

Food Donation Guidance

Vermont's Universal Recycling Law bans throwing food and food scraps into trash. Consider donating surplus food to food rescue organizations in your community. Donating food can help Vermonters experiencing food insecurity, lower your trash and diversion costs and potentially qualify your business for a tax deduction.

Only donate surplus food that has been handled properly and has not been served. Follow these guidelines when donating food.



If you need help accessing or understanding this information, contact FoodLodging@vermont.gov.

Donating Food Safely and Safe Food Handling

Time and Temperature Controls

Keep potentially hazardous foods like meat, dairy, seafood, tofu, eggs and cut produce at a safe temperature. Foods stored in the temperature **danger zone between 41°F and 135°F** can spoil, grow bacteria, and may make people sick. Use this table to decide whether you can donate food based on how you have stored it.

Food Type	Storage Requirements	Foods that Cannot be Donated
Prepared Foods	Stored at 41°F or below Frozen at 0°F or below	• Foods kept in the danger zone for more than 2 hours • Previously reheated foods • Previously served foods
Chilled perishable, prepackaged foods (like dairy and juice)	Stored at 41°F or below	• Foods kept in the danger zone for more than 2 hours • Damaged or bulging packaging • Foods stored in non-food grade packaging
Meat, poultry and fish	Stored at 41°F or below	• Foods kept in the danger zone for more than 2 hours • Foods stored in non-food grade packaging

Food Type	Storage Requirements	Foods that Cannot be Donated
Frozen meat, poultry and fish	Frozen at 0°F or below	• Foods kept in the danger zone for more than 2 hours • Severe freezer burn • Defrosted foods
Whole fresh produce	Stored in a cool, dry and clean area	• Significant decay
Cut fresh produce	Stored at 41°F or below	• Foods kept in the danger zone for more than 2 hours • Color change or decay
Baked goods	Stored in a cool, dry, and clean area	• Foods stored in non-food grade packaging • Moldy or stale products
Canned or boxed foods	Stored in a cool, dry, and clean area	• Damaged or bulging packaging • Home-canned products

Labeling Food for Donation

You must properly label food for donation. Always keep food items in food-grade packaging. Refer to the [Date Marking Toolkit](#) for tips on how to correctly mark the dates on food.

For prepared foods:

- Include an ingredients label, especially for these major allergens: milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, soybeans and sesame.
- You must use date marking and discard prepared food after 7 days. Clearly mark the date food must be discarded.
- Do not donate food that has been refrigerated for 7 days or more.
- Do not donate foods that are frozen, thawed and then refrozen.
 - You can freeze food before donating to “stop the clock” and prevent bacteria growth. Label the package with the date it was frozen.

Non-perishable foods like baked goods and food that comes in cans or boxes will have “best by”, “sell by” or “use by” dates from the manufacturer. These dates are for quality and not necessarily food safety. Food may be safe to donate past the “best by” date.

Recommendations for Tracking Donations

We recommend keeping a log of the food your facility donates to show that you handled it properly. You can use the table below as an example:

Date	Name of Food Donated	Temperature (°F)	Name of Food Rescue Agency
6/10/2026	Deli sandwiches	39 °F	ABC Company
6/11/2026	1 gallon frozen pea soup	40°F	123 Company

Make sure you donate to a food rescue agency that has the equipment to maintain proper food temperatures during transportation, receiving and storage.

Resources

- For help finding a donation site, contact the [Vermont Foodbank](#) at 800-585-2265 or vtfoodbank.com.
- For questions about food safety and handling, reach out to the Health Department's [Food and Lodging Program](#) at 802-863-7221 or by emailing FoodLodging@vermont.gov.
- For more information about donations and the Universal Recycling Law, contact the Department of Environmental Conservation's [Solid Waste Management Program](#) at 802-828-1138 or visit vtrecycles.com.