



FRESH
RESCUE
PROGRAM HANDBOOK

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THE FRESH RESCUE PROGRAM

Purpose

The purpose of this manual is to provide guidance for Vermont Foodbank empowered agencies to create and uphold a strong Fresh Rescue Program. This manual will explain all necessary procedures and best practices gathered from previous years' experiences at the Vermont Foodbank, as well as other Feeding America network food bank members that operate a store donation program.

National donors, such as Hannaford, Shaw's, Price Chopper, and many more, create an opportunity for empowered agencies to access more fresh food - and in turn help strengthen their communities. This partnership enables grocery retailers to donate unsaleable, yet usable, products to food banks. Donations consist of perishable and some non-perishable food items and occasionally non-food items. Safe food handling and storage guidelines must never be compromised in the process.

Federal and State laws (The Federal Law: The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, and the Vermont Law: The Good Samaritan Law) protect businesses, volunteers, and non-profit organizations from civil and criminal liability in the course of donating fit and wholesome food or grocery products for distribution to those in need.

Program History

In 2000, with assistance from the industry's food safety experts and nonprofit representatives, the Conference for Food Protection created a set of safe food handling guidelines for the recovery of perishable products from retail outlets such as restaurants, retail grocery stores, and commercial kitchens. Previously, due to the perishable nature of the product, the industry deemed the product unsafe to donate. The change in these guidelines opened the door for perishable recovery from retail grocery stores through store donation programs.

Vermont Foodbank has always partnered with grocery retailers to receive excess and unsaleable perishable products. It began with only food items that could be frozen, such as meat and bread. Retailers began to adopt Fresh Rescue programs, which opened up an avenue for more fresh, wholesome foods to be kept out of the waste stream. In 2014, Act 148, the Universal Recycling Law, was in its first stages and Vermont Foodbank began to empower the network of food shelves and meal sites to make direct-to-store pick-ups. This allowed for perishable food items to be distributed much quicker than before. Not only did this save millions of pounds of food from the waste stream, but it has also allowed many network partners to distribute more nutritious options to those struggling with hunger in their communities.

BUILDING A STRONG FRESH RESCUE PROGRAM

Who is a Donor?

National donors are all large grocery retailers that have established a relationship with Feeding America and participate in their version of Fresh Rescue throughout their national footprint. In Vermont, these donors include, Hannaford, Walmart, Price Chopper, Shaw's, Trader Joe's, Costco, Cumberland Farms, Dollar General, Aldi, Frito Lay, Big Lots, Bimbo/Freihofers Bakery, Panera, and Target.

Local donors can include, smaller markets, food producers, farms, or restaurants including Cabot, Vermont Creamery, Coop's, Healthy Living and others.

Who is an Empowered Agency Partner?

Most national donors require their empowered agency to be a member of their local food bank to participate in their donation program. This is because retailers know that food bank members are providing food to people in need, have the training needed to handle food safely, and are an important resource for those seeking assistance in their local communities. Although this is the preference, some exceptions may be made and it is not the decision of the Retail Store Program Manager (RSPM), the Vermont Foodbank, or Feeding America when or how these exceptions are made.

Always be sure to check in with the RSPM before going to a store/retailer to learn if there is an existing relationship between the retailer and another agency.

What Can be Donated?

Donations can include one or all of the following categories: produce, meat/seafood, bread/bakery, deli/prepared, dairy, mixed cooler products, dry grocery/non-perishable, and non-food. A more detailed list is provided in this handbook. As previously mentioned, The Good Samaritan law protects the donor and non-profits from liability as long as the food was donated in good faith.

Identifying a Network Partner as a Good Fit:

To participate in the Fresh Rescue Program, the network partner must:

- Be a network partner of Vermont Foodbank and be a member in good standing.
- In addition to the Basic Agreement, agencies must agree to sign the Fresh Rescue Program Agreement before receiving donations and each time, thereafter, the contact person has changed.
- Be within 30 minutes, one way, to the designated retail donor or have active thermal devices (reefer truck). Thirty minutes allows for the use of passive thermal devices which are provided by the Foodbank.

- Maintain all equipment, including scale, infrared thermometers, and thermal blanket. The empowered agency is responsible for communicating to the Foodbank when something isn't working properly. The Foodbank will replace items once if they have been lost or stolen. If items are lost or stolen again, after being replaced by the Foodbank the agency will be responsible for replacing them with approved devices.
- Have adequate refrigerator and freezer capacity to store perishable donations and accept all donated food categories.
- Have at least one person who is ServeSafe certified and trained in safe food handling procedures, or willing to complete the training before pickups dependent on the training schedule.
- Have trusted volunteers/staff that are committed to doing weekly pickups, maintain a clean pickup vehicle, sorting, taking and recording temperatures, and reporting of Fresh Rescue donations.
- Commit to reporting every week utilizing the current online reporting system.
- Have a backup person designated for reporting if the usual person is unable to do so.
- Be able to maintain a respectful relationship and to communicate effectively with store employees and Vermont Foodbank.

BEGINNING THE FRESH RESCUE PROGRAM

Once a network partner has been identified as a good fit to participate in the program, they will then become an empowered agency, and will solidify with the RSPM the following:

- Obtaining appropriate devices for the Fresh Rescue Program
- Preferred pickup days
- Preferred time of pickup
- Discussion of acceptable vs. unacceptable products to donate
- The volunteer or staff member that will be doing store pick-ups
- Training on reporting procedures, temperature log, and program expectations
- Designate a contact who will be responsible for reporting pounds, establishing a plan, and identifying a backup person to report when the main contact is unavailable

Equipment Needed for the Fresh Rescue Program:

The empowered agency is responsible for maintaining the equipment provided and alerting the Foodbank when items are no longer functioning properly. If the equipment is lost or stolen the Foodbank will replace the equipment once, then it is the responsibility of the empowered agency to replace it if it is lost or stolen a second time.

