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October 13, 2023

Attention: Polly Fairfield
Food and Nutrition Service
United States Department of Agriculture
1320 Braddock Place
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

RE: Proposed Rule: Improving Access and Parity in Food Distribution Programs

Dear Deputy Under Secretary Stacy Dean and Administrator Cindy Long:

On behalf of Feeding America, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on USDA's proposed rule on Improving Access and Parity in Food Distribution Programs.

Feeding America is committed to an America where no one is hungry. We support tens of millions of people who experience food insecurity to get the food and resources they say they need to thrive as part of a nationwide network of food banks, statewide food bank associations, food pantries and meal programs. We also invest in innovative solutions to increase equitable access to nutritious food, advocate for legislation that improves food security and work to address factors that impact food security, such as health, cost of living and employment.

USDA's food distribution programs are central to the service of the Feeding America network. We support opportunities to strengthen and streamline these programs to best serve people experiencing food insecurity across the country.

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Introduction

Why Feeding America Responded to This Proposed Rule

Feeding America responds to administrative rules and policy proposals when they impact individuals experiencing food insecurity, food access for families and children, and food banks' ability to respond to hunger in their communities.

USDA food distribution programs are central to our work:

TEFAP: This program is a cornerstone of the Feeding America network's food supply, providing nearly 30% of the food distributed through network food banks and local hunger-relief programs. In 2022, TEFAP enabled 192 participating network food banks to serve over 1 billion meals.

CSFP: Older adults need nutritious foods to maintain good health. Feeding America network food banks help meet the needs of over half a million seniors each year by administering CSFP.

FDPIR: Feeding America works closely with Native partners to address hunger in tribal communities. We glean from experts, including our colleagues at the Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative, to inform our work in this space.

Disaster: Food banks are often the first responders against hunger when disaster strikes. Feeding America network food banks can serve as primary distributors of USDA foods and emergency supplies during hurricanes, wildfires, pandemics and other declared disasters.

To inform our comment, the Feeding America national organization solicited feedback from network members, people with experience accessing these programs, and other leading national nonprofit organizations. We held network member listening sessions on each program addressed by the rule, including TEFAP, CSFP, FDPIR and USDA foods in disaster. More than 150 people provided input during these sessions. We also collected feedback through monthly network member webinars and one-on-one conversations with food banks. Additionally, we gathered information through multiple network member surveys: one in November 2022, after reviewing the regulatory agenda and in anticipation of a proposed rule for USDA commodities, and another during this proposed rule's 60-day comment period. Network members offered a wealth of knowledge on opportunities to strengthen USDA food programs through administrative rulemaking, based on decades of experience administering these programs as well as new learnings from the pandemic era. To provide an additional, critical and sometimes overlooked perspective, we also held a listening session with over 30 people who have accessed food assistance programs. Their firsthand experiences also inform the content of our comment.

Comments on Proposed Rule (by Program)

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

Eligibility Guidelines

Feeding America strongly supports USDA's proposal to implement a federal minimum income eligibility threshold for TEFAP at 185% of the federal poverty level. This adaptation would help to modernize eligibility standards, placing minimum TEFAP income eligibility thresholds in line with other federal nutrition programs, such as the National School Lunch Program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program. This would help expand TEFAP access for more people and streamline program administration within and across states. In a November 2022 Feeding America survey, 85% of responding network food banks stated that raising the TEFAP eligibility level was needed to serve more people facing hunger through TEFAP in their state.

Additionally, we encourage USDA to explicitly require that categorical eligibility, in addition to income thresholds, be employed by states to verify need. This mirrors a similar current proposed rule change for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and would help increase access to and program administration alignment between both programs. Network members and individuals with experience accessing food assistance expressed the importance of streamlining eligibility and access, as much as possible, across social programs.

We strongly oppose the implementation of a federal maximum threshold for TEFAP income eligibility. We believe states should be able to set income eligibility guidelines based on firsthand knowledge of their unique populations, the local cost of living, resource management and other factors. Eight states[1] with areas where the cost of living is high have already received USDA approval for TEFAP eligibility above 250% of the federal poverty level to best serve people facing hunger in their communities. We are concerned that the proposed income eligibility ceiling of 250% of the federal poverty level would:

- Create additional undue administrative burden for eight states—those already operating above 250% of the federal poverty level—to provide justification to maintain their income eligibility thresholds. Food banks in some of these states have expressed concern about the potential for such requests to be denied, resulting in currently eligible individuals losing their food access.
- Be a potential deterrent for states to adjust their income eligibility thresholds above 250% in the future, due to added administrative burden (despite the potential benefits for families with slightly higher earnings who are experiencing food insecurity in states with areas where the cost of living is high).

