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REPORT ON ATTITUDES OF URBAN RESIDENTS  
TOWARD  
THE FOOD STAMP PLAN  
AND TOWARD  
ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF DISPOSING OF AGRICULTURAL SURPLUSES  
  
(FOR ADMINISTRATIVE USE ONLY)

April 29, 1940

Division of Program Surveys





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## INTRODUCTION

This report presents material on the attitudes of urban residents 1/ toward the Food Stamp Plan and toward alternative possible methods of disposing of surplus farm commodities. It is based on 385 interviews conducted in New York City, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Rochester, and Providence. Results should be interpreted with both the size-of-sample limitations and the geographical limitations closely in mind. 2/

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

1. One-third of our sample had actually or virtually never heard of the Stamp Plan. A considerable additional proportion seemed to know relatively little about it.
2. Of those who knew about the Plan, 70 percent were favorable and 20 percent were opposed, with the remaining 10 percent undecided or neutral.
3. Favorable reasons emphasize that it aids the poor, with a sizeable number mentioning also that it aids the farmer. Reasons for opposition divide into two groups:
  - a. Those coming primarily from the upper-income class - voicing general opposition to all relief and regarding the Plan as a relief mechanism.
  - b. Those coming primarily from the lower-income class - voicing opposition to certain aspects of the Stamp Plan operation.
4. Many city residents seem never to have thought of agricultural surpluses as constituting a major national problem.
5. When told of the existence of such surpluses and then asked their attitudes toward 3 suggested alternate methods of disposal - sell abroad, even at a loss; store them; distribute them to the poor - distribution to the poor was favored very much more heavily than the others.
6. No correlation was found between the attitudes of people toward the Stamp Plan and their attitudes toward either distributing surpluses to the poor or toward the disposal plan which they favor most. This absence of correlation is probably due, at least in part, both to inadequate information and to the fact that the two problems are viewed from different standpoints.

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1/ A later report will deal with the attitudes of farmers toward the Stamp Plan.

2/ See table 1 for some details of the sample.





Table 1.-- Details of sample

A.-- Number of interviews in each city

New York City	121
Philadelphia	82
Cincinnati	64
Rochester	62
Providence	<u>56</u>
Total	335

B.-- Proportion of interviews by sex

Men	72%
Women	28%

C.-- Interviewing period and status of Food Stamp Plan

	<u>Interviewing period</u>	<u>Status of Stamp Plan</u>
Philadelphia	Oct. and Nov. 1939	None
New York City	Nov. 10-Dec. 12, 1939; Feb. 22-Mar. 1, 1940	None
Providence	Dec. 18-Dec. 23, 1939	Started Dec. 4, 1939
Rochester	Jan. 8-Jan. 24, 1940	Started May 16, 1939
Cincinnati	Mar. 12-Mar. 22, 1940	Started Mar. 20, 1940



PART I  
ATTITUDES OF CITY RESIDENTS TOWARD THE FOOD STAMP PLAN

I. What proportion of city residents know about it?

One-third of those interviewed either had not heard of the Stamp Plan or claimed to have heard of it but could make no comment which might be classed as "favorable" or "unfavorable" or "undecided or neutral."

- A. The relative size of this group varied considerably from city to city - the range being from one-fifth to nearly one-half. As might be expected, those cities which had had the Plan before our samples were taken were lowest; those which had no Plan were highest. Cincinnati's position is probably due in part to the Plan's being introduced almost at the end of our sample period.

	<u>"Don't know"</u> (Percent)
Providence	19
Rochester	23
New York City	33
Philadelphia	41
Cincinnati	45

(See table 1 for interview periods  
and status of Stamp Plan.)

- B. Further probing of the group expressing no opinion seems to show no concentrations by income levels and only a slightly higher proportion of women than of men - with most of this sex difference appearing in the lowest income group.

	<u>Percent having</u> <u>no opinion</u>	<u>Number</u> <u>in sample</u>
Upper income - men	33	78
- women	33	18
Middle income - men	32	114
- women	34	56
Lower income - men	25	78
- women	45	26

(Total is less than 385 because some interviews  
had data missing.)



II. What is the attitude toward the Food Stamp Plan of those city residents who know about it?

Of the 253 city residents, or 67 percent of our sample, who knew about the Plan, more than two-thirds expressed a favorable opinion, one-fifth were unfavorable, and the remaining one-tenth were undecided or neutral.

