




Ozarks Food Harvest  
**DONATION**  
**INSPECTION**  
**GUIDELINES**



OFH Volunteers help The Food Bank provide more than 16million meals annually.

**Because of YOU, someone will eat today.**

[ozarksfoodharvest.org/volunteer](http://ozarksfoodharvest.org/volunteer) 11/2017



# Donation Inspection Guideline Overview

Purpose: Use of these guidelines will more consistently yield a safe and quality product. This will increase OFH's agency satisfaction and efficiently train volunteers.

- **When questions about the acceptability of an item or the correct procedure for handling product arise, ask a Volunteer Coach or an experienced volunteer for guidance.**
- **Work efficiently, set questionable items aside to review as time allows instead of stopping the process. Consider time spent to rescue one item verses rescuing thousands of items.**
- **Food safety is critical for the clients OFH serves. When in doubt, throw it out!**
- **Review Current Product Notices at the beginning of each shift**
  - Volunteer Coaches will post on dry erase board and discuss during session training.**
    - Current cut-off dates for acceptable items (food, baby food, formula, etc.)
    - Product defects
    - Health hazards
    - Recalls
    - Other special instructions, such as handling of jars of baby food
- **Inspect Incoming Totes for Evidence of Rodents:** Before unloading a box of donated items, inspect for obnoxious odors, mouse droppings, and nibbled packaging. Discard the banana box and all food items in the box that can't be cleaned and sanitized. Clean and sanitize all remaining product such as canned and jarred food. This protects those using the food from the possibility of becoming ill.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Donation Inspection Guideline Overview	2
Dates & Labels, Multi & Bulk Packaging	3
Cans & Glass Containers	4-5
Package Inspection	6-7
Perishable Products - Refrigerated	8
Perishable Products - Eggs, Frozen	9
Non-food & Miscellaneous Items	10
Packing and Waste	11

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## Inspecting Expiration Dates

Extension guidelines for dates are provided by manufacturers, USDA, FDA and Feeding America. Donated items must be inspected for expiration dates that are within the extension dates listed on OFH's Expiration Extension Sheets.

Expiration dates are printed on or stamped into the carton, label, top or edge of jar lids or the ends of cans.

### Examples:

- **Campbell's soup can: JUL 2003 (July 2003)**
- **Colgate toothpaste: 10APR02 (April 10, 2002)**

Some products bear a manufacturing code.  
Do not confuse these with date indicators – ignore them.  
Example: Stop & Shop beans can: 0282C 13:36 XPK XQ



- **Dates must be within Expiration Extension Guidelines, refer to OFH Expiration Extension Sheets**
- **Follow exception dates posted by Volunteer Coach on dry erase board**

**Products that do not have a date are acceptable!** Inspect for signs of age such as rust, yellow or stained labels, discard products that appear old.

## Labels

All food item (except fresh fruit and vegetables) must have a label listing the following;

1. **Common name of the product**
2. **Quantity of the contents (10 oz.)**
3. **Common name of each ingredient**
4. **Name and address of manufacturer, packer or distributor**

Torn labels are acceptable when the above information is legible and complete.



## Multiple & Bulk Packaging

If product is packed for bulk distribution to agency (food service packing) check for single label in distribution box that agencies can duplicate as needed for individual distribution.



Multiple packed single servings (pudding & fruit cups) may not be individually labeled. Copy label from the original package and tape to individual items.

**For efficiency, set individual items missing label in grocery cart to label & package at the end of the sort. Consider time spent to rescue one item versus rescuing thousands of items.**

Take your time during inspection and ask questions as needed!  
Food safety is critical to those OFH serves.



## Inspect Condition of Banana Boxes

- **Inspect liner and box for trash, excessive dirt, spillage or other contamination.** Discard boxes that are not reasonably clean. Replace liners with cardboard for added support.
- **Inspect bottom flaps of box to assure they are securely fastened.** Use tape to repair as needed.
- **Replace bottom liner sheet as needed.** Do not recycle old liners in cardboard recycle tote.
- **To match appropriate tops and bottoms, look for matching holes and symbols.**
- **Walmart boxes must be returned to store, do not throw away regardless of condition.**



## Packing Banana Boxes

- **Pack products so that height is less than the box depth.** Boxes must stack evenly on the pallets.
- **Prevent leaks, place liquids upright if possible.**
- **Include a variety of product, boxes should have no more than 1/3 of the same type of item.** Pack items that would make a meal together, such as pasta sauce and pasta.
- **40 pounds maximum!** Boxes should weigh no more than 40 pounds regardless of amount of box filled.



