



PRODUCE HANDLING TOOLKIT V3
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*Indicates Hard 7, which represent the primary items of focus for the National Produce Program due in part to their relative high durability, availability, and nutritional value



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i. Intro

The Feeding America network saw produce as a category (from the farm channel) grow impressively, from about 607 MM lbs. in FY10 to over 839 MM in FY18 which do not include retail pounds. Produce has many attractive benefits, such as being highly nutritious and typically lower costs as compared to purchased shelf-stable product. However, it also presents unique handling requirements that can differ from traditional food bank staple items like canned goods.

As they move increasing amounts of produce, members have articulated a need for more materials to guide them on how to handle produce. This toolkit aims to address that need by providing a set of guidelines and best practices on produce handling for food banks, from receiving to outbound.

Food banks see a wide range of produce crops and quality, everything from excess product that is retail quality to produce that has gone beyond a salvageable state. This toolkit is intended to address the unique produce handling needs of food banks in a way that standard produce industry guides cannot. It incorporates produce industry standards for handling, best practices from members, and Feeding America policies.

Every food bank is different. Not every practice described in this toolkit will fit the needs of every food bank. This document is meant to be a guide, not a rulebook.

Special thanks to all of the food banks that contributed to this toolkit: Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties, City Harvest, Greater Chicago Food Depository, Houston Food Bank, Food Gatherers, Feeding South Dakota, Northeast Iowa Food Bank, Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma, and the California Association of Food Banks.

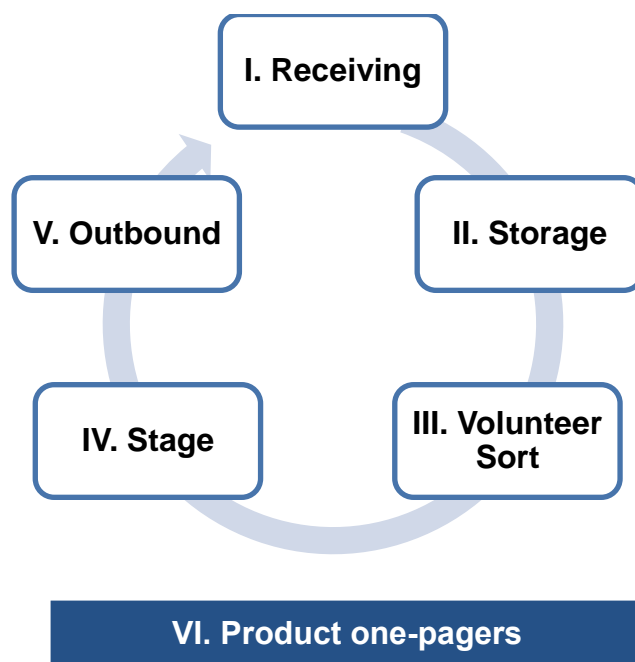
Finally, this toolkit is a living document. We welcome feedback on its contents as well as suggestions for additions. Feedback will be incorporated as it is provided. Please contact freshproduce@feedingamerica.org for comments or questions. This document is available on the Produce Resource Center of Sharepoint/Hungernet.



Framework

The following framework of the produce handling process organizes the contents of this toolkit. It begins when the product is received at the food bank and ends when it is outbound to agencies (or, in some cases, directly to clients).

There is a section in the toolkit with best practices for each of the five steps below. Additionally, for some of the most common crops that the network handles, there is a series of product one-pagers with handling information.





Produce handling guide: From pick-up to outbound

I. Receiving

When produce is received at the food bank, it is usually the first opportunity for food banks to physically examine the product. Unlike other food types like cans or other shelf-stable packaged food, produce requires unique and specific handling. Produce can generally withstand a range of storage/transport temperatures, but going too extreme on either end could cause damage. Therefore, going through a thorough inspection process during receiving is crucial to ensuring product quality.

Executing the receiving process well is also an essential part of inventory management. Recording dates, quantities, conditions, etc. are important for any type of food, but is especially important with food types that can go bad in days. Collecting and labeling the appropriate information during the receiving process will help the food bank coordinate inventory well.

The “Receiving” section begins with best practices for pick-up at the donor site and then details a recommended receiving process, including instructions for inspection. There is a recommended **produce inspection form** for receiving that is included in the appendix (page 56).

Pick-up

Some food banks choose to pick up produce directly from the donor. For these food banks, it is a good idea for drivers to go through the inspection process detailed below at the pick-up site, before loading it onto the truck. That way, the driver can decide whether or not the load is usable before putting in the time and resources to transport it.

It is particularly important for the drivers to take photos at pick-up, since there are no other food bank personnel there to help assess on-site. In the event that a load is rejected, photos are necessary evidence of the reasons for rejection.

Field heat

Keep in mind that most produce loads are packed to order and field heat may not have time to cool to the correct temperatures before food bank arrival. Farms often may not have cooler facilities at the pick-up site, and produce that has sat out in the sun may be too hot to cool down to the proper transport temperature when loaded, even if the refrigerated truck itself is at the recommended temperature before the truck is loaded. This is not necessarily grounds for rejection unless there is visible decay, mold, or foul odor upon arrival. If not able to properly cool to the appropriate product temperature, distribute immediately to clients as quickly as possible.



Receiving process

Executing produce receiving well is important because it helps ensure product quality and good inventory management. The receiving inspection is typically the first opportunity to examine the condition of the produce, while the information documented during receiving is a key input into the overall inventory management system.

The following **produce inspection form (page 8 and also located in the appendix)** is recommended to document the process detailed in this section.



Produce Inspection Form

The following form must be completed and returned to freshproduce@feedingamerica.org within one hour of receiving the load.



Produce Inspection Form to Report a Quality Issue

This form must be completed with proper documentation to be considered for reimbursement through FANPP.

Date	Time	Carrier
Loading Zone/Dock #	License Plate	Inspected by:

Seal:

Were the trailer door seals intact? (Check one):		
Yes	No	Missing
Seal Number(s)		

Temperature:

Bill of Lading stated temperature	Reefer running at time of arrival: YES / NO	
Ambient temperature of trailer	Reefer Set Point	
Pulp temps taken by item		
Temperature Recorder #	Recorder found: YES / NO	
Average Temp	High Temp	Low Temp

Valid Reasons for Rejection with proper documentation: (Check all that apply)	Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Live infestation (pests)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Severe decay over 50% unusable product	
<input type="checkbox"/> Temperature abuse	
<input type="checkbox"/> Visible damage to the truck	
<input type="checkbox"/> Cross contamination	
<input type="checkbox"/> Foreign debris	
<input type="checkbox"/> Adulterated or food safety risk	

Possible Freight Claim: YES / NO	Federal Inspection Requested: YES / NO
----------------------------------	--

Amount of Loss (pounds/quantity):
Before rejecting a load, do not release driver. You will need to take pictures of the BOL and all temperatures to demonstrate the scope of the issue then send to freshproduce@feedingamerica.org immediately.

Date/Time FA Released Driver:	FA Contact:
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Inspection Process

Inspecting should happen at multiple times throughout the life of the product—not just at receiving, but also while it is stored and before it gets loaded. However, inspection when the produce is first received should be the most thorough.

Please note the following USDA terminology for condition/grade/quality and food banks should pay special attention to condition defects:



Condition Defect – The relative degree of soundness or preservation of a product and includes, but is not necessarily limited to, its firmness, or stages of ripeness, decay, shriveling, flabbiness, or any other progressive factor which affects its marketability. Condition defects worsen over time.

Grade Specified Contract – The commodity is sold as to a specific U.S. grade. Both quality and condition defects are utilized to determine a breach of contract.

Quality Defect – These defects do not change over time and include, but are not limited to: scars, shape, dirt, etc.

We recommend the following steps for receiving produce:

1. Check the seal (if applicable)

- For loads ordered from the Feeding America Produce Matchmaker portal, there will be a seal on the truck door. If the seal is broken on one of these trucks before arriving at the food bank, contact Feeding America.
- Verify the actual seal number with the seal number on the Bill of Lading (BOL) to make sure that it is the original seal.
- 3rd party trucks may not have a seal for various reasons (i.e., distribution to multiple food banks). Working with partners that seal their loads is best practice.



