

Nation

Food banks face high prices

By JANIE HAR
Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — U.S. food banks dealing with greater demand from families sidelined by the pandemic now face a new challenge — surging food prices and supply chain issues walloping the nation.

The higher costs and limited availability mean some families may get smaller servings or substitutions for staples such as peanut butter, which some food banks are buying for nearly double what it cost two years ago. As holidays approach, some food banks worry they won't have enough stuffing and cranberry sauce for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

“What happens when food prices go up is food insecurity for those who are experiencing it just gets worse,” said Katie Fitzgerald, chief operating officer of Feeding America, a nonprofit organization that coordinates the efforts of more than 200 food banks across the country.

Food banks that expanded to meet unprecedented demand brought on by the pandemic won't be able to absorb forever food costs that are two to three times what they used to be, she said.

Supply chain disruptions, lower inventory and labor shortages have all contributed to increased costs for charities on which tens of millions of people in the U.S. rely on for nutrition. Donated food is more expensive to move because transportation costs are up, and bottlenecks at factories and ports make it difficult to



AP Photo/Terry Chea

A volunteer packs onions in the warehouse of the Alameda County Community Food Bank in Oakland, Calif., on Nov. 5.

get goods of all kinds.

If a food bank has to swap out for smaller sizes of canned tuna or make substitutions in order to stretch their dollars, Fitzgerald said, it's like adding “insult to injury” to a family reeling from uncertainty.

In the prohibitively expensive San Francisco Bay Area, the Alameda County Community Food Bank in Oakland is spending an extra \$60,000 a month on food. Combined with increased demand, it is now shelling out \$1 million a month to distribute 4.5 million pounds of food, said Michael Altfest, the Oakland food bank's director of community engagement.

Pre-pandemic, it was spending a quarter of the money for 2.5 million pounds of food.


The cost of canned green beans and peaches is up nearly 9% for them, Altfest said; canned tuna and frozen

tilapia up more than 6%; and a case of 5-pound frozen chickens for holiday tables is up 13%. The price for dry oatmeal has climbed 17%.

Many people also rely on government aid, including the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

Kate Waters, a spokeswoman for the USDA, which administers the SNAP program, said there were no immediate plans for an emergency boost in SNAP benefits to compensate for the rising food costs. But she said that previous moves by the Biden administration such as the permanent increase in SNAP benefits earlier this year and a fresh wave of funding for food banks should help ease the burden. In addition, Waters said the fact that schools are open and offering free lunches and, in some cases, free breakfast, should also help.

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2. _____	12. _____
3. _____	13. _____
4. _____	14. _____
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