

Reevaluating Food Ranking Systems and Developing Culturally Responsive Nutrition Education for the Latinx community in Burien, WA: Strategic Initiatives of Alimentando al Pueblo



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Introduction

- Alimentando al Pueblo (AAP) is a Latinx-founded and led community-building organization in Burien, WA¹
- They are the only Latinx food bank in the country and provide culturally-relevant foods¹
- AAP is developing a comprehensive and culturally relevant nutrition strategy, which includes a food ranking system (FRS)



Background

- FRS help food banks make informed purchasing decisions, assess the nutritional quality of items, monitor nutrition policies, and educate partners on selecting more nutritious options when ordering food from food banks²
- FRS were not designed with Latinx communities or their cultural foodways in mind, and are used by food banks whose inventories differ significantly from that of AAPs
- Latinx cultural foods have been mischaracterized within nutrition discourse and media³

Objectives and Deliverables

- Recommendations that AAP can use to develop a food ranking system for their food inventory
- Presentation in Spanish for AAP staff members on nutrition and chronic disease management
- These two deliverables will be part of AAP's comprehensive nutrition strategy

Methods

- 2-part literature review on (1) the representation of Latinx foods in nutrition/public health and (2) strengths and limitations of the 3 main FRS²
- Summary of key findings from the 2024 AAP/Your Latina Nutrition (YLN) Best Practices Report on Latinx food preferences⁴
- Presentation on nutrition and chronic disease management, using insights gathered from the 2025 AAP Staff Survey



AAP staff at the first nutrition class of the 4-part series

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Findings

Main ranking systems

1. Supporting Wellness at Pantries (SWAP)⁵

- 3-tier stoplight system to categorize foods to choose: often (green), sometimes (yellow), rarely (red)
- Final item ranking is based on the lowest individual rating

2. Choose Healthy Options Program (CHOP)⁶

- Positive (iron, fiber, calcium, vitamins A, C, D, and folate) and negative (saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, and added sugars) nutrient content
- Peer-reviewed algorithm based on the Nutrient-Rich Foods indices to assign a composite score to each item

3. Feeding America's Foods to Encourage (F2E)⁷

- Items meet limits for sodium, total sugar, saturated fat, and trans fat
- Binary system: foods that meet limits are classified as “healthy,” while those that don’t are considered “not healthy”

2024 AAP/YLN Best Practices Report ⁴

- Latin American cuisines consist largely of mixed dishes
- In the US, dishes are separated into distinct food groups
- USDA's *MyPlate* may not adequately reflect traditional Latinx foodways and create a false impression that Latinx dishes are nutritionally unbalanced
- Vegetables are used as flavor and garnishes (e.g., salsa)

AAP Nutrition Class

- Basic concepts about diabetes, hypertension, and hypercholesterolemia
- Role of nutrition in chronic disease management
- Nutritional value of traditional Latinx dishes
- Traditional dishes adapted for people living with chronic diseases

Recommendations

1. Food Ranking System

Partner with nutrition experts, ideally Latinx dietitians, to use CHOP as a model and create a ranking system adapted to AAPs food inventory and needs

- Can help prioritize purchasing decisions to align with nutritional goals

2. Nutrition Guidelines for Food Ranking System

Use guidelines from Latin American countries as a reference point when evaluating AAP's food inventory

- Guidelines may provide more accurate and meaningful approaches
- Promote items commonly consumed in Latinx culture
- Emphasize the communal nature of Latinx eating patterns

3. Visual Tool for Food Ranking System

Develop a culturally responsive visual tool to accompany any future food ranking system

- Avoid colors typically linked to “good” or “bad”
- Create visuals that break down common Latinx dishes (e.g., pozole, arepas) into their key nutritional components⁸



4. Medically Tailored Resources

Gather feedback from individuals and families currently receiving AAP food boxes to assess the prevalence of chronic diseases and the community's interest in receiving medically tailored food boxes.

- Surveys, interviews, and focus groups
- Prerecorded workshops, videos, or written materials for condition-specific nutrition education