

Senate Panel Blasts USDA

"The inflationary food price spiral, that has drastically affected the poor, is likely to continue during the foreseeable future. Insofar as poor people's budgets are disproportionately consumed by food costs, this continuing development will have significantly adverse effects on the indigent — far worse than the consequences felt by the affluent and the middle class.

Thus, if hunger is to be abated among the poor in the United States, extraordinary steps must be taken. For those people receiving minimal wages, such wages will have to be increased dramatically; for those dependent upon food stamps and welfare, those benefits too will have to increase substantially. Otherwise, hunger will not only continue to exist, but for the foreseeable future conditions of hunger, malnutrition and consequent ill health will reach unconscionable proportions."

from the National Nutrition Policy Study
Prepared by the Panel on Nutrition and Special Groups
Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs
June 1974

Federal nutrition programs for the poor, the elderly and young school children came under heavy criticism from a panel of the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs which met in late June to study the matter.

The Panel on Nutrition and Special Groups found four of five major food programs operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) beset by a variety of woes which render them unresponsive, inefficient, and unable to feed the millions of Americans who remain hungry or malnourished.

Pointing a heavy finger of blame at USDA, the panel, in its 177 page report, National Nutrition Policy Study, said that "the most basic fact about USDA's family food assistance programs is that they are failing to reach enormous numbers of impoverished persons who are subject to a high risk of undernutrition and malnutrition. The failure of these programs is the most important failure in the entire array of federal efforts to deal with hunger in America."

The panel found the Food Stamp Program, the Supplemental Food Program, the Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and the Special Food Service Program for Children (which is comprised of the Day Care and Summer Feeding Programs) to be suffering from a variety of ailments including neglect by USDA, delays in funding, refusal by USDA to provide local operating funds and, in the case of the Food Stamp Program, basic structural problems.

Only the various school nutrition programs seemed to be doing an adequate job. According to the panel, "they are firmly established, abundantly funded and open to participants from all income levels."

While recommending in its report that the food assistance programs be made as responsive and accessible as the Congress and USDA can make them, the panel warned that "we must not be fooled. Food programs are no solution to low wages, to discrimination, to poverty. Whatever value they may have in the short term, for the longer haul they are not the answer."

"We look to the day when all of these programs will have ceased to be necessary to maintain basic nutrition, and will remain only to improve the quality of people's lives. That is the basic test of whether or not the job is done."

Against this background the panel recommended that national nutrition policies promote first and foremost a commitment to move toward adequate income for all Americans. "It is only by altering the basic facts of income maldistribution that we can hope to reduce the size of our welfare, medicaid and food assistance programs. When the benefits of our economy are more fairly distributed, there will be less need for welfare programs of any type."

Until adequate income becomes available, the panel said, it seems an expanded Food Stamp Program, a full range of nutrition services, food service in all schools and institutions serving children, adaptation of all food programs to meet the special needs of migrants and Indians, and nutritional protection for all elderly.

of persons do not know they are eligible for food stamps, or do not know that food stamps benefits have risen sharply in recent years.

The Food Stamp Program, said the panel, has performed so badly that "no amount of program revision can ever enable it to solve this problem (of malnutrition). The only solution is a just, dignified, guaranteed income maintenance program that ensures that no person lives without adequate income."

Acknowledging that a truly adequate income maintenance program is not an imminent political possibility, the study recommended that the Food Stamp Program be retained but be thoroughly restructured, and be made into a free program.

Recognizing that a free Food Stamp Program does not appear an immediate political prospect either, the panel made the following suggestions for modifying the present program:

1. Lower purchase prices to 20 percent of net income instead of 30 percent.

2. Food Stamp allotments should be based on the cost of USDA's Low Cost Food Plan rather than on the Economy Food Plan. The Economy Food Plan, which provides food stamp allotments that allow less than 40 cents per person per meal, does not permit the purchase of a nutritionally adequate diet.

3. Revise Food Stamp certification procedures so persons can be certified by affidavits of no more than two pages which would allow them to obtain on-the-spot eligibility and benefits.

