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NF93-151 Donating Foods

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Donating Foods

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Food banks and soup kitchens request donated food for people in need. Food may also be donated for emergency disaster relief. Food safety should be a concern for people donating or receiving donated foods. Avoiding foodborne illness is particularly important in a disaster when facilities may be minimal or when people have compromised immune systems. Contaminated food does not always taste bad, smell bad, or look bad. This factsheet contains guidelines for people who wish to donate food and for organizations that receive donated foods.

There are three things to look for in a food to be donated or received. First, there should be no evidence of spoilage. For example, produce with soft or brown spots would be unsuitable for donating. Second, the food should be fresh. Freshness dates are often printed on food packages. Only donate foods which you would want to use yourself. Third, commercially canned food can be considered safe if the cans are sound with no dents, bulges, or rust.

Best Foods to Donate and Receive:

1. Foods that are not potentially hazardous include:

- Fruit- high quality fresh, frozen, or commercially canned
- Tomato sauce-plain
- Pickles (commercially prepared)
- Jellies (commercially prepared)
- Relishes (commercially prepared)
- Vegetables-frozen, commercially canned, or high quality fresh
- Commercially canned food mixtures in good condition; no dented, swollen, or rusted cans
- Fresh baked goods without cream or custard fillings or icings
- Dry goods-flour, sugar, cereal, dry beans, lentils, boxed mixes

2. Frozen foods that have not been thawed and refrozen

Foods Not To Be Donated:

1. Foods which require extensive handling include:

- Potato salad
- Tuna salad
- Egg salad
- Chicken salad

2. Foods cooked in large quantities (4-6 quarts or more)

- Soups
- Gravies
- Stews
- Chili
- Sauces
- Large cooked roasts
- Mixed dishes such as casseroles

3. Foods left over from banquets

4. Hot foods should not be donated unless hot holding facilities are provided during transport and at the distribution center. Keep hot foods at or above 140° F

Leftovers

Leftovers are the most dangerous foods because of the possibility that the item was improperly cooled or improperly reheated. Improperly cooled foods cause most foodborne illness outbreaks.

Leftover food must be handled properly to either donate or accept at a donating facility.

- Cold items should be held at 40° F or below during the entire period.
- Hot items must be held at 140° F or above during the entire period.

Moderate caution should be taken when donating or accepting luncheon meats (with preservatives) and cheeses. Meats and cheeses must have been stored under continual refrigeration at 40° F or below. Meats should not be past the "use by" date on the label. Cheeses should have no evidence of spoilage (molds) unless they are aged in a manner where mold is added for flavoring (Roquefort).

Extreme caution should be taken when donating or accepting the following items:

- Raw meats
- Raw poultry
- Dairy products
- Cooked rice or beans
- Eggs
- Fish
- Shellfish
- Cooked potatoes
- Tofu

Proper Handling

Raw meats should have been held no longer than two (2) days in the refrigerator. If meats were frozen initially and defrosted, the defrosting must have been done in the refrigerator or under cold running water.

Only donate or receive unopened dairy products which have been under continual refrigeration and have not yet reached the expiration date.

If cooked dishes of meats, poultry, fish, potatoes, rice, or beans are being donated, they should be immediately refrigerated in shallow layers not exceeding 3 inches in depth. These foods must be held at 40° F or below for no longer than two days.

Eggs, raw or cooked, should be held under continual refrigeration. Cooked eggs should be used within one week; or 2 weeks if the eggs are hard cooked and the shell is intact. Do not donate or accept cracked raw eggs.

Organizations That Receive Donated Food

When receiving foods requiring moderate caution or extreme caution:

- Record who donated the food, what type of food, when it was prepared, and how it was handled (temperature, how was the food cooled, and the length of time it was cooled).
- Inspect the food
- Take the internal temperature of donated food
 - cold foods should be below 40° F
 - hot foods should be above 140° F
- Keep recorded information on file

Conduct a yearly inspection of your organization. Use these questions as a guide for determining the safety and cleanliness of your operation:

- Is the facility clean?
- Are staff using safe recommended food preparation methods?
- Is the equipment clean and in good working order?
- Are storage areas adequate?
- Has the site been inspected by the local health department?
- Have the workers participated in a food safety training?

Donors of Food

Provide the organization that is to receive the donated food the following information for foods listed under moderate caution and extreme caution.

- Name and address of donor
- Type of food
- When the food was prepared
- How the food was cooled

- How long the food was held under refrigeration
- Is the food at 40° F or below ready for pickup?

Very large packages, such as a 50 pound bag of flour, should be kept intact if possible. It is best to keep goods in their original packaging to avoid confusion about the contents. If a large package must be divided, containers should be clean and clearly labeled. Proper food handling techniques are a must when handling all foods.

Liability

Nebraska state law 25-21,189 limits the liability of organizations that donate food or distribute donated food. The law states that if the donating organization believes that the food is safe, it is not liable for damages unless it can be proven that the donor was negligent or reckless.

References:

Guidelines for Donating Foods. Central Atlantic States Association of Food and Drug Officials. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Food Handling Is A Risky Business. University of Massachusetts Cooperative Extension System.

File NF151 under FOODS AND NUTRITION

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