Medically Tailored Groceries Nutrition Standards for Community-Based Organizations

FEEDING AMERICA





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Introduction

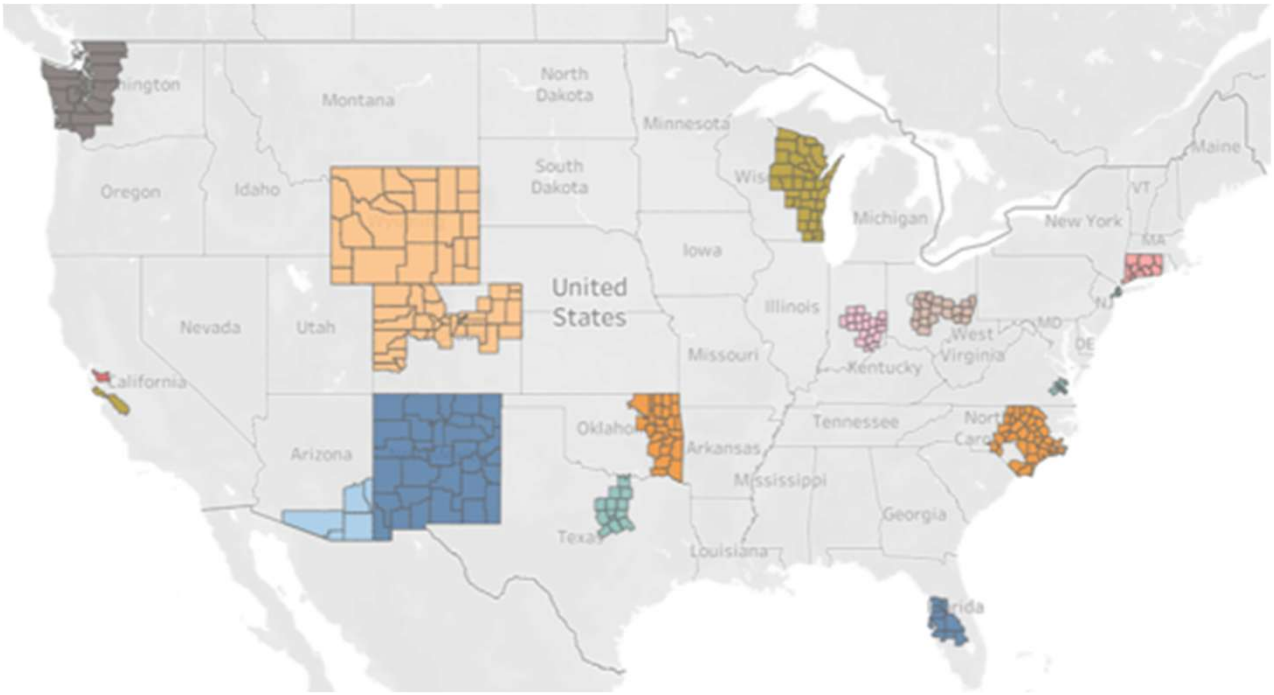
The *Medically Tailored Grocery Nutrition Standards* establish a clinically grounded, operationally feasible framework for delivering nutritious, condition-appropriate food across the charitable food system. Reviewed by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and informed by national frameworks such as Coding 4 Food and insights from the Elevance Health Foundation Food as Medicine 3 (FAM3) initiative and network-wide program analysis, these standards support the prevention and management of diet-related chronic disease while strengthening alignment between food systems and healthcare.

At the core of this framework are the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines, which rank foods based on sodium, saturated fat, and added or total sugar to assess nutrition quality. As a widely adopted system across the network, HER provides a consistent foundation for evaluating inventory, guiding procurement, and ensuring that food distributed through food banks meets defined nutrition standards.

Recognizing food banks, their partner agencies, and community-based organizations as trusted access points within local food and health systems, the standards are designed to support real-world implementation across diverse settings. Their development intentionally balanced clinical rigor with operational practicality, incorporating input from 36 food banks alongside more than 14 registered dietitians through a structured, multi-month review process. This combination of RD and non-RD perspectives ensures the standards are both clinically appropriate for individuals managing chronic conditions and adaptable to varying levels of organizational capacity across the network.

