USDA Foods in Disaster Response

FNA, an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), coordinates with state, local, and disaster relief organizations including Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) to provide nutrition assistance to those affected by major disasters, emergencies, and situations of distress. This disaster assistance includes USDA Foods Disaster Assistance.

State agencies can provide USDA Foods – nutritious, domestically sourced and produced foods – for mass feeding and/or household distribution during a Presidentially-declared disaster or emergency, or a situation of distress. USDA Foods programs operate in every state and U.S. territory; and statutory and regulatory authorities allow USDA Foods distributing agencies to leverage current USDA Foods inventories to serve people affected by disasters, emergencies, and situations of distress. USDA Foods inventories for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) are most commonly used.

Program Operation

Depending on the situation, USDA Foods are provided to individuals via congregate feeding or Disaster Household Distributions (DHD).

Congregate feeding involves providing USDA Foods from current program inventories to disaster relief organizations for use in preparing congregate meals served in group settings. Congregate feeding is typically provided in the immediate aftermath of a disaster when grocery stores may be closed or when people are staying in shelters and are served in a central location, such as schools, churches, community centers, or mobile kitchens.



Disaster Household Distributions (DHD) use USDA Foods from current program inventories for distribution to households for home use. In a DHD, USDA Foods are not prepared or consumed at a central location; rather, the foods are taken home to be prepared by individuals and families. DHD is typically provided for short periods of time following a disaster when traditional, commercial channels of food distribution are disrupted but when people have the ability to prepare foods.

USDA Foods Disaster Assistance is usually provided in the first days or weeks after a disaster and complements other disaster nutrition assistance, such as Disaster-SNAP (D-SNAP). Households may receive D-SNAP and USDA Foods Disaster Assistance at the same time if needed. Please see the Disaster Nutrition Assistance Timeline for additional information.

Major Disaster or Emergency

Major disasters and emergencies are defined by The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (the Stafford Act).

A **major disaster** is any natural catastrophe, in any part of the United States, which in the determination of the President causes damage of sufficient severity and magnitude to warrant major disaster assistance under the Stafford Act to supplement the efforts and available resources of states, local governments, and disaster relief organizations in alleviating the damage, loss, hardship, or suffering caused thereby.

An **emergency** is any occasion or instance for which, in the determination of the President, federal assistance is needed to supplement state and local efforts and capabilities to save lives and to protect property and public health and safety, or to lessen or avert the threat of a catastrophe in any part of the United States.

A formal request for a major disaster declaration or emergency assistance must be made by a State Governor or Chief Executive of a Tribal government to the President of the United States. When the President determines that federal assistance is needed, based on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) evaluation and recommendation, a formal Presidential Major Disaster Declaration (MDD) or Emergency Disaster Declaration (EDD) is made, and resources of the federal government become available to designated areas.

Situation of Distress

Situations of distress are defined in program regulations as a natural catastrophe or other situation that has not been declared a disaster or emergency by the President, but, in the determination of a USDA Foods distributing agency or FNA, warrants the use of USDA Foods to assist survivors of such a catastrophe or other event. Situations of distress may include, for example, a hurricane, tornado, flood, snowstorm, or explosion.

Approvals to Provide USDA Foods Disaster Assistance

Distributing agencies including ITOs do not need approval from FNA to operate **congregate feeding** operations during major disasters, emergencies, and under situations of distress that are a result of a natural event (e.g., a hurricane). However, distributing agencies must notify the FNA regional office (RO) that USDA Foods are being used in this way and must notify the FNA RO of the period of time that assistance is expected to be needed. FNA approval must be obtained to operate a congregate feeding operation longer than 30 days, and to operate congregate feeding in situations of distress that are not caused by a natural event. Distributing agencies including ITOs must request approval from FNA prior to using USDA Foods to operate a **Disaster Household Distribution**.



Additional Resources

State agencies and partner organizations can find more information in the USDA Foods in Disasters Manual and program regulations at 7 CFR 250. This includes information regarding the replacement of USDA Foods used for disaster response, and reimbursement for applicable transportation costs.

Individuals and households in needs of disaster nutrition assistance should visit the FNA Disaster Assistance for Individuals webpage.

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