

Heart of Alabama Food Bank (HAFB)

FIFO Inventory Training for Partner Agencies (TEFAP Focus; Applies to All Food Bank Inventory)

This document is a TEFAP (USDA) training guide. While TEFAP-specific requirements are emphasized, FIFO (First-In, First-Out) practices apply to all Food Bank inventory (TEFAP and non-TEFAP).

Non-Negotiable Requirements

- TEFAP must be segregated and clearly identified in all storage areas: dry, refrigerated, and frozen. TEFAP may not be mixed with non-USDA food.
- Product dating supersedes receipt date: if a product has a Best By, Use By, or similar date, that date determines FIFO priority and placement.
- If no product date exists, label the item/case with the date received and use that date for FIFO.
- Labeling is required for all FIFO methods so dates are identifiable and traceable.
- FIFO instructions must be posted and visible in all food storage areas (dry, refrigerated, frozen), including TEFAP areas.

Choose ONE FIFO method below and use it consistently across all storage areas.

Quick Method Comparison

FIFO Method	Best For	What Controls FIFO
Option 1: Front-to-Back Shelf	Stable shelving / dry storage	Physical placement (oldest in front)
Option 2: Color-Coded FIFO	Volunteer-heavy sites / visual cues	Color priority (supported by dates)
Option 3: Delivery-Day FIFO	Set delivery schedules / limited space	Delivery cycle confirmed by dates

Option 1: Front-to-Back Shelf Method

Best for: Shelving units, dry storage rooms, smaller pantries

What controls FIFO: Physical shelf placement (supported by labeling)

How to do it (step-by-step):

- Identify TEFAP storage locations in dry, refrigerated, and frozen areas and label them clearly (example: "TEFAP - Dry", "TEFAP - Cooler", "TEFAP - Freezer").
- At receipt, determine the applicable date: use the product Best By / Use By date when present; if not present, write the date received on the case/item.
- Ensure the date label is large, legible, and placed consistently so volunteers can find it quickly.
- Place the oldest-dated product at the front (or top) of the shelf/stack.
- Place newer-dated product behind (or below) older product - never in front.
- During distribution, pull product from the front/top position first.
- At every delivery/pickup, do a quick rotation check and adjust immediately if shelves were disturbed.

Quick check: If you always take the front item first, FIFO is working.

Option 2: Color-Coded FIFO Method

Best for: High volunteer turnover, visual learners, busy storage areas (especially coolers/freezers)

What controls FIFO: Color priority (supported by dates)

Supplies: Red/Yellow/Green stickers (or tape) and a posted color key

How to do it (step-by-step):

- Identify TEFAP storage locations in dry, refrigerated, and frozen areas and label them clearly.
- Label each case/item with the applicable date (product date when present; otherwise date received).
- Apply a color sticker based on priority (earliest date = highest priority). Recommended key: Red = Use First, Yellow = Use Next, Green = Newest Stock.
- Post the color key in every storage area (dry, cooler, freezer) so all staff/volunteers follow the same rule.
- Store items so Red is easiest to access (front/top), then Yellow, then Green.
- During distribution, pull Red first, then Yellow, then Green - confirming the date if items are similar.
- At each delivery, assign colors to new items and re-check that the highest priority color remains most accessible.

Tip: Write the exact date on the sticker to reduce confusion.

Option 3: Delivery-Day FIFO Method

Best for: Agencies with set delivery schedules and limited storage space

What controls FIFO: Delivery cycle confirmed by dates (dates always win)

How to do it (step-by-step):

- Identify TEFAP storage locations in dry, refrigerated, and frozen areas and label them clearly.
- Label each case/item with the applicable date (product date when present; otherwise date received).
- Set up sections by delivery cycle (example): Week 1, Week 2, Week 3 (or by month if deliveries are monthly).
- Place incoming product into the correct delivery section when received.
- During distribution, pull from the earliest delivery section first.
- Critical rule: If a newer delivery has an earlier product date, move it forward into the earlier section and use it first.
- At each delivery and before each distribution, do a 2-minute check to confirm the earliest applicable dates are in the earliest section.

Posting Your FIFO Instructions

Post the chosen method's instructions in all storage areas (dry, cooler, freezer), including TEFAP-designated areas. Postings should be easy to read, at eye level, and visible where volunteers actually pull product.

- Minimum posting locations: dry storage area, cooler door/interior, freezer door/interior.
- If you have separate TEFAP areas, post inside each TEFAP section as well.

Reminder: Select one FIFO method and apply it consistently. FIFO and TEFAP segregation may be reviewed during Food Bank site visits and audits.