

FNS 2008 and 2009 DISASTER LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) provides nutrition assistance to disaster survivors in two primary ways, through (1) the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP,) formerly known as the Disaster Food Stamp Program, and (2) the Disaster USDA Foods Distribution Programs, formerly known as USDA Commodity Distribution Programs. FNS works with its State agency (SA) partners to administer the Programs by determining and responding to the nutrition assistance needs of survivors through authorization and implementation of the D-SNAP and delivery coordination of USDA Foods to shelters, other mass feeding sites, and/or disaster relief agencies. FNS funds all D-SNAP benefits for eligible households, and like the regular SNAP, 50 percent of the administrative costs to operate the Program. FNS also funds the procurement, replacement, and delivery of USDA Foods used to feed disaster survivors.

The 2008 disaster season was unprecedented in scope. There were 72 major Presidential disaster declarations, and it was the only year to have a major hurricane in nearly every month of the hurricane season.¹ Also, a D-SNAP was operated almost every month of the fiscal year (FY), with 378 counties and parishes issuing over \$447 million in benefits to nearly 1.2 million households. Disasters in 2008 ranged from wildfires in California; floods in Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Nebraska, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin; tornadoes in Arkansas, Colorado, and Oklahoma; and Hurricanes Gustav and Ike that affected Louisiana and Texas. 2009 proved to be a less volatile disaster season than its 2008 counterpart. D-SNAP's were operated in response to tornadoes in Arkansas and Oklahoma and floods in Illinois and Minnesota. In total, 14 counties issued \$12.7 million in D-SNAP benefits to 27,482 households, less than three percent of the number of households and benefits issued in 2008. A number of new disaster lessons learned and best practices emerged from the 2008 and 2009 responses.

BACKGROUND

This document combines feedback from Federal FY's 2008 and 2009 from FNS and State and Tribal agency disaster responders who participated in regional meetings, trainings, conferences, and/or provided responses through the *Reflection on Recent Disaster Responses* questionnaire and State Agency Post-Disaster Review reports. It provides new lessons learned and best practices for disaster responders to incorporate into their disaster plans and operations. It also updates information provided in a similar, June 2006 report by the FNS Disaster Task Force in response to Hurricane Katrina. A detailed list of disaster lessons learned by FNS and State agency responders is included at the end of this report, along with their associated best practices.

COMMUNICATIONS

Communication continued to be an overarching challenge for disaster responders and other stakeholders involved in disaster nutrition assistance in FY's 2008 and 2009. Disaster responders referred to in this report, include:

- FNS National, Regional, and Field Office staff and Customer Service Branch staff
- State and Tribal agencies and local office staff
- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- Private sector EBT vendors, food and infant formula manufacturers, and SNAP retailers

¹ In comparison, there was a high of 75 declarations in 1996. A major hurricane is Category 3 or higher (out of 5Categories). The Atlantic Hurricane season runs from June 1st to November 30th each year.

- National, State, and local retailer associations
- Professional, advocacy, and hunger relief organizations, such as the American Public Human Services Association, Feeding America, Food Research and Action Center, the American Red Cross, Salvation Army, and Southern Baptist Convention

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES IN COMMUNICATIONS:

1. *Program flexibilities put in place in response to the disaster were sometimes difficult to administer, because survivors were not aware of them or did not trust the information coming from a single source.*
 - A best practice is to maintain and update disaster responders' and other stakeholders' contact information so that information can be shared faster across parties.
 - In addition, messages to survivors and other members of the public regarding program flexibilities need to be reinforced across parties. Post these messages on disaster responders' public websites. FNS' Customer Service Branch in Minneapolis can also usually generate and mail notices to SNAP retailers within 24 hours.
2. *By issuing benefits before determining and/or confirming which disaster areas experienced power outages, claims had to be established against ineligible households.*
 - A best practice is to establish contacts at local power companies that can confirm the length and areas of power outage before D-SNAP or replacement SNAP benefits are issued.
3. *On-site observations provided valuable feedback to disaster responders at State, Regional, and National Offices.*
 - A best practice is to assign staff to visit disaster sites to provide feedback on site conditions to headquarters' offices which can aid senior managers in making informed decisions.
4. *Disaster responders and other stakeholders did not understand each other's roles and responsibilities. This affected the accuracy of information that was shared with survivors and other members of the public, and in some cases, resulted in duplication of effort among responders, or missed opportunities to provide disaster assistance.*
 - A best practice is for disaster responders and other stakeholders to establish and maintain relationships with one another so they clearly understand what their individual roles and responsibilities are prior to a disaster. Annual training with disaster partners can be a part of this relationship-building and understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities.
 - Also, information regarding the locations of nutrition assistance sites, hours of operation, and directions to sites need to be shared with all disaster responders and posted on responders' public websites.

5. *Some neighboring State agencies responding to the same disaster had different D-SNAP eligibility requirements and benefits which created confusion for applicants living near State borders.*
 - A best practice is for State agencies responding to the same disaster to collaborate with one another to design similar responses, which may help reduce survivor confusion. This collaboration can begin before a disaster strikes as part of annual training.
6. *Communications equipment used by deployed staff was invaluable.*
 - A best practice is to purchase and provide deployed disaster responders with communications equipment for remote internet access and power, logistical assistance, and correspondence needs.
7. *No clear understanding of how messages should have been relayed between responders and survivors caused confusion, frustration, and interfered with information sharing efforts.*
 - As a best practice, responders can develop a communications plan, prior to a disaster, which streamlines and describes how messages are to be relayed between the parties.
 - Before disaster operations begin, responders can review the chain of communication, discuss expectations for handling client inquiries and complaints, and verify each other's contact information during regular and non-business hours.
 - During the disaster response, responders can schedule frequent conference calls, or schedule them as-needed, so problems can be addressed as they arise.
8. *A limited media campaign resulted in some survivors not receiving the food assistance they were eligible for.*
 - As a best practice, multiple types of media, such as newspapers, TV and radio stations, hotlines, and websites can be utilized to provide information timely to survivors and other stakeholders.
 - It is best if communications from each responder come from one, centralized source.
9. *Relying solely on email to make requests and provide information caused delays in receiving responses when messages were inadvertently blocked and never reached their intended parties.*
 - A best practice is to always follow-up important email messages with a phone call or other form of correspondence to ensure they are received.
 - In addition, when transmitting data files for account set-up and benefit issuance, State agencies and their processors communicate frequently to ensure files can be transmitted during non-business hours and verify files are received and processed timely and correctly. It is advisable to test this process in advance.

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES IN THE WAIVER PROCESS

In FY 2008, FNS approved 94 waivers to enable State agencies to provide more efficient and effective D-SNAP operations in response to Hurricanes Gustav and Ike; floods in the Midwest and Northwest States; tornadoes; and

wildfires in Southern California.² As noted in the 2006 Task Force Report, State agencies continued to expect FNS to approve waiver requests immediately. In response, FNS established a goal to respond to all disaster-related waiver requests within 24 hours of receipt and communicated this goal to State agencies at meetings and trainings, so they could incorporate this timing into their planning and response efforts.

10. Gathering data on the number of households impacted by a disaster and other required demographic information justified the State agency's request to operate a D-SNAP.

- To meet FNS requirements and justify the State agency's request to operate a D-SNAP, it may be helpful for State agencies to rely on local or State emergency services staff to provide the necessary demographic information.

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES IN TRAINING

11. A number of training materials and resources have been developed to assist FNS, State and Tribal agencies, and other disaster responders and stakeholders in creating, reviewing, implementing, and participating in disaster nutrition assistance programs. These materials and resources include:

- **FNS D-SNAP Guidance** – This document was originally published online in April 2007 and is updated as needed. It provides policy guidance and tools/templates to assist State agencies in planning, implementing, and assessing their D-SNAP operations.
- **Online Training Programs** – The State of Washington has developed an online training program for its D-SNAP workers that can be accessed anytime. The USDA offers FNS employees online training via AgLearn, and FEMA provides online training for Essential Support Function (ESF)-11, Agriculture and Natural Resources, responders.
- **FNS Regional D-SNAP Meetings** – Before each hurricane season, FNS Regional Offices in hurricane-prone regions bring together State agencies to discuss their D-SNAP plans; new lessons learned and policies in place; and the roles and responsibilities of FNS and SA's in disaster situations. Other FNS Regional Offices have also organized these types of meetings on an annual or biennial basis.
- **D-SNAP Waiver Request Templates** – FNS has created EBT/issuance disaster waiver templates that State agencies may use to request EBT/issuance disaster-related waivers. The templates are posted on the FNS PartnerWeb.
- **FNS Regional Office Toolkits** – These documents clearly outline disaster roles and responsibilities in FNS Regional Offices and offer tools for State agencies to use when requesting to operate a D-SNAP.
- **D-SNAP Fact Sheets and Instructions** – These materials can be handed out to disaster responders and applicants at D-SNAP sites so there is a clear understanding of the application process, what types of verification will be needed to determine eligibility, fraud policies in place, how to use and PIN an EBT card, what can be purchased with benefits, when benefits will be available on cards, etc.
- **Face-to-Face Training for ESF-11 Members** – Throughout the year, FEMA and the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS,) in conjunction with FNS Headquarters and Regional Office Disaster Coordinators, offer training for ESF-11 members on their roles and responsibilities in various types of disasters. These trainings also allow ESF-11 members to share their experiences from past disasters and the missions of their individual agencies.

