

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP): Background and Funding

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The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP): Background and Funding

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is a federal food distribution program that supports food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and other emergency feeding organizations serving low-income Americans. Federal assistance takes the form of federally purchased commodities—including fruits, vegetables, meats, and grains—and funding for administrative costs. Food aid and funds are distributed to states using a statutory formula that takes into account poverty and unemployment rates. TEFAP is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA’s) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS).

TEFAP was established as the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program by the Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983. The Emergency Food Assistance Act continues to govern program operations, while the Food and Nutrition Act authorizes funding for TEFAP’s entitlement commodities. TEFAP also incorporates bonus commodities, which are distributed at USDA’s discretion throughout the year to support different crops using separate budget authority. A smaller amount of discretionary funding is appropriated annually to cover administrative and distribution costs under Emergency Food Assistance Act authority. Along with TEFAP’s usual sources of aid, additional commodities and administrative funds have been distributed through TEFAP in recent years as a result of USDA’s use of the Commodity Credit Corporation and supplemental appropriations from COVID-19 pandemic response laws. In FY2024, federal spending on TEFAP was approximately \$2.2 billion.

FNS coordinates the purchasing of commodities and the allocation of commodities and administrative funds to states, and provides general program oversight. State agencies—often state departments of health and human services, agriculture, or education—determine program eligibility rules and allocations of aid to feeding organizations (called *recipient agencies*). States often task food banks, which operate regional warehouses, with distributing foods to other recipient agencies. TEFAP aid makes up a modest proportion of the food and funds available to emergency feeding organizations, which are reliant on private donations as well.

TEFAP is the primary federal program supporting emergency feeding organizations. Other related food distribution programs focus on specific subpopulations; for example, the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA’s) Emergency Food and Shelter Program distributes food to organizations serving homeless individuals and USDA’s Commodity Supplemental Food Program distributes food to organizations serving older individuals with low incomes.

TEFAP typically has been amended and reauthorized through farm bills. Most recently, the 2018 farm bill (P.L. 115-334) extended the funding authorization for TEFAP’s entitlement commodities through FY2023 (programs with expired funding authorizations can continue if appropriations are provided, which has been the case for TEFAP). The law also funded new projects aimed at facilitating donations from farmers and other agricultural producers, processors, and distributors to emergency feeding organizations. Recent program developments include the program’s use in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, TEFAP’s receipt of Commodity Credit Corporation commodities, and the extension of TEFAP’s Farm to Food Bank Projects through FY2031.

Contents

Introduction	1
The Demand for Charitable Food Assistance	3
Characteristics of Emergency Food Recipients.....	5
Characteristics of Emergency Feeding Organizations	6
Program Administration	7
Federal Role	7
State Role	8
Local Role	9
Eligibility Rules for Individuals and Households.....	10
Funding and Appropriations	11
Commodity Food Support.....	12
Entitlement Commodities	12
Bonus Commodities.....	13
USDA Food Purchasing, Ordering, and Delivery Process.....	14
Types of Foods.....	15
Administrative Cash Support	16
Other Funding	17
Farm to Food Bank Projects	17
Funding Trends.....	18
State Allocation Formula.....	18
State Funding	19
Role of TEFAP During Disasters and Emergencies	19
COVID-19 Pandemic Response.....	20
Farm Bill Reauthorization	22

Figures

Figure 1. Flow of Foods and Funds through TEFAP.....	2
Figure 2. Population Receiving Charitable Food Assistance in 2023	4
Figure 3. Households Using Emergency Feeding Organizations, 2008-2021	5
Figure 4. TEFAP Funding, FY1983-FY2024	18

Tables

Table 1. TEFAP Funding, FY2024	11
Table 2. COVID-19 Response Funding for TEFAP	21
Table A-1. Annual TEFAP Funding, FY1983-FY2024	22
Table B-1. TEFAP Expenditures by State, FY2024	24

Appendixes

Appendix A. TEFAP Funding, FY1983-FY2024	22
Appendix B. TEFAP Spending by State, FY2024	24
Appendix C. Legislative History of TEFAP	26

Contacts

Author Information.....	28
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Introduction

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP; previously the *Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program*) provides federally purchased commodities and a smaller amount of cash support to food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and other types of emergency feeding organizations serving low-income households and individuals.¹ Commodities include fruits, vegetables, meats, and grains, among other foods.² In addition to serving individuals, TEFAP's domestic commodity purchases support the agricultural economy by reducing supply on the market, thereby increasing food prices. TEFAP is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS).

TEFAP was established under the Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983 in an effort to dispose of government-held agricultural surpluses and alleviate hunger in the wake of a recession and declining food stamp benefits.³ Since then, TEFAP has evolved into a permanent program that operates in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and four U.S. territories.⁴ The program was most recently reauthorized by the 2018 farm bill (P.L. 115-334).

At the federal level, TEFAP is administered by FNS in collaboration with USDA's purchasing agency, the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). At the state level, TEFAP is administered by a *state distributing agency* designated by the governor or state legislature; generally, these are state departments of health and human services, agriculture, or education. Federal commodities and funds may flow through the state or directly to feeding organizations (called "recipient agencies"⁵) based on how the state structures the program.⁶ States will often task food banks with processing and distributing food to local feeding organizations. Food banks typically operate regional warehouses and distribute food to other organizations rather than to households directly.⁷ **Figure 1** depicts the flow of commodities and funds through TEFAP.

¹ The 1990 farm bill (P.L. 101-624) removed "Temporary" from the program title.

² USDA, FNS, "USDA Foods Available List for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)," <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/foods-available>.

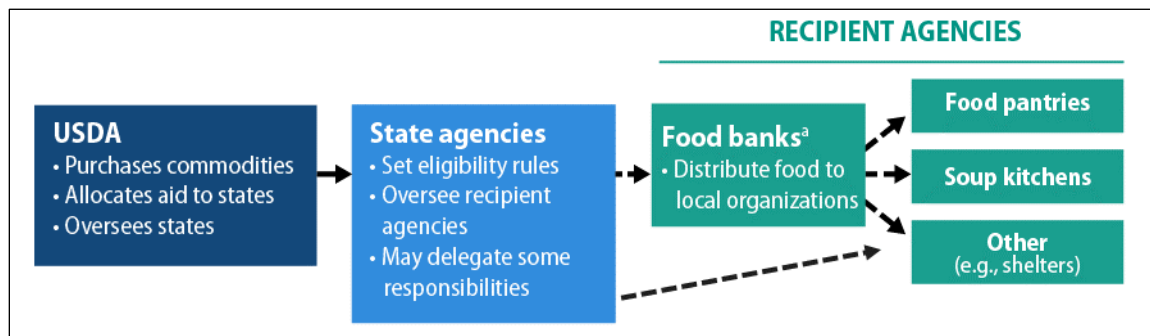
³ See **Appendix C** for further legislative history.

⁴ Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam. Throughout this report, the term *states* includes these territories and DC.

⁵ Consistent with statute and regulations, this report uses the term "recipient agency" to describe organizations receiving TEFAP support. Emergency feeding organizations are the most common type of recipient agency.

⁶ For an inventory of states' TEFAP policies as of summer 2023, see Feeding America, "The Emergency Food Assistance Program State Policies," April 2024, https://feedingamericaaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Resource_Feeding-America-TEFAP-State-by-State-Guide.pdf (accessed June 2025) (hereinafter, "Feeding America, *TEFAP State Policies*, 2024").

⁷ See "Program Administration" for further discussion of federal, state, and local roles. C. Cabili, E. Eslami, and R. Briefel, *White Paper on the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)*, prepared by Mathematica for the Office of Policy Support, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, August 2013, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/white-paper-emergency-food-assistance-program-tefap> (hereinafter, "Cabili et al. 2013").

Figure 1. Flow of Foods and Funds through TEFAP

Source: Adapted from USDA, FNS, *White Paper on the Emergency Food Assistance Program*, 2013.

a. States may distribute food to recipient agencies directly or task recipient agencies with food distribution to other recipient agencies. States often delegate this responsibility to food banks.

TEFAP is part of a larger web of federal food assistance programs.⁸ Some of these programs provide cash assistance while others primarily distribute food. TEFAP foods may reach individuals who do not qualify for other food assistance programs or supplement the assistance that they receive through other programs. Related federal programs⁹ include the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) Emergency Food and Shelter Program, which, among its other services for homeless individuals, provides food through shelters, food banks, and food pantries.¹⁰ In addition, USDA's Commodity Supplemental Food Program distributes monthly food packages to low-income elderly individuals through local organizations, which can include food banks and pantries.¹¹

This report begins by describing available data on the population using emergency food assistance. It goes on to discuss the TEFAP program, including its administration at the federal, state, and local levels, eligibility rules, and funding structure. The report concludes with a summary of TEFAP's role in disaster response and recent reauthorizations. **Appendix A** lists total TEFAP funding from the program's inception in 1983 to present; **Appendix B** lists TEFAP funding by state; and **Appendix C** provides a brief legislative history of TEFAP.

Definitions

Emergency feeding organizations (EFOs): "The term 'emergency feeding organization' means a public or nonprofit organization that administers activities and projects (including the activities and projects of a charitable institution, a food bank, a food pantry, a hunger relief center, a soup kitchen, or a similar public or private nonprofit eligible recipient agency) providing nutrition assistance to relieve situations of emergency and distress through the provision of food to needy persons, including low-income and unemployed persons."

⁸ For more information, see CRS Report R42353, *Domestic Food Assistance: Summary of Programs*. Other recent, temporary programs included the Farmers to Families Food Box Program (2020-2021), which funded food boxes for distribution to households in need during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic; and the Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) program (2021-2024), which awarded funds to state agencies, territories, and tribes to purchase and distribute local and regional foods to food banks and other types of feeding organizations. For more information, see CRS Report R46681, *USDA Nutrition Assistance Programs: Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*; and USDA, AMS, "Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program," <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food-to-usda/lfpacp> (accessed June 2025).

⁹ For a discussion of additional programs, see CRS Report R48124, *Connecting Charitable Food Assistance Organizations to Federal Funding Information and Resources*.

¹⁰ For more information, see CRS Report R42766, *The Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program and Homeless Assistance*.

¹¹ For more information, see CRS Report R42353, *Domestic Food Assistance: Summary of Programs*.

The term “charitable food organization” is used synonymously with EFO in this report.

Common types of EFOs

- **Food banks:** “The term ‘food bank’ means a public or charitable institution that maintains an established operation involving the provision of food or edible commodities, or the products of food or edible commodities, to food pantries, soup kitchens, hunger relief centers, or other food or feeding centers that, as an integral part of their normal activities, provide meals or food to feed needy persons on a regular basis.”
- **Food pantries:** “The term ‘food pantry’ means a public or private nonprofit organization that distributes food to low-income and unemployed households, including food from sources other than the Department of Agriculture, to relieve situations of emergency and distress.”
- **Soup kitchens:** “The term ‘soup kitchen’ means a public or charitable institution that, as an integral part of the normal activities of the institution, maintains an established feeding operation to provide food to needy homeless persons on a regular basis.”

Source: Section 201A of the Emergency Food Assistance Act (codified at 7 U.S.C. §7501)

The Demand for Charitable Food Assistance

According to an analysis of Current Population Survey (CPS) Food Security Supplement data by USDA’s Economic Research Service (ERS), approximately 9.3 million households (7.1% of all low-income households) obtained free groceries from “a food pantry, food bank, church, or other place that helps with free food” in 2023.¹² A smaller proportion of low-income households (2.2%) received free meals from “a church, shelter, home-delivered meal service like Meals on Wheels, or other place that helps with free meals,” representing close to 3 million households.¹³ **Figure 2** presents the number of individuals (adults and children) living in households receiving free groceries or free meals from a charitable organization in 2023.

