Guidelines to Food Aid Standards

These standards are to act as a reference source for any organization involved in the handling of food aid. Specifically, they are to serve as a compass, in order to encourage members of InterAction to adhere to industry best practices whenever possible. These guidelines are not intended to supplant, supersede or replace the standards and guidelines to food aid programs issued by governments, government agencies or UN related organizations, but rather to complement them or to act in circumstances where those guidelines are not in effect. The guidelines, regulations and policies of donor agencies like USDA, USAID, FFP and WFP should always have precedence with their respective recipient organizations.

These guidelines are intended to be read with and expand on the InterAction Food Aid Standards approved by InterAction Board of Directors on February 28, 2012.

They provide guidance and some indicators for members involved in the provision of food aid and some elaboration on the intent and application of the Food Aid standards.

Many of these guidelines are based on the IFRC Code of Conduct and the Sphere Humanitarian Charter.

7.14.1 Criteria For Food Aid Distribution

Members will introduce general (free) distributions of food aid only when absolutely necessary, as when a community’s normal means of accessing food are compromised through natural disasters, loss of crops, deliberate starvation, voluntary or forced displacement, and/or the pervasive existence of extreme poverty. A general distribution of food aid should be considered: whenever a food aid response is required to sustain life; in order to protect or restore people’s self-reliance, and reduce the need for them to adopt potentially damaging coping strategies; when it is necessary to reduce malnutrition where it could become a major threat to life and good health; to mitigate or minimize malnutrition in pregnant women and infants/toddlers up to the critical age of 24 months; when used in combination with micro-enterprise projects to avoid malnourishment between implementation and self-sustainability. These distributions will be targeted to those who need the food the most, with priority given to those who are most vulnerable amongst that population, and should be discontinued as soon as possible.

Members should provide dry rations whenever possible. Mass distribution of cooked food should be organized only when people do not have the means to cook for themselves, or in a situation of insecurity where the distribution of dry rations could put recipients at risk.
Members, when introducing food assistance to refugees and IDPs, will base said assistance on assessment of their situation and needs, not on their status as refugees or IDPs.

Members will import food commodities into a country only when there is an in-country deficit or no practical possibility of moving available surpluses into the disaster-affected area, regardless of whether the reason be geographical, imminent danger or political/governmental will.

Members will put measures in place to avoid food aid fueling conflicts, where there is risk of food aid being commandeered or used by combatants in an armed conflict.

### 7.14.2 Food Aid Policy and Compliance

Members will share technical and operational information that will contribute to the overall improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of food aid.

Members will strive to improve public appreciation and understanding of food aid and its role in relief, rehabilitation and development.

Members will not make misleading or unrealistic claims to donors and the public.

Members will exercise all reasonable caution to reduce the possibility of their programs becoming a disincentive to local food production, of creating unattainable beneficiary expectations, or contributing to other negative effects.

Members will not promote/use food aid that might undermine optimal infant feeding practices, particularly related to breastfeeding as per WHO/UNICEF recommendations.

Members will not supply or deny food aid on the basis of providing a political incentive to influence government or beneficiaries.

Members will respect cultural differences and human rights, always treating beneficiaries with dignity and respect, and including them, whenever possible, in the design, execution and evaluation of the program.

Members will place the beneficiary interest above that of the organization and ensure, as much as possible, that those providing food aid to the final beneficiaries use poverty and need as the sole criteria for distribution.

Members will assess and consider the availability of locally/regionally sourced food commodities and the implications of both local/regional purchase and the importation of food will have on local production and market systems. In the case of imported food aid, members will assure that the populations served by the food aid are those living in extreme poverty or those in the most vulnerable groups, and therefore having little impact on the market share, except for situations where the entire region is characterized by extreme poverty or vulnerability, where impacts on
local markets would be more significant. Additionally, the extremity of need, together with careful rationing, will diminish greatly the issue of selling the food aid received.

Members will not allow their staff to realize undue personal gain – monetary, in-kind, or service related – from the performance of their duties.

Members will establish and periodically review a food aid policy that explains the organization’s purpose in using food as a program resource and its understanding of the responsibilities and obligations inherent in the use of food.

Members will be informed of the laws that govern food aid and its operational aspects in both the donor and recipient countries.

