



Florida opens disaster food assistance program to provide Irma relief 1:22

HURRICANE

# Florida opens disaster food assistance program to provide Irma relief

BY ELIZABETH KOH  
ekoh@miamiherald.com

OCTOBER 11, 2017 8:19 AM

For about a month, Andres Garbinski has mostly been living off a diet resembling his hurricane stash.

Diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes in 2014, the Northwest Miami-Dade man's meals have consisted of crackers and canned foods like tuna since Hurricane Irma hit, he said. Though he's been able to take his oral medications, power to his home was out for a week and the frozen vegetables he usually keeps on hand spoiled within days.

So when he heard the Department of Children and Families was conducting sign-ups Wednesday morning for a disaster food assistance program, Garbinski decided to drive down to apply before his security guard shift started.

"What the heck, let's see what happens," he said.

## Breaking News

Be the first to know when big news breaks

Enter Email Address

SIGN UP

Close Ad



No throttle. No gas. So how does an e-bike work?

Shimano



People line up to apply for assistance at Tropical Park where the Department of Children and Families and the U.S Department of Agriculture are coordinating the Food for Florida Disaster Assistance Program on Wednesday, October 11, 2017

C.M. GUERRERO - cmguerrero@elnuevoherald.com

Garbinski was among more than a thousand Miami-Dade residents who arrived at Tropical Park off Bird Road to sign up for the Food for Florida Disaster Food Assistance Program, which is offering food benefits in 48 counties across the state after Irma swept through. The agency opened sites in Broward and Miami-Dade on Wednesday and will take applications through Sunday, organizers said.

Though the program is activated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the DCF submitted a request to activate the program after Irma hit last month.

The disaster food assistance is restricted to those who are not already receiving food benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, said site manager Ofelia Martinez. Disaster SNAP, as it is called, has different, slightly steeper income limits, and only qualifies recipients if they have suffered some kind of loss as a result of the disaster, such as property or income.

If people are approved for the program, they receive EBT cards that can be used at most grocery stores and which should show benefits in two to three days, Martinez said.

The site's first day was slowed by some technical problems, including an intermittently down computer system that forced DCF employees at all four sites to switch to carbon-copy applications for those who hadn't pre-registered online.

Martinez said the agency expects the computer issues to be resolved by Thursday, but urged applicants to submit some of their information through the online portal before arriving on site.

"It'll be easier and faster," she said.

That didn't deter the several hundred people who lined up through the morning Wednesday, despite downpours that ~~lasted~~ puddles long after the clouds drifted west. Mary Guerra, patiently behind rows lined



**No throttle. No gas. So how does an e-bike work?**

Shimano

around 11 a.m., waiting

Her family had never applied for disaster food assistance before, she said, but she decided to submit an application after her cousin posted about the program on Facebook. Both her home and her father’s home near Westchester had sprung leaks because of Irma, she said, and the terrace behind her house had shifted by about a foot in the storm.

She and her father reached the first tent about half an hour after they arrived, though others who arrived earlier found longer waits ahead.

Brenda Clarke, 70, said she arrived with her daughter Verna, 37, and granddaughter Kierra, 19, around 7:15 a.m. to stand in line at Tropical Park, though they did not receive their EBT card until more than three hours later. Their Coconut Grove home lost power for 10 days, ruining the ribs, steak, pork chops, eggs and milk they had stocked up on before the storm, and the Clarke women were impatient to replenish their supply.

The line they waited in eventually snaked across the parking lot three times over, even though some people ahead of them left when rain drenched the crowd.

“They were not organized,” Clarke’s daughter Verna said.

Garbinksi ended up standing in line for about an hour before he left with a copy of his application and a new EBT card tucked into the front slot of his black leather wallet. The benefits, according to the paperwork he received, should average out to just shy of \$200 for October when they activate in two or three days.

The first thing he plans to buy at the grocery store: vegetables.

**FOR HELP**

- In Miami-Dade, the program will be available at Tropical Park (7900 SW 40th St.), Miami Dade College North Campus (11380 NW 27th Ave.), South Dade Government Center (10710 SW 211th St.) and Amelia Earhart Park (451 E. 56th St. in Hialeah) every day from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. until Sunday, Oct. 15.
- Broward locations, including Central Broward Regional Park (3801W. Sunrise Blvd., Lauderdale, C.B. Smith Park (900 N Flamingo Rd, Pembroke Pines) and Quiet Waters Parks and Recreation (401 S. Powerline Rd., Deerfield Beach), will also be open from Oct. 11 to Oct. 15. They will accept in-person sign ups each day based on last names, with a makeup day on Sunday.

**Never miss a local story.**

Sign up today for a free 30 day free trial of unlimited digital access.

SUBSCRIBE NOW

**IN OTHER NEWS**

Men Are More Satisfied By ‘Bromances’ Than Their Romantic Relationships, Study Says



Close Ad

COMMENTS



**No throttle. No gas. So how does an e-bike work?**

Shimano