



BOSTON AREA GLEANERS

Summer 2019 Policy Brief: MA Emergency Food Assistance Fund

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Food banks face inconsistent qualities and amounts in donations of healthy staple grocery items.

- Hunger relief agencies need consistent access to staples such as fruits and vegetables, milk, eggs, and tuna in order to prevent food insecurity.
- Donations that come from food manufacturers, wholesalers, and supermarkets are not always reliable.
- The cost of food insecurity, including increased healthcare expenses and loss of productivity during work hours, totals to \$2.4 billion a year.

Many food-insecure households do not qualify for SNAP benefits and must rely on emergency food assistance programs to eat.

- 1 in 10 Massachusetts families are food insecure.
- A third of food-insecure households in Massachusetts do not qualify for SNAP benefits, which are capped based on income and resources.
- SNAP leaves out certain populations, including the working poor and undocumented immigrants.

WHO IS AFFECTED?

The working poor and other food-insecure households that do not qualify for SNAP benefits are especially dependent on emergency hunger relief.

- Food insecurity does not guarantee qualification for SNAP benefits; those who do not qualify are dependent on sources of donated food.
- Emergency hunger relief is less reliable, making it difficult to build longer-term food security.

WHAT IS MEFAP?

MEFAP is an emergency hunger relief fund that supplements the inventory of hunger relief agencies with healthy staples.

- Funding is received by Massachusetts' four main food banks, which distribute purchased goods to more than 800 smaller agencies.
- In 2018, 32% of goods distributed by Massachusetts food banks were purchased through MEFAP funding.
- Providing a dependable source of healthy staples allows access to long-term nutrition and health.

MEFAP BUYS LOCAL

- Half of MEFAP vendors are local to the state.
- More than 3 million pounds of fresh produce have been purchased with MEFAP funding from 30 local farmers, including:
 - Apples – 21%
 - Pineapples – 17%
 - Squash – 17%
 - Potatoes – 7%
 - Corn – 7%
 - Greens – 5%
 - Peppers – 3%
- Advocates hope to expand MEFAP's impact to at least 10% of its funds going to local producers each year.



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WHO BENEFITS?

Anyone who needs the services provided by food banks and hunger relief agencies may be receiving MEFA-funded items.

- This includes those with limited food and nutrition access, the homeless, and the working poor.
- MEFAP funding serves 700,000 people yearly.
- MEFAP-funded goods are a dependable supplement to grocery lists, allowing qualifying households to pay for other important services, including utilities, healthcare, and transportation.

Local farms and farmers also benefit from MEFAP funding.

- Half of all vendors that supply food banks through MEFAP are local to Massachusetts.
- Food purchased from local farmers through MEFAP are bought at a fair market value.

HOW IS IT FUNDED?

MEFAP has been funded by the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural resources since its establishment in 1995.

- MEFAP funds are sent through two programs in order to ensure food banks receive items in demand: Core Food and the MassGrown Initiative.
- Core Food allows MEFAP funds to be bid on grocery store staples, including meat, eggs, and dairy.
- The MassGrown Initiative provides locally sourced dairy and produce to MEFAP funding.

Advocates for MEFAP are seeking a \$2 million increase in FY20.

- This increase will total to a \$20 million budget, allowing food banks to reach their target of 25 million MEFAP-funded meals.

ARE THERE FUTURE GOALS?

The Massachusetts Food Systems Collaborative advocates recommendations that would amplify the effect of MEFAP.

- Ensuring culturally appropriate food is available by diversifying what items are purchased.
- Improving transportation and distribution logistics for perishables.
- Strengthening relationships between hunger relief agencies and local farmers, growers, and fishermen.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Food-Insecure Families:
 - Locate resources that assist food-insecure households through the Project Bread FoodSource hotline: 1-800-645-8333
- Farmers and Vendors:
 - Become a USDA approved vendor and apply to distribute through MEFAP.
- MEFAP Advocates:
 - Sign the Greater Boston Food Bank petition for a \$2 million increase in funding for FY20.
 - Contact your legislators in support of the FY20 budget.
 - Support the local farmers who produce a third of MEFAP goods.



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