

The Emergency Food Assistance Program

1. What is The Emergency Food Assistance Program?

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

Through TEFAP, the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) (USDA) purchases USDA Foods, including processing and packaging, and makes it 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 food and nutrition assistance to low-income Americans through the distribution of food for home use or the preparation of meals to be served in a congregate setting may receive food as local agencies. They must 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.

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 agricultural market conditions. Around 80 products are available for 2012, including:

- canned fruits
- canned vegetables
- fruit juice
- dried egg mix
- meat/poultry/fish
- dried beans
- pasta products
- milk
- rice/grits/cereal
- soups

For a complete list of foods available through TEFAP in FY 2012, visit the Food Distribution website at:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/foods/tefapfoods.pdf>.

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. Are homeless people eligible for TEFAP food?

Yes. Homeless people can benefit from TEFAP through organizations like soup kitchens which provide prepared meals, or food pantries which distribute foods to individuals.

Homeless people do not have to complete an application to receive prepared meals served in a congregate setting. However, they must meet State eligibility requirements to receive TEFAP food that is not served in prepared meals.

6. When and why did TEFAP start?

TEFAP was first authorized in 1981 to distribute surplus foods to households. It was formally named The Emergency Food Assistance Program under the 1990 Farm Bill.

The program was designed to help reduce Federal food inventories and storage costs while assisting low-income persons.

Stocks of some foods held in surplus had 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 surplus foods donated to TEFAP by USDA.

7. How much does the program cost?

In FY 2012, Congress appropriated \$308.25 million for TEFAP through the normal appropriations process - \$260.25 million to purchase food and \$48 million for administrative support for State and local agencies.

In addition to USDA Foods purchased with appropriated funds, TEFAP receives surplus USDA Foods. In FY 2011, \$235.26 million of such foods were made available to TEFAP.

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

Since this program is administered at the State level, we suggest that you contact your [State Distributing Agency](#) for more information about TEFAP. A list of State contacts may be found on the Food Distribution website at:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/contacts/sdacontacts.htm>.

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