



**FRESH  
RESCUE**  
DONATION GUIDELINES

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# GENERAL GUIDELINES

While individual donors ultimately decide what is eligible to be donated from their brand, this document is intended to be used as a visual guide when preparing donation to ensure that all food is donated with dignity and is safe to consume. Discarding food that does not meet the following criteria is not a waste; you are protecting people.

All donated food must:

1) Be in its original packaging, with no loss of sanitary barrier and must be packed in clean banana boxes, i.e no clear or black trash bags, boxes used to store chemical, or boxes that were used to store raw meat.

## ACCEPTABLE



## UNACCEPTABLE



2) Contain a label with the product's name, full list of ingredients, code date (expiration, use-by, sell-by etc.)

## ACCEPTABLE



## UNACCEPTABLE



**Some food items may be donated past the code date.** Please see the attached document for further guidance on what items the Vermont Foodbank can distribute past the code date.

# CANNED GOODS

## ACCEPTABLE

- Minor dents
- All items must have their full ingredient label
- Safety seal must be intact
- Dented beverage cans



## UNACCEPTABLE

- Dents on seal
- Metal touching metal/ crimped over
- Puffy, bulging
- Rust
- Missing label
- Leaking
- Severely dented



# DRY GROCERY

## ACCEPTABLE

- Outer packaging damaged with inner seal intact
- Crushed top of plastic jugs (seal must be intact)
- Cosmetic Damage
- Individual units taped back to original packaging, containing label



## UNACCEPTABLE

- Open or ripped bag that has been taped
- Open box with no inner seal (ie pasta)
- Missing/no ingredient label
- Jars missing inner seal



# BREAD, BAKERY & PASTRIES

## ACCEPTABLE

- Cosmetic damage
- Items approaching or just past best-by date
- Bread, pastries and other items with full packaging, label and no mold



## UNACCEPTABLE

- No packaging/ open packaging (open-ended baguettes, self-serve bulk rolls, etc.)
- Open or torn packaging
- Mold, decay or crushed
- Missing/no ingredient label
- Items left outside for pick-up



# DAIRY

## ACCEPTABLE

- Discard broken eggs and donate any unbroken eggs
- Refrigerated juices, dips, sauces, etc
- Milk, cheese, yogurt, butter, etc
- Cosmetic damage



## UNACCEPTABLE

- Open, leaking
- Broken seal
- Puffy, bulging
- Missing/no ingredient label
- Items left out of temperature



# PRODUCE

## ACCEPTABLE

- Minor bruises
- Superficial spots
- Slightly green oranges
- Small sprouts



• Slight speckling



• Odd shapes



• Minor spots on surface



• Some brown at base



## UNACCEPTABLE

- Overripe
- Rot
- Green potatoes (solanine)
- Decay



• Wilted leaves

• Mold

• Chill damage

• Puffy/bulging packages





# FROZEN MEAT & SEAFOOD

## ACCEPTABLE

- Frozen fish or seafood
- Outer packaging damaged with inner seal intact
- Lunch meat, hot dogs, other deli items
- All beef, chicken, pork and turkey products
- All items from frozen department (pizzas, frozen vegetables, etc.)



**1 ALL PROTEIN MUST BE FROZEN ON OR BEFORE THE USE-BY DATE 1**

# UNACCEPTABLE

- Marrow bones, suet



- Open or exposed



- Leaking



- Discolored



- Discolored



- Discolored



- Missing/no ingredient label



- Items not frozen



- Freezer burn



- Loosened vacuum seal



- Puffy/bulging



- Uncooked fish or seafood



# UNACCEPTED ITEMS

The Vermont Foodbank does not accept the following items:

- Explosives
- Lighters
- Charcoal
- Matches
- Lighter fuel
- Charcoal lighter
- Alcohol
- CBD products
- Kombucha
- Home-canned/pickled products
- Cough medicines/medicines containing pseudoephedrine or ephedrine
- Products containing Olestra
- Wild Game

# SHELF LIFE GUIDELINES

While inspecting donations for quality assurance, it is important to check the dates or codes on the packaging. These dates are commonly misunderstood as “expiration dates,” a date that signifies the item is no longer safe to eat. This is in fact not true for most items. Many non-perishable items are safe to eat long after the date on their packaging, and the shelf life of refrigerated and frozen foods can be extended if they are handled properly. Baby food and formula and over-the-counter medications are the only items that are required by federal law to have an actual expiration date.

