



## Disaster Feeding Guidance for School Food Service Using USDA Foods

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### Who should I contact for information about emergency feeding in disaster situations?

Need to have the following contact person's name and emergency phone numbers:

- Your Immediate Supervisor
- State Distributing Agency (SDA)
- County/City Emergency Assistance Coordinator
- Local Disaster Feeding Coordinator
- State Emergency Disaster Coordinator

### How do I know if one of my schools is/will be a disaster feeding site?

Your State Distributing Agency or the local disaster feeding organization may let you know that you have been selected as a congregate feeding site. Hopefully, you will have been pre-designated as an approved site, but it's not always possible because it's hard to tell ahead of time exactly where disaster feeding will be needed most.

The use of USDA Foods for congregate disaster feeding does not require USDA or FNS approval as long as USDA Foods used are those within the State where the disaster occurred. However, your SDA **must** be notified of any disaster feeding activity **as soon as possible**. If an emergency happens on a weekend, the Food Service Director should contact their SDA as soon as possible the next business day. USDA recommends that if you haven't received written direction or guidance from your SDA about disaster procedures and you know that a potential disaster is coming, call your SDA to discuss potential contingency plans.

In some States, school districts can provide shelter feeding without any prior approval or prior knowledge from the SDA. There have been situations in other states where a localized heavy weekend rain has required congregate feeding for a small number of families, and the Food Service Director provided USDA Foods to the Red Cross for immediate emergency feeding without any prior approvals. Such situations may require immediate action and decisions by a Food Service Director without an opportunity for prior approval from the SDA. The SDA should inform their School Food Authorities to make available USDA Foods for disaster congregate feeding to the Red Cross immediately upon request, with or without prior approvals.

However, School Food Authorities (SFAs) cannot give the Red Cross or other disaster organizations authority to take USDA Foods out of the schools on their own. ONLY the SFA has authority to distribute and/or use USDA Foods from their own inventory.

If USDA Foods have to be moved from another State, your SDA should inform their Food and Nutrition Service Regional Office (FNS-RO) to obtain at least a verbal approval.

**Note about using USDA Processed End Products:** If a SFA uses products that contain USDA Bulk Foods, only the USDA Bulk product in the food is eligible for reimbursement. If that happens, keep track of what products you are using. You will be asked to provide a copy of the National Processors' Summary End Product Data Schedule or State Processors' End Product Data Schedule as back up. The remaining cost can be claimed for reimbursement through FEMA.



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## How do disaster organizations request food and from whom?

Most of the time disaster organizations request food assistance through SDA's or State Agencies that administer the Food Distribution Program. The SDA then notifies the FNS-RO of the types and quantities of food that are needed by the relief organizations for emergency feeding. SDA's work with the School Food Service staff. Please keep in mind that because disaster situations can be chaotic, a disaster organization at the local level might not be able to contact its local Red Cross or the SDA. That is why it is so important that local emergency feeding officials have knowledge of and immediate access to any and all available USDA Foods stored in the affected area. This includes USDA Foods from School Lunch, The Emergency Food Assistance Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, etc.

## I am a Food Service Director and have been asked to provide emergency feeding operations; what records do I keep?

- Description of the Disaster situation
- Number of people affected
- Period of time of the congregate feeding
- Quantity and types of food used
- Number and location of feeding sites

## How will food used for disaster feeding be replaced?

USDA Foods: The State Distributing Agency or Regional Office will submit a FNS-292A form online to request replacement or reimbursement within 45 days following termination of the disaster assistance. If the disaster has a "Presidential Disaster Declaration", FNS will replace foods or reimburse the value of the food when the request is received within the 45 days or justification exists to waive the 45-day requirement. If the disaster, emergency or situation of distress does not have a Presidential declaration, FNS will attempt to reimburse the SDA for the value of the foods used, if funds are available. It is the SDAs responsibility to transfer the disaster reimbursement to the SFA USDA Foods Planned Assistance Level, or replace the food. Funding is guaranteed for Presidentially declared disasters and emergencies, but is not guaranteed for Situations of Distress, disasters or emergencies that do not have a Presidential declaration.

Non-USDA Foods: For Presidentially declared emergencies or disasters, SFAs can apply for reimbursement of the value of foods used through FEMA (site resource)

## What is the role of the Red Cross using my kitchen?

In almost every State, the American Red Cross is the designated Emergency Feeding Agency. As such, every possible effort should be made to assist and support their mission in a disaster situation. If use of a school kitchen or a central kitchen will help the Red Cross to provide congregate meals to affected survivors, then they should be given use of that facility. An SFA may also solicit their food service staff to volunteer in the kitchen to help the Red Cross, since they are familiar with the facility and equipment operation. In addition, a school building does not have to be a designated disaster shelter, for its kitchen facilities to be utilized to prepare



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congregate meals. We have had situations whereby the Red Cross worked jointly with local school food service personnel to prepare disaster meals and manage kitchens, but the meals were served elsewhere.

