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Food and Nutrition

October 1975 • Volume 5 • Number 5

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School lunch and the bicentennial



Food stamps grow home gardens

By Joe Dunphy



In the spring, Sylvia Bell went shopping at her local supermarket in Norwich, New York, and came away with a lot of bargains. She bought about \$2,000 worth of fruits and vegetables for \$10.

"I bought enough then to get us through the whole year," Ms. Bell said. Then, she tilted her head ever so slightly upward and said softly, "I hope."

The amount of food she purchased might suggest that Ms. Bell needed a very large truck to carry the groceries. And the amount she paid might lead one to believe the truck arrived very late at night, while the store manager and his employees were home watching television.

Actually, Sylvia Bell is a home gardener. The seeds and plants she purchased for her two garden plots on a 1-acre tract in Sherburne, New York, came to about \$40. But Sylvia Bell is also a food stamp recipient, and based on her income, she buys her monthly allotment of coupons at about one-fourth their face value.

"I have been in the program for several years," she said. "But now that I can buy plants and seeds, food stamps mean a lot more to my family."

Ms. Bell was referring to the 2-year-old change in food stamp regulations that permits program participants to use their coupons to purchase seeds and plants to grow food

for home consumption. Participants can buy the seeds and plants at any authorized food store that sells them, and the procedure is exactly the same as using stamps to purchase food items.

Ms. Bell pointed out that food stamps will enable the family to have enough from their garden to last the whole year. "In fact, when the harvest season comes," she said, "our freezer is going to get mighty crowded. Don't get me wrong, though, I'm not complaining about having too much."

In Uniontown, Pennsylvania, Barbara Jordan spent about \$20 in food stamps to buy leafy starter plants for tomatoes, eggplants, and peppers.



(Opposite page) In the spring, Sylvia Bell and her daughters April and Noelle planted the tomato seedlings they bought with food stamps. They placed tires over the plants to help keep the ground moist as the plants grew. (This page) In July, the tomatoes were ready to be picked, as the family tended their other crops. From the seeds and plants they purchased with food stamps, they grew corn, cabbage, peas, beans, cucumbers, squash, pumpkins, and other vegetables.

"The fella down at Moss' Food and Garden Center told me that I could use my stamps to purchase plants," Ms. Jordan said. "It sure comes in handy, too, because the garden keeps on giving each day."

Jerry Byers, manager of the Moss store, placed a sign atop his large display of starter vegetable plants and vegetable seeds advising food stamp customers they could use coupons to purchase the items for their home gardens.

He said the number of customers purchasing plants and seeds rose from around 40 last year to well over 100 this spring.

"My biggest sales have been in cabbage, tomato plants and onion

sets," the store manager explained.

In the central New York area, managers of Victory Markets, where Sylvia Bell purchased many of her plants and seeds, took the food stamp theme and made it a major campaign in an attempt to increase sales in their 75 stores.

The idea for the campaign came from H.L. Gilliam, FNS food stamp officer-in-charge for Syracuse. Realizing his area was mostly rural and that vegetable gardens played a key part in the everyday existence of the rural poor, Mr. Gilliam suggested that Victory undertake an all-out effort that would focus the attention of food stamp recipients on the store's garden center displays. Company of-

ficials readily accepted the idea.

"We notified our buyers to purchase much more than we had originally intended," said Jules Fox, Victory's director of personnel and training. "But we still couldn't get as much as we wanted."

The result of the campaign, which included large multi-colored posters throughout all stores, was a 25-percent increase in plant and seed sales over last year. In addition, the inventory was sold out well ahead of last year's schedule.

At first, Mr. Fox pointed out, supermarket officials were a little wary of how the sale of plants and seeds would affect their own produce department.



Noelle, April and their mother gather peas from one of the family's two garden plots in Sherburne, New York. They have had the garden for several years, and freeze the produce each harvest season. Ms. Bell says this crop is bigger than usual, and there should be enough vegetables to last the entire year.

"But we realized that even if people have their own produce from their seeds during harvest season, they'll still have the same amount of stamps," Fox explained. "If they come to our store, we'll simply get their business in another department."

