



TEFAP

The Emergency Food Assistance Program



2026

Operations Manual

AGENCY HANDBOOK FOR LDAs

www.endhungernj.org

INTRODUCTION

What is TEFAP?

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) was designed to distribute federally donated food to eligible, food insecure persons throughout the country.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA) administers and contracts with several Emergency Feeding Organizations (EFOs) to coordinate the program at the local level throughout New Jersey.

These EFOs, in conjunction with the NJDA, have developed a network of contracted Local Distribution Agencies (LDAs) that are responsible for the actual distribution of these foods to food insecure residents of New Jersey. An LDA can be an emergency food pantry, a soup kitchen, a homeless shelter, or a needy feeding agency. All LDAs must be public or private non-profit organizations, as recognized by the United States Internal Revenue Service, with 501C-3 status. New Jersey agencies (EFOs & LDAs) must adhere to all current federal, state, and local health codes & regulations (N.J.A.C. 8:24). The distribution of TEFAP USDA Foods occurs in various ways.

- Pantries distribute food packages containing both TEFAP USDA Foods **and** privately donated foods to New Jersey residents experiencing food insecurity and emergency food needs.
- Soup kitchens and homeless shelters use TEFAP USDA Food in the preparation of hot and cold meals to be served to those in need.

It is because of the dedication and diligence of those working statewide that New Jersey's TEFAP USDA Food distribution program has been successful.

Since 1982, the efforts of NJDA, EFOs and LDAs have distributed several hundred million pounds of federally purchased food throughout the state.

The following pages will explain TEFAP in more detail and how your organization, as an **EMERGENCY FOOD PANTRY** can participate in this vital link within the hunger prevention network.

DEFINITIONS YOU SHOULD KNOW

EMERGENCY FEEDING ORGANIZATION (EFO/Food Bank):

EFOs are public or non-profit organizations that provide nutrition assistance to relieve situations of food insecurity and distress by providing emergency food for needy persons to other agencies that perform this service. EFOs include charitable institutions, pantries, hunger centers, soup kitchens, shelters and similar public or private non-profit agencies. The NJDA contracts with several EFOs to distribute TEFAP USDA Foods to local distribution agencies (**LDAs**) that provide meals or food to needy people.

This is a public and or charitable nonprofit institution that maintains an operation to provide food to pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, or other hunger relief centers for needy persons on a regular basis. A Food Bank that contracts with the NJDA to distribute USDA foods is considered an **EFO for TEFAP**, (i.e., trained staff, warehousing for freezer refrigeration and dry storage capability along with forklifts and loading docks for unloading tractor trailers). For an EFO to distribute TEFAP USDA Foods in the state, it must be physically located in New Jersey.

LOCAL DISTRIBUTION AGENCY (LDA):

LDAs are public or non-profit volunteer/charitable organizations which receive TEFAP USDA Foods from EFOs and distribute these foods to the eligible recipients. New Jersey Soup kitchens, homeless shelters, pantries, and other agencies, which meet NJDA requirements (as set forth in this manual) can be considered **LDAs for TEFAP**.

NEEDY PERSON/FOOD INSECURE

A person who meets the TEFAP income guidelines as outlined in this Manual.

FOSTER CHILD:

A child supported through State funding for care and maintenance payments to be used for board, clothing, and Medicaid. The allocations for the child are not considered income for the host family.

FUNCTIONS OF VARIOUS LDAs

SOUP KITCHEN:

Soup kitchens maintain an established feeding operation to provide food in the form of prepared meals to needy persons on a regular basis as part of their normal activities. Soup kitchens also maintain regular days and hours of operations throughout the month providing privately and federally donated foods (**A minimum of four hours per month**). To receive TEFAP USDA Foods, a Soup Kitchen must be able to document and demonstrate that it maintains an inventory of privately donated (non-USDA) food stocks to meet emergency needs.

HOMELESS SHELTER:

Homeless shelters maintain on-site feeding programs serving the homeless, on regular days and hours of operation throughout the month. Shelters for battered women and children and runaway children may also qualify as homeless shelters.

GROUP HOME:

Is any private or non-public housing corporation or institutional facility for profit that provides living quarters and meals. This also entails a domicile for unrelated persons such as a retirement home or a long-term health care facility. (**GROUP HOME is not eligible to participate in TEFAP**).

PANTRY:

Pantries distribute both TEFAP and privately donated foods to low income and unemployed households, to relieve food insecurity and emergency distress situations. Pantries maintain scheduled days and hours of operation during the month, (minimum of four hours per month). To receive TEFAP USDA Foods, a pantry must be able to document and demonstrate that it maintains an inventory of privately donated (non-USDA) food stocks to meet emergency needs.

