



# Overview of U.S. International Food Assistance

The U.S. government administers multiple international food assistance programs that aim to alleviate hunger and improve food security around the world. Some of these programs provide emergency assistance to people affected by conflict or natural disaster. Other programs provide non-emergency assistance to help communities improve agricultural productivity and strengthen local food systems. This In Focus provides an overview of international food assistance programs, including legislative authority, funding trends, statutory requirements, and select potential issues for Congress.

## International Food Assistance Delivery

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) administer U.S. international food assistance programs. These agencies provide assistance through two distinct methods—in-kind and cash-based. *In-kind aid* involves purchasing U.S. commodities and shipping them to regions in need. *Cash-based assistance* provides recipients with direct cash transfers, food vouchers, or locally and regionally procured food (LRP). Under LRP, food comes from the country or region where it is to be distributed rather than from the United States.

## Legislative Authority

The Food for Peace Act of 1954 (FFPA, P.L. 83-480), commonly referred to as “P.L. 480,” provides statutory authority for most international food assistance programs. These programs include Food for Peace (FFP) Title II, the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust, Farmer-to-Farmer (also known as FFP Title V), Food for Progress, and the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program. Congress has reauthorized these programs in periodic farm bills, most recently in the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-334). These programs provide primarily in-kind aid or, in the case of Farmer-to-Farmer, technical assistance.

The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (FAA, P.L. 87-195) provides statutory authority for the cash-based Emergency Food Security Program (EFSP). Congress first authorized EFSP in the Global Food Security Act of 2016 (P.L. 114-195) and reauthorized the program through 2023 in the Global Food Security Reauthorization Act of 2017 (P.L. 115-266). EFSP provides cash-based assistance. It is often used in conditions when in-kind aid cannot arrive quickly enough, when in-kind aid could potentially disrupt local markets, or when food assistance is targeted to conflict zones where it is unsafe to operate.

## Funding

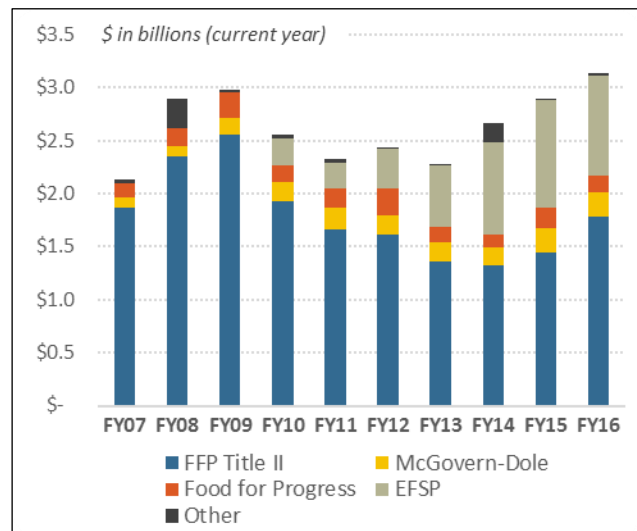
Congress funds international food assistance programs through annual agriculture appropriations and state and

foreign operations (SFOPS) appropriations bills. U.S. international food assistance outlays have fluctuated over the past 10 years (**Figure 1**). Outlays increased in FY2008 and FY2009, partly due to commodity price increases during the global food price crisis of 2007-2008. Outlays subsequently decreased in the years after FY2009 as commodity prices receded. An increase in outlays between FY2013 and FY2016 was in part in response to increased demand for food assistance owing to conflicts in Syria and Yemen and the Ebola epidemic in West Africa.

## In-Kind vs. Cash-Based Assistance Funding

FFP Title II, which delivers primarily in-kind aid, has comprised the bulk of U.S. international food assistance outlays since the mid-1980s. More recently, cash-based EFSP assistance has increased from a 10% share of total outlays in FY2010 to a 30% share in FY2016. During that same period, FFP Title II outlays decreased from 75% to 57% of total outlays.

**Figure 1. U.S. International Food Assistance Outlays FY2007-FY2016**



**Source:** Figure created by CRS using data from USAID, *U.S. International Food Assistance Report*, for years FY2007-FY2016.

