



## Rural Remote Food Bank Module 1: Food Sources

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## Federal Food Sources

### 1. USDA EDFAP – Emergency Food Assistance Program

#### Unique Remote Rural Challenges:

- For remote rural, EFAP is one of the primary and initial sources of food. In some counties, EFAP food may be the only source for food distribution. Remote rural food banks distribute EFAP food through a combination of direct services and distribution to non-profit partners.
- USDA EFAP has inadequate baseline funding to support operational costs for small counties.
- USDA commodities that are nutritionally needed have a high cost (this is a nation-wide challenge).
- Loads constantly must be rescheduled or cancelled due to distance or inability to receive and store full loads.

#### Suggested Standards and Best Practices:

- Quality Goal: EFAP funding is sufficient to get a balanced, healthy bag of food.
- Best practice: Choice Pantry at Humboldt Food Bank. Supermarket model, where clients can make personal food choices from food on shelves and have access to recipes. This requires combining EFAP with other food sources to provide a wider variety of food choices.

#### Resources and Contacts:

- Connect with local and regional nutritionists through: UC Cooperative Extension, Public Health, WIC, local schools or hospitals.
- Information on [Choice Pantry](#) at Food For People (Humboldt).
- CA Association of Foodbank for knowledge of programs.

## 2. USDA CSFP – Commodity Supplemental Food Program (Federal funds distributed to eligible states, including CA, and to Indian Tribal Organizations)

### Unique Remote Rural Challenges:

- Not all remote rural FBs have; Humboldt Food Bank has a CSFP program.
- For seniors only, age 60+, income eligible. Strict admin requirements: social security number, proof of income, signature upon food receipt. Requirements can result in reduced distribution venues to ensure that staff are present to comply; too burdensome for volunteers.
- Reimbursement does not cover actual costs of freight, storage, and distribution; received in arrears 4-5 months, resulting in cash flow issues.
- Boxes come pre-assembled, but some items are too heavy/bulky for elderly.

### Suggested Standards and Best Practices:

- No local standards applicable; program is closely defined by federal rules.

### Resources and Contacts:

- [Mark Lowry](#), Community Action Partnership of Orange County, (714) 897-6670. Mark has been on the National Level CSFP Board and is very knowledgeable.

## Purchased Food

### 3. Farm 2 Family CAFB program, purchases off-size produce, allows food banks to purchase from hub at a good discount.

### Unique Remote Rural Challenges:

- *CA Association of Food Banks (CAFB) Program.* Program operates on a hub and spoke model, with food delivered to hubs on major highways. For remote rurals, finding a carrier and funds to pay for transportation from the hub site is a challenge.
- Only counties that are members of the CA Assoc. of Food Banks are eligible for participation.
- Due to remote rural distances from hub, the variety of produce is limited to less perishable items such as root crops. Currently, there is no system to ensure that the bin that is sent out has fresh produce, resulting in a high rate of purchased food having to be discarded upon arrival.
- RRFB's in county with freight barriers may only be able to pick up on one day/week, also resulting in old produce.

### Suggested Standards and Best Practices:

- Standards for CAFB:
  1. Food should reach all counties as fresh as possible, with the greatest possible variety, taking transportation into account.
  2. Keep in place the California State tax receipts (AB515) for donating farmers. Work to expand the credit to other food categories.

- Standards for local Food Banks:
  1. Distribution of food as quickly and effectively as possible to ensure freshness. For example, look at tailgate distribution models or pop-up Farmer's Markets.
  2. Rural Remote Food Banks that are located in counties with active agricultural businesses should develop relationships with local growers and packing houses for access to fresh produce that may be edible but not saleable.
  3. CalRecycle Food Waste Prevention grants are available to help RRFB build larger refrigeration capacity to rescue more local farm produce rather than have it end up in landfill. Imperial Valley Food Bank benefited from this grant – contact [Sara Griffen](#) for more information.

