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Domestic Food Programs

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The USDA food assistance programs provide food or food coupons to low-income persons, helping them to achieve a more adequate diet. With the exception of the Food Stamp Program (FSP), the USDA programs are designed to meet the specific needs of segments of the low-income population. For example, the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs provide nutritious meals to children of high school age and under.

Low-Income Mothers

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers two programs that provide food assistance to low-income pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women and to infants and pre-school children:

- The Commodity Supplemental Food Program distributes federally purchased commodities to States which in turn donate the foods to eligible women and children.
- The Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides participants either with vouchers redeemable for specified foods at participating food stores or with a food package prepared according to Federal guidelines.

Under both programs, participants receive foods selected to meet particular nutritional needs. These foods include iron-fortified formula, cereal that is high in iron, fruit juices, cheese, eggs, and fortified milk. (See Fall 1981 *NFR*.)

As the unique needs of specific subgroups become apparent, the foods provided, as well as the method of delivery, have been altered. In 1978, FNS, with a grant from the Community Services Administration, developed a demonstration project to improve services for migrant workers participating in the WIC program. The goal of the project was to ensure continuity of benefits for migrants as they moved into new areas by issuing certification cards which describe the nutritional needs of the participant and the nutrition education received.

A dramatic increase in the number of refugees coming into the United States from Southeast Asia resulted in an increased need for information materials in WIC clinics serving Southeast Asians. The information

is designed to help local clinic staffs explain the program and encourage the use of foods new to the Asian diet.

Native Americans

The Food Stamp and Food Distribution programs provide nutritional aid to Native Americans. The Food Stamp Act of 1977 allows for the dual operation of both Food Stamp and Food Distribution programs when requested by the tribal organization.

Households may apply for either the Food Distribution Program or the Food Stamp Program. They may not, however, participate in both programs simultaneously. In 1981, the Food Distribution Program served low-income families on 75 Indian reservations in 18 States, and in the Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands.

A number of problems, however, complicate the delivery of benefits to the approximately 1 million Native Americans. About half of them live on reservations in remote areas with limited grocery facilities, making food purchasing difficult and inhibiting participation in the Food Stamp Program. The smaller selection and higher prices in reservation stores reduce the buying power of food stamps. Meat and fresh fruit and vegetables, for example, are frequently unavailable or are too expensive.

The practice of certifying applicants and issuing stamps at county welfare offices has also contributed to low participation because eligible people have difficulty getting to the offices. Issuing food stamps by mail, however, is permitted and may encourage greater participation.

Before the advent of the Food Stamp Program, commodity donations were the only form of food aid available to needy families. The direct distribution of foods is again becoming the primary means of providing food assistance to Native Americans.

New Federal regulations allow recognized tribal organizations to run their own food distribution programs and, under special circumstances, their own food stamp programs. Certification for these programs, therefore, may be obtained on the reservation, eliminating the need to travel long distances to county welfare offices. Further, program participation rates may be improved by permitting applicants to be certified by

members of their own tribal organization.

Those eligible for donated foods include Native Americans living on or near reservations, and other persons who live on the reservations. In addition, households must qualify on the basis of monthly incomes.

Eligible households receive approximately 70 pounds of food per person each month under the Food Distribution Program. Food packages include dry beans, canned meat, cheese, flour, rice, oats and dehydrated potatoes, as well as canned fruits and vegetables. New regulations also allow participants some degree of choice in the commodities they receive. For example, two types of canned meat and five kinds of fruit juices are offered.

The Elderly

In fiscal year 1980, USDA contributed \$48.3 million in cash and \$17.5 million in foods to the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) nutrition programs for the elderly. USDA supplies donated foods or cash to nonprofit meal services for the elderly funded under the Older Americans Act of 1965. The amount of food or cash that USDA provides is based on the number of meals served in the program and the level of assistance per meal authorized by legislation.

HHS gives grants to State agencies on aging, which designate area agencies on aging to plan and coordinate the local nutri-

Federal Cost of USDA Food Programs

| Item | 1978 | 1979 ¹ | 1980 | 1980 | | | | 1981 | |
|--------------------------------------|------|-------------------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 |
| Million Dollars | | | | | | | | | |
| Food Stamps | | | | | | | | | |
| Total Issued | 8347 | 7111 | 8997 | 2224 | 2258 | 2263 | 2252 | 2846 | 2811 |
| Bonus Stamps | 5261 | 7108 | 8997 | 2224 | 2258 | 2263 | 2252 | 2846 | 2811 |
| Food Distribution³ | | | | | | | | | |
| Needy Families | 13.7 | 22.2 | 24.3 | 4.7 | 5.9 | 6.9 | 6.7 | 6.7 | 6.7 |
| Schools ⁴ | 577 | 720 | 910 | 301 | 219 | 155 | 236 | 304 | 241 |
| Others ⁵ | 64 | 85 | 107 | 27 | 32 | 28 | 21 | 26 | 28 |
| Child Nutrition⁶ | | | | | | | | | |
| School Lunch | 1877 | 2101 | 2392 | 749 | 560 | 308 | 775 | 775 | 576 |
| School Breakfast | 191 | 243 | 308 | 91 | 73 | 42 | 102 | 106 | 83 |
| Special Food ⁷ | 246 | 288 | 334 | 53 | 77 | 138 | 67 | 75 | 100 |
| Special Milk | 139 | 146 | 139 | 48 | 37 | 19 | 35 | 35 | 27 |
| WIC | 422 | 569 | 783 | 175 | 192 | 183 | 233 | 232 | 205 |
| Total⁸ | 8790 | 11283 | 13995 | 3672 | 3454 | 3143 | 3727 | 4406 | 4077 |

¹Annual totals computed from monthly data beginning with 1979. Previously obtained from quarterly data supplied by FNS.

