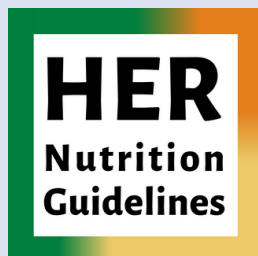




Resources to Improve Implementation of the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System



About This Guide

This guide contains training materials, resources, tips, and examples of practices to help food banks improve the implementation of Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System.

To create this guide, we interviewed people working in food banks across the country to learn how they approach ranking foods using the HER Guidelines. They shared their experiences, the challenges they face, and the practices that help with their work. We also analyzed these food banks' inventory reports to identify specific categories of foods that are most confusing to rank and topics that needed clarification or more training.

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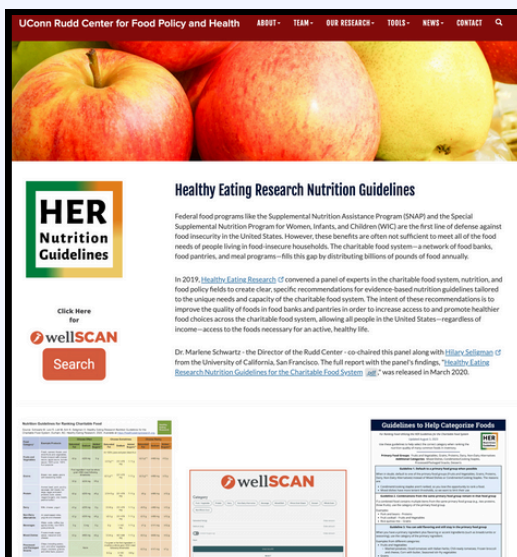
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We are grateful to everyone in the food banks who collaborated with us on this project and shared their experiences with the HER Guidelines. They were the basis for developing this guide. This guide was created as part of a research project supported by Healthy Eating Research, with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (Award 81351).



**For more information and other
resources, please visit:**

uconnruddcenter.org/her-guidelines

**If you have any questions about this
guide, please email:**

rudd.center@uconn.edu

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Approaches to Implementing the HER Guidelines

Background

There are multiple ways to implement the HER Guidelines. Food banks may choose to focus their efforts on implementing HER Guidelines depending on their readiness, size, capacity, policies, and priorities. They may get started by ranking certain food categories, food from certain sources or it may depend on the team responsible for nutrition ranking.



Who, where, when?

Here are three possible scenarios for the implementation of HER ranking:

1

Rank foods when purchasing



Food purchasing provides an opportunity to start with the ranking process **before the foods come into the warehouse**. In this scenario, the purchasing team enters the item information in the inventory system when making purchases, and determines the rank of foods before they arrive at the warehouse.



2

Rank foods when receiving



Many food banks rank the products as they **receive them at the warehouse**. In this approach, food bank staff enter the item information in their inventory system and determine the rank of foods as they get to the warehouse.

3

Rank foods already in the inventory system



Other food banks determine the rank of foods **after the foods have been received, identified, and entered in their inventory system**. In this case, the ranking team determines the rank based on the description of the item in the system.




Resources and Training Materials

Here is a list of resources and materials to help your food bank implement the HER Guidelines using the three different ranking approaches.

The icons on the left indicate scenarios when these resources can be the most helpful:

 Ranking foods when purchasing	 Ranking foods when receiving	 Ranking foods in the inventory system
--	---	--

When it is most useful?	Resources
	<u>HER Guidelines Basic Training</u> : This basic training is for anyone at the food bank who works on HER ranking. It provides an introduction to the HER Guidelines and lists examples of foods in each HER food category.
	<u>Step-by-Step Guide to Ranking Foods</u> : This guide explains how to identify products' nutritional information and use it to determine their rank. It also explains tips for entering item names and their description in the inventory system in ways that are useful to agencies and helpful for data teams to rank or verify ranks.
	<u>Foods Always Ranked the Same</u> : Here is a list of foods and their ranks. These foods will always have the same rank, no matter the brand. If your food bank is new to HER Guidelines, this is a good place to start!
	<u>Ranking Foods from USDA</u> : A quick way to increase ranking completeness is to rank the foods purchased through the USDA in The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). The ranks for these foods can be easily searched for using the wellSCAN database .
	<u>Common Challenges When Ranking</u> : This training module lists the most common mistakes when ranking foods and explains how to assign the correct HER category and rank.
	<u>Checking for Ranking Errors in Inventory Reports</u> : A guide to monitor ranking accuracy and completeness. This guide can also be used to rank foods retrospectively , i.e., after they have been received, identified, and entered in their inventory system but were not yet ranked.

Roadmap to Implementing the HER Guidelines

The purpose of this roadmap is to list steps to implement HER ranking in the three possible scenarios. These implementation steps are lined from the less to the more complex, in ways that food banks can build up their capacity, team, and resources to expand their approaches to ranking foods along the map.

Where to start?

First, decide who, when, and where to rank foods:



Ranking foods
when purchasing



Ranking foods
when receiving



Ranking foods in the
inventory system

Train your team about
HER Guidelines

Rank USDA foods

Run reports and check
ranks

Rank foods that always
have the same rank

Rank purchased foods

Rank bulk donations

Build the HER Ranking Team

Whatever ranking approach the food bank has taken to implement the HER Guidelines, building up a HER ranking team can facilitate all stages of implementation. Fostering a collaborative environment can help the food bank achieve a more complete and accurate HER ranking. Here are some examples of how some food banks have engaged their teams to implement HER:

Get everyone involved:

Training people from different departments will help with the implementation of the HER guidelines at different stages of the process.

"We also have a nutritionist on our staff... I can call her and ask her opinion, she's extremely helpful..."

Process Coordinator

Have an IT "expert":

A person knowledgeable about technology and the food bank's software will help set up the ranking process and pull inventory reports for evaluation.

"So we have a monthly 'mixer', which is a monthly meeting with at least half the staff and we've done a training and conversation about HER.... it's really hard to pull those individuals off the floor, so we're doing it as we can..."

Director of Nutrition

Record nutrition information:

Ask receiving or purchasing team to attach pictures of the nutrition facts label and the front of the each new product. These pictures can be saved in a shared location or be sent to the data ranking team.

"One of the things that we focused early on when we implemented the original nutrition policy was education for staff and ongoing education for staff."

Director of Inventory Management

Have a nutrition "expert":

Having a person who is knowledgeable in nutrition (e.g., dietitian) can help the ranking team solve some of the harder nutrition-related questions.

"Our strategic director is really good. So if there's ever any issue of if I ever have a question with [the software] P2, she's the first person I will go to."

Food Sourcing Coordinator

Keep communication channels open:

Create opportunities for the ranking team to periodically share their experiences and questions regarding the HER ranking.

"We do pictures of the item and the labels. So we know exactly what we are sending to that person, whoever is going to do the ranking..."

Director of Nutrition

Other Ideas to Improve Implementation

"...sometimes I can get the vendor to send me the picture of the nutrition label before it even arrives in the building and I'll create the item card before it's even inside the building."

Food Sourcing Coordinator

Get nutrition information for purchased items ahead of time

Connect with other food banks or organizations

"It was helpful to tap into the Feeding America Network and, for those individuals who had been ranking, I reached out to them... So that's always helpful to get that firsthand testimony."

Nutrition Education Supervisor

"We get dietetic interns. So we also do some training with them and give them the overview of what the guidelines are, how we use them, and they're big support with nutrition ranking"

Nutrition Education Supervisor

Partner with local dietetics programs

Have a nutrition policy informed by HER Guidelines

"...the nutrition policy has to be ongoing, ever living, breathing... we are always engaged in a conversation about this work. It has to be top of mind for our inventory people, it has to be top of mind for our purchasing team."

Director of Nutrition

"We also set a goal to develop a monitoring and evaluation plan. So that was something I knew was important because we can rank all day long but if we don't set goals, then what's the point of all of it?"

Nutrition Education Supervisor

Develop a monitoring and evaluation plan

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is it essential to implement the HER Guidelines in food banks?

The charitable food system is an important contributor to the food environment and many organizations within this system have prioritized sourcing and supplying more nutritious foods. Many families and individuals are not only experiencing food and nutrition insecurity, but also chronic and diet-related diseases. Therefore, the HER Guidelines provide food banks with a common metric for identifying foods based on their nutritional quality.

Our food bank is new to HER Guidelines; where should we start?

There is no right or wrong answer, and each food bank can plan to implement HER Guidelines according to its needs and priorities. Some rank only procured foods, and others try to rank donated items as well. Once your food bank has decided which foods will be their priority to rank, you can outline the steps using the [Roadmap to Implementing the HER Guidelines](#).

Our food bank has decided to rank only the purchased foods; where should we start?

If your food bank decides to rank only purchased foods:

1. Train your procurement team with the [HER Guidelines Basic Training](#) and the [Step-by-Step Guide to Ranking Foods](#)
2. Ask vendors to send the purchased items' nutrition information ahead of time
3. Rank foods that always have the same rank using [Foods Always Ranked the Same](#)
4. Rank foods from USDA using the [Ranking Foods from USDA](#) guide
5. Run reports and check ranks using [Check for Ranking Errors in Inventory Reports](#)

Our food bank has decided to rank the purchased foods and bulk donated when they get to the warehouse; where should we start?

1. Train your warehouse or receiving team using the [HER Guidelines Basic Training](#) and the [Step-by-Step Guide to Ranking Foods](#)
2. Rank foods that always have the same rank using the [Foods Always Ranked the Same](#)
3. Rank foods from USDA using the [Ranking Foods from USDA](#)
4. Rank assorted donations; assigning a rank is better than leaving them without one. The [Food Always Ranked the Same](#) guide suggests a process to identify and rank this category
5. Run reports and check ranks using the [Check for Ranking Errors in Inventory Reports](#)

Our food bank has decided to rank foods that are already in the inventory system; where should we start?

If your food bank is planning to rank foods that are already in the inventory system:

1. Train your data team with the [HER Guidelines Basic Training](#)
2. Use the [Check for Ranking Errors in Inventory Reports](#) to guide your team on a process for ranking foods by looking at their description and food categories in the inventory report.
3. Rank foods that always have the same rank using the [Foods Always Ranked the Same](#)
4. Rank foods from USDA using the [Ranking Foods from USDA](#)
5. Rank assorted donations; assigning a rank is better than leaving them without one. The [Food Always Ranked the Same](#) suggests a process to identify and rank this category.

Continued

Frequently Asked Questions

Are there any foods or food categories that are easier or quicker to rank?

Yes, there are some food categories that you can rank faster than others. The **Foods Always Ranked the Same** guide lists foods that always have the same rank, no matter their brand. Another category of foods that you can rank quickly is the foods from USDA. The **Ranking Foods from USDA** guide lists foods available from the USDA in The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and explains how to search for the foods and ranks using the **wellSCAN database**.

Some food categories are more challenging to rank than others. Is there a guide to help?

Yes, the **Common Challenges When Ranking** guide includes a list of common confusions and ranking challenges and an explanation of how to rank these foods.

Our staff finds some snack products challenging to rank. Is there a resource that can help?

Snack items such as chips, crackers, pretzels, popcorn, granola, and snack bars are frequently available in the charitable food system. **HER Guidelines Basic Training** and the **Step-by-Step Guide to Ranking Foods** will help you identify and rank Packaged and Processed Snacks.

How should we rank assorted foods (e.g., mixed flavors, yogurt, or assorted snacks)?

Assorted foods are challenging to rank for most food banks, but it is better to assign a rank than to leave it without. **HER Guidelines Basic Training** and **Food Always Ranked the Same** list examples of foods in this category and the outline of a process to rank assorted foods.

My team needs help identifying if a food is a whole grain. Is there a guide to help?

Many shelf-stable foods contain whole grains, but identifying whether certain foods contain whole grains can be tricky. The **Step-by-Step Guide to Ranking Foods** explains how to identify products' nutritional information, like whole grains, and use this information to determine ranks.

What is the difference between added sugars and total sugars?

Total sugars are all sugars, both added and naturally occurring in food. Added sugars are only those that are added to a food during processing. For example, 1 cup of frozen strawberries may include 6 grams of total sugars, but 0 grams of added sugars because no additional sugar has been added. Meanwhile, one cup of strawberry jam may include 19 grams of total sugars of which 14 grams are added sugars. The **Step-by-Step Guide to Ranking Foods** explains where to find this information on products' nutrition facts labels.

Why should we pay attention to the presence of sweeteners in foods?

Many foods in our food system contain some sweeteners. Whether these are caloric sweeteners or diet sweeteners, it is important to check if foods have sweeteners as these determine their HER rank. Caloric sweeteners comprise the added sugars value that impacts the HER Rank. Diet sweeteners are often found in dairy and beverages and should be considered when determining the HER rank. The **Step-by-Step Guide to Ranking Foods** outlines tips to identify sweeteners in food.

Continued

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the relationship between Feeding America food categories (FANO) and the HER food categories? Are they the same?

The eleven HER categories are distinct from the 31 Feeding America (FANO) categories that are used in Foods to Encourage (F2E) reports. The relationship between HER categories and Feeding America FANO/F2E categories are explained in the [**HER Guidelines Basic Training**](#).

