



STATE DISASTER FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SDFAP)

Permanently Authorize the State Disaster Food Assistance Program (SDFAP) to Ensure California Can Respond in Times of Disaster

California's State Disaster Food Assistance Program (SDFAP) – our state's only and highly effective disaster food distribution program – cannot continue to operate once the current supply of food runs out, unless action is taken to place the program permanently in the law.

The fundamental feature of the SDFAP 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 SDFAP fills these critical gaps in the food safety net:

- » In the fall 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 over 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.

Action is Needed to Continue the Success of SDFAP

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.

The Department is unable to execute a contract with a vendor to procure and distribute food in an emergency using money in the Emergency Food Bank Reserve without this legal authority to access the account.

Permanently authorize SDFAP

To help ensure the smooth operation, avoid the delays seen this year, and streamline administration of the program we are asking to place SDFAP in the Welfare & Institutions Code where the state's other emergency food programs reside.

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 made permanent 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 \(Budget Act of 2022\)](#)

The Power of the Emergency Food Bank Reserve in 2022 & 2023

In 2022 alone, this fund has helped to mitigate hunger caused by fire disasters in four communities, and dispatched nearly 6,000 boxes of food:

- » **Food for People:** 384 cases in Jan 2022 (winter storm and heavy snow)
- » **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)
- » **Food for People:** 1,650 cases in Aug 2022 (Six Rivers Fire)
- » **El Dorado Food Bank:** 1,650 cases in Sept 2022 plus \$50,000 expense reimbursement (Mosquito Fire)
- » **Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz:** 1,050 cases in Jan 2023 (extreme rain and flooding)

Since 2019, the Emergency Food Bank Reserve account has been replenished three times (SFY 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22) for a total of \$2.5 Million dollars spent on SDFAP assistance. Currently, there are approximately 8,000 boxes of food remaining in the Department's warehouse, ready for deployment as needed. **But when these boxes run out, CDSS will not be able to replenish the supply.**

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In January of 2022, a major winter storm brought heavy, wet snow to the eastern part of Humboldt County causing a record number of trees to fall, which also brought down power lines and triggered landslides. It took almost two weeks to clear roads and restore power, but thanks to the SDFAP boxes that were quickly delivered to Food for People, which is based in Eureka, we were able to work with our local partners to respond immediately to help people in the communities impacted. The food provided helped fill the gap for those who were unable to get to a grocery store to restock their cupboards.

The same held true in August of 2022 when the Six Rivers Fire impacted the same area. Smaller, rural food banks like ours typically lack the funding and the capacity to keep large quantities of food on hand to meet emergency needs so it was incredibly reassuring to us and to the communities we serve to know that the SDFAP food boxes could be made available to us quickly, and at no cost to our food bank, to support local emergency response and recovery efforts."

– Food for People (Humboldt County)



For more information, please contact becky@cafoodbanks.org