

FOOD DONATION DATE GUIDELINES



Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County is a non-profit 501(c)3 charitable organization that provides food for more than 400,000 people each month through our network of community partners who distribute that food to food-insecure men, women, and children in all 34 cities. Your donations are protected under the Good Samaritan Law and may be tax-deductible. Each time you donate, you help our mission by providing food and personal care items that are unsellable but still safe for consumption. These food items may be close to code date, dented cans, mislabeled products, overstock, etc.

We kindly request that you keep these guidelines in mind when making a food donation.

GENERAL DONATION REQUIREMENTS

- Donations must be first generation, packaged in first use, food- grade packaging and has not been previously served to the public.
- All donations must be from regulated businesses or otherwise meet federal, state and local regulations.

INTERPRETING LABEL DATES

This handy reference guide is a suggestion based on federal health standards. **ALWAYS** use your best judgment when giving away food- if you are in doubt, throw it out! This is simply the maximum time the food product is considered safe.

Expiration or “Use By” Date: Last day the product should be eaten or used for assured quality.

- Phrase most often: “Do not use after (date).”
- Includes baby formula and baby foods

Freshness or “Sell by Date”: Last recommended date of sale that allows ample home storage time.

- Phrase most often used: “Sell by (date).”
- Includes milk, yogurt, and eggs

“Best if used by” Date: Date after which a product is not likely to be at peak quality or flavor.

DENTED CAN GUIDELINES

Only small, shallow dents away from seams, rims, and edges are acceptable. Cans must have intact labels, no leaks, pitting rust, foul odors, swelling, or bulging. Reject cans with sharp dents on seams/rims, severe dents that weaken the can, swelling, rust with pitting, leaks, bad odors, spurting liquid, or missing/illegible labels.

COLD STORAGE & INSPECTION

All refrigerated food must be kept at or below 40°F and visually and/or sensorially inspected before donation to ensure they are fresh, safe, and free from spoilage.

References used: USDA Food-Safety-Facts Sheet/Food Labeling, Food Keeper Guide, Food Keeper App

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Product Perishable Products	Donation Deadline:
Butter	1 month
Yogurt	5 days
Cheese (Soft – goat, feta, brie)	1 week
Cheese (Hard – parmesan, gouda)	2 weeks
Cheese (Cream)	1 week
Cheese (Cottage)	1 week
Coffee Creamer (Liquid, refrigerated)	1.5 weeks
Eggs	2.5 weeks
Juice (Refrigerated)	1.5 weeks
Milk	3 days
Prepared salads containing egg, chicken, tuna, ham or macaroni salads	2 days
Side dishes such as cooked vegetables, rice or potatoes	2 days
Guacamole	3 weeks
Hummus	1.5 months
Fruit, cut	2 days
Store cooked/prepared convenience meals	2 days
Sour Cream	1.5 weeks
Pudding (Refrigerated)	3 Days
Most meat products distributed by the food bank are frozen on or before their "sell-by" date. The following guidelines apply only in rare cases when meat is unfrozen .	
Lunch Meats/Hot Dogs	1 week
Bacon	3 Days
Produce (Refrigeration slows down the ripening process and preserves freshness)	Visual Inspection - Should not have: mold, slimy or wet texture, unusual odor, discoloration, soft or mushy spots, cracked or damaged skin
Fresh Bakery Goods (Do not require refrigeration unless they contain perishable ingredients)	Visual Inspection – Should not have mold, unusual odor or texture

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Product	Donation Deadline:
Shelf Stable Product	
Cans & Bottles with low acidity (Canned meats, stews, soups, vegetables...)	2 years
Cans & Bottles with high acidity (Juice, tomatoes, sauerkraut, fruit)	9 months
Milk & Soy Milk (Shelf stable)	1.5 months
Juice (Bottle, shelf stable)	4.5 months
Coffee – whole bean ground	3 months
Instant	1 year
Water	1 year
Carbonated Beverages – canned	4.5 months
plastic bottle	3 months
Cereal	6 Months
Baking Ingredients - Boxed or bagged (Cake mixes, flour, baking soda)	6 Months
Condiments Ketchup, BBQ sauce, mustard, pickles, salad dressing	6 Months
Mayonnaise	3 months
Dry Goods – Boxed or bagged (pasta, beans, white rice, spices)	1 year
Boxed or bagged (brown rice, lentils, nuts)	6 Months
Jams, Jellies, Preserves	6 Months
Peanut Butter	1 year
Snacks – Cookies	1.5 months
Chips	1 month
Popcorn, granola bars, toaster pastries, jerky	6 Months
Over the Counter Medication	Throw Away
Vitamins & Supplements	Before Expiration Date
Baby Food & Formula	Throw Away
Alcoholic Beverages (Kombucha is safe to distribute up to its expiration date)	Throw Away
Non-food items health & beauty -	Before Expiration Date - Using expired items may reduce effectiveness or cause skin/health issues. When in doubt— check the label or discard anything that looks, smells, or feels off.