

An Open Letter to Food Donation and Recovery Networks,

We recognize in this time of uncertainty around COVID-19, that the protection of public health is paramount. We have recently learned of suggestions provided to halt food donations from 'affected areas' with COVID-19. This decision is not risk-based, nor is it rooted in data. This action will lead to more fear and will impact getting food to our most vulnerable populations. These populations need this support now more than ever in this time of uncertainty. Halting food donations will also lead to massive food waste. We believe these decisions are not only egregious but will be devastating during this pandemic.

Transmission of COVID-19 through food, food packages, or even food handlers has not been identified as a risk factor for this illness. Decades of data related to other similar respiratory viruses, indicate that food distribution channels (e.g. food banks, grocery stores, warehouses) are not transmission routes. We have never seen a public health authority advise individuals to stop shopping for food at certain stores due to the risk of respiratory virus transmission. In short, the risk of transmission through food or food packaging has not been demonstrated.

Recent and historical studies on coronaviruses and other respiratory viruses such as Influenza demonstrate that viruses deposited on surfaces will decline in concentration over hours or days (with rates depending on temperature and humidity). This natural decline, coupled with the basic risk management practices already practiced by food banks and their partner organizations drastically reduces the risk of transmission. This is why we do not see food or food packages as a transmission route. These standard risk management practices include hand hygiene regimens of washing coupled with sanitizing (using sanitizer containing at least 70% alcohol, as per CDC's guidance). Routine operating procedures in evaluating the integrity of packaging as well as for any soil are already in place. In addition, reinforcing messages to clients related to handwashing will also reduce the risk of virus transmission.

We urge those making these recommendations in the strongest possible terms to reverse, or not implement the guidance you have received and messaging related to halting the acceptance of donations due to COVID-19. It hurts the very people we are trying to protect.

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