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# USDA-Donated Foods

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is charged with administering the Commodity Distribution Program. Through the Commodity Distribution Program, USDA purchases food through direct appropriations from Congress and under surplus removal and price support activities. The foods are distributed to state agencies for use by eligible schools. Schools and institutions participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP) and the Summer Program may receive USDA-donated commodity meats, vegetables, fruits, grains and dairy products.

## Administered by Texas Department of Agriculture

The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) administers the Commodity Distribution Program. Contact the department at:

Texas Department of Agriculture  
Commodity Distribution Unit  
P.O. Box 12847  
Austin, TX 78711  
(512) 420-2412  
Commodity Complaint Hotline 1-800-446-6991 or  
e-mail at [usda-fns-commoditycomplaints@fns.usda.gov](mailto:usda-fns-commoditycomplaints@fns.usda.gov)

## Available Commodity Food Items

USDA's Web site at [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov) provides a list and estimate for commodities expected to be available for schools during the applicable school/fiscal year. The availability of these commodities depends on market conditions. Each school district should check with TDA to ensure the availability of a certain commodity.

## Commodity Specifications and Purchasing Information

Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) purchases meats, poultry, fish, fruit, vegetables, egg products, dry beans, and tree nuts for distribution in the National School Lunch Program. Products are purchased through competitive bids or negotiated contracts. These purchase programs assist farmers, commodity producers, and processors by helping to maintain stable commodity prices. Product specifications can be found on the AMS Web site at [www.ams.usda.gov](http://www.ams.usda.gov).

## Use and Sale of USDA-Donated Foods

There are restrictions on the use and sale of commodities and products containing USDA commodities. A district may use USDA commodities across all programs as long as the income accrues to the nonprofit Child Nutrition (CN) account.

Local policies should address type and quantities that can be released without affecting the financial accountability and quality of the CN program. Good management practices ensure that usage be carefully monitored.

## Monies from Sales Containing Commodity Ingredients

Funds derived from sales of food items using any donated commodities must accrue to the CN program.

## Use of Commodities in Disaster Feeding

The school district must make foods available to designated agencies, including the Red Cross, Civil Defense, and Salvation Army, if the agency requests them for disaster feeding and has the facilities to prepare and serve these foods. Donated foods are made available by USDA in emergency situations whether they are stored in schools, school warehouses, or area warehouses. Proper receipts should be on file for all foods released to one of the designated agencies from a warehouse or school. All foods must be accounted for that are used in schools operating as shelters. This is very important in assuring that the foods are replaced or replaced in value.

Districts will receive commodity entitlement credit for commercially labeled or USDA labeled commodities that are used during nationally declared disasters. The credit may not exceed the lesser of the actual commodities supplied or the amount of the commodity that the district received during the past 12 months.

Refer to the “Other Operational Issues—Disaster Feeding” section for additional information.

## Use of Commodities in the Summer Food Service Program

Districts that operate the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) are required to report the disposition of commodities allocated to the SFSP at the end of the SFSP operations.

## Commodity Fact Sheets

On USDA’s Web site at [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov), there are more than 100 fact sheets about commodity food items. Each sheet provides basic information that will help Child Nutrition personnel make the best use of donated foods. Additionally, this information can simplify ordering and serve as a ready reference for the nutrient content of USDA’s commodities. Each fact sheet includes the following information:

- *Product description* lists the contents as well as the USDA grade, variety, cut, packing medium and other applicable information.
- *Pack size* describes the packaging of the commodity such as case weight, number and weight of individual bags, can size, and number of cans per case.
- *Yield* tells the number of servings per pound/portion or per can, as well as additional information.
- *Uses* provides a variety of menu ideas and serving suggestions for the commodity.
- *Storage* suggests where, how, and how long to store the commodity.
- *Nutritional Values* are included for a specified portion of each commodity. Values are listed for calories, protein, carbohydrate, fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, vitamin A, vitamin C, iron, calcium, sodium and dietary fiber.

## **Commodity Recipes**

A recipe archive has been established and can be found at [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov). Recipes can be researched by either food groups or menu category.

## **“Best If Used By” Dates**

Pack dates will be lost, since they are not required on commercial labels. Pack dates were the basis for USDA’s “Best if Used By Dates” Guidance; therefore, this guidance will no longer be available. Districts should use good inventory practices.