These are likely underestimates of charitable food receipt—particularly free meal receipt—because of benefit underreporting. In addition, the CPS uses address-based sampling and therefore does not capture individuals who are homeless and does not fully capture those in temporary housing arrangements.¹⁴

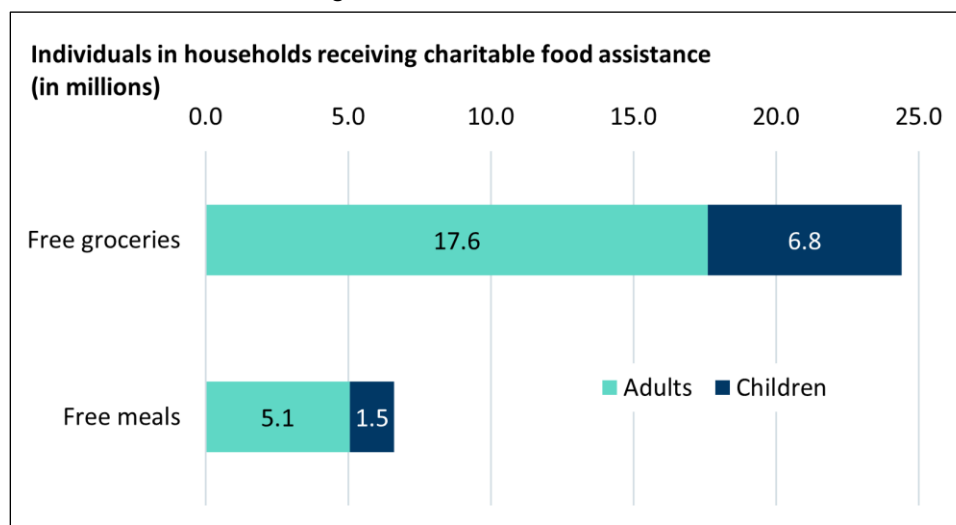
¹² “Low-income” is defined as households with income at or below 185% of the federal poverty guidelines, and/or those who reported indications of food insecurity.

¹³ The U.S. Census Bureau conducts the CPS Food Security Supplement annually with funding from USDA’s ERS. The charitable food assistance on the Food Security Supplement was revised in 2022, disallowing comparisons with prior years. USDA, ERS, *Statistical Supplement to Household Food Security in the United States in 2023*, Report No. AP-124, September 2024, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details?pubid=109902> (hereinafter, “ERS Statistical Supplement 2023”).

¹⁴ For literature on underreporting of benefits, see, for example, Bruce D. Meyer, Wallace K.C. Mok, and James X. Sullivan, “Household Surveys in Crisis,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Fall 2015), pp. 199-226. For limitations of the CPS sample pertaining to charitable food assistance, see ERS Statistical Supplement 2023, p. 20.

Figure 2. Population Receiving Charitable Food Assistance in 2023

Individuals Living in Households that Reported Receipt of Free Groceries or Free Meals from a Charitable Organization in the Past 12 Months



Source: Table S-11 (page 21) in USDA, ERS, *Statistical Supplement to Household Food Security in the United States in 2023*, Report No. AP-124, September 2024, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details?pubid=109902>.

Notes: Figures are likely underestimates due to underreporting of benefit receipt and the exclusion of homeless individuals. “Free Groceries” indicates receipt of free groceries from “a food pantry, food bank, church, or other place that helps with free food,” and “Free Meals” indicates receipt of free meals from “a church, shelter, home-delivered meal service like Meals on Wheels, or other place that helps with free meals.”

ERS found an increase in use of charitable foods during the COVID-19 pandemic. As shown in **Figure 3**, according to ERS analysis of CPS Food Security Supplement data, household receipt of emergency food reached a recent peak in 2020 (data are not reported for 2022 and subsequent years due to changes to the survey).¹⁵ A separate survey by the Urban Institute (a nonprofit research and advocacy organization) found that use of charitable foods was 38% higher in 2021 compared to 2019.¹⁶ Factors such as increased demand, increased food prices, decreased private donations, and reduced volunteer capacity posed challenges to emergency food organizations during the pandemic.¹⁷ At the same time, such organizations saw an influx of federal aid (discussed in the “COVID-19 Pandemic Response” section).

Data on the number of TEFAP food recipients specifically are not available, in part because TEFAP commodities are mixed in with other commodities provided by emergency feeding organizations and because of “the transient nature of participation.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Statistical supplements to *Household Food Security in the United States* for 2019-2020.

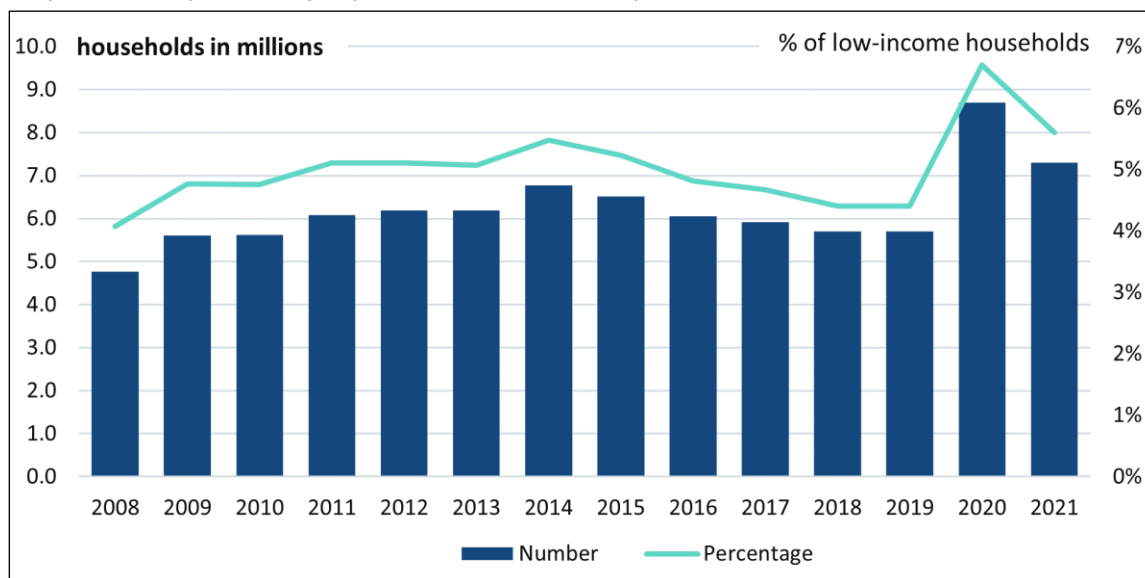
¹⁶ Poonam Gupta, Julio Salas, and Elaine Waxman, *Two Years into the Pandemic, Charitable Food Remains a Key Resource for One in Six Adults: Findings from the December 2021 Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey*, Urban Institute, May 2022. Also see Elaine Waxman, Poonam Gupta, and Dulce Gonzalez, “Charitable Food Use Increased Nearly 50 Percent from 2019 to 2020,” Urban Institute, March 2021.

¹⁷ For further discussion, see CRS Report R46432, *Food Banks and Other Emergency Feeding Organizations: Federal Aid and the Response to COVID-19* (June 2020).

¹⁸ USDA, FNS, *Nutrient and MyPyramid Analysis of USDA Foods in Five of Its Food and Nutrition Programs*, prepared by Westat for the Office of Research and Analysis, January 2012, p. 3-84, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/NutrientMyPyramid.pdf>.

Figure 3. Households Using Emergency Feeding Organizations, 2008-2021

Reported Receipt of Emergency Food from a Food Pantry, Food Bank, or Church in the Past 12 Months



Source: CRS graphic based on data contained in statistical supplements to *Household Food Security in the United States*, USDA Economic Research Service, for 2008-2021.

Notes: Comparable data not available for 2022 forward. Figures are likely underestimates due to underreporting of benefit receipt and exclusion of homeless individuals. “Low-income households” are defined as households with income at or below 185% of the federal poverty guidelines, and/or those who reported indications of food insecurity.

Characteristics of Emergency Food Recipients

Food insecurity is common among households using emergency feeding organizations.¹⁹ According to the ERS analysis, 58% of households receiving free groceries from charitable feeding organizations could be categorized as food insecure in 2023, meaning they had difficulty providing enough food for all of their members at times during the year due to a lack of resources.²⁰ Roughly half of these households experienced very low food security, meaning that the food intake of some household members was reduced and normal eating patterns were disrupted due to limited resources.

According to the ERS analysis, households with children, single-parent families, and low-income households were more likely than other types of households to receive free groceries from a charitable food organization in 2023.²¹ Based on older (2013) data collected by Feeding America (a membership and advocacy organization), individuals using meal programs (e.g., soup kitchens

¹⁹ *Food security* focuses on economic and access-related factors associated with an individual’s ability to purchase food or otherwise obtain enough to eat, as opposed to *hunger*, which is considered a physiological condition. For more information on the differences between food insecurity and hunger, see CRS Report R42353, *Domestic Food Assistance: Summary of Programs*.

²⁰ ERS Statistical Supplement 2023, p. 21.

²¹ For these and other characteristics, see ERS Statistical Supplement 2023, p. 22. For additional research, see Urban Institute, *Households Faced Persistent Challenges Affording Food in 2024*, March 2025 and Urban Institute, *Who Is Accessing Charitable Food in America?*, December 2019.

and shelters) were typically single-person households (70%) and often homeless or living in temporary housing (34%).²²

Emergency feeding organizations may act as a safety net for food insecure households who are ineligible for or do not participate in other federal food assistance programs, or they may cover food needs when other benefits run out. For example, some food insecure households may have an income too high to qualify for assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or they may fail to meet other program eligibility rules.²³ According to the ERS analysis, an estimated 45% of households receiving free groceries from a charitable feeding organization in 2023 also reported receiving SNAP benefits in the past month.²⁴ Research has found that such households tend to use charitable food assistance after their SNAP benefits run out for the month.²⁵

Characteristics of Emergency Feeding Organizations

There has not been a comprehensive study of emergency feeding organizations in the United States since 2000, or any recent research on organizations participating in TEFAP.²⁶ A U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report published in September 2024 recommended that USDA collect more current data on and conduct more current evaluations of TEFAP.²⁷

Recent informal estimates of the charitable food assistance sector by Feeding America and *Food Bank News* place the number of food pantries and charitable meal programs at more than 60,000 and the number of food banks at around 370.²⁸ According to the data collected by *Food Bank News* (an independent news agency geared toward charitable food assistance sector), roughly three-quarters of the nation's food banks were an affiliate or partner to Feeding America in 2023.²⁹ Other food banks operated independently, including the nation's two largest food banks by revenue (Midwest Food Bank and Feed the Children). Other common affiliations include

²² Nancy S. Weinfield et al., *Hunger in America 2014*, Feeding America, prepared by Westat and the Urban Institute, August 2014, pp. 91, 100-102, <http://help.feedingamerica.org/HungerInAmerica/hunger-in-america-2014-full-report.pdf> (hereinafter, "Feeding America, *Hunger in America*, 2014").

²³ For more information on SNAP eligibility, see CRS Report R42505, *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): A Primer on Eligibility and Benefits*.

²⁴ ERS Statistical Supplement 2023, p. 21.