Provided by the Foodbank:

- Passive thermal blanket and/or ice pack blanket, or a cooler with ice packs is also acceptable but is not provided by the Foodbank
- Infrared thermometer, or a probe thermometer is also acceptable but not provided by the Foodbank at this time
- Digital scale for weighing donations
- ID card: These cards will be issued each October
- Log in credentials to the online reporting system: MealConnect

Provided by the empowered agency:

- A clean, reliable vehicle
- Access to a computer for reporting donations
- Boxes or tubs (sometimes it's good to have extra, in case a box is overflowing or acceptable items need to be separated from unacceptable items)

Making a Connection With the Store:

The Retail Store Program Manager will set up an initial meeting with the empowered agency and the store manager to discuss:

- Days of donation pick-up (a designated schedule will be agreed upon and these days are not to be changed without first discussing with the RSPM)
- Time of donation pick-up
- Designated area at the store where donations will be stored (i.e.. freezer, cooler, or dry)
- Pick-up procedure
- Store contact that the volunteers or staff should check in with at the time of donation pickup
- Categories included in a donation
- Discussion of acceptable vs. unacceptable products to donate
- Procedure for holidays, closures, and missed pickups. Please provide a list of holiday closures for the store.
- Expectations of the empowered agency, RSPM, and the retail partner store
- Establish a start date to begin picking up donations, preferably within one week of meeting

During the first 2 weeks of store pickups, the RSPM will be in frequent contact to understand how the process is working and if there are any adjustments that need to be made to the pickup process. It is the responsibility of the empowered agency to update the RSPM and the store of any changes to their contact person(s). After the initial meeting, the **schedule of pickup days may not be changed** unless discussed with the RSPM. There may be more than one agency assigned to the same store. All agencies must commit to maintaining a helpful and respectful relationship with each other and can act as a substitute in the event that one agency has a closure or missed store pickup.

BUILDING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Establishing good relationships is at the heart of the Fresh Rescue Program. The empowered agency and the donor must create a respectful partnership by being consistent, keeping communication open and honest, and being accountable. The empowered agency's staff and volunteers are ambassadors of their organizations and Vermont Foodbank and should feel enabled to educate the donor about the importance of this program and how it is impacting the lives of those that are using its services. This is a great way to connect and engage the donor to provide context to where the food goes once it's left the store. **Establishing consistency within all aspects of the program will create success and will, most likely, result in a greater amount of useable donations.**

Points of Contact at the Store: Know Who to Talk to

The best way to create a good rapport with store employees is to **know their language**. Each store banner (Hannaford, Shaw's, Price Chopper etc.) names the positions within their stores something different than the next grocery store. For example: Walmart has "Store Directors," but Hannaford has "Store Managers". They are in the same position, but knowing the store's language lets them understand you know who they are.

Receiver/Claims Managers are the ones that will be getting donations organized and ready for pickup. They are often the ones that understand the procedures and will prove to be vital for getting the donations ready for you.

Department Managers are responsible for training their staff to pull products for donations and when the donations are fluctuating; they are the ones that know why. It is important to make contact with each department manager and let them know who you are. Checking in with them regularly will hold them accountable for the success of that department's donations. These managers can change often and sometimes when the donations are on a downward trend, it's because there was changeover within the department.

Assistant Managers are usually the ones that are more involved with the day-to-day operations of the donation program. They are a good contact for when issues arise surrounding the pickup procedure.

Store Managers/Store Directors are usually involved with their donation program at a high level and do not know all the details. This person is usually a contact that the RSPM will contact when issues arise that can't be resolved with other employees. It is still important to introduce yourself and let them know who you are.

Being a Good Partner

It is the responsibility of the empowered agency and all of its volunteers and/or staff to follow the terms and conditions that have been agreed upon in the Fresh Rescue Agreement. The RSPM is always available as a resource to help manage the relationships between the partner store and the empowered agency. The RSPM will support the empowered agency if issues arise and the

empowered agency is uncomfortable addressing these issues with store employees. If there are any concerns about the Fresh Rescue Programs' obligations or expectations, the empowered agency should not hesitate to reach out to the RSPM to discuss any concerns or questions they may encounter.

- It is important to build rapport with the receiver or department manager of the store. Often they are the ones that are ensuring donations are ready for pickup.
- Please be patient at the time of pickup and understand sometimes the process can be delayed; but your time is valuable also, so please raise issues around long wait times for donation with the RSPM.
- Empowered agencies are responsible for communicating with the store if there are closures due to holidays, weather-related issues, or if a pickup cannot be made.
- Be consistent with the pick-up procedure, including pickup time.
- Communicate effectively with appropriate staff at the store about experiences during pickups.
- Inform the RSPM of any concerns regarding the Fresh Rescue Program.
- Carry your Identification Card when picking up donations and present it when asked.
- Be open to the variability of the amount/type of product donated.
- Thank the store employees, even when the amount of donations is not large.
- Report donated pounds on time.

