

U.S. Title II Food Assistance Advocacy Points and Explainer

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The Main Points: Food assistance for millions of people was cut in the mass wave of terminations of USAID programs earlier this week. Some grants remain, but **until USAID pays its bills, any ‘waiver’ allowing U.S. in-kind food aid is meaningless. Much USAID-funded food assistance is not currently being delivered.**

- **Elon Musk, Donald Trump, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio refuse to listen to the will of the American people or the orders of a federal judge.** Instead of restarting all food assistance and related payments as ordered by a federal court, this past week they terminated over five thousand grants and contracts - including at least 1 billion dollars of food assistance.
- **Americans across the political spectrum recognize how important U.S. food aid is**, both for its economic benefit and for hungry people worldwide. **They spoke up – and forced Elon Musk, Donald Trump, and Marco Rubio to allow** a relatively small portion of commodities — those which were already in process — to restart in mid-February.
- But **DOGE and USAID officials still refuse to pay USAID’s bills.** Until they get the money they are owed, **USAID’s partners are increasingly unable to move or distribute food**, or even pay their staff.
- Plus, **new purchases of U.S. produced food assistance are still blocked.** This means people in crisis zones will continue to suffer and die. More than \$500 million in upcoming US Title II food assistance awards are being held.
- Far from putting America first, Elon Musk and Donald Trump’s reckless actions **hurt American farmers, kill American jobs**, and damage national security. If this continues, **they may waste enough food to feed over 12 million people** for a month.
- Equally concerning, following DOGE’s meddling, USAID’s payment systems are non-operational. USAID’s partners distributing and monitoring food assistance are **owed hundreds of millions of dollars for work already performed** – but DOGE and Trump operatives have blocked access to the payment system, preventing timely repayments in accordance with the law. These late payments mean American taxpayers now have to pay interest charges on them - all because of DOGE.

What is Title II?

- Title II of the Food for Peace Act authorizes the USAID Administrator to establish programs to provide U.S.-grown agricultural commodities around the world on behalf of the American people.
- **This program supports American farmers across the country; and uses the American maritime industry** to ship these commodities abroad to feed people who are in need of emergency food assistance.
- American-produced food has been purchased to support USAID emergency and development programs for more than 70 years, since 1954. **The USAID food bag is one of the most recognized and iconic symbols in American diplomacy: a sign of hope to those in crisis.**

How is this happening?

- Over a month into the so-called “pause” on foreign assistance - really a destruction of more than a half-century of U.S. foreign aid - millions of people are suffering around the world, with an enormous waste of taxpayer dollars.
- In late January and early February, DOGE staff and Pete Marocco of the State Department furloughed or locked out of critical systems all the USAID staff managing the purchase and movement of these commodities.
- The UN World Food Program—USAID’s largest food assistance partner –announced on X (formerly Twitter) on Feb. 9 that the ‘pause’ had been lifted for their US-funded food operations. However, since they are owed over \$800 million in payments for past work completed in 2024, WFP is now being forced to cut food rations and stop food distribution. Further, the administration is withholding nearly \$1.8 billion in funding for WFP, urgently needed to make sure hungry people keep receiving the food and assistance they need in countries such as Sudan, Haiti, and Afghanistan.
- On February 24, nearly all USAID staff were placed on administrative leave prior to being terminated - leaving just a skeleton crew, far too few people to adequately manage and monitor our food aid. Then, on February 26—just after a federal court again ordered the administration to restart foreign assistance programs that had been suspended en masse—the administration sent termination letters to thousands of programs worldwide. This included at least \$1 billion of programming using U.S. in-kind food assistance.
- If we let this stand, **these terminations will have far-reaching consequences across the globe.** Vulnerable families will fall deeper into poverty. Areas that already faced hunger could fall into famine. Increased hunger and famine fuel instability and migration; and the farmers, shippers, and small businesses across America that contribute to these programs will lose vital business.
- The longer this disruption continues, the harder it will be to undo. **Congress must act now to restore USAID staff, operations, and partners that oversee this vital program.**

Background and If-Asked on U.S. Food Assistance

What is U.S. in-kind food aid?