²⁵ Linlin Fan et al., "The Use of Charitable Food Assistance Among Low-Income Households in the United States," *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, vol. 121, no. 1 (January 2021), pp. 27-35.

²⁶ At the time, ERS found that there were approximately 5,300 soup kitchens, 32,700 food pantries, and 400 food banks in the United States. J. C. Ohls et al., *The Emergency Food Assistance System—Findings From the Provider Survey*, 16-2, prepared by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. for the Food and Rural Economics Division, Economic Research Service, USDA, October 2002, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=46507> (hereinafter, "Ohls et al. 2002").

²⁷ GAO, *Charitable Food Assistance: USDA Can Enhance Guidance and Improve Program Performance Assessment*, GAO-24-106539, September 23, 2024, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-106539>. USDA congressional budget justifications in FY2024 and FY2025 requested funding for a study of TEFAP agencies (<https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/general-information/staff-offices/office-budget-and-program-analysis/congressional-justifications>).

²⁸ Feeding America, "More than 53 Million People Received Help from Food Banks and Food Pantries in 2021," June 15, 2022, <https://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/press-room/53-million-received-help-2021> (accessed June 2025) and FoodBankNews.org, "How Many Food Banks Are There?," January 8, 2020, <https://foodbanknews.org/how-many-food-banks-are-there> (accessed June 2025).

²⁹ *Food Bank News*, "Which Food Banks are the Biggest in the U.S., 2024?," October 23, 2024, <https://foodbanknews.org/which-food-banks-are-the-biggest-in-the-u-s-2024>.

United Way, Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, and other nonprofit organizations.³⁰ According to historic data from 2000, food banks tended to be secular, nonprofit organizations (91%) while the majority (65%) of food pantries and emergency kitchens were associated with a religious group.³¹

Emergency feeding organizations are reliant on both private donations and publicly funded resources, including TEFAP aid. In recent years, Feeding America has estimated that TEFAP foods comprised more than 20% of the foods delivered through its network.³² This proportion may fluctuate from year to year depending both on the level of private-sector donations and TEFAP funding (see the “Funding Trends” section).

Program Administration

Federal Role

FNS is responsible for allocating TEFAP aid to states (see “State Allocation Formula”) and coordinating the ordering, processing, and distribution of commodities. Specifically, FNS decides which foods will be available in the USDA Foods catalog and allocates entitlement aid and administrative funds to states. States and recipient agencies then place orders for certain quantities and types of commodities (discussed under “Types of Foods”) based on their entitlement allocation. FNS collaborates closely with USDA’s purchasing agency—the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)—to process and fulfill the orders.³³ AMS and FNS also collaborate to purchase and distribute bonus commodities throughout the year that are not based on state requests but rather USDA’s discretion to support different crops. Selected vendors deliver both entitlement and bonus commodities to state-selected distribution points, which can include direct delivery to recipient organizations.³⁴

FNS also issues regulations and guidance and provides general oversight of states’ TEFAP operations. FNS provides oversight by reviewing and approving state TEFAP plans, which are documents that outline each state’s operation of TEFAP. States are required to submit amendments to the plan for approval “when necessary to reflect any changes in program

³⁰ Ohls et al. 2002 and United Way, “Strengthening Food Security,” <https://www.unitedway.org/our-impact/healthy-community/food-security>, Salvation Army, “Hunger,” <https://www.salvationarmyusa.org/hunger>, and Catholic Charities, “What We Do: Food and Nutrition,” <https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/what-we-do/food-and-nutrition>.

³¹ Ohls et al. 2002, pp. 16, 50.

³² Feeding America, “Our Lawmakers Must Invest in TEFAP,” <https://www.feedingamerica.org/advocate/the-emergency-food-assistance-program> (accessed June 2025). For state-specific rates, see Feeding America, “State-by-State Resource: How Food Banks and the Farm Bill’s Nutrition Programs Address Hunger in the United States,” <https://feedingamericaaction.org/resources/state-by-state-food-banks-and-farm-bill> (accessed June 2025). For historic rates, see Ohls et al. 2002, which found that TEFAP foods comprised 14% of foods distributed by the emergency food assistance system and TEFAP administrative funds comprised 12% to 27% of organizations’ operating costs in 2000.

³³ Cabili et al. 2013.

³⁴ Section 203B of the Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983 (codified at 7 U.S.C. §7505); 7 C.F.R. §251.4 and 7 C.F.R. §250. A September 2024 GAO report evaluated the TEFAP food delivery process and found that while recipient organizations reported that most deliveries went smoothly, they had concerns with federal inefficiencies in regards to the rejection of spoiled foods. GAO, *Charitable Food Assistance: USDA Can Enhance Guidance and Improve Program Performance Assessment*, GAO-24-106539, September 23, 2024, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-106539>.

operations or administration as described in the plan, or at the request of FNS, to the appropriate FNS Regional Office.”³⁵ FNS also conducts management reviews of state agency operations.³⁶

State Role

TEFAP is administered at the state level by an agency designated by the governor “or other appropriate State executive authority” that enters into an agreement with FNS.³⁷ States most commonly administer TEFAP through a health and human services, agriculture, or education department.³⁸ State agencies administering TEFAP are responsible for creating eligibility and other program rules (see the “Eligibility Rules for Individuals and Households” section), which are outlined in state plans approved by FNS.³⁹ They are also responsible for selecting and overseeing recipient agencies.

Federal regulations allow states to delegate a number of responsibilities to recipient agencies, including selecting and subcontracting with other recipient agencies.⁴⁰ States often delegate the ordering and distribution of USDA Foods to regional food banks, which receive foods and make deliveries to other recipient organizations, such as food pantries.⁴¹ According to 50-state surveys conducted in 2015 and 2020, most states reported that commodities were delivered by vendors directly to recipient agencies (often to food banks for distribution to other organizations).⁴² States cannot delegate their responsibility to set eligibility rules or oversee recipient agencies.⁴³

States must review at least 25% of the recipient agencies that contract directly with the state (e.g., food banks) at least once every four years, and at least one-tenth or 20 (whichever is fewer) of other recipient agencies each year.⁴⁴ If the state finds deficiencies in the course of review, the state agency must submit a report with the findings to the recipient agency and ensure that corrective action is taken.

³⁵ Section 202A of the Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983 (codified at 7 U.S.C. §7503).

³⁶ USDA, Office of Inspector General (OIG), *COVID-19—Oversight of the Emergency Food Assistance Program—Final Report*, August 18, 2023, <https://usdaoig.oversight.gov/reports/inspection-evaluation/covid-19-oversight-emergency-food-assistance-program-final-report>.

³⁷ 7 C.F.R. §251.2(b).

³⁸ USDA, FNS, *TEFAP State Contacts*, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/contacts>.

³⁹ Individual state plans are often available on the state agency’s website that administers TEFAP. A list of state agencies that administer TEFAP is available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/contacts>. According to Section 202A of the Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983 (codified at 7 U.S.C. §7503), state plans must include eligibility rules.

⁴⁰ 7 C.F.R. §251.2, 7 C.F.R. §251.5; Cabili et al. 2013.

⁴¹ Feeding America, *The Emergency Food Assistance Program: State Guide*, February 2020; Washington State Department of Agriculture, *The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP): Distribution National Survey 2015*, AGR 609-574. Per Section 202A of the Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983 (codified at 7 U.S.C. §7503), state plans must describe how the state will give recipient agencies an opportunity to provide input on the commodities selected.

⁴² Washington State Department of Agriculture, *The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP): Distribution National Survey 2015*, AGR 609-574. Larger states often reported multiple, regional warehouses while smaller states sometimes had one central warehouse.

⁴³ 7 C.F.R. §251.5.

⁴⁴ 7 C.F.R. §251.10.

Local Role

Organizations that are eligible for TEFAP aid are referred to as *recipient agencies* in the Emergency Food Assistance Act. According to the statute, recipient agencies are public or nonprofit organizations that fall under the following categories:

- emergency feeding organizations,
- charitable institutions,
- summer camps or child nutrition programs,
- nutrition projects operating under the Older Americans Act of 1965, or
- disaster relief programs.⁴⁵

The first category of organizations—emergency feeding organizations—receive priority under TEFAP statute and regulations and the majority of TEFAP aid.⁴⁶ Emergency feeding organizations are defined as public or nonprofit organizations “providing nutrition assistance to relieve situations of emergency and distress through the provision of food to needy persons, including low-income and unemployed persons.”⁴⁷ They include food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and other organizations serving similar functions, including many with a religious affiliation.⁴⁸

Recipient agencies are responsible for serving and distributing TEFAP foods to individuals and households. Individuals may pick up foods or eat meals on-site, or they may receive home deliveries in states where it is allowed.⁴⁹ As discussed above, recipient agencies may also have additional responsibilities as delegated by the state agency; for example, food banks may be tasked with distributing food to subcontracted recipient agencies like food pantries and soup kitchens, which in turn distribute foods or serve prepared meals to low-income individuals and families.

Recipient agencies must adhere to program rules. For example, they must safely store food and comply with state and/or local food safety and health inspection requirements.⁵⁰ Recipient agencies must also maintain records of the commodities they receive and a list of households receiving TEFAP foods for home consumption, while adhering to confidentiality protections.⁵¹ There are also restrictions on the types of activities that can occur at distribution sites. Recipient agencies must ensure that any unrelated activities are conducted in a way that makes clear that the activity is not part of TEFAP and that receipt of TEFAP foods is not contingent on participation in the activity.⁵² Activities may not disrupt food distribution or meal service and may not be

⁴⁵ Section 201A of the Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983 (codified at 7 U.S.C. §7501).

⁴⁶ Section 203B of the Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983 (codified at 7 U.S.C. §7505) gives states the option to give emergency feeding organizations priority. When they cannot meet the full demand of all eligible recipient organizations, states *must* give priority to emergency feeding organizations according to TEFAP regulations (7 C.F.R. §251.4). The statement that emergency feeding organizations receive the majority of TEFAP aid is based on CRS communication with the Food and Nutrition Service in September 2018.

⁴⁷ Section 201A of the Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983 (codified at 7 U.S.C. §7501).

⁴⁸ See discussion starting on page 45 of Feeding America, *Hunger in America*, 2014.

⁴⁹ For a list of states that allow mobile distribution, see Feeding America, *TEFAP State Policies*, 2024, pp. 23-28. Recent literature on home delivery in the charitable food sector includes Urban Institute, *Connecting People with Charitable Food through New Home Delivery Partnerships: Insights from DoorDash’s Project DASH*, September 2023, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/connecting-people-charitable-food-through-new-home-delivery-partnerships>.

⁵⁰ 7 C.F.R. §250.14.

⁵¹ 7 C.F.R. §251.10.