[1] Alaska, Connecticut, Illinois, Minnesota, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington.

- Open the door for denial of threshold adjustment requests. Justification processes leave room for subjectivity, and administrations could interpret such requests in a manner that denies states' ability to do what works best for their area.

If USDA determines there must be a ceiling, it should be no less than 400% of the federal poverty level to be inclusive of all current state administrative practices and best reflect the economic realities of people experiencing food insecurity. Due to the uneven economic recovery from the pandemic, insufficient wage growth, fluctuating rates of inflation and heightened costs of living in many areas, some states agree that a 400% limit is necessary to help families experiencing food insecurity access the food they need. **We strongly recommend that USDA retain the proposed option for state agencies to submit a request to establish eligibility thresholds at a higher level, with justification.** This would allow states to continue to serve their residents as required by the economic circumstances of their communities.

Additionally, we urge USDA to add to its final rule language that protects eligibility thresholds submitted by states and approved by FNS. This would help maintain consistency and reduce variation across administrations.

Removal of Address Requirement

Feeding America supports the proposed language to disallow the requirement that individuals seeking assistance provide their address or identification to prove residency. As noted in the proposed rule, there is no demonstrated need to require participants to disclose their address, and requiring identification can be an unnecessarily restrictive measure. As shared by individuals who have accessed food assistance through TEFAP, this would be an especially positive program change for people experiencing housing insecurity, and it would decrease concerns around privacy and stigma. Eligible recipient agencies noted they would also benefit from this change, as it would eliminate a lengthy administrative intake step, freeing up staff capacity and helping to shorten long lines at food distributions.

Feeding America is committed to ensuring our work is data-driven, and many network members use voluntarily provided residency indicators, like ZIP codes, to help inform where food distributions are most needed. **We support the language in the proposed rule allowing for continued collection of residency indicators, voluntarily and not as a precondition for participation, so network members can continue using such data to inform their work.**

Network members believe the final rule should remove geographic limitations on service altogether. This change would be particularly helpful to food banks with operations that cross multiple states or serve at state borders. It would also be beneficial if eligible recipient agencies could serve people from different states. Another major barrier that was repeatedly raised by individuals who have accessed food assistance was restrictions on frequency of access (e.g., only being able to attend distributions once per month). **When surveyed, the majority of responding network members stated that USDA should not allow states to implement TEFAP distribution frequency restrictions. Many individuals with lived experience agreed that eliminating distribution frequency limits would make it easier for people to access the food they need.**

Publicly Available Information

The proposed language would require state agencies to make TEFAP participant eligibility criteria publicly available on a webpage. **Feeding America supports making participant eligibility information available on a public webpage to make the program more transparent and accessible to people seeking food assistance.**

Additionally, this proposal would require state agencies to annually post on a public webpage a list of all eligible recipient agencies serving TEFAP foods and their contact information. Network members support this provision's intent to make the program easier to access. However, the utility of such information would depend on its accuracy and clarity. We want to ensure people do not receive information that could unintentionally mislead them by directing them to eligible recipient agencies that have limited operating hours or little staff capacity to answer calls. There was agreement among network members and individuals who have accessed food assistance that it is of the utmost importance that people access information that is fully up to date. Therefore, **we urge USDA to require states to list eligible recipient agencies with which the state has an agreement as the main points of contact for the public, so that people seeking assistance would be directed to organizations that have capacity to assist and can provide them with the most accurate and useful information available.**

We strongly request that USDA require state agencies to annually post on a public webpage their current TEFAP state plan. This mirrors a current proposed rule change for CSFP and would help bring transparency and parity to both programs. Ability to access a state plan varies from state to state, and the information contained in each plan is critical to ensure eligibility and operations information is known to providers and participants. Requiring state agencies to post current TEFAP state plans would enhance the charitable food system's ability to meet the needs of people facing hunger.

