

Lack of USDA Shipments Hurts Bay Area Food Banks

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A lack of shipments from the federal government is leaving some Bay Area food banks with empty shelves. And it's happening just as demand for food is especially high.

The empty shelves say it all these days at the Alameda County Community Food Bank. For the first time in a long time the food bank has had to go without deliveries of crucial items like canned vegetables, fruit, rice, beans, and frozen meats. The reason -- the U.S. Department of Agriculture hasn't delivered surplus commodities to Oakland for two months.

"We haven't received a shipment of the USDA items since the end of July so we are experiencing a real significant shortage that our agencies and the clients are feeling," said Michael Altfest with the Alameda County Food Bank.

Normally the Alameda County Food Bank would have about one million pounds of USDA food on the shelves, now they're down to about half of that.

It's the same story at the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, which also relies heavily on the USDA deliveries. It's not clear if the food's being diverted or is just not available due to the drought in the Midwest. The USDA has yet to give us those answers.

But the reality is the shortage is coming just as demand for food in both Contra Costa and Alameda counties remains extremely high, "More families find themselves turning to the Food Bank these days and we are a lifeline to them," said Suzan Bateson with the Alameda County Food Bank. "So, need in Alameda County is growing. We are serving 1 in 6 Alameda county residents, the majority of which are children."

To try to offset the shortage, both East Bay food banks are appealing to the public, asking for them to organize their own food drives and make monetary donations, "We can turn every dollar that is donated into four dollars worth of food that we can distribute," Altfest said. "Or come down here, volunteer, help out, lend your voice, call your legislature. There's a lot that can be done to help our neighbors in need."

It's unclear when the USDA shipments will resume.

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