

[Brandywine Table]

A Fresh Take On Hunger

HOW THE CHESTER COUNTY FOOD BANK IS RAISING THE BAR FOR FOOD INSECURITY

Alyssa Thayer

THIS TIME OF YEAR, WE EMERGE FROM THE doldrums of winter craving the freshness of spring. Unfortunately, for those facing food insecurity, access to fresh food can be more of a luxury than a normal part of the change of seasons. Also less palatable, emergency food is often synonymous with heavily-processed or canned goods and for good reason—it's easier to store, transport and distribute.

From its inception in 2009, the **Chester County Food Bank** has set out to change this story. Culinary Director Ranney Moran says they are constantly trying to move from canned and processed to fresh and sustainable. “This is the foundation the Food Bank was built on,” says Ranney. Ultimately, the Food Bank has been working toward the goal of making 50% of the food they distribute fresh.

In recent years, the Food Bank has met this goal through a comprehensive approach, which includes establishing a robust fresh food supply-chain, increasing the capacity of their 120 partner agencies to store and distribute fresh food, bringing their Fresh2You Mobile Market to areas lacking fresh food access, and offering nutrition and culinary education through their Eat Fresh cooking series and FRESHstart Kitchen workforce development program. “We even



have our own partner farms and agricultural team during the growing season,” says Ranney proudly.

This past year has presented the Food Bank with unprecedented challenges, but they have still managed to achieve their 50% fresh goal. In 2020 they distributed 3.3 million pounds of food with an astounding 1.5 million pounds of it in the form of fresh fruits and veggies.

On top of the 30% increase in local need, the Food Bank has had to navigate the hardship brought on by a 60% drop in volunteer labor. “We rely heavily on volunteers,” says Ranney, “the staff has had to rise to the occasion.” Ranney, who personally oversees the commercial kitchen, says their prepared meal production has ramped up from 400–500 meals a week pre-pandemic to 2000–3000 meals a week now.

Amid monumental need, the Food Bank has stood strong as a pillar of strength for the community. To celebrate their mission, programs, and the coming of spring, we've selected a few of their tastiest EatFresh recipes to feature. Try them, make them your own, and if you're interested in going further, check out their extensive archive of recipes and video tutorials at ChesterCountyFoodBank.org/recipes.



Students from FRESHstart Kitchen program, a 14-week culinary workforce development program led by Manager Amy Rossman (far left) and Director of Culinary Programs, Chef Ranney Moran (far right).



Volunteers working in the Coatesville Community Garden as part of the Raised Bed Garden program.

Stuffed Sweet Potato Breakfast

The sweet earthiness of this fully loaded sweet potato creation will fill you up and satisfy your sweet tooth!



- ½ C. oats
- 1 C. milk or water
- 2 T. nut butter (peanut or almond works well)
- 1 T. honey or maple syrup
- 1 sweet potato

Toppings:

- ¼ C. plain Greek yogurt

Optional:

- Nuts and seeds
- Dried fruit
- Grated coconut
- Granola

Begin by preparing the oatmeal according to directions on the stovetop or in the microwave. Once oatmeal is cooked, mix in the honey and nut butter and set aside.

To cook the sweet potato quickly, poke holes around the outside and cover with a damp paper towel or cloth. Cook in microwave for 3 minutes or until tender. Once cooled, slice a slit down the center of the potato lengthwise (making sure to not cut all the way through).

Stuff the sweet potato with the oatmeal mixture and top with your choice of toppings.

Enjoy as a breakfast or as a wholesome dessert!
Makes 2 servings.

Beet and Greens Slaw

Rather than tossing those vibrant radish or beet greens, use them on this fresh take on slaw.

- 2 or 3 beets
- ½ bunch of greens (beet greens, cabbage, turnips greens, etc.)
- 1 T. fresh lemon juice
- 1 T. olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 tsp. chili sauce (optional)

Tips For Eating Fresh & Frugal

It's not a secret that using natural and whole ingredients can often be more expensive than their processed counterparts. But here are a few tips to help you eat fresh on any budget.

Plant Power – Incorporating plant-based proteins like legumes (beans and lentils) into your meals not only ups the nutrition but also helps stretch your meat budget. For example, try adding a can of black or pinto beans to your turkey chili.

In-season Ingredients – If you've ever tried to buy berries in the middle of winter, you know they're expensive and often tasteless. For optimal taste and value, opt for in-season when possible.

Cheaper Cuts – Tougher and fattier cuts of meat are available at a fraction of the cost. Examples include pork shoulder, brisket, chuck and ribs. All of these benefit from a low and slow preparation. Bonus: the fat in these cuts makes them the most flavorful as well.

Whole Hen – One surprising value pick is whole chicken. While poultry is one of the most common proteins, most folks opt for a pack of pre-portioned breasts or thighs. With a little practice, you can whip up a whole roast chicken and use it in different ways for a few days!

Favor Frozen – Remember that whole thing about not buying berries out of season? There's one exception ... Frozen fruit and vegetables can be a great way to add affordable freshness to your meal. So go ahead and enjoy frozen blueberries in your oatmeal or frozen peas to your risotto. They are generally harvested and frozen at their peak, and unlike some canning methods, freezing tends to maintain the taste and nutrient content.

Erase Waste – Throwing food away is throwing money away. Avoid this by only buying what you are going to use (meal planning helps a lot with this). Be cautious about buying large quantities of perishable foods unless you have a preservation plan, for example batch cooking and freezing leftovers.

Save Scraps – Beyond not wasting the good stuff, there are also ways to use the bits that would normally be tossed. Save rendered fat for future sautees, use vegetable peels and animal bones for broth, and find recipes to help use over-ripe produce—banana bread anyone?