12. A best practice for State agencies in training includes keeping printed training materials in one place for easy location and access.

² In comparison, FNS approved 72 DFSP waivers in 2005.

DISASTER SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (D-SNAP)

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES IN D-SNAP CERTIFICATION

- **Duplicate Participation Checks Policy** – Based on an audit finding from the USDA’s Office of Inspector General, FNS issued the *D-SNAP Eligibility Determination System Readiness* policy memo on December 17, 2008. The memo requires that State agencies perform tests on their D-SNAP certification and issuance systems by October 1, 2010, to check for duplicate participation of all household members, including current SNAP and D-SNAP participants and denied applicants, before benefits are issued. In response to questions and concerns from State agencies on the memo, FNS distributed a *Disaster SNAP Duplicate Participation Check Survey* on June 30, 2009, to all State agencies to solicit feedback from them on what specific issues and barriers they face in the area of duplicate participation checking. Results from the survey were shared with State agencies on December 28, 2009, and showed that most State agencies are prepared to perform the required checks or are making changes to their systems to meet the requirements by the deadline.

Increased data sharing efforts are being made among State agencies to check for duplicate participation across State lines, in either their ongoing SNAP populations and/or when responding to the same disaster. The Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) Disaster Workgroup is made up of EBT and program staff from over 20 State agencies, FNS National and Regional Offices, and private sector EBT vendor representatives. The Workgroup has prompted five of its State agency members that are in close, geographic proximity to one another, to establish agreements to share their ongoing SNAP issuance files on a weekly basis during hurricane season, or as needed. This data sharing effort is currently in the testing phase, and the Workgroup provides feedback on its progress during monthly conference calls.

13. Some State agencies’ D-SNAP certification and issuance systems were neither prepared to perform duplicate participation checks or to complete them timely nor were they set up to track different benefit types necessary to generate daily reports.

- It is now a requirement for State agencies to adapt their certification and issuance systems so duplicate participation checks can be performed on all household members prior to D-SNAP issuance, while also meeting the requirement to issue benefits to eligible applicants within 72 hours of application.
 - Also, systems can be modified to assign and track different benefit types to properly report disaster benefit issuances.
- **Operating a D-SNAP Beyond the Disaster Benefit Period Policy Issue** – One State agency that experienced massive flooding over an extended period of time decided to operate a D-SNAP beyond the period in which the disaster occurred, because it did not receive a Presidential Declaration for Individual Assistance (IA) timely. It was later determined that the Program was not beneficial to survivors, since the disaster had occurred three months prior to when the D-SNAP was implemented. State agencies that did receive timely IA declarations due to flooding-related disasters, had difficulty choosing a specific disaster start date and benefit application period, since survivors were not able to return to their homes to assess damage and their possible need to apply for D-SNAP benefits.

14. *There may be significant lag time between the disaster declaration and approval for Individual Assistance.*

- A best practice is for State agencies to work with their Homeland Security Offices and organizations such as the American Red Cross to assess damages and quickly identify specific areas in need of nutrition assistance.
- State agencies and FNS can also work together to determine disaster start and benefit period dates and whether or not operating a D-SNAP beyond the disaster benefit period would be beneficial to survivors.

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES IN D-SNAP BENEFIT ISSUANCE

D-SNAP benefits are issued through EBT debit cards. State agencies generate demographic and benefit files and transmit them to their EBT processors to set-up and post benefits to recipients' accounts. Recipients use their EBT cards to make purchases at authorized SNAP retailers. Depending on the disaster scenario, a SA may choose to issue EBT cards over-the-counter in local offices, at offsite D-SNAP application sites, or through the mail. Disaster EBT cards may be pre-pinned, pinned onsite, or require the recipient to call a toll-free customer service number to PIN their card. Whatever the disaster scenario, State agencies need to have multiple plans for EBT card and PIN issuance, including having an adequate supply of readily available EBT cards and PIN devices, if necessary, on hand.

15. *Processing applications away from application sites created tremendous backlogs and eligible recipients did not receive their benefits timely.*

- A best practice is to process D-SNAP applications at or near application sites.
- "Back-rooms" can be created at sites where applications can be scanned and entered into the eligibility system quickly and easily.

16. *Since most disaster EBT cards do not have recipients' names on them, it was difficult to track cards and ensure that they were issued onsite to the correct households.*

- A best practice is to have EBT card issuance logs onsite for recipients to sign to verify that they received the correct card, or install card swipe devices onto laptops that automatically match the household's information with the EBT card that is issued.
- Also, load replacement and supplemental disaster benefits onto SNAP recipients' EBT cards rather than issue new disaster cards to them.

17. *Power and phone outages interfered with recipients being able to PIN their EBT cards and access benefits timely.*

- A best practice is to pre-PIN cards so recipients have immediate access to their benefits.
 - In addition, use four digits in the middle of the card number or use the recipient's birth month and day as an initial PIN until phone access is available and recipients are able to make PIN changes.
- **Mass Replacement Policy Issue** – State agencies continued to be interested in issuing automatic, mass replacements when a disaster impacted large areas and created extended power outages. This waiver allowed State agencies to respond proactively to ongoing SNAP recipients' needs while it also freed up their local office staff to issue D-SNAP benefits to other survivors in need of nutrition assistance. While

issuing automatic mass replacements to ongoing SNAP recipients has been a viable and useful solution in some cases, a number of new lessons learned and best practices have evolved in this area over the last two years.

18. There is often political and public pressure put on State agencies to request a waiver to issue mass replacements when conditions may not warrant the need for the waiver.

- As a best practice, consider issuing a series of short press releases to share information and preempt questions regarding replacement benefits while waiting for waiver decisions to be made.
- The State agency should be prepared to answer and respond to questions and complaints regarding how areas that received mass replacement of benefits were determined (compared to those areas that were deemed not appropriate for mass replacement issuance).

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES IN RETAILER OPERATIONS

Before operating D-SNAP, it must be determined if there are an adequate number of SNAP retailers operating in a disaster area. State agencies have primarily relied on their EBT vendors to provide this information in the past, but it has not always been easily incorporated into useful reports or generated timely. FNS has recently assisted State agencies by providing this information through its daily Store Tracking and Redemption System (STARS) reports.

19. Data on the number and location of SNAP retailers operating in a disaster area helped State agencies determine whether or not to operate a D-SNAP and where to direct recipients to use their benefits.

- A best practice is to use available mapping software to translate retailer activity reports into images that show how a disaster has impacted operations in an area and assist in monitoring the recovery process.

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES IN D-SNAP SITE MANAGEMENT

Several State agencies have implemented new strategies to better manage D-SNAP site set-up, operation, and closure.

20. Arrangements needed to be made in advance to ensure sites were available, secure, and had the necessary supplies and equipment in place to open timely and meet public demand and comfort needs.

- A best practice is for State and local authorities to work together ahead of time to identify D-SNAP sites that could be used in different disaster response scenarios depending on the demand for assistance, traffic conditions, etc.
- Also, Information Technology staff can evaluate connectivity capabilities at each site, and install computer lines where necessary.
- As a best practice, consider staggering the dates when applicants can apply for benefits at sites by last name to reduce crowding and prevent long lines from forming.
- State agencies can establish Memorandums of Understanding (MOU's) with vendors who can provide facilities, ice, water, generators, laptops, security, etc. as part of disaster planning and preparation efforts.
- In addition, ensure all sites are handicapped accessible, and establish separate lines for elderly and disabled applicants.

- Finally, a station can be set-up at each site to troubleshoot EBT/issuance problems, and equipment can be provided onsite for recipients to use to verify that their EBT cards are active and benefits are available.

21. *State agencies often faced political and public pressures to open D-SNAP sites before they were adequately set-up and staffed.*

- A best practice is to create a list ahead of time of disaster responders from each program and support area that will assist in disaster situations.
- Also, State agencies can rely on local agency staff to project how many disaster workers will be needed at each site, or can overstaff sites, initially, until an appropriate applicant-to-worker ratio can be determined.
- Evaluate whether it is better for appropriate decision makers to be onsite or at a central location to be reached immediately to respond to changing circumstances.
- Responders should be prepared to shift staff roles and responsibilities, if necessary.
- Another best practice is to ensure sites receive program materials prior to the day they open.
- Finally, State agencies can create “To-Go Kits” that contain all the necessary equipment and supplies needed to operate a disaster site. Responders should practice setting up and testing the equipment prior to disasters to troubleshoot and preempt any problems that could occur. Kits should be strategically placed throughout the state for immediate dispatch to disaster sites.

