



SUPPORT FOOD BANK DISASTER RESPONSE

Request: Permanent Authorization for the State Emergency Food Bank Reserve to Ensure California Can Respond in Times of Disaster

California's only and highly-effective disaster food distribution program (formerly called the State Disaster Food Assistance Program, or SDFAP) has stopped operating, and food banks are being turned away in times of disaster.

The fundamental feature of the State Emergency Food Bank Reserve is to ensure that there is an adequate resource to respond to California's disasters that often force families to make life-saving decisions overnight with flooding, explosive fires, and the threat of earthquakes. The federal response – if at all – is often designed to be a lagging support, such as Disaster CalFresh that is not always triggered and requires the restoration of commercial channels. The State Emergency Food Bank Reserve filled these critical gaps in California's food safety net:

- » In the autumn of 2019, California experienced fires and Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) events at unprecedented levels and affected 30 counties. The PSPS events were an attempt to mitigate against fire disasters, but also caused widespread hardship especially to low-income families as they lost power for refrigeration. These PSPS events ultimately impacted more than 3 million people.
- » In the face of these natural and human-caused disasters, in October of 2019 the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) requested to use \$1 million from the State's General Fund to purchase and deliver food to food banks in affected communities, as well as provide reimbursement for some food bank expenses related to emergency response. This effort was called the "State Disaster Food Assistance Program" (SDFAP) and the "Emergency Food Bank Reserve" was created as the account to fund the program with ongoing replenishment authority.

Immediate Action is Needed to Continue the Success of the State Emergency Food Bank Reserve

Although replenishment language for the Emergency Food Bank Reserve account has been included in the State budget since 2020, CDSS currently lacks the legal authority to access this account. As of today, the Department has run out of food boxes, and is unable to execute a contract with a vendor to procure and distribute more food during an emergency due to the lack of statutory authority to access the Emergency Food Bank Reserve account.

To help ensure the smooth operation, avoid the delays seen in 2023, and streamline administration of the program we are asking to place the State Emergency Food Bank Reserve in the Welfare & Institutions Code where the state's other emergency food programs reside.

History of California's Bold Action on Disaster Food Preparedness:

- » **2019:** CDSS issued an [Information Notice 19-01](#) on December 18, 2019 to announce the launch of the "State Disaster Food Assistance Program" to California food bank partners.
- » **2020:** The "Emergency Food Bank Reserve" was created in [SB 74 \(Budget Act of 2020\)](#), with replenishment language allowing CDSS to request up to \$1M in additional funding from the Department of Finance as needed, ensuring this mechanism of food bank support could continue to respond to the growing number of fire and other disasters California faces as a result of climate change:
 - › *The Department of Finance is authorized to approve expenditures in excess of the amounts appropriated in Schedule (2), upon notification from the State Department of Social Services, to replenish the State Emergency Food Bank Reserve.*
- » **2021 & 2022:** The same replenishment language is also included in [SB 170 \(Budget Act of 2021\)](#) and [SB 840 \(Budget Act of 2022\)](#).
- » **2024:** CDSS has run out of food boxes and no longer holds the legal authority or funding to replenish the supply.

The Power of the State Emergency Food Bank Reserve

In the last two years alone, this fund has helped to mitigate hunger caused by fire disasters in four communities and dispatched nearly 14,000 boxes of food. The affected food banks were able to receive food boxes and/or submit an invoice for emergency related goods and services up to \$50,000; allowing the agencies to have this flexibility was critical for a quicker response to emergencies.

- » **Food for People:** 384 cases in Jan 2022 (winter storm & heavy snow), 1,650 cases in Aug 2022 (Six Rivers Fire)
- » **Trinity County Food Bank:** 960 cases in Jan 2022 (River Complex Fire)
- » **Community Food Bank of San Benito:** 1,650 cases in Jul 2022 (Anzar Fire), 1,050 cases in Mar 2023 (emergency flood relief)
- » **El Dorado Food Bank:** 1,650 cases in Sept 2022 plus \$50,000 expense reimbursement (Mosquito Fire), : 330 cases in Mar 2023 (storm response)
- » **FoodLink for Tulare County:** 2,100 cases in Dec 2022 (flooding)
- » **Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County:** 1,050 cases in Jan 2023 (extreme rain & flooding)
- » **Feeding America Riverside | San Bernardino:** 1,050 cases in Mar 2023 (snow storms)
- » **Kings Community Action Organization:** 1,050 cases in Mar 2023 (severe flooding)
- » **Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank:** 875 cases in Feb 2024 (severe rain and flooding)

Since 2019, the Emergency Food Bank Reserve has been replenished three times (SFY 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22) for a total of \$2.5 million spent on disaster food assistance. CDSS has run out of food boxes and is unable to provide assistance for any future disasters unless the above request is granted.



In the first quarter of 2023, Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County faced two major disasters with severe 'atmospheric river' level storms causing extensive flooding and the breach of a nearby levee. Hard-working families, already on the brink of food insecurity, were evacuated from their homes. The State Disaster Food Assistance Program (SDFAP) played a crucial role, enabling us to distribute food quickly to those affected. This collaborative and effective effort emphasized the importance of the expedient action of our state network in crisis response, allowing Second Harvest to serve our community."

- Erica Padilla Chavez, CEO, Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County



For more information, contact: policy@cafoodbanks.org