And Sylvia Bell proved the company official was right.

"With the savings we have made by purchasing plants and seeds, we will now be able to buy fruit and other things we don't grow and wouldn't ordinarily buy," she said.

There is little waste in Ms. Bell's two garden plots that measure 30 by 100 feet and 30 by 40 feet. Her crops include tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage, corn, potatoes, peppers, car-

rots, beets, peas, beans, pumpkins, squash, onions, and rhubarb.

"We've had our garden for several years," Sylvia Bell said. "But I'm able to do a lot more now that we can use food stamps."

Aline Oliver, food stamp director for Chenango County where Ms. Bell lives, said the seed regulation has been a big help to area residents.

"We are a very rural county," the director said. "Many of our participants have home garden plots and this purchasing aspect is important to them."

In Mt. Braddock, Pennsylvania, John and Lorraine Landman purchased enough vegetable seeds and plants with food stamps at the Moss

Center to cover half an acre. Seed potatoes were a major buy.

"We purchased 100 pounds of seed potatoes and we expect to harvest about 600 pounds," Ms. Landman said. "That is, if the bugs don't get them first."

Ruth and Clyde Morris' 20 by 40 foot garden plot in Adah, Pennsylvania, is considerably smaller than the Landman's, but it's a major source of food for the family.

"When I went down to Moss' store this spring, I noticed the seeds and food stamp sign and made my purchase on the spot," Mr. Morris said. "Growing our own food is going to make our food stamps last longer."

Many food stamp recipients who



do home gardening make it a family activity.

Ms. Bell's two daughters, April, 8, and Noelle, 6, are quite adept with most garden tools, and during the planting season they spent quite a few days in the garden with mother.

"Everybody works in this family," Sylvia Bell said. "Mainly, we do it because it's fun working together."

Barbara Jordan and her three children also spend a lot of time in their 25 by 30 foot garden. Besides being fun, gardening has had a positive affect on the eating habits of the children, according to Ms. Jordan.

"They like to eat whatever they take care of," she pointed out, "even spinach." ☆

What's Happening in School Food Service?

By Michael McAteer

In the 1974-75 school year, the National School Lunch Program was available to more than 43 million children, the largest number in the history of the program.

That's just one of the conclusions in an FNS report on the status of school food service programs. The report is the third annual profile of school feeding, based on data collected by States and regional offices each October. It includes information on all U.S. schools—both those with and without food service.

Here are some highlights from the 1974-75 report:

- The National School Lunch Program is available to children in more schools than ever before. Of the more than 45.6 million children enrolled in schools with some form of food service, 43,499,837 children or 95.5 percent attended schools which take part in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

- There were 50,048,237 children attending all U.S. schools. This represents a decrease of 370,000 or 0.7 percent below the previous year. In spite of this decline, there was an increase of 415,000 children attending NSLP schools over 1973-74. Most of this increase came from schools joining the NSLP which previously had taken part in one of the other

Federal-State-local child nutrition programs.

- A total of 85,053 schools were participating in the National School Lunch Program in October 1974—an increase of 776 schools over the previous October. These schools made up 79.5 percent of all U.S. schools, but enrolled 87.2 percent of the total student population.

The increase in the number of NSLP schools is especially significant in light of the decrease in the total number of public and private schools—from 107,735 to 106,927—a decline of 808 schools.

- Ninety-one percent of all school children had some food service program available to them: 86.9 percent were enrolled in NSLP schools, 4.1 percent were in schools with some other form of food service. A total of 5.3 percent were enrolled in schools with only the Special Milk Program. That leaves only 3.7 percent of the total school enrollment with no milk or food program in their schools.

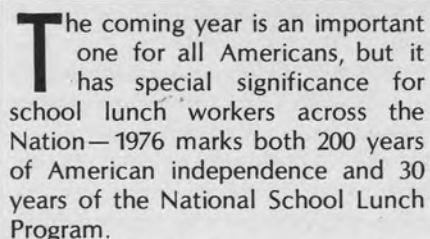
- The number of eligible schools not participating in any of the child nutrition programs dropped from 17,794 to 16,516. The total enrollment in these schools also decreased—by 647,000 children. Some 507,000 of these children were in public schools and 140,000 were in private schools.

