



pennsylvania

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

BUREAU OF FOOD ASSISTANCE

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

Outlet Manual

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This manual contains information about The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) policies, rules, and regulations for Lead Agencies and their food outlets (food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters).

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

1. **mail:**
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. **fax:**
(833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. **email:**
Program.Intake@usda.gov

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

1.2 Introduction to TEFAP

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) helps supplement the diets of low-income families by providing them with emergency food assistance at no cost. TEFAP also supports American agriculture by distributing high quality, 100% American grown food purchased and

distributed by USDA. The program is administered at the federal level by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). State agencies receive the commodities, administrative funding, and provide for the overall management of the program within their state.

The amount received by each state depends on the low-income and unemployed population. States provide the food to local agencies (Lead Agencies) which then distribute the commodities to emergency food providers (Outlets/Local Agencies) who directly serve eligible recipients.

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) has been designated the state agency responsible for program administration. The TEFAP contact within PDA is the Bureau of Food Assistance (BFA) and can be reached at 1-800-468-2433 or RA-Fooddist@pa.gov.

Federal regulations pertaining to TEFAP can be found in 7 CFR, Part 251 and 7 CFR, Part 250.

This manual is intended for TEFAP outlets, which are agencies that have contracts directly with the TEFAP County Lead Agencies, and not with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, regarding the distribution of USDA Foods for TEFAP.

1.3 Agreements

PDA has contract agreements with all 67 counties in the state, referred to as County Lead Agencies, which coordinate the program at the local level throughout Pennsylvania. These County Lead Agencies, in conjunction with PDA, have developed a network of contracted Outlet Agencies that are responsible for the actual distribution of these foods to needy persons. The Lead Agencies manage program requirements and coordinate USDA Foods distribution with staff and volunteers at food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters, referred to as TEFAP outlets. All TEFAP outlets must be public or private non-profit organizations, as recognized by the United States Internal Revenue Service with 501(c)(3) status. TEFAP outlets must have a contract on file with the County Lead Agency to receive USDA Foods.

A directory of the County Lead agencies can be found on the PDA Bureau of Food Assistance website www.agriculture.pa.gov/Food/food_assistance.

1.4 USDA Foods

Each year the USDA provides TEFAP funds to each state for the purchase of USDA Foods. Foods purchased using these funds are referred to as "Entitlement."

USDA Foods, which consist of 100% American-grown foods, may include meats, vegetables, fruit, juices, dairy, beans, cereals, and nuts. Each year the USDA releases a menu of available entitlement foods from which states can order. TEFAP Lead agencies are surveyed yearly by PDA for their recommendation on foods to order.

In addition to providing Entitlement TEFAP, which includes non-surplus food products, USDA also periodically makes surplus food products available for TEFAP distribution. These TEFAP

foods are referred to as “Bonus.” The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) purchases these surplus domestic agricultural products as part of its price stabilization program. Pennsylvania receives a portion of these Bonus products for distribution to contracted TEFAP agencies.

USDA Foods are high quality, nutritious foods and are an important supplement to existing emergency food assistance resources. The standards in this guide about food storage, distribution, and food safety must be followed to maintain the quality of the USDA Foods for public distribution.

2. TEFAP Outlets

2.1 Types and Functions of TEFAP Outlets

Soup Kitchen: Soup kitchens maintain an established feeding operation to provide food in the form of prepared meals to needy persons on a regular basis as part of their normal activities. Soup kitchens also maintain regular days and hours of operations throughout the month providing privately and federally donated foods.

Homeless Shelter: Homeless shelters maintain on-site feeding programs serving the homeless, on regular days and hours of operations throughout the month. Shelters for battered women and children and runaway children may also qualify as homeless shelters.

Pantry: Pantries distribute TEFAP, foods purchased using funds from Pennsylvania’s State Food Purchase Program, and/or privately purchased or donated food to low income and unemployed households, to relieve food insecurity and emergency distress situations. Pantries maintain scheduled days and hours of operation during the month.

Needy Feeding Agencies: Needy Feeding Agencies serve meals to the needy but not necessarily homeless persons. To receive USDA Foods, a Needy Feeding Agency must document to the satisfaction of their Lead Agency that their organization does serve predominately needy persons. An example is a senior housing complex.

