

Recommendations apply to foods in their original, unopened package. Always inspect products and discard if damaged or signs of spoilage appear.

## For Food Safety Sake: Distributing and Using Shelf Stable Donated Products

Category	Product(s)	Distribution and Use Guidelines
Baby Food	Moist food	Do not distribute or use after package date. Refrigerate after opening. Use within 3 days once opened.
	Dry infant cereal	Do not distribute or use after package date. Store in a cool, dry location.
	Infant formula – wet or dry	Do not distribute or use after package date. Store in a sealed container. Keep liquid formula refrigerated.
Bakery Items	Breads, rolls, cakes, pastries, cookies	Distribute and use up to 3 weeks after package date. Sort carefully and discard if mold appears.
Canned Foods (includes trays and pouches)	Canned fruits, tomato products	Distribute and use up to 2 years after package date. Refrigerate after opening. Discard damaged packages.*
	Canned meat, poultry, fish, soup, vegetables, and pasta	Distribute and use up to 2 years after package date. Refrigerate after opening. Discard damaged packages.*
Cereals, Chips and Crackers	All types	Distribute and use up to 2 years after package date. Product may stale before then.
Condiments	Ketchup, mustard, mayo	Distribute and use up to 2 years past package date. Discard if discolored or separation has occurred. Refrigerate after opening.
Cream-filled Pastries & Cream Pies	Pastries or pies with whipped cream topping or custard filling	Keep refrigerated. Distribute and use up to 7 days past package date.
Dry Mixes	Soup, meal-in-a-box (i.e. meal helper)	Distribute and use up to 2 years past package date.
	Potato, pudding, flavored rice or pasta, seasonings	Distribute and use up to 6 months past package date. Store in a cool, dry location.
Foods in Glass or Plastic	Pickles, sauces, applesauce, pudding (includes single-serve cups)	Distribute and use up to 2 years past package date. Refrigerate after opening. EXCEPTION for juice (see below).
Juice	Jars, cans or juice boxes	Distribute and use up to 6 months past package date. Refrigerate after opening.
Mixes (bakery)	Cake, muffin, cookie, pancake	Distribute and use up to 6 months after package date. Store in a cool, dry place.
Flour	Wheat, rice, soy	Distribute and use up to 1 year past package date. Store in a cool, dry place. Discard if signs of insect infestation appear.
Rice & Pasta	Unflavored	Distribute and use up to 2 years past package date.
Whole Grains	Whole wheat flour, corn meal, oatmeal	Distribute and use up to 1 year past package date. Store in a cool, dry place.
Whole Fruit & Vegetables	Uncut	Sort daily and discard as signs of spoilage appear. See Fruit & Vegetable Storage chart.

\***Damaged packages** have **deep dents** with sharp edges that are large enough to rest a finger in the dent.

Also discard cans that are bulging, leaking or with heavy rust (pitting).

**Ripped** or **torn flexible packages** should be discarded.

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**Extension**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

**“Sell by”** – Quality date found on eggs, milk and lunch meat. Distribute by this date, with time still left for storage and use at home.

**“Use by or Best by”** – Quality date found on canned food and cereal. Except for baby food, product may be safely used and distributed well past this date.

**“Expiration date”** – Quality date on infant formula and vitamins. Do not distribute past date.

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## A Guide to Refrigerated or Frozen Products

Category	Product(s)	Distribution and Use Guidelines
Butter & Margarine		Keep refrigerate or freeze. Distribute or use for up to 6 months after package date.
Cheese	<b>Soft</b> (cottage, string, feta, cheese spread)	Distribute up to 7 days past package date; use within 1 week. Keep refrigerated.
	Cream cheese (spread)	Distribute up to 14 days past package date; use within 1 week. Keep refrigerated. Discard if moldy.
	<b>Hard</b> (Cheddar, parmesan)	Distribute up to 12 months past package date. Keep refrigerated. Discard if moldy.
	<b>Medium</b> (muenster, brick, mozzarella)	Distribute up to 1 month past package date. Keep refrigerated. Discard if moldy.
Eggs	From a licensed processor, dated	Distribute up to 5 weeks past package date; use within 1 week. Keep refrigerated.
Juice (pasteurized)	Fresh juice, stored refrigerated	Distribute and use within 7 days of product date. Keep refrigerated.
Milk & Smoothies	Milk (reg and flavored) Smoothies	Distribute and use within 7 days of package date. Keep refrigerated.
	Canned or boxed milk (incl dry powdered milk)	Distribute and use within 1 year of package date. Refrigerate fluid milk and use within 7 days.
Soft Desserts	Puddings, cheese cake	Distribute and use up to 2 weeks past package date. Keep refrigerated.
Yogurt & Sour Cream	Yogurt, sour cream	Distribute and use up to 3 weeks past package date. Keep refrigerated.
Casseroles or Soups	Lasagna, mac & cheese, prepared soups	Distribute and use within 7 days of package date, or freeze. Reheat thoroughly. Keep refrigerated.
Cut fruits, vegetables	Fresh salsa, diced peppers, cut fruit	Distribute and use within 4 days of package date. Keep refrigerated.
Guacamole or Hummus	Individual packages or bulk	Distribute and use within 7 days of package date. Do not freeze. Keep refrigerated.
Leafy greens, Salad mixes	Bagged salads or Salad kits	Distribute and use within 5 days of package date. Keep refrigerated.
Meat salads	Egg, tuna, chicken	Distribute and use within 7 days of package date. Keep refrigerated, do not freeze.
Sandwiches	All meat or cheese types	Distribute and use within 7 days of package date, or freeze (removing any leafy greens). Keep refrigerated.
Tofu	All types	Distribute and use within 1 month of package date. Keep refrigerated. Do not freeze.
Poultry (chicken, turkey)	Fresh (uncooked)	Cook or freeze within 3 days. Keep cold.
	Cooked	Use within 7 days or freeze. Keep cold.
Ground Meat or Fresh sausages	Beef, chicken, turkey, pork, lamb	Cook or freeze within 3 days. Once cooked, use within 7 days. Keep cold.
Meat (beef, pork, lamb)	Fresh (uncooked)	Cook or freeze within 5 days. Keep cold.
	Cooked (incl. sausage)	Use within 7 days. Keep cold.
Ham	Fresh or canned	Distribute and cook by package date, or freeze. Use cooked ham within 2 weeks. Keep cold.
Lunch Meat, Sausage	Deli-sliced	Use within 5 days or freeze. Keep cold.
	Packaged (bacon, hot dogs, sausages)	Distribute up to 2 weeks past date. Once opened, use or freeze within 7 days. Cook before eating.
	Hard/dry (summer sausage)	Shelf stable. Distribute and use within 3 months of package date. Refrigerate after opening.