

Reduce Waste, Save Money, and Help Others on Thanksgiving

If you have plenty of food this Thanksgiving, you may want to express gratitude by avoiding waste and sharing with those less fortunate. Unfortunately, doing so is not easy.

FOOD Share, a non-profit regional food bank supplying food distribution programs throughout Ventura County, feeds 75,000 people per month, but they are not able to accept or direct prepared food to their partners over the Thanksgiving weekend. Monica White, FOOD Share's President and CEO, warns, "You may have difficulty finding a local food pantry with the staff, refrigeration, and other capabilities needed to handle prepared food." Instead, "cash donations are encouraged as \$1 equals \$5 worth of food through FOOD Share's partnerships with national and statewide food banks," according to White.

The lack of options for prepared foods may change next year if Ventura County wins a competitive grant from the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle), but in the meantime, prepared food is too expensive to distribute.

Personally giving your Thanksgiving leftovers to a homeless or "food insecure" family can also be problematic. A narrow range of temperatures prevent bacterial growth, and even if you think your food was not out of that temperature range too long, "there can be food safety issues" according to Elizabeth Huff, a Community Services manager with the Ventura County Environmental Health Division.

Some people who are hungry are also immuno-compromised, so your leftovers could pose a health risk, even if you are giving away only food that was not yet served onto your guests' plates. "Your thoughtfulness is better expressed through the donation of your time or money to an organization with the proper facilities to safely distribute food to those in need," according to Huff.

Last month, on October 9, Governor Jerry Brown signed Assembly Bill 1219, which expanded our state's previous "Good Samaritan Food Donation Act." However, the legislation still protects only organizations, such as businesses and schools, donating to a non-profit. It does not shield individuals from the liability of donating food to another individual.

One exception is the Good Samaritan Act does protect gleaners, so if you have fruit trees, you can contact FOOD Share or Food Forward. They have volunteers who come to houses, pick trees, and bring the bounty to distribution centers.

As for prepared food, since donation is not likely to be a viable option this year, you might instead look for ways to prevent food waste. One classic method is to give your guests take-home care packages, preferably in reusable containers packed with reusable ice packets.

For food you keep, consider making dips, croutons, soups, and juices from leftovers you do not save in your refrigerator or freezer.

For information on how to safely handle leftover food, visit:

https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/leftovers-and-food-safety/ct_index