



Diabetes: A Family Matter **Food Pantries**

Brief Description:

Most communities already have local food pantries associated with local churches, civic, or other local groups. Most food pantries have a mission to increase access to food for hungry people directly through food pantries. Some communities also look for ways to provide funding to new and existing food pantries. In these times, food security or the availability of nutritious food items for all family members is of great concern.

The main purposes of the *Diabetes: A Family Matter* program are to increase the healthy life of community people and to prevent diabetes. Thus, it is natural to be concerned about the availability of nutritious food to all people in the villages, towns, and cities across the Appalachian region. It is important to consider that local people not only have food, but that they have the right kinds and adequate amounts of nutritious food items.

Food pantries operate differently in various communities as they try to meet local needs. This activity is not about ways to start a food pantry but ideas for ways to make the existing ones better. Food pantries mainly operate through volunteer efforts. Volunteers do things like sort food items, repack food, take referrals, make deliveries, and many other things. This is a great way for local teens and families to get involved. If you are not already familiar or involved with your local food pantry or pantries, then this might be the first thing you do as a volunteer. Get to know what is happening locally.

Get to know the people working the food pantry. Meet some of the people that use the services. See what else is needed. What is working? What could use some improvement? It is always important to not go into a group as an outsider and think you know all of the answers. Instead, you need to work a while, be part of the group, and become an insider. Once you have done that and the people that have been there a long while, then they will sense that you really care and sincerely want to help.

Food pantries offer excellent opportunities for volunteer *SUGAR Helper* involvement. Volunteers that are concerned about increasing the healthy activity and eating of community people might be interested in assisting those at local food pantries find some ways to offer additional services or programs. Remember, these ideas are merely some suggestions to begin thinking about! You will need to work with others in your community to discover the things that will work best where you live. Adapt and modify these ideas and think of new ones as you work with other local people and groups.

Objectives:

1. Local people have access to adequate amounts of healthy and nutritious food.
2. Local people know nutritious ways to prepare foods.
3. Local people about diabetes prevention and care.



Participants:

The participants in this activity will vary based upon the ideas you choose and the directions people in your local area believe is right. It is likely that at least one volunteer *SUGAR Helper* would be involved, but it could be several volunteers or a whole large group. This is an activity where you will likely be working with people from many different sectors of your community.

Activities:

In many cases, food pantries tend to provide food items to people without giving any other services. Although food pantries usually provide excellent service and definitely meet basic needs, it might be possible to do even more. Keys to success in local communities often result from things like:

