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# USDA Actions

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## Food Safety and Quality

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### Lower Fees for Meat Grading

The fees charged for the voluntary Federal meat grading service were decreased on March 25, 1979, which will result in savings to users of approximately \$1.3 million annually.

The fees are now \$18.20 per hour for work performed between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. Monday through Friday; \$22.20 per hour for work on Saturday and Sunday, and between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. Monday through Friday; and \$36.40 per hour for work on national holidays. The previous fees were \$20 per hour, \$24 per hour, and \$40 per hour, respectively.

USDA's Food Safety and Quality Service, which administers the grading service, computes the fees to cover the costs of the service, as required by the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946.

The lower rates are possible, in part because the agency has arranged for industry to provide secure storage space for meat grading equipment. Previously, meat graders had to carry their equipment to and from work and, under the Fair Labor Standards Act, had to be paid for their travel time.

### Net Weight Labeling

USDA's Economics, Statistics, and Cooperatives Service (ESCS) will be conducting further studies on accurate net weight labeling of meat and poultry.

A net weight proposal made by USDA's Food Safety and Quality Service in December 1977 requires accurate net weight statements on meat and poultry products from the time they leave the plant until purchased at the retail level. Juices drained from the product may not be counted as part of the net weight.

A new ESCS study will evaluate the comments submitted by both the meat and poultry industries and consumers. It

will also address questions raised by an economic study submitted by the Consumer Federation of America and a December 1978 report by the General Accounting Office.

The ESCS report will be developed consistent with an executive order concerning impact analyses which went into effect after the net weight proposal was made. The new study will consider the need for regulation changes, assess the effects proposed changes would have on industry and consumers, and evaluate alternatives.

### Growing Fresh-market Tomatoes

The effect of new farming techniques on the yield and shipping quality of fresh-market tomatoes will be studied by scientists at the Clemson University Truck Crops Experiment Station under a cooperative agreement with USDA.

The 1-year, \$26,500 study is aimed at developing new and improved production practices for small-acreage tomato growers who supply the fresh market. The study is funded by the USDA's Science and Education Administration.

The scientists will study the controlled use of drip irrigation and fertilization under plastic mulch to determine the interaction of irrigation timing and rate with the fertilization rates. They will also try to determine the cause of "soft fruit," a condition that sometimes occurs in tomatoes.

### New Broiler Inspection Procedures

USDA has approved the first of a series of reforms to modernize inspection of broilers after slaughter. At the same time, USDA set uniform inspection rates for broilers on existing production lines.

In approving this more efficient inspection method, known as modified traditional inspection, USDA will achieve substantial savings in its inspection program budget without sacrificing product safety or quality. The new techniques were found to be as effective as traditional inspection in field testing.

The reforms are possible in part be-

cause of the marked drop in poultry disease incidence. Methods used to inspect chickens have changed little over the last 30 years, yet the number of inspected broilers has increased from 1.5 billion in 1960 to 3.5 billion in 1978.

The new procedure eliminates most of the time an inspector spends positioning the carcass for inspection—which can take up to 50 percent of the time under traditional methods. It involves using mirrors to help the inspector see behind the chicken.

### 1979 Sugar Loan Program

USDA has proposed a 1979 sugar loan program that would guarantee processors 13 to 14.25 cents per pound of raw cane sugar and 15.15 to 16.52 cents per pound for refined beet sugar.

The administration's current market price objective is 15 cents per pound (raw sugar equivalent) for 1978-crop sugar and 15.8 cents for 1979 if there is new legislation giving USDA authority for a 15.8-cent market price objective.

Since legislation raising sugar price supports is currently being considered by the Congress, USDA is proposing ranges of price support levels rather than a specific figure for public comment.

The proposed loan levels are designed to enable sugar processors to cover the costs of loan redemption and transportation to market when raw sugar prices reach the established objective.

Under the Government's nonrecourse sugar loan program, the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) makes loans to sugar processors who guarantee to pay producers an established amount for their crop. When the loan matures, processors have the option of either repaying the loan, plus interest, or forfeiting the collateral sugar to CCC, in which case the loan will be considered paid in full.

In a change from the current program, USDA will not establish a minimum wage for sugar field workers.

