



## Hosting A Food Drive

*Authored by H. Lester Schonberger, Senior Research Associate, Department of Food Science and Technology, Virginia Tech; Renee Boyer, Professor and Extension Specialist, Department of Food Science and Technology, Virginia Tech*

In 2020, over 38 million people in the United States lived in households which experienced food insecurity (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2021). One part of being food insecure is being unable to access safe, nutritious, culturally appropriate foods to satisfy hunger.

Hosting a food drive can secure food for distribution through regional or local hunger relief organizations, like food pantries and meal providers. This is one way to support the people in your community who are experiencing hunger and food insecurity. You could do this at school, at work, around your neighborhood, or another place that makes sense to you.

Here are some best practices for getting started and delivering food to those in need.

### Getting Started

This is something you can do on your own, and you may consider working on this as part of a team. For example, if you are doing this in your neighborhood you might ask for someone on each block to help make a plan together.

It is important for you to identify where you will send the food. This will also be helpful as you advertise the food drive so donors know where the food is going.

Be sure to advertise your food drive so the people donating will have enough time to gather what they will donate and to bring it to you. You will need to tell people what you will collect and where/when to drop-off donations. You may choose to have a one-day food drive, or host it over a week or longer. You might have only one collection location, multiple, or pick-up from people willing to donate. There is no one right way to get started.

### What Should We Collect?

You should ask the organization if there are specific foods they would like you to collect for them. The organization's needs may change over time. It is generally recommended to collect shelf-stable, non-perishable foods (Morello, 2020). Another option might be to accept money or grocery store gift cards so the organization can buy food as they need it (Thoelke, 2021). Other items that might be needed include non-food items like personal toiletries, cleaning supplies, and pet care products.

If you schedule your food drive over multiple days, collect the food at the end of each day to inspect it. Discard any damaged, leaking, or opened packages. Store the food somewhere secure and keep it elevated at least six inches off of the ground to keep out unwanted pests.

The foods you collect will likely have a date on them (e.g., sell-by, use-by, etc.). In some cases, that date may have already passed. With few exceptions, these dates represent the quality of a food and do not communicate safety. Please review our publication, [Food Packaging Dates](#), for more information about this. Check with your local organization for their policy on accepting past-date foods.

You may receive donations that the organization did not say they wanted. You can follow-up with the organization to ask if they would like these items anyway. We also recommend you count how much of various items you have collected so you can provide an inventory list to the organization when you drop them off. This can help them to sort and store your donation.

### Transporting the Food

Discuss the best way to get the food from you to the organization when setting-up the food drive. Some organizations may come and pick up the food. If

you take the food to them, we recommend you do this in a clean vehicle.

## Dropping Off the Food

Ask for the best time to drop off your food so they know when to expect you. It is best for an employee or volunteer to be there so they can properly sort and store your food.

Sometimes, there may not be anyone available to accept your donation. If they allow you to drop off your food when no one is there, we only recommend doing this when absolutely necessary. Leave the food in a way so it is not taken or otherwise disturbed by wildlife.

## Wrapping-Up

It can be a good practice to report back to the people who donated food as part of this food drive to let them know that the food arrived safely. This can include a final count of how much food was collected/dropped-off. With permission, take pictures to include in this follow-up as well.

## References

Coleman-Jensen, Alisha, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian A. Gregory, and Anita Singh. 2021. Household Food Security in the United States in 2020, ERR-298, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.  
<https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/102076/err-298.pdf?v=6225.9>

Morello, P. 2020. "What to donate to a food bank and what to avoid." Feeding America.  
<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-blog/what-donate-food-bank-and-what-avoid>

Thoelke, Olivia. 2021. "Donating food to a food bank? Consider cash instead of canned foods." Feeding America.  
<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-blog/donating-food-food-bank-consider-cash-instead-canned-goods>

## Additional Resources

[Federation of Virginia Food Banks.](#)

Food Packaging Dates. FST 422P. Available at:  
[https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/en/FST/fst-422/fst-422.html](https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs_ext_vt_edu/en/FST/fst-422/fst-422.html)

VA Regional Foods Banks List

- [Capital Area Food Bank](#)
- [Fredericksburg Food Bank](#)
- [FeedMore](#) (Central Virginia Food Bank)
- [Feeding Southwest Virginia](#)
- [Blue Ridge Area Food Bank](#)
- [Virginia Peninsula Food Bank](#)
- [Food Bank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore](#)

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2022

FST-432NP