

NEW JERSEY

North Jersey food banks brace for disruption to SNAP benefits amid government shutdown

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Key Points

The Trump administration warns Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits will end on Nov. 1 if the government remains closed.

The shutdown entered Day 28 on Oct. 28, 2025.

Food banks across New Jersey are seeing signs of mounting demand as the ongoing federal government shutdown disrupts services and threatens to delay Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or [SNAP benefits](#) for thousands of low-income families.

The Trump administration has warned that SNAP benefits will end Nov. 1 if the shutdown extends past that date.

In cities from Paterson to Montclair and in Bergen County, food pantry directors say the ripple effects are beginning to show.

At Oasis – A Haven for Women and Children in Paterson, the organization's soup kitchen has been busier than ever, according to Laetitia Cairoli, the group's director of development.

"We've seen a rise in demand in our soup kitchen over the past year," Cairoli said. "In the past couple of months, our social workers have reported that numerous

clients have experienced a decrease in SNAP benefits, significantly affecting their ability to feed themselves and their children.”

Cairolì said that while the organization has been working to raise more money and collect additional food donations, the outlook is grim if federal benefits are delayed.

“We are anticipating a surge of need in the next few days if SNAP benefits are delayed or denied,” she said. “People are already suffering from food insecurity, which will be worsened by a delay in benefits. Working people — families with children — will go hungry.”

Oasis serves hundreds of families in Paterson each week with hot meals, groceries, and social services, relying heavily on community donations and volunteers.

Just a few blocks away, another Paterson nonprofit is bracing for the same storm. Jessica Padilla Gonzalez, CEO of Center for United Methodist Aid to the Community, said that while her organization has not yet seen a major spike, they are preparing for what’s likely ahead. She said the biggest challenge will be maintaining a steady food supply at a time when donations are already down and federal support programs have been cut.

“The loss of programs like the Local Food Purchase Assistance Program and overall reductions in food purchasing due to budget constraints have made it even harder to meet the need,” she said. “When federal aid is disrupted, families feel it first, and food pantries like CUMAC feel it next.”

The story is similar in Bergen County, where the Food Brigade Inc., a partner agency of the Community Food Bank of New Jersey, has reported one of its largest spikes in food requests since 2020.

“What we’ve been currently seeing reminds us of the COVID pandemic,” said Karen DeMarco, president and co-founder of the organization. “We’ve seen a 77% increase in new clients this month compared to the same period last year. This is the largest increase in requests for assistance we’ve witnessed since the pandemic.”

DeMarco said that in just the past week, 36 new families registered for food aid, and 21 more reached out over the weekend, including some federal employees who were furloughed because of the shutdown.

“Things have gotten very scary out there for a lot of people,” she said. “We’re not just seeing increased need, but also a lot of fear and worry — people asking, ‘Am I going to be able to feed my children?’ or ‘Will my electricity be turned off if I buy food instead of paying the utility bill?’”

To prepare for a potential surge, DeMarco said the organization is coordinating with several of the largest food pantries in the state to plan mass food box distributions in each county, beginning the first week of November.

But those efforts face significant challenges. The Food Brigade, which distributes U.S. Department of Agriculture food through the Emergency Food Assistance Program, has seen federal supplies drop by 60% compared to last year.

“We need to make up the deficit in food supplies through our food rescue operations, where we pick up surplus food from supermarkets and wholesalers,” DeMarco said. “At the same time, we’re dealing with fewer donations and higher costs. Our needs are threefold: money, food, and volunteers.”

She noted that state lawmakers like Assemblywoman Shama Haider and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin have been active in addressing hunger, citing Haider’s resolution declaring a right to adequate food for all New Jersey residents.

"At the federal level, it’s critical that those in the House and Senate hear from their constituents, to let them know in no uncertain terms that what is happening with increasing hunger in America is not OK," DeMarco said.

At Table to Table, a food rescue nonprofit that sources surplus food for about 300 food pantries across North Jersey, the ripple effects are already being felt. “Nov. 1 is now around the corner, and over 800,000 New Jersey residents will not have their SNAP cards refilled,” said Heather Thompson, the group’s executive director. “This

will impact working families, veterans, seniors, and children who rely on SNAP to get food on the table. Our pantry partners are telling us the lines are getting longer each day, and the full impact of the hold on SNAP funding hasn't yet been felt."

Thompson said Table to Table has been fielding daily calls from community partners requesting more food particularly meat, produce, and other perishable items, while also hearing from new organizations seeking help for the first time. "We're working seven days a week to deliver as much free, fresh food as possible," she said. "We're stretched from a staffing perspective, but our team is doubling down. We're asking food donors and volunteers to step up during this unprecedented strain on families and seniors."

The nonprofit, which rescues unsold food from grocery stores, wholesalers, and cafeterias, is urging local businesses to donate surplus food and volunteers to sign up through its I-Rescue App, which allows residents to pick up and deliver food rescues in their area.

In Montclair, Mike Bruno, executive director of the Human Needs Food Pantry, said his organization hasn't yet seen a spike directly tied to the shutdown, but the strain of inflation and increased living costs has been mounting for months.

The pantry registers about 100 to 120 new households each month and serves more than 300 walk-in clients daily, in addition to delivering groceries to over 250 homebound residents each week.

While demand has remained high, donations have dropped slightly this year, Bruno said — a reflection of the financial pressures many New Jersey families face.

"Policymakers need to understand that their decisions have very real ramifications," he said. "Food stamps don't go as far as they used to. We all know what we're spending in supermarkets — now imagine trying to stretch food stamps to feed a family."

The pantry's costs have ballooned as food prices continue to rise. Bruno said the price of ground beef, a pantry staple, rose from about \$5,200 for a week's supply in January to nearly \$7,500 by August. Even basic supplies such as bags used to package groceries have cost the organization more than \$22,000 in the past year.

As the federal shutdown continues, food bank directors warn that even short disruptions to SNAP benefits could leave many families with nowhere to turn.

“For so many of our neighbors, they're only one paycheck away from food insecurity,” DeMarco said. “Food insecurity is not limited to the most impoverished. During tough times, any one of us might need assistance.”