Community Health Commitment

Nutrition guidelines for the receipt and distribution of food

Statement of Purpose

Foodlink believes that access to nutritious food is fundamental to health and well-being. As the sole food bank and food resource center for our 10-county service area, we leverage the power of food to end hunger and build healthier communities.

Our Community Health Commitment reflects this belief by guiding the types of food we source, distribute, and promote. We are committed to increasing access to fresh, nutritious, and culturally responsive foods while reducing the distribution of products that may contribute to poor health outcomes.

This commitment provides a framework for Foodlink staff, member agencies, donors, government partners, and the broader community, ensuring that our food distribution practices support both immediate food access and long-term community health.

Policy Rationale and Benefits

Since 1978, Foodlink has worked to address hunger. Today, we recognize that food security and health are inseparable. Access to nutritious food is essential not only for relieving hunger[i,ii], but also for preventing and managing chronic diseases and supporting overall well-being. We join Feeding America and food banks nationwide[iii] in recognizing the important role food banks play in advancing both food security and community health.

Foodlink is dedicated to promoting healthy dietary patterns and providing nutrient-dense, healthful foods, while addressing the hunger needs of the population being served in a culturally responsive way.[iv,v] Certain foods and beverages, such as ultra-processed, sugar-sweetened or heavily-salted foods can be economical and easily available but have been known to contribute to obesity and other chronic diseases.[vi] Often, clients report that they have easy access to these types of foods but not necessarily to other healthy options.[vii, viii]

Foodlink works both to increase access to health-promoting foods like fruits and vegetables and to decrease the amount of non-nutritious food in the food system. Foodlink understands that nutrition-focused[i,ii] culturally-responsive[iv,v] food banking is client-focused food banking, and we want our clients to know that their health and preferences for more healthful, culturally-centered foods are among our highest considerations in procuring food.

Implementation

Foodlink ranks the relative nutritional quality of the foods in our inventory to assist our community partners in choosing items that best meet the needs of their clients. The system, called The Healthy Choice, incorporates evidence-based research about which foods are the most and least supportive and impactful to long-term individual health.

The color-coded ranking — green: choose often, yellow: choose sometimes, and red: choose rarely — is viewed via our members' online shopping list. (See page 3 for complete ranking.)

The Healthy Choice is not a fixed and definitive ruling on all items in every circumstance, as there may be unique situations or products that require a decision from Foodlink's Nutrition Resource Manager that fall outside the bounds of the ranking. Such decisions would be based on the Nutrition Resource Manager's knowledge and discretion to make appropriate decisions for Foodlink and its member agencies, along with insights and guidance from our on-site dietitians.

This ranking provides staff, vendors, donors, and community members with information about the types of food that Foodlink will procure, encourage, and prioritize. It demonstrates good corporate citizenship, models responsible behavior, and will be used for communication with donors and other suppliers.

Foodlink is committed to reducing the distribution of items ranked red and increasing distribution of those ranked green.

Food and Beverage Inventory

a) Types Included:

- Donated from retailers and manufacturers
- Purchased by Foodlink
- Supplied by government sources (i.e. USDA TEFAP)

b) Types Excluded:

- Heterogeneous donations

Reducing Distribution of Red-ranked Items

Foods and beverages with large amounts of saturated fat, added sugars, and sodium are ranked by Foodlink in the red category.

Foodlink commits to:

- Decline full pallets of sugar-sweetened beverages and candy for distribution to our network
- Ensure meals prepared by Foodlink's Community Kitchen contain no artificial sweeteners, flavors, colors, or high-fructose corn syrup
- Limit the total red-ranked pounds distributed to our network to no more than 5% of the total ranked inventory

Increasing Distribution of Green-ranked Items

The Healthy Choice is based upon evidence-based research,[vii] which emphasizes the importance of making the most healthful options available to consumers as often as possible.

Foodlink commits to:

- Provide only fresh or frozen fruit and vegetable servings from the Foodlink Community Kitchen
- Keep water on our shopping list whenever possible as a healthy option for clients, and in case of emergency
- Ensure that a minimum of 95% of all ranked inventory meets the criteria of the green and yellow categories

Mission. To leverage the power of food to end hunger and build healthier communities.

Core Belief. We believe that good food is a human right, and that everyone deserves to feed themselves and their families in dignity.

Cultural Foods Considerations

Foodlink prioritizes distributing as many culturally relevant foods as possible to the communities that we serve. Additionally, Foodlink aims to provide guidance to member agencies about culturally relevant foods that they can choose from us or procure through other sources.

Our "Flavors of Diversity: Cultural Foods Handbook" provides guidance for both Foodlink and our member agencies toward this effort. (See page 9 for the guide.)

References

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vi U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2020–2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. 9th Edition. December 2020. Available at https://odphp.health.gov/our-work/nutrition-physical-activity/dietary-guidelines/previous-dietary-guidelines/2020. Accessed September 3, 2026.

