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U.S. International Food Assistance Primer

Global food insecurity generally refers to varying degrees of hunger and malnutrition among populations worldwide stemming from a lack of regular access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. In 2026, an estimated 318 million people globally will face acute hunger. The drivers of food insecurity are often interrelated, far reaching, and lasting. They may include conflict and forced displacement, natural disasters and effects of climate change, economic downturns and high prices, and public health events.

Congress has authorized and appropriated funds for international food assistance for over 70 years. In FY2024 (latest data available) such assistance totaled nearly \$5.5 billion. The United States has provided international food assistance for a range of reasons, including to respond to global humanitarian crises, support international development, and serve strategic interests, such as promoting political stability and strengthening agricultural markets. In addition, the purchase of U.S.-sourced commodities (e.g., beans, corn, vegetable oils, wheat) and absorption of food surpluses through in-kind food assistance programs have directly benefitted U.S. agriculture. Many U.S.-funded international food assistance programs are implemented through partners, including multilateral entities, such as the UN World Food Program (WFP), and bilateral contracts with nongovernmental organizations. The Administration's decision to shutter the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) as of July 1, 2025, shifted the implementation of U.S. international food assistance to different Department of State (State) bureaus and potentially other agencies. These structural changes may affect the delivery of international emergency food assistance, potentially reduce program scope and funding, and impact program efficiency and effectiveness.

Food Assistance Programs

USAID and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have historically administered U.S. international food assistance programs. Statutory authorities for international food programs are found in the Food for Peace Act (FFPA, 7 U.S.C. §§1691 et seq.) and related agriculture legislation, the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (FAA, 22 U.S.C. §§2151 et seq.), and the Global Food Security Act of 2016 (GFSA, 22 U.S.C. §§9301 et seq.). The House and Senate Agriculture Committees have jurisdiction over programs authorized by the FFPA and related agriculture legislation, while the House Foreign Affairs and Senate Foreign Relations Committees have jurisdiction over programs authorized by the FAA and GFSA. Key programs are described below.

Farm Bill-Authorized Programs

International food assistance programs authorized by the FFPA and related agriculture legislation are generally

amended and reauthorized by periodic farm bills, most recently by the 2018 farm bill (P.L. 115-334). Subsequent legislation has extended the authorizations through FY2026. These programs are usually funded by Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Acts (Agriculture appropriations) or from USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation's (CCC's) borrowing authority. Most of these programs require the use of U.S.-sourced commodities and are subject to cargo preference laws.

Food for Peace Title II Grants (FFP, 7 U.S.C. §§1721 et seq.). Under FFP, the U.S. government provides U.S.-sourced commodities to food-insecure populations overseas via qualifying implementing partners. Historically, USAID administered FFP and allocated the majority of FFP funding for emergency food assistance, with a required minimum of \$365 million made available each year for nonemergency assistance. FFP derives its authority from Title II of the FFPA and receives funding from Agriculture appropriations acts. For FY2026, Congress appropriated \$1.2 billion for FFP. According to USDA, it currently administers FFP.

Farmer-to-Farmer Program (F2F, 7 U.S.C. §1737). F2F is to fund short-term technical assistance from U.S. volunteers to farmers, agribusinesses, and other agricultural institutions in developing and transitional countries. Minimum funding for F2F is to be the greater of \$15 million or 0.6% of funds appropriated for FFP programs. Although not a food-distribution program, F2F derives its authority under FFPA Title V. The program does not appear to be active and was previously administered by USAID.

McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Nutrition Program (McGovern-Dole, 7 U.S.C. §1736o-1). The USDA-administered McGovern-Dole program is to advance food security, nutrition, and education for children—especially girls—by providing mostly U.S.-sourced commodities for school meals in priority countries. McGovern-Dole has received funding from Agriculture appropriations, and up to 10% of annual funding may be used for local and regional procurement (LRP) rather than procuring U.S.-origin commodities. For FY2026, Congress appropriated \$240 million for McGovern-Dole.

Food for Progress (FFPr, 7 U.S.C. §1736o). The USDA-administered FFPr is to sell U.S. commodities, usually in aid-recipient countries' local markets, and is to use the proceeds to fund agricultural development projects. FFPr has received mandatory funding by CCC financing or discretionary funding under FFPA Title I. The program is required to annually provide a minimum of 400,000 metric tons (MT) of U.S. commodities but is also restricted from paying more than \$40 million annually for freight costs. In FY2025, USDA procured 460,000 MT of U.S. commodities, valued at \$148 million, for FFPr.

Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust (BEHT, 7 U.S.C. §1736f-1). BEHT is a commodity and/or monetary reserve maintained by USDA that may be released if FFP funding for emergency food situations is deemed inadequate. In 2022, for example, \$282 million was released to procure U.S. commodities in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. BEHT funds may be replenished from funds available to FFPA programs or directly by appropriations.

FAA/GFSA-Authorized Programs

International food assistance programs authorized by the FAA and GFSA have been amended and reauthorized by periodic GFSA reauthorization acts, most recently in December 2022 as part of P.L. 117-263. These programs have been funded through State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS) Appropriations Acts. They employ *market-based* food assistance—such as LRP, food vouchers and cash transfers for food—along with selected nonfood assistance in emergency and nonemergency settings.

Emergency Food Security Program (EFSP, 22 U.S.C. §2292(c)). EFSP provides global food assistance to vulnerable populations using market-based approaches. Though its general authority under the FAA was used as early as FY2010, EFSP was authorized in the GFSA in 2016; Congress authorized appropriations of up to \$1.8 billion annually through FY2028. USAID previously administered EFSP with funding through the SFOPS International Disaster Assistance account; for FY2024, it programmed \$2.9 billion.

Community Development Fund (CDF, 22 U.S.C. §2151a et seq.). CDF has funded, either solely or in conjunction with FFP nonemergency funds, development programs aimed at addressing the root causes of food insecurity. Deriving its authority from the FAA, CDF receives funding through the SFOPS Development Assistance account, and the funding may count toward the FFP \$365 million nonemergency requirement. USAID previously administered CDF; for FY2024, \$80 million was programmed.

Feed the Future (FtF, 22 U.S.C. §§9301 et seq.). FtF is a development initiative to provide food security and agricultural resources in selected “focus” countries. Congress authorized FtF programs under the GFSA; the current authorization of appropriations is \$1.2 billion annually through FY2028. Congress has directed funds for FtF programs in annual SFOPS Acts under the heading “food security and agricultural development”; for FY2026, Congress designated not less than \$720 million for FtF. Currently, State’s Office of Global Food Security (GFS) is responsible for active FtF projects.

Recent Developments

While USDA continues to administer its food assistance programs, it reportedly has cancelled some projects. State now appears to lead the provision of most U.S. foreign assistance, having assumed certain former USAID functions. Some announcements suggest that certain food security programs are being administered by GFS, which had previously led U.S. diplomatic engagement on food security. Emergency food programs are reportedly being administered by State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees,

and Migration, but some experts suggest the Administration’s newly proposed Bureau of Disaster and Humanitarian Response could take over this role. In the FY2026 National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs (NSRP, formerly SFOPS) Appropriations Act (P.L. 119-75), Congress appropriated \$5.4 billion in international humanitarian assistance but, in keeping with past practice, did not specify funding for international emergency food programs. As part of its FY2026 budget request, the Administration called for eliminating international food assistance programs that provide U.S.-origin commodities: FFP, McGovern-Dole, and FFP. For FY2026, Congress provided appropriations for these programs (Division B; P.L. 119-37).

Issues for Congress

Congress may consider amending, reauthorizing, or deauthorizing international food assistance programs in a potential farm bill and/or stand-alone legislation, and adjusting funding levels and oversight requirements.

Program Administration. With USAID’s closure, questions remain about which international food assistance programs are being administered by State or other agencies; what interagency agreements are in place and whether these align with authorities; whether there is administrative capacity (e.g., staffing and expertise to meet program objectives); and the scope of global food assistance disruptions. Congress may consider whether to amend the existing statute referencing the role of USAID or support, or seek to alter the Administration’s plans for international food aid programs. In the 119th Congress, for example, H.R. 1207/S. 525 and H.R. 7567 (§§3101 et seq.) would legislate a move of USAID FFPA functions to USDA.

Funding and Allocation. Outlays for international food assistance have fluctuated since FY2010, when EFSP was established, but have trended upward as global food insecurity increased. EFSP has grown from comprising approximately 10% of international food assistance outlays in FY2010—the first year in which it was used—to 56% in FY2023, while FFP has provided approximately \$2 billion per year (in nominal dollars). Congress may debate overall funding for these programs. Considerations may include the balance of funding between commodity-based and market-based programming and support for U.S. agriculture. Congress may also consider the Administration’s recent realized and proposed program and budget cuts as it determines funding levels to meet congressional priorities or address the current structure of international food assistance.

U.S. Foreign Policy. More broadly, Congress may examine the role of international food assistance in U.S. foreign policy, the focus of which could include cost sharing with other donor countries, bilateral relationships with recipient countries, food assistance-implementation strategies, global food insecurity levels and impacts, and U.S. leadership in global food security fora.

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