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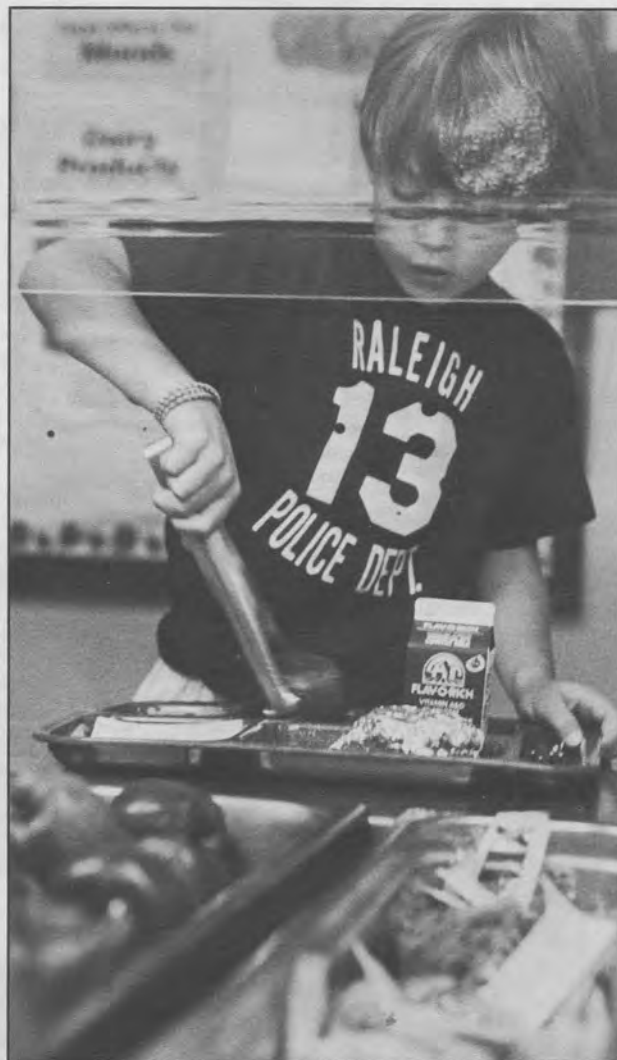
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Celebrating the 20th
Anniversary of USDA's
Food and Nutrition Service



We've Come A Long
Way In 20 Years

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A Message From Secretary Yeutter



THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20250

Dear Friends:

It is a pleasure to join with you in celebrating the 20th Anniversary of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service.

Over the past two decades, I have watched the success of food assistance programs with special interest. For as some of you may recall, I was Assistant Secretary for Marketing and Consumer Services in the early 1970's during the dramatic expansion of the food stamp and school lunch programs. I was also a proponent of the WIC program and was in Pineville, Kentucky, in 1974 for the ribbon-cutting of the country's first WIC site.

There's no doubt we've made tremendous progress in providing Americans with improved diets. The Food Stamp Program, which was in just a few counties in the early 1960's, has grown to a nationwide system that provides benefits to millions of people each month. Today, there's hardly a school in the country that doesn't participate in the National School Lunch Program. And I agree with those who believe our food assistance programs have been the most successful of all the federal antipoverty efforts.

It's good to be back with you working among many old friends on the challenges we face together. I look forward to further strengthening the effective partnerships we have forged with state agencies and local communities.

Clayton Yeutter
Clayton Yeutter
Secretary of Agriculture



We've Come A Long Way In 20 Years

In the 1960's, American farmers—only 5 percent of the population—were producing food enough to feed the nation and to help feed the world. Yet there was a shadow over this agricultural bounty. Too many Americans could not afford to buy the food they needed for a healthful and adequate diet.

When a series of events placed hunger squarely before the American conscience, the federal government responded with significant changes in its food assistance policies. One of the first of those actions was creating the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) in 1969.

Only a separate USDA agency, it was felt, could give the focus and emphasis required to end hunger. And, in fact, FNS programs have proved to be among the most durable and successful of anti-poverty initiatives.

Under FNS administration, the Food Stamp and National School Lunch Programs have expanded to reach millions of low-income Americans. They've also been augmented with

new forms of assistance tailored to the needs of specific groups, such as women and infants, elderly people, and needy children not served by school nutrition programs.

In 1969, the federal cost of food aid to Americans totaled \$1.1 billion; last year, FNS spending on food assistance programs for needy Americans was \$20 billion, approximately 40 percent of the total USDA budget.

Meanwhile, the specialized network of federal, state, and local offices that manage these operations has grown more efficient, equipped with sophisticated technology to support today's high standards of accuracy and integrity.

From its headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, FNS now operates through seven regional offices throughout the United States. In addition, 65 field offices and 35 satellite offices foster the close local-level relationships that have been a hallmark—together with a commitment to people—of the food assistance programs.

Today, the programs function with the cooperation of one or more government agencies in each state, 233,000 retailers, more than 20,000 school food authorities, and over 10,000 financial institutions. Yet, the FNS staff that manages this complex

Since FNS was set up in 1969, millions of Americans have benefited from the special help the food assistance programs provide.



network has grown modestly—from the 1,200 employees on board when the agency was launched to less than 2,000 today.

USDA Mobilizes Against Hunger

President Richard M. Nixon announced the formation of FNS in a message to Congress that ended with this phrase: "It is a moment to act with vigor; it is a moment to be recalled with pride."

Twenty years later, we know these words to be prophetic. In this issue of *Food and Nutrition* magazine, we recall with pride the day-to-day work and decisions that strengthened and expanded food aid until it reached into every corner of our nation.

While we mention some outstanding individual contributions, we necessarily omit others of equal importance. Our purpose is to paint a broad picture of teamwork, rather than call the roster of all participants.

But the story would be incomplete without reference to the special climate of determination and urgency in which the agency assumed its mission.