What is the difference between HER and Feeding America's Foods to Encourage (F2E)?

Feeding America lists the F2E based on food categories. HER Guidelines consider food category and the foods' content of three key nutrients, saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar, to determine the nutritional rank. Therefore, the specific nutritional value of individual foods determines their rank. For example, using HER Guidelines, whole grain cereals are ranked "Choose Often," and cereals with high amounts of added sugar are ranked "Choose Rarely." In the F2E list, all cereal types are included.

My food bank has a high staff turnover and we need to train new staff constantly. Is there a basic HER ranking training that we can use for this?

Yes, the [**HER Guidelines Basic Training**](#) is a resource for food banks that need to constantly train or retrain staff members who work on HER ranking. The training introduces the HER Guidelines and lists examples of foods in each HER food category. The [**Step-by-Step Guide to Ranking Foods**](#) explains how to identify products' nutritional information and use this information to determine the foods' rank.

Can I make my food bank's product identification process more efficient?

While each food bank organizes its operations according to its resources and needs, good product identification can help improve the consistency and accuracy of the HER ranking and monitoring process. The [**Step-by-Step Guide to Ranking Foods**](#) provides tips and examples for describing items in inventory systems. It explains a process for naming foods that come to food banks in ways that are useful to agencies and helpful for data teams to rank or check for rank errors.

How do I check for errors in ranking?

You can develop a plan to check for ranking errors using reports from your inventory system. To identify and fix ranking errors, follow the process explained in the [**Check for Ranking Errors in Inventory Reports**](#) guide.

My food bank is trying to rank foods that are already in our inventory system. Is there a way to rank these foods retrospectively?

Yes, the [**Checking for Ranking Errors in Inventory Reports**](#) guide explains a process for ranking foods retrospectively using inventory reports. The same process can be used to check for ranking errors and monitor ranking accuracy and completeness in inventory reports.

Healthy Eating Research (HER)

Nutrition Guidelines - Basic Training

Background

Welcome to the basic training for the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System!

This resource is designed for anyone new to the HER Guidelines for charitable foods. The HER Guidelines set a process for identifying and ranking food's nutritional quality. Ranking foods is an important step in helping charitable food agencies (food banks and pantries) track the nutritional quality of their offerings.

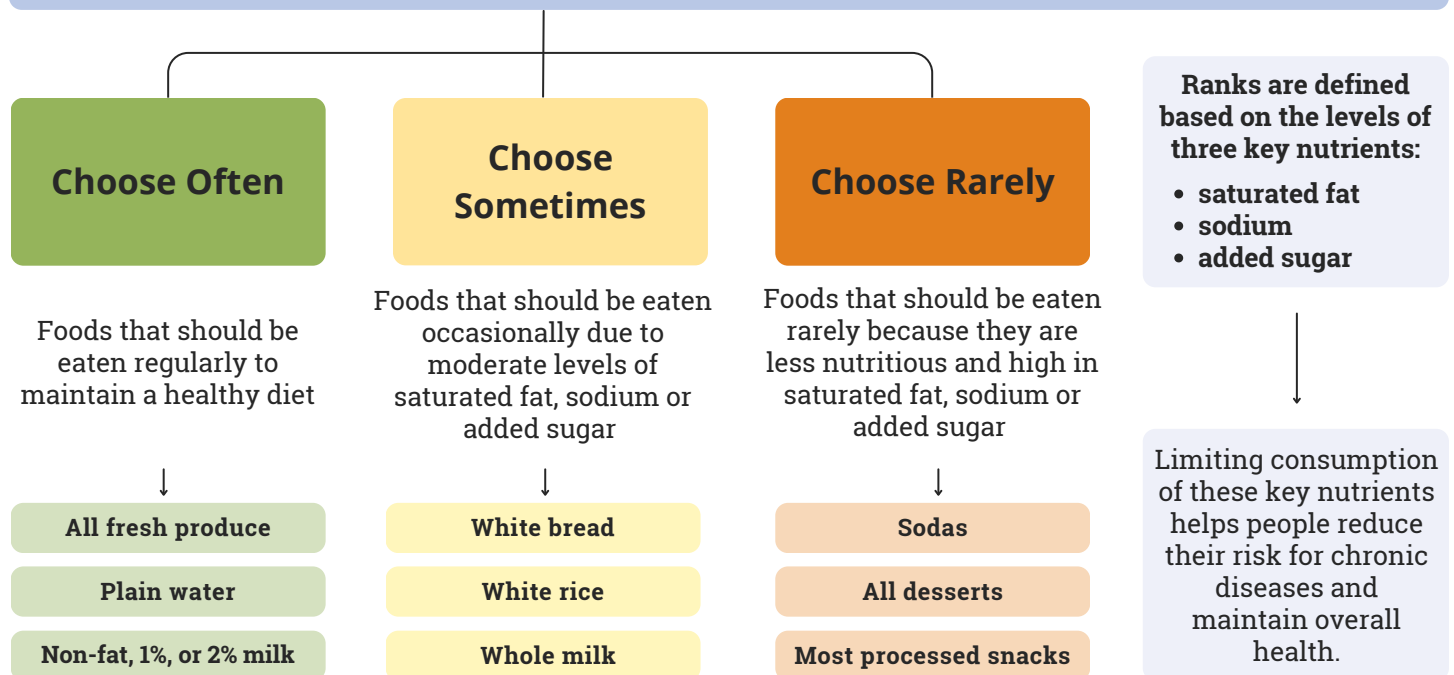


This training answers the following questions:

- What do the HER ranks mean?
- How were the limits of key nutrients established?
- What are the HER food categories?
- What are examples of foods in each category?
- What is the relationship between HER food categories and the Feeding America food categories (FANO/F2E)?

HER Nutrition Ranks

The HER Guidelines classify foods into three levels of recommendation (or ranks). A few example items are listed:



Defining Limits for Key Nutrients



Health experts discussed appropriate limits for key nutrients of concern, considering the purpose and the category of foods



The limits of saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars to determine a rank are specific for each food category



The limits were defined based on existing standards focused on promoting healthy diets, such as the Dietary Guidelines for Americans



The goal of setting nutrient limits is to guide food banks and pantries to offer healthier food choices



American Heart Association



Dietary Guidelines for Americans



11 HER Food Categories

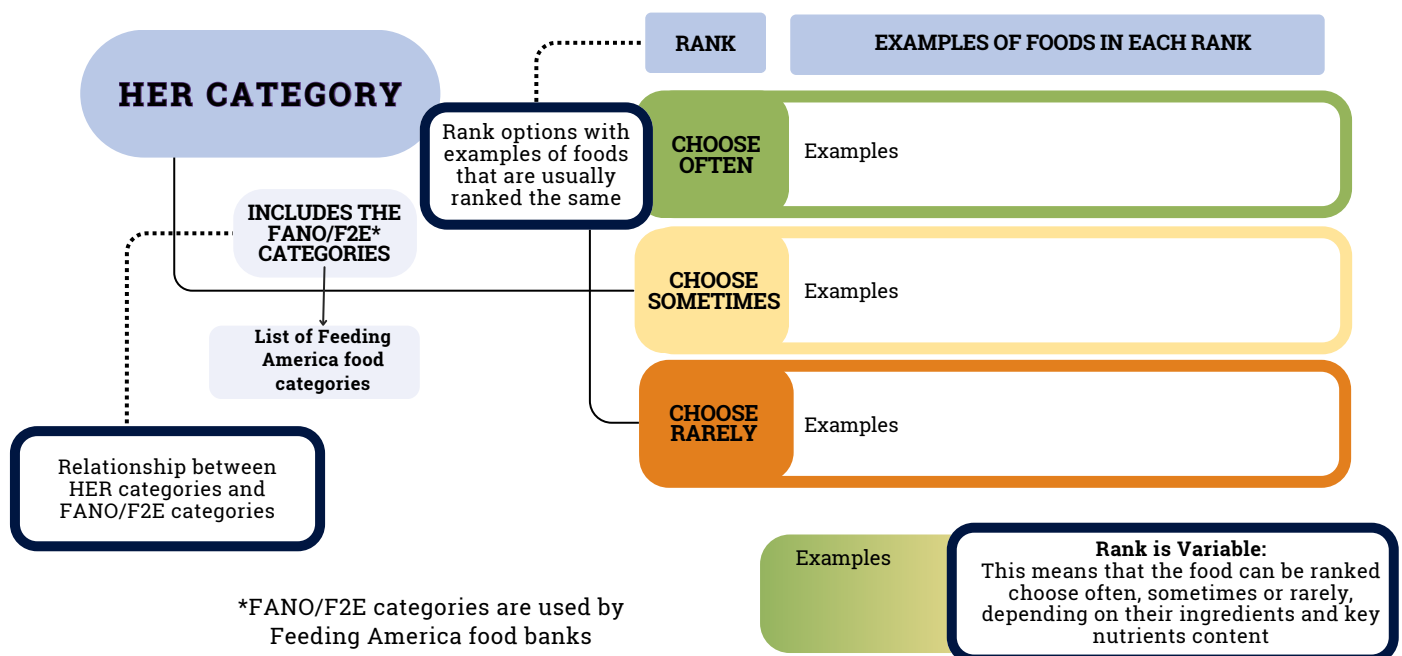
Some of these categories directly align with USDA MyPlate categories; others represent food groups commonly found in food banks and pantries

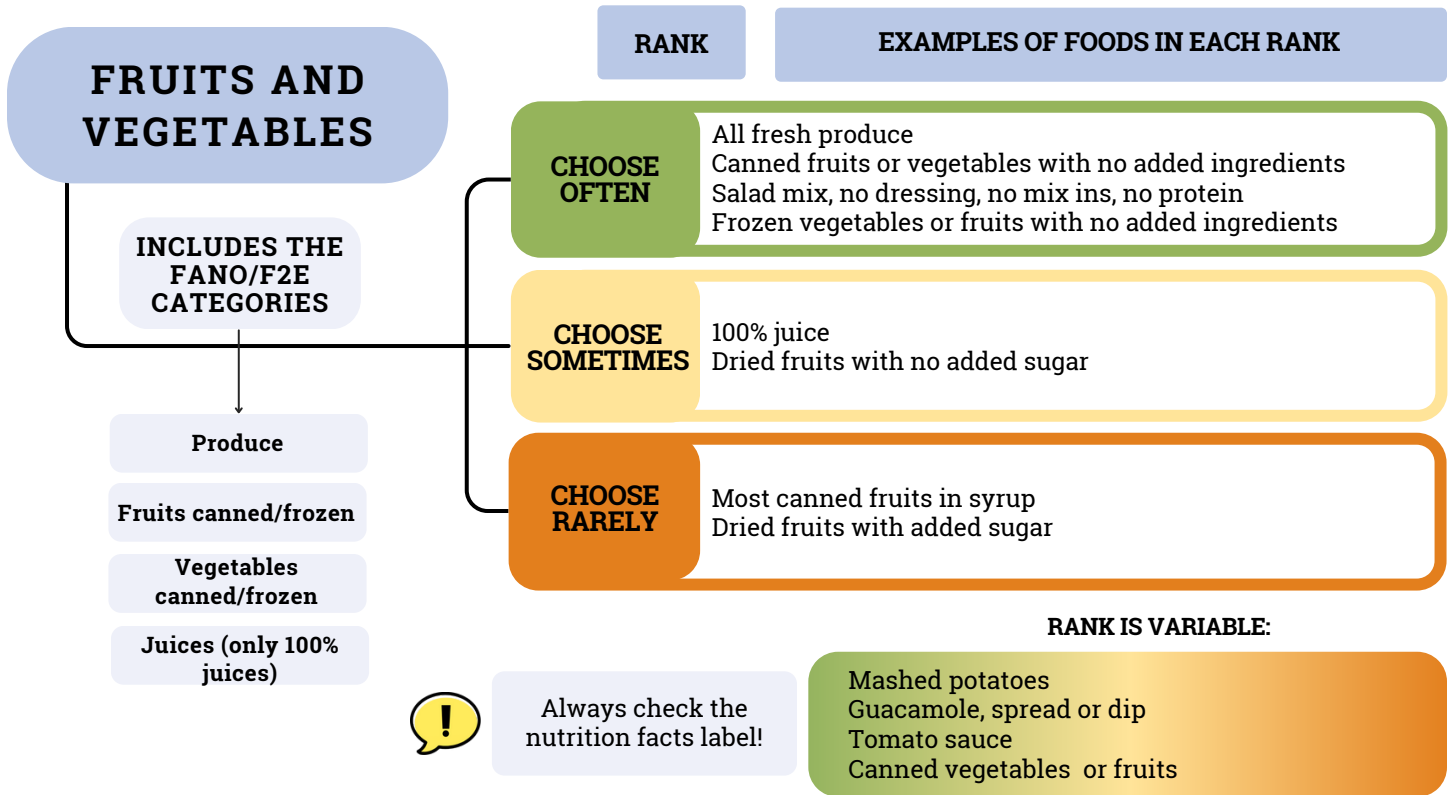
Fruits and Vegetables	Dairy	Mixed Dishes	Miscellaneous
Grains	Non-Dairy Alternatives	Processed and Packaged Snacks	Condiments and Cooking Staples
Protein	Beverages	Desserts	



Feeding America (FANO) / Foods to Encourage (F2E) categories refer to the 31 food categories used by Feeding America food banks. These are distinct from the 11 HER food categories.

