



Disaster Planning

Idaho School Nutrition Reference Guide

OVERVIEW

The mission of the Food Distribution Division of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is to strengthen the nation's nutrition safety net by providing food and nutrition assistance to school children and families, and supporting American agriculture by distributing high quality, 100% American-grown USDA Foods. To achieve this mission, the FNS Food Distribution Program coordinates the distribution of USDA Foods to many of the public and private schools and institutions that provide meals to students. Having enough to eat is critical for life and the USDA Foods program is a resource that is available to ensure that the basic needs of individuals impacted by a disaster can be met. In an emergency, USDA can authorize states to release food stocks to disaster relief agencies to feed people at shelters and mass feeding sites.

If the President declares a disaster, states can, with USDA approval, distribute commodity foods directly to households that are in need as a result of the emergency. Such direct distribution takes place when normal commercial food supply channels such as grocery stores have been disrupted, damaged or destroyed, or can't function for some reason such as lack of electricity. If deemed necessary and appropriate, State agencies (SA) can work through their FNS regional office to request food from USDA contracted warehouse inventories. Federal inventories of USDA Foods purchased for distribution to households are maintained by USDA in commercial warehouses.

TERMINOLOGY

Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) – A branch under USDA that administers the food and nutrition assistance programs, providing regulations and guidance materials.

Situation of distress - A natural catastrophe or other situation that has not been declared a disaster or emergency by the President, but, in the judgment of the State agency or FNS, warrants the use of USDA Foods.

USDA Foods - Food products purchased by USDA and distributed to the NSLP to help reduce food costs for food service operations, as well as remove surplus domestic food from the marketplace.

WHAT IS DISASTER PLANNING?

USDA Foods are a valuable resource provided to the nation as a result of taxpayer dollars. It is important to recognize that the foods procured with these funds are intended to benefit persons in need, such as congregated meal feeding during a presidentially declared disaster.

Notification and approval by the Idaho State Department of Education is required before food items can be released to disaster organizations under such circumstances; the Idaho State Department of Education must notify the Western Regional Office of the USDA.

During or following a disaster:

- The State agency (Idaho State Department of Education) may provide additional USDA Foods from state storage, as necessary and if available.
- The recipient agency (RA) / school district or the disaster organization must maintain a sign-in log during disaster feeding. A copy of the sign-in log may be requested to verify meal count.
- The RA should maintain records on all equipment, labor, and non-USDA Foods used, and may file claims with the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) in the instance of a presidentially declared Federal disaster.
- The RA and/or disaster organization must report, ten days following the end of the meal service, the type and number of meals served.
- The RA must report, within ten days following the end of the last meal service, the inventory of all USDA Foods used.
- The State agency would give organizations permission to contact the school food service representatives to use and track USDA Foods. The school food service representative would in turn provide this information to the State agency. If it is determined USDA Foods will be used, foods provided through the National School Lunch Program should be used whenever possible. These larger pack sizes are easier for disaster feeding organizations to prepare congregate meals, and they are easier for FNS to replace or reimburse. USDA Foods contained in school district warehouses located close to the disaster should be used first for congregate feeding.

Requirements associated with use of USDA Foods:

- The specific FNS program from which the USDA Foods are taken will depend on the needs of the non-governmental organization (like American Red Cross or Salvation Army), the scale of the disaster, accessible inventories and available funding. Local USDA Foods inventories from school kitchens and food banks can be sources of supplemental USDA Foods used by the authorized organizations, if available, but the request must go through the State agency before any food is accessed for disaster response.
- **There are penalties for the misuse of USDA Foods.**

Once USDA Food inventory leaves the USDA's possession and goes to a congregate feeding site, "leftover" inventory should NOT go back to the outlet or warehouse that originally donated the USDA Foods. It must remain with the disaster feeding organization. After USDA Food inventory leaves a distributing agency's possession, the agency has no control over how it is handled. Care should be taken that reasonable amounts of USDA Foods are sent to feeding sites to prevent gross overages. Local USDA Foods inventory should be factored in first when calculating a feeding site's long term needs.

Keep Food Safe

- Always keep meat, poultry, fish, and eggs refrigerated at or below 40 °F and frozen food at or below 0 °F. This may be difficult when the power is out. Keep cooler and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature.
- Shelf-stable food, boxed or canned goods should be part of a planned emergency food supply.
- Undamaged, commercially prepared foods in all-metal cans and retort pouches (for example, flexible, shelf-stable juice or sealed pouches) can be saved if very specific steps are taken.
- Food in cans or jars may appear to be okay, but the heat from a fire can activate food spoilage bacteria if the heat is extreme.
- Discard any food that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with flood water.

Disaster categories

It is important to know the difference between the types of disasters to ensure that all requirements are met prior to the distribution of USDA Foods.

- A major disaster declaration provides a full range of long-term Federal assistance programs for individuals and public infrastructure.
- An emergency declaration is more limited in scope, and without some of the long-term Federal recovery programs available in a major disaster declaration.
- Situation of distress is when a natural catastrophe or other situation has not been declared a disaster emergency by the President, but assistance can still be available.

For situations of distress, the State agency has the authority to release USDA Foods for congregate feeding for up to 30 days. Subsequently, if the President issues a major disaster or emergency declaration, the State agency has the authority to use USDA Foods for congregate feeding for as long as needed.

The State agency should be contacted immediately upon a determination that the “possibility” of community feeding may be warranted. Keep in mind that CNP (Child Nutrition Programs) is a division of the Idaho State Department of Education and there are people in place that have access to state decision makers such as the governor, mayors, senators and congressional members. Having direct communications with these individuals can allow for quicker relief and potentially extended support.

FNS will do its best to make timely replacements to prevent disruption in ongoing service to the programs from which USDA Foods are taken. It should be remembered that, while replacement is guaranteed in a presidentially declared disaster or emergency, replacement is not guaranteed in situations of distress.

Required Information

The Idaho State Department of Education requires the following information regarding a disaster situation as soon as possible:

- Description of the disaster situation
- Number of people requiring meals and the time of the meal service
- Quantity and types of food needed for group meal service
- Number and location of sites for group meal service
- Method of meal service (organization and facility)
- Disaster relief organization(s) involved

Upon approval by the Idaho State Department of Education – Child Nutrition Programs, USDA Foods would be released to authorized disaster organizations. A signed receipt/inventory is required for all items. USDA Foods will be made available based on the information provided by the disaster organizations.

State Emergency Notification System (SENS)

Idaho has recently incorporated a technology solution that is an exceptional tool for sending out mass communications when rapid notification is warranted. The USDA State Emergency Notification System (SENS) is a tool that allows State agencies to rapidly communicate critical food recall information to Recipient Agencies so they can remove contaminated food from distribution, and keep kids and families safe. The system can also be utilized for disaster planning and any other critical communications.

WHY IS DISASTER PLANNING IMPORTANT?

Only through proper planning can the effects of a local, state or national disaster be mitigated. It is not just ‘natural’ disasters (wild fires, flooding, winter weather storms, earthquake damage, etc.) that could be disasters; nuclear/radiological, pandemics, cybersecurity and terrorism are real threats, too, and no matter the situation, food service professionals can serve a much needed role in mitigating human suffering.

RESOURCES

Additional resources may be available for this topic. Please check the Idaho School Nutrition Reference Guide website for copies of manuals, user guides, and helpful links to relevant subject matters.

For Questions Contact

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