

# Food Pantry OR Food Bank

## What's the Difference?

Have you ever wondered what the actual difference is between a food bank and a food pantry? People assume that there is no difference because they share the same goals or that the terms are interchangeable. However, they really are two different types of organizations and there are many differences between the two in their day-to-day operations. This article will break down the similarities and differences between the two.

A food bank is defined as a non-profit organization that collects and distributes food to hunger relief charities/organizations. Food banks are typically operated out of large warehouses where they solicit, store and distribute millions of pounds of food. Most food housed in a food bank comes from various sources in the food industry; grocery stores and wholesalers that have thousands of pounds of food that need to be given away. Mislabeled, overproduced, test market items and products with short code dates are only a few of the reasons why these companies need to give the food away. Food banks also receive salvageable products which are items such as dented cans and crumpled boxes that grocery stores tend to push aside. After food has been collected at a food bank, it is sorted and distributed to non-profit organizations such as food pantries, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, senior care and emergency relief programs. All organizations must have a 501(c)(3) status from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to be eligible to become a partnering agency and receive food from a local food bank. The IRS defines a non-profit group as one that raises funds for charitable reasons without its directors and stockholders gaining any private income. They must use all of their earned income toward achieving their charity's goals. Furthermore, the local organizations cannot charge the individuals for the food that is handed out or served.

A food pantry provides food directly to those in need. These facilities receive, buy, store and distribute food to low-income individuals in their community. Large amounts of food that are received by pantries come from food banks only after they become an agency member. Once the food pantry receives its supply of food, it is then distributed to individuals and families at no cost. Unlike food banks, food pantries are typically ran out of churches or buildings that have adequate amount of freezers, refrigerators and shelving to store food. Food banks will then monitor these agencies on a regular basis to assure that food is handled in a safe and sanitary manner.

Once a pantry becomes an agency with a food bank, the agency may make scheduled visits to the warehouse to pick up allotments of food. Food banks may also deliver the food to the agencies via boxed or semi-truck. Food pantries cooperate in the support of the food bank by contributing a shared maintenance fee of \$0.19 per pound for most of the food they receive. Some food, such as store-rescue produce, beverages (pop and water) and bakery products are provided to all agencies free of charge.