Under other features of the proposal, regional loan rates would be established for the same processing regions desig-

nated in the 1978 program. Other terms and conditions would be similar.

## Nutrition Education and Research

### USDA Focuses on Nutrition

USDA, in its leadership role in the field of human nutrition, is increasing its efforts to educate Americans on the importance of good nutrition in their lives.

Programs in USDA are helping to carry out the Department's nutrition mission. Among the most important of these developments is the Human Nutrition Center, a part of USDA's Science and Education Administration (SEA). The Center fosters programs about the role of nutrition in human health by administering human nutrition research with USDA, coordinating USDA nutrition activities, and cooperating with other Federal agencies.

Research priorities for the Center during the next few years include nutrition education research, the study of the nutritional needs of the elderly, the role of nutrition in the aging process, the needs of children, and trace minerals.

This research will be conducted primarily in the five major research organizations that make up the Center:

- The Consumer and Food Economics Institute, Hyattsville, Maryland, which conducts research on food consumption, dietary levels, and nutrition education.

- The Human Nutrition Institute, Beltsville, Maryland, which carries out research on nutritional requirements for protein, carbohydrates, lipids (fats), vitamins and minerals, and nutritive composition of food.

- The Human Nutrition Laboratory on Trace Elements, Grand Forks, North Dakota, which conducts research related to requirements for trace minerals such as zinc, cadmium, nickel, and copper.

- The Human Nutrition Laboratory on Aging, Tufts University, Boston, Massachusetts, which will conduct research on nutritional, physiological, and biochemical factors related to the aging process.

- The Children's Nutrition Laboratory, Houston, Texas, in cooperation with Baylor College of Medicine and the Texas Children's Hospital, which will develop a scientific base for standards of nutrient intake and nutrition assessment in infants and children. It will investigate the relationships between nutrition and physical and mental development of children from pre-birth to teenage.

Nutrition education also is receiving increased attention through new and ongoing programs at USDA. The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, administered by SEA through State Cooperative Extension Services, continues to reach some 6 million individual low-income homemakers with information on food and nutrition.

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service has expanded its nutrition education emphasis through a variety of new programs and pilot projects. These include:

- \$26 million provided to States to develop nutrition education and training programs for children, teachers, and food service personnel through the classroom and school lunch facilities.

- \$1 million for projects designed to provide and evaluate different approaches to nutrition education for children. Included is a pilot research project which will lead to a mass media campaign encouraging better eating practices among children.

### New Members Named

Eleven new members have been selected to fill vacant positions on the National Advisory Council on Maternal, Infant, and Fetal Nutrition. All members will serve 3-year terms, except for the parent participants, who will serve for 2 years.

The Council was created to make a continuing study of the operation of the Supplemental Food Program for Wo-

men, Infants and Children (WIC), the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, and related programs to determine how they may be improved. The Council reports to the President and Congress, and makes administrative and legislative recommendations for the food assistance programs.

The new members are:

Reginald C. Ramsay Jr., Director, Arkansas Department of Health.

Margaret Beatty, WIC Coordinator for Upper Des Moines, Iowa, Opportunity, Inc.

Rita Belanger, Fall River, Massachusetts, a parent participant in the WIC program.

Hilary S. White, San Francisco, California, a parent participant.

Charles S. Mahan, M.D., Director, Ambulatory Services, University of Florida College of Medicine, Gainesville, Florida.

Karen Brown, Vice-President of Consumer Affairs, Food Marketing Institute, Washington, D.C.

Linda White, Director, WIC program, for the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

Ronald S. Mikesell, Department of Social Services, Denver, Colorado.

Lawrence Samuel Byrd, Assistant Director for Community and Food Nutrition, Idaho Migrant Council, Boise, Idaho.

Stefan Harvey, WIC Advocacy Director, The Children's Foundation, Washington, D.C.

Eleanor Josaitis, Associate Director of FOCUS: Hope, Detroit, Michigan.

Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Carol Tucker Foreman chairs the council. Robert Greenstein, Acting Administrator of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, is the vice-chairman.

### Nutrition Education and Training

USDA is making \$25.9 million in nutrition education and training funds available to States for fiscal year 1979.

State education agencies are eligible to receive grants for this program based on a rate of 50 cents for each child enrolled

in a school or child care institution. The minimum amount a State can receive is \$75,000.

