



## School Districts Donate Edible Foods

At the end of every school year and prior to other school breaks, school kitchens typically have edible foods such as produce, dairy products, and baked goods that would spoil or reach expiration dates before school resumes.

In 2007, King County Green Schools Program worked with Food Lifeline and Northwest Harvest to achieve collection of over **5,000 pounds** of food from five school districts. What would have gone to waste instead provided **3,900** meals to hungry families in Washington. Donating leftover food items also may reduce disposal costs for school districts.

To participate, follow these three simple steps.

1. Review Food Donation Guidelines below to learn which types of items the organizations will accept, how you need to handle the food to keep it safe for consumption, and to answer other questions.
2. Use the lists on page 2 to determine which organization your school district should contact first for collection of its leftover edible food.
3. Contact the organization to request a pickup of food. The organizations may refer you to a local food bank or other nonprofit organization that can provide pick up.

Food is transported in temperature-controlled vehicles and handled by drivers who have received food safety training.

### Contacts

**Food Lifeline:** Nicole Acinelli at 206-545-6600, ext. 231, [NicoleA@fill.org](mailto:NicoleA@fill.org)

**Northwest Harvest:** Barbara Cerna at 206-923-7451

**Food Lifeline**

Bellevue  
Highline  
Lake Washington  
Mercer Island  
Northshore  
Riverview  
Shoreline  
Skykomish  
Snoqualmie Valley  
Tukwila

**Northwest Harvest**

Auburn  
Enumclaw  
Federal Way  
Highline  
Issaquah  
Kent  
Renton  
Tahoma  
Tukwila  
Vashon Island

If the organization listed for your school district cannot accept your food or provide collection, call the other organization. If your district is listed under both organizations, then call either one.

**The organizations can safely accept:**

- **Whole fresh produce** without significant decay.
- **Chopped fresh produce** packed separately in food-grade packaging.
- **Prepared foods** chilled to 40°F that have not been served or placed on a buffet.
- Chilled **perishable packaged foods** such as juice and cheese in their original packaging.
- **Meat, poultry, fish** chilled to 40°F or frozen.
- **Dairy products** 40°F to expiration date.
- **Shelled eggs.**
- **Frozen foods** in original packaging.
- **Baked goods** (day-old bread, bagels, and other bakery items).
- **Canned and packaged** goods in original packaging.

**The organizations cannot accept:**

- Foods that have been served or put on a buffet table.
- Foods that have been previously reheated.
- Foods that have been kept in the danger temperature zone for more than 2 hours.
- Foods with damaged or compromised packaging, resulting in the loss of a sanitary barrier protection.
- Any food containing alcohol.
- Produce with significant decay.
- Frozen foods with severe freezer burn.
- Sushi or any seafood intended for raw consumption.
- Open, punctured, bulging, or seriously damaged canned goods.
- Home canned or home jarred products.

Perishable foods past the original manufacturer's "sell by" (or "best if used by") date are suitable for donation, but not foods past a "use by" date.

**Distressed foods:** Foods that have been stored for a long time, gone through a fire, or suffered another disaster may still be safe. Contact the food safety program of your public health agency to ask if these foods can be safely donated under the specific circumstances.

## Questions and Answers

Q. Are there minimum quantities to qualify for a pick up?

A. There is no set minimum quantity, but the organizations will compare the cost of the recovered food to the cost of collection. Quantities available will determine urgency of food pick-up. If the organizations cannot pick up your food, they usually can refer you to one of their member agencies (typically a local food bank).

Q. Will the organizations be able to pick up food quickly if a district experiences a power outage or freezer/refrigerator equipment failure? How quickly?

A. The time between receiving a request for pick up and providing collection depends on the extent of the power outage and the quantity of food to be picked up. If the organizations are not suffering the same exposure, it may be possible for them to pick up the foods.

Q. After we request a pick up, how long will it take to get a pick up? How much notice is preferred?

A. Longer notice will allow the organizations to include the pick up into their regular collection schedules. But do not hesitate to call when you have edible food that you cannot use. If the organizations cannot provide a pick up, you may be able to deliver the food, but please call to confirm that the organizations will accept the food and to ask for driving directions.

Q. Does food need to be in one location such as a central district facility?

A. One location is preferred unless you have large quantities at multiple locations.

Q. Will districts be held liable?

A. On October 1, 1996, President Clinton signed the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act to encourage donation of food to non-profit organizations for distribution to needy individuals. This law makes it easier to donate. Here's how:

- The law protects donors from liability when donating to a nonprofit organization, and from civil and criminal liability should the product donated in good faith later cause harm to the needy recipient.
- The law standardizes donor liability exposure so that donors and their legal counsel no longer have to investigate liability in 50 states. The law also sets a liability floor of "gross negligence" or intentional misconduct for persons who donate grocery products.
- Congress recognized that the provision of food close to the recommended date of sale is in and of itself not grounds for finding gross negligence. For example, cereal can be donated if it is marked close to code date for retail sale. (See [Act text](#) for further definitions.)