

Making the Most of Your Food Donations

In times of economic stress, individuals and families are increasingly forced to rely on food pantries and other sources of emergency food assistance, like meal sites and shelters, to meet their basic needs.

Collecting food to donate to a local food bank or food pantry is just one way to contribute to preventing hunger in your community. Keep the following tips in mind to enhance the quality and nutritional value of food donations in your community.

Always check with your local food bank or food pantry to determine their donation policy, preferences, and needs.

Food Items

Consider collecting healthier combinations of food donations to help meet recipients' and/or family food needs. In general avoid sugary cereals, salty noodle mixes, and fruit-flavored beverages, and choose foods that have a stable shelf life, are full of nutrients and are easy to prepare. Some pantries might also welcome fresh produce.

- Whole grain, low-sugar cereals such as plain instant oatmeal, whole grain Os, and bran flakes.
- Whole grain or enriched pasta and instant rice—either brown or enriched. Boxed noodle and rice dishes can be an easy starting point for a one-dish meal.
- Whole grain crackers (especially reduced-sodium) and popcorn.
- Canned vegetables, especially those without added salt.
- Fruits canned in juice, unsweetened applesauce, 100-percent fruit juice and dried fruit such as raisins or raisins.
- Spaghetti sauce, salsa and canned beans, including baked beans.
- Canned meats. Food pantries tend to receive a lot of canned salmon or tuna, so consider other meats such as canned chicken, ham or beef. Do not donate meat canned at home.
- Peanuts and peanut butter.
- Reduced-sodium broth and soups.
- Low-fat salad dressings or spreads, and condiments such as ketchup or mustard.

Some pantries may also be in need of **non-food personal hygiene items**, such as toilet paper, toothbrushes & toothpaste, facial tissue, paper towels, soap, shampoo, laundry detergent, disposable diapers, and sanitary napkins.

Keep in Mind

- Home canned foods, and meat or eggs that have not been handled by licensed food processors should not be donated.
- Consider donating cash to food pantries. Pantries can often get more for their dollars, address shortages and needs, and focus on high quality products with some extra financial assistance.

Strategies for sourcing fresh produce donations:

- Consider “planting a row for the hungry” in your home, church, school, or community garden.
- Start a food pantry garden to grow food for your pantry donations – contact your local UW-Extension, Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Program for garden support.
- Collect unsold produce from your local farmers market or directly from your local farmers.
- Donate seeds or seedlings.
- Donate unclaimed community supported agriculture (CSA) shares.