There are now 4.4 million children, down from 5 million, in schools without food service. This figure includes 2.6 million children attending the 8,400 schools which operate the Special Milk Program only. This represents a slight change from the comparable 1973-74 totals of 2.5 million children in 9,000 schools which have only that program.

- Of all those children attending schools without food service: 94.8 percent attended schools with enrollments greater than 100; 4.5 percent attended schools with enrollments of 26 to 100; and 0.7 percent attended schools with enrollments of 25 or less.

FNS will be examining similar factors in program participation in the annual report on school food service for the 1975-76 school year. States and regional offices are currently collecting data for that report, which will be published in the spring. ☆

By Katherine G. Thomas and Melanie Watts



saries, USDA, the child nutrition directors in State departments of education, and ASFSA—the American School Food Service Association—are sponsoring a Child Nutrition Bicentennial Project.

develop plans for this project.

6



suggesting ways these groups can join the effort by publicizing the project through newsletters and magazines, and by developing educational or theme materials for cafeterias and classrooms. The project sponsors have developed a certificate of recognition for private groups that become involved in the bicentennial effort.

The "School Foodservice Journal" plans an entire section on the bicentennial in each monthly issue.

"This section will consist of recipes of the menu items, a 4-color photo of the menu, merchandising ideas, a column from a leading nutrition expert on some facet of nutrition or history of food, that sort of thing," says Ms. Roberts. "It will also include some lesson plans that can be used in the classroom. The lesson plans will be geared toward three levels: early elementary, upper elementary and middle school; and high school. They have been developed by ASFSA's nutrition education committee."

Future issues of the "Journal" will include alternate recipes for bicentennial menu items, some developed by USDA and others from ASFSA sources. This will give schools options in instances when certain foods are not in season or difficult to obtain.

The project officially began with the ASFSA convention in July 1975. The convention brought together a large group of people involved in school food service and provided a forum for bicentennial project ideas.

One aspect of this convention was a meeting of the State directors section of ASFSA, the third sponsoring group.

"When we meet in the ASFSA section as State directors," says John Stalker, the group's chairman, "we're discussing the problems and responsibilities for administering all of the child nutrition programs within the State, so we wear two hats in a way."

"Rather than have a separate organization of State directors, we've elected to stay within ASFSA," he explains. "But the State directors' section is one that has autonomy within the association—its actions are not

subject to the executive board in matters relating to State administration of the programs."

At their meeting at the convention, the State directors discussed plans to disseminate bicentennial information at a local level. The majority of States have newsletters and will use them to pass on this news.

To increase school participation in Massachusetts, Mr. Stalker, who is director of Massachusetts' bureau of nutrition education and school food services, is printing applications for pennants and plans to distribute them to all National School Lunch Program schools in his State.

When awarding the pennants, the director plans to add a star for each

We are hoping that the bicentennial festivities... will teach children more about good nutrition and encourage them to eat lunch at school.

editor, "School Foodservice Journal"

theme area the school participated in—Festival U.S.A., Heritage '76 or Horizon '76.

"This is something a little additional that we are going to do within the State when we pass them out," says Mr. Stalker. "That may not be done in every State."

A vehicle Mr. Stalker is using to in-

crease interest on the State level is "Hot Lines," a bimonthly newsletter which prints information to and from State directors. Mr. Stalker hopes to get feedback from the States about local activities and promote successful ideas by publishing them in the newsletter.

"We hope, through 'Hot Lines,' to increase participation in the program, and to get more interest in the bicentennial project," explains Mr. Stalker. "We will be teaching and sharing the kinds of things the States are doing."

Project sponsors are encouraging individual schools to develop programs on their own, particularly in instances where it is possible to tie in a local historical event.