Layout of this Guide



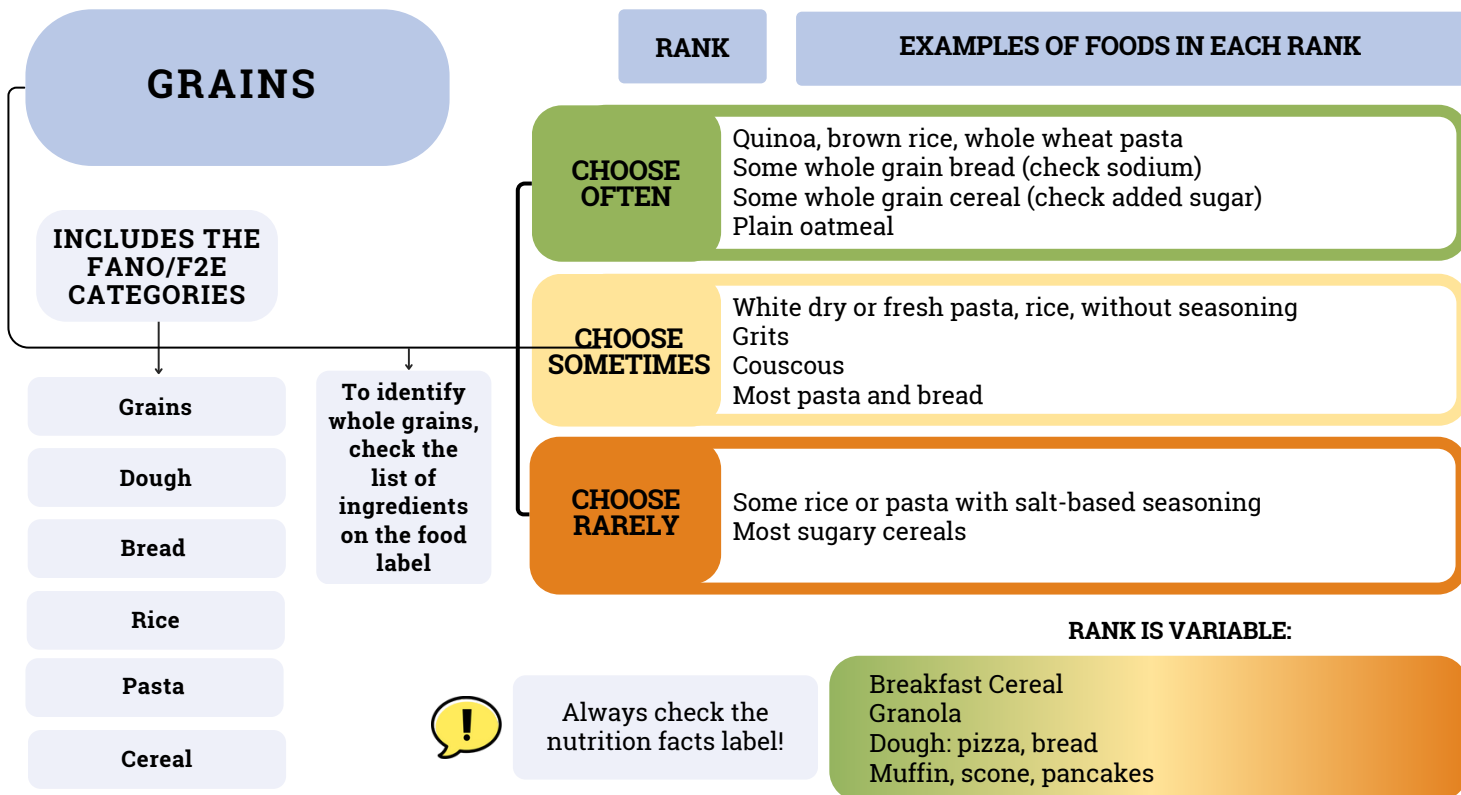


Always use the value for added sugar if available

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES NUTRIENT LIMITS

CHOOSE OFTEN			CHOOSE SOMETIMES			CHOOSE RARELY		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR	SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR	SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
2 g or less	230 mg or less	0 g (12 g or less for Total Sugars)	2.5 g or more	231 to 479 mg	1 to 11 g (13 to 23 g for Total Sugars)	2.5 g or more	480 mg or more	12 g or more (24 g or more for Total Sugars)





! First ingredient must be whole grain

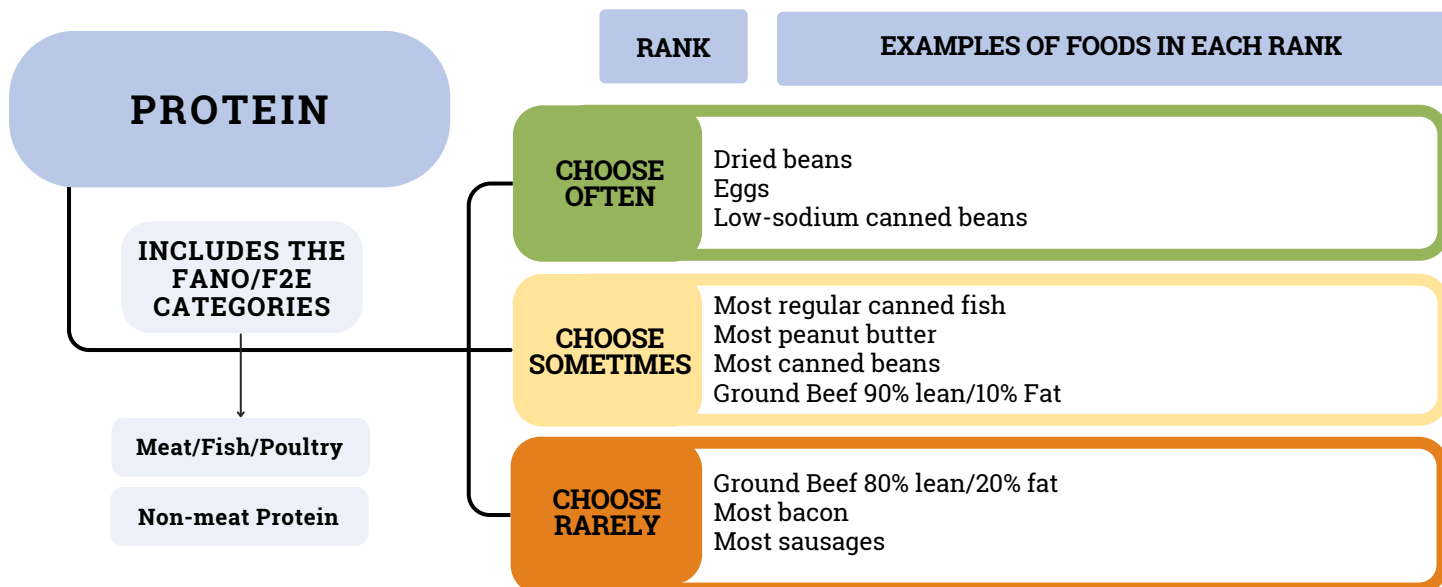
GRAINS NUTRIENT LIMITS

CHOOSE OFTEN		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
2 g or less	230 mg or less	6 g or less

CHOOSE SOMETIMES		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
2.5 g or more	231 to 479 mg	7 to 11 g

CHOOSE RARELY		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
2.5 g or more	480 mg or more	12 g or more





RANK IS VARIABLE:



Always check the nutrition facts label!

Meats: chicken, fish, turkey, beef
Pork & beans

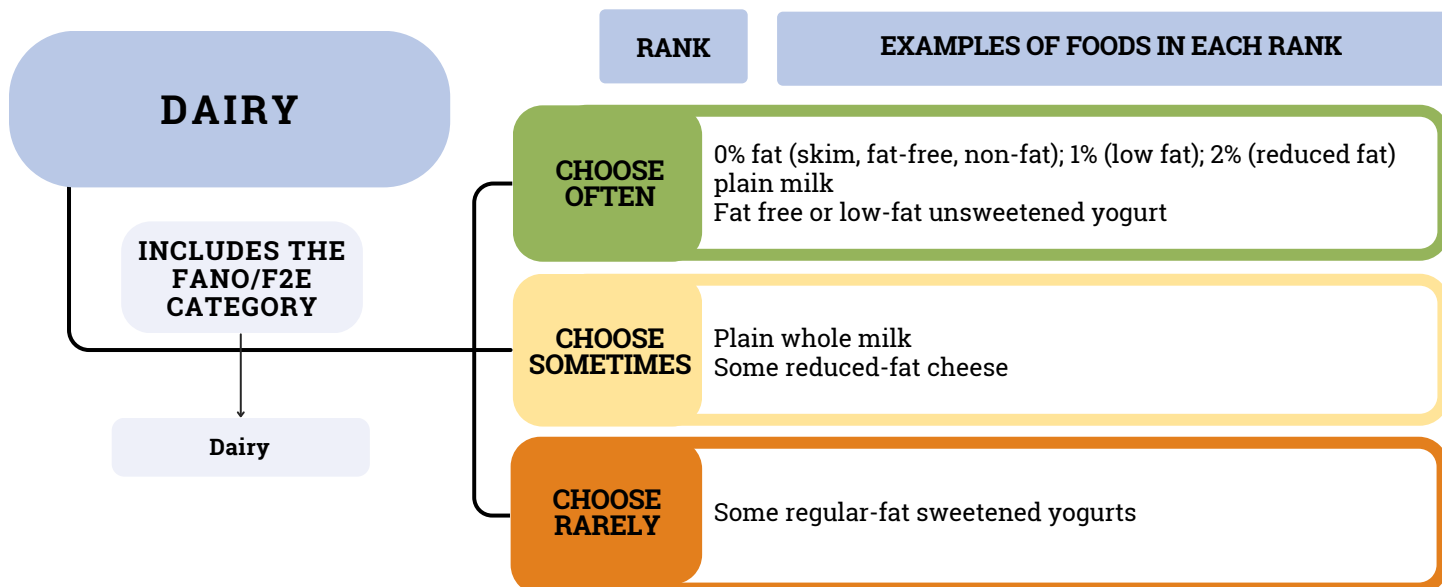
PROTEIN NUTRIENT LIMITS

CHOOSE OFTEN		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
2 g or less	230 mg or less	6 g or less

CHOOSE SOMETIMES		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
2.5 to 4.5 g	231 to 479 mg	7 to 11 g

CHOOSE RARELY		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
5 g or more	480 mg or more	12 g or more





DAIRY NUTRIENT LIMITS

RANK IS VARIABLE:

Flavored milk
Yogurt
Cheese

Always check the nutrition facts label!

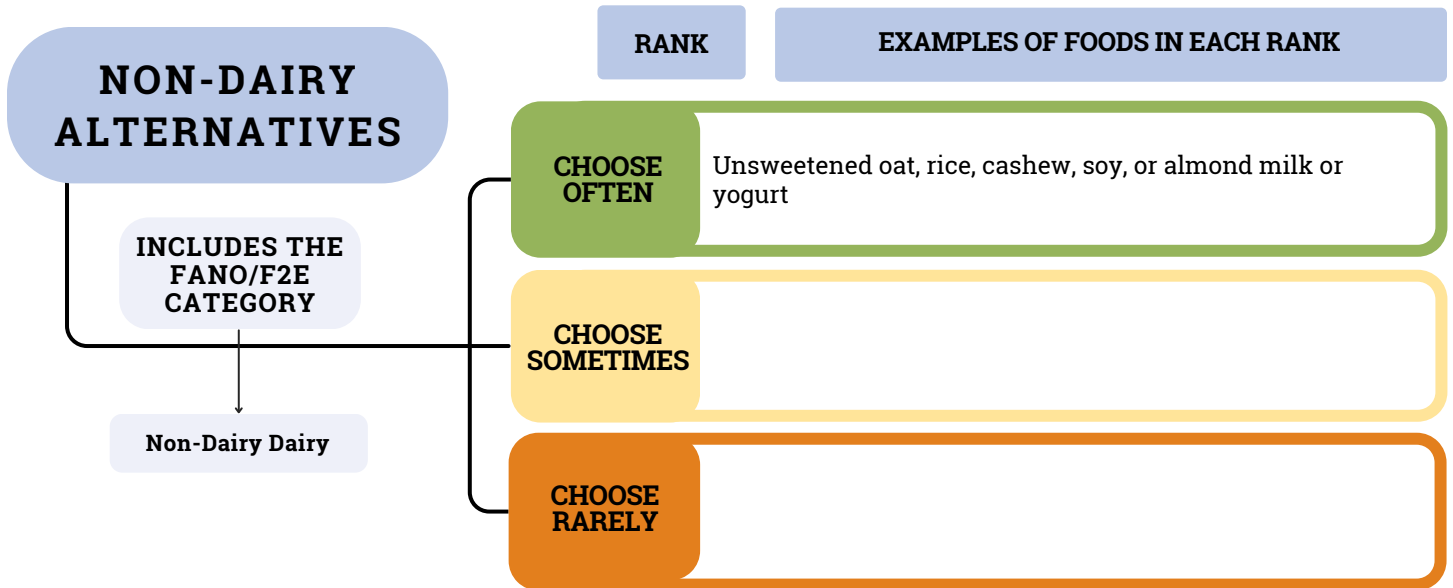
Diet sweeteners are often found in dairy products and should be considered when determining the HER rank.

