



7/18/2022

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma is writing to you to share the challenges that many food banks are facing and how the USDA can help. The increased costs for fuel, especially diesel, is wreaking havoc on operational budgets as is the supply chain disruptions and increased costs of food. The Regional Food Bank is paying 75% more for diesel than just one year ago. These increased fuel costs are hampering our ability to pick up food donations outside the metro area and driving up costs by 13% to bring in food from outside of Oklahoma. The neighbors we serve are also facing more challenges with the rise of inflation combined with the phaseout of COVID-era enhancements to critical federal nutrition programs.

We urge you to provide more funding for USDA food purchases to distribute through The Emergency Food Assistance Program by utilizing the Commodity Credit Corporation or other funds available to provide an additional \$1 billion in critically needed food purchases. This will help address the increased costs USDA is paying for TEFAP food purchases as well as provide additional food to meet the increased demand food banks are facing. USDA has precedent for similar actions, both through the Food Purchase and Distribution Program and the recent Supply Chain Assistance Funds providing resources to schools.

Nationally, 80% of Feeding America food banks recently reported sustained or increased levels of demand for food assistance, with an average increase of about 10% more people in one month. TEFAP has been a significant help and represented 39% of all food distributed by food banks in 2020. USDA foods distributed through TEFAP provided 2.4 billion meals out of a total of 6.2 billion meals served by the Feeding America network in 2020. TEFAP plays a critical role in ensuring access to nutritious food through our nation's food banks, especially in rural America. Unfortunately, today, many Feeding America food banks across the nation do not have the resources to meet the still-heightened need. USDA foods received by the food bank network decreased by 30% in 2021. For the Regional Food Bank, USDA foods have decreased by 34%.

Food banks have provided a record response during the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic and in the ensuing economic disruption, assisting 60 million individuals in 2020 and 53 million in 2021. A May 2022 survey of the Feeding America food bank network illustrates additional challenges:

- 94% report paying more for food purchases.
- 89% report paying more for food sourcing, transportation and distribution.
- 73% report a decrease in food donations.

Given these challenges, and to compensate for reduced federal commodities, most food banks are using reserve funds to purchase more food but these funds are limited.

Our nation is quickly transitioning from a pandemic crisis to a hunger crisis. Additional investments in USDA food purchases distributed through TEFAP will help sustain food assistance for millions of our neighbors facing hunger. The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma, along with our faith-based and charitable partners, is dedicated to ending hunger and strengthening communities through partnership and collaboration. This work cannot succeed without our government, nonprofit, corporate and community stakeholders working together to support the needs of people facing hunger in America.

The Regional Food Bank looks forward to continuing to work with you to ensure we are meeting the needs of our neighbors facing hunger.

Sincerely,



Stacy Dykstra, Ph.D.  
Chief Executive Officer  
Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma