

FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

The questions that follow are a summary of the questions that are put to us by donor Entities and/or institutions that receive and distribute meals. The questions were all answered by the ASAE (Food and Economic Safety Authority) and by the DGAV (National Authority for Animal Health).

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A. Type of packaging to use for donating/distributing meals

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What kind of container should people use when they go to an Entity to gather their own portion?

The institution's responsibility ends at the point when it hands over the meal to the user. The user should bring whatever container he/she has. As a question of good practice, in specific cases and if this is justified, where there is a container that is not clean or which does not seem appropriate (such as packaging for non-food products), the institution may make this observation to the user.

Should the Recipient Entity have small containers that are appropriate for the needs of each applicant? If yes, of what type?

If this situation is foreseen, they may be reusable plastic containers, suitable for re-heating (placing in a microwave, for example, to make things easier). However, do not forget that this situation would require the implementation of washing and disinfection logistics for the containers in question.



Is there a valid alternative to disposable container for carrying surplus food from meals?

As an alternative to disposable containers, other containers for packaging meals may be used, reusable if they are of an appropriate material, provided that a satisfactory state of preservation and hygiene can be ensured by the parties.

B. Type of meals to donate/be used

Can any type of cooked meals be used by Recipient Entities? Or is there a type of meal that should not be consumed x hours after being made?

All meals from that day, in principle, can all be reused. However, extra care is needed with regard to certain types of meals received (for example, cod à la Brás that is very moist, dishes made with minced meat, dished with sauce, etc.) With these dishes in particular, it should always be ensured that they are re-heated above 75°C. It is equally important that all meals are consumed within a maximum timeframe of two hours after re-heating.

Foods with expired “best before” date can be donated? Can they be consumed?

Unlike consumption expiration dates that can be found in the labelling of microbiologically highly perishable foodstuffs (with the mention “use by...”), that cannot be marketed, and for that reason should not be donated or consumed after the date marked in the packaged, it is permitted to market foodstuffs whose date of minimum durability (mentioning “Best before ...”) is overdue being possible to donate and consume them, as long as they don’t show any signs of alteration.

The pre-packed products in the supermarket, “product of the day”, can only be donated on the packaging day?

The pre-packaged products in the supermarkets, “product of the day”, can be donated until the end of the morning of the day after packaging, as long as they are preserved in the proper conditions.

Yogurt with a use by date expired may or not be donated?

Foodstuff which shelf life is referred with a “use by date” reference, as yogurts are, shall not be consumed or donated when the date expires.

However, it is important to know that, instead of other foodstuff that also contain the reference “use by date”, generally, yogurt does not represent a risk to the health of consumers when shelf life date expires, if its package remain unopened and the the cold chain maintained. With its high acidity and usually made from pasteurized milk, the conditions for pathogenic microorganisms to develop are reduced.

Naturally it is always important the visual examination (opaque packaging, fungi presence, among other exams).

Furthermore, yogurt can be used in cakes or other products cooked using high temperatures.

Since 2013 yoghurts in Spain have a “best before” date, replacing “use by” date in order to avoid food waste. This measure was based precisely on the absence of health risk presented by the yoghurts after the dates previously applied.

C. Storage conditions for food to be donated/donated food

How should hot meals to be donated be handled?

In the case of hot meals being donated, deliver them immediately (applicable for journeys to the closest receiving entity, less than 30 minutes). For long distances, meals should be delivered cold, i.e. meals considered suitable for donation should be chilled immediately, so that they may be delivered later (e.g. at the end of the day). In these cases, it is important to ensure that the transportation continues to maintain the adequate temperature until arrival at the Recipient Entities.

We are a Receiving Entity that distributes dinners. If we are set up to collect meals within the confines of a supermarket, can we only distribute on the following day, at dinner time?

Yes. In this case, meals to be collected at a supermarket should be refrigerated, and the Recipient Entity should ensure that the adequate temperature is maintained during their transportation and until they are in place, whereupon it should only provide for their reheating near to the time they are to be served, ensuring that the food is reheated above 75°C right though. It should be emphasised that the user must always be informed, if he/she wishes to take the meal home, that it absolutely must be eaten on the following day. It is a good practice to only distribute to users' meals no more than 24 hours after the moment they are prepared/made by the donor supermarket/restaurant.

We are a Receiving Entity that operates between Monday and Friday. Can we keep what we collect at the weekends?

