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# Overview of U.S. International Food Assistance

The U.S. government administers international food assistance programs that aim to alleviate hunger and improve food security around the world. Some of these programs provide emergency assistance to people affected by conflict or natural disaster. Other programs provide nonemergency assistance to help communities improve agricultural productivity and strengthen local food systems. This In Focus provides an overview of U.S. international food assistance programs, including legislative authority, funding trends, statutory requirements, and selected issues for Congress.

## International Food Assistance Delivery

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) administer U.S. international food assistance programs. These agencies primarily provide assistance through two distinct methods—in-kind aid or market-based assistance. *In-kind aid* involves purchasing U.S. commodities and shipping them to countries and regions in need. *Market-based assistance* provides recipients with direct cash transfers, food vouchers, or food purchased in the country or region in which it is to be distributed (local and regional procurement, or LRP).

## Legislative Authority

The Food for Peace Act of 1954 (FFPA; P.L. 83-480), commonly referred to as “P.L. 480,” provides statutory authority for most international food assistance programs. These programs include Food for Peace (FFP) Title II, the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust, Farmer-to-Farmer (also known as FFP Title V), Food for Progress, and the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program. Congress most recently reauthorized these programs through FY2023 in the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-334). These programs provide in-kind aid and, in the case of Farmer-to-Farmer, technical assistance.

Congress established the Local and Regional Procurement (LRP) Program as a pilot program in the 2008 farm bill (P.L. 110-246) and permanently authorized it in the 2014 farm bill (P.L. 113-79). Under the LRP program, USDA purchases food in the country or region where it is to be distributed rather than buying food of U.S. origin. USDA typically has used the cash-based LRP program to supplement in-kind assistance for activities under McGovern-Dole.

The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (FAA; P.L. 87-195) provides statutory authority for the market-based Emergency Food Security Program (EFSP). Congress amended the FAA to authorize EFSP via the Global Food Security Act of 2016 (P.L. 114-195). Congress reauthorized the program through FY2023 in the Global Food Security

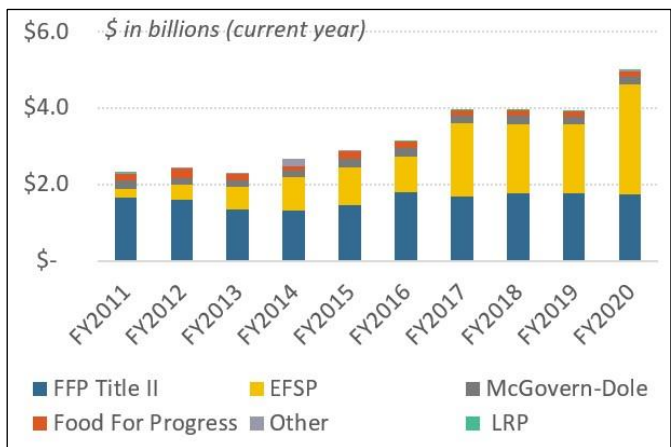
Reauthorization Act of 2017 (P.L. 115-266). EFSP provides market-based assistance in emergency contexts.

## Funding

Congress funds U.S. international food assistance programs through annual Agriculture appropriations and through annual Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs (SFOPS) appropriations. U.S. international food assistance outlays have fluctuated over the FY2011-FY2020 period (Figure 1). An increase in outlays between FY2016 and FY2020 was in part a response to increased demand for food assistance, owing to conflicts in Syria, South Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia. In 2020, Congress provided for an increase of over \$1 billion in EFSP funds in response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

FFP Title II, which delivers primarily in-kind aid, historically has comprised the bulk of U.S. international food assistance outlays since the mid-1980s. In recent years, market-based EFSP assistance has increased from 10% of total outlays in FY2011 to 57% in FY2020. During this same period, FFP Title II outlays decreased from 71% to 35% of total outlays.

Figure 1. U.S. International Food Assistance Outlays FY2011-FY2020



Source: CRS using data from USAID and USDA, *U.S. International Food Assistance Report*, for years FY2011-FY2020; and USAID, *Emergency Food Security Program Report*, for years FY2011-FY2020.

Notes: “Other” includes Farmer-to-Farmer, Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust, and the inactive Section 416(b) program.

## Statutory Requirements

In-kind food aid programs authorized by the FFPA share a number of statutory requirements, including the following:

- All agricultural commodities are to be U.S. commodities, unless otherwise noted (7 U.S.C. §1732(2)).