2. Record truck temperature (if possible)

- Refrigerated trucks usually have a temperature recorder that shows the truck temperature during its journey. If it is too high, the produce may have begun to decay; if too low, the produce may be frozen or damaged by chill.
- National Produce Program (NPP) trucks are required to have a single use, paper strip temperature recorder. Pull the paper strip from the temperature recorder, review, and attach to BOL for future reference. Please notify NPP at freshproduce@feedingamerica.org if no recorder is found.
- Member-Arranged freight trucks - It is advisable for food banks to require growers/shippers to use temperature recorders.

3. Assess produce appearance (take photos)

- The food bank inspector should do a visual scan to check for signs of damage, decay, pests, etc. when first opening the door.
- Pull the pallets off from front, middle and back of the truck and examine quality from pallets top, middle and bottom of each pallets sampled.
- Take photographs of the produce from multiple areas of the shipment to provide documentation, particularly if there is a reason to reject the load.

4. Check product samples (temperature, condition) from multiple areas of the shipment

- A measuring device for temperatures need to be taken from inside the product using a pulp thermometer (most accurate) (acceptable temperatures in "[Produce Storage/Transport Guidelines](#)") and/or an infrared device which provides the surface temperature of the product.

A pulp thermometer should be inserted into the core of each item type/product (see picture) and recorded on the BOL and/or the internal inspection forms for your food bank.



An infrared thermometer can determine the surface temperature of each item type (Please note: This is not as accurate as the pulp temperature device).



- Conditions can vary between different areas of the truck and for this reason, it is recommended to obtain samples from different pallets in the front, middle and back of the shipment and inspect the top, middle and bottom of the selected pallets to be comprehensive in the inspection process.
- Food bank inspectors should assess the qualitative condition of the samples for signs of decay and damage. If necessary, inspectors should cut into the product samples to examine for rot, discoloration, etc.



Keep in mind that donated produce is often a USDA #2 grade with surface blemishes that do not affect its overall quality.

5. Set an expiration date based on the temperature and condition assessment

- Food bank inspectors should set a date by which the produce needs to be moved out of the warehouse. This date should be based on temperature and condition at receiving, as well as the typical life span of the product. Identifying an expiration date will help manage inventory efficiently.
- Because there are so many factors affecting produce life span, this task is best done by people experienced in produce handling. For some guidance on how to estimate life span, see "[Product lifespan estimation](#)" in the appendix.



6. *Unload and label produce*

- Pallets should be labeled with product type, amount, date of arrival, and date of expiration.
- In appendix, see "[Produce labeling forms](#)" for a suggested template on reusable produce labels. It is meant to be printed and then laminated so that the yellow side is on front (label before volunteer sort) and green on back (label after volunteer sort). Then dry erase markers can be used to fill in the information

7. *If necessary, follow protocol to reject the load of produce*

- In general, make sure to check and photograph any issues with the trailer and/or produce, note damage on bills, and keep the truck on site until the situation is resolved.
- For NPP/Produce Matchmaker loads, please follow the "[Bad Load Processing Food Bank Guide](#)".



Quick Receiving Produce Checklist



Quick Receiving Produce Checklist

Today's Date:	PR#:
Date of Delivery:	Inspected by:

Food Bank must contact Feeding America within 1 hour of receiving the load by emailing this form and the FA Produce Inspection Form to Report a Quality Issue to freshproduce@feedingamerica.org and/or your designated PFS

****Do not release the driver until Feeding America has advised to do so****

Please complete the following steps in order below:

Step	Completed & Info Sent to FA
Bill of Lading Copy	
9 Pictures/or Video of the sample*	
FA Produce Inspection Form to Report a Quality Issue	
Check Reefer	
Seal Intact (Yes/No)	
Unload pallets	
Inspect all item types (Damage, mold, live infestation (bugs, birds, rodents, etc.)	
Take temperatures (via pulp, infrared, temp recorder)	
Reload pallets if quality issues	
BOL updated with quality issues, temps listed before returning to the driver	

*Please submit a total of 9 pictures or 1 video for a product sample from the front, middle, back of the trailer and top, middle, bottom of the pallets to demonstrate the scope of the issues noted.

When emailing Feeding America the Produce Inspection Form and this form, please elaborate as to the specific events that took place.



Acceptable Reasons for Accepting and Rejecting Produce

	Acceptable % of Usable Product	Unacceptable % of Usable Product
Zero Cost Produce Loads	More than 50%	More than 50% - Do not accept and may result in a dump recommendation
PPO Produce Loads	Less than 80% of offer and member may receive a credit on loss amount	Less than 50% and may result in a dump recommendation (no invoice to member)



Valid reasons to reject a load of PPO produce with adequate photo evidence:

- Live infestation (insects, rodents, birds, etc.)
- Severe decay and/or mold should not exceed more than 10% of the original offer's notated usable percentage (i.e. Donor offered on Produce Matchmaker as 90% usable, then less than 80% usable would be grounds for rejection with proper documentation)
 - More than 50% usable product: With proper food bank documentation, FANO will request credits with the donor for any food bank losses and the food bank should accept the load for a discount
 - Less than 50% usable product: With proper food bank documentation, FANO will recommend sending to the load to the closest and least expensive dump location
- Dry Truck (non-reefer/non-refrigerated) should not be accepted unless previously approved by donor, member and FANO prior to delivery
- Visible damage to the truck that may indicate that the temperature could be compromised (open holes on the trailer, accident damage, etc.)
- Potential temperature abuse - Reefer temp, Bill of Lading (BOL), and temperature recorder tape vary significantly from the pulp temp along with vast fluctuations that would indicate temperature changes in the product
- Dirty trailer with visible foreign debris or contamination
- Documented seal was broken prior to delivery and product appears to be missing and/or adulterated and poses a food safety risk

Invalid reasons to reject a load of produce with or without photo evidence:

- Shifted pallets that can be restacked and redelivered
- Minor decay and mold that could be culled and salvaged - product can still be distributed (small waste amount in comparison to the load)
- No known temperature abuses
- Not exactly as ordered (quantity may vary based on availability at the time of harvest and may be packed by volume, not by weight)
- Did not meet the delivery appointment – The food bank must make every possible concession to fit in the load that was ordered (only in extreme circumstances will FANO redirect the load to another facility)



Produce Matchmaker Bad Load Resolution Process

Scenario: A bad produce load arrives at your dock.

Your cooperation with these rare cases of bad produce arrival is greatly appreciated.

Solution: Truck must remain at your facility.

You must notify Feeding America immediately to ensure these loads are properly handled expeditiously.

It is important for us to make sure we can manage this issue in an expedient and acceptable manner for all parties involved. What helps this process go as smoothly as possible is to receive timely and accurate information regarding the issue, following some well tested procedures outlined below:

Once these items are collected and sent via email, please contact your Produce Fulfillment Specialist to confirm receipt of your information.

Please note: You may let the driver move away from your dock, but do not sign the Bill of Lading until Feeding America has notified you to do so.

If the procedures outlined below are not followed, the proper party responsible for the costs associated with the load may not be held accountable. In some cases, improper receiving can pass along liability to the food bank for an issue out of your control. Our goal is to make sure that does not happen.

Step 1: Contact Feeding America within 1 hour of receiving the load at freshproduce@feedingamerica.org and contact your designated Produce Fulfillment Specialist with the following information:

- Copy of the Bill of Lading (BOL)
- 9 Pictures/Or Video (front, middle, rear of truck and top, middle, back of the pallets selected)
- Complete and return the [“Produce Inspection Form to Report a Quality Issue”](#)

Step 2: Check to see if the refrigerated unit on the truck is running. Examine the condition of the trailer and make note of any holes in the trailer on either the side, bottom, back, or the roof area. A damaged trailer can lead to improper refrigeration and temperature controls.

Step 3: You will need to off-load the pallets of product and do the following:



- (1) Pulp and/or infrared temperatures for each product type (take temperature readings) the product from different location points inside the trailer.
- (2) 9 photographs (or 1 video) of the product on the trailer, off the trailer, standing alone and cut open (Please note: It is required that 9 unique pictures from the front, middle, rear of the truck and top, middle, back of the pallets be submitted for your claim to be considered).
- (3) Collect the data from the temperature recorder and notate high, low and average temps and then compare to the temperature listed on the BOL
- (4) Check for live infestation of bugs, rodents, etc. If so, take pictures of that too. Send photos or video via email to freshproduce@feedingamerica.org immediately.