Members will not materially alter the scope or objective of a project without the consent of the donor and counterpart.

Members will provide adequate field staff with decision-making authority for the reception, storage, transfer, disposition, and, if applicable, the sale of commodities. The member organization will ensure its staff members understand their responsibilities and are equipped with the necessary skills to perform their jobs.

Members will observe prudent and cost-efficient management practices.

7.14.3 Food Aid Ration Planning

Members will determine the amount of the rations to be distributed with a view of bridging the gap between the affected population’s requirement and their own food resources.

Members will design rations for distribution conscious of the population’s requirements for energy, protein, fat and micronutrients.

Members will assure that the rations distributed reduce or eliminate the need for disaster-affected people to adopt damaging coping strategies.

Members will take into consideration special circumstances where other foods may be available and the beneficiaries may be expected to trade some of their rations to obtain them. Under these circumstances, members will calculate the economic transfer value of the rations and that this value is appropriate to the local situation.

Members will design, whenever possible, a transition and exit plan for the food aid distribution in order to avoid dependency.

7.14.4 Food Aid Appropriateness And Acceptability
Members will provide food items that are appropriate and acceptable to recipients and that can be used efficiently at the household level.

Members will consult beneficiaries during assessment or program design on the acceptability, familiarity and appropriateness of food items, and results are factored into program decisions on the choice of commodities.

Members will design an education program, when distributing unfamiliar foods, to instruct the local population on the foods preparation in a locally acceptable manner, with minimum nutrient loss, and in the local language. Members will always distribute foods that respect the cultural and religious traditions of the beneficiaries.

Members will distribute unfamiliar, ready-to-eat foods only when there are acute survival needs and no access to cooking facilities, particularly where there is evidence of severe malnourishment and/or micronutrient deficiencies.

Members will consider the availability of cooking fuel and water, and the duration of cooking times and soaking when selecting commodities for distribution.

Members will ensure, whenever possible, that recipients of whole grain cereals have the means to mill or process it in a traditional home-based manner, or have easy access to adequate milling/processing facilities.

Members will make every effort to include culturally important items and condiments that are part of daily food habits, when selecting items for long-term food distribution.

\section*{7.14.5 Food Aid Quality And Safety}

Members will distribute food of appropriate quality and fit for human consumption.

Members sending food aid will conform to international standards (like The FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius standards) and those of the recipient countries. Whenever possible, food commodities should be accompanied by Phytosanitary certificates (for grain) and Zoosanitary certificates (for canned meats), as well as required certificates for pulses and oils. Random tests for quality should be carried out both at the point of delivery and on in-country stocks.

Members will assure that all imported packaged foods are fit for human consumption, considering not only their condition on arrival in the countries, but allowing time for distribution and consumption by end users before the expiry date or well within the “best before” period, unless the manufacturer has supplied the member with an extension letter certifying that the food product is fit for human consumption for a determined period of time beyond the stated expiration date. As this practice is rare, it is recommended to conduct independent testing in country, following the regulations of local government, to determine the fitness for distribution of the foods.
Members will verify complaints, if the situation allows, about the quality of food distributed, following them up promptly and handling them in a transparent and fair manner that will not offend or intimidate the person bringing the complaint. At the same time, sound judgment is encouraged in weighing complaints qualitatively and quantitatively, and discerning between health-related complaints and those based solely on individual taste preferences.

Members will ensure that food packaging is sturdy, convenient for handling, storage and distribution, and is not a hazard for the environment. Preferably, packaging should allow for direct distribution of food, without the need for repackaging.

Members will endeavor to post appropriate information on packages and that recipients understand food ingredients and preparation instructions in their appropriate language, including the date of production, the “best used by” date and details of the nutrient content.

Members will ensure that storage conditions for food aid are adequate and appropriate, that storage areas are dry and hygienic, adequately protected from the elements and uncontaminated by chemical or other residues. Stores should be properly managed and routine checks on food quality should be carried out in all locations. Storage and warehouse guidelines are available from USAID/Food for Peace and from World Food Program².

Members will endeavor to secure all storage areas against pests (such as insects and rodents) using fumigation as required or allowed. If, despite best efforts, the food aid cannot be distributed because of expiry or infestation, members will dispose of the commodities in a manner that will ensure no possibility of usage by or risk to the population. This will be done in a manner consistent with regulations of local government.

