

USDA food box program fails to deliver significant share of much needed aid

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The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) "Farmers to Families Food Box Program" has failed to deliver 15 percent of its promised deliveries to charities and food banks so far.

Announced by President Donald Trump in April, the program allocated \$3 billion to purchase food from farmers who had lost sales to large buyers during the pandemic and contracted companies to box and deliver it to people in need. The boxes are composed of fresh produce, meat and dairy, with enough food to feed a family of four for one week.

The USDA anticipated the delivery of \$1.2 billion worth food between May 15 and June 30. Instead, the program has delivered less than two-thirds of this amount, just \$755.5 million, while being plagued by chronic issues. Many of the companies awarded contracts lacked proper experience and personnel to work in food distribution, and often failed to deliver boxes on time or at all.

The San Antonio, Texas based CRE8AD8 (pronounced 'create a date'), a high-end wedding and corporate event planner, was awarded a \$39 million contract to deliver 750,000 boxes across seven states. The *San Antonio Express-News* reports that the company has only delivered a fraction of its promised boxes, a performance so dismal that it is one of 16 companies whose contracts were not renewed for the second round of the program (July 1 to August 31).

The Houston Food Bank reported that only 15 of 87 truckloads were delivered. Even worse, the North Texas Food Bank in Plano, the Southeast Texas Food Bank in Beaumont, the West Texas Food Bank in Odessa, the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona in Tucson and the Utah Food Bank in Salt Lake City all have reported that they received none of their expected deliveries from CRE8AD8.

The USDA has not commented on whether the undelivered boxes will be provided later or if the money and food allocated has been lost.

Even if all the food boxes had been delivered it would still have not been enough. The number of food insecure Americans was 37 million in 2019, prior to the economic collapse triggered by the coronavirus pandemic. The number of Americans lacking access to the necessary amount of nutrition has doubled since the onset of the pandemic according to the COVID Impact Survey.

The total amount allocated for the Food Box Program between May 15 and August 31 is \$2.67 billion. For this 78-day period the allocated funds amount to less than a dollar a day for each of the 37 million people already living with food insecurity.

Such a paltry sum, organized in a pathetically disorganized and careless manner, is a demonstration of the failure of the capitalist system and its inability to meet the needs of the working class and the most vulnerable layers of society. Trillions of dollars were made available to bail out the banks and corporations through the CARES Act, but only a few billion dollars could be spared to prevent mass hunger and malnutrition among workers and children.

In total, government payouts and actions from the Federal Reserve have reached upwards of \$8 trillion dollars in bailouts to the ruling class. The \$3 billion for food aid is equal to less than one four-thousandth of this unprecedented bailout.

The myth that there is no money to provide for the social needs of the masses of workers and youth has been undone by the pandemic. The money is there, it is simply not profitable to allocate it to those who need it the most.

The average annual cost to feed a person in the

United States is \$3,144 per year. The planned military budget for 2021 of \$740.5 billion would be enough to fully cover the food costs of 235 million people every year. Even just one-sixth of the American budget for war could end food insecurity entirely.

The USDA already has 1.9 million food boxes invoiced for the second round and is preparing to use the remaining \$330 million in a third round starting September 1. If the first round is an indication, the rest of this program will fall severely short of its intended goal, and even further short of meeting the social needs of the American working class.



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