CHOOSE OFTEN		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
3 g or less	230 mg or less	0 g (12 g or less for Total Sugars)

CHOOSE SOMETIMES		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
3.5 to 6 g	231 to 479 mg	1 to 11 g (13 to 23 g for Total Sugars)

CHOOSE RARELY		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
6.5 g or more	480 mg or more	12 g or more (24 g or more for Total Sugars)





RANK IS VARIABLE:

Nut-based (almond, cashew) milk, yogurt, cheese products
Plant-based (oat, rice, soy, coconut) milk, yogurt, cheese products

Diet sweeteners are often found in dairy products and should be considered when determining the HER rank.

Always check the nutrition facts label!



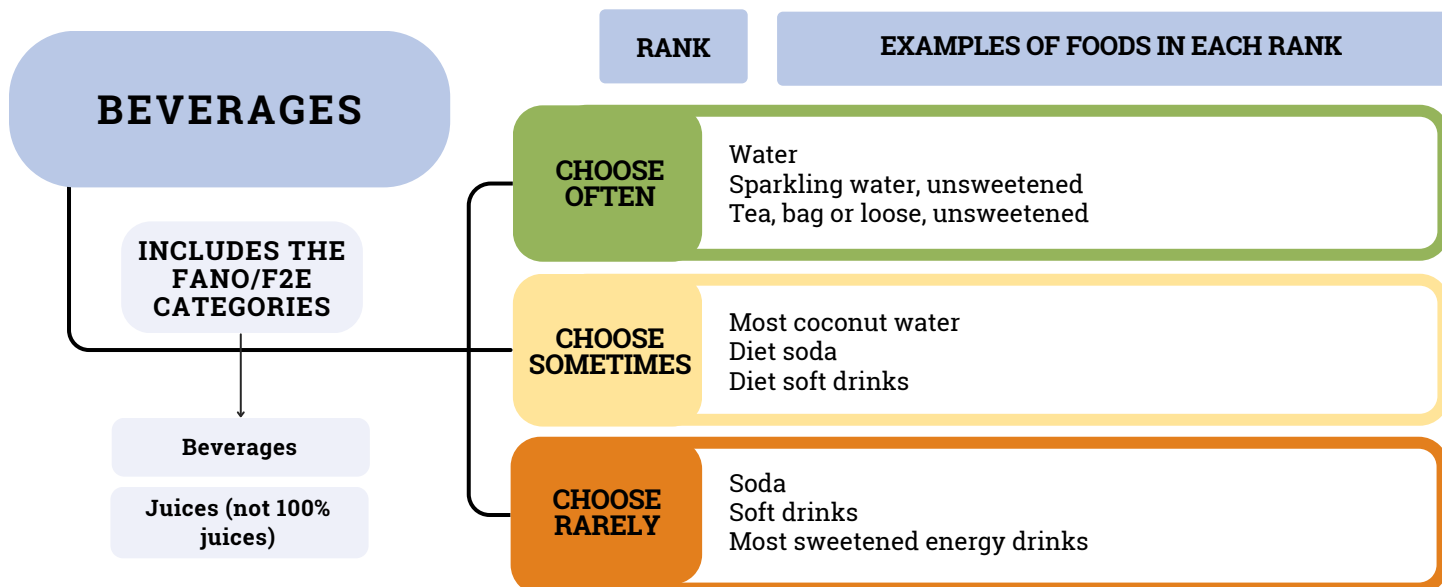
NON-DAIRY ALTERNATIVES NUTRIENT LIMITS

CHOOSE OFTEN		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
2 g or less	230 mg or less	6 g or less

CHOOSE SOMETIMES		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
2.5 or more	231 to 479 mg	7 to 11 g

CHOOSE RARELY		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
2.5 g or more	480 mg or more	12 g or more





RANK IS VARIABLE:

Coffee drinks or beverages (ready-to-drink)
Tea drinks or beverages (ready-to-drink)
Fruit drinks
Juice drinks

Always check the nutrition facts label!

Diet sweeteners are often found in beverages and should be considered when determining the HER rank.

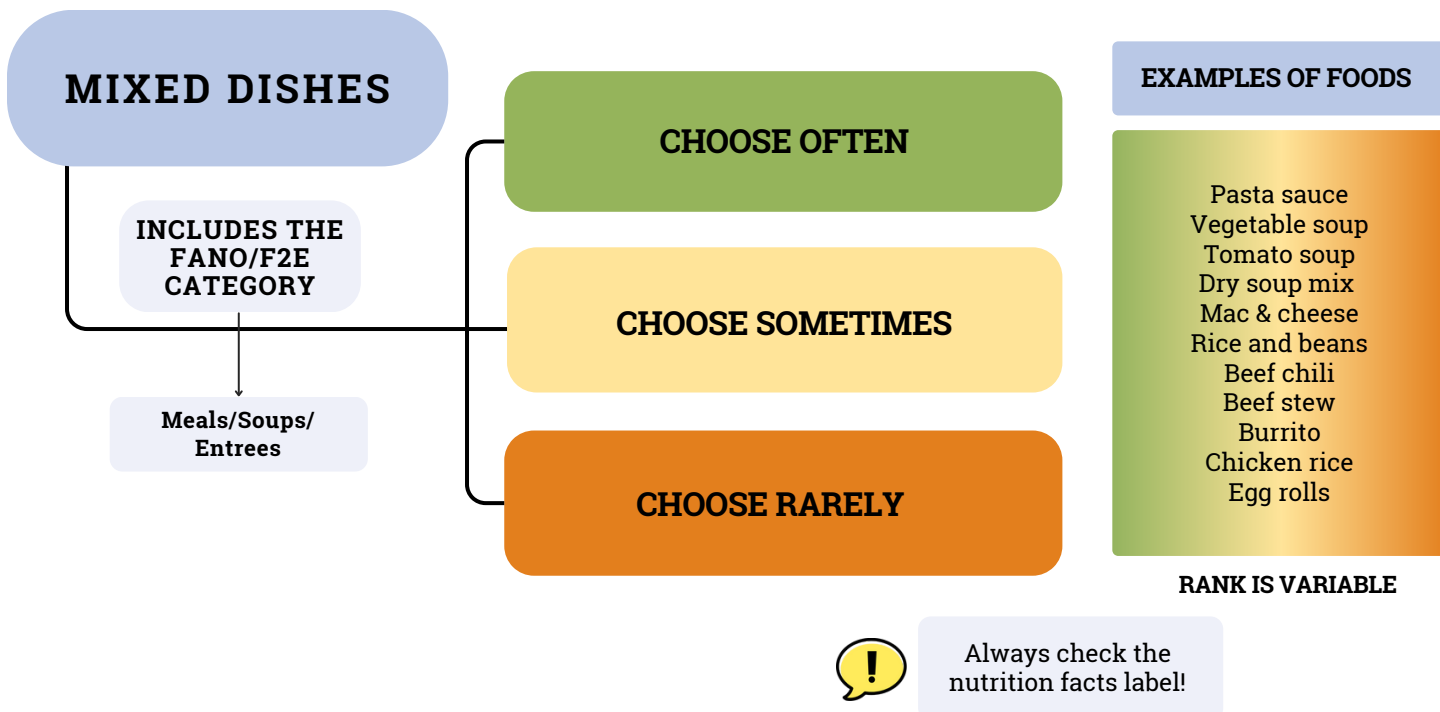
BEVERAGES NUTRIENT LIMITS

CHOOSE OFTEN		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
0 g	0 mg	0 g

CHOOSE SOMETIMES		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
0 g	1 to 140 mg	1 to 11 g (13 to 23 g for Total Sugars)

CHOOSE RARELY		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
1 g or more	141 mg or more	12 g or more (24 g or more for Total Sugars)





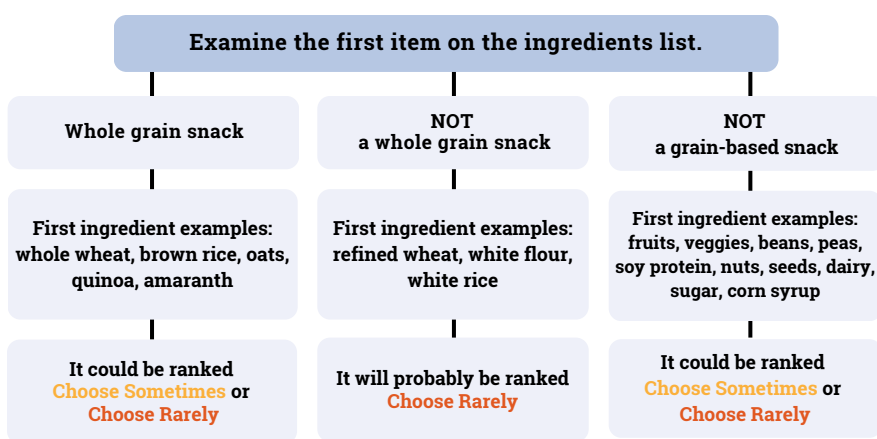
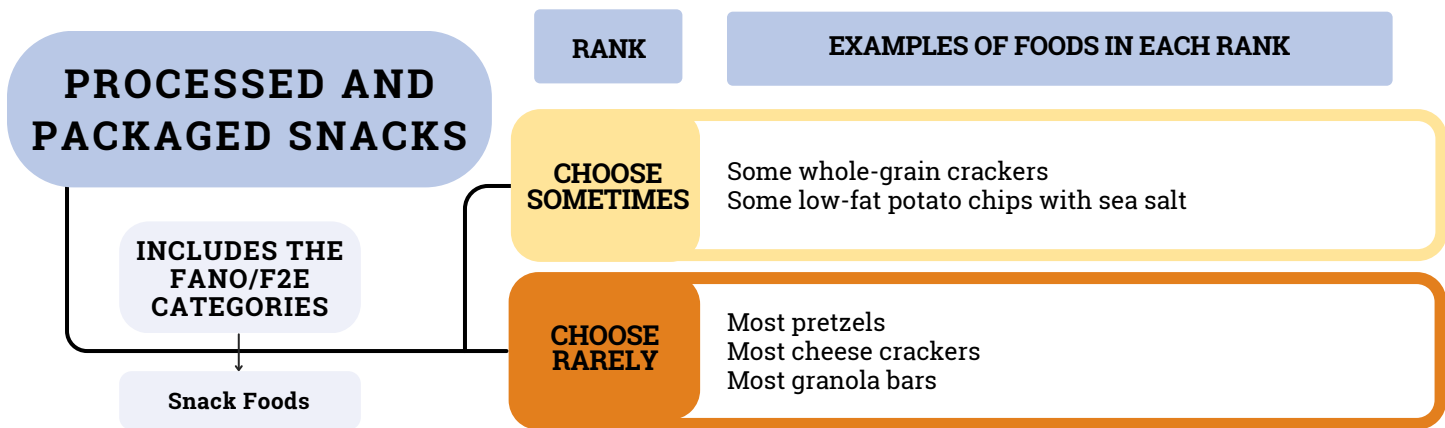
MIXED DISHES NUTRIENT LIMITS

CHOOSE OFTEN		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
3 g or less	480 mg or less	6 g or less

CHOOSE SOMETIMES		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
3.5 to 6 g	481 to 599 mg	7 to 11 g

CHOOSE RARELY		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
6.5 g or more	600 mg or more	12 g or more





Always check the nutrition facts label!

