

State Emergency Food Assistance: Get with the Program

California Association of Food Banks

Need in California

Five million Californians report that they are unable to afford the food they need – including many seniors and working parents whose budgets for food are squeezed by economic crisis. The State has a role to play in meeting people’s need for food, along with the charitable sector and government at all levels. To that end, the California Association of Food Banks (CAFB) is requesting that the State of California follow the lead of 24 other states and launch a state emergency food program.

Food banks across California have seen a sudden and unprecedented increase in requests for food assistance, beyond anything that has been seen in a generation. Statewide, most food banks are reporting a 30–50% increase in people in need, but in some individual programs, increased requests for assistance were 100% or greater over the previous year.

California also has the unfortunate distinction of having the lowest food stamp participation rate in the nation, which is reinforced by a myriad of red tape and outdated state policies. The USDA estimates that 2 million eligible people in California aren’t getting food stamps. California’s low food stamp participation creates a hole in the government safety net, which combined with the lack of a state investment in emergency food, shifts the burden of providing emergency food to an already–stretched network of food banks. All of these factors combined with an unpredictable supply of food, lead to the conclusion that food banks are facing an uncertain future with the possibility that the continual increase in demand will surpass available food.

Many States Are Investing in Emergency Food Programs

24 states have made investments in emergency food and nutrition programs. Many of California’s peer states have also invested in emergency food programs, even in tough fiscal climates. States that make the greatest investments in emergency food provide between \$15 and \$67 per food insecure household annually. All of these states are making the investment while also achieving food stamp participation rates between 10% and 20% higher than California’s participation rate.

States normally provide a percentage of the overall funds to meet the critical transportation, storage and infrastructure requirements of food banks. In addition, some states require that any funds used from a state emergency food program be spent on products grown or produced in-state, which benefits the agriculture and food sector of the state.

State Emergency Food Fast Facts

24 states currently invest in state emergency food programs.

4 states increased funding for emergency food this year, while facing unprecedented budget deficits.

2 states created emergency food programs this year, while facing budget deficits.

California has 1.3 million food insecure households.

California has the worst food stamp participation rate in the nation.

Peer State Investments in Emergency Food

State	Annual State Emergency Food Funding ¹	Food Insecure Households ²	Annual Expenditure Per Household	Food Stamp Participation Rate ³
Massachusetts	\$13.3 million	198,000	\$67	61%
New York	\$30.9 million	750,000	\$41	63%
Pennsylvania	\$18 million	492,000	\$37	75%
New Jersey	\$4 million	281,000	\$14	60%
Ohio	\$8.5 million	561,000	\$15	70%
Illinois	\$1 million	467,000	\$2	79%
Texas	\$1 million	1,260,000	\$.79	63%
Florida	\$500,000	668,000	\$.75	62%
California	\$0	1,300,000	\$0	50%

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The existing state programs are generally intended to help fill the unmet need left by the federal Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), which can be unpredictable in both the amount and variety of food offered. For instance, California received almost 97 million pounds of food (the equivalent of 76 million meals) through TEFAP in Federally Fiscal Year 2001–02, but received only 53 million pounds of food (43 million meals) in FFY 2007–08. It must be noted that food distributed through TEFAP has been on a significant rise in the past six months due to a confluence of events, but the spikes and dips in the amount of food available are inevitable and can make the program difficult for food banks to administer. This is where a state program can add both predictability and stability in addition to supplementing the overall amount and variety of food.

States with Deficits Have Increased Emergency Food Funding

Several states increased their emergency food funding during their most recent budget process. Both New York and New Jersey have provided \$4.5 million and \$3 million, respectively in supplemental funding for their emergency food programs in the last year while simultaneously confronting unprecedented budget deficits. Virginia and Arkansas have each funded programs for the first time with \$1 and \$2 million investments, respectively during their most recent legislative sessions, while also confronting budget deficits. These states have recognized the strain the economic crisis has put on household budgets, especially working poor households who might not qualify for other forms of government assistance. Their response has a dual and positive impact by providing food for families in need who then are able to spend precious dollars on non-food items and therefore provide economic activity to communities hardest hit by the crisis.

Supplemental Funding For Emergency Food

State	Supplemental/ First Time Emergency Food Funding ¹	State Budget Deficit ⁴	Program First Funded in 2008–09
New York	\$4.5 million	\$16 billion	
New Jersey	\$3 million	\$6.1 billion	
Arkansas	\$2 million	\$107 million	X
Pennsylvania	\$1 million	\$2.3 billion	
Virginia	\$1 million	\$3.8 billion	X
California	\$0	\$42 billion	

California Must Play a Role in Meeting Family Food and Nutrition Needs

California should invest in an emergency food assistance program, just as 24 states have already done. An emergency food program would immediately increase the amount of food distributed and reduce the devastating impact of hunger on adults, children and seniors in the State.

When looking at the 24 states who fund emergency food, if California matched funding levels of the state with the **lowest** emergency food funding by household (Florida), the State would invest approximately \$1 million in emergency food annually. If California matched the **average** funding levels of all state programs by household, the state would invest \$17 million in emergency food annually. Every \$1 million appropriated by California could purchase 1.2 million pounds of food, or the equivalent of 910,000 meals. This food could be utilized to both help serve new clients seeking food assistance and to serve existing clients who are not receiving an adequate amount of food. To further leverage this investment, state funding for food could be targeted to in-state purchases, to benefit the agricultural and food sectors, and nutritious products, to further support good health.

Furthermore, there is an existing State network that can efficiently distribute emergency food. The Department of Social Services (DSS) has contracts with 50 local food banks and California Emergency FoodLink, to provide all 58 counties with federal TEFAP food, disaster food, and the private funds donated through the state tax check-off for Emergency Food Assistance. This network reaches 1 million people each month living at 150% of poverty -- \$30,000 for a family of four -- with approximately 2 meals worth of federal food.

Sources: ¹ Feeding America; ² USDA: Household Food Security in the United States; ³ USDA: State Food Stamp Participation Rates; ⁴ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

Food Insecure Household—At some time during the year, these households were uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food for all their members because they had insufficient money or other resources.



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The California Association of Food Banks (CAFB) represents 44
community food banks working to build a well-nourished California.