

FOOD DONATION GUIDELINES

| ACCEPTABLE FOODS | UNACCEPTABLE FOODS |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Low-risk food items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercially canned foods • Whole fruits & vegetables (including home-grown, see Appendix A for more details) • Dry, unopened packaged goods (e.g., cereal, crackers, pancake mix, etc.) • Baked goods without perishable fillings -must come from a valid food handling facility 2. High-risk food items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be maintained at safe temperatures) -high-risk foods that are refrigerated at or below 4°C (40°F), or frozen at or below -18°C (0°F) • Wild game meat if received through an approved program (e.g., "Hunters Who Care"). 3. Prepared food <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be distributed if the following criteria are met: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - not leftover from a patron's table or an open buffet. -maintained at safe temperatures (below 4°C or above 60°C) and protected from contamination. -comes from an accredited facility with a valid Food Handling Permit. -prepared by folks with food safety certification. 4. Baked foods with perishable fillings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only accepted from AHS-approved facilities and if they meet the criteria for safe temperature maintenance (below 4°C or above 60°C). | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High-risk foods from facilities without a valid Food Handling Permit. 2. Foods that have been held at unsafe temperatures (i.e., between 4°C and 60°C). 3. Canned foods that are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulging, rusty, leaking, or severely dented • Without labels, unless the contents are reliably assured. • Canned infant formula after its expiry date. • Home-canned foods or home-processed fruits and vegetables (e.g., jam, pickles, blanched vegetables). 4. Contaminated foods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foods that have been contaminated by insects, rodents, or chemicals. 5. Uninspected meat & poultry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meat or poultry that has not been inspected by a Government Meat Inspector. • Uninspected wild game meat that has not been received through an approved program. 6. Fish products that were not caught under a commercial licence. 7. Eggs that are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ungraded, cracked, leaking, or visibly dirty. |

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5. Graded eggs that are:

- Not cracked, leaking, or visibly dirty.
- Can be accepted past the best before date if they pass the [float test](#) (sink = good; float = discard).

6. Meat & poultry that have:

- Been inspected by a Government Meat Inspector or come through an approved program (e.g., wild game meat).
- Not been improperly stored or transported.

8. Foods that have not been maintained at proper temperatures (e.g., refrigerated or frozen high-risk foods outside safe temperature ranges).

9. Expired products

- See **Appendix B** for guidelines on expiry dates vs. best before dates.

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

Low Risk Foods are foods that present a low risk of foodborne illness and do not require refrigeration.

APPENDIX A - ASSESSING FOOD QUALITY

PRODUCE

Bruised/scarred produce: Bruised or scarred produce can still be donated if the damaged portion is cut away prior to consumption. Bruising is often caused by handling or shipping methods and does not necessarily indicate spoilage.

Cut/prepared produce: If produce has been cut or prepared, it must be treated as a high-risk food and transported accordingly. Only accept cut/prepared produce from accredited facilities (not personal homes).

* Whole produce can be accepted from home and community gardens through

Reject produce if:

- The majority is bruised, mouldy, extremely discoloured, has a foul odour, or if the skin is wrinkling or peeling with the slightest touch.
- The item has been cut and not kept refrigerated or frozen.

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BAKED GOODS

High-risk baked goods: If baked goods contain high-risk ingredients (e.g., meat, dairy, cheese, meringue fillings, creams/icing that contain eggs, cream cheese), they must be transported according to safe food handling guidelines and come from an approved facility.

Reject baked goods if:

- The item is considered high-risk but has not been kept refrigerated or frozen.
- There is any visible sign of mould or the product has a foul odour.

MEAT

Meat is always considered high-risk food and must be transported as such. All products should come from approved facilities and meet food safety guidelines. Whenever possible, meat should be frozen prior to transport.

Reject meat if:

- It has not been kept refrigerated or frozen.
- It shows signs of discolouration, mould, or a foul odour.
- It is past the best before guidelines (see **Appendix B**).

DAIRY

Dairy products are always considered high-risk food and must be transported as such and meet the best-before guidelines. Dairy does not need to be frozen, but it must be kept at safe temperatures (refrigerated).

Reject dairy if:

- It has not been kept refrigerated or frozen.
- It shows signs of mould, inconsistent texture, or a foul odour.
- The product has been tampered with (i.e. not properly sealed).

EGGS

Eggs must come from an approved facility (not personal homes or farms.) Eggs can be accepted **past their best-before date as long as they meet safety standards**, which include a float test to determine freshness:

- If the egg sinks and sits horizontally or vertically, it is still good. If the egg floats, it should be discarded.

Reject eggs if:

- The eggs are ungraded, have not been kept refrigerated, or are cracked, leaking, or visibly dirty.

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PREPARED FOOD

Prepared food should always be treated as high-risk. Only accept prepared food from accredited facilities with food handling permits. Leftovers will only set up instances for rescuing prepared food from approved sources. Prepared food must not be leftover from a patron's table or an open or unattended buffet.

Reject prepared food if:

- It has not been kept in a temperature controlled environment - refrigerated or frozen.
- It is not safely packaged (sealed or reliably covered from contamination in transport).
- If items are not labelled with date of production and contents.

APPENDIX B - UNDERSTANDING BEST BEFORE vs. EXPIRY DATES

EXPIRY DATES are related to food safety and must be strictly adhered to. In Canada, only certain foods are required to have expiry dates, including:

- Infant formula
- Meal replacements
- Nutritional supplements

These foods should not be donated, sold, or consumed after the expiry date.

Otherwise, the printed date is a best before date, and these are in place for manufacturer guarantee.

BEST BEFORE DATES indicate peak quality rather than safety. They apply only to unopened food products. Foods past their best before dates may experience a decline in freshness, flavour, texture, or nutritional value, but they are not automatically unsafe to consume. These foods should be checked for quality and safety before distribution. Additionally, for foods you are uncertain about, you may consult with the manufacturer of the food to ensure the product is safe after its best before date.

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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 |
| 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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APPENDIX C - DONATED FOOD HANDLING AND TRANSPORT

All transporters of food through the Leftovers program should have thoroughly read and understand the procedures outlined in our [Volunteer Manual](#).

AT DONATION PICKUP

- Follow safety guidelines outlined above and go through the food safety observation checklist, confirming that donated food has been stored/contained properly and safely.
- All persons involved in direct handling of the donated food must:
 - Maintain a high standard of personal cleanliness
 - Wear clean outer garments while handling food
 - Wash hands frequently (at the start of shift, after breaks, after using the toilet, after handling raw meat or poultry, etc.)
 - Do not smoke, drink, or eat in areas where food is directly handled or stored.

DURING TRANSPORTATION

- If not using a refrigerated vehicle, limit transport time for perishable foods to **one hour**.
- Keep perishable food refrigerated at **4°C (40°F)** or below, and frozen food at or **below -18°C (0°F)** during transportation
- Use clean, sanitary containers for food transport and maintain sanitary conditions through transport.

RECEIVING DONATION/DELIVERING FOOD

- Deliver and distribute all food to the final destination **within 1 hour of pick-up** to minimise spoilage or bacterial growth.
- If the recipient does not have sufficient acceptable storage space upon delivery, please notify your Leftovers City Coordinator and deliver the remaining food to one of the back-up agencies provided in the app.
- Help the receiver place food requiring refrigeration or freezing into their respective receptacle immediately upon receipt.
- Ensure non-frozen prepared foods are consumed within 72 hours of preparation

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.