"The people in the field have a lot of imagination," says Mr. Dickey. "And they are more than willing to go ahead and do all sorts of things. We are suggesting to them that they try and tie in with local bicentennial activities—that they contact their local bicentennial groups and work with their State commissions to develop their own menus and their own activities."

The focus of this effort—children in the schools—will benefit from the project nutritionally and educationally. And officials hope this project will increase communication between students, teachers and school food service workers.

As part of the Child Nutrition Bicentennial Project, National School Lunch Program schools can qualify for a pennant by taking part in projects listed under two of the three bicentennial themes. One of these themes, Horizon '76, requires a 5 percent or more average increase in lunch or breakfast participation for 1 month.

In the past, schools working together or by themselves have stimulated student interest and improved participation by adding to and sometimes changing existing systems. Quite often schools have discovered similar answers to common problems, but they have always tailored the solutions to meet individual needs.

The following accounts present different approaches to comparable problems.

ALASKA

**Isolated
villages and
volatile
weather
conditions
challenge
Alaska's food
stamp workers**



Field staff solve logistic problems

By Benedicto Montoya

An hour before, the weather for flying was ideal. The single engine, pontoon-equipped plane, sitting in a cove adjacent to Juneau airport, was fueled and ready. Suddenly, however, the weather changed. At best it would be a bumpy 30-minute flight to the fishing village of Hoonah.

Once there, the decision could be made to return or continue on to the other villages scheduled for a visit that particular day.

The decision to go was made by a slight young woman who visits towns and villages throughout Alaska as part of her job. It was summertime, the best time to travel, and she had a lot of ground and water to cover before the Alaskan winter made travel really difficult.

Joanna Demmert is a field representative for FNS. She, and her two colleagues, officer-in-charge of the Anchorage field office, Les Horne, and FNS field representative, Dave Bailey, have responsibility for author-

izing stores in Alaska to participate in the food stamp program and making sure they abide by the Federal regulations that govern the program. Because of the difficulties of travel in Alaska, being a field representative is not a job most people would want, and many have declined. But Joanna Demmert has been at it for 4 years.

Ms. Demmert, however, has special qualifications for being a field representative in this rugged State. She was born there, raised there, and takes great pride in her native Alaskan heritage. She is a member of the Tlingit Indian Tribe. Her father, she pointed out, was well known throughout Southern Alaska and for many years operated the first fish cannery on Prince of Wales Island near Ketchikan.

Field representatives say that Alaska is, without a doubt, the toughest of the States to travel in. During the past fiscal year, staff members in the Anchorage-based FNS field office



Ms. Demmert and pilot prepare to fly to an isolated Alaskan village (above and left). Boat (above) is another means of transportation.

have traveled a total of 15,348 miles by automobile and 108,173 by air. There are about 550 stores authorized to participate in the food stamp program in Alaska, many of them reachable only by single-engine plane or boat. In comparison, one city in another part of the FNS Western region—San Francisco—has about 1,370 stores spread over a 50-square-mile area, nearly all of them reachable by city bus.

Because of the need to utilize single-engine aircraft as much as they do, Alaska field representatives look for the most economical service available. A charter is \$70 per hour, so they try to use those flights that travel to remote villages with mail and supplies on an unscheduled but somewhat regular basis. And the cost for some of these flights, Ms. Demmert explained, is comparable to round-trip cab fare in metropolitan areas in the 48 contiguous States.

"However," she added, "if no such

flight exists, or time becomes a factor, we try to locate others who want to share a charter. As a last resort we charter a flight."

Once the field representative arrives at a village, it is often a matter of miles to the store.

"With the plane waiting or scheduled to pick you up in an hour, you can't waste much time on the ground," Joanna Demmert said. So to get where she's going as fast as she can, she borrows a car, hitches a ride or even rides a bicycle.

When Alaska field representatives leave the office in Anchorage for a round of village store visits, they are likely to be gone a week or more. This is because they try to cover as much ground as possible on these trips, and because they are never quite sure of travel arrangements, connections, and, of course, the weather.