Step 4: Once thoroughly inspected, reload truck and close up trailer.

Step 5: Wait for Feeding America to call back and **do not send the truck away**.

Additionally, if it is determined that the load is going to be dumped, we will need your assistance to find a local landfill that accepts bad produce to direct the driver to--this is key because not all landfills accept bad produce. If you have contact information for the local landfill readily available, that will speed up the process.

Step 6: Before returning bills or load manifest to the driver, you must note damage on the bills.

Use terminology similar to the following options:

- Load rejected due to temperature abuse or damage (Note: Pulp and temp tale temperatures and damage reason must be listed on the BOL for a freight claim to be filed)
- Load rejected due to severe decay/mold of X pallets for a total estimated loss amount of X%
- Load rejection due to live infestation (type)
- Load rejected due to foreign debris/food safety issue

Step 7: Feeding America will advise and work with you to resolve this problem, but again, **do not send the truck away** until we have a joint resolution and a next-step action plan.

Any further questions or comments about this procedure should be referred to freshproduce@feedingamerica.org.



Things to remember:

- In many cases these loads are U.S. Number 2 grade produce (grade 1 is available at the grocery store).
- Please keep in mind that there could be some discoloration, deformation, and exterior/surface blemishes that are common reasons for the grading difference.
 - For example, an apple may have what is referred to in the produce industry as “limb or branch rub” meaning that the apple was rubbed by blowing branches during a certain point in their development leaving a bark-like section due to the fruit’s continued growth and healing process—essentially creating a “scab.” The interior fruit quality is not poor, but this surface blemish causes the fruit to be effectively “unmarketable” to the commercial fresh market. Even though it may lack the cosmetically pristine look on the outside, it does not mean that it is not good quality in the inside.
 - In addition, grade 2 produce might have 1 to 2 percent decay in addition to what percent usable was listed in the original offer (this is common industry standard approval guidelines).

Produce labeling form instructions

The following templates can be used to label produce while it is at the food bank, after receiving and before it is loaded for distribution. It is meant to help capture relevant handling information (like type, quantity, expiration date) and make it easy to identify at a glance if it has been sorted or not. Using this labeling system, volunteers and staff immediately know what needs to be sorted and in what priority (yellow tags by date), and staff know what is available to send out to agencies (green by date).

Using the yellow side indicates that the produce has not yet been sorted, while the green side indicates that it has been sorted already.

Instructions for use:

1. Print the two templates located in the appendix ([Labels](#)) on one sheet of paper, yellow on one side and green on the other.
2. Laminate the sheet.
3. After produce is received, use dry erase marker to fill out the yellow side with relevant information. Date is especially important (expiration date for a FEFO inventory management system, arrival date for a FIFO system).
4. Use a binder clip to fasten the filled-out sheet to an item on the pallet with the yellow side facing out.
5. After the produce is sorted, flip the tag around and copy the info to the green side. Clip to pallet.
6. Remove before the produce is loaded and reuse as needed.



II. Storage

Once produce has been received and inspected, the food bank needs to hold it until it can go out again for distribution. Keeping produce in the recommended storage conditions gives it the best chance of getting to the client's hands in good condition. After all, agencies may not be able to distribute produce immediately, and clients may store it after receiving as well. Most produce requires conditioned storage space to maintain its quality. Also, some crops have special storage considerations to take into account (i.e., apples and bananas should not be stored together because the ethylene gas that the apples emit will cause the bananas to ripen too quickly).

This section begins with best practices for storage, followed by handouts that can be printed and used separately for education or reference purposes (e.g., temperature guidelines).

Temperature

Maintaining proper temperatures is key to ensuring quality. Produce should spend as little time as possible outside of its recommended temperature settings. **Use the "[Produce storage/transport guidelines](#)" table to determine at what temperature to store each crop**, as well as additional info (on ethylene and odors).

Storage food safety measures

For coolers, adequate air circulation should be provided. Product must be stored at least four inches from walls. Each cooler unit needs an accurate, easily visible and readable thermometer. Cold storage facilities and in particular refrigeration coils, refrigerator drip pans, forced air cooling fans, drain tiles, walls and floors should be cleaned and sanitized on a frequent and regular basis. Avoid placing warm products in coolers with insufficient capacity; the temperature will rise, and as the room cools condensation may drip and contaminate produce.

Products in dry storage must be maintained off the floor by using pallets, shelving or other means, and must be kept 18 inches away from walls. Any surface it comes in contact with should be cleaned and sanitized on a regular basis.

Organizing produce storage

Certain crops should not be kept in close proximity to other products. Ethylene gas and odor are typical culprits. Some crops (like apples) emit ethylene gas, which causes ethylene-sensitive crops (like bananas) to ripen too quickly if exposed. Likewise, some crops (like lemons) have strong odors that affect some sensitive crops (like pineapples). **Refer to "[Produce storage/transport groupings](#)" for produce items by ethylene sensitivity/production and odor sensitivity/production.** Produce should never be kept near chemicals, raw poultry, meat, or seafood.



Given that food banks often do not have the luxury of using numerous coolers with different temperature control settings, "[Produce storage/transport temperature grouping](#)" categorizes crops into various temperature groupings. These groupings are not the recommended storage temperature for each crop, but rather general guidelines on the temperature range that each crop falls within to aid in produce area organization.

Storage inspections

While in storage, **produce should be checked daily (if not more often) to ensure that there are no new signs of damage, decay, or pest infestation and that it is being held in the proper temperature.** One way to integrate this with other warehouse activities is to check for produce quality while doing inventory level checks. Documenting and coordinating checks will help make operations more efficient. Based on the condition observed, it may be necessary to change the order in which pallets are pulled down for distribution. Also, if any pallets appear damaged or unstable sitting in racks, they may need to be rearranged or replaced.

Produce storage/transport guidelines

PRODUCT	STORAGE TEMP (°F)	ETHYLENE SENSITIVE	ETHYLENE PRODUCER	ODOR SENSITIVE	ODOR PRODUCER	SUSCEPTIBLE TO FREEZING
APPLES	32-34	N	Y	Y	N	Y
BANANAS	56-58; to ripen 60-65	Y	N	N	N	Y
BEANS, SNAP/GREEN	40-45	N	N	N	N	Y
BEANS, LIMA	37-41	Y	N	N	N	Y
BERRIES, BLACKBERRIES	32-34	N	N	N	N	Y
BERRIES, BLUEBERRIES	32-34	N	N	N	N	Y
BERRIES, STRAWBERRIES	32-34	N	N	N	N	Y
BROCCOLI	32	Y	N	N	N	Y
CABBAGE	32	Y	N	Y	N	N
CANTALOUPE	36-41	N	Y	N	N	Y
CARROTS	33-35	Y	N	Y	N	N
CAULIFLOWER	32	Y	N	N	N	N
CELERY	32-36	N	N	Y	N	N
CORN	34-38	N	N	Y	N	N
CUCUMBERS	45-50	Y	N	N	N	Y
MIXED FRUIT, FRESH CUT	33-41	N	N	N	N	Y
GRAPES	30-32	N	N	Y	Y	Y
GRAPEFRUIT	CA and AZ: 50-55; FL and TX: 50-60	Y	N	N	N	N
HONEYDEW	45-50	N	N	N	Y	Y
LEMONS	45-48	Y	N	N	N	Y
LETTUCE WHOLE	34-36	Y	N	N	N	Y
LETTUCE LEAF	34-36	N	N	N	N	N
NECTARINES	32-36; to ripen 51-77	Y	Y	N	N	N
OKRA	43-45	Y	N	N	N	Y
ONIONS, BULB	40-60	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
ONIONS, GREEN	32	N	N	N	Y	N
ONIONS, SWEET	45-55	N	N	Y	Y	Y
ORANGES	FL: 32-34; CA: 45-48; AZ & TX: 32-48	N	N	N	Y	Y
PEACHES	In-transit: 32-34; Receiving 57-77	Y	Y	N	N	Y
PEARS	32; To ripen 60-70	N	Y	Y	Y	Y

Ethylene sensitive products should NOT be stored or transported with ethylene-producers. Similarly, odor sensitive products should NOT be stored or transported with odor producers

