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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Consumer and Marketing Service

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN U.S.D.A. FOOD PROGRAMS

Talk by Howard P. Davis  
Deputy Administrator, Consumer Food Programs  
at the 46th National Agricultural Outlook Conference  
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For the past several years starvation, hunger and malnutrition have been very much in the news and are weighing heavily on our national conscience. We in the Department have been very much concerned about hunger and malnutrition for some years and have been trying in every way we knew to meet this problem and do something about it. We are hopeful that with increased public awareness and concern we can make more rapid progress. We have made considerable progress in the past several years but much remains to be done.

In the process of the general awakening of concern there have been many misconceptions of the problems and a lack of understanding of what is involved in meeting these problems. There has been almost complete absorption in making a national issue of hunger and malnutrition with very little attention to possible workable solutions. In the first place, within the popular meaning of the term starvation, I am sure we would all agree that there are very, very few isolated instances. While there is hunger of the gnawing conscious kind -- the craving for food -- here again we do not know the extent with any exactness. There are not millions and millions of people suffering from this kind of acute hunger. There are millions, however, who are suffering from chronic hunger; millions who year in and year out do not get enough to eat -- but far more important -- do not get the right kinds of food. Traditionally, due to poverty, they have learned to live very, very low on the hog.

And, of course, the overriding problem and the very, very serious problem is the extent of malnutrition among the poor. There are many causes of malnutrition -- ignorance of the need for or what constitutes an adequate diet, miserable housing and sanitation that lead to parasitic infestation as well as those factors that can only be determined clinically and that may occur in people at all economic levels. But there are many, many people in this land of plenty who are suffering from malnutrition because they have been unable to afford the right kinds of food.

Although I am sure this group is very knowledgeable in regard to our food assistance programs, let me take just a minute to review these programs and their structure for you. First, let me say that our food assistance programs, particularly the family assistance programs, are perhaps most effective in meeting the need of continuing hunger -- insuring that poor families have enough to eat. The problem of insuring that in getting enough to eat these families at the same time know enough to want a varied nutritious diet and are able to buy it and prepare it is another matter.

We have two basic programs to insure families enough food to prepare and eat in their homes -- the Commodity Distribution Program and the Food Stamp Program. In addition, we have been working for some months on a program to provide special supplementary foods for pregnant and nursing mothers and small children based on medical determinations. The other major group of programs is designed to provide nutritious meals in group situations to children, both in school and out of school.

First, of course, is the National School Lunch Program which has been in operation formally since 1946. More recently under the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 we have provided Federal assistance for breakfast programs in schools. And then just in this past session of Congress legislation was passed providing for Federal assistance to feeding programs in non school situations such as child care centers, settlement houses, etc. for young children and group feeding programs during the summer months for all children high school grade and under.

The National School Lunch Program is designed to improve the nutrition of all children regardless of their family's income. This program is designed to not only provide at least one-third of the child's daily requirements of the basic nutrients but teach the children good nutrition through becoming accustomed to eating well-balanced meals and through tying the lunch program into formal nutrition education in the school.

While the School Lunch Act itself requires that lunches be served free or at reduced price to those children who cannot afford to pay, we have been becoming increasingly concerned over the years that in fact there were millions of poor children who were not participating in the program. We have obtained amendments to the Act to help correct this and the newer programs under the Child Nutrition Act and the provision for group feeding in non school situations have been aimed toward reaching the poor children.

The Federal Government prescribes meal-type requirements for these programs that insure nutritionally adequate meals. We provide technical assistance to the states and to the schools in many forms and more directly, cash reimbursement for meals served, donated commodities, and this year for the first time substantial funds to assist the schools in obtaining necessary lunch room equipment. We also for the first time are providing some funds to strengthen the state educational agencies' administrative staffs.

The programs are operated primarily through agreements with State Agencies who are responsible for selecting the schools that participate in the program. The actual operation of the program is in the hands of local school boards who are responsible for determining which children qualify for a free lunch. Federal funds are apportioned among the states which in turn reimburse the local schools at the end of each month for the lunches served. The Federal assistance, cash and commodities, provide about one-fourth of the cost of the lunches; about one-fourth comes from state and local sources; and about one-half comes from those children who can afford to pay.

