

# The Homesteader's Guide To Emergency Food Storage

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# THE HOMESTEADER'S — GUIDE TO — EMERGENCY FOOD STORAGE



HOMESTEAD SURVIVAL SITE



As a homesteader, it is important to have reserved food stocks in case of an emergency. These food stocks should be able to last a very long time, keep your energy up, keep you healthy, and keep you hydrated. That's a tall order from a collection of nonperishable foods.

All of the hard work is worth it, though. If you find yourself in a situation without power or refrigeration, your family could be in danger. We all saw how the epic toilet paper shortage of 2020 went, with TP becoming a form of currency during the pandemic. Instead, there are easy ways of keeping a rotating emergency food stock that is sustainable on your homestead.

Article continues below.

There are many rules to having a successful emergency food stock. It is something that takes constant attention, as you should be cycling through your stock based on the expiration date. But what does that mean exactly?

In this article, we will discuss everything you need to know for having optimal homesteader emergency food storage.

## What Not to Do

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We will start with what NOT to do when preparing your emergency food stock. It's easy to head over to Costco or Sam's Club and buy a ton of items in bulk and throw them in the basement for a later time. This is not what it means to keep emergency food on hand!

Here are a few steps to avoid if you are just starting your emergency food storage journey.

## Buying in Bulk

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You might be a card-carrying member of a bulk grocery store. And that's awesome! People with big families benefit from bulk stores because you can feed a large number of people with the larger serving sizes found at these stores.

However, buying in large bulk quantities does not necessarily mean you are setting yourself up for success. Purchasing a gallon tub of peanut butter, for example, is a way of spending wastefully. It is hard to finish that amount of peanut butter in a small amount of time, so the leftovers will spoil by the time you're able to finish it all.

Instead, opt for multiple smaller jars of peanut butter. Open one at a time and the rest will stay sealed and fresh until you need them. This also goes for large quantities of other nonperishable foods such as rice, beans, pickled foods, dried meats, and condiments. Always buy multiples of smaller containers to keep the foods fresh.

## Buying Foods You Do Not Eat Regularly

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If you see dried beans on sale at the grocery stores, your immediate reaction might be to stock up on lots of legumes. This is a smart buy, but only if you are used to cooking and eating beans from dry. If you have little experience in this, it's best to leave the beans on the shelf.

Why is this? You are more likely to eat foods that you know that you like. You are also more likely to use them if you are experienced in cooking those foods. Cooking beans from scratch might be hard for a first-timer, leading to wasted food. If you buy foods you and your family actually like, you will consume them more frequently and easily.

Food sitting in your stock and spoiling is worse than simply buying foods you are comfortable with. Food wasted is money wasted. Tons of foods that you love are nonperishable and can be stored very easily. It just takes a little time and research to get it right.

## Buying Just to Buy

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If you want an emergency food stock and you don't know where to start, the grocery store should not be the first place that you go. Instead, do some research online and make a list before you begin. Again, pick foods that you enjoy eating.

Circling back to the pandemic toilet paper shortage in 2020, folks were buying TP just to buy it. The news caught wind and gave a voice to those who panic-buy, leading to an even worse shortage. This is exactly what **not** to do when buying nonperishables.

If you do want to build up stock on a particular item, such as toilet paper, do not buy many packs all at once. Instead, each time you head to the grocery store, buy 1-2 extra packages than what you need. Add those 1-2 packages to your stock after each shopping trip. Over time, the stock will build up and there will be plenty left over for everyone else at the store.

## Buying Only MREs and Emergency Freeze-Dried Meals

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This tip goes hand-in-hand with not buying foods you eat regularly. The internet makes it easy to go splurge on months of MREs for a cool \$1000, but that doesn't mean you should do that. MREs vary from being delicious to atrocious, and you cannot always rely on customer reviews to tell you this info.

Spending a few grand on MREs without ever having tried them is a risky and expensive move. Your money is better spent on nonperishable items that you enjoy. Plus, cooking from your food stock can create tons of amazing recipes, even if you don't have access to refrigeration.



## What to Store in Your Emergency Food Storage

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When designing your food stock, remember the 3 most important aspects to your storage: energy, nutrition, and water.