PEPPERS, BELL	45-50	Y	N	N	Y	Y
PINEAPPLES	Green: 50-55; Ripe: 45	N	N	Y	N	Y
PLUMS	In-transit: 32-34; Receiving 51-77	Y	Y	N	N	Y
POTATOES	45-50	N	N	Y	Y	Y
SALAD MIXES, FRESH CUT	33	N	N	N	N	N
SQUASH	Soft: 41-50; Hard: 50-55	Y	N	N	N	Y
SWEET POTATOES	55-60	Y	N	N	N	Y
TOMATOES	62-68; Ripe 55-60	N	N	N	N	Y
WATERMELONS	50-60	Y	N	N	N	Y

Ethylene sensitive products should NOT be stored or transported with ethylene-producers. Similarly, odor sensitive products should NOT be stored or transported with odor producers

Data from *The Guide: Produce Availability & Merchandising Guide*

Produce storage/transport groupings

Ethylene* sensitive

BANANAS
BEANS, SNAP/GREEN
BROCCOLI
CABBAGE
CARROTS
CAULIFLOWER
CUCUMBERS
HONEYDEW MELONS
LETTUCE WHOLE
LETTUCE LEAF
OKRA
ONIONS, BULB
PEACHES
PEARS
PEPPERS, BELL
PLUMS
SQUASH
SWEET POTATOES
WATERMELONS

Odor** sensitive

APPLES
CABBAGE
CARROTS
CELERY
CORN
GRAPES
ONIONS, BULB
ONIONS, SWEET
PEARS
PINEAPPLES
POTATOES

Ethylene* producers

APPLES
CANTALOUPE
PEACHES
PEARS
PLUMS

Odor** producers

GRAPES
LEMONS
ONIONS, BULB
ONIONS, GREEN
ONIONS, SWEET
ORANGES
PEARS
PEPPERS, BELL
POTATOES

***Ethylene is a gas that causes many fruits and vegetables to ripen. Certain crops are particularly sensitive to it, while others produce large quantities of it. Ethylene sensitive crops should never be stored or transported with ethylene producers.**

****Some crops will readily absorb odors from certain other crops with strong odors if kept in the same area. Crops labeled as odor sensitive should never be stored or transported with odor producers.**

Produce storage/transport temperature groupings

Very cold group:

32-38°F

APPLES
BEANS, LIMA
BERRIES, BLACKBERRIES
BERRIES, BLUEBERRIES
BERRIES, STRAWBERRIES
BROCCOLI
CABBAGE
CANTALOUPE
CARROTS
CAULIFLOWER
CELERY
CORN
GRAPES
LETTUCE LEAF
LETTUCE WHOLE
MIXED FRUIT, FRESH CUT
NECTARINES
ONIONS, GREEN
PEACHES
PEARS
PLUMS
SALAD MIXES, FRESH CUT

Cold group:

45-50°F

BEANS, SNAP/GREEN
CUCUMBERS
GRAPEFRUIT
HONEYDEW MELONS
LEMONS
ONIONS, SWEET
ORANGES
OKRA
PEPPERS, BELL
PINEAPPLES
POTATOES
SQUASH
WATERMELONS

Cool group:

55-65°F

BANANAS
ONIONS, BULB
SWEET POTATOES
TOMATOES

These cooler space groupings are meant to help organize storage for coolers at food banks, not to be taken as an exact indication of recommended storage temperature for each product. For precise temperatures by product, check “[Produce storage/transport guidelines](#).”



III. Volunteer Sort

Once the produce has been taken into the food bank, it is often sorted by food safety trained volunteers. This sorting generally serves one (or both) of these purposes:

1. Culling

Volunteers will sort produce by hand to ensure that moldy or otherwise unusable produce is disposed of. The need for culling depends on how fast the food bank typically distributes produce as well as what percentage of the produce usable is usable when it comes in. For food banks that have extremely fast turnover (same day or next day from receiving), culling is not as important as for food banks that may have to store produce for longer.

2. Repack

The need for repack depends largely on program and agency capacity. Many programs and agencies do not have the capabilities to handle full pallets of produce.

Programs that distribute to seniors and children, for example, may need their produce to be placed into small packs (i.e., 3 lb. bags). Programs that distribute to families often can handle slightly larger packs. Regardless, programs that involve handing small quantities of produce to individuals or families will generally require repack.

Small agencies often do not distribute large enough volumes to handle full pallets of produce. For instance, if agencies cannot distribute an entire pallet of cantaloupes at once, it will likely spoil and go to waste before it reaches clients. To deal with this agency capacity issue, volunteers can sort produce into mixed pallets that agencies can use more easily.

The volunteer sort process will differ from food bank to food bank, given different facilities, resources, and product mix. The following handout is a list of tips for volunteer sort that should be widely applicable to most food banks.

Practical tips for volunteer sorting

Sanitary practices

- Make sure anyone sorting is in good health (not sick with a cold or flu-like symptoms)
- Wash hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before sorting and when returning from breaks; preferably, dry hands with paper towels
- Put on a hair restraint (hairnet, bandana, or hat) before sorting
- Use disposable food-service grade gloves
- For very dusty crops like potatoes or sweet potatoes, you can use masks and disposable aprons to avoid breathing in dust and dirtying clothes
- After finishing the sort, wash and sanitize all surfaces that were used, especially tabletops
 - Sweep floors and inspect for spills; clean floors with sanitizing solution as necessary
 - Thoroughly wash and sanitize sinks
 - Wash, rinse and sanitize all equipment used

Physical safety tips

- Use safe lifting techniques when carrying heavy objects (i.e., lift with legs and not back)
- Avoid heavy work if you have health issues that will become aggravated
- Stay hydrated and take breaks as needed
- Stay out of the way of potentially dangerous warehouse equipment like fork lifts

Sorting equipment suggestions

- Softer products that have with more delicate skin (i.e., peaches) are better in boxes for repack, while harder products (i.e., apples) can withstand repack in bags
- Of all of the materials to use in the sort process, plastic bins are ideal from a food safety perspective because it can be properly sanitized, while cardboard and wood cannot
- The ideal packaging for outbound produce includes vents (i.e., perforation in bags or sides of boxes) to encourage ventilation
- Try not to reuse cardboard boxes if possible, to avoid cross-contamination

General recommendations

- If you find a moldy item, do not sniff it because of potential respiratory issues; remove and place in scrap receptacle
- Always minimize the time produce spends outside of ideal storage conditions

- Show volunteers acceptable vs. not acceptable blemishes to help understand what produce should be thrown away (see Product one-pagers for some examples to use)
- Using the [Produce labeling forms](#) included in the appendix makes it easy to identify what produce has been sorted or not (yellow is unsorted, green is sorted)
- For distribution to small agencies, it may be a good idea for volunteers to sort mixed pallets
- Do not overfill repack containers or bags
- Composting rejected produce is an alternative to discarding it



IV. Stage

Staging is when the food bank is preparing produce for outbound distribution. While the physical act of staging is usually straightforward, deciding which produce goes out when can be trickier. Different crops in different conditions at receiving have different lifespans. Managing produce inventory involves balancing different needs—while certain products may need to be distributed quickly, agencies may not necessarily have the capacity to handle large amounts of it in a short period of time.

While the best practices below focus on produce in the food bank, we want to acknowledge the role of agencies. From an inventory management perspective, a “push” model where the food bank works out a produce distribution schedule with the agencies is better for the food bank than a “pull” model where agencies order specific quantities/types of produce. However, a “push” model will require more planning upfront to forecast produce demand and supply.

FEFO or FIFO

FEFO stands for First Expired, First Out. It is an inventory management practice for perishable goods that will minimize spoilage. Using FEFO means that the produce that will expire the soonest needs to leave the warehouse the soonest. For instance, there could be shipments of potatoes and strawberries received on Monday. However, during the receiving inspection, the strawberries are assigned an expiration date of that Wednesday, while the potatoes are assigned an expiration date of the following Monday. Despite the fact that the potatoes and strawberries came in at the same time, the strawberries should leave earlier because of their shorter life span.

To use FEFO, make sure to assign, label, and document an expiration date for produce when it is first received. The expiration date assessment should be based on the product’s typical life span as well as its condition upon receiving.

FIFO stands for First In, First Out. Using this practice, whatever comes in to the warehouse first should leave soonest. **FEFO is highly preferable to FIFO for produce**, due to examples like the one just mentioned above. However, FEFO may also be harder to implement because estimating product life span can be a difficult task. At the very least, produce should be managed using FIFO based on arrival times.