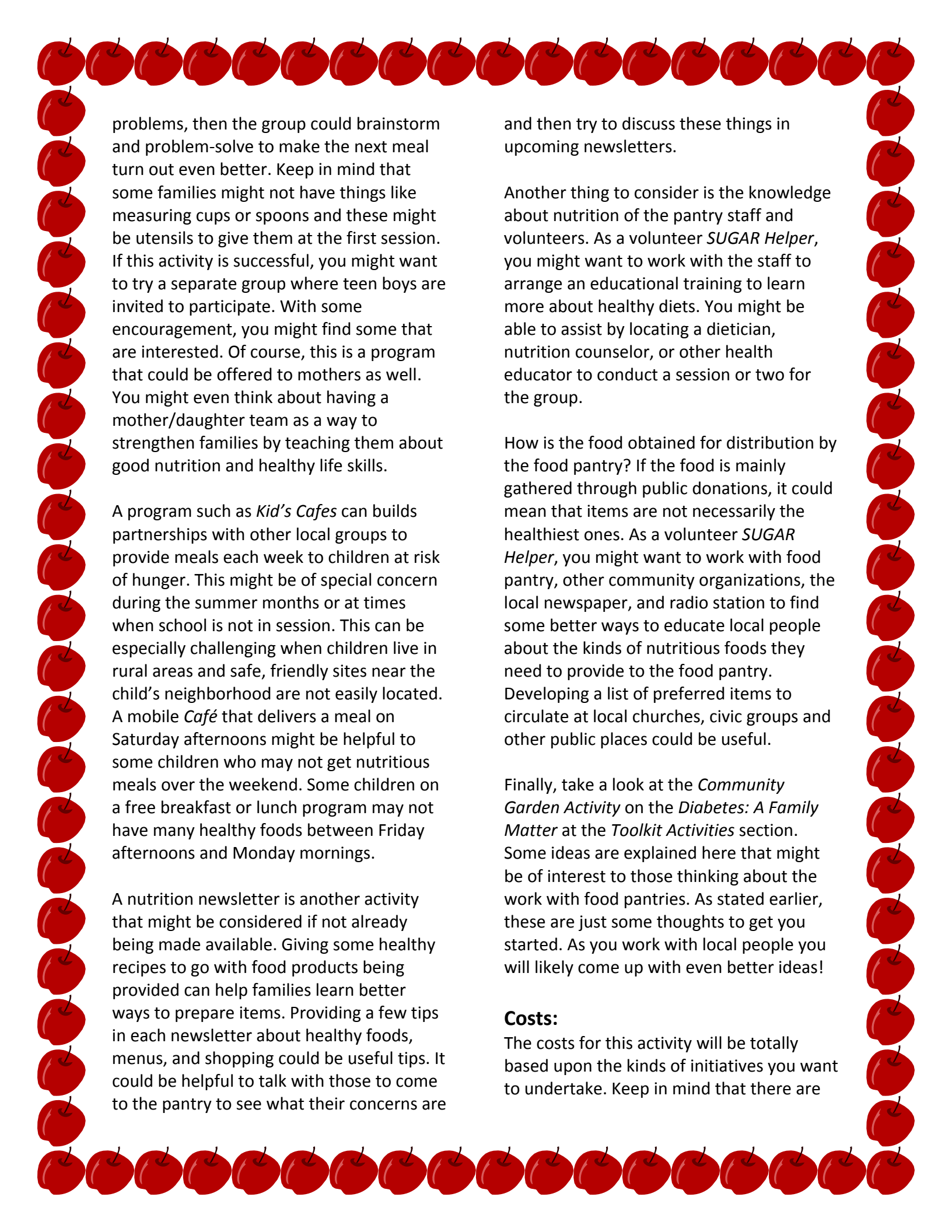
- Involving people from many sectors of the community.
- Finding ways to get people and groups connected to one another.
- Coordinating care services to avoid overlaps.
- Locating resources not previously considered.
- Identifying ways existing resources could be extended to meet more needs.

Here are some ideas that might be useful for your local food pantry. Maybe they are already doing some of these things, but some ideas may be useful in your community.

One project that food pantries might consider is gleaning. This is a traditional Biblical practice of gathering crops that would otherwise be left in the fields to rot or be plowed under after harvest. Some

food is unmarketable and some growers will allow crews of gleaners to pick what is left after harvest to donate to those who are needy. This is a wonderful way that food pantries can add some fresh fruits and vegetables to what is locally offered to people and families in need. Check within your local area to see what might be available. You will need someone to talk with local farmers to see who might be willing to participate. You will then need some volunteers to get involved in the actual gleaning. If the food pantry does not want to be involved, then maybe the farmer will just let people come and glean themselves on a particular time and date.

Another project is to consider a partnership with the local Cooperative Extension Agents who can teach low-income individuals the skills they need to make healthier, more economical choices for themselves and their families. *A STARS in the Kitchen* (Skills to Achieve Real Success) might be a way to engage teen girls that are part of low-income families. Offering a 4 to 6 week program where educational life skills about healthy eating could be of interest and benefit. At each session, participants would do some hands-on work and prepare a nutritious meal that they enjoy together. After the meal and kitchen clean-up, a brief educational session on topics such as food guide pyramid; food safety; menu planning; fat, sugar, and carb awareness; food budgeting, etc. is provided. A short quiz could be used to test the girl's learning. When they are ready to leave, each girl gets a copy of the recipes from the meal fixed and a sack filled with the needed groceries to make this meal at home for her family. At the beginning of the next session, prior to beginning the cooking, each girl should share their experience. If there were



problems, then the group could brainstorm and problem-solve to make the next meal turn out even better. Keep in mind that some families might not have things like measuring cups or spoons and these might be utensils to give them at the first session. If this activity is successful, you might want to try a separate group where teen boys are invited to participate. With some encouragement, you might find some that are interested. Of course, this is a program that could be offered to mothers as well. You might even think about having a mother/daughter team as a way to strengthen families by teaching them about good nutrition and healthy life skills.

A program such as *Kid's Cafes* can build partnerships with other local groups to provide meals each week to children at risk of hunger. This might be of special concern during the summer months or at times when school is not in session. This can be especially challenging when children live in rural areas and safe, friendly sites near the child's neighborhood are not easily located. A mobile *Café* that delivers a meal on Saturday afternoons might be helpful to some children who may not get nutritious meals over the weekend. Some children on a free breakfast or lunch program may not have many healthy foods between Friday afternoons and Monday mornings.

