Strategic Food Sourcing Report: Metrics & Data Inputs

Food sourcing directly impacts a food shelf's budget and what types or amounts of food is offered to the community. Since food sources constantly change, FFEN recommends a food sourcing "health-check" every 6 months to track trends, identify new opportunities, and plan for consistent service to food shelf shoppers.

FFEN has identified five measurements to help food shelves understand and evaluate food sourcing performance. These measurements can help communicate with stakeholders, improve operations, and make budget decisions. All measurements cover a 6 month period and are informed by the most recent Minnesota Food Shelf Shopper Survey results.

Strategic Food Sourcing Report Metrics

Meeting Shopper Needs: Prioritizing Most Important Foods - Fresh produce, protein, dairy			
Key metric	**Definition**	**Why is this important?**	**How can a food shelf use this metric?**
Most Important Foods: Percent of Pounds Sourced	Total pounds of fresh produce, protein, and dairy divided by total food pounds sourced	Provides a high level view of the priority given to sourcing the most important foods FFEN Target: at least 50% of foods sourced are in Most Important Foods	Talking point for your community • "Our food shelf ensures that over XX% of our food is what our shoppers most want: fresh produce, protein, and dairy."
Most Important Foods: Total Pounds Sourced	Total pounds sourced of fresh produce, protein, and dairy	Provides a high level view related to the work of managing highly perishable food streams Note: While the % of Most Important Foods might stay the same, more total pounds means a higher level of effort	Planning tool for food shelf operations: • What processes need to be refined given the number of perishable pounds moving in and out in a week/month? • What additional cooler, freezer, or merchandising equipment could help manage these pounds?

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Most Important Foods: Pounds sourced per individual per visit of fresh produce, protein, and dairy	Total pounds sourced by each food category - divided by total number of individual visits	Provides an average view of what an individual shopper might experience when they shop the food shelf Overall numbers can look large so it is also valuable to view information from an individual shopper experience	Food Sourcing goal setting: • Set goals by individual amounts to help build regular food orders • Identify opportunities to increase sourcing in Most Important Food categories
Stewarding Donor Dollars: Raising funds and ensuring dollars have the most impact			
Key metric	**Definition**	**Why is this important?**	**How can a food shelf use this metric?**
Cost per individual per visit	Total food costs (captured in report) - divided by total number of individual visits	Provides a high level view of the costs per individual, allowing for better budget planning and forecasting by the organization Note: The goal is not $0 but to identify an amount that provides consistent service to the community into the future, even as demand increases or revenue changes	Budgeting tool for food shelves: • Use cost per individual to develop scenario plans and food budgets based on anticipated service numbers • If cost is unsustainable, identify ways to decrease food costs by category or item • Increase intentional food drive requests instead of purchasing Talking point for your community: • “Your donation of $XX will provide food for XX individuals in your community.”
Pounds sourced per individual per visit of TEFAP and purchased product	Total pounds sourced by food stream - divided by total number of individual visits	Provides an average view by individual visit on pounds of TEFAP and purchase products sourced	Food Sourcing goal setting: • Set goals around TEFAP sourcing to reduce cost per individual

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		Per individual visit data can help determine if a food shelf is getting their fair share of USDA foods based on their service numbers	Choice Framework review: • Review choice framework and categories to allow for most flexibility when sourcing (i.e. canned fruit options vs canned peaches always)
Meeting Shopper Needs: Unique community needs and considerations			
Key metric	**Definition**	**Why is this important?**	**How can a food shelf use this Metric?**
Direct Shopper Feedback	Intentional collection of shopper feedback through surveys, interviews, focus groups, etc.	Provides organized and direct feedback about programming and services from those impacted most	Storytelling for social media and communications out to the public Identify potential process and programming improvements
Community Demographics	Intentional review of community demographics - MN Compass is a great resource	Provides a view of changes and trends in demographics that might highlight communities that are under-served or under-represented within the organization	May be helpful to identify culturally connected foods to stock at the food pantry

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Appendix: Strategic Food Sourcing Report – Data Inputs, Definitions, Reminders

Food Shelf Service Statistics:

- Pounds distributed by the food shelf site reported in monthly statistics
- Total individual visits reported in monthly statistics

Food Sourced:

- Pounds and cost of food items received at the food shelf site as reported by food bank orders/deliveries
- Includes food rescue pounds reported to food banks
- Includes local purchasing pounds when provided by the food shelf

Using Individual vs Household Metrics

- The Strategic Food Sourcing Report uses individual visits in metrics rather than households because household sizes vary by food shelf — using individuals allows metrics to be compared across food shelves

Pounds per Individual Visit

- Uses all individual visits (not unique individuals) in monthly services stats

Data Update Process

- When possible, historical data is added as new sites join FFEN's service. Prior rounds gain additional food sourcing and service data and metrics update accordingly when each new report round is finalized.
- With more data sets included, a more robust picture of food sourcing across the state can be provided.

This resource has been developed by Foundation for Essential Needs (FFEN) in support of our Strategic Food Sourcing Service. More resources and details can be found at ffen.org/strategic-food-sourcing. If you have updates, corrections, or questions, please contact programs@ffen.org. (Last updated: 9/13/2026)