⁵² 7 C.F.R. §251.10.

explicitly religious.⁵³ In addition, recipient agencies may not engage in recruitment activities designed to persuade an individual to apply for SNAP benefits.⁵⁴

Eligibility Rules for Individuals and Households

Under broad federal guidelines, states set eligibility rules for individuals and households participating in TEFAP. Eligibility rules differ for organizations distributing commodities directly to households (e.g., food pantries) and organizations providing prepared meals (e.g., soup kitchens). For individuals receiving foods (as opposed to prepared meals), states must set income-based standards. Due to recent rulemaking, as of October 2024 those standards must be between 185% and 300% of the federal poverty guidelines; however, USDA may approve a state's request to set the threshold above 300% of poverty.⁵⁵ States cannot set such standards for individuals receiving prepared meals. However, organizations serving prepared meals must serve predominantly needy persons, and states "may establish a higher standard than 'predominantly' and may determine whether organizations meet the applicable standard by considering socioeconomic data of the area in which the organization is located, or from which it draws its clientele."⁵⁶

Income eligibility rules for households receiving TEFAP foods vary by state. Prior to the 2024 change, income eligibility limits ranged from 130% to 400% of the federal poverty guidelines depending on the state.⁵⁷ Some states also confer household eligibility based on participation in other federal and state programs (known as *categorical eligibility*).⁵⁸

Federal regulations require that individuals receiving food directly live "in the geographic location served by the State agency at the time of applying for assistance."⁵⁹ However, length of residency cannot be a criterion, and states cannot require the collection of addresses or identification for the purposes of eligibility determination (however, states may require documentation of income).⁶⁰ States may also create additional rules for households' receipt of TEFAP foods, such as requiring a signature at the time of receipt, or limiting the number of times households can get food in a certain period.⁶¹

⁵³ 7 C.F.R. §251.10; USDA, FNS, *Further Clarification on the Prohibition Against Explicitly Religious Activities As Part of TEFAP and CSFP Activities*, FD-142, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/usda-foods/prohibition-against-explicitly-religious-activities>.

⁵⁴ USDA, FNS, *Prohibition of SNAP Recruitment and Promotion Activities by FDPIR and TEFAP Administering Agencies*, Policy Memorandum No. FD-143, May 2017, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/usda-foods/prohibition-snap-recruitment-and-promotion-activities-fdpir-and-tefap-administering-agencies>.

⁵⁵ USDA, FNS, "Food Distribution Programs: Improving Access and Parity," 89 *Federal Register* 87228, October 31, 2024, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/10/31/2024-24966/food-distribution-programs-improving-access-and-parity>.

⁵⁶ 7 C.F.R. §251.5.

⁵⁷ Feeding America, *TEFAP State Policies*, 2024, p. 23.

⁵⁸ Feeding America, *TEFAP State Policies*, 2024, pp. 23-28.

⁵⁹ 7 C.F.R. §251.5(b).

⁶⁰ 7 C.F.R. §251.5(b)(3), as amended by 89 *Federal Register* 87228, October 31, 2024. Also see USDA, FNS, "Participant Eligibility in TEFAP (Revised)," FD-120, December 6, 2024, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/participant-eligibility-revised>.

⁶¹ See individual state plans for state-specific eligibility rules, which can usually be found on the state agency's website that administers TEFAP. A list of state agencies that administer TEFAP is available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/contacts>. For state-by-state policies, see Feeding America, *TEFAP State Policies*, 2024.

Funding and Appropriations

TEFAP's Authorizing Laws

The Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983: governs TEFAP operations and authorizes discretionary funding for administrative costs (codified at 7 U.S.C. §§7501-7516)

The Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (previously the Food Stamp Act): Section 27 authorizes mandatory funding for TEFAP commodities (*entitlement commodities*) (codified at 7 U.S.C. §2036)

Federal assistance through TEFAP is primarily provided in the form of USDA-purchased domestic agricultural commodities (*USDA Foods*). A smaller amount of assistance is provided in the form of cash support for administrative and distribution costs.

There are two types of TEFAP commodities: *entitlement commodities* and *bonus commodities* (described further in the sections to follow). Funding for entitlement commodities is considered appropriated mandatory spending, meaning that the authorizing law sets the level of spending but an annual appropriation is needed to provide funding.⁶² Funding for bonus commodities is not included in the TEFAP appropriation and is instead provided by separate USDA budget authority. These funds are used by USDA for bonus commodity purchases for the program throughout the year. TEFAP's administrative funds are discretionary spending and require an annual appropriation.⁶³

TEFAP may also receive supplemental appropriations in response to a disaster or emergency. For example, TEFAP received supplemental funding during the COVID-19 pandemic in addition to an influx of bonus commodities (see the “Role of TEFAP During Disasters and Emergencies” section). More recently, the American Relief Act of 2025 (P.L. 118-158) included \$25 million for TEFAP agencies' infrastructure needs related to major disasters that occurred in 2023 or 2024.

As shown in **Table 1**, TEFAP funding totaled more than \$2.2 billion in FY2024 (including both entitlement and bonus commodities).

Table 1. TEFAP Funding, FY2024

Category	Funding (\$ in millions)
Entitlement foods	455.1
Administrative (storage and distribution) funds	156.2
Bonus foods	1,626.1
Farm to Food Bank Projects	3.7
Total	2,241.1

Source: USDA, Office of Budget and Program Analysis, *2026 USDA Explanatory Notes – Food and Nutrition Service*, p. 34-104.

Notes: Table displays food and administrative funds made available to states and USDA bonus purchases. Food and administrative funds are post-conversion (following any conversion of entitlement food funds to

⁶² For an explanation of appropriated mandatory spending, see CRS Report R44582, *Overview of Funding Mechanisms in the Federal Budget Process, and Selected Examples*.

⁶³ Funding for TEFAP's entitlement commodities is typically contained in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) account and appropriations for administrative costs is typically contained in the Commodity Assistance Program account of annual appropriations acts.

administrative funds, and vice versa) and include any entitlement food funds that states carried over from the prior fiscal year.

Commodity Food Support

Entitlement Commodities

Mandatory funding for TEFAP commodities is authorized by Section 27 of the Food and Nutrition Act (codified at 7 U.S.C. §2036). The 2018 farm bill (P.L. 115-334) was the most recent vehicle to extend TEFAP's entitlement commodity funding, authorizing \$250 million annually plus additional amounts each year in FY2019 through FY2023. Programs with expired funding authorizations may continue to operate if funding is provided in appropriations acts, which has been the case for TEFAP in subsequent years.⁶⁴

As specified in the law, entitlement commodity funding is adjusted for food price inflation in accordance with USDA's Thrifty Food Plan.⁶⁵ Appropriations may also provide additional discretionary funding for entitlement commodities beyond the levels set in the Food and Nutrition Act.

Historically, appropriations laws have allowed states to convert a portion of their funds for entitlement commodities into administrative funds.⁶⁶ From FY2009-FY2017, states were allowed to convert 10% of funds; FY2018 and FY2019 appropriations acts increased the proportion to 15%, and FY2020-FY2024 appropriations acts increased the proportion to 20%.⁶⁷ States typically exercise this option. For example, in FY2024, states converted \$67 million out of a possible \$92 million in eligible funds.⁶⁸ States are also allowed to carry over entitlement commodity funds into the next fiscal year.⁶⁹

Within USDA, FNS works closely with AMS to determine which entitlement foods are available for TEFAP and considers input from state and local agencies (discussed further in the "USDA Food Purchasing, Ordering, and Delivery Process" section). According to statute, USDA must, "to the extent practicable and appropriate, make purchases based on (1) agricultural market conditions; (2) preferences and needs of States and distributing agencies; and (3) preferences of recipients."⁷⁰

⁶⁴ USDA-FNS, "FY 2024 Food and Administrative Funding for TEFAP," April 19, 2024, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/fy-2024-funding> and USDA-FNS, "TEFAP - Availability of Foods for Fiscal Year 2025," April 28, 2025, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/fr-042825>.

⁶⁵ Amounts are adjusted using the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), a USDA-calculation that estimates the cost of purchasing a nutritionally adequate low-cost diet. The TFP is the cheapest of four diet plans meeting minimal nutrition requirements devised by USDA. USDA calculates the cost of the TFP each year to account for food price inflation; additionally, in 2021 USDA reassessed the contents of the TFP (often thought of as a market basket of goods), which resulted in an increase to TEFAP entitlement commodity funding starting in FY2022. USDA, FNS, "The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP): Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) Adjustment of TEFAP Funding," FNS-GD-2021-0086, August 16, 2021.

⁶⁶ States may also convert any amount of administrative funds into food funds, but this happens to a lesser extent.

⁶⁷ Prior to FY2009, from FY2002-FY2008, states were allowed to convert \$10 million of entitlement commodity funds into administrative funds.

⁶⁸ USDA, Office of Budget & Program Analysis, *2026 USDA Explanatory Notes – Food and Nutrition Service*, p. 34-104.

⁶⁹ This has occurred since FY2015 as a result of a provision in the 2014 farm bill (P.L. 113-79).

⁷⁰ Section 27 of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (codified at 7 U.S.C. §2036(b)).

Bonus Commodities

Bonus commodities are purchased at USDA's discretion throughout the year using separate budget authority. USDA's purchases of bonus commodities are based on agricultural surpluses or other economic problems, as raised by farm and industry organizations and assessed by USDA's own commodity experts. The amount and type of bonus commodities that USDA purchases for TEFAP fluctuates from year to year, and depends on agricultural market conditions and USDA decisionmaking. As shown in **Figure 4**, the level of bonus commodities within TEFAP has fluctuated substantially over time.

USDA often offers states bonus foods according to the poverty and unemployment formula used in entitlement food allocations (discussed in the "State Allocation Formula" section).⁷¹ States and recipient agencies are not required to accept bonus foods.

USDA's purchases of bonus commodities stem from two authorities: Section 32 of the act of August 24, 1935 and the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC).⁷² Section 32 is a permanent appropriation that sets aside the equivalent of 30% of annual customs receipts to support the farm sector through the purchase of surplus commodities and a variety of other activities.⁷³ The CCC is a government-owned entity that finances authorized programs that support U.S. agriculture. Its operations are supported by USDA's Farm Service Agency. The CCC has permanent, indefinite authority to borrow up to \$30 billion from the U.S. Treasury to finance its programs.⁷⁴

Section 32 historically financed TEFAP commodities to a greater extent than the CCC.⁷⁵ However, in recent years, CCC support for bonus foods has matched or outpaced Section 32.⁷⁶

USDA's Recent Use of the Commodity Credit Corporation

In recent years, USDA has increased its use of the CCC to distribute bonus commodities through TEFAP.⁷⁷

In 2018 and 2019, USDA under the first Trump Administration announced two trade aid packages aimed at assisting farmers impacted by retaliatory tariffs, using CCC authority.⁷⁸ The first trade aid package, announced in August 2018, included \$1.2 billion in purchases of commodities for distribution to TEFAP and other domestic food assistance programs.⁷⁹ The second trade aid

⁷¹ Feeding America, *TEFAP State Policies*, 2024, p. 18.

⁷² For Section 32 purchasing authorities, see Section 32 of the act of August 24, 1935 (P.L. 74-320). For CCC purchasing authorities, see Section 5 of the CCC Charter Act. The Secretary's authority to donate such commodities to TEFAP is established by Section 17 of the Commodity Distribution Reform and WIC Amendments Act Of 1987.

⁷³ While overall funding for Section 32 is affected by trends in tariff revenue, Section 32 TEFAP bonus purchases are funded under a "reserved spending authority" that is adjusted annually for inflation per law (7 U.S.C. §612c-6(b)(2)) and typically specified in annual appropriations acts. For more information, see CRS In Focus IF12193, *Farm and Food Support Under USDA's Section 32 Account*. Within its reserved spending authority, USDA has some discretion to increase or decrease TEFAP bonus purchases each year.

⁷⁴ For more information, see CRS Report R44606, *The Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC)*.

⁷⁵ CRS communication with USDA, FNS in September 2018.

⁷⁶ CRS review of USDA, FNS Congressional Budget Justifications for FY1983-FY2026.

⁷⁷ CRS review of USDA, FNS Congressional Budget Justifications for FY2019-FY2026.

⁷⁸ For more information, see CRS Report R45310, *Farm Policy: USDA's 2018 Trade Aid Package*; and CRS Report R45865, *Farm Policy: USDA's 2019 Trade Aid Package*.