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES IN D-SNAP FRAUD CONTROL AND DETERRANCE

In addition to the requirements and suggestions in the FNS D-SNAP Guidance, State agencies have applied new strategies for fraud control and deterrence, including:

- Establishment of toll-free fraud hotlines to report and respond to potential program abuses
- Creation of State systems to recoup benefits timely

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES IN D-SNAP REPORTING

FNS requires that a State agency operating a D-SNAP submit daily reports on the number of households and individuals issued benefits and the total value of those benefits by disaster location. This information is used to monitor the disaster response, generate reports, and respond to media inquiries. To reduce the burden on State agencies and ensure uniformity in disaster reporting, FNS developed an Excel template that State agencies must use to submit daily reports that captures all the data elements required by FNS. State agencies can also use the template to record the number of households and individuals that are issued replacement SNAP benefits and the total value of those benefits. Replacement benefits are not considered D-SNAP benefits, but do affect a State agency’s Letter of Credit (LOC). If this information is provided on a daily basis to FNS, FNS can determine if additional funds need to be added to the State agency’s LOC.

22. *Creating daily reports manually was time consuming, impacted service delivery at sites, and made report reconciliation extremely difficult.*

- As a best practice, State agencies can adapt certification and issuance systems to accurately and easily capture data electronically, and use it to populate spreadsheets that can be submitted to FNS to meet the daily reporting requirement.

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES IN D-SNAP INNOVATIONS

A trend over the last two years has been the development of innovative D-SNAP solutions, including State agencies implementation of stand-alone, internet-based D-SNAP systems and the Buddy State concept. While FNS remains supportive of these innovations and ideas, it also recognizes that new solutions must be thoroughly tested before being implemented in a disaster response. Based on an experience from 2008, where one State agency attempted to issue D-SNAP benefits to another State agency's recipients in the middle of a disaster response, FNS determined that a successful Buddy system needs to be tested in advance to ensure that it meets several critical and important criteria. The State agency needing assistance eventually recovered system capability, and the Buddy State solution was never fully implemented. The EBT Disaster Services Workgroup continues to turn Buddy State concepts into promising work products, however.

23. When thoroughly tested, these innovations should prove to be extremely helpful in disaster situations.

DISASTER USDA FOODS DISTRIBUTION PROGRAMS

In addition to D-SNAP, FNS also provides USDA Foods for shelter and other mass feeding sites and for distribution directly to households by coordinating with State, local, and voluntary organizations. State distributing agencies (SDA's) have pre-approval from FNS to release USDA Foods to approved disaster relief agencies for congregate meal service. In the majority of disaster responses, USDA Foods are initially provided only for congregate meal service until commercial channels of trade are no longer disrupted and then, with a Presidential Declaration for Individual Assistance, D-SNAP becomes the most feasible method for providing nutrition assistance. It is important to understand, however, that meals-ready-to-eat (MRE's), heater meals, and other types of pre-prepared food are usually more useful than USDA Foods during the early stages of disaster response, since USDA Foods require more preparation. Distribution of household USDA Foods is not usually a common response, since open commercial channels of trade allow D-SNAP recipients to purchase what they want to eat and meet any of their specific dietary requirements.

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES IN USDA FOODS OPERATIONS

Over \$1.4 million in USDA Foods, baby food, and infant formula were provided to disaster survivors in FY 2008. From these experiences, the following lessons learned and best practices were developed:

24. Without an understanding among partners of the role USDA Foods played in disaster response, false expectations were created as to what could be provided to meet survivors' needs.

- A best practice is for FNS to continue to communicate with its partners on the role USDA Foods can play in a disaster response and how the programs operate, including the fluctuating nature of inventory, availability of transportation to move USDA Foods, and the requirement to request household distribution of USDA Foods.
- Best practices for SDA's are to initiate contact with local disaster feeding organizations such as the American Red Cross and community and faith-based organizations in the areas affected by a disaster, exchange contact information with them, and provide information to them on the potential use of USDA Foods in their congregate feeding operations.
- Another best practice is for FNS and State agency staff to develop protocols that help prevent duplication of commodity food orders from both FEMA and USDA.
- A final best practice in the area of USDA Foods operations is to provide FNS with an accurate estimate of what the USDA Food needs are and how the estimate was derived.

25. *Inconsistent delivery discouraged mass care responders from requesting USDA Foods.*

- It is important to consider local infrastructure conditions before making arrangements to transport USDA Foods to disaster areas. Roads/bridges need to be open, and feeding sites must be available and able to store USDA Foods and prepare meals.

CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Although Child Nutrition Programs administered by FNS are not specifically designed to provide disaster nutrition assistance, FNS is committed to authorizing waivers, when necessary, to assist Program operators in providing benefits to Program participants on an uninterrupted basis in disaster situations. .

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC)

Similar to the Child Nutrition Programs administered by FNS, the WIC Program is not meant to provide disaster nutrition assistance. While the WIC Program has no direct role in providing immediate food assistance to disaster survivors other than eligible WIC applicants and participants, there are important ways that WIC State agency personnel contribute to the overall disaster relief response based on information exchanges with State or Tribal disaster relief agencies. WIC policies allow State agencies flexibility in program design and administration to ensure continuation of benefits to participants in situations of disaster. Policies will continue to include:

26. *Giving State agencies the option to honor WIC food instruments in other States when clients have evacuated from their home State.*
27. *Mailing vouchers, certified with return receipt, to Program participants when the technology usually used to provide benefits is not available or working.*
28. *Encouraging and supporting breastfeeding as the preferred infant feeding method during a disaster and promoting these efforts by providing information and organizing meetings with the local emergency preparedness team, hospitals, and food banks in order to convey the importance of breastfeeding during emergencies and to develop a plan to support breastfeeding mothers and infants in disaster situations.*

DETAILED LIST of DISASTER LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES

#	Operations/Policy Area – Communications	Lesson Learned	Best Practice
3	FNS Presence at Disaster Sites	Having FNS onsite helped to assess current conditions and communicate these observations back to FNS Regional and National Offices, who, in turn, could make more informed decisions.	Onsite FNS staff wear disaster response shirts/jackets to grant easy access to sites and other disaster response staff.
1	Communication Between FNS, State Agencies, SNAP Retailers, and National Retailer Associations	<p>Even though FNS had sent a notice on the temporary allowance of the sale of hot foods, some stores would still not sell hot foods to SNAP and D-SNAP recipients.</p> <p>FNS SNAP BRD worked closely with its Customer Service Branch (CSB) in Minneapolis to produce individual hot foods notices to authorized SNAP retailers within 24 hours notice.</p>	<p>Maintain contact information (email addresses and phone numbers) for local (by State agencies) and national (by FNS National Office) retailer associations to increase and improve communications with these stakeholders who can, in turn, reinforce and speed delivery of information to SNAP retailers on temporary flexibilities in the operation of the SNAP and D-SNAP.</p> <p>FNS SNAP BRD works with CSB to produce overnight, mailed notices to authorized SNAP retailers on special disaster procedures in place.</p>
7	Communication Between FNS National and Regional Offices (RO's), State Agencies, Local Offices, and Other Partners	Regularly scheduled conference calls between response parties helped address issues as they arose.	<p>Make regularly scheduled conference calls, daily, or as needed, between FNS National and RO's, State agencies, and, if necessary, local offices and other partners involved in a disaster response.</p> <p>Have daily, weekly, or as necessary, conference calls between the State agency and local disaster sites for issue resolution and support.</p>
4	Information Sharing Between Disaster Stakeholders on Disaster Programs, Site Locations, and Operating Hours	Lack of information sharing between disaster responders, including State agency staff, FEMA, Red Cross, and others, led to incorrect information being given out on disaster programs, site locations, and operating hours.	Have a system in place for sharing information with disaster stakeholders on disaster programs, site locations, operating hours, etc.
9	Waiver Requests and Responses	<p>Waiver requests and responses between State agencies and FNS were blocked and never reached their intended parties, which caused delays.</p> <p>Some State agencies had</p>	<p>Follow-up important email messages with phone calls to ensure they are received timely.</p> <p>State agencies should expect D-SNAP and waiver request responses from FNS within 24 hours of the request being made and incorporate this timing into their planning.</p>

		unrealistic expectations (within a few hours) regarding the timing of FNS D-SNAP waiver reviews and decisions.	
4	Communication Between State Agencies, FNS, and State Emergency Boards	FNS needed to work with State/Tribal emergency contacts who could assist in informing others of FNS' role in disasters and in disseminating correct information to the public.	Create relationships between State agencies, FNS, and State Emergency Boards before disasters occur so all parties are aware of their individual roles in disaster situations, where disaster sites will be set up, how to get to each, etc.
5	Communication Between State Agencies for Disasters Affecting Multiple States	Communication between State agencies prior to responding to the same disaster is important. Some neighboring State agencies responding to the same disaster had different D-SNAP eligibility requirements and benefits which created confusion for applicants living near State borders.	State agencies responding to the same disaster collaborate with one another to design similar responses, which may help reduce survivor confusion. This collaboration can begin before a disaster strikes as part of annual training.
7	Communication Between FNS, State Agencies, and FEMA	Coordination and communication between State agencies, FNS, and FEMA ESF-6 and ESF-11 regarding USDA Foods inventory levels, the need of USDA Foods for emergency feeding organizations, situational updates, and responsibilities for purchasing USDA Foods are important elements of a successful disaster response.	State agencies, FNS, and FEMA ESF-6 and ESF-11 all need to coordinate, communicate, and participate in joint conference calls regarding: (1) USDA Foods inventory levels in States; (2) emergency feeding organizations needs for USDA Foods and where they are needed; (3) availability of electricity for refrigerated or frozen foods; (4) situational updates, when necessary; and (5) responsibilities for purchasing USDA Foods, so that consistent messages are shared at the same time, quickly, and across parties and duplication of effort does not occur. State agencies and FNS establish protocols at the Joint Field Office ESF-6 desk to ensure the prevention of duplicate orders of FEMA food commodities and USDA Foods.
7	Shelter Contact Information		Have contact information for at least two people at each shelter who can help coordinate use of USDA Foods.
6	Communications Equipment	Use of air/broadband cards, power packs to charge laptops in cars, and GPS devices by deployed staff was invaluable.	Purchase and provide disaster response staff with air/broadband cards, GPS devices, laptops, hand-held devices, headsets, and power packs for off-site internet access, communication, logistical aids, and remote power access.
3	FNS Presence at Disaster Sites	Having FNS staff onsite, helped communicate inventory availability to the ESF-6 and ESF-11 desks and to shelters and ensured these groups had correct contact information so	

