

Food banks will feel fallout for months

Many Americans used up reserves during closure

Sarah D. Wire
USA TODAY

The Missoula Food Bank & Community Center in Montana doubled its food order for the first two weeks of November to help handle a flood of requests and will spend “far and above” more than what its has budgeted this month, said Executive Director Amy Allison.

A half-dozen other food banks across the country have similar stories: They’ve carved massive holes in their budgets over the past six weeks as they’ve tried to keep up with demand sparked by the federal government shutdown. It hit at the same time layoffs and rising prices had already boosted the number of people seeking help.

And now they’re facing the rest of the year having already pleaded with every donor on their list to give as much as possible.

“The fallout is going to be huge, and I don’t think we can even really wrap our heads around that yet,” Allison said.

The food banks said they expect to feel the impacts of the shutdown for months, even though the federal government reopened Nov. 13.

Soon, benefits will resume flowing to tens of millions of federal food assistance recipients and paychecks will arrive for hundreds of thousands of federal workers. But those people used up what reserves they had during the 43-day shutdown, said Linda Nageotte, president and chief operating officer of Feeding America, which provides millions of meals of food support to organizations across the country.

It will take substantial time for people to feel financially secure enough to stop using food banks, Nageotte said.

“While our government may have reopened, the impacts are not like a light switch. We can’t magically go back to the before times and everything feels normal,” she said. “For people whose lives have been so extraordinarily disrupted, it will take time for neighbors to be able to even out their household finances over the course of many coming



When the USDA announced in late October that there would be no SNAP benefits in November, it was the first time federal food aid had not arrived in the program’s more than 60-year history. GARY C. KLEIN/SHEBOYGAN PRESS

paychecks.”

When the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced in late October that “the well has run dry” and there would be no Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits in November, it was the first time federal food security had not arrived in the program’s more than 60-year history.

Cutting off SNAP benefits shook people who had faith in the government to provide a safety net, said Cyndi Kirkhart, CEO of Facing Hunger Food Bank in Huntington, West Virginia.

“The one certainty that folks had for a long time was regardless of what else is happening, we’ll have SNAP benefits, we can provide for our families,” she said. “There is no certainty now. I don’t have it.”

Until the benefits actually arrive on people’s EBT cards, the debit card facsimile used by SNAP recipients, she’s going to act as if it isn’t coming. Her food bank usually distributes 1 million pounds of food each month. It distributed that much in the first week of November alone.

Some people may be warily looking at the next funding deadline, which Congress set at fewer than three months away.

The bill to reopen the government partially funds the federal government for nearly a full year and provides the USDA with funding through September 2026. So SNAP benefits will be safeguarded from another potential lapse in

the budget for at least a year, but another shutdown would mean tens of thousands of federal employees could be furloughed or working with no pay again as job cuts surge nationally.

“If I was someone that had been subjected to all of that, there would be a lot of distrust at this point,” said Gayle Carlson, president and CEO of Montana Food Bank Network.

Carlson said people have had to juggle paying their mortgage, utilities and other bills for more than a month, and it will take time for them to feel settled again.

With inflation making food more expensive and cost of living up across the board, food banks and pantries were already seeing huge demand before the shutdown, said Jilly Stephens of City Harvest in New York City.

In 2019, City Harvest saw 25 million visits to its food pantries, she said. In 2024 it saw a near doubling to 47 million.

“Now this is layered on top,” she said of the shutdown. “It is an incredible setback.”

Roughly 14% of U.S. households reported food insecurity on average between January and October, up from 12.5% in 2024, according to the latest data from Purdue’s Center for Food Demand Analysis and Sustainability. The overall rate had been declining since 2022, at the height of the pandemic, when an average of 15.4% of households were food insecure.

Purdue researchers define food insecurity as some members of a household at times not being able to afford a balanced diet, as well as occasionally having to skip a meal or eating less for financial reasons.

Purdue’s survey has become one of the few remaining national measures of food insecurity after the USDA canceled its annual Household Food Security survey, which had been conducted since 2001, in September. The USDA said in September that its survey was “redundant, costly, politicized and extraneous.”

Food banks and pantries were also dealing with more than \$1 billion in federal funding cuts and pauses the USDA made in the spring as part of Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency attempt to downsize the federal government.

The USDA paused half the funding, or \$500 million, for The Emergency Food Assistance Program, a nutrition program that purchased food from American farmers for emergency food providers. Some of the funding was later restored.

When that funding was cut, the Missoula food bank lost 40% of what it expected to receive for the year, or about 91,000 pounds of food. It cost about \$200,000 to replace that much food, Allison said. Other food banks provided similar figures.

The USDA also canceled the Local Food Purchase Assistance program, which helped food banks buy fresh food directly from farmers in their region. It would have funded about \$500 million in 2025 for food banks.

Changes to SNAP put into place under the GOP tax-and-spending bill over the summer will bring “untested challenges,” said Feeding America’s Nageotte. In early November, new work requirements took effect that the Congressional Budget Office estimates will reduce SNAP participation by 2.4 million people.

For the first time in the program’s history, states will be required starting in 2028 to contribute to SNAP benefits if they have a payment error rate above 6%. Error rates were about 11% nationally in 2024.

ANALYSIS

China finds much bigger role at COP30

U.S. sidesteps annual U.N. climate summit

Valerie Volcovici and Lisandra Paraguassu
REUTERS

BELEM, Brazil – With the United States absent from the U.N. annual international climate summit for the first time in three decades, China is stepping into the limelight as a leader in the fight against global warming.

Its country pavilion dominates the entrance hall of the sprawling COP30 conference grounds in Brazil’s Amazon city of Belem, executives from its biggest clean energy companies are presenting their visions for a green future to large audiences in English, and its diplomats are working behind the scenes to ensure constructive talks.

Those were Washington’s roles, but they now reside with Beijing.

“Water flows to where there is space, and diplomacy often does the same,” Francesco La Camera, director general at the International Renewable Energy Agency, told Reuters.

He said China’s dominance in renewable energy and electric vehicles was bolstering its position in climate diplomacy. China’s transformation from a quiet presence at the U.N.’s Conference of the Parties summits to a more central player seeking the world’s attention reflects a shift in the fight against global warming since President Donald Trump’s return to office.

Long a skeptic of climate change, Trump has again pulled the United States – the world’s largest historic emitter – from the landmark international Paris Agreement to limit global warming. This year, for the first time ever, he declined to send an official high-level delegation to represent U.S. interests at the summit.

“President Trump will not jeopardize our country’s economic and national security to pursue vague climate goals that are killing other countries,” White House spokeswoman Taylor Rogers told Reuters.



Attendees gather near the China pavilion during the U.N.’s COP30 conference on Nov. 14 in Belem, Brazil. ADRIANO MACHADO/REUTERS

But critics warn the U.S. withdrawal from the process cedes valuable ground in the climate negotiations, particularly as China, currently the world’s top greenhouse gas emitter, rapidly expands its renewable and EV industries.

“China gets it,” said California Gov. Gavin Newsom during a visit to the conference earlier this week. “America is toast competitively, if we don’t wake up to what the hell they’re doing in this space, on supply chains, how they’re dominating manufacturing, how they’re flooding the zone.”

Unlike previous years, when China had a modest pavilion with just a handful of seats available for mostly technical and academic panels, its COP30 pavilion occupies prime space near the entrance next to host country Brazil.

Cups of sustainable Chinese single-origin coffee, panda toys and branded swag lure in passers-by who can watch presentations by Chinese officials and executives from the world’s biggest renewable energy companies.

“Let’s honor the legacy and fulfill the Paris vision guided by the vision of shared future,” Meng Xiangfeng, vice president of China’s CATL, the world’s largest battery maker, told an audience on Nov. 13. “Let’s advance climate cooperation and build a clean, beautiful world together.”

The battery giant already supplies one-third of batteries for EV makers including Tesla, Ford and Volkswagen. It was CATL’s first time hosting an event at a COP, seeking to reach an audience of governments and nongovernmental organizations.

Earlier that afternoon, Li Gao, China’s vice minister of ecology, told a packed audience that China’s status as the world’s leading producer of renewable energy “brings benefits to countries, particularly in the Global South.”

China’s State Grid, the world’s largest electric utility, and solar giants Trina and Longi also made presentations. Chinese electric auto giant BYD introduced plug-in hybrid vehicles compatible with biofuel manufactured at its plant in Bahia, Brazil, for use at COP30.

Both COP President Andre Correa do Lago and COP30 CEO Ana de Toni have praised China’s role as a clean-energy technology leader.

“China has shown leadership not only by carrying out its own energy revolution, but with China’s scale capacity, we can now also buy low-carbon ... at competitive prices,” de Toni said.

China is playing a more subtle role behind the scenes in the negotiations by filling a void left by the United States, which was known for rallying governments toward agreement, according to

current and former diplomats involved in negotiations.

“Little by little, China is acting as a guarantor of the climate regime,” said one senior diplomat from an emerging economy. “They invested a lot on the green economy. If there’s any kind of revolution, they will lose.”

One Brazilian diplomat said China played a key role in helping reach an agreement on the COP30 agenda before negotiations even began, whereas in previous years its diplomats would not get involved unless there was some key issue for them.

Sue Biniacz, who served as U.S. deputy climate envoy under John Kerry and was a key architect of the Paris Agreement, said China had the ability to bring together the wide-ranging interests of the developing world, from major emerging economies like the BRICS nations to small developing nations. She worked closely with Chinese counterparts on four bilateral climate agreements, including the one that unlocked the Paris deal.

“They tend to be very tough, take on tough positions like the U.S. did, but then be pragmatic towards the end,” she told Reuters. “They have to come up with an outcome that nobody thinks is bad enough to block.”

Biniacz said she was not yet convinced that China was playing a leadership role beyond the pavilions.

“If they had wanted to, they would have put in a more ambitious emission reduction target,” she said, referring to China’s announcement in September that it would cut emissions at least 7% from their peak by 2035.

Li Shuo, a veteran observer of China at U.N. climate talks who heads the China Climate Hub at the Asia Society Policy Institute, countered that China’s technology position was already a show of political leadership because its companies were making U.N. pledges achievable.

“The most powerful country isn’t the one with the loudest microphone at COP,” he said, “but the one actually producing and investing in low-carbon technologies.”