It is a good practice to only distribute to users, meals with no more than 24 hours after the moment they are prepared/made by the donor supermarket or restaurant. However, as long as there is the guarantee that the adequately cold conditions are kept and that the foods involved aren't very perishable, nothing prevents that they can't be kept and donated/consumed in the following Monday.

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If there is left over donated food, can the Receiving Entity freeze it, assuming it is still within the validity period stipulated by the donor? If yes, in what conditions and in what type of freezer?

Foods can be frozen, suitably labelled and packaged, in equipment with specific departments for that specific end.

D. How to donate meals to Receiving Entities

We are a restaurant with surplus food from the dish of the day. What do we have to do to deliver meals? Can they go in a normal container?

All prepared food that has not been served and which has not been exposed may be donated to a Receiving Entity, taking into account certain general procedures for ensuring food safety:

- Pack the meals into appropriate containers (e.g. non-reusable aluminium containers, similar to those used within the “take-away” system, properly washed and disinfected plastic containers, or others that ensure adequate transportation of the meals);
- Identify the food within the containers (date and time of production);

In the case of hot meals being donated, deliver them immediately (applicable for journeys to the closest Receiving Entity, less than 30 minutes). For long distances, meals should be delivered cold, i.e. meals considered suitable for donation should be chilled immediately, so that they may be delivered later (e.g. at the end of the day). In these cases, it is important to ensure that the transportation continues to maintain the chilled environment until arrival at the receiving entity.

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E. How to distribute meals to users

We are a Receiving Entity that will be seeking to source meals and distribute them to the homes for families earmarked for this. Can we distribute in bulk, or will we have to pack individual servings into containers?

All meals to be distributed at home may be packed into individual or family servings beforehand at the Recipient Entity, it being important to know the number of people within each family or household, in order to better manage the quantities to provide, avoiding food waste.

We are a Recipient Entity that will be collecting from different sites. Can we mix and arrange the meals as we see fit?

It is not advisable to mix meals originating from different sites. Doing this increases the probability of invalidating the traceability in a food poisoning event by not knowing the precise origin of the food that gave rise to it and thus finding the source of the contamination. Whenever possible, meals should be immediately dispatched to the user. It should be emphasised that, in order to guarantee the safeguard and protection of the users' health, the good practice of registering the providence of the donated meals should be upheld.

The Donor Entity makes the food, keeps it warm, and delivers it like this. Can Receiving Entities reheat it?

Yes, Receiving Entities can reheat it, although if it is a large quantity, it should only deliver to the end-consumer the part that he/she is going to consume, as the food should only be reheated once, at the consumption moment. In other words, the Recipient Entity should divide the food into portions and only reheat them when they are going to be consumed, in the quantities in which they are going to be consumed.

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Where a smaller portion involves removing the corresponding part from containers, how should this division process and the handling of utensils for dividing and removing to a small container be carried out?

There are smaller containers to package the food with lesser depth which allow for a better dosage of the meals.

F. Responsibilities of the intervenients in the Donation Process and Official Supervision

In the case of surplus food being donated in line with the good practices defined by DARIACORDAR/ASAE/DGAV, what is the Health Authority's position?

The Health Authority only intervenes and has powers in case of a food poisoning incident or serious risk to health and its intervention will be articulated with the other Competent



Authorities, either in the case of the donation, or in the case of the commercialization, as to enable the elaboration of the respective epidemiologic inquire.

Who is responsible for a donated item once it leaves de premises of the Donor Entity?

The responsible for the hygiene and safety of the donated food items is the next intervenient in the donation process to which the Donor Entities delivers the items, with the latter party being free from any responsibility from after the donation.

There is a food poisoning incident, the Receiving Entity and all Other operators after the supplier (Donor Entity) have complied with the rules and good practices, and the Donor Entity itself can also provide evidence that it has done so. What legal action might the Competent Authority take in these circumstances?

If traceability and general and specific hygiene conditions are guaranteed by the different operators in the donation chain, no legal measure will be applied by the competent Authority.

Who is the “supplier” and the “operator” for the purposes of responsibility?

In the donation process there are not economy operator as the activity doesn't aim to obtain profit. There are only intervenient.

The Donor Entity in the process is the “supplier” of the Recipient Entity that collects the food surplus, delivering them directly to the final consumer or to another charity.