FRESH FISH Donations Guide

Donation

Whether a donation comes via a private citizen, business or a Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) run hatchery they all must follow the same rules. Please check with your local health jurisdiction for more specific food safety information.

Food Safety

Donated fish should be minimally processed. This means that the heads will be removed, the abdominal cavity will be eviscerated to remove the guts and must be temperature regulated. Fish must be kept at an internal temperature of 41°F or below on ice or in a cooler.

Fish may also come as fish in the round, meaning that the fish come whole without processing. This may be how some WDFW hatchery donations arrive. Fish in the round still need to be kept at 41°F or below and should be kept on ice or in a cooler. They will need to be distributed immediately i.e. within a few hours of receiving the fish at the EFO.

Minimal Processing

Gutting fish received from WDFW hatchery donations is allowed at the food pantry-level as long as proper hand-washing and cross contamination prevention steps are followed. Please still discuss this process with your local health jurisdiction.

At all stages of processing and transport, fish not acquired from a retail establishment must be accompanied by the written statement identifying the name and address of the person who harvested the fish; the license, permit or tag number; the number and kind of animal provided; the date killed; the county and area where it was taken; and the fisherman’s signature.
An EFO possessing a game fish not acquired from a retail establishment must have a signed, written statement identifying the person who caught the fish; the license, permit or tag number; and other details to confirm that the fish was caught legally.

To the right, you will see a step-by-step guide for donating legally caught fish to an EFO. Please work with your Food Safety Contact at each step to ensure a safe and wholesome donation.

**Visual Inspection**

Donated fish requires emphasis on visual inspection cues.

- The eyes of the fish should be clear, plump, wet and shiny.
- The tail and dorsal fins should be healthy-looking, wet and intact.
- The fish should feel cold, wet and slippery, but not sticky.
- When pressed, it should spring back.
- The gills should be bright red. The gills should also feel clean and cold, not slimy.

**Transportation/Storage**

When transporting fish, it must be temperature controlled. Fresh fish should be kept at 41°F or below and frozen fish must be kept frozen at all times.

**Private Citizen**

An EFO must not accept meat from a private citizen because the EFO cannot sufficiently verify proper handling of this high-risk food (even if the donor is known to the EFO as a decent and reliable person).

**A Note About the Good Samaritan Donation Act**

RCW 69.80.031 offers food donors protection from criminal and civil liability. The act, however, is not a “get-out-of-jail-free” card relieving donors and EFOs of the duty of acting responsibly. The act requires that the donated food be “apparently wholesome.” Animal products can look just fine but still carry E. coli, salmonella or other disease. Therefore, verifying whether animal products are, in fact, “apparently wholesome” requires knowing whether the food has been handled in accordance with suitable food safety standards.