- A. The variation in favorableness among cities does not seem to be accounted for by the status of the Stamp Plan in each locality.

Attitudes of persons with an opinion

	<u>For</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Against</u>	<u>Number with opinions</u>
Philadelphia	67%	9%	24%	46
New York	76	5	19	79
Providence	74	13	13	45
Rochester	60	15	25	48
Cincinnati	66	17	17	35
	70	10	20	253

- B. There seem to be no significant differences in favorableness either among economic classes or between men and women - although women in the lowest economic class seem to be the most favorably inclined of any group, the samples are too small to warrant the reliability of this distinction.

Attitudes of persons with an opinion

		<u>For</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Against</u>	<u>Number with opinions</u>
Upper income	Men	71%	9%	20%	56
	Women	57	8	25	12
Middle income	Men	69	13	18	77
	Women	70	6	24	37
Lower income	Men	65	16	19	37
	Women	79	0	21	14

III. What reasons are given for liking or disliking the Food Stamp Plan? What comments are made most frequently?

- A. As might be expected from the preponderance of favorable opinions, more than two-thirds of the comments made are



favorable. Incidentally, more than one-third of those who expressed opinions gave neither supporting reasons or general comments -- suggesting that the figures in "I," on the proportion of city people who do not know about the Stamp Plan, are probably on the conservative side.

B. Analysis of the reasons given for approving the Plan shows the following categories as having been mentioned by the greatest number of people:

	<u>Percent of people making favorable mentions</u>
Poor people benefit	51
Helps farmers	12
Helps poor and farmers both	12
Grocers benefit	6
Helps business	5
Prevents use of relief money for liquor	9
All right as stop gap or emergency measure	5
Total <u>number</u> of people making favorable mentions	104

C. Among the categories of unfavorable comments, the following are mentioned most often:

	<u>Percent of people making unfavorable mentions</u>
Against relief:	48
Relief demoralizes people	29
Against principle of government relief	14
Relief involves graft and politics	5
Against way Stamp Plan works:	52
Rather have cash given than stamps	26
Embarrassing or inconvenient to recipient	14
Plan does not give enough help to poor (high ratio of orange to blue stamps)	7
Opposes aid Plan gives to middlemen	5





PART II  
ATTITUDES TOWARD ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF DISPOSING OF  
AGRICULTURAL SURPLUSES

I. Introduction.

A. General attitude toward existence of surpluses

Many city residents seem never to have thought of agricultural surpluses as constituting a major national problem. They tend to dismiss a general question on how to dispose of these surpluses by indicating that large numbers are inadequately fed and clothed. Some others omit the reasoning but arrive at similar doubts about the existence of such surpluses. Here seems to be at least one serious gap in the knowledge of basic farm problems which, at least in part, affects the opinions held by urban people about the agricultural programs.

B. The approach used

1. The problem

In an effort to study the receptivity of city residents toward alternative possible methods of disposing of agricultural surpluses, when most of them doubted or were unaware that such surpluses existed, it was decided to provide each interviewee with a definite amount of information first and then probe for his reactions to it. Briefly, this method attempts a crude, miniature approach toward determining what people's reactions might be after a program had succeeded in placing those facts before the public which are posited in our introductory statement.

2. The method

This part of each city interview progressed in the following sequence of statement and then questions:

Reports indicate that this year as in each of the past few years, the supplies of farm products, such as cotton and corn (previously wheat), will be larger than have ever been used up in any one year.

What do you think should be done with this excess?

Would you favor having it sold to



other countries, even at a loss? Why?

Would you favor having the Government buy it and add it to the large surpluses already being carried over (stored) from previous years? Why?

Should the Government buy it and distribute it to the poor in the U.S.? Why?

Which of the above would you consider to be the best plan? Why?

Which do you feel is the worst? Why?

### C. Limitations of results

At least two major limitations on interpreting the following results must be emphasized.

1. They should not be interpreted to mean that city residents in general either recognize or accept the existence of agricultural surpluses.
2. Even among those who have been presented with our lead statement in the course of an interview, many do not accept the existence of such surpluses in the sense of their being more of these products than the people of this country need or can consume - and hence crop control is not very popular with such folk.

## II. Do city residents approve or disapprove of having the Government buy agricultural surpluses and sell them to other countries, even at a loss?