		commodities could be moved quickly.	
4	Continual Training of FEMA, State Agency, and Local Disaster Planners Regarding Role of USDA Foods in Disaster Feeding	If FEMA, State agencies, and local disaster planners do not fully understand the role USDA Foods play in disaster feeding, false expectations can be created as to what inventory is available and when it can and should be provided to disaster sites.	FNS continually trains/reminds FNS partners on the role USDA Foods can play in a disaster response, including the fluctuating nature of USDA Foods inventory, the availability of transportation to deliver USDA Foods to disaster sites, and limitations of USDA Foods during the initial disaster response when local disaster feeding sites are not yet available to prepare USDA Foods. FNS will issue copies of its revised, <i>“Food Distribution Disaster Manual”</i> to its partners to help them better understand the role of USDA Foods in disaster feeding.
4	Communication Between State Agencies and Community and Faith-Based Organizations	Community and faith-based organizations may not be aware of the availability of USDA Foods in congregate feeding, restricting the assistance they can provide to survivors.	State agencies are pro-active in contacting local disaster feeding organizations, such as community and faith-based organizations in areas affected by a disaster and provide them with SA contact information and information on the availability of USDA Foods in congregate disaster feeding.
1	Communication Between FNS, State and Local Agencies on Breastfeeding Promotion and Support During Disaster Situations		State agencies promote breastfeeding as the preferred infant feeding method during a disaster by providing information and organizing meetings with the local emergency preparedness team, hospitals, and food banks and developing plans to support breastfeeding mothers and infants in disaster situations.
7	Disaster Personnel and Onsite Availability	Have staff from each program and support area, including finding hotels for deployed staff, available to assist during disaster situations. Having management onsite at each location helped facilitate responses to staffing, supply, etc. needs.	Prior to a disaster, develop a list of volunteer and assigned staff from each program and support area to assist or be on stand-by at all times to provide disaster response, including staff to coordinate and transmit site information, supplies, set-up, clean-up, IT help, and lodging for deployed staff. Be prepared to shift staff roles and responsibilities, if necessary. Determine the number and type of responders needed onsite or at central location. Designate a manager/coordinator-in-charge and information liaison to be onsite at each disaster location, if possible or needed. Consider limiting response staff to mission-essential personnel, only.
7	Limited FNS Personnel Resources	Anticipating when to deploy FNS staff to detect any problems that may arise at D-SNAP sites is difficult, and limited resources do not permit stationing staff at sites for the duration of a response.	Key State and local authorities should have FNS contact information to easily reach FNS staff, when needed, and to provide reports to FNS when FNS personnel are not on-site.
7	Communication Between State Agencies and FNS	Phone calls and emails directly from State agency staff to the FNS National Office, without including the FNS RO in the	State agencies first contact their FNS Regional Office for guidance, requests, or other issues involving disasters. This best practice will be reinforced in the revised, <i>“Food</i>

		correspondence, caused confusion and interfered with information sharing across parties.	<p><i>Distribution Disaster Manual.</i>"</p> <p>The FNS RO contacts the State agency providing the disaster response before operations begin to review the chain of communication and share RO contact information during regular and off-business hours.</p> <p>Develop a communications plan that streamlines how messages are relayed between parties.</p>
7	Recipient Case Information	Disaster recipients referred to FNS for case-specific information, transportation information, etc. were frustrated when referred back to the State agency by FNS for answers.	<p>Refer disaster recipients to the State agency issuing the benefits rather than to FNS for case-specific, transportation to sites, etc. information.</p> <p>FNS and SA's discuss expectations for handling client inquiries and complaints in advance of disaster situations/operations. FNS and SA's review what resources will need to be available to handle such inquiries during a disaster.</p>
7	Communication and Understanding of Disaster Roles and Responsibilities	Having plans in place prior to a disaster and an understanding of disaster partners' roles and responsibilities, aided in providing an effective disaster response.	<p>Finalize and update FNS Regional Office disaster toolkits to clearly outline disaster roles and responsibilities in FNS Regional Offices.</p> <p>Before hurricane season, FNS and State agencies in hurricane-prone regions, meet to develop and discuss contingency plans, duties, and responsibilities for disasters.</p>
8	Public Information Sharing	Lack of public information coordination led to applicants lining up at wrong locations or applying for benefits when they were not eligible.	<p>State agencies coordinate efforts to publish accurate and consistent information to the public regarding disaster application site locations, operating hours, program eligibility, etc.</p> <p>Establish one, central phone number for the public to call with questions, and publicize it well.</p>
8	Public and Internal Communications	<p>State agencies used different forms of media, including newspapers and websites to provide information timely to disaster survivors and other stakeholders on the: (1) length of the D-SNAP application period; (2) locations and hours of operation of D-SNAP sites; (3) need to provide accurate information on applications; (4) updates, etc.</p> <p>In some rural areas, newspapers are only published on a weekly basis, and eligible applicants learned about the program too late to apply for benefits.</p>	<p>State agencies use the media, including newspapers and websites, to provide timely information and updates to disaster stakeholders on response operations. Have local office staff communicate directly with local newspapers and TV and radio stations to publicize information.</p> <p>State agencies provide regular updates to the governor's and legislators' offices.</p> <p>State agency, local, and regional responders centralize all communications and commands in one location/room.</p> <p>State agencies work more closely with media and community organizations in rural areas to assure there is adequate news coverage to reach eligible survivors.</p>

2	Utility Contacts and D-SNAP Claims	State investigative staff had to work with utility companies long after the disaster benefit period had ended to establish claims against households that received benefits when there was no loss of power in their area to qualify them for benefits.	State agencies establish contacts with local power companies or collect information from companies to verify the length and areas of power outage before issuing D-SNAP or replacing SNAP benefits.
9	Communication Between State Agencies and EBT Vendors	State agencies access to their EBT vendors via internet Virtual Private Network (VPN) connections when their own systems were down was helpful.	State agencies communicate with their EBT vendors to ensure files transmitted during off or extended hours or on weekends are processed correctly and timely.
8	SNAP Timely Reporting and Mass Replacements Waiver Outreach	<p>Ongoing SNAP recipients often did not know that they could request a replacement for SNAP-purchased food that was destroyed in a disaster. However, once publicized, local offices could not handle the large volume of requests that were made in a short span of time.</p> <p>Requiring individual replacement requests greatly increased staff workloads and was burdensome to recipients who had to file affidavits of loss.</p>	<p>State agencies consider publishing a series of short press releases while waiting for waiver decisions to be made to preempt questions and share information more fully with the public.</p> <p>Be familiar with waiver flexibilities allowed during disasters, and refer to FNS' online D-SNAP Guidance.</p> <p>If appropriate, State agencies consider requesting a waiver to issue automatic, mass replacements to on-going recipients in disaster areas. This waiver decreases the burden on recipients by not requiring them to complete individual affidavits and allows local offices to concentrate on issuing D-SNAP benefits to eligible disaster survivors. Be prepared to answer and respond to questions and complaints regarding how areas were determined to receive or not receive mass replacement benefits.</p>
	Operations/Policy Area – Waiver Process	Lesson Learned	Best Practice
9	Waiver Requests and Responses	<p>Waiver requests and responses between State agencies and FNS were blocked and never reached their intended parties, which caused delays.</p> <p>FNS cannot usually reply to D-SNAP operations and waiver requests within hours of the requests being made.</p>	<p>Follow-up important email messages with phone calls to ensure they are received timely.</p> <p>State agencies should expect D-SNAP and waiver request responses from FNS within 24 hours of the request being made and incorporate this timing into their planning.</p>
10	Request to Operate a D-SNAP	Gathering information on the number of households affected and other demographic data to submit to FNS with the request to operate a D-SNAP was challenging.	Tap into local staff or State Emergency services' expertise to provide the best demographic information needed to justify the SA's request to operate a D-SNAP.