²Preliminary.

³Cost of food delivered to State distribution centers.

⁴Includes Summer Food Service Program.

⁵Includes supplemental food, institutions, elderly persons.

⁶Money donated for local purchase of food. Excludes nonfood assistance.

⁷Includes Child Care and Summer Food Service programs.

⁸Excludes those food stamps paid for by the recipient. Do not add due to rounding.

Food Programs Update

The value of food stamps issued under the Food Stamp Program during the second quarter of 1981 was \$2.8 billion—up 24 percent from the second quarter of 1980. This increase may be partially attributed to increased participation. Preliminary data show an average of 22.7 million persons participated in the Food Stamp Program in the second quarter of 1981, an increase from the 21.6 million persons that participated during the same period in 1980. Average monthly benefit per person rose from \$34.85 in the second quarter of 1980 to \$41.29 during the second quarter of 1981.

Participation in the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has grown slightly, with second quarter 1981 participation at 2.0 million people. A year earlier, participation averaged 1.9 million people. The cost of the program during the period rose by 6.8 percent.

An average of 86,000 needy families received \$6.7 million in commodity assistance under the Needy Family Program during the April-June quarter of 1981. The Nutrition Program for the Elderly supplied \$17.0 million in commodity assistance or cash in lieu of commodities to needy elderly people.

Federal cash expenditures for the child feeding programs rose from \$753 million in the second quarter of 1980, to \$782 million during the second quarter of 1981. Cash payments for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) represented about 73 percent of total cash expenditures during the second quarter of 1981, while cash payments for the School Breakfast Program represented about 11 percent. Expenditures for the Special Milk, Food Service Equipment Assistance, Child Care Food, and Summer Food Service programs accounted for the remaining 17 percent of the total cash expenditures for the child feeding programs.

An average of 21.1 million children received a total of 1.0 billion lunches through the

NSLP in the April-June quarter of 1981. About 426 million of these lunches were served free and 78 million were served at reduced prices. Participation in the School Breakfast Program during the quarter averaged 3.3 million children. About 400 million half pints of milk were served under the Special Milk Program during the April-June quarter of 1981.

Food Stamp Amendments

The Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 (P.L. 97-98) was signed by the President on December 22, 1981. This Act, which provides the basic framework for U.S. food and agricultural programs, also contains new food stamp rules. The Act authorized \$11.3 million for the Food Stamp Program (FSP) in fiscal 1982. To reduce program costs, a scheduled April 1, 1982, cost-of-food adjustment in food stamp allotments will be postponed until October 1, 1982. The October 1982 adjustment will reflect changes in food prices between October 1980 and June 1982. In early 1982, Congress will most likely consider reauthorization of FSP appropriations for fiscal 1983 through 1985, along with the periods upon which cost-of-food adjustments will be made.

Other FSP changes included in the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 are:

- Additional penalties for food stamp fraud and increased incentives to States to reduce errors.

- Permission for all localities to establish workfare programs for food stamp participants. Under workfare, able-bodied participants are required to accept public service jobs and work in return for their food stamps. In November 1980, local jurisdictions in 16 States had workfare projects.

- Extension of pilot cash-out projects through September 1985. These projects allow States to pay food stamp benefits in cash, rather than stamps, to households in which all members are elderly or receive Supplemental Security Income benefits (SSI). Currently, cash-out projects are being conducted in 8 sites throughout the country.

tion programs. Area agencies on aging provide nutrition services in schools, community centers, churches, public housing, and other places located within walking distance of the homes of the majority of local elderly persons. These centers provide hot or cold meals at least once a day, 5 or more days a week. The centers provide transportation to and from the sites for the elderly who need it. The centers also provide home-delivered meals for persons who cannot attend the communal dining facilities. The meals are provided free of charge to eligible persons. Others are required to make some contribution toward the cost of their meal.

Nonprofit meal services for the elderly which are not funded by HHS, may not receive cash payments. However, they do qualify as charitable institutions and therefore may receive some USDA foods. Again, the amount of food received depends upon the number of meals served.

In addition, USDA authorizes nonprofit meal services to accept food stamps as payment for meals served to elderly or disabled participants. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients and people 60 years of age or older and their spouses, plus mentally and physically handicapped people, and others who cannot adequately prepare all their meals.

The food stamp participant must also meet the requirements for participating in these special meal programs, and the meal delivery service or dining facility must be authorized to accept food stamps. In December 1980, there were 2,638 nonprofit communal dining services, and 1,472 nonprofit meal delivery services in the Nation accepting food stamps.

Meal service at social centers or schools is an important source of both nutrition and companionship for many elderly persons. Home delivery of meals enables many elderly and physically or mentally handicapped persons to continue living in their own homes. ■