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- **Energy** – These foods should have energizing qualities. If you are a homesteader, then you know it requires tons of energy to keep your animals fed, your crops hydrated, and your family happy. The foods you store should be filling and hearty to get through each day.
- **Nutrition** – It should go without saying that your food storage should have healthy options to keep your health in an optimal place. Diversity comes from canned vegetables and fruits, harvested vegetables and fruits, legumes, and healthy spices such as dried turmeric or ginger. Diverse fresh foods can be kept in your food stock and will provide the nutrients you need to stay sharp.
- **Water** – As the building block of life as we know it, you will need fresh water in your food stock. This is the most important part of emergency food storage. Always have multiple stocks of water ready if you need it. This is the one ingredient that you should purchase in larger containers to ensure you never, ever run out.

## Nonperishable Food

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Now that we have discussed the 3 important aspects of a healthy emergency food stock, we can talk specifics on exactly what foods to store. Again, all of these options are just suggestions. Think of your favorite foods before heading to the grocery store to stock up.

Nonperishable foods are foods that can be stored at room temperature without the need for refrigeration. They have a long shelf life and can be stored in a pantry, cabinet, or basement. Some of the most popular nonperishable foods are:

- All-purpose flour
- Almonds
- Applesauce
- Artichokes
- Baking powder
- Baking soda
- Black beans
- Broth
- Canned chicken
- Canned corn
- Canned fruit
- Canned soup
- Canned tomatoes
- Canned tuna
- Cashews
- Chia seeds
- Chickpeas
- Coffee
- Dark chocolate
- Dried apricots
- Dried cranberries
- Flax seeds
- Granola bars
- Grits
- Honey
  
- Jerky
- Kidney beans
- Lentils
- Liquor
- Maple syrup
- Nut milk
- Nuts
- Oats
- Oil

- Pasta
- Peanut butter
- Popcorn kernels
- Powdered milk
- Prepared shelf-stable meals
- Pumpkin puree
- Pumpkin seeds
- Quinoa
- Raisins
- Rice
- Sugar
- Tea
- Vanilla extract
- Vinegar
- Walnuts
- Water

The thing about nonperishable food is that once the package is opened, the entirety must be consumed. If you do not have refrigeration in an emergency, the leftover food will go to waste. This is also why it is great to buy smaller portions in larger quantities.

## **Foods That Are Not Worth Storing**

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Some foods are a higher priority over others. Just because an item is sealed does not mean it is fit for long-term storage. Many of the foods below have a very short shelf life. These foods take up precious food storage space, so try not to waste your space storing these foods below:

- Bacon
- Beer
- Bottled juice
- Boxed cereal
- Boxed juice
- Bread
- Butter
- Cheese
- Eggs
- Gluten-free foods
- Graham crackers
- Hot dogs
- Milk (purchased cold)
- Packaged cookies

- Prepared mayonnaise
- Prepared salad dressing
- Processed maple syrup
- Rice premixed with seasoning or pasta
- Saltine crackers
- Vegetable oil

## Gardening Your Produce

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As we have seen, most nutrition is coming from canned produce when eating nonperishable items. By having a garden, you will get the fresh vitamins that you need daily from nutritious fruits and veggies. Gardening takes a lot of work, but if you are a homesteader, you likely have a small summer garden already.

If you plan on cooking hearty meals, such as soups or stews, having onions, garlic, carrots, or celery in your garden will be a game-changer. These vegetables are known as the building blocks of flavorful dishes. Adding these veggies to beans, chili, or chicken soup will add nutrition and help you feel more satisfied.

Root vegetables are also fabulous foods to grow in the garden. Not only are they super nutritious, but they can be stored in the ground during the cold months. Homesteaders can simply bury their sweet potatoes, carrots, and parsnips during the fall months and into winter. Critters will be hibernating, so the frozen ground keeps the vegetables fresh just as the freezer would. Be sure to mark where the veggies are buried so you can find them when you need them.

Alternatively, you can keep root vegetables and onions for a while at room temperature in a dry place. Many people do not refrigerate their onions, garlic, and potatoes from the grocery store, so the logic is similar here. Just be sure to use up your oldest produce before adding more to the bunch.