Reporting on Participation

The proposed language requires state agencies to collect information on the number of participants served by TEFAP and report it to the USDA on a quarterly basis. **We support USDA's proposal to collect just one data point on TEFAP: the number of participants served by the program. We strongly support aligning the timing of this report with that of other required reporting from states to USDA.**

We recognize this metric would require additional reporting from eligible recipient agencies and state agencies. We urge USDA to consider aligning the timing of this report with that of other required reporting from eligible recipient agencies to state agencies. Alternatively, this metric could be collected via annual audit processes, which would further reduce the reporting burden on eligible recipient agencies and state agencies, while still providing USDA with helpful service metrics. Additionally, state-approved electronic intake platforms, such as Service Insights on MealConnect, Link2Feed, Oasis Insight and other platforms operating at eligible recipient agency distribution locations are approved for the data collection and reporting required by this section. USDA has encouraged the use of such platforms to improve data accuracy. Feeding America's Service Insights on MealConnect helps network food banks and local agency partners collect basic information and manage program compliance at distributions to better inform how and where they provide assistance. We encourage USDA to highlight examples of how electronic intake platforms, like Service Insights on MealConnect, help eligible recipient agencies and food banks report critical metrics to state agencies and better serve their communities to encourage further buy-in from state agencies.

Participant Confidentiality

Privacy and confidentiality are of the utmost importance to the Feeding America network and the people we serve, and we support the proposed efforts to ensure these principles are upheld in TEFAP. The Service Insights on MealConnect platform was designed with individuals' privacy and data protections in mind. The platform incorporates industry-standard technology and practices at every step of the process to ensure data is being protected, including a privacy policy, terms of use, master license agreement, end user license agreement, and data sharing acknowledgement. As part of intake, each neighbor is asked if they agree or disagree to sharing their personal information with third parties, such as healthcare and social service providers, for the purpose of improving services and connecting them with additional services.

We encourage USDA to ensure confidentiality regulations are aligned with ongoing best practices, including the use of state-approved electronic intake platforms. This will allow network members to continue using electronic intake platforms, like Service Insights on MealConnect, that benefit both food banks and the people they serve.

Additionally, network members request that USDA clarify through this rulemaking process, including related guidance and policy memos interpreting the final rule during implementation, that TEFAP distributors may continue using state-approved electronic intake platforms, like Service Insights on MealConnect, to efficiently administer TEFAP intake and distribute food to people in need. Feeding America's Service Insights on MealConnect is an electronic intake platform that allows network food banks and local agencies to collect basic information and manage program compliance at distributions to better inform how and where they provide assistance. This platform is offered to network members free of cost, and 57 network food banks and more than 1,000 agency partners use it.

Particularly for TEFAP, Service Insights on MealConnect helps network members collect federally required information about program participants, such as name, residency indicators and household size. In the past year, the platform has assisted nearly 650 TEFAP-serving sites recording over 2.2 million visits.

Rural, Remote and Tribal Expansion

USDA's proposed language would encourage the implementation or expansion of TEFAP distributions to rural, remote and tribal populations—the latter two groups are not included in current regulations. **Feeding America fully supports this proposal to expand access to TEFAP in tribal communities and to historically underserved populations. We support this proposed change, especially as it would align regulatory language with that of TEFAP Reach and Resiliency grants.**

Technical Corrections

The proposed language includes various technical corrections, which Feeding America supports. **We support updating the nondiscrimination language and ensuring that sexual orientation and gender identity are acknowledged as protected classes in all aspects of program implementation.**

Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

Eligibility Guidelines

Feeding America supports the proposal to increase the maximum CSFP income eligibility threshold to 185% of the federal poverty level. This proposal would help more older adults access the food they need to thrive. Network members and individuals who have accessed food assistance alike shared many instances in which, under current regulations, older adults have been denied participation due to having incomes slightly above the 130% eligibility threshold. Increasing the income eligibility threshold to 185% also brings parity between the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program and CSFP. These programs complement nicely, providing fresh and shelf-stable foods when accessed together for seniors experiencing food insecurity.

We also believe that states should be required to set their maximum income eligibility threshold between 130% and 185% of the federal poverty level. Providing a range for states would further bring parity between CSFP and TEFAP and help to ensure consistency in access and resource management across states. A minimum income eligibility threshold at 130% of the federal poverty level also aligns the CSFP minimum access threshold with that of other federal nutrition programs, including SNAP and the National School Lunch Program.

