



Vermont Foodbank  
www.vtfoodbank.org

## Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Handling Guidelines for Food Shelves

### Food Quality and Safety

Food distributed to food shelf visitors must be safe and of good quality. Good quality food tastes, smells, and looks good, and is often more nutritious. Safety means the food will not make anyone sick. The goal of proper food handling is to provide both safe and good quality foods.

### Keep It Clean

Germ or bacteria can get into food during handling.

- Keep hands, work surfaces, utensils and the refrigerator clean.
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds to remove germs or bacteria before handling fresh produce. This can greatly reduce the risk of food poisoning.
- Watch out for cross contamination. Never handle raw meat before fresh produce without washing hands and disinfecting work surfaces first.

### Storage/Refrigeration Tips

- Keep the temperature between 34°F and 40°F. Keep a thermometer in the refrigerator and check it daily.
- Keep any raw meat, poultry, or fish on the lowest shelf in the refrigerator and away from fresh produce. This will prevent meats from potentially dripping and contaminating the produce.

### Handling Fresh Produce Deliveries

1. After receiving, sort fresh fruit and vegetables by quality and level of ripeness.
  - Fully ripe and over-ripe produce should be used first.
  - Discard moldy produce and anything badly bruised or with large soft spots.
  - Produce with some spots, soft areas or bruises is generally safe to use, but should be distributed immediately and held under refrigeration if possible. Consider cutting the spots out if it won't compromise the quality of the produce.
  - Remove produce from cardboard boxes, bulk cases and bags. Divide it up into family size portions or have bags available for visitors to choose their own. Very perishable items like greens should be prepackaged to preserve shelf life.
2. Do not wash produce before distributing. Washing introduces extra moisture that can cause spoilage.
3. Follow the "First In, First Out" (FIFO) rule. This means you use the oldest produce first. Labeling produce with delivery dates will help with FIFO.

## Holding Produce at Room Temperature

Some fruits and vegetables can be stored at room temperature. Produce that can be stored at 55-65°F until ripe include:

- o Apple
- o Avocado
- o Banana
- o Cantaloupe
- o Honeydew melons
- o Kiwifruit
- o Mango
- o Nectarine
- o Peach
- o Pear
- o Plum
- o Tomato
- o Watermelon
- o Winter squash
- o Pumpkin
- o White potato
- o Sweet potato
- o Garlic and onion

Produce that can be stored at 45-50°F include:

- o Snap beans
- o Cucumber
- o Eggplant
- o Okra
- o Pepper
- o Summer squash
- o Citrus fruits
- o Pineapple
- o Tomatillo

## Distribution

- If repackaging produce, use clean food grade boxes, storage bags or plastic wrap. Leave the opening loose so as not to trap extra moisture.
- Remind visitors to wash produce prior to use under running water and scrub with clean hands or a clean brush. Do not soak produce in water since this increases the chance of cross-contamination.

## Display

- Create prominent, centrally located, and well organized fruit and vegetable displays. The more visible and appealing, the more likely it is to be taken by food shelf visitors. Consider setting up a Farmers' Market type display with produce in baskets at eye level.
- Create visually appealing signage including photos, labels and posters to draw attention to the fruits and vegetables and their nutritional benefits, etc.
- Remove produce from boxes so that visitors can clearly see what is being offered.
- Continue to sort through and discard any produce that is spoiled.
- Obtain a glass front cooler to display highly perishable produce like tender greens while still keeping it as fresh as possible.

## Prepack Produce

- Providing visitors with convenient prepackaged fruits and vegetables greatly increases distribution. Consider prepackaging produce in familiar and convenient bags and trays you would find in grocery stores such as lettuce bags, paper plates/trays with plastic wrap or clear plastic/zip lock bags.
- If fruits and vegetables are cut or sliced, remember they must always be refrigerated for food safety.