- American farmers in small towns across the country grow food, such as corn, lentils, pinto beans, rice, sorghum, vegetable oil, wheat, and yellow split peas. This is then purchased by the U.S. government on the commercial market and shipped abroad on American ships, preventing famine around the world.

What U.S. states is the food from?

- The food is produced across the United States. Vendors are located in **Wisconsin** (Corn Soy Blend, Corn Meal), **North Carolina** (Corn Soy Blend), **Texas** (Sorghum, Corn, Yellow Split Peas, Vegetable Oil), **Louisiana** (Rice), **Nebraska** (Yellow Split Peas, Corn Meal, Beans), **Iowa** (Vegetable Oil), **Illinois** (Vegetable Oil, Corn Soy Blend, Rice), **Kansas** (Sorghum, Pinto Beans), **North Dakota** (Pinto Beans, Yellow Split Peas, Lentils), **Florida** (Vegetable Oil), **Indiana** (Cornmeal), **Missouri** (Cornmeal), **Oklahoma** (Flour), **Washington** (Wheat, Pinto Beans), **Montana** (Yellow Split Peas, Lentils), **Colorado** (Beans), **Minnesota** (Yellow Split Peas), **Georgia** (ready-to-use therapeutic food),

and **Rhode Island** (ready-to-use therapeutic food, lipid-based nutrient supplement).

How does this impact the U.S. shipping industry?

- In fiscal year 2024, USAID procured and transported **a total of 1.1 million metric tons (MTs), of food assistance valued at nearly \$685 million, through ten US ports:** Boston (MA), Chicago (IL), Corpus Christi (TX), Houston (TX), Lake Charles (LA), Miami (FL), Newark (NJ), New York (NY), Norfolk (VA), and Savannah (GA). This is **enough to feed 72 million people** for a month.
- **In addition, the U.S. invested \$230 million in shipping transportation for the food,** including with U.S. flagged vessels, such as American President Lines, Hapag-LLOYD USA, Liberty Glory, National Shipping of America, Maersk Line Limited, and Schuyler Line Navigation Company.

How does U.S. food aid work?

- USAID and USDA administer international food assistance. (1) American producers grow food; (2) at USAID's request, USDA purchases American produced commodities on the commercial market. (3) USDA enters into contract with ocean carriers — half of which must be U.S.-flagged. (4) The food is branded with the USAID logo "From the American People" – demonstrating the values and generosity of the American people, (5) Carriers ship and transport the food to its destination, (6) USAID partners—many of whom are U.S.-based organizations employing Americans—distribute food to hungry people.

Is U.S. food aid tied to U.S. legislation?

- Yes, Congress funds food assistance programs through annual appropriations laws. U.S. in-kind food aid is directly tied to legislation that benefits American farmers and the American maritime industry.
- **Title II of the Food for Peace Act** authorizes the USAID Administrator to establish programs to provide U.S. agricultural commodities to foreign countries on behalf of the people of the United States.
- **The Cargo Preference Act** of 1954 requires that at least 50% of government-generated cargo be transported on U.S.-flag ships. U.S.-flag ships must be privately owned and have a crew that is at least 75% U.S. citizens. This supports a strong American maritime industry and creates jobs. It also supports **national security** by ensuring a readily available U.S.-flag merchant marine that can be utilized during times of war or national emergency.

Secretary Rubio issued a waiver for emergency food assistance, so isn't U.S. in-kind food moving?

- The waiver was only effective in allowing U.S. food that had already been bought to be moved, although the USAID officers who managed that transportation were also placed on leave. This food includes corn and cornmeal, lentils, pinto beans, rice, sorghum, vegetable oil, wheat, and yellow split peas. It is worth more than \$450 million paid to American farmers and is enough to feed more than 36 million people across 23 countries, including Haiti, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, South Sudan, and Chad.
- But moving food means paying shippers, warehouse and dock workers, truck drivers, food distribution monitors, and more. Given DOGE's continuing blockage of USAID's payment system, these people aren't getting paid - so the waiver does not enable USAID to pay bills that are also critical to getting the food to the people who need it. Without also paying for all these expenses, the waiver achieves very little.