Role of the Vermont Foodbank and Retail Store Program Manager

The Fresh Rescue Program is a partnership between retail grocery stores, empowered agencies, and the Vermont Foodbank. The RSPM manages all aspects of the Fresh Rescue Program and will establish specific guidelines, manage the pickup schedules, and address issues and concerns of the empowered agency and retail grocery stores. The RSPM will also engage with Feeding America and retail grocery stores at the corporate level to ensure the Vermont Foodbank and the empowered agencies are kept current and up to date with any changes within Fresh Rescue Program. The RSPM will strive to create a partnership that is both beneficial and sustainable to the empowered agency and the partner store. The RSPM should be considered the first point of contact when issues arise that cannot be solved between the empowered agency and the partnered store. Frequently communicating with the RSPM will ensure that stores and empowered agencies are held accountable and appropriately nurturing the partnership.

When to communicate with the RSPM:

- Communicate often! Share the good and the less than perfect information.
- Another way to keep communication flowing is to use the description line on MealConnect. This is a great way to show what donations you are receiving.
- When donation quality begins to degrade and more than 30% of donations are compost.
- When there is a decrease in the variety of categories.
- When there is a decrease within a specific category.
- When there is an increase in a specific category to the point where the empowered agency is no longer able to take all donations based on capacity.
- Issues surrounding the pickup procedure: long wait for donations to be ready, change in pickup time, other store requests.
- Rude or inappropriate interactions with store employees.
- Barriers to reporting weekly.
- Changes in staff or volunteers.
- **BEFORE any changes are made to pickup schedule or pickup of categories.**

It's helpful for the RSPM to understand what is happening on the ground during store pickups. Frequent communication will inform the RSPM where there are areas for improvement within the Fresh Rescue Program and to ensure that the most wholesome and quality donations are being donated and distributed to those in need. The RSPM will keep the best interest of the empowered agency top of mind and will create a safe space to discuss individual needs that will help to better serve their guests.

PICKUP GUIDELINES & HANDLING FOOD SAFELY

Each store company has slightly different guidelines for their store donation program. Some stores request that the empowered agency check in with each department for donations, while other stores require product to be taken from the receiving area in the back of the store where the receiver has organized all departments' donations. The empowered agency is expected to follow the procedure that was agreed upon during the initial meeting with the store. All stores are required to pack their donations in sturdy, clean boxes, yet sometimes boxes can be overfilled. Having a few extra boxes or totes will come in handy. Many times stores will have extra banana boxes on hand.

Pickup Best Practices

- Whether you are checking in with each department or the receiver, it's important to let a store employee know you are there.
- Have your ID card ready and available to present to a store employee if asked.
- Only take donations that are marked with your organization's name, "food shelf, or food bank". If it is unclear if the product is set aside for donations, ask a store employee in that department or the receiver or leave the boxes there and notify someone when this occurs.
- The empowered agency is expected to take all donations offered unless their capacity is limited at that time. For example, there are 12 boxes of deli available but the empowered agency only has storage capacity for 4, please take 4 boxes without cherry-picking items and let the store know you are unable to take all the donations available due to capacity limitations. If this occurs often, an additional empowered agency may be partnered with the store to ensure all donations are being utilized.
- When collecting donated food items from the retail partner store, the volunteer or staff should take the time to inspect the donations to ensure quality foods are being donated. Notify a store employee in that department or the receiver if there are donations that do not meet donation guidelines and leave any unacceptable donations at the store.
- Collect all donations from the cooler and freezer and take an average temperature. Each category should be handled with care and with food safety in mind. Keeping foods out of the temperature danger zone, the range between 41°F – 135°F, will prevent harmful bacteria from growing and making foods unsafe (see full procedure below)
- When loading the transport vehicle, use passive thermal devices to ensure cold/freezer products stay cold/frozen.
- Upon return to the empowered agency, take an average temperature of both cooler and freezer products.
- Sort and weigh each category.

Safe Transport of Donations

Once the donations have been collected and a temperature taken (see procedure below), they must be packed into a clean vehicle for transport back to the empowered agency's location. With the understanding that many of the vehicles are limited in space, certain packing techniques will ensure that donations are handled safely to decrease the risk of foodborne illnesses.

| PRODUCT TYPE | SAFE HANDLING |
|-----------------------|---|
| FROZEN PRODUCT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temperature required • Covered with thermal blankets, placed above refrigerated items <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In coolers with ice packs |
| REFRIGERATED PRODUCTS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temperature required • Covered with thermal blankets, unless the vehicle has a refrigeration unit capable of keeping the inside of the vehicle 41°F or below • Do not store or transport raw products (meat, poultry, and shell eggs) on top of ready-to-eat products. • Do not store allergens (milk, eggs, etc.) over other products |
| SHELF-STABLE PRODUCTS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No temperature requirements • Do not store allergens over other products (peanuts, tree nuts, flour, dry milk, etc.) |
| NON-FOOD ITEMS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No temperature requirements • Do not store chemicals with food items |

