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“Food Donation Tips”

If you plan to donate to food pantries or community food blessing boxes, take a moment to consider the individuals and families who will receive your items. By choosing nutritious, safe, and practical items, you help ensure that your contributions meet the needs of those facing food insecurity.

Before donating, check the expiration dates and best-by dates to ensure the products are still safe to consume. Avoid donating canned goods that are dented, bulging, or rusty. Never donate food that has been removed from its original packaging, or that appears to have been opened or repackaged in any way. When food is not in its original container, the recipient has no way of knowing how it was stored or if anything has been added to it. For similar reasons, most organizations discourage donations of home-canned or home-preserved foods, since they cannot guarantee they are safe.

When selecting items to donate, choose shelf-stable, non-perishable goods that have a long storage life. If you are donating to an outdoor blessing box, consider how weather conditions may affect the food. During winter months, avoid items that can freeze, such as canned goods or food in glass containers. Instead, focus on products that hold up well in varying temperatures, such as dried pasta, rice, beans, instant oatmeal, powdered milk, and instant soup mixes. Shelf-stable snacks, such as granola bars, jerky, nuts, seeds, dried fruit, trail mix, and crackers, are also great items to donate. Include simple cooking staples like seasoning packets, dried spices, salt, pepper, or bouillon cubes, which can help turn basic ingredients into flavorful and satisfying meals.

When choosing foods, try to keep the USDA MyPlate food groups, fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins, and dairy, in mind. Many food-insecure households struggle to access fresh produce or protein-rich foods, so items like canned tuna or chicken, peanut butter, shelf-stable milk, canned fruits in juice or water, and vegetables with no added salt can be especially helpful. Whole grain options, such as brown rice, whole grain pasta, and low-sugar cereals, provide long-lasting energy and better nutrition.

Food pantries and blessing boxes sometimes accept more than just food. They may also need essential household and hygiene items. Check with the organization you are supporting to see if they accept donations of personal hygiene items, such as toothpaste, soap, deodorant, shampoo, and other essentials. Warm clothing items, such as coats, socks, and gloves, may also be needed. If you're unsure about what to donate, consider making a monetary donation instead. Even small financial contributions allow organizations to purchase what is needed most.

Information comes from Kansas State University Publications.