About two-thirds of those who were asked this question registered opposition, with only about one-fourth in favor.

- A. Among the different cities in our sample, Cincinnati seemed to be the most unfavorable toward the proposal and Rochester the least critical.



	<u>For</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Against</u>	<u>"Don't know"</u>	<u>No. of persons asked</u>
Rochester	37%	5%	55%	3%	62
Philadelphia	33	5	59	3	69
Providence	29	5	64	2	55
New York City	23	7	67	3	114
Cincinnati	17	3	75	5	64
Total	27	5	65	3	364

B. The two reasons mentioned most frequently by those who were unfavorable were: "Prefer using surplus at home" and "Against selling at a loss." The former was given by almost one-third of those who were disapproving, the latter by almost one-quarter of this group. For the other side, "Better than wasting it or getting nothing" was mentioned by almost half of those approving the plan.

III. What is the attitude of city residents toward having the Government buy up these surpluses and add them to those already being stored?

Opposition to this plan was only slightly less than toward the immediately preceding alternative - about 30 percent were favorable and about 60 percent were unfavorable.

A. A breakdown of this total by cities shows Philadelphia differing quite markedly from the others - our data do not indicate the reason for this.

	<u>For</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Against</u>	<u>"Don't know"</u>	<u>No. of persons asked</u>
Philadelphia	47%	4%	44%	5%	76
Providence	29	2	62	7	56
Cincinnati	30	0	68	2	63
Rochester	26	11	63	0	62
New York	22	6	67	5	119
Total	30	5	61	4	376

B. The reason given most often for approving the plan was that storing surpluses for future use was a good idea - some because of the possibility of short crops in the future (incidentally, there seemed to be almost no knowledge whatever of the term, Over-Normal Granary); a few because of the possibility of an enlarged war demand. Just as the foregoing account for the reasons



given by almost half of those favoring this alternative, so the following three kinds of reasons account for about half of those in the disapproving group: Objection to building up larger surpluses, objection to the waste or spoilage believed to be inevitable in storage, and preference for the distribution of such supplies to the poor.

IV. What is the attitude of city people to having the Government buy agricultural surpluses and distribute them to poor people in this country?

In contrast to the other alternatives, this proposal seems to receive overwhelming approval - about four-fifths were in favor with only one-eighth opposed. Further indication of the strength of this approbation is reflected in the fact that this plan was suggested voluntarily by several people even before it was mentioned by the interviewer.

A. New York City ranked highest in favorableness, Rochester ranked lowest.

	<u>For</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Against</u>	<u>"Don't know"</u>	<u>No. of persons asked</u>
New York City	88 $\frac{1}{2}$	4 $\frac{1}{2}$	8%	0%	119
Providence	80	2	16	2	56
Philadelphia	76	13	8	3	75
Cincinnati	75	9	16	0	64
Rochester	66	18	16	0	62
Total	79	8	12	1	376

B. Very few people had reasons for their attitude on this point. By and large, city residents seemed to feel that the merits of this plan of surplus disposal were so obvious as to make justifications unnecessary.

V. Which of these three plans for surplus disposal do city residents like best?

When they were asked to choose the one they liked best among the three proposals, city residents favored "distribution to the poor" even more heavily than when it was considered by itself - while "selling abroad" was favored by 7 percent of our sample and "storing" by 6 percent, "distributing it to the poor" was preferred by 87 percent.





A. Differences among cities were relatively small.

	<u>Sell</u> <u>abroad</u>	<u>Store</u>	<u>Give to</u> <u>poor</u>	<u>No. of per-</u> <u>sons asked</u>
New York City	5%	4%	91%	113
Philadelphia	7	5	88	62
Rochester	9	4	88	56
Cincinnati	7	10	83	62
Providence	7	13	80	55

B. Differences among economic groups were quite interesting:

<u>Economic</u> <u>group</u>	<u>Sell</u> <u>abroad</u>	<u>Store</u>	<u>Give to</u> <u>poor</u>	<u>No. of per-</u> <u>sons asked</u>
Upper	13%	11%	76%	90
Middle	8	7	85	163
Lower	1	5	94	95