### **What if it is a weekend, I receive a call from the Red Cross, they want to start feeding, and I am unable to contact the State Distributing Agency? What do I do?**

Food Service Directors should do everything possible to assist the Red Cross to provide congregate meals to disaster survivors. In addition, Food Service Directors should offer available USDA Foods to the Red Cross for such feeding. As stated earlier, prior approvals are neither required nor necessary from the State Distributing Agency. If in doubt, the Food Service Director should take the precaution to ask for ID to assure that the individuals requesting USDA Foods are legitimate Red Cross workers.

### **What if the Red Cross knocks on my door and announces they are "taking over?"**

When disaster strikes, the timeliness of feeding affected survivors is crucial. Food Service Directors or designees should work cooperatively and professionally with the Red Cross and others (even before the actual event of a disaster). These should not be situations of who is in charge. The Red Cross also has a responsibility to act in a professional manner.

Further, the question of who is ultimately in-charge of managing kitchen operations would depend on what agreement the State has with the Red Cross as the designated Emergency Feeding Agency. For instance, in Puerto Rico, the State Emergency Plan states that any School Food Service Authority facilities used for disaster meal preparation will be staffed and managed by school food service personnel. However, many States do not have written plans or agreements that go into such detail. The Red Cross has the responsibility to provide congregate meals utilizing USDA Foods. When they request help from school personnel, it should be given. If a Food Service Director wants to give full management authority of the emergency kitchen operations to the Red Cross, that is his/her prerogative. However, if the Food Service Director wants to participate on an equal basis with the Red Cross in his/her kitchen, utilizing his/her USDA Foods, he/she has every right to do so. The senior on-site Red Cross official and the local Food Service Director would have equal status, and hopefully, work as equals towards the common goal. Both would share in the management of the facility operations.

### **Can we feed Red Cross and other volunteers and do we include that count in what is reported to the State Distributing Agency?**

The Food Distribution regulations require that disaster organizations distribute USDA Foods only to recipients eligible to receive them. However, if recipient agencies serve meals containing USDA Foods to persons other than those who are eligible, these individuals must be few in number compared to the eligible. Volunteers and servers may eat prepared meals as long as they are present and don't out-number the disaster survivors. Volunteer meals should be included in the total meal count.



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## **Whose responsibility is it for clean up after the meal(s) is served?**

Whichever organization is operating the feeding facilities. If no agreement were in effect, the Red Cross would probably have such responsibility. There could be an instance where another agency or organization would be designated specific responsibility for maintenance of disaster shelters and feeding sites.

## **Who pays me and my staff for working overtime in a disaster response? The School District or Red Cross?**

If it were a Presidential Declared Disaster, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) would pay 75% of the directly related disaster overtime. The State would have to cover the other 25%. In Non-Presidential disaster situations, reimbursement would have to be sought from the State.

## **Who does the disaster feeding menu planning?**

Traditionally, the Red Cross does menu planning, requests for specific foods, and maintains meals served, and USDA Foods usage records. However, the Food Service Director or designee is also responsible for keeping usage records, but sometimes it is a joint effort. SFAs should show the Red Cross their breakfast and lunch menus because their food inventory supports their menu and may be the easiest way to start feeding people. In addition, the SFAs staff is already familiar with the preparations required to serve these menus. In some situations of distress, the SFA may be able to set up a per-meal-rate for the Red Cross, subtracting out the value of the USDA Foods.

## **What if we need paper products, utensils, etc., who pays gas used to shop for supplies, who does the actual shopping?**

As stated earlier, FEMA should reimburse 75% of these costs if it is a Presidential Declared Disaster. If not, reimbursement would have to come from the State. If any shopping is required for paper products, utensils, etc., the Red Cross normally brings or orders such supplies to a disaster site, or will place a request order through FEMA to bulk purchase such supplies. The Red Cross or FEMA might ask the State if they have such supplies warehoused and available for use. Reimbursement for these supplies would come from the Red Cross or FEMA.

## **What liabilities if any are there regarding "accidents" in the kitchen i.e. if Red Cross staff or a school food service worker falls, slips or gets burned?**

FEMA would be involved in such coverage if the disaster was Presidential Declared. Otherwise, Workmen's Compensation rules would apply like any other on-the-job injury. These issues are usually worked out between the disaster organization and the Food Service Director without FNS involvement.