



Food and Nutrition Policy

Purpose and Guidelines

At Giraffe Laugh, we believe that access to nutritious food is a foundational component of health, learning, and long-term success, especially for our youngest community members. We serve children ages 0–5 living in low-to-moderate income (LMI) and ALICE households, and we recognize the important role that nutritious foods play in shaping early development, preventing chronic diseases, and supporting overall well-being. Rooted in our values of *Responsibility*, *Excellence*, and *Caring*, we are dedicated to modeling accountability and empathy in everything we do, including how we nourish our children, families, and community.

Guided by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines, this policy affirms our commitment to equity, choice, and community-informed programming, while reinforcing our commitment to **Excellence**.

By maintaining **Stability** in our food environments, we ensure consistency and security for the families we serve. We are also committed to building health literacy through culturally respectful nutrition education for children, families, and the broader community.

We promote **Education** by fostering a love of learning around food and health, both in our classrooms and in our homes, while advancing health literacy through inclusive and culturally respectful programming.

With **Pride** in the diversity of our community and a strong belief in *Teamwork*, we work alongside staff, parents, and our board to ensure every food-related decision supports the best interests of our children.

Overall Nutrition Commitments

We commit to:

- Increasing the percentage of foods offered that fall into the “choose often” category according to HER guidelines.
- Prioritizing the distribution of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and low-sodium, low-sugar items.
- Promoting consistency between the meals and pantry items we provide and the healthy eating lessons we teach.
- Offering food that meets the dietary, cultural, and medical needs of our diverse participants.

Food Purchases

When making food purchases, we will:

- Prioritize healthy, culturally appropriate options that align with our nutrition standards, based on the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) guidelines.
- Focus purchasing on cooking staples, fresh produce, and items in the “choose often” category.
- Avoid purchasing items such as sugary beverages, candy, or ultra-processed snacks.

Food Donations

To better serve our community:

- We will guide donors toward our most needed items using clear and accessible graphics and printed guidelines that highlight popular and nutritious items, especially low-sodium and low-sugar choices.
- We reserve the right to turn away donations that do not meet our quality standards (e.g., expired or spoiled food), in alignment with our commitment to safety and dignity.
- All donated food items must be in sealed, unopened containers. We do not accept items that have been opened, tampered with to ensure the safety and well-being of the children and families we serve. We will abide by the USDA food safety standards in regards to expiration dates.

We aim to:

- Increase nutrition education for the families we serve, including workshops, recipe cards, cooking demos, and taste tests.
- Share community-level education about food insecurity, the impact of childhood hunger, and how donors can make informed, supportive choices.
- Elevate conversations about health equity and the long-term effects of food insecurity on child development, especially in LMI/ALICE households.

Administration and Implementation

- This policy will be reviewed annually by our Operations Director.
- Policy implementation is the responsibility of the food program team, with support from leadership and ongoing feedback from staff, families, and community partners.
- All staff and volunteers will receive orientation and periodic training on this policy and its goals.
- We are committed to staying flexible and responsive to the evolving needs of our participants, and will include questions to collect feedback on this in our annual surveys for improvement.