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The Healthy Choice BY FOODLINK

Foodlink is committed to making the healthy choice the easy choice by increasing distribution of fresh, nutritious foods and decreasing distribution of non-nutritious foods and beverages.

This nutrition ranking serves as a guide

For ranking Foodlink product inventory and steering procurement decisions

To help our member agencies and partners choose healthy options for their clients and solicit nutritious donations from the community

To help community members make healthy choices for their families

This guide ranks common foods within the five food groups: Fruits, Vegetables, Grains, Protein, and Dairy. This ranking also tackles nutrition content for products that do not fit within these confines.

Particular attention is paid to sugar, sodium, and saturated fat content, which, when consumed in excess, can contribute to chronic illnesses, such as obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease.

CHOOSE OFTEN

***Most nutritious**, such as:*

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Canned beans and vegetables with no salt added
- Whole grains
- Lean meats
- Milk, low-fat or non-fat, unflavored

CHOOSE SOMETIMES

***Moderately nutritious**, such as:*

- Canned beans and vegetables with ≤140mg sodium/serving
- Refined grains
- Whole or ground meats <90% lean
- Flavored milk, low-fat or non-fat

CHOOSE RARELY

***Least nutritious**, such as:*

- Canned beans and vegetables with >140mg sodium/serving
- Canned fruit in syrup
- Processed meats, such as ham, bacon, sausage
- Flavored milk, 2% or higher
- Mixed meals, such as macaroni and cheese
- Candy

The Healthy Choice BY FOODLINK

VEGETABLES

CHOOSE OFTEN	CHOOSE SOMETIMES	CHOOSE RARELY
• **Fresh,** including value-added processed • **Frozen with no added sugar or sauce** • **Canned or jarred with no salt added** • **Tomato/pasta sauce**	• **100% juice** • **Canned or jarred with ≤140mg sodium/ serving** • **Frozen with added salt or sauce and ≤140mg sodium/serving** • **Dried/dehydrated with no salt added,** including mashed potato flakes	• **Canned or frozen with added salt or sauce and >140mg sodium/ serving** • **Canned or jarred in heavy syrup or light syrup,** e.g. yams • **Dried/dehydrated with salt added,** including flavored mashed potato flakes and au gratin potatoes • **Breaded or fried**

TIP: Canned vegetables with added salt (sodium) can be part of a healthy diet. When possible, choose No Salt Added. When not possible, rinse canned vegetables off thoroughly in a strainer/colander to greatly reduce sodium intake.

Breaded can be a healthy option if the food is baked rather than fried.

FRUITS

CHOOSE OFTEN	CHOOSE SOMETIMES	CHOOSE RARELY
• **Fresh,** including value-added processed • **Frozen with no added sugar or sauce**	• **100% juice** • **Canned or jarred in water or 100% juice** • **Unsweetened applesauce** • **Dried/dehydrated**	• **Canned or jarred in heavy syrup or light syrup** • **Sweetened applesauce** • **Frozen with added sugar**

TIP: Despite being packed with important vitamins and minerals, 100% juice, canned fruit in 100% juice, unsweetened applesauce, and dried fruit, have a high concentration of natural sugar and are therefore listed as Yellow instead of Green.

In 2019, Healthy Eating Research group released the following recommendation for children and juice:

- **Infants less than 12 months** old should not consume juice.
- **Children ages 1 – 3** should consume no more than ½ cup (4 ounces) of 100% juice per day.
- **Children ages 4 – 5** should consume no more than ¾ cup (6 ounces) of 100% juice per day.

These amounts are upper limits, not minimum requirements.

For more information, see: HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org

PROTEIN

The Healthy Choice BY FOODLINK

CHOOSE OFTEN

- **Dry beans and lentils**
- **Canned beans with no salt added**
- **Lean, high protein meats**
  - fresh or frozen
  - no breading or added seasoning containing salt or sodium

  Includes:
  - chicken (no packages with just wings)
  - turkey
  - beef (no oxtails or ribs)
  - venison
  - buffalo
  - pork (no ribs, ham hocks)
- **Ground beef and ground turkey ≥90% lean**
- **Fish and shellfish**
- **Canned tuna, chicken, salmon packed in water**
- **Eggs**
- **Tofu, tempeh**
- **Nuts and seeds with no salt or seasoning added**
- **Peanut butter, sunflower butter, almond butter, natural with no added salt, sugar, or oil**

CHOOSE SOMETIMES

- **Canned beans with ≤140mg sodium/ serving**
- **Peanut butter, sunflower butter, almond butter with added salt, sugar or oil**
- **Canned tuna, chicken, salmon packed in oil**
- **Whole or ground meats <90% lean**
- **Breaded or seasoned meats with ≤140mg sodium/serving,** e.g. nuggets, tenders
- **Luncheon/deli meats with ≤140mg sodium/ serving**
- **Canned pork or other meat with ≤140mg sodium/serving**