**** *Group Home:* A group home is any private or non-public housing corporation or institutional facility for profit that provides living quarters and meals. This also entails a domicile for unrelated persons such as a retirement home or a long-term mental care facility. ****Group homes are NOT eligible to participate in TEFAP.****

2.2 How to Receive USDA Foods

If an agency meets PDA’s definition of a TEFAP outlet and wishes to receive USDA Foods, the organization must sign a contract with only one County Lead Agency. Exceptions can be made for agencies supporting multiple counties. The contract should state the responsibilities of the Lead Agency and the TEFAP outlet.

As required by FNS 113-1, TEFAP outlets must adhere to providing the same level of service to participants regardless of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Outlets that are interested in receiving TEFAP foods must be a public or private organization, governmental agency, or a not-for-profit organization with a 501(c)3 tax-exempt status or church affiliation. The site must be considered safe and appropriate for storage and distribution of USDA Foods. Handicap accessibility should be provided. However, if the site cannot be assessable, the outlet must identify ways in which appropriate accommodations can be made for participants.

TEFAP outlets are subject to inspections by the Lead Agency, PDA, and USDA staff. All storage facilities for USDA Foods must be located in Pennsylvania. Private residences may not be used for storage and/or distribution of USDA Foods.

2.3 TEFAP Outlet Responsibilities

- TEFAP outlets shall distribute food to income eligible households, including food from sources other than USDA/TEFAP to relieve situations of emergency and distress.
- Outlets shall maintain regularly scheduled and consistent operating hours for TEFAP distribution and provide emergency access to food.
- Food distribution must take place at least once per month. Every effort should be made to set distribution hours to accommodate participants' schedules – including weekend and evening hours. Outlets should make every effort to be open at least one day per week to ensure households have reasonable access to food.

Outlets shall publicize the days and hours of operations. A sign must be posted at the physical location of the site to identify it.

- Civil Rights “And Justice for All” posters should be posted, and Civil Rights Complaint forms should be available and easily accessible.
- Civil Rights training should be completed annually by all workers and volunteers who interact directly with participants.
- Outlets should ideally have at least one freezer, one refrigerator, good quality shelving, and an adequate, well-maintained facility, storage area, and equipment.
- Outlets must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, which requires places of public accommodation to provide goods and services to people with disabilities on an equal basis with the rest of the general public.
- TEFAP providers may not require any religious activities or religious instruction for participants to receive food or prepared meal containing USDA Foods. If a provider is operated by or is housed in a place of worship, the Notice of Beneficiary Rights and a list of alternative outlets must be posted.
- Outlets should have a geographically defined service area, such as a school district, county, zip code, or neighborhood. Service areas help ensure that as many low-income

families as possible in each county have access to emergency food without duplicating services.

- Outlets must properly store, handle, and distribute all USDA Foods. Outlets are fully accountable for any loss of product received.
- All USDA Foods must be stored separately from other privately donated or purchased foods, cleaning supplies, and/or chemicals and must be labeled as USDA Foods. A separate inventory record for USDA Foods must also be maintained.
- TEFAP commodities may not be sold, and contributions may not be accepted or requested in lieu of receipt of food. Selling or trading of commodities for services for volunteerism is prohibited.

2.4 PDA Reviews

The purpose of the review process is to evaluate the programs operations, review record keeping procedures, and to ensure that proper health and safety standards are being followed and maintained.

PDA site reviews can be announced or unannounced and should occur at least once every three years. However, reviews are subject to occur more frequently if a complaint is received or another non-compliance issue occurs. Lead Agencies should make Outlet staff and volunteers be aware of TEFAP policies and regulations and instruct them to provide access to records and facilities to PDA staff and/or USDA staff during such reviews.

3. Recipient Eligibility and Application Process

3.1 Eligibility Determination

Pennsylvania households are eligible to receive USDA Foods at participating TEFAP outlets if the total gross income for the household does not exceed 185% of the federal poverty levels provided on the current year TEFAP Self-Declaration of Need form.

A “household” is defined as a single individual or group of related or unrelated individuals who are living as one economic unit and purchase and prepare food together. If it is self-reported that multiple households live together at the same residence, each household is eligible for their own commodity distribution.

Youth who are disconnected from a household and provide for their own basic needs are allowed to use TEFAP outlets and must be offered the same level of service as all other users.

Foster children or wards of the state living with and under the charge of related or unrelated individual(s) are included as members of the household with which they reside, and do not qualify as separate households. TEFAP eligibility guidelines do not require the host family to include, in their total household income, funds received for keeping foster children.

TEFAP outlets must serve homeless participants with the same level of service as all participants receive.