## Other Suggestions

- Offer simple suggestions to encourage food shelf visitors to try something new. Share ideas and quick tips.
- Display recipe cards next to the items being distributed.
- Consider offering taste tests or cooking demos.
- Solicit feedback from visitors about their favorite ways to prepare different produce.

## Summary

- Keep everything clean: hands, work surfaces, packaging and produce.
- Sort produce by ripeness and quality. Discard when necessary.
- Distribute produce using FIFO: first in, first out.
- Store at room temperature or in a refrigerator, as appropriate.

## Resources

Vermont Fresh: A Fruit and Vegetable Handbook, contains information on over 40 fruits and vegetables, their nutritional value, storage advice, preparation tips and many recipes. Available at [www.vtfoodbank.org](http://www.vtfoodbank.org).

**Vermont Foodbank -Fresh Foods' Donation Guidelines**  
**We want your excess or unmarketable food, NOT your waste.**

<b>PRODUCT</b>	<b>PACKAGING</b>	<b>STORAGE</b>	<b>UNACCEPTABLE</b>
Deli prepared salads	Separately, securely closed, avoid spillage	Chilled to 41 F or less. Do not freeze.	Mixed food types in the same container or temperature abused. <b>Do not freeze.</b>
Deli sandwiches/pickles	Wrapped in foil or plastic	Chilled to 41 F or less	Stale/hard bread. <b>Do not freeze.</b>
Day Old Breads	Packaged separately	Cool, dry area	Stale or moldy
Pastries	Packed in boxes, avoid crumbling	Cool, dry area	Stale/hard or crushed
Prepackaged Foods	Packaged separately, securely closed	Chilled to 41 F or less	Opened, punctured, or damaged packaging
Frozen Foods	Packaged separately	Frozen to 0 F or less	Defrosted, freezer burned, or punctured
Liquid dairy products	Individual containers	Refrigerated at ALL times to 41 F or less	<b>Cannot accept past code.</b> Damaged packaging or temperature abused
Soft dairy (yogurt, cream cheese etc.)	Individual containers	Refrigerated at ALL times to 41 F or less	Damaged packaging or temperature abused
Hard Cheese	Individual containers	Refrigerated at ALL times to 41 F or less	Mold, damaged packaging or temperature abused
Meat, Poultry Must be frozen.	Original packaging	<b>frozen on code date &amp; stored at ALL times to 0 F or less</b>	Defrosted, freezer burned, punctured container, temperature abused or not frozen on code date
Fresh Produce (whole)	Packaged separately from other foods	Cool dry area	Significant decay
Fresh Produce (chopped)	Packaged separately from other foods	Chilled to 41 F or less	Discoloration or significant decay
<b>Fish</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>We cannot accept any fish of any kind or variety</b>

**The Vermont Foodbank reserves the right to refuse any product that we question the safety of.**



# Guidance for Food Donation: Businesses and Institutions

Vermont’s Universal Recycling and Composting Initiative bans throwing away food and food scraps in landfills by 2020. This law adopted the Food Recovery Hierarchy that sets priorities for managing food and food scraps.

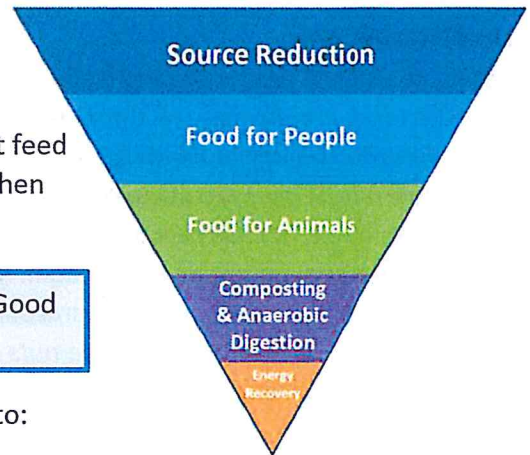
Extra food can be donated to food rescue agencies or organizations that feed the hungry only if it was handled properly and not previously served. When creating a program to donate food, follow these guidelines.