Optional:

- 1 C. chickpeas cooked or canned, drained
- 3 T. peanuts/cashews

Peel and remove stem from beets. Shred with a box grater into a medium-sized bowl. Chop greens and toss into bowl with beets (if using chickpeas and nuts, add into bowl as well).

To make dressing, whisk together lemon juice, olive oil, salt, pepper and chili sauce (if using). Taste and adjust acidity, salt and heat to your liking.

Pour dressing over beet and green mixture and toss to combine. Let everything sit about 5 minutes to let the veggies absorb the flavors of the dressing.

Serve on its own, or piled onto a favorite sandwich as shown on the next page.

Makes 2 side portions.

Hakurei Sandwich

The creaminess of the mayo pairs perfectly with the crisp freshness of the veggies to make this sandwich a lunchtime favorite.

Note: One of our favorite healthy swaps is to mix Greek yogurt into mayo—not only is it healthier, it also keeps its creamy consistency and adds a delicious tanginess to the flavor profile!

- Garlic Cilantro MAYO-gurt:
- 3 C. fresh cilantro
- 1 C. plain Greek yogurt
- 1 clove garlic, peeled
- 1 T. lemon juice
- Salt and pepper to taste

Place all ingredients in a food processor. Process until sauce is relatively smooth, about 30 seconds. Scrape down the sides of the food processor bowl and pulse again to form a smooth sauce. Taste and add additional salt, pepper, lemon juice as necessary. Serve immediately or store in the fridge for up to a week.



- Sandwich:
- 4 slices whole-wheat bread
 - Garlic Cilantro MAYO-gurt to taste
 - 3–4 Hakurei Turnips, sliced into ¼ inch rounds
 - Beets and Greens Slaw (previous recipe)
 - ½ big or 1 small kohlrabi, julienned

Optional: Roast turnips by tossing in olive oil, salt and pepper and baking on cookie sheet at 400° until browned.

To prepare the sandwich, toast bread (recommended) then slather on freshly-made MAYO-gurt. Cover one slice of bread with a thin layer of hakurei turnips and top with a scoop of Beets and Greens Slaw (draining any extra juices before adding to ensure sandwich does not get soggy). Finish with a sprinkle of julienned kohlrabi for crunch, and close sandwich with the other slice of bread. Slice and enjoy immediately! Makes 2 sandwiches.

Beet Fried Rice

It’s your favorite take-out dish, but healthier! Make it your own with various veggie combinations that match your preferences and what’s in season! Also a great bet for using up leftover cooked rice or quinoa!

- 1½ T. coconut oil
- 2 medium beets, peeled and finely diced
- 1-inch ginger root, peeled and finely minced/grated or ¼ tsp. powdered ginger
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ tsp. ground cumin
- ¼ tsp. ground coriander
- ¼ tsp. ground turmeric
- ⅛ tsp. ground black pepper
- 1 crown broccoli, cut into florets
- 1 bell pepper, cut into strips
- 1 onion (any color), diced
- 2 C. brown rice, cooked

- Sauce:
- ¼ C. freshly squeezed orange juice
 - 2 T. freshly squeezed lime juice
 - ¼ C. low-sodium soy sauce/tamari



In a small bowl, whisk together all sauce ingredients. Set aside. Heat coconut oil in a large, wide pan over medium-high heat. Add beets and stir. Continue to cook, stirring frequently, for 5 minutes or until beets are starting to soften. Add ginger and garlic and cook for 30 seconds, until fragrant. Add cumin, coriander, turmeric and black pepper and cook an additional 2-3 minutes more, stirring constantly. Stir in remaining vegetables. Sauté until bright in color and slightly tender. Add in cooked rice and stir to combine. Add sauce mixture, stirring well until well mixed and hot throughout. Makes 4 servings.

Note: Instead of broccoli or bell pepper, feel free to mix and match other veggies of choice. Other options include sliced cherry tomatoes, cauliflower (takes a bit longer to cook), snap peas and kohlrabi.

Quinoa Sweet Potato Burger

These meatless patties seem to have solved one of the biggest issues facing homemade veggie burgers—crumbling! Unlike countless we’ve tried, these are formed, then refrigerated 2+ hours to help hold them together even during the cooking process.

- ⅔ C. quinoa
- 2 medium sweet potatoes
- 2 C. kale, finely chopped
- ½ C. scallions, chopped
- 1 T. fresh herbs such as parsley, cilantro, dill or mint
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- Salt and pepper to taste
- ½ C. bread crumbs or flour
- 2 T. high-heat oil such as avocado, grapeseed or peanut

Cook quinoa according to package directions. Allow to cool slightly. Poke small holes all over surface of sweet potatoes and microwave on high heat for 4–5 minutes, until soft throughout. Allow to cool, then remove skin. Place sweet potato flesh in a large bowl and mash. Add cooked quinoa, kale, scallions, fresh herbs, garlic, salt and pepper and mix. Scoop out mixture one at a time to form balls. Roll balls in bread crumbs or flour and press down into a patty shape. Refrigerate patties for 2 hours or overnight.



Note: The patties can also be frozen at this point. To cook, bring oil to medium heat in a large pan. Add a few patties to the pan at a time, ensuring space between them. Cook until crisp on the bottom, about 3–4 minutes. Flip and cook for an additional 3–4 minutes. If cooking in batches, place sauteed burgers on parchment in a warm oven until serving. Makes 4 servings.

Note: Serve on a burger roll, on top of salad greens, or as part of a burrito bowl over rice. We also enjoyed them with a slice of cheese melted on top! ♦

Alyssa Thayer found her love of food at an early age, frolicking around her mother’s organic farm and eating her weight in berries and snap peas each summer. She is a self-proclaimed urban farm girl, whose mission is to bring inspired ideas to life, passionate people together, and good food to every table.



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