

# Giving Back : Smart Holiday Food Donations



**The economy continues to hit emergency food agencies hard.** Food banks typically see a jump in services in the summer and again during the holidays, when money is tight. Communities experience hunger for complex and unpredictable reasons, so food banks must be efficient and prepared for spikes in need. August 2010 was a near record month for food banks. The harsh reality is that 2010 is a tough year for everyone, especially the vulnerable populations such as seniors, children and people with physical and mental health issues.

Adding to difficulties, Montana is heading into the holiday season and the cold weather. With hefty heating bills, people at times must make sacrifices and turn to the food bank as a last resort. [There are many first-time families, our friends and neighbors, tapped out on resources.](#) (see this month's Eat Right Montana Newsletter). They've gone through their savings and have asked for help from their relatives. Now they turn to the food bank.

**During the holidays**, many potential donors also have less disposable income. There are rising bills to pay, special meals to prepare and gifts to buy! Making a contribution that gives the [most benefit for the buck](#) is smart. These tips may help:

- \* **Give cash, plain and simple** so that your food bank can buy in bulk at a discount. You might consider putting a small can or jar on your desktop or dresser and empty your spare change on a daily basis. You may be surprised at how it can add up by the end of the month.
- \* **Buy one, get one free** is another way to donate foods to the food bank without over-spending your food budget. Especially welcome are traditional holiday foods. Start a special bin at work or at home for collections. Plan a family trip to the food bank. Practicing charity during the holidays can teach children empathy and kindness.

## Use Holiday \$ Wisely: Keep Healthy Foods in Mind

**Frozen turkeys and hams** are special gifts for your food bank

**Canned meats like chicken, tuna, salmon or turkey** provide protein for hungry families

**Shelf-stable milk and dairy products** provide needed calcium

**Chunky soups, stews and chili (low sodium if possible)** have a long shelf life and are nutritious

**Whole grain cereals** both cold and hot are always appreciated

**Brown rice, whole grain pasta, dried beans, lentils and peas** are a welcome staple

**Canned or dried fruits and canned vegetables** help families meet recommended quota

**Some community members** become volunteers when they lose their jobs. Volunteering at their local food bank lifts their spirits, while benefiting their community. They don't have money, but they do have time. Whatever your ability, wherever you live, give a little, mean a lot!

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