NEEDY FEEDING AGENCIES:

Needy Feeding Agencies (NFA), serve meals to the needy but not necessarily homeless persons. To receive TEFAP USDA Foods, a Needy Feeding Agency must document to the satisfaction of their EFO (Food Bank), that their organization **does serve** predominately needy persons. An example is a senior housing complex.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF EMERGENCY FOOD PANTRIES

1. Emergency Food Pantries may contract with any EFO, regardless of the NJ location. The contract states the responsibilities of each party. **LDAs may contract to receive TEFAP USDA Foods from only one EFO.**
2. EFOs will make food available based on the recipients served per month and TEFAP USDA Foods available. All TEFAP USDA foods must be distributed equitably. LDAs must respond to the written offering from the EFO.
3. Foods must be picked up at scheduled times at the EFOs in an enclosed vehicle (No open or tarpaulin covered vehicles allowed), that can safely and securely transport the weight of the food. The amounts must be verified and LDAs must obtain a signed receipt. All pick-ups from EFOs must be delivered to LDAs in a timely manner, to avoid spoilage.
4. Properly store, handle, and distribute all foods. Pantries are fully accountable for any loss of foods received from the EFO.
5. New Jersey is Self-Declaration however residents are also eligible if currently participating in local, state or federal programs that meet the income eligibility guidelines and in the event of a disaster. The Screener should read and establish that the applicant understands the Self Certification Clause:

“I certify that my total yearly gross household income is at or below 185% of the poverty level., I will also notify the Pantry, if there are changes to my income which may cause me to become ineligible for the TEFAP USDA Foods.”

The Pantry Representative must provide their signature to verify that they explained the Self Certification statement to the Applicant. **The Pantry will not ask the recipient to show proof of income** or keep copies of an Applicant’s information other than the Intake Form signed by the applicant. This must be kept on file at the Pantry and the recipient must re-certify their eligibility to the food pantry once a year.

All self-certification forms must have the name of the EFO and the name of the LDA on the form. If form is printed in different languages (i.e., Spanish) opposite side should be printed in the English language.

6. TEFAP USDA Foods are given to eligible recipients at no charge. Each time a recipient receives food, they must submit on the USDA Foods Acceptance Report: the date, their printed name, and the number of adults/children in the family. All recipients must be a resident of New Jersey. **The recipient is not required to provide a street address. However, they must provide the town they live in and a zip code.**
7. Each month the LDA completes a TEFAP Summary Report that provides the amount of food distributed, number of eligible recipients served and submit it by the 7th of the month along with the USDA Foods Acceptance Form, to the EFO. Submit originals and keep copies at the site for review. The EFO will supply the TEFAP Summary Report and USDA Foods Acceptance forms required. **LDAs must use all state provided documents.**
8. Limitations on unrelated activities – Activities unrelated to the distribution of TEFAP USDA Foods or meal service may be conducted at distribution sites, if the following occurs:
 - The person(s) conducting the activity makes clear that the activity is not part of TEFAP and is not endorsed by the NJDA (impermissible activities include information not related to TEFAP placed in or printed on bags, boxes or other containers in which USDA foods are distributed).
 - Recipes or other information about foods, date of future distributions, hours of operations, or other Federal, State or local government programs or services for the needy may be distributed without a clarification that the information is not endorsed by the NJDA.
 - The person(s) conducting the activity makes clear that cooperation is not a condition of the receipt of TEFAP USDA Foods for the home consumption or prepared meals containing TEFAP USDA Foods (cooperation includes contributing money, signing petitions, or conversing with the person(s): and the activity is not conducted in a manner that disrupts the distribution of TEFAP USDA Foods or meal service.
 - Eligible recipient agencies and distribution sites will ensure that activities unrelated to the distribution of TEFAP USDA Foods or meals service are conducted in a manner consistent with USDA requirements.
 - Maintain accurate temperature logs for dry storage (ventilation) as well as cooler and freezer storages.

HOW TO RECEIVE FOODS

If an organization meets the NJDA's definition of an Emergency Food Pantry and wishes to receive TEFAP USDA Foods, that organization must sign a contract with only ONE EFO which states the responsibilities of the EFO, and the pantry.

Pantries are subject to inspections by the EFO, NJDA and USDA staff. Prior to receiving foods, the EFO will conduct a pre-inspection of a new pantry's facility, including the storage area(s) and operations center. All storage facilities for TEFAP USDA Foods must be in New Jersey. Private residences may not be used for storage and/or distribution of USDA TEFAP USDA Foods. The use of off-site storage is not allowable unless the facility has been pre-approved in writing by both an EFO official and an NJDA TEFAP field agent.