Staging best practices

As with any step for produce handling, keep a continuous cold chain. **Staging should be done in the cooler to maintain proper storage conditions.** In the event that staging cannot be done in the cooler because of space restrictions, make sure to minimize time out of proper storage conditions. Maintain continuous cold chain wherever possible to preserve quality and shelf life.



V. Outbound

Having put so much effort into handling produce through its lifetime at the food bank, it is important to make sure it gets to the agency (or other final destination) in good condition. On its way out the door, the basics of handling produce are the same as they have been throughout the whole handling process. However, there are some tips in this section specific to loading onto transport that will help ensure that the produce stays fresh.

Also, many food banks have expanded produce distribution into a new channel: Mobile Pantry. Although Mobile Pantry comes in many forms, the model that will be discussed here is the one where food banks operate their own truck and distribute directly to clients. This channel helps food banks distribute produce in excess of agency capacity or in areas where there is very little agency activity. Mobile pantry is typically used to target clients that do not have access to nutritious food regularly, “food deserts.” There are some tips for operating Mobile Pantry included in this section as well.



Practical tips for loading

Loading pointers specific to produce:

- Pre-cool the unit to recommended storage/transport temperature before loading begins
 - Road and weather conditions may affect the temperature of the truck—keep them in mind when setting a transport temperature
- Verify that the produce shipped for longer distances is compatible by considering the odor producing/odor sensitive, ethylene producing/ethylene sensitive and storage temps for each item shipped. Incompatibility could lead to faster decay of the product
- Before loading produce, make sure to inspect its condition one last time
 - Catching a quality issue before the produce reaches the agency will save time and fuel
- Load as quickly as possible to minimize time out of optimal storage conditions
- For transport to many small agencies, make sure to organize the load by what will go out to each agency (i.e., don't put all of one type of produce in the front of the trailer when it should be distributed to every agency)

Trucking best practices, as for any type of load:

- Make sure the weight is distributed evenly across the trailer
- Reefer trucks should arrive pre-cooled and if not, be aware that the ambient temperature may lead to condensation if varying degrees
- Make use of strapping, shrink wrap, brace bars, and other stabilizing tools as necessary to minimize shifting and damage during transport
- Allow at least one foot of airspace above the load to ensure proper circulation
- Check that refrigerated unit is operating normally and at the correct temperature before leaving
- Wherever possible, make use of truck strip curtains to help maintain trailer air temp, especially when frequently opening doors



Mobile Pantry tips



Example of mobile pantry truck, re-outfitted beverage truck with multiple panel doors

Mobile Pantry vehicle

- For direct distribution to clients, beverage trucks with side panel doors work well
- Having at least some cooled compartments within truck allows the truck to carry a variety of food types, including produce

Produce planning for Mobile Pantry runs

- Forecasting and planning ahead is especially important for ensuring consistent produce supply on frequent Mobile Pantry runs (i.e., twice a week)
- Sourcing a variety of produce is ideal for relatively small distributions like these—a truck full of onions is probably not appealing to clients
- Mobile Pantry can ensure that produce with a short lifespan gets to clients before it goes bad
- Packing produce in small enough packs for families/individuals facilitates quick distribution

Operating the Mobile Pantry program

- Make sure to market the event well beforehand, especially if the Mobile Pantry does not make consistent visits to the site
- Although volunteers usually help with distribution, using a driver that can drive and oversee program operations can be an efficient use of resources
- If running water is not available at the site, have hand sanitizer available for staff and volunteers
- In adverse weather conditions (especially in areas with harsh winters), Mobile Pantry may need to coordinate with agencies to use an actual facility



VI. Product one-pagers

These one-pagers on common produce crops are designed for produce handling training or ongoing reference. They may be helpful for training volunteers on sorting or for labeling shipments of certain products as they come in. All of the one-pagers include temperature guidelines, inspecting tips, and photographs to help identify what product is acceptable and what is not.

Crops covered in the one-pagers:

1. [Apples*](#)
2. [Apricots](#)
3. [Bananas](#)
4. [Bell peppers](#)
5. [Berries \(black, blue\)](#)
6. [Broccoli](#)
7. [Brussels sprouts](#)
8. [Cabbage*](#)
9. [Cantaloupe](#)
10. [Carrots*](#)
11. [Cauliflower](#)
12. [Celery](#)
13. [Corn, sweet](#)
14. [Cucumbers](#)
15. [Grapefruit](#)
16. [Lemons/limes](#)
17. [Lettuce](#)



18. [Mushrooms](#)
19. [Nectarines](#)
20. [Onions \(bulb\)*](#)
21. [Oranges*](#)
22. [Peaches](#)
23. [Pears](#)
24. [Plums](#)
25. [Potatoes*](#)
26. [Squash, hard-shell](#)
27. [Squash, soft-shell](#)
28. [Strawberries](#)
29. [Sweet potatoes*](#)
30. [Tomatoes](#)
31. [Watermelon](#)

*Indicates Hard 7, which represent the primary items of focus for the National Produce Program due in part to their relative high durability, availability, and nutritional value

Main sources: The Packer, PMA

Apples

Receiving and inspecting

Apples should be firm and have smooth skin.

Storing and handling

Apples should be stored at 32-34°F, at 85-95% relative humidity. Susceptible to freezing; do not store below 29°F.

Sensitive to ethylene: No

Odor-sensitive: Yes

Produces ethylene: Yes

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable

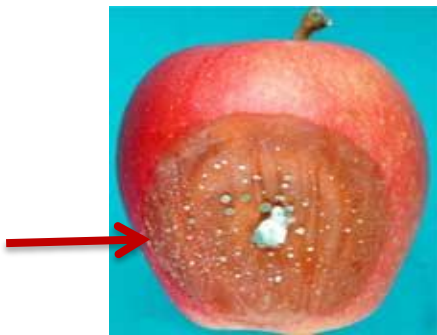


Bruises

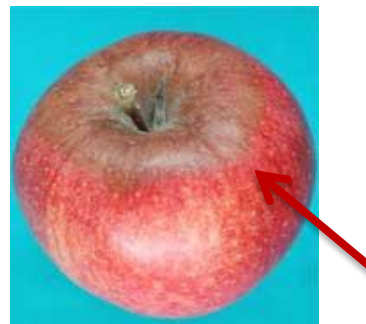


Superficial spot

Not acceptable



Blue mold



Gray mold



Alternaria rot



Bull's eye rot

Apricots

Receiving and inspecting

Apricots should be firm to slightly soft (ripe), but not overripe (mushy).

Storing and handling

Apricots should be stored at 32-36°F, 85-95% humidity. Do not store below 31°F.

Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**

Odor-sensitive: No

Produces ethylene: **Yes**

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Sunburn or ripe fruit OK.



Surface scarring, mechanical damage OK

Not acceptable



Rot-mushy and discolored



Split skin

Bananas

Receiving and inspecting

Avoid fruit with damaged skins.

Storing and handling

Bananas should be stored at 56-58°F, at 85-95% relative humidity. To ripen green bananas, store at 60-65°F. Bananas bruise easily; handle with care.

Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**

Odor-sensitive: No

Produces ethylene: No

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



A few bruises



Slight speckling

Not acceptable



Chill damage



Overripe



Also, overripe

Banana ripening guide

Suggested Guide for Banana Ripening

		Pulp Temperatures °F							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
4 Day Schedule	ETHYLENE	64°	64°	62°	60°				
	ETHYLENE	62°	62°	62°	62°	60°			
5 Day Schedule	ETHYLENE	62°	62°	60°	60°	60°			
	ETHYLENE	60°	60°	60°	60°	60°	58°		
6 Day Schedule	ETHYLENE	60°	60°	60°	60°	60°	58°		
	ETHYLENE	58°	58°	58°	58°	58°	58°	58°	
7 Day Schedule	ETHYLENE	58°	58°	58°	58°	58°	58°	58°	
	ETHYLENE								58°
8 Day Schedule	ETHYLENE								58°
	ETHYLENE								



Notes:

- Temperatures are °F
- Temperatures are PULP not AIR
- Proper temperature, humidity, time, air circulation, mature bananas and ethylene are required for ripening.
- Use the Super-Ripening Center® and Ethy-Ger® II to hasten ripening.
- Maintain 100-150 ppm of ethylene until color breaks.
- After 24 hour ripening initiation period, vent room for 15-20 minutes with fan on.
- For delayed shipment hold at 58°F.