You may find that you have tons of leftover onions, herbs, cucumbers, or tomatoes at the end of the season. This is the perfect time to can and preserve some of your produce! By learning the simple skill of sealed canning, you can keep your produce fresh and flavorful by pickling almost anything. Properly home-canned foods last 1 year or more!

## Water

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Surviving in an emergency depends highly on how much freshwater you have. Some people are lucky enough to live on a well or near a stream, although it is usually necessary to purify these water sources.



If you do not live near water, keep large jugs of water in your food stock. Multiple water-cooler-sized jugs are a great option to keep on hand. This will allow you to keep hydrated and be able to wash up in an emergency without power or running water.

## **Livestock**

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Keeping animals on your land is common among homesteaders. Those starting might get a few chickens for fresh daily eggs. Goats, cows, and pigs are great animals to have if you have the means for taking care of them. They can be an excellent food source in an emergency, but not everyone can accommodate large animals on their land.

Some also choose to breed animals for an extra food source around their land. You will often see rabbits, ducks, and pheasants being bred around homesteads to ensure a large population of animals for hunting. The breeding and hunting should be kept for an emergency to keep the practice sustainable and ethical.

## **How to Store It**

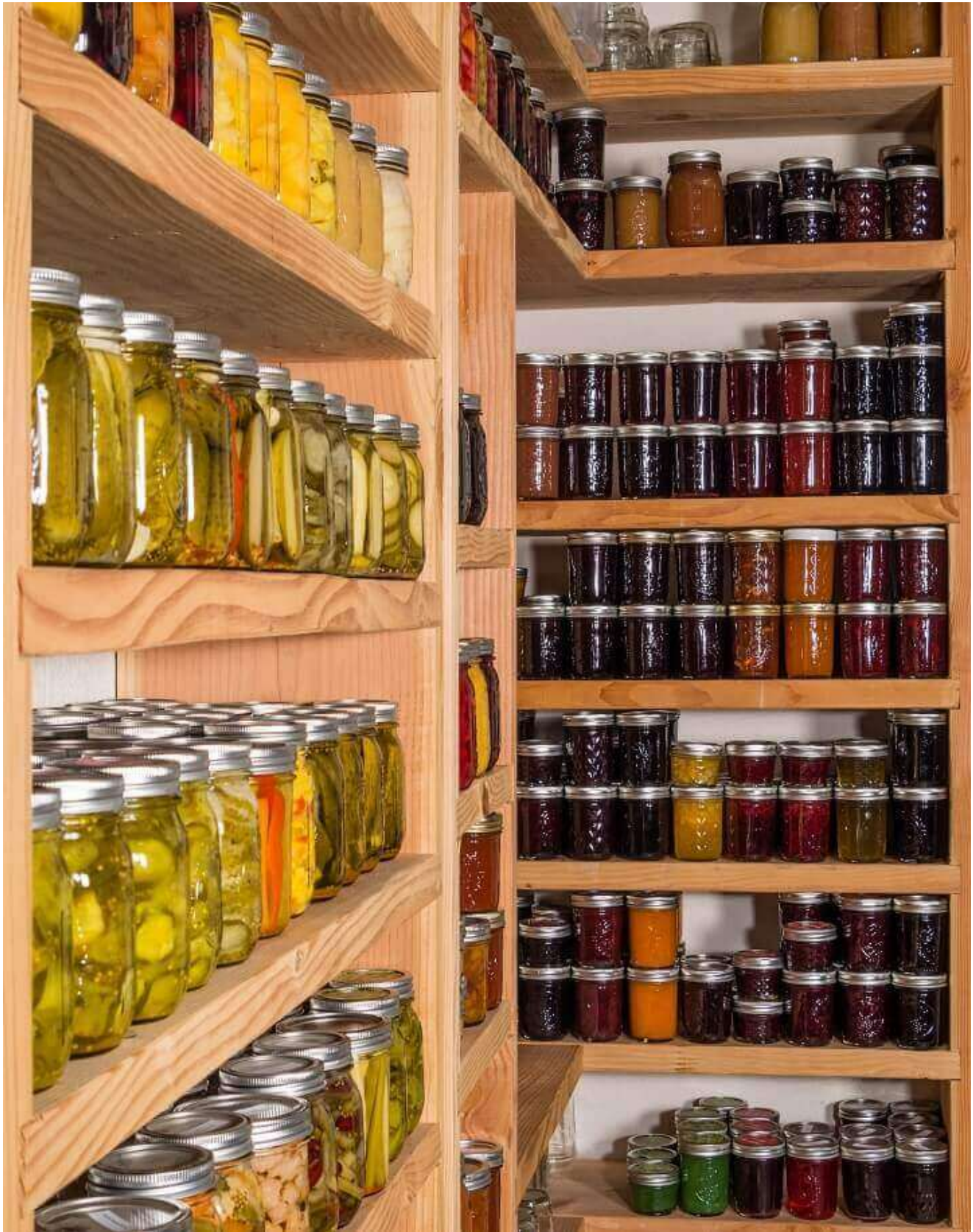
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In addition to depending on what you have, you'll also need a great storage method to keep the food long-lasting and fruitful.