A nutrition newsletter is another activity that might be considered if not already being made available. Giving some healthy recipes to go with food products being provided can help families learn better ways to prepare items. Providing a few tips in each newsletter about healthy foods, menus, and shopping could be useful tips. It could be helpful to talk with those to come to the pantry to see what their concerns are

and then try to discuss these things in upcoming newsletters.


Another thing to consider is the knowledge about nutrition of the pantry staff and volunteers. As a volunteer *SUGAR Helper*, you might want to work with the staff to arrange an educational training to learn more about healthy diets. You might be able to assist by locating a dietician, nutrition counselor, or other health educator to conduct a session or two for the group.

How is the food obtained for distribution by the food pantry? If the food is mainly gathered through public donations, it could mean that items are not necessarily the healthiest ones. As a volunteer *SUGAR Helper*, you might want to work with food pantry, other community organizations, the local newspaper, and radio station to find some better ways to educate local people about the kinds of nutritious foods they need to provide to the food pantry. Developing a list of preferred items to circulate at local churches, civic groups and other public places could be useful.

Finally, take a look at the *Community Garden Activity* on the *Diabetes: A Family Matter* at the *Toolkit Activities* section. Some ideas are explained here that might be of interest to those thinking about the work with food pantries. As stated earlier, these are just some thoughts to get you started. As you work with local people you will likely come up with even better ideas!

Costs:

The costs for this activity will be totally based upon the kinds of initiatives you want to undertake. Keep in mind that there are



often state and federal monies available through grant-writing. If you want to attempt something that will be costly then consider a local foundation or other sources that might be willing to assist you with funding the activities. Find ways to partner with other community groups to enlist the help you need to get the financial resources to meet your community's needs.

Activity Duration:

As long as there are hungry people in your community, needs for working with local food pantries will continue. It is important to think about empowerment as you work with those in the community with lower incomes. What kinds of things can you give besides food? It hurts many people's pride in Appalachia to have to be dependent on others or to ask for food. Many that need food may never come to the food pantry. Treating people respectfully and assisting them address their needs is important. Once you know what the local needs are, then work with others to find ways to solve the problems.

Materials Needed:

In this activity, the materials needed are based solely upon the activities you decide to pursue. However, do not forget the people you need to make your planned activities successful. People with skills such as grant writers, nutritionists, health professionals, and others can be helpful. If you have a university closeby, see if there are faculty members there that might be interested in getting involved with some new activities.

Ways to Extend the Activity:

Here are a few things to consider as ways to extend this activity. First, on the dates when the food pantry is open you might want to think about having others from the community there. One problem for many is they do not always know where to get the kinds of help they need. If you could have some others available during the time the pantry is open then this might be helpful in assuring that local people get the services they need. For example, having someone from the health department available to give flu shots or immunizations could be helpful. If someone from WIC was there, they might be able to connect with people that need their services. If someone from Job and Family Services was there could be there they might be able to answer questions and give information about programs people visiting the pantry might be eligible to receive. Someone that could talk support to pay for heat during the winter months is another person to consider. Canvas those that come to the pantry to see what their needs are and then try to find additional ways to empower them.

