

Food Safety Guide



About this Guide

Who is this guide for?

This guide has been prepared for members of the Aotearoa Food Rescue Alliance and is available for download at www.afra.org.nz/food-safety-guide.

Why read this guide?

The purpose of the AFRA Food Safety Guide is to assist member organisations in protecting the safety and dignity of recipients who consume rescued food. It is aimed to help uphold the public perception of food rescue organisations and make it easier to comply with government food safety expectations.

While food rules under the Food Act 2014 apply only to food that is traded, & not donated, food safety is still important for our sector. The Ministry of Primary Industries has reviewed and offered comments on this guidance.

What is food safety?

Food safety is about preventing food from causing illness or harm. Food can be unsafe if it contains certain 'hazards', which fall into three categories:

- (1) Biological (bugs): certain bugs can make people sick.
Food can be unsafe if it has high enough levels of these bugs.
- (2) Chemical: Many chemicals can make people sick if in or on food
- (3) Physical (foreign): glass, metal or other sharp objects can sometimes get into food and cause harm.

Acknowledgements

This guide has been produced with significant input by Kaibosh and KiwiHarvest - thank you to the teams for creating great resources which we have been able to share here.

Linked Resources

There are linked resources in this guide which won't be available on published copies. To access all linked resources visit www.afra.org.nz/food-safety-guide

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Photo credit: Just Zilch



Rescuing Food

All parties within the donation and logistical chain are responsible for ensuring food is kept safe and suitable for human consumption. It is important to have clear guidelines on what food can be rescued and how to ensure its safety. We suggest that staff members who manage donor relationships or pick-ups should familiarise themselves with this section and ensure that food donors are aware of this information.

Good Samaritan Clause - s 352, Food Act 2014

Also known as *Immunity of Food Donors*, this clause applies to businesses who donate food they would normally sell. Providing that food is safe and 'fit-for-purpose' when it is donated, and that it comes with any information needed to keep it safe and suitable, a donor is protected from liability under the Food Act 2014.

1. Food is considered **unsafe** if it is likely to cause the person eating it harm.
2. Food is considered **unsuitable** if it is contaminated, deteriorated, in a condition that affects its intended use or if people can't tell what is in it.

Which goods can be accepted?

Food that should not be donated/distributed:

- Food past its 'use-by' date (more on page 14).
- Food that may have been opened, has damaged packaging or broken seals, or rusty, dented or bulging cans (see following info).
- Food that has clear signs of spoilage e.g., mould, rot, discolouration.
- Packaged food that has had its original label removed.
- Food that has been thawed and then refrozen.
- General rubbish e.g. cut scraps or floor sweepings.
- Food that is subject to a current recall notice: a list of recalled foods can be found [here](#).
- Home-prepared food.
- Plate waste from hospitality is not safe or suitable for donation.
- Food types that are high risk i.e. AFRA does NOT recommend the distribution of shellfish (more on page 11).

Safe handling and storage:

- Packaging should cover food (and have been used for food only).
- Food items should be separated from non-food items.
- Raw food is separated from cooked/ready-to-eat food.
- Ensure hot food for donation is thoroughly cooked and kept above 60°C.
- Meat should be hard-frozen when received. Ensure other frozen foods are still hard-frozen when received.
- Chilled foods for donation must be maintained in the chill chain at or below 5°C.
- Where possible, **keep food that may contain allergens separated from other food** (more information in section 3).
- Mislabelled items or items with missing labels may be donated provided necessary corrective information is provided to the rescue organisation, and passed on to recipients,
- Unpackaged food items like deli or bakery goods can be donated if food safety practices are followed and they are appropriately packaged for donation (e.g., bread in paper bags) to ensure safe handling and inclusion of relevant instructions.



Photo credit: Kaibosh

Food donors should inform receiving food rescue organisations of any special conditions relating to donated food, for example, if food is safe to eat only for a limited time, if the food requires special handling or storage, if any unlisted allergens are present or if reasons for previous recall exist.

For further information, please see MPI 's [“Donations of food from commercial sources”](#) and Annex 2 of [OPMCSA's Food Rescue Report](#), which outlines more specific considerations for specific food donor industries.

More on damaged packaging: Are dented cans ok?