The funds are being provided to States for the 1979 fiscal year ending September 30, 1979. USDA released over \$24.8 million to 46 State agencies in 1978 for the first year that the program was operational.

The nutrition education and training program was enacted in November 1977. Through this program, States provide children, teachers, and school food-service personnel with training that emphasizes the important relationship between nutrition, good food, and health. The training is designed to help them become better informed, more knowledgeable consumers.

If State law prohibits a State from administering the nutrition education and training program in nonprofit schools and institutions, the USDA will administer the program in that State. USDA will withhold a proportionate amount from a State's grant to administer the program in those nonprofit private schools and institutions.

## Food Assistance

### Redesigned Food Stamp Form

After months of discussion, design, and field testing, USDA has produced a totally redesigned series of forms to let needy people sign up for food stamps with less hassle and fewer errors than ever before in the program's 19 year history.

The Food and Nutrition Service, the USDA agency which administers the Food Stamp Program nationally, handled redesign and field testing of the forms.

The new forms use better design, arrangement of text, italics and other type faces to emphasize key words and phrases, and plainer language.

It is also more polite, containing occa-

sional requests such as "please . . .," and "we would like you to . . .," in place of the standard commands such as "fill in . . .," "list . . .," and "give . . .," usually found on forms.

An example of the plainer language: instead of asking for "name of head of household (last, first, middle)" as was required by the old form, the new form simply asks for "your name."

Information especially important to the applicant, such as what papers to bring for an interview, what not to do, and penalty warnings are presented in boldface type.

The way information is organized on the new form gives special clarity. Complicated requests for information, such as the requirement to list shelter costs, are broken out in logical groupings that aid understanding. The new form gives more room for answers.

Over 92 percent of the applicants could complete the new form within 25 minutes, according to the research firm which field tested it in 25 project areas in 19 States. Although 59 percent of the applicants needed some help, they made fewer errors, and USDA officials feel that's a considerable improvement over problems both case workers and their food stamp clients encountered with the old form.

Many applicants felt the language used in the new form spoke directly to them and was easier to understand and use.

State governments, which operate the program, are required by the Food Stamp Act of 1977 to use the new forms. The only exceptions are States which need their own forms for computerized food stamp operations. Previously, States designed and printed their own forms using a sample provided by USDA. The new form will be available in English and Spanish.

### Summer Food Service Program

Federal payments to States for the summer food service program for children have been increased to reflect a 10.03-percent rise in the Consumer Price

Index series for food away from home. The increase took place between November 1977 and November 1978.

Under the new rates, States may reimburse sponsors 56.75 cents for each breakfast, \$1.02 for each lunch and supper, and 26.75 cents for each snack. These rates are up from 51.5, 92.75, and 24.25 cents, respectively.

Nonprofit organizations sponsor the summer food program and serve free meals to children in needy areas during school vacations. The organizations are reimbursed by State agencies with Federal funds.

Sponsoring organizations prepare meals at each serving site, deliver food from a central kitchen, or purchase meals from a food service firm.

Sponsors are also reimbursed for the administrative cost of each meal served. The new maximum administrative reimbursement rates for sponsors who purchase meals from a food service firm—with previous rates in parentheses—are 4.25 cents (3.75 cents) for breakfast, 8 cents (7.25 cents) for lunch and supper, and 2 cents (2 cents) for each snack.

Administrative costs are higher for meals prepared by the sponsor or served at rural sites. Therefore, the administrative payment for rural and self-preparation sites has been increased to 5.25 cents for each breakfast served, 9.75 cents for each lunch or supper, and 2.75 cents for each snack.

### Bread and the School Lunch

"Dirty rice" is a lunch treat in southern Louisiana schools. The name spoofs a savory mixture of ground beef sauteed with onions, seasoning, and rice.

Under the National School Lunch Program, USDA and State governments provide cash and food to schools that serve lunches meeting nutritional standards set by USDA.

Under current USDA regulations, however, schools must serve bread or an approved alternate with meals—even though they're serving a rice-based meal—to meet USDA school lunch requirements.

But there is concern that requiring bread to be served with school meals already including a high percentage of rice and pasta results in high calorie meals, and contributes to overweight children, or an unusual amount of food left on students' plates.