⁷⁹ For more information, see CRS Report R45310, *Farm Policy: USDA's 2018 Trade Aid Package*; and CRS Report R45865, *Farm Policy: USDA's 2019 Trade Aid Package*. USDA, "USDA Announces Details of Assistance for Farmers Impacted by Unjustified Retaliation," press release, August 27, 2018, [https://www.usda.gov/media/press-\(continued...\)](https://www.usda.gov/media/press-(continued...))

package, announced in May 2019, provided another \$1.4 billion for such purposes.⁸⁰ In total, USDA distributed \$1.1 billion worth of trade mitigation foods through TEFAP in FY2019 and \$1.2 billion in FY2020.⁸¹ USDA provided a smaller amount of funding for organizations' operational expenses associated with storing and distributing trade mitigation foods.⁸²

In September 2022, USDA under the Biden Administration allocated \$943 million in CCC aid for TEFAP, which was intended to help organizations "address supply chain challenges and elevated food costs" (for food deliveries occurring in FY2023 and FY2024).⁸³ In November 2023, USDA announced another round of identical CCC aid (\$943 million) for the same purpose, with deliveries starting in FY2024.⁸⁴ Both rounds of aid included a smaller amount of funding for organizations' operational costs. In December 2024, the Biden Administration announced another \$500 million in slated CCC purchases for FY2025 that were later reportedly cancelled by USDA under the second Trump Administration.⁸⁵

USDA Food Purchasing, Ordering, and Delivery Process

The processes for procuring and delivering USDA Foods are based on federal law, regulations, and agency policy. The process described in this section is specific to TEFAP, but similar processes are used for other federal nutrition assistance programs that use USDA Foods.

The process starts with determining what foods will be available. In the case of entitlement commodities, FNS and AMS work together to determine a list of foods for the fiscal year that will be procurable by USDA and usable by emergency feeding organizations.⁸⁶ In the case of bonus commodities, AMS determines which foods it will purchase on an ongoing basis throughout the year based on the needs of producers.

State agencies, in consultation with emergency feeding organizations, place orders via a Web-Based Supply Chain Management system (in some cases, state agencies delegate this responsibility to food banks).⁸⁷ They use their allocated entitlement funds to choose foods from a

releases/2018/08/27/usda-announces-details-assistance-farmers-impacted-unjustified. The largest purchases announced include pork, sweet cherries, apples, pistachios, dairy, and almonds.

⁸⁰ USDA, "USDA Announces Support for Farmers Impacted by Unjustified Retaliation and Trade Disruption," press release, May 23, 2019, <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2019/05/23/usda-announces-support-farmers-impacted-unjustified-retaliation-and>.

⁸¹ USDA, FNS, "FY2023 USDA Explanatory Notes – Food and Nutrition Service," p. 35-134, <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/35-2023-FNS.pdf>.

⁸² USDA, FNS, "Trade Mitigation Program Eligible Recipient Agency Operational Funds," January 14, 2020, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/usda-foods/trade-mitigation-program-eligible-recipient-agency-operational-funds>; and USDA, FNS, "Terms and Conditions for Funds Available for Storage and Distribution of Food Purchase Distribution Program Foods," December 5, 2019, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/terms-and-conditions-funds-available-storage-and-distribution-food-purchase-distribution>.

⁸³ USDA, FNS, "Conditions for Funds Available for the Storage and Distribution of Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) USDA Foods," February 3, 2023, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/conditions-funds-available-storage-distribution-ccc-foods>.

⁸⁴ USDA, FNS, "FY 2024 Commodity Credit Corporation TEFAP Funding," November 30, 2023, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/fy24-ccc-funding>.

⁸⁵ USDA, FNS, "Fiscal Year 2025 Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) Funding," December 2, 2024, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/fy25-ccc-funding> and Rebekah Alvey, "USDA suspends food bank funding source, cites 'unsustainable' expectations," *AgriPulse*, March 25, 2025.

⁸⁶ USDA, FNS, "USDA Foods Available List for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)," <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/foods-available>.

⁸⁷ 7 C.F.R. §250.10; 7 C.F.R. §251.2. For further details on this process, see Feeding America, *TEFAP State Policies*, 2024, pp. 18-19.

list that includes meats, eggs, grains, fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, and milk. They can also opt to receive preselected bonus foods, if available. (Types of entitlement and bonus foods available are discussed further in the next section of this report.) Most foods show up in the catalog on a quarterly basis; others are only available in the catalog at certain times of the year (e.g., fresh whole apples).⁸⁸

Once organizations make their selections, AMS publishes a solicitation via an online system, which “describes USDA’s needs in terms of the product, volume, delivery destination (city/State) and delivery window, and invites approved vendors to submit offers to fill the demand.”⁸⁹ Pre-approved vendors may respond to the solicitation and then AMS reviews the offers and awards contracts. Per the terms of the contract, a vendor may deliver food to a state warehouse, directly to a food bank or emergency feeding organization, or to a food processing company (if the state or food bank opts to use a portion of their entitlement funds for this purpose).⁹⁰ Once the product has been delivered, AMS pays the vendor.⁹¹ Depending on the product, it takes roughly two to seven months from solicitation through delivery.⁹²

Types of Foods

USDA-purchased agricultural products (*USDA Foods*) in TEFAP include a variety of products, such as meats, eggs, vegetables, soup, beans, nuts, peanut butter, cereal, pasta, milk, and juice.⁹³ Most foods are nonperishable and ready for distribution when delivered to states, although some foods, such as some meat, dairy, and fresh produce, require refrigeration.⁹⁴ USDA has made efforts in recent years to increase kosher and halal USDA Foods and raise awareness of available options.⁹⁵ States (and sometimes designated recipient agencies) select entitlement commodities from a catalog of USDA Foods.

In contrast, USDA selects bonus foods based on market conditions. In FY2024, bonus food purchases included fruits (e.g., grapefruit, oranges, peaches, apples, pears), nuts (e.g., hazelnuts, walnuts, pistachios, pecans, almonds), dried fruits (e.g., prunes, figs, dried cherries, dates), beans (e.g., navy, pinto, kidney), seafood (e.g., shrimp, rockfish, whiting, salmon, catfish), asparagus, pork products, milk, grape juice, and cheese.⁹⁶

Research has shown that TEFAP foods are relatively nutritious compared to foods in the average American diet. For example, a 2023 study compared TEFAP’s list of available foods in FY2022 with the Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System, which classify foods as green (choose often), yellow (choose sometimes), or red (choose rarely) based

⁸⁸ See “AMS CPP Procurement Schedule” at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food/solicitations>.

⁸⁹ USDA, AMS, “How the Process Works,” <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food/how-process-works>.

⁹⁰ 7 C.F.R. §250.2 “Processor”; 7 C.F.R. §250.11.

⁹¹ USDA, AMS, “How the Process Works,” <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food/how-process-works>.

⁹² CRS calculations based on “AMS CPP Procurement Schedule for 2025 to 2026 (xlsx),” available at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food/solicitations>. In general, fruits and vegetables have longer procurement timeframes compared to other types of products.

⁹³ USDA, FNS, “USDA Foods Available List for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP),” <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/foods-available>.

⁹⁴ Cabili et al. 2013. USDA added mixed fresh produce boxes to its TEFAP offerings in 2021 following the completion of the separate Farmers to Families Food Box Program. For more information, see USDA, FNS, “TEFAP Fresh Produce,” March 30, 2021, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/fresh-produce>.

⁹⁵ USDA, Office of Budget & Program Analysis, 2025 *USDA Explanatory Notes – Food and Nutrition Service*, p. 34-134.

⁹⁶ USDA, Office of Budget & Program Analysis, 2026 *USDA Explanatory Notes – Food and Nutrition Service*, pp. 34-103 to 34-104.

primarily on the amount of saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars they contain.⁹⁷ The study found that 59% of TEFAP foods were in the green category, 36% were in the yellow category, and 3% were in the red category (2% were not ranked because they were condiments or cooking staples).⁹⁸

Administrative Cash Support

TEFAP provides funds to cover state and recipient agency costs related to processing, storing, transporting, and distributing USDA-purchased commodities, as well as administrative costs related to determining eligibility, training staff, recordkeeping, and other activities.⁹⁹

Administrative funds can also be used to support the costs of storing, handling, and distributing foods from non-TEFAP sources, including private donations and food rescue efforts such as gleaning.¹⁰⁰

The Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983 authorizes \$100 million to be appropriated annually for administrative costs.¹⁰¹ In FY2024, appropriators designated \$80 million in discretionary funding for TEFAP administrative funds, consistent with levels in FY2020-FY2022, but down from a recent high of \$92 million in FY2023.¹⁰²

The Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983 also authorizes up to \$15 million to be appropriated for competitive grants to improve the infrastructure and capacity of emergency feeding organizations, particularly those in rural areas.¹⁰³ Funds (\$6 million) were last appropriated for these grants in FY2010 (P.L. 111-80). More recently, USDA used \$100 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA; P.L. 117-2) funding for *Reach and Resiliency* grants similarly geared toward improving capacity and infrastructure.¹⁰⁴ The grants were awarded competitively to 42 TEFAP state agencies in 2022 and 2023 to expand the program into remote, rural, tribal, and low-income areas underserved by TEFAP.¹⁰⁵ Funds were used for needs assessments, equipment and supplies (including expanded freezing and cooling capacity), building and warehouse renovations, mobile distribution infrastructure, staff training, and outreach to underserved populations, among other activities.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁷ Healthy Eating Research, *Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System*, March 2020, p. 11.

⁹⁸ M. F. Gombi-Vaca and M. B. Schwartz, "Evaluation of US Department of Agriculture Foods Programs for Households Using Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System," *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 2023. For prior research, see USDA, FNS, *Nutrient and MyPyramid Analysis of USDA Foods in Five of Its Food and Nutrition Programs*, prepared by Westat for the Office of Research and Analysis, January 2012, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/NutrientMyPyramid.pdf>.

⁹⁹ Section 204 of the Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983 (codified at 7 U.S.C. §7508).

¹⁰⁰ Section 203D and Section 204 of the Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983 (codified at 7 U.S.C. §7507). Also see Cabili et al. 2013.

¹⁰¹ Section 204 of the Emergency Food Assistance Act Of 1983 (codified at 7 U.S.C. §7508).

¹⁰² Committee reports accompanying P.L. 116-94, P.L. 116-260, P.L. 117-103, P.L. 117-328, and P.L. 118-42.

¹⁰³ Section 209 of the Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983 (codified at 7 U.S.C. §7511a).

¹⁰⁴ USDA, "USDA to Invest \$1 Billion to Purchase Healthy Food for Food Insecure Americans and Build Food Bank Capacity," June 4, 2021, <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2021/06/04/usda-invest-1-billion-purchase-healthy-food-food-insecure-americans>.

¹⁰⁵ USDA, FNS, "The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) Reach and Resiliency Grants: Fiscal Year 2022 Request for Applications (RFA)," CDFA 10.568, December 6, 2021.

¹⁰⁶ USDA, Office of Budget & Program Analysis, *2025 USDA Explanatory Notes – Food and Nutrition Service*, p. 34-135.

