



THE PANTRY PRIMER

Section III



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You Don't Know What You Need Until You Know What You Have

The very first step to building your new prepper's stockpile isn't a shopping trip. It's an inventory.

There's good news and bad news.

First the good news: In most cases you'll discover that you have a lot more than you think you do.

Now the bad news: You're about to make a heck of a mess.

#1 Pull out every bit of food in the house that doesn't belong in the refrigerator.

Clear your counters and table and empty out your food storage areas completely. Now, while they're empty, is a perfect time to clean out your storage areas. I like to clean areas that are going to store food with the most natural products possible. You can use vinegar and water, or a non-toxic cleaning product. I'm a big fan of the Method brand or Mrs. Meyer's brand. (Mrs. Meyer's is expensive, but wonderful.) Scrub everything down and then leave it open to air out while you're organizing your stuff.

You won't want to pull all of your freezer items out where they'll thaw. Simply pull them out for long enough that you can write down what's in the freezer and in what amounts.

#2 Sort it into categories

Now that you can see everything, it's time to sort it out. Put similar items together. You might categorize something like this:

- Baking supplies
- Pasta
- Rice
- Boxed food like flavored pasta or rice dishes
- Canned meat like tuna or chicken

- Canned fruit
- Canned vegetables
- Crackers
- Cereal
- Jars with sauce (marinara, salsa, cheese)
- Cans of soup, stew, and chili
- Mixes (pancake, brownie, cake)
- Dried fruit
- Treats like cookies, chips, etc. (Items with little nutritional value)
- Granola bars

#3 Make a list of what you have

Now that you have everything out, are you surprised by anything? Do you have more or less than you thought you might?

Now it's time to put it all down in black and white. This probably won't be your permanent pantry list, it's just a starting point.

When you write down your quantities, do it in the way that makes the most sense to you. Some people like to use the weight, for example:

6 pounds of pasta

Others, myself included, like to quantify it in realistic serving sizes. By realistic, I mean a size your family members would actually consume at a meal, not the 1 ounce servings touted on the package.

24 servings of pasta

Quantifying by serving size doesn't work with things like baking soda or flour – for those items, weight measurements will be the most accurate.

#4 Figure out meals you could make with these items

Now, pretend you have no food except for this. Regardless of what the calculators tell you about how long your supply will last, a meal that consists of raisins, rice, and canned green beans might not be your idea of a meal.

So, using ONLY the items you have on hand, how many meals could you make that your family would want to eat? How many meals are just lacking 1-2 ingredients to make them perfect? Start a list of those missing ingredients.

Are you taking some staples for granted? For example, if you're considering cereal a meal, do you have a source of shelf-stable milk? For baked goods, are you assuming eggs are available? There are shelf-stable substitutes available for this too.

#5 Figure out how much you need

Remember back in "The Perfect Pantry" section when we figured out how much food we needed in our pantries? If you didn't do the calculations then, do them now.

#6 Make an ideal meal plan

This is going to sound crazy, especially considering the fact that we are preparing for scenarios that are outside of our normal life, but the next thing I want you to do in this preparation stage is to make a meal plan for a normal month.

Include in it your family favorites: maybe it's oatmeal for breakfast, sandwiches for lunch, and a dinner of meatloaf, mashed potatoes, and a vegetable. Maybe you have a tradition of Saturday morning pancakes. Put that in, too. Is there a special meal for celebrations in your family? Even in differing circumstances, birthdays, anniversaries, and achievements will happen and they should be celebrated.

While the primary goal of your pantry is keeping you nutritionally sustained, there's another goal that people often forget about. Having "normal" food means that you can provide a sense of comfort during an extraordinary time. Children will have meals that are familiar, and less food will go to waste. (Waste is something we'll discuss in upcoming chapters. When you are reliant on your pantry, the waste of food is a sin that could be deadly.) When everything in your life is in turmoil, the comfort provided by a favorite food or beloved tradition can't be overrated.

Now you know what you have...

Are you surprised? In a good way or a bad way? Do you have as many supplies as you thought you did? Do you have *more* supplies than you thought you did? Analyze this list like it's the key to a map that leads to the Holy Grail. This is your starting point. In a few months, you'll compare your supplies then to this list and feel a major sense of accomplishment.

Finally, It's Time to Go Shopping

You've been plotting the creation of your stockpile. You've taken inventory of what you already have. You've made a meal plan. You know why you need to build a pantry, and since the timing is getting more imperative by the day, now you just need to start doing it.

There are two ways to get started, and which you choose depends on the status of your inventory. You might be starting with a completely empty pantry, or you may have some basic supplies on hand.

Either way, you need to focus first on building your supply so that you have everything you need to begin cooking from scratch as soon as possible. Below, we'll talk about the two different starting points. The pantry-building plan will only be different during the first few weeks.

Pantry A: Getting started when you have some supplies:

Most people will fall into this category.

It's a lot easier to get started if you've got a few things in your cupboard. If you already have spices, condiments, and a few meals worth of food, you can free up some of your grocery money for stockpile purchases.

If that's the case, double up on some of the items on List #1.

Pantry B: Getting started when your cupboards are bare:

Some folks will start with nothing. While that may seem hard to wrap your head around, there are many valid reasons that might be the case:

- Maybe you just undertook a long distance move.
- Maybe your home was destroyed by fire or flood.
- Maybe you live in a city and have been, up until this point, a daily purchaser of take-out food.
- Maybe you've been living with others and just moved out on your own.

When making your first shopping list, you must take into account foods that can pull double duty as "right-now" meals and as "storage food." When you have absolutely nothing on hand, the challenge is keeping your family fed while you put aside money to make bulk purchases.

When you are starting with bare cupboards, you can break down your shopping into two types:

1. Shopping for weekly groceries
2. Shopping for the stockpile

The weekly groceries are the fresh items that you get for the meals you are making throughout the week - I call this "right-now food." Items like meat, dairy products, eggs, and produce make up the bulk of it. The stockpile groceries are the larger purchases of items that you are putting away in the pantry for later use, as well as the staples that you need to cook from scratch - this is your "later" food.

If you're starting with nothing, you may need to pick up some shortcut foods you wouldn't normally eat. For example, that first week, you might need to grab some canned soup and bread for quick, thrifty lunches, whereas later, the majority of your food will be wholesome, delicious, made-from-scratch items.

Be sure, however, not to focus ONLY on “right now” food. It’s imperative to pick up a few pantry basics each week. Your meal plan will be simple fare, but that’s okay, because you have a goal to meet!

Meal Planning While Starting Your Pantry

It's really easy to get sucked into purchasing food for the here and now, and to forget about creating a stockpile. We live in a "just in time" society, where people in metropolitan locations often grocery shop that very day for the evening meal. Many people are completely reliant on the delivery of foods to the grocery

And here is one very simple fact: It's hard to cook from scratch with an empty pantry.

I'm a big proponent of cooking from scratch. It tastes better, it's more frugal, and it's far healthier. You know exactly what is in a loaf of bread that you make yourself from simple ingredients, but a loaf of bread in a cellophane package often bears a list that reads more like the supplies for a chemistry project than a compilation of ingredients.

I know, I know. My website is called “The Organic Prepper” so you probably never thought you’d see me recommending packaged food of any type. But, in a bare cupboards situation, it is a little bit tricky, particularly in the first week or two, to make everything completely from scratch.

Remember how I said that I started this project with absolutely nothing in my kitchen? When I say I was starting with completely bare cupboards, I mean COMPLETELY BARE. Not so much as a packet of ketchup was thrown in a drawer. I did not have a single spice, not even salt or pepper. Nor did I have any pantry basics yet, like white vinegar, baking soda, yeast, condiments, or sugar. If I were to go and stock my cupboards totally with those items, it would take the entire weeks' budget, and I wouldn't be able to afford the right-now foods: ingredients like fruits, vegetables, meat, eggs, and dairy products.

Here’s an example: if you wanted to make a loaf of bread and a pot of beef and vegetable soup, you'd have to purchase all of the ingredients separately.

Think about the list of ingredients required for this:

- Flour
- Salt
- Sugar
- Yeast
- Milk
- Oil
- Broth
- Ground Beef
- Barley
- Assorted vegetables
- Tomato paste
- Garlic
- Onion
- Spices
- Salt and Pepper
- and to make it a little nicer, butter and Parmesan cheese

Within a month, you'll have enough basics to make this practical, but initially, that meal would be a large percentage of your budget for the week. So, in light of that, you may have to take some shortcuts. To start out, plan a few inexpensive off-the-shelf meals to make it possible to put aside the money for those pantry basic purchases.

I can't express strongly enough how important it is not to be married to your menu. I know we've discussed the before, but I just want to reiterate it: if you go to the store and chicken is outrageously expensive but ground beef or pork tenderloin are on sale, then roll with it. Always be ready to modify your menu and base it around the items you can get at a good price. Meat and produce are the items that have the most fluctuation, so always be flexible and prepared to improvise.

Shopping List #1

First, let me introduce the shopping lists. These lists are NOT engraved in stone. These lists are a basic guideline to get you started. You need to figure in these variables and adjust the lists as needed:

- Your budget
- The preferences of your family
- Your level of cooking skills
- The sales in your area
- The time of year (buying things in-season is a huge money saver)
- The number of people you're feeding

The first week's shopping trip should net you about a two-week supply of food, or perhaps a bit more if carefully rationed.

I have not included quantities for most of these items because you'll need to decide on that based on the variables above.

Look for good buys on couscous, oats, rice, and pasta for grains.

When purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables, look for large quantities. Bagged apples and oranges are generally less expensive than individually selected ones. Large bags of whole carrots, potatoes, and onions are usually reasonably priced. Choose other produce only if it is in-season and a good price.

The first shopping trip is always the trickiest - especially if you're a Pantry B family and you have to purchase things like condiments, spices, and pantry basics. This list includes those types of basics. If you are a Pantry A family, simply omit the things you already have and double up on "later" food like dried beans, rice, and canned tomatoes.

- ✓ Milk
- ✓ 1 pound of butter
- ✓ Square of Parmesan
- ✓ Cottage cheese
- ✓ Greek yogurt
- ✓ Bread
- ✓ Eggs
- ✓ Peanut butter
- ✓ Dried beans
- ✓ whole chicken
- ✓ Roast (beef or pork)
- ✓ Ground beef (Try to get at least one extra package for the freezer)

- ✓ Small ham (half for sandwiches or breakfast, and half for recipes)
- ✓ Breakfast cereal
- ✓ Rice
- ✓ Dry pasta
- ✓ Canned soup
- ✓ Canned fruits and vegetables
- ✓ Cans of crushed tomatoes
- ✓ Frozen fruits and veggies
- ✓ Fresh fruits and vegetables
- ✓ Potatoes
- ✓ Popping corn
- ✓ Garlic
- ✓ Onions
- ✓ Olive oil
- ✓ Ketchup
- ✓ Mustard
- ✓ Coffee
- ✓ Tea
- ✓ Jar of jam
- ✓ Basic spices: garlic powder, onion powder, oregano, seasoning salt (MSG free), sea salt, black pepper, paprika
- ✓ Sugar
- ✓ Baking soda
- ✓ Baking powder
- ✓ Flour
- ✓ 10 gallons of spring water (5 to drink and 5 to put back)

From here on out, things will be easier. Now you have quite a few pantry basics that will make scratch cooking easier, like baking soda, baking powder, flour, and spices. These "support items" will last much longer than a week.

Menu #1

This might be very different from the food you've been eating, so here's a sample menu using the above items. (A * indicates that the recipe is in the final section of the book.)

Breakfasts

- Ham, eggs, and toast
- Cereal with milk
- Yogurt with fruit
- Pancakes with butter and warmed jam topping

Lunches

- Peanut butter and jam sandwich
- Can of soup
- Baked potato with butter and Greek yogurt
- Leftovers from the previous night
- Ham sandwich
- Fruit salad with yogurt

Dinners

- Pot roast with potatoes and carrots*
- Stew made from leftover pot roast and vegetables* (serve over rice or noodles if you need to extend it)
- Spaghetti made with crushed tomatoes, ground beef, and herbs, topped with Parmesan*
- Spaghetti Pie*
- Slow cooker ham and potatoes*
- Potato soup*

Snacks:

- Fruit
- Veggies
- Peanut butter sandwiches
- Popcorn
- Yogurt

As you can see, we're stretching the leftovers as far as possible by creating an entirely new meal with them. Breakfasts and lunches are very simple, but filling, with a family dinner being the highlight of the day.

It can be helpful to dedicate one shelf of the refrigerator to foods that are off-limits for snacking. There is little more frustrating than going to make a meal and discovering that a hungry family member ate half of your ingredients.

Lest your kids stage a rebellion, have another shelf of the fridge that has food to which they can help themselves. It's really essential that the entire family sticks to the menu to allow you to control costs at this time.

Beverages and Your Budget

Did you ever stop to consider how much of your grocery allotment is dedicated to beverages?

If your kids drink soda pop, juice, and milk throughout the day, you are most likely spending a fortune on drinks. It's time to switch to water for between meal refreshments. If they absolutely refuse to drink water, you can make iced tea for an inexpensive refreshment.

In our home, coffee, tea, and water are free-for-all drinks. Everything else is served only with meals. We have a certain amount of juice and milk to be used as beverages through the week, and when it's gone, it's gone. Soft drinks are purchased only for parties. A glass of fruit juice is allotted for breakfast, and a glass of milk for dinner.

When I first switched to this method of refreshment, my family nearly staged a coup.

I'm happy to report that now, after a period of adjustment, the kids voluntarily reach for a glass of water throughout the day, and get the majority of their nutrients from food instead of drinks.

Shopping List #2

When meal planning during the building phase, your meals should either be simple and inexpensive, or they should contribute to the creation of the stockpile.

Sometimes the meal you cook today can actually help you in building your stockpile.

Take a whole chicken, for example.

If whole chickens are on sale, it can be an amazing investment for your stockpile. You can get a lot of mileage out of a chicken if you practice some black-belt frugality. Turkeys are even better, and when they go on sale after the holidays, I buy at least two if I can afford it.

First, enjoy a roasted chicken. Throw in some inexpensive veggies like potatoes and carrots, or cook a big pot of rice or couscous to go on the side. This is a nice Sunday dinner that, depending on the size of your family, may leave you some leftovers for one more meal.

Second, try a meal that is light on the meat for using up the rest of the poultry. I generally make a casserole, stir fry, or pasta dish to use the rest of the "better" leftover chicken.

Then, make broth. Simply pop the carcass into the crockpot with a head of garlic and a couple of onions. Cover it with water and simmer it overnight (8-12 hours). You can add some herbs to the pot also - but if you are going to can the broth, do not add sage. (I learned this the hard way - when canned, the flavor of sage turns very bitter.) You can freeze the broth or can it to begin building your home-preserved stockpile. *You absolutely, positively MUST have a pressure canner to safely preserve your homemade broth in jars - no exceptions!* See the next section of this book for basic canning instructions and freezing instructions.

Other meals that will add to your stockpile are homemade soups or chilies. They will provide you with "right now" food and "later" food - and both will be a wonderful home-cooked meal. Make a great big pot of whatever soup you fancy, leave some out to eat right now, and pressure can the rest.

Look through your favorite recipes

Take a look at your family's favorite recipes and search for the ones with the least number of ingredients. This is another good way to cook from scratch while building your stockpile.

Some recipes with few ingredients are potato soup, a pot of beans and rice, tomato soup, or a crockpot roast with potatoes and carrots. Think simple when you are building your stockpile and save the fancy stuff for later when you are well-supplied. Keep in mind that if you have to constantly run to the store every day for extra ingredients, you are defeating your purpose. You're spending extra money on gas, you are spending valuable time, and it's hard to keep your budget under control when you are constantly adding \$5 here and \$10 there.

Base the next list on your simple menu plan

So, during week 2, we're going to begin to build out our stockpile a little bit. You will have some basic supplies left over from week 1, and this week, you'll add to that with the following guideline:

- ✓ Milk (2x the normal amount)
- ✓ Cheddar cheese
- ✓ Eggs
- ✓ Bread
- ✓ Whole chicken
- ✓ Ground beef (Try to get at least one extra package for the freezer)
- ✓ Small ham (half for sandwiches or breakfast, and half for recipes)
- ✓ Quick-cooking oatmeal
- ✓ Frozen fruits and veggies
- ✓ Fresh fruits and vegetables
- ✓ 1 gallon of white vinegar
- ✓ Baking cocoa
- ✓ Coconut oil
- ✓ More spices: chili powder, basil, thyme, parsley, ginger
- ✓ Soy sauce
- ✓ Brown sugar
- ✓ Yeast