Ms. Demmert has often flown into a small village under the threat of

bad weather and been unable to get out or unwilling to chance the flight. Few of the villages she visits have hotels but when she's stranded, she always finds a home with a cousin, a distant relative, or with one of her many friends or friends of the family. Native Alaskans, she explained, have very strong ties to one another. Many times children who have been orphaned, for example, just move in with relatives or close family friends.

Les Horne and Dave Bailey, on the other hand, generally camp out in the schoolhouse, council hall or a warm room in the back of a store. Experience has taught them to carry sleeping bags and warm clothing when traveling during bad weather.

Ms. Demmert has seen a great many changes in the stores during her years with the food stamp program.

"Stocks of food have increased as has the variety of food," she said. "More stores are now carrying fresh produce because people now have the means to purchase it."

Les Horne recalls going out to the Bethel area when the program first began and seeing eggs being sold singly. On his last trip to that area, people were buying them by the dozen.

FNS field representatives visit about half of the nearly 550 authorized stores once a year. They visit the other half—stores with food stamp redemptions of \$400 or more per month—twice a year. They make sure that the stores have adequate stocks of food and are familiar with program regulations.

In addition, they make special compliance visits to stores that appear to have excessive redemption of coupons. In the 48 States, field representatives make these special visits within 30 days after noticing an increase in the number of redemptions. In Alaska, because of the difficulty of travel, field representatives have an additional 15 days to make the trip to determine the reason for the increase.

"Special circumstances here make certain adjustments in timing necessary," Joanna Demmert said. "But essentially we operate the same way as our colleagues in all the other FNS field offices."



Fish remain the main source of food for many native Alaskans. (Below) Fred Hurley and his wife prepare a recent catch for curing. The dried fish will provide food for the coming winter. The food stamp program serves as a buffer when the summer's salmon catch is not enough to carry a family through the winter. (Above right) OIC Les Horne and the operator of New Stuyahok's community cooperative store discuss food stamp regulations.



Villagers help meet local needs

By Benedicto Montoya

Fred Hurley has lived along the Nushagak River in the Alaskan village of Ekwook all of his life. He is a fisherman, a hunter, and takes great pride in his small home garden. When king salmon are running in the Nushagak, Fred and most of his family are up early, checking the nets and handling the catch.

This looks like a good year for the Hurley family as well as the other native Alaskans who live in this small, isolated village. Already a number of the big salmon have been caught, cut into long thin strips, and left to dry in the sun in preparation for the bitter winter ahead.

In the Arctic Ocean village of Barrow, a meeting of village and Federal government officials abruptly ends as word reaches them from beyond the ice fields that a whale has been killed. The meeting does not resume for 3 days as the Eskimo villagers celebrate, and divide and store this traditional food which once

meant survival for the Arctic Circle village.

On Chichagof Island in Southwest Alaska, most of the village fishing fleet is still at anchor as the residents of Hoonah, mostly Tlingit Indians, patiently await the first run of salmon. A 60-pound salmon was caught this morning, yet these commercial fishermen still feel that this will not be a profitable year since the number of fish caught each season has been declining for several years.

In years past, Alaskans have relied on success at hunting, fishing and gathering from the land and sea to provide food for the family table. And, like Fred Hurley, many native Alaskans and long-time residents of the 49th State take great pride in continuing to rely upon these traditional skills. But there is a backup system to which they can turn if they are in need of food help—the food stamp program.

Alaska operates the food stamp

program under national standards set by FNS for all States. However, because of the higher cost of food in Alaska, there are higher income eligibility standards and proportionately larger food stamp allotments for Alaskan participants.

About one-third of the State's 20,000 food stamp participants live in the major population centers, such as Anchorage, Juneau, and Fairbanks. In metropolitan areas, the program operates like it does anywhere else: households make application for food stamps at the local welfare office; eligibility workers assess the merit of their applications; qualified households receive authorization to purchase stamps; and the stamps are spent at supermarkets or corner grocery stores for food.

Basically the same thing happens in the "bush" or at the village level. However, the task of bringing the program to the people and administering it in these areas is more com-



plicated. Because the population is isolated, scattered, and diverse, there are special transportation problems, communication difficulties, language barriers and a centuries old subsistence level lifestyle that hasn't seen a need for receipts and paper clips.

