



Lowcountry Food Bank-Food Outlook for 2025

Purchased Food:

We will see a significant reduction in the amount of purchased food we are able to acquire in 2025 for multiple reasons:

- In 2023 and 2024 the state had COVID relief funding that had not been spent and was allocated to the food banks for food purchases, through this allocation, we were able to purchase more than 4 million pounds of food. While this food was restricted to specific HUD designated communities, even agencies not in those communities benefited because the recipient agencies were taking less of the general inventory.
- The LCFB received a grant from a private foundation to purchase protein items for Horry County in 2023 and from the same foundation again in 2024 for Horry and for some Southern Region locations. It is unlikely we will receive this funding again as we anticipate the foundation will shift their support closer to their own community which has been heavily impacted by natural disaster.
- While we are aggressively fundraising to purchase food, prices have risen significantly at the wholesale level just as they have at the retail level. As a point of comparison, pre-COVID a case of canned vegetables cost between \$10-\$14. They have steadily crept up to between \$19-\$21. Throughout the pandemic, the LCFB subsidized purchased items as we were able. We are unfortunately no longer in a position to do so.

Produce:

Produce remains a primary area of focus for our network, and despite significant increases in cost, we don't anticipate a reduction of produce overall. We may see an impact on variety though.

- For the past 2.5 years, the LCFB has been participating in the USDA's Local Food Purchase Assistance program, which has allowed us to purchase more than a half million pounds of food grown by local BIPOC farmers at market price. The 500 million announced in November to continue this program nationally for 3 more years has been rescinded as of last week, therefore we will only have private funds to purchase this type of produce, significantly reducing the volume.
- We anticipate still having access to full truckloads of produce grown regionally, but the loss of freight subsidies provided through Feeding America's COVID funding means each load will cost us an additional \$1200 to \$1800, so it may limit the distance we can source from and thus the variety available to us.

USDA Foods:

Both The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) are part of the Farm Bill, which is a large piece of legislation that is up for renewal every 5 years. These are important sources of quality food for our neighbors and comprise about 25% of the food our network distributes. Although we hope it will not be significant, we do expect a decrease from 2024 for the following reasons:

- The current Farm Bill began in 2018 and expired in 2023, and since then the USDA has been operating on extensions. This means that the level of funding per year has not increased, but the price of food has risen significantly, so the same dollars buy less food. Congress is working on a new Farm Bill, but it could be 2026 or later before any legislation is presented for a vote.
- Over the past 5 years, there have been multiple pools of COVID recovery funding to add to product to the TEFAP pipeline, and those have been exhausted, and it is unlikely there will be any more.

Retail: →

Retail recovery remains the largest source of food for our network (nearly 40%). We expect small incremental increases in retail recovery as new stores open in our service area.

Warehouses:

As warehouse space increases in our southern region to accommodate activities at the Port of Savannah, we anticipate new opportunities for large donations of dry goods. These offerings are unpredictable, and sometimes unfamiliar products, but we will continue to pursue relationships with any warehouse owners that are handling food products and may be a source of excess goods for our neighbors.