Glossary of Hunger Terms

**Hunger** – The uneasy or painful sensation caused by lack of food. The recurrent and involuntary lack of access to food. For more information see the ERS/USDA Briefing Room - [Food Security in the United States: Measuring Household Food Security](https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/poverty-and-wealth/disadvantaged-communities-and-food-security/

**Backpack Program** - While free and reduced breakfast and lunch programs provide significant nutritional benefits to students during the school day, many children do not receive sufficient food when school is not in session. Backpack Programs help alleviate child hunger by discreetly providing hungry children with backpacks full of nutritious and easy-to-prepare food on Friday afternoons so they have food to eat throughout the weekend.

**Basic Food** - Called Basic Food in Washington, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), helps low income people make ends meet by providing monthly benefits to buy food.

**Child Nutrition Act** – The Child Nutrition Act and the National School Lunch Act are the two pieces of authorizing legislation for the child nutrition and WIC programs. These laws were most recently reauthorized through 2009 by the [Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, P.L. 108-265](https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/)

**Child Nutrition Programs** – The five USDA domestic food assistance programs that primarily serve the nutritional needs of children. These programs include: the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Summer Food Service Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Special Milk Program.

**Commodity Foods** – As a result of federal surplus-removal and price-support programs, the USDA purchases excess food produced by American farmers. The USDA utilizes a number of commodity distribution and nutrition programs to provide these excess commodities to low-income Americans.

**Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)** – A type of farm where growers and consumers share the risks and benefits of food production. Typically CSA farm members or “share-holders” pledge in advance to cover the anticipated costs of the farm operation and farmer’s salary. In return, the share-holders receive shares in the farm’s production throughout the growing season. Share-holders also share in the risks of farming, including poor harvests due to unfavorable weather or pests. By direct sales to community members, who have provided the farmer with working capital in advance, growers receive better prices for their crops, gain some financial security, and are relieved of much of the burden of marketing. CSAs are increasingly used as a way to provide low-income, urban neighborhoods with access to fresh produce. More information can be found at the USDA’s Alternative Farming Systems Information Center.

**Dietary Guidelines for Americans** – Issued jointly every five years by HHS and the USDA, the Dietary Guidelines provide recommendations for dietary habits to promote health and reduce the risk of chronic disease. Meals served under many of the federal nutrition programs, such as the Child Nutrition Programs, must meet the requirements outlined in the Guidelines. The current Dietary Guidelines can be viewed here.
Emergency Food Providers – Private, nonprofit organizations that provide food to individuals and households in need. Emergency food providers obtain most food through bulk purchasing and donations; however, the federal TEFAP program also makes excess commodities available to the emergency food network.

Farm Bill – Authority for the Food Stamp Program is contained within the Farm Bill. This legislation can also affect commodity distribution programs such as TEFAP and CSFP and the child nutrition programs that receive commodity foods. In addition to nutrition programs, authority for many other USDA programs and activities is contained within the Farm Bill. The Farm Bill was most recently reauthorized by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, P.L. 107-171.

Farm to Cafeteria / Farm to School – Part of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, Farm to Cafeteria projects link local farmers and schools to bring locally-grown food into the National School Lunch Program. Examples of Farm to Cafeteria projects include salad bars, seasonal items incorporated into lunch menus, and school gardens. Although currently no funds have been appropriated for the implementation of this program, schools in 17 states have started their own programs, sometimes referred to as Farm to School programs, with funding from community organizations and Community Food Projects Grants from the USDA.

Farmers Market – A market where consumers can purchase fresh produce and other food items (such as meat, dairy products, and baked goods) directly from small to medium-sized farmers. Farmers markets are often located in urban settings, providing an important link between rural and urban communities. Some farmers markets also have the ability to accept EBT, allowing consumers to use their food stamp benefits to purchase food at these locations.

Federal Poverty Level (FPL) – A measure used to determine the household income level for a family to be considered in poverty. The measurement was developed in 1965 by multiplying the USDA’s economy food plan (predecessor to the Thrifty Food Plan) by three. The measurement is updated each year based on price increases reflected in the Consumer Price Index. Also referred to as the poverty level.

FMNV – Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value. FMNV is defined as: (i) In the case of artificially sweetened foods, a food which provides less than five percent of the Reference Daily Intakes (RDI) for each of eight specified nutrients per serving; and (ii) in the case of all other foods, a food which provides less than five percent of the RDI for each of eight specified nutrients per 100 calories and less than five percent of the RDI for each of the eight specified nutrients per serving. The eight nutrients to be assessed for this purpose are: protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, niacin, riboflavin, thiamine, calcium and iron. The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 210.11 defines FMNV; Appendix B states foods of minimal nutritional value include: soda water, water ices, chewing gum and certain candies.