CHOOSE RARELY

- **Canned beans with >140mg sodium/serving**
- **Ham**
- **Spam**
- **Bacon**
- **Sausage**
- **Hot dogs**
- **Pepperoni**
- **Luncheon/deli meats >140mg sodium/serving**
- **Breaded or seasoned meats with >140mg sodium/serving,** e.g. nuggets, tenders
- **Canned ham, hash**
- **Canned pork or other meat with >140mg sodium/serving**
- **Canned stew, chili, beef ravioli,** etc.
- **Nuts and seeds with salt or seasoning added**

TIPS: Canned beans with added salt (sodium) can be part of a healthy diet. When possible, choose No Salt Added. When not possible, rinse canned beans off thoroughly in a strainer/colander to greatly reduce sodium intake.

To be considered an adequate protein source, canned stew, chili, beef ravioli, etc. must contain ≥7g protein/serving.

Vegetable and fruit photos by Vecteezy.com

The Healthy Choice BY FOODLINK

GRAINS

CHOOSE OFTEN

- **Whole grains**
  - brown rice
  - wild rice
  - barley
  - oats/plain oatmeal
  - bulgur wheat
  - quinoa
  - whole wheat flour
  - buckwheat
- **Whole wheat pasta**
- **Whole grain breads**
  - bread
  - rolls
  - whole grain pancake mix
  - bagels
  - pita
- **Whole grain cereal with ≤6g sugar/dry ounce**

CHOOSE SOMETIMES

- **Refined grain (not whole grain) products**
  - bread
  - white rice
  - pasta
  - egg noodles, etc.
- **Refined grain pancakes/waffles,** mix and pre-made
- **Refined grain cereal with ≤6g sugar/dry ounce**

CHOOSE RARELY

- **Mixed grain meals,** e.g. Mac 'n Cheese, Rice-A-Roni, Pasta Roni
- **Biscuits,** mix and pre-made
- **Whole or refined grain cereal with >6g sugar/dry ounce**
- **Flavored oatmeal**
- **Grain-based desserts and snacks,** e.g. cakes, cookies, muffins
- **Stuffing mix**

TIPS: A whole grain product must have a whole grain (e.g. whole wheat flour, whole grain oats) as the first ingredient.

Although flavored oatmeal is a whole grain food, it contains a significant amount of added sugar (typically around 13g/serving). A healthier alternative is to use plain oats/oatmeal and add flavor with, for example: fresh fruit, cinnamon, peanut butter, or a small amount of jam or maple syrup.

DAIRY

CHOOSE OFTEN

- **Milk, low-fat (1%) or non-fat (skim), unflavored**
- **Yogurt and kefir (≤12g added sugar per 6oz serving) and no cookie/candy mix-ins**
- **Cheese and cottage cheese**
- **Fortified milk substitute, e.g. soy, almond: plain, regular, unsweetened, or unsweetened vanilla**

CHOOSE SOMETIMES

- **Milk, 2% or higher, unflavored**
- **Flavored milk, low-fat or non-fat**
- **Cream cheese and sour cream**
- **Fortified milk substitute, flavored or sweetened**

CHOOSE RARELY

- **Flavored milk, 2% or higher**
- **Half & Half and cream**
- **Yogurt with cookie or candy mix-ins or >12g added sugar per 6oz serving**
- **Butter**
- **Cheese product,** e.g. spray cheese, Cheez Whiz
- **Whipped cream/topping**
- **Ice cream/frozen dessert**

TIPS: Milk can be fresh or shelf-stable.

Plant-based milk/beverage, such as soy milk, should contain at least 8g of protein per 8 oz. serving in order to adequately substitute for dairy milk.

MIXED MEALS & SOUPS

CHOOSE OFTEN	CHOOSE SOMETIMES	CHOOSE RARELY
	• **Mixed meals and soups with ≤720mg sodium/serving**	• **Ramen** • **Lunchables** • **Au gratin potatoes** • **Mixed meals and soups with >720mg sodium/serving**

TIP: Mixed meals and soups are high in sodium/salt. Due to their convenience, they can be consumed more often than is healthful. Whenever possible, choose whole foods to create a meal from scratch.

CONDIMENTS, SAUCES, DRESSINGS, FOOD PREP INGREDIENTS, SPICES

TIPS: Foodlink does not rank this category, as these items are often critical to creating culturally relevant meals and/or making certain foods more palatable. Additionally, these items are typically consumed in small quantities.

Many condiments and sauces, though, are high in fat, sodium, and/or sugar. When using those items, such as BBQ sauce or mayonnaise, try dipping food into it, rather than pouring or spreading it on.

