

Nutrition and Food Safety Literacy Status Among Food Pantry Supervisors and Volunteers in South Carolina

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According to the USDA, food insecurity or the inadequate access to a sufficient amount of nutritious food, affects over 12.3 percent of the U.S. population and including more than 680,000 South Carolinians (USDA, 2017). These individuals find some relief from food banks and food pantries that provide meals, groceries and services to individuals experiencing hunger, poverty, food insecurity and inadequate nutritional intake. Because food banks and pantries operate on limited budgets, they rely heavily on volunteers to perform numerous activities such as handling, sorting and distributing food. For this reason, food safety education of volunteers is critical to minimize foodborne illness among food bank and pantry clients. Nutrition education is less prevalent among volunteers at food banks and pantries, but it is emerging as a successful intervention for improving client health and food insecurity. A study was conducted to determine the nutrition and food safety literacy among supervisors and volunteers working in food banks and pantries in South Carolina. A survey of food pantry supervisors was conducted to characterize South Carolina food pantries and to identify gaps in nutrition and food safety knowledge. This survey revealed that 10 percent of food pantry supervisors had not been trained to manage their volunteers on food safety topics, while 40 percent had not been trained to manage volunteers on nutrition topics. Results of the survey indicated that 68 percent of SC food pantry supervisors are unpaid, with most having worked more than 4 to 6 years at their respective food pantries. Eighteen percent of supervisors stated that they accepted home-canned food at their pantry, a type of food that is associated with the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum* due to improper handling. Additionally, 20 percent responded that they did not have policies, procedures or rules about worker cleanliness and 22 percent responded they had none on wound/scab/injury coverage. Survey information was then used to create a series of food safety and nutrition education modules for food pantry volunteers. Pre and post-test scores of volunteers completing the modules will be used to improve modules and determine effectiveness.