

REDUCING WASTE AND RECOVERING FOOD IN CANADA

Guidelines to Minimize Wasted Food and Facilitate Food Donations

NATIONAL ZERO WASTE COUNCIL





The National Zero Waste Council is a leadership initiative bringing together governments, businesses and non-government organizations to advance waste prevention in Canada.

VISION

Canada united in the achievement of zero waste, now and for future generations.

MISSION

To act collaboratively with business, government and the community, at the national and international level, as an agent of change for waste prevention and reduction in the design, production and use of goods.

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Executive Summary

These guidelines are for current and potential food donors from all sectors of the food industry, and for organizations that receive donated food from businesses. As a national organization focusing on waste prevention through design and behavior change, the Food Working Group of the National Zero Waste Council (NZWC) views donation as one tool to prevent wasted food. These guidelines address all aspects of the food donation process, including the operational norms and needs of donors and recipient organizations. Included in this document are recommended practices to set up and facilitate industry donations of safe, healthy, quality foods to organizations. Readers are also encouraged to check for any additional guidance available in their region.

The first section provides background information about wasted food and will help potential industry donors get started and find organizations that might be able to use some of their unsold food. Food waste is differentiated from wasted food - which can be donated if it meets quality and safety standards.

Included in other areas of the document are health and safety considerations related to food donation. The structures and processes of public health oversight of food safety in four provinces (Alberta, Ontario,

Quebec, and Nova Scotia) are described in detail, and readers are directed to additional information about other provinces. The importance of nutrition is stressed and these guidelines can help ensure that healthier foods are available to organizations (and their clients). There are also tips to manage brand identity when donating food.

Readers will further find information about the day to day operations of giving and receiving food donations. This supports donor businesses and recipient organizations to build strong working relationships that can streamline the donation process and help meet unique needs. Donors and recipients will also find guidance about safe food handling and how to assess foods for health and safety within a donation context, including specific information about temperature control, understanding date stamps, and dealing with packaging flaws. Where unsold food is not suitable for donation, there are options to minimize waste going to landfills.

Finally, these guidelines include industry-specific information for processors, retailers, and food service providers, showing how each sector can reduce waste and donate food in different ways.

SECTION 1: Introduction

ABOUT THESE GUIDELINES

These guidelines were developed for the [National Zero Waste Council](#). They contribute to national action on preventing and reducing food loss and waste in Canada.

PURPOSE

These guidelines facilitate the donation of high quality, nutritious foods by all sectors of the food industry by providing information about donor-recipient relationships, food quality and health, brand protection, and sector-specific guidance. This information is intended to guide industry food donors and recipient organizations across Canada. It is not regulatory in nature and does not supersede any government or health agency policies or regulations. These guidelines are based on information and industry best practices available at the time of writing. The recommendations, as well as the regulations cited herein, may evolve over time.

WHO SHOULD USE THESE GUIDELINES?

- Food industry donors (and potential donors) such as grocers and other retailers, food service providers including caterers and restaurants, and food processors.
- Organizations that receive food donations.

These guidelines are national in scope, but include more details about the regulatory contexts in Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia. These provinces – along with British Columbia, which already has detailed provincial guidelines^{1&2} – are the major food production or processing hubs in Canada. They should be used in conjunction with any other applicable guidelines available in users' own jurisdictions.

THESE GUIDELINES address food donation between businesses and organizations that receive and redistribute donated food. The practices described here do not apply to donations from the public via food drives or individual donations. They apply only to food donations from businesses or organizations with trained personnel and licensed kitchens or processing facilities.

INDIVIDUALS interested in donating food can contact local organizations to find out what and how they can donate. Individuals are also encouraged to seek out ways to reduce waste in their own kitchens and pantries.

FOOD EXCHANGE and other forms of peer-to-peer donation have an increasing presence in many communities. Although this is a promising tool to reduce the waste of food, such networks are not covered by this document.

DON'T WASTE, DONATE...BUT DON'T DONATE WASTE

Food is wasted throughout the food system. Excess waste raises environmental concerns due to resource use for wasted product and excess packaging waste, and contributes to greenhouse gas production in landfills.³ It also creates significant disposal costs. Food waste in Canada has an estimated value of over \$31 billion – over \$100 billion if indirect costs such as labour, infrastructure, and energy are accounted for.⁴

A significant portion of what is referred to as “food waste” is avoidable. Foods and beverages are frequently discarded because they are no longer wanted or are nearing or past their best before date (which is not an indicator of food safety; see Date stamps, pg. 31). Much of this waste is preventable, and some of those foods and beverages may be donated.^{5&6}

Food waste includes inedible components of food (e.g., peels, bones) and products that are no longer fresh, safe, or desirable. Some food waste may be prevented by better storage.

Food waste should never be donated for human consumption.

Wasted food results when food is not used or sold for reasons unrelated to safety and quality (e.g., poor sales rates, excess production, some aesthetic variations, certain production or ordering errors, etc.). **Wasted food can often be avoided, and quality, unsold food may be donated.**

FOOD SYSTEM FEEDBACK PATHWAYS



SOURCE: [HTTPS://MATHINSTITUTES.ORG/HIGHLIGHTS/MODELING-THE-NATIONS-FOOD-SYSTEM/](https://mathinstitutes.org/highlights/modeling-the-nations-food-system/)

Much of the food currently discarded by industry (and consumers) need not be wasted. Waste prevention through source reduction will benefit business operations, the environment, and society in general. Although the most sustainable path to zero waste is source reduction, some food may be donatable before it becomes waste.^{4&7}

GETTING STARTED AS A FOOD DONOR

Donated food is put to good use by a variety of organizations. It is useful to know that financial donations better enable organizations to purchase specific foods to meet their clients' needs without having to manage and sort donated foods as they become available. Still, donation remains a viable option to make unsold food available for consumption.

Initiating a donation program need not be onerous. Businesses can start small, or focus on one type of donation or a single recipient organization. The important thing is to find a match between the types of food available, the needs of the recipient organization, and the capacity and operations of both the donor and recipient.

- Food donors and organizations that receive donated food operate on all scales. A donation program could be as simple as a corner grocer sharing unsold produce with a community kitchen in the neighbourhood, or as complex as an ongoing donation program between a national grocery chain to a network of food banks.
- A visit or phone call is the first step to building a relationship and identifying how food donations

might support an organization's work. If they do not accept what is available, they may be able to recommend another potential recipient with different needs or that has capacity to use that food.

- There are ways to donate ready-to-eat foods and hot meals, perishable and non-perishable foods, grocery items, or bulk raw ingredients.
- Business networks can raise awareness about wasted food and food donation. New donors can learn from those already donating and encourage others to take action.
- The last section of these guidelines includes specific tips on what to donate from the processing, retail, and food service sectors.

Example: Donating prepared foods from the food service sector

The Shaw Conference Centre in Edmonton donates food from their food service operations through the Edmonton Food Bank Second Helping Program. Instead of wasting good food, prepared food is donated to community partners with guidance from Alberta Health Services. To find out more visit the Edmonton Food Bank website or search YouTube "Second Helping ShawTV"

WHERE TO DONATE

Virtually every community has organizations that receive and redistribute donated food.

- Food banks and food pantries – provide limited supplies of groceries for people in need.
- Soup kitchens and other meal programs – provide prepared food at no or very low cost.
- Food redistribution organizations – accept donated foods and re-package, re-process, or redistribute to other groups that can use the food.
- Social enterprises – educate and train people to enter the food industry workforce.
- Cultural or faith groups – use food for cultural events or community meals.
- Organizations that increase community resilience, such as community kitchens or training groups – prepare and share food collectively, or use food for skill- or capacity-building programs.
- School meal programs – provide meals to children at school, preferably as part of a larger food and nutrition education and skill-building program.
- Discount food retail outlets – sell food for nominal charge, providing an opportunity for people in need to access food with dignity and choice (may be for-profit entities or non-profit organizations raising funds).

Many, but not all, organizations that receive food donations are registered charities that can offer tax receipts for the fair market value of donated foods. If tax receipts are desired, donors are advised to check with recipients about their internal policies for receipting food donations and follow Canada Revenue Agency regulations.^{8 & 9}

Local agencies can assist with finding organizations that can use donated food. United Way Canada operates a 2-1-1 phone service in most provinces and territories that can refer to community resources and organizations. Visit 211.ca or dial 2-1-1 to connect with local services. Food Banks Canada keeps a directory of affiliated food banks and provincial associations at foodbankscanada.ca.

PARTNERS IN FOOD DONATION

Donor businesses are highly variable. The neighbourhood bistro or corner market differs in size and capacity from a large food service operation or grocery store chain. Any size and type of food business can work to prevent wasted food, yet still have quality food to donate.

ABOUT INDUSTRY FOOD DONORS	RECIPIENT ORGANIZATIONS CAN...
Efforts to increase efficiency may result in less unsold food in the future.	<p>...anticipate change and plan ahead for upstream alternatives (e.g., financial donation and direct purchasing).</p> <p>...work toward a healthier, more sustainable, more equitable food system that relies less on food redistribution.</p>
Operational schedules, staffing considerations, and workload fluctuations influence when donors can identify donatable foods and when they can make them available.	...anticipate seasonal fluctuations and discuss available times to schedule pickup and delivery of donated foods.
Some businesses want to be identified publicly as food donors, while others may not.	...be aware of donor preferences and mutually agree on how to promote donors or protect brands.
Businesses may or may not wish to have branded items distributed, particularly if they are discontinued, damaged, or have manufacturing variations.	...use food preparation or repackaging rather than redistributing such foods directly to clients as groceries.