- At least 50% of the gross tonnage of U.S. food aid is to be shipped on U.S.-flag vessels (46 U.S.C. §55305; 46 U.S.C. §55314).
- Organizations or foreign governments receiving U.S. commodities are to publicize that food aid is from the American people (7 U.S.C. §1733(f)).
- The United States will not provide food aid if (1) the recipient country lacks adequate storage facilities to prevent spoilage or (2) food aid distribution would substantially interfere with domestic markets in the recipient country (7 U.S.C. §1733(a); 7 U.S.C. §1733(b)).

The requirements listed above do not apply to EFSP. **Table 1** summarizes key elements of U.S. international food assistance programs.

### Potential Issues for Congress

The United States’ use of market-based assistance has increased significantly in recent years—EFSP is now the largest among all U.S. international food assistance programs in terms of annual outlays. At the same time, the United States remains one of the few major donor countries that continues to provide large quantities of in-kind aid. Most other major donors—such as Canada, the United Kingdom, and the European Union—have converted

principally to market-based assistance. U.S. delivery of in-kind aid generally has higher cost compared with market-based approaches. At the same time, in-kind aid supports demand for U.S. commodities and avoids potential problems associated with unreliable suppliers and poor infrastructure in recipient countries that may hinder the efficiency and efficacy of market-based assistance.

Another potential issue for Congress is agricultural cargo preference (ACP), the requirement that at least 50% of U.S. food aid commodities ship on U.S.-flag vessels. Proponents of ACP assert that it contributes to maintaining a U.S.-flag merchant marine to provide sealift capacity during wartime or national emergencies. Opponents contend that ACP can raise transportation costs and lengthen delivery times for food aid, ultimately decreasing the amount of food aid provided.

Congress could consider the role and effect that the current mix of market-based assistance, in-kind assistance, and the ACP requirement have on achieving congressional objectives for international food assistance programs.

### More Information

For more information, see CRS Report R45422, *U.S. International Food Assistance: An Overview*.

**Table 1. Selected Key Elements of U.S. International Food Assistance Programs**

| Program  | Description  | Statutory Authority | Funding                        | FY2020 Outlays (in millions) <sup>a</sup> | Govt. Admin. Agency |
|--|--|---------------------|--------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Food for Peace Title II  | In-kind food to be distributed directly to recipients.   | FFPA                | Agriculture approp.            | \$1,733.3                                 | USAID               |
| Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust (BEHT)                             | A reserve of U.S. funds that can supplement FFP Title II when Title II funds alone cannot meet emergency food needs.   | FFPA                | Mandatory approp.              | \$0 <sup>b</sup>                          | USDA                |
| Farmer-to-Farmer (FFP Title V)                                     | Short-term volunteer placements in which U.S. citizens from farming, agribusiness, universities, or nonprofit organizations provide technical assistance to farmers in developing countries. | FFPA                | Agriculture approp.            | \$15                                      | USAID               |
| Food for Progress  | In-kind donations sold on local markets to fund agricultural or economic development projects in the recipient country.  | FFPA                | Mandatory approp. <sup>c</sup> | \$144.7                                   | USDA                |
| McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition | In-kind donations to school feeding programs and pregnant or nursing mothers and technical assistance to help governments in recipient countries establish national school feeding programs. | FFPA                | Agriculture approp.            | \$215.0                                   | USDA                |
| Emergency Food Security Program                                    | Market-based assistance (direct cash transfers, vouchers, or locally procured food) provided in emergency contexts.  | FAA                 | SFOPS approp.                  | \$288.0                                   | USAID               |

**Source:** Compiled by CRS using USAID and USDA, *U.S. International Food Assistance Report*, for years FY2011-FY2020; and USAID, *Emergency Food Security Program Report*, for years FY2011-FY2020.

**Notes:** FFP = Food for Peace; FFPA = Food for Peace Act of 1954, as amended; Approp. = appropriations; FAA = Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended; SFOPS = Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs; USAID = U.S. Agency for International Development; USDA = U.S. Department of Agriculture.

a. Outlays after FY2020 are not available. For current appropriations, contact CRS.

b. BEHT funds were not used in FY2020.

c. Authorizing legislation establishes mandatory funding. The borrowing authority of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) finances program activities. The CCC is a government-owned financial institution overseen by USDA.

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