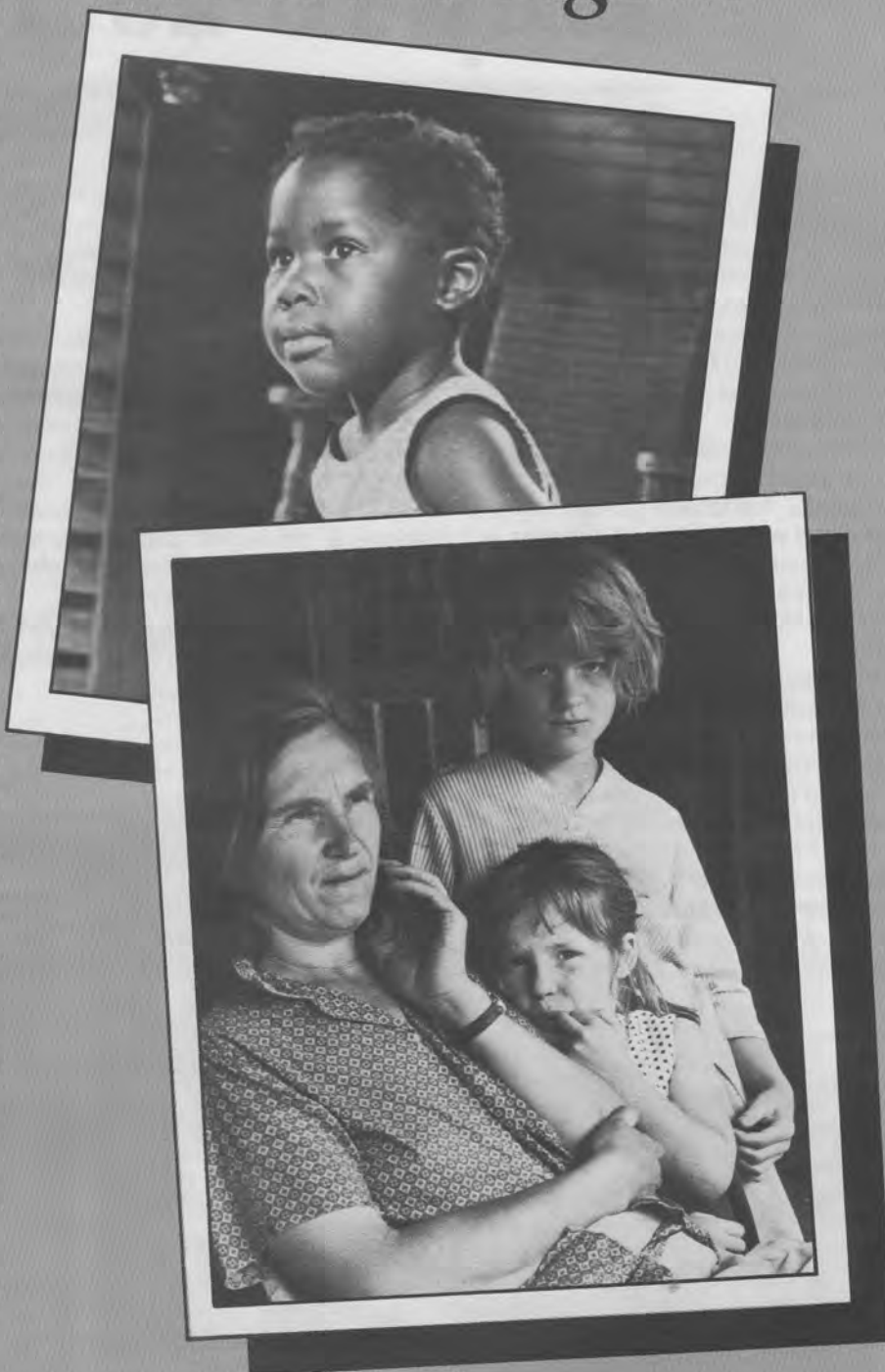
In 1969, many voices and reports swelled the public dossier on the impact of hunger on the lives and hopes of poor Americans.

The extent of hunger and malnutrition was verified by teams of physicians in research sponsored by the privately financed Field Foundation. It was further documented by members of Congress, who traveled into areas of poverty to see the situation for themselves.

The public demanded not only a more effective bridge between surplus food and needy people, but a system that would end poverty-based hunger in America.

In the late 1960's, the Food Stamp Program was still a relatively small operation. While it had grown from the pilot projects established by President John F. Kennedy in 1961 and was authorized on a permanent, national basis by the Food Stamp Act of 1964, many counties did not choose to participate. Appropriations were small, and direct distribution of federal commodities remained the primary source of food aid. Moreover, many counties did not participate in either

*"...a moment to
act with vigor..."*



"The Administration had pledged to give every American, no matter where he or she lived, access to food assistance. Like a team racing for a pennant, we scored each time we brought on board a county not previously served by our food programs."

program, and there was no single, national standard of eligibility.

Congress, which formerly had meted out funds sparingly for food assistance, now demanded something in the nature of a crusade. A small group of food assistance specialists in USDA's Consumer and Marketing Service (CMS) found themselves in a spotlight of publicity and were transformed, practically overnight, into hunger fighters.

Fortunately, the initial gradual growth in the Food Stamp Program had allowed USDA time to develop an administrative structure and working relationships with the states that would make a national program feasible.

A key architect in FNS' response to the challenge was Richard Lyng, then newly appointed Assistant Secretary for Consumer and Marketing Services, and recently Secretary of Agriculture during the Reagan Administration.

"When Dick Lyng was named to oversee USDA's food assistance functions, he hit the ground running," says Phil Fleming, who served as FNS' first public information director. "The Administration had pledged to give every American, no matter where he or she lived, access to food assistance. Like a team racing for a pennant, we scored each time we brought on board a county not previously served by our food programs."

Isabelle Kelley, who headed the overall food stamp operation, agrees on the sense of urgency.

"The night before the President's hunger message went to Congress," she says, "Hod Davis and I were called to Assistant Secretary Lyng's office at 5 o'clock." (Howard Davis was deputy administrator for food programs).

"There we met three young men from the White House whose task was to write, that night, a message that would provide direction to the national consensus to end hunger."

The rest is history. The existence of the Food and Nutrition Service as a separate agency made two clear statements:

- First, the size and scope of food programs required and justified the full attention of an administrator; and
- Second, although food assistance efforts would continue to serve both agricultural and welfare purposes, the emphasis would shift from primarily agricultural purposes to serving the food needs of poor people.

"Food stamps were perceived as a blend of free enterprise and welfare. To grocers, we emphasized that providing assistance through 'normal channels of trade' gave their customers more buying power."



In the late 1960's, many counties had not yet joined the Food Stamp Program. One of FNS' earliest goals was enlisting more counties and expanding the program nationwide.



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"Malnourishment is a national concern because we are a nation that cares about its people," President Richard M. Nixon said in his opening remarks at the 1969 White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health.

In less than a year, the Food Stamp Program surged from participation of 3.6 million people in December 1969 to 9.3 million in November 1970—and continued climbing. Today, in the course of a year, this family food assistance program provides benefits to one in seven Americans. Current average monthly participation is more than 19 million.

A Landmark Conference

Another important outcome of the 1969 hunger message was the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health, which was held in December of that year.

"A few skeptics dismissed the conference as no more than a public relations gimmick, but they were wrong," recalls Phil Fleming. "Dr. Jean Mayer, the Harvard professor of nutrition who was appointed to organize and chair the conference, brought not only management skills and professional knowledge, but a flair for publicity that helped make the conference front-page news nationwide.

"But the true strength of the event came from the 3,000 people—nutritionists, activists, advocates, and others—who were invited to participate. Like a New England town meeting, it was democracy at its finest.

"They were determined the conference would not be just another forum that leaves nothing behind but volumes of unreadable reports. The recommendations of the conference were to be blueprints for action.

"In fact, *Food and Nutrition* magazine was conceived as a continuing channel of communication with conference participants. It was designed to report on progress in achieving the goals set by the conference, and be a vehicle for sharing new ideas and developments in the field."