These standards provide condition-specific MTG protocols that complement clinical care, promote dietary adherence, and address barriers such as access, affordability, and cultural relevance. They serve as a unifying framework to support consistent, high-quality, and scalable Food Is Medicine programming that improves health outcomes and overall well-being.

Network Contributors



Feeding America would like to express gratitude to the following network food banks that contributed feedback and input into these standards:

- Elevance Health Foundation Food As Medicine 3 Cohort
- CVS HealthZones Cohort
- Alameda County Community Foodbank
- Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona*
- Connecticut FoodShare*
- Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin*
- Feeding Tampa Bay
- Food Bank for Central and Eastern North Carolina
- Food Bank for New York City
- Food Bank of Alaska, Inc*
- Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma*
- Food Bank of the Rockies
- Food Lifeline*
- Gleaner's Foodbank of Indiana, Inc
- Mid-Ohio Food Collective
- Roadrunner Foodbank*
- Second Harvest of Santa Cruz*
- Tarrant Area Food Bank
- Virginia Peninsula Foodbank*

*Indicates food banks with no RDN on staff. These organizations were included to ensure the effectiveness of this resources in organizations with a range of resources.



Medically Tailored Groceries (MTGs) Nutrition Standards

Medically Tailored Groceries Nutrition Standards



The following is a set of standards for Medically Tailored Groceries (MTGs) designed to help partner food banks, agencies, and other CBOs better serve neighbors with chronic conditions while building readiness for healthcare partnerships. These standards align with likely provider and payor expectations and aim to improve your ability to support MTGs in Food & Health programs.

Assortment

Unless otherwise directed by a healthcare professional:

At least 60% of total food items must be “Choose Often” according to HER Guidelines.

“Choose Sometimes” foods may comprise no more than 40% of total items and must be limited to the following categories:

- Dairy and Non-dairy alternatives
- Grains
- Proteins
- Mixed dishes

"Choose Rarely" foods are not included.

- Condiments/cooking staples can be offered as available.
- Depending on program needs and/or partner/pantry capacity, shelf stable, frozen, and fresh options must be offered to neighbors.

Dose and Duration

Medically Tailored Groceries programs should last at least 3 months to help ensure improved health outcomes.

Neighbors participating in Food & Health Medically Tailored Groceries programs should be offered between 3-5 days (12-25 pounds) of nutritious foods.

Neighbors should have the option of picking up foods twice weekly if large amounts are hard to carry or once every other week if transportation limitations prohibit frequent trips.

Neighbors who cannot pick up foods should be provided with alternative solutions, such as home delivery. Feeding America encourages our network food banks and partner agencies to use platforms and services like Order Ahead to promote choice within the standards whenever possible.

Please note: when a patient receives food prescription care while living in a food insecure household, it can be challenging to comply with recommendations if adequate food is not available for their family. Supporting household-level access through complementary programming helps create a more stable food environment that enables patients to adhere to dietary guidance and sustain healthy eating behaviors over time.

Disease-Specific Standards

These standards focus on supporting neighbors with diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease (CVD), as these are the most commonly addressed conditions in health and nutrition programming. The goals are to improve neighbor health outcomes, demonstrate measurable impact, and pursue sustainable reimbursement for MTG programming.