Products with significantly damaged packaging are unsuitable and potentially unsafe so the Good Samaritan clause of the Food Act may not apply. In some situations, determining acceptable damage is subjective. Depending on the nature of the damage, food safety risks may exist – e.g. cans with compromised seals may allow bacteria to infiltrate. AFRA strongly urges a conservative approach to receiving and distributing food that may potentially be compromised.

Each food rescue organisation will have a way of handling dented cans, but we recommend this advice from [Love Food Hate Waste](#): “If a tin has a small dent, but otherwise there appears to be nothing wrong with it, the food should be safe to eat. But if a can has a deep dent – one that you can lay your finger into – it should be discarded.”

Vehicles must have the capacity to keep cold food cold and frozen food frozen. Ensure that your staff, and especially drivers, are aware of how to keep food safe whilst in transit.

2.

Transporting Food

Guidance for Drivers: Transporting Food

- Transport the following foods at or below 5 °C: dairy, meats, and prepared and chilled foods.
- Ensure that frozen foods remain frozen: food frozen may be transported at or below 5 °C if transit time is less than an hour to delivery (be prepared for the impact of weather and traffic on journeys).
- Ensure raw food and cooked food are transported separated.
- Rescued food should be packed into crates or cardboard boxes.
- The cargo floor, walls of the truck chiller, and reusable crates should be cleaned and disinfected regularly or whenever there are spillages.



Photo credit: Fair Food

While the Food Act requirements do not apply to most food rescue sites (as they are not donors that trade in food) food rescue organisations still have a duty of care to ensure the safety and suitability of the food they give out.

This means:

- Keeping food in the same condition it was received until distributed to the end user.
- Ensuring food is appropriately stored, refrigerated or frozen.
- Only distributing food that is safe and fit for purpose.
- Identifying, adopting and adhering to stringent food safety policies at all times.

A. The Staff

- Pick a food safety leader: Each food rescue site should nominate a staff member to 'lead' food safety measures and be responsible for keeping up to date with this guide and any other MPI guidance.
- AFRA recommends that staff members attend food safety training.
- Where appropriate we recommend that a volunteer within each volunteer group be nominated to be a 'lead' on food safety.
- Every volunteer should know how to keep food safe and suitable and should receive an initial training briefing from either the staff lead or the volunteer lead.
- Regular (daily) checks are recommended with an annual audit process to ensure whether food safety guidance & practices need updating.



3. Safe Food Practices

B. The Surroundings

1. Clean premises

- Premises and all equipment must be kept clean to a high standard.
- A cleaning schedule should be created e.g., what needs cleaning, how often and by whom.
- Surfaces used for food sorting must be cleaned and sanitized before and following each use.
- Phones should be kept away from food, sorting areas and equipment.
- Ensure any equipment and utensils are clean and regularly disinfected
- Only use repackaging materials which are clean and fit for purpose
- Floors should be regularly swept and mopped with hot water.
- Provide food waste and rubbish areas separate from food sorting and food storage areas.

2. Clean people

- Hands should be properly washed (see this [MPI guide](#) or [video](#)).
- New volunteers should be trained by key staff members.
- Hair should be tied back.
- Clean clothing, shoes and aprons should be worn and appropriate PPE (gloves, masks and high-viz vests) where needed.
- Anyone sick or feeling unwell should not volunteer or sort food - many food rescue organisations have a 48-hour standdown for people who have been unwell.

3. Refrigeration and storage

- The temperature of cool rooms should be between 0 – 5°C.
- Vegetables should be stored in a cool room.
- Potatoes, citrus and onions should be ideally kept in a dry storage area.
- Fridges should be checked for maintenance issues and thermometers should be available for checking fridge temperatures.
- Fridges and cool storage units should be washed and disinfected inside and out regularly
- It is good practice to check the temperatures of food daily at the start and end of a shift.

Here's a tip!

Use a second thermometer in your chiller to check the temperature is recorded properly.

Have your inbuilt thermometer recalibrated yearly - your refrigeration service can do this for you.



4. Anti-pest measures

Pest control is an important consideration for food rescue organisations as microbes and faeces from pests can contaminate or damage food and cause illness. We recommend an approach that includes prevention, monitoring and action if required.



