USAID/FFP Partner Perspectives on Food Aid Formulation, Selection & Distribution

Food Aid Quality Review Phase III
Tufts University Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Boston, MA
April 2018

Introduction

To fulfill its mandate of mobilizing America's resources to predict, prevent, and respond to hunger overseas, United States Agency for International Development/Office of Food for Peace (USAID/FFP) works with a wide range of stakeholders in the United States (U.S.) and around the world. These include product suppliers, shippers, implementing partners, recipient governments, and in-country collaborators.

In 2016 and 2017, the Food Aid Quality Review project (FAQR)[1] interviewed dozens of international and U.S.-based stakeholders. Specifically, we met with individuals within organizations who determine what food aid products or programming approaches are included in their organization's operations.

Our questions aimed to contribute to understanding: **How can the basket of food aid products and their programming be improved?**

This memo synthesizes what we heard from partners, whose responses reinforce past assessments (from 2002 and 2006),[2,3] shed light on remaining challenges in using food aid products, and highlight opportunities for improvement.

Background

In total, we elicited input from 102 stakeholders from 61 different organizations, sought through 3 activities:

1) **A series of semi-structured interviews and focus groups** held from June to September 2017 with 35 Nutrition Advisors, Program Directors, Chiefs of Party, Commodity Managers, and others (Table 2), from 11 implementing partner organizations (Table 1).

2) **A webinar** held in November 2017, hosted jointly by the Technical and Operational Performance Support program (TOPS) and the Nutrition Core Group, with 36 participants (Table 1). In this webinar, FAQR shared preliminary conclusions from the interviews and elicited feedback on these conclusions from webinar participants.

3) **A formal side meeting** held in October 2016 at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)-USAID International Food Assistance & Security Conference (IFASC) that brought together 32 participants representing 24 organizations, including commodity suppliers, U.S. government, nongovernmental organizations, consulting firms, shipbrokers, and research institutions (Table 1).

---

[1] The Food Aid Quality Review project (FAQR) is part of a series of United States Government activities aimed at improving food and nutrition programs under Title II of Public Law 480. The FAQR contract, administered by USAID/FFP, was first awarded to Tufts University's Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy in 2009. Two follow-on awards have since been administered; the project is in its third phase.

[2] Marchione, T. (2002). Foods Provided through U.S. Government Emergency Food Aid Programs: Policies and Customs Governing Their Formulation, Selection and Distribution. *The Journal of Nutrition*, *132*(7), 2104S-2111S. doi:10.1093/jn/132.7.2104s

[3] SUSTAIN. (2006). WFP & PVO Survey Report.

Methods

In October 2016, the Food Aid Quality Review (FAQR) held a meeting with stakeholders alongside the IFASC. The goal of this meeting was to engage in discussion on future directions and opportunities for food aid product innovations. FAQR team members led discussions in focus groups using a guided question format. Participant responses were systematically aggregated and distilled into 6 major takeaways (Appendix 2).

From June to October 2017, interviews were held with key informants (primarily at implementing partner organizations) to gain an understanding of the qualitative aspects of their use of the "food basket". FAQR sent emails to targeted contacts at all of USAID's prime awardees of Title II programs from Fiscal Year 2011 through Fiscal Year 2016 inviting their participation. Representatives from 11 prime awardee organizations were interviewed: ACDI/VOCA, ADRA, CARE, CRS, Food for the Hungry, Mercy Corps, PCI, Save the Children, UNICEF, WFP, and World Vision. The interviews were semi-structured, and held as one-time one-on-one sessions or focus-groups over the phone or in-person. After completing all interviews, FAQR collated responses, identified areas of consensus, and determined preliminary takeaways (Appendix 3).

To ensure that these preliminary takeaways were accurate, FAQR presented them in a webinar cohosted by TOPS and the Nutrition Core Group. Feedback from this webinar indicated that FAQR had correctly interpreted the input from respondents and had come to sound conclusions. Given this confirmation, FAQR finalized the conclusions and identified recommended actions (delineated in the following sections).

A full description of the methods used to carry out each stakeholder engagement activity is detailed in Appendix I.

What did we learn?

*These engagement activities elucidated **7 key takeaways** corresponding with **11 priority actions that USAID/FFP should consider taking** in the near term in order to enhance the life-saving aid it currently provides. Not all of these actions can be taken by USAID/FFP alone; some call for active collaboration with, and cooperation from, USDA and other partners or stakeholders.*

Key takeaways

Takeaway #1 USAID/FFP's current standards of operating enable uninterrupted and rapid food aid response

USAID/FFP's efforts to preposition food aid stocks and its flexibility in allowing partners to engage in "commodity swaps" has been critical for maintaining product delivery pipelines and responding quickly to emergencies.

Takeaway #2 USAID/FFP provides useful tools for managing programs

The tools partners find most valuable for operating their programs are: the Commodity Calculator; the Food for Peace Management Information System Ration Calculator; the Food for Peace Modality Selector Tool; and Country desk reviews.

Takeaway #3 More technical guidance for IPs will support "fit-for-purpose" goals

Building technical capacity is one way to help ensure that the foods programmed are most appropriate for the nutrition goals and context. However, partners are not aware of all the foods available for programming, and they are missing information on the nutritional difference between foods *and* how to use them (e.g. in what circumstances? for which populations?). When asked, partners said that enhanced product guidance their *most important* and *most urgent* need.

Priority actions for USAID/FFP

i.   Develop a training series focused on a) what is on the menu of food aid products, b) what principles partners should follow when making food choices, and c) how to use different food aid decision-making tools. Require that a representative from all partners take the training annually as part of their contract with USAID/FFP.

ii.   Build up written technical guidance for the products: e.g., for specific nutrition goals, which products are appropriate and make these resources available on a single USAID/FFP landing website.

