

Food Pantry LAX



Summer 2026

Is That Still Okay to Eat??

It is not uncommon for Food Pantry LAX to receive a donation of food from someone's pantry. Often the food is well past the "use by," "best by" or "sell by" date on the box or can. We also receive donations of salads and other perishable items from grocery stores that might be past their dates.

But that food is still often safe to eat. Pantry volunteers examine each donated item to determine whether it can be given to customers. And consumers can use these same techniques with their own food. After all, throwing away still-edible food wastes both food and money. And food waste dumped in landfills can gradually turn into global-warming methane gas.

A law now taking effect in California (AB660) aims to reduce the needless disposal of still edible food by standardizing and simplifying food-date labeling. Food

manufactured after July 1 this year can no longer list "sell by" dates. For packaged goods, food can be labeled only "best if used by" or "best if used or frozen by," indicating when quality begins to decline. Perishable items can be labeled either "use by" or "use or freeze by," indicating when the food becomes unsafe to eat.



In deciding what food is safe to distribute, the pantry relies in part on a guide published by the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank at LAFoodBank.org/shelf-life. Another resource is the FoodKeeper App issued by the U.S. Department of Agriculture: foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe/foodkeeper-app.

How long food remains edible depends in part on the type of food.

Consumers should throw out baby food and formula that are past their "use by" dates for the safety of the infant. But packaged items like crackers, cookies and dry cereal are usually safe to eat for several months after their dates (usually "best by") as long as they are still sealed. The food may begin to lose nutrients and quality, but is generally still edible.

Canned food can usually be eaten long past the best-by date. Unopened cans of beans, vegetables, tuna and soups (except tomato soup) may be fine for two to five years on your pantry shelf from the date of purchase. Canned fruit, juices and tomato soup are generally okay for 12 to 18 months from purchase. Unopened jams and jellies may be good 6-18 months, salad dressing 10-12 months and mayonnaise 3 to 6 months.

Always check the package, can or jar: If it is leaking, cracked, stained, swollen or rusty, discard it. Also toss it out if the safety seal is broken, the lid is loose or if it has a foul odor.

Besides inspecting donated cans and boxes, Food Pantry LAX volunteers also inspect perishable items that are donated by grocery

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stores. Generally, these items, such as fruit cups and salads, have been kept refrigerated right up until pantry volunteers pick them up, and they are given to customers as soon as possible.

Fruits and vegetables that are slightly bruised but edible are offered to customers. But discolored or rotting vegetables, packaged salads that look puffy or dry goods with evidence of insect infestation are thrown away or composted.

The Department of Agriculture estimates that the average family of four wastes \$1,500 worth of food a year.

Nobody wants to get sick from eating spoiled food. But wasting food and money can be minimized. Paying attention and knowing food safety guidelines can help at home, at the store, at the food pantry, and our community. 🍅



**Donate to
Food
Pantry LAX
through
PayPal
Giving
Fund.**

For other ways to donate, go to
<https://foodpantrylax.org/ways-to-donate/>

Most needed items right now are boxes of mac & cheese, and pop top cans of tuna, chicken, chili, stew and pasta.

Volunteer of the Year: Marta Lear

Perhaps it's her background as a family therapist, but Marta Lear thrives on her interactions with the food pantry's clients when she hands them bags of food.

"I really like speaking to people, smiling at people," she says. "I think that's important, for them to be seen and acknowledged."

For her work at Food Pantry LAX, Marta has been named the Wilma S. Matz Volunteer of the Year. The award is named after a woman who helped save the pantry many years ago by leaving it money in her will.

Marta was born and raised in Inglewood. A college calculus course dissuaded her from trying to become a doctor, so she became a licensed marriage and family therapist. After retiring in late 2022, she recalled, "I was looking for things to do, and how to help out."

Some years ago, Marta and another woman at her church, Westchester United Methodist, began a hot meal program which ran for 6 years. Marta's church has also long participated in the pantry's Christmas Bag-it-Up food drive. So when she was looking for volunteer gigs, the Food Pantry LAX proved to be a good fit for her.

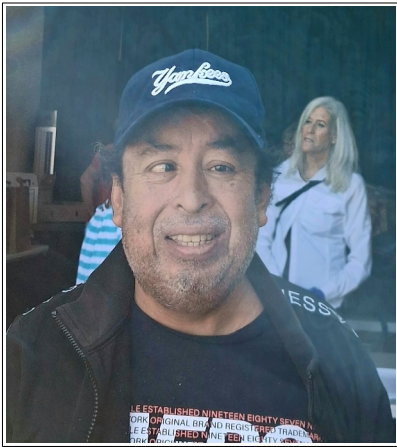
Marta works at the pantry every Tuesday. When she's not distributing food to clients, she typically assembles the bags of fresh fruits and vegetables the pantry provides each customer. Her ability to speak some Spanish is greatly appreciated. Marta has also represented the pantry at various community events, such as those organized by the YMCA and a local Starbucks.