Prevention and monitoring:

- Keep rubbish bins covered and empty them regularly.
- Proof the premises against pests where possible (e.g. covers on drains, repairing and restricting access points promptly).
- Monitor the premises and incoming food for signs of pests (e.g. droppings, damaged food) and train staff to recognise and report these signs.
- Clean premises regularly, ensure water is not allowed to pool and any spills are cleaned promptly.
- Any set traps and bait stations must be checked regularly and located appropriately to avoid contaminating food.

What to do if you see evidence of pests

- Immediately discard any food that may have been compromised by pests
- Clean down affected areas and clean and sanitise areas where food is prepared or handled.
- Ensure any access routes are removed.
- Take appropriate physical control measures (e.g. bait stations, electric insect killers, curtains and traps) and follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Chemical control measures (e.g. applying pesticides, insecticides, fumigants) should be carried out by a suitably qualified person (certification may be required).

Ensure pest control measures don't contaminate food:

- Ensure the appropriate location and placement/positioning of control measures away from food (e.g. electric fly killers, rodent baits).
- Remove all food before treating the premises with insecticides or chemical sprays (call a pest control company if the infestation is severe).
 - Any food-contact surfaces (e.g. benches) must be cleaned to remove the chemical before using them again.
 - Ensure the area is adequately ventilated.
- Store pest control products under lock and key where they can't contaminate food and food areas.
- Ensure the appropriate collection and disposal of dead pests.
- Where appropriate, treat pests outside normal operating hours to minimise disruption to normal activities.

We have used information from MPI to form the above recommendations, and if you would like further details we recommend you refer to MPI's **Guidance for Developing Good Operating Practice Procedures: Pest Control, and Foodservice and Retail Food Control Plan** for further and more detailed information.

C. Food Safety Considerations

High-risk foods

Below is a list of high-risk foods and further considerations for their safe food handling practices. For information on homekill, please see the section further below.

seafood and shellfish	meat	dairy products	eggs	prepared fruit salads
small goods such as ham and salami	raw poultry	cooked rice	cooked pasta	prepared salads such as potato, pasta, rice salads and coleslaw

High-risk foods to avoid:



- AFRA recommends food rescue organisations avoid distributing raw chicken, or fresh shellfish due to their heightened microbiological safety risks.
- If your organisation chooses to rescue these items, it's crucial to adhere to best practices in storing, sorting, and distribution, and to train team members accordingly.

Visual and sensory inspection:



- Visually inspect high-risk foods, incl. precut items like bagged spinach, for signs of spoilage
- Sensory checks for dairy and eggs can mitigate safety risks (sniff test for dairy, float test for eggs)
- The [OPMCSA's Food Rescue report](#) suggests checks could be included in volunteer food safety training and/or guidance provided to food recipients to enhance safety.

Handling eggs:



- Based on [MPI advice](#), AFRA recommends keeping eggs cool (in the fridge) and in general, eggs should not be distributed with a best-before date of longer than 14 days.
- Current [MPI advice](#) includes washing your hands after handling eggs and only distributing clean eggs (e.g., free from dirt, and cracks).
- The float test can also be used to assess for freshness.

Handling meat:



- It's important not to leave raw meat out at room temperature. Always store meat in the fridge or freezer.
- When freezing meat it must be frozen on or before its 'Best-before' date and be hard-frozen upon leaving donor storage. Include labels with the freezing date and usage instructions.
- Store raw meat away from any cooked food or food that won't be cooked (e.g raw fruit, vegetables, and salad).
- For further information, MPI's guidance on handling raw meat is available [here](#).

Allergens

In the same way as raw foods are kept apart from ready-to-eat foods, foods that don't contain allergens must be kept separate from allergen-containing foods and handled appropriately to avoid cross-contamination

Common allergen foods include:

- Peanuts and tree nuts
- Dairy
- Eggs
- Fish
- Soy
- Cereals containing gluten
- Sulphites
- Sesame
- Soy



Photo credit: Love Soup

Homekill and Recreational Catch

In December 2023 MPI issued updated guidelines on donating meat, which advises distributing homekill or recreational catch can be acceptable under certain conditions. The advice below is based on this guidance from MPI which can be viewed [here](#). If you are planning to distribute homekill or recreational catch we recommend you familiarise yourself with [MPI's full advice](#).