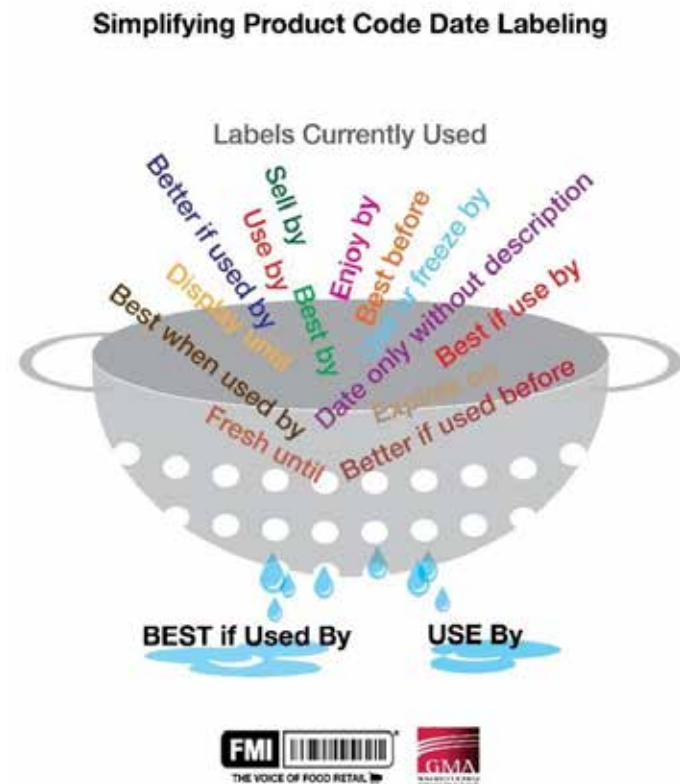
DATE LABELING DEFINITIONS

Donations from stores will include product that has met code date, but these dates are generally based on *peak quality*. Feeding America guidelines suggest that dairy items must be donated on the last day of the code date and protein products must be frozen on or before the last day of the code date. Accepting other foods beyond these peak quality dates is acceptable, as the foods are still safe for consumption.

In 2017, the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) and other partners began work on standardizing code dates. FMI worked with retailers and manufacturers to encourage them to immediately begin phasing in the common wording, “BEST if Used By” and “USE By”, with widespread adoption urged by the summer of 2018. Broad industry adoption of this new voluntary standard will occur over time so companies have the flexibility to make the changes in a way that ensures consistency across their product categories and doesn’t create unintentional food waste. Full adoption has not yet occurred, but in 2019 the FDA endorsed the use of the “BEST if Used By” date language. You can find more information at

www.fmi.org.

- **“BEST If Used By” or “BEST If Used or Freeze By”** quality phrasing will indicate to consumers that after the specified date, the product may not taste or perform as expected but is safe to use or consume. For example, the quality of the product taste or texture may have diminished slightly or it may not have the full vitamin content indicated on the package.
- **“USE By” or “USE or Freeze By”** safety phrasing will inform customers that these products should be consumed on or before the date listed on the package. The product should not be consumed after the date on the package due to the product’s perishable nature, and the product should be disposed of. This date label is for perishable products with potential safety implications or material degradation of critical performance, such as nutrition



TEMPERATURE LOG PROCEDURE

The purpose of a temperature log is to ensure the cold chain, of each product type, has been kept and food safety has not been compromised. Time and temperature sensitive foods, including Deli, Dairy, all meat and seafood, freezer and cooler products, must be kept out of the temperature danger zone. Bacteria can begin to grow rapidly if these types of products have been left in the temperature danger zone (between 41°F and 135°F) for too long. Most guests we serve are considered a high-risk population and may have a compromised immune system. Bacteria that grows due to the mishandling of foods can lead to foodborne illnesses and high-risk populations are more susceptible to these illnesses.

| TYPE OF FOOD | TEMPERATURE AT PICK-UP AND AT AGENCY | STORAGE AT AGENCY |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meats, Fish, and Shellfish (includes rotisserie chicken) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frozen solid, between -15°F and 30°F • Must be frozen on or before the "Sell by" or "Use by" dates. <p><i>* Note: Record average temperature for freezer product in temp. log</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If frozen, can keep up to 3 months. • If product is not frozen, freeze immediately, can keep up to 3 months |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dairy Products (Milk, half and half, whipping cream, yogurt, cheeses, soy products, dips, butter, margarine, etc.). • Eggs and Egg Substitutes • Cut Produce (fruit and vegetables) and leafy greens and melons, cantaloupes, honeydews. • Deli Items & Individually Packaged Sandwiches (Potato salads, coleslaws, bean salads, macaroni salads, pork and beans, desserts, etc.) | <p>Between 33°F and 41°F</p> <p><i>* Note: Record Average temperature for cooler product in temp. log</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At 41°F or below. • Use within recommended storage guidelines at the Foodbank. • If frozen, can be kept a maximum of 3 months. • Store allergens (Eggs, fish, milk, soy milk) separate from each other and away from other products. • Note: raw, whole eggs should not be frozen. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelf Stable Products • Canned Products • Jarred Products (Ketchup, mustard, BBQ sauce, Steak sauce, pickles, relishes, jams, jellies, preserves, salad dressings, salsas, mayonnaise, peanut butter, etc.) • Bakery Items (Bread, rolls, bagels, cakes, cookies, donuts, muffins). • Dry Products (Flours, pastas, rice, grains, beans, lentils, etc.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Room temperature. • Must be sealed. <p><i>* Note: No temperature needs to be recorded for this product type</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean and dry storage rooms or warehouse. • Bakery products should be frozen if not to be used within 48 hours. • Store allergens (Peanuts, almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews) separate from each other and away from other products. • Flours, pastas, dry beans, rice, grains, and lentils should be refrigerated if not to be used in 3 months. |

| TYPE OF FOOD | TEMPERATURE AT PICK-UP AND AT AGENCY | STORAGE AT AGENCY |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non Foods (Paper goods, etc. Health and Beauty aids, vitamins, cleaning chemicals) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Room temperature <i>Note: Chemicals should be transported separate from each other and away from other products.</i> <i>* Note: No temperature needs to be recorded for this product type.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean and dry storage rooms or warehouse. Store chemicals away from food products. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole Produce <p><i>Note: Not all whole produce needs to be kept under refrigeration.</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Room temperature. Chilled. <p><i>*Note: No temperature needs to be recorded for this product type.</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean and dry storage rooms or warehouse. Cooler. |

Procedure

Please follow the steps below to ensure safe food practices are being followed by both the donor and the empowered agency.

