

# Community Pantries

## Introduction

In recent years, community pantries have been increasing in numbers to help alleviate local food security issues. Most can be accessed 24/7 and encourage a take only what you need principle.

The following information provides guidance for community groups, and volunteers on how to handle food donations safely.

## Guidance for Operators and Volunteers

- Locate donation site in an area accessible to all.
- Construct from smooth, non-porous, easily cleanable materials.
- Shelves and surfaces holding food should be of material that is easy to clean and disinfect and is durable.
- Coolers or insulated boxes are not suitable, as they cannot keep food at a consistent temperature.
- If intending to provide perishable foods in controlled temperature appliances (fridge/freezer):
  - keep fridges between 0°C and 4°C
  - in order to ensure frozen foods stay frozen it is recommended that freezers be maintained at -18°C or lower
  - consider interiors with metal or shatterproof shelves
  - add thermometers for temperature monitoring
  - have plan for power outages (notification, relocation of food, back up source, etc.).

*Provide contact information (i.e. poster or sign) for donators and users to report issues.*

Monitor your pantry often to ensure:

- it is clean, with no spills, pests, animal droppings or gnawed packaging.
- proper fridge and freezer temperatures are maintained.
- there are no rotting food or foods unsuitable as per donation guidance below.
- if waste or recycling receptacles are provided, ensure they are cleaned and emptied often.

## Guidance for Food Donations

During sub-zero temperatures, donations should be limited to foods that are not damaged by freezing. Cans and other shelf stable liquid containers may swell when frozen affecting food safety.

### Don't Donate These Items

- perishable food items (requiring fridge or freezer storage if no fridge/freezer on site)
- food without labels or in damaged packages (dented or bulging cans, torn packaging, cracked jars)
- food that is contaminated by pests, chemicals or anything else
- home-prepared foods, home-canned foods or leftovers
- expired baby formula or perishable foods
- open food or partially consumed product
- mouldy or rotten foods

### Donate These Items

- food purchased from approved food establishments
- foods stored in original, sealed containers with labels and in good condition
- non-perishable foods (do not need to be stored in the fridge)
- perishable foods – place in fridge and/or freezer
- donations of non-food items should be kept separate from food items (cleaning supplies, pet supplies, etc.).

## For More Information

Contact your local Environment and Climate Change office to speak with a Public Health Officer

<https://novascotia.ca/nse/dept/regional-office-locations.asp>

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