

USDA and Food Aid and how it will operate. By Ayenat Mersie, *Devex Dish*, 21 Jan 2026

One year after USAID was dismantled, the outlines of where Food for Peace now sits — and how it will operate — are becoming clearer.

The program, which was administered by USAID for decades, **falls under a new, temporary arrangement** that [moves it to the U.S. Department of Agriculture](#). That shift was quietly formalized last Christmas Eve, when USDA, the State Department, and the Office of Management and Budget signed an interagency agreement transferring the program to [USDA](#) for fiscal years 2025 and 2026. (Since FY 2025 ended Sept. 30, the deal means USDA gets any leftover unspent funds.) A permanent move would require congressional approval. **But the agreement itself hasn't been made public**, and the groups it affects — agriculture industry groups, NGOs, and implementing partners — tell Devex they still haven't seen it.

What has been more visible is USDA's effort to figure out how to run the program.

Earlier this month, the department convened a closed-door roundtable with humanitarian groups, commodity organizations, and shippers to talk through how Food for Peace might function under its oversight. Multiple attendees described the meeting to Devex as constructive and open, with officials asking basic questions about how the program works and where the pain points are. USDA officials present were **Luke J. Lindberg**, the undersecretary for trade and foreign agricultural affairs; **Jennifer Mack**, associate administrator and general sales manager at the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service; and **Peter Laudeman**, senior policy adviser for trade and foreign agricultural affairs.

"The tone was very much: We want to do this right, we want to do this well, and we want to hear from you," one participant says, speaking on condition of anonymity to protect their relationship with USDA.

One notable absence: the [State Department](#), which has been responsible for Food for Peace since it took over whatever programs were left after [USAID's](#) dissolution. **"No one from State was there.** But they were invited," another participant tells Devex.

The transfer has been welcomed by farm industry groups that have long argued that Food for Peace belongs at USDA, which already sources the U.S.-grown wheat, corn, and other commodities used in the program. Republican lawmakers backing the move say it will strengthen ties to U.S. producers and make the program more durable.

For humanitarian aid experts, **the worry isn't where the program sits — it's how it operates.** In recent years, Food for Peace has been used as a flexible aid tool tailored to different emergency settings, they say. But a move to USDA's full control **could turn it into a means of offloading surplus U.S.-grown food commodities**, or pull resources away from the logistics and oversight that make food aid effective, they say.

There's also the question of capacity. USDA has lost tens of thousands of staff over the past year, including senior officials with deep experience in international programs. The office most likely to house Food for Peace, USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service, is operating with significantly reduced staffing. Food for Peace is several times larger than the other food aid programs that USDA currently runs. **Can a depleted workforce take on an initiative of that scale?**

For those working closest to the program, the priority is less about which agency's logo is plastered on the door — and more about avoiding another disruptive transition. As one person puts it: "The system and the children who rely on it cannot go through another eight months of breakages."