Core Food Prescription

Food Category	Examples	Diabetes	Cardiovascular Disease	Hypertension
Food and Drug Interactions*		*Recommendations for insulin or diabetes medication interactions will be available in MTG patient care guidance.*	***Avoid:*** *citrus fruits and juices (oranges and grapefruits); high potassium fruits and vegetables (potatoes, tomatoes, bananas, avocados)*	***Avoid:*** *citrus fruits and juices (oranges and grapefruits); high potassium fruits and vegetables (potatoes, tomatoes, bananas, avocados)*
Vegetables	Fresh, canned, frozen, and dried fruits and vegetables, apple sauce, tomato sauce	• **HER Tier:** Choose Often • **Minimum**: 3 types (Maximum 1 type of starchy vegetable, like potatoes or corn, may be offered)	• **HER Tier:** Choose Often • **Minimum:** 3 types	• **HER Tier:** Choose Often • **Minimum:** 3 types
Fruit		• **HER Tier:** Choose Often • **Maximum** 2 types	• **HER Tier**: Choose Often • **Minimum:** 2 types	• **HER Tier:** Choose Often • **Minimum:** 2 types
Protein	Animal (beef, pork, poultry, eggs) and plant-based proteins (nuts, seeds, veggie burgers, soy, beans, peanut butter)	• **HER Tier**: Choose Often or Choose Sometimes • **Minimum**: 2 types of plant-based proteins (beans, lentils, etc.); animal-based proteins (beef, pork, poultry, eggs) can also be included	• **HER Tier**: Choose Often or Choose Sometimes • **Minimum**: 2 types of plant based-proteins (beans, lentils, etc.); animal-based proteins (beef, pork, poultry, eggs) can also be included	• **HER Tier**: Choose Often or Choose Sometimes • **Minimum**: 2 types of plant based-proteins (beans, lentils, etc.); animal-based proteins (beef, pork, poultry, eggs) can also be included
Grains	Bread, rice, pasta	• **HER Tier:** Choose Often • **Minimum**: 2 types (first ingredient must be whole grain)	• **HER Tier**: Choose Often or Choose Sometimes • **Minimum**: 2 types (one must be whole grain)	• **HER Tier**: Choose Often or Choose Sometimes • **Minimum**: 2 types (one must be whole grain)

Source for this table: Schwartz M, Levi R, Lott M, Arm K, Seligman H. Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System. Durham, NC: Healthy Eating Research; 2020.

Optional/As Available Total Items Should Not Exceed Total Items From Core Prescription				
Food Category	**Examples**	**Diabetes**	**Cardiovascular Disease**	**Hypertension**
Dairy and Non-Dairy Alternatives	Diary milk, yogurt, and cheese, as well as all plant-based milks, yogurts, and cheeses	• **HER Tier:** Choose Often or Choose Sometimes	• **HER Tier**: Choose Often	• **HER Tier:** Choose Often or Choose Sometimes
Beverages	Water, coffee, tea, sports drinks	• **HER Tier:** Choose Often	• **HER Tier:** Choose Often	• **HER Tier:** Choose Often
Vegetables and Fruit: 100% Juice	100% fruit or vegetable juice; 100% fruit or vegetable juice popsicles	• **HER Tier:** Choose Often	• **HER Tier:** Choose Often	• **HER Tier:** Choose Often
Mixed Dishes	Frozen meals, soups, stews	• **HER Tier:** Choose Often	• **HER Tier:** Choose Often	• **HER Tier:** Choose Often
Condiments and Cooking Staples	Spices, oil, butter, plant-based spreads, flour	**Offer as available**	**Offer as available**: avoid offering butter, coconut oil, or margarine	**Offer as available**
Processed and Packaged Snacks	Chips, crackers, granola and other bars, popcorn	**Not included**		
Desserts	Ice cream, frozen yogurt, chocolate, cookies, cakes, pastries, etc.	**Not included**		



Appendices:

- Frequently Asked Questions
- Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines
- Example MTG box menus
- For More Information



Frequently Asked Questions

What does Feeding America mean by Food & Health programming?

Feeding America's Food & Health programming refers to a full range of strategies (food security support, medically tailored groceries, produce prescription, etc.) and services that improve access to nutritious food while supporting overall health and well-being. These approaches recognize that access to healthy food is a critical factor in health outcomes and are designed to improve health while addressing food insecurity.

What is the purpose of the Medically Tailored Grocery Standards?

The Medically Tailored Grocery Standards support the use of food as a tool to improve health outcomes for individuals managing diet-related chronic conditions. They combine clinical best practices[123] with implementation science findings to ensure they translate into meaningful outcomes in real-world settings.

The standards are designed to support individual needs—helping people consistently access, select, and use foods aligned with their health conditions and daily realities. This approach supports improved adherence, consistent utilization, and stronger health outcomes while enabling programs to operate effectively at scale.

Do these standards address the individual or household level?

The standards are designed to support health at the individual level, particularly for those managing chronic conditions. However, an individual may find it difficult to follow nutrition guidance if the rest of their household is food insecure. That is why additional food assistance may be provided for the rest of the household. This complementary assistance reinforces behavior change and supports sustained outcomes over time.