- To turn on the thermometer, click the black trigger once and the screen will light up.
- To take the temperature of the product, refer to the Temperature guidelines for temperature requirements for each product type.
 - Hold the thermometer trigger and point the red laser on a spot on the product packaging that is not clear or shiny. Hold the thermometer no more than 3 inches away from that spot.
 - Keep the laser still and when the numbers stop moving, that is the temperature reading.
 - If there is more than one box, please take 3 random temperatures to get an accurate average temperature reading.
 - Accept the donation if the average temperature is within the range listed at the top of the temperature log.
- Troubleshooting:** the temperature is reading too high when the product is clearly frozen, but the temperature is reading above 32°.
 - Make sure the thermometer is close enough to the product. Infrared thermometers can pickup surface air temperatures.
 - Make sure the thermometer is pointed directly at the product and the laser is perpendicular to the surface of the packaging.
- Record the temperature.
 - Record what store and what town the store is located in.

- b. Record the date the donation was received.
 - c. The person that takes the temperatures needs to record his/her initials.
 - d. Record what the product type is by marking a "C" for cooler product or an "F" for freezer product.
5. Pack all acceptable donations into the transport vehicle, using any passive thermal devices (thermal blanket, cooler with ice packs) to ensure the donations do not reach the temperature danger zone while in transport.
 6. Upon arrival to the empowered agency organization, use the same procedure used at the store for taking the temperature for cooler and freezer product.
 7. If the drive from store to organization is longer than 30 minutes and the donations are in the temperature danger zone, immediately transfer to appropriate storage.
 - a. If the drive from store to organization is over 2 hours and the donations have reached the temperature danger zone, the product must be discarded.
 8. Product must be kept in the appropriate storage until it is distributed.
 9. Record the temperatures either on the paper temperature log provided and/or on MealConnect.
 - a. a. The Vermont Foodbank will provide an electronic copy of the temperature log. Log pages should be printed at the empowered agency as needed.
 - b. b. If MealConnect is not used to record the temperatures, the hard copy must be kept for one year.
 10. During the yearly agency visits, the empowered agency may be asked to show the temperature log if a hard copy is used. If reported on MealConnect, there is no need to keep the hard copy.

REPORTING PROCEDURE

The Fresh Rescue Program is a way to capture edible foods from being wasted or thrown away. Feeding America partners with retail stores to help local communities receive more fresh food items, and in return, the retail corporate entities need to track food donations for tax benefits and other business purposes. The Vermont Foodbank must have this information available for these corporate partners to inspire and engage the donors of the Fresh Rescue Program.

Reporting Requirements

- Reports are to be submitted using the online reporting system MealConnect.
- Reports are to be submitted **every WEEK**. It is suggested that reports be submitted on Mondays by 4 pm.
- If the empowered agency is unable to complete a report, the RSPM should be contacted **ONE WEEK BEFORE** the end of the month to discuss options.
- Reports must be up to date by the **last Monday of every month** no later than 4 pm.
- All donations are to be separated into specified categories and weighed. Usually, donation will be sorted by category by the store already, but accurate reporting is essential and some sorting may need to be done at the location of the empowered agency. Review the “category reporting” document in this handbook for more details.
- All pounds received from the store are to be weighed and recorded, even if some product is deemed unusable.
- The description section should be used to list products received in that category. This can also be an area used to report pounds that were unusable or notes of quality.

Online Reporting Procedure (Required procedure): The required and most efficient method of reporting is to use the online reporting system called MealConnect. The RSPM will set up a MealConnect account with a username and password for the designated reporter and the person designated as a backup. All pounds will be recorded on this site. Temperatures can also be recorded on this site but isn't required. The RSPM will train the designated reporter on the proper reporting procedure. A reference guide will be provided and is part of this handbook. Donation reports can be run and referred to at the empowered agency's convenience.

Reporting must be done every week and up to date and double-checked by the last Monday of each month. The RSPM will send out three e-mail reminders before the last Monday of the month. This is to ensure the donation pounds for that month are synched with the Vermont Foodbank's inventory system, which, in turn, creates an accurate report for Fresh Rescue donors. If the donation pounds are reported after the last Monday of the month, the pounds will be entered into the next month showing skewed donation pounds for that month. If there are circumstances where the report cannot

be completed by the end of the month (vacation, sickness, etc), please contact the RSPM one week before the end of the month.

The RSPM will only remind the empowered agency a total of **three times per month about reporting** donated pounds weekly. Once the empowered agency has been notified their reports are tardy, the empowered agency has three days to complete the tardy reports. If there are no pounds reported or the reports are not up to date after three days, the empowered agency will be notified of non-compliance. This notification will lead to a discussion with the RSPM as to how the rectify the issue of non-compliance. The RSPM will work with the empowered agency to help resolve the issues or barriers that are causing incomplete or late reporting. If the issues are not resolved, the retail partner store will be notified that there is no longer a record for donated pounds and will need to discontinue donating to this empowered agency. **Failure to submit reports on time may result in being put on hold from the Fresh Rescue Program.**

AREAS OF NON-COMPLIANCE

There are certain guidelines and procedures of the Fresh Rescue Program that are required by Feeding America and it is expected the Vermont Foodbank and its members adhere to these expectations.