The Healthy Choice BY FOODLINK

PROCESSED SNACKS & DESSERTS

CHOOSE OFTEN	CHOOSE SOMETIMES	CHOOSE RARELY
	• **Low Sodium whole grain crackers** • **Plain popcorn** • **Low Sodium whole grain rice and corn cakes**	• **Chips** • **Pretzels** • **Sweets** • **Candy** • **Pudding** • **Crackers, not whole grain** • **Baked goods,** mix and pre-made, e.g. cookies, cake, brownies, pies, pie crust • Jell-o • Salted/buttered popcorn • Snack bars

TIP: The healthiest snacks and desserts are fruits and vegetables, such as fruit salad or veggies with hummus.

BEVERAGES

CHOOSE OFTEN	CHOOSE SOMETIMES	CHOOSE RARELY
• **Water,** plain or carbonated (seltzer, mineral water)	• **Coffee** • **Unsweetened Tea**	• **Soda/Pop** • **Punch** • **Hot chocolate** • **Energy drinks** • **Sports drinks** • **Lemonade** • **Juice drinks,** non-100% juice • **Powdered drink mixes** • **Sweetened Tea**

TIPS: Nutrition supplement drinks (e.g. Boost, Ensure) are not listed, as they are not encouraged for individuals who do not require them nor discouraged for those who do.

See "Dairy" category for milk and plant-based milk/beverage.

See "Fruits" and "Vegetables" for 100% juice.

Flavors of Diversity:
Cultural Foods Handbook

Foodlink
NOURISHING LIVES

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Purpose of the Cultural Food Guide for Emergency Food Providers

A resource to support culturally responsive food access throughout the Rochester and Finger Lakes Region

Food is more than nourishment. It **reflects culture, family traditions, religious practices, and personal identity.**

Emergency food providers have an opportunity to create welcoming environments where food preferences are recognized, respected and celebrated. As the Rochester and Finger Lakes region becomes increasingly diverse, understanding the role food plays in people's lives can help organizations better serve their communities.

This guide was developed to support culturally responsive food access and celebrate the diverse cultures, traditions and foodways of the region. It is not intended to categorize people, places or identities. Instead, let it serve as a starting point for learning, conversation and relationship-building.

Within food pantries and community meal programs, we encourage staff and volunteers to use this guide to **spark curiosity** by asking guests about the foods they grew up with, the meals they enjoyed preparing, and the traditions that are meaningful to them.

The goal is to create a welcoming space where food becomes a bridge for connection, storytelling, and shared learning across cultures.

By approaching food assistance with curiosity and respect, providers can build trust and help ensure that community members feel valued and nourished.

Key Terms & Ideas

Cultural Competence

The ability to understand, appreciate and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from one's own.

How is this practiced?

- *Self-awareness:* Recognize your own values, beliefs or assumptions
- *Knowledge:* Learn more about others and ask questions
- *Respect:* Listen without judgement
- *Empathy*: Seek to understand another person's lived experience and perspective

Cultural Humility

An active process of self-reflection and continuous exploration of one's own and others' cultural identities and beliefs, allowing trust and relationships to form

How is this practiced?

- *Vulnerability:* Acknowledge that you do not have all the answers
- *Openness:* Be willing to learn from others
- *Curiosity:* Ask questions and remain receptive to new perspectives
- *Reflection*: Examine your own assumptions and biases

Cultural Relevance

Providing services, resources, and food choices that reflect and respect the cultural identities and preferences of the communities being served

Examples in a pantry or community meal setting:

- Offering foods that are commonly used across different cultures
- Seek guest feedback on food preferences

Person-Centered Service

An approach that prioritizes the needs, preferences, and lived experiences of individuals rather than making assumptions based on identity, ethnicity, culture, or religion

What this can look like:

- Asking rather than assuming
- Offering choice whenever possible
- Respecting individual food preferences

Communities in the Rochester and Finger Lakes Region

Foodlink serves 10 counties in the Rochester and Finger Lakes region of New York: Allegheny, Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming and Yates.

Finger Lakes, 2021-2023 , DOH	
Population Group	**Estimated Population**
White	969,672
Black	124,336
Hispanic	100,889
Asian/Pacific Islander	37,445
American Indian or Alaska Native	2,913

75,000 immigrants live in the Finger Lakes Region

This is 6% of the region's population

The region is home to both longstanding cultural communities and more recent immigrant and refugee populations.

Recent refugee resettlement and migration patterns have contributed to the growth of several communities throughout the region.

Recent arrivals have included households from:
Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Sudan, Syria, Myanmar (Burma)

A Note About Culture and Food

The Rochester and Finger Lakes region is home to communities with diverse cultural backgrounds, food traditions, and dietary preferences.