TEFAP USDA Foods serve as a supplement to a pantry's non-governmental donated foods.

To receive TEFAP USDA Foods, a pantry must be able to document and demonstrate that it maintains a regular inventory of privately donated (non-USDA) food stocks to meet emergency needs.

TEFAP USDA Foods must be distributed in an equitable manner and only to residents of New Jersey.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR RECIPIENTS

To be eligible to receive TEFAP USDA Foods from emergency food pantries, all recipients must reside in New Jersey.

A household is defined as: A group of related or non-related individuals, exclusive of boarders, who are not residents of an institution, but who are living as one economic unit and for whom food is customarily purchased and prepared in common. It also means an individual living alone.

Foster children or wards of the state living with and under the charge of related or unrelated individual(s) are included as members of the household with which they reside, and do not qualify as separate households. TEFAP eligibility guidelines do not require the host family to include, in their total household income, funds received from the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) for supporting foster children. When registering at a TEFAP pantry site, a recipient may include foster children in total family size but should not include DYFS funds received for foster child placements.

Eligibility Criteria

1. **Self-Declaration** – Their household income should not exceed income eligibility guidelines (185% of federal poverty guidelines). See EFO /LDA agency representative for current Income Eligibility Guidelines. Applicants will not be asked to show proof of income to self-certify. Applicant must be a resident of New Jersey.
2. **Existing** - Local, State or Federal Program participant (example – WIC)
3. **Disaster Relief**- Event description to be provided.

STORAGE AND HANDLING FOODS

TEMPERATURE

TO MAINTAIN ITS QUALITY, FOOD MUST BE STORED AT THE PROPER TEMPERATURES. THE USDA PUBLICATION FNS 251, "FACTS ABOUT USDA FOODS" SPECIFIES THE PROPER STORAGE TEMPERATURES FOR USDA FOODS. THERMOMETERS ARE REQUIRED FOR DRY, COOLER AND FREEZER STORAGE. TEMPERATURES OF ALL STORAGE AREAS MUST BE CHECKED AND RECORDED FREQUENTLY ON YOUR TEMPERATURE LOGS.

THE FOLLOWING TEMPERATURES ARE ACCEPTABLE:

DRY 50 F. to 70 F. DEGREES BEST CONDITIONS

COOLER 35 F. to 41 F. DEGREES NO VARIATION

FREEZER -10 F. to 0 F. DEGREES NO VARIATION

AIR CIRCULATION

AIR CIRCULATION IS IMPORTANT FOR FROZEN OR CHILLED FOODS AS WELL AS THOSE HELD IN DRY STORAGE. FOODS MUST BE STACKED ON PALLETS OR SHELVES WITH AT LEAST TWO INCHES OF WALL AND FLOOR CLEARANCE AND TWO FEET OF CEILING CLEARANCE.

~ STORE ALL FOOD OFF OF FLOOR ~

PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING OUT OF CONDITION FOOD

What to Report

Any out of condition USDA/TEFAP USDA Foods from:

- Contamination/spoilage (discolored contents; off odor, texture, or flavor)
 - Foreign matter
 - Infestation
- Defective packaging - (leaking or rusty cans, crushed boxes etc.)
 - Any other obvious damage

How to Report

If the damage is minimal (less than a case), contact the Food Bank from which your agency received the USDA/TEFAP USDA Foods. Depending on the amount of food and the extent of damage, the Food Bank will determine if a NJDA TEFAP inspector should be contacted. The Food Bank will provide the LDA with instructions for handling the food in question.

If the damage is more significant; contact your Food Bank and your TEFAP Inspector. If damage is discovered after business hours, separate the out of condition food and contact the Food Bank on the next business day. The TEFAP inspector will make an on-site inspection and determine the proper course of action.

UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD FOOD BE DISPOSED OF PRIOR TO THE ON-SITE INSPECTION.

Please make sure your pantry's insurance coverage includes loss of food due to equipment failure, fire, theft, and or other unforeseen incidents.

In cases where out of condition food presents an immediate health hazard, contact the EFO & NJDA Office at 1-609-292-0337.

SEPARATE FOOD IMMEDIATELY AND MAKE SURE IT CANNOT BE USED.

- Your agency names, ID number, address, and contact person and telephone number.
 - The date, time, and place of discovery.
 - Description and quantities of each type of damaged food.
 - Circumstances of loss and any apparent cause.
- General storage conditions (temperature, pallet, shelves, cold or dry storage, etc.)
 - Any reports from local police, fire, or health officials
- Copies of temperature logs and /or dates of any pest control, if applicable.

