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# Domestic Food Assistance Costs Are Rising

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*Participation and program costs discussed in this article compare the second quarter of fiscal year 1991 (January-March) with the same period in 1990. Recent data are reported as of April 1991 and are subject to revision.*

**F**ederal expenditures for the 13 USDA domestic food assistance programs for the second quarter of fiscal 1991 increased 13.8 percent over the same period in 1990, from \$6.2 billion to \$7 billion (table 1). The higher outlays primarily reflect greater participation in the Food Stamp Program and higher benefit levels for most of the food assistance programs.

All programs reported gains in numbers of participants, especially the Food Stamp Program. Food distribution costs climbed slightly due to the increased amount of commodities provided to the School Lunch Program. Costs for other food distribution programs fell from the previous year.

## Food Stamp Program

Average participation in the Food Stamp Program rose 11.9 per-

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*Each school day in the second quarter of fiscal 1991, an average of 24.2 million students received free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch Program.*

cent, from 20.1 million to 22.5 million persons due to the continuing economic slowdown and higher unemployment. Benefit costs and total program expenditures rose over 21 percent above levels reported in 1990, with benefits totaling \$4.3 billion for the quarter and expenditures reaching \$4.6 billion.

Average monthly per capita benefits increased from \$58.90 to \$63.96. These benefits, designed to help low-income households purchase a nutritious diet, are adjusted annually based on income, household size, and the June cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) for a family of four. The plan is the least costly of four representative food plans developed by USDA's Human Nutrition Information Service. TFP specifies the types and quantities of food that households may use to provide nutritious diets for their members.

## Child Nutrition Programs

An average of 24.2 million students participated in the National School Lunch Program each school day during the second quarter of fiscal 1991, approximately the same level as the previous year. Eligibility for free and reduced-price meals, which are designed to provide approximately one-third of the recommended dietary allowances for school age children, is based on household income and size. Lunches served during the quarter fell from 1.32 billion to 1.26 billion, due primarily to fewer



USDA Food Assistance Benefits Have Risen Over the Last Two Quarters<sup>1</sup>

Programs	1989	1990	FY 1990 quarters*				FY 1991 quarters*	
			I	II	III	IV	I	II
Million dollars								
Family food:								
Food stamps	11,676	14,191	3,506	3,549	3,563	3,574	4,090	4,296
Puerto Rico <sup>2</sup>	912	940	235	235	235	235	242	242
Food distribution:								
Indian reservations	51	51	12	13	13	13	12	13
Schools <sup>3</sup>	771	620	193	243	96	88	216	279
Other <sup>4</sup>	208	183	45	51	43	43	46	43
TEFAP <sup>5</sup>	231	209	51	56	56	45	44	39
Cash-in-lieu of commodities <sup>6</sup>	153	156	38	39	40	38	38	39
Child nutrition: <sup>7</sup>								
School lunch	3,005	3,210	958	1,045	773	434	1,066	1,079
School breakfast	507	594	173	190	147	84	203	204
Child care and summer food	744	865	172	188	217	288	203	207
Special milk	18	19	5	5	4	4	5	5
WIC <sup>8</sup>	1,906	2,116	500	548	518	549	521	567
Total <sup>9</sup>	20,183	23,153	5,889	6,163	5,705	5,397	6,686	7,012

\*Preliminary and quarterly data may not add to annual total due to rounding. <sup>1</sup>Administrative costs are excluded unless noted. <sup>2</sup>Puerto Rico transferred from the Food Stamp Program to a substitute Nutrition Assistance Program on July 1, 1982. Data represent appropriated amounts. <sup>3</sup>National School Lunch, Child Care Food, Summer Food Service Programs, and schools receiving only commodities. <sup>4</sup>Commodity Supplemental Food Program and Elderly Feeding Pilot Projects, excluding bonus commodities and donations to charitable institutions. <sup>5</sup>Initiated December 1981. <sup>6</sup>Child nutrition programs and Nutrition Program for the Elderly. <sup>7</sup>Cash expenditures. <sup>8</sup>Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children. Includes administrative costs. <sup>9</sup>May not add due to rounding.

Source: Food and Nutrition Service, Program Information Division.

days of operation. Free and reduced-price meals increased, and paid meals declined proportionally over the levels of the previous year.

Schools receive both cash and commodities. They received 14.0 cents worth of commodities per meal in the 1991 school year, in contrast to 13.25 cents in 1990. Schools also receive bonus commodities, depending on the availability of surplus Government stocks. In the second quarter of 1991, \$29.0 million worth of bonus commodities were delivered to schools, in contrast to \$54.4 million in 1990. This

46.7-percent drop was due to the continuing reduction in the level of Government surplus stocks.

The School Breakfast Program provided subsidized breakfasts to an average of 4.4 million children during the second quarter of fiscal 1991, a 6.4-percent increase over the same period in fiscal 1990. This program has grown steadily since the early 1980's. Total breakfasts served during the second quarter increased from 228.1 million to 231.7 million between 1990 and 1991. Numbers of free, reduced-price, and paid meals also rose from the previous year. Expendi-

tures for the program increased 7.2 percent, from \$190.0 million to \$203.6 million.

Meals served in the Child and Adult Care Food Program increased from 254.6 million in 1990 to 266.3 million in 1991, a 4.6-percent rise. The recently instituted adult care component of this program has increased significantly with a daily average of 22,600 being fed, up from 16,900 in 1990. Costs for this component rose similarly, from \$1.9 million to \$2.7 million. Total quarterly costs for the Child and Adult Care Food Pro-





gram increased 10.4 percent, from \$211.7 million in 1990 to \$233.6 million in 1991.

The number of half pints served under the Special Milk Program fell 7 percent, from 52.0 million in 1990 to 48.3 million in 1991. Costs dropped slightly from \$5.45 million in 1990 to \$5.42 million in 1991. This program serves schools, child care facilities, and summer camps.

## Supplemental Food Programs

The Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) reached an average of 4.76 million persons in 1991, a new high. This growth continues a trend for the last 10 years, reflecting added attention and increased

appropriation levels every year. WIC participation increased in all categories, with the number of infants showing the greatest gain. Total program costs increased 3.4 percent, from \$548.4 million in 1990 to \$567.2 million in 1991, while benefits per person dropped from \$31.08 to \$30.63.

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program provides monthly food packages to supplement the diets of needy women, infants, children, and the elderly. The number of participants increased slightly from 282,500 in the second quarter of fiscal 1990 to 285,400 in the same period of 1991. Program costs dropped from \$17.5 million to \$15.6 million, primarily because the value of the food issued declined each month.

## Food Distribution Programs

Needy families on Indian reservations and in the Marshall Islands received \$12.7 million worth of commodities in 1991, compared with \$13.0 million the previous year. The lower benefits stem from a \$600,000 decline in distribution of bonus commodities and only a \$300,000 increase in entitlement commodities. Participation also dropped, from a monthly average in 1990 of 143,200 to 134,500.

Surplus foods valued at \$21.6 million were distributed to charitable institutions in 1991, 22.7-percent less than the \$27.9 million in 1990.

USDA provides food and cash-in-lieu of commodities to the Nutrition Program for the Elderly, which is administered by the Department of Health and Human Services. In 1991, USDA provided \$35.1 million to this program, compared with \$35.6 million provided in 1990. This program served an average of 910,000 meals daily in 1991, compared with 929,000 in 1990.

Food distributed under The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) declined to \$39.2 million in the second quarter of 1991 from \$56.4 million in 1990, primarily because Government stocks were depleted. Some Government surplus foods are available for limited distribution. Other commodities are purchased specifically for distribution under this program. ■