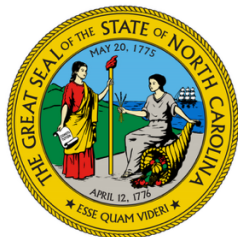


Guidance for Donating Food During Emergencies

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Public Health
Environmental Health Section



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**
Division of Public Health

The objective of this guidance is to provide best practices for food that is donated or offered as not for sale during an emergency. This document provides information on what standards should be met and what foods cannot be donated. This document is intended to assist local health departments, community organizations, and others in proper food safety practices and control measures needed to provide safe donated meals.

Introduction

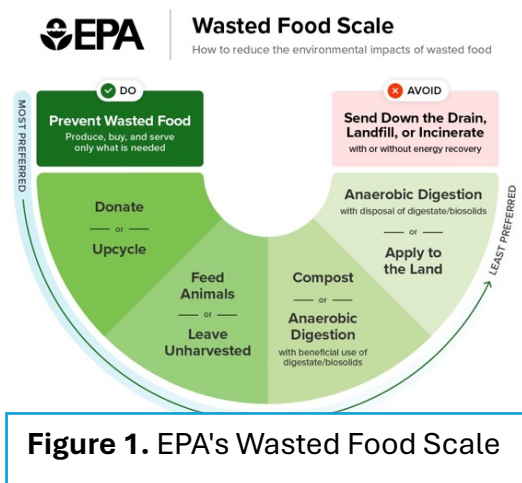


Figure 1. EPA's Wasted Food Scale

In times of crisis, the generosity of individuals and communities exemplifies the meaning behind teamwork. When disaster strikes or circumstances leave neighbors in need, the simple act of donating food can provide essential nourishment. Donated food plays a crucial role in supporting communities, alleviating hunger, and promoting sustainability. Donating food occupies the second tier of the EPA's Wasted Food Scale shown in **Figure 1**. When nutritious food is salvaged, redistributed, or donated, it not only feeds individuals but also prevents food from going to waste. Effective communication about donated food ensures transparency, fosters trust, and maximizes the impact of donations. This guideline aims to facilitate effective communication surrounding the donation of food for

emergencies and shelters, outlining key strategies to maximize impact and ensure that every contribution makes a meaningful difference.

Requirements and Considerations When Donating Food

In the wake of emergencies such as natural disasters, pandemics, or other crises, shelters and relief organizations play a vital role in providing safety, shelter, and sustenance to those affected. Donated food serves as a lifeline during these challenging times, offering nourishment and comfort to individuals and families facing uncertainty and upheaval. Foods that can be safely donated include packaged food such as non-perishable cans, undamaged boxes of pasta or crackers, boxes of cereal, pre-packaged baked goods, and bottled beverages. Prepared food can be donated if it comes from a permitted restaurant or other food establishment. Consider cultural preferences and dietary practices when communicating about donated food. If necessary, provide translations or culturally appropriate materials for diverse communities. Also respect religious or cultural dietary restrictions and preferences. Communicate guidelines for safe handling, storage, and distribution of donated food. Ensure that donated food meets safety standards and regulations before distribution.

Donated foods that require temperature control must meet the following criteria:

- ✓ **Cold food** must be maintained cold at 41° F or below prior to and during service.
- ✓ **Hot food** must be maintained hot at 135° F or above prior to and during service.
- ✓ **Cool** any hot foods that are left over to 71°F within 2 hours and to 41° F within the next 4 hours for a total of 6 hours.
- ✓ **Track** the temperature of the food before and after transportation, and the amount of time between locations.
- ✓ The donor should verify that the recipient **has the proper facilities** to meet all the requirements during transport, storage, and reheating to maintain the proper temperature of the food.
 - Encourage recipients **to inspect donated food** for any signs of spoilage or damage before consumption.
 - The donor facility **must be permitted** by the local health department.
 - If the donated food **is transported by a third party**, the transporter must meet the requirements under the hot and cold holding temperatures listed above.

The following are examples of foods that cannot be donated:

- × **Foods that are Past Shelf Life** – The donated foods that require refrigeration must not be used or consumed: past the shelf-life/expiration date, past 7 days after preparation, or past 7 days after removing from its original package.
- × **Damaged Foods**
 - Canned foods that are heavily dented on the rim or seam.
 - Packaged foods with missing or incomplete source/manufacturer label.
- × **Distressed Foods** – Foods that have been exposed to fire, flooding, excessive heat, smoke, radiation, and other environmental contamination, or food that has been held in prolonged storage must not be donated.
- × **Previously Served Foods** – Foods previously served to consumers may not be donated.
- × **Home Prepared Foods** – No home-prepared foods can be donated to be served or consumed.

Collaborate and Educate

Collaboration with food donors, community organizations, and local authorities is critical for maximizing the impact of communication efforts related to donated food. Local authorities can provide regulatory guidance and logistical support. By working together and leveraging collective resources, expertise, and networks, stakeholders can reach more people in need, design holistic approaches, enhance outreach, coordinate efforts, and promote shared accountability toward common goals. Access to healthy food options is often limited in underserved communities, contributing to health disparities and inequalities. By providing education and resources for healthy eating, communities can address these disparities and promote health equity by empowering individuals to make healthier choices regardless of socioeconomic status or geographic location.

Providing information and resources to empower individuals and communities to make healthy food choices is essential for promoting better health outcomes, preventing malnutrition, fostering empowerment and autonomy, reducing health disparities, promoting sustainability, and achieving social and economic benefits for society. Effective communication about donated food is fundamental for building trust, promoting dignity, and maximizing the impact of donations. By following these best practices, organizations can ensure that their communication efforts support their mission of improving health outcomes, alleviating hunger, reducing health disparities, and strengthening communities.