**USDA cancels $500M in food deliveries, leaving food banks scrambling**

The Trump administration’s latest move, which follows $1 billion in cuts to food aid programs, puts more pressure on groups trying to feed hungry Americans.

Updated

March 21, 2025 at 5:51 p.m. EDTtoday at 5:51 p.m. EDT

At a Boston food bank, volunteers load vans with food for distribution. (Iaritza Menjivar/For The Washington Post)

Food banks across the country — already facing huge cuts to locally grown food assistance — learned this week that the U.S. Department of Agriculture is canceling $500 million in expected food deliveries, further disrupting help at a time when need continues to rise.

Vince Hall, chief government relations officer at Feeding America, the country’s largest hunger-relief organization, said some local food banks and food pantries were told that USDA deliveries of commodities such as cheese and meat are being canceled at least temporarily. Many others were not notified by federal officials that their deliveries were not coming, he said.

Hall characterized the USDA’s decision as a pause to review existing programsand said his organization is hoping the administration will resume purchases and deliveries “with minimum disruption on the flow of food.” Groups working in rural areas, which rely more on government food than gleaning, would be especially hard hit by a lack of commodities, he said.

With inflation rising and fundraising down from a pandemic high, “food banks are at a moment of extraordinary demand that is taxing food banks to the breaking point,” Hall said Thursday.“Any interruption of food sources will mean serious consequences to our neighbors facing hunger.”

The USDA did not respond to a request for comment.

One of every six Americans sought food from food banks in 2023, according to a Feeding America study. That was a 38 percent increase from 2021.

Earlier this month, the Trump administration announced $1 billion in [cuts](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2025/03/12/usda-funding-local-farms-schools-food-banks/) to food assistance programs that help schools and food banks buy fresh food from local farmers — part of the funding announced last fall by the Biden administration when it extended both programs. Agency officials dismissed them as “covid era” assistance that was no longer necessary.

Emily Shearer, the food acquisition program manager for Food Bank of Iowa, said the latest news “puts in jeopardy” 16 truckloads of food that her organization expected to receive from April through July, a shortfall of 387,000 pounds of food worth $798,000. That’s in addition to the food it no longer will be able to purchase from local farmers after this month because of the administration’s earlier action.

“It’s also important to note not just the potential for canceled loads but the types of food we would miss out on receiving — multiple loads of meat, cheese and fresh milk, some of the most expensive items to procure,” she said Thursday. The only way to make up that deficit is for the food bank to purchase those items, which would be “an added expense in an already record year.”

In her eight years at the food bank, Shearer said, “I do not ever remember being so uncertain about how we will meet the need.”

At the Capital Area Food Bank in D.C., Communications Director Hilary Salmon said staffers have not yet received formal notice of the cancellations. Last week, however, they began to see the status of existing orders change from “approved” to “returned” — which in the past has signaled a cancellation.

Twenty-eight truckloads of food, or about 670,000 meals worth of chicken, eggs and produce due by the end of June, have been affected so far, Salmon said Friday.

Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins, who previously led a conservative think tank in Texas, has touted on social media her relationship with the team from billionaire Elon Musk’s U.S. DOGE Service. She posed for photos with DOGE staffers and [wrongly claimed](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/doge-mischaracterizes-study-as-transgender-usda-cancels-it/) that USDA had cut a $600,000 grant to a Louisiana school to study “menstrual cycles in transgender men.” The grant actually was for researching the health risks of using synthetic materials in menstrual products.

Asked last week about ending programs for locally sourced food, Rollins [told Fox News](https://www.msnbc.com/top-stories/latest/trump-usda-cuts-schools-food-banks-rollins-rcna196050): “If we are making mistakes, we will own those mistakes and we will reconfigure. But right now, from what we are viewing, that program was nonessential, that it was a new program, and that it was an effort by the left to continue spending taxpayer dollars that were not necessary.”

The moves come as Republican lawmakers in the House [consider](https://www.politico.com/live-updates/2025/02/12/congress/house-gop-budget-targets-snap-cuts-00203872) a $230 billion reduction in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, a cut that advocates have characterized as drastic and unprecedented.

Rep. Henry Cuellar (D-Texas) told a virtual town hall meeting Thursday that he is worried federal assistance to food banks could be scaled back even further. “We’ve got to make sure that we restore some of those [cuts], because I talk to some of the food banks, and I’m concerned that some of those cuts will continue or might be magnified,” he said.

The [seven swing states](https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/interactive/2024/2024-swing-states-trump-harris/) that won Donald Trump the 2024 presidential election are losing nearly $178 million in local food that would have gone on schoolchildren’s plates, according to an analysis by The Washington Post.

Kyle Waide, the president and chief executive of the Atlanta Community Food Bank, said it is trying to determine the impact of the USDA’s recent cancellations of a “significant number” of food orders and shipments there.

“We don’t know the totality of what that means yet,” he said. “But it’s a significant amount of food that we for sure will need in three, four, five months from now to meet the demand in our community.”

Waide said his organization is already “barely keeping up with demand” given the number of people seeking aid from its network in northern Georgia, a figure that increased 60 percent over the last three years. That increase, he added, was “primarily” due to inflation.

A new administration in Washington typically reviews programs and may make changes, Waide acknowledged. But he hopes the Trump administration will clarify the situation soon so food bankswill have “access to a comparable amount of food resources to support the community.”

“We don’t have any idea right now and don’t know what to plan for,” Waide said.

Pamela Irvine, the president and chief executive of Feeding Southwest Virginia, expressed similar uncertainty about what comes next. She said her food bank does not receive enough donated food — or have enough money to buy its own food — to make up for losing the federal supply.

“Without those commodities and a strong farm bill, we wouldn’t have enough food to feed the food-insecure neighbors in our 26 counties,” she said.