4. Improve local food stamp services by establishing federal standards for local

9. Persons with special medical needs should receive increased food stamp allotments.

10. Asset limits should be raised to \$2,000 for a family of two, with \$250 more for each additional household member, up to a maximum of \$3,000. Households should be allowed asset limits of \$3,000 regardless of size if they include one person 60 or over. An additional \$1,500 should be allowed for each additional elderly person up to a maximum of \$6,000.

11. The work registration requirement should be eliminated.

12. When recipients receive change for purchases paid for with food stamps, they should be allowed to receive cash instead of scrip for change of less than 50 cents.

13. Greater involvement of the poor should be built into the program.

14. A nondiscriminatory hiring program should be implemented immediately to insure that minority groups and poor recipients are substantially employed in food assistance offices throughout the country.

15. USDA should be required to collect data on percentage of eligible persons who receive food stamps, numbers of migrant workers reached, etc. to facilitate the identification of areas where the program is failing and where some form of corrective action is needed.

Supplemental Foods

The Supplemental Food Program which was created in 1968 in response to the Poor People's Campaign has survived "in spite of, rather than because of the Department of Agriculture."

vated the situation, causing periodic shortages of vegetables, evaporated milk and other commodities. And for a time there was concern that the program might be phased out entirely should Congress fail to extend the authority to purchase commodities at market price.

In addition, impoundments in 1972 of Emergency Food and Medical Services funds caused a number of programs to close for lack of administrative funding.

Women, Infants, & Children

On WIC, the panel found even more to criticize, and directly called USDA to task.

"Unlike Supplemental Foods, which has had a number of problems, WIC has had only one: USDA," the report said. "Over the brief, two-year history of the program, the Department has pursued a single strategy of delay and neglect."

Legislation passed in September, 1972, authorized the Department to create a pilot special Supplemental Food Program for pregnant and nursing women and children under four. Instead of commodities, cash grants were to be made to state health department at the rate of \$20 million in FY 1974 and \$20 million in FY 1975. A medical evaluation was to be operated in conjunction with the food program to determine the health benefits accruing to participants and the advisability of program expansion.

Instead of moving quickly to implement WIC, USDA stalled for the first seven months in an attempt to transfer WIC to HEW, the report said, and the next three months trying to turn it into a research project. Regulations were delayed, officials said, because HEW refused to accept the program and because USDA had not been able to design a medical evaluation on its own. Furthermore, USDA announced plans to spend only five million of the forty million dollars available.

As the result of a class action lawsuit, USDA was ordered to promulgate regulations and to begin processing applications.

When faced with the inevitable, the report said, USDA made only the most perfunctory efforts at publicity. Regulations completed on July 6 were not sent to state health departments or to HEW until 10 days later. And at the time of the panel's study, literature about the program consisted of nothing besides a press release and the highly technical regulations.

The processing of applications was handled the same way, the report said, with USDA trying to shift blame for the delays on the applicants. As a result, participation rates for April stood at only 36,000 out of an authorized caseload of 314,000. And, because of funding miscalculations, the program stands a chance of dying at the end of the calendar year.

Nevertheless, the panel concluded, "We believe in the importance of insuring nutritionally adequate diets for this group. If the effort is to survive and be responsive to the need, extensive changes will have to be made in the law and administrative procedures now governing the program."

Dell Martin



"Now, bite on the bullet—that'll stop you wasting all your money on food!"

Food Stamps

The Food Stamp Program, the panel found, is basically flawed and is not solving America's malnutrition problem. Its defects lie, the report said, in five major areas:

1. The requirement that households pay sizeable sums in cash to participate in the program each month.

2. The time-consuming and frequently degrading process entailed in applying for food stamps.

3. Being publicly identifiable as a food stamp user in grocery stores.

4. The failure of the program to provide low income families with a sufficient amount of food stamps to purchase an adequate diet.

5. The lack of outreach which has meant that millions

certification and issuance procedures. Included should be a provision that offices be open at least from 9 to 5 all weekdays, several evenings, and half a day on Saturday.

5. USDA should pay 80 percent of the cost of all state food stamp administrative costs.

6. USDA should actively advertise the program and all changes in food stamp tables through national radio and TV publicity and other means.

7. Restaurant meals should be purchasable with food stamps by the elderly, the disabled, and those without cooking facilities.