Marta and her husband, Jerry, live in Westchester and have two grown sons and three grandchil-

dren. Not one to sit still, Marta also volunteers twice a week as a teacher's assistant at a public school, and plays the organ and piano at her church. 🍅

Marta Lear on the right, assisting a customer





Customer Profile: Carlos

Carlos began coming to Food Pantry LAX a few months ago. He had been working as a painter, until major health issues arose for him.

He has had open heart surgery, and is now dealing with damaged eye muscles from a stroke. He is scheduled for surgery to correct his vision, and hopes to be able to return to work.

Carlos has a school-aged daughter to provide for. The extra food he receives helps him meet his family's needs.

In spite of his difficulties, Carlos is always smiling and has a friendly greeting for Pantry workers. There may be a time when he no longer needs the Pantry's help, but for now, the food is most welcome. 🍎

Farewell to Mary and John Cantwell

There's something about Mary.

For several years the day-to-day operations of Food Pantry LAX have been run by a remarkable woman named Mary Cantwell. She decides on the weekly menu, shops for food at Costco, Amazon or wherever she can get the best deal, and manages the other volunteers when the pantry is open. She also deals with our main food supplier, the Westside Food Bank, each week placing our order for more than 2,000 pounds of groceries.

Now Mary and her husband, John, who also often volunteers at the pantry, are moving to San Diego, marking the end of an era for the pantry.

Originally from Queens, N.Y., Mary started helping at the pantry in 2011, making her one of our long-

est serving volunteers. She was named Volunteer of the Year in 2015 and joined the board of directors shortly afterwards. Around 2019 she became the pantry's general manager.

Her dedication to the pantry and its clients is such that when she and John moved from Playa Vista to Woodland Hills several years ago to be closer to children and grandchildren, she continued coming to the pantry twice a week, waking in the wee hours of the morning to beat the rush-hour traffic on the 405.

John, who has been coming to the pantry for a few years, has also been an extremely dedicated and valuable volunteer. A Navy submarine veteran, he prepares food bags, lifts heavy items and has made numerous repairs around the pantry.



Mary and John Cantwell retire after giving many years of valuable service to Food Pantry LAX.

We wish them well in their new life in San Diego, where they lived for many years while John was in the Navy.

Mary leaves such Shaq-sized shoes to fill that more than one person will be required to fill them.

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Cathy Heppell and Hope Lorimer, board members who have distinguished themselves in their service to the pantry and its clients, have agreed to share Mary's responsibilities. In such good hands, the pantry should continue to fulfill its mission of helping to feed those in need, with help from the generosity of the community. 🇺🇸

Food Pantry LAX

Food Distribution:

Tuesdays and Fridays
9:30-12 noon

Location:

355 E. Beach Avenue
Inglewood, CA 90302

Phone: 310-677-5597

Mailing Address:

6201 W. 87th St. #320
PMB 741
Los Angeles, CA 90045

Email:

FoodPantryLAX@gmail.com

Website: FoodPantryLAX.org

EIN Number: 95-4036782

Food Pantry LAX gives out an average of 2,500 pounds of food each distribution day!

Special thanks to these groups for food drives & donations in Nov. and Dec. 2025:

Beit T'Shuvah
Boy Scout Troop 915
Canfield Avenue Elem. School
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Westchester
Congregational Church of the Messiah
Covenant Presbyterian Church
Elks Lodge 2050, Westchester
Erin Hamme and friends
Gregorius Pineo Furniture
Holy Nativity Episcopal Church
Jack and Jill of America,
Inglewood Chapter
Kaiser Permanente
Knox Presbyterian Church
Los Angeles Airport Police



Marina del Rey Middle School
Mychal's Learning Place
NFL Community Teammates LA
Ocean Charter School
Oceanside Trucks
Our Savior Lutheran Church
Playa Vista Elementary School
Skechers
SoCalSport and Fitness
St. Jerome Church and School
The Concert Singers
The Meadows Apartment Homes
The Parking Spot
Westchester Lutheran Church
Westchester United Methodist
Westside Neighborhood School
Woman's Club of Playa del Rey



Left: Canfield Avenue Elementary School representatives, with pantry volunteer.

Above: SoCalSport and Fitness owners, with pantry volunteers.

These weekly food contributors make our work possible:

Westside Food Bank ♦ Vons, Centinela Avenue ♦ Bristol Farms, Manhattan Beach

Food Forward / Social Justice Learning Institute ♦ Cadoro Bakery

Togo's, Westchester ♦ Holy Nativity Episcopal Church Community Garden

Noah's NY Bagels, Marina del Rey ♦ Westchester Farmer's Market ♦ FoodCycle LA

Manhattan Bread & Bagel, Manhattan Beach ♦ Michelson Found Animals

Gjusta Bakery, Venice ♦ Manhattan Beach Community Garden