

## Guidance in Making Food Donation to TASK

One of the most important issues that a soup kitchen faces is that of food safety and sanitation.

TASK is licensed by the local municipal health department as a public food service facility and those in charge of food preparation have received Food Safety and Sanitary training offered through Mercer County Community College and/or The New Jersey Restaurant Association. In addition, TASK adheres to a wide range of important food safety rules, i.e., temperature control of potentially hazardous food; hand sanitizers for staff, volunteers and patrons; proper use and cleaning of kitchen tools and cutting boards to prevent cross-contamination; the wearing of sanitary aprons, hats or hairnets and gloves by those working in the kitchen etc.

Inspection of food is an important element of food safety. When making donations to TASK please do not include food with the following characteristics:

- Food that is discolored or has an odor.
- Dented, rusted, leaking, or bulging.
- Opened cans and bottles.
- Moldy bread or pastry.
- Items that have been thawed and refrozen.
- Food that has been sitting out for hours, such as leftovers from a company picnic, office party, or family gathering. Don't donate items from summer picnics that have not been refrigerated properly. If you are unsure safety of a certain item, please don't donate it.

Unfortunately there is no single date on a can that you can look at to determine whether a product can be used, and after which they must not be used. The exception is infant formula. Instant formula and some baby foods are unique in that they must not be used after the "use-by" date that appears on the item.

A "**best-if-used by**" date means that the manufacturer recommends using the product by this date for the best flavor or quality. At some point after that date, the product will change very gradually in taste, color, texture and nutrient content. But, the product may be wholesome, nutritious, and safe past that date. A "**use-by**" date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. The date has been determined by the manufacturer of the product.

You may also see a "**sell-by**" date on the food product. This means the manufacturer recommends that a store sell the product by that date. It is assumed that the product may then be stored for some period of time before it is used. Therefore a "**sell-by**" date would be reached earlier in the life of a product than a "**best-if-used-by**" or the "**use-by**" date.

While the various dating systems do not represent expiration dates, and they do not indicate when product safety becomes an issue. They can, however, be helpful when you have concerns about when you should or should not donate a particular item. If an item is well-past its "**use-by**" date – this can often happen when someone is cleaning out the pantry of someone who is deceased or you find a can buried in the back of your pantry - the general rule is, "If in doubt, throw it out."