

Produce Distribution Guide for Agency Partners

Contents

1. What is a produce distribution or free farmers market?.....	2
2. Why do a produce distribution?	2
3. What’s on the order?	3
4. Quality expectations	4
5. Produce Return Policy.....	4
6. How you can help with returns and quality assurance.....	4
7. How to market your distribution	5
8. Setting up your distribution	5
A. Supplies	5
B. Where it will be located	6
C. Parking and car management	7
D. Distribution set-up and waste management	8
E. Line Management	10
F. Additional resources for clients	10
G. Civil Rights.....	10
H. Weather Policy.....	11
9. Intake and Statistics	12
10. Volunteers & Staffing.....	13

1. What is a produce distribution or free farmers market?

Produce distributions tend to be large giveaways and programs of all sizes have done them! Here are some ways partners in the network are doing produce distributions:

- **Farmer’s market style giveaways** once or twice per month (or more).
- **Providing extra produce along with normal programming** – for example a food shelf provides produce during regular visits, encourages extra visits or designated “produce day/s.”
- **Meals and giveaways** – meal programs making produce available for clients to take home.
- **One-time distributions** for example, at a special event.

2. Why do a produce distribution?

Produce is highly desired by clients. It’s also expensive for clients to purchase. Below are results from the 2019 Statewide Food Shelf survey that show how important produce is to people and the role food shelves play in providing it.


A produce distribution is a great way to increase food access. Consider having it at another site to bring the food to a high need or underserved area.



▶ CLIENTS WANT & NEED HEALTHIER FOODS TO FEED THEIR FAMILIES

 **93%**
said they would like to provide more fruits & veggies for their family.

 **96%**
said they know how to prepare many fruits & veggies.

 **60%** of food shelf clients reported getting **HALF or MORE** of their total fruits and vegetables from the food shelf in the last 6 months.*
(*19% missing response.)

“ The food shelf offers fresh fruits and vegetables that I would not normally buy due to cost. It helps me save money that we can put towards other expenses-utilities, heat, fuel oil, etc. It helps put food on my table.

-Food Shelf Client ”

3. What's on the order?

Agencies determine the number of pallets they would like to receive and SHH will send what we have in inventory.

The varieties listed below are those that we can get regularly and can successfully manage quality.

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Fruits												
Apples												
Watermelon, tote												
Cantaloupe												
Oranges												
Pears												
Walmart DC Fruit												
Vegetables												
Cabbage												
Carrots												
Onions												
Potatoes												
Sweet Corn												
Sweet Potatoes												
Winter Squash												
Cucumbers												
Eggplant												
Peppers												
Tomatoes												
Zucchini and Yellow Squash												
Walmart DC Vegetables												

Varieties are subject to change and dependent on growing season, crop conditions, quality, cost and other market dynamics.

4. Quality expectations

Expect up to 15% waste with each delivery and prepare to sort, cull and manage waste.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but it's important to remember that produce may be blemished, seconds or nearing the end of its shelf life. Produce is also highly perishable and delicate.

Before rejecting produce, please consider taking the time to cull, sort and use what you can. **Produce returned to SHH will most likely all be thrown away (even if some of it is still good quality).**

5. Produce Return Policy

- Returns are accepted if there is 15% or more spoilage or waste.
- Partners are responsible for inspecting all orders upon delivery. (We suggest inspecting a sampling from each pallet as soon as possible.)
- If you wish to reject produce that has 15% or more waste, immediately contact Agency Relations at 651-209-7990 or 833-856-0149 or orders@2harvest.org.

Agency Relations will work with you to find the best produce fit for your program.

6. How you can help with returns and quality assurance

Report quality concerns immediately to Agency Relations and provide the following:

1. Photos so we can see what you see
2. Description of the issue (mold, bruising, rot, damage, etc.)
3. When was produce inspected? At delivery? Later? If later, how was produce stored?
4. Other issues of note such as pest, pallet conditions, packaging, etc.

[Click here](#) for a Fruit & Vegetable guide with information about receiving & inspecting, handling & storage, nutritional index and more.

7. How to market your distribution

Start by letting your regular clients know about the produce distribution. If you are holding the distribution at another site, involve the host site in letting their community know. We will share it within the network, and our SHH SNAP Outreach and Child Hunger teams will share with clients upon request.

There are many ways you can promote your produce distribution that are effective and low cost. It's common for your distribution to grow as more people learn about it. Here are some tips; and you can also contact Agency Relations for additional support.