## Stacking Boxes on Pallet

- Bend with your knees when lifting boxes.
- Banana boxes must stack flatly on pallet.
- Stack box on a blue pallet, stack boxes in 2 rows, 3 boxes wide and 5 boxes high.

## Disposal of Unacceptable Items

The amount of disposal can be a concern for volunteers. Keep in mind that you are “rescuing” items that would otherwise be thrown away by retailers and manufacturers. Food safety is a number one concern for the clients OFH serves.

Donations not safe for human consumption may be safe to use as pig or hog feed which will eventually be converted into pork products.

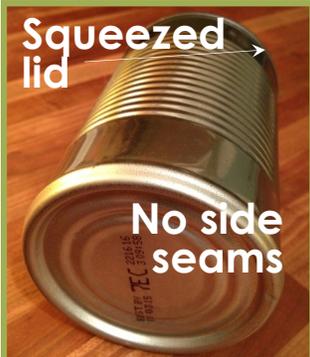
**Items NOT suitable for pig or hog feed:**

- **Coffee, dehydrated grated cheese found in packaged meals, dried rice or beans, raw biscuit dough, small containers of yogurt, mushrooms, hot peppers, fresh or frozen raw meat and glass containers of any kind.**
- **No meat of any type is acceptable for pig feed.** (lunch meats, fully cooked bacon).
- **Pet food not safe for animal consumption is not acceptable as animal feed.**
- **Volunteer Coaches may post additional unacceptable items on dry erase board.**
- **Discarded items not suitable for pig feed must be bagged and placed in dumpster.**

Food safety is critical for the clients OFH serves. When in doubt, throw it out!  
Work efficiently, set questionable items aside to review as time allows instead of stopping the process.  
Consider time spent to rescue one item versus rescuing thousands of items.



Sealing food in airtight cans protects from contamination. Dents may damage the thin plastic lining of a can which may allow bacteria to contaminate food.



**2-piece can**  
Formed metal cup  
& top lid squeezed-in-  
place on one end only.



**3-piece can**  
Cylinder with side seam  
& squeezed-in-place  
lids at both ends

**Dented cans are SALVAGE, intended for the trash. You are rescuing what can be saved but not everything is safe to distribute. When in doubt, throw it out.**

Consider the damage a dent has caused to the inside or lining of the can.

- If the dent is sharp, the lining may be damaged and the food contaminated.
- If the dent is soft and round, the lining may not have been bent.

If unsure, set item aside to review with Volunteer Coach and continue sorting.

## Inspecting Canned Goods

### Rust that remains after wiping—DISCARD

This may indicate rust pitting is deep enough to cause the can to longer be airtight.



### Sharp dent on seam—DISCARD

Sharp dents on lid seams offer the greatest possibility of allowing bacteria to enter. If the dent extends below the lid seam and into the side of the can, discard the item.



### Peeled seam—DISCARD

Dents that peel back the seam are unacceptable. If you can fit a thumbnail under the seam, discard.



### Sharp crease—DISCARD

Sharp creases or folds indicate the inner protective coating may be torn, exposing food to contamination by contact with the metal. When the crease is so deep that it deforms an end of the can, causing it to wobble, discard it.





### Sharp dents—DISCARD

Feel the edges of a dent, sharp dents indicate inner lining has been damaged allowing contamination.



### Swollen or bulging can—DISCARD

Bacteria release gas when they feed on canned food. Swollen cans are a sign that contamination is present.



### Dent on pull top with LIQUID contents—DISCARD

Any damage to a pull top lid with LIQUID contents may allow contamination, discard. Even small dents may leak if struck by another item during packing.

Dents on pull top can with DRY contents (coffee) are acceptable if no leaking is visible.

**When in doubt, throw it out!**  
Food safety is critical for those we serve.

## Inspecting Glass Jars & Bottles



### Inward dished lid—ACCEPTABLE

Typically marked with a printed pop-up indicator. Note: Item may have both a pop-up seal indicator and a tamper proof band. If the band is broken and the pop seal is intact, the item is acceptable.



### Outward dished lid—DISCARD

A lid with a raised center that may or may not spring back after being depressed is not airtight, discard.

### Screw top & band

Food that is very resistant to bacterial contamination (such as syrup and honey) may not be vacuum-sealed but instead have a screw-cap and plastic seal to protect the contents contamination.

Discard if there is visual evidence of contamination or if the seal is broken.



### Dented lids on glass jars—DISCARD

Glass jars with dents on lids may contain glass chips.