7.14.6 Food Aid Management Handling

Members will endeavor to educate and inform food aid recipients so that food can be stored, prepared and consumed in a safe and appropriate manner.

Members will ensure that the highest hygienic standards possible are utilized in food handling and preparation at distribution sites.

Members will inform recipients of food aid about the importance of food hygiene, stressing the importance of washing hands before handling foods, avoiding contamination of water, taking pest control measures, etc. Members will provide caregivers with information of the optimal use of household resources for child feeding, together with safe methods of food preparation.

Members will proactively organize, whenever possible, program-monitoring systems (through group discussions and surveys), that will ensure the efficient storage, preparation, cooking and consumption of the food distributed.
Members will make reasonable efforts, where conditions allow, to ensure that each household has access to at least one cooking pot, water storage containers with a minimum capacity of 40 liters, an adequate supply of soap, and sufficient fuel for food preparation. In cases where access to cooking fuels is limited, members should give preference to distributing foods with a short cooking time, when available, or offer alternate cooking methods acceptable to the population.

Members will identify individuals who cannot prepare food or cannot feed themselves, such as young children, the elderly, the infirm, those with physical or mental disabilities, and people debilitated by HIV/AIDS, and help provide access to a caregiver who will prepare appropriate food in a timely manner and administer feeding where necessary.

Members will provide training to the staff in safe storage, handling of commodities and the preparation of food, wherever cooked food is distributed, offering the staff an understanding of the potential health hazards caused by improper practices.

7.14.7 Food Aid Supply Chain Management

Members will be good stewards of all food aid resources (commodities and support funds) by using transparent and responsive systems. (See HAP Standards\(^3\)).

Members will implement systems that will ensure that food aid resources reach the intended beneficiaries.

Members will assess the capabilities of local supply chain management (SCM) and establish a strong logistics infrastructure and co-ordinate the many different individual components to form an efficient SCM system, which will result in the safeguarding of all commodities until distribution to recipient households.

Members will evaluate the availability, reliability and capacity of locally available stakeholders, unless a high risk of corruption and collusion exists, before recruiting distribution staff from outside the impact area, nationally or internationally. The use of local capacity can help ensure valuable knowledge of local regulations, procedures and facilities. Additionally, it can help to ensure compliance with the laws of the country and to expedite delivery operations.

Members will assure that contracts for SCM services are awarded in a transparent, fair and open manner without favoritism or corruption. Members will avoid food aid packaging that carries any messaging that is divisive in nature.

Members will ensure that staff at all levels of the SCM system are adequately trained and observe procedures relating to food quality and safety. This training should include the staff of partner organizations and, if applicable, local community members who may be involved in commodity management.
Members will ensure that there are appropriate inventory accounting, reporting and financial systems in place to ensure accountability at all levels of the SCM system. This will assure the timely fulfillment of specific reporting requirements of food aid donors and the successful fulfillment of day-to-day management needs, including the maintaining of a well-documented audit trail of transactions.

Members will exercise care in order to minimize all losses. In the case of warehousing, members will show preference for dedicated (food-only) warehouses in order to avoid losses by contamination, also giving consideration to security, capacity, ease of access, solidity of structure and threat of flooding. In the case of internal theft, procedures should be established to minimize this threat by introducing strict internal control systems that would minimize collusion and keep close check of the stock. In the case of theft due to conditions of armed conflict or natural disaster, the strengthening of security at warehouses and transport routes should merit strong consideration.

Members will ensure that the disposal of commodities unfit for human consumption, after they have been certified as such by qualified inspectors, will take place by one of three methods: they may be used for the feeding of animals, if certified safe for this purpose; they may be buried; and they may be incinerated. Care must be taken that their disposal does not cause harm to the environment or contaminate water supplies.

Members will monitor and maintain the food pipeline in a manner that will mitigate against interruption to distribution. Close scrutiny of information pertaining to stock levels, expected arrivals and distributions should highlight anticipated shortfalls in time for solutions to be found.

Members will ensure that information on the performance of the supply chain is provided to all stakeholders on a regular basis. The use of local media or other traditional methods of news dissemination will reinforce transparency, but caution must be advised, as this may create concerns in regards to security and the political slant of certain outlets.