11	Waiver Request Templates	Creating waiver requests from scratch was challenging and time consuming.	State agencies use waiver request templates developed by FNS for operation of a D-SNAP and EBT/Issuance and Retailer-related waivers. These templates are posted on the PartnerWeb. Be prepared to gather information quickly to justify waiver requests.
26	State Agency Option to Honor WIC Food Instruments When a State Agency's Clients Have Been Evacuated and Housed in Other States and Communicating that Information on Federal and State Websites	State agencies that quickly determined that WIC clients were evacuating to other States in a disaster situation were better able to decide if WIC food instruments would be honored in all States where evacuees were housed.	Quick determination by a SA that its WIC clients are evacuating to other States can assist the SA in deciding whether or not to honor WIC food instruments in other States where their clients are being housed. Once a SA makes this determination, post this information on the FNS public website and on all State agencies' websites that are involved in the disaster response.
27	Alternative WIC Benefit Issuance	When program operations are interrupted, there was a back-up plan in place to mail vouchers to Program participants (certified with return receipt.)	Have a back-up plan in place, such as mailing vouchers certified with return receipt, to provide WIC benefits when program operations are interrupted.
10	Early SNAP Issuance Waiver	Issuing benefits early when a disaster was anticipated was helpful to ongoing SNAP recipients.	State agencies consider requesting a waiver to issue SNAP benefits early to ongoing recipients when a disaster is anticipated. Be familiar with waiver flexibilities allowed during disasters, and refer to FNS' online D-SNAP Guidance.
10	Extension of Certification Periods for SNAP Recipients Waiver	Extending certification periods for current SNAP recipients helped reduce the workload in local offices already overwhelmed by the disaster.	State agencies consider requesting a waiver to extend certification periods for ongoing SNAP recipients to prevent benefits from ending during a disaster and to give workers more time to assist new applicants.
10	D-SNAP Application Waiver	Having a waiver that allowed applicants to apply for benefits at any disaster site within the State, helped to assist clients that had to relocate because of the disaster.	When disaster survivors have to relocate within the State, consider requesting a waiver to allow them to submit applications at any disaster site within the State.
8	SNAP Timely Reporting and Mass Replacements Waiver Outreach	Ongoing SNAP recipients often did not know that they could request a replacement for SNAP-purchased food that was destroyed in a disaster. However, once publicized, local offices could not handle the large volume of requests that were made in a short span of time. Requiring individual	State agencies consider publishing a series of short press releases while waiting for waiver decisions to be made to preempt questions and share information more fully with the public. Be familiar with waiver flexibilities allowed during disasters, and refer to FNS' online D-SNAP Guidance. If appropriate, State agencies consider requesting a waiver to issue automatic, mass replacements to on-going recipients in disaster areas. This waiver decreases the burden on recipients by not requiring them to complete

		replacement requests greatly increased staff workloads and was burdensome to recipients who had to file affidavits of loss.	individual affidavits and allows local offices to concentrate on issuing D-SNAP benefits to eligible disaster survivors. Be prepared to answer and respond to questions and complaints regarding how areas were determined to receive or not receive mass replacement benefits.
17	Card Not Present During Key-Entered Transactions Waiver	Evacuees relocating to other States had difficulty contacting the EBT vendor to replace cards that had been lost or destroyed. Access to benefits for ongoing SNAP clients was delayed due to out-of-State address issues.	Have a plan in place to provide replacement EBT cards to displaced households. Consider requesting a waiver that allows SNAP and D-SNAP clients to access their benefits without requiring the card to be present at the time of sale by completing key-entered transactions. Clients must still be able to get their EBT card number from State or local staff or the EBT processor and have an active PIN.
	Operations/Policy Area – Training	Lesson Learned	Best Practice
11	D-SNAP Planning Resource	FNS Regional Offices worked closely with their State agency partners to improve their D-SNAP Plans.	
21	D-SNAP Site Staffing, Pre-Operations Planning, Communication, and Training	Rushing to open disaster sites before ensuring there was an adequate number of trained staff on hand to handle the expected number of applicants created problems and impaired the SA’s ability to provide a prepared response. Sites did not always receive program materials before opening, which caused problems with training and coordination of staff members.	Allow time for pre-operations planning, communication, and training, so D-SNAP sites are adequately staffed and workers are trained prior to sites opening. Keep training materials in one place for easy location and access. Ensure sites receive program materials prior to opening. Develop and update, in advance, training toolkits and/or online training for disaster responders that can be accessed at any time. For example, Washington State’s Training and IT Departments developed the following sample, online training program for its State disaster workers: http://www.lindadjordan.com/D-SNAP/player.html
12	Training	Disaster response staff remained up to date on disaster response operations, procedures, and policies with continual training, internal and external meetings, reviews, and exercises.	Have on-going, refresher (especially before hurricane season) and just-in-time training for disaster response staff. Have student-led training so experienced staff can focus on other duties. Continue to clarify Federal regulations and program guidance and share lessons learned and best practices, internally, and externally with all partners through meetings, policy memorandums, other documentation/communications, and reviews.
4	Signage and Training Materials at D-SNAP Sites	Signs posted at D-SNAP application sites helped direct applicants and responders to sites and kept lines orderly.	Provide applicants and responders with directions to sites, so they can share accurate information with others also needing assistance locating sites. Create/Purchase/Use an adequate number of well-placed

		Providing handouts with basic information about the application process, required verification, fraud policies, etc. to applicants in line was helpful.	<p>banners and other types of signage to direct applicants and site workers to D-SNAP locations and proper lines at sites.</p> <p>Create quick D-SNAP fact/reference sheets to hand out to applicants and responders at disaster sites, so they understand and give out consistent and correct information.</p> <p>For D-SNAP recipients, hand out instructions on how to use and PIN EBT cards, what can be purchased with benefits, and when they can expect benefits to be available on their cards.</p> <p>Provide information on food pantries and other feeding sites where survivors can receive feeding assistance.</p>
10	Waiver Request Templates	Creating waiver requests from scratch was challenging and time consuming.	<p>State agencies use waiver request templates developed by FNS for operation of a D-SNAP and EBT/Issuance and Retailer-related waivers. These templates are posted on the PartnerWeb.</p> <p>Be prepared to gather information quickly to justify waiver requests.</p>
20	Signage, Training Materials, and Interpreters for Non-English Speaking Applicants	Signage and training materials written only in English created confusion among non-English speaking applicants or discouraged them from applying for disaster benefits.	As required by SNAP regulation, State agencies must provide language-appropriate service to non-English speakers. To that end, State agencies develop signage and training materials in languages besides English, use graphics to communicate application procedures, program rules, and EBT/issuance operations to non-English speaking applicants, and have language interpreters onsite to assist non-English speaking applicants and responders.
11	Federal Training and Experience	Trained and experienced staff are assets in disaster situations. Specifically, having Federal staff with AgLearn and FEMA training and experience during past disasters ensured they were prepared to perform their disaster roles.	<p>Develop a list of trained ESF-11 staff in FNS Regional Offices who can support disaster operations at the FEMA Regional Response Coordination Centers (RRCC) and Joint Field Offices.</p> <p>Consider developing Home/Away Teams and schedule staff to work at the FEMA RRCC, especially during hurricane season.</p> <p>Conduct more inter-agency training involving all members of ESF-11.</p>
7	Communication and Understanding of Disaster Roles and Responsibilities	Having plans in place prior to a disaster and an understanding of disaster partners' roles and responsibilities, aided in providing an effective disaster response.	<p>Finalize and update FNS Regional Office disaster toolkits to clearly outline disaster roles and responsibilities in FNS Regional Offices.</p> <p>Before hurricane season, FNS and State agencies in hurricane-prone regions, meet to develop and discuss contingency plans, duties, and responsibilities for disasters.</p>
13	Tracking State Employee D-SNAP Applications	Some State agencies had difficulty tracking State and local employees' D-SNAP applications and conducting	Ensure there is a system or method in place to track State or local employees' applications for D-SNAP, so they can be reviewed later. Include this information in disaster

		Quality Control reviews after the disaster period.	plans and trainings for State and local disaster workers. Start Quality Control reviews while disaster programs are still operating.
11	FAQ's		State agencies create a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document on policy-related questions.
	Operations/Policy Area –D-SNAP Certification	Lesson Learned	Best Practice
10	Extension of Certification Periods for SNAP Recipients Waiver	Extending certification periods for current SNAP recipients helped reduce the workload in local offices already overwhelmed by the disaster.	State agencies consider requesting a waiver to extend certification periods for ongoing SNAP recipients to prevent benefits from ending during a disaster and to give workers more time to assist new applicants.
10	D-SNAP Application Waiver	Having a waiver that allowed applicants to apply for benefits at any disaster site within the State, helped to assist clients that had to relocate because of the disaster.	When disaster survivors have to relocate within the State, consider requesting a waiver to allow them to submit applications at any disaster site within the State.
10	Food Loss Definition		FNS has maintained a consistent policy regarding food loss as a D-SNAP eligibility qualifier for some time. State agencies can refresh their understanding of this policy by consulting FNS' D-SNAP Guidance, which includes complete information on food loss as a qualifier for D-SNAP eligibility.
	Operations/Policy Area –D-SNAP Innovations and Duplicate Participation Checks Policy	Lesson Learned	Best Practice
23	Advanced Testing of D-SNAP Application Processes and System Innovations	Implementation of new D-SNAP application processes, such as the use of voice signatures and internet-based issuance systems cannot be accomplished in the immediate aftermath of a disaster and must be tested and planned for in advance of operating a D-SNAP.	Thoroughly test use of innovative D-SNAP application processes and issuance systems before operation of a D-SNAP.
13	D-SNAP Dual Participation Checks in Other States	If an evacuee policy is in place, timely, demographic data from the affected State(s) is needed by the issuing State(s) to check for dual participation before issuance.	State agencies issuing D-SNAP benefits to another State's evacuees can establish agreements with each other on frequency of file data sharing and have a dissemination plan in place to get the data to disaster site staff so that duplicate participation checks can be completed before issuance. Before an impending disaster, State agencies can make electronic copies of their regular, monthly SNAP issuance

