Encouraging Wellness with the ATCAA Food Bank

SUMMARY
The Amador Tuolumne Community Action Agency Food Bank is Tuolumne County’s only food bank, overseeing several distributions, household deliveries, and partner pantry programs. In conjunction with the UCCE CalFresh Healthy Living program, a Wellness Policy was written and adopted by the agency’s board in early 2019. The wellness policy is used to inform procurement policy and donation solicitation guidelines for all programs housed under the ATCAA Food Bank. The adoption of this policy will influence the food received by clients, who cumulatively accessed food bank resources 129,940 times last year.

BACKGROUND
The ATCAA Food Bank served 14,783 individuals from 6,142 households in Tuolumne County in 2018 alone. With a mission to solicit, transport, store, and distribute food, they are an integral part of the food safety network here in Tuolumne County. Last year 960,432 pounds of food were distributed to those facing food insecurity. The adoption of a wellness policy marks how ATCAA’s vision has moved beyond caloric fundamentalism (the belief that those needing food simply need calories) and towards the importance of giving foods that are both nutritious and appealing to clients.

SOLUTION
The ATCAA Food Bank Director met with the UCCE CalFresh Healthy Living Nutrition Educator and Nutrition Advisor to help prioritize which foods should be purchased with the food bank’s discretionary funds. Priority was given to nutrient dense foods while limiting foods high in sodium, added sugars, or saturated fats. A need for a donation policy was also noted, and written to assure best food safety practices and the USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans were being promoted. The donation “grocery list” follows the Wellness Policy and aims to be clear and concise, focusing on soliciting healthy foods from local community donations.

“This wellness policy is the first step towards changing the culture surrounding food insecurity. We recognize that health and nutrition go hand in hand.”

-Joe Tobin, Food Bank Director

OUTCOME
The Wellness Policy was adopted by ATCAA’s Board of Directors in early 2019 and revised in August when a new Food Bank Director was hired. The Wellness Policy continues to be a living document, shared with community members and donors alike. The policy is expected to continue to support health in ATCAA’s procurement and education efforts.

For more information or to get involved, contact Katie Johnson, Nutrition Family and Consumer Sciences Advisor for the University of California Cooperative Extension in the Central Sierra at ckrjohnson@ucanr.edu.