We recognize that increasing CSFP income eligibility thresholds may increase demand for food. Policymakers should consider revising the caseload allocation methodology alongside increases to eligibility thresholds to ensure waiting lists do not grow drastically.

Categorical Eligibility

The proposed language requests comments on allowing CSFP applicants to be categorically eligible for the program via participation in other federal means-tested programs with income limits at or below the CSFP threshold.

Feeding America strongly supports implementing categorical eligibility in CSFP, while maintaining the option to self-declare income. Allowing categorical eligibility for participation in SNAP, FDPIR, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and other federal programs would streamline the burdensome application process for older adults and could reduce administrative work for state agencies. Including other programs that support seniors with low incomes and do not use federal means-testing, such as the Housing Choice Voucher Program and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), could further increase access. USDA could also encourage states to implement categorical eligibility for state-level means-tested programs.

Feeding America urges USDA to remove the requirement that federal means-tested programs have income limits at or below the CSFP threshold to be considered for categorical eligibility. Restricting categorical eligibility to other programs with those criteria would exclude programs that serve households with low incomes using different methods of determining eligibility. For example, the Housing Choice Voucher Program requires that families have incomes less than or equal to 50% of the median income for the area in which the family lives. LIHEAP eligibility thresholds allow participants to have an income up to 60% of the state median income level. Both programs serve older adults who have low incomes, but they would not be considered for categorical eligibility for CSFP under the proposed federal means-tested income limits language. **We encourage the USDA to model the CSFP categorical eligibility regulations after the National School Lunch Program language, which confers eligibility based on participation in other programs without reference to the income limits of other programs, including TANF programs, which have higher income thresholds.**

Identity Verification

While this provision would make it easier for participants to prove their identity, a requirement to provide some form of identification makes CSFP delivery partnerships more difficult to implement, reducing efficiency and delivery program reach. **Network members and individuals who have experience accessing food assistance expressed support for completely removing identity verification as a requirement to fully eliminate this barrier to access.**

Should USDA determine identity verification must be required, Feeding America supports the proposed provision to allow CSFP state and local agencies to establish additional methods of verifying the identity of participants when receiving food packages. Flexible verification methods could reduce barriers to access for many older adults, including those with limited or no ability to obtain traditional forms of identification. Individuals who have accessed food assistance shared anecdotes of being denied service due to improper identification and strongly supported this effort to create needed flexibility in such verification processes. Additional identity verification methods could also help reduce the burden on eligible recipient agencies and help ensure efficient distributions. **We encourage USDA to provide examples of alternative materials that can be used to verify identity to clarify options for people accessing the program. Such materials could include health care cards, a library card, official mail or other documentation that indicates identity.**

Publicly Available Information

Proposed language would require state agencies to annually post on a public webpage a list of all eligible recipient agencies serving CSFP food boxes. Feeding America supports this provision's intent to make the program easier to access. However, the utility of such information would depend on its accuracy and clarity. We want to ensure people do not receive information that could unintentionally mislead them by directing them to eligible recipient agencies that have limited operating hours, no capacity to answer calls or full caseloads. There was agreement among network members and individuals who have accessed food assistance that it is of the utmost importance that people access information that is fully up to date. Therefore, **we urge USDA to require states to list eligible recipient agencies with which the state has an agreement as the main points of contact for the public, so that people seeking assistance would be directed to organizations that have capacity to assist and can provide them with the most accurate and useful information available.**

Feeding America strongly supports the proposal to make state plans publicly available on state agency webpages. Additionally, we encourage USDA to require state agencies to make publicly available on a webpage participant eligibility information. This mirrors a similar current proposed rule change for TEFAP and would help bring transparency and parity to both programs.

Given that many older adults have limited digital fluency, Feeding America suggests that USDA also encourage state agencies to make information about eligibility requirements and eligible recipient agencies available in physical form via mail or at places that seniors experiencing food insecurity already visit, such as congregate meal sites and food pantries. Doing so could help connect more individuals to CSFP, and this idea was raised specifically by older adults who have accessed food assistance.

Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program

The proposed language requires that local agencies share written information and referrals to the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) where applicable. **Feeding America supports this provision because many CSFP participants are also eligible for SFMNP; this would be especially pertinent should USDA implement a CSFP income eligibility threshold that mirrors that of SFMNP at 185% of the federal poverty level.** Ensuring CSFP participants are aware of SFMNP and how to enroll in the program could help further address senior food insecurity and provide CSFP participants with access to fresh produce, which is not available through CSFP. We encourage USDA to explore expanding this provision to include information about and referrals to other programs for older adults with low incomes, such as the Older Americans Act nutrition services, housing services, such as the Housing Choice Voucher Program, and LIHEAP.

Technical Corrections

The proposed language includes various technical corrections, which Feeding America has no concerns with. We support removing outdated references to WIC. We also support preserving income exclusions based on WIC, as doing so would maintain existing CSFP access and prevent a cascade of income reevaluations that would be burdensome for program participants and administrators. **Additionally, we support updating the nondiscrimination language and ensuring that sexual orientation and gender identity are acknowledged as protected classes in all aspects of program implementation.**

Feeding America also requests a technical change, impacting the FNS-191 form, to allow program participants to indicate "prefer not to say" or to select a category of "other" if they feel the race and ethnicity options provided do not fully represent their identity. Network members specifically shared that the requirement to mark a race or ethnicity, even if the participant does not self-identify with one of the available options, can be an obstacle in CSFP. Visual observation of race and ethnicity was removed from some other nutrition programs through USDA's policy memo: *Collection of Race and Ethnicity Data by Visual Observation and Identification in the Child and Adult Care Food Program and Summer Food Service Program – Policy Rescission* (May 17, 2021). Appropriate updates through regulation or guidance for this practice in CSFP would be beneficial for staff and/or volunteers helping to run local programs. We recognize the importance of collecting demographic data to address the unique needs of specific communities, and CSFP agencies should continue explaining the importance of this data to participants as they encourage them to self-identify and self-report.

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)

Urban Place Service

The proposed rule states that any urban place outside of the reservation boundaries may be served by the Indian Tribal Organization (ITO) without justification. **Feeding America supports this proposal, and we encourage USDA to retain the language "may be served" instead of "must be," to allow ITOs to make the most informed and effective distribution decisions based on their unique communities.**

As a result of historical federal policies, enrolled citizens and descendants of tribes across the country may live in urban areas outside the reservation. Yet, they still face challenges in securing stable, nutritious foods and have difficulty in obtaining FDPIR services despite living in a tribe's FNS service area. This proposed change would allow ITOs to serve tribal citizens in urban areas without the administrative burden of requesting and justifying the need. Removing this barrier would reflect the contemporary living situations of tribal members and descendants, and such action is necessary to meet their needs.

Waivers

The proposed rule would allow FNS to waive or modify specific regulatory requirements for ITOs in certain situations.

Feeding America encourages USDA to continue seeking programmatic flexibility that respects tribal sovereignty in programs. Waiver authority has been used across numerous federal departments to break through bureaucratic and regulatory barriers, helping tribes and their federal partners be more responsive to the unique needs of tribal citizens on a tribe-by-tribe basis.

Feeding America supports this provision, as it would give ITOs authority and flexibility to apply to FNS for waivers to regulatory requirements to help ensure programs are best serving their communities. We encourage USDA to mirror existing SNAP waiver authority for FDPIR (EO 13175) to ensure parity between the programs. USDA should continue dialogue with tribal leaders to determine the conditions under which a tribe might be granted a waiver.

Deduction Calculation

The proposed rule would allow for the FDPIR shelter and utility standard deductions to be increased to the level of the SNAP maximum deduction, and for the use of actual expenses to calculate the deductions.

Regional and state program calculations do not always account for the distinct conditions present on tribal reservations and in Alaska Native village jurisdictions. State SNAP calculations often fail to incorporate the increased costs of living and transportation in geographically remote reservations, the lack of available vendors to service these areas, and the challenge for participants to reach distribution points without reliable transportation.

Feeding America supports the proposed language and increased flexibility in counting deductions. This would provide parity with SNAP, which the National Association for FDPIR and tribal leaders note would help more tribal citizens access FDPIR.

Household and Dependent Status

The proposed rule would allow for separated household status to be granted to separated spouses who are living apart. Through this regulation, requirements for determining parental control of minor children would mimic SNAP regulations.