Edward J. Hekman (pictured at left during a visit to a Chicago elementary school) was FNS' first administrator. The "cup-can" lunch (right) was an innovative way to serve meals in schools without cafeterias.

Taking Programs To the People

Little wonder memories of the early days remain vivid. There was the challenge of a new mission, a high level of support within the federal government, the freedom to innovate, and the satisfaction of seeing achievements overnight.

The agency's first administrator—Edward J. Hekman—brought the right mix of energy and salesmanship to the task of securing the support of local governments and communities.

According to Jim Springfield, who directed the new agency's food stamp operation, the nature of the program gave it wide appeal. This was crucial, since the cooperation of grocers was vital to expanding food stamp assistance.

"Food stamps were perceived as a blend of free enterprise and welfare," Springfield says. "To grocers, we emphasized that providing assistance through 'normal channels of trade' gave their customers more buying power."

Soon Congressmen were vying to announce the extension of food stamp aid to new counties in their districts and keeping the fairness of the selection process under close scrutiny.

Along with rapid program growth went a freewheeling spirit of problem-solving.

Jerry Stein, a food program specialist then and now, recalls working with grocers in the "Hatfield and McCoy country" of Kentucky and West Virginia in the earliest days of the Food Stamp Program.

While monitoring store compliance in these mountain hollows, he discovered that the private food chain could be very different from the state and local government network being used to distribute donated food.

When Stein asked to see the accounting system of a small store, the owner—who didn't read or write—gestured toward two boxes.

"Whenever I pay money out," he said, "I jot it down on a piece of brown paper

and throw it in that box. When someone pays me, I mark that on a white piece and throw it in the other. You're welcome to dig through."

While rules made in Washington were sometimes confounded by such circumstances, the programs themselves were frequently enriched by local improvisation.

Nowhere was this more evident than in FNS' drive to extend lunch programs to every school and make free or reduced-price meals available to all needy children.

"There were one-room schools in the Appalachian region that had no equipment other than a potbelly stove they used for heat," Stein says. "But people just rallied around the way they do for a barn raising. Without any cash, they'd find what they needed in the community."

An approach widely used in both rural and inner-city low-income schools was the "cup-can" system. Schools needed only a portable oven to offer a hot main dish. Children ate an entree from individual serving-sized cans which, when heated and supplemented with cold foods, met the USDA meal standard.

Twenty Years Of Change

With automation just around the corner, FNS bookkeeping never had such elegant simplicity as the brown paper/white paper box system. Nevertheless, in the early years, decision-making was not as "codified" as it is today, and it sometimes owed more to individual judgment than to formal procedures.

Nor did such decisions always go unchallenged. A series of lawsuits—some argued before the U.S. Supreme Court—were instrumental in shaping both the programs and agency management.

"When I came on board, all the program regulations fit on a single page," marvels Isabelle Kelley.

Regulations grew longer and more complex as the agency had to answer to public satisfaction such questions as what, in a world of rapidly changing family units, should constitute a household.

Along with the constraints of public scrutiny came the benefits of public input. The Food Stamp Program that emerged after vigorous public debate is more responsive not only to the persons it serves but to the state and local officials who administer it.

Here are some of the landmark developments in policy under FNS' administration, for the Food Stamp Program as well as for other major programs.

- By 1970, uniform national eligibility standards had been established for the Food Stamp Program, and for free and reduced-price school lunches.

- Also important to child nutrition was a change made in allocating federal funds. Beginning in 1971, funds were provided based on "performance funding." This meant that reimbursement was paid to school districts on a per meal basis. Additional funding for meals served to needy children was based on actual service. Previously, this additional support went only to schools designated as being needy.

Currently, 90,000 schools participate in the National School Lunch Program, and benefits are closely targeted to need. The number of free and reduced-price meals has risen from 15

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percent of the total meals served in 1969 to over 48 percent today.

- In another early development, the Special Food Service Program for Children—a pilot project when the agency was formed—was split into the Summer Food Service Program and the Child Care Food Program. Both programs were designed to provide nutritious meals and snacks to low-income children in settings other than schools—such as residential institutions, day care homes and centers, summer camps, and neighborhood playgrounds.

- In 1972, the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) was authorized as a pilot project. The first WIC site opened in Pineville, Kentucky, in 1974. In the same year, the Food Stamp Program was mandated nationally.

- From 1977 on, people were no longer required to purchase part of their food stamp allotments. This opened the program to many of the country's neediest people.

The same year saw changes in the school lunch meal patterns, giving food service workers added flexibility in pleasing a new generation of children with distinct eating habits.

- In another innovation reflecting the "food and fitness" concerns that were building in the 1970's, federal funds became available to support state nutrition education activities for children, parents, teachers, and food service workers in child nutrition programs. At the same time, the national dietary guidelines became a model for improving the quality of school lunches.

- In 1981, President Reagan directed the distribution of surplus cheese to low-income households. Subsequently, Congress passed the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Act to continue and expand food donations and to help states meet the costs of administering the program.

Since its inception, this program has

distributed more than 5 billion pounds of surplus food to needy households, greatly reducing stockpiles and storage costs.

- Significant reforms designed to improve management and increase efficiency were introduced in the early 1980's, as the federal government sought to reduce the budget deficit. Benefits were targeted to the most needy; eligibility standards were tightened; and accountability was strengthened.

The Food Stamp Program, through its Make Your Food Dollars Count campaign, prepared and distributed informational materials to help low-income families stretch their dollars and improve their family's nutrition.

- As the era of budget austerity continued, new actions were taken to reduce waste, abuse, and errors. Advanced technology and better management were reflected in the Food Stamp Program with the addition of photo identification cards, computerized recordkeeping, checking of application information against wage records, and other techniques.

Also, Congress mandated a food stamp quality control system with penalties for states where error rates exceed established ceilings.

- In 1985, Congress amended the Food Stamp Program to require states to establish employment and training programs for recipients. The emphasis on work mirrored a national move to reduce welfare dependency that would culminate in a major reform of public assistance in 1988.

- Another important current trend is the revamping of the commodity distribution system. While a primary purpose remains to remove surplus food from the farm marketplace, the commodity program now responds more fully to user needs in packaging, delivery, communication, and in the quality and variety of the food it provides.



FNS food assistance programs have reached into every corner of our nation, serving communities as diverse as Waynesboro, Virginia, (above) and San Francisco's Chinatown (below).

Conclusion

Thanks to FNS' tenacious 20 years of food aid activities, progress has been made. Millions of lives have been enhanced, and billions of dollars saved that might have been lost to diet-related illness.

Changes in the social and economic climate continue to influence the agency's priorities. And this is not surprising. What is remarkable is the constancy—and the success—with which the Food and Nutrition Service and its partners in state and local agencies have pursued their basic mission of ensuring a healthful diet for all Americans.

article by Wini Scheffler



A Look At The Early Days In The Southeast

The Food and Nutrition Service's Southeast region has been a fertile area to test pilot programs and discover talented employees. The result has been the expansion of a number of regional projects to national programs and a steady flow of individuals from the Atlanta office to key positions in Washington and other regions.