Organizations that receive donated food vary in size, capacity, and scope of work. Some focus on increasing community resilience around food, often engaging in other diverse food system activities. Some distribute food as groceries or through meal programs and some also re-work, re-process, or re-package foods into safe and healthy options for their clients. Others use food as an educational, skill-building, or capacity building tool

ABOUT ORGANIZATIONS THAT RECEIVE DONATED FOOD	INDUSTRY FOOD DONORS CAN...
<p>Organizations that build community resilience may be trying to move away from a reliance on donated foods.</p>	<p>...work together toward a healthier, more sustainable, more equitable food system.</p> <p>...be open about source reduction efforts that may decrease the amount of food available to donate in the future.</p>
<p>Organizations that receive donated food generally prefer ongoing and predictable donations.</p>	<p>...set up regular schedules when possible and build long-term relationships with organizations.</p>
<p>Many organizations rely on volunteers. Training and education of staff and volunteers will vary.</p>	<p>...ensure that organizations are aware of safe food handling precautions whenever donating foods, particularly perishable items.</p> <p>...be aware that some organizations may also offer training opportunities for vulnerable people as a tool to increase community resilience.</p> <p>...consider including volunteers in staff training for food safety or business operations, or consider working with organizations to provide job placement opportunities.</p>
<p>Some organizations have limited capacity to assess donations.</p>	<p>...ensure that donated foods are suitable for redistribution, to prevent errors and avoid creating waste for the recipient organizations.</p> <p>...provide extra information where possible, e.g., to highlight that a particular case or batch of product contains allergens.</p>
<p>Operational schedules, staff or volunteer availability, and workload fluctuations will influence when they can pick up or receive donated foods, particularly for volunteer-based organizations.</p>	<p>...provide as much advance notice about donations as possible.</p> <p>...find out key information such as whether donations can be received late at night or when volunteers are busy preparing meals for clients.</p>

ABOUT ORGANIZATIONS THAT RECEIVE DONATED FOOD	INDUSTRY FOOD DONORS CAN...
<p>Not-for-profit organizations incur the same costs as businesses to dispose of food or packaging weight.</p>	<p>...not donate foods of questionable quality or safety that will not be used, passing disposal costs on to organizations.</p> <p>...be aware that organizations that decline donations (due to quality, client needs, capacity, etc.) should not be responsible for their disposal.</p>
<p>Smaller organizations in particular may have limited access to refrigerated transport and storage for shelf-stable, refrigerated, or frozen foods.</p>	<p>... provide in-kind or financial support for delivery or partner with distributors to increase storage and transportation capacity of organizations that accept donated foods.</p>

Section 2. Health and Legal Considerations

FOOD SAFETY REGULATIONS AND INSPECTION FRAMEWORKS

This section provides an overview of provincial food safety inspection and regulation in four provinces: Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia. Public health oversight of food donation in British Columbia is described in [guidelines](#) from the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC). These provinces collectively make up the major food production and processing hubs in Canada. In addition to the public health oversight described here, some activities (e.g., food production; inspection of meat, eggs, dairy, and fish processing) may fall under the jurisdiction of other federal or provincial/territorial agencies:

- [Health Canada](#) establishes federal policies, regulations, and standards for food safety and nutrition quality for all food sold in Canada.
- The [Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#) (CFIA) enforces Health Canada's food safety policies and standards.
- The CFIA regulates foods traded across provincial or international boundaries.
- The CFIA and/or provincial/territorial agriculture or health portfolios have specific authority over certain slaughter, meat packing, and dairy inspection activities.

All food donation activities in Canada should follow provincial/territorial and federal food safety guidelines and regulations. Industry food donors and recipient organizations are advised to contact local public health officials to clarify existing guidelines or obtain

additional guidance about specific practices.

FOOD DONORS

- Handle food donations with the same level of food safety care used in regular sales operations.
- Follow usual quality assurance protocols that relate to health, safety, or nutrition.
- Consider how donated food will be handled, transported, and stored, particularly for perishable items requiring refrigeration.

FOOD DONATION RECIPIENTS

- Know and follow safe food handling practices and local regulations. This is advisable regardless of whether facilities are licensed and inspected. Consider specifying organizational criteria for when to accept or decline donated foods.
- Food handler training may be mandatory, and is always a good idea, for staff and volunteers. There are multiple food safety training courses available across Canada, some of which can be completed online. Check with local public health department for approved courses.
- Consider how donated food will be handled, transported and stored, particularly for perishable items requiring refrigeration.

* For further Legal Considerations related to liability under the Good Samaritan Act, see *Food Donation and Civil Liability in Canada* at [nzwc.ca](#).

Alberta

Food safety in Alberta is governed by two ministries: Alberta Agriculture and Forestry (AF) and Alberta Health. AF covers production and processing of meat and livestock, dairy, and eggs.¹⁰ Alberta Health oversees foods offered to the public, which are governed by the Public Health Act and the Food Regulation.¹¹ The Food Regulation is enforced by Alberta Health Services (AHS), which provides guidance and inspects all operations that provide food to the public, including retail operations, restaurants and caterers, institutional kitchens, farmers' markets, community organization events, and food banks. This work is carried out by public health inspectors. Contact [Environmental Public Health](#) for information or to connect with an inspector.

Food banks are inspected in Alberta for compliance with the Food Regulation. A food bank is defined in the Regulation as a “non-profit organization that (i) operates exclusively to provide food to persons in need, (ii) provides food for consumption by such persons off the organization’s premises, and (iii) does not process food.”¹¹ AHS has Guidelines for the Distribution of Donated Foods,¹² which lay out general food safety requirements for food facilities, shipping and receiving, storage and containers, and transporting foods, as well as guidance about acceptable and unacceptable food donations.

Ontario

Food Safety in Ontario is governed by the Health Protection and Promotion Act R.S.O. 1990, Chapter H.7, specifically the Food Premises Regulation R.R.O. 1990, Reg.562.” The Regulation is one component of Ontario’s Food Safety Program applied at the local

level through the 36 public health units. Public health inspectors are responsible for providing food handler training and education, and monitoring and enforcing compliance of the regulation. Food banks and soup kitchens are considered food premises under the Regulation and are subject to inspections. Individual health units may have food safety guidelines that apply to food donation, food banks, or other organizations that use donated foods. Contact the [local health unit](#) for more information about food safety guidance and inspection.

Quebec

Food safety in Quebec falls under the Food Products Act (R.S.Q., c. P-29) and regulation respecting food (R.S.Q., c. P-29 r.1). Food premises are licensed by the [Ministère de l’Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l’Alimentation](#) (MAPAQ).

These regulations are enforced by the MAPAQ inspection service (Direction générale de l’inspection et du bien-être animal), which inspects production sites (abattoirs, milk farms) and all operations that provide food to the public, including retail operations, restaurants and caterers, institutional kitchens, farmers’ markets, community organization events, and food banks. Contact the [regional inspection service](#) for detailed information about inspection and requirements.

In the City of Montreal, the MAPAQ has delegated power over food safety regulations to the [Division de l’inspection des aliments](#).

** Effective July 1, 2018 the Food Premises Regulation R.R.O.1990, Reg.562 will be revoked and replaced by the Food Premises Regulation O. Reg. 493/17.

Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia Environment oversees food safety and food premises inspections across the province. Businesses that produce and distribute food require a Food Establishment Permit and inspection by a public health inspector.¹³ Organizations that receive food donations do not require permits or inspection in Nova Scotia. They should follow general safe food handling and hygiene practices.

Regulation of food establishments falls under the Food Safety Regulations of the Health Protection Act,¹³ with operational requirements set out in the Nova Scotia Food Retail and Food Services Code.¹⁴ Additional information and guidelines for retailers, processors, and producers is available online from Nova Scotia Environment [Food Protection](#).

Some provinces have programs in place to allow donation of uninspected wild game meat, which provides a protein source and can support access to traditional foods. Butchers can offer their services to support initiatives like Hunters Who Care in Alberta, [Hunters Helping the Hungry](#) in Nova Scotia, and [Generous Hunters in Quebec](#).

FOOD SAFETY REGULATION ACROSS CANADA

Federal	Canadian Food Inspection Agency Health Canada
Alberta	Alberta Health Services, Environmental Public Health
British Columbia	Provincial, Regional, and First Nations Health Authorities
Manitoba	Department of Health, Seniors and Active Living, Health Protection
New Brunswick	Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health
Newfoundland and Labrador	Department of Health and Community Services, Food Safety Program
Northwest Territories	Health and Social Services, Environmental Health
Nova Scotia	Nova Scotia Environment, Food Protection
Nunavut	Department of Health, Environmental Health
Ontario	Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Local health units
Prince Edward Island	Department of Health and Wellness, Inspections, Licenses and Permits
Quebec	Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation (MAPAQ), Regional Inspection Service
Saskatchewan	Saskatchewan Health Authority, Food Safety Program
Yukon	Yukon Health and Social Services, Environmental Health

NUTRITION AND HEALTHY EATING

Food quality and nutrition are important considerations when donating food. Food banks and other organizations that receive donated food do more than simply providing calories to feed people. They increasingly try to offer a variety of wholesome food options to their clients. Choice is one way that these organizations try to bring more dignity to difficult life circumstances.

Many organizations also try to provide healthier foods (see Appendix A). Consider that some people obtain a significant portion of their daily nutrition from food banks and other charitable sources. Clients include children, the elderly, people with dietary restrictions due to health conditions (such as diabetes or heart disease) or medication interactions, and people who follow diets such as halal or kosher.

Public health dietitians promote healthy eating in each province and territory, and may provide consultation services related to healthy foods. Contact local, regional, or provincial population/public health offices for more information about healthy eating or to access public health dietitian services.

A wide range of foods may be donated, such as:

- Fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables
- Inspected dairy, meat, fish, poultry, and eggs^{***}
- Grains and grain products such as breads, cereals, or pasta
- Basic ingredients such as cooking oils, flour, seasonings, etc.
- Prepared foods and meals

- Non-perishable or shelf-stable foods – canned, packaged, or bulk.