Food Bank – A private, nonprofit organization that collects mostly nonperishable food in bulk from private and government sources. The food bank then distributes the food to food pantries and emergency kitchens which serve individuals and households in need.

Food Pantry - An agency that provides food directly to needy households by distributing bags of grocery items to be prepared and eaten at home. Also known as a Food Shelf.
**Food Bank Network** – An organization of food banks that coordinates the transfer of donated food and grocery products to where they are needed most. Often a food bank network will coordinate transfer of food to areas of need on a nationwide basis.

**Food Insecurity** – Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways. That is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies. For more information see the ERS/USDA Briefing Room - Food Security in the United States: Measuring Household Food Security.

**Food Security** – Access by all people, at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food Security includes at a minimum: (1) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods and (2) an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways. That is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies. For more information see the ERS/USDA Briefing Room - Food Security in the United States: Measuring Household Food Security.

**Food Stamp Administration** – Administration of the Food Stamp Program is shared by the federal and state governments. The USDA monitors state administration of the program, and provides bonus awards to states with the lowest and most improved payment error rates, lowest and most improved negative error rates, highest and most improved participation indices, and highest rates of timeliness in case handling.

**Food Stamp Program** – The largest nutrition program for low-income Americans that provides an allotted monthly benefit on electronic debit cards. Benefits can be redeemed at many grocery stores, some farmers markets and other retail sites, allowing low-income individuals to obtain food through normal channels of trade. The Food Stamp Program is a USDA program that provides an entitlement to states. Benefits are 100% federally funded. Administrative costs are shared between the federal and state governments. Food stamp benefits can only be used for food, and cannot be used to buy: any nonfood item (such as pet food, household supplies, grooming items, etc.); alcoholic beverages and tobacco; vitamins and medicines; any food that will be eaten in the store; and hot foods.

**Meal Program** - An organization that provides free, prepared meals on-site directly to hungry individuals or families. Often focused specifically on serving children, the elderly, the homeless, the displaced or other vulnerable populations.

**National School Lunch Program (NSLP)** – This USDA program helps public and private schools provide nutritious lunches to all students. Low-income students are able to receive free or reduced-price lunches through the program.

**Poverty Guidelines** – Guidelines issued each year by HHS that are used to determine eligibility for the all means-tested programs, including nutrition programs. Poverty guidelines are based upon calculation of the Federal Poverty Level.

**ACRONYMS**

**CSFP** – Commodity Supplemental Food Program. CSFP is a USDA program that makes commodity foods available to low-income pregnant women, new mothers, infants, children up to age six, and the elderly.
The USDA makes the commodities available to state agencies, which then distribute them to public and non-profit local agencies that serve these populations. This program does not operate in all states.

EBT – Electronic Benefits Transfer. EBT is the method by which food stamp and other benefits are distributed via an electronic debit card. Some states also use EBT to distribute benefits under WIC and some other programs.

EITC – Earned Income Tax Credit. EITC is a tax benefit for low- to moderate-income working families. Workers who qualify for the EITC and file a federal income tax return can receive a refund, making this an important program to support low-income families. Partnering with EITC outreach campaigns is one way of conducting multi-benefit outreach for food and nutrition programs.

EFAP – Emergency Food Assistance Program.

SSI – Supplemental Security Income. A federal assistance program that provides cash benefits to the elderly and disabled. SSI recipients are categorically eligible for the Food Stamp Program.

SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

TEFAP – The Emergency Food Assistance Program. Through TEFAP, the USDA makes commodity foods available to states, which in turn provide the food to local agencies, such as food banks. Food banks then distribute the food to food pantries and soup kitchens that serve the public.

TANF – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program. A block grant program enabling states to operate cash-assistance programs and services to help low-income families. Participation in TANF can be used to determine eligibility for many of the nutrition programs.

WIC – the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children. This USDA nutrition program provides nutritious foods, nutrition education, and access to health care to low-income pregnant women, new mothers, and infants and young children at nutritional risk. Participants receive monthly benefits which allow them to purchase food items in the WIC Food Package.

WIC FMNP (Farmers Market Nutrition Program) – A USDA program that provides WIC participants with coupons to be redeemed at local farmers markets for designated fresh, unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables. The federal benefit provided through this program is up to $30 per year, although some states supplement this amount. FMNP does not operate in all states.

USDA – United States Department of Agriculture. The federal agency responsible for administration of most nutrition and commodity distribution programs at the federal level.