This guide aims to showcase the diversity of cultures within this region. Grouping these cultural 'foodways' together is not meant to suggest that everyone in a community, region, or culture eats the same foods.

Demographics can be helpful to understand broad trends but do not define individual households or food choices.

Food preferences for groups and communities is not uniform.

This guide highlights common food traditions and practices but is not a one-size-fits-all resource.

Eastern European Food Traditions

Countries represented include:

Ukraine, Russia, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Moldova

Produce

- **Vegetables:** cabbage, beets, potatoes, cucumbers, root vegetables
- **Fruits**: apples, cherries, berries, plums

Protein

- **Pork:** sausage, cured meats and roasted cuts
- **Poultry:** chicken and turkey
- **Dairy**: sour cream, curd cheeses, cream cheese
- **Fish:** carp, herring
- **Legumes**: split peas, beans and lentils

Seasonings

- **Herbs & Greens**: dill, parsley, marjoram, sorrel
- **Spices & Seeds**: paprika, caraway seeds, coriander and juniper

Grains

- **Rye**
- **Buckwheat (Kasha)**
- **Barley**
- **Millet**
- **Wheat**

Pantry-friendly foods:

- Potatoes
- Cabbage
- Onions
- Flour
- Oats
- White rice varieties
- Beans
- Tinned fish

Popular Dishes

Varenyky (Pierogi): Dumplings with different types of fillings (potatoes, cheese, sauerkraut, mushrooms, fruits)

Borscht: A beet soup with many variants and may be enjoyed both hot and cold

Goulash: Warm meat stew

Holubtsi/Sarmale: Stuffed cabbage rolls

Kilbasa/Krakowska: Variety of sausages

Pelmeni: Dumplings wrapped in thin, unleavened dough wrapped around a meat filling

Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) Food Traditions

Countries represented include:

Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Turkey, Yemen

Produce

- **Vegetables:** tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplants, squash, peppers
- **Fruits**: pomegranates, citrus fruits, dates, olives

Grains & Legumes

- **Grains**: wheat, barley, freekeh, rice
- **Legumes:** chickpeas, lentils, fava beans

Protein

- **Lamb & Mutton, Beef**
- **Eggs**
- **Fish**
- **Dairy & Eggs:** milk, labneh, cheese, feta
- **Plant-based:** legumes, grains and nuts

Seasonings

- **Single spices**: cumin, coriander, cardamom, sumac, paprika, ginger, cinnamon and allspice
- **Spice Blends:** za'atar, baharat, harissa, ras el hanout

Pantry-friendly foods

- Dry lentils
- Chickpeas
- Canned tomatoes
- Cooking oil
- Tahini
- Dates
- Pita or flatbreads
- Garlic
- Onions
- Shelf-stable milk

Popular Dishes

Hummus: Creamy dip made from chickpeas

Falafel: Deep fried balls or patties made from ground chickpeas or fava beans

Shawarma: Thin slices of chicken, beef or lamb wrapped in thin flatbread or markook

Tabbouleh: Fresh salad with chopped parsley, mint, tomatoes, and bulgur wheat

Kibbeh: Spiced minced meat and bulgur wheat shells that are fried, baked or served raw

Baba Ghanoush: Smoky dip made from roasted mashed eggplant, tahini, garlic and lemon juice

Tahini: Smooth paste made from ground sesame seeds

South Asian Food Traditions

Countries represented include:

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives

Produce

- **Vegetables:** bitter melon, bottle gourd, okra, eggplant, leafy greens (spinach), taro root, yams, radishes
- **Fruits**: mangoes, jackfruit, pomegranate, guava, sitaphal (custard apple)

Grains

- **Rice:** basmati rice
- **Wheat**
- **Sorghum**
- **Millet**
- **Maize**
- **Barley**

Protein

- **Dairy and Animal Products:** paneer, dahi (yogurt), chicken, fish, goat, lamb, eggs
- **Dal:** lentils
- **Legumes**
- **Soy**

Seasonings

- **Whole spices & seeds:** cumin seeds, mustard seeds, fenugreek seeds, asafoetida
- **Powders**: turmeric, coriander, red chili, mango powder
- **Fresh Herbs:** ginger, garlic, green chilies, cilantro, curry leaves
- **Blends:** garam masala, chaat masala

Pantry-friendly foods

- Basmati rice
- Lentils
- Chickpeas
- Dry beans
- Flour
- Neutral oil
- Canned tomatoes
- Onions
- Garlic

Popular Dishes

Biryani: Basmati rice layered with spiced meat or vegetables, cooked with saffron and onions

Pulao: Rice and meat dish cooked in seasoned broth

Nihari: Beef or lamb stew traditionally enjoyed in the morning

Murgh Makhani (Butter Chicken): Chicken pieces in a mild tomato and butter sauce

Palak Paneer: Cubes of fresh soft cheese in a spiced spinach puree

Chana Masala: Chickpeas simmered in an onion and tomato spice blend

East & Southeast Asian Food Traditions

Countries represented include:

