

Food Assistance FAQ

California is home to *50 food banks* and a network of more than *6,000 community-based food pantries*. Food banks and pantries provide ongoing services to their communities and are first responders for the food safety net in emergencies.

What's the difference between a food bank and a food pantry?



A FOOD BANK

A food bank is a warehouse that collects and stores food that's been donated, recovered, or purchased for distribution. Many food banks also provide food directly to people; however, it's best to contact them directly to find out what services they offer.

[**FIND A FOOD BANK**](#)



A FOOD PANTRY

is a place where people can get free food. These can be at schools, colleges, senior centers, community-based nonprofit organizations, places of worship, and various other service organizations across the state. Food pantries get food from a food bank and give it directly to people.

IF YOU NEED FOOD

Who can receive food at a food bank or pantry?

Anyone who needs food can visit a food pantry or meal program. Before visiting, contact them directly or check their website for information about their programs. [**FIND A FOOD BANK**](#)

Do I need to bring documentation or fill out forms to receive food?

Generally, you don't need to provide any documentation or income information or fill out forms to receive food. However, some programs, like those in The Emergency Food Assistance Programs (TEFAP) fund, may have income requirements. These will typically ask for your name, country, zip code, family size, and whether it's your first time receiving food for the month. Before visiting, contact your local food bank for information about programs and requirements.

Before visiting, contact your local food bank for information about programs and requirements.

[**FIND A FOOD BANK**](#)

How often can I go to a food pantry?

Services vary by food bank or agency. Some allow you to come as often as you need, while others limit visits to once a week, or even once a month. It's important to verify programs with each individual organization [**FIND A FOOD BANK**](#)

Food Assistance FAQ

IF YOU WANT TO SUPPORT FOOD BANKS

Should I donate cash or food to a food bank?

Donating money is the most effective way to help food banks provide food to our neighbors. Food banks can often purchase highly nutritious food for pennies on the pound. Monetary contributions also cover program costs like staff salaries, gas for delivery trucks, and repairs if refrigerators and freezers break. [SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL FOOD BANK](#)

What types of food should I donate to a food bank?

Food banks accept dry and canned food donations that are “shelf-stable” or nonperishable. That means you can keep it in your pantry, and it won’t go bad. Think about the type of food you’d like to receive, if you were visiting a food bank. Remember to *ONLY* donate food that hasn’t reached its “sell-by” date. Every food bank has different needs. It’s best to reach out to your local food bank to find out what they need. [FIND A FOOD BANK](#)