



Donating Unused Food From Your Pantry

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Going through your pantry is a good way to see what you have, and you may find foods you realize you do not need anymore. Rather than throwing those foods away, consider donating them!

Where to Take Donated Food

Organizations like food banks, food pantries, and meal kitchens exist in your local community. They will take donated food and distribute it to community members at no cost. If you do not know where to donate food in your community, contact your regional food bank for guidance.

What Foods to Donate

We recommend you contact the organization you would like to donate your food to. They should be able to tell you if there are any particular foods they need at the time.

We recommend that you donate unopened, non-perishable foods from your home (Morello 2020). Examples include:

- Jarred or canned goods (e.g., beans, jam, soup, sauces),
- Dry goods (e.g. pasta, rice),
- Baking supplies (e.g., flour, sugar, shortening, and cake mixes).

The foods in your pantry likely have a date on them (e.g., sell-by, use-by, etc.). In some cases, that date may have already passed. With few exceptions, these dates represent the quality of a food and do not communicate safety. Please review our publication, [Food Packaging Dates](#), for more information about this. Check with your local organization for their policy on accepting past-date foods.

What Foods to Not Donate

There are some foods we do not recommend donating:

- Do not donate infant formula or baby foods past its use-by date. Infants/babies require specific nutrients to properly grow, and the manufacturer cannot guarantee the nutritional content after that date.
- Do not donate anything that has been opened, torn, severely dented, or leaking.
- Do not donate refrigerated, frozen, or other perishable foods from your home.
- Do not donate anything that has been home preserved, like jams or vegetables. Food businesses are required to follow specific regulations; someone at home does not.

Dropping Off Your Food

Ask for the best time to drop off your food so the organization knows when to expect you. It is best for an employee or volunteer to be there so they can properly store your food.

Sometimes, there may not be anyone available to accept your donation. If they allow you to drop off your food when no one is there, we only recommend doing this when absolutely necessary. Leave the food in a way so it is not taken or otherwise disturbed by wildlife.

What if the Food Cannot be Donated?

There may be some foods you cannot donate. Use the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Food Recovery Hierarchy (2022) as one way to think about what you might do with the food next. You may consider feeding it to animals, or composting it. The goal is to do what you can to keep the food from going into landfill.

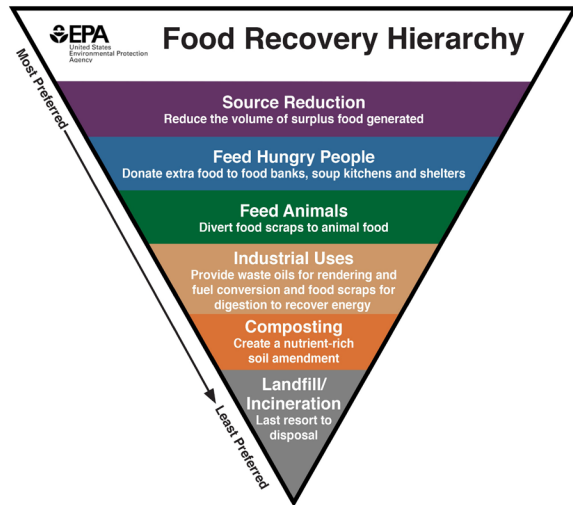


Figure 1. The U.S. EPA's Food Recovery Hierarchy (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency).

If you are unable to donate food, consider donating money or grocery store gift cards. They can be used by the organization to purchase food or pay for other costs (Thoelke 2021).

References

- Morello, P. 2020. "What to donate to a food bank and what to avoid." Feeding America.
<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-blog/what-donate-food-bank-and-what-avoid>
- Thoelke, Olivia. 2021. "Donating food to a food bank? Consider cash instead of canned foods." Feeding America.
<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-blog/donating-food-food-bank-consider-cash-instead-canned-goods>
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 2022. "Food Recovery Hierarchy."
<https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/food-recovery-hierarchy>

Additional Resources

[Federation of Virginia Food Banks.](#)

Food Packaging Dates. FST 422P. Available at:
https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs_ext_vt_edu/en/FST/fst-422/fst-422.html

VA Regional Foods Banks List

- [Capital Area Food Bank](#)
- [Fredericksburg Food Bank](#)
- [FeedMore](#) (Central Virginia Food Bank)
- [Feeding Southwest Virginia](#)
- [Blue Ridge Area Food Bank](#)
- [Virginia Peninsula Food Bank](#)
- [Food Bank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore](#)

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2022

FST-431NP