

SHARE Food Buying Club

Overview

By providing access to high quality food at savings up to 30-50% off grocery store prices, SHARE's nonprofit food buying club is an integral link in the chain of food security for thousands of Wisconsin families. While many organizations such as food banks, meal programs and church-based food pantries respond to the food needs of people in emergency, or even chronic hunger situations, as families move up the ladder of food security fewer and fewer community resources are available. But seniors, the working poor and large families who do not qualify for these programs still need a helping hand so that good, nutritious food does not become a "flexible expense" in the family budget. That's where SHARE's volunteer-run food buying club comes in—to help everyone save BIG money on food.

Eligibility

There are no income limits, eligibility requirements or membership fees to participate in SHARE. Everyone is welcome - no questions asked.

Access/Participation

During FY 2005-06, SHARE served about 6,700 families every month. The food cost members \$2.4 million – a savings of nearly \$1 million over retail store prices. SHARE can achieve these savings because a network of over 200 volunteer groups called host sites - located throughout Wisconsin, northern Illinois and the Upper Peninsula - distribute the food SHARE buys in bulk.

Program Details

SHARE offers a variety of healthy foods, including meats, fruits & vegetables. Members can choose from several purchasing options, such as the "traditional SHARE package" consisting of pre-selected foods, or the "SHARE Select" option where members decide what foods and what quantities to order.

During the holidays SHARE's annual *Share the Season* campaign distributes 15,000 Thanksgiving and Christmas Dinner Packages. Church groups and other community-based organizations, such as food pantries, also purchase dinner packages that they donate to families in need. The cost savings has enabled these organizations to reach hundreds of more families.

However SHARE is more than food and savings. The mission is to bring people together to build and strengthen community through volunteer service. Every month hundreds of volunteers promote the program, take orders, do the accounting, and sort and distribute the food. In FY2005-2006, volunteers gave over 160,000 hours to their communities worth an estimated \$1.6 million. Though no longer required as a condition of membership, volunteering is encouraged.

Program Impact

SHARE serves as a vital link in the chain of food security for families who are on the brink of needing to use sources of emergency food such as food pantries. But more than a link to food

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security, the volunteer-run SHARE host sites are also an important connection to a caring community of friends and neighbors.

Positive Developments & Trends

- *Organic Produce Assortment:* Beginning in June 2007, SHARE began offering a monthly assortment of certified organic fruits and vegetables. The initial response has been overwhelmingly positive, with sales rivaling the sales of other non-organic products.
- *Leadership Development:* In 2006 SHARE initiated a leadership development process to engage SHARE's volunteer leaders and empower their vision for developing their communities. The goal of this ongoing project is to create opportunities to develop grassroots leaders who will take innovative action in their local communities.
- *The SHARE Technology Project:* In conjunction with technology partner Digital Campfires Foundation, SHARE has laid the groundwork for a volunteer-led computer refurbishing program. The project has distributed 30+ computers this year and provided basic training.

Concerns, Problems & Negative Trends

- The overall trend over the past several years has been a small decline in participation. The organization is examining ways to shift product offerings and introduce alternative distribution systems (truck sales, community stores) that will appeal more to shoppers.
- Our volunteers and members are telling us we need to offer healthier choices and lifestyle knowledge and skills. SHARE is exploring ways to expand the order form and include more information in our newsletter and website on healthy lifestyle choices.
- Food insecure pantry clients with low-incomes could benefit significantly from the lower cost foods available through SHARE, but many do not participate or remain unaware of the opportunity.

SHARE of Wisconsin would be more effective if...

- *general awareness of SHARE was heightened.* Increased participation would allow SHARE to maintain a break-even budget. Outreach partners in government and social service agencies, the media and advertising could have a great impact on attracting new members.
- *More food pantries were host sites.* Food insecure families that use food pantries could benefit from participation in SHARE. Food pantries could experiment with becoming host sites.
- *SHARE could partner to provide nutrition and food preparation training* that was complimentary to the products on its monthly order form.
- *if SHARE's distribution system could be altered* so that people could purchase and pick up food more frequently and at a time of their choosing.
- *if the USDA or other partners could help us equip our host site teams with wireless EBT (Quest Card/Food Stamp) scanners* so more Food Stamp recipients could participate easily.
- *if it were legal to purchase and sell Wisconsin state-inspected meats in our entire service area,* including Illinois and the UP of Michigan.