China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Cambodia, Laos

Produce

- **Vegetables:** cabbage, carrots, bok choy, choy sum, water spinach
- **Roots and Tubers**: daikon radish, lotus root, taro, bamboo shoots
- **Fruits**: mango, lychee, longan, pomelo, coconut, dragon fruit, jackfruit, rambutan, mangosteen, durian

Grains & Breads

- **Jasmine and White Rice**
- **Glutinous (Sticky) Rice**
- **Short-Grain Rice**
- **Wheat**
- **Millets**
- **Sorghum**

Protein

- **Pork, Poultry**
- **Eggs**
- **Fish & Seafood**: tuna, milkfish, carp, shrimp, squid
- **Soy:** tofu and tempeh
- **Legumes:** mung beans and peanuts

Seasonings

- **Fresh Herbs:** lemongrass, galangal, Thai basil
- **Spices and Roots:** bird's eye chili, turmeric, garlic and shallot, kampot (local black and red peppers)

Pantry-friendly foods

- Jasmine rice
- Sticky rice
- Rice noodles
- Dry beans
- Tofu
- Eggs
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Onions
- Garlic
- Soy sauce
- Tinned fish

Popular Dishes

Pho: Noodle soup made with broth, rice noodles, herbs and chicken or beef

Ramen: Noodle soup featuring wheat noodles served in a meat or fish-based broth, with toppings such as pork, green onions, and eggs

Pad Thai: Stir-fried rice noodles prepared with eggs, tofu, peanuts and tamarind sauce

Fried Rice: Rice vegetables, eggs and various proteins

Dumplings: Pockets of dough filled with vegetables, meat or seafood

Congee: Savory rice porridge often served with vegetables, eggs, meat or seafood

Latin American & Caribbean Food Traditions

Countries represented include:

Mexico, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Venezuela

Produce

- **Vegetables:** cassava, plantains, corn, chili peppers, chayote, tomatoes, peppers, jalapeños
- **Fruits**: avocado, guava, mango, papaya, pineapple, citrus

Grains

- **Corn**
- **Quinoa**
- **Rice**: long-grain and medium-grain white rice

Protein

- **Chicken, Beef, Pork**
- **Fish and Seafood:** red snapper, mahi-mahi, tilapia
- **Beans**: black, pinto, red, kidney
- **Eggs**
- **Milk, Cheeses**

Seasonings

- **Cumin**
- **Achiote**
- **Allspice**
- **Adobo**
- **Chili powders**
- **Jerk seasonings**
- **Fresh thyme**
- **Ginger**
- **Garlic**
- **Onion**

Pantry-friendly foods

- White rice
- Dry beans
- Lentils
- Corn flour
- Canned tomatoes
- Plantains
- Yuca
- Onions
- Garlic
- Citrus fruits

Popular Dishes

Arroz con Gandules: Rice, pigeon peas, pork and a seasoning based called sofrito

Mofongo: Mashed fried green plantains commonly prepared with garlic and served with meat, seafood or broth

Rice and Peas: Rice, beans or peas, herbs and spices

Tamales: Masa dough filled with meats, vegetables steamed in corn husks or banana leaves

Sancocho: Stew prepared with meats, root vegetables, and seasonings

Tacos: Tortillas filled with meat, beans, vegetables, and fresh toppings

Empanadas: Pastries filled with meat, cheese, vegetables, or beans

Ceviche: Seafood cured in citrus juice and mixed with onions, peppers, herbs, and other fresh ingredients

African Food Traditions

Countries represented include:

Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda

Produce

- **Vegetables:** amaranth leaves, okra, jute mallow, pumpkin leaves, cowpea leaves, African nightshade, spider plant
- **Fruit**: baobab, marula, kiwano, star apple, dates, matoke, papaya, bananas

Grains

- **Maize**
- **Sorghum**
- **Millet**
- **Teff**
- **Fio/Fonio**
- **African Rice**

Protein

- **Fish:** tilapia, catfish, and mackerel
- **Poultry and Meats:** chicken, goat meat, and beef
- **Eggs**
- **Cowpeas and Beans**
- **Peanuts**
- **Bambara Groundnuts** and **African Yam Beans**

Seasonings

- **Grains of Selim**
- **Suya spice**
- **Berbere**
- **Mitmita**
- **Korarima**
- **Peri-peri**

Pantry-friendly foods

- Rice (African, Jasmine, Basmati)
- Dry beans
- Lentils
- Cornmeal
- Cooking oil
- Onions
- Garlic
- Canned tomatoes
- Sweet potatoes
- Plantains

Popular Dishes

Fufu: Dough-like ball of pounded cassava, yam, or plantain paired with a stew

Saka-Saka: Cassava leaves cooked with palm oil and often served with fish or meat