Takeaway #4 Better transparency & communications improves programming

Partners seem well aware of the complicated procedures involved with managing their own food aid programs, but different partners do not have the same information about USAID/FFP food aid products & operations.

Priority actions for USAID/FFP

i.   Establish a single USAID/FFP landing website. Make the full menu of products, technical guidance for their use, and information on their effectiveness available at this webpage. Update this information regularly.
ii. Create a subscription service that automatically sends alerts about order solicitations, changes to the list of available products, and other important announcements.

Takeaway #5 Implementers can best respond to recipient needs with an innovative menu of food aid products

Implementers desire cost-effective, culturally acceptable products that are easy to transport and distribute. They are interested in working with novel products that better meet the needs of their recipients and supply chains.

Priority actions for USAID/FFP

i.   Invest more in non-GMO food product formulations, particularly for use in Africa.
ii.   Invest more in determining the cost-effectiveness of products for specific outcomes in various contexts.
iii. Devise a component of USAID/FFP contracts that enables implementing partners to pilot test novel products in such a way as to determine their effectiveness and cost-effectiveness relative to alternatives.

Takeaway #6 Changes to food aid products are best made collaboratively

Manufacturers are interested in supplying new products to USAID/FFP. However, a major challenge is identifying new products or improvements in existing ones that meet the needs of all stakeholders in the decision-making chain.

Priority actions for USAID/FFP

i.   When developing or making changes to foods, packaging, and specifications, work to include a wide range of stakeholders involved in all steps from production to distribution before final changes are made.
ii. Adopt a set of guidelines for USAID/FFP products. Make these publicly available.

Takeaway #7 There are opportunities to support institutional learning

Partners need forums for solving shared challenges and learning from each other's successes. They also need more historical context to make better decisions about an appropriate food assistance response.

Priority actions for USAID/FFP

i.   In coordination with USDA, continue to host an annual forum where partners can share lessons learned.
ii. Develop a web tool (accessible via a single USAID/FFP landing website) that aggregates comprehensive historical programming information at the country level. For every program that has been completed there should be information on: i) what food assistance programs have taken place, ii) what form of assistance was used and why, and iii) what lessons were learned.

APPENDICES

Table 1. Organizations represented in information-gathering activities

Table 2. Job titles of participants in semi-structured interviews & focus groups

Appendix 1. Engagement Activity Methods https://tufts.app.box.com/s/bxvlkvff5obkhtecfpzbam1nlvtkjtga

Appendix 2. IFASC Side Meeting Proceedings https://tufts.app.box.com/s/uz56dh7y4ywtw96mdfaoszam6cg4xcls

Appendix 3. Food Basket Interview Webinar Slides https://tufts.app.box.com/s/cmrijaeu2hf0dmfb4c3zq4m5smulrrl0

Appendix 4. Interview Questions for semi-structured interviews and focus groups
https://tufts.app.box.com/s/ssqj4m9g98hcmgosf2tk4hr6i427vqfs

Table 1. Organizations represented in information-gathering activities

IFASC Side Meeting (24)	Interviews (11)	Webinar (36)
Africare	ADRA	ACDI/VOCA
Alaska Seafood	CARE	ADRA
American Peanut Council	CRS	Africare
Bread for the World	Mercy Corps	ALIMA
Breedlove Foods, Inc.	PCI	Americares Foundation
Bryant Christie Inc.	Save the Children	CARE
Bunge Milling	UNICEF	Catholic Relief Services
Challenge Dairy Products, Inc.	World Vision	CORE Group
Didion Milling Inc.	ACDI/VOCA	Crown Family Philanthropies
Edesia Nutrition	Food for the Hungry	Detroit Food Policy Council
Interaction	USAID (on behalf of REST)	DSM
Kansas State University		Edesia Nutrition
NAMA		Education Tech. For Development
Pacific Rim Shipbroker		Eleanor Crook Foundation
Randall Consulting		Emory University
SD Wheat		FAO
Sorghum		Feed the Children
TCE Consulting Group		FHI 360
USA Dry Beans		Food for the Hungry
USA Rice		Global Food and Nutrition Inc.
USAID FFP		Helen Keller International
USDA FAS		International Rescue Committee
USDA KCCO		McLane Global
		Partners in Health
		Purdue University
		Samaritan's Purse Int'l Relief
		Save the Children
		SternVitamin GmbH & Co. KG
		The Manoff Group
		Tufts University
		United States Agency for International Development
		University of Queensland
		USDA
		Winger Consulting
		World Vision International
		Independent Consultant

Table 2. Job Titles of Respondents (with # of people reporting that job title)

- Director Food Operations Technical Unit
- Director of Food Security (2)
- Director of Nutrition
- Acting Director, Food, Nutrition, and Livelihood Security
- Director of Programme Development and Quality
- Chief of Party (3)
- Deputy Director of Food Security
- Deputy Director of Food Security and Livelihoods
- Deputy Director, Operations, Food Security & Livelihoods
- Business Development Manager
- Health and Nutrition Coordinator
- Program Management Officer

- Program Manager
- Regional Technical Advisor
- Senior Director for Programs and Innovations
- Senior Director, Food Security and Livelihoods
- Senior Nutrition Advisor (4)
- Senior Program Officer for Logistical Support
- Senior Programs Manager
- Senior Technical Advisor in Nutrition
- Senior Technical Director of Nutrition
- Technical Advisor
- Technical Director of Commodity Management
- Technical Specialist