

# How to Safely Recover Edible Food

## Wholesale Food Vendors and Distributors



Following these practices can help you safely recover your maximum amount of surplus edible food in compliance with Senate Bill 1383 and local ordinances. Items marked with a ★ are necessary to comply with these laws if your operation is a business or establishment engaged in the merchant wholesale distribution of food, where food (including fruits and vegetables) is received, shipped, stored, prepared for distribution to a retailer, warehouse, distributor, or other destination.

### Best Practices - Stop waste from the start!

- Conduct a food waste audit. Save money and be eco-smart by purchasing only the amount of food needed to meet customer demand.
- Work with your supply chain to clearly label or define the difference between safety-based and quality-based dates to reduce customer confusion.
- Rotate perishable stock at every delivery to minimize waste.
- Evaluate which storage containers best maintain food quality.
- Consider other markets for bruised or blemished produce, such as juicing businesses, or working with the [Upcycled Food Association](#).
- Consider making surplus food available to staff, community members, and/or food recovery organizations.



### Plan Your Food Recovery Logistics

- ★ Contract with a Food Recovery Organization or Service (FRO/S). Visit your city's website for a list of local food recovery organizations.
- ★ Work with FRO/S to set a schedule that meets your storage space and operational needs while maximizing the freshness and amount of edible food for quick redistribution. Notify FRO/S in advance if you expect to have more surplus than usual, so they can plan accordingly.
- ★ Establish a dedicated area (in compliance with California Retail Food Code ([CalCode](#))) for storing and labeling (with date and contents) food designated for donation.
- ★ Establish recordkeeping system, see "Keep Records" section.
- Properly depackage and compost any inedible food or food scraps that are not safe or suitable for food recovery

### Secure Necessary Equipment

- Food-safe containers or transport bags. Check the packaging preferences or requirements of your partner(s).
- Dedicated refrigerator/freezer space
- Labeling and recordkeeping supplies
- Scale, if you are tracking your weights (some FRO/S will track and/or weigh for you)

## Determine What to Donate

Food donation policies vary by local Food Recovery Organization or Service, verify before donating. You may also use the information below as a general guide. Food safety regulations can be found in the California Retail Food Code ([CalCode](#)).

Potentially Donatable Foods	Foods that Cannot Be Donated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Food fit for human consumption and donated in good faith (e.g., may include food near quality expiration dates or past labeled shelf-life date).</li><li>Prepared foods chilled to 41°F or below that have not been served or placed on a buffet.</li><li>Fresh or frozen on or before the date on the package.</li><li>Unopened canned/dry-packaged, securely sealed and dated appropriately, with labeling intact</li><li>Lightly bruised or soft produce.</li><li>Packaged cut produce stored 41°F or below while awaiting pickup.</li><li>Pre-packaged meals sealed appropriately with date and content labels.</li><li>Surplus unserved prepared foods kept at safe temperatures or cooled down (per <a href="#">CalCode</a> protocol), and labeled with date and contents.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Food not fit for human consumption: bad odor, discoloration, moldy and/or bulging packaging.</li><li>If packaging is torn, has holes, dents, or broken seals.</li><li>Cans that are dented, bulging, or unlabeled.</li><li>Home baked, home canned, or home jarred products.</li><li>Food not in its original packaging and missing ingredient label and/or a date.</li><li>Foods previously served to consumers.</li><li>Perishable foods that were not held at safe temperatures.</li><li>Sushi or any seafood intended for raw consumption.</li><li>Expired or opened over-the-counter medications, nutritional supplements, and infant formula.</li><li>Food containing alcohol or CBD.</li></ul>

*\* FRO/S have the right to refuse donations or terminate relationship with generators for any reason including if food donated is inedible or unfit for human consumption.*

## Ensure Food Safety

- Follow standard safety and food handling protocol per [CalCode](#) for all food in your possession, whether it's intended for sale or recovery.
- Anyone packaging food donations should take a food safety course and obtain a [Food Handler Card with an accredited program](#).
- Keep hot foods at 135°F or above and cold foods at 41°F or below. [Food temperature guidance](#).
- Confirm your food bank, FRO/S partner's specific donation policies.
- Package donations in shallow, sanitary, food-grade containers or bags. Do not mix different foods.
- [Properly cool all hot foods](#) prior to donation.
- Label containers with type of food and date prepared/stored.
- Leave space between packages to ensure proper air circulation and freezing.
- Donate food nearest its expiration date first.

## Keep Records

- ★ You must keep the following records onsite: pounds of food recovered each month, a copy of your contract with each FRO, list of food types being recovered, and frequency of pickup/delivery.

## Additional Information

Regional SB 1383 Organics Collection & Edible Food  
Recovery Resources



Department of Environmental Health & Quality  
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