Ekwok, located on the banks of the Nushagak River in southcentral Alaska, is somewhat typical of many Alaskan villages. There are no roads leading out of this small village of less than 200 people. It's a full day's journey down river by boat to the area's population center, Dillingham, and an hour or so up river to the neighboring village of New Stuyahok. Other than the river, access is by light plane. Before the snows, the planes are equipped with wheels for the village's mostly gravel runway. In the winter, skis replace the wheels. Many villages can only be reached by float planes.

Ekwok has a store which has been

authorized by FNS field representatives to accept food coupons. The store, which is the only formalized retail activity in the village, has in the past year grown from what FNS Alaska field representatives call "an under-the-bed store," to a full-fledged one-room general store. The "under-the-bed stores," which serve many villages, are simply retail outlets operated out of a home.

Many villages, heartened by the increased purchasing power of food stamp recipients, have begun community cooperative stores. This is the case with New Stuyahok. Supplies for the stores in Ekwok and New Stuyahok are shipped in by barge when the weather and river conditions permit. During the winter they are flown in.

Travel to most points in Alaska is, at best, unscheduled. "You don't say when you will be there," explained a long time resident of the State, "just that you will be."

Dorothy Emmons, the State department of health and social services southcentral district representative, faces daily the problems of transportation and communications. From her office in Dillingham, she can reach only one village by road. Yet, she has responsibility for three regional offices serving 25 villages.

To make the food stamp program available to people at the village level on a continuing basis, she explains, the State has come up with a unique system using "fee agents." A fee agent is a villager who is appointed by the State through the village council to help villagers apply for participation in the food stamp program. The agent's role, according to Ms. Emmons, is not to make decisions about who is eligible for the program. That is left up to a qualified eligibility worker in the regional or district office.

The fee agent explains the program, assists the villager with the application, and verifies by his signature that the information contained in the application is true to the best of his knowledge. The agent is familiar with program requirements, application procedures, and necessary documentation, and he explains all this in simple terms and in the native language of the applicant. For each

household certified eligible for the program, the agent receives a fee of \$4 from the State department of health and social services.

Ms. Emmons has a "good feeling" that the fee agent system is reaching people. She sees no alternative to the service provided by the agents and feels that it provides the villagers with access to the program and helps in dealing with the complexities of government.

Once an application is complete, it is mailed to the appropriate regional office of the department of health and social services. There a trained eligibility worker reviews the application and supporting documentation, and determines if the applicant is eligible for participation. If certified eligible, the applicant then receives his or her authorization-to-purchase card by mail.

In many remote areas, recipients purchase stamps by mail. However, the department of social services also has 29 district offices which issue food stamps, and four post offices sell them. There are no banks or private agencies which issue stamps in Alaska.

Food stamp participation fluctuates throughout the State, according to Rod Betit, Alaska's food stamp manager. He points out that the overall economic situation is an important factor, and participation has shown a definite decrease since work began on the Alaska pipeline.

But village participation is still closely tied to the subsistence lifestyle of the villagers, and fluctuations coincide with fishing seasons, beaver trapping, and the opening and closing of canneries. Ms. Emmons points out that for many native Alaskans pay-days are seasonal. This has made many families excellent budgeters, able to manage their food stamps from month to month.

To make the food stamp program compatible with subsistence living, FNS amended program regulations in July to allow recipients to use stamps to purchase non-explosive hunting and fishing equipment.

And that change, says Dorothy Emmons, will be a help to Alaskan natives who want to continue their tradition of providing their families with food from the land and sea. ☆



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FOOD AND NUTRITION is published bimonthly by the Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. The use of funds for printing this publication has been approved by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget through November 30, 1976. Yearly subscription is \$3.00 domestic, \$3.75 foreign. Single copies 50 cents each. Subscription orders should be sent to the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

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contents

- 2** Food Stamps Grow Home Gardens
- 5** What's Happening in School Food Service
- 6** Child Nutrition Bicentennial Project
- 12** Food Stamps in Alaska