that the link between hunger, homelessness and unemployment is widely used as an illustration of who may visit a pantry, however, you do not have to be homeless to use food pantry services. In fact, the vast majority of food pantry clients are employed, underemployed or recently unemployed. More than 60 percent of our neighbors in Northern Illinois have had to choose between paying for food and paying their rent or mortgage at least once in the past 12 months.



## Visiting a Food Pantry Myth vs. Reality (continued)

**Myth:** The food pantry only provides a prepackaged box of canned goods.

**Reality:** Pantries provide perishable and non-perishable foods including: dairy products, vegetables, fruits, baked goods, canned goods, dried goods, and frozen meats. While some pantries distribute these items in a pre-packaged form, many of the pantries in Northern Illinois operate a client choice, shopping based distribution method.

**Myth:** Food pantries receive funding and food from the government.

**Reality:** The Northern Illinois Food Bank receives most of its food from donations (82 percent) and supplements this with purchased food (9 percent) and government commodities (9 percent). These foods are available for pantries to shop for their clients. Some pantries participate in the USDA commodity program which does require clients to self-attest to income (no verification), but the government does not track your visits.

**Myth:** You can only visit one pantry each month.

**Reality:** While some pantries restrict visits due to the volume of clientele and available food, you are welcome to visit multiple pantries to ensure your needs are met during the month. Pantries do not share who comes to visit, and there is no overall count of the amount of agencies clients might have used.

**Myth:** People who visit the pantry are chronically poor and abuse the services.

**Reality:** Northern Illinois Food Bank and our member agencies (food pantries) work under the assumption that everyone that comes to a food pantry is in need of food. From families of all types to seniors to disabled citizens and even students, many people visit pantries and could be your neighbors, coworkers and friends. Asking for help is not easy, but food pantries see new clients every week who have never requested services before. Clients who visit a pantry do so at times of their highest need. Our role is to treat everyone seeking help with dignity and respect.