- Flyers posted in the area at public places, low-income housing units, community centers, food shelves, meal programs, social services, etc.
- Sandwich boards, banners or signs visible to traffic and walk-ins.
- Word of mouth – encourage everyone to spread the word to friends, family and neighbors.
- Be welcoming! They will be more likely to come again and spread the word.
- Take-away information about future distributions. (Put your full schedule for the season on a flyer.)
- Make announcements at neighboring religious institutions (churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, etc.) and/or put it in their regular bulletins.
- Network with social services, neighboring food programs, youth programs, civic groups, etc.
- Collaborate with organizations in your community that can help encourage people to come, such as senior centers.
- Use your website and social media platforms.
- Ask volunteers, staff and clients to post on personal Facebook and social media sites.
- Post on places like garage sales sites, community webpages, Craigslist, etc.
- News stories – send press release to local media.
- Electronic billboards –ask businesses if they will stream information about your distribution.
- Advertisements – these may cost money. Classified ads are usually cheaper and widely read.

8. Setting up your distribution

A. Supplies

Agencies may consider some of these supplies for a produce distribution. In regards to bags, tents, etc., think about companies that may want to give an in-kind donation in exchange for logo placement. Some programs actively promote that clients bring their own bags, boxes, carryalls, laundry baskets, etc.

Commonly used supplies:

- Signs, banners, sandwich board signs, etc.
- Gloves (vinyl) (<http://www.labsource.com/>)
- Aprons
- Plastic Bags
- Work gloves
- Plastic table clothes
- Tables (<http://www.uline.com/>)
- Garbage bags
- Dolly
- Utility knives
- Tents/Canopies (<http://www.harborfreight.com/>)
- Step stool or tall volunteer for tall pallets

COVID preparedness additions, if applicable:

- Face masks
- Hand sanitizer

Partners may also want to consider borrowing or renting a large vehicle or truck for transportation of extra produce back to their main food program location (food shelf or meal program).

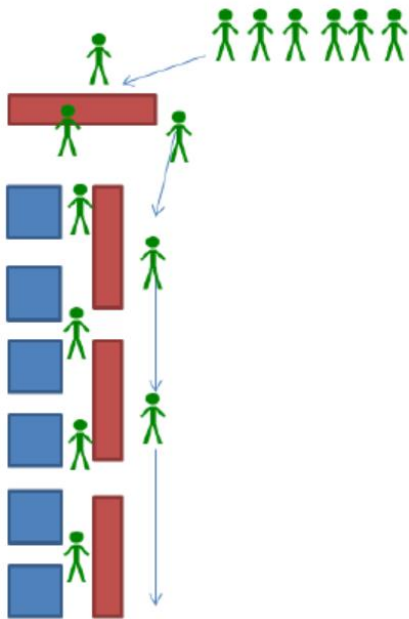
B. Where it will be located

Where is the best place on the property to set up? Possibilities are the parking lot, sidewalk, a large patio space or entry area or even indoors. Some things to think about are:

- Where the Second Harvest Heartland truck will deliver the produce.
- A clear path for driver to move pallets off of the truck to where you want it dropped.
- Having enough room for both the pallets and tables to set in front of them.
- The flow of clients as they arrive, get in line and depart, early arrivals, waiting line, etc.
- If tabling, where will those go? If you or other community groups have information tables, where will those go?

You may want to consider your first distribution to be a “trial run” in terms of layout and then you can refine it for the next time. If you do change where you want the SHH truck to pull up for the next time, let Agency Relations know right away, so we can inform Transportation.

Example of pallet and table set up with customer flow:



C. Parking and car management

Be sure to work out access to the parking lot, surrounding streets, building, length of time needed, parking arrangements, etc. with the host site, if applicable.

If you will be using the parking lot for distribution site, block off the area clearly that will be needed for delivery, set up, intake, client waiting area, etc. If part of the parking lot will be accessible to cars, also clearly mark and have a staff or volunteer direct cars. Consider safety of pedestrians.

Drive through model

Many programs have used drive through models during COVID to ensure safety and ease of distribution. If you opt to use this model, be sure that you plan for traffic control and possibly long lines of cars. You may want to consider checking with local law enforcement for consultation or assistance directing traffic.

D. Distribution set-up and waste management

Schedule & Timing Expectations:

- SHH will provide estimated delivery time
- Be prepared for a window of 30 minutes on either side of that time
- Someone must be present at the distribution site to meet the driver by the earliest possible delivery time

Timeline Estimates:

- 20-30 minutes for the driver to unload
- 10-20 minutes for volunteer orientation
- 30-60 minutes to organize produce
- 1-2 hours for distribution
- 30 minutes for clean up

Sample Timeline:

7:30am – Lead Staff/Volunteers arrive at distribution site

8:00am – Delivery of Produce Scheduled (could arrive between 7:30 and 8:30am) ***remember to inspect each pallet after driver has dropped and moved out of the way***

9:00am – Volunteers Arrive and sign in

9:00- 9:15am – Volunteer Orientation

9:15- 9:45am – Set up, produce sorting, culling and bagging

10:00- 11:30 – Distribution

11:30- Noon – Clean Up

Noon- Volunteers depart

Note: It's OK to let people who arrive early wait until the advertised start-time. (You wouldn't expect the farmer's market to open up just for you if you got there early, would you?)