## Evidence of Rodents

- **Before unloading box of donated items, inspect for signs of rodents such as obnoxious odor, mouse droppings and nibbled packaging.** If signs of rodents are found, discard box and all food items that can not be cleaned and sanitized such as boxes without liners.
- **Clean and sanitizing jars and cans can be wiped with food grade sanitizing solution.**

## Visual Inspection

- **Dirt and other contamination must be removed by wiping with a dry towel or towel moistened with food grade sanitizing solution.** Spray bottles of sanitizing solutions are stored under tables.
- **Do not submerge jars of food when washing as this may drive contaminants under the lid.** Instead, wipe jar with wet sanitizing rag.
- **Discard packages showing signs of spilled liquid as unknown liquid may be toxic.**
- **Bulk-pack cartons (fruit juices, puddings) that show signs of leakage should be opened, inspected and leaking items discarded.**
- **Discard items that have visible signs of abnormal food conditions or foreign material.**

## Tamper-proof Seals

Seals must be intact and show no signs of tampering or contamination.



### Seal must be intact, remove lid & inspect

Discard the item if the seal is pierced, does not adhere to container or has visual evidence of contamination.



### Shrink-wrapped plastic seal must be intact

If completely broken, discard. If the seal is damaged but shows no tampering was possible, retain the product.



Links must be intact, discard if links are broken.



A paper seal must be intact. If torn, discard. 7

## Cardboard, paper and plastic bag containers

- If cardboard or paper containers show signs of spillage (with or without inner sealed package), **DISCARD** as unknown liquid may be toxic.

Shake the container;

If item has an inner sealed package (cereal, gelatin, cake mix and etc.);

- **DISCARD** if food comes out of container.
- If no food comes out, inspect the inner package. If there is no damage, replace the package in the carton and use tape to close the carton.
- Taped bags of sugar, flour, grains are not acceptable.

If the item has **NO** inner sealed package (mac and cheese, rice, pasta, sugar, flour and dry beans) **DISCARD** if food comes out.



## Styrofoam plastic containers

Styrofoam plastic containers (dried soup mixes) may have a thin plastic or paper seal adhered to the edge of the foam container.

**DISCARD** if the container or seal is damaged.



## Using Tape

- **Never use tape to reseal container** (such as taping a hole in a bag of dry beans). Tape can be used to repair packaging such as taping a cereal box closed after inspection of inner lining.
- Donations arriving taped should be inspected to ensure tape is not sealing contents but only repairing outer package as described above.
- Remove tape retailers have used to mark item for store removal (examples include "No Good", "Damaged" and "Rejected").

## Missing Caps

Items with missing caps may cause damage by spilling or spraying when packed.

- **DISCARD** if cap cannot be repaired or replaced.
- Damaged caps that can be repaired with tape are acceptable.
- Replacement caps, held in place with tape because they are not the proper size, are acceptable.



## Food Requiring Refrigeration

When sorting canned and dry goods discard perishable products that require refrigeration but have not been kept cold. For example; some pickles, salad dressings and certain Jell-O products.

Accept products marked for refrigeration after opening.



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**Non-food & miscellaneous donations often require separate boxing and palletizing, follow directions given by Volunteer Coaches.**

**Medical Products:** **DISCARD** all prescription medicines, give to Volunteer Coach for disposal.

- Follow the direction of Volunteer Coach for all other internal and external medicinal items such as vitamins, non-prescription medicines, nasal sprays, ear drops, herbal supplements, Band-Aids, skin creams, antiseptics and etc.



**Hygiene Items:** **Box separately**, items include shampoo, soap, body sprays and deodorant

- Feminine products: individually wrapped products are acceptable, tape outer box as needed.



**Sex-related Products:** **DISCARD** sex related donations such as contraceptives and pregnancy tests (results may not be accurate).

**Plastic wrapped products:** **Box separately**, items include table napkins, disposable dinnerware, toilet paper & paper towels

- DISCARD products with torn wrapping**, presents the possibility of contamination,
- Single item: retain for use at food bank or discard because of possible contamination.
- Multi-pack item: Remove items exposed by a *small* tear and repair the tear with tape.



**Liquid Products:** **Prevent leaking**; pack upright, tighten cap & tape caps or flip-up lids

**Chemicals:** **DISCARD** pesticides, insect repellants and oven cleaners (unless "foam-free").

**Gloves:** **DISCARD latex gloves**, due to possible allergic reaction. **ACCEPT non-latex gloves.**

**Flammable products:** **Give to Volunteer Coach for proper disposal.** Items include matches, lighters, lighter fuel, and charcoal lighter.