The Commodity Distribution Program is again operated through agreements with state agencies with the Federal Government buying the commodities, packaging them and delivering them in carload lots to points within the states. We also prescribe the general program regulations. States are responsible for ordering commodities and accounting for them and supervising the operation of the program in the local areas. The local government, usually the county, is responsible for determining eligibility and actually distributing the commodities and in most cases bear the total cost of this operation. The eligibility rules are determined by the states with our approval and must generally bear a direct relationship to the states public assistance standards in regard to maximum incomes.

The supplemental food program I mentioned earlier is designed to run through health facilities serving the poor and is based on medical determinations that the mothers and young children need supplemental foods.

The Food Stamp Program which has operated on a national scale since passage of the Act in 1964, is designed to reach the same group with essentially the same eligibility standards as Commodity Distribution. Under this program the Federal Government provides the coupons, including the full cost of the subsidy as well as about one-third of the local cost of administering the program. Again, this program is operated through agreements with state public welfare agencies who assume full responsibility for operation within the state. However, the Department assumes responsibility for authorizing and supervising the participating grocers.

With exception of the Federal matching of part of the cost of certification of non public assistance recipients, generally the local government must bear the cost and responsibility for the local operation of the program. As you know, under this program the families pay about what they would spend for food each month in the absence of the program and receive food coupons or stamps that are worth considerably more than they pay. On a national average of all incomes and family sizes they pay on the ratio of about \$6 for \$10 worth of coupons.

Now, what have we done lately? What progress are we making?

At the present time the Commodity Distribution Program is operating in 1,288 counties, including some independent cities, serving 3.7 million persons. Last June the program was operating in 1,249 counties and was serving 3.2 million persons. This is a net figure since during this period many counties have switched from Commodity Distribution to Food Stamp. Under the law we cannot operate both programs in the same county.

We now have available for distribution about 22 commodities. If these commodities were all distributed every month and the families actually consumed these commodities in the amounts authorized they would provide essentially 100 percent of the daily allowances of essential nutrients prescribed by the National Research Council. In some nutrients they would provide well over these allowances. For example, protein. However, they are slightly short on calories and vitamins A and C.

Under the supplemental program for expectant mothers and children we have made available several commodities: evaporated milk, corn syrup, iron fortified farina, fruit juice, and additional canned meat and poultry. We now have 71 projects in operation and we hope by the end of the year to be reaching 225,000 mothers and children.

At the present time there are 1,232 Food Stamp Project Areas in operation with 2.7 million persons participating. Last June, at the end of the fiscal year, there were 1,027 projects, serving 2.4 million persons. We have made several program modifications to make the program more responsive to the needs of the people it is designed to serve. A little over a year ago we reduced the minimum purchase requirements for families in the very lowest income group from \$2.00 a person a month to \$.50 a person a month up to a maximum of \$3.00 for a family of 6 or more. We also provided for selling the coupons at one-half the regular purchase price for new participants during their first month of participation. This was designed to help them adjust their spending patterns.

In almost all the project areas the families may buy their monthly quota of stamps in two semi-monthly installments. There are quite a few areas that provide even weekly purchases. Where the families receive their income in a monthly check, as public assistance or pensions, they are encouraged to purchase once a month when they get their checks.

Just this month many states are implementing a program modification which we authorized some time ago which reduces the purchase requirement and increases the total amount of coupons received for families with incomes of less than \$70 a month. We had proposed further modifications in the purchase price at all levels with some

increase in total coupons received but were unable to secure the necessary appropriations this year to make this possible.

Largely as a result of the increased public concern for the nutrition of children from low income families we were able to secure substantially increased appropriations for the child feeding programs for this current year. In the past few years the local communities have been able to inaugurate the School Lunch Program in additional schools and are now operating in schools that represent about 80 percent of the total national average daily school attendance. Last year there were about 19 million children participating in the School Lunch Program with about 2.3 million of these children receiving their meals free or at reduced cost.