Set up:

1. Produce will be delivered on 4x4 foot pallets or very large totes. (Like items may be double-stacked.)
2. Decide how you want pallets arranged. For example, by like items and by weight so the heaviest items go in the bottom of the client's bag/box. (Others advise putting the heaviest items last so people don't have to carry them through the line.)
3. If using table for intake, place at the front of the line of pallets or where you can best talk to participants.

Sorting/Handing Out Produce:

- Pre-bag smaller items (potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, etc.) for ease of distribution. This is a great activity for a team of 2-4 volunteers per item!
- If you have a large variety of similar kinds of produce group them together. Try to set out one type at a time to avoid clients asking for different items and holding up the line. For instance, if you get a variety of berries, start by distributing strawberries, then pull out blueberries after the strawberries run out.
- Determine how much of each item will be given to people before starting distribution, based on a guesstimate of how many families will come to the distribution. Adjust as needed during the distribution.
- Agency Relations can provide consultation and resources around serving sizes if needed or [click here](#).

Food Safety

- Keep produce and boxes, bags, etc. containing produce at least six inches off the ground.
- If any refrigerated items (e.g., packaged cut fruit or deli items) are delivered by mistake, make sure to use temperature controls (freezer blankets) or discard them.

Excess and Waste

- Before the distribution starts, cull items that are spoiled or poor quality. Ask: would you take it home and serve it to your family?
- Have a clearly designated area for waste, let everyone know where it is. If no garbage cans are available, we suggest using a sturdy box with a good bottom and lining the bottom with a garbage bag to prevent leakage.
- Have a plan for what to do with any edible produce that is left over (e.g., bring back to the food shelf) and how to dispose of food waste and other garbage.

Clean-up

Leftovers:

- As your distribution goes on, you can adjust amounts to help you move as much produce as possible.
- You may choose to let clients go through the line a second time after everyone else has gone through once. In times when you are concerned about leftovers, invite clients to come back at the end.
- You may also choose to participate in a “Sub-distribution Agreement” with other agency partners of Second Harvest Heartland and then can contact them about taking leftover produce for their food program. Ask Agency Relations about this option.

Pallets –will be picked up at your next delivery. If you are unable to store them until your next delivery, you may give away or recycle pallets.

Bread trays & Milk Crates should also be returned to SHH. SHH will pick them up at the next delivery.

Garbage – determine ahead of time how you will dispose of waste and cover the cost. You may need to budget for the cost of extra garbage pick-ups.

Composting – If your agency does not have its own community garden, farmer or other agricultural program to absorb compostable materials, check with your county to see if they have any organic waste reduction assistance.

E. Line Management

Serving Clients:

- The distribution will serve a larger number of clients in a short time frame, consider how to manage the line. For example, giving random numbers, “lottery” style, may help avoid people arriving too early.
- Offer clients each item that is available. It typically works best if it’s a yes or no offer, vs either/or. Getting into “I don’t want this, but I’d like two of those” can slow the line down.
- Pre-bagging helps keep the line moving and helps ensure fewer leftovers.

F. Additional resources for clients

A large-scale distribution like this is an excellent opportunity to provide additional information and resources to your clients. For example, some agencies like to invite health and wellness organizations to have information tables at these events.

In some counties we may be able to provide SNAP interns at distribution sites. Let us know if you need interns with specific language proficiency (e.g., Hmong, Spanish or Somali). These interns can help determine eligibility for this program and will refer people to SHH for assistance with their SNAP applications. Make sure to have information available about regular food service programming, if applicable, including hours and location.

G. Civil Rights

See also, [Civil Rights Checklist for Staff & Volunteers](#):

Be sure to include civil rights training for volunteers. It is a partnership requirement.

- Additional information about orientation for volunteers is outlined in the [Volunteer & Staff](#) section.

- Asking volunteers to read through the checklist as they arrive or while waiting for things to start. You may also want to do it as a group during the orientation. Be sure everyone signs tracking sheet.

H. Weather Policy

Think about the safety of your clients, volunteers and staff during outdoor distributions. Consider having a proactive plan for bad weather. Should severe weather cause you to cancel a distribution, please follow this policy.

SHH Notification

- **If during the work week:**
 - Contact Agency Relations **651-209-7990** or orders@2harvest.org ASAP
- **If on Saturday:**
 - Agency Relations will email on-call contact information prior to Saturday event. Contact us as instructed ASAP.

