

March 9, 2020

Dear Food & Nutrition Services Colleagues,

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and our Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) have received questions from Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) officials asking how their programs and operations could be impacted as a result of Coronavirus (COVID-19). At this time, continue normal program operations.

If a public health emergency happens in your community, such as an outbreak of COVID-19, USDA Foods currently in your local inventory can be used as an emergency feeding source for your community without prior approval or permission from DESE Food and Nutrition Services. Information about that decision-making can be reviewed on the USDA Foods During Disaster [fact sheet here](#). Within 45 days of an emergency feeding, local FNS officials will submit to DESE FNS [via email](#) the total amount of products that need to be replaced. DESE FNS officials will then work with local SFAs to gather additional information needed, such as the disaster rate, total number of persons receiving USDA Foods, the period those foods were issued, etc. The USDA Foods used will be replaced with another like product or, in some cases, credit entitlement for the value of the food used.

The [USDA Food Program Disaster Manual here](#) provides FNS officials key information about this process. DESE encourages FNS officials to review this information as a precautionary measure, including:

- Page 21: School Food Authority Disaster Preparation information
- Page 32: Procedures for the Replacement and Reporting of USDA Foods
- Page 73: Disaster preparation recommendations (attachment 13)

Additional guidance for local FNS officials includes the following resources:

- USDA encourages Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) officials to review this [2014 memo](#) that details disaster response measures and provides guidance for FNS programs. The memo details that, in the event of a public health emergency, “...FNS may approve flexibilities to accommodate the needs of severely impacted areas. Flexibilities are provided on a case-by-case basis and will require justification from the requesting State agency. Changes to program operation or administration must be approved by FNS prior to implementation.”
- The USDA has updated the FNS Strategic Plan and the FNS Pandemic [webpage here](#), which houses guidance to states on Food and Nutrition Service programs in emergency situations. A new [Q&A related to COVID-19](#) is posted there. As you know, our programs require congregate feeding, unless USDA issues different guidance. Find out more about the [USDA Food feeding options here](#).
- If a case of COVID-19 is identified in your community, the [CDC’s guidance to schools](#) states, “Ensure continuity of meal program. Consider ways to distribute food to students. If there is community spread of COVID-19, design strategies to avoid distribution in settings where people might gather in a group or crowd. Consider options such as ‘grab-and-go’ bagged lunches or meal delivery.”

A complete list of resources to assist FNS officials in responding to an emergency (many of which are reference above) can be found on the [DESE Food and Nutrition Services webpage here](#). For more information or additional questions, please contact our DESE Food and Nutrition Services office at [573-751-3526](tel:573-751-3526) or foodandnutritionservices@dese.mo.gov.