RANK IS VARIABLE:

Popcorn
Trail mix
Veggie or potato chips
Tortilla chips

PROCESSED AND PACKAGED SNACKS NUTRIENT LIMITS

CHOOSE OFTEN
No Snacks are Choose Often

CHOOSE SOMETIMES		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
0 to 2 g	0 to 140 mg	0 to 6 g

CHOOSE RARELY		
SATURATED FAT	SODIUM	ADDED SUGAR
2.5 g or more	141 mg or more	7 g or more



DESSERTS

INCLUDES THE
FANO/F2E
CATEGORIES

Dessert

Bakery

CHOOSE RARELY



**All desserts are ranked
Choose Rarely**

Cookies
Candy
Chocolate bar
Ice cream
Brownie
Cheesecake
Donuts
Cakes

CONDIMENTS AND COOKING STAPLES

INCLUDES THE
FANO/F2E
CATEGORIES

Condiments

Dressings

UNRANKED



EXAMPLES

Baking soda
Soy sauce
Black pepper
Flour (wheat, whole
wheat, rice, corn)
Breadcrumbs
Coconut milk
Coffee creamer
Sugar
Syrup (pancake, maple)

MISCELLANEOUS

INCLUDES THE
FANO/F2E
CATEGORIES

Baby Food

Nutritional Aid/
Supplements

UNRANKED



EXAMPLES

Baby foods
Infant formula
Diabetes care products
Nutritional supplements
Protein powder or mix
Prepared foods
Hydration Products

ASSORTED

INCLUDES THE
FANO/F2E
CATEGORIES

Salvage

Assorted/Mixed

ASSORTED
NOT RANKED

EXAMPLES

Assorted meats
Assorted milk
Food Box

NON-FOODS

INCLUDES THE
FANO/F2E
CATEGORIES

Cleaning Products

Health/Beauty Care

Paper products -
Household

Non-Food

Paper products -
Personal

Pet Foods/Care

NON-FOOD
NOT RANKED

EXAMPLES

Household cleaners
Diapers
Clothes
Toys
Medicine

HER categories and FANO/F2E categories

Feeding America (FANO) / Foods to Encourage (F2E) categories refer to the 31 food categories used by Feeding America food banks. These are distinct from the 11 HER food categories. The following table shows how they are related:

HER Categories	FANO/F2E (Feeding America)
Fruits and Vegetables	Produce
	Fruits Canned/Frozen
	Vegetables Canned/Frozen
	* Juices (only 100% juices)
Grains	Grains
	Dough
	* Bread (From Bread/Bakery)
	Rice
	Pasta
	Cereal
Protein	Meat/Fish/Poultry
	Non-Meat Protein
Dairy	Dairy
Non-Dairy Alternatives	Non-Dairy Dairy
Beverages	Beverages
Mixed Dishes	Meals/Soups/Entrees
Packaged and Processed Snacks	Snack Foods
Desserts	Desserts
	* Cookies (from Snack Foods/Cookies)
	* Bakery (From Bread/Bakery)
Condiments and Cooking staples	Condiments
	Dressing
Miscellaneous	Baby Food
	Nutritional Aids/Supplement
	Prepared Foods
Assorted	Salvage
	Mixed/Assorted
Non-Food	Non Foods
	Cleaning Products
	Health/Beauty Care
	Paper Products - Personal
	Paper Products - Household
	Pet Foods/Care

Step-by-Step Guide to Ranking Foods Using the HER Guidelines

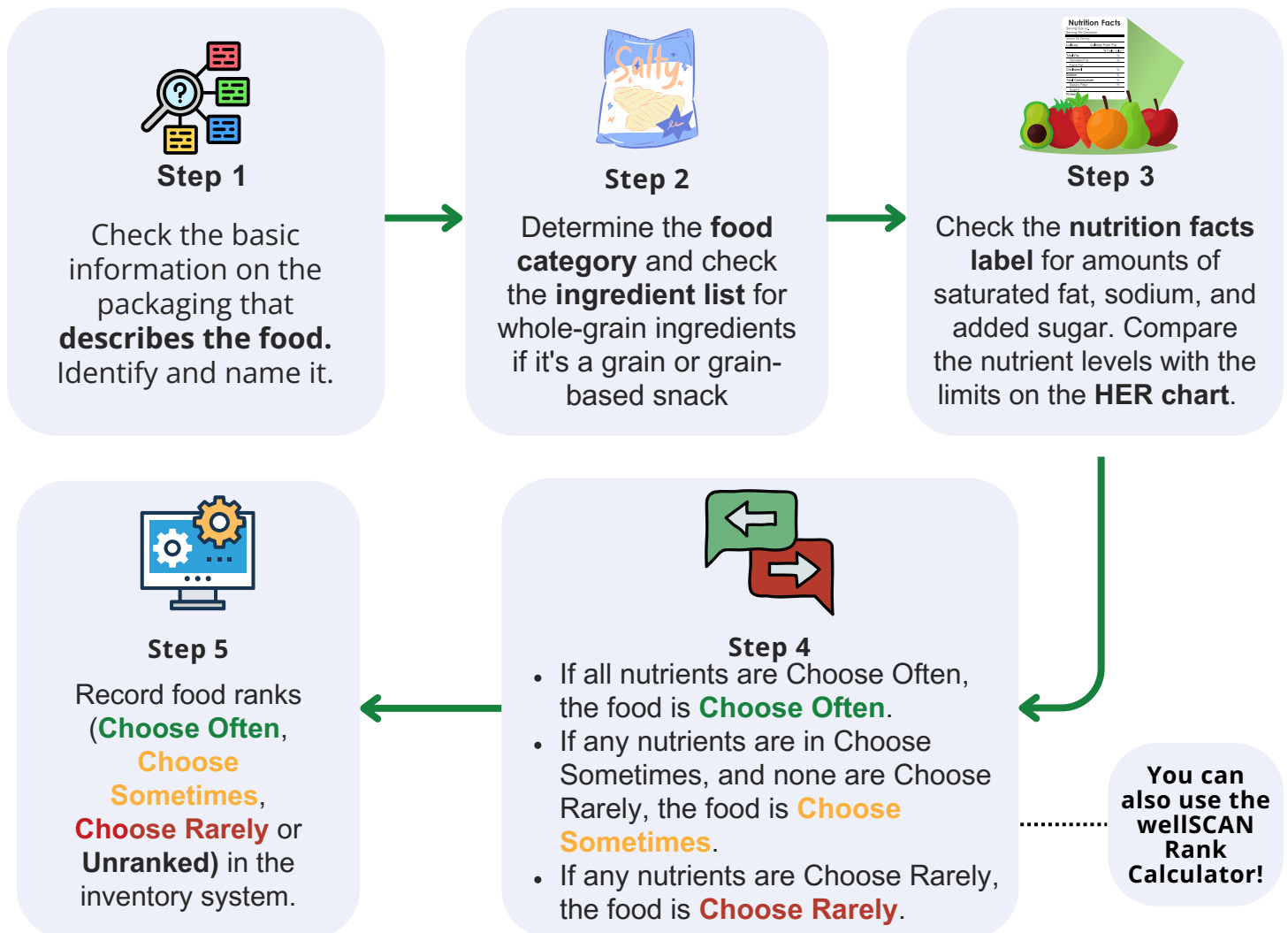
Background

This training covers the following topics:

- Steps to rank foods using the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System
- Tips for naming and identifying foods
- How to check labels and identify key components of foods
- How to identify whole grains
- Understanding added sugars
- How to identify if a product has diet sweeteners



Step-by-Step Guide



Naming Items to Create the Item Description

For packaged products, look at the front of the package to find information about the name, brand, and type of food

1

Look for phrases like: "sugar-free", "low-fat", "fat-free", "no added salt", "low-sodium", "diet", or "no added sugar"

2

Note the packaging type: e.g., bag, can, bottle

3

Name the food like the way you see in the grocery store by including specific details. For example: black beans, low sodium, canned

4

For USDA Foods, add the USDA identification number (i.e., WBSM ID) to the name. For example: Rice, long grain, 111075

5





Taking a photo of the front and back of a product and storing it in a folder or inventory system is a great strategy for ranking, and it makes it easier to verify ranks later!



When naming food in the inventory system, give enough detail to distinguish between different products.

Example of Creating the Item Description

Product	Get as much information as possible about the product	Look for phrases on the packaging such as "Sugar-Free", "Low-fat", "Fat-free", "No Salt", "Low-sodium", "Diet", or "No added sugar"	Is the product in a can? Jar? Bottle?	Is this product a USDA food?	Create the item description the product
 Spaghetti sauce	Spaghetti sauce with basil leaves from Wonder Tomato	Low sodium	Jar (14oz)	No	Spaghetti sauce, with basil, low sodium, Wonder Tomato, jar (14oz)
 Milk	Milk, low-fat, unflavored	Low-fat, shelf-stable UHT	Carton (32oz)	Yes; add USDA ID#	1% low-fat milk, unflavored, shelf-stable UHT, carton (32oz) (100050)



Over time, if the same item has different formulations and different ranks, create one detailed item description to identify each of versions of the product and its rank.

How to Check Labels

Nutrition Facts	
8 servings per container	
Serving size (500g)	
Amount per serving	
Calories	250
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 10g	15%
Saturated Fat 2g	7%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 100mg	5%
Total Carbohydrate 30g	10%
Dietary Fiber 2g	11%
Total Sugars 1g	25%
Incl. Added Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	
Vitamin A 2mcg	8%
Vitamin C 5mcg	15%
Calcium 200mg	20%
Iron 10mg	40%

Nutrition Facts labels provides information about the amount of nutrients in **one serving** of the product. It is usually located in the back of the product.



Use the "as packaged" information instead of the "as prepared"

Check the amount of saturated fat

Saturated fat is listed in grams (g) under the "Total Fat" section

Check the amount of sodium

Sodium is listed in milligrams (mg)

Check the amount of added sugar

Added sugars are listed in grams (g) under the "Total Carbohydrates" section

Some labels only list Total Sugar and not Added Sugar



In this case and for Fruits and Vegetables or Dairy products, use "Total Sugars" to rank the item. There is a higher total sugar threshold because of the naturally occurring sugars. More information can be found on the next page.

Identifying Whole Grains

DEFINING WHOLE GRAINS

- GRAINS
- GRAIN-BASED SNACKS



As a first step, you should look for the Whole Grain Stamp on the package

In the second step, examine the first item on the ingredients list

The words "enriched", "refined", "bleached", "polished" are usually in products that ARE NOT a whole grain

If the word "whole" is present, it should be classified as a whole grain. A list with other common words is described here!

LOOK FOR THESE WORDS TO IDENTIFY IF THE PRODUCT IS WHOLE GRAIN

✓	Amaranth	✓	Oats
✓	Barley	✓	Popcorn
✓	Brown Rice	✓	Quinoa
✓	Buckwheat	✓	Sorghum
✓	Bulgur	✓	Spelt
✓	Dark Rye	✓	Unrefined Wheat
✓	Farro	✓	Wheat Berries
✓	Millet	✓	Wild Rice

Understanding Added Sugars

WHAT ARE ADDED SUGARS?

ADDED SUGARS

Sugars not naturally present in food and added through industrial processing

Some foods like regular soda, concentrated fruit juice, energy drinks, cereals, granola bars and desserts have added sugars

TOTAL SUGARS

Represents the natural and added sugars present in foods and beverages

Divided into added sugars and natural sugars

NATURAL SUGARS

Sugars naturally present in foods, such as fruits, dairy, and vegetables

Dried fruits have their natural sugars concentrated



Some foods like canned fruit and yogurt can have both natural sugar and added sugars

LOOK FOR SOME EXAMPLES OF THESE WORDS TO IDENTIFY ADDED SUGARS*

- | | |
|------------------|------------|
| ✓ Cane sugar | ✓ Dextrose |
| ✓ Corn sugar | ✓ Molasses |
| ✓ Corn sweetener | ✓ Sucrose |
| ✓ Corn syrup | ✓ Maltose |
| ✓ Maple syrup | |

*Not all names of added sugars are included in this list



The amount of added sugars can be found on the Nutrition Label. If missing, check the rank using Total Sugars

Identifying Diet Sweeteners

- DAIRY
- BEVERAGES

Some Dairy and Beverages products may contain diet sweeteners. If so, they should not be ranked **Choose Often** because of potential health risks



Look for products that have sugar-content labels, e.g., "diet", "no sugar", "sugar free"

Check for diet sweeteners in the ingredient list

If identified, rank can be **Choose Sometimes** or **Choose Rarely** based on the amounts of saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar

LOOK FOR THESE WORDS TO IDENTIFY DIET SWEETENERS

- ✓ Acesulfame potassium (Ace-K) (e.g., Sunett, Sweet One)
- ✓ Advantame
- ✓ Aspartame (e.g., Equal, NutraSweet)
- ✓ Monk fruit extract (e.g., Luo Han Guo)
- ✓ Neotame (e.g., Newtame)
- ✓ Saccharin (e.g., Sweet'N Low)
- ✓ Steviol glycosides (e.g., Stevia, Truvia)
- ✓ Sucralose (e.g., Splenda)
- ✓ Sugar alcohols, xylitol, sorbitol, mannitol, hydrogenated starch hydrolysates (HSH), erythritol

Nutrition Guidelines - Ranking Charitable Food

Food Category	Example Products	Choose Often			Choose Sometimes			Choose Rarely		
		Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugars*	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugars*	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugars*
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	7-11 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	≥141 mg	≥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, dressing, jarred sauces (except tomato sauce), seasoning, salt, sugar	Unranked								
Miscellaneous Products	Nutritional supplements, baby food	Unranked								

Source: 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. Available at <https://healthyeatingresearch.org>.

*Use the added sugars value when available on the Nutrition Facts Label. If it is not available, use the value of the total sugar. The thresholds are the same for all categories except Fruits and Vegetables and Dairy.

Notes: Overall food product rankings are determined by the lowest tier of any nutrient. For example, a product that is ranked Choose Often for saturated fat, Choose Sometimes for sodium, and Choose Rarely for added sugars would receive a final ranking of Choose Rarely.

Foods Always Ranked the Same

Some types of foods are always ranked the same way when using the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System. For these foods, no matter their brand, so **there is no need to check the nutritional facts label** to determine their rank. The list below shows the usual rankings for these foods. With this list, food banks' staff and volunteers can quickly identify and rank foods, saving time and improving the implementation of HER Guidelines.