This provision would allow for greater flexibility for tribal families who, due to various circumstances, live in separate households and have previously been denied separate access to the program in a way that will help feed their whole family. **Maintaining parity between SNAP and FDPIR requirements would help participants have a more seamless opportunity to transition between the programs through commonly held verification standards, and Feeding America supports this proposed rule change.**

Food Assessment

This proposed provision would require FNS to periodically assess how USDA foods provided through FDPIR compare to federal dietary guidelines and to adjust food package contents to ensure they are consistent with basic dietary needs.

We applaud USDA for incorporating feedback from ITOs through regular consultation to incorporate more nutritious, culturally preferred foods for American Indian and Alaska Native participants.

Feeding America supports this proposal, while also continuing to promote ad-hoc flexibility for the FDPIR Work Group. We encourage USDA to ensure that this provision promotes reviews on an as-needed basis, with no limitations to how often they can occur. This provision would also clearly prohibit the FDPIR package benefit from being reduced through review and analysis, meaning participants would not be at risk of losing food—a proposal that Feeding America strongly supports. **We also encourage USDA to increase parity between FDPIR and SNAP by ensuring any adjustments to SNAP benefit calculation methods are accompanied by adjustments to FDPIR food package amounts.**

Gross Income Eligibility and Data

Through this proposed rule, USDA is requesting public comment on whether there are data sources that should be considered when establishing income guidelines for FDPIR, and/or whether USDA should consider use of a gross income eligibility requirement without deductions.

Feeding America would like to uplift the position of our Native partners, namely our colleagues at the Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative, who expressed that one of the main challenges in securing full program participation is the need for staff and administrative time to navigate federal participation guidelines. They shared that ITOs operate on minimal budgets, resulting in limited administrative staff capacity to meet the needs of eligible participants. Using eligibility criteria that accept gross income without deductions would simplify the process for many ITOs. Feeding America supports the Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative's suggestion that localized guidelines may better reflect the income eligibility situation for program participants.

Technical Changes

The proposed language includes various technical corrections, which Feeding America supports. **We support updating the nondiscrimination language and ensuring that sexual orientation and gender identity are acknowledged as protected classes in all aspects of program implementation.**

USDA Foods in Disaster

USDA Foods and D-SNAP

The proposed language would allow for the simultaneous provision of Disaster SNAP (D-SNAP) and USDA foods in disaster response, which is currently prohibited by federal regulation. Feeding America strongly supports this provision.

It is beneficial to allow various avenues of food access for people experiencing food insecurity, especially during times of disaster. Network members—particularly those who serve areas that face disasters more frequently—noted that a person's ability to access grocery stores or food distributions might vary based on the type of emergency, and that some people may need to access both avenues given the intensity of a disaster's impact. Both types of access can and should be available to any person facing food insecurity, and Feeding America supports USDA's proposed language.

Reporting

The proposed language would require state distributing agencies operating a disaster household distribution past 14 calendar days to submit a weekly report to FNS on the number of individuals served and on the amount of USDA foods issued. **The change from the current 45-day threshold to 14 days would create additional administrative burden for states during times of already heightened administrative burden.** The estimated calculation of additional burden included in the proposed rule language does not account for administrative burden eligible recipient agencies and food banks might face to help gather such information. **We urge USDA to consider utilizing the data of other, on-the-ground sources (such as FEMA) to collect this additional information during times of duress.**

Impact on Other Programs

We support the proposed language related to limiting impact on other programs. USDA's effort to better understand when USDA foods are being used in disaster response and replace them, so as not to reduce the amount of USDA foods available in other programs, has direct benefits to the people served by the Feeding America network. **When deciding whether disaster response activities may negatively impact the distribution of foods through other programs, it is critical that the preferences of distributing agencies like food banks be a top priority.** Local eligible recipient agencies are in the best position to evaluate the severity and scope of a disaster impact, allocating TEFAP resources in a way that best addresses the unique needs of the people impacted by a disaster and the needs of individuals experiencing food insecurity outside of the disaster area. Sometimes, eligible recipient agencies may need to prioritize disaster distributions to serve their community most effectively.

Conclusion

Feeding America appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed rule on Improving Access and Parity in Food Distribution Programs. We thank USDA for taking this opportunity to strengthen these programs to more efficiently, effectively and equitably serve people experiencing food insecurity. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Vince Hall

Vince Hall
Chief Government Relations Officer
Feeding America