And the following duplicates of the previous week for the stockpile:

- ✓ Peanut butter
- ✓ Dried beans
- ✓ Rice
- ✓ Dry pasta (Including macaroni)
- ✓ Canned fruit and veggies
- ✓ Cans of crushed tomatoes
- ✓ Coffee
- ✓ Tea
- ✓ Flour
- ✓ 10 gallons of spring water (5 to drink and 5 to put back)

This week, we have added some more scratch basics, plus some extra goodies for our stockpile. You might notice that the list doubles the milk purchase but doesn't add more dairy products. That's because now, you're going to learn to make your own yogurt and cottage cheese. (Find directions in the recipe section.) If frugality is high on your list of priorities, you'll love how much money you save, particularly if you opt for organic dairy products.

Menu #2

Breakfasts

- Ham, eggs, and toast
- Cereal with milk
- Yogurt with fruit
- Pancakes with butter and warmed jam topping
- Oatmeal with brown sugar and fruit

Lunches

- Peanut butter and jam sandwich
- Can of soup
- Baked potato with butter, cheese and Greek yogurt
- Leftovers from the previous night
- Ham sandwich
- Fruit salad with yogurt

Dinners

- Roasted chicken with potatoes and carrots*
- Chicken fried rice*
- Chili*
- Chili Mac*
- Leftover buffet

Snacks:

- Fruit
- Veggies
- Peanut butter sandwiches
- Popcorn
- Yogurt
- Haystack cookies*

Finally, some variety! You may have noticed the last dinner entry for the week, “leftover buffet.” This was a Thursday night tradition in my family when the kids were younger. On Thursday, I pulled out all of the leftovers for the week and put them out, buffet-style, on the counter. The girls could then pick and choose their meal from the odds and ends that weren’t quite enough to feed everyone. It was the easiest way to get rid of the leftovers, and everyone was happy. Added bonus: no-cook night for Mom!

Shopping List #3

This week is going to be a little different. We’re going to assume there’s a bit of ham left over from last week, since no recipes on the menu called for it. Our list

for “right now food” will be much shorter this week, and the focus will be on pantry basics and the stockpile.

For the stockpile purchases, this is the week to start really investing in those loss-leader purchases. Since that will vary, based on where you are and the time of year, much of this week’s list will be up to you. Also, remember how we purchased bread before? This week, we’ll add some quick cooking breads to our menu.

- ✓ Milk (2x the normal amount)
- ✓ Eggs
- ✓ Butter (get extra for baking)
- ✓ Fresh fruits and vegetables
- ✓ More spices: cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, clove
- ✓ Organic cornmeal
- ✓ Potatoes and onions if needed

And hit the sales! You have enough in your pantry that you can skip regular grocery buying this week and put the additional savings into your stockpile.

Menu #3

This menu is based on stockpile supplies. It's not fancy, but it is hearty. Play around with this based on what you have on hand.

Breakfasts

- Eggs and toast
- Yogurt with fruit
- Pancakes with butter and warmed jam topping
- Oatmeal with brown sugar and fruit
- Biscuits with butter and jam

Lunches

- Peanut butter and jam sandwich
- Can of soup
- Baked potato with butter, cheese and Greek yogurt
- Leftovers from the previous night
- Fruit salad with yogurt

Dinners

- Pork and beans* with cornbread*
- Mexican beans and rice*
- Chicken and dumplings* (made with your canned or frozen broth and chicken)
- Meatloaf, mashed potatoes, and veggies
- Shepherd's pie
- Leftover buffet

Snacks:

- Fruit
- Veggies
- Popcorn
- Yogurt
- Haystack cookies

In the meal plan above, you're utilizing pantry stockpile items, cooking from scratch, and eating some alternative proteins this week.

Shopping List #4

This is the last specific shopping list. This week, your mission is to buy duplicates of the pantry staples that you've been purchasing, plus some right now food. You should never have only "one" of anything in your pantry. Always have one in reserve, and restock when you put that last one into play in your kitchen.