			files and prepare to send them to neighboring States to ensure duplicate participation will not occur.
23	Buddy State Support	<p>A successful Buddy system requires:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to perform dual participation checks • Sufficient capacity/stress testing • Reconciliation reporting • Issuance validation • Data entry error correction • MOU to be in place • Training • Data security and confidentiality • Evaluation of each State's business practices and systems 	Form Buddy State agreements and fully test new, innovative solutions before disasters occur.
13	System Capabilities and Capacity Testing	<p>Eligibility systems were not prepared to complete duplicate participation checks or to complete them timely; were not available on Sundays; or were not set up to track different types of benefits, such as D-SNAP, supplements, or replacements, for proper reporting.</p>	<p>Upgrade and prepare State agency eligibility systems to receive a large influx of data to provide a prompt disaster response. This is especially important for State agencies that use their regular eligibility systems to issue disaster benefits. If a State agency has a separate, stand-alone disaster benefits system or one that relies on interfacing with the State's eligibility system, these systems should also be thoroughly tested to receive large amounts of information at one time for issuing benefits within a short span of time.</p> <p>Adapt systems so that information can be collected on each household member and duplicate participation checks can be performed on each member quickly and prior to issuance.</p>
	Operations/Policy Area – Individual Assistance	Lesson Learned	Best Practice
14	Presidential Disaster Declaration for Individual Assistance (IA)	<p>There was significant lag time between the disaster declaration and the approval for IA.</p> <p>Operating a D-SNAP outside the disaster benefit period, because the State agency did not receive a Presidential Declaration for Individual Assistance soon after a disaster occurred, was not beneficial to disaster survivors.</p> <p>Counties had different forms and benefit periods which made processing D-SNAP applications</p>	<p>Streamline and coordinate IA approvals so that those in need at the time of a disaster can receive help timely.</p> <p>State agencies and FNS can work together to determine whether or not operating a D-SNAP after a disaster benefit period has passed, would be beneficial to disaster survivors.</p> <p>Standardize forms and benefit periods across counties/parishes.</p>

		difficult.	
14	Flooding	Due to the ongoing impact of flooding disasters, it was difficult for the SA to choose a specific disaster start date and benefit period. In some areas, survivors were not able to return to their homes to assess damage and their need to apply for D-SNAP benefits until after the D-SNAP had been implemented.	State agencies work closely with their FNS Regional Office contacts to determine start dates and benefit periods for D-SNAP operations.
14	Start-up Operations Planning, and Site Identification	Without cooperation and information sharing between the SA, State DHS and ARC staff, the State agency felt it had no other option than to request that a larger area than may have been necessary be declared as a disaster area.	State and local staff working closely with State and local Department of Homeland Security and American Red Cross staff can aid in assessing damages and identifying areas that are in need of disaster assistance. Do not rush into implementing a D-SNAP. Carefully plan the start of operations and be aware of the areas within counties, especially urban areas that have been designated by FEMA as disaster areas. Track when specific areas received disaster declarations, and monitor their individual response efforts.
	Operations/Policy Area –D-SNAP Benefit Issuance	Lesson Learned	Best Practice
15	D-SNAP Application Processing	In large-scale disasters, D-SNAP benefit issuance was most efficient when applications could be processed onsite or nearby. “Back-rooms” were used to scan applications and enter information into the eligibility system.	Process D-SNAP applications at or near application sites.
16	D-SNAP EBT Card Issuance	Securing disaster EBT cards at each site and having card issuance logs for recipients to sign, helped account for each card and verified that recipients received their cards onsite.	Plan to issue EBT cards in various scenarios. Have an adequate supply of readily available disaster EBT cards and PIN devices (if necessary). If issuing EBT cards onsite, ensure that cards are adequately secured and have recipients sign a log confirming that they have received a card. Check that disaster EBT cards, without recipients’ names printed on them, are issued to the correct recipients. Load supplemental disaster benefits to ongoing recipients’ cards rather than issue new cards to ongoing clients. Set-up a station at each disaster site to troubleshoot EBT problems, and consider having equipment onsite for recipients to verify their cards are active and their benefits

			are available.
17	D-SNAP EBT Card PIN'ing	Power and phone outages interfered with clients being able to PIN cards. Issuing new EBT cards to ongoing clients and retaining their original PIN's created delays in activating the new cards.	Pre-PIN cards so that new clients have immediate access to benefits. Use four digits in the middle of the PAN, so that the pre-assigned PIN is not printed on the receipt. Another suggestion is to use the client's birth month and day as an initial password until phone access is available for PIN changes.
21	D-SNAP Volunteers	Using volunteers to assist with crowd control freed up State disaster workers to complete interviews and authorize D-SNAP benefits at disaster sites.	Use volunteers to assist with crowd control.
13	Tracking State Employee D-SNAP Applications	Some State agencies had difficulty tracking State and local employees' D-SNAP applications and conducting Quality Control reviews after the disaster period.	Ensure there is a system or method in place to track State or local employees' applications for D-SNAP, so that they can be reviewed later. Include this information in disaster plans and trainings for State and local disaster workers. Start Quality Control reviews while disaster programs are still operating.
9	Communication Between State Agencies and EBT Vendors	State agencies access to their EBT vendors via internet Virtual Private Network (VPN) connections when their own systems were down was helpful.	State agencies communicate with their EBT vendors to ensure files transmitted during off or extended hours or on weekends are processed correctly and timely.
10	Early SNAP Issuance Waiver	Issuing benefits early when a disaster was anticipated was helpful to ongoing SNAP recipients.	Consider requesting a waiver to issue SNAP benefits early to ongoing recipients when a disaster is anticipated. Be familiar with waiver flexibilities allowed during disasters, and refer to FNS' online D-SNAP Guidance.
8	SNAP Timely Reporting and Mass Replacements Waiver Outreach	Ongoing SNAP recipients often did not know that they could request a replacement for SNAP-purchased food that was destroyed in a disaster. However, once publicized, local offices could not handle the large volume of requests that were made in a short span of time. Requiring individual replacement requests greatly increased staff workloads and was burdensome to recipients who had to file affidavits of loss.	State agencies consider publishing a series of short press releases while waiting for waiver decisions to be made to preempt questions and share information more fully with the public. Be familiar with waiver flexibilities allowed during disasters, and refer to FNS' online D-SNAP Guidance. If appropriate, State agencies consider requesting a waiver to issue automatic, mass replacements to on-going recipients in disaster areas. This waiver decreases the burden on recipients by not requiring them to complete individual affidavits and allows local offices to concentrate on issuing D-SNAP benefits to eligible disaster survivors. Be prepared to answer and respond to questions and complaints regarding how areas were determined to receive or not receive mass replacement benefits.

17	Card Not Present During Key-Entered Transactions Waiver	Evacuees relocating to other States had difficulty contacting the EBT vendor to replace cards that had been lost or destroyed. Access to benefits for ongoing SNAP clients was delayed due to out-of-State address issues.	Have a plan in place to provide replacement EBT cards to displaced households. Consider requesting a waiver that allows SNAP and D-SNAP clients to access their benefits without requiring the card to be present at the time of sale by completing key-entered transactions. Clients must still be able to get their EBT card number from State or local staff or the EBT processor and have an active PIN.
20	Access to D-SNAP Systems	Giving additional staff benefit issuance rights only during the disaster period helped with staffing shortages.	Ensure that D-SNAP certification and issuance staff have usernames and passwords that can access the D-SNAP system before deploying them to disaster sites.
	Operations/Policy Area – Retailer Operations	Lesson Learned	Best Practice
19	Determining Authorized SNAP Retailer Activity	State agencies gathered information on the number and locations of SNAP retailers operating after a disaster from their EBT providers and/or FNS.	FNS can assist State Agencies in determining the number of SNAP retailers operating in particular areas after a disaster by generating daily reports from its STARS system. States with mapping software can translate these store activity reports into maps that show how a disaster has affected retailer operations and to monitor the recovery process.
	Operations/Policy Area –D-SNAP Site Management	Lesson Learned	Best Practice
21	Access to Decision Makers at Disaster Sites	Having immediate access to decision makers, onsite or at a central location, provided quick responses to changing circumstances.	Evaluate whether it is better for appropriate decision makers to be onsite or at a central location to be reached immediately to respond to changing circumstances. Share personal contact information, such as cell and home phone numbers, of FNS National Office disaster personnel with Regional Offices, for assistance that may be needed during non-business hours.
20	D-SNAP Site and Resource Preparation	Having agreements in place prior to a disaster ever occurring for use of specific site locations and resources, such as ice, water, generators, laptops, satellite uplink devices, and security during a disaster response, helped ensure sites could be opened timely and meet public demand and comfort needs. Have separate lines for elderly and disabled D-SNAP applicants, and ensure all sites	State agency establishment of MOU's or other types of agreements, in advance, as part of disaster planning and preparation efforts, for future provision of D-SNAP application sites and resources. Utilize historical information from past disasters on areas best suited for site set-up and incorporate this knowledge into future site usage plans. Keep a list of contacts that can provide space, outreach, transportation, assistance with elderly and disabled applicants, bottled water, copying, etc. Prepare to have separate lines set-up for elderly and disabled D-SNAP applicants. Ensure that all sites are handicapped accessible.

