

FOOD SAFETY GUIDELINES

DEVELOPED BY THE ALBERTA FOOD BANK NETWORK ASSOCIATION



Each year millions of dollars of donated food is distributed by Food Banks¹ across Alberta. Food Banks have become an essential service by providing nutritional food to people in need. While it is important to feed the needy, it is equally important to ensure that food being distributed by Food Banks is safe and suitable for distribution.

The Code of Ethics of the Canadian Association of Food Banks states:

The Food Bank will have the highest regard for the proper and safe storage and handling of food.

a. The Food Bank will sort all food to safely consumable levels before distribution.

b. The Food Bank will seek to encourage safe handling and storage amongst its agencies.

While the following guidelines are designed to assist Food Banks in handling, storing and distributing food, it is essential that Food Banks work closely with local monitoring agents and health inspectors to ensure that they are fulfilling the guidelines, regulations and legislation as they apply to their facility and programs. In all situations, the policy and direction given to local Food Banks by their health inspectors supersedes this document. There may be liability concerns associated with operating Food Banks or handling specific high-risk foods. For example, in Alberta, it is illegal to distribute uninspected meat. Food Banks are encouraged to seek legal advice as appropriate prior to initiating programs. Most jurisdictions require that a Food Bank have a permit or a license to operate.

1. Food Facility Requirements

A. Interior Finishings

Facilities must be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition at all times.

Floors, walls and ceilings should be kept in good repair. There should be adequate lighting in hand washing areas, toilet rooms and areas where food or food ingredients are examined, sorted and stores and utensils are cleaned. Consideration should be given to shielding lights in order to protect against broken glass falling in unpackaged food. Food Banks should be sufficiently ventilated in order to prevent condensation and dripping onto food and food preparation surfaces. Food should not be stored under plumbing pipes or other pipes that could leak onto food and food preparation surfaces.

All refuse should be kept in leakproof, non-absorbent containers that are kept covered with tight fitting lids when stored or not in continuous use. All refuse should be disposed of with sufficient frequency and in a manner to prevent contamination of the salvaged food product and surrounding processing areas.

Effective measures should be taken to protect against the entrance, breeding and presence of rodents, insects and vermin in the Food Bank. Dogs, cats, and other pets should not be allowed in the premises.

B. Personal Cleanliness and Training

All volunteers and staff having contact with food, must maintain a high degree of personal cleanliness and wear clean outer garments. They must wash their hands, or use plastic gloves depending on the type of food handling they are doing. Volunteers and staff should not smoke, drink or eat food in areas where food is being handled and stored.

The manager, employees and/or key volunteers may be trained or receive information from their local health inspector. In turn, these supervisors may train volunteers working in critical areas.

C. Cleanup Equipment

It is recommended that Food Banks work closely with health officials in this regard as requirements vary upon jurisdiction and types of product being handled.

D. Food Equipment

1. All food equipment must be maintained in good repair and be clean and sanitary at all times.
2. Refrigeration Equipment
 - a. Coolers must maintain food at temperatures below 4° C/40° F.
 - b. Freezers must maintain food at temperatures below -18° C/0° F.
3. Food Containers
 - a. Store food in clean containers designed for food storage. Stainless steel pans, aluminum foil pans and food grade plastic containers may be used.
 - b. Food grade, unused plastic bags are recommended for repackaging dry food products.
 - c. Containers that are being re-used must be free of cracks or defects that may make them difficult to properly clean. Containers must be thoroughly washed, rinsed and sanitized between use.
 - d. Aluminum foil pans and other single service containers must be used only once.
4. Food contact surfaces such as countertops and cutting boards must be smooth and easily cleanable.

2. Donated Food Guidelines

The following should be used as a guide in determining whether a particular donated food should be accepted or distributed.

Note: Non-perishable foods will not support the growth of pathogenic microorganisms (i.e. dry foods, unopened commercially canned foods, whole fresh fruits and vegetables, baked goods without perishable fillings).

Perishable foods are foods which will support the growth of pathogenic microorganisms (i.e. meat, poultry, seafood and seafood products, dairy products, soups, sauces, gravies, egg and egg products, baked goods with perishable filling, etc.)

A. Acceptable Foods

1. Non-perishable food items including:
 - commercially canned foods
 - whole fruits and vegetables
 - dry goods (i.e. cereal, crackers, pancake mix, etc.)
2. Donated ready-to-eat cooked foods (e.g. surplus foods from restaurants) may be distributed if:
 - a. the product is not leftover patron's table food
 - b. the product has been maintained below 4° C or above 60° C and protected from contamination at all times, and
 - c. the age of the product does not exceed recommended requirements.