With our increased funds for this year we hope to extend the program into more schools and to be serving about 1 million more needy children lunches at free or reduced prices. At the same time the breakfast program has been growing from its beginning during the latter part of the 1966-67 school year and we hope by the end of this school year to be assisting in providing breakfast for over 200,000 children. A very high proportion of these breakfasts are free and the others served at very nominal cost -- 10 or 15 cents.

The non school feeding program has been somewhat slow in getting underway. However, it is too soon to tell how this program may develop since funds became available to the states only around the first of last December.

One of the most dramatic and important developments this year has been the provision of \$10 million transferred to the Extension Service for the purpose of hiring, training, and supervising a large number of program aids to work directly with poor families in the area of nutrition education, food buying and preparation. We are hopeful that this program can be greatly expanded next year. However, in the time allotted to me, I will not be able to go into the details of this program. It will have to be a separate paper.

While we are rather proud of the progress that has been made, many needs remain and the problems of meeting these needs are so great that we cannot waste time patting ourselves on the back.

Perhaps the greatest problem that we still have in spite of the current concern for hunger is the motivation of and securing support from the local communities. Regardless of the mechanism we may develop, in the last analysis progress or success of these programs in meeting the unmet need depends on the local community.

Second, as I mentioned before, the programs themselves can provide food for the hungry but our basic problem once raw hunger is met is one of eliminating malnutrition. Here is the area where the combined Federal, state, local and private voluntary resources must be marshalled to provide nutrition education and homemakers training in buying, preparing and serving nutritious meals. And, of course, we have a very



substantial problem in just making the programs available to those who need this assistance. We have somewhat less than 480 counties and independent cities left in the country which have no family food assistance program available in their area -- this after years of prodding, cajoling and even pressures.

During the last 1½ years we have been able to get a food program in every one of the 1,000 lowest income counties. This has not been easy and has meant for some 180 counties we have supplied funds for local administration where local governments could not or would not finance a program. In 49 counties we had to go the last mile and go into these counties, in most cases over the active objection of local governments and run the program with Federal personnel and funds. Somehow we must convince the local authorities in these 480 areas that they should make these food assistance programs available to the poor in their communities.

Over the long haul there are some inherent constraints in the Commodity Distribution Program. The sheer logistics of buying in very large quantities, scheduling and shipping as many as 22 commodities to insure an adequate diet represents a major problem. Then making the commodities accessible to those who need them is a very difficult problem. How to finance and manage enough distribution points within a county so that the participant does not have to travel long distances and pay high transportation costs to get the commodities. And certainly even with 22 commodities the lack of variety, the inability to distribute fresh perishable commodities, and the inevitable unfamiliarity of many families with the commodities that can be distributed -- all these things affect the acceptability of the foods and full use by the participants.

The major problem under the Food Stamp Program in recent years has really been a refusal by many people to accept the basic premise of the program -- that is, the Food Stamp Program is a food program and carefully designed to increase the families' food purchasing ability. It therefore requires that the families continue to spend as much for food as they have been. The poor spend a very high percentage of their income for food and having spent this they do not have enough money for their other needs. The public feeling, at least that part of the public that has been vocal, has been that poor families should not have to spend that much for food and that the Food Stamp Program should be in large part an income supplement rather than merely subsidizing increased food purchasing power. There can be no real objection to this on moral grounds. It will be necessary, however, for the Congress to approve this sort of basic change in the program.

We do feel, however, that to insure greater participation in the program by the poor the reduction in purchase requirements which we

had proposed should be funded. We believe that our studies on which these purchase requirements are now based do tend to ignore the fact that there are many months when poor families spend considerably less for food when other needs for clothing, rent, etc., must be met.

Basically we believe the Food Stamp Program is sound and is the most effective way of getting more food to people who need it. The problem at this time is largely one of appropriations.

The major problem in the area of our child feeding programs is that of adequate funds and local cooperation in getting programs started in areas where they are not now available. In this connection by far the greatest unmet need is in the old, crowded schools of the downtown urban areas. Here arrangements must be made for central preparation and a minimum of preparation and service facilities in the individual schools. Here we are hoping the modern technology in the area of convenience foods and central commissaries developed by private industry can speed the process of meeting this need.

To sum up, what we need to eliminate hunger is money and local support.