



# Avoiding Premature Structural Changes to Food for Peace

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## Background

For decades, the [Food for Peace Act](#), as reauthorized in the [Farm Bill](#), has demonstrated the generosity of the American people by purchasing food from U.S. farmers and delivering it to people in urgent need around the world. In December 2025, after spending far less than what was appropriated, and despite reservations expressed by key Members of Congress, the State Department relinquished control of the Food for Peace (FFP) program, which it was administering after the shuttering of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). An [interagency agreement](#) (IAA) signed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Office of Management and Budget, transfers FFP to USDA for fiscal years (FY) 2025 and FY 2026.

At the same time, the State Department retained authority over all other emergency response tools previously administered by USAID, including cash-based food assistance used for local and regional procurement of food as well as food vouchers. In addition, the move separates the [FFP Resilient Food Security Activities](#), which address the underlying causes of hunger, from other agriculture and food security investments retained at the State Department. Effective humanitarian response and longer-term investments to reduce the need for emergency food aid depend on effective coordination across these tools.

As Congress reauthorizes the Farm Bill, the House version makes significant changes to FFP—transferring authorities permanently to USDA. Congress should not rush to make this arrangement permanent; rather, it should use the interim arrangement to test the concept and assess USDA's performance, interagency coordination, and overall program efficiency and effectiveness. Codifying long-term USDA administration and oversight of FFP prior to rigorous analysis or a pilot period to demonstrate proof of concept runs counter to congressional oversight, risks disrupting the timely and efficient provision of food assistance abroad, and should not be adopted.

## What the House Bill Would Do

- a) Permanently transfer FFP to USDA, separating it from all other U.S. emergency response tools;
- b) Assign USDA responsibility for complex humanitarian access negotiations that enable commodities and other relief supplies to reach people in a crisis, and medical evacuation of personnel;
- c) Reduce coordination with the State Department, requiring consultation only “from time to time;” and,
- d) Limit program flexibility by restricting allowable costs and (mis)characterizing expenditures other than commodity purchase and ocean freight as “diversion.”

These provisions would codify a new structure and complicate humanitarian diplomacy before it has been tested in practice.

## Why Timing Matters

The Food for Peace program has steadily improved its efficiency and effectiveness, saving millions of lives over the years thanks to robust early warning and timely action, improved market assessments and expanded delivery response options, coordination with complementary relief and development programs, and a highly specialized workforce in Washington and in hunger hotspots around the world.

USDA has only recently assumed responsibility for FFP and is in the early stages of implementation. **It has not yet provided reports required by Congress** (in the Agriculture and State and Foreign Operations spending bills) outlining how USDA will administer the program and coordinate with the State Department.

Over the next several years, USDA's response to ongoing crises from the Horn of Africa to the Middle East will demonstrate how the Department can deliver timely, effective assistance aligned with broader U.S. response efforts. Codifying structural changes now would limit Congress' ability to incorporate lessons learned and adjust the Food for Peace Act based on evidence.

## Key Operational Risks and Open Questions

**Oversight and accountability:** At the time of writing, USDA has hired no new staff to administer the program. It has limited field presence and no monitoring systems comparable to prior practice, which involved a robust team of U.S. food monitors and third party monitors in some high risk environments. Historically these people and systems identified waste, fraud, and operational failures and recommended course correction.

- *How will USDA identify and respond to diversion, spoilage, port or inland transport delays?*
- *Will it have staff with the right expertise in the right locations?*
- *How will it independently verify that food reaches the intended beneficiaries in a timely and effective way?*
- *How will USDA assess the impact of U.S. commodities on local agricultural production?*

**Humanitarian effectiveness:** The Food for Peace program has historically prioritized timely delivery, needs-based targeting, and commodity selection aligned with strong food security and nutrition outcomes.

- *What systems, including early warning, will USDA use to select target countries and on what basis will it schedule and ship commodities?*
- *Will commodity selection and funding decisions prioritize humanitarian outcomes?*

**Fragmented U.S. response and coordination:** The State Department retains responsibility for the broader emergency response strategy and all other program elements aside from U.S. food, including cash-based food assistance. It also fields Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DARTs).

- *How will USDA align with State-led strategies and field operations?*
- *Will USDA integrate into DARTs, and if so, what is the chain of command when urgent food assistance is requested via an Embassy, regional humanitarian office, or DART?*

The House bill would reduce the requirement for interagency consultation, stating that USDA must coordinate with the State Department only “from time to time.” The lack of a clear chain of command for emergency response and a loosening of coordination between involved departments risks heightened inefficiency, duplication, delays, gaps, and poor response when peoples’ lives are at stake.

**Humanitarian access and diplomatic function:** The House bill assigns USDA responsibility for “safe passage of commodities and other relief supplies and to establish safe zones for medical and humanitarian treatment and evacuation of injured persons.” This division of responsibility between USDA and State may create confusion in high-stakes contexts when clarity and speed are essential.

- *How and why should USDA carry out these functions while the State Department retains overall responsibility for diplomacy and crisis response?*
- *What happens when access negotiations intersect with broader policy and security considerations?*

**Restrictions on program flexibility:** The House bill limits funding for costs other than procurement and ocean transportation, labelling other expenditures as “diversion.” These costs, however, are legitimate and integral to delivering assistance and ensuring effectiveness.

- *Will USDA be able to adequately fund inland transportation (including last-mile delivery), storage, and monitoring under these constraints?*
- *In complex emergencies requiring costlier delivery methods, such as airdrops or multicountry overland transport, will they decline to act or make decisions that constrain program effectiveness?*

## What can Congress do?

- Do not codify the transfer of Food for Peace to USDA in this Farm Bill.
- Maintain existing statutory language on coordination and humanitarian access.
- Use the current IAA period to evaluate USDA performance and interagency coordination.
- Leverage FY 2026 reporting requirements to inform oversight and future decisions.
- Remove reference to “diversion” and ensure adequate flexibility for inland transportation and other delivery and monitoring costs.
- Use the FY 2027 appropriations to fund the Food for Peace program and extend the IAA for another year.



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