Volunteer and Client Notification

- How will you notify volunteers? Are you able to contact them? As a best practice, consider having someone go to the site to meet with volunteers you were unable to reach.
- If applicable, make sure volunteers/staff at your food program are aware or set up a voice mail greeting indicating the cancellation of the distribution.
- Consider posting a sign at the site if feasible.
- If applicable, can host provide on-site help?

9. Intake and Statistics

The only information SHH requires are high level demographics. Names, addresses, etc. are NOT required! To collect demographics, set up an intake table or send out volunteers with clipboards to gather info.

What demographics we need for each household:

- Number of children 0-17
- Number of adults 18-64
- Number of seniors 65+
- Number of households
- First time?
- Total pounds distributed (estimated by Shipment Weight minus Estimated Waste/Undistributed Produce) Tip: You will find the total weight of your order on the shipping document and the emailed invoice.

Other statistics notes:

- Many distributions have a volunteer or staff person or two taking down client data while people move through the line rather than having clients sign in.
- Statistics are due by the 10th of the following month on [AgencyExpress](#).
- Agency Relations is available to consult on statistics questions.

10. Volunteers & Staffing

It's important to share the goals and expectations of the produce distribution with volunteers. A volunteer orientation and support during distribution will make this a rewarding and pleasant experience for all!

Staffing/Volunteers:

- You should have a staff or experienced lead volunteer present to make higher level decisions, such as when and where to discard poor quality produce, when to change quantity of items per family, and what to do with left over produce.
- Consider having a “floater” staff/volunteer who's only task is to support volunteers. They can help volunteers manage quantities, encourage generosity, step in when there are issues, make sure all produce stations are manned, answer questions, etc.
- Plan on having 1-2 volunteers to manage the line, 1-2 doing intake, and at least 5-10 volunteers for a smaller distribution and 15-18 for a larger one. Have at least 2 people per each pallet. It is also helpful to have volunteers to help carry bags/boxes to vehicles.
- If doing a drive through model, consider how many people you will need to direct traffic.

These are a few tips for volunteers:

- Smile and enjoy yourself!
- Don't yuck someone's yum – keep dislikes to yourself!
- Share knowledge –share ideas or recipes with clients who may be uncertain of items.
- Offer to help people carry their produce back to their cars or to the bus stop.

Encourage generosity or when you have too much produce:

- Keep in mind bigger households may need larger quantities.
- Welcome participants to take all the produce they can use.
- It's ok to encourage people to share with friends or family that couldn't be there.
- If someone mentions they can or preserve food or really like to bake, and you have plenty, encourage them to take extra.
- If you are unsure of how many people will be visiting vs. how much product you have, consider having “seconds” after everyone has been served in allotted time. Clients could be instructed to return later or wait to see if there are extras.
- If you do need to set limits, use positive language like, “You may take up to X number of these!”

Volunteer Orientation

Orientate volunteers at the beginning of their shift to help them understand the work to be done. It's also a great opportunity to tell them about your program. Plan approximately 10-15 minutes when the volunteers arrive to gather them together to cover this important information and make sure they know what they will be doing.

Sample Orientation

- Thank the volunteers for being there!
- Introduce yourself and who they go to for questions.
- Point out restrooms and water.
- Schedule of shift (training, prepping for distribution, distribution, and clean-up)
- Give the context for the importance of this distribution. Some ideas:
 - Hunger facts
 - Statistics/facts about your program and community
 - The importance of giving fresh food
- Cover Civil Rights Training and have them sign off- attach to a clipboard for ease
- Expectations for client interaction
 - Be welcoming at all times
 - Expectations of gratitude
- Training on what they will be doing
 - Volunteer tasks and placement
 - Sorting instructions (what to throw away, where to throw it, etc.)
 - Generosity instructions and expectations
- If you are allowing volunteers to participate, provide instructions for how/when they will access.
 - Do NOT let volunteers set aside items for themselves.
 - They should be treated the same as other participants with no perception of favoritism and should provide intake information.

Sample CLOSING

- Thank the volunteers for being there
- Impact of their time
 - Estimate of people served
 - Estimate of pounds distributed

Volunteer Recruitment:

Most programs have had great luck recruiting volunteers for produce distributions. Volunteers report they enjoy the pleasant client interaction and outdoor activity.

- Produce distributions may provide opportunities to engage a whole new set of volunteers. Or reinvigorate current volunteers.
- Short term volunteers who are only able to give limited time may find produce distributions to be a good fit.
- Great opportunities for families, youth groups, civic organizations, faith-based organizations, etc.
- Ask Agency Relations if you need volunteer recruitment support.