Here are explanations of different code dating you may see on food packages:

## **Expiration Date- (“Expires 1/1/11”, “Do not use after 1/1/11”)**

- Look for it on: Baby food and formula, medicines, vitamins, yeast, baking powder.
- What it means: Do not distribute or consume infant formula, baby food, vitamins or medicines after the expiration date! Yeast and baking powder work less effectively after expiration, but are still safe to eat.

## **Sell By Date – (“Sell by 1/1/11”, also called “Pull Date”)**

- Look for it on: Refrigerated foods such as milk, yogurt, cottage cheese, eggs, lunch meat, packaged salad mixes.
- What it means: This tells the store how long to display the product for sale. If the food has been handled properly, it may still be safe to eat past this date.

## **Use By or Quality Date – (“Best if used by 1/1/11” or “Use before 1/1/11”)**

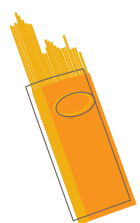







- Look for it on: Crackers, cookies, cereals, canned goods, and other dry, shelf stable foods.
- What it means: This date is the manufacturer’s recommendation for how long the food will be at peak quality. After the quality date, the food is still safe to eat but slowly begins to lose nutrients and the quality begins to lessen.

## **Pack Date or Coded Date – (“Packed on 1/1/11”, “A70319R 23:16”)**

- Look for it on: Canned food, crackers, cookies, spices, and other dry shelf-stable foods.
- What it means: These dates represent the date on which the food was packaged or processed for sale. They are not intended for consumers but rather are used by manufacturers and retailers to track inventory, rotate food on shelves, and locate items in case of a recall. Since dates are printed at the manufacturer’s discretion, their meanings may be different for each product line, and therefore be difficult to decipher. Usually this food is safe to eat for a long time past the date, as long as the packaging is not damaged.

The suggested shelf life (how long an item is considered “good” past the code date) varies drastically from product to product, even between similar types of items. For example, some shelf-stable items can be kept for 3-5 years past the date, while others might only be good for 1 month after the date. Below is a condensed list of the most commonly donated products with guidelines about shelf

life after the code date. It is important to remember that these guidelines are in fact just that – guidelines! They are primarily intended to ensure quality, not safety. The product should be safe as long as the product has been properly handled and stored, and does not have significant damage. The timeframes listed are for product that has been properly handled, stored, and remains un-opened. The following should be used for training staff and volunteers who will be inspecting donations. Please refer to [The Food Keeper](#) brochure, website, or app available for more specific items’ recommended shelf lives.

	Food Item	Shelf Life After Code Date
	<b>SHELF STABLE</b>	
	canned goods (low acidity)*	3 years
	canned goods (high acidity)**	18 months
	dry beans, rice, pasta, ramen	2 years
	boxed/bagged goods - cereal, crackers, mixes, etc.	1 year
	saucers, condiments, dressings	1 year
	beverages	1 year
	chips	2 months
	mayonnaise/cream based items	3 months
	baby food/adult formula	discard after date
	<b>FROZEN</b>	
	all assorted meats/poultry	2 months
	fruit, vegetables	6 months
	ice cream	2 months
	<b>DAIRY/COOLER</b>	
	juice	3 weeks
	milk	1 week
	cheese	1 week (soft) 1 month (hard)
	eggs	3 weeks
	yogurt, sour cream, dips	2 weeks
	salsa, pesto	discard after date
	hummus	1 week
	prepared dishes or meals	3 days
	salads	3 days
	<b>PRODUCE</b>	
	packaged produce (bagged lettuce, etc.)	Discard if moldy, has a slimy look/feel, or is overly soft or discolored
	cut produce	Discard if moldy, has a slimy look/feel, or is overly soft or discolored
	<b>BREAD/PASTRY</b>	
	fresh	4 days
	frozen	1 month
	containing cream	throw away if not kept refrigerated/frozen