Hunger relief network celebrates new law helping fight food insecurity

Retailers can now donate eggs to food shelves past their quality assurance date

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(SUBMITTED PHOTOS)

LEFT: From left: Minnesota Department of Agriculture Commissioner Thom Peterson, ICA Executive Director Dan Narr, Second Harvest Heartland CEO Sarah Moberg, Rep. Andrew Myers (R-45A) and Steve Barthel with the Minnesota Grocers Association attend an Aug. 13 press conference at ICA Food Shelf in Minnetonka. **RIGHT:** ICA volunteers label eggs at ICA Food Shelf in Minnetonka.

Hunger relief programs across Minnesota are celebrating after the state Legislature unanimously passed a law allowing retailers to donate eggs to food assistance programs past their quality assurance dates.

As of Aug. 1, retailers and distributors can donate eggs to food shelves and food banks up to 30 days past the quality assurance date listed on the carton. The new law is a win for all of Minnesota, as it was one of the only states prohibiting retailers from donating eggs beyond the printed "best by" date, even though eggs remain nutritious and safe to consume for much longer.

"Eggs are one of the most requested and sought-after items by our food shelf partners," said Zach Nugent, senior media relations manager at Second Harvest Heartland in Brooklyn Park. "They are ones that are consistently requested by individuals who are visiting our food shelves, and so this is just an opportunity to have a new donation stream, a new source to get eggs, and to get more of them into the community, because we know that they are versatile and they are consistently asked for by our neighbors."

The Shell Egg Bill (SF 3891) signed into law by Gov. Tim Walz on May 26, requires that donated eggs be distributed within 30 days of their listed quality assurance dates. Eggs must also remain in their original packaging materials, receiving updated labeling and continuous refrigeration, as well as undergoing proper grading procedures. Food shelves must discard any donated eggs that go undistributed beyond the 30-day window.

Prior to the law change, retailers and distributors were prohibited from donating eggs that had reached the quality assurance dates listed on the cartons, leading to an increased concern from local hunger relief programs regarding community access to nutritious food items and food waste.

The bill — which was sponsored by Rep. Andrew Myers (R-45A) — addresses common food waste concerns by providing food assistance programs with safe and nutritious eggs that would have otherwise been discarded. In fact, food rescue and donation can make up 65% of the distributed food at some food shelves.

Rep. Myers established the bill after volunteering at Westonka Community Food Shelf in Mound for over a decade and serving on its board. His involvement with the food shelf gave him insight into the challenges food assistance programs face, which helped him shape the bill.

"Because of my work with our local food shelf and the hundreds of volunteers, I know how important reliable access to protein is for families," Myers said in a May 16 news release. "I also know how frustrating it is to see safe, nutritious food go to waste when it could be helping our neighbors. This bill is a practical fix that supports food shelves, reduces waste, and keeps strong food safety standards in place."

Second Harvest Heartland — a Brooklyn Park-based food shelf and the largest food distributor for food shelves in the state — celebrated the passage of the new law and its impact on the hunger relief network at an Aug. 13 press conference, alongside the ICA food shelf in Minnetonka, as well as the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and the Minnesota Grocers Association.

ICA Executive Director Dan Narr emphasized the impact of the law's passage on the local area, saying that approximately 70% of the food distributed by the Minnetonka-based nonprofit comes from community donations. This law change will help ICA achieve its mission of providing families with the resources and support needed to thrive.

"ICA is a wonderful and incredible partner of Second Harvest Heartland and we wanted to ensure that we were doing this in partnership, because this was not just a Second Harvest Heartland effort, this was an effort from across the Hunger relief network," Nugent said.

ABOUT SECOND HARVEST HEARTLAND

Second Harvest Heartland is one of the nation's leading hunger-relief organizations. The nonprofit partners with over 1,000 food shelves and hunger-relief programs throughout Minnesota and western Wisconsin to provide meals to neighbors in need. Visit 2harvest.org to learn more.

ABOUT ICA

Founded in 1971, ICA (originally Intercongregation Communities Association) is a community-based nonprofit organization providing food assistance, housing stability support, and employment resources to individuals and families throughout the western suburbs. ICA currently serves residents in Deephaven, Excelsior, Greenwood, Hopkins, Minnetonka, Shorewood, and Woodland. Visit icafoodshelf.org to learn more.

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