#### **Resources and Contacts:**

- CAFB: [Maria Houline](#), Director of Farm to Family, (510) 350-9916
- Imperial Valley Food Bank, Imperial County: Pop up Farmer's Market (successful program that distributes excess fresh produce at agencies, low-income housing where need is high. Contact: Lucia Sanchez, Dir. of Operations at (760) 370-0966

## **4. Private Vendors and Group Buys**

#### **Unique Remote Rural Challenges:**

- High freight and storage costs make purchasing unfeasible from lower-cost vendors in larger population areas. Some vendors do not want to work with small loads (pallets vs. truckloads)
- Local low-cost options have limited food choices.
- Repackaging food into smaller portions presents a staffing challenge.
- If funders have limitations on where food is grown, this limits vendors.
- Need to test out any group buy system to make sure that it is compatible with RRFB as well as urban.

#### **Suggested Standards and Best Practices:**

- Enter into agreements with local fuel companies for gas rebates for exclusive use of their fuel.
- Look into existing transportation systems in the community to explore the feasibility of back-hauling food from larger communities.
- Explore vendors who sell food in smaller packaging to local Dollar Stores or who sell wholesale to local restaurants, such as meat companies.
- Look into shared purchasing and storage options. Explore local partnership possibilities. Statewide, CAFB is looking into group buys and warehousing options for shelf stable foods, using a hub and spoke model. This group buy and storage strategy will have to be combined with a good transportation strategy to ensure that it is compatible with remote rural food banks.
- Look to other state's lessons for group buying.

## Resources and Contacts:

- CAFB: [Maria Houlne](#), Director of Farm to Family, (510) 350-9916
- Local relationships with vendors are critical to ensure effective processes.
- Imperial Valley Food Bank, Imperial County: fuel vendor agreements, wholesale meat purchases, work with vendors who sell food in smaller packaging. Group buys with community partners for shelf stable food; exploring meat and dairy.
- Vendor list:
  - GALOT – Londo Whittaker (760) 804-0480
  - SIMCO – Teresa Mishner (310) 284-8446
  - WESTERN GOURMET – Jin An (323) 265-9494
  - LA Foods (has lower sodium food)
  - Shamrock Meats Project Preserve

## Corporate Donations

### 5. Feeding America – private non-profit

Subcategories include programs with names such as Fresh Rescue, Second Harvest

#### Unique Remote Rural Challenges:

- System works through distribution to CA certified affiliates, who warehouse and redistribute to Partner Distributing Organizations (PDO's), such as food banks. There are no rural remote certified affiliates, many are PDOs.
- While the nationwide system may be an effective group purchasing strategy, California's distance from the origination source makes food handling and transportation barriers paramount.
- Food donated from Feeding America is often of poor nutritional quality.
- Food quality fluctuates from store to store as more food is now going to Dollar Stores. Corporate links result in mostly packaged food such as cookies, crackers and granola bars close to their expiration dates, both at the affiliate level and especially at the rural remote PDO level. There are no standards for the types of food received. Some food banks who are PDOs choose not to spend their transportation dollars to pick up this nutritionally poor food.
- Feeding America also allows some retail purchasing through a CHOICE program, but it is difficult to amass enough points to purchase quality food without combining points.
- Independent rural and remote food banks face many common challenges, including insufficient funding for infrastructure and operation costs. A number of rural food banks are partnership organizations (PDO) of larger Feeding America food banks which allows for them to have more access to food and grant opportunities. Depending on the rural region and its needs this type of affiliation may or may not be optimal. Each rural food bank needs to independently evaluate the pros and cons of entering a Feeding America partnership.

**Suggested Standards and Best Practices:**

- Certified Affiliates develop an equitable allocation system to distribute nutritious food from Feeding America to PDOs. The challenge is that there is no predictability regarding what food comes from Feeding America to the Affiliates.
- In the best case scenario, local food and cash donations to Feeding America at local grocery stores should come back directly to local food banks.
- Look at options for PDOs to combine points to maximize CHOICE purchasing options for remote rural food banks.

