

Catholic Mutual...CARES

Food Pantries Safe Food Storage

It is imperative that food stored and distributed at food pantries meet state requirements as each state has varying food dating laws.

Guidelines for Food Pantries:

- Damaged, dented, swollen/bulging, pitted, rusted, and leaking canned goods should not be accepted or distributed.
- Infant formula and baby food are required to have a “use by” date on the product label. Never distribute baby formula or baby food after its “use by” date.
- Types of dates indicated on foods are: Sell by date, best if used by (or before), use by, and closed or coded dates.
 - Sell by date indicates how long to display the product. Food should be distributed before the date expires.
 - Best buy date is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
 - Use by date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. The date is determined by the manufacturer of the product.
 - Closed or coded dates are packing numbers used by the manufacturer.
- Perishable products such as meats and dairy products must be held at less than 40°F consistently. These foods become a health hazard if allowed to sit at room temperature for more than 2 hours TOTAL.
- Food should be organized using a “First In, First Out” method of distribution. Foods should be rotated to assure foods that have been on the shelves the longest are the first to be distributed and newer items are stored in the back.
- Frozen foods should be kept consistently at 0°F or lower. Every time food partially thaws, the quality of that food deteriorates.
- Foods placed in the freezer should be dated the day they enter the freezer.
- Dry foods should be stored at least 6” off the floor and 2” from the wall.
- Dry food storage areas should be swept and mopped regularly, garbage cans covered, and shelving kept clean.

- Storing foods on pallets should be avoided as bugs can nest in the crevices of the slats.
- Foods stored in permeable packaging (e.g. flour, rice, sugar) should be stored in rodent proof bins such as clean plastic containers with tight lids. Additionally, these foods should not be overstocked as a weevil (flour bug) infestation may occur after prolonged storage periods.
- A thermometer manufactured for monitoring refrigerator temperatures, should be placed in refrigerators so that temperatures are easily monitored.
- Freezer and refrigerator temperatures should be recorded on a daily log. If the pantry is not open daily, record the temperature each day the pantry is open.
- If non-food products are accepted for donation, the pantry should be aware of items that are not acceptable for donation.
- Food should be kept separate from other donated items such as clothing, toiletries, and cleaning products.
- A log should be kept identifying foods and products that are donated to the pantry along with a list of who donates to the pantry.
- A log should be kept identifying foods and products that have been distributed along with who received them.
- Visible signs should be posted indicating the time the pantry is open for distribution, along with signs posted indicating loitering is prohibited. Loitering should be prohibited except during pantry distribution hours.
- If identified, security personnel may need to be present during distribution times.
- Parking lot and outside waiting areas should be well maintained and well lit.
- Food pantries that partner with outside food providers need to have any contract reviewed and necessary insurance certificates obtained.
- Volunteers providing transportation such as picking up and dropping off food should be screened and required to take Catholic Mutual's online driver training curriculum.
- All volunteers and employees of the food pantry should comply with Diocesan Safe Environment requirements.