Ful Medames: Slow-cooked fava beans seasoned with olive oil, garlic, and spices

Injera with Stew: Ethiopian flatbread served with flavorful stews and vegetables

Jollof Rice: Rice cooked in a blend of tomatoes, peppers, onions, and spices

Peanut Stew: Stew made with peanuts, vegetables, and other chicken or beef

African-American Food Traditions

Communities represented include:

African American communities living throughout the Rochester and Finger Lakes Region

Produce

- **Vegetables:** collard greens, mustard greens, and turnip greens, okra, black-eyed peas, cabbage, corn, green beans
- **Roots and Tubers:** sweet potatoes, onions, garlic
- **Fruit:** watermelon, peaches, berries, oranges, lemons, apples, pears

Grains

- **Rice:** long-grain rice, Carolina gold
- **Cornmeal**
- **Sorghum**

Protein

- **Chicken, Pork, Turkey, and Beef**
- **Fish and Seafood:** catfish and whiting, salt fish, shrimp
- **Plant Based:** black-eyed peas, red beans and pigeon peas
- **Milk, Butter, Cheese, Yogurt**

Seasonings

- **Spices:** garlic, onion, seasoned salt, paprika, celery seed, lemon pepper
- **Herbs:** dried thyme, bay leaves, parsley, oregano

Pantry friendly foods

- Rice (Carolina gold)
- Dry beans
- Black-eyed peas
- Cornmeal
- Oats
- Tinned fish
- Sweet potatoes
- Greens
- Onions
- Garlic
- Cooking oil

Popular Dishes

Collard Greens: Leafy greens slow cooked with seasonings and traditionally served as a side dish

Fried Chicken: Seasoned chicken fried until crispy on the outside

Cornbread: A slightly sweet bread made with cornmeal that pairs well with many soul food dishes

Catfish and Grits: Crispy cornmeal-crusted or blackened catfish served over warm, savory, stone-ground or creamy cheese grits

Black-Eyed Peas: Nutritious legumes cooked with savory seasonings

Red Beans and Rice: Slow-cooked beans served over rice and seasoned with herbs and spices

Indigenous Food Traditions

Communities represented in the Finger Lakes region may include:
Seneca Nation, Cayuga Nation, Onondaga Nation, Tuscarora Nation, Mohawk Nation, Oneida Nation

Produce

- **Vegetables:** corn, squash, beans, wild greens, turnips, pumpkin, wild leeks (ramps)
- **Fruits:** strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, and blueberries

Grains

- **Maize**
- **White Corn**
- **Roasted Corn**
- **Wild Rice**
- **Hominy**
- **Sunflower Seeds**
- **Squash Seeds**

Protein

- **Venison, Rabbit, Turkey**
- **Fish:** trout, salmon, bass
- **Beans**
- **Nuts:** walnuts, hickory nuts

Seasonings & Flavorings

- **Rendered Fats:** bear or deer fat
- **Nut oils**
- **Leeks & Onions**
- **Mint**
- **Sage**
- **Maple Syrup**

Pantry-friendly foods

- Dried beans
- Cornmeal
- Hominy
- Dried corn
- Dried berries
- Maple syrup
- Winter squash

Popular Dishes

White Corn Soup: Traditional Haudenosaunee soup made with hulled white corn and roasted corn flour

Three Sisters Stew: A traditional dish made with corn, beans and squash, known as the “Three Sisters”

Foraged and Hunted Stews: Broths flavored with seasonal ramps, wild roots, berries, maple, and game meats such as venison

Succotash: A combination of corn, beans, and seasonal vegetables.

Religious Dietary Considerations

Halal

- *Halal* means “permissible” or “lawful” under Islamic law
- Muslim households may follow Halal dietary practices, which provides guidance on foods that are permitted under Islamic law
- There are approximately 2 billion Muslims worldwide
- Muslims live throughout the world and may observe halal dietary practices differently depending on their cultural practice, personal beliefs, and religious tradition
- It is important to respect individual preferences and seek guidance from a local religious leader

Halal **-** “Permissible” or “Lawful” Foods

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Grains
- Legumes
- Nuts
- Seafoods with scales
- Milk or eggs from *halal* sources

What makes meat *halal* in Islam?