3.2 Application Process

The application process requires the participant to complete the Self-Declaration of Need form with their name, household address, the number of people residing in their household, and an indication of their annual income. The participants self-declare eligibility upon signing the application.

3.3 Self-Declaration of Need Forms

The Self-Declaration of Needs form is updated by PDA every June 1st with the new income guidelines. The forms are made available on the PDA website and are available in several languages. All participants are required to complete and sign a new Self-Declaration of Need form beginning July 1st even if a Self-Declaration of Need form was already completed in the past year. All Self-Declaration of Needs forms are required to have the non-discrimination statement and proxy form included on the backside of the form or stapled to the self-declaration of needs form. ****The Self-Declaration of Needs form may not be altered in any way.****

3.4 Proxies

The proxy form is intended for participants who are unable to pick up TEFAP commodities due to disability, health concerns, transportation issues, or conflicting work schedules. The participant must complete the form and submit it to the outlet where the commodities are being received. Ideally, proxy forms would be submitted at the same time as a participant submits their annual Self-Declaration of Need form.

3.5 Residency

Participants must reside in the state of Pennsylvania to be eligible for TEFAP. Participants should also live within the geographic area supported by the TEFAP outlet. Those who live outside of the TEFAP outlet's serving area, but are still PA residents, may be served if the agency has sufficient product, but the client should be advised of the correct location for future reference. Residency is based on self-declaration. No identification is needed as the physical presence in the area and statement of address on the TEFAP Self-Declaration of Need form supports statement that they live in the area.

If any homeless person or those with disabilities lack documentation of identity or residence, the distribution site may indicate "NONE" in the address section. Individuals fitting these criteria are still eligible to receive TEFAP. Staff and volunteers are encouraged to refer any homeless person to the local social services agencies which may assist the individual with obtaining documentation or other needed services.

3.6 Documentation

TEFAP regulations prohibit agencies from collecting income documentation from program participants. Instead, individuals and families establish their eligibility for annual enrollment through self-declaration that they meet the current income guidelines. Households are also not required to show proof of dependents. The participants must sign the self-declaration form to self-validate that they meet the program guidelines annually.

Recipients of prepared meals are considered needy and are not subject to income requirements.

If an agency collects income information for other services and/or programs, forms must identify the information as “not required for TEFAP participation” or “optional.” This information must not be collected at the same time and place self-declaration forms for TEFAP are being completed.

Social security numbers, photo IDs, or other forms of identification may not be collected as part of the TEFAP eligibility screening, in compliance with the Privacy Act of 1974.

3.7 Identification

TEFAP outlet staff and volunteers may request to verify ID from the household member who is providing the signature for the receipt of USDA Foods. If the recipient does not have identification, they are still eligible for TEFAP and should receive the USDA Foods. Proxies **are** required to show identification prior to picking up the USDA foods. An acceptable ID can be a driver’s license, state ID card, form of picture ID, or any other form that proves identity.

If any homeless person or those with disabilities lack documentation of identity or residence, the distribution site may indicate “NONE” in the address section. Individuals fitting these criteria are still eligible to receive TEFAP. Staff and volunteers are encouraged to refer any homeless person to the local social services agencies which may assist the individual with obtaining documentation or other needed services.

3.8 Signature Logs

Participants must sign for the receipt of TEFAP products each time they receive food. Signatures can be obtained either on paper forms or electronically. The participants take responsibility for compliance with income guidelines when they sign for receipt of USDA Foods. Signature logs are legal documents and must be kept on file for three years plus the current fiscal year.

3.9 Participant Confidentiality

Participant confidentiality must be acknowledged and always maintained. Participants seeking food assistance are providing household information at the time they complete the Self-Declaration of Need form. This information is confidential, and every step should be taken to

ensure that the information is protected. Only immediate staff and volunteers should have access to this information. Outlets must ensure that there are procedures in place to respect participant confidentiality when seeking food assistance. Participant names should not be called out during the food distribution process, nor should participants' names be visible to others during the signing in process. Participants' files must be maintained in locked files and/or in rooms that can be locked and are secure from unauthorized entry. Files must not be taken home or to other locations except as required for travel to TEFAP distribution sites. During such travel, files should be transported in such a way to maintain confidentiality and must be in the possession of staff at all times.

5. TEFAP Distribution

5.1 Food Packages vs Participant Choice

Food products may be pre-packaged or made available to participants through a client choice procedure. With client choice, clients can choose from a variety of options which foods to include in their food package. With either option, participants may choose to decline food that will not be consumed by the household in a timely manner. It is up to the TEFAP outlet to determine which option works best for their operation.