## 6. Local corporation donations

**Unique Remote Rural Challenges:**

- Some large grocery chains, such as Walmart, Safeway, Save Mart participate in bagged food donation programs. If the food is pre- bagged by the store, it is frequently of low nutritional value, and the food bank is not able to give input as to what foods are needed. The store can actually make money when customers buy these bags to donate. In some communities, local food banks got less in food drives once the stores started this practice. There is often no connection between the stores and the local food banks regarding these practices. In some counties, the local food banks do not get the locally donated food if the Feeding America Certified Affiliate contracts with those stores Feeding America Certified Affiliate contracts with those stores.
- Albertson's/Safeway still offer the premade bags as a selling point but instead of providing pallets of food once the drive is over they have shifted to providing gift cards for purchases through the local store.
- Corporate decisions do not often align with quality food distribution, but local managers risk difficulties if they bring forward quality donation issues to the corporate office.

**Suggested Standards and Best Practices:**

- Coordinate requests for food donations by various organizations to make the system easier for donors, and to ensure maximum use of donated food.
- Coordinate and communicate between food banks and recipient agencies to ensure that information is shared about what types of food are being provided by corporate donors at the time of pick up.

**Resources and Contacts:**

- Imperial Valley Food Bank gets donations from a local food distribution warehouse. Also does a Fresh Rescue program where produce is collected from 7 local stores and delivered to soup kitchens and shelters.
- Food For People (Humboldt) coordinates efforts between partner agencies for food donation requests from local stores.

## Food Reclamation, Gleaning, Growing

### 7. Local Gleaning from farmers, home gardeners, grocers, restaurants

#### Unique Remote Rural Challenges:

- Produce harvesting is difficult to do only with volunteers; Food Banks need to have dedicated and trained staff who can build good community relationships and train volunteers to properly harvest.
- Some counties with big agriculture have liability issues with food bank staff or volunteers gleaning directly from the field, and instead work directly with packing sheds doing farm reclamation. This is critical when there is no local outlet for locally grown produce such as farmer's markets.
- Collecting leftover food from restaurants has health and safety issues, is labor intensive and requires physical strength.
- Seasonal home orchard gleaning requires a tracking and communication system.
- Depending on geography and climate, different counties will have different availability and sources of gleaning opportunities. It is important to leverage opportunities that are out there.
- Perishable Distribution Programs (which take food near expiration from grocers for distribution) are rarely done in remote rural counties due to food safety issues and lack of staffing.

#### Suggested Standards and Best Practices:

- Train staff and volunteers to properly harvest and not damage other crops or trees.
- Work with farmers & backyard farmers to harvest unused produce.
- Work with Farmer's Markets and packing sheds to collect unused produce.
- Tool sharing programs for community garden collaborative or small farmers, in exchange for donations to food bank.
- FoodLink for Tulare County partners with United Way for their [Harvesting Hope](#) program: community members can register trees and local youth harvest and donate tree fruit to food banks and pantries. FoodLink provides the tools, supplies, and transportation for the harvest.
- For restaurant gleaning, ensure staff and volunteers are trained in safe food handling.

#### Resources and Contacts:

- Food For People (Humboldt) [gleaning program](#). Farmers, Backyard Farmers, Farmer's Markets; and has a database for home orchard gleaning tracking. Has contact for volunteers to set up gleaning webpages.
- American AgCredit: funds local protein purchasing.
- Imperial Valley Food Bank, Imperial County: donations from packing sheds.
- UC Cooperative Extension Offices or other UC agriculture program nutritionists and farm advisors will help in setting up programs and advertising.

## 8. Food Growing: Plant a Row, Food Bank owned farms, Local Farm Donation Agreements, On the Hoof

### Unique Remote Rural Challenges:

- Requires the local capacity to grow excess produce or meat animals, and to have the staffing and volunteer capacity to organize donation systems.

### Suggested Standards and Best Practices:

- Plant a Row: Private gardeners donate surplus produce, deliver to the Food Bank.
- Various models to support start-up farmers to succeed in farming (through tool lending or start-up funds), while ensuring food donations to the local food bank.
- Food Bank Owned Farms
- On the Hoof: local ranchers donate meat, various strategies for butchering. Work with local land trust on larger agreements.