The most commonly requested foods are listed in the box below. For a more detailed list of healthy foods to donate, refer to Appendix A. Different organizations have different needs, so it is best to check before donating so that food they cannot use does not go to waste.

TYPICAL “MOST WANTED” ITEMS AT CANADIAN FOOD BANKS****

- Meat, poultry, and fish – canned, fresh, frozen
- Vegetables and fruit – canned, fresh, frozen
- Canned or dry beans and legumes, tofu
- Nuts and seeds
- Pasta, rice, and other grains – especially whole grain
- Pasta and tomato sauce – especially low sodium
- Peanut butter – unsalted, unsweetened
- Cereal and plain oatmeal
- Eggs
- Milk and dairy products, including powdered milk
- 100% fruit juice
- Infant formula, baby food
- High protein stews, soups, and other meals
- Special diet foods: gluten-free, lactose-free, sugar-free, kosher, halal

^{***} Or products obtained via programs such as Hunters Who Care, Hunters Helping the Hungry, or Generous Hunters.

^{****} Adapted from Food Banks Canada, Food Banks Alberta, Ontario Association of Food Banks, Food Banks of Quebec, and Feed Nova Scotia.

The foods most requested by organizations that receive donated food are whole or minimally processed foods low in added sugar, salt, and saturated fat.²

Individual organizations that receive donated food increasingly have their own policies about what items they will accept for donation, with good reasons for refusing certain foods. This document does not supersede individual organizational policies or the guidelines or regulations of provincial public health agencies.

DO NOT DONATE:

- Alcoholic beverages, medicines, or edible marijuana products
- Foods identified by the recipient organization as unwanted or not needed**** creates waste and imposes significant disposal costs on the organization, even when part of a mixed donation that includes other foods needed by the organization
- Foods deemed unsafe (see Safe Food Handling and Storage, pg. 21 and Assessing Foods for Donation, pg. 27).

As of September 15, 2018, partially hydrogenated oils will no longer be permitted in foods sold and served in Canada. Once that regulation comes into effect, those foods will no longer be suitable for donation.¹⁵ A similar restriction on trans-fat is already in place in British Columbia. Visit restricttransfat.ca to learn more.

**** Organizations may choose not to accept donations of human breast milk substitutes (infant formula), foods considered unhealthy (e.g., pop, candy, chips, pastries, sugary drinks, etc.), foods they lack the capacity to store and distribute, or foods they already have in large quantities.

There are additional, related ways that potential food donors can further support recipient organizations:

- Financial donations help organizations run their operations and purchase items in quantities, and on a schedule, that matches their capacities and client needs. Companies can match or “top up” employee donations.
- Personnel time and expertise can be valuable to organizations that rely heavily on volunteers. Businesses might consider supporting employees to offer their services.
- Many organizations that receive food donations lack safe food transport methods, particularly refrigerated trucks. Donors can transport donations or work with their distributors to help transport foods or deliver directly to an organization when possible.
- Cold storage and warehouse services may be valuable to organizations that lack infrastructure or space to safely store foods prior to use or distribution.
- Related services such as marketing or packaging may help organizations increase their impact.

LIABILITY AND BRAND

Organizations and businesses may have concerns about liability or brand reputation. This section directs readers to information about liability and offers guidance on how to protect brand identity when donating food.

FOOD DONOR LAWS IN CANADA

In every part of Canada, the law provides protection for companies and individuals who donate food rather than throwing it away. The laws are worded in various ways, but they all provide food donors with a strong defence if a consumer sues because of illness caused by the donated food.

Alberta	Charitable Donation of Food Act, RSA 2000, c C-8
British Columbia	Food Donor Encouragement Act, SBC 1997, c 8
Manitoba	The Food Donations Act, CCSM c F135
New Brunswick	Charitable Donation of Food Act, RSNB 2011, c 124
Newfoundland and Labrador	Donation of Food Act, SNL 1997, c D-26.1
Northwest Territories	Donation of Food Act, SNWT 2008, c 14
Nova Scotia	Volunteer Services Act, RSNS 1989, c 497
Nunavut	Donation of Food Act, SNU 2013, c 8
Ontario	Donation of Food Act, 1994, SO 1994, c 19
Prince Edward Island	Donation of Food Act, RSPEI 1988, c D-13.1
Quebec	Civil Code of Quebec, CQLR c CCQ-1991 Art.1471
Saskatchewan	Donation of Food Act, 1995, The SS 1995, c D-32.01
Yukon	Donation of Food Act, SY 2012, c 11

Liability issues are unlikely if a business only donates foods that are safe enough to sell. More information about food donor laws in Canada, including legal interpretation of hypothetical scenarios involving food donation, is provided in the companion publication *Food Donation and Civil Liability in Canada*.¹⁶

BRAND PROTECTION FOR FOOD DONORS

Careful attention to the quality and safety of donated food will protect both donors' reputations and people's health. Corporate and social responsibility includes minimizing wasted food and supporting community organizations.

Donate with dignity. Never donate foods you wouldn't be willing to eat.

Concerns about brand representation may be valid but need not prevent donations of safe, quality foods. Here are some strategies to alleviate those concerns:

- Donate products to organizations that will use the food for meal preparation or further processing (rather than to organizations that redistribute food to clients as groceries).
- Remove the branded packaging and provide the product in bulk form (along with important label information about allergens, ingredients, dates, and traceability). Or, enter an agreement with the organization about how the product will be used.
- Repackage, and/or relabel the product before donating. (Ensure new labels include information about allergens, ingredients, dates, and traceability.)

Concerns about brand reputation may arise when donating certain types of food:

- Large quantities of a single product, particularly niche brands
- Discontinued, relabelled/repackaged, or reformulated products that will not be sold
- Promotional products that are no longer needed
- Safe, quality product that does not meet consistency or aesthetic specifications (e.g., minor variations in colour, texture, or viscosity; variation in fat or sugar content; product that is too spicy or too mild; etc.)

- Product with label or package errors that do not compromise safety or required ingredient and health-related information (e.g., new label applied on top of original to correct ingredient list, or gluing error on outer box that doesn't impact inner bag packaging)
- Product near, at, or past a sell-by or best before date (see Date stamps, pg. 31).

All of these concerns can be addressed using strategies provided in these guidelines.

TIPS TO PROTECT BRAND WHEN DONATING FOOD

Use Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) or other written agreements to specify how a product should or should not be used. MoUs may also be used to protect the identity of donors.

Trust and positive relationships built over time can facilitate these arrangements. Recipients will have confidence that donated foods are of sufficient quality and are safe to provide to clients, and donors will have assurance that their brand will be protected.

Maintain traceability and follow labelling requirements (e.g., ingredient lists, allergen warnings) and avoid donating unsafe food (see Safe Food Handling and Storage, pg. 21 and Assessing Foods for Donation, pg. 27).

Section 3: Managing Food Donations

DONOR-RECIPIENT RELATIONSHIPS

Food donation, like sales, is a relationship-based process. Because there are no financial transactions and often no formal contracts, relationships are critical when giving or receiving food and in-kind donations. Donor businesses and recipient organizations both benefit from careful attention across all stages of the donation process. Information sharing and clear communication are essential.

ADMINISTRATION

A designated liaison can streamline the communication process between food donors and recipient organizations. It will be easier to set up and maintain donation partnerships if there is a single contact for each business and organization. The liaison might manage the donation process or be a point of contact who can share information and redirect inquiries as needed.

Documentation is important for food traceability, inventory tracking, financial accounting, and other operational factors. Prepare **forms** and plan **operating practices** in advance:

- criteria for donating or accepting food
- checklists of required information about donated foods
- shipping and receiving documentation
- tax receipts
- internal processes for giving or receiving donations
- blank labels to fill in missing information (e.g., product name, ingredients, allergens, date stamps)
- any other information you require.

Donors who wish to receive charitable tax receipts should communicate with an organization prior to donating food to confirm its registered charity status and learn that organization's policy about issuing tax receipts for fair market value. Donors that claim donations as gifts out of inventory need to document details (e.g., fair market value and/or production costs) required by the Canada Revenue Agency.

Consider using written agreements such as Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) to clarify mutual expectations and responsibilities.² These may relate to operations or take the form of legal or quasi-legal agreements (see Brand protection for food donors, pg. 18).

OPERATIONS

Some donations can be planned in advance. However, donating unsold foods inevitably means unexpected transactions and quick turnaround times (particularly for perishable foods). Businesses should provide as much notice as possible so that organizations can prepare to receive and redistribute the food in a safe and timely and manner.

When the exact timing and details of the donation cannot be predicted, even a “heads up” can be helpful. If a business checks inventory every Wednesday, the organizations that receive donations from them can know that perishable items might be available on that day.

When food donation occurs on an ongoing basis, regularly scheduled pickup and delivery times facilitate planning for both parties. Even if the exact contents of the donation are not known trucks, personnel, and storage can be made available according to the schedule.

The content and quantity of donations should be confirmed as soon as possible so that the organization receiving the food can prepare – particularly for perishable foods.

Distribution and transport are important parts of the food donation process. Once foods have been identified for donation, donors should consider how they will get to the receiving organization (including maintaining the cold chain).

Some organizations that receive donated food are well equipped to pick up a variety of foods. If not, donors might deliver food or partner with distributors to help transport donated foods.

Coordinate delivery to ensure trucks can access the receiving area of an organization, determine whether loading bays and pallet jacks are required, and assess traffic stopping restrictions and alley access, etc.

SAFE FOOD HANDLING AND STORAGE

General practices to ensure food safety are based on:

- hygiene of facilities, equipment, and people
- time and temperature controls
- safe packaging, transportation, and storage processes (including maintaining the cold chain)
- good donor-recipient relations.