5.2 Guidelines for Food Packages

Food packages should be as nutritionally balanced as possible and should ideally contain a three to five day supply that is adjusted for the size of the household. The actual amount and type of food in each package will depend on exactly what and how much food is in storage. Outlets should ask whether participants have dietary restrictions and, if possible, provide foods that meet the cultural, dietary, and religious needs of the household. Appropriate foods should be considered for individuals with reduced ability to prepare foods (i.e., persons with disability, inadequate cooking facilities, and for homeless individuals).

USDA Foods are generally distributed based on the size of the household, as shown below:

- 1-4 family members: 1 package
- 5-8 family members: 2 packages
- 9-12 family members: 3 packages

6. TEFAP Prohibited Activity

6.1 Sale of Food

USDA requires agencies to distribute commodities to eligible households at no charge. Selling food products or trading food products for services is strictly prohibited. Violators are subject to Federal and/or State prosecution.

6.2 Political and Religious Activity

TEFAP Outlets may not engage in political or religious activities when distributing food. Political candidates may not make appearances during distributions and campaign signs and materials may not be evident. Bags or boxes advertising candidates or political causes may not be used for food packages containing commodities. Political and/or religious materials may not be included inside or with food packages for distribution. Distribution sites may not require or pressure participants to attend political meetings or religious services or join an organization as a condition of receiving assistance.

6.3 Commodities as Compensation

Volunteers and staff are entitled to USDA products only if they meet income eligibility guidelines. Eligible volunteers and staff shall not be given extra food to encourage help. Preferential treatment of staff and volunteers is strictly prohibited. Staff and volunteers at meal sites and shelters may receive meals prepared with TEFAP products if it is the outlet's practice to serve meals to workers and the site serves predominately low-income people.

6.4 Repackaging Food

Repackaging of TEFAP commodities is prohibited.

6.5 Discrimination

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

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6.6 Disaster Assistance

TEFAP requirements are not to be waived or modified by a TEFAP outlet in the event of a natural disaster. Any variations from normal distribution must come from the Federal level in the event of such emergency. USDA Foods may not be distributed as part of a disaster food distribution without permission from the State and Federal level.

7. Food Storage and Handling

7.1 Basic Storage Requirements

All TEFAP outlets must:

- Maintain food within optimal storage conditions, including monitoring and logging temperatures of freezers, refrigerators, and dry storage.
- Store food on racks or pallets that keep it at least eight inches of the floor, six inches from the wall, and one foot from the ceiling to allow for proper air circulation.
- Keep rooms and shelving clean, well-maintained, and free of toxic items (cleaning supplies, paint, hazardous chemicals, etc.) that could contaminate food.
- Keep storage areas free of pests such as rodents and insects. Outlets must either contract with a professional pest control company or regularly inspect storage areas themselves, taking all necessary steps to prevent and safely control any infestations that might occur.
- Insulate any heat generating pipes or ducts.
- Ensure the food storage area is secure to prevent access by unauthorized persons.
- Notify the Lead Agency of any USDA Foods lost due to power outages or stolen due to theft for instructions on proper procedures.
- Store USDA Foods separately from other privately donated or purchased foods and label the product as such.
- Keep a separate inventory record of USDA Foods.

7.2 Temperature

If food is delivered to the site for only the day of distribution, food must be accounted for by the Lead Agency and the site. USDA Foods must be kept in a manner that maintains temperature, as needed, and must be safeguarded against theft.

Correct temperature control is essential to maintain food quality, nutrient content, and control bacterial growth. Daily monitoring of temperatures is necessary to ensure adequate storage conditions.

Dry Storage

Many items such as canned goods, baking supplies, grains, and cereals may be held safely in dry storage areas. The guidelines below should be followed:

- Keep dry storage areas clean with good ventilation to control humidity and prevent the growth of mold and bacteria.
- Store dry foods at 50°F for maximum shelf life. However, 70°F is adequate for dry storage of most products.
- Place a thermometer on the wall in the dry storage area.
- Check the temperature of the storeroom daily.
- Store foods away from sources of heat and light, which decrease shelf life.
- Store foods off the floor and away from walls to allow for adequate air circulation.