Remember that describing the item in the inventory system in detail helps reduce errors!

Fruits and Vegetables

Choose Often

- All fresh produce
- Frozen fruits and vegetables without added ingredients
- Salad mix, no dressing, no mix ins, no protein

Choose Sometimes

- 100% Fruit juices

Protein

Choose Often

- Dried beans
- Eggs

Dairy

Choose Often

- Milk 1%, 2%, Low-fat, Fat-free, unsweetened
- Yogurt, Low-fat, Fat-free, unsweetened

Choose Sometimes

- Whole milk, unsweetened

Beverages

Choose Often

- Water; Sparkling water, unsweetened
- Ground coffee; Tea bags

Choose Sometimes

- Diet Soda / Diet Soft drinks

Choose Rarely

- Soda / Soft drinks

Assorted

Assorted Not Ranked

- Assorted beverages
- Groceries box

Choose Often

- Assorted produce

Choose Rarely

- Assorted dessert
- Assorted candies, chocolate

Whenever possible, sort assorted items into specific categories to rank

Desserts

All are Choose Rarely; some examples:

- Brownies, cookies
- Ice cream
- Cheesecake
- Cakes
- Chocolate
- Donuts

Condiments and Cooking Staples

All are Unranked; some examples:

- Baking soda
- Broth (chicken, beef, vegetable)
- Coconut milk
- Dressing
- Flour (wheat, whole wheat, rice, corn,...)
- Ketchup
- Oil
- Seasoning mix
- Toppings, croutons

Miscellaneous

All Unranked; some examples:

- Infant and toddler formula
- Baby food
- Protein powder (e.g., whey or soy protein)
- Nutritional pills, mixes, or powder
- Functional drinks
- Diabetes care powder or mixes
- Prepared foods
- Hydration products

Non-foods

All are Non-Food Not Ranked; some examples:

- Cleaning products
- Health and beauty products
- Paper goods
- Pet supplies

Ranking Foods from USDA: A Guide to Using WellSCAN

This guide offers a process for identifying the rank of foods from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) using the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Guidelines for the Charitable Food System.

- Foods from USDA are available to food banks through the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP).
- The HER rank of foods from USDA was determined by assessing one product from one of the vendors that supplied USDA during the fiscal years 2020 to 2022. Because multiple vendors can supply the same type of product, there may be variations in the ingredients and, as a result, in the HER ranks.

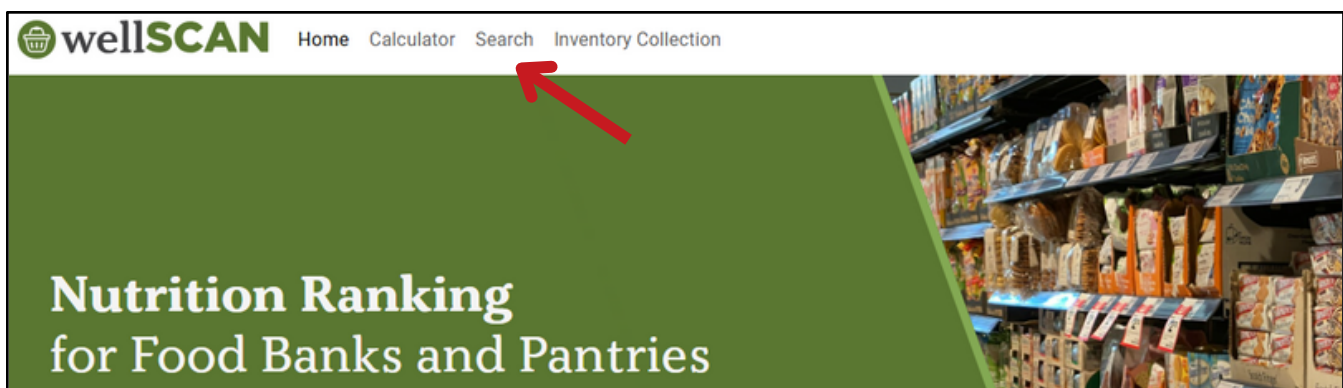
The ranks for foods from USDA can be searched on the wellSCAN website. Follow steps 1 to 3 to identify the rank of a USDA food.

wellSCAN is a web-based search tool that summarizes HER rankings for common foods and UPC (barcode)-specific foods.



Step 1: Go to wellSCAN website

1. Access the wellSCAN website: <https://wellscan.io/>
2. Click on the "Search" button on the menu bar.



Step 2: Search for the Food from USDA

1. Type in the name of the product or its WBSCM ID in the search bar.
2. Then, select "USDA Only Item Cards" box.
3. Click on the "Search" button on the right of the search bar.

The screenshot shows the wellSCAN website's search interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links: Home, Calculator, Search, and Inventory Collection. A 'Login' button is in the top right. Below the navigation bar is a green header with the text 'Lookup the Category & HER Rank for Common Foods' and a brief description of the project. The main search area has a 'Search' label above a text input field containing 'rice'. To the right of the input field is a green 'Search' button. Below the input field, there's a checkbox labeled 'Select only USDA Food Program items' which is checked. To the right of the checkbox are two dropdown menus: 'Filter HER Score' (set to 'All Ranks') and 'Filter Category' (set to 'All Categories'). Red arrows with numbers 1, 2, and 3 point to the search input field, the 'Select only USDA Food Program items' checkbox, and the 'Search' button, respectively.



Foods from USDA have a unique identifier called the Web-Based Supply Chain Management Identification (**WBSCM ID**). This identification number is specific to each product type and packaging size. This number can be used to search for the rank of foods from USDA in wellSCAN.

Step 3: See the results!

The screenshot shows the search results page for 'rice'. At the top, it says 'Searched Results For: rice'. Below that is the heading 'Item Card Categories' and a subtext: 'Groups of food items analyzed by the WellSCAN team. The most relevant item card categories are shown based on the search query.' There are six item card categories displayed in a grid. Each card has a header with the WBSCM ID, a title for the food item, a recommendation (e.g., 'Choose Often', 'Choose Sometimes'), and a 'View' link. The cards are: 1. WBSCM: 100500; 100501: Rice, Brown, Long Grain, Parboiled, Choose Often. 2. WBSCM: 111075; 100491; 100492: Rice, Long Grain, Choose Sometimes. 3. WBSCM: 111083: Rice, Long Grain, Brown, Choose Often. 4. WBSCM: 100487; 100488: Rice, Medium Grain, Choose Sometimes. 5. WBSCM: 110692; 110830: Rice, Wild, Choose Often. 6. WBSCM: USDA: Cereal, Corn/Rice Biscuits, Choose Sometimes. A seventh card is partially visible at the bottom left: WBSCM: USDA: Cereal, Rice Crisp, Choose Sometimes.

The results page shows item cards for foods from USDA, their WBSCM ID, and their HER rank.

List of Foods from USDA with HER Ranks

Food name	HER Category	HER Rank	USDA WBSCM ID
Butter, Salted	Condiments and cooking staples	Unranked	100001
Buttery Spread, Light	Condiments and cooking staples	Unranked	100921
Cranberry Sauce, Canned	Condiments and cooking staples	Unranked	100213
Flour, All Purpose, Enriched, Bleached	Condiments and cooking staples	Unranked	100400
Flour, White Whole Wheat	Condiments and cooking staples	Unranked	110857
Oil, Vegetable	Condiments and cooking staples	Unranked	100441
Cheese, American Blended, Reduced Fat, Sliced	Dairy	Choose Often	110198
Milk, 1%, Fresh	Dairy	Choose Often	111200; 111173
Milk, 1%, Individual Portion, Shelf-Stable UHT	Dairy	Choose Often	100875
Milk, 1%, Shelf-Stable UHT	Dairy	Choose Often	100050
Milk, Evaporated, Skim, Canned	Dairy	Choose Often	110162
Milk, Instant Nonfat Dry	Dairy	Choose Often	111006
Milk, Skim, Fresh	Dairy	Choose Often	111175; 111405
Cheese, American, Loaves	Dairy	Choose Sometimes	110199
Cheese, American, Reduced Fat, Loaves, Refrigerated	Dairy	Choose Sometimes	100035

Continued

Food name	HER Category	HER Rank	USDA WBSCM ID
Cheese, Cheddar, Yellow, Shredded, Refrigerated	Dairy	Choose Sometimes	110843
Apple Slices, Unsweetened, Frozen	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	110470
Apples, Braeburn, Fresh	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100523
Apples, Empire, Fresh	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100517
Apples, Fresh	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	110561
Apples, Fuji, Fresh	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100522
Apples, Gala, Fresh	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100521
Apples, Granny Smith, Fresh	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	110543
Apples, Red Delicious, Fresh	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	110514
Applesauce, Unsweetened, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100207
Applesauce, Unsweetened, Cups	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	110890
Applesauce, Unsweetened, Cups, Shelf-Stable	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	110361
Beans, Green, Low-sodium, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100306
Beans, Green, No Salt Added, Frozen	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	111054

Continued

Food name	HER Category	HER Rank	USDA WBSCM ID
Blueberries, Highbush, Frozen	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	110623
Carrots, Diced, No Salt Added, Frozen	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	111052
Carrots, Sliced, Low-sodium, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100308
Corn, Whole Kernel, No Salt Added, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100311
Corn, Whole Kernel, No Salt Added, Frozen	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	111053
Hominy, Low-sodium, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100904
Mixed Produce Box, Fresh	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	111427
Mixed Vegetables, 7-Way Blend, Low-sodium, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100320
Oranges, Fresh	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100283
Peaches, Freestone, Slices, Frozen	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100238
Pears, Bartlett, Fresh	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	111424
Pears, Bosc, Fresh	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	111423
Pears, D'Anjou, Fresh	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	111422
Pears, Fresh	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	110560

Continued

Food name	HER Category	HER Rank	USDA WBSCM ID
Peas, Green, Frozen	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	110763
Peas, Green, Low-sodium, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100314
Potatoes, Dehydrated Flakes	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100337
Potatoes, Round, Fresh	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	101019
Potatoes, Russet, Fresh	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	101017
Potatoes, Sliced, Low-sodium, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100331
Pumpkin, No Salt Added, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100319
Spaghetti Sauce, Low-sodium, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100335
Spinach, Low-sodium, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100323
Sweet Potatoes, Fresh	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	111058
Tomato Sauce, Low-sodium, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100333
Tomato Sauce, Low-sodium, Canned (Kosher) (Halal)	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	110610
Tomatoes, Diced, No Salt Added, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	100328
Apple Juice, 100%, Unsweetened	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Sometimes	100893

Continued

Food name	HER Category	HER Rank	USDA WBSM ID
Apricots, Halves, Extra Light Syrup, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Sometimes	100210
Cherry Apple Juice, 100%, Unsweetened	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Sometimes	100894
Corn, Cream Style, Low-sodium, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Sometimes	100310
Cranberry Apple Juice, 100%, Unsweetened	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Sometimes	100899
Grape Juice, Concord, 100%, Unsweetened	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Sometimes	100895
Grapefruit Juice, 100%, Unsweetened	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Sometimes	100896
Mixed Fruit, Extra Light Syrup, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Sometimes	100211
Orange Juice, 100%, Unsweetened	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Sometimes	100897
Peaches, Sliced, Extra Light Syrup, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Sometimes	100218
Pears, Extra Light Syrup, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Sometimes	100223
Plums, Pitted, Dried	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Sometimes	100290
Plums, Purple, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Sometimes	100233
Raisins, Unsweetened	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Sometimes	100295
Raisins, Unsweetened, Individual Portion	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Sometimes	100293

Continued

Food name	HER Category	HER Rank	USDA WBSCM ID
Sweet Potatoes, Light Syrup, No Salt Added, Canned	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Sometimes	100316
Tomato Juice, 100%, Low-sodium	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Sometimes	100898
Cranberries, Dried, Individual Portion	Fruits and vegetables	Choose Rarely	110723
Cereal, Oat Circles	Grains	Choose Often	-
Cereal, Wheat Bran Flakes	Grains	Choose Often	-
Cereal, Wheat, Shredded	Grains	Choose Often	-
Cornmeal, Blue	Grains	Choose Often	110673
Oats, Rolled, Quick Cooking	Grains	Choose Often	111074
Pasta, Macaroni, Whole Grain	Grains	Choose Often	101023
Pasta, Rotini, Whole Grain	Grains	Choose Often	110777
Pasta, Spaghetti, Whole Grain	Grains	Choose Often	101035
Rice, Brown, Long-Grain, Parboiled	Grains	Choose Often	100500; 100501
Rice, Long Grain, Brown	Grains	Choose Often	111083
Rice, Wild	Grains	Choose Often	110692; 110830
Tortillas, Whole Grain, Frozen	Grains	Choose Often	110741
Bakery Mix, Lowfat	Grains	Choose Sometimes	110902
Cereal, Corn Flakes	Grains	Choose Sometimes	-
Cereal, Corn Squares	Grains	Choose Sometimes	-

