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United States
Department of
Agriculture

Subject: Faith-Based Organizations and the Emergency Food Assistance Program
(TEFAP)

Food and
Nutrition
Service

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The majority of food pantries and soup kitchens in the Nation's emergency food assistance system are faith-based, and these faith-based organizations play a critically important role in the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). The compatibility of TEFAP and faith-based organizations is a well-established fact. In keeping with President George W. Bush's Faith-Based Initiative, this memorandum outlines the regulatory framework that supports this compatibility.

TEFAP was established by Congress in the Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983, 7 USC 7501 et seq., to make USDA commodities available to public and nonprofit organizations such as emergency feeding organizations, food banks, soup kitchens, and food pantries providing nutrition assistance by serving needy persons across the country. Regulations governing the relationship between TEFAP operations and the conduct of activities unrelated to the distribution of program foods or meal service appear in the Code of Federal Regulations at 7 CFR Part 251.10(f). Unrelated activities, including political and religious activities such as political speeches or prayer before a meal, can be conducted by organizations that participate in TEFAP if:

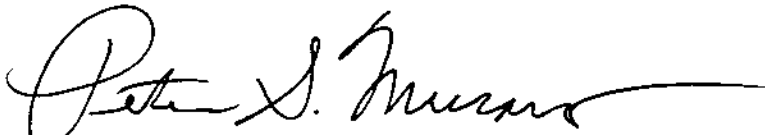
- The person conducting the activity makes clear that the activity is not part of TEFAP and is not endorsed by USDA;
- The person conducting the activity makes clear that cooperation or participation in the activity is not a condition of receipt of TEFAP benefits; and
- The activity is not conducted in a manner that disrupts TEFAP commodity distribution or meal service.

A practical application of these requirements will be found in a publication issued by the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (WHOFBCI) that is entitled Guidance to Faith-Based and Community Organizations on Partnership with the Federal Government:

A church that receives direct government aid to provide shelter to homeless individuals may not require those individuals to attend a Bible study or participate in a prayer preceding a meal as part of the government-funded services they provide. But they may invite those individuals to join them, so long as they make clear that their participation is optional.

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Faith-based organizations across the country have found over the years that they can participate in TEFAP without compromising their mission or values. They are valued partners in the effort to combat hunger in America.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Peter S. Murano". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Peter S. Murano
Deputy Administrator
Special Nutrition Programs