- *Halal* meat is prepared under Islamic dietary laws that follow specific guidelines outlined in the Quran
- The preparation of halal meat involves an exact process being completed by a practicing Muslim who invokes the name *Allah* (God)
- *Halal* meats typically include:
  - Lamb, beef, chicken, goat, venison, rabbit

Haram **-** “Forbidden” or “Unlawful” Foods

- Pork and its byproducts (including gelatin)
- Any animal that was not slaughtered according to Islamic guidelines
- Blood and its byproducts
- Alcoholic beverages

Religious Dietary Considerations

Kosher - "Fit" or "Proper" in Hebrew

- *Kashrut* is the body of Jewish law dealing with what foods can and can't be eaten, and how those foods must be prepared.
- *Kosher* is a term that describes food that meets those standards.
- A set of dietary laws that is traditionally followed by Jewish people in accordance with Jewish law

Kosher Rules

- Kosher animals must be slaughtered according to a process called *shechita* - a quick process that minimizes suffering
- Meat and dairy products cannot be eaten or cooked together
  - Extends to using separate utensils, dishes and cooking surfaces for meat and dairy
- Food facilities and ingredients must be inspected and certified by a rabbi or certification agency
- Examples of forbidden foods:
  - Pork and pork products, shellfish (shrimp, crab, lobster, etc.)
- There are unique kosher rules for Passover – including not eating leavened bread and other grain products, such as pasta, crackers, or cereals made from wheat, barley, rye, oats, and spelt.

Kosher certification symbols called ***hechshers*** are used to indicate that food or kitchen facilities comply with kosher dietary laws. The following are three of the most common examples.

Orthodox Union or OU

Star-K

Kof-K

Jewish subcommunities may not consider different hechsers to be equally as reliable. When unsure, seek guidance from a local religous leader.

Examples of Kosher foods

- **Meat (if slaughtered properly and certified):** cows, sheep, goats, deer, chicken, turkey
- **Fish (no shellfish; may require hechsher):** salmon, tuna, tilapia, cod, halibut
- **Dairy (must have hechsher):** milk, cheese, yogurt, butter, cream cheese
- **Fruits and Vegetables**
- **Nuts**
- **Processed foods (must have hechsher)**

Cultural, Religious and Seasonal Food Considerations

Islam

- Some households may seek halal-certified foods
- Eating schedules may change during Ramadan in which it is customary to fast
  - Ramadan is observed in the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar (date shifts by 10-12 days every year)
  - Fasting during Ramadan is one of the pillars of Islam. Muslims should not eat food or drink any liquids from sunrise to sunset every day of the holy month

Judaism

- Traditional Jewish practices vary widely by denomination
- Some households may follow kosher dietary practices
- Additional dietary restrictions apply during Passover
- The extent to which dietary guidelines are followed depends on denomination, family and individual choice.

Christianity

- Some individuals may abstain from certain foods during Lent
  - Many abstain from eating meat on all Fridays during Lent (season that spans 40 days)
- Holiday food traditions vary widely

Hinduism

- Beef is prohibited
  - Cows are considered sacred and are treated with deep respect
- Vegetarianism: many follow this diet by the ideal of doing no harm to living creatures
  - Matter of personal choice or regional tradition rather than universal rule
- Dairy
  - Dairy products from cows are considered spiritually pure and are widely consumed

Buddhism

- Some households may follow vegetarian or plant-forward guidelines
  - Depends on personal choice, sect to which they belong and country they are from
- Many follow lacto-vegetarian diet
  - Consume dairy products but exclude eggs, poultry, fish and meat from their diet

Common Pantry Staples Across Cultures

Rice (white rice)	African, East & Southeast Asian, Latin American & Caribbean, Middle Eastern & North African
Dried or canned beans/lentils	African, African-American, Indigenous, South Asian, Latin American & Caribbean, Middle Eastern & North African
Cooking Oil	Commonly used across food traditions represented in this guide
Onions	Commonly used across food traditions represented in this guide
Fresh tomatoes, canned tomatoes, or tomato paste	African, African-American, Eastern European, Latin American & Caribbean, Middle Eastern & North African, South Asian
Garlic	Commonly used across food traditions represented in this guide
All-purpose Flour	Commonly used across food traditions represented in this guide
Canned or dried chickpeas	African, Middle Eastern & North African, South Asian
Beef	Commonly used across food traditions represented in this guide
Cooking greens or cabbage	African, African-American, Indigenous, Eastern European, East & Southeast Asian

Common Pantry Staples Across Cultures

Eggs	Commonly used across food traditions represented in this guide
Potatoes	Eastern European, African-American, Indigenous, Middle Eastern & North African, South Asian
Chicken	Commonly used across food traditions represented in this guide
Cornmeal/Maize Products	African, African-American, Indigenous, Latin American & Caribbean
Fresh or Frozen vegetables	Commonly used across food traditions represented in this guide
Tinned Fish	African, East & Southeast Asian, Eastern European, Latin America & Caribbean, Middle Eastern & North African
Citrus Fruits	Latin America & Caribbean, Middle Eastern & North African, South Asian, East & Southeast Asian
Yogurt	Eastern European, Middle Eastern & North African, South Asian
Pasta and Noodles	Commonly used across food traditions represented in this guide
Peanuts or Peanut Butter	African, African-American, East & Southeast Asian, South Asian

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