- In addition, **new purchases of food assistance, which normally occur every two weeks, remain blocked.**
- Now, as of February 26, **the administration has permanently terminated the food aid that helps chronically poor and vulnerable communities reach a more stable situation.** Withholding this aid **undermines U.S. foreign policy goals** by making it more likely these communities will need more emergency aid, for longer, when the next disaster strikes. It also increases risks of instability and out-migration from affected countries.
- Purchasing, storing, treating, and transporting food with taxpayer dollars requires specialized expertise and oversight. Deputy Administrator Pete Marocco's lockout of nearly all USAID staff the week of February 3 was blocked by a temporary restraining order on February 7. However, the administration never fully complied with the order; and just days after it expired on February 21, the vast majority of USAID personnel were placed on administrative leave, blocked from doing their jobs. This includes many of the experts with the specialized skills and knowledge to responsibly procure, transport, manage and monitor food assistance.

How many people around the world need food assistance right now?

- Prior to the freeze in USAID assistance, approximately 343 million people across 74 countries were estimated to be in need of emergency food assistance. This is a 10 percent increase from last year, according to the UN.
- Prior to the destruction of USAID, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network expected the number of people in need of urgent humanitarian food assistance to be highest in Sudan, Yemen, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Nigeria. Now that this system has been shut down by the administration, the U.S. government can no longer accurately assess the number of people in need.

Why can't the Department of State or USDA take over U.S. food aid? Why do we need USAID?

- Providing U.S. food assistance is a complicated process - much tougher than ordering takeout.
- USAID staff working on food assistance - both in the U.S. and around the world - possess a variety of specialized skills. They are experts in logistics and supply chains, price forecasting, market analysis, nutrition and food safety, monitoring, and grant and contract management. Many teams at USAID support the provision of food assistance, from grant and contract managers in Washington, to the program officers overseas who monitor food distributions. Technical advisors ensure the food is of good quality and provides adequate nutrition. Partnership and risk management teams minimize risks of waste, fraud and abuse and ensure accountability. Information officers ensure that Congress, the White House, and the American people get timely and accurate reporting on the work USAID does.
- Other U.S. agencies do not have the specific expertise and global footprint required to responsibly manage this assistance.
- Relying on others who lack this expertise would risk inefficient use of U.S. taxpayer resources and the potential fraud, waste, and diversion of U.S.-grown food aid.

There are hungry people here in America. Why can't farmers instead sell the food here?

- There is enough food to do both! U.S. farmers produce more food than Americans can consume by themselves. In fact, that's how the U.S. food assistance program got started—ensuring American farmers could sell all their food at a stable price, while assisting hungry people overseas—and

building foreign goodwill toward the U.S. for this generosity.

- Hunger in the U.S. is a very real problem. Congress could choose to pass laws to provide more assistance to food-insecure Americans. Given the enormous amount of food grown in the U.S., and how little money is spent on foreign assistance (only about 1% of the budget), there is no competition between helping hungry people here at home and those overseas.
- The provision of U.S. food assistance overseas demonstrates American generosity and values, a core component of U.S. foreign policy and American diplomacy that makes America safer and stronger.

What if we just did food aid? Is that enough?

- No. Food aid is a critical part of responding to humanitarian emergencies, but it isn't enough on its own.
- People displaced from their homes also need a safe place to sleep and cook the food they get, clean water to cook and drink, dishes, pots and pans, and soap.
- When communities don't get enough to eat, babies and young children are at higher risk for malnutrition and death, and often need specialized nutrition support. People whose bodies are weakened by lack of food are more susceptible to disease. That means that access to healthcare, and to clean water to reduce the spread of disease, are also critical.
- Additionally, the assistance that USAID provides abroad can serve as the first line of defense for the American people. USAID's help can prevent international crises from becoming domestic ones. For example, during the West African Ebola crisis from 2014-2016, USAID's interventions contained the spread worldwide. Only eleven people were treated for Ebola in the United States during this period. Had there been an outbreak here, it would have had devastating consequences for the American economy and public health.
- In recent years, there have been other outbreaks of Ebola and other diseases. Most people in America have never heard about them. Why not? Because, with USAID's assistance, they were quickly contained before they could spread.