

ADDRESSING HUNGER AND NUTRITION

A Tool Kit for Positive Results



National
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The Emergency Food Assistance Program

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June 2005

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) provides commodity foods to state agencies for distribution to local agencies that serve low-income clients. A state's TEFAP distribution depends upon the size of the low-income population and upon the state unemployment rate. Examples of foods made available through TEFAP include canned and dried fruits, canned vegetables, nonfat dry milk, peanut butter, fruit juice, pasta products and soups.

At the federal level, TEFAP is administered by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). State administering agencies tend to include departments of human services, departments of education, or departments of agriculture. State agencies contract with community agencies, typically food banks, that, in turn, distribute commodity foods to service agencies such as food pantries and soup kitchens that directly serve the public.

The benefit provided by TEFAP is commodity food. These foods can be used in one of two ways. First, TEFAP food can be provided to food pantries for distribution to low-income recipients for meal preparation at home. Alternatively, TEFAP food can be distributed to soup kitchens for use in meals served on-site.

Eligibility criteria are determined by the state agency. State agencies establish eligibility criteria to determine household eligibility to receive food from a food pantry for home consumption. The state agency adjusts income criteria to ensure that the most needy households are able to receive food and can determine whether criteria can be met through participation in other assistance programs. Generally, recipients of prepared meals at soup kitchens are considered to be in need and are not subject to a means test.

In fiscal year 2004:

- Total federal spending for TEFAP (cost of commodity foods plus federal administration) was \$417 million.
- TEFAP distributed 533 million pounds of food.

Program Issues and Challenges

Emergency Food Resource

TEFAP is intended as an emergency food resource to serve as a safety net in the case of unexpected financial hardship—for example, a job loss. Unfortunately, evidence suggests that many working families have come to rely more regularly on emergency food resources such as food pantries and soup kitchens that use TEFAP. The U.S. Conference of Mayors 2004 “Hunger and Homelessness Survey” reported that 34 percent of adults who requested emergency food were employed. The USDA supports a variety of other nonemergency nutrition programs such as the Food Stamp Program and the National School Lunch Program, that are intended to support low-income working families.

Storage

On occasion, perishable meats are made available through the TEFAP program. For a food bank and food pantry to receive these goods, they must have the appropriate food storage infrastructure, such as properly working refrigerators. Such large-scale infrastructure requirements could pose a challenge for nonprofit agencies that have limited financial resources.

Program Models and Promising Practices

Providing Referrals to Other USDA Nutrition Programs

The Hunger Task Force is a food bank with a network of food pantries and meal programs serving Milwaukee County, **Wisconsin**. In addition to private donations and purchased food, the food bank administers the TEFAP program. The Hunger Task Force created and published the *Standards of Excellence* guide to ensure that participating programs implement TEFAP with accountability and integrity. Food pantries and meal programs that receive food from the Hunger Task Force must adhere to these standards that, in addition to requiring that programs appropriately store and handle food, encourage emergency food programs to conduct outreach and referrals to the federal nutrition programs. Hunger Task Force staff provide training and information to food pantry and meal program workers to make them aware of the USDA programs and their various eligibility requirements, allowing the pantries

and meal programs to inform and refer program clients. The *Standards of Excellence* guide notes that, when pantries are able to reduce demand for emergency food by improving participation in existing, fully funded federal nutrition programs, individuals are less likely to use emergency food as their only form of food assistance. This process helps to ensure that TEFAP remains available to individuals and families who are in need of emergency food. More information on the Hunger Task Force can be found at www.hungertaskforce.org.

Leveraging Community Programs

The Capital Area Food Bank administers the TEFAP program in the **District of Columbia** and northern **Virginia**. In addition to providing TEFAP commodities to member agencies through its Brown Bag Program, the food bank

operates a number of initiatives to leverage its connections with TEFAP receiving agencies throughout the region. For example, through the Produce for People program, member agencies are able to receive excess produce from area farms and distributors. Through the Sister Hook-Up program, member agencies are linked directly with local supermarkets for direct donations of perishable food items.

Resources

- Federal Program Overview: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/tefap/>
- State Agency Contacts: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/contacts/sdacontacts.htm>

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Definitions of commonly used hunger and nutrition terms can be found in NCSL's Hunger and Nutrition Partnership *Glossary of Hunger and Nutrition Terms* at <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/immig/Glossary.htm>.