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Food and Nutrition Legislation

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Numerous food and nutrition bills have been introduced in the 99th session of Congress. Some of the legislation is described below.

Food Assistance

S. 2239—Sen. Jesse Helms (NC)

This bill, entitled the Food Stamp Cost Avoidance Act of 1986, would repeal several changes in the Food Stamp Program made by the Food Security Act of 1985, P.L. 99-198 (see *NFR-33*, p. 32). Specifically, S. 2239 would make the following changes:

- Eliminate the requirement that States grant automatic food stamp eligibility to recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI).
- Repeal the increase in the earned income deduction—from 18 to 20 percent—that became effective May 1, 1986. This deduction compensates households for mandatory work-related expenses, such as taxes and union dues.
- Repeal the increase in the excess shelter deduction and the establishment of a separate limit on dependent care deductions. The 1985 Act established a separate deduction for dependent care, at \$160 per month, and raised the excess shelter deduction from \$139 to \$147 per month for the 48 contiguous States and the District of Columbia. The deductions for Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands reflect their differing shelter costs.
- Eliminate the asset limitation increases for food stamp recipients. The 1985 Act raised the asset limit from \$1,500 to \$2,000 for nonelderly households and to \$3,000 for households consisting of one elderly person.
- Repeal the requirement that the Secretary of Agriculture and the National Academy of Sciences conduct studies on the food stamp quality control system. Provisions

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mandating a new control system, based on the studies' findings, would also be repealed.

- Freeze the funding levels for Puerto Rico's nutrition assistance block grant program at \$825 million annually, thereby eliminating the scheduled increases for fiscal years 1987-90.
- Repeal the expansion of the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). The 1985 Act allows additional sites for food distribution and participation by the elderly.
- Repeal the provisions that require State Cooperative Extension Services to expand food, nutrition, and consumer education programs for low-income persons.

The bill would also amend the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 (P.L. 99-177), popularly known as Gramm-Rudman-Hollings. The Food Stamp Program; the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and child nutrition programs would be removed from the list of programs exempt from automatic spending cuts.

S. 2279—Sen. John Heinz (PA)

This bill is designed to standardize and improve the administration of the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). S. 2279 defines three tasks. First, States would be required to submit an annual plan to the Secretary of Agriculture outlining the distribution of surplus commodities to volunteer and emergency feeding organizations, including State efforts in training and technical assistance. Second, States would also have to submit quarterly reports on actual commodity inventories, allocations, and distributions. Third, the Secretary would issue regulations that establish standards for warehousing and storing commodities, State monitoring of commodity distribution by local organizations, and the liability of organizations for the loss of commodities. The bill would also reopen the Food Bank Demonstration Program, making food banks eligible to receive surplus USDA commodities.

S. 2495—Sen. Ted Kennedy (MA)

and H.R. 4990—Rep. Leon Panetta (CA)

These identical bills, the Hunger Relief Act of 1986, would amend the Food Stamp Act of 1977, the Child Nutrition Act of 1966, and the National School Lunch Act to improve the benefits available under these programs. The bills would:

- Gradually increase the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan over a 4-year period and ultimately move to the Low Cost Food Plan as the basis for determining food stamp benefits. USDA issues four food plans. The Thrifty Food Plan is the least expensive; the Low Cost Food Plan is the second least expensive.
- Raise the cap on the shelter deduction from \$147 to \$175. An increase from \$147 to \$152 is already scheduled for October 1986.
- Set the medical deduction for the elderly at 5 percent of gross income or \$35, whichever is less.
- Raise the asset limit to \$2,250 for nonelderly households and \$3,500 for elderly

ly households. The limit for an automobile would increase to \$5,500.

- Restore the Federal 50-percent matching funds for States who opt to provide food stamp outreach services—informing elderly, unemployed, and disabled people about the availability of food stamps.
- Exempt the first \$50 a month paid in child support when determining eligibility and benefits. This would make the Food Stamp Program consistent with AFDC.
- Increase the Federal reimbursements for school breakfasts to help defray the costs of providing a nutritional meal. S. 2495 and H.R. 4880 would also increase the reimbursements for reduced-price meals, lowering the price for breakfast from 30 to 15 cents and lunch from 40 to 25 cents.
- Raise the reimbursement rate for breakfasts served in day care centers and family and group day care homes. One additional meal or snack per day would be provided through the Child Care Food Program.
- Increase WIC funding by \$550 million over 3 years.
- Increase funding authorization for congregate and home-delivered meals, and nutrition education for the elderly. TEFAP funding authorizations would also be increased.
- Raise the authorization levels for the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program, the Community Food and Nutrition Program, and Nutrition Education Training in schools.
- Establish and implement a Coordinated National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Program. This section was originally introduced as H.R. 2436 (see *NFR-30*, page 33 for a description).

Food and Safety and Quality

S. 2446—Sen. John Chafee (RI)

The Fast Food Ingredient Information Act of 1986 would provide for ingredient labeling of food served in fast food restaurants. The Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act; the Federal Meat Inspection Act; and the Poultry Products Inspection Act require that food sold in wrappers or containers have ingredient statements on the label. S. 2446 would make these laws applicable to fast food. If it is impractical to put the information on a label, lists of ingredients could be displayed on wall charts, food tray liners, or printed in brochures. The Secretaries of Agriculture and Health and Human Services would determine what is impractical. A fast food restaurant would be defined as one which is part of a chain of 10 or more franchised outlets.

H.R. 4683—Rep. Charles Stenholm (TX)

This bill, entitled the Processed Products Inspection Improvement Act of 1986, would allow USDA greater flexibility in allocating inspectors among meat processing establishments (e.g., canning, salting, packing, or rendering). USDA would determine the type and frequency of inspections for a particular establishment, taking into account the nature and volume of the processing operation, the reliability of processing controls and sanitation procedures, and the history of compliance with USDA regulations. Presently, USDA must always have an inspector on site when the plant is in operation.

H.R. 4762—Rep. Douglas Bosco (CA)

The Food Irradiation Safety and Labeling Requirement Act of 1986 would prohibit the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) from implementing its regulations relating to the irradiation of fresh foods. In April, FDA

published regulations covering irradiation to inhibit sprouting and maturing and to rid the foods of insects (*Federal Register*, April 18, 1986). USDA and FDA would likewise be prohibited from implementing regulations relating to the irradiation of pork (*Federal Register*, July 22, 1985).

H.R. 4762 would require a study, conducted by the National Academy of Sciences, on the possible risks food irradiation presents to human health and the environment. The National Academy of Sciences would be required to provide a review of existing research on the safety and wholesomeness of consuming irradiated food. It also would be required to study the contamination of food by improper irradiation, the health risks to employees in food irradiation facilities and residents who live near such facilities, and the effects of transporting radioactive source material on the environment, population centers, and rural areas.

As do current FDA and USDA regulations, the bill would require irradiated food to carry a label stating this fact. The bill would go beyond FDA's regulations, however, by requiring that irradiated ingredients in foods also be identified on the label and that restaurants designate on their menus any foods that have been irradiated. Firms involved in irradiating foods would have to submit semiannual reports to FDA, which would then be available to the public. The report would contain a summary of the foods irradiated during the period (including quantities), for whom the work was done, and the dosages used. □