LDAs are responsible for all USDA foods received from their Food Bank. LDAs should check the temperature of dry storage areas (ventilation), refrigerators and freezers daily using the temperature control chart included, conduct pest control inspections monthly, and rotate your inventory. Date all inventory when you receive it. Check pack date and use oldest date first.

You should always do a review of storage areas after a power outage or construction work.

VEHICLES

All LDAs must use appropriate vehicles to pick up their foods. These guidelines should be followed.

1. Vehicles must be clean and sanitary. No waste removal vehicles or other unsanitary vehicles are permitted to pick up foods.
2. Vehicles must be able to safely transport the weight of the foods being picked up.

Be sure to check the maximum weight limits and load capacity specified on the vehicle's I.D. sticker (usually found on the inside of the door). Rental trucks have their weight limits printed on the outside of the body.

A gross weight limit means you must subtract the weight of the vehicle before figuring its net load capacity.

3. **Only, enclosed VEHICLES can be used when picking up TEFAP USDA Foods. All health regulations must be followed regarding the transportation of TEFAP USDA Foods. Food must be delivered in a timely manner to avoid thawing and or spoilage.**
4. Municipal road trucks, garbage or dump trucks are prohibited from picking up TEFAP USDA Foods.

WEEKLY PANTRY DISTRIBUTION GUIDE RATE

This chart shows the **MINIMUM** number of units to distribute to clients

Pantries are encouraged to consider family size and need when including TEFAP USDA Foods in packages to eligible recipients. The following guide rate is the recommended **MINIMUM** quantity to offer:

FOOD / PACK SIZE	NO. UNITS PER FAMILY SIZE				
	1 - 2	3 - 5	6 - 8	9 - 11	12 PLUS
Match to number of family members	1 - 2	3 - 5	6 - 8	9 - 11	12 PLUS
Canned Fruits & Vegetables (various sizes)	1	2	3	4	5
Fresh – Frozen Fruits & Vegetables (various sizes)	1	2	3	4	5
Fruit Juice, Bottle (64 oz.)	1	2	3	4	5
Cans – meat, poultry, fish (various sizes)	1	2	3	4	5
Frozen meats, poultry, fish (various sizes)	1	2	3	4	5
Dried or canned Beans (various sizes)	1	2	3	4	5
All Pasta (Bag - various sizes)	1	2	3	4	5
Dried Fruits (various sizes)	1	2	3	4	5
Cereal (15 - 18 oz. Box)	1	2	3	4	5
Peanut Butter (16-18 oz jar)	1	2	2	2	3
Rice, corn meal, oatmeal, grits (various sizes)	1	1	2	2	3
Cheese – package (various sizes)	1	2	2	2	3
Oil – (various sizes)	1	1	2	3	4
Soups – (various sizes)	2	3	4	5	6
Fresh Milk – 2-half gallons or 1 full gallon	1	2	3	4	5
Instant Non-Fat Dry Milk (various sizes.)	1	2	2	2	3

Note: Availability of foods is determined by the United States Department of Agriculture. Varieties and pack sizes of foods available will vary as USDA buying patterns adjust to food market conditions. This is a guide and does not contain all foods available.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

CIVIL RIGHTS REQUIREMENTS

CIVIL RIGHTS- NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

In accordance with federal civil rights law and USDA civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its agencies, offices, employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the state or local agency that administers the program or contact USDA through the Telecommunications Relay Service at 711 (voice and TTY). Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

1. Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Mail Stop 9410, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
2. Fax: (202) 690-7442; or
3. Email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

This non-discrimination statement will be included on all printed materials relating to TEFAP, such as pamphlets, forms or any other program materials distributed to the public.

Additionally, the USDA "And Justice for All" poster shall be displayed in a prominent area at all agency locations where USDA Foods are being distributed or served to recipients.

All eligible persons and households will have an equal opportunity to participate in the program.

Program information must include revised eligibility standards and be made available to all potential eligible persons. Program information should be bi-lingual, where services are being provided in the language of the minority area.

EFOs and LDAs are encouraged to provide program information on a regular basis to eligible organizations where minority and grassroots organizations exist.

The *Civil Rights Discrimination Complaint Form* (see the Appendix of forms at your EFO) must be displayed and easily accessible to all participants/applicants during distribution or Registration.

EFOs and LDAs must conduct annual Civil Rights training for all its staff and volunteers, ensuring that the above basic requirements are followed, as well as any new amendments or changes. The contents of this section can be used as the basis for training. Always maintain an attendance record of staff receiving training for all scheduled training.

Complaint form links below: Please print and have available the complaint form.

<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf>

<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027s.pdf>