Required food safety practices depend on the level of food safety risk associated with the donated food. Non-perishable foods have the lowest risk – they require little special attention and no cold storage. They have historically been the focus of food donation programs. By their nature, perishable foods are more likely to be wasted and provide ample opportunity to increase the nutritional quality of food donations, but they require more careful assessment to determine suitability. Perishable foods differ in their level of risk to cause foodborne illness. Consult local food safety or public health authorities for guidance on accepted practices for handling perishable foods in your region.



NON-PERISHABLE

Canned or bottled products, dry goods (flour, crackers, etc.), pastries without cream filling

- **Shelf-stable**
- Check integrity of packaging
- Ensure labels are present, complete, and intact
- Evaluate best before dates
- Check for signs of rodent or insects inside and outside packaging
- Bulk or large containers may be repackaged



PERISHABLE


Whole raw fruits and vegetables; cut and packaged raw fruits and vegetables; packaged prepared foods; dairy; eggs; tofu; meat, fish and poultry

- **Refrigerated** (with some exceptions such as most whole raw fruits). Perishable foods vary in risk; this category includes “potentially hazardous foods” (PHF)
- Ensure appropriate refrigeration or freezing temperatures are maintained and keep higher risk foods out of the danger zone (4-60 °C)
- Evaluate best before dates on packaged items
- Check safe food handling protocols for processing or re-packaging
- Ensure meat, dairy, and poultry are from approved sources

Perishable and non-perishable food categories with generally recommended precautions. Certain lower risk perishable foods can remain safe for a limited time without refrigeration. Specific requirements for some perishable foods (e.g. uncut raw fruits and vegetables, hard cheese) vary by jurisdiction.

Some higher risk foods may be donated depending on the context. Balance risk with local needs for specific foods. Avoid providing high risk foods to vulnerable people, such as those with compromised immune systems, young children, pregnant women, and the elderly. Always check local guidelines and consult health authorities about when and how to donate higher risk foods as safely as possible.

DONATING FOODS WITH HIGHEST RISK

DONATING FOODS WITH THE HIGHEST RISK	 MAYBE Always check local guidelines & organization policies, and consult local public health officials	 NEVER Not suitable to donate
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unpasteurized juices • Home-canned jams and jellies (high sugar foods) • Opened packages used only in licensed kitchen facilities (e.g., restaurants) • Buffet or restaurant dishes that have been held in the kitchen under appropriate temperature control • Wild game that follows guidelines from programs such as Hunters Who Care or other local health guidelines • Ungraded eggs (practices vary by jurisdiction) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unpasteurized “raw” milk • Home-canned low-acid products: vegetables, meat, fish, or combination products (e.g., salsa, antipasto)* • Partially consumed foods or open packages from consumers • Foods that have been on display in a public buffet • Un-inspected meat or wild game

* Some jurisdictions may permit some “food rescue” activities with these products. Consult local organizations and health authorities.

† Consult local public health officials about home-canned acidified foods such as pickled vegetables, which must be produced using validated processes.

FOOD PRODUCT LABELS

Foods that are repackaged or that have been mislabeled must be relabeled for traceability and health reasons, regardless of whether they are distributed to clients or used to prepare other foods.

Be cautious with food donations affected by packaging or labelling errors. As an example, a manufacturer might donate a batch of granola with nuts that was accidentally put into packages for plain oats. Or, an importer might donate crackers for which the label doesn't meet all Canadian labelling standards.¹⁷ In either case, there is nothing wrong with the food but it can't be sold because of the packaging. Labels must be corrected and/or added in order to prevent potentially severe health consequences. Consider whether such foods would be better used for meal preparation or processing, or if they can be distributed to the public as groceries.

FOOD LABELS SHOULD INCLUDE:¹⁷

- Product name
- Ingredient list and declaration of allergens
- Date markings (packaged on, frozen on, or use by dates; Canada's Food and Drug Regulations require best before dates on foods with shelf life <90 days)
- Storage instructions (e.g., keep refrigerated or keep frozen)
- Source of food (donor or manufacturer – can be indicated by a code)

PRIORITY ALLERGENS MUST BE DECLARED ON FOOD LABELS:¹⁸

- tree nuts – almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, pecans, pine nuts, pistachios, walnuts
- peanuts
- sesame
- milk/dairy
- eggs
- soy
- wheat
- gluten – barley, rye, oats, triticale, wheat
- seafood – fish, shellfish, crustaceans
- mustard – powdered, liquid, seed
- sulfites

Allergen declaration is required by Canada's Food and Drug Regulations.

TRACEABILITY

Accurate record keeping is important to track inventory and product flows, ensure product rotation, as well as for accounting and tax purposes, regardless of whether food is sold or donated.

Track wasted food and donations to help quantify how much food was diverted by donating it before it deteriorated or became unsellable.

All donated foods should be traceable in the event of a food safety recall. Donors and recipients need to keep track of lot or batch numbers, production dates, donation dates, supplier information, best before or other date markings, received dates, and ship dates.^{2 & 19}

Use the “one step forward” and “one step back” method to keep track when food changes hands:

Know where food came from.

Obtain and keep all necessary information.

Keep track of where food was sent.

Provide all necessary information when distributing food.

STORAGE AND TRANSPORT

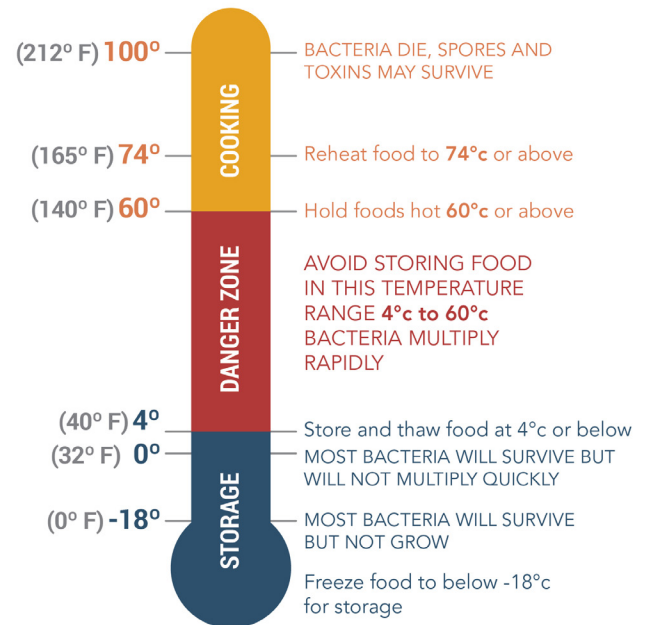
Store and transport donated foods with the same level of care given to foods destined for sale.

TIME AND TEMPERATURE CONTROL

The total length of time that foods can be stored prior to donation or distribution depends on food risk level, packaging, and storage conditions. Many organizations and health departments provide guidance on recommended storage times for different foods.

All potentially hazardous foods (PHF) and most perishable foods must be refrigerated, frozen, or kept hot in order to prevent growth of bacteria and toxins. Do not keep these foods in the “danger zone” (4-60°C) for more than two hours, even during thawing (see figure below).

SAFE FOOD HOLDING TEMPERATURES



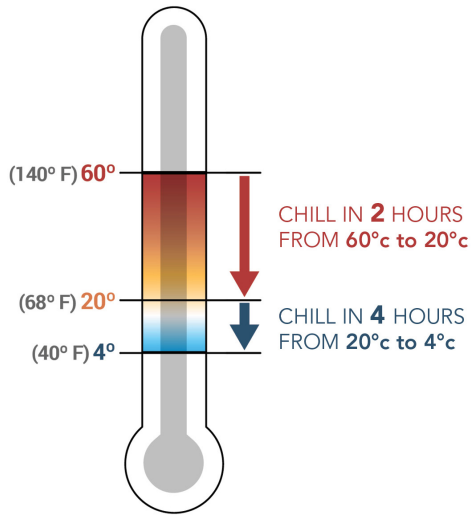
BC CENTRE FOR DISEASE CONTROL

Cool hot or cooked foods as quickly as possible to prevent growth of harmful bacteria. Some ways to speed up the cooling process:²

- Divide hot foods into smaller containers
- Cool foods in shallow containers
- Stir foods with ice wands
- Place large containers into a sink or basin filled with cold water

Consult local guidelines or public health authorities for guidance on cooling foods (such as whole hams, roasts, or birds) as the methods listed above are not practical.

FOOD COOLING PROCEDURE



BC CENTRE FOR DISEASE CONTROL

Maintain temperature controls during transportation as well as storage. Larger organizations that receive donated food may have delivery and refrigerated trucks and fully trained staff, but smaller organizations often rely on volunteer drivers and personal vehicles. Provide volunteer drivers with training about what they can transport and how to handle donations safely and maintain the cold chain when necessary. Donors can offer to transport donated items, or encourage distributors to provide in-kind delivery service.

PRODUCT SEPARATION

Some categories of product should be **kept separate**²⁰ using protective packaging and/or separated containers (in addition to temperature controls). Never transport food and waste (garbage, compost, recycling) together. Ideally, use separate vehicles. Otherwise, thoroughly clean vehicles after transporting waste, before using them to transport food.

Food				Household chemicals personal care products
Non-allergen foods				Allergen foods
Raw foods				Cooked foods
Foods for people				Pet foods
Food				Trash and waste

HYGIENE

Pest control and sanitation (clean vehicles and storage areas) are also important, whether food is in fully equipped facilities or being moved in volunteers' private vehicles.

- Keep vehicles, loading and receiving docks, and storage areas clean and protected from pest infestation.
- Protect food with adequate packaging. Use pallets, cartons, or other clean containers (e.g., clean plastic bins) when transporting foods.

ASSESSING FOODS FOR DONATION

Food safety is a shared responsibility, and all foods should be assessed for safety and quality throughout the donation process. Donors need to ensure products are safe before offering them. Recipient organizations should further assess donations upon delivery and refuse unsafe donations.