The statute specifies that administrative funds must be made available to states, which must in turn distribute at least 40% of the funds to emergency feeding organizations.¹⁰⁷ However, states are required to match whatever administrative funds they keep. As a result, states typically send nearly all of these funds to emergency feeding organizations.¹⁰⁸

States can convert any amount of their administrative funds to food funds, but this happens to a lesser extent than the conversion of food funds to administrative funds.¹⁰⁹

Other Funding

Farm to Food Bank Projects

The 2018 farm bill (§4018 of P.L. 115-334) authorized projects to support the harvesting, processing, packaging, and/or transportation of raw or unprocessed commodities from agricultural producers, processors, and distributors to emergency feeding organizations—termed *Farm to Food Bank Projects* by USDA. The law provided \$4 million in annual mandatory funding for the projects from FY2019 to FY2023 (extended through FY2024 by P.L. 118-22 and through FY2025-FY2031 by P.L. 119-21) and required at least a 50% nonfederal match. It also required states to include a plan of operations for Farm to Food Bank Projects in their state TEFAP plans in order to receive funding. The law gave USDA discretion to determine how funds would be allocated to such states; through rulemaking published in October 2019, USDA established that funds would be allocated the same way as current TEFAP entitlement funds: based on state’s shares of households in poverty and unemployed persons (see “State Allocation Formula”).¹¹⁰

FNS awarded Farm to Food Bank funds to 19 states in FY2020, 24 states in FY2021, 29 states in FY2022, 28 states in FY2023, and 27 states in FY2024 that submitted plans to implement projects.¹¹¹ Projects typically focused on setting up state-level infrastructure to facilitate relationships between agricultural donors and feeding organizations, rescuing or gleaning commodities, processing foods into end products, and distributing foods through food bank networks. Some states used funds to support statewide initiatives, while others funded specific projects carried out by a single organization or group of organizations. Likewise, some projects supported various agricultural sectors while others focused on specific commodities (e.g., blueberries and cheese). In many cases, federal funding supported pre-existing state and local initiatives.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Section 204 of the Emergency Food Assistance Act Of 1983 (codified at 7 U.S.C. §7508). States may count funds they spend on direct expenses of emergency feeding organizations toward this requirement.

¹⁰⁸ For the percentage of administrative funds distributed to recipient organizations by state, see USDA, FNS, “Percentage of TEFAP Administrative Funds Passed Through from State Agencies to Emergency Feeding Organizations,” <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/percentage-tefap-administrative-funds-passed-through-state-agencies-emergency-feeding> (accessed June 2025).

¹⁰⁹ USDA, Office of Budget & Program Analysis, *2026 USDA Explanatory Notes – Food and Nutrition Service*, p. 34-104.

¹¹⁰ USDA, FNS, “The Emergency Food Assistance Program: Implementation of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018,” 84 *Federal Register* 52997, October 4, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/10/04/2019-21665/the-emergency-food-assistance-program-implementation-of-the-agriculture-improvement-act-of-2018>.

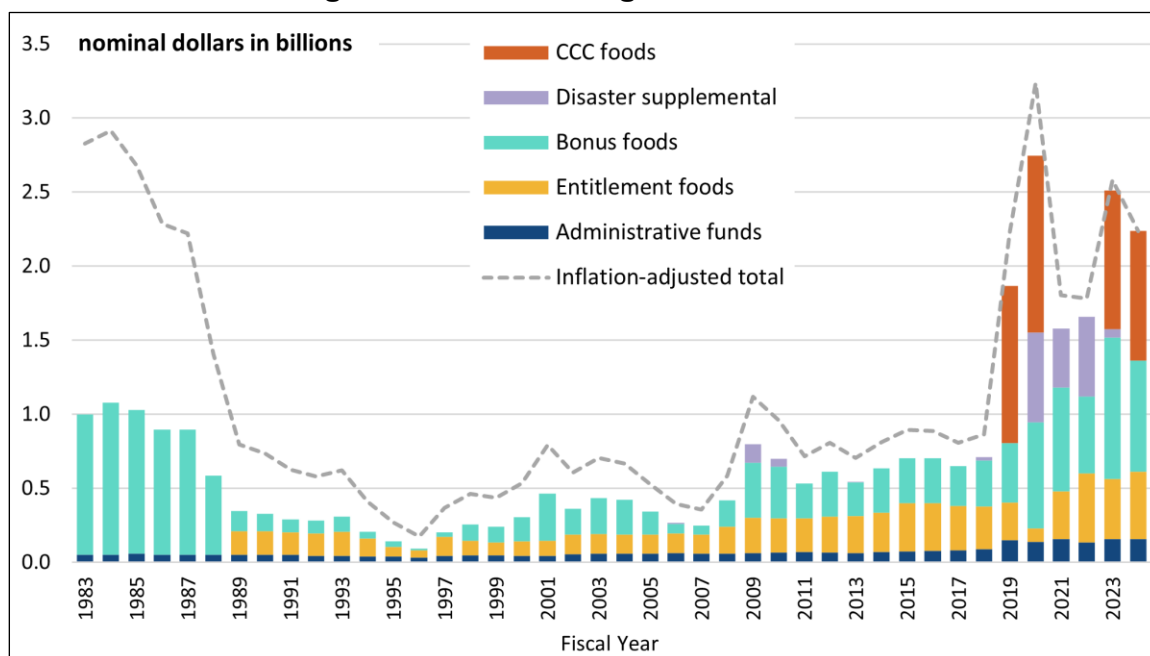
¹¹¹ USDA, FNS, “The Emergency Food Assistance Program Farm to Food Bank Project Grants,” <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/farm-to-food-bank-project-grants> (accessed June 2025).

¹¹² USDA, FNS, “FY 2024 Farm to Food Bank Project Summaries,” <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/fy24-farm-food-bank-projects>.

Funding Trends

Figure 4 displays TEFAP funding for administrative costs, entitlement commodities, and bonus commodities from the program's inception (FY1983) to FY2024 (see **Appendix A** for specific dollar amounts). TEFAP funding reached a recent high in FY2020 as a result of supplemental funding for entitlement commodities and administrative costs provided by COVID-19 pandemic response laws and bonus foods provided under the first Trump Administration's trade aid program. Previously, spending was highest around the time of the program's inception, when TEFAP served as a means for disposing of large stockpiles of government-held commodities (for further legislative history, see **Appendix C**).

Figure 4. TEFAP Funding, FY1983-FY2024



Source: CRS calculations using USDA, FNS Congressional Budget Justifications for FY1983-FY2026. The inflation-adjusted total (FY2024 dollars) was calculated by CRS using Office of Management and Budget (OMB), "FY2026 Budget: Historical Tables: Table 10.1—Gross Domestic Product and Deflators Used in the Historical Tables: 1940–2024."

Notes: Graph displays the value of food and administrative funds made available to states and USDA bonus purchases. Bonus foods include both Section 32 and Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) purchases until FY2019, when USDA started reporting CCC foods separately. For exact amounts and additional notes, see **Table A-1**.

State Allocation Formula

TEFAP's entitlement commodity and administrative funds are allocated to states based on a statutory formula that takes into account poverty and unemployment rates.¹¹³ Specifically, USDA calculates each state's share of the total national number of households with incomes below the federal poverty level and each state's share of the total national number of unemployed individuals. A state's share of households in poverty is then multiplied by 60% and its share of unemployed individuals is multiplied by 40% to calculate the state's share of TEFAP

¹¹³ 7 C.F.R. §251.3(h). Administrative funds use the same formula as commodities according to Section 204 of the Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983 (codified at 7 U.S.C. §7508).

commodities and funds. For example, if a state has 4% of all households in poverty and 2% of all unemployed individuals, it would receive $(4\% \times 60\% = 2.4\%) + (2\% \times 40\% = 0.8\%) = 3.2\%$ of TEFAP funds.¹¹⁴ As noted previously, states may carry over any extra food or administrative funds for one fiscal year (e.g., from FY2024 to FY2025).

State Funding

States must match any administrative funds that are not allocated to emergency feeding organizations or expended by the state on behalf of such organizations.¹¹⁵ In practice, most states use 80% to 100% of their administrative funds to support emergency feeding organizations, resulting in a small state match requirement.¹¹⁶

Beyond the state match, 14 states reported supplying additional state funds “to support the TEFAP program either directly or indirectly” in a national survey conducted by the Washington State Department of Agriculture in 2015.¹¹⁷

There is also a maintenance of effort requirement in TEFAP, meaning that states cannot reduce their own funding or commodity support for recipient agencies below the level that they were supporting such organizations at the program’s inception or FY1988 (when the maintenance of effort went into effect)—whichever is later.¹¹⁸

Role of TEFAP During Disasters and Emergencies

There are two main ways TEFAP can be deployed in disaster response: (1) transferring TEFAP foods to disaster response organizations for distribution to households (*Disaster Household Distribution* programs) and (2) adjusting TEFAP program rules and/or distributing additional aid through TEFAP. Both of these approaches were used during the COVID-19 pandemic (discussed in the next section).

During a presidentially declared disaster or emergency, USDA may approve state requests to operate Disaster Household Distribution programs and repurpose USDA Foods (largely from TEFAP) for direct distribution to households in areas affected by an emergency or disaster.¹¹⁹ USDA later replenishes or reimburses TEFAP and federal nutrition assistance programs for the reprogrammed foods.¹²⁰ Disaster Household Distribution facilitates faster distribution to households by reducing administrative requirements (e.g., removing eligibility determinations);

¹¹⁴ This explanation draws upon Appendix B of Cabili et al. 2013.

¹¹⁵ Section 204 of the Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983 (codified at 7 U.S.C. §7508).

¹¹⁶ USDA, FNS, “Percentage of TEFAP Administrative Funds Passed Through from State Agencies to Emergency Feeding Organizations,” <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/percentage-tefap-administrative-funds-passed-through-state-agencies-emergency-feeding>. Note that territories are exempted from the matching requirement if it is under \$200,000 (7 C.F.R. §251.9).

¹¹⁷ Washington State Department of Agriculture, *The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP): Distribution National Survey 2015*, AGR 609-574.

¹¹⁸ Section 215 of the Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983 (codified at 7 U.S.C. §7516).

¹¹⁹ 7 C.F.R. §250.69; USDA, FNS, Food Distribution Division, “USDA Foods Program Disaster Manual,” revised September 2017, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/usda-foods/program-disaster-manual>; USDA, FNS, “USDA Foods Disaster Assistance,” <https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/usda-foods-disaster-assistance>. Note that households cannot receive both disaster SNAP benefits and disaster USDA Foods. USDA Foods for household consumption are most often obtained from inventories intended for TEFAP, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations.

¹²⁰ 7 C.F.R. §250.69(g).

however, it temporarily results in lower USDA Foods inventory for TEFAP and other federal nutrition assistance programs. USDA authorized Disaster Household Distribution using TEFAP foods in several states in recent decades, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹²¹

Additional foods may also be distributed through TEFAP to aid in disaster and emergency response, and additional flexibilities may be provided. Congress may provide supplemental funding for disaster or emergency feeding through TEFAP, as was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic and during hurricanes and wildfires in recent decades.¹²² In addition, USDA and/or states may adjust certain program rules during a disaster or emergency (e.g., by amending state plans).

COVID-19 Pandemic Response

The COVID-19 pandemic response included both transferring TEFAP foods to Disaster Household Distribution programs and distributing a higher volume of foods and funds through TEFAP.¹²³ USDA also approved states' requests for certain program flexibilities.

During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, USDA authorized some states' requests to use TEFAP foods for Disaster Household Distribution. Following the presidential emergency declaration for COVID-19, USDA approved requests from 21 states, Guam, and 33 tribal nations to repurpose TEFAP foods for Disaster Household Distribution.¹²⁴ These approvals had different timeframes but typically ended by July 2020.