B. Unacceptable Foods

The following must not be distributed by the Food Bank:

1. Perishable foods from premises without a valid Food Establishment Permit.
2. Unacceptable Canned Foods:
 - a. foods in bulging, rusting, leaking or severely dented cans
 - b. cans without labels, unless there is reliable assurance as to the contents of the can
 - c. canned infant formula after the expiry date on the can, and
 - d. home-canned foods (see notes on page 6).

3. Perishable food that has been held at unsafe temperatures (i.e. between 4° C and 60° C).
4. Food that has been contaminated by insects, rodents and chemicals.
5. In most jurisdictions, uninspected meat, poultry and wild game meat is not to be kept in, or distributed by, Food Banks. If there are any doubts whether meat or poultry product has been inspected do not accept the product, or hold the product and contact your local health inspector.

3. Special Notes Concerning Perishable & High Risk Food Items

Perishable food items include potentially hazardous foods such as dairy products, meat products, prepared and semi-prepared food. Due to the potential health risks of these types of food, Food Banks are urged to discuss this issue with their local health officials to ensure a good understanding of the risks and handling of this product. Arrangements should be made with health jurisdictions, or other agencies, to provide safe food handling courses.

- * Perishable food must be kept at appropriate temperatures at all times. (i.e. less than 4° C or above 60° C)
- * Milk and milk products (including cream and cream products), ice cream, frozen desserts, yogurt and similar foods must be pasteurized, held and distributed in their original unopened containers.
- * Meat and meat products should be held and distributed in their original unopened packages. If large pieces of meat have been donated and further processing is required, consult with your local health inspector to ensure that your facility is suitable for meat processing.

Particular attention must be given to the handling of raw meat.
- * Poultry and poultry products – if large birds are donated and cutting is necessary then precautions should be taken as mentioned previously handling and processing of the meat and meat products. Particular attention must be given to handling the poultry because of Salmonella concerns.
- * Packaging wrap used for the finished product should be made of a material that will not contaminate the food product (i.e. food grade).
- * Eggs and egg products should be refrigerated. Visibly cracked eggs should be discarded.
- * Home canned preserves (jams, jellies and other high sugar content type foods) may be accepted as donations and distributed in some jurisdictions. For example, Saskatchewan Farmers' Market Association has guidelines on what constitutes an appropriate container for home canned goods. Check with your local health inspector.
- * The following foods are not to be accepted for distribution: unpasteurized dairy products, home canned vegetables or home canned meat products.
- * All donated fish products must be caught under a commercial license.

4. Transportation Guidelines

Food Banks should ensure that food transport vehicles and food transport containers are maintained in a clean and sanitary condition. The following procedures are required during the transport of foods to the food facility.

1. Keep perishable foods either refrigerated or frozen while in transport.
2. Transport time for perishable foods should not exceed one hour.
3. Perishable foods must be refrigerated to 4° C (40° F) or lower, or frozen to -18° C (0° F) or lower before transporting foods to other facilities.

5. Receiver/Shipper Guidelines

The following procedures are recommended:

1. Inspect food upon arrival at the food facility to ensure that all products comply with this guideline. Foods that do not comply must be discarded immediately.
2. Keep detailed and accurate records of donated products received by the facility. Records may include date and time of receipt, product temperature at time of receipt, origin of product (name and address), and date of production (for ready-to-eat foods).
3. Do not accept foods that have been improperly refrigerated, packaged or labelled.
4. Ensure that there is sufficient acceptable storage space at the Food Bank before accepting foods.
5. Place food requiring refrigeration in a refrigerator or freezer immediately upon receipt. Care must be taken to ensure the refrigerator or freezer is not overloaded, to allow for proper air circulation.

1. These guidelines have been developed to assist Alberta Food Banks in the safe handling and distribution of food. Soup kitchens, shelters and other food programs are encouraged to contact their local health inspectors to discuss specifics of their operations.

For the purpose of this document, a Food Bank is defined as a charitable non-profit distribution organization whose usual activity is:

- a) the large-scale collection of food;
- b) the large-scale distribution of such food among other feeding organizations in their geographical area;
- c) providing food directly to people in need, if there are no organizations in the community whose activities are described in a) or b).

Adapted September 28th, 1998 from:
Guidelines for the Distribution of Donated Food (Draft) – Capital Health
Food Safety Guidelines for Food Banks – Regina Food Bank

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