Bell peppers

Receiving and inspecting

Bell peppers should be firm in texture.

Storing and handling

Bell peppers should be stored at 45-50°F, at 85-95% relative humidity. Avoid storing below 42°F to avoid chill injury.

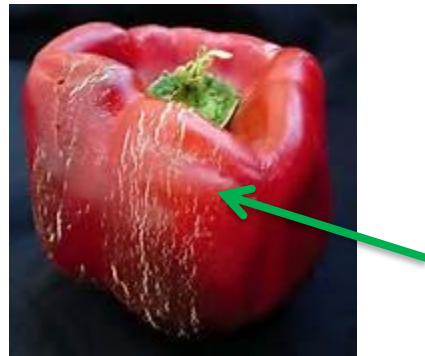
Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**
Produces ethylene: **No**

Odor-sensitive: **No**
Odor-producing: **Yes**

Acceptable



Variations in colors



Surface cracks, blemishes,
slight puckering

Not acceptable



Decay, heavy puckering or rotting



Mold

Berries (black, blue)

Receiving and inspecting

Berries should be firm and fairly dry. Berries do not ripen after harvest; discard any green berries.

Storing and handling

Blueberries and blackberries should be stored at 32-34°F at 90-98% relative humidity. Do not store below 30°F, as blackberries are very susceptible to freeze damage. Blackberries in particular are very perishable, so handle with care and use soon after receiving.

Sensitive to ethylene: No
Produces ethylene: No

Odor-sensitive: No
Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Should not be green or underripe



Check that cartons are not oozing, slight moistness ok

Not acceptable



Mushy and discolored fruit



Mold

Broccoli

Receiving and inspecting

Broccoli should be firm and not limp. Some yellow is ok.

Storing and handling

Broccoli should be stored at 32°F, at 90-98% relative humidity. Handle with care to avoid damage to bud clusters.

Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**

Produces ethylene: No

Odor-sensitive: No

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Some yellowing



Multi-colored varieties

Not acceptable



Bacterial soft rot on broccoli

Discoloration from rot (soft, dark spots)



Moldy

Brussels sprouts

Receiving and inspecting

Brussels sprouts should be firm, green, and have compact leaves.

Storing and handling

Plums should be stored at 32-36°F, at 90-98% relative humidity. Do not store below 31°F.

Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**

Produces ethylene: No

Odor-sensitive: No

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Firm, green, some surface spots OK

Not acceptable



Yellowing due to age or ethylene exposure



Rot, large black spots

Cabbage

Receiving and inspecting

Cabbages should be fairly even colored and heavy for its size. Can remove outer leaves if damage is superficial.

Storing and handling

Cabbages should be stored at 32-36°F, at 90-98% relative humidity.

Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**

Odor-sensitive: **Yes**

Produces ethylene: No

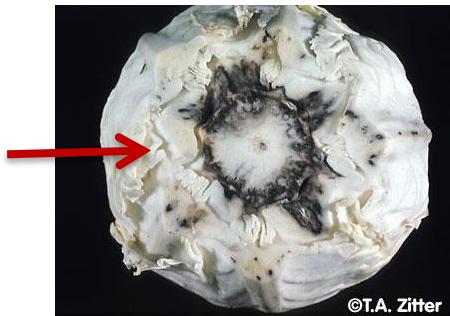
Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Small spots on outer leaves

Not acceptable



Black rot



White rot



Downy mildew

Cantaloupe

Receiving and inspecting

Cantaloupes should be round with good netting or webbing over creamy-colored rind. They have a distinctive aroma and the blossom end will yield to gentle pressure when ripe.

Storing and handling

Cantaloupes should be stored at 36-41°F, at 90-98% relative humidity. Susceptible to freezing; to prevent chill injury, do not store below 30°F.

Sensitive to ethylene: No

Produces ethylene: **Yes**

Odor-sensitive: No

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable

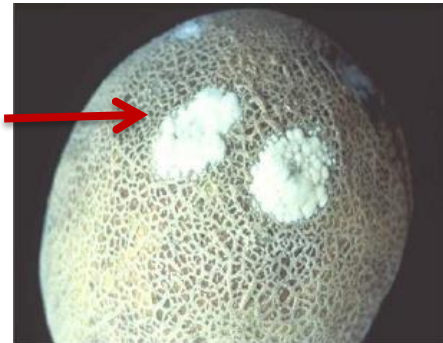


Slight discoloration



Variations in shape (e.g., oval)

Not acceptable



Mold



Decay



Anthracnose

Carrots

Receiving and inspecting

Carrots should have firm, smooth exteriors (i.e., should snap when bent far enough). Color should be vibrant orange to orange-red.

Storing and handling

Carrots should be stored at 33-35°F, at 90-98% relative humidity. Do not store below 30°F.

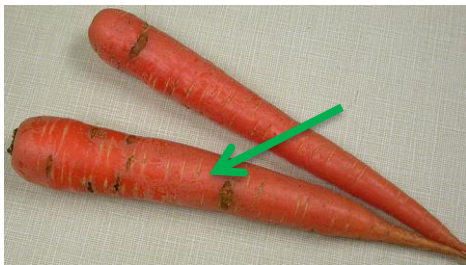
Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**

Produces ethylene: No

Odor-sensitive: **Yes**

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Spots on outer surface



Odd shapes

Not acceptable



Rot



Mold



More rot

Cauliflower

Receiving and inspecting

Cauliflower should be firm in texture. Most are white, though there are other color varieties as well.

Storing and handling

Cauliflower should be stored at 32°F at 90-98% relative humidity. Do not store below 31°F to avoid freeze injury. Cauliflower is susceptible to bruising; handle with care and do not drop shipping containers on the floor.

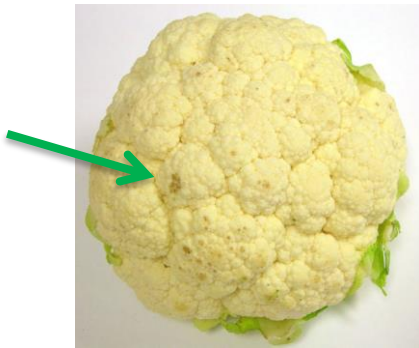
Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**

Odor-sensitive: No

Produces ethylene: No

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Light brown spots are fine as long as cauliflower is still firm



Color variations

Not acceptable



Rot – soft/mushy, discolored or moldy

Celery

Receiving and inspecting

Celery should be firm in texture and not too limp; ribs should snap crisply when bent. Color is green but some yellow is ok.

Storing and handling

Celery should be stored at 32-36°F, 90-98% humidity. Do not store below 30°F.

Sensitive to ethylene: No

Odor-sensitive: **Yes**

Produces ethylene: No

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Some yellow is ok



Some brown at base is ok

Not acceptable



Soft and slimy



Mold

Corn, sweet

Receiving and inspecting

Sweet corn should be firm but kernels not hard and dry like feed corn. Color varies white to deep yellow. It should have fresh green husks with silk ends that are free of decay or worms.

Storing and handling

Corn should be stored at 34-38°F at 95% relative humidity. Do not store below 32°F.

Sensitive to ethylene: No

Odor-sensitive: **Yes**

Produces ethylene: No

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Varied colors and odd shaped or missing kernels



Dark silks can be ok (check kernels for moisture)

Not acceptable



Corn worm



Corn smut mold

Cucumbers

Receiving and inspecting

Cucumbers should be firm in texture. Color should be green (or mostly green).

Storing and handling

Cucumbers should be stored at 45-50°F at 85-95% relative humidity. To avoid chill injury, avoid storing below 45°F.

Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**
Produces ethylene: No

Odor-sensitive: No
Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Outer blemishes



Slight yellowing

Not acceptable



Rot-puckered and soft (especially common after chill injury)



Moldy

Grapefruit

Receiving and inspecting

Grapefruit should be firm and heavy for its size. Grapefruit may exhibit some greening of the skin, but that does not affect the internal fruit quality.

Storing and handling

Optimal storage temperature varies by type. CA and AZ: 50-55°F; FL and TX: 50-60°F, 85-95% relative humidity.

Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**

Produces ethylene: No

Odor-sensitive: No

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Slight greenish skin



Some surface blemishes

Not acceptable



Rot



Mold

Lemons/Limes

Receiving and inspecting

Lemons and limes should be firm in texture.