HEALTH

Health assessment of food donations includes attention to both nutrition and food safety. Refer to Nutrition and Healthy Eating (pg. 15) to learn about **healthy, nutritious** food donations.

Assess **safety and other quality issues** on a case by case basis, particularly for perishable and higher risk foods:

- visually inspect food and packaging
- assess cleanliness of storage and transport vehicles
- check food temperature and time in storage (particularly time in the “danger zone”). Check temperatures for *all* PHFs upon arrival
- examine labels and date markings
- review any other information available about the source and history of the food.

Donors and recipients have a shared responsibility to ensure food is transported in conditions that do not put it at risk of temperature abuse, resulting in wasted food. Food Banks Canada provides receiving, storage, repackaging, and documentation guidance for member food banks when receiving perishable foods.²⁰

In some cases, foods not acceptable for distribution can be further processed. For example, bruised or slightly soft (but not mouldy or rotten) vegetables might be cooked into soup or stew. Appendix B provides two decision trees to guide decisions about whether and how to use perishable food items.²

PACKAGING

Although damage to packaging may indicate that foods have been mishandled, some packaging damage is superficial and does not impact food safety. Foods with superficial packaging issues may be repackaged, repaired, or re-labelled. (Ensure new labels include information about allergens, ingredients, dates, and traceability.)

Consider how foods might be perceived by those who ultimately receive them. Organizations can make and share policies for what they consider acceptable donations. Donors should check and follow organizations' policies.

PACKAGING ISSUE	SIGNS OF DAMAGE	DONOR ACTIONS
Label	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No label Damaged or unreadable Lacks allergen declaration or full ingredient list Date stamp missing 	<p>If known, add missing information or secure a new label to package prior to distribution.</p> <p>If required information is not known, divert to waste or recycling stream for health and safety reasons.</p>
Severely compromised packaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaking Punctured or torn Soiling, soaked through packaging Visible contamination or degradation of food contents Seal damaged, broken, or missing 	<p>Not suitable for human consumption. Divert to waste or recycling stream.</p>
Can defects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large or sharp dents, dents in seam, or crushed Bulging or swollen Rusting or corrosion Leaking Punctures or damage to seams or score line Damaged can ends Score marks that may impact metal integrity or pull-tab 	<p>Canning process may have been flawed or seal may have been damaged, leading to potentially serious or even lethal bacterial growth. Divert to waste or recycling stream.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small dents that do not affect seams 	<p>Should not impact safety of contents.</p>

PACKAGING ISSUE	SIGNS OF DAMAGE	DONOR ACTIONS
Signs of rodents or insects	<p>Droppings visible on or inside packages</p> <p>Urine visible (check by using a UV/black-light)</p> <p>Visible insects, casings, or webs on or inside packages</p> <p>Chewed or torn packages</p>	<p>If outer package shows damage, but inner wrapping and contents are undamaged and intact (e.g., soiled cereal box with clean, intact inner bag), discard outer packaging and relabel for use (items may best be directed to organizations that do meal preparation or processing). Ensure new labels include information about allergens, ingredients, dates, and traceability.</p> <p>Otherwise, divert to waste or recycling stream.</p>
Cut packaging	Score marks or cuts in boxes or flexible packaging	<p>If inner wrapping is undamaged and intact (e.g., knife damage to box of crackers but inner plastic wrap undamaged), food should not be damaged.</p> <p>Otherwise, divert to waste or recycling stream.</p>
	Score damage to single-layer packaging	<p>Impact on contents depends on the food. Evaluate on a case-by-case basis:</p> <p>Uncut, raw, bagged fruits and vegetables (e.g., carrots or apples) can be donated.</p> <p>Flour, dried beans, or other bulk items may be acceptable if tear is covered and no signs of contamination.</p> <p>Viscous or liquid foods – divert to waste or recycling stream.</p> <p>Cut fruits and vegetables – divert to waste or recycling stream.</p>

PACKAGING ISSUE	SIGNS OF DAMAGE	DONOR ACTIONS
Soiled packaging	Water Heat or smoke damage Debris	Evaluate on a case-by-case basis in conjunction with local health authorities.
	Waste water Flood water	Divert to waste or recycling stream.

DATE STAMPS

There are a variety of different date stamps used on food labels. Some are related to food safety, but most are not. Careful attention to date stamps and their meaning can help prevent wasted food at the industry and consumer levels. Some post-dated foods may be donated even if businesses choose not to use or sell them. Assess perishable items for spoilage when used after the best before date,

DATE LABELS ON PACKAGED FOODS IN CANADA ²¹	
Best before date (BBD) on perishable items- Also known as durable life date	<p>Not an indicator of product safety.</p> <p>Determined by manufacturer, indicates time during which an un-opened product stored under recommended conditions will retain optimal freshness, taste, nutritional value, or other qualities identified by the manufacturer. Required on foods that will keep fresh for 90 days or less. Date is determined by manufacturer or retailer.</p> <p>Does not apply to opened packages.</p> <p>Many products may be consumed after the BBD, if they are unopened and have been stored and handled correctly.</p>
Packaged on date	<p>Similar to BBD. Use on foods with a durable life of 90 days or less. Must be accompanied by information about durable life (e.g., consume within x days or consume by ____).</p> <p>Does not apply to opened packages.</p>
BBD on canned or dry foods	<p>Voluntary on shelf-stable foods that may be added by manufacturer or retailer.</p>
Expiry date	<p>Required only on foods with strict nutritional or compositional specifications (nutritional supplements, infant formula, and meal replacements or other specific dietary products). Date indicates time during which product is expected to meet specifications.</p> <p>Foods must not be donated, sold, or consumed after the expiry date.</p>
Sell by date Prepared on date Freeze by date Manufactured on date	<p>Voluntary date markings that are permitted provided they are not misleading and other required date markings are included on the label.</p> <p>Not a guarantee of product safety or quality.</p>

Foods can also be sold at a discount, providing a valuable opportunity for anyone to access affordable food *and* helping to prevent waste.

Date labels in Canada must be bilingual. They are presented as year/month/day. (Because required BBDs indicate 90-day durable life dates, the year is optional unless needed for clarity, i.e., if shelf life extends to a new calendar year). Two-letter abbreviations are used to indicate month.²¹

JA = January	AL = April	JL = July	OC = October
FE = February	MA = May	AU = August	NO = November
MR = March	JN = June	SE = September	DE = December

Manufacturers typically include a margin for error when determining best before dates. “Sell by” dates generally incorporate a reasonable period for storage and consumption after purchase,²² though manufacturer practices may vary. Donors and recipients are advised to contact manufacturers to obtain information about how dates were determined and for guidance on consumption after the dates stamped on labels.

Many organizations accept foods that are past their best before dates. Food Banks Canada has developed guidance for member agencies about distributing foods past their best before dates (see Appendix C as an example). Local guidelines or organizational policies may also be in place.

MINIMIZING WASTED FOOD

Businesses may donate food as a means to prevent waste, or simply to support organizations that redistribute food or increase community resilience. It helps to create internal policies or criteria regarding which types of food to donate (or accept), where to donate them, and when/under what circumstances they will be donated. Appendix D offers a decision matrix to help identify foods suitable for donation.

Industry donors can minimize waste, improve quality, and facilitate the process of donating food by establishing donation criteria and best practices. Anticipate items not likely to sell by the BBD and prepare them for donation. Freeze and donate (or store) items like tofu or meat products. Pull items like bagged salad greens, dairy products, and eggs to donate a few days before the BBD.

Food donation is only one tool to prevent wasted food. Source reduction is much more cost-effective and will provide greater environmental benefits than donating unsold food. Businesses might consider donating some of the cost savings gained through efficiencies and waste reduction efforts to organizations that increase community resilience in the food system. Still, some surpluses remain unavoidable and efficiencies take time to achieve. *Identify foods unlikely to sell early to ensure that quality foods can be donated before they are wasted.* Mouldy, spoiled, expired, badly wilted or bruised, or contaminated foods are not suitable for donation and/or redistribution for human consumption.

DEAL WITH UNAVOIDABLE WASTE - DIVERSION STREAMS

A certain amount of food waste is unavoidable. However, products with compromised packaging or that have not been stored at the correct temperature, contaminated foods or foods that have been opened or in contact with the public, or foods that spoil before they can be consumed, sold, or donated can still be diverted from the landfill.

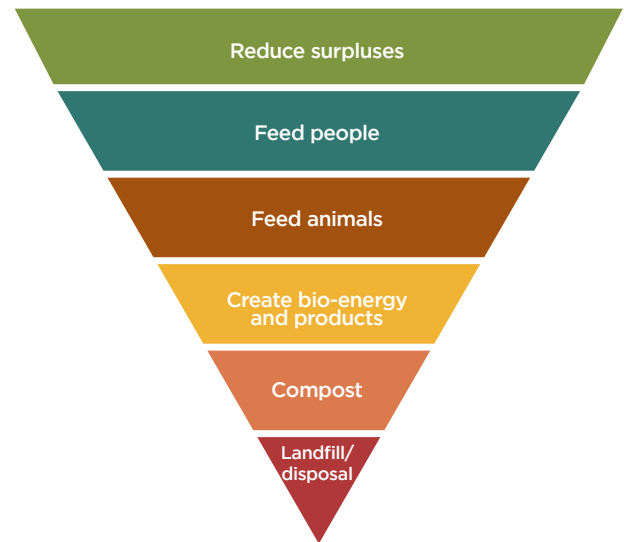
The US Environmental Protection Agency food recovery hierarchy identifies options to explore after source reduction and food donation opportunities have been exhausted.²⁴

Food waste may be appropriate for use in **animal feed**. *Some* fresh or raw foods may be suitable to feed directly to livestock or other animals. Check Schedule IV of the federal Feeds Regulations, 1983 (SOR/83-593).

- Where available, organic waste may be diverted to **industrial processing or rendering** to produce soil amendments, biogas, biodiesel fuel, or raw materials used in soaps and cosmetics.
- When no further use is identified, waste may be **composted**. Many municipalities in Canada now have organics recycling programs.
- Disposal to landfill should be a last resort when no diversion options are available.

Keep in mind that packaging from unconsumed food may be recyclable, so should be disposed separately from the product.

HIERARCHY TO REDUCE WASTED FOOD



ADAPTED FROM FEEDING THE 5000, SUSTAIN ONTARIO, AND USEPA.

Section 4: Industry-Specific Operations

The information provided in Sections 1–3 of these Guidelines apply to donations from any type of food business. This section offers specific guidance for the food processing, retail, and food service sectors. It identifies unique opportunities to donate within each sector and provides suggestions to facilitate those donations. Refer to Appendix D for a general decision-making tool.

Large retail or food service chains may need to coordinate donation programs between individual outlets or franchises and their corporate offices. Corporate policies can streamline the process, provide guidance to help reduce wasted food, and encourage food donation from individual outlets. Businesses that use central distribution infrastructure are advised to review the sections for all sectors – much of the information provided for processors can also apply to distribution centres used by grocery or restaurant chains.

Although best before dates are not reliable indicators of product safety, some donor businesses and recipient organizations may have internal policies for handling shelf-stable and perishable foods that are past their best before dates.

Fruits and vegetables that do not meet grading criteria for size, shape, or colour are not sold at the retail level and may go to waste. Produce that does not meet grade for aesthetic reasons can be donated as long as it meets the health and safety requirements set out in the [Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Regulations](#) and the [Food and Drug Regulations](#) (and can be

donated across provincial boundaries). Processors, retailers, and food service operators can work with distributor and packer partners to find ways to use, and not waste, this ‘ugly’ produce.

Each food industry sector has opportunities to donate high quality surplus foods *before* they spoil and are wasted.

PROCESSORS

PREVENT WASTE AND IDENTIFY FOODS THAT CAN BE DONATED

Processors *may* be able to donate:

- perishable or non-perishable ingredients that will not be used
- foods with labelling errors – if necessary information can be provided¹
- mispackaged foods – provided food safety has not been compromised
- leftover seasonal or promotional items, discontinued products, or products from cancelled orders.¹

HOW AND WHERE TO OFFER FOODS FOR DONATION

- Indicate if the food has been previously frozen and thawed.²³
- Consider freezing perishable foods to ensure freshness and extend shelf life; indicate freezing date on label.
- Foods that have incorrect, incomplete, or missing labels may be donated to an organization that redistributes groceries *if* labels can be corrected or replaced securely.¹
- Foods that have incorrect, incomplete, or missing label information may be donated to an organization that processes food or prepares meals *if* information about ingredients and allergens is provided along with those foods.¹
- Food products with cosmetic flaws such as colour variation or bruises may best be directed toward organizations that process food or prepare meals.¹ For example, too much or too little colouring in cheddar cheese will not affect safety or taste, but the unfamiliar appearance may make it better suited to use in a casserole or other prepared dish.

- When donating foods as a result of manufacturing errors, ensure that those errors do not affect the safety of the food or facilitate bacterial growth. For example, incorrectly pasteurized products *must not* be donated.¹
- Manufacturing errors that do not affect quality or safety but differ from usual specifications can be donated. For example, dairy fat errors in yogurt do not affect safety and the product may be just as tasty. Information about product variations should be provided either on the label or with the donation.

GOOD TO KNOW...

- Identify a range of organizations that can accept different types of donated foods, e.g., prepared items, bulk ingredients, etc.
- Work with organizations to identify ways that different products might be used.
- Never donate foods that have been recalled.

RETAILERS – GROCERY

PREVENT WASTE AND IDENTIFY FOODS THAT CAN BE DONATED

Retailers *may* be able to donate:

- perishable foods near, at, or sometimes past their best before date¹
- shelf-stable foods near, at, or past their best before date¹
- foods received through shipping or delivery errors¹
- customer returns of non-perishable foods – provided they are unopened.¹

Many organizations also welcome donations of non-food items such as personal care products, cleaning products, food wraps, pet food, etc.

HOW AND WHERE TO OFFER FOODS FOR DONATION

- Conduct shelf inventories for shelf-stable, refrigerated, and frozen foods nearing their date stamp that may be suitable for donation.²³
- Indicate if the food has been previously frozen and thawed.²³
- Clearly identify foods that are near, at, or past their best before dates so that they will be used first. Consider freezing perishable foods on or just before their best before dates to ensure freshness and extend their shelf life; indicate freezing date on label.
- Sort items for donation using the same best practices as for retail sales:¹
 - Separate non-food items – particularly chemicals, beauty products – from foods.
 - Separate pet food from human food.
 - Separate raw from cooked foods.
 - Maintain temperature for hot, refrigerated, and frozen foods.
- Stores that collect grocery items from customers (e.g., in food drive bins) should keep those items separate from the business donations because customer donations require more sorting.

GOOD TO KNOW...

- Do not donate customer returns of perishable items, even if unopened, because safe food handling and temperature controls cannot be guaranteed.
- Do not donate customer returns of any foods with open packaging, as product integrity cannot be guaranteed and there may be an identified contamination.
- Never donate foods that have been recalled.
- Never donate *expired* (see Date stamps, pg. 31) products (e.g., expired infant formula, meal replacements, or dietary supplements).
- When collecting grocery items from customers, clear signage can prevent waste and contamination of food drive bins. Well-intentioned customers who are unaware of how collections bins are maintained sometimes leave perishable items such as dairy or raw meat/fish/poultry that can render the entire bin unusable. Customer food drive bins can create a lot of sorting work and waste for organizations – consider providing a list of “most needed” items or inviting customers to make financial donations instead.

In 2015, **Les Banques alimentaires du Québec (Quebec Food Banks)** developed long-term partnerships with retail grocery chains such as Metro Inc. to facilitate the donation process for unsold food while increasing the nutritional quality and diversity of the food they redistribute to their clients. This served as a pilot program that was rolled out across the province in 2017 as **Supermarket Recovery Program**. This is a collaboration between Food Banks of Québec, Recyc-Québec, and grocery retailers (Provigo, Maxi, Metro, Super C, and IGA). The program offers training for supermarket employees, supports operations, and assists food banks with warehouse upgrades.

FOOD SERVICE – RESTAURANT AND CATERING

PREVENT WASTE AND IDENTIFY FOODS THAT CAN BE DONATED

Food service businesses *may* be able to donate:

- perishable or non-perishable ingredients/ inventory that will not be used
- ingredients and food left over from seasonal menu items
- perishable foods near their best before date¹
- shelf-stable foods near or past their best before date¹
- misshapen produce that is difficult to work with in the kitchen or may not plate well
- slightly bruised produce that may not meet restaurant presentation standards.²³

HOW AND WHERE TO OFFER FOODS FOR DONATION

- Assess inventory of shelf-stable and frozen foods periodically to identify items that are not likely to be used.²³
- Consider freezing perishable foods to ensure freshness and extend their shelf life; indicate freezing date on label.
- Examine perishable food stock frequently to identify items that are still good but that may not meet the restaurants' standards for quality or freshness.²³
- Indicate if the food has been previously frozen and thawed.²³
- Hold hot foods at or above 60°C at all times prior to cooling. Cool hot foods to 4°C quickly, following the guidance for storage and transport.
- Provide labels with company/kitchen name, product name, ingredients and allergens, dates, and storage/handling/reheating instructions.

The Québec organization La Tablée des Chefs operates a *Sustainable Food Brokerage Service* to support food donations from the hotel, restaurants, and institutional sector. They also provide culinary training to increase food autonomy among youths.

GOOD TO KNOW...

- Use smaller serving trays and refill more frequently at buffets and catered events so that food held back in the kitchen can be donated rather than wasted.
- Do not donate foods that have been served to customers or the public. This includes leftover buffet items that have been put out as well as plated leftovers.
- Never donate foods that are subject to a health-related recall.
- Plan ahead. Hot and prepared foods require specific time and temperature controls. Plan ways to minimize plate and buffet waste and decide how to manage leftovers.¹ Make arrangements in advance with organizations that receive donated food to ensure that they can accept and redistribute the product when it becomes available.
- Caterers can discuss food waste with clients when planning events and agree on tools to prevent wasted food and maximize food donations.

Smaller plates also help minimize consumer waste. Have readily available take-out containers, and encourage customers to take plated leftovers – which cannot be donated – home, rather than wasting them.