The entire South was undergoing a tremendous social and economic upheaval in the early 1960's when FNS was just coming into its own. As racial integration was changing the social fabric of the region, mechanization was altering economic patterns in large and small communities alike. Mass unemployment occurred in many towns as new interstate highway systems bypassed them.

The area also felt the impact of events in other areas—for example, large numbers of Hispanics began to have a cultural impact as thousands of Cubans sought refuge in southern states.

Arvid Dopson, deputy administrator of FNS' Southeast region and senior FNS employee in the region, says, "We've seen a lot of changes over the past 25 to 30 years, and we've learned a lot about what works and what doesn't work. I feel we've made a lot of progress in opening up a variety of federal feeding programs to a large segment of the needy population."

Helped with early food stamp program

Dopson joined FNS' predecessor agency, the Agricultural Marketing Service, in 1959. One of his first assignments was to manage the opening of a pilot food stamp program in Floyd County, Kentucky. Floyd was one of eight counties targeted nationally to test the program. Nearly all of the counties were located in the

country's hard-hit mining areas.

"We were looking at high rates of unemployment throughout the mining industry," Dopson says. "In many instances, there wasn't any other employment available to people in those areas and they were destitute."

According to Dopson, the cultural attitudes of many Southerners toward any type of public assistance was what made establishing feeding programs so challenging.

"By the late '60s, we were charged with establishing a feeding program—food stamp or commodity distribution—in every county in the region," he says.

"Yet, the social mores we were up against ranged from the staunch refusal of many independent mountain



Floyd County, Kentucky, was one of the counties selected to test the pilot Food Stamp Program in the early 1960's. This photo from 1964 shows a woman receiving her family's food stamps.

people to utilize food help no matter how dire their situation, to the routine practice in many counties of removing families on AFDC from any assistance during tobacco-stripping or cotton-picking season, to outright racial prejudice. I guess you could say those were interesting times."

Being in on the beginning of a program has its pluses and frequently provides opportunities for employees to make tangible contributions. In



Another early food stamp project in the Southeast was in Nash County, North Carolina. This couple and their sons were some of the first people to be helped through the program.

Dopson's case, he was called in to participate at meetings in Washington and other areas of the country as the Food Stamp Program was being formulated.

"This was especially valuable as the program began to expand in our region," he says. "It also helped when I was called into Washington and given the task of assisting in developing the first basic issuance schedule for the Food Stamp Program."

Social changes added special challenges

Developing issuance schedules and timetables for setting up a food stamp or commodity distribution program was easy compared to convincing opposing factions in various counties that all of their residents had a right to receive food assistance if needed, according to Dopson.

"Many areas of the South were going through social and economic turmoil," Dopson says. "Up until the early '60s, tenant farming prevailed. Large

landowners had scores of tenant farmers who exchanged hand labor for free housing, a little cash, and a garden patch.

"However, as tractors began to replace mules and cotton harvesters began to replace extensive hand labor, landowners found themselves with little need for the large number of tenant farmers they were supporting. And the tenant farmers, many of whom were illiterate, found themselves with no skills to exchange for their free housing and garden plot.

"In general, on the larger farms, the best workers were taught to drive and maintain the tractors. The rest had no work but were allowed to continue living in the tenant housing. Eventually, the majority of this housing was torn down or utilized for other purposes. As could be expected, this resulted in a growing number of unemployed, homeless farm families, and resentment was high on both sides."

In the middle of this economic crisis, federal courts determined that

"separate but equal" did not meet the intent of the Civil Rights Act of 1954. Then, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. The result was social upheaval in the workplace, in schools, and on the homefront.

Dopson recalls an incident in western Tennessee that required all the skill he could muster to convince local politicians and county leaders that setting up a feeding program for the poor was in the best interest of everybody—not to mention that it was the humane thing to do.

"We had a situation erupt that had racial, political, and economic overtones," he says. "Farmers in the area had almost unanimously kicked the tenant farmers off their property, and the result was a series of 'tent cities' for the unemployed and homeless. When we set up a food

As mechanization replaced hand labor, many tenant farmers and their families (right) were left homeless. When FNS staff tried to set up food programs to help (below), they sometimes met with resistance and needed support from local law enforcement officials.



distribution program in two of these counties, feelings toward us were hostile.

"I remember once when one of our staff from Atlanta, who was in charge of setting up these programs, was talking on the phone with us and suddenly said he had to go because someone had just come into his office and was threatening him with a pistol."

Handling recipient complaints was another area Dopson describes as requiring steel nerves. "We frequently met in churches where people would bring in their complaints about being discriminated from receiving federal food assistance. Some of these complaints were legitimate, some weren't. But, regardless, the whole time you were there, you were aware that churches were being burned and bombed, and that people were even being shot."

Dopson notes that racism wasn't practiced by everyone or progress couldn't have been made. "A number of leaders from both races were working together and with us to set up programs to help needy citizens in their counties regardless of race or creed."

"In fact, I know of one situation in Clarksdale, Mississippi, where members of the community—black and white—took turns guarding the home of Aaron Henry, the state NAACP director, after his first home had been damaged. I found this out when I went to visit Aaron at his home and was met at the door by a man armed with a shotgun."

Developing a trusting relationship with the leaders of groups FNS was trying to reach was the key to making

any headway during those hectic times, Dopson says.

"I had a simple formula for working with Aaron Henry and everybody else," he says. "If someone was being treated unfairly, we would correct it. I guaranteed it. But, it was up to that person to give us the correct information. They had to provide tangible proof that a person was or wasn't being treated unfairly."

Much talent and many ideas from Southeast

Working in such a challenging climate had a lot of professional rewards, according to Dopson, but one of the best was working with many talented individuals who began their FNS careers in the Southeast region.

To name just a few: Herb Rorex became national school lunch director; Jim Hutchins and Neil Freeman, national food distribution directors; Vernon Morgan, director of personnel and later of regional operations; Jim Greer, deputy food distribution director; Gene Dickey, Southwest regional administrator; Hicks Elmore,

Western regional administrator; and Jack Boozer, deputy administrator for the Western region.

Andy Hornsby, who currently serves as Alabama's welfare commissioner, was previously regional administrator for the Mid-Atlantic region (MARO).

"Obviously, most of these individuals already had a lot going for them," Dopson says. "But the political, economic, and cultural climate in the Southeast during this time enabled them to explore and expand their natural talents."

Dopson notes that several pilot projects begun in the Southeast by FNS, or through state agencies working with FNS, have been expanded nationally.

"A nutrition education program piloted in Mississippi for families on USDA's food stamp or commodity distribution programs became so successful that it eventually was removed from FNS and became a multi-million dollar educational program in USDA's Extension Service," he says.

Another program begun in the Southeast and expanded nationally was a supplemental food program for pregnant and nursing mothers, infants, and small children (the precursor to the WIC program), which was piloted in Greensboro, North Carolina; Nashville; and Memphis. The initial program was so highly regarded that St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital participated with USDA in the research phase of this program.