- ✓ Peanut butter
- ✓ Dried beans
- ✓ Breakfast cereal
- ✓ Rice
- ✓ Dry pasta
- ✓ Canned soup
- ✓ Canned fruits and vegetables
- ✓ Cans of crushed tomatoes
- ✓ Popping corn
- ✓ Olive oil
- ✓ Ketchup
- ✓ Mustard
- ✓ Coffee
- ✓ Tea
- ✓ Jar of jam
- ✓ Spices: garlic powder, onion powder, oregano, seasoning salt (MSG free), sea salt, black pepper, paprika, chili powder, basil, thyme, parsley, ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, clove
- ✓ Organic cornmeal
- ✓ Sugar
- ✓ Baking soda
- ✓ Baking powder
- ✓ Flour
- ✓ Quick-cooking oatmeal
- ✓ 1 gallon of white vinegar
- ✓ Baking cocoa
- ✓ Coconut oil

- ✓ Soy sauce
- ✓ Brown sugar
- ✓ Yeast

This week, you'll want to focus on a simple menu, perhaps repeating some of the meals you've had over the past few weeks. Continue to make your homemade dairy products and baked goods. Be sure to eat or preserve leftovers, and allow nothing to go to waste. At this point, there's no need for special menus. Just take what you've learned to shop and plan meals efficiently.

Subsequent weeks

As we discussed previously, weekly grocery shopping is not the way to quickly build a one-year food supply. Now that you have built a base, you'll be able to easily skip the weekly trips and save up for larger purchases.

To be able to afford large purchases when you are on a regular, week-to-week budget, you have to figure out a strategy. For me, the best way to save up for bigger purchases is to skip a week of shopping and then add the budgets of the two weeks together in order to make some bulk purchases that I ordinarily couldn't swing alongside a week of regular grocery shopping. Other strategies could include:

- Selling something in order to come up with a lump sum of money
- Using coupons to build a pantry
- Taking a part-time job
- Cancelling something that you make monthly payments on and putting every dime of that money towards your stockpile (cable, cellphone, etc.)

Now, it's time to do another inventory. You've spent the past weeks creating the beginnings of your stockpile. You have enough supplies that the majority of your shopping can be geared towards replenishing and building up your supplies. Your weekly needs should be minimal at this point.

When you go through your supplies, pay special attention to the categories we discussed in the second section of the book, *The Perfect Pantry*. You'll probably find that you have lots of one type of supply (for me that is usually grains) and just a few items in one category (for me that is often protein.)

So, now that you have your basic stockpile, from here on out, each week's mission is to top up your weakest category and replenish your pantry with the best sales around. Try a rotation of the following focus areas:

Grains:

Make a bulk purchase, and also get Mylar liners and food-safe buckets for storing it. You can also buy individual bags of rice, flour, cornmeal, and oatmeal, and put these in proper storage containers.

Proteins:

Either hit a really great sale on meat or purchase in bulk from a butcher shop. It is fine to store the meat in the freezer initially, but you need a back-up plan if you have any concerns about a potential power outage. Consider canning or dehydrating some of your meat.

Fruits and veggies:

You can purchase grocery store canned produce, but there are tastier and more nutritious ways to get your fruits and veggies. Freeze-dried vegetables and fruits are shelf stable and quite tasty when reconstituted. These usually come in sealed #10 cans and can be put directly in your storage room with no further fuss. If it's the right season, you can break out your canning supplies to preserve some local bounty.

Scratch Basics:

One thing many people forget is milk. Look for a source of dry milk for your pantry, preferably organic or rBGH-free at the very least. Store this carefully because it can pick up flavors and odors from other nearby pantry items. Mark the container with the expiration date. If you need other scratch basics, this is your week for things like vinegar, baking soda, yeast, and chocolate chips!

The Latter Day Saints' Warehouse

One larger purchase that I made while building my pantry was 8 starter kits from a nearby Latter Day Saints warehouse for \$31 apiece.

Each kit contains 28 pounds of food, including: wheat, flour, pinto beans, rice, and oats, and the Mormon church considers this a one-month supply of food for one person.

Now, these kits are *not* the rock-bottom, cheapest way to purchase this longer-term storage food. I could have gotten the items for less money by purchasing them in bulk elsewhere. However, if you're starting out without most supplies, these kits allow you to add supplies that are already packed in #10 cans, ready to sit on my shelves for the next 10 years if need be. If you don't have food sealers, Mylar bags, food safe buckets, and other items for repackaging, this can be a

great way to build a base of shelf-stable supplies that are pest and environment-proof.