## **Organization Method**

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You can store your cans in jars in any order that you see fit. Many people keep their canned vegetables together, their canned fruits together, and so forth including jarred items and canned meats. Each can be in their category, which is totally up to you.



Be sure that any time you are checking your food storage, you check cans and packaging for signs of wear and tear. Dents in cans can allow air, rust, and bacteria into the food. Be sure each package is clean and free of dents and scrapes.

## **Dated List**

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So you buy all this extra canned food that you very much enjoy. Now what?

Folks who are serious about keeping their food storage alive keep a detailed list of each food they have, how much of it they have, and what the expiration date on the can is. This way, you can easily keep track of all that you have and you can consume anything before it expires. Keep the list close to the stock for safekeeping.

## **Rotated Stock**

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Now that you have a food stock and a detailed list, you can begin rotating your stock. This is a method that many homesteaders use as a rule of thumb to ensure none of your food goes bad. The general rule is “first in, first out” meaning the oldest foods are the first ones you grab to eat. Eat the nonperishable foods that are closest to the expiration date for an easy, foolproof system.

The method is similar to how a grocery store is stocked. For example, when a gallon of milk is sold, the first to expire is pushed towards the front of the shelf so that it sells faster. As new milk is added, the more distant expiration date is now at the end of the stock.

## **Common Food Storage Methods**

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Let's imagine a situation where you have an excess of a crop, an animal you've hunted, or you bought in bulk an item that you enjoy. There are plenty of methods for storing fresh produce or meat for the long term, creating less waste and more sustenance for you and your family.

### **Canning**

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By using lidded mason jars, a hot water bath, and a little patience, you can preserve foods by canning and storing them at room temperature for 1 year. The lids must be completely sealed tight with no movement when you press the middle of the lid.

You may begin canning produce using plain water or create a pickle brine by utilizing vinegar. This works great for homemade pickled cucumbers or any other vegetable.

### **Cold storage**

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Refrigeration is similar to freezing, in that it is used as a modern convenience today. Some emergencies may be due to cut power. Everything in your cold storage would spoil in this type of scenario.

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## Dehydrating

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This method of food storage works even if you don't own a fancy dehydrator. By using a low-temperature oven with the door askew and a fan positioned outside, you can create a homemade effective dehydrator. You can dehydrate meat, fruits, vegetables – anything! Store the dehydrated goods in vacuum-sealed bags for the best shelf life.

## Fermentation

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Vegetables lend well to fermentation. Excess cabbage can be turned into sauerkraut or kimchi by fermenting. Keep an eye on your fermentation projects closely to ensure no mold or harmful bacteria find their way in.

## Freezing

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Freezing is a viable option, but not always the first choice of homesteaders. If there is an emergency food situation and you are left without power, you could lose your entire freezer stock in a matter of days.

## Root cellars

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These cellars can be used to process your fresh meat, as they are a cool, dark place. This area is perfect for meat drying, ripening, and curing.

## Smoking

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If you are lucky enough to have a smoker, you can smoke meats for long-term storage. Crafty homesteaders can also easily turn their regular grill into a smoker by adding wood chips and water to a disposable pie tin. Place the tin over indirect heat and close the lid. The grill can now be used as a smoker! Continue to add more wood chips as needed throughout smoking.