You are protected from liability by federal law under the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act when donating properly handled food.

Donating surplus food to local food rescue organizations will allow you to:

- Lower trash disposal and diversion costs
- Follow the Universal Recycling law by not throwing food away
- Support your community by helping the one in four Vermonters who is in need
- Take possible federal tax deductions (ask your accountant about the details)

## Vermont Food Recovery Hierarchy



## DONATING FOOD SAFELY & SAFE FOOD HANDLING GUIDE

### TIME & TEMPERATURE CONTROLS

Potentially hazardous foods require temperature control for safety (see guide below). Examples include prepared foods, meat, poultry, dairy, fish, seafood, tofu, eggs, cut produce, and garlic in oil mixtures. Foods kept in the **temperature danger zone**, which is **between 41°F and 135°F**, can spoil, cause bacteria to grow, and may cause people to become sick.

Food Type	Storage Requirements	Foods That Cannot be Donated
Prepared Foods	Stored at 41°F or below Frozen at 0°F or below	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foods kept in the danger zone more than 2 hours</li> <li>• Previously reheated foods</li> <li>• Previously served foods</li> </ul>
Chilled Perishable, Prepackaged Foods (e.g., dairy, juice)	Stored at 41°F or below	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foods kept in the danger zone more than 2 hours</li> <li>• Damaged or bulging packaging</li> <li>• Foods stored in non-food grade packaging</li> </ul>
Meat, Poultry, Fish (Unfrozen)	Stored at 41°F or below	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foods kept in the danger zone more than 2 hours</li> <li>• Foods stored in non-food grade packaging</li> </ul>
Meat, Poultry, Fish (Frozen)	Frozen at 0°F or below	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foods kept in the danger zone more than 2 hours</li> <li>• Severe freezer burn</li> <li>• Defrosted foods</li> </ul>
Fresh Produce (Whole)	Stored in a cool, dry, and clean area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant decay</li> </ul>
Fresh Produce (Cut)	Stored at 41°F or below	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foods kept in the danger zone more than 2 hours</li> <li>• Color change or decay</li> </ul>
Baked Goods	Stored in a cool, dry, and clean area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foods stored in non-food grade packaging</li> <li>• Moldy or stale products</li> </ul>
Canned/Boxed Foods	Stored in a cool, dry, and clean area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Damaged or bulging packaging</li> <li>• Home-canned products</li> </ul>

Information in this table is from *Comprehensive Guidelines for Food Recovery Programs* (p. 44 – 45), developed at the Conference for Food Protection, revised March 2007

## LABELING FOOD FOR DONATION

Food service facilities must properly label the food they are donating. **All food donated must be kept in food-grade packaging at all times.**

### ALLERGEN LABELING

Each year, millions of Americans have allergic reactions to food. It is strongly recommended that foods for donation be labeled with the ingredients so people with food allergies are aware of what is in the food. These eight major foods account for 90% of food allergic reactions and are important to label: *milk, eggs, fish (e.g., bass, flounder, cod), crustacean shellfish (e.g., crab, lobster, shrimp), tree nuts (e.g., almonds, walnuts, pecans), peanuts, wheat, and soybeans.*

### DATE MARKING

The Vermont Department of Health food service regulations require date marking for prepared foods. Prepared food must be discarded **after seven days**. Mark the date when food is prepared and the date when food must be discarded (the day food is prepared + six days = seven days).

### Prepared Foods

- Label the packaging with the food name and the date it was either prepared, frozen, or with the seven-day expiration date.
- Food that has been refrigerated for seven days should not be donated and should be composted.
- Foods that are frozen, thawed, and then refrozen should not be donated.

- Food that will be donated can be frozen prior to donation to “stop the clock” and prevent the growth of bacteria. Label the frozen food with the number of days left in the seven-day holding period.
- Store foods in a designated area of a refrigerator or freezer while waiting for pick-up.