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Appendix A: Healthy Foods and Beverages for Donation

FOOD CATEGORIES	HEALTHY VERSIONS
VEGETABLES AND FRUIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh vegetables and fruit • Canned vegetables and fruit, including unsweetened sauces and purees • Frozen vegetables and fruit • Dried vegetables and fruit • Prepackaged products listing a vegetable or fruit (not sugar) as the first ingredient • Canned fruit packed in water or 100% juice • Canned vegetables and 100% vegetable juices labelled “low sodium” or “no added sodium” • 100% vegetable and fruit juices with no added sugar
GRAIN PRODUCTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grains (e.g., rolled oats, pot barley, millet, brown basmati rice, wild rice, quinoa) • Noodles or pasta, especially whole grain • Hot and cold cereals, especially whole grain with little or no sugar added (e.g., oatmeal) • Bread, especially whole grain • Crackers, especially whole grain • Gluten-free options • Pre-packaged products listing a grain, especially a whole grain, as the first ingredient

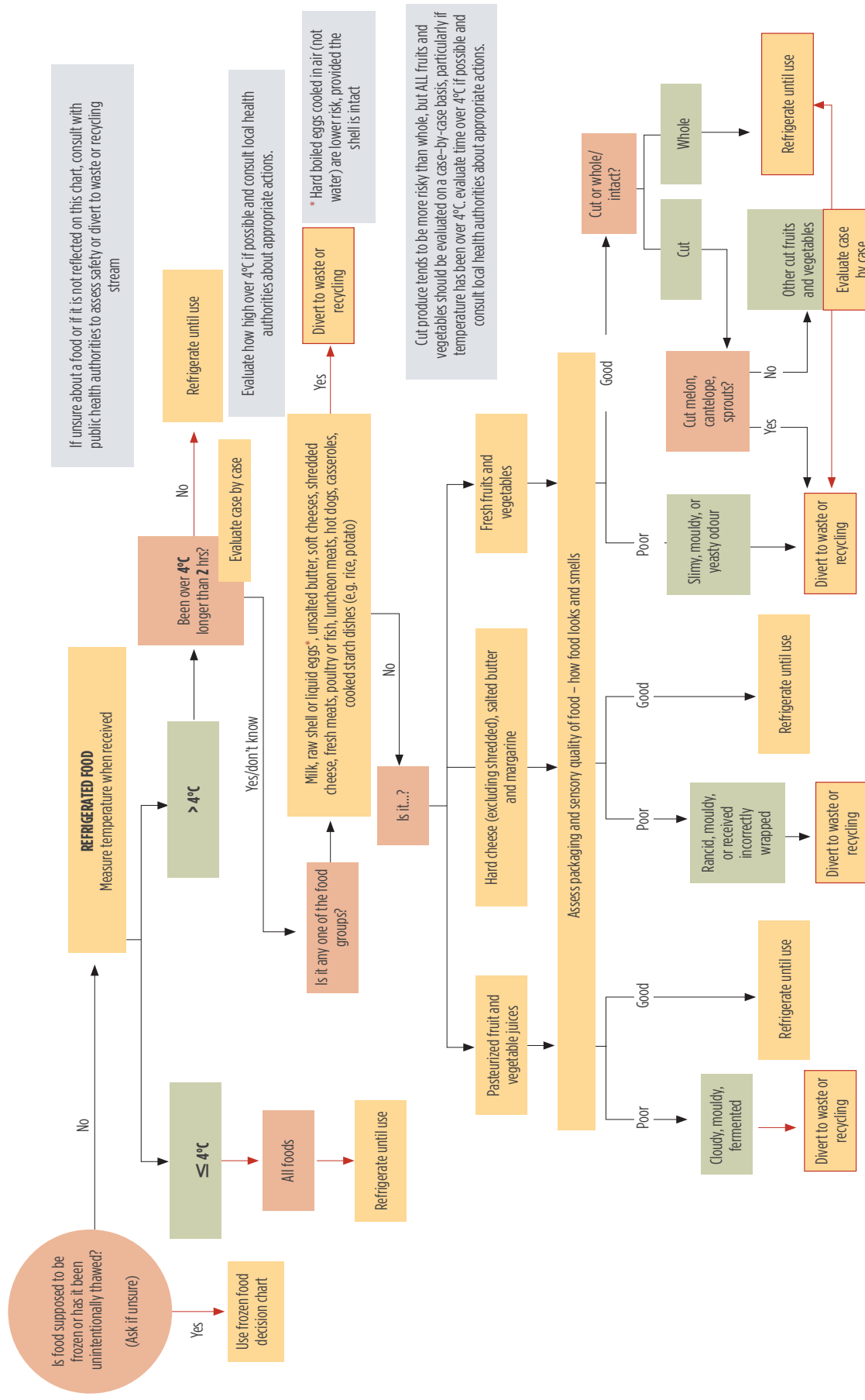
FOOD CATEGORIES	HEALTHY VERSIONS
HIGH PROTEIN FOODS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh or frozen meat • Fresh or frozen poultry • Fresh or frozen fish or seafood • Canned poultry, especially chicken or turkey • Canned fish or seafood • Eggs • Dried or canned beans, peas, and lentils • Nuts and seeds and nut and seed butters (e.g., peanut butter, almond butter) • Soy products (e.g., tofu, tempeh) • Lean or extra lean meats and poultry • Pre-packaged meat, poultry, fish, and seafood with little or no added sodium • Nut and seed butters with little or no added sugar and sodium • Nut and seeds with little or no added sugar and sodium
DAIRY AND HIGH CALCIUM FOODS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Milk, including powdered, canned (evaporated) and shelf-stable UHT • Fortified soy beverages • Yogurt • Cheese • Plain or unsweetened milk and milk alternatives (e.g., rice, nut, or coconut 'milks')

FOOD CATEGORIES	HEALTHY VERSIONS
Cooking and baking ingredients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsaturated vegetable oils (e.g., olive, canola, soybean, safflower) • Non-hydrogenated margarine • Flour, especially whole grain (e.g., whole wheat flour), including gluten-free options • Baking powder and baking soda • Spices and herbs; sauces and dressings • Sauces and dressings with little or no added sugar and sodium

Adapted from: BC Centre for Disease Control, Greater Vancouver Food Bank, Food Banks BC. Guidelines for food distribution organizations with grocery or meal programs. Vancouver, BC: BC Centre for Disease Control, Environmental Health Services; 2016 Feb. Available from: bccdc.ca/health-info/food-your-health/healthy-food-access-food-security.

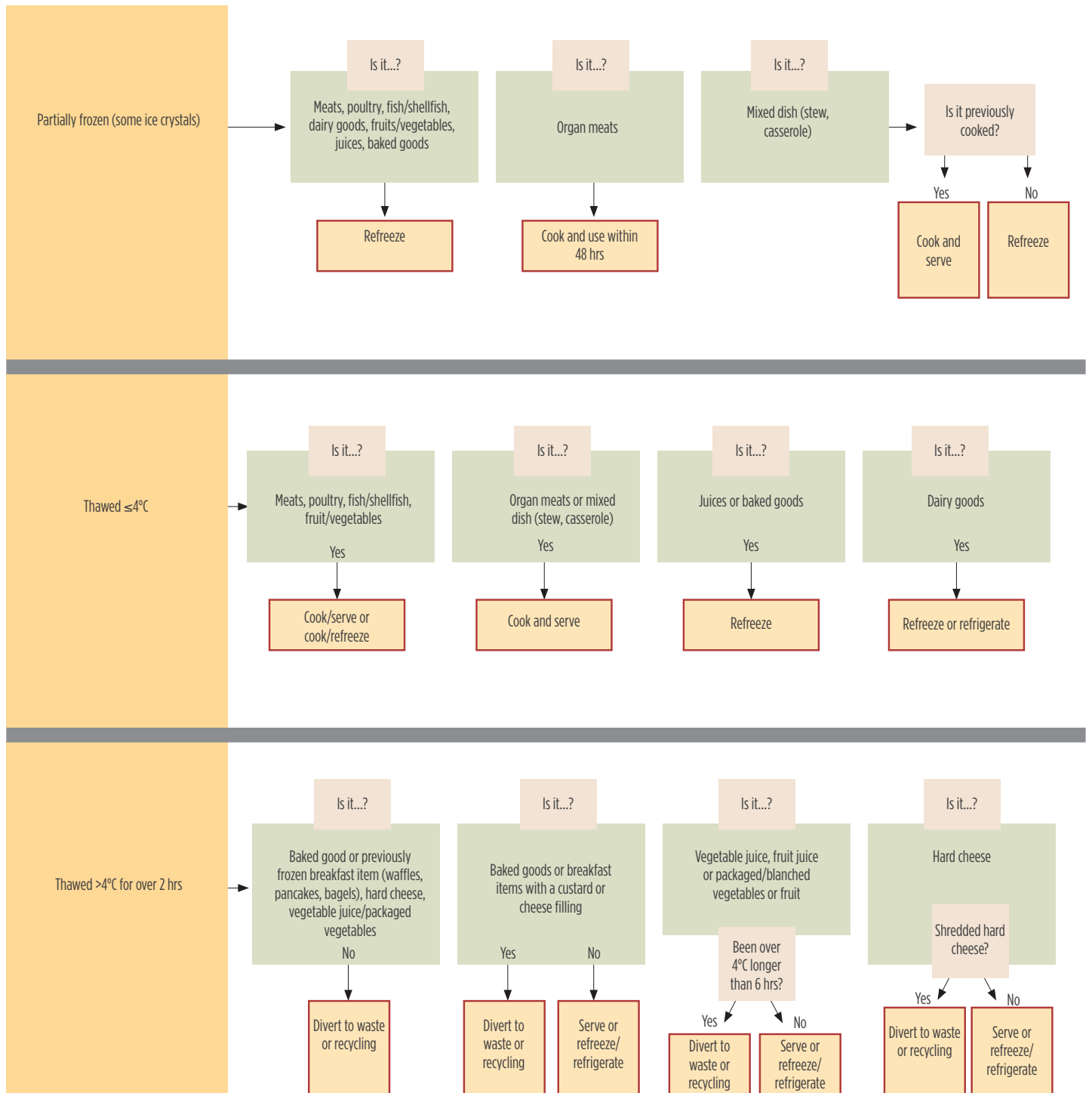
This table is provided as an example– recipient organizations or health authorities may have their own nutrition guidelines.