7.14.8  **Food Aid Distribution Management**

Members will assure that the method of food distribution is responsive, transparent, equitable and appropriate to local conditions.

Members will identify and target the recipients of food aid on the basis of need, by means of an assessment carried out through consultation with stakeholders. The most vulnerable in the community should be at the top of the list for distribution, without discrimination on any basis other than their vulnerability. Members should encourage those who distribute to final recipients to register households receiving food aid.
Members will design efficient and equitable distribution methods in consultation with local groups and partner organizations, and should involve the various recipient groups, including the most vulnerable. This system must be frequently monitored in order to assure that food continues to reach the intended recipients.

Members will make every effort to ensure that the point of distribution is as close as possible to recipients’ homes so as to ensure easy access, and not convenience for the organization. As much as possible, members should ensure that the determined location for distribution is safe and secure for all concerned, taking into consideration political, religious and gender neutrality. The location and time factors should minimize disruption of recipients’ everyday activities. Where possible, waiting areas and potable water should be provided at distribution points. All possible risks to recipients and organization should be assessed in advance and all available steps taken to minimize these risks.

Members will inform recipients (or encourage partners who affect final distribution) well in advance of the quality and quantity of the food ration and the distribution plan (day, time, location and frequency) and of the reasons for any deviation from the established norms. Additionally, recipients should be informed about the nutritional value of the food and the ways to protect that value if necessary, together with the requirements for the safe handling and use of the food commodities.

Members will consistently monitor and evaluate the performance and effectiveness of the food aid program at all levels of the food chain. Random weighing of rations will help determine accuracy and equity of distribution management; random visits to the community receiving food aid will help ascertain acceptability and usefulness of the ration, while identifying people who meet the criteria and yet are not receiving food aid.

7.14.9 Food Aid in Disaster Response

Members will make every effort to ensure, when responding with food aid to disasters, that foods that need preparation should be accompanied with cooking implements (pots, pans, etc.) required for their preparation, whether at wet feeding stations or household levels.

Members will ensure that wet feeding stations meet appropriate sanitary and hygiene standards.

When distributing food aid after a disaster, members will coordinate, as necessary, to work with local government and other agencies through in country coordination mechanisms in place, such as the UN clusters.

Members will avoid the long-term importation of bottled water after a disaster and seek more appropriate solutions. Examples include, water trucks for delivery of potable water, installation and/or rehabilitation of wells, the building and installing
of cisterns and water tanks and the establishment of sustainable water purification systems.

Members will consider the effectiveness gender based distributions of food aid after a disaster in order to increase the likelihood that food is utilized more appropriately.

Members considering distribution of infant formula must do so with extreme caution and must research the topic well by reading all available recommendations. For guidance members should consult sources such as: *Sphere Project Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response*, *FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Standards*, and *The Innocenti Declaration on the Protection, Promotion and Support of Breastfeeding and the World Health Organization’s International Code of Marketing Breast-milk Substitutes*.

Members will consult with in-country authorities in regards to the importation of infant formula, as governments may not grant approval for importation because it tends to discourage breastfeeding, thus reducing the health benefits for infants associated with this activity.

### 7.14.10 Food Aid and Development Programs

Members will, where possible, use food aid to encourage development projects, using food aid for a specific period of time, allowing the recipients to use the funds earned from the projects (agricultural, aquaculture, animal husbandry, fish farming, baking, etc.) to build capital and re-invest in order to encourage success and growth of project.

Food aid may also be used as a stop-gap measure to supplement nutrition for vulnerable families for the time between implementation of a development program and self sustainability, as in most of the programs listed above.

In other cases, the food aid may be directly related to the development aspect, as in the case with the distribution of soy, where the recipients use solar powered machines that convert soy beans and water into soy milk for sale to the community and for the self-sustainability of the recipient.

### 7.14.11 Valuation of donated food

Regarding basis and methods for valuing donated gifts-in-kind, please see section 7.12.5 in these standards. In addition, important guidance on fair value measurement can be found in Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) website.
Reference Sources


5. http://www.codexalimentarius.net/web/standard_list.jsp

   http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/code_english.pdf