Frequently Asked Questions (con't)

Why include fresh, frozen, and shelf-stable options?

Offering a mix ensures programs meet the practical needs of individuals experiencing food insecurity. These options increase flexibility, affordability, and the likelihood of sustained healthy eating beyond program participation.

Why are HER Nutrition Guidelines used?

HER Nutrition Guidelines provide a consistent framework for assessing food quality and are widely used across the charitable food system. Using them ensures alignment with best practices while maintaining flexibility for real-world implementation.

Why include protein recommendations?

Providing produce alone does not guarantee participants can afford the protein needed to meet a medically appropriate diet. USDA purchasing data show that, compared with food-secure households at similar income levels, food-insecure households spend approximately $13 less per adult per week on food and purchase significantly less total protein, seafood, and plant protein. They are also more likely to purchase no protein foods at all during a given week[4] (Gregory, Mancino, and Coleman-Jensen, 2019). More recent survey data confirm the barrier directly. Among food-insecure households in Washington State, 83% reported difficulty affording red meat, 62% chicken, 49% eggs, 47% fish or shellfish, and 26% nuts or nut products[5] (UW Center for Public Health Nutrition, 2025).

This is not just a nutrition preference gap. The American Heart Association's clinical scientific statement on Food is Medicine defines medically tailored groceries as unprepared or lightly processed foods including fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and lean proteins selected by a registered dietitian nutritionist to match the participant's condition.[6] Lean protein is built into the clinical definition of the intervention itself, not an optional add-on. Because affordability already limits access to both animal and plant protein, an MTG program cannot assume that produce alone creates enough purchasing power for participants to add protein on their own. Condition-appropriate proteins (beans, lentils, nuts, eggs, fish, poultry, and lean meats) must therefore be built into the grocery package as an essential, not optional, component.

Why do these standards focus primarily on the dose, duration, and nutrition information?

Experience shows us that a slow-to-adapt supply chain can be one of the biggest challenges for community-based organizations implementing MTG programs. While these food standards are just one component of a broader suite of MTG standards, they were prioritized for early release because organizations often have greater ability to influence other program elements than they do the food supply itself. Releasing the food standards first helps support equitable access to healthier food options for individuals and communities experiencing food and nutrition insecurity while giving the supply chain time to adapt to program needs. Additional standards focused on clinical care, nutrition education, implementation, and other program components are being developed in collaboration with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, other health organizations, and network stakeholders and will be released to complement this work.



Frequently Asked Questions (con't)

Will these standards expand?

Yes. The Feeding America Dietetic Community of Practice (or DCoP) is a group of over 100 RDNs and NDTRs from across our national network. These dietetic professionals design implement Food & Health programming at all levels across our Food & Health framework, giving them both nutritional expertise and lived experience with serving communities and individuals that are food insecure. This group was heavily instrumental in the creation of the current standards. They will be identifying and prioritizing other chronic diseases and life cycle stages that require MTG standards, as well as creating the standards along with individuals at the Academy, on an ongoing basis.

References:

1. American Diabetes Association Professional Practice Committee. *Standards of Care in Diabetes—2026*. *Diabetes Care*. 2026;49(Suppl. 1). American Diabetes Association.
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3. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. DASH Eating Plan. National Institutes of Health. Updated February 25, 2026.
4. Gregory CA, Mancino L, Coleman-Jensen A. Food Security and Food Purchase Quality Among Low-Income Households: Findings From the National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey. USDA Economic Research Service; 2019 (ERR-269).
5. University of Washington Center for Public Health Nutrition. Washington State Food Security Survey, Wave 5: Research Brief 16. February 2025. N=5,528.
6. American Heart Association. A Systematic Review of "Food Is Medicine" Randomized Controlled Trials for Noncommunicable Disease in the United States: A Scientific Statement From the American Heart Association. Circulation, 2024.

Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines

Nutrition Guidelines for Ranking Charitable Food

Food Category*	Example Products	Choose Often			Choose Sometimes			Choose Rarely		
		Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar**	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar**	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar**
Fruits and Vegetables	Fresh, canned, frozen, and dried fruits and vegetables, frozen broccoli with cheese sauce, apple sauce, tomato sauce, 100% juice, 100% fruit popsicle	≤2 g	≤230 mg	0 g	All 100% juice and plain dried fruit			≥2.5 g***	≥480 mg	≥12 g
					≥2.5 g***	231-479 mg	1-11 g			
Grains	Bread, rice, pasta, grains with seasoning mixes	First ingredient must be whole grain AND meet following thresholds:			≥2.5 g***	231-479 mg	7-11 g	≥2.5 g***	≥480 mg	≥12 g
		≤2 g	≤230 mg	≤6 g						
Protein	Animal (beef, pork, poultry, sausage, deli meats, hot dogs, eggs) and plant proteins (nuts, seeds, veggie burgers, soy, beans, peanut butter)	≤2 g	≤230 mg	≤6 g	2.5-4.5 g	231-479 mg	7-11 g	≥5 g	≥480 mg	≥12 g
Dairy	Milk, cheese, yogurt	≤3 g	≤230 mg	0 g	3.5-6 g	231-479 mg	1-11 g	≥6.5 g	≥480 mg	≥12 g
Non-Dairy Alternatives	All plant-based milks, yogurts and cheeses	≤2 g	≤230 mg	≤6 g	≥2.5 g	231-479 mg	7-11 g	≥2.5 g	≥480 mg	≥12 g
Beverages	Water, soda, coffee, tea, sports drinks, non-100% juice products	0 g	0 mg	0 g	0 g	1-140 mg	1-11 g	≥1 g	≥141 mg	≥12 g
Mixed Dishes	Frozen meals, soups, stews, macaroni and cheese	≤3 g	≤480 mg	≤6 g	3.5-6 g	481-599 mg	7-11 g	≥6.5 g	≥600 mg	≥12 g
Processed and Packaged Snacks	Chips (including potato, corn, and other vegetable chips), crackers, granola and other bars, popcorn	None			If a grain is the first ingredient, it must be a whole grain AND meet following thresholds:			≥2.5 g	≥141mg	≥7 g
					0-2 g	0-140 mg	0-6 g			
Desserts	Ice cream, frozen yogurt, chocolate, cookies, cakes, pastries, snack cakes, baked goods, cake mixes	None			None			All desserts		
Condiments and Cooking Staples	Spices, oil, butter, plant-based spreads, flour, salad dressing, jarred sauces (except tomato sauce), seasoning, salt, sugar	Not ranked								
Miscellaneous Products	Nutritional supplements, baby food	Not ranked								

Source for this table: Schwartz M, Levi R, Lott M, Arm K, Seligman H. Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System. Durham, NC: Healthy Eating Research; 2020.

Example MTG Box Menus: Cardiovascular Disease (CVD)

Shelf Stable (adapted from Gleaners Food Bank of Indiana and Fresh Connect Central):

- NSA* carrots
- NSA* corn
- NSA* green beans
- Diced peaches in 100% juice
- Mixed fruit in 100% juice
- Oats
- Brown rice
- Dried kidney beans
- Dried pinto beans
- Low sodium canned chicken
- Low sodium canned soup

Vegetarian:
Fresh produce box

Shelf stable box:
- NSA* carrots
- NSA* green beans
- Unsweetened applesauce
- Diced pears in 100% juice
- Oats
- White rice
- Dried kidney beans
- NSA* pinto beans
- Low sodium vegetable soup

MTG for African American Neighbors:
Fresh produce box: cabbage, bell peppers, collard greens, apples, pears, potatoes

Shelf stable box:
- NSA* corn
- Unflavored potato flakes
- Diced peaches in 100% juice
- Oats
- White rice
- Dried pinto beans
- Dried black-eyed peas
- Canned tuna in water

Consider offering frozen chicken, turkey, pork loin, lean beef, or seafood

MTG for Filipino Neighbors:
Fresh produce box: bok choy, celery, bell peppers, onions, apples, pears, watermelon

Shelf stable box:
- NSA* carrots
- NSA* green beans
- Pineapples in 100% juice
- Brown rice
- Egg noodles
- Dried kidney beans
- Peanuts or cashews
- Canned tuna in water

Consider offering frozen chicken, pork, and seafood

MTG for Russian Neighbors:
Fresh produce box: apples, peaches, pears, cabbage, cucumbers, potatoes

