

LEFTOVERS  RESCUE FOOD

FOOD DONATION GUIDELINES

ACCEPTABLE FOODS	UNACCEPTABLE FOODS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Whole fruits & vegetables, including home-grown (see Appendix A for more details) ● Commercially canned foods ● Home-canned low-risk food (<i>must</i> adhere to the 2020 Alberta Food Regulation update requirements¹) ● Dry, unopened, packaged goods (e.g. cereal, crackers, pancake mix etc.) ● Baked goods without perishable fillings (<i>must</i> come from a valid food handling facility² or follow regulation for low-risk³ home-prepared foods¹) ● Baked goods with perishable fillings and ready-to-eat cooked foods (e.g. surplus foods from restaurants or events) IF it meets the following criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the product is not leftover food from a patron's table or open buffet; ○ the product has been chilled and maintained at or below 4°C and protected from contamination at all times; and, ○ the product comes directly from a facility with a valid AHS Food Handling Permit². ● <i>High-risk foods</i>⁴ that are maintained at or below 4°C if refrigerated, or below -12°C if frozen ● Wild game meat IF received through a program approved by AHS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Foods in bulging, rusty, leaking or severely dented cans ● Cans without labels, unless there is reliable assurance as to the contents of the can ● Dry goods (e.g. cereal, crackers, pancake mix etc.) that aren't in sealed packages ● Loose goods that aren't in food grade packaging (e.g. loaves of bread in garbage bags) ● Home-processed/canned fruits or vegetables (e.g. jam, pickles, blanched vegetables) if not produced following 2020 Alberta Food Regulation update requirements¹) ● Eggs that are cracked or visibly dirty ● Meat and poultry which have not been inspected ● Fish products not caught with a commercial license ● Any food that has been contaminated by insects, rodents, or chemicals ● <i>High-Risk Foods</i>⁴ that are not maintained at or below 4°C if refrigerated, or below -12°C if frozen ● Expired products (see Appendix B for more information on expiry vs. best before dates)

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APPENDIX A - ASSESSING FOOD QUALITY

PRODUCE

Bruised/scarred produce is usually still edible - the bruised/scarred portion of the item can be cut away and very little of the fruit is wasted. Bruising is most often caused by the handling and method in which the fruit is shipped, and is *not* an indicator that the item is spoiled.

Whole/uncut produce can be donated from both AHS-approved facilities and home gardens. If produce has been cut/prepared, it must be treated as a *high risk food* and transported appropriately (see our ***Guideline for Transporting Donated Food***). Only accept cut/prepared produce from AHS-approved facilities (not personal homes).

When to refuse/discard:

- If the majority of the produce is bruised, mouldy, extremely discolored, has a foul odour, or the skin is wrinkling or peeling away with the slightest touch
- If the item is not whole (i.e. has been cut) and has not been kept refrigerated or frozen

BAKED GOODS

If baked goods contain high risk food/ingredients⁴ (meat, dairy, cheese, meringue fillings and creams/icings that contain eggs, cream, cream cheese), they must be transported appropriately (see ***Guideline for Transporting Donated Food***). Only accept high-risk baked goods from AHS-approved facilities (not personal homes).

Low-risk³ baked goods can be accepted from home kitchens as long as the producer has adhered to Alberta Food Regulations¹ (some producers at Farmers Markets fall in this category).

When to refuse/discard:

- If the item is considered high risk and has not been kept refrigerated or frozen
- If there is any visible sign of mould or the product has a foul odour

MEAT & PREPARED MEALS

Meat and prepared meals (such as salads, sandwiches, pasta, etc.) are always considered *high risk foods* and must be transported as such (see ***Guideline for Transporting Donated Food***). Only accept meat & prepared meals from AHS-approved facilities (not personal homes) and only if they meet the best before guidelines (see ***Appendix B***).

When to refuse/discard:

- If the item has not been kept refrigerated or frozen, or is past the time guidelines given in ***Appendix B***
- If there is any visible sign of discolouration, mould, or the product has a foul odour.