Continued

Food name	HER Category	HER Rank	USDA WBSCM ID
Cereal, Corn/Rice Biscuits	Grains	Choose Sometimes	-
Cereal, Rice Crisp	Grains	Choose Sometimes	-
Cereal, Wheat Farina, Enriched	Grains	Choose Sometimes	110880
Cornmeal, Yellow	Grains	Choose Sometimes	100471
Grits, Corn, White	Grains	Choose Sometimes	111082
Grits, Corn, Yellow	Grains	Choose Sometimes	111072
Pasta, Egg Noodles	Grains	Choose Sometimes	100433
Pasta, Macaroni, Enriched	Grains	Choose Sometimes	110511
Pasta, Spaghetti, Enriched	Grains	Choose Sometimes	110450
Rice, Long Grain	Grains	Choose Sometimes	111075; 100491; 100492
Rice, Medium Grain	Grains	Choose Sometimes	100487; 100488
Pasta, Macaroni and Cheese	Mixed dishes	Choose Often	110960
Soup, Cream of Chicken, Condensed, Reduced Sodium	Mixed dishes	Choose Often	111210
Soup, Cream of Mushroom, Condensed, Reduced Sodium	Mixed dishes	Choose Often	110912
Tomato Soup, Condensed, Low- sodium, Canned	Mixed dishes	Choose Often	100322

Continued

Food name	HER Category	HER Rank	USDA WBSCM ID
Vegetable Soup, Condensed, Low-Sodium, Canned	Mixed dishes	Choose Often	100321
Beef Chili, With Beans, Canned/Pouch	Mixed dishes	Choose Sometimes	111180
Beef Chili, Without Beans, Canned/Pouch	Mixed dishes	Choose Sometimes	100138
Beef Stew, Canned/Pouch	Mixed dishes	Choose Sometimes	100526
Fruit and Nut Mix, Dried	Processed and packaged snacks	Choose Sometimes	100297
Crackers, Unsalted	Processed and packaged snacks	Choose Rarely	100403
Beans, Black, Low-sodium, Canned	Protein	Choose Often	110020
Beans, Black-eyed Pea, Dry	Protein	Choose Often	100374
Beans, Black-eyed Pea, Low-sodium, Canned	Protein	Choose Often	100367
Beans, Garbanzo, Canned (Kosher)	Protein	Choose Often	111060
Beans, Great Northern, Dry	Protein	Choose Often	100380; 111067
Beans, Kidney, Light Red, Dry	Protein	Choose Often	100385; 111080
Beans, Kidney, Light Red, Low-sodium, Canned	Protein	Choose Often	100372
Beans, Lima, Baby, Dry	Protein	Choose Often	100378; 111068
Beans, Pinto, Dry	Protein	Choose Often	100382; 111063
Beans, Pinto, Low-sodium, Canned	Protein	Choose Often	110021

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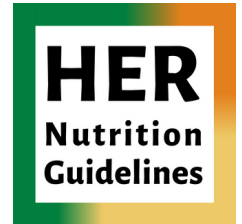
Food name	HER Category	HER Rank	USDA WBSM ID
Beans, Refried, Low-sodium, Canned	Protein	Choose Often	100361
Beans, Vegetarian, Low-sodium, Canned	Protein	Choose Often	100363
Catfish, Fillet, Frozen	Protein	Choose Often	110390
Chicken, Boneless Breast, Frozen	Protein	Choose Often	110950
Chicken, Canned	Protein	Choose Often	110940
Chicken, Pouch	Protein	Choose Often	110477
Egg Mix, Dried	Protein	Choose Often	100044
Eggs, Fresh	Protein	Choose Often	100936
Lentils, Dry	Protein	Choose Often	100388; 111102
Peanuts, Roasted, Unsalted	Protein	Choose Often	100391
Peas, Green Split, Dry	Protein	Choose Often	111055
Salmon, Wild, Fillet, Frozen	Protein	Choose Often	110750
Walleye, Fillet, Frozen	Protein	Choose Often	111360
Alaska Pollock, Fillet, Frozen	Protein	Choose Sometimes	110345
Alaska Pollock, Whole Grain Breaded Fish Sticks, Frozen	Protein	Choose Sometimes	110850
Beef, Canned/Pouch	Protein	Choose Sometimes	100127
Beef, Round Roast, Frozen	Protein	Choose Sometimes	100166

Continued

Food name	HER Category	HER Rank	USDA WBSM ID
Bison, Ground, Lean, Frozen	Protein	Choose Sometimes	110001
Chicken, Split Breast, Frozen	Protein	Choose Sometimes	110154
Chicken, Whole, Frozen	Protein	Choose Sometimes	100880
Peanut Butter, Smooth	Protein	Choose Sometimes	111081
Peanut Butter, Smooth (Kosher)	Protein	Choose Sometimes	111170
Peanut Butter, Smooth, Individual Portion	Protein	Choose Sometimes	110854
Pork, Canned/Pouch	Protein	Choose Sometimes	100139
Pork, Chops, Boneless, Frozen	Protein	Choose Sometimes	110380
Pork, Ham, Frozen	Protein	Choose Sometimes	100182
Salmon, Pink, Canned	Protein	Choose Sometimes	110563
Salmon, Pink, Canned (Kosher)	Protein	Choose Sometimes	110580
Tuna, Chunk Light, Canned (Kosher)	Protein	Choose Sometimes	100194
Beef, Fine Ground, 85% Lean/15% Fat, Frozen	Protein	Choose Rarely	100159
Beef, Fine Ground, 85% Lean/15% Fat, LFTB OPT, Frozen	Protein	Choose Rarely	110260
Pork, Pit Ham, Smoked, Frozen	Protein	Choose Rarely	110900

Common Challenges When Ranking

When using the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Guidelines for the Charitable Food System, some foods may be challenging to rank. This guide lists the most common confusions when ranking foods and explains how to assign the correct HER category and rank.



Here is how the guide is organized:



The foods in this guide are organized by the HER category.



For each HER category, you will see a list of foods, followed by their usual rank and an explanation about possible reasons for the confusions when ranking.



Foods with a **“Variable” rank**: This means that the food does not have a usual rank, and rank can be Chosen Often, Sometimes, or Rarely, depending on the nutrition facts label and ingredients, which may vary by brand.

1

Key Point

2

Key Point

You will see key points for each HER category. These are essential information to avoid rank confusions.

You will also see quotes from food bank staff about confusions and ranking challenges they have experienced. These quotes were collected through interviews from a research study to understand barriers to implement HER Guidelines.



FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Food	Rank	Explanation
100% Fruit juices	Choose Sometimes	100% fruit juices have no added sugar, but because sugars found naturally in fruits are more concentrated in juices than in fresh fruits, they are ranked Choose Sometimes.
Canned, sliced, or diced fruits and vegetables	Choose Often if there are no other ingredients; Variable if there are other ingredients.	These foods usually have added ingredients (e.g., salt, sugar, syrup, oil), so their rank is variable. They can be Choose Often if no other ingredients are added.
Dried fruit, e.g.: dates, raisins, dried cranberries	Choose Sometimes , if unsweetened (no added sugar). Choose Rarely , if sweetened.	Dried fruits are not ranked Choose Often because sugars found naturally in fruits are more concentrated in dried fruits than in fresh fruits.
Fresh fruits and vegetables	Choose Often	Fresh fruits are always ranked Choose Often. They only have naturally occurring sugars.
Frozen fruits and vegetables	Choose Often , if there are no other ingredients. Variable if other ingredients are added.	If there are added ingredients (e.g., salt, sugar, syrup, oil), the rank is variable. If there are no other ingredients, they are ranked Choose Often.
Guacamole, spread or dip	Variable	Guacamole is categorized as Fruits and Vegetables, and not as a Mixed Dishes or Condiment. It has added ingredients, but it still stays in the primary food group.
Mashed potatoes	Variable	Mashed Potatoes are categorized as Fruits and Vegetables, not as Mixed Dishes. If there are multiple ingredients, categorize the food according to the primary food group instead of Mixed Dishes. Potatoes are the main ingredient in mashed potatoes; other ingredients are added for flavoring or accent (such as milk or seasoning) as part of the food preparation.
Tomato sauce	Variable	Tomato sauce with or without herbs and seasonings is categorized as Fruits and Vegetables. All other packaged pasta sauces (including tomato-based pasta sauce, dairy-based sauces, pesto and sauces including meat and vegetables) are Mixed Dishes.



"And one question that I have it was the strawberries because the strawberry has so much sugar. And I keep asking why is not Red? And finally, someone came to me: 'well, that's natural sugar'. So it's okay, it has to be green. All produce and vegetables, perishables have to be green."

Warehouse Inventory Manager

Key Points for Fruits and Vegetables

- 1** Identify descriptions in the product label that helps with determining the rank, such as "no added sugar", "unsweetened", "low sodium", "no salt"
- 2** 100% juices are not ranked Choose Often; they are ranked Choose Sometimes and have no added sugar
- 3** Low-sodium cans of vegetables that do not contain any other ingredient are likely to be Choose Often. Otherwise, their rank is variable
- 4** Some canned vegetables (especially corn) and tomato sauces have added sugars as well
- 5** For packaged Fruits and Vegetables, when added sugar information is not available on the nutrition facts label, total sugars are used to determine a rank. There is a higher total sugar threshold because of it combines added sugar and naturally occurring sugars

GRAINS

Food	Rank	Explanation
Cereal, granola	Variable	Cereal and granola in any packaging size are categorized as Grains. However, cereal bars and granola bars are categorized as Processed and Packaged Snacks.
Dough: pizza, bread	Variable	The final product is categorized as Grain. Dough is categorized into the food group of their final product. These items are not considered cooking staples.
Mixes: pancake, muffin, biscuit, bread, pizza	Variable	The final product is categorized as Grain. Mixes are categorized into the food group of their final product. These items are not considered cooking staples.
Muffin, scone, pancake	Variable	They are categorized as Grains and not as Desserts.
Stuffing	Variable	Stuffing is categorized as Grains and not as Condiments because it can be eaten on its own.
White/yellow dry or fresh pasta, rice, grits, couscous	Choose Sometimes if plain; Variable with seasoning or flavors are added	Because the first ingredient is not a whole grain, they cannot be ranked Choose Often. If made with other ingredients (seasoning), rank is variable.
Whole-grain dry or fresh pasta, brown rice, oats, quinoa	Choose Often if plain; Variable with seasoning or flavors are added	Because the first ingredient is a whole grain, they can be ranked Choose Often. If made with other ingredients (seasoning), rank is variable.

Key Points for Grains

1 Judge a baking mix and a dough by their final form, which is a grain for non-dessert baked goods such as muffins, scones, pancakes, etc

2 Check if the first ingredient is a whole grain

PROTEIN

Food	Rank	Explanation
Eggs, fresh	Choose Often	Fresh eggs are categorized as Protein and not as Dairy. They are always ranked Choose Often.
Ground beef 80% lean	Choose Rarely	Ground beef with specified labels (such as 80% lean/20% fat or 90% lean/10% fat) will have a standardized saturated fat content per serving.
Ground beef 90% or more lean	Choose Sometimes	Ground beef with specified labels (such as 80% lean/20% fat or 90% lean/10% fat) will have a standardized saturated fat content per serving.
Peanut butter Almond butter Sunflower butter Other nut butter	Variable	Peanut butter and other nut butter spreads are categorized as Protein and not as Condiments.

Key Point for Proteins

- 1** The ranking for meats are generally determined by their saturated fat content
- 2** The ranking for canned beans are generally determined by the sodium content. Low sodium canned beans are likely Choose Often

DAIRY

Food	Rank	Explanation
Milk: reduced fat, 1%, 2%, skim, nonfat, or fat-free	Choose Often , if plain. Variable , if sweetened.	These milk types have less than 2 g of saturated fat per serving and are ranked Choose Often if they are made with no other ingredients.
Whole milk	Choose Sometimes , if plain. Choose Sometimes or Choose Rarely , if sweetened.	Milk has specified labels to identify the saturated fat content per serving. The whole milk has more than 2 g of saturated fat per serving and is ranked Choose Sometimes if made with no other ingredients.
Yogurt	Variable	Yogurt's saturated fat content is variable, and they usually have sweeteners. Look at the ingredient list to check for diet sweeteners: if they are present, their rank is variable but cannot be Choose Often.

Key Points for Dairy

- 1 The fat content in plain milk defines its rank. If milk is made with flavoring and added sugars, the rank will be variable
- 2 Always check Dairy products' ingredient list for diet sweeteners: if they are present, their rank is variable but not Choose Often
- 3 For Dairy products, when added sugar information is not available on the nutrition facts label, total sugars are used to determine a rank. There is a higher total sugar threshold because it combines added sugar and naturally occurring sugars

NON-DAIRY ALTERNATIVES

Food	Rank	Explanation
Almond milk Oat milk Soy milk Other nut/plant-based milk	Variable	These items are categorized as Non-Dairy Alternative and not as Beverages.