Mississippi was the first state to institute statewide cost containment on foods distributed in its WIC program by negotiating prices directly with vendors. Tennessee was one of the first states to adapt this cost-containment approach to the retail level through a vendor rebate program.

"Over the years, FNS' role in food assistance programs has changed from a hands-on operation to more of a management/review operation," Dopson says. "But, overall, I don't think the agency has ever lost sight of its mission to provide food help to those who can't provide for themselves."

"I get a lot of personal satisfaction from knowing that I, through FNS' food assistance programs, have made a positive difference in the lives of others."

article by Connie Crunkleton

Reaching Children:

An Interview With Gene Dickey

One of the people who has worked with FNS at many levels is Southwest regional administrator Gene Dickey.

He is recognized nationally as an innovative program manager and food assistance policy expert. During his career, he has not only been honored with several awards from the agency and the Department, but has also twice, in 1983 and 1988, received the Presidential Rank Award for Meritorious Executive—one of the most prestigious awards a member of the federal senior executive service can earn.

Dickey started in the school lunch program with FNS' forerunner (Consumer and Marketing Service) in 1967 in the Atlanta regional office. He went on to headquarters where he served in a variety of key positions.

He left federal service for a while to work with child nutrition in North Carolina, but returned to FNS in November 1980 to become administrator of the Southwest region. During his 9 years in the Southwest, he has also had special assignments in Washington, serving, at different times, as acting administrator and as acting associate administrator of the agency.





In the late 1960's, there were many schools, like this one-room school in Knox County, Kentucky (left), that did not have lunchroom facilities. Many of today's schools (right) have sophisticated food services.

Having been involved in federal food assistance in progressively responsible positions for over 20 years, Dickey has a deep interest in and insight into the development of the various programs. In the following interview, he describes how programs have evolved in response to what was needed—and what society wanted—at that time.

Q: When you came to FNS in 1967, federal food assistance was structured quite differently from today. What were the major food programs?

A: The principal child nutrition programs were school lunch, school breakfast, an equipment program to help schools get necessary food service equipment, and a very large special milk program. Since the

Food Stamp Program was just getting started, the principal family food assistance program was food distribution.

My first job with FNS involved working with private schools in the Southeast. One of my responsibilities was to handle school lunch reimbursement claims. Of course, we didn't have automation then, so we had our own ledgers and, after we received the claims, we manually paid them.

Q: What was the social climate of our country at that time?

A: The issues of human rights, poverty, and malnutrition were just emerging. They were not full-blown, but the nation was beginning to focus on them.

In 1968, a team of doctors from the Field Foundation shocked the nation with their report of widespread hunger in America. It had been the doctors' goal to document malnutrition, and they did. The result was an outpouring of

public sentiment and support.

People from every political, economic, and social level began to focus on the problem. There was a White House conference on the subject, and Congress and the Administration worked together on legislation needed to authorize and fund programs.

One outgrowth was the establishment of FNS. Another was President Nixon's pledge to provide free or reduced-price meals for every needy school child.

Before 1969, the philosophy of the law was that free meals should be given to economically deprived children; however, there was no federal mandate nor federal funds provided to do so. There were also no standard criteria as to what constituted poverty.

It was left to local officials to help children in their schools. What was done was based on their good will, their sense of responsibility, and their ability to fund what they thought was needed.

So, the President's pledge presented a real challenge. There were many



schools without lunch programs, there were no federal funds, and no eligibility standards. When Public Law 91-248 was passed, all of that changed.

Q: Seeing to it that lunch was available to every needy child in school appears to have been a big job. Didn't you run into some problems?

A: Yes, it was a tremendous undertaking because of two obstacles. One was the structure of school systems and school facilities. Another was resistance to federal aid.

Back then, we had not had the benefit of the school consolidation efforts of the last 20 years. There were many one- and two-room schools throughout the country, and often, even in larger schools, there were no cafeteria facilities.

We had huge communities that had been structured in the 1800's and the early 1900's for children to come home for lunch—but society and economics had changed, and now there was no one for them to come home to. Since these schools had been designed

without food service and often didn't even have a common room to use, we had to be innovative and get food satellited in or provide bag lunches.

The other obstacle we were up against was a feeling that accepting government help was somehow inconsistent with being responsible for one's own family. With money and resources, it was fairly easy for us to accomplish our goal in some regions of the country. In other areas, though, it was difficult because of fear of government interference.

It was fiercely debated where lines should be drawn between government help and family responsibility, and, in fact, it still is. You have to understand that when we tried to help school districts provide food service to their students, we were dealing with the very fiber of what those communities were about—with their beliefs of parental responsibility.

Q: I have heard you mention a project called "Operation Metropolitan." Just what was that effort?

A: We went into the cities and assessed the circumstances there in terms of numbers of children in the community, numbers of children in school, numbers of children being reached by food service, and numbers of children without food service.

We then compared these data to poverty levels to get an idea of unmet need. From the data, we developed standard eligibility criteria, even though we did not yet have legislation establishing it.

Q: And then came Public Law 91-248. What did it do?

A: P.L. 91-248 authorized state administrative expense funds to operate the programs. It also established eligibility criteria for free and reduced-price meals and provided additional funding for the child nutrition programs.

The significant thing, though, was that it established entitlement funding. This evoked a lot of political and public debate. It was a serious public policy issue—the basic thought being that disenfranchised children are entitled to a school meal at no cost.

This attitude was reflected in the application form used at the time. It was a simple affidavit of income and number of children in the family. There were no questions, no reviews, no verification. That type of philosophy was clearly a reflection of the time.

Q: It sounds like that was an exciting time to work for FNS.

A: Those were very exciting times—very intense in terms of work. Everything was new because it was a time of major expansion. Of course, there was a down side to all of this, too. There was a feeling throughout government that you could solve almost any problem by throwing money at it, and we threw a lot of money.

But we did narrow the gap on hunger. There's no question about that. We reached more children than ever before, and we changed the way of looking at poverty. We were successful, through expansion and through school consolidations, in getting a food service operation in almost every school—certainly, in all that really wanted one.

Q: Let me switch our focus to FNS' relationship with the states. Has that also evolved?

A: Yes, I think it has. In the early years of our agency, federal employees were viewed as being the "leaders" in terms of how to do things. In fact, our basic philosophy was one of a partnership in which we provided states with technical assistance. We did that very well then because we had more people and specialized expertise. State agencies were competent, but they did not have the staff they have today.

As state and local staff expanded and developed professionally, their capabilities improved tremendously. They are now fully capable of running the programs.

At the same time states were increasing their expertise, the federal budget deficit was down-sizing federal operations. Of necessity, our management philosophy has evolved more toward monitoring and ensuring accountability.

I feel this is appropriate. There is far less federal involvement today in state and local administration of these programs. This is as it should be.

Q: As a long-time and effective civil servant, please share with us a little of your philosophy concerning public service.

