

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.

Under TEFAP, the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) makes commodity foods available to State Distributing Agencies. States provide the food to local agencies that they have selected, usually food banks, which in turn, distribute the food to soup kitchens and food pantries that directly serve the public.

These organizations distribute the commodities for household consumption or use them to prepare and serve meals in a congregate setting. Recipients of food for home use must meet income eligibility criteria set by the States. States also provide the food to other types of local organizations, such as community action agencies, which distribute the foods directly to needy households.

TEFAP is administered at the Federal level by the Department of Agriculture's [Food and Nutrition Service](#). State agencies receive the food and supervise overall distribution.

2. Who is eligible to get food?

(a) Public or private nonprofit organizations that provide food and nutrition assistance to the needy through the distribution of food for home use or the preparation of meals. See below:

- Organizations that distribute food for home use must determine the household's eligibility by applying income standards.
- Organizations that provide prepared meals are eligible to receive commodities if they can demonstrate that they serve predominately needy persons.

(b) Households that meet State eligibility criteria. Each State sets criteria for determining what households are eligible to receive food for home consumption. Income standards 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 the income criteria in order to ensure that assistance is provided only to those households most in need. However, recipients of prepared meals are considered to be needy and are not subject to a means test.

3. How do TEFAP foods reach recipients?

USDA buys the food, including processing and packaging, and ships it to the States. The amount received by each State depends on its low-income and unemployed population.

State agencies work out details of administration and distribution. They select local organizations that either directly distribute to households or serve meals, or distribute to other local organizations that perform these functions.

4. What foods are available through TEFAP?

The types of commodity foods USDA purchases for TEFAP distribution vary depending on the preferences of States and agricultural market conditions. More than 60 products were made available for Fiscal Year 2004, including:

- canned & dried fruits
- nonfat dry milk
- canned vegetables
- pasta products
- fruit juice
- peanut butter
- dried egg mix
- rice/grits/cereal
- meat/poultry/fish
- soups

For a complete list of Foods Available for TEFAP for FY 2004, visit the Food Distribution web site at: www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/foods/fy04-tefapfoods.pdf

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

Many TEFAP households, including low-income senior citizens, may be eligible to get food stamps through USDA's [Food Stamp Program](#).

Low-income people can also get food and nutrition assistance through other USDA programs, including the following:

- [National School Lunch Program](#);
- [Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children \(WIC\)](#).
- [Nutrition Service Incentive Program \(NSIP\)](#)

- [Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations \(FDPIR\)](#)
- [Commodity Supplemental Food Program \(CSFP\)](#)

All together, USDA provides nearly \$40 billion annually for food and nutrition assistance to low-income households.

6. Are homeless people eligible for TEFAP food?

Yes. Homeless people, including low-income senior citizens, can benefit from the program through organizations like soup kitchens that provide prepared meals, or food pantries that distribute commodities to individuals.

Homeless people can receive prepared meals served in a congregate setting without making an application. Homeless people must meet State income eligibility requirements in order to receive TEFAP food that is not served in prepared meals.

7. When and why did TEFAP start?

TEFAP was first authorized as the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program in 1981 to distribute surplus commodities to households. The name was changed to 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 the needy.

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 commodities specifically for TEFAP.

Food Distribution Fact Sheet

The Emergency Food Assistance Program

Foods acquired with appropriated funds are in addition to any surplus commodities donated to TEFAP by USDA.



The U.S. Department of Agriculture makes commodity foods available to State and local agencies, which in turn, distribute the food to eligible recipients participating in foods banks and soup kitchens.

8. How much does the program cost?

Congress appropriated \$190 million for TEFAP for Fiscal Year 2004--\$140 million to purchase food, and another \$50 million for administrative support for state and local agencies.

This is the same level of funding as was provided in Fiscal Year 2003. In addition to the \$190 million that was appropriated for TEFAP in Fiscal Year 2003, about \$240 million worth of surplus commodities were delivered to States for distribution through TEFAP.

For Fiscal Year 2002, Congress provided \$190 million for TEFAP--\$135 million to purchase food, and another \$55 million for administrative support for State and local agencies.

In addition to these funds, about \$172 million worth of surplus commodities were donated to TEFAP in Fiscal Year 2002.

For Fiscal Year 2001, Congress made \$100 million available for TEFAP food purchases, and \$45 million for program administration. In addition, about \$319 million worth of surplus commodities were donated to TEFAP in Fiscal Year 2001.

9. 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.

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