Homekill and recreational catch (incl. wild game) are unregulated meat sources, not subject to the same rigorous regulatory controls that apply to meat purchased from a supermarket or butcher. Recreational catch means wild animals that are killed, captured, taken or harvested by a recreational hunter or fisher. Homekill means the slaughtering and butchering of your animals for your own use. Slaughter must meet the requirements of the Animal Welfare Act 1999, you must ensure the animal does not suffer unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress.

The two main food safety risks faced by homekill and recreational catch are:

- Bacterial contamination can be caused by the animal being exposed to pathogens such as Salmonella and E. coli which have contaminated the meat.
- Chemical contamination e.g. caused by the animal eating poison baits, lead from bullet fragments or chemicals through transport exposing meat to harmful chemicals.

Donating homekill and recreational catch

Under some circumstances, giving away or donating homekill or recreational catch meat products is acceptable, such as donating through an agreed and well-managed system with a recognised foodbank or charity organisation.

Key considerations for food rescue organisations when receiving homekill and recreational catch:

- MPI recommends consuming regulated meat when possible.
- Each individual, charity or food bank delivering donated unregulated meat needs to have systems in place and carry out due diligence to minimise risk and protect all consumers, especially the vulnerable, including the elderly or people with weakened immune systems.
- Those consuming or donating homekill and recreational catch do so at their own risk. Carefully consider how these risks can be managed to protect the public. AFRA recommends this includes clear labelling and instructions on how homekill or recreational catch should be stored and prepared.
- Homekill and recreational catch:
 - should be refrigerated and consumed within 24 hours of receiving or defrosting if frozen. The product must be well and thoroughly cooked before consumption.
 - are unregulated, and therefore, must not be sold or traded.

For more information view MPI's Donating Meat Guidelines [here](#).

D. Sorting

There is a difference between **Use-by** (do not distribute) and **Best-before** (can still distribute and may be safe to eat). Recipient community organisations may take a day or two to distribute food, which should be taken into account.

*Special attention should be given to **bagged salads and pre-cut vegetables** even before the best-before date.*

Check daily in chilled storage for any sign of deterioration (liquid, slimy or 'wet look') and discard immediately if seen.

Use-by Date <i>Food Safety</i> Do not distribute food after this date.	Best-before Date <i>Quality</i> You can eat food after this date, but it may not be at its best.
<p>A use-by date means there is a potential health risk if consumed after midnight of that date.</p> <p>Under no circumstances should products past their Use-by date be distributed unless they have been frozen prior to that date.</p>	<p>A best-before date indicates the period for when the product is at its optimal quality.</p> <p>Products with a best-before date are safe to consume after that date although the quality will deteriorate. If deterioration or spoilage becomes noticeable, it is then a health/safety risk. If it looks ok and smells ok, you can generally eat it.</p>
Do not distribute food that is past its use-by date.	Food can be donated after the best-before date provided it is fit to eat.

For more guidance, please see these resources from [MPI & Love Food Hate Waste](#) or for more information on use-by, best-before, packed-on and baked-on dates, see this article from [Consumer](#).

E. Keeping Records

It is strongly recommended each food rescue organisation keeps records relating to food safety. Templates can be [viewed here](#).

Records should cover:

- Staff training i.e. that staff are meeting training requirements
- Staff sickness
- Refrigeration and chill-chain needs are met
- Cleaning and sanitising checks
- 'When something goes wrong' register - for example, accidents or near misses.

AFRA members do not distribute food that has past its use-by date except where donations comply with food safety exemptions as given by the food producer.

A copy of all documents or requirements should be kept for at least four years.

Best-Before Guidelines

Food type

Don't give out if....

