

Recommended **Uses and Definitions** submitted by Kristi Rule on behalf of Second Harvest Food Bank of East Tennessee / February 9, 2026

Food Banks and **Food Pantries** serve distinct and complementary roles within the charitable food system and are not interchangeable uses. Feeding America—the nation’s largest and most widely recognized hunger-relief organization—formally differentiates between food banks as regional warehousing and distribution hubs serving partner agencies, and food pantries as community-based sites that distribute food directly to individuals and families.

By way of local context, **Second Harvest Food Bank of East Tennessee** serves a regional footprint of 18 counties, including but not limited to **Knox County**, illustrating the scale at which food banks typically operate. Conflating these uses in a **Unified Development Ordinance** overlooks meaningful differences in scale, operations, infrastructure needs, and land-use impacts such as traffic, delivery frequency, and facility size. Separate definitions will improve clarity, support appropriate zoning decisions, and better align the ordinance with nationally recognized standards.

Food Bank

A nonprofit organization that serves as a regional hub for hunger relief by soliciting, storing, warehousing, and distributing food and essential household items **to partner agencies**, rather than primarily to the public.

- Food banks typically operate large-scale facilities with refrigeration, freezer, and warehouse space.
- Distribution is primarily to food pantries, meal programs, shelters, and other nonprofit partners within a defined service area.
- Food banks may include administrative offices, training space, and limited food preparation functions ancillary to distribution.

Food Pantry (Partner Agency)

*A nonprofit or community-based organization that **distributes food directly to individuals and families experiencing food insecurity**, often receiving food from a food bank or similar supplier.*

- Food pantries are typically smaller in scale and focused on direct client service.
- Operations may include limited on-site storage and client-facing distribution areas.
- Food pantries do not function as regional warehouses and do not primarily redistribute food to other organizations.