Shelf stable box:
- NSA* sliced beets
- NSA* carrots
- Diced peaches in 100% juice
- Oats
- White rice
- NSA* canned kidney beans
- NSA* lima beans
- Low sodium canned chicken

Consider offering frozen beef, chicken, or turkey

*NSA= No Salt Added Canned Food

Example MTG Box Menus: Hypertension (HTN)

Shelf Stable (adapted from Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee):

- NSA* carrots
- NSA* corn
- NSA* green beans
- Unsweetened applesauce
- Canned mixed fruit in 100% juice
- Oatmeal
- Corn flakes
- NSA* pinto beans
- Peanut butter
- Low sodium canned chicken

Vegetarian:
Fresh produce box

Shelf Stable Box:
- NSA* carrots
- NSA* corn
- NSA* green beans
- Unsweetened applesauce
- Diced pineapples in 100% juice
- Oatmeal
- White rice
- NSA* pinto beans
- Peanut butter
- Dried chickpeas
- Low sodium canned vegetable soup

MTG for Vietnamese Neighbors:
Fresh produce box:
Cabbage, onions, bell peppers, cucumbers, pineapple

Shelf stable box:
- NSA* carrots
- Canned bamboo shoots
- Pineapples in 100% juice
- Rice noodles
- Brown rice
- Peanuts
- Dried mung beans
- Canned tuna in water

Consider offering frozen pork, chicken, or fish, as well as tofu

MTG for Guatemalan Neighbors:
Fresh produce box:
Cabbage, onions, bell peppers, apples, pineapple

Shelf stable box:
- NSA* corn
- Pineapples in 100% juice
- Corn tortillas
- White rice
- Dried black beans
- NSA* pinto beans
- Low sodium canned chicken

Consider offering frozen pork, chicken, fish, or beef

MTG for Ukrainian Neighbors:
Fresh produce box:
Carrots, celery, potatoes, apples, pears, peaches, onions

Shelf stable box:
- NSA* corn
- NSA* green peas
- Unsweetened applesauce
- Oats
- Egg noodles
- Dried split peas
- Dried lentils
- Canned tuna in water

Consider offering frozen beef, chicken, or turkey

*NSA= No Salt Added Canned Food

Example MTG Box Menus: Diabetes

Shelf Stable (adapted from Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee):

- NSA* corn
- NSA* diced tomatoes
- NSA* green beans
- Unsweetened applesauce
- Canned mandarin oranges in their own juice
- Oats
- Brown Rice
- Dried kidney beans
- Peanut butter
- Tuna packed in water

Vegetarian:

Fresh produce box

Shelf stable box:

- Unflavored potato flakes
- NSA* diced tomatoes
- NSA* green beans
- Unsweetened Applesauce
- Oats
- Whole wheat pasta
- Dried kidney beans
- NSA* pinto beans
- Low sodium spaghetti sauce

MTG for Afghani Neighbors:

Fresh produce box:
Cabbage, apples, bell peppers, cucumbers, oranges, potatoes

Shelf stable box:

- NSA* diced tomatoes
- 100% pumpkin puree
- Unsweetened Applesauce
- Oats
- Whole wheat spaghetti noodles
- Dried chickpeas
- Dried black eyed peas

Consider offering frozen halal chicken or turkey

MTG for Haitian Neighbors:

Fresh produce box:
Cabbage, bell peppers, mangoes, oranges, plantains

Shelf stable box:

- NSA* corn
- 100% pumpkin puree
- Canned pineapples in 100% juice
- Oats
- Cornmeal
- Dried chickpeas
- Dried black eyed peas

Consider offering frozen beef, chicken, pork, turkey, or seafood

MTG for Mexican Neighbors:

Fresh produce box:
Apples, bell and jalapeno peppers, oranges, cabbage, onions

Shelf stable box:

- NSA* diced tomatoes
- NSA* corn
- Canned pineapples in 100% juice
- Oats
- Corn tortillas
- Dried black beans
- Dried kidney beans

Consider offering frozen beef or whole chicken

*NSA= No Salt Added Canned Food



For More Information

For more information on Feeding America's medically tailored grocery standards, dietetic professional support, or Food and Health work, please reach out to:

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