

The Emergency Food Assistance Program

1. What is TEFAP?

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is a Federal program that helps supplement the diets of low-income Americans, including seniors, by providing them with emergency food assistance at no cost.

Through TEFAP, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) purchases a variety of nutritious, high-quality USDA Foods, and makes those foods available to State Distributing Agencies. The amount of food each State receives out of the total amount of food provided is based on the number of unemployed persons and the number of people with incomes below the poverty level in the State. States provide the food to local agencies that they have selected, usually food banks, which in turn distribute the food to local organizations, such as soup kitchens and food pantries that directly serve the public. States also provide the food to other types of local organizations, such as community action agencies, which distribute the foods directly to low-income households.

These local organizations distribute USDA Foods to eligible recipients for household consumption or use them to prepare and serve meals in a congregate setting.

Under TEFAP, States also receive administrative funds to support the storage and distribution of USDA Foods. These funds must, in part, be passed down to local agencies.

TEFAP is administered at the Federal level by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), an agency of the USDA.

2. Who is eligible to get food?

(a) Public or private nonprofit organizations that provide nutrition assistance to low-income Americans, either through the distribution of food for home use or the preparation of meals, may receive food as local agencies. They must also meet the following criteria:

- Organizations that distribute food for home use must determine household eligibility by applying income standards set by the State.
- Organizations that provide prepared meals must demonstrate that they serve predominately low-income persons.

(b) Households that meet State eligibility criteria may receive food for home use. States set income standards, which may, at the State's discretion, be met through participation in other existing Federal, State, or local food, health, or welfare programs for which eligibility is based on income. States can adjust eligibility criteria to ensure that assistance is provided only to those households most in need.

(c) Recipients of prepared meals are considered to be low-income and are not subject to a means test.

3. What foods are available through TEFAP?

The types of foods USDA purchases for TEFAP vary depending on the preferences of States and on agricultural market conditions. More than 120 nutritious, high-quality products are available. Products include: canned, frozen, dried, and fresh fruits and vegetables, eggs, meat, poultry, fish, nuts, milk and cheese, and whole-grain and enriched grain products including rice, cereal, and pasta. For a complete list of foods available through TEFAP, refer to the [USDA Foods Available List for TEFAP](#).

4. What other food and nutrition assistance can TEFAP recipients get?

TEFAP households may be eligible for other FNS programs, including:



- [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#)
- [National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\)](#)
- [Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children \(WIC\)](#)
- [Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations \(FDPIR\)](#)
- [Commodity Supplemental Food Program \(CSFP\)](#)

5. When and why did TEFAP start?

TEFAP was first authorized in 1981 to distribute foods purchased by USDA to support agriculture markets for household use. The program was designed to help reduce Federal food inventories while assisting low-income persons. Food inventories had largely been depleted by 1988. Therefore, the Hunger Prevention Act of 1988 authorized funds to be appropriated for the purchase of USDA Foods specifically for TEFAP. Foods acquired with appropriated funds are in addition to any ‘bonus’ foods purchased by USDA to support agriculture markets. The program was formally named The Emergency Food Assistance Program under the 1990 Farm Bill.

6. How much does the program cost?

In FY 2020, Congress appropriated \$397.1 million for TEFAP - \$317.5 million to purchase food and \$79.63 million for administrative support for State and local agencies.

In addition to USDA Foods purchased with appropriated funds, TEFAP distributes ‘bonus’ foods purchased by USDA to support agriculture markets. In FY 2018, \$403.2 million of such foods were made available to TEFAP.

7. Who should I contact for more information about TEFAP?

Contact your State Distributing Agency for more information about TEFAP. A list of State contacts may be found on the [Food and Nutrition Service website](#).

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- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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