### Non-Perishable Foods (baked goods and canned/boxed foods)

- “Best by,” “sell by,” and “use by” dates found on food packaging are dates marked by the manufacturer. They indicate the time period the product will have the highest quality. These dates do not mean that food is no longer safe to eat.
- Store foods in a designated area while waiting for pick-up.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRACKING DONATIONS

Facilities are encouraged to keep logs documenting that food is handled and served properly within the facility. Here is an example of a food donation log:

Date	Name of Food Donated	Temperature (°F)	Name of Food Rescue Agency

Food rescue agencies receiving donations should have the equipment to maintain proper food temperatures by keeping foods hot or cold during transportation, receiving, and storage.

## QUESTIONS?

### Food Safety and Handling

Contact the Vermont Department of Health, Food and Lodging Program at 802-863-7221 or visit [healthvermont.gov](http://healthvermont.gov)

### Food Donation and Vermont’s Universal Recycling and Composting Initiative

Contact the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Solid Waste Management Program at 802-828-1138 or visit [www.recycle.vt.gov](http://www.recycle.vt.gov)

### Food Donation Locations

Visit the Materials Management Map and zoom in to find the purple apple: [anrmaps.vermont.gov/websites/Organics/default.html](http://anrmaps.vermont.gov/websites/Organics/default.html)



**SHARING TABLES** are an effort to reduce the amount of wasted food and encourage the consumption of food served at schools. Children can place unconsumed food and beverage items they choose not to eat or drink on the table. This provides other children the opportunity to take additional helpings of food or beverages at no extra cost. Use these guidelines to help your school start a sharing table program. The Vermont Department of Health can help you plan your program.

## Sharing Table Checklist

- The table should be close to the cashier or wherever students exit the food service line.
- The sharing table must be monitored by any employee other than the cashier.
- Food or beverages that must be under temperature control (e.g., milk, cut fruit) must be placed in a small refrigerator, cooler or ice bath.
- Recovered food and beverages should be clearly labeled and not mixed with unsold foods.

## Food Safety Checklist

- Students should place their unwanted food onto the sharing table before sitting down to eat. This will prevent any potential contamination.
- The monitor should identify any food, beverage, or condiment to make sure it has not been contaminated (e.g., opened, partially eaten, etc.) and the original packaging is in sound condition.
- Unused food should be donated rather than thrown away. USDA regulations allow donations, such as packaged foods, whole fruits and vegetables, and milk nearing expiration, to 501c3 non-profit organizations.
- Students may not be allowed to put items brought from home on the sharing table.

## Questions?

### Starting a Food Sharing Table Program and Food Safety

Contact the Vermont Department of Health, Food and Lodging Program at 802-863-7221 or visit [healthvermont.gov](http://healthvermont.gov)

### Vermont's Universal Recycling and Composting Initiative

Contact the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Solid Waste Management Program at 802-828-1138 or visit [www.recycle.vt.gov](http://www.recycle.vt.gov)

### School Meals Program

Contact the Vermont Agency of Education, Child Nutrition Programs at 802-479-1360 or [education.vermont.gov/nutrition](http://education.vermont.gov/nutrition)



- Develop Standard Operating Procedures in the school's Food Safety HACCP Plan.

## Allowable Products

- Non-temperature-controlled, pre-packaged products like food bars, drinks, crackers and cereal packs
- Wrapped fruit and vegetables or fruit with a thick skin, like bananas and oranges
- Temperature-controlled, pre-packaged products like cheese and milk as long as they are placed in a cooler, refrigerator, or ice bath

## Best Practices

- Use Sharing Tables in combination with Offer Versus Serve and careful portion control to combat excess waste on trays.
- For more information about Offer Versus Serve, visit [www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/guidance-and-resources](http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/guidance-and-resources) or call the Vermont Agency of Education, Child Nutrition Programs at 802-479-1360.
- Other ways to minimize wasted food include:
  - Marketing the sharing table program
  - Increasing food choices
  - Changing food presentation
  - Allowing appropriate time for meals
  - Implementing recess before lunch