### Resources and Contacts:

- Food For People (Humboldt): Plant a Row, Locally Delicious (organic produce for seniors), On the Hoof (707) 445-3166
- [The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts](#): State preserves land for farm development; Food Bank purchased land for farming; farmer donates half to the food bank, gets other half to sell to CSA.
- Chester Co. Food Bank in Pennsylvania: [food bank owned farm](#) and community raised bed program involving local volunteer organizations (122 sites, including schools).
- FoodLink for Tulare County is part of the [Central Valley Agroecology Program Planning Committee](#); working on starting a farmer training program, support home, and community gardens.

## Local Food Drives

### 9. Local food drives – local, postal, internet

#### Unique Remote Rural Challenges:

- Labor intensive, requires dedicated staff to keep it going. Difficult to fund.
- Food banks have seasonal shifts in workloads, food drives can be a fit in when workload slows.
- Theft can be a problem for doorstep or mailbox donations in poor communities.

#### Suggested Standards and Best Practices:

- Inform donors of specific products needed to encourage donations of healthier non-perishable foods.
- Find ways to do ongoing vs. one-time drives, with delivery to food bank.
- For postal drives, utilize sponsors to print a bag that the food can be donated in, work with post office to deliver in mailboxes.
- Online food drive models have been successful; however, the cost of the software may

prove to be a barrier for RRFBs.

**Resources and Contacts:**

- Food For People (Humboldt): Local media does live broadcasts in grocery stores to encourage donations at holiday time. Also does postal food drives with printed bags. (707) 445-3166
- Ashland Food Bank National Model - [Food Project](#) for ongoing donations organized by neighbors

## Advocacy Issues for RRFB Food Sources

The USDA EFAP base funding allocation needs to be increased to support basic operational needs of rural remote food banks.

The USDA entitlement toward purchasing commodities has been reduced so much, on a national level, that food banks have to make difficult choices between purchasing quantity (of lower nutrition value food) versus quantity (of higher nutrition value food). The cost per case is now so high for nutritionally needed food, it is not affordable. Sometimes the choices available do not make sense for the target population.

The USDA CSFP program has inequities in access to program, and needs improvement in food choices, nutritional quality, reimbursement rates and reimbursement schedule. The program is vulnerable at the federal level, as it is not available in all states.

Farm to Family: The CAFB Food to Family Committee should be invited to look at two issues specific to RRFB challenges:

- a. CAFB should consider a new allocation formula for equitable food distribution that acknowledges higher access costs for remote rurals. Any fund surplus from this program should go into addressing this equity issue (e.g. subsidizing freight costs).
- b. A system review should be considered between CAFB and the certified affiliates to ensure that bins with fresh produce are sent, linked with the specific order.

Tax Credit: Advocate at the state level to push for expanded tax credit for other food groups other than produce, especially proteins and high-quality grains. Contact Andrew Cheyne, Policy Director at CAFB ([andrew@cafoodbanks.org](mailto:andrew@cafoodbanks.org)).

Private vendors and group buys:

- Transportation subsidies, tax credits
- Explore brokers at Association level for food backhaul system coordination.
- Find ways to encourage vendors to provide competitive pricing on high nutrition food to food banks.
- Create shared learning opportunities with other states regarding Food Bank Association best practices.



### Feeding America:

- Address the issue of Feeding America's poor food nutritional quality.
- Local food and cash donations to Feeding America at local grocery stores should come back directly to local food banks. "Your Local Food Bank" should be included on their signage when they do their campaigns in local grocery stores. Currently, funds or food go to the national organization or the Feeding America Affiliate food bank.

### Local corporate:

- Work at the corporate levels of big grocery chains to develop corporate guidelines that allow local store managers to more effectively work with their local food banks to provide quality donated food.
- Educate donors at a higher corporate level that some donated food must be dumped if it does not meet quality standards.