Storing and handling

Lemons and limes should be stored at 45-48°F, 85-95% relative humidity.

Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**

Odor-sensitive: No

Produces ethylene: No

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Some surface blemishes are ok

Variations in colors are ok

Not acceptable



Diseases or rotting



Moldy

Lettuce

Receiving and inspecting

In general, avoid wilted and discolored leaves. For iceberg lettuce, some browning of the core end is natural and occurs from oxidation after lettuce has been harvested and trimmed.

Storing and handling

Lettuce should be stored at 34-36°F, at 90-98% relative humidity. Keep lettuce away from drafts to avoid dehydration.

Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**

Odor-sensitive: No

Produces ethylene: No

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Brown core

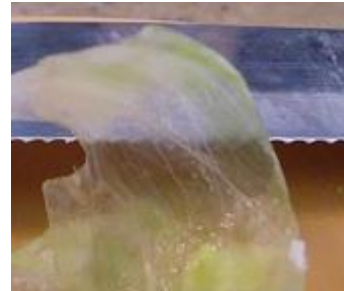


Tear/slight bruising

Not acceptable



Wilted leaves



Translucent leaves (freeze damage)



White mold

Mushrooms

Receiving and inspecting

Mushrooms should have a firm texture and be free of spots. Open veils are not a sign of poor quality, size and color do not affect quality. Some common types are portabella, cremini, white, and oyster.

Storing and handling

Mushrooms should be stored at 32-36°F, at 90-98% relative humidity.

Sensitive to ethylene: No

Odor-sensitive: **Yes**

Produces ethylene: No

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Irregular shapes or dirt

Not acceptable



Sliminess or dark spots



Shriveled or dehydrated

Nectarines

Receiving and inspecting

Nectarines should be firm to slightly soft (ripe), but not overripe (mushy).

Storing and handling

Nectarines should be stored at 32-36°F, 90-98% relative humidity. Do not store below 31°F.

Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**

Odor-sensitive: No

Produces ethylene: **Yes**

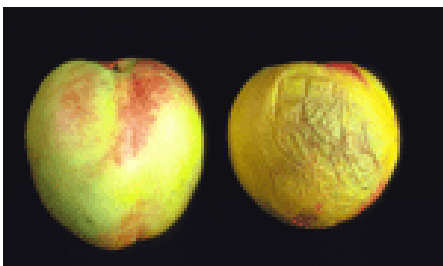
Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Slight pitting OK

Not acceptable



Shriveling



Rot, mold

Onions, bulb

Receiving and inspecting

Good quality onions should be firm and hard with short, tight necks and dry papery skin. Slightly loose outer skin is common and should not affect quality.

Storing and handling

Onions should be stored at 40-60°F, at 85-95% relative humidity. For extended storage (longer than 7 days), hold at 32-36°F. Keep out of direct sunlight.

Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**

Odor-sensitive: **Yes**

Produces ethylene: No

Odor-producing: **Yes**

Acceptable



Small sprouts



Unusual shape

Not acceptable



Bulb rot



Bacterial soft rot



Neck rot



Sour skin

Oranges

Receiving and inspecting

Oranges should be firm, heavy for size, and have fine-textured skin. Skin color of a ripe orange ranges from orange to greenish-orange. Many oranges go through a regreening process on the tree in which the skin color begins to turn from orange back to green again. Regreening is a natural occurrence and does not affect the flavor quality of the orange.

Storing and handling

Optimal storage temperature varies by type. FL: 32-34°F; CA: 45-48°F; AZ & TX: 32-48°F, at 85-95% relative humidity.

Sensitive to ethylene: No

Produces ethylene: No

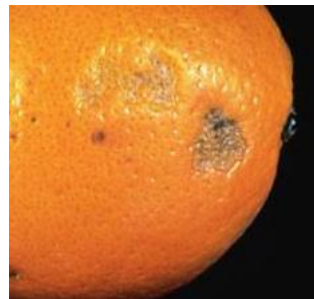
Odor-sensitive: No

Odor-producing: Yes

Acceptable



Slightly green oranges

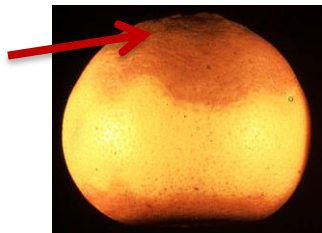


Small spots

Not acceptable



Mold



Stem end decay



Mold in navel



More mold (green)

Peaches

Receiving and inspecting

Peaches should be firm to slightly soft (ripe), but not overripe (mushy).

Storing and handling

Peaches should be stored at 32-36°F, 90-98% humidity. Do not store below 31°F.

Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**

Odor-sensitive: No

Produces ethylene: **Yes**

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Skin discoloration (inking) OK

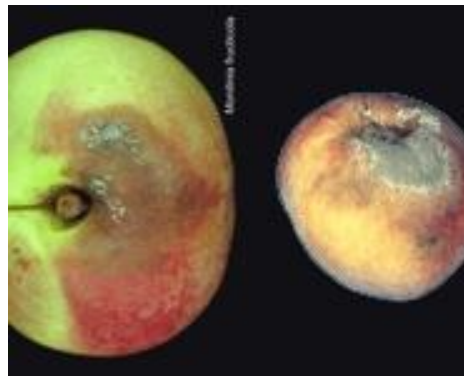


Surface scarring OK

Not acceptable



Severe bruising



Rot, mold

Pears

Receiving and inspecting

Pears should be at least fairly firm in texture.

Storing and handling

Pears should be stored at 32°F at 90-98% relative humidity. Do not store below 29°F to avoid freeze injury. Ripen at 60-70°F.

Sensitive to ethylene: No

Produces ethylene: Yes

Odor-sensitive: Yes

Odor-producing: Yes

Acceptable



Variations in colors and green unripe



Some surface blemishes and slight bruising

Not acceptable



Heavy bruising and mushiness



Moldy

Plums

Receiving and inspecting

Plums should be firm to slightly soft (ripe), but not overripe (mushy).

Storing and handling

Plums should be stored at 32-34°F. Do not store below 31°F.

Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**

Odor-sensitive: No

Produces ethylene: **Yes**

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Skin discoloration, surface scarring OK

Not acceptable



Shriveling



Rot, mold

Potatoes

Receiving and inspecting

All potato varieties should be fairly clean, firm, and smooth. Avoid potatoes with wrinkled skins, soft dark spots, or green appearance.

Storing and handling

Potatoes should be stored at 45-50°F, at 85-95% relative humidity. Susceptible to freezing; to prevent chill injury, do not store below 42°F.

Sensitive to ethylene: No

Produces ethylene: No

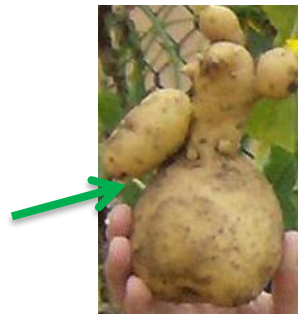
Odor-sensitive: **Yes**

Odor-producing: **Yes**

Acceptable



Small peepers (sprouts)



Odd lumps

Not acceptable



Moldy cut



Green potato (solanine)



Common scab



Late blight

Squash, hard-shell

Note: *Hard-shell squash types are generally larger than soft-shell types and have hard, inedible rinds. Major types include acorn, buttercup, kabocha, and spaghetti.*

Receiving and inspecting

Squash should be firm in texture.

Storing and handling

Hard-shell squash should be stored at 50-55°F at 85-95% relative humidity. To avoid chill injury, avoid storing below 50°F.

Sensitive to ethylene: Yes

Odor-sensitive: No

Produces ethylene: No

Odor-producing: No



Acceptable



There are many varieties—very similar needs in terms of handling and storage

Discoloration, slight surface blemishes

Not acceptable



Start of decay



Moldy and rotting

Squash, soft-shell

Note: *Soft-shell squash are also known as summer squash. Common varieties include zucchini, straight-neck (yellow squash), crookneck, and pattypan.*

Receiving and inspecting

Squash should be firm in texture with shiny, tender rinds.

Storing and handling

Soft-shell squash should be stored at 41-50°F at 85-95% relative humidity. To avoid chill injury, avoid storing below 41°F.