A: We could do a better job of public service in this country. Too often we as civil servants, from the starting levels right through the senior executive service, lack a basic understanding of government. We do not understand how government works—the roles and responsibilities of the legislative, judicial, and executive branches.

There should be a better distinction in public servants' minds between their own personal political, social, and economic philosophies and their professional responsibilities. In the decisionmaking process, public servants should express themselves and provide input concerning an issue. That process will render the best decisions, and that is what every Administration expects and deserves. But, after the decision is made and the change is effected, we have a duty to respond quickly and to follow that course.

Q: We've come a long way in 20 years. What do you see as the next challenge?

A: Yes, we have come a long way. We've developed and put into place programs that serve the specific food assistance needs of almost every group of people in America.

As for the future, I think the biggest challenge is to target our scarce resources toward the highest priorities and to determine how to structure programs in order to continue our



School Lunch Director Receives Special Honor

commitment to the economically deprived. This process must be balanced against the changing economic conditions in the country and increased competition for available resources.

Another challenge will be equipping our people—the citizens of this nation—to become self-sufficient and more productive contributors to society.

interview by Blanche Jackson

Many of the people who have been involved with child nutrition and family food assistance programs have worn many hats.

This is certainly true of Thelma Crenshaw, former school food service director, teacher, and principal from Chesterfield County, Virginia. Because she touched so many lives during her 42-year career, she recently received a rare honor—having the county's new elementary school named after her.

Thelma Crenshaw started teaching in the eastern Virginia county in 1925. She was the principal of an elementary school from 1933 through World War II. From there until the remainder of her career, she was the director of special services, which encompassed many programs.

Contributed in many ways

Among her accomplishments was starting a visiting teacher program in Chesterfield County to help children with social problems.

She also started a special education program to help retarded children who could not keep up with regular classes, and looked after what was called the "homebound program" for youngsters with illnesses that prevented attendance at school.

"I was into everything," says Crenshaw. "I worked in every school in the county. The county was smaller then, so when new programs would come long, I was asked to do them."

That included the new federal lunch program—the National School Lunch Program—which was authorized in 1946. Crenshaw had handled the kitchen for a Girl Scouts summer camp for many years. Planning meals and supervising the camp's kitchen, along with some college courses in home economics, made her the likely candidate to administer the program.

Crenshaw remembers the program's beginnings well. "We gradually worked into it," she says.

Until that time, food service had been operated independently in each school by a PTA. "As the principals got to know me, they became interested in this federal program. Whenever they built a new school, the principal knew

he'd go with the federal program.

"With all the regulations from the government, I had to do a lot of research. The government wanted a Type A lunch. I took people who had probably been through elementary school only, and taught them a great deal about nutritive values and what was necessary for the child to have each day."

Providing quality meals a priority

Hamburgers, hot dogs, meat loaf, string beans and salad greens were some of the components of the lunches Crenshaw served.

"A dessert was not required," she says, "but I always believed that if you offered a cookie, kids would buy the meal."

Prior to her retirement, Crenshaw was in the midst of centralizing the lunch program and involving students in selecting menu items—ideas which are integral to many school food service operations today.

"Over the years, Miss Crenshaw's concern was to provide quality meals to children at the best possible price," says Jim Raines, principal of the Thelma Crenshaw Elementary School. "And the children learned about nutrition from those meals."

Crenshaw says she had many rewards during her career with the school system. Improving the meal service—from ladling soup during the Depression to serving well-balanced meals, complete with fresh, hot rolls—is one of them.

Her interest in people, her good nature, and her ambitious attitude carried over to the programs she directed.

"She retired from the job," says Raines, "but she didn't retire from her interest in the school system and the children."

The vote was unanimous to name the school after Thelma Crenshaw. "It never crossed my mind," she says, that she would be honored that way. "I did what I did all those years because I was interested in children."

article by Marian Wig

Making WIC Work:

An Interview With Harold McLean

Harold McLean, administrator of FNS' Northeast Region has been involved with the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) since its early days when he served as the program's first national director.

McLean has seen WIC evolve from an idea in Congress to a \$20 million pilot project to a \$2 billion program operated today by 87 state agencies working with approximately 1,700 local agencies.

As WIC director from March 1975 to September 1976, McLean faced the challenges of creating a national program. As regional administrator for the past 13 years, he has witnessed the effects of expansion and change. He has played an active role in modernizing WIC operations through automation, encouraging the use of computers for such varied functions as caseload management and monitoring and controlling abuse among vendors who exchange WIC participants' vouchers for specified food items.

McLean's accomplishments as Northeast administrator include taking the lead in directing major operational changes in the New York WIC program that saved \$12 million in food package costs and increased participation by 27,000. He shared proven measures for preventing vendor fraud and abuse through national distribution of the booklet, "Four Tested Strategies for Preventing WIC Vendor Abuse." His efforts brought about changes in WIC and food stamp regulations firmly establishing vendor non-compliance in either program as a basis for removal from both.

Prior to joining WIC, he served in a variety of key positions with FNS, including deputy director of food distribution in Washington from 1971 to 1975.



McLean brought to FNS many years of management skills and private sector experience in food marketing, storage, and transportation. For more than 20 years, he was responsible for food promotion and distribution for the Great A&P Tea Company, headquartered in New York.

In the following interview, McLean shares some thoughts on and experiences with WIC.

Q: How did you first become involved with WIC and what were the initial challenges you faced in working with state and local officials in creating a national program?

A: When the legislation passed and WIC began, it was given to

Harold McLean was the first national director of the WIC program. Since 1976, he has been working with WIC and other food programs as administrator of FNS' Northeast region.

FNS as a branch of food distribution. At the time, I was deputy director of food distribution. When WIC became a separate unit, I was initially named temporary director and several months later appointed permanent director.

The major challenge at the time was to create an administrative environment that would allow us to run a good program. To insure that, I had to get out there and make sure every state knew what the program was;

When the WIC program opened in Pineville, Kentucky, in 1974, Deborah Holland and her young son Robert were the first to receive WIC coupons and use them at a local grocery store.

what the restrictions were; how much money was available; and most importantly, how to spend the money prudently and efficiently.

The states were willing to start. All they needed was encouragement and more information. I met with health officials, had meetings with regional and state health department staff, and spoke at organizational meetings like the American Public Health Association and many others. The media responded favorably, and WIC received a lot of good publicity.

We got off to a good start. We had a small staff of 16 in Washington and 2 people in each of the regions. Within the first year, 250 project areas were approved in all states but one. The federal people and state health officials were highly dedicated, motivated, and very cooperative, and that had a major effect on our success. I can't emphasize enough the role of those great FNS people who gave so much to this endeavor.



Q: What do you consider your most significant accomplishment during your tenure as national director?

A: My most significant accomplishment actually occurred while I was still in food distribution. WIC started out briefly as a branch of our division.