## **Inventory Requirements**

Districts are no longer required to maintain a separate inventory of USDA commodities. The district may maintain a single inventory that includes both USDA commodities and purchased food products. As always, a district must maintain good inventory management and control practices.

Districts will need to value their inventory for three different situations.

- Purchased products for which the district receives no USDA commodity equivalent. An example of products that a school would purchase commercially but would not receive as a USDA commodity would be condiments, such as catsup and mustard. It is suggested that the district base the inventory value for such items on the net purchase price for that item.
- USDA commodity products for which the district purchases no commercial equivalent. Examples of USDA commodities that schools receive but usually do not purchase commercially include pouched salmon, frozen diced chicken, and prune puree. TDA will continue to provide the district with the value of USDA commodities, which is based on the actual cost per pound.
- Products that the district purchases as well as receives as commodities. Canned fruits and vegetables are examples of such products. Base the value of these products on the net cost to purchase such products, on the commodity value provided by TDA, or the district could also use an average or weighted average of the two values.

Districts are no longer required to take an annual physical inventory for TDA.

## Care and Storage of Commodities

School districts receiving USDA commodities should take prudent and reasonable care of these commodities. This would include but is not limited to the following:

1. Check each delivery of food for possible shortages and damage before the foods are accepted.
  - Refrigerated products must be examined to ensure the temperature of the product is adequate and they are in good condition. This is especially essential for frozen foods.
  - Canned foods must be examined to determine if there are any damaged, disfigured, or discolored cases or cans, which might indicate spoilage or deterioration.
  - Foods subject to insect infestation must be thoroughly inspected.
  - Foods found to be out of condition must be segregated from other foods and handled in accordance with the procedures outlined in your contract.
2. Adequate safeguards must be taken to protect donated foods from infestation in your facility.
  - There must be no external openings in the structure of the building where foods are stored, which would allow rodent and insect infestation.
  - Extermination must be performed at a minimum of once a month. Extermination may not be an adequate safeguard against infestation; therefore, fumigation should be instituted when extermination is inadequate. A record of extermination/fumigation must be kept.
3. Freezer/cooler checks. It is recommended that district personnel be assigned to make freezer/cooler checks every other day as a minimum and maintain a log of checks. The log should contain:
  - The exact date of the check.
  - The exact time of the check.
  - The recorded temperature.
  - The signature of the person conducting the check.

This practice should be continued during the summer vacation or any other vacation period. If it is not possible to make these checks on weekends, then they should be made late Friday afternoons and early Monday mornings. Refer to the end of this section for a sample temperature log.

4. Secure locks should be placed on freezer/coolers and all doors of buildings where commodities are stored. This will help prevent theft and vandalism.
5. Donated foods must be stored off the floor on pallets or shelving and away from the wall for proper ventilation.
6. The following temperatures should be maintained:

<i>Items</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Recommended Temperatures</i>
Frozen Foods	Meat and Poultry	0° F or below
Cooler Foods	Cheese	32 to 35° F
Grain Products	Flour, Cornmeal	50° F or below
Dry Storage	Canned Goods	70° F or below

7. Only order quantities that can be properly stored and utilized without waste. Except in unusual circumstances, an inventory of no more than a six-month supply of commodities on hand should be maintained.

## Storage of Perishable Foods During the Summer

All USDA-donated foods should be utilized during the school year. If foods cannot be used or transferred, it becomes necessary to store foods in schools during the summer months. Prudent management requires proper storage practices be followed. Infestation, spoilage, deterioration, and contamination of foods usually occur because of refrigeration/freezer malfunction and improper storage practices. Listed below are desirable storage practices to follow when storing perishable foods during the summer:

1. Store foods in refrigerators/freezers that are thoroughly cleaned and dried, operating properly, and in good repair.
2. Place foods on shelves with a one- or two-inch space left between the walls and food containers to ensure proper air circulation. In walk-in units, place foods on dunnage platforms rather than directly on the floor and stack foods properly to prevent falling and possible damage.
3. It is recommended that temperatures in the refrigerators and freezers should be taken and recorded daily. The cooler/freezer should be checked every other day, and a temperature log maintained (optional). At a minimum the temperature log should include the following information: date, time, temperature, and the signature of the person making the check.