Sensitive to ethylene: Yes

Odor-sensitive: No

Produces ethylene: No

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Irregular shapes



Discoloration, slight surface blemishes

Not acceptable



Blossom end rot



Mold

Strawberries

Receiving and inspecting

Strawberries should be firm in texture. Color should be red, though some lighter color is ok. Avoid strawberries that are green, or those that appear mushy, shriveled, or leaky.

Storing and handling

Strawberries should be stored at 32-34°F at 90-98% relative humidity. Berries should not be rinsed until just before they are used. Temperatures above 36°F will accelerate the growth of gray mold.

Sensitive to ethylene: No
Produces ethylene: No

Odor-sensitive: No
Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Odd shapes

Red in color, though some lightness is fine

Not acceptable



Rot-mushy and discolored



Moldy

Sweet potatoes

Receiving and inspecting

Good quality sweet potatoes should be firm with smooth skins.

Storing and handling

Sweet potatoes should be stored at 55-60°F, at 85-95% relative humidity. Store in well-ventilated area.

Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**
Produces ethylene: No

Odor-sensitive: No
Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



Odd shapes



Small sprouts

Not acceptable



Mold



Chill damage (soft spots)

Tomatoes

Receiving and inspecting

Good quality tomatoes should have bright, shiny skin and firm flesh.

Storing and handling

Ripe (nearly full red) tomatoes should be stored at 55-60°F; less ripe tomatoes should be stored at 62-68°F. 85-95% relative humidity is ideal.

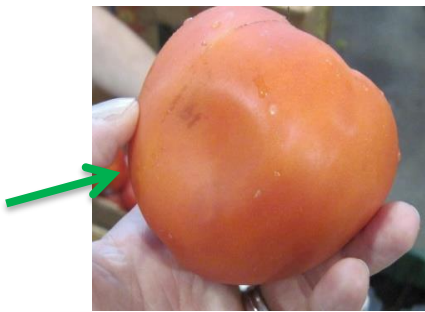
Sensitive to ethylene: No

Odor-sensitive: No

Produces ethylene: No

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable

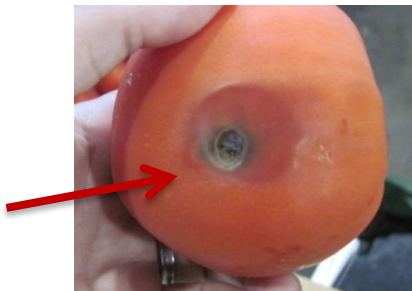


Slight dent



Greenish tint

Not acceptable



Moldy bruise



Black rot



Late blight



Mold and bruising

Watermelon

Receiving and inspecting

Watermelons should be firm. Watermelons do not ripen after harvesting; a ripe watermelon will produce a distinct hollow sound when thumped.

Storing and handling

Watermelons should be stored at 50-60°F, at 85-95% relative humidity. Susceptible to freezing; to prevent chill injury, avoid storing below 41°F.

Sensitive to ethylene: **Yes**

Odor-sensitive: No

Produces ethylene: No

Odor-producing: No

Acceptable



White/yellow patch



Small spots

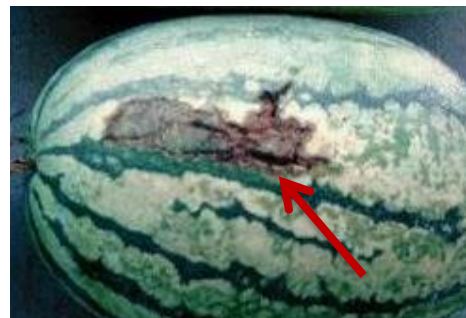
Not acceptable



Decay



Anthracnose



Fruit blotch

Appendix

Please use the following documents as quick references to post within your food bank or print for your internal staff to establish or include within your standard operating procedures for produce receiving.

Inbound Produce Inspection form



Produce Inspection Form to Report a Quality Issue

This form must be completed with proper documentation to be considered for reimbursement through FA NPP.

Date	Time	Carrier
Loading Zone/Dock #	License Plate	Inspected by:

Seal:

Were the trailer door seals intact? (Check one):		
Yes	No	Missing
Seal Number(s)		

Temperature:

Bill of Lading stated temperature	Reefer running at time of arrival: YES / NO	
Ambient temperature of trailer	Reefer Set Point	
Pulp temp taken by item		
Temperature Recorder #	Recorder found: YES / NO	
Average Temp	High Temp	Low Temp

Valid Reasons for Rejection with proper documentation: (Check all that apply)	Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Live infestation (pests)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Severe decay over 50% unusable product	
<input type="checkbox"/> Temperature abuse	
<input type="checkbox"/> Visible damage to the truck	
<input type="checkbox"/> Cross contamination	
<input type="checkbox"/> Foreign debris	
<input type="checkbox"/> Adulterated or food safety risk	

Possible Freight Claim: YES / NO	Federal Inspection Requested: YES / NO
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Amount of Loss (pounds/quantity):

Before rejecting a load, do not release driver. You will need to take pictures of the BOL and all temperatures to demonstrate the scope of the issue then send to freshproduce@feedingamerica.org immediately.

Date/Time FA Released Driver:	FA Contact:
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Quick Receiving Produce Checklist



Quick Receiving Produce Checklist

Today's Date:	PR#:
Date of Delivery:	Inspected by:

Food Bank must contact Feeding America within 1 hour of receiving the load by emailing this form and the FA Produce Inspection Form to Report a Quality Issue to freshproduce@feedingamerica.org and/or your designated PFS

****Do not release the driver until Feeding America has advised to do so****

Please complete the following steps in order below:

Step	Completed & Info Sent to FA
Bill of Lading Copy	
9 Pictures/or Video of the sample*	
FA Produce Inspection Form to Report a Quality Issue	
Check Reefer	
Seal Intact (Yes/No)	
Unload pallets	
Inspect all item types (Damage, mold, live infestation (bugs, birds, rodents, etc.))	
Take temperatures (via pulp, infrared, temp recorder)	
Reload pallets if quality issues	
BOL updated with quality issues, temps listed before returning to the driver	

*Please submit a total of 9 pictures or 1 video for a product sample from the front, middle, back of the trailer and top, middle, bottom of the pallets to demonstrate the scope of the issues noted.

When emailing Feeding America the Produce Inspection Form and this form, please elaborate as to the specific events that took place.

Produce labeling form (FRONT, before volunteer sort)

Expiration date: _____

Arrival date: _____

Product: _____

Quantity: _____

Produce labeling form (BACK, after volunteer sort)

Expiration date: _____

Sort date: _____

Produce lifespan estimation method (from Frank Bonner, formerly at St. Mary's



Product: _____

Quantity: _____

Food Bank in Phoenix, AZ)

Product lifespan estimation:

The inspection process is conducted by assessing Condition and Temperature. You will need to determine the percentage of decay or damage on each carton sampled (**using best judgment practice**) and record that percentage along with general description of findings. Each percentage will be totaled and an overall percentage will be determined.

The same basic process will be used to determine percentages on temperatures. Each overall percentage is equal to one point. Example: 20% = 20 points. Add the two numbers together to obtain your overall score.

Example of Inspection #1: 10 pallets of cantaloupes come into the food bank; during your inspection you notice the following. All cartons are straight and show no damage externally, but about 20% of the cantaloupes you inspected have minimal or some sunken places and appear sound. There is no sign of mold or decay visible on the melons. When you cut (generally 1 to 3 melons per pallet if suspect) a few of the melons showed some slight translucent discoloration in the flesh near or under the external sunken places. The pulp temperatures (taken from the sample melons) are reading 40 degrees consistently.

Condition is good no visible decay, sunken area's 20%..... score = 20

Temperature is only 4 degrees above standards..... score = 4

Total score = 24

Result: Product recommended to be distributed within 4 days for maximum usage

Example of Inspection #2: 10 pallets of cantaloupes come into the food bank; during your inspection you notice the following. Most cartons are broken and show damage externally; about 60% of the cantaloupes you inspected have multiple sunken places and some mold is present sporadically through the carton. There are also consistent signs of decay visible on the vine end (belly button). When you cut (generally 1 to 3 melons per pallet if suspect) a sample of the melons, there is discoloration in the flesh near or under the external sunken places. The pulp temperatures (taken from the sample melons) are reading 73 degrees consistently.

Condition is poor, visible decay, sunken area's 60%..... score = 60

Temperature is 35 degrees above standards..... score = 35

Total score = 95

Result: Product should be disposed of, and not distributed.