

King County Green Schools Program

Food Donation Guidelines from Food Lifeline and Northwest Harvest

These food safety guidelines and the answers to questions were prepared by Food Lifeline and Northwest Harvest (“the organizations”).

Frequently Asked Questions

[Q. What food items can be donated?](#)

A. Please review the specific food safety guidelines below.

[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 the recovery. 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 product.

[Q. After we request a pick up, how long will it take an organization to pick up the food? How much notice would you prefer?](#)

A. Longer notice will allow the organizations to weave the pick up into their regular collection schedules. But do not hesitate to call when you have edible food that cannot be used. If the organizations cannot provide a pick up, and you are able to deliver the food, 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 \(a central school district facility\) rather than two or more?](#)

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

[Q. Will the 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.)

Food Safety Guidelines from Northwest Harvest and Food Lifeline

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 the local health agency to see if these foods can be safely donated under the specific circumstances involved.

Discarding food that does not meet the above criteria is not a waste. You are actually protecting the at risk hunger community that we help feed.