There was also additional federal aid distributed through TEFAP as a result of funding provided by COVID-19 pandemic response acts. Specifically, supplemental appropriations for TEFAP entitlement foods and administrative funds were provided by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA; P.L. 116-127) (\$400 million), the CARES Act (P.L. 116-136) (\$450 million), and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, FY2021 (P.L. 116-260) (\$400 million). In addition, the Biden Administration decided to use another \$500 million in CARES Act funds for TEFAP entitlement purchases and administrative funds and \$100 million in ARPA funds for Reach and Resiliency grants (discussed previously).¹²⁵ These amounts and authorities are shown in **Table 2**.

¹²¹ For example, foods intended for TEFAP were used for disaster response in Florida, Texas, and Puerto Rico following Hurricanes Irma, Harvey, and Maria in 2017. For a list of FNS's disaster response by state, see USDA, FNS, "State by State FNS Disaster Assistance," <https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/state-by-state>.

¹²² For example, the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-123) provided \$24 million in supplemental funding for TEFAP commodities and administrative funds to jurisdictions that received a major disaster or emergency declaration related to the consequences of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria or wildfires in 2017. More recently, the American Relief Act of 2025 (P.L. 118-158) included \$25 million for TEFAP agencies' infrastructure needs related to major disasters that occurred in 2023 or 2024.

¹²³ For further discussion of the use of TEFAP in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, see CRS Report R46681, *USDA Nutrition Assistance Programs: Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*.

¹²⁴ USDA, FNS, "Disaster Household Distribution," June 11, 2020, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/usda-foods/covid-19-disaster-household-distribution>.

¹²⁵ USDA, FNS, "The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP): Allocation of Supplemental Food and Administrative Funds from Division B of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act)," FNS-GD-2021-0083, August 4, 2021.

During the pandemic, USDA also encouraged states to make policy changes within TEFAP to facilitate food distribution, such as expanding eligibility rules for participants and waiving signature requirements for the receipt of TEFAP foods.¹²⁶

Table 2. COVID-19 Response Funding for TEFAP

Authority (in order of enactment)	Description	Timeframe	Budget Authority (millions of dollars)
Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA; P.L. 116-127), Division A, Title I, “Commodity Assistance Program”	Supplemental funding for TEFAP entitlement foods, up to \$100 million of which could be used for administrative costs. ^a	Made available to states in FY2020	400
CARES Act (P.L. 116-136), Division B, Title I, “Commodity Assistance Program”	Supplemental funding for TEFAP entitlement foods, up to \$150 million of which could be used for administrative costs. ^b	Made available to states in FY2020	450
CARES Act (P.L. 116-136), Division B, Title I, “Office of the Secretary”	Funding for USDA “to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus by providing support for agricultural producers.” USDA used \$500 million for supplemental TEFAP entitlement foods, up to \$100 of which could be used for administrative funds. ^c	Made available to states in FY2022	500
Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (P.L. 116-260), Division N, Title VII, Section 711	Supplemental funding for TEFAP entitlement foods, up to \$80 million of which could be used for administrative costs. ^d	Made available to states in FY2021	400
American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA; P.L. 117-2), Title I, Section 1001(b)(4)	Funding for USDA “to make loans and grants and provide other assistance to maintain and improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency.” USDA designated \$100 million for TEFAP Reach and Resiliency grants. ^e	Made available to states in FY2022 and FY2023	100
Total			1,850

Source: CRS, based on the referenced laws and USDA funding announcements (cited below).

Notes: Amounts made available are not necessarily the amounts expended by states.

- a. USDA, FNS, “Additional Information on FY 2020 Funding Sources for TEFAP,” FNS-GD-2020-0091, June 12, 2020.
- b. USDA, FNS, “The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP): Allocation of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act Supplemental Appropriations,” FNS-GD-2020-0052, April 4, 2020.
- c. USDA, FNS, “The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP): Allocation of Supplemental Food and Administrative Funds from Division B of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act),” FNS-GD-2021-0083, August 4, 2021.
- d. USDA, FNS, “FY 2021 Food and Administrative Funding for The Emergency Food Assistance Program,” February 16, 2021.

¹²⁶ USDA, FNS, “Questions and Answers related to COVID-19 and the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP),” May 22, 2020, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/covid-19-qas>; USDA, Office of Inspector General (OIG), *COVID-19—Oversight of the Emergency Food Assistance Program—Final Report*, August 18, 2023, <https://usdaoig.oversight.gov/reports/inspection-evaluation/covid-19-oversight-emergency-food-assistance-program-final-report>.

- e. USDA, FNS, “USDA Foods from Farm to Plate: Household Highlights, December 2021,” December 22, 2021.

Farm Bill Reauthorization

TEFAP typically has been amended and reauthorized through farm bills.¹²⁷ The 2018 farm bill (P.L. 115-334) extended TEFAP’s funding authorization and increased funding for entitlement commodities through FY2023.¹²⁸ The law also authorized *Farm to Food Bank Projects* (discussed previously) and provided \$4 million in annual mandatory funding for such projects through FY2023 (extended through FY2024 by P.L. 118-22 and through FY2025-FY2031 by P.L. 119-21). In addition, the 2018 farm bill required states to include, in their TEFAP state plans, a plan to provide emergency feeding organizations and other recipient agencies with the opportunity to provide input on commodity preferences and needs (e.g., in regard to USDA Foods), such as through a state advisory board. In addition, the law required USDA to issue guidance outlining best practices to minimize food waste of commodities donated by non-USDA entities.¹²⁹

Prior farm bills have also increased funding for TEFAP’s entitlement commodities, including in 2014 (P.L. 113-79) and 2008 (P.L. 110-246). The 2014 farm bill also required USDA to develop a plan to increase purchases of Kosher and Halal foods and allowed TEFAP funds to be spent over two fiscal years.

Appendix A. TEFAP Funding, FY1983-FY2024

Table A-1. Annual TEFAP Funding, FY1983-FY2024

(nominal dollars in millions)

Fiscal Year	Annual Administrative Funds	Annual Entitlement Foods	Bonus Foods	Disaster and COVID-19 Foods and Funds	Commodity Credit Corporation Foods and Funds	Total
1983	50.0	0.0	948.2	0.0	—	998.2
1984	50.0	0.0	1,030.0	0.0	—	1,074.6
1985	57.0	0.0	972.0	0.0	—	1,026.2
1986	50.0	0.0	846.1	0.0	—	895.2
1987	50.0	0.0	845.7	0.0	—	895.0
1988	50.0	0.0	537.2	0.0	—	645.4
1989	50.0	160.0	135.2	0.0	—	301.2
1990	50.0	159.0	118.9	0.0	—	329.2
1991	50.0	152.0	89.3	0.0	—	298.7

¹²⁷ For a discussion of 118th Congress farm bill efforts, see CRS Report R48167, *The 2024 Farm Bill: H.R. 8467 Compared with Current Law*.

¹²⁸ For further discussion, see CRS Report R45525, *The 2018 Farm Bill (P.L. 115-334): Summary and Side-by-Side Comparison*.

¹²⁹ USDA issued guidance regarding this provision on August 15, 2019; USDA, FNS, “Best Practices to Minimize Food Waste of Privately Donated Foods to The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) State Agencies and Emergency Feeding Organizations,” August 15, 2019, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/best-practices-minimize-food-waste>.

Fiscal Year	Annual Administrative Funds	Annual Entitlement Foods	Bonus Foods	Disaster and COVID-19 Foods and Funds	Commodity Credit Corporation Foods and Funds	Total
1992	44.9	151.3	85.1	0.0	—	271.3
1993	44.9	160.0	105.6	0.0	—	270.8
1994	40.0	119.4	48.4	0.0	—	264.1
1995	40.0	65.2	35.2	0.0	—	134.8
1996	30.7	49.1	14.3	0.0	—	79.6
1997	41.7	130.3	29.5	0.0	—	191.8
1998	46.4	100.0	108.8	0.0	—	234.3
1999	45.8	89.2	107.5	0.0	—	243.2
2000	43.6	98.7	162.0	0.0	—	224.8
2001	44.7	99.6	319.4	0.0	—	377.1
2002	54.3	134.8	171.4	0.0	—	434.5
2003	59.7	130.3	242.1	0.0	—	455.6
2004	59.2	128.5	233.0	0.0	—	419.7
2005	58.6	130.5	154.3	0.0	—	372.4
2006	63.5	130.1	67.0	6.0	—	300.4
2007	58.0	130.6	58.2	0.0	—	255.4
2008	57.1	182.3	178.1	0.0	—	417.5
2009	63.6	236.2	373.7	125.0	—	798.5
2010	67.1	231.9	346.6	54.6	—	700.2
2011	70.3	228.4	235.3	0.0	—	534.0
2012	65.8	242.9	304.2	0.0	—	612.9
2013	64.3	247.2	228.5	5.7	—	545.7
2014	69.1	268.0	298.8	0.0	—	635.9
2015	74.0	327.0	302.9	0.0	—	703.9
2016	77.9	320.3	305.5	0.0	—	703.7
2017	83.3	297.0	268.6	0.0	—	648.9
2018	90.7	287.5	308.9	24.0	—	711.1
2019	148.6	254.9	403.0	0.0	1,059.3	1,865.8
2020	137.2	92.2	716.2	606.5	1,193.3	2,745.4
2021	158.4	319.9	701.0	397.3		1,576.6
2022	136.2	465.4	517.0	539.4		1,618.6
2023	156.3	405.1	954.8	58.5	934.3	2,509.0
2024	156.2	455.1	753.0	0.0	873.1	2,237.4

Source: CRS calculations using USDA, FNS Congressional Budget Justifications for FY2000-FY2024 amounts and USDA, FNS, “Food Distribution Tables (Emergency Food Assistance),” June 13, 2025, for FY1983-FY1999 amounts.

Notes: Subtotals may not sum to totals due to rounding. Table displays food and administrative funds made available to states and USDA bonus purchases. Bonus foods include both Section 32 and CCC purchases up to FY2019, when USDA started reporting CCC foods separately. Entitlement food and administrative funds are post-conversion (following any conversion of entitlement food funds to administrative funds, and vice versa) and include any entitlement food funds carried over from the prior fiscal year.