	DAIRY	Fresh milk	3 days or more after 'best-before date'
		Yogurt, sour cream, cottage cheese, cream	2 weeks or more after 'best-before date'
		Eggs	2 weeks or more after 'best-before date'
		Soft cheese: brie, camembert	2 weeks or more after 'best-before date'
		Mayonnaise, hollandaise and tartare sauce	1 month or more after 'best-before date'
	MEAT	Fresh meat - not chicken or shellfish	After 'best-before' date. Only give on 'best-before date' if meat is to be consumed on that day.
		Fresh meat - chicken or shellfish	We recommend you DISCARD IMMEDIATELY
		Cured meat - bacon, salami etc.	After 'best-before' date. Only give on 'best-before date' if meat is to be consumed on that day.
	BREAD	Fresh bread	2 or more days after 'best-before' date
		Packaged breads	10 days or more after 'best-before' date
	DRINKS	Smoothies	2 days or more after 'best-before' date
		Juices	1 week or more after 'best-before' date
		Fizzy drinks	6 months or more after 'best-before' date
	READY MEALS	Salads (bags and pottles)	Don't distribute after 'best-before' date
		Single serve microwave meals/bulk prepared meals	On or after 'best-before' date
		Fresh pies, pizzas and quiches	3 days after 'best-before' date
		Fresh soups (plastic pouches)	2 weeks or more after 'best-before' date
	OTHER	Tofu	1 week or more after 'best-before' date
		Dips (including hummus)	1 week on or more after 'best-before' date
		Packaged chips, biscuits and crackers	1 month or after 'best-before' date
		Chocolate and sweets	2 months or more after 'best-before' date
		Dried nuts and fruits	3 months or more after 'best-before' date
		Packaged cereals and muesli bar	6 months or more after 'best-before' date
		Spreads and chutneys	6 months or more after 'best-before' date
		Canned goods	1 year or more after 'best-before' date
		Dried bulk goods (flour, sugar, oats etc.)	1 year or more after 'best-before' date

These are **guidelines only** as referenced by international website www.eatbydate.com and in consultation with AFRA members and MPI. **You should always question any food past its best-before date before re-distributing back out into the community.**



Photo credit: Love Soup

4.

Distributing Food

While the obligations under the Food Act to ensure food is safe and suitable to eat legally apply to food businesses only, all parties within the donation chain have a duty of care to ensure food is safe and suitable. This includes organisations who are distributing food provided by AFRA members.

It is in food rescue organisations' best interests to have appropriate guidelines and procedures in place to ensure the continued suitability and safety of donated food.

Recipient organisations may also be able to learn from the expertise of rescue organisations. Feel free to share this guide with them, or use information in it to create safety information hand outs for their benefit.

A: Final checks

At the point of transaction to recipient/s:



Undertake a final check for any delivery spoilage



Draw attention/ pass on relevant best-before-date guidance (on pg 13)



Note food needs to remain frozen if in a frozen state

B: Recalled Food

If you become aware that food already delivered is under recall, please alert the recipient/s immediately. If it is not possible to contact the recipient/s then an appropriate measure would be to use social media and signage to advise of the recall and to inform that the affected foods should not be consumed and/or distributed.

A list of recalled foods can be found [here](#). You can also [subscribe to MPI's](#) email alerts

Many AFRA members act as distribution hubs for food procured and provided by the New Zealand Food Network (NZFN). This food is distributed by AFRA members at their own risk. While precaution is always taken to ensure this food is within date and good quality, it is the responsibility of AFRA members to ensure the food they distribute is fit-for-purpose.

A: Storage

Ensure that food is stored appropriately. Bulk food including palletized goods can provide additional storage challenges and it is key that these are safely stored including chilled and frozen when required.

B: Distribution requirements

Ensure that NZFN's distribution requirements (instructions from the donor) are carefully followed.

For example, some donations may be:

- Specified for a commercial kitchen or food service environment only. These may not be handed out to individual recipients.
- Specified for a commercial kitchen OR a large family. This must be adhered to so that the LABEL (on the OUTER packaging) can be seen by all users.
- Unable to be 'broken down' and repackaged into smaller packs, due to labelling, safety or brand requirements from the donor.
- Fully utilised at 'point of consumption' i.e. food service kitchens.

Please ensure that recipients of bulk food are aware of these conditions when required for food provided via NZFN.

C: Specific Instructions

At times NZFN may forward specific instructions around the preparation of donations. These instructions must also be adhered to and passed onto any recipient organisations and, in turn, their end recipients.

Example: Fonterra products cannot, for any reason, be broken down from the original individual sku packaging even if it seems too big for an end recipient.

D: No sale or trade

Neither the Food Hub nor any person, charity or other organisation receiving food or other items provided by NZFN may sell or trade the donated goods for any reason. This includes fundraising purposes or ticketed events.

If you have any questions about the food safety or distribution of food provided by NZFN, please get in touch with Courtney Clark: Courtney.Clark@nzfoodnetwork.org.nz

The **Aotearoa Food Rescue Alliance** proudly works with