At the time, the food distribution director was Juan Del Castillo. Castillo was dissatisfied with the federal government's letter-of-credit system. Under the system, money was sent to the states in a loose fashion. There was little or no control on states' "overdrawing" beyond their immediate needs, which enabled them to accrue interest on the grants they received.

Since the interest was nonrecoverable, we felt we needed a better system of control over the grants. Castillo succeeded in designing a new letter-of-credit arrangement, which limited the amount of money the states could "draw down," and he convinced the Treasury

Department to pilot the system. Castillo's system was challenged in Congress by Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, who wanted to convert financial arrangements with the states to a system of advance payments. I believed in Castillo's system and argued for it before the Senate Agricultural Committee.

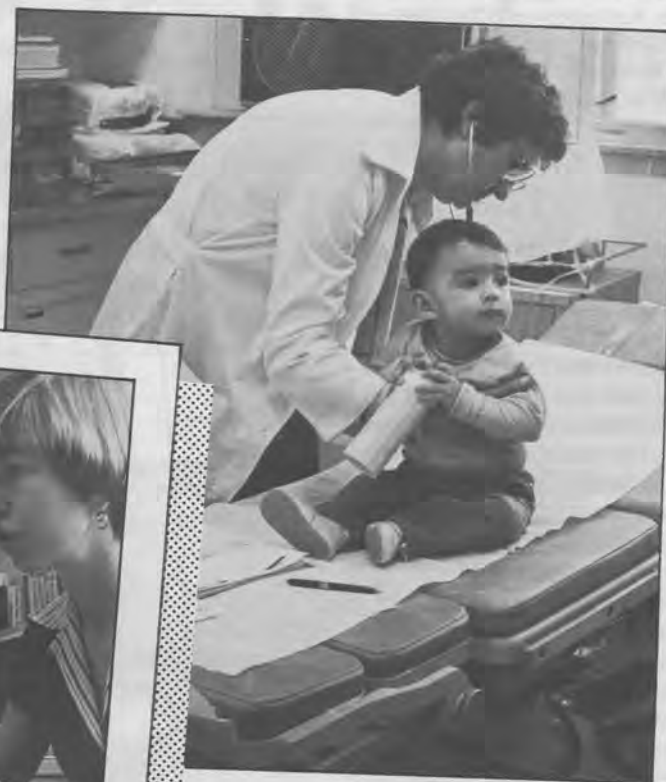
Fortunately, my argument prevailed and the letter-of-credit system stayed and eventually expanded to the entire federal government. It saves taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. Although I didn't initiate the letter-of-credit system, I felt I played a part in preserving it.

Q: What do you consider to be the most significant changes in the administration of the WIC program over the years?

A: As WIC grew larger, the need for insuring better administration and compliance with the intent as well as the spirit of the law increased. The challenge has always been to maintain the program's effectiveness without making it too complicated.

Computerization has played a major part in preserving the integrity as well as serving the nutritional goals of the program. I don't think it has reached its full potential because all states don't have the capabilities yet, but they are getting there. Computerization has made it easier to keep data on recipients and insulate the program against vendor abuse.

Nutrition education has been an important part of WIC since its start. Local health agencies tailor food packages and nutrition counseling to the individual needs of participating mothers and children.



Q: To what do you attribute the Northeast region's success in minimizing and controlling vendor abuse?

A: The regional WIC staff has been very insistent on strict vendor abuse controls. One way they have done this is by limiting the number of vendors so there are fewer to control. They've also developed computer printouts to identify high-risk vendors, and have begun analyzing vendor records to compare WIC redemptions with food stamp redemptions and reported annual sales.

With these and several other fraud prevention measures, states find it relatively easy to disqualify vendors. New York, for example, really clamped down on its vendors. The state put in stringent rules and consequently was able to get rid of a lot of vendors who were abusing the program. This

caused a dramatic drop in the cost of the WIC food package, which allowed the state to greatly increase participation.

Our WIC people were the first ones to really enforce the disqualification of vendors from food stamps if they had been disqualified from WIC. And now it works both ways. That has been a great deterrent to fraud.

I think the WIC program is working hard to overcome vendor problems, and many promising initiatives are underway.

Q: Another area of concern in WIC today is targeting benefits. The Northeast regional office and the Connecticut WIC program have developed what's called the "Automated Nutritional Risk Scoring System," which may serve as a model for targeting benefits to the neediest individuals on a nationwide basis. Could you tell us about this?

A: The concept was developed by the WIC staff, and basically it is an automated certification system that determines the priority of applicants for program benefits. Local WIC staff will evaluate the applicant's status using preprogrammed software. Program eligibility and priority will be determined based on factors such as nutritional risk, age, and income.

I believe it will be an important step in the future certification of WIC applicants, and it will provide for more effective caseload management. As the project nears completion, we will, of course, share it with other regions.

Q: Much of WIC's success may be attributed to state and local agencies tailoring their programs to local needs. The Northeast region consists of a mix of states from small to large with urban as well as rural areas. Given that, what do you consider to be the region's greatest challenges?

A: The challenge in the Northeast is to make certain each state's delivery system operates optimally and meets participants' needs. Each state has the option of providing its own delivery system.

For example, Vermont, which uses dairies for home delivery, reaches more potentially eligible people than any other state. It has been successful because it had a strong desire to expand its program, and it designed ways to achieve this and use them to its advantage.

In more urban areas, retail distribution usually works best. The potential for vendor problems is great in each system, but good administration, effective management, and improved computerization can deal effectively with these problems.

Q: What do you consider to be the greatest challenges facing WIC?

A: Reaching the groups the program serves—women, infants, and young children—is undeniably a high priority. I think the greatest challenge is reaching a high percentage of eligible people most in need of the program. In some areas, we are doing this, but we need to find and provide program benefits to those at highest risk who are not getting them.

Another challenge is protecting the program against fraud potential, especially vendor fraud. We have to be vigilant and develop computerized systems to prevent fraud rather than react to it. In short, as custodians of the taxpayers' money, we have an obligation to see that the money is spent effectively and in accordance with the law.

Q: You have been associated with WIC since its beginning. How would you summarize your achievements and experience in working with this program?

A: I think the achievements really belong to the WIC staff at the federal, state, and local levels, who are highly dedicated people. I had a lot of fun starting the program. To have the experience that very few people have of starting something brand new and developing it was challenging and very fulfilling.

interview by Cynthia Tackett

The Local Connection:

Field Offices Play Important Role

Independent and individualistic are two words often used to describe Vermonters. Not coincidentally, perhaps, they are two words which aptly describe Donald J. Carrigan, officer-in-charge (OIC) of the Montpelier, Vermont, field office.

Carrigan, a one-man operation, finds being an OIC fits his temperament and works to his advantage. "I know what has to be done," he says, "and I'm free to do it without the restraints I would probably have in a larger office setting."

An FNS "veteran," Carrigan has been the Montpelier OIC since 1968 when the field office was relocated from St. Albans, Vermont, where he had been the OIC since 1965.

Carrigan has watched his position evolve through the years from one of a program specialist to one of a program generalist. He has experienced his responsibilities shift with program changes and advancing technology.

