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'Tis the Season of Giving!

This is the time of year when many people focus on their holiday and end-of-year giving. If you are considering making a donation, take time to research the charity and make sure it is legitimate.

All charities soliciting within the state of Florida (excluding religious, educational, political and governmental agencies) are required to register and file financial information with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Some organizations may spend as much as 95 percent on their purpose or cause, while others spend more on administrative costs. It is up to the donor to determine if their contribution will be spent the way they intend.

Keep the following tips in mind before agreeing to donate:

- Ask for financial information, such as a copy of the organization's IRS 990 income tax return, annual report or a breakdown of how the money is spent.
- Ask how your contribution will be used.
- Ask if the caller is a volunteer or a paid solicitor if you are solicited by telephone.
- Ask the solicitor for their license number.

Contact the FDACS toll-free hotline at 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or use our online [Check-A-Charity](#) tool at FloridaConsumerHelp.com to verify registration and financial information.

You can also visit www.give.org the website of the BBB Wise Giving Alliance, where you can access reports on nationally soliciting charities. The BBB Wise Giving Alliance evaluates charities against comprehensive [Standards for Charity Accountability](#) to help donors make informed giving decisions.

Serving Safety for the Holidays

Holiday planning is kicking in to high gear. Friends and families will soon be gathering to enjoy their favorite dishes that include everything from cornbread dressing and pumpkin pie to that special congealed salad made from Aunt Bethany's secret recipe. To keep your holiday meal memorable for all the right reasons, food safety should be at the top of the planning list.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends following these simple tips to avoid foodborne illness during the holidays.

- **Wash your hands with soap and water** at these key times when you are likely to get and spread germs:
 - Before, during, and after preparing food
 - After touching raw meat, raw eggs, or unwashed vegetables
 - Before eating or drinking
 - Before and after caring for someone who is sick
 - Before and after treating a cut or wound
 - After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
 - After using the toilet
 - After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet
 - After touching an animal, animal feed, or animal waste
 - After touching garbage.
- **Wash surfaces and utensils after each use.** Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and countertops with hot, soapy water especially after they've held raw meat, poultry, seafood, or eggs. Wash dish cloths often in the hot cycle of your washing machine.
- **Wash fruits and vegetables, but not meat, poultry, or store-bought eggs.**
 - Cut away any damaged or bruised areas, then rinse fruits and vegetables under running water without soap, bleach, or commercial produce washes.
 - Scrub firm produce like melons or cucumbers with a clean produce brush.
 - Dry produce with a paper towel or clean cloth towel.
 - Don't wash meat, poultry, eggs, or bagged produce marked "pre-washed".
- **Cook food thoroughly.** Meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs can carry germs that cause food poisoning. Use a food thermometer to ensure these foods have been cooked to the [safe](#)

[minimum internal temperature](#). Roasts, chops, steaks and fresh ham should rest for 3 minutes after removing from the oven or grill.

- **Keep food out of the danger zone.** Bacteria can grow rapidly at room temperature. After food is cooked, **keep hot food hot and cold food cold**. Refrigerate or freeze any perishable food within 2 hours. The temperature in your refrigerator should be set at or below 40°F and the freezer at or below 0°F.
- **Use pasteurized eggs for dishes containing raw eggs.** [Salmonella](#) and other harmful germs can live on both the outside and inside of normal-looking eggs. Many holiday favorites contain raw eggs, including eggnog, tiramisu, hollandaise sauce, and Caesar dressing. Always use pasteurized eggs when making these and other foods made with raw eggs.
- **Do not eat dough or batter.** Dough and batter made with flour or eggs can contain harmful germs, such as [E. coli](#) and [Salmonella](#). Do not taste or eat [unpasteurized dough or batter](#) of any kind, including those for cookies, cakes, pies, biscuits, pancakes, tortillas, pizza, or crafts. Do not let children taste raw dough or batter or play with dough at home or in restaurants.
- **Keep foods separated.** Keep meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs separate from all other foods at the grocery and in the refrigerator. Prevent juices from meat, poultry, and seafood from dripping or leaking onto other foods by keeping them in containers or sealed plastic bags. Store eggs in their original carton in the main compartment of the refrigerator.
- **Safely thaw frozen meat.** Thaw meat in the refrigerator, in a sink of cold water that is changed every 30 minutes, or in the microwave. Avoid thawing foods on the counter. Frozen meat must thaw at a safe temperature to prevent harmful germs from growing rapidly.

For more information on food safety and foodborne illnesses, visit [FoodSafety.gov](#).

#GivingTuesday

December 3rd is [#GivingTuesday](#), a global day of giving observed on the Tuesday following Thanksgiving in the U.S. [#GivingTuesday](#) is a generosity movement designed to unleash the power of people and organizations to transform their communities and the world. More than 30,000 worldwide organizations are participating in the movement.

Nonprofits, civic organizations, businesses and corporations, as well as families and individuals, are invited to participate in the [#GivingTuesday](#) movement by donating time, resources and talents to address local challenges and amplify small acts of kindness. Visit [GivingTuesday.org](#) to learn more about the movement and participating organizations and to download the #GivingTuesday toolkit.

Be sure to always visit FloridaConsumerHelp.com to use the Check-A-Charity tool before making any charitable donations.

[Click to View Food Recalls](#)

The Division of Food Safety monitors food from the point of manufacturing and distribution through wholesale and retail sales to ensure the public of safe, wholesome and properly represented food products.

[Click to View Consumer Product Recalls](#)

The Consumer Product Safety Commission provides consumer product recall information as part of the agency's mission to protect consumers and families from hazardous products.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is the state's clearinghouse for consumer complaints, protection, and information. Consumers who believe fraud has taken place can contact the department's consumer protection and information hotline by calling 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or, for Spanish speakers, 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832) or visit us online at FloridaConsumerHelp.com.

Follow us on Twitter -- [@FDACS](#) and [@NikkiFriedFL](#)



Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Nicole "Nikki" Fried, Commissioner

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