What is the Holiday Assistance Program?
The Holiday Assistance Program is one of the ways that the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano helps partner agencies provide hot meals or food bags/baskets to low income families and individuals during the holiday season.

Who is eligible?
Food pantries and soup kitchens receive priority for this program because they serve the general public throughout the year. Some communities or churches that do not provide food year round have eligible holiday bag/basket programs. You must be open to the public in order to receive assistance from the Food Bank. Food Bank staff will visit your site so please provide us with accurate information about the date and time of your distribution.

What does “receive priority” mean?
Pantries and soup kitchens will be served first and may receive more variety in terms of the food items for their meals or bags/baskets. If resources are limited, other agencies may not receive holiday assistance at all.

How do I sign up?
An agency can get help for both Thanksgiving and Christmas. You must fill out separate applications for your Thanksgiving and Christmas programs. All programs must provide information regarding how many people they hope to serve, and when they plan on providing service, in addition to contact information such as address and telephone number.

What kind of donations will we get from the Food Bank?
Resources are different each year and also vary by holiday. Nonperishable food donations from the Food Bank are not available to agencies providing food at Thanksgiving. We will have a limited number of grocery store gift cards to share during the Thanksgiving season but not all agencies will be eligible to receive these. Only Food Bank Partner Agencies that distribute food throughout the year are eligible to receive these cards. Hopefully, we will be able to share fresh produce (onions, potatoes, apples, for example) but that depends on weather and crop surpluses. If you are a Partner Agency of the Food Bank you are always able to obtain nonperishable food items using the normal shopping process to supplement the food received at Thanksgiving.

At Christmas, we have supplies of nonperishable canned and dry items as well as produce. We try to provide 8-10 pounds of nonperishable food items per household. Some agencies will also be eligible to receive grocery store gift cards.

How do I know if my agency will receive grocery store gift cards?
If your agency came to the Food Bank to pick up grocery store gift cards in previous years and completed reports regarding gift card use in a timely manner, it is likely that you will be notified via email two weeks before the holiday that you are eligible to pick up gift cards this year. If you have never received gift cards, you will be eligible to receive cards if you are a Partner Agency of the Food Bank on a year-round basis.
Holiday Assistance Program Info Sheet

Will we get enough food for everyone we want to serve?
At Thanksgiving, the Food Bank is just beginning to receive donations. We do not have any resources to share at Thanksgiving except fresh produce. We have more food items to share by Christmas. While the Food Bank makes every effort to divide the resources we receive in a fair manner, THERE IS NO GUARANTEE THAT YOU WILL RECEIVE ENOUGH FOOD FOR ALL THE CLIENTS YOU WANT TO SERVE FOR THE HOLIDAYS. Pantries and other agencies need to seek out other donors and other resources for food during the holiday season. We suggest approaching local grocery stores for donations or discounted food. If you are a Partner Agency of the Food Bank you are always able to obtain non-perishable food items using the normal shopping process to supplement the food received. If you do not have any other resources, you should limit the size of your holiday program to fewer than 30 bags/baskets, and you should only plan on providing bags/baskets at Christmas.

What about turkeys at Thanksgiving?
Turkeys do not begin arriving at the Food Bank until a few days before Thanksgiving. Most of the turkeys we receive are distributed at Christmas. Any turkeys the Food Bank has at Thanksgiving are reserved for agencies cooking a meal for the general public and that have completed the application.

Can an agency get help for both Thanksgiving and Christmas?
Yes. You must fill out separate applications for your Thanksgiving and Christmas distributions.

Can I expect the same food as last year?
Food Bank holiday resources change from year to year. The Food Bank cannot give you food that we do not have. This year we have a limited supply of gift cards to provide assistance to Food Bank Partner Agencies with Thanksgiving and Christmas as well as the free produce that is available all year. Agencies that completed Holiday Assistance Application by the end of September will be notified in early November if they are eligible to receive gift cards. An agency representative will need to come to the Food Bank to pick up the gift cards. If you are receiving gift cards for both holidays, you will need to pick up twice.