BEVERAGES

Food	Rank	Explanation
Coffee drinks Tea drinks (prepared beverages)	Variable	Prepared or ready-to-drink coffee and tea drinks are categorized as Beverages. Their rank is variable because they are usually made with other ingredients (e.g., milk, cream) and added sugar.
Dry drink mixes Dry fruit or shake drink mixes	Variable	Dry drink mixes are categorized as Beverages and not as Miscellaneous. However, if a dry mix is a nutritional or protein powder, it is categorized as Miscellaneous.
Fruit drinks or juice drinks	Variable	Fruit drinks or juice drinks are not 100% juice and are categorized as Beverages. 100% Juices are Fruits and Vegetables and are always ranked Choose Sometimes.
Liquid water enhancers	Variable	Categorized as Beverages and not as Condiments.
Tea, bag or loose, unsweetened Ground or whole bean coffee	Likely Choose Often	Tea bags and ground coffee are categorized as Beverages and not as Miscellaneous. They will be Choose Often if they are made with no added sugars.
Water (plain, sparkling)	Choose Often; Variable (if sodium or sweetener is added)	Water is categorized as a Beverage. It is not categorized as Miscellaneous.

Key Points for Beverages

- 1** Beverages that are dry or powder mixes are categorized as Beverages (and not as Miscellaneous). Examples: ground coffee, drink mix, chocolate mix, hot cocoa mix, tea bags
- 2** Only 100% juices are categorized as Fruits and Vegetables, not as Beverages. All other fruit drinks and beverages are ranked as Beverages
- 3** Always check Beverages products' ingredient list for diet sweeteners: if they are present, their rank is variable but not Choose Often

MIXED DISHES

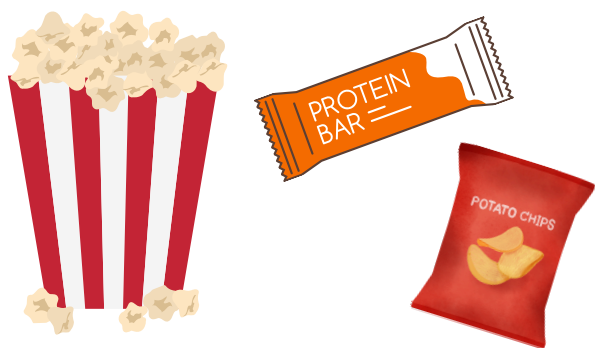
Food	Rank	Explanation
Dry soup mix	Variable	Dry soup mix is categorized as a Mixed Dishes and not as Condiments.
Mac and cheese	Variable	Mac and cheese is categorized as Mixed Dishes, not as Grain because the two primary ingredients are from different categories. Look at the information in the “as packaged” column of the nutritional facts label to rank.
Pizza rolls	Variable	These are Mixed Dishes, even if they are in a one-portion package. They are not ranked as Processed and Packaged Snacks.
Sauces: pasta, Alfredo, creamy rosa, spaghetti	Variable	All packaged pasta sauces are Mixed Dishes. Plain tomato sauce is an exception, and it is categorized as Fruits and Vegetables.

Key Points for Mixed Dishes

- 1 Meal kits that combine individual products in different categories (e.g., meal kit: cereal and yogurt) are ranked as Assorted Not Ranked and not as Mixed Dishes. Mixed Dishes are products that contain more than one category of food mixed together (e.g., lasagna, mac and cheese)
- 2 Mixed Dishes products in a “one-serving” (i.e., individual packaging) are still considered Mixed Dishes and not Processed and Packaged Snacks
- 3 Sauces consumed with cooked dishes (e.g., pasta, meats) are categorized as Mixed Dishes. Sauces that are used in small amounts and add flavor to a prepared dish or food (e.g., hot sauce, barbeque sauce) are categorized as Condiments

PROCESSED AND PACKAGED SNACKS

Food	Rank	Explanation
Popcorn	Choose Sometimes or Choose Rarely	It's a whole grain-based snack, usually containing added oil and salt.
Cereal bar Granola bar Protein bar	Likely Choose Rarely ; it could be ranked Choose Sometimes if the first ingredient is a whole-grain AND it meets the nutrient limits.	Look for the word "bar" in the name of these products to categorize them as Processed and Packaged Snacks and not as Grains.



"I think it's just making sure that when we're ranking, you know, we're ranking it under the right category...But I do notice some inconsistencies with like labeling, or categorizing products as snacks versus grains."
Nutrition Education Supervisor

Key Points for Processed and Packaged Snacks

- 1 Processed and Packaged Snacks are never ranked Choose Often. They can be Choose Sometimes if they are a whole-grain snack (e.g., whole-grain cracker, popcorn) or a non-grain snack (e.g., potato chips) and meet the sodium, fat, and added sugar limits
- 2 Most snacks will be ranked Choose Rarely
- 3 Kid-themed snacks, such as Goldfish crackers, are still ranked as Processed and Packaged Snacks and not as Miscellaneous, Baby Food
- 4 Grain-based foods such as cereal bars and crackers, are not Grains because they are consumed between meals. These are ranked as Packaged Snacks

DESSERTS

Food	Rank	Explanation
Dough: cookie, pastry, cake	Choose Rarely	The final product is a dessert.
Mixes: cake, cookie, brownie	Choose Rarely	The final product is a dessert.

Key Points for Desserts

1

Judge a baking mix and a dough by their final form

2

Muffins are not considered desserts, but cookies, brownies, and cakes are

CONDIMENTS AND COOKING STAPLES

Food	Rank	Explanation
Flours: all purpose, corn masa, whole wheat flour, rice flour, almond flour	Unranked	All flours are categorized as Condiments and Cooking Staples and not as Grains. They are a single ingredient and not something typically eaten on their own.
Coffee creamer, half-and-half	Unranked	These are categorized as Condiments and Cooking Staples and not as Dairy. They are used in small amounts or to prepare foods and are not consumed on their own.
Condensed milk		
Heavy cream, light cream, whipping cream, whipped cream		
Icing, frosting, filling		

Continued

CONDIMENTS AND COOKING STAPLES

Food	Rank	Explanation
Broth	Unranked	These are categorized as Condiments and Cooking Staples because they are used in small amounts when consuming or preparing foods and are not eaten on their own.
Butter, margarine		
Coconut milk		
Dressings		
Jelly		
Ketchup, mustard, canned salsa, mayo		
Pancake syrup, honey		
Pickles, pickled vegetables, olives		
Sauces: cranberry, barbeque, hot, lemon, teriyaki, cilantro lime, soy, sloppy joe, enchilada, tartar, green peppercorn		
Seasoning mixes		
Sweeteners		

Key Points for Condiments and Cooking Staples

- 1 Generally, the spreads are ranked based on the main ingredient category. For example, hazelnut spread is categorized as Protein, while cheese dip is Dairy. However, jelly and butter are exceptions and are classified as condiments
- 2 Sauces used in small amounts (e.g., 1 tbsp) are categorized as Condiments and Cooking Staples. If they are used in large amounts (e.g., 1/2 cup for pasta dishes), they are categorized as Mixed Dishes. Tomato sauce with no other ingredients is an exception and is categorized as Fruits and Vegetables

MISCELLANEOUS

Food	Rank	Explanation
Baby or toddler food Baby or toddler formula	Unranked	Babies' and toddlers' foods and formulas are designed to meet their specific nutritional needs.
Nutritional, protein, diabetes care powder or mix Functional drinks powder or mix	Unranked	Dry mixes intended for specific nutritional needs are ranked as Miscellaneous and not as Beverages. Look for the words nutritional, protein, diabetes, and functional to identify these products.
Perishable prepared food	Unranked	Prepared perishable foods are Miscellaneous. Frozen meals are categorized by the main food group, or as Mixed Dishes.

ASSORTED

Food	Rank	Explanation
Assorted refrigerated foods	Assorted Not Ranked	Assorted boxes may have products from the same food category or a combination of products from different food categories. Ranking all the products in an assorted box is impracticable for most food banks.
Assorted beverage		
Backpack bag		
Meal kit: cereal & juice		
Disaster box		
Donated box		
Food drive box		
Meal box, shelf stable		
Milk, assorted flavors		
Unsorted meat		
Youth Program milk		

Key Points for Assorted

1

Rank food identified as mixed, assorted, salvage, disaster boxes, or meal boxes for programs (e.g., "Family Meal Box") as Assorted Not Ranked if they do not have a consistent rank

2

It is better to assign a rank to these items than to leave their rank blank, so they can be correctly identified when creating inventory reports

NON-FOODS

Food	Rank	Explanation
Paper products	Non-food Not Ranked	These items are not food; there is no nutritional value to assess.
Cleaning products		
Laundry detergent		
Pet food		

Key Points for Non-foods

- 1 Non-food includes health and beauty care products, household cleaners, paper products, pet foods, and pet care products
- 2 It is better to assign a rank to these items than to leave their rank blank, so they can be correctly identified when creating inventory reports

Checking for Ranking Errors in Inventory Report

Ranking errors happen! Checking inventory reports is important to monitor the implementation of the Healthy Eating Research Guidelines (HER) for the Charitable Food System in the food bank, improving ranking accuracy and completeness. This guide allows staff and volunteers to identify opportunities to fix ranking errors and omissions quickly. It can also be used to rank foods retrospectively, i.e., after the foods have been received, identified, and entered in their inventory system, but not yet ranked.



Before starting to check ranks, organize the inventory spreadsheet

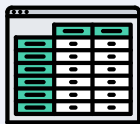


Step 1

Generate a report from the inventory system and export as an Excel file

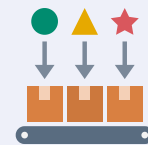
Include the following fields:

- a. Item name or description
- b. HER category
- c. HER rank
- d. Source of food (e.g., purchased, donation, USDA)
- e. FANO (Feeding America) category



Step 2

Add the column "Rank fixed" to track the items to be updated in the inventory system



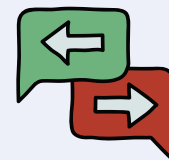
Step 3

Sort the records by FANO category, followed by item name



Step 5

Identify and rank all items that are missing ranks or have an incorrect rank. Mark the "Rank fixed" column when a rank is updated



Step 4

Filter one FANO category at a time in the order described in the following pages (Steps 6-9).

The list of items marked in the "Rank fixed" column can be used to identify areas where the ranking team needs retraining.



Step 6

Start with these FANO categories and rank:



QUICK TIPS

Check the **"HER Guidelines Basic Training"** to see how HER categories and FANO categories are related

FANO	HER Rank
Health/Beauty Care	Non-Food Not Ranked
Non-Foods	
Paper Products - Personal	
Paper Products - Household	
Pet Foods/Care	
Cleaning Products	
Baby Food/Formula	Unranked
Nutritional Aids/Supplements	
Prepared Foods	
Dressing	
Condiments	

Filter the FANO categories for assorted items:

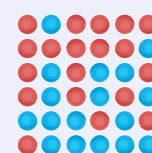
FANO	HER Rank
Salvage	Assorted Not Ranked
Mixed/Assorted	

When possible to identify, add which category the assorted item belongs to:

Examples:

- Assorted produce - Fruits and Vegetables - **Choose Often**
- Assorted cookies - Desserts - **Choose Rarely**

If it is not possible to identify the category, rank as **"Assorted Not Ranked"**



Step 7

Check assorted foods



QUICK TIPS

Work with IT to set up an automatic rank for these categories in the inventory system

Step 8

Check foods always ranked the same

Filter the remainder of the FANO categories, one at a time, and identify and rank all those foods that are always ranked the same. For example:

Fruits and Vegetables

FANO	HER Rank
Produce	Choose Often

Desserts

FANO	HER Rank
Desserts	Choose Rarely

In each FANO category, look for words related to foods that are always ranked the same:

Example:

- Search for the word “eggs” in the item description column to check if it’s ranked as **Choose Often**
- Search for the word “100% juice” in the item description column to check if it’s ranked as **Choose Sometimes**



Check the “**Foods Always Ranked the Same**” guide to see more examples



Describing the item in the inventory system in detail helps to reduce errors!

Over time, if the same item has different formulations and different ranks, create one detailed item description to identify each of versions of the product and its rank.

Step 9

Check foods from USDA

In each FANO category, check foods from USDA by filtering USDA items in the “source” column. Search for terms like TEFAP, CSFP, or USDA to identify items. View the “Ranking Foods from USDA” to rank these foods.



Extra Step

Remaining foods that have variable ranks

After completing the 9 steps, you will be left with foods with variable rank. These have variable amounts of saturated fat, sodium and added sugar between brands:

Fruits and Vegetables

FANO
Vegetables Canned/Frozen
Fruits Canned/Frozen

Protein

FANO
Meat/Fish/Poultry
Non-Meat Protein

Dairy

FANO
Dairy

Non-dairy alternative

FANO
Non-dairy dairy

Mixed Dishes

FANO
Meals/Soups/Entrees

Grains

FANO
Pasta
Bread/Bakery
Dough
Grains
Rice
Cereal

Beverages

FANO
Juices
Beverages

Processed and packaged snacks

FANO
Snacks

Check if the product's nutrition label photo is available in the system to rank variable foods

If no nutrition labels are available, these foods will not be ranked or their rank cannot be checked



Check the **"HER Guidelines Basic Training"** guide to see examples of foods with variable ranks