Areas of Non-Compliance Include:

- Failure to separate donated pounds into categories.
- Tardy reports.
- Failure to keep reports up to date.
- Failure to report.
- Cherry-picking donations.
- Time and temperature abuse to donated products.
- Failure to follow guidelines put forth by the Vermont Foodbank and Feeding America.
- Making unscheduled pick-ups or changing scheduled pickup day without the knowledge of the RSPM.
- Giving donations to other organizations without the PDRM's knowledge. Donations cannot be shared with organizations that are not network partners of the Vermont Foodbank and sharing between network partners must be communicated to the PDRM and be recorded properly, if appropriate.
- Failure to notify any retail partner stores of closures due to holidays or weather.
- Improper distribution of donated products.
- Failure to obtain proper devices for safe food handling and pounds reporting.

If any of the issues above occur, the RSPM will work with the empowered agency to help resolve the issues of non-compliance. If a solution is not found, the empowered agency may be put on hold from the Fresh Rescue Program and may be able to resume Fresh Rescue in the future if previous issues have been addressed.

FRESH RESCUE PROGRAM AGREEMENT

VERMONT FOODBANK, INC.

Fresh Rescue Program Agreement 2024

In partnering with the Vermont Foodbank and local retail stores, the approved Network Partner (name)_____ Agency Number _____ is a part of the nationwide retail store donations program, called the Fresh Rescue Program in Vermont. The network partner, participating in the Fresh Rescue Program, is the empowered agency and will establish a respectful relationship with local retail stores who set aside perishable and non-perishable food, which would otherwise be discarded, for donation. These donated items may include produce, meat, bread/bakery, beverages, deli items, dairy, prepared, and grocery items. This will allow the powered agency to distribute more nutritious and fresh options in their communities.

BEST PRACTICES

The empowered agency agrees to follow the guidelines of safe food handling and food distribution described in the Vermont Foodbank's Basic Agreement.

When partnering with a retail partner store, the empowered agency should be realistic about their capacity to store and distribute donated items, and should not commit to receiving more than the empowered agency can handle properly.

Due to Feeding America requirements, the empowered agency cannot distribute food to another organization, even if the agency is a network partner of the Vermont Foodbank, without making arrangements first with the Foodbank's Retail Store Program Manager (RSPM).

The empowered agency will carry the Vermont Foodbank identification card with them when picking up donations. The empowered agency should have the ID card available if asked by a retail partner store employee to confirm what agency they represent. This ID card shows the empowered agency is a Vermont Foodbank network partner and a member of Feeding America.

Any issues that arise with the retail store must be communicated with the RSPM immediately.

SAFE FOOD HANDLING

A staff member or volunteer of the empowered agency must take a food safety training course to the highest level appropriate and maintain the certification.

The empowered agency volunteer or staff transporting donations must keep the transport vehicle clean, free of toxins, and have the capacity to haul donations from the retail partner store to the empowered agency's location.

The empowered agency must obtain approved safe food handling devices, with the help of Vermont Foodbank when available, to continue the cold chain of products using a combination of the following items:

- Insulated Blankets
- Thermometer
- Storage Refrigerator
- Storage Freezer
- Clean and Maintained Vehicle Food Grade Tubs and Freezer Packs

The empowered agency must log the temperature, on the log sheet provided by Vermont Foodbank or on MealConnect, of refrigerated and frozen food items at the time of pick-up and again upon delivery to the agency's storage. If the product falls outside the safe temperature zone (> 41°F), the product must be

destroyed and not distributed for consumption.

The empowered agency has the right to refuse any donated item if there is evidence of it being tampered with or of temperature abuse. Please notify the RSPM if this occurs.

EMPOWERED AGENCY RESPONSABILITIES

The empowered agency must be a member in good standing with the Vermont Foodbank to participate in the Fresh Rescue Program.

The empowered agency is representing their agency as well as the Vermont Foodbank and is responsible for all actions.

The empowered agency should create and maintain a respectful relationship with store employees and take care in handling the donations received.

If there are multiple empowered agencies assigned to the same retail partner store, the empowered agencies must agree to work in partnership and support all involved to ensure good communication and a high level of customer service to the retail partner store.

The empowered agency and retail partner store will agree upon days and times of donation pick-up and adhere to that schedule. The schedule of days and time of donation pick-up will not be changed without notifying and receiving approval of the RSPM.

All volunteers of the empowered agency must abide by the schedule agreed upon. Extra, unscheduled pick-ups are not permitted unless coordinated with the retail partner store prior to arrival; showing up unannounced is not permitted.

Picking and choosing or Cherry-picking, certain donated food items from what is available is not permitted. If there are concerns about the volume or quality of donations available, the empowered agency will call the RSPM to discuss reallocating the donations to additional empowered agencies. The empowered agency is not expected to take more than can be handled by your agency.

The empowered agency will only pick-up food designated and marked for donation.

The empowered agency will accurately report all pounds of donated food items from retail partner store(s) to the RSPM WEEKLY . Each category will be weighed separately and recorded using the appropriate reporting procedure.

The empowered agency will provide 2 contacts for the retail partner store with name and phone number for incidents that can be dealt with, without the RSPM involvement.