PART III  
RELATION OF ATTITUDE TOWARD STAMP PLAN TO ATTITUDE TOWARD  
ALTERNATIVE DISPOSAL METHODS

I. The over-all relationship between these two attitudes

- A. Seventy percent of city residents who had an opinion favored the Stamp Plan; 79 percent approved having the Government distribute agricultural surpluses to the poor; and 87 percent selected the latter method as the most desirable among the three suggested alternatives for disposing of such surpluses. Remembering that the Stamp Plan question was always asked sometime after the surplus disposal question, what accounts for the discrepancies in favorableness noted above? What estimate can be made of the reactions to the Stamp Plan which might be expected when information reaches the one-third of our sample who know nothing about it at present?
- B. Analysis reveals that the deviations among the attitudes noted above are very much greater than is suggested by the figures -- that in fact there seems to be virtually no correlation between attitude toward the Stamp Plan and attitudes toward either "Distribute surpluses to the poor," considered by itself, or toward the plan regarded as best among disposal methods suggested. Breakdowns by economic levels and by cities tend to confirm this important negative conclusion. In other words, an individual who favors the Stamp Plan is as likely to be opposed to "Distribute agricultural surpluses to the poor" as an individual who opposes the Stamp Plan. And, again, a person who favors "Distribute agricultural surpluses to the poor" is as likely to be against the Stamp Plan as is another who opposes "Distribute agricultural surpluses to the poor." The same relations seem to hold when "Which plan do you like best?" is considered in place of "Distribute agricultural surpluses to the poor."

II. Factors affecting the relationship between these attitudes

What seems to be the basis for this seeming discrepancy in the attitudes of those interviewed? Results involving what appear to the outside observer as discrepancies or contradictions are not infrequently encountered in attitude studies. Two of the important causes tending to underlie such apparent inconsistencies are, first, lack of adequate correct information, and, second, consideration of the two factors from different points of view or in different and non-comparable frameworks. Both of these appear to be operative in the seeming attitude inconsistency being discussed.



- A. Our data indicate that most people in our sample knew relatively very little about the Stamp Plan. Not only did one-third know nothing at all, but an additional third made no comment whatever beyond stating whether they were for or against the Plan. Even the comments of the remaining one-third failed to suggest much prevalence of a thorough knowledge of both the objectives and the procedures of the Stamp Plan.
- B. It was shown earlier that attitude toward the Stamp Plan showed no variation among economic levels, whereas favorableness toward distribution of surpluses to the poor increases as we shift from upper to lower economic groups. Difference in the frameworks in which attitudes are built up and expressed is revealed by an analysis of the very small group of reasons given in support of the individual attitudes.
  1. Members of the upper economic level made 11 mentions of reasons for being opposed to the Stamp Plan. Three-fourths of these regarded the Plan as a form of relief and opposed it for this reason. Among the lower income group only 3 out of 13 made this point. But, whereas only 2 in the upper income group objected to the way the Plan works, in the lower economic group 9 made such criticisms.
  2. Similarly, "Poor people benefit" and "Helps the poor and farmers both" were mentioned 50 percent more often by members of the lower income group than by members of the upper. On the other hand, the latter group mentioned "Helps business" and "Helps grocers" with the greater frequency.
  3. And so, although upper and lower income groups mentioned about the same number of reasons in proportion to their numbers in our sample, and although they were equally approving of the Plan, it is clear that they had dissimilar aspects of the operation in mind.
  4. Another dissimilarity of framework was introduced by the different points of view from which the interview raised the Stamp Plan questions on the one hand and the surplus disposal questions on the other. When surplus disposal methods were considered, the setting was - We have these



surpluses, so what shall we do with them. And in the majority of the cases back came the answer, "Use them." In discussing the Stamp Plan, however, the setting was entirely different - to one group, it appeared simply as another genus of a disliked species, i.e., relief devices, to the other it was a mechanism whose parts were not functioning quite as they would prefer. To relatively few, was much of the surplus removal setting carried over as the basis for commenting on the Stamp Plan.

5. Thus, the absence of correlation between attitude toward the Stamp Plan and attitudes toward either "Distribute to the poor" or toward the plan of disposal most favored, becomes at least a little more comprehensible in the light of these two categories of differences in points of view.
- C. Correlations between these attitudes have not been found on the level of total figures nor even after the data were broken down by economic groups and by cities. Hence, our best estimate of how the group now listed as without attitudes toward the Stamp Plan will react to information given them is that they will probably divide in the same proportions as the rest of the sample.