Thermometers and other refrigeration equipment should be checked periodically to ensure they are operating properly. It is desirable that this be done at least twice each week. Malfunctioning equipment should be repaired immediately.

Refrigerators and freezers should be equipped with an alarm system for easy detection of high temperatures and power failures. Refrigerators and freezers should be checked immediately after a power failure to make sure they are operating properly and stored foods are still in good condition.

4. Grain products should be stored between 36 degrees Fahrenheit and 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Higher temperatures may increase the likelihood of insect infestation. Grain products stored at temperatures between 60 degrees Fahrenheit and 90 degrees Fahrenheit are especially attractive to insects and thus provide an excellent environment for insect egg hatching and development. Since these and even higher temperatures are common in the dry storage facilities in our state, insect infestation has been a major cause in the loss of grain products stored in dry storage over the summer months. All USDA-donated grain products held over summer months from May through September should be kept in refrigerated storage.
5. All refrigerators and freezers should be locked during the summer months. The keys should be left with the individual in charge of the school. Only authorized personnel should be allowed to check the refrigerators and freezers to take the temperatures.
6. An effective insect and rodent control program should be maintained in all schools that store foods during the summer.

## **Refusal of Commodity Delivery**

If the warehouse delivers requested commodities and the district decides later that the entire order is not needed, the district is still responsible for the delivery charges of the original request. If the warehouse is responsible for delivering excess commodities, the district is not responsible for those delivery charges.

## **Transferring Donated Foods**

TDA will no longer be involved with arranging or accounting for commodities that a district wishes to transfer to another district. A district may transfer commodities to other participating districts without TDA approval. However, if commodities are transferred to another CNP organization, the district is not due any additional entitlement and a record of transfer should be maintained.

## **Food Alert**

All school districts must be notified when there is an urgent concern about the safety, wholesomeness, and condition of donated foods or Child Nutrition (CN) label products. Notification will be made expeditiously either verbally or in writing stating “This is a Food Alert”—a potential hazard has been discovered. An immediate “hold” must be placed on all products covered by this alert until advice on proper disposition is received. After instructions are received from the USDA, notification will be provided either releasing the foods for program use or providing instructions for the disposition of unsafe products.

## **Commodity Losses**

A district will no longer report commodity losses to TDA and TDA will not require a district to replace lost commodities or pay TDA for the loss of commodities. A district will be responsible for ensuring commodities are safeguarded.

## **Food Service Management Companies Utilization of Commodities**

All commodities made available to a food service management company (FSMC) by a school must continue to accrue to the benefit of the nonprofit CN program. If a FSMC is being used in the district, the district should use the existing method for ensuring the value of any donated commodities and purchased products used by the FSMC accrues to the benefit of the nonprofit CN account.

## **Food Safety Recall Process**

The commodity hold and recall process is used when a food safety issue is raised about a USDA purchased commodity. The new process pertains exclusively to purchased commodities delivered to approved districts and processors.

If you suspect a food safety issue, immediately contact your local or state health department. In addition, please contact the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) through their commodity hotline number at 1-800-446-6991.

## **USDA Commodity Complaint Hotline**

USDA, as well as TDA, want to hear district concerns regarding the Commodity Distribution Program. If, in the judgment of district personnel, the commodities received do not meet specifications or if there is a problem relating to the appearance, texture, odor, etc. of the foods, contact TDA as soon as possible. TDA and USDA take all complaints seriously and act appropriately to correct the deficiencies.

The Commodity Complaint Form can be found on the Texas Commodity System Web site at [www.texascommodity.dhs.state.tx.us](http://www.texascommodity.dhs.state.tx.us). Complaints can also be sent to:

Texas Department of Agriculture  
Commodity Distribution Unit  
P.O. Box 12847  
Austin, TX 78711  
(512) 420-2412

## **Additional Resources**

Federal Emergency Management Agency—[www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)  
U.S. Department of Agriculture—[www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov)

**Optional**

## Temperature Recording Chart

Name of Recipient Agency	Month/Year
Location of Freezer/Cooler	

Day of Month	Signature/Time	Freezer	Freezer	Cooler	Cooler
1					
2					
3					
4					
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