The empowered agency will notify the RSPM of any changes to the contact person(s) and provide a new contact person(s) and their contact information.

The empowered agency will not discontinue donation pick-ups without a discussion with the RSPM.

The empowered agency has read and can commit to follow the guidelines set forth within this agreement.

I have read and understand the terms outlined in this agreement.

Date: _____

Executive or Program Director

VF Retail Store Program Manager

REPORTING IN MEALCONNECT



How to Use MealConnect to Report Fresh Rescue Pounds

Step One: Visit www.mealconnect.org

Step Two: Click the “LOGIN” button.



Step Three: Under “Partner Login,” enter your username & password, then click “Login.”

A screenshot of the "Partner Login" form. The form has a white background with a green border. At the top, it says "Partner Login". Below that, there are two input fields: "E-Mail Address" with a placeholder "Email" and "Password" with a placeholder "Password". Below the password field is a link for "Password Reset »". At the bottom right of the form is a blue button with the word "Login" in white.

Please contact Joshua Ellison if you are having trouble logging in or would like to change any login information.

E-mail: jellison@vtfoodbank.org

Cell Phone: 802-595-5023

ENTERING THE POUNDS IN MEALCONNECT

The screenshot shows the MealConnect interface for recording new receipts. The page title is 'RECORD NEW RECEIPTS'. On the left is a sidebar with navigation options: Dashboard, New Receipt, Previous Receipts, Reports, Settings, Messages, and Help Resources. The main content area has a 'Vermont Foodbank' logo and a 'START GUIDED TOUR' button. The 'Add New Receipt' form includes a date field (10/29/2018), a donor dropdown menu, checkboxes for 'Scheduled Pickup Not Attempted' and 'No Pounds', a table for adding items with columns for Category, Storage, Description, and Pounds, and an 'Add' button. A zoomed-in view of the donor dropdown shows several 'Hannafood Bros. Co.' entries with their addresses. A purple 'Add Another Line Item' button is also visible.

1. Enter the date the pick up *occurred*. Do not use the date you are reporting on.
2. Choose the store and location from the drop down menu, you may only have one; select the donor.
3. Submitting a “zero report”: This is when there are no donations to report. If you are unable to pick up due to weather, sickness, etc check the first box, “scheduled pick up not attempted”. If you went to the store and the store had no donations, check the second box, “no pounds”.
4. Choose the category you are reporting for. **DO NOT USE “VFB Use Only” categories**. Ex: VFB Use Only Meat. The storage will auto fill. Please use the description section to note what the donation included.
5. Enter the total pounds and click the green “add” button.
6. Click the purple “add another line receipt” to add more categories for the same store on the same day and repeat step 4 & 5.
7. when you are finished reporting for this store and day click the green “add receipt and review” button.

COMPLETING THE REPORT



Here you can see the **total pounds** for the store you have already reported for on that day.

If you find something is incorrect, you can click on the **edit button** to bring you back to the reporting screen where you can edit anything that is incorrect or you can click the **delete button** and start all over again.

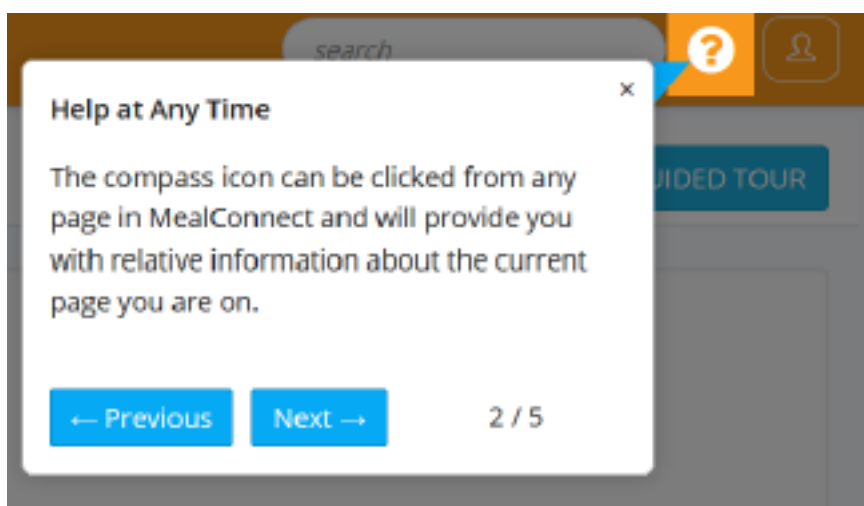
To submit a report for another store or another pick up date, click the purple “add new receipt” button. It will bring you to the same screen as seen on page 3.

Once you are confident everything is correct and are finished adding receipts, click the green “**submit receipts**” button to submit all reports.

Once you submit receipts from this screen, **you will not be able to edit them**, so please make sure you are correct.

Need More Help? Click on the **Question Mark** in the upper right-hand corner. Or, click on the **Help Resources** button on the left-hand side of the roll center to bring you to step-by-step videos related to each section of MealConnect.

If a mistake is made, please contact Joshua Ellison at jellison@vtfoodbank.org and provide the following information: Store name and location, date report was submitted, date the pick up occurred, the number of pounds, and category.



TROUBLESHOOTING AND FAQ

I've forgotten my password , how do I get a new password?

The Retail Store Program Manager (RSPM) can fix/change a password at any time.

There is a new person doing MealConnect reports at my organization, do they need their own account and if so who do I contact to set one up?

