



Disaster Assistance

What Role Does the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Play in Disaster Response?

FNS plays a vital role in providing supplemental nutrition assistance when disasters occur by coordinating with States, Tribes, and local voluntary organizations to:

- provide food for shelters and other mass feeding sites,
- distribute food packages directly to households in specific situations,
- offer flexibility in nutrition assistance programs' design and administration to continue providing benefits to participants in need, and
- approve eligible States' requests to operate a Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP).

How Does USDA Provide Food During Disasters?

FNS coordinates closely with State agencies, Tribes, and their local voluntary organization partners as they develop a plan to respond to and recover from disasters using the most appropriate strategies for each situation. This may include:

USDA Foods for Disaster Assistance

State agencies and local organizations may use USDA Foods—nutritious, domestically sourced and produced foods—for mass feeding and/or household distribution during a Presidentially-Declared Disaster or emergency situation.

USDA Foods intended for school meal programs are often used for mass feeding when the President issues a disaster declaration and in certain other emergencies. These foods are typically supplied by the State agency to disaster relief organizations to provide meals for those in need.

With formal FNS approval, States can distribute packages of USDA Foods intended for household distribution programs, such as The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), directly to households in need. Disaster organizations may request USDA Foods through State agencies.

Existing inventories of USDA Foods stored at State, local, and school warehouses that are utilized during a Presidentially Declared Disaster or emergency are replaced by USDA. States must track the use of these foods and provide a report to USDA.

USDA does not set aside or pre-position food specifically for disasters.

Disaster - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP)

State agencies may request D-SNAP after an area has received a Presidential Disaster Declaration for Individual Assistance. D-SNAP is designed to operate once retailers have reopened and power is restored. After FNS approves the State's request for D-SNAP, disaster-impacted households may apply using a simplified application, and eligible households receive 1 month of benefits equal to the maximum allotment for a SNAP household of their size. As in regular SNAP, D-SNAP provides benefits on an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card for use at SNAP-authorized retailers.

Are Other Nutrition Assistance Programs Available During Disaster Response?

Yes, regular nutrition assistance programs that can still operate under disaster conditions may do so. Upon request, FNS may also provide flexibility to make the programs easier to administer during a disaster.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

At the request of a State and in the event of a Presidential Disaster Declaration for Individual Assistance, FNS may approve a waiver that allows SNAP households to purchase hot, prepared foods for immediate consumption. Existing SNAP households affected by the disaster may have their regular program benefits replaced if food purchased with SNAP was destroyed, or they may receive supplemental benefits, at the request of a State. FNS may approve additional disaster waivers in order to assist households currently enrolled in SNAP after a disaster occurs.

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Child Nutrition Programs

FNS may provide States with flexibility in administering Child Nutrition Programs in a disaster situation. For example, FNS may allow schools and child care institutions to serve meals that do not meet regular menu planning or meal pattern requirements, or provide meals to all children at no charge and be reimbursed at the free reimbursement rate during the disaster waiver period.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

In the event of a Presidentially-Declared Disaster, FNS may provide States with flexibility in administering the WIC program. For example, FNS may approve a State to allow substitutions in the WIC food package when inventories of approved food items are low due to disaster impacts.

Infant Formula and Food

FNS may also make emergency procurements of infant formula and food within 96 hours on request from a State agency or the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) following a Presidential Disaster Declaration for Individual Assistance.

Where Can I Go To Learn More About Food Assistance During Disasters?

For more information and resources, please visit FNS website at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/disaster-assistance>.

Whom at FNS Can I Contact To Discuss USDA's Disaster Nutrition Assistance Efforts?

Please contact the FNS Division of External and Governmental Affairs at fns.govaffairs@usda.gov.