



TC Food Justice

Safe and Healthy Food Donation Guidelines

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*Adapted from Loving Spoonful's **Healthy, Safe Food Donation Guidelines**
Reducing food waste and hunger in the Twin Cities area*

Our Mission

We seek out innovative ways to combat hunger issues and reduce food waste in the greater Twin Cities area by being a link between those willing to help and those in need.

The Issues

Food Insecurity

The United States Department of Agriculture uses the following definition of food insecurity: *“Food insecurity is limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.”*¹

According to Feeding America, approximately 12 percent of residents in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties experienced food insecurity in 2014.² Local students are struggling as well; 17.5 percent of University of Minnesota students reported in a recent survey that they have worried about running out of money for food³.

Malnutrition and Obesity

Historically, malnutrition has been associated with undernutrition or hunger. Hunger is still very much a tragic reality facing the world community in the 21st century. However, malnutrition is increasingly taking the form of overweight and obesity. In the United States, low-income people are at increased risk of this form of malnutrition. The link between poverty and obesity can in part be attributed to the relatively high cost of nutrient-dense fruits, vegetables, meats, and whole grains, versus cheaper-per-calorie

¹ “Nutrition Challenges,” World Health Organization. <http://www.who.int/nutrition/challenges/en>

² “Food Insecurity in Minnesota,” FeedingAmerica. <http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2014/overall/minnesota/county>

³ “2015 College Student Health Survey Report.” Boynton Health Service, University of Minnesota. http://www.bhs.umn.edu/surveys/survey-results/2015/UofMTwinCities_CSHSReport_2015.pdf

but nutrient-deficient convenience foods, sweets, and sugar-sweetened beverages.⁴ Yet another factor may be the dependence of this population on food shelves and other hunger relief agencies; these charitable programs face similar challenges in procuring and storing fresh and healthy foods.

Food Waste

Food waste is a human injustice when discarded foods could have fed a family in need. Food waste is also a serious environmental concern; as the single largest component of landfills, wasted food emits a potent greenhouse gas (methane) into the atmosphere. Methane emissions are believed to play a significant role in global warming.⁵

The Guidelines

The purpose of this document is to clarify what foods will be accepted on TCFJ food rescues. These guidelines will assist donors and volunteers in determining which donations align with TCFJ's dual mission to ensure everyone in our community has access to healthy food while also protecting the environment by reducing food waste sent to landfills.

⁴ "Why Low-Income and Food Insecure People are Vulnerable to Obesity," Food Research and Action Center. <http://frac.org/initiatives/hunger-and-obesity/why-are-low-income-and-food-insecure-people-vulnerable-to-obesity>

⁵ "U.S. Food Waste Challenge Frequently Asked Questions," USDA Office of the Chief Economist. <http://www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/faqs.htm>

Preferred Foods List

TCFJ believes healthy lives are built from fresh, whole, minimally-processed foods. The following list highlights the foods we will most eagerly accept to support our goal to ensure healthy food access for everyone in our community.

Fresh or frozen:

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Soups and sandwiches
- Legumes, nuts, and seeds
- Low-sugar baked goods (breads, bagels, etc.)

Less Acceptable Foods

The high nutrient-density foods like those listed above are ideal for supporting a healthy weight and overall health and wellbeing. Foods that high in sugar, fat, and salt but low in vitamins, minerals, and fiber (low-nutrient density foods) contribute to obesity and diet-related chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer. While TCFJ understands and respects that all foods work toward mitigating hunger, we will minimize our handling of low-nutrient density foods in order to reserve our limited resources for healthier items that are often in shorter supply at food shelves and shelters. See the Food Acceptance Guidelines at the end of this guide for a list of foods our volunteers may not accept.

Safety and Quality

Rule of thumb

Our volunteers are taught to only accept donations of food that they would consider good enough to serve to their own mothers.

Product dating

According to the USDA, “Sell-By,” “Best if Used By,” and “Use By” dates typically apply to the peak quality of a product⁶. Most foods can be consumed safely after these dates if they are handled following proper food safety procedures (such as temperature storage guidelines for meat, poultry, and eggs). TCFJ will generally accept foods past these dates, but volunteer may decline anything that appears below acceptable quality.

Cross Contamination

Fresh produce can be a health risk if it has come into contact with other foods, surfaces, utensils, hands, gloves, or packaging that are contaminated with harmful bacteria (most frequently from raw meat, poultry, and eggs). This can lead to serious, even fatal, foodborne illnesses such as Salmonella and E. coli poisoning. For this reason, fresh produce should never be stored near meat, poultry, eggs or seafood. Fresh foods should always be handled by clean hands or uncontaminated gloves. TCFJ will not accept fruits, vegetables, or any foods that may have been affected by cross-contamination. For more information, please refer to the Minnesota Department of Health’s [Prevent Cross-Contamination Guide](#)⁷.

Food Acceptance Guidelines

⁶ “Food Product Dating,” USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service.
<http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/food-labeling/food-product-dating/food-product-dating>

⁷ “Prevent Cross-Contamination Guide.” Minnesota Department of Health.
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/foodsafety/clean/xcontamination.pdf>

We accept:

- Fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables
- Beans, legumes, and nuts
- Low-sugar baked goods (breads, bagels, etc.)
- Soups and sandwiches- still fresh and good quality
- Perishable foods before or near the “use by” date

We will not accept:

- Moldy, decaying, badly bruised, or limp foods
- Any foods potentially exposed to contamination
- Highly-processed foods (i.e. chips, most canned foods, prepackaged frozen meals)
- High-sugar foods (i.e. cakes, candy, soda, juice)
- Foods that are part of a recall
- Foods for which safe food handling processes were violated (i.e. perishable foods left unrefrigerated)