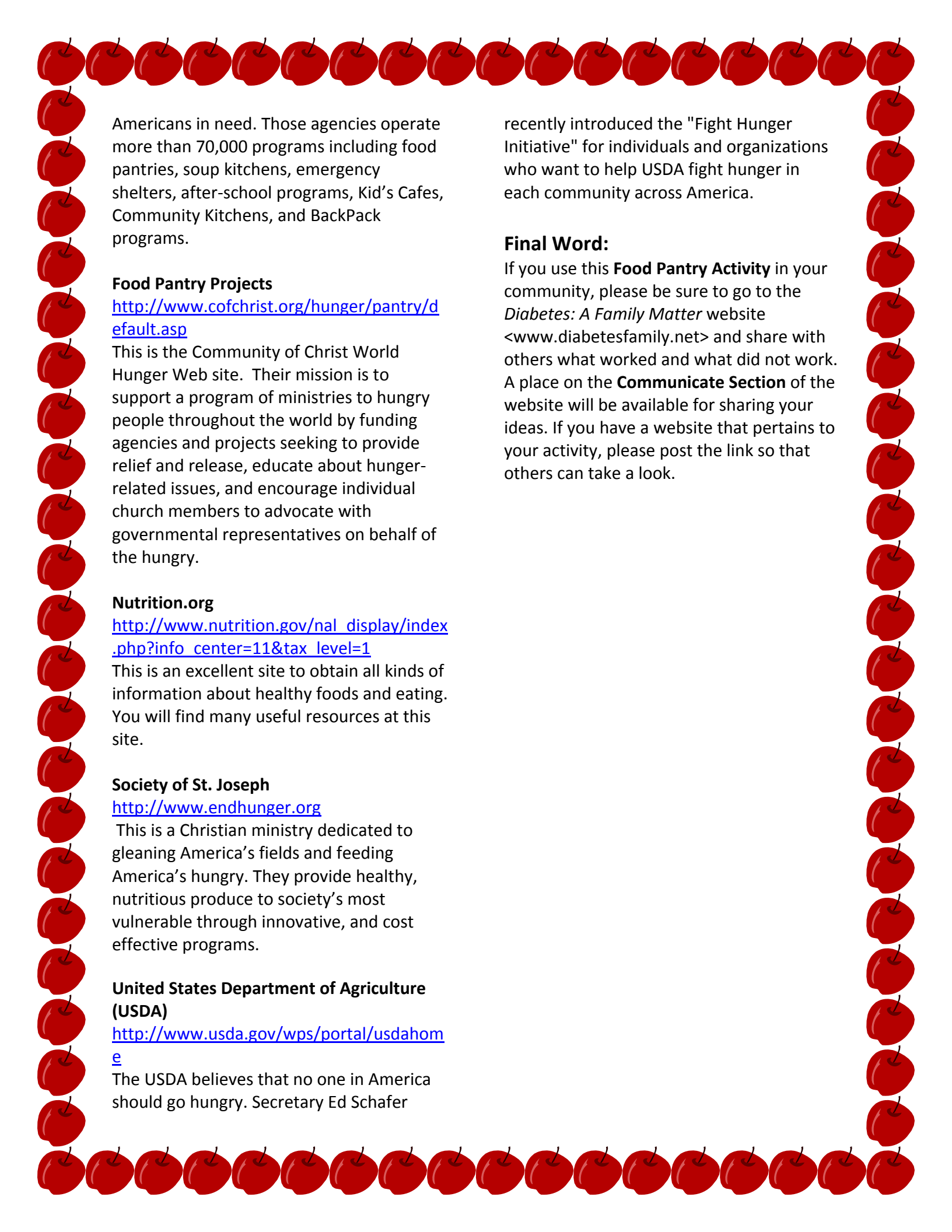
Resources:

Many food pantries exist across the Appalachian region. Take some time to review some of these via the Internet. You will likely find many good ideas that you might want to consider in your own local program. Here are a few websites to get you started, many more exist:

Feeding America

<http://feedingamerica.org/>

The Feeding America network supports approximately 63,000 local charitable agencies that distribute food directly to



Americans in need. Those agencies operate more than 70,000 programs including food pantries, soup kitchens, emergency shelters, after-school programs, Kid's Cafes, Community Kitchens, and Backpack programs.

Food Pantry Projects

<http://www.cofchrist.org/hunger/pantry/default.asp>

This is the Community of Christ World Hunger Web site. Their mission is to support a program of ministries to hungry people throughout the world by funding agencies and projects seeking to provide relief and release, educate about hunger-related issues, and encourage individual church members to advocate with governmental representatives on behalf of the hungry.

Nutrition.org

http://www.nutrition.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=11&tax_level=1

This is an excellent site to obtain all kinds of information about healthy foods and eating. You will find many useful resources at this site.

Society of St. Joseph

<http://www.endhunger.org>

This is a Christian ministry dedicated to gleaning America's fields and feeding America's hungry. They provide healthy, nutritious produce to society's most vulnerable through innovative, and cost effective programs.

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

<http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome>

The USDA believes that no one in America should go hungry. Secretary Ed Schafer

recently introduced the "Fight Hunger Initiative" for individuals and organizations who want to help USDA fight hunger in each community across America.

Final Word:

If you use this **Food Pantry Activity** in your community, please be sure to go to the *Diabetes: A Family Matter* website <www.diabetesfamily.net> and share with others what worked and what did not work. A place on the **Communicate Section** of the website will be available for sharing your ideas. If you have a website that pertains to your activity, please post the link so that others can take a look.