



Quality Control station at Second Harvest Heartland's Brooklyn Park facility.

Making Produce Easier

Despite increasing farm donations to hunger relief, we know that the people who participate in your programs are looking for more fresh produce to bring home. Second Harvest Heartland is continuing to build our capacity to access, handle, store and distribute produce. As we think about where we make key investments in produce work, we are asking three key questions:

- **How do we improve the quality of the produce we distribute?**
- **How can we provide greater consistency of the produce available?**
- **How do we ensure variety year-round?**

Ultimately, these questions boil down to making produce easier. Easier to manage with better quality. And easier to access regardless of the time of year.

These questions are driving strategies and new initiatives at Second Harvest Heartland to improve our quality of service to partners.

“Core” Inventory Offerings

While we continue to add variety and access seasonal, Minnesota-grown produce, we also know that making produce easier also involves consistency and always having key items that you can't go without. Staples items like apples and onions, that are the building blocks of meals. Over the course of the next year we are creating a “core” produce inventory. Specific produce staples items that will be available on our inventory in 5-pound bags year-round at one set price point.

This is driving us to think differently about sourcing strategies and where we need to develop new partnerships to ensure a year-round supply of targeted items. We want to be a reliable place you can find what you're looking for. As we ramp up the “Core” inventory initiative, we will start two high priority items – apples and potatoes – and sustainably grow the initiative to offer at least 2 fruit items, 3 vegetable items and potatoes, giving you the option to order any of those items by the case. Whether ordering produce from the “Core” inventory is a supplement to the produce you receive through a case counted subscription, a regular standing order from inventory or anything in between we want to be a partner you can rely on for consistent access to the staple items you need.

More info to come about this soon!

Enhancing Produce Quality Assurance

Second Harvest Heartland has always conducted checks of produce loads when they are received. Recently, in attempt to better understand and combat produce degradation during storage, periodic quality control checks were added. These are done in order to ensure that redistributed food is both high quality and in good condition.

Quality Control checks allow for a more robust understanding of the quality and condition of produce being received, as well as the rates of degradation while in the warehouse. Six measures of quality and condition considered with every check:

- temperature (internal and external),
- humidity of storage area,
- sugar levels,
- firmness,
- cut tests and
- visual observations.

Quality control checks are documented in the form of a spreadsheet and photos of all produce items are taken. Adjustments in storage and handling practices are then made, based on the findings of the quality control checks.

Leveraging Automation to Get Produce to You Faster

In addition to enhancing our quality control program, we are exploring several different ways to shorten the timeframe of when produce is received to when it gets to you, extending the shelf life of produce and improving the overall quality.

One method of shortening this timeframe is to increase volunteer capacity. The new Brooklyn Park facility has the ability to accommodate much larger groups than in the past. Volunteer shifts with 120 slots are being offered daily. We are also in the early stages of researching automating the repacking process, with a focus on automated bagging technology. Installing an automated bagger would allow for increased productivity during volunteer shifts and shortens the time it takes to get produce from the field to a table.