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APPENDIX A - ASSESSING QUALITY

DAIRY

Dairy is always considered a *high risk food* and must be transported as such (see **Guideline for Transporting Donated Food**). Dairy does not need to be frozen, but only accept dairy from AHS-approved facilities (not personal homes) and only if it meets the best before guidelines (see *Appendix B*).

When to refuse/discard:

- If the item has not been kept refrigerated or frozen, or is past the time guidelines given in **Appendix B**
- If there is any visible sign of discolouration, mould, inconsistent texture, or the product has a foul odour
- If the product has been tampered with (ie. is not sealed)

EGGS

These are always considered *high risk foods* and must be transported as such (see **Guideline for Transporting Donated Food**). Only accept eggs from AHS-approved facilities (not personal homes or farms). We can accept eggs that are past the best before date as best before dates do not reflect food safety, but peak food quality, and with eggs a simple test of placing the egg in a glass of water will tell you whether or not it is safe to consume: if it sinks (can sit horizontally or vertically), it's still good; if it floats, throw it out!

When to refuse/discard:

- If the item has not been kept refrigerated
- If the eggs are leaking, cracked, or visibly dirty

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APPENDIX B - UNDERSTANDING BEST BEFORE vs. EXPIRY DATES

EXPIRY DATES refer to food safety. The only foods in Canada required to have expiry dates are infant formula, meal replacements, and nutritional supplements. These items should not be bought, sold, donated, or eaten after the expiry date.

BEST BEFORE DATES are an indicator of peak quality, *not* food safety. They apply to unopened food only. Foods that are past their best before dates may lose some freshness or change in flavour, texture, or nutritional value, but it does not mean they are unsafe to eat. The following table lists the amount of time that food is generally still acceptable for distribution past the best before date.

Table B-1: Guideline for Distributing Food Past the Best Before Date

	PRODUCE	BREAD	GRAINS & CEREALS	DAIRY		JUICE
				milk & cheese	butter	
Room temperature	up to 1 month*	1 week	12 months	<2 hours	1 week	1 month
Refrigerated	up to 1 month*	2 weeks	-	2 weeks	3 months	6 months
Frozen	1 year	1 month	-	6 months	6 months	1 year
Canned/jarred	1 year	-	-	-	-	1 year

*Depending on the produce item

	RED MEAT		POULTRY		SEAFOOD	
	raw	cooked	raw	cooked	raw	cooked
Room temperature	<2 hours	<2 hours	<2 hours	<2 hours	<2 hours	<2 hours
Refrigerated	3-4 days	within 3 days of preparation	3-4 days	within 3 days of preparation	3-4 days	within 2 days of preparation
Frozen	12 months (whole) 3 months (ground)	3 months	12 months (whole) 6 months (processed)	2 months	4-6 months	-
Canned/jarred	-	1 year	-	1 year	-	1 year

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References:

[Guideline for Distributing Food Past the Best Before Date](#). Food Banks Canada, July 2013.

[Guidelines for Distribution of Donated Foods](#). Alberta Health Services, December 2010.

[Low-risk home-prepared food: fact sheet for operators](#). Alberta Government, April 2020.

¹ Personal home kitchens can produce low-risk foods as long as they meet the [2020 Food Regulation Update requirements](#) (also see: [Low-risk home-prepared food: fact sheet for operators](#)).

² Facilities with an *AHS Food Handling Permit* include restaurants, bakeries, grocery stores, commercial kitchens, etc.

³ *Low Risk Foods* are foods that present a low risk of foodborne illness and do not require refrigeration. Baked goods must not contain any meat, dairy, cheese or meringue fillings; only sugar icing and buttercream that does not contain eggs, cream or cream cheese are permitted.

⁴ *High Risk Foods* are foods which will support the growth of pathogenic micro-organisms (i.e. meat, poultry, seafood and seafood products, dairy products, soups, sauces, gravies, eggs and egg products, baked goods with perishable fillings, etc).