## Vacuum sealing

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Many homesteaders keep a vacuum sealer in their homes. These machines vacuum the air out and then seal the food from all outside air, critters, and bacteria. Many people remove rice, beans, or other nonperishable foods from their original packaging and store them in vacuum-sealed bags for the longest possible shelf life.

## Where to Store It

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None of the previous points matter unless you have a critter-free, temperate area to store your food.

## Location

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Consider your food's location when storing your emergency food storage. This is the most crucial part of food storage. Many chose wine cellars, basements, underground bunkers, or critter-proof sheds to store their food. A cool, dry, well-circulated, and dark place will be your best bet for keeping your excess food safe.

Most homesteaders advise against storing your cans and jars on the floor. Critters can easily penetrate boxes left on the ground, so keep anything enticing to animals high and away from the ground, including cans. Install some simple wood shelving for easily rotating your food stock or buy inexpensive stand-alone industrial storage shelves.

Consider these places when choosing a food storage location:

- Basements
- Behind walls or floorboards
- Cabinets
- Campers
- Closets
- Crawl space
- False-bottom items
- Five-gallon buckets
  
- Inside broken appliances
- Over doors and hallways
- Root cellars
- Sheds
- Suitcases
- Under beds
- Under indoor planters
- Under the stairs



## Air Quality

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As stated before, you want a place with cool, dry air. This is why dry basements work so well for food storage. To ensure the air is very dry, some people put dehumidifiers in their food location. This is only necessary if you live in a very damp environment. Moisture from the air can create a breeding ground for mold and bacteria around your food, which you do not want.

## Temperature

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The cooler the temperature is in your storage area, the better off the food will be. Much like how the refrigerator keeps your food fresh, a cool storage area will do the same. If the temperature fluctuates where you plan to store your food, be sure it never reaches higher than 70-72 degrees F. Ideally the temperature would be somewhere between 32 degrees F and 60 degrees F.

If you have fresh produce in your stock from your garden, it is beneficial to have a very cool stock area. The cool dry air will keep your fresh vegetables longer than if they were stored at room temperature. Store the fresh produce in moisture-wicking bags or containers made of natural materials up and off the ground, away from critters.

## General Food Storage Tips

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Here are some tips overall to ensure you are successful in your emergency food storage:

- **Buy freeze-dried food a little at a time** – Freeze-dried foods are easily re-hydrated using less water than dehydrated foods. This is great if water is scarce in an emergency, however, these foods can get very expensive. Buy a little at a time if you wish to keep freeze-dried foods.
- **Don't waste money on MREs** – In certain situations, MREs are great. For homesteading and food stock, they are virtually useless as you can store healthier foods to make full meals yourself. Your homemade meals will taste much better than the MREs, and that is a promise.
- **Keep a running inventory of everything** – You will thank yourself later for keeping all foods under a close eye.
- **Keep similar foods close together in your stock** – For easily finding what you are looking for, have a system that keeps similar foods near one another.
- **Label everything!** – This includes dates purchased, expiration dates (as the ink can wear off of the packing over time), allergies, or any other pertinent information. Use a black marker and sticky labels if need be.
- **Oxygen absorbers are very useful** – If, for example, you are storing pasta outside of the box, seal it with 300cc oxygen absorbers per 1-gallon bag. This just further extends the shelf life of nonperishables.
- **Start small** – Do not go overboard buying all of your groceries just to quickly build a food supply. These things take time and energy, so start on a small scale and grow as you learn.
- **Use multiple seals for best storage** – Many people vacuum seal, then add to another airtight container for extra protection. You can use Mylar bags before adding them to a lidded container, too.
- **Use Mylar bags for storage** – These bags can increase shelf life to years, or even decades. They keep out all moisture and oxygen from your food stock. They can get expensive, but you will use them for years.

## Conclusion

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As we can see, there are a lot of tasks to go through before beginning your own sustainable homesteader emergency food storage. The chances of ever needing to solely live off of your stock are slim, but not impossible.

Being prepared is the best thing to do before a true food emergency. And with you constantly rotating out and consuming the foods you keep, you will always have a backup plan if you need one.

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