

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Eat Smart Idaho helps high school students create food pantry

AT A GLANCE

Eat Smart Idaho partnered with students at a local high school to help create a food pantry and food drive.

The Situation

Food insecurity is a pervasive issue that affects those of all ages. In Idaho, one in seven residents struggle with food insecurity, and among children it is even worse, with one in six children struggling with food insecurity. One method to help address this issue is by providing food pantries. As one source for emergency food, pantries are typically set up to provide food to anyone in need, regardless of their background. However, if children are struggling with food insecurity, they do not often have a way of getting to a local food pantry, even if there is one available. Thus, school food pantries fill an important role in reducing food insecurity among youth.

Blackfoot High School had an operating hygiene pantry, where students could come and get necessary personal care items. Students did not need to ask a teacher or anyone else for access to the hygiene pantry, as it was open to anyone who needed the items. Two seniors wanted to expand the hygiene pantry by adding a food pantry as their senior project, but they were not sure how to make it happen.



Food pantry stocked with food from the food drive. Photo credit: Michelle McMurphy.

Our Response

Eat Smart Idaho's Healthy Pantry/Healthy Food Drive project works with pantry managers and food drive organizers across the state to increase access to nutritious food choices and improve the atmosphere of the food pantry and attitudes/culture surrounding emergency food assistance. Food drive materials promote healthy donations while signs and recipes in the pantry encourage pantry participants to select healthy food items. Students at Blackfoot High School contacted Eat Smart Idaho community nutrition advisor, Michelle McMurphy, for assistance in starting the food pantry. Michelle and Eat Smart Idaho eastern district administrator, Laura Foist, met with the students to discuss starting a pantry in the high school.

The students already planned where to have the pantry — in the same location as the hygiene pantry — and received the appropriate approvals. Eat Smart Idaho helped the students figure out logistics of how to obtain food for the pantry, how to organize the pantry and pantry sustainability.

Eat Smart Idaho also helped set up a Healthy Food Drive, where the students went to the local grocery stores, handed out a list of needed food items and collected donations from individuals. The food collected was a great start to the pantry.

Program Outcomes

Students participating in Blackfoot High School's Healthy Food Drive handed out 100 copies of the Eat Smart Idaho Healthy Food Drive Donation List to patrons entering local grocery stores. Students then collected food on the same day and location.

The healthy food drive was a success, with 365 pounds of food collected. This was enough food to reach 304 people with meals. Students were connected with the Idaho Food Bank to receive an ongoing food supply for the pantry.

The food in the pantry was organized based on Eat Smart Idaho's Healthy Food Pantry guidelines. This includes grouping food by food groups — vegetables, fruits, grains, protein and dairy and hanging MyPlate

signs to help participants identify foods from each food group, to encourage selection of food from all five food groups. Recipes utilizing the foods in the pantry are also available to assist participants in learning how to cook and eat the food offered at the pantry.

The food from the healthy food drive was used to stock the pantry, which is in connection with the hygiene pantry. Both are in an area of the school where students can privately enter the pantry without needing to request access from anyone. This allows students in need to pick up food without feeling judged. This is one way Eat Smart Idaho works with community partners to help increase access to healthy food. In FY19, Eat Smart Idaho partnered with 64 pantries and food drives, reaching over 116,000 youth and adults across the state.

The Future

This process of creating a healthy food pantry in schools, starting with the inception of the food pantry, instead of in an existing pantry, can serve as an example for Eat Smart Idaho community nutrition advisors in other areas of the state as opportunities arise in other schools to increase access to healthy foods through school-based pantries.

In the future, students in the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) club will continue to keep the pantry running with input from the school counselors and the family and consumer sciences teacher, Tammy Luker. Eat Smart Idaho has also helped students identify large equipment donation resources, such as a refrigerator for cold items. This could be a project students will work on in the future, as well as identifying potential areas for growth of the food pantry.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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