Appendix B. TEFAP Spending by State, FY2024

Table B-1. TEFAP Expenditures by State, FY2024
(in dollars)

	Annual Administrative Funds	Annual Entitlement Foods	Bonus Foods	Commodity Credit Corporation Foods and Funds	State Total
Alabama	1,488,843	3,896,934	10,687,772	11,386,673	27,460,222
Alaska	211,360	1,325,533	1,457,853	1,949,749	4,944,495
Arizona	3,765,501	9,018,456	20,537,352	20,546,709	53,868,018
Arkansas	1,394,854	3,497,062	8,841,902	8,167,782	21,901,600
California	21,150,903	45,472,586	88,762,410	109,718,294	265,104,193
Colorado	1,107,920	5,977,549	10,769,540	12,378,162	30,233,171
Connecticut	792,625	6,954,804	6,047,800	7,914,238	21,709,467
Delaware	370,422	1,157,490	5,634,573	7,203,183	14,365,668
DC	419,627	885,022	1,754,315	2,502,695	5,561,659
Florida	8,974,759	22,876,393	49,647,906	54,224,099	135,723,157
Georgia	3,905,958	11,500,524	22,282,235	26,730,718	64,419,435
Hawaii	287,356	1,133,160	3,875,924	4,396,994	9,693,434
Idaho	789,319	1,619,882	2,661,236	3,363,856	8,434,293
Illinois	3,194,128	14,387,056	27,702,358	33,573,266	78,856,808
Indiana	1,532,094	6,070,811	14,474,687	15,239,064	37,316,656
Iowa	655,122	3,743,667	6,016,398	7,084,001	17,499,188
Kansas	1,076,816	2,977,659	2,805,581	4,479,180	11,339,236
Kentucky	2,678,540	5,590,290	12,048,007	13,343,859	33,660,696
Louisiana	2,894,487	7,019,599	13,193,874	15,587,790	38,695,750
Maine	264,713	2,076,054	4,387,184	6,396,631	13,124,582
Maryland	2,402,981	5,196,322	3,570,528	6,124,315	17,294,146
Massachusetts	2,618,257	7,111,777	7,943,565	11,373,996	29,047,595
Michigan	5,488,651	11,043,036	25,660,788	31,358,517	73,550,992
Minnesota	1,544,329	5,475,873	10,805,583	11,148,766	28,974,551
Mississippi	962,997	4,689,820	8,758,266	8,802,311	23,213,394
Missouri	1,340,647	7,330,728	11,627,486	12,301,217	32,600,078

	Annual Administrative Funds	Annual Entitlement Foods	Bonus Foods	Commodity Credit Corporation Foods and Funds	State Total
Montana	489,272	1,060,859	1,919,838	2,550,665	6,020,634
Nebraska	506,307	1,963,952	3,098,514	3,857,668	9,426,441
Nevada	1,009,957	5,568,755	7,978,875	8,768,024	23,325,611
New Hampshire	361,673	1,007,726	1,989,398	2,574,404	5,933,201
New Jersey	4,114,039	7,934,922	11,747,150	18,160,696	41,956,807
New Mexico	1,281,269	2,426,082	6,528,159	8,515,577	18,751,087
New York	11,077,101	23,439,605	50,613,725	52,234,876	137,365,307
North Carolina	5,404,453	11,187,894	25,065,727	25,143,590	66,801,664
North Dakota	311,735	645,453	1,502,894	2,283,010	4,743,092
Ohio	6,302,031	12,102,280	29,578,334	31,748,398	79,731,043
Oklahoma	1,256,733	4,868,864	10,662,472	10,310,009	27,098,078
Oregon	3,145,522	3,301,818	9,499,446	13,441,114	29,387,900
Pennsylvania	6,732,396	13,730,579	27,783,266	34,046,737	82,292,978
Rhode Island	252,288	1,107,096	3,381,699	4,497,291	9,238,374
South Carolina	1,232,633	6,648,195	11,437,384	13,966,115	33,284,327
South Dakota	379,970	728,829	1,784,221	2,462,404	5,355,424
Tennessee	3,524,890	6,570,885	15,646,083	16,093,403	41,835,261
Texas	12,950,103	39,875,648	84,959,569	94,846,138	232,631,458
Utah	1,157,644	2,630,543	5,244,921	6,405,651	15,438,759
Vermont	262,572	850,940	743,356	1,080,652	2,937,520
Virginia	3,762,427	7,546,359	13,430,672	17,760,394	42,499,852
Washington	16,957,190	7,710,099	15,419,689	19,648,581	59,735,559
West Virginia	1,087,099	2,346,303	7,464,241	7,524,128	18,421,771
Wisconsin	2,467,583	4,880,889	7,263,591	11,242,397	25,854,460
Wyoming	151,365	644,595	1,015,160	2,299,590	4,110,710
Northern Mariana Islands ^a	78,764	0	0	0	78,764
Guam	68,258	593,001	47,749	201,447	910,455
Puerto Rico	4,099,054	9,321,229	15,026,252	13,937,057	42,383,592
Virgin Islands	67,586	171,895	266,978	373,932	880,391
Total^b	147,821,928	455,187,374	753,054,486	873,270,013	2,229,333,801

Source: CRS, adapted from Table FNS-67 and Table FNS-68 in USDA, Office of Budget and Program Analysis, *2026 USDA Explanatory Notes – Food and Nutrition Service*, pp. 34-108 to 34-109.

Notes: Table displays food and administrative funds made available to states and USDA bonus purchases. Food and administrative funds are post-conversion (following any conversion of entitlement food funds to administrative funds, and vice versa) and include any entitlement food funds carried over from the prior fiscal year.

a. USDA provides the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands with cash in lieu of commodities.

- b. Totals include anticipated adjustments and federal administrative expense funds (not shown).

Appendix C. Legislative History of TEFAP

Program Inception¹³⁰

In 1982, the Reagan Administration created a discretionary dairy distribution program to dispose of stockpiles of CCC-purchased cheese and butter. This effort occurred in the aftermath of reductions in federal food assistance (e.g., food stamps) legislated in 1981 and 1982 and in the midst of an economic recession and growing concern over hunger and homelessness. USDA distributed the foods to states, which selected recipient organizations.

As the program developed, there were requests for additional types of commodities such as flour, rice, and nonfat dry milk that USDA had purchased and had in storage. In addition, there were reports of local organizations declining foods because of a lack of storage and distribution capacity. These and other factors prompted pressure for federal cash assistance as well as increased variety and volume of foods. In 1983, Congress followed up with funding for grants to help with distribution costs and legislative authority that created the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) (P.L. 98-8 and P.L. 98-92). Establishment of TEFAP helped reduce federal commodity inventory and storage costs, provided an alternative source of food assistance for low-income individuals, and supported an expanding network of charitable emergency feeding providers that also drew food and resources from private sources.¹³¹

Changes to TEFAP's Funding¹³²

USDA continued to distribute large amounts of CCC-purchased foods (including cheese, butter, nonfat dry milk, cornmeal, flour, honey, and rice) through FY1988. That year, CCC holdings began to drop substantially because of changes in agricultural policies and the economy, and the Reagan Administration indicated plans to phase out TEFAP. Instead, Congress authorized a specific level of funding (starting at \$120 million for FY1989) for USDA to buy commodities for distribution through TEFAP, entitling the program to a minimum level of support regardless of the level of federal commodity holdings (P.L. 100-435). The law also created a separate program to buy commodities for soup kitchens and food banks not receiving TEFAP commodities (mandatory funding was provided at \$40 million for FY1989). The separate program was established out of a concern that some food banks had trouble meeting TEFAP rules, and that most commodities for emergency feeding were going to local agencies that distributed food packages directly to individuals and families (e.g., food pantries), rather than to soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and other organizations serving meals in congregate settings.

¹³⁰ Adapted from CRS Report RL30164, *The Emergency Food Assistance Program and Emergency Feeding Needs*; and CRS Issue Brief IB85095, *Commodity Donations to the Poor: The Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program*. (These reports are no longer available.)

¹³¹ Further discussion of the history and expansion of the emergency feeding network is in Doug O'Brien, Erinn Staley, Stephanie Uchima, Eleanor Thompson, and Halley Torres Aldeen, *The Charitable Food Assistance System: The Sector's Role in Ending Hunger in America*, UPS Foundation and the Congressional Hunger Center, 2004, <https://www.hungercenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/The-Charitable-Food-Assistance-System-Americas-Second-Harvest.pdf>.

¹³² Adapted from CRS Report RL30164, *The Emergency Food Assistance Program and Emergency Feeding Needs*; and CRS Issue Brief IB85095, *Commodity Donations to the Poor: The Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program*. (These reports are no longer available.)

In 1990, the omnibus farm bill (P.L. 101-624) changed funding for TEFAP and the soup kitchen program from appropriated mandatory to discretionary (dependent on annual appropriations decisions). The law also removed the word “Temporary” from the program title. Over the next few years, funding for TEFAP declined, reaching an all-time low in FY1996. However, that same year, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA; P.L. 104-193) reinstated appropriated mandatory funding (\$100 million per year through FY2002) for TEFAP’s entitlement foods, partly in an effort to provide a safety net for households losing access to food stamps as a result of other provisions in the law. PRWORA also incorporated the soup kitchen program into TEFAP.

Following these changes, funding generally increased in the late 1990s and early to mid-2000s. There was another dip in appropriations in FY2006 and FY2007, but the 2008 farm bill raised annual entitlement purchases to \$250 million starting in FY2009 (indexed annually for food-price inflation in later years).¹³³ There were also supplemental funds available for TEFAP in FY2009 and FY2010 as a result of ARRA. In addition, the 2014 farm bill increased mandatory funding for TEFAP’s entitlement commodities by a Congressional Budget Office (CBO)-estimated \$125 million over five years.¹³⁴ Total funding from FY2011 to FY2018 hovered around \$600-\$700 million annually.¹³⁵

Recent Changes and Increases in Spending

As discussed in this report, there has been an influx of federal aid in TEFAP in recent years. The 2018 farm bill increased funding for TEFAP’s entitlement foods by a CBO-estimated \$105 million over five years. It also provided mandatory funding of \$4 million for each of FY2019-FY2023 for new Farm to Food Bank Projects (later extended through FY2024). These projects provided funds directly to local organizations (in contrast to TEFAP’s traditional structure of federally purchased foods).

¹³³ See CRS Report RL33934, *The 2008 Farm Bill: A Summary of Major Provisions and Legislative Action* (available to congressional clients upon request).

¹³⁴ See CRS Report R43332, *SNAP and Related Nutrition Provisions of the 2014 Farm Bill (P.L. 113-79)*.

¹³⁵ USDA, FNS Congressional Budget Justifications for FY2008-FY2020, available at USDA, “Congressional Justifications: Archived USDA Explanatory Notes,” <https://www.usda.gov/obpa/congressional-justifications>.

However, the main driver behind increased TEFAP spending has been supplemental aid and growth in bonus purchases. As part of its trade aid package, the first Trump Administration distributed approximately \$2.3 billion in CCC food purchases through TEFAP between FY2018 and FY2020.¹³⁶ In FY2020-FY2022, TEFAP saw another influx of aid as lawmakers aimed to use the program to address increased demand for food assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹³⁷ TEFAP continued to receive additional aid in FY2023 and FY2024 as the Biden Administration used the CCC to distribute approximately \$1.9 billion in bonus purchases through the program to help address post-pandemic supply chain challenges.¹³⁸ In total, annual spending on TEFAP hovered between \$1.5 billion and \$2.7 billion between FY2019 and FY2024—roughly triple prior years’ levels.¹³⁹

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¹³⁶ USDA, “USDA Announces Details of Assistance for Farmers Impacted by Unjustified Retaliation,” press release, August 27, 2018, <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2018/08/27/usda-announces-details-assistance-farmers-impacted-unjustified>; USDA, “USDA Announces Support for Farmers Impacted by Unjustified Retaliation and Trade Disruption,” press release, May 23, 2019, <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2019/05/23/usda-announces-support-farmers-impacted-unjustified-retaliation-and-trade-disruption>. For more information, see CRS Report R45310, *Farm Policy: USDA’s 2018 Trade Aid Package*; and CRS Report R45865, *Farm Policy: USDA’s 2019 Trade Aid Package*.

¹³⁷ Nicholas Kulish, “‘Never Seen Anything Like It’: Cars Line Up for Miles at Food Banks,” April 8, 2020, *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/08/business/economy/coronavirus-food-banks.html>.

¹³⁸ USDA, FNS, “Conditions for Funds Available for the Storage and Distribution of Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) USDA Foods,” February 3, 2023, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/conditions-funds-available-storage-distribution-ccc-foods>; and USDA, FNS, “FY 2024 Commodity Credit Corporation TEFAP Funding,” November 30, 2023, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/fy24-ccc-funding>.

¹³⁹ TEFAP spending was roughly \$500-\$700 million annually (unadjusted) in FY2010-FY2018.