

# MEMO

**To:** Texas Food Banks  
**From:** Angela Olige  
**Date:** April 3, 2020  
**Re:** Food Bank Response to COVID-19 Emergency

---

Thank you for your quick and tireless response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As you navigate these extraordinary circumstances, the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) is working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to find ways to support your efforts to keep your communities healthy. The following update will provide some background regarding the actions TDA is taking in response to requests from food banks, and the guidance TDA has received from USDA.

## Food Availability

### USDA Foods Deliveries

TDA has seen delays with shipments from USDA vendors and food banks are communicating that they are having difficulty receiving timely deliveries from commercial providers. TDA has informed USDA of these issues. TDA is working with USDA to resolve late deliveries.

TDA plans to meet with industry partners to gain insight on what challenges are occurring at various levels in the supply chain. USDA has requested that all warehouses be as flexible as possible as they work with vendors on inbound shipments.

### Inventory Levels

Food banks have communicated that the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) inventories are depleting quickly due to the increased need in Texas caused by unemployment and loss of resources due to COVID-19. TDA has asked USDA to expedite April and May inbound shipments of USDA Foods equivalent to 220 truckloads. TDA is also evaluating excess inventories in the National School Lunch Program to see if any of that food can be provided to TEFAP for food banks.

### Stimulus Bills

Additional food funds have been made available to USDA through stimulus bills passed by Congress. The national availability of \$400 million from the Families First Act, and \$450 million from the CARES Act, will increase the food available in TEFAP. However, this will not be immediately available and may take three months to arrive in the state. Texas will receive approximately \$35 million of additional TEFAP funding through the Families First Act. TDA has not received an allocation for the \$450 million appropriated in the CARES Act.

## Disaster Household Distribution (DHD)

Nine of 17 TEFAP food banks have requested DHD for 28 specific counties. Food banks have identified socio-economically disadvantage populations or areas having difficulty getting access to food. TDA has drafted an application to send to USDA requesting that they activate DHD in Texas. TDA is working with USDA to determine the elements needed that will ensure the application is approved.

To improve the quality of the application, TDA needs additional information. Food banks



requesting DHD should provide TDA with updated reports on physical inventory in the warehouses that is specifically designated for TEFAP and trade mitigation. Food banks should also provide TDA detailed information about how they determined there is limited access to food supplies in counties or ZIP codes where DHD is requested. It could be that the county or ZIP code is in a food desert and the existing stores don't have enough supply to meet the demand; the county or ZIP code is in a food desert and there has been a degradation or disruption to the normal transportation methods used to access food; or the rural county or ZIP code lost its only commercial retail supplier. If food banks can show clearly that people in those areas will not get food without DHD, the application is more likely to be approved.

## **Waiver Requests**

### **Eligibility Intake**

Food banks have expressed concerns about performing the eligibility intake process for TEFAP, given the importance of social distancing. They have requested guidance on eliminating or making it a no-contact process and requested waived eligibility requirements. USDA did not approve the waiver request as they were not given the authority to do so. However, through April 30, TDA has removed the state intake requirements, so only federally required information must be collected for eligibility determination. Other states have shared their efforts to limit contact in TEFAP distribution, including use of a texting application (<https://mobilizeus.com>). TDA has heard of other ways organizations are addressing physical distancing to obtain necessary information and plans to put some best practices on Squaremeals.org.

### **Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) Three Months Advanced Issuance**

Texas's request to allow three months of issuance for CSFP was NOT approved. However, regulations already allow food banks to provide two month's issuance at one visit to an eligible senior. TDA encourages food banks to consider this option to assist with social distancing for at-risk populations.

### **Delayed Distribution of CSFP Cheese Component**

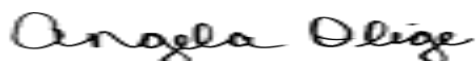
TDA was granted approval to waive the requirement to include cheese in the CSFP food package when food safety concerns exist. In these instances, the additional cheese component must be included with the participants' April food package.

### **Retroactive Distribution**

TDA was granted approval to allow retroactive distribution of the March food package when sites close due to COVID-19. If a food bank was unable to give seniors a CSFP food box in March, they may issue it in April.

Any food banks utilizing the approved waivers must complete the jot form developed by TDA — <https://form.jotform.com/200835028837053>.

Your feedback and best practices will be invaluable as we continue to navigate the distribution of USDA Foods in the coming weeks. Please communicate with us via (877) TEX MEAL (839-6325) or [CommodityOperations@TexasAgriculture.gov](mailto:CommodityOperations@TexasAgriculture.gov).



Angela Olige  
Assistant Commissioner  
Food and Nutrition