		are handicapped-accessible.	
21	Implementation of a D-SNAP and Site and Operation Readiness	Taking time to adequately set-up D-SNAP sites and operations, despite political pressure to open sites quickly, can ensure SA's are better prepared for the estimated number of applicants each site will get and that the appropriate number of staff is available to assist applicants.	<p>Do not rush into opening D-SNAP sites until sites and personnel can adequately handle the expected number of applicants.</p> <p>Rely on local agency staff to project how many locations and staff will be needed at each site, or overstaff sites, initially, until a good applicant-to-staff ratio can be determined.</p> <p>State agencies post information on their websites, such as, checklists for how to set up D-SNAP sites, along with sample layouts; guidance; D-SNAP application forms; verification information; step-by-step instructions on issuing EBT cards; sample reports; etc.</p>
21	D-SNAP Site Staffing, Pre-Operations Planning, Communication, and Training	<p>Rushing to open disaster sites before ensuring there is an adequate number of trained staff on hand to handle the expected number of applicants created problems and impaired the ability to provide a prepared response.</p> <p>Sites did not always receive program materials before opening, which caused problems with training and coordination of staff members.</p>	<p>Allow time for pre-operations planning, communication, and training, so D-SNAP sites are adequately staffed and workers are trained prior to sites opening. Keep training materials in one place for easy location and access. Ensure sites receive program materials prior to opening.</p> <p>Develop and update, in advance, training toolkits and/or online training for disaster responders that can be accessed at any time. For example, Washington State's Training and IT Departments developed the following sample, online training program for its State disaster workers: http://www.lindadjordan.com/D-SNAP/player.html</p>
20	D-SNAP Site Selection	Disaster sites were removed by State Police due to potential security and traffic problems.	<p>Identify D-SNAP site and set-up requirements in advance for different disaster scenarios to ensure adequate space will be available and optimal confidentiality for applicants is provided. State and local authorities work together to assess potential demand on sites and select facilities that will be able to handle the expected crowds and traffic. Have IT staff evaluate each site for connectivity, and install computer lines, where needed. Invoke greater support from FEMA and State Emergency services to provide adequate facilities comparable to those used by FEMA.</p>
16	D-SNAP EBT Card Issuance	Securing disaster EBT cards at each site and having card issuance logs for recipients to sign, helped account for each card and verified that recipients received their cards onsite.	<p>Plan to issue EBT cards in various scenarios.</p> <p>Have an adequate supply of readily available disaster EBT cards and PIN devices (if necessary).</p> <p>If issuing EBT cards onsite, ensure that cards are adequately secured and have recipients sign a log confirming that they have received a card. Check that disaster EBT cards, without recipients' names printed on them, are issued to the correct recipients.</p> <p>Load supplemental disaster benefits to ongoing recipients'</p>

			<p>cards rather than issue new cards to ongoing clients.</p> <p>Set-up a station at each disaster site to troubleshoot EBT problems, and consider having equipment onsite for recipients to verify their cards are activated and their benefits are available.</p>
20	Crowd Control Measures at D-SNAP Sites	<p>When D-SNAP application sites open, crowding and long lines can quickly become problems.</p> <p>Having security onsite to help with crowd control, gave workers more time to address applicants' needs and answer their questions.</p>	<p>Stagger the dates in which D-SNAP applicants can apply for benefits by applicants' last names to reduce crowding and long lines at disaster sites.</p> <p>Plan for and establish security up-front, especially in urban areas, where demand may be extremely high. Consider moving local office operations offsite, so service to ongoing clients is not disrupted.</p>
14	D-SNAP Implementation, Start-up Operations Planning, and Site identification	Without cooperation and information sharing between the State agency, State DHS and ARC staff, the State agency felt it had no other option than to request that a larger area than may have been necessary be declared as a disaster area.	<p>State and local staff working closely with State and local Department of Homeland Security and American Red Cross staff can aid in assessing damages and identifying areas that are in need of disaster assistance.</p> <p>Do not rush into implementing a D-SNAP. Carefully plan the start of operations and be aware of the areas within counties (esp. urban areas) that have been designated by FEMA as disaster areas. Track when specific areas received disaster declarations, and monitor their individual response efforts.</p>
4	Signage and Training Materials at D-SNAP Sites	<p>Signs posted at D-SNAP application sites helped direct applicants and responders to sites and kept lines orderly.</p> <p>Providing handouts with basic information about the application process, required verification, fraud policies, etc. to applicants in line was helpful.</p>	<p>Provide applicants and responders with directions to sites, so they can share accurate information with others also needing assistance locating sites.</p> <p>Create/Purchase/Use an adequate number of well-placed banners and other types of signage to direct applicants and site workers to D-SNAP locations and to the proper lines at sites.</p> <p>Create quick D-SNAP fact/reference sheets to hand out to applicants and responders at disaster sites, so they understand and give out consistent and correct information.</p> <p>For D-SNAP recipients, hand out instructions on how to use and PIN EBT cards, what can be purchased with benefits, and when they can expect benefits to be available on their cards.</p> <p>Provide information on food pantries and other feeding sites where survivors can receive feeding assistance.</p>
4	Signage, Training Materials, and Interpreters for Non-English Speaking Applicants	Signage and training materials written only in English created confusion among non-English speaking applicants or discouraged them from applying	As required by SNAP regulation, State agencies must provide language-appropriate service to non-English speakers. To that end, States develop signage and training materials in languages besides English, use graphics to communicate application procedures, program rules, and

		for disaster benefits.	EBT/issuance operations to non-English speaking applicants, and have language interpreters onsite to assist non-English speaking applicants and responders.
7	Disaster Personnel and Onsite Availability	<p>Have staff from each program and support area, including finding hotels for deployed staff, available to assist during disaster situations.</p> <p>Having management onsite at each location helped facilitate responses to staffing, supply, etc. needs.</p> <p>Having FNS staff onsite after D-SNAP implementation can provide valuable feedback to RO's.</p>	<p>Prior to a disaster, develop a of volunteer staff from each program and support area to assist or be on stand-by at all times to provide disaster response, including staff to coordinate and transmit site information, supplies, set-up, clean-up, IT help, and lodging for deployed staff. Be prepared to shift staff roles and responsibilities, if necessary.</p> <p>Determine the number and type of responders needed onsite or at central location. Designate a manager/coordinator-in-charge and information liaison to be onsite at each disaster location, if possible or needed. Consider limiting response staff to mission-essential personnel, only.</p> <p>Onsite observations can create valuable feedback to Regional and Headquarters' Offices.</p>
21	To-Go Kits/Boxes	To-Go Kits/Boxes were created that each contained 16-18 wireless notebook computers, extension cords, wireless EBT devices, switches, surge protectors, mice, and materials necessary to set up and secure equipment quickly and easily at each disaster site.	Create and strategically place "To-Go Kits/Boxes" containing equipment and supplies that can be easily dispatched to and used at disaster sites. Assign IT staff to set up equipment at each site. Practice setting up and testing equipment prior to disasters to troubleshoot and preempt any problems that could occur.
21	D-SNAP Volunteers	Using volunteers to assist with crowd control freed up State disaster workers to complete interviews and authorize D-SNAP benefits at disaster sites.	Use volunteers to assist with crowd control.
20	Back-up Equipment and Site Locations	Having back-up equipment and site locations helped when primary equipment and locations were destroyed or could not be used.	Have back-up equipment and site locations identified and available.
20	Access to D-SNAP Systems	Giving additional staff benefit issuance rights only during the disaster period helped with staffing shortages.	Ensure that D-SNAP certification and issuance staff have usernames and passwords that can access the D-SNAP system before deploying them to disaster sites.
	Operations/Policy Area – Fraud Control	Lesson Learned	Best Practice
21	Fraud Control	Applications needed to be thoroughly reviewed with applicants to determine if the	State agencies use a toll-free fraud hotline to take reports of fraud related to disaster benefits and have staff assigned to