8. Food Stamps should be exchangeable for items necessary for personal cleanliness, hygiene and home sanitation.

The Department's chief means of limiting the program which provides nutritious commodity foods to pregnant and postpartum women and pre-school children has been its refusal to provide local operating expense funds, the panel said in its report.

Counties desiring these "free" government purchased commodities for needy mothers and infants have been forced to look elsewhere — to private charities, the welfare department, or the Emergency Food and Medical Services Program of OEO. USDA has also issued a whole series of instructions designed to limit program expansion and eligibility.

Changes in the economy, the report said, have aggra-



SCENE of eight consecutive nights of Posadas. Father Frank Knusel seeks lodging, while attendants sing. The waiting apparently was worthwhile as Pilgrims were treated with tamales and mexican food.



Height is no problem for this youngster. Hundreds of children shared Christmas traditions Las Posadas.

CAO Shows Residents Mexican Christmas

"You can lead the horse to the water, but you cannot make it drink." is an old saying. "Not necessarily so," mentioned Carla Johnson, Community Action Organization executive director, "At least not this Christmas with the people we serve. Of course people are not horses, people are people, and if you bring warmth, understanding, and show love to human beings that is all you need to fulfill human hearts."

Community Action Agency had been working arduously for the past month soliciting toys, candies, and goodies for the Mexican Christmas tradition, Las Posadas, an event preceding Christmas. The festive ceremony was led by Father Frank Knusel who also de-

scribed the scene as "amazing".

"I am really glad to be able to attend an event of this nature, here I could see that children do not fear danger. As an adult I would not get near that swinging stick," commented an attendant. Another expressed, with a cup of hot punch in his hand, "What is this?" A Mexican lady near by explained kindly that, knowing it was going to be cold, we wanted to provide something typically Mexican. She concluded by saying, "At least you got more than the pilgrims did." She chuckled, referring to the refusal to lodge Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem.

"It is a warm, happy custom," Osvaldo Hinojosa said. "It will make many Mexican families feel happy

and at home, and it will introduce English speaking Americans to a very old Spanish custom."

Despite the constant rain, the community showed no signs of discouragement and more than 200 families watched with joy the outdoor breaking of three pinatas. Pinatas are containers, made in the form of animals, angels, or other objects, filled with candy. They are hung from the ceiling. The game is to give the children (and adults) a stick, once blindfolded they are led underneath the pinata, children form a circle and patiently wait for some fortunate soul to hit it, which once broken, spills candy and fruit onto the floor. At this time children try to gather as many goodies as will fit into their hands. Miles Green and Dale Swanson from *The Oregonian*

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Cruse For Foods, a Hillsboro grocery store, made a discount on items purchased for bunuelos and punch. Ralph Baer, a Portland toy wholesaler, donated several boxes of toys. Ben Padrow, book dealer, donated a great amount of Christmas books for children. Bernstein Brothers, candy wholesalers in Portland, provided the candy. Estela Gonzales and family made the delicious bunuelos and punch. Community Action staff and horseman Paul Vigil helped with the outdoor illumination. Pinatas contributors were: Father Frank Knusel, Sr. Landeros and Mrs. Hernandez from Forest Grove.

Director Carla Johnson, expressed pleasure at seeing the community react to this tradition when she said, "We must be doing extremely well with the people of this county; because, it makes no difference if it rains or shines, the good people of this County are always backing us up in our activities, whether they are political or just a social event that calls for togetherness." Ms. Johnson attempted to break the pinata to no avail.

Enrique Méndez Flores

Your Child's Health

Of all of the diseases a doctor sees in his office, one of the most frequent is the common cold. We are all familiar with the symptoms: days of runny nose and sneezing, nights of coughing; stopped up sinuses and all the other miseries so familiar to us from TV commercials. We sit amidst a mass of rumpled tissues, popping aspirin and cold pills, waiting for the cold to run its course.

When we feel sufficiently miserable, we drag ourselves off to the doctor in search of a cure. Many believe that "a shot of penicillin" or "an antibiotic" will give them relief. Unfortunately, this is not so.

The common cold can be caused by any one of more than a hundred different viruses. A virus is an infinitesimally small germ; (approximately 5,000,000,000 can fit on the head of a pin). Viruses are completely unaffected by antibiotics. Scientists are currently working on several drugs that will kill viruses without hurting the patient, but none are yet safe enough for general use.

