

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, territories, 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 FNS Provide Food During Disasters?

FNS coordinates closely with State agencies, territories, Tribes, and their 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 voluntary 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:

<https://www.fema.gov/disaster/how-declared>

USDA does not set aside or pre-position food specifically for disasters. Disaster organizations request USDA Foods through State agencies. USDA Foods are supplied by the State agency to disaster relief organizations to provide meals for those in need.

Existing inventories of USDA Foods 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. With FNS approval, in certain limited circumstance, distributing agencies can also provide USDA Food boxes from current program inventories for distribution to

households for home consumption following a major disaster or emergency.

Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP)

State agencies may request D-SNAP after an area has received a Presidential Major 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 not already receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits may apply using a simplified application. Eligible households receive 1 month of benefits equal to the maximum allotment for a SNAP household of their size. Households not normally eligible for SNAP may qualify for D-SNAP as a result of their disaster-related expenses, such as loss of income, damage to property, relocation expenses, and, in some cases, loss of food due to power outages. 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, other nutrition assistance programs that can still operate under disaster conditions are available to assist impacted households. 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 from FNS authorized retailers. At the request of the State, FNS may approve other flexibilities and waivers in response to disasters alongside D-SNAP.

State agencies may request to extend the 10-day requirement for households to individually request replacement benefits for a disaster-related loss of food purchased with SNAP benefits.

State agencies may also request an automated mass replacements waiver that will replace a portion of currently certified households' monthly SNAP allotments if they reside in an area that was substantially impacted by a disaster. Under this waiver, households will not have the added burden of signing paperwork to individually request the replacement of benefits lost during a disaster. State agencies will need to provide data and documentation to FNS to support the automated mass replacements request.

Child Nutrition (CN) Programs

FNS may provide States with flexibility in administering CN programs during disaster situations. For example, in advance of a disaster, or in response to a State request during a disaster, FNS may allow non-congregate meal service to ensure that children and eligible adults maintain access to meals when offsite meal consumption is necessary due to disaster conditions. In addition, in the event of a natural disaster or catastrophe, FNS may temporarily authorize schools to serve meals for reimbursement that do not meet school meal pattern requirements. FNS regulations also give State agencies discretion to allow CN program operators to serve meals with an alternate form of fluid milk or without milk when the supply of milk is disrupted due to disasters or emergency conditions. Summer meal programs may provide meals to children when schools are closed due to a disaster or public emergency. Emergency shelters may also provide meals to children, either directly to those residing at the shelter or via another facility that is providing meals to temporarily displaced families.

Children in households receiving D-SNAP benefits or who are identified as homeless by a school or emergency shelter officials are eligible for school meals regardless of income, for the remainder of the school year.

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

In the event of a Presidentially Declared Major Disaster or Emergency, a public health emergency, or a supply chain disruption, FNS may provide State agencies with waivers that provide flexibility in administering the WIC

program and support the continuation of WIC benefits and services to participants. For example, FNS may approve a State agency to allow substitutions in WIC food packages when inventories of approved food items are low due to a disaster.

Infant Formula and Food

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

Civil Rights

Facilitating equal and timely access to FNS programs and services for all individuals is critical. Additionally, the ability to provide timely and accurate information and services to individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) and/or individuals with disabilities is always crucial, but it is especially paramount in disaster settings. Two relevant resources that provide additional information in these areas include:

- Emergency Planning | ADA.gov
<https://www.ada.gov/topics/emergency-planning/>
- Tips and Tools for Reaching Limited English Proficient Communities in Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery
justice.gov
<https://www.justice.gov/crt/file/885391/dl>

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

For more information and resources, please visit FNS' website at:

- Disaster Assistance | Food and Nutrition Service
<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 sm.fn.govtaffairs@usda.gov