		information provided was complete and accurate.	follow-up on reports.
	Operations/Policy Area –D-SNAP Reporting	Lesson Learned	Best Practice
22	Daily Reporting	Daily reporting was time consuming and impacted service delivery at local disaster sites and made report reconciliation extremely difficult.	<p>State agencies must use the FNS Daily Reporting Excel Template to submit D-SNAP statistics to FNS. Adapt State systems so that daily, disaster reports can be input easily into the FNS Excel template and submitted to FNS electronically.</p> <p>State agencies use the standardized FNS-292A or B in the Food Programs Reporting System (FPRS) to submit final disaster figures electronically to FNS.</p> <p>State agencies include any special system coding necessary for disaster applications in worker training materials so that reporting is accurate and consistent.</p>
	Operations/Policy Area – USDA Foods	Lesson Learned	Best Practice
24	USDA Foods	Meals-ready-to-eat (MRE's), heater meals and other types of pre-prepared food are most useful during the early stages of disaster response than USDA foods, which require more preparation.	<p>State Distributing Agencies and local disaster response organizations use MRE's, heater meals, and other types of pre-prepared food in the early stages of disaster response before requesting USDA Foods which require more preparation. This topic will be discussed in the revised, <i>"Food Distribution Disaster Manual."</i></p> <p>Encourage the public to purchase heater meals/grab and go kits, etc. in advance so they are better prepared for disaster situations.</p> <p>State agencies determine the amount of USDA Foods needed before making the request to receive USDA Foods.</p>
7	Communication Between FNS Regional and National Offices, State Agencies, and FEMA	Coordination and communication amongst State agencies, FNS, and FEMA ESF-6 and ESF-11 regarding USDA Foods inventory levels, the need of USDA Foods for emergency feeding organizations, situational updates, and responsibilities for purchasing USDA Foods are important elements of a successful disaster response.	<p>State agencies, FNS, and FEMA ESF-6 and ESF-11 all need to coordinate, communicate, and participate in joint conference calls regarding: (1) USDA Foods inventory levels in States; (2) emergency feeding organizations needs for USDA Foods and where they are needed; (3) availability of electricity for refrigerated or frozen foods; (4) situational updates, when necessary; and (5) responsibilities for purchasing USDA Foods, so that consistent messages are shared at the same time, quickly, and across parties; projections of grocer availability, etc. are more accurate; and duplication of effort does not occur.</p> <p>State agencies and FNS develop protocols for the Joint Field Office ESF-6 desk to prevent duplicate orders of</p>

			FEMA food commodities and USDA Foods.
7	Shelter Contact Information		State agencies have contact information for at least two people at each shelter that can help coordinate use of USDA Foods.
24	USDA Foods Needs Assessment and Justification	Provision of USDA Foods and/or infant formula/food for State agency emergency feeding sites required coordination between the SA and FEMA ESF-6, Mass Care. Specifically, FNS needed to receive an accurate estimate of what the SA's needs were and how the estimate was derived.	If USDA Foods and/or infant formula/food are needed, State agencies provide FNS with an accurate estimate of what is needed and how the estimate was derived.
24	Reimbursement of USDA Foods Under the TEFAP	State agencies needed prior approval from FNS for household distribution of USDA Foods under the TEFAP to ensure reimbursement of Foods issued by food banks.	State agencies request FNS approval of household distribution of TEFAP USDA Foods prior to issuing USDA Foods to ensure FNS will provide reimbursement.
24	Continual Training of FEMA, State Agency, and Local Disaster Planners Regarding Role of USDA Foods in Disaster Feeding	FEMA, SA's, and local disaster planners did not fully understand the role USDA Foods play in disaster feeding. False expectations were created as to what inventory was available and when it could be provided to disaster sites.	FNS continually trains/reminds FNS partners on the role USDA Foods can play in a disaster response, including the fluctuating nature of USDA Foods inventory, the availability of transportation to deliver USDA Foods to disaster sites, and limitations of USDA Foods during the initial disaster response when local disaster feeding sites are not yet available to prepare USDA Foods. FNS will issue copies of its revised, <i>"Food Distribution Disaster Manual"</i> to its partners to help them better understand the role of USDA Foods in disaster feeding.
25	Transportation of USDA Foods	Closed roads and bridges may cause problems in delivering USDA Foods to disaster areas.	Consider local infrastructure conditions before making arrangements to transport USDA Foods to disaster areas. This topic will also be addressed in FNS' revised, <i>"Food Distribution Disaster Manual."</i>
4	Communication Between State Agencies and Community and Faith-Based Organizations	Community and faith-based organizations may not be aware of the availability of USDA Foods in congregate feeding, restricting the assistance they can provide to disaster survivors.	State agencies are pro-active in contacting local disaster feeding organizations, such as community and faith-based organizations in areas affected by a disaster and provide them with SA contact information and information on the availability of USDA Foods in congregate disaster feeding.
24	Donations	A SA operating a State warehouse was asked to serve as a donation center. Managing large amounts of donations and handling some donations was challenging and strained the SA's limited resources.	State agencies establish a system for tracking donations and generate letters of appreciation, afterwards. State agencies obtain information on what is needed and where to take items.

		More resources needed to be provided to SA's that operated their own USDA Foods warehouses/distribution systems. For example, the SA was asked to facilitate the storage and delivery of medical supplies to local health jurisdictions in support of the Strategic National Stockpile Plan. USDA was able to provide USDA-funded facilities, equipment, and personnel to support the SA's efforts.	
	Operations/Policy Area – WIC Program	Lesson Learned	Best Practice
26	State Agency Option to Honor WIC Food Instruments When a State Agency's Clients Have Been Evacuated and Housed in Other States and Communicating that Information on Federal and State Websites	State agencies that quickly determined that WIC clients were evacuating to other States were better able to decide if WIC food instruments would be honored in all States where evacuees were housed.	Quick determination by a SA that its WIC clients are evacuating to other States can assist the SA in deciding whether or not to honor WIC food instruments in other States where their clients are being housed. Once a SA makes this determination, post this information on the FNS public website and on all State agencies' websites that are involved in the disaster response.
27	Alternative WIC Benefit Issuance	When program operations are interrupted, there was a back-up plan in place to mail vouchers to Program participants (certified with return receipt.)	Have a back-up plan in place, such as mailing vouchers certified with return receipt, to provide WIC benefits when program operations are interrupted.
1	Communication Between FNS, State and Local Agencies on Breastfeeding Promotion and Support During Disaster Situations		State agencies promote breastfeeding as the preferred infant feeding method during a disaster by providing information and organizing meetings with the local emergency preparedness team, hospitals, and food banks and developing plans to support breastfeeding mothers and infants in disaster situations.
	Operations/Policy Area – General	Lesson Learned	Best Practice
7	Incorporating COOP into Disaster Feeding Plans	Depending on the disaster situation, disaster responders may have to work at alternate locations and/or with fewer staff.	Incorporate continuity of operations plans into disaster feeding plans when there may be a need to relocate staff and/or work with a reduced workforce.
15	Management of Ongoing SNAP Caseload	It was difficult to keep up with regular work while also administering a D-SNAP.	Have the capability to electronically send work to SA workers in other parts of the State that are not as impacted by the disaster to manage the ongoing SNAP caseload while also responding timely to disaster needs.
7	Following Approved Disaster	Circumstances may arise during a disaster that warrant a change	Follow disaster plans as closely as possible, making

	Plans	in disaster plans and response, but every effort should be made to follow established plans, decreasing the possibility for confusion and timeliness in agencies' responses.	adjustments quickly, when necessary. Update disaster plans with new lessons learned and contact information, as appropriate. Re-evaluate disaster plans to ensure they are realistic and include suitable contingency plans based on the types and severity of disasters the State agency might incur.
7	Disaster Planning and Operations in County-Administered State Agencies		State agencies with county-administered programs should facilitate agreements between counties to allow for sharing of resources in severe disaster situations and continually monitor county operations to ensure no significant problems arise.
4	Signage, Training Materials, and Interpreters for Non-English Speaking Applicants	Signage and training materials written only in English created confusion among non-English speaking applicants or discouraged them from applying for disaster benefits.	As required by SNAP regulation, State agencies must provide language-appropriate service to non-English speakers. To that end, State agencies develop signage and training materials in languages besides English, use graphics to communicate application procedures, program rules, and EBT/issuance operations to non-English speaking applicants, and have language interpreters onsite to assist non-English speaking applicants and responders.
7	FNS Inter-Regional Teamwork	Successive or prolonged disasters in one geographic area put a strain on FNS Regional resources. Deployment of disaster response staff from other RO's relieved this strain on resources.	FNS inter-Regional teamwork is essential during prolonged disaster responses or when there are multiple disasters that have occurred in close succession in one region.
7	Preparation and Response		Prepare for the worst, and respond to disaster warnings, immediately.
6	Weather Alert Equipment	Remote Tribes may benefit from acquiring better weather alert equipment.	Tribal Organizations located in remote areas may find it useful to have better weather alert equipment on hand for alert and preparation purposes.
24	Donations	A SA operating a State warehouse was asked to serve as a donation center. Managing large amounts of donations and handling some donations was challenging and strained the SA's limited resources. More resources needed to be provided to SA's that operated their own USDA Foods warehouses/distribution systems. For example, the SA was asked to facilitate the storage and delivery of medical supplies to local health jurisdictions in support of the Strategic National	State agencies establish a system for tracking donations and generate letters of appreciation, afterwards. State agencies obtain information on what is needed and where to take items.

		Stockpile Plan. USDA was able to provide USDA-funded facilities, equipment, and personnel to support the SA efforts.	
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