Antibiotics (such as penicillin, erythromycin, etc.) are effective in infections caused by bacteria. This is a totally different type of germ — much larger and with a more complicated structure than viruses.

It is the doctor's responsibility to decide what type of germ is causing the patient's infection. If it is a bacteria, an appropriate antibiotic will result in rapid improvement. If it is a virus, an antibiotic will not affect the disease at all. In fact, the person with a viral infection who is treated with an antibiotic may get worse, since all antibiotics have side effects, sometimes quite severe.

Agencia CAO Enseña Tradición Navidena

"Ud. puede llevar el caballo al agua, pero no puede hacer tomarla." dice un viejo adagio. "Pero no necesariamente," mencionaba Carla Johnson, Community Action Organization, directora ejecutiva. "al menos no ésta navidad con la gente con la cual trabajamos. Desde luego las personas no son caballos, gente es gente, y si nosotros traemos calor, comprensión, y enseñamos cariño como seres humanos es todo lo que necesitamos para llenar los corazones de las personas."

Esta Navidad Community Action Agency trabajó arduamente durante los pasados meses solicitando juguetes, dulces y golosinas para las tradicionales fiestas Navideñas Las Posadas, eventos anteriores al nacimiento de Cristo. La ceremonia festiva fue encabezada por el Rev. Padre Frank Knusel, quien también donó una piñata para los niños.

A pesar de la lluvia constante, los participantes no mostraron señal de desilucionamiento y mas de 200 familias observaron con alegría a sus hijos quebrar las piñatas. Piñatas son recipientes decorados en forma de animales, ángeles o otros objetos, llenos de dulces. Se cuelgan del techo y a los niños se les vendan los ojos (o a los adultos) mientras el resto de niños forman un círculo y esperan pacientemente a que algún afortunado le pegue a la piñata. Ya rota el contenido se disparte en el suelo en donde todos tratan

de alcanzar alguna golosina. Dos reporteros del *Oregonian* describieron la escena como "sorprendente".

"Estoy muy contento de poder asistir a un evento de ésta naturaleza, en donde puedo observar que los niños no le temen a nada. Como adulto yo no me acercaba a ese palo tan peligroso," comentaba un individuo que atendía Las Posadas. Otra persona expresaba, con una taza de ponche caliente en la mano, "Qué es ésto? a lo cual una señora pacientemente le explicaba que al saber que hiba a hacer frío querían proporcionar algo caliente para el cuerpo. Ella concluyó en decirle, "al menos a Ud. le toco mas que a los peregrinos." Ella sonreía, refiriéndose al pasaje donde les rehusaban alojamiento a José y María en Belem.

"Es una costumbre de amor y calor," Osvaldo Hinojosa mencionaba. "Esta ocasión traer alegría a muchas familias mexicanas y los hará sentir como en casa, y al mismo tiempo se enseñará a personas de habla inglesa una costumbre española muy antigua."

Cruse All Foods, tienda de comestibles en la ciudad de Hillsboro, hizo descuento en las compras de mercancía para la hechura del ponche y los bunuelos. Ralph Baer, distribuidor de juguetes en Portland, donó varias cajas de juguetes. Ben Padrow, vendedor de libros, dona una gran cantidad de libros para colorear. Bernstein Bros. distrib-



uidores de dulces en Portland, proporcionaron cajas de dulces. La señora Estela Gonzalez y familia hicieron el ponche y los deliciosos bunuelos. Paul Vigil de Aloha junto con miembros de Community Action Agency ayudaron con la iluminación externa. Personas que donaron las piñatas fueron; Padre Frank Knusel, Sr. Landeros y la señora Hernandez de Forest Grove.

La directora de Community Action Agency, Carla Johnson, expreso su satisfacción de ver que la comunidad reaccionó favorablemente con esta tradición al expresar, "Nosotros estamos haciendo un buen trabajo con la

comunidad de este condado, las actividades que afectan sus vidas ya sea políticamente o socialmente siempre han sido respaldadas por ellos. Par ellos el que llueve o haga sol no tiene importancia. Como agencia estamos haciendo un buen trabajo para el mejoramiento de sus vidas." La señora Johnson trató de quebrar la Piñata pero no tuvo suerte.

Enrique Mendez Flores