

Advocacy Update 10.19.2020



Quick Hits

- Program Money for USDA Trade Mitigation Food Purchases Ending
- Judge Strikes Down New SNAP Work Requirements
- New York Makes SNAP Applications Easier

USDA Commodities Crash

Feeding America has released some rather grim numbers on the USDA food commodity outlook for 2021. Food Banks source their food from a variety of sources, a large one being USDA commodity programs.

In 2019, the Trade Mitigation program was introduced to offset the impact of the trade war with China & Europe. USDA bought food products from American farmers, suffering due to lack of export opportunities. These foods were fed them into the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and largely distributed by the Food Bank network, almost doubling the volume of the program.

It is estimated that more than 40% of farm income this year will be from federal payouts, though who the money went to is being scrutinized as [the NY Times reports](#). Economists are warning the agricultural industry to not become reliant on government aid (and the same goes for food banks).

As the Trade Mitigation (Food Purchase and Distribution Program) comes to a close, it represents a loss of \$1.4 billion in food purchases available for FY2021, that's a whole lot of food lost at a time when it is needed the most.

Some good news...

1. \$104M in TEFAP entitlement will carry over from FY2020
2. \$225M in CARES Act and FFCRA TEFAP funding will carry over from FY2020
3. \$600M (we hope) in TEFAP bonus buy foods will be offered

Though this off-of-entitled funding will help soften the blow it still represents a massive loss of TEFAP spending for 2021 from 2020. What that exactly means to the North Texas Food Bank, we are still inking those numbers up on the back of napkin, as more information comes in from Feeding America and then our State Agency.

More thoughts...

Additionally, the Farmers to Family Food Box Program ends at the end of this month. And, many TEFAP orders are getting cancelled due to supply chain and aluminum can shortages, and not

enough USDA vendors and flexibility. It doesn't sound great, but know that dedicated folks at the National, State, and local levels are working hard to address this issue.

What we can do about it - Promote SNAP and...Lobby Congress and the USDA on getting additional funding for food purchases to make up this shortfall, later this week a national engagement plan will be released, and we will let you know how to participate in it once we have the details.

Federal Judge Strikes Down SNAP Rule

(& uses one of my all-time favorite words, capricious)

Bringing it back to 2019, you may remember that the food stamp program, SNAP, was being reformed through a three prong strategy using the final rule procedure (an executive order), instead of the traditional law making through congress.

One of prongs was a rule that would restrict the ability of States' to waive the work requirements for Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents in areas without a lot of jobs.

At the core was an argument from 2019 hunger advocates that said "Sure, unemployment is low right *now* and the economy is looking good, however, the heart of SNAP is to be responsive to economic conditions, if people lose their source of income and need temporary food assistance, they need SNAP without strings, we can't predict the future and this is dangerous!"

The rule was finalized anyway.

Enter 2020.

In mid-March, right before it was to begin, a federal judge delayed the implementation of the final rule by issuing an injunction (enjoined) and Congress waived work requirements broadly through legislation in their temporary relief packages.

This weekend however, that same judge formally struck the rule down.

Chief U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell wrote 67 pages on it:

The rule "at issue in this litigation radically and abruptly alters decades of regulatory practice, leaving States scrambling and exponentially increasing food insecurity for tens of thousands of Americans," Howell wrote, adding that the Agriculture Department "has been icily silent about how many [adults] would have been denied SNAP benefits had the changes sought . . . been in effect while the pandemic rapidly spread across the country." The judge concluded that the department's "utter failure to address the issue renders the agency action arbitrary and capricious."

Ouch.

SNAP Applications Simplified in New York, Provides Hope for Texas

When the 87th Texas State Legislature convenes in January, a high priority item for anti-hunger advocates is a simplified SNAP application for Texas seniors. This shortened application and longer benefit enrollment period will help thousands of elderly Texans access nutrition they need from their local grocery stores.

[New York announced this weekend](#) that it will seek the permission from the US Department of Agriculture to use their simplified application process for vulnerable populations. Texas is primed and ready to advocate for our own simplified process to help increase access to healthy foods.

[Sign up for the Crossroads Community Services Virtual Lunch & Learn series event this week.](#) Join us on Wednesday at 12pm-1pm if you want to hear a talk on the future and sustainability of the Emergency Food response from yours truly.



Questions or Comments?

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