Appendix B: Food Safety Decisions for Refrigerated Perishable Food



Adapted from: BC Centre for Disease Control, Greater Vancouver Food Bank, Food Banks BC. Guidelines for food distribution organizations with grocery or meal programs. Vancouver, BC: BC Centre for Disease Control, Environmental Health Services; 2016 Feb. Available from: bccdc.ca/health-info/food-your-health/healthy-food-access-food-security

FOOD SAFETY DECISIONS FOR FROZEN PERISHABLE FOOD



Adapted from: BC Centre for Disease Control, Greater Vancouver Food Bank, Food Banks BC. Guidelines for food distribution organizations with grocery or meal programs. Vancouver, BC: BC Centre for Disease Control, Environmental Health Services; 2016 Feb. Available from: bccdc.ca/health-info/food-your-health/healthy-food-access-food-security

Appendix C: Food Banks Canada Guideline for Distributing Food Past the Best Before Date



Guideline for Distributing Food Past the Best Before Date

Time Frame Past Best Before	CATEGORIES											Infant Formula and Nutritional Supplements		
	Produce	Juices and Soft Drinks	Bread & Bakery	Packaged Grains, Cereals & Baked goods	Meat & Seafood	Deli Meats	Prepared Foods	Milk and non-dairy alternatives	Cultured Dairy	Cheese	Fats		General Grocery (shelf stable)	Non-Food
Product Descriptions	Fruit / Vegetables - Whole, Undamaged	Fruit & Vegetable Juices and Soft Drinks	Loaves, Rolls, Bagels, Muffins	Granola, Flours, Rices, Dry Pastas, Cookies, Crackers, Breakfast/Lunch Cereal Bars	Packaged and Bulk Meats, Poultry, Fish	Deli Meats, Sausages	Prepared meals, fresh pasta, cooked meats, Mixed Salads, Cut produce, Soups, Stews	Milk (Fresh, Powdered, Canned, UHT tetrapak); Soy and Almond Beverages	Yogurt, kefir, sour cream	Cottage cheese, cream & soft cheeses, hard cheeses	Butter, Margarine; Cooking Oils	May include: Canned pastas, canned meats/fish, Tomato Sauces, condiments, etc.	Laundry Detergent, Pallets, Body Washes, Deodorants, Diapers, Infant Wipes	Note: These products contain Expiry Dates - not Best Before Dates
Room Temperature	Fresh, whole 1-7 days	less than 2 hours	up to 1 Week	NA	less than 2 hours	less than 2 hours	less than 2 hours	less than 2 hours	less than 2 hours	less than 2 hours	NA	NA	NA	
Refrigerated	Fresh, whole 1 day - 2 months (depending on produce and condition)	7-10 days	2 Weeks	NA	3-4 days whole pieces; 1-2 days ground; 1-2 days seafood/fish	3-5 deli counter; 7 days commercially packaged	2-3 days meal items; 3-4 days cut fruits and vegetables	1-2 Days	1-3 weeks cultured	1-2 weeks cottage cheese; 3-6 months hard blocks; 1-2 months soft blocks	1-5 Months	NA	NA	Do Not Distribute Past Expiry Date
Frozen	1 Year	1 Year	1 Month	NA	beef, lamb pork, veal, whole poultry 12 months; poultry pieces 6 months; ground meat 2-3 months; fish 2-6 Months; and shellfish 2-4 months	2-3 months	4 Months	6 months	1-3 months cultured/textured will change	6-12 months hard cheese blocks; 3-6 month soft blocks	6-12 Months	NA	NA	Do Not Distribute Past Expiry Date
Canned/Jarred/ Bottled	NA	1 Year	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1 Year	NA	NA	1-2 Year	1 Year	1 Year	
Boxed/Bagged	NA	6-12 months	1 Week	6-12 Months	NA	NA	NA	UHT - 6 months*	NA	NA	6-12 Months	1 Year	1 Year	

Used with permission from Food Banks Canada. See next page for explanatory notes.

*Milk powder	Temperature is a critical quality factor for milk powder. Keep milk powder cool.
Best Before Date	This gives consumers information as to when the product is at its best - with sensory qualities as acceptable as the day it was made when stored under appropriate conditions and packaging is intact. Best before dates indicate the shelf life of foods. They are not indicators of food safety.
Expiry Date	Tells consumers that the product may not be providing them with the nutrients expected of the product and they should no longer consume it after that date. Products with expiry dates must not be shared past the date on the packaging.
Products Include	Infant Formula (canned or boxed, liquid or powdered), and many Nutritional Supplements and Meal Replacements (canned, boxed, or ready to use, liquid or powdered). Note that baby foods for older babies and toddlers have best before dates, not expiry dates.

Food Products and their ability to be shared should always be based on:

1. Ensuring the product has been handled safely (ie. Chilled product is kept chilled)
2. Assessing all packaging for integrity (i.e., dents, creases, etc.) based on Food Banks Canada Safe Food Handling Standards
3. That the product is at a level of quality (e.g., taste and smell) that is still worth sharing
4. That the Manufacturer's Branding will not be compromised if the product is shared

Note This information is to be used as a guide only. It was developed based on general knowledge, industry practices and the understanding that best before dates are about sensory quality.

For reference: Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Date Labelling on Pre-packaged Foods, Date Modified: 2013-07-07, Available at:

<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/food/information-for-consumers/fact-sheets/labelling-food-packaging-and-storage/date/eng/1332357469487/1332357545633>

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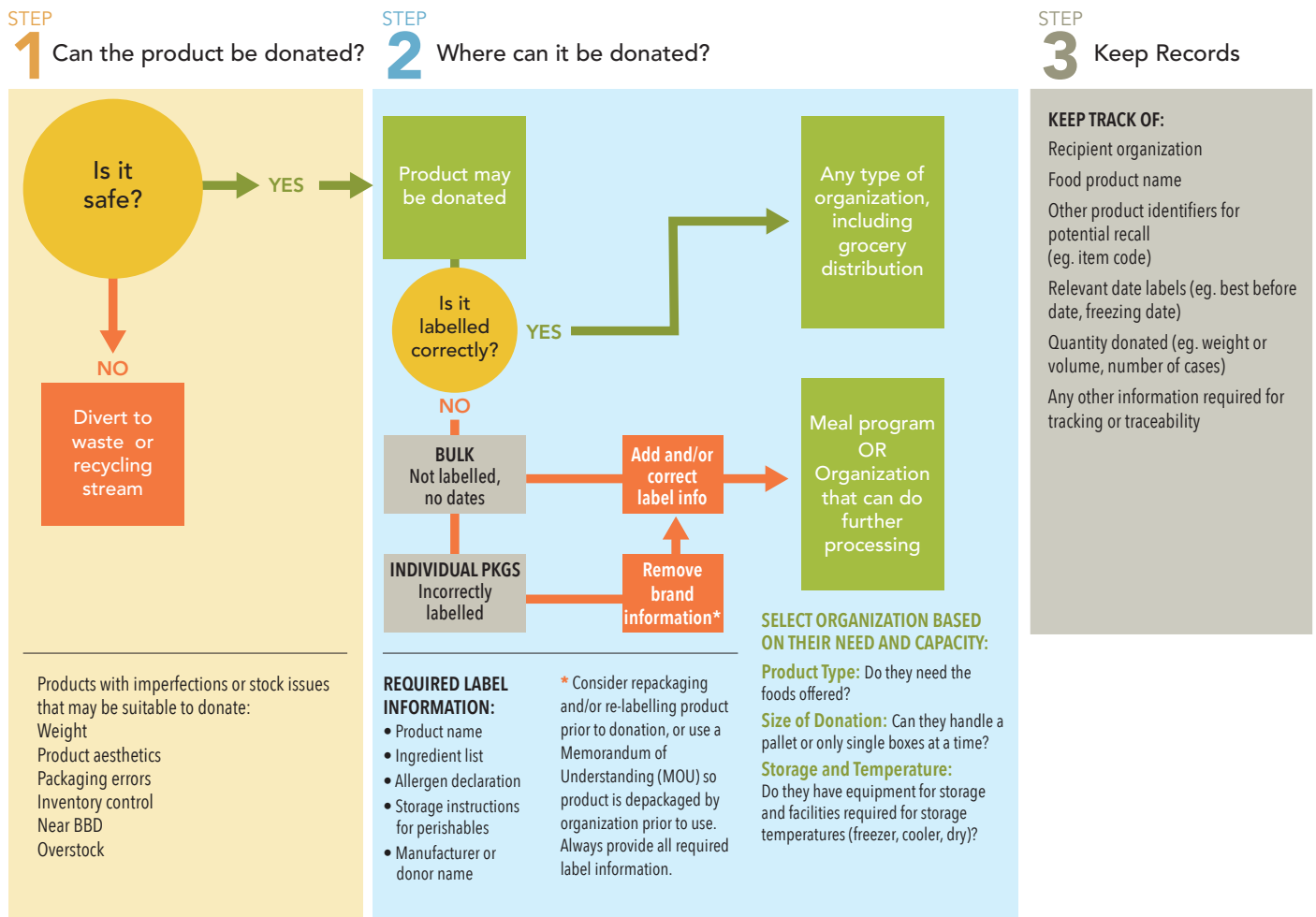
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INFORMATION: Contact Food Banks Canada at 1-877-535-0958 or info@foodbankscanada.ca

Appendix D: Product Donation Guide for Foods That Will Not Be Sold



Adapted from: BC Centre for Disease Control, Greater Vancouver Food Bank, Food Banks BC. Guidelines for food distribution organizations with grocery or meal programs. Vancouver, BC: BC Centre for Disease Control, Environmental Health Services; 2016 Feb. Available from: bccdc.ca/health-info/food-your-health/healthy-food-access-food-security

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- City of Montreal
- City of Toronto
- Food Banks Canada
- Halifax Regional Municipality
- Metro Vancouver
- Metro Richelieu Inc.
- Nature's Path
- Province of British Columbia – Ministry of Environment and Climate Change
- Second Harvest Food Rescue
- Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA)
- Township of Langley

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- Alberta Health
- Dietitians of Canada
- Le ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec (MAPAQ)
- Nova Scotia Environment
- Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
- Food Working Group representatives

*This document is provided for informational purposes only and does not represent official policy of any of the reviewing organizations.