**Notes:** “Other” includes Farmer-to-Farmer, Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust, the LRP pilot program, and the inactive Section 416(b) program. Data for FY2017 is not available.

## Statutory Requirements

In-kind food aid programs authorized by the FFPA share a number of statutory requirements. Certain of these requirements are listed below.

- All agricultural commodities are to be U.S. commodities (7 U.S.C. §1732(2)).

- At least 50% of the gross tonnage of U.S. food aid is to be shipped on U.S.-flag vessels (46 U.S.C. §55305; 46 U.S.C. §55314).
- Organizations or foreign governments receiving U.S. commodities are to publicize that food aid is from the American people (7 U.S.C. §1733(f)).
- The United States will not provide food aid if (1) the recipient country lacks adequate storage facilities to prevent spoilage or (2) food aid distribution would substantially interfere with domestic markets in the recipient country (7 U.S.C. §1733(a); 7 U.S.C. §1733(b)).

The requirements listed above do not apply to EFSP, which has statutory authority in the FAA. **Table 1** summarizes key elements of U.S. international food assistance programs.

### Potential Issues for Congress

U.S. international food assistance has relied predominantly on in-kind aid since its origins in the 1950s. Many other major donors—such as Canada, the United Kingdom, and

the European Union—have converted primarily to cash-based assistance. U.S. reliance on in-kind aid is controversial due to its potential to disrupt local markets and generally higher cost compared with procuring food locally. At the same time, in-kind aid creates demand for U.S. commodities and avoids problems associated with unreliable suppliers and poor infrastructure in recipient countries that may hinder the efficiency and efficacy of cash-based assistance.

Another potential issue for Congress is agricultural cargo preference (ACP). ACP refers to the statutory requirement that at least 50% of U.S. food aid commodities must ship on U.S.-flag vessels. Proponents of ACP assert that it contributes to maintaining a U.S.-flag merchant marine to provide sealift capacity during wartime or national emergencies. Opponents contend that ACP can raise transportation costs and lengthen delivery times.

### More Information

For more information, see CRS Report R45422, *U.S. International Food Assistance: An Overview*.

**Table 1. U.S. International Food Assistance Programs**

Program	Description	Statutory Authority	Funding	FY2016 Outlays (in millions) <sup>a</sup>	Govt. Agency
Food for Peace Title II	In-kind donations to be distributed directly to recipients or sold on local markets to fund development projects.	FFPA	Agriculture approp.	\$1,788.5	USAID
Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust (BEHT)	A reserve of U.S. commodities or funds that can supplement FFP Title II when Title II funds alone cannot meet emergency food needs.	FFPA	Mandatory approp. <sup>b</sup>	\$0 <sup>c</sup>	USDA
Farmer-to-Farmer (FFP Title V)	Short-term volunteer placements in which U.S. citizens from farming, agribusiness, universities, or non-profit organizations provide technical assistance to farmers in developing countries.	FFPA	Agriculture approp.	\$15	USAID
Food for Progress	In-kind donations sold on local markets to fund agricultural or economic development projects in the recipient country.	FFPA	Mandatory approp. <sup>b</sup>	\$161.4	USDA
McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition	In-kind donations to school feeding programs and pregnant or nursing mothers and technical assistance to help governments in recipient countries establish national school feeding programs.	FFPA	Agriculture approp.	\$226.0	USDA
Emergency Food Security Program	Cash-based assistance (direct cash transfers, vouchers, or locally procured food) provided when in-kind aid cannot arrive quickly enough or may disrupt local markets or when it is unsafe to operate in conflict zones.	FAA	SFOPS approp.	\$941.1	USAID

**Source:** Compiled by CRS

**Notes:** FFP = Food for Peace; FFPA = Food for Peace Act of 1954, as amended; Approp. = appropriations; FAA = Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended; USAID = U.S. Agency for International Development; USDA = U.S. Department of Agriculture.

a. Outlays after FY2016 are not available. For current appropriations, contact Alyssa Casey.

b. Authorizing legislation establishes mandatory funding. The borrowing authority of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) finances program activities. The CCC is a government-owned financial institution overseen by USDA.

c. USDA did not use BEHT funds in FY2016.

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