**Beverages:** **Pack in labeled bulk totes along south wall**

- WATER** totes: non-carbonated water
- SODA** totes: carbonated beverages including flavored water
- JUICE** totes: non-carbonated & non-perishable juice



**Pet Supplies:** Use the same sorting rules as those for human use items. **All unacceptable pet food must go in dumpster, DO NOT donate as animal feed.**

**Alcoholic Products:** **Give to Volunteer Coach for proper disposal.**

**Candy:** **Box separately**

- DISCARD** chocolate products that show signs of melting.



## Refrigerated Products OFH coolers are kept between 36-38°

### Refrigerated products can only remain out of cooler for 30 minutes

Fridge items include foods found in grocery store coolers such as dairy, produce, lunch meats and eggs.

- **Watch expiration dates closely as refrigerated goods can go bad very quickly!**  
Refer to OFH Expiration Extension sheets provided & white board for quick assessment.
- **Keep products that are within their extension of the expiration date**, even if it is at the end of its expiration. Some refrigerated product can be frozen to extend the life of the product.
- **Packages must be intact** so that the product has not been exposed to contaminants.
- **Pack a variety of items in mixed refrigerated boxes**, stack boxes 5 high on a blue pallet.

### Refrigerated Meat

- **All fully cooked meats must be frozen within seven days of expiration.**
- **Raw meat must be frozen by expiration date.**
- **DISCARD** meat that appears to be discolored or has a bad smell.
- **Bar codes associated with price on raw meat must be marked through with a permanent black marker.**
- **All refrigerated meat must be placed in banana boxes to be frozen, extending expiration.**



### Juices (including juices containing yogurt)

- **Pack cold juices and other refrigerated beverages in separate banana box or tote.**

### Hiland Products

- **Hiland products must be sorted by type and packed with like items.**  
Example: 9 oz. milk bottles must be packed together, regardless of flavor.
- **Do not throw away Hiland containers**, set unacceptable product aside for inventory by Volunteer Coach. Discard only after inventory is complete.
- **Hiland Dairy should NOT be placed in mixed refrigerated boxes, Hiland boxes must contain only Hiland product.**
- **Hiland crates are red or black and must be returned to donor.**



### Fresh Produce

- **Produce should be sorted into either mixed produce boxes or totes.**
- **Look for signs of mold or any type of growth on produce.**
  - If small amount of damaged, remove spoiled produce and rescue remainder.
  - If more than 70% is contaminated, DISCARD to prevent spread of mold or bacteria.
- **Remove wilted outer layers of produce (such as lettuce) to rescue the remaining product.**
- **Discard produce with cuts from unknown source.** Item cutting produce may have been contaminated.
- **Dispose of moldy banana boxes** to prevent spread of mold and bacteria.
- **Premade salads with fully cooked meat, check and follow expiration dates on package.**



## Eggs: can only remain out of cooler for 30 minutes.

- **ALWAYS** wear rubber or vinyl gloves when processing eggs.
- **INSPECT** eggs for cracks in the shell.
- **DISCARD** cracked or broken eggs.
- **DISCARD** contaminated egg cartons.
- Egg waste **MUST** have **TWO** layers of trash bags to prevent spread of bacteria.
- Eggs are acceptable one month past expiration date.

### Egg washing process

- Use paper towels and sanitizing solution provided.
- Wet paper towels with sanitizing solution.
- Wipe off any egg waste on unbroken eggs.
- Pack cleaned eggs into a clean egg carton.
- Place filled egg cartons in banana boxes.
- Discard paper towels and gloves upon completion.



## Frozen Products OFH freezers are kept between -2 and -5°

### **Frozen products can only remain out of freezer for 1 hour**

#### Frozen RAW Meat

- **Frozen raw meat must be separated by type and packed only with like type.** Beef products must stay with beef products, poultry must stay with poultry, pork stays with pork and so on.
- **DISCARD** packaging with holes.
- **If meat appears to be discolored, DISCARD.**
- **Bar codes associated with price must be marked through with a black permanent marker.**
- Dates on frozen raw meat are checked by staff as product is received.



#### Mixed Frozen Product Boxes

Mixed frozen items include vacuum sealed, fully cooked lunch meats, frozen meals, fully cooked bacon, frozen pastries, veggies, chicken nuggets, fish sticks, frozen juices and need to bake pies.

- **Inspect vacuum sealed products for holes or loose packaging.**
- **Include a variety of product, boxes should have no more than 1/3 of the same type of item.**
- **40 pounds maximum!** Boxes should weigh no more than 40 lbs. regardless of amount of box filled.
- Boxes must stack evenly on the pallets, no more than 5 boxes high.