USDA adopted temporary meal patterns last August for use while preparing final regulations for lunch patterns. About 380 schools in Louisiana and throughout the country are using the new meal patterns under controlled conditions to determine whether they give students better meals. Other schools are using the interim regulations on a voluntary basis with permission from their State school lunch director.

The study report will help food specialists determine whether the new patterns provide children with a healthier diet. It also will include information on new bread options.

USDA will base its final decision on whether the changes are practical and desirable by the test results and on public comment.

The interim meal patterns enlarge the bread alternates in school lunches to include enriched or whole-grain rice, macaroni, noodles, and other pasta products and permits schools to meet the bread requirement on a weekly rather than a daily basis.

Under previous guidelines, schools were allowed to substitute for bread only those products whose primary ingredient is whole-grain or enriched meal or flour. That meant menu items such as tacos, pizza, hush puppies, and flatbreads met the bread requirement but rice and pasta did not.

The new menu pattern would increase the amount of bread to be served each week and would allow rice and pasta to be counted as bread. Another change will allow schools to meet the "bread requirement" over the week period.

An argument in favor of that step is that schools serve sandwiches as entrees more often than in the past and more ethnic products with a high flour content.

### **Child Care Food Program Payment**

Federal payments to States under the child care food program have been increased 4.78 percent to reflect increases in the Consumer Price Index for food away from home. The increase was retroactive to January 1 and extended to June 30.

Payments to States are based on need and on the number of meals served by participating child care institutions. Higher rates of reimbursement are provided for meals served to children whose family income meets the criteria for free or reduced-price school meals.

The new payment rates for "paid" meals are 12.75 cents for each breakfast served, 15.75 cents for each lunch and supper, and 6.50 cents for each snack. These rates are up from 12.00 cents, 15.25 cents, and 6.25 cents, respectively.

For meals reimbursed at the reduced-price rate, the payment is 36.50 cents for each breakfast served, 77.25 cents for each lunch and supper, and 19.75 cents for each snack. Previous rates were 34.75 cents, 73.50 cents, and 18.75 cents, respectively.

For meals reimbursed at the free rate, the payment is 44.50 cents for each breakfast served, 87.25 cents for each lunch and supper, and 26.00 cents for each snack. Previous rates were 42.25 cents, 83.50 cents, and 25.00 cents, respectively.

Instead of keeping records on actual costs of food served, sponsors of family and group day care homes may choose payment based on a food cost scale established by USDA. This rate has been increased from 26.75 cents to 28 cents for each breakfast, from 47.75 cents to 50 cents for each lunch and supper, and from 16.25 cents to 17 cents for each snack.

### **WIC Changes**

Migrant workers and others will retain eligibility for the Federal feeding program for women, infants, and children even if they move to another State, under proposed changes.

The Supplemental Food Program for

Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides food packets to low-income, pregnant, and breastfeeding mothers up to 1 year after delivery and to children under age 5, whose health may be at risk due to inadequate income and nutrition.

In the area of nutrition education, States will be required to spend at least one-sixth of their WIC administrative funds for nutrition education. State agencies also will be required to establish an outreach program to make eligible persons aware of the program.

Under the legislation passed last year, a national income cap was set for a family of four to participate in the program. Previously, many State agencies that administer local WIC programs set income limits, so they varied from State to State.

### **Food Stamp Allotments To Increase**

Low-income families will receive a 6.8-percent cost-of-food increase in food stamps starting July 1. The 6.8-percent increase is based on the increase in the cost of foods in the USDA's "Thrifty Food Plan" between Sept. 1978 and March 1979. It is less than the 7.9-percent increase in the cost of all food because the cost of foods in the Thrifty Food Plan, which uses the cheapest foods available to achieve a nutritionally adequate diet, rose at a slower rate than the increase in all foods. With the increase, food stamp users will be getting an average food stamp benefit of 35 cents per person per meal.

Effective July 1, the maximum monthly allotment in the 48 contiguous States and the District of Columbia for a family of four with no net income increased from \$191 to \$204. Nearly all food stamp households will receive less than this amount, however, because allotments are reduced if families have income. The maximum monthly net income a family of four may have and still be eligible for food stamps will increase from \$542 to \$596.

By law, the USDA adjusts food stamp allotments twice a year, on January 1 and July 1.