



FRESH PRODUCE DONATION GUIDANCE

Dear Food Bank Member Agencies,

Throughout 2020 and 2021, there had been an increased interest in gardening and farming as people have stayed home and supported their local food systems. At the same time, government agencies on the federal and state levels have begun to pay more attention to fresh produce food safety standards because of numerous high-profile recalls of fresh produce, including romaine lettuce, tomatoes, melons, onions, herbs, and more. In fact, fresh fruits and vegetables have now become one of the leading causes of foodborne illnesses in the United States.

Fresh local produce is one of the best and healthiest foods we can provide to the community! However, food safety is just as important with fresh produce as it is for other food products, particularly since so many fruits and vegetables are eaten raw or uncooked. Stronger food safety standards will not only lead to safer food, but better customer service for your guests.

The Food Bank has created this Fresh Produce Donation Guidance in the summer of 2021 to provide our members with the most up-to-date information about fresh fruit and vegetable donations. This guidance was built to assist your agency in making informed decisions about fresh produce donations. The guidance and accompanying resources were developed with the help of the RI Department of Health (RIDOH), RI Department of Environmental Management (DEM), and the University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension (URI). Thank you to our state partners and member agencies who provided their questions and thoughts while building this guidance.

Fresh Produce Key Points:

- There are currently no legal restrictions to accepting fresh, whole fruits and vegetable donations from residential or community gardens.
- There are certain risks associated with produce donations from home and community gardens. The Food Bank, RIDOH, RIDEM, and URI encourage agencies to accept produce from gardeners who practice good, food safe, agricultural practices. See the included resources and links to learn more.
- Fruits and vegetables grown by local commercial farms are encouraged to take as donations or to purchase. The Food Bank encourages you to build partnerships with farms and farmers markets in your community!
- Produce safety is rapidly developing, so we will continue to keep the network updated as we learn more.



Attachments & Food Bank Resources:

Attachments:

- Fresh Produce Handout (created with URI and RIDEM)
- Food Facts on Raw Produce (from FDA)
- Donation Log

This guidance and attachments can also be accessed on the Agency Portal:

- 1) Go to www.rifoodbank.org
- 2) Click on “Member Agencies” tab on the top of the website
- 3) Click on “Agency Portal” link on left side the page
- 4) Password is “200Niantic”



Q & A:

Q) What does this guidance mean for my agency?

The Food Bank encourages sharing the *Fresh Produce Handout* with home gardeners and community gardens that donate to your program. The handout provides information on food safety practices, as well as plenty of educational resources for anyone looking to improve their gardening skills.

Consider implementing the Required and Encouraged practices on the next page. We understand that we are already halfway through this year’s harvest season, and many donors have already established their gardens for the season. We have plans to meet with RIDOH, DEM, and URI well ahead of next year’s season for more timely updates.

Q) What can my agency expect in the future?

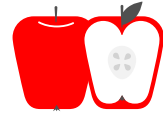
Produce safety standards are *very new* – it has only been in the last few years that regulators have begun establishing food safety requirements for fresh produce. Because these regulations are still developing, the Food Bank will continue to stay on top of any changes that may affect the network. We will pass on new information as we learn more.

Q) What if I have more questions and what should my agency communicate to donors?

Firstly, let them know that their donations are very much appreciated. Next, we suggest reminding them that many of the guests you serve are at the highest risk for foodborne illnesses (children, elderly, and immunocompromised individuals) and the least able to afford getting sick (health insurance, time off from work, childcare, etc.) Let donors know that practicing good food safety while gardening helps to protect the health and wellness of their fellow community members.

Our contacts at RIDEM and URI have generously offered to provide support and answer any questions or concerns. Their contact information is on the *Fresh Produce Handout*. We encourage you to direct interested donors to URI and RIDEM’s food safety and agricultural programs – there are many fantastic, free or low-cost resources that can help home or community gardens improve their yield, quality, and safety!

For ALL Fresh Produce
(Donations, Purchases, and/or from the Food Bank):



Requirements:

- **Whole, uncut produce** must be distributed to guests *as is*.
 - Pantries may NOT cut, slice, peel, etc. any produce before distribution.
 - Meal Sites MAY cut, slice, peel, etc. produce as part of their meal service.
- **Cut or processed produce** may be accepted ONLY from grocery stores, restaurants, caterers, etc. **Cut or processed produce must be treated as a cold donation.**
 - Cut or processed produce must be received at or below 41° F
 - Cut or processed produce must be stored at or below 41° F
- **All donations must be logged on a Donation Log.** A Donation Log is included in this guidance and may also be found on the Agency Portal. Donation logs have been a RIDOH and Food Bank guideline for years, this is just a reminder to log produce donations received from sources other than the Food Bank.

Encouraged:

- Encourage guests to **wash all produce** before consuming at home.

Additional Guidance for HOME and COMMUNITY GARDENS

Requirements:

- Produce must be **whole and uncut**.
- Produce from home and/or community gardens must be **kept separate and labeled from produce received from commercial farms** so guests know and can decide whether to take non-commercially grown produce.
 - **Ex)** Display home garden grown produce in a designated produce bin or shelf with a sign saying “*Generously grown by home gardeners from [town or neighborhood]*”
 - **Ex)** Display produce donated by a local community garden in a designated produce bin or shelf with a sign saying “*From [Name of Community Garden]*” or “*From Local Community Gardens*”
 - **Ex)** Produce from home or community gardens should NOT be mixed together with commercially grown produce from retailers or farms.
- If there are any critical food safety concerns, **decline and/or discard the produce donation.**

Encouraged:

- Chat with home gardeners and community gardens to learn more about their **agricultural and food safety practices.**
- **Hand out the attached resources to donors** to share resources in the state available to gardeners. Encouraging donors to explore these resources will help ensure future donations are of good food safety and quality!