My church has agreed to provide food baskets to another organization. Are we eligible to get food or gift cards through this program?
No. The Food Bank only provides food and/or gift cards to organizations that are directly distributing to low-income people within Contra Costa and/or Solano counties. We need to have a direct contact with the organization distributing the food.

Do I need to complete the Holiday Assistance Applications?
Yes. The Holiday Assistance Applications provide us with the information we need to divide our resources and contact you. If you do not fill out the applications, we may overlook your program, and we will not know where to contact you when we have food for your agency. Please fill out the online forms by September 30th. This is the due date for both Thanksgiving and Christmas.
Our Christmas program provides baskets to whoever shows up during our distribution. What do I put on the Holiday Assistance Application?
The Food Bank needs to know how many people you expect to serve. If you do not have a sign up process, you will have to make a guess based on the number of people you normally serve at your distribution. Please be realistic; holiday resources are not infinite. Please make your best estimate for how many people you think you will serve.

What should I do if our plans change?
You must keep the Food Bank informed if you change your mind about the services you will be providing or when you will be providing them. If more people sign up than you expected, or you discover that you won’t be serving as many, please let us know. We will adjust your order. If you change the date you will be serving people, we will need to know that, so we can be sure the food is ready for you in time. If your day or time changes and you do not inform the Food Bank, it will affect your chances of receiving holiday assistance next year.

How will I know if my agency will be getting food?
The Food Bank determines how much food is going to each agency approximately two weeks before the baskets are distributed. Once the allocation is made, agencies are notified by mail or by phone. If you have questions or have not heard from us, please wait to contact us regarding your allocation until the second week of November (Thanksgiving) or the second week of December (Christmas).

What if I don’t know what I am going to do until I know whether the Food Bank is going to supply the food?
You should not plan to do a holiday giveaway that relies 100% on food from the Food Bank. Please make sure you have other resources. If you have no additional resources, plan to do something small and understand that your baskets may only include bread and produce. If you are a Partner Agency of the Food Bank you are always able to obtain non-perishable food items using the normal shopping process to supplement the food received at Thanksgiving.

Can I get turkeys if I don’t have any freezers to put them in?
If you do not have freezer space, you must make arrangements to pick up the turkeys at the Food Bank and distribute them to the basket recipients within four hours. You do not know that everyone who receives a turkey plans to cook the turkey right away. Thawed turkeys present a food safety risk, so it is unacceptable to thaw turkeys prior to distributing them.

Should we let you know if we do not need turkeys?
Please let us know if you have your turkeys covered by another donor or your own resources. We always have more requests than we have turkeys. Write “we do not need turkeys” on your Holiday Assistance Applications, or call as soon as you know.
What about gift certificates?
The Food Bank receives funding from the community to support holiday meals and baskets. We purchase grocery store certificates or gift cards. These certificates are distributed to Partner Agencies who are providing holiday services. They can be used to purchase items at the grocery store, or they can be given to food recipients. **To be eligible for gift certificates, an agency must complete and submit the Holiday Assistance Applications before September 30** and have a history of using gift certificates appropriately. There are also reporting requirements. You must be a Partner Agency of the Food Bank on a year round basis to receive gift cards.

We are starting a new program. How do I get on “the list”?
Planning is critical to successful holiday programs. If you contact the Food Bank in September about your plans, you will be able to complete the Holiday Assistance Applications in time to be part of the allocation process. If you are a first time holiday applicant the Food Bank will limit the food we give you to serve 50 families. We will also visit your site so please provide us with accurate information about the date and time when you plan to distribute. Holiday Assistance Applications announcements are sent to everyone who participated the previous year and are in good standing with the Food Bank.

What should my agency do with leftover food?
Your agency can keep any nonperishable food you do not use in your Christmas baskets to distribute in January or February.

*If you have further questions, contact Caitlin Sly, Programs Director, at 925-677-7004 or 707-421-9777 ext. 204*