Yes, each person that is doing a report in MealConnect should have their own account. the RSPM can set this up with the following information: e-mail address, a phone number (preferably a cell phone if possible), and the person's full name.

I've entered my pounds, but I can submit the receipt, what's happening?

Check to make sure each field is filled out, sometimes when you switch the category the storage doesn't auto-fill.

I'm getting a warning that my pounds I entered are high, what does this mean?

There is a setting in place to make sure that the pounds entered, over 501 lbs, is the intended amount and was not entered by accident. You can still submit receipts if the pounds are over 501 and are correct.

The "pounds" box has turned red in color and I can't submit my report.

This indicates that there is a character in there that is not correct. Make sure there are no spaces, letters, or characters.

What is the description field for and do I need to use it?

This is not a required field. This is space to include specifics of the donation contents to provide more detail. For example, the category was produce and in the description you could write apples, oranges, potatoes" this are can also be used to leave notes about the quality of the donation product. This is useful information for the RSPM to see what was included in donations.

I've entered something wrong on my report, what do I do, can I correct the error myself?

No, you cannot edit a receipt once it has been submitted. As soon as possible, contact the RSPM and give them the following information: what the error was and what the correction should be, the date you submitted it on, the pick up date, category, and amount of pounds, store name, and location.

I want to look at the receipts that I have entered, where can I find them?

On the left hand side, in the roll center, there is a section called "previous receipts" you click on that and it will allow you to review all the receipts you have entered.

MEALCONNECT CATEGORIES EXPLAINED

A guide to what product goes in what category on MealConnect.

| CATEGORY | DONATED PRODUCT | TEMP. REQUIRED |
|--|--|----------------|
|  <p>Bread/ Bakery</p> | artisan loaves, rolls, sliced bread, bagels, cakes, cookies, pastries, muffins, pitas, wraps, cupcakes, donuts | NO |
|  <p>Dairy</p> | fluid milk, half/half, heavy cream ,cheese: shredded, block, sliced, and snack sticks, cream cheese, yogurt, sour cream, butter, eggs | YES |
|  <p>Produce</p> | vegetables and fruit, including bulk, pre cut, fresh herbs | NO |
|  <p>Meat</p> | all protein: beef, chicken, pork, lamb, sausage, bacon, hotdogs, frozen seafood | YES |
|  <p>Mix (Refrigerated products)</p> | refrigerated juice, ice cream, box frozen meals, cool whip, Pillsbury-type biscuits and cookies, dips, frozen vegetables, frozen juice | YES |
|  <p>Beverages</p> | shelf stable juice, soda, water, juice boxes, sparkling water, drink mixes | NO |
|  <p>Prepared/ Perishable</p> | deli meat, sliced deli cheese, rotisserie chicken, prepared sandwiches, salads, yogurt parfaits, Cumberland Farms fruit cups, prepared meals | YES |
|  <p>Mix (dry, grocery product)</p> | cans, cereal, crackers, snacks, candy, dried herbs, baking products, cake/bread mixes, gravy, mix bouillon, shelf stable soups, shelf stable nut milks, condiments, applesauce | NO |
|  <p>Non-food Items</p> | paper products, feminine hygiene, cleaning supplies, clothing, toys, cat food, dog food | NO |

Legal Fact Sheet for Vermont Food Donation: Liability Protections

February 2017

Businesses (including farms) and non-profits that provide or receive donated food are generally well-protected by laws designed to provide immunity from liability related to such donations. The federal Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act provides liability protection for food donors, and Vermont's Good Samaritan Law for Donations of Food law provides additional liability protection to businesses and non-profits in the state.

The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act

The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act (the Emerson Act) provides a federal baseline of protection for food donors.¹ The Emerson Act covers individuals, businesses, non-profit organizations, and the officers of businesses and non-profit organizations. It also covers gleaners—individuals that harvest donated agricultural crops to a non-profit organization that distributes to the needy.² The Emerson Act protects most but not all donations of qualifying food. In order to receive protection, donors and distributors must meet the following four requirements:

1. The donor donates to a non-profit organization.³
2. The food must meet all federal, state, and local quality and labeling requirements, even if it is not “readily marketable due to appearance, age, freshness, grade, size, surplus, or other conditions.”⁴

If all quality and labeling requirements are not met, the food must be reconditioned to meet all quality and labeling requirements before it can be donated,⁵ which include:

- The donor informs the non-profit of the nonconforming nature of the product;
 - The non-profit agrees to recondition the item so that it is compliant; and
 - The non-profit knows the standards for reconditioning the item.⁶
3. The non-profit organization that receives the donated food must distribute it to needy individuals.⁷ Direct donations from the donor to needy individuals are not protected by the Act.⁸
 4. The needy individuals receiving the food may not pay for it.⁹ However, if one non-profit donates food to another non-profit for distribution, the Act allows the first non-profit to charge the distributing non-profit a nominal fee to cover handling and processing costs.¹⁰

So long as these criteria are met, the Emerson Act is quite protective of donors, and does not hold a donor liable unless the donor acts with gross negligence or intentional misconduct.¹¹

- **Gross Negligence** involves “voluntary and conscious conduct (including a failure to act)” by a person or organization that knew when the donation was made that the donated food was likely to have harmful health impacts.¹²
- **Intentional Misconduct** is when a person or organization donates “with knowledge . . . that the conduct is harmful to the health or well-being of another person.”¹³

FEEDING PEOPLE TOGETHER



33 Parker Road
Barre, VT 05641
1-800-585-2265