Refrigerated Storage

Refrigeration increases shelf life of most products. Most importantly, refrigeration slows bacterial growth. Optimal refrigerated storage conditions can be achieved by following these guidelines:

- Maintain refrigerated storage spaces at 32-40°F.
- Make thermometers readily observable, easily readable, and accurate to +/-3°F.
- Position the temperature sensor to register the warmest air in the refrigerated space to ensure adequate cooling.
- Establish the correct refrigerator temperature by placing a thermometer in a glass of water in the middle of the refrigerator. Wait five to eight hours. If the temperature is not 38-40°F, adjust the temperature control. Check again after five to eight hours.
- Ensure that refrigerators have enough open, slotted shelving to allow for air circulation around shelves and refrigerator walls to maintain proper food temperatures.
- Ensure that doors have a good seal and close tightly to maintain the temperature and the efficiency of the unit. Additionally, keep doors closed as much as possible.
- A back-up appliance thermometer should be kept in the refrigerated unit in case of a power outage. If a power outage occurs, any foods held at 41°F or higher for more than two hours should not be consumed.

Freezer Storage

Freezers should be used to store frozen food when it is received. Optimal frozen storage conditions can be achieved by following these guidelines:

- Maintain freezer storage spaces at 0°F or below.
- Position the temperature sensor to represent the actual storage temperature or place several thermometers in the unit to ensure accuracy and consistency.
- Establish the correct temperature in the freezer by placing a thermometer between frozen food packages. Wait five to eight hours. If the temperature is not 0-2°F, adjust the freezer temperature control. Check again after five to eight hours.
- Ensure that freezers have enough open, slotted shelving to allow for air circulation around shelves and walls to maintain adequate food temperatures.
- Ensure that doors have a good seal and close tightly to prevent heat gain. Additionally, keep doors closed as much as possible.
- A back-up appliance thermometer should also be kept in the freezer unit in case of a power outage. If there is a power outage, it is important to keep foods grouped together to retain the cold and to keep the door closed as much as possible. If the freezer has maintained a temperature of 0°F or below up to the time that the power returns, the food is safe. Again, foods held at 41°F or higher for more than two hours should not be consumed.

References

- [Food Safety in Schools](#)
- [Food Safety and Inspection Service](#)
- [Food Safety.Gov](#)

8. USDA Foods Complaints

8.1 What to Report

Any out of condition TEFAP products should be reported to the Bureau of Food Assistance.

Out of condition products include:

- Contamination/spoilage (odor, texture, mold, discoloration, flavor, etc.)
- Foreign material (bugs, metal, etc.)
- Defective packaging (leaking cans, rust, dented boxed, crushed cans, etc.)
- Poor quality

8.2 How to Report

Any complaints regarding TEFAP product should be submitted to the Bureau of Food Assistance. A Commodity Complaint Form should be completed, and pictures should be taken. The pictures should include the reported issue as well as the box and packaging. Any identifying information that can be submitted is extremely helpful. The complaint will be sent to the USDA for resolution. The product should not be disposed of until approval is received from the USDA. Exceptions can be made if the product is leaking and would attract mold or bugs.

9. Monitoring Requirements

9.1 Lead Agencies

To meet USDA monitoring requirements, PDA conducts annual reviews of at least 25% of the agencies that have a signed agreement with PDA to participate in TEFAP. Each agency must be reviewed at least once every four years. Lead agencies must review their distribution sites and pantries at least once annually. The purpose of the on-site visit is to ensure the site complies with all food storage, record keeping, and program operation requirements identified in this manual, as well as state and federal regulations.

9.2 TEFAP Outlets

USDA regulations require PDA to review 20 or 10%, whichever is fewer, of all outlets that receive USDA Foods through an agreement with a Lead Agency.

10: Outreach & Referral

10.1 Outreach

TEFAP outlets should partner with Lead Agencies to conduct outreach that includes the program name (TEFAP), the site's name, address, distribution dates, and hours of operation. Posters, pamphlets, and public service announcements, including newsletters and social media, can be used to make potential participants aware of the availability of USDA Foods. Word-of-mouth should not be the only method of public outreach. The USDA non-discrimination statement must be included on all printed materials. Outreach to potential participants is especially important when an outlet has a large service area or serves people in more than one community.

10.2 Referral

Households seeking food assistance are frequently eligible for other assistance programs that may provide much needed resources and reduce the need for emergency food. This includes nutrition programs (SNAP, WIC, school meals, meals-on-wheels) as well as non-nutrition programs like health care, energy assistance, cash assistance, childcare, disability assistance, and tax credits. Participation in non-nutrition programs can improve household food security by reducing other expenses and leaving more money in the household budget to purchase food.