Historically, OIC's were key to the development of the Food Stamp Program; today they are an integral part of all regional operations.

Remembering the early days

For Carrigan, his professional "glory days" were the early days of the Food Stamp Program, and he fondly recalls the period. "It was an exciting time," he says.

"The mid-to-late 1960's were part of the Great Society years, and public support for the then new Food Stamp Program was high. We literally had programs springing up overnight. It was a very satisfying time. The work

made you feel important because you knew you were doing something that had to be done."

John Ghiorzi, assistant regional administrator for FNS' Northeast region, explains the early role of the OIC. "When the OIC position was created in the field offices, it was under the auspices of the Food Stamp Program, and the OIC reported directly to the regional office food stamp director.

"At the time the program was starting, there was a great need to sign up retail stores to participate, and the OIC had the specific responsibility to authorize them."

A foundation for Carrigan's independent work habits was laid in those early days. "We had a specific goal—to set up the Food Stamp Program in a given area—and we were judged on results. We didn't have a lot of regulatory procedures governing how we got the job done.

"Usually, this involved going into an assigned area and contacting the welfare agency to explain what we were doing. Then we used radio, TV, and newspaper ads, flyers or anything else at our disposal to let stores know that we would be holding a meeting to discuss the program.

"After the meetings, we spent days going into the various cities in an area and authorizing retailers. And, of course, we had to go to the banks to explain the redemption process."

OIC's now have different focus

As the program expanded through

the years, the focus of the OIC's responsibilities shifted. According to John Ghiorzi, this may be attributed to two developments.

First, as the number of authorized stores increased (there are now more than 230,000 authorized stores), the emphasis was less on authorization and more on quality control and management evaluation reviews. Second, in the late 1970's, FNS administrators decided to create a separate organizational structure for field offices and have the field staff work with all FNS programs.

Also, computerization has dramatically impacted field operations, taking the field offices from a manual system of authorizing retailers to a fairly sophisticated automated system that is fast as well as accurate.

One price of this progress is the need for less direct contact with the retailers. Carrigan, who by his own admission is reluctant to change, laments this diminishing contact with retailers. "Years ago, all we did day in and day out was visit stores. Now, we have virtually no contact with them unless something unusual happens. I'll admit the program runs pretty well now, but I sometimes think we should have more contact with the retailers than we do these days."

More valuable all the time

Both Ghiorzi and Carrigan agree on the importance of locally based personnel. "Because of my knowledge of local conditions I feel I can be more effective than someone located at a

regional level," says Carrigan. He believes field offices should be moving toward functioning as "mini regional offices" in light of their increased responsibilities.

As the OIC's duties have broadened through the years, the importance of field operations has increased. "I feel there will be an increased emphasis on field operations in the next few years," says Ghiorzi.

"As budgets become tighter, field offices become more valuable because they are closer to where the action is and better able to monitor local situations. You might say that the OIC's are the 'eyes and ears' of the regional office."

article by Cynthia Tackett



Getting grocers interested in the Food Stamp Program and authorizing them to accept food stamps was a huge job in the early days of FNS. This grocer (above) was one of the first to join. Today, many grocers also accept WIC coupons (left).

Child Nutrition In Colorado:

Schools Get The Message



Daniel Wisotzkey and FNS aren't exactly strangers. They're jointly celebrating a twentieth anniversary, and they've come a long way together.

Wisotzkey joined the Colorado Department of Education in February 1969. He was one of three employees covering child nutrition programs in the state. By fall, he was reviewing school lunch operations across Colorado and in August 1970 took up the reins as state child nutrition director.

Like all good marriages, the 20-year relationship has had its ups and downs. Wisotzkey says he has seen a lot of change and progress in child nutrition—with special emphasis on the word “nutrition.”

Early lunch efforts not always successful

Wisotzkey—and FNS—inherited the roots of a lunch program that began as an outlet for surplus foods. Early Colorado records indicate that 60 percent of the meals served under the aegis of sponsoring parent groups or PTA organizations in the 1940s were nutritionally incomplete.

The need for more focus on nutrition did not go unnoticed in the state. An archival paper from 1956, written by a food service director in Greeley, Colorado, is interesting. Noting how many World War II draftees were rejected because of malnutrition and its effects, the writer foresaw the importance of serving well-balanced, attractive lunches and encouraging good eating habits.

She felt strongly that lunch should be a part of the overall school program

and that schools would benefit from federal support.

“When our government steps in with a nutrition program such as the National School Lunch Program,” she wrote, “it seems doubtful that a school could afford not to avail itself of the educational and healthful means of promoting a partially financed program of such great benefits to the school child.”

When Wisotzkey began working with the school lunch program 13 years later, he carried the same message to local school boards. At the time, as many as 300 schools did not have lunch programs. Apparently, his work paid off—today Wisotzkey can count nonparticipating schools on the fingers of one hand. Only three school districts in the state do not have lunch programs, and some of these are one-room facilities or are in remote areas.

That's not to say the state director will not continue to try to enlist even the most isolated schools. In fact, many remote schools do take part in the lunch program. For example, Montrose, on the sparsely populated Western Slope, has a ranch school that serves four or five children and operates only from April through October each year.

Increased funds and commodity support

Meal reimbursement figures are more impressive these days than 20 years ago, certainly. The average reimbursement during the 1969-70 school year was about 3.1 cents per meal. Colorado received about \$3.3

In 1969, as many as 300 Colorado schools did not participate in the lunch program. Today, there are only a handful of nonparticipating schools.

million that year for all programs, including \$25,000 in nonfood assistance funds to provide kitchen equipment for schools entering the program or upgrading outmoded kitchens.

In fiscal year 1987, Colorado received \$44.5 million in reimbursement and more than \$12 million in commodity assistance for school meal programs.

Wisotzkey has also seen considerable improvement in the quality and usefulness of USDA-donated foods provided to schools. In the early years, some choices were less than ideal.

Once, for example, navy beans were shipped to Colorado and pinto beans to New England. Since kids didn't recognize the unfamiliar varieties, they wouldn't eat them. Another year, much of the plentiful supply of fresh cranberries went to waste because they spoiled by the time they had been trucked all the way to western Colorado.

Wisotzkey has been a strong voice for lunch program improvements over the years. Some of his viewpoints have changed along with the program. He is now a firm advocate of making commodities an important part of school lunch planning.

The main thrust of food distribution, as he sees it, is still to help farmers, but

over the past 8 or 9 years. He has seen much more consideration given to the ultimate consumers—in this case, the lunch program and the 24 million children it serves.

Twenty years ago, prior to formation of the Mountain Plains Regional Office in Denver, Colorado, state officials worked with the Dallas FNS office. Wisotzkey has seen the federal-state relationship mature from one concerned chiefly with enforcing regulations to one of mutual cooperation and respect.

He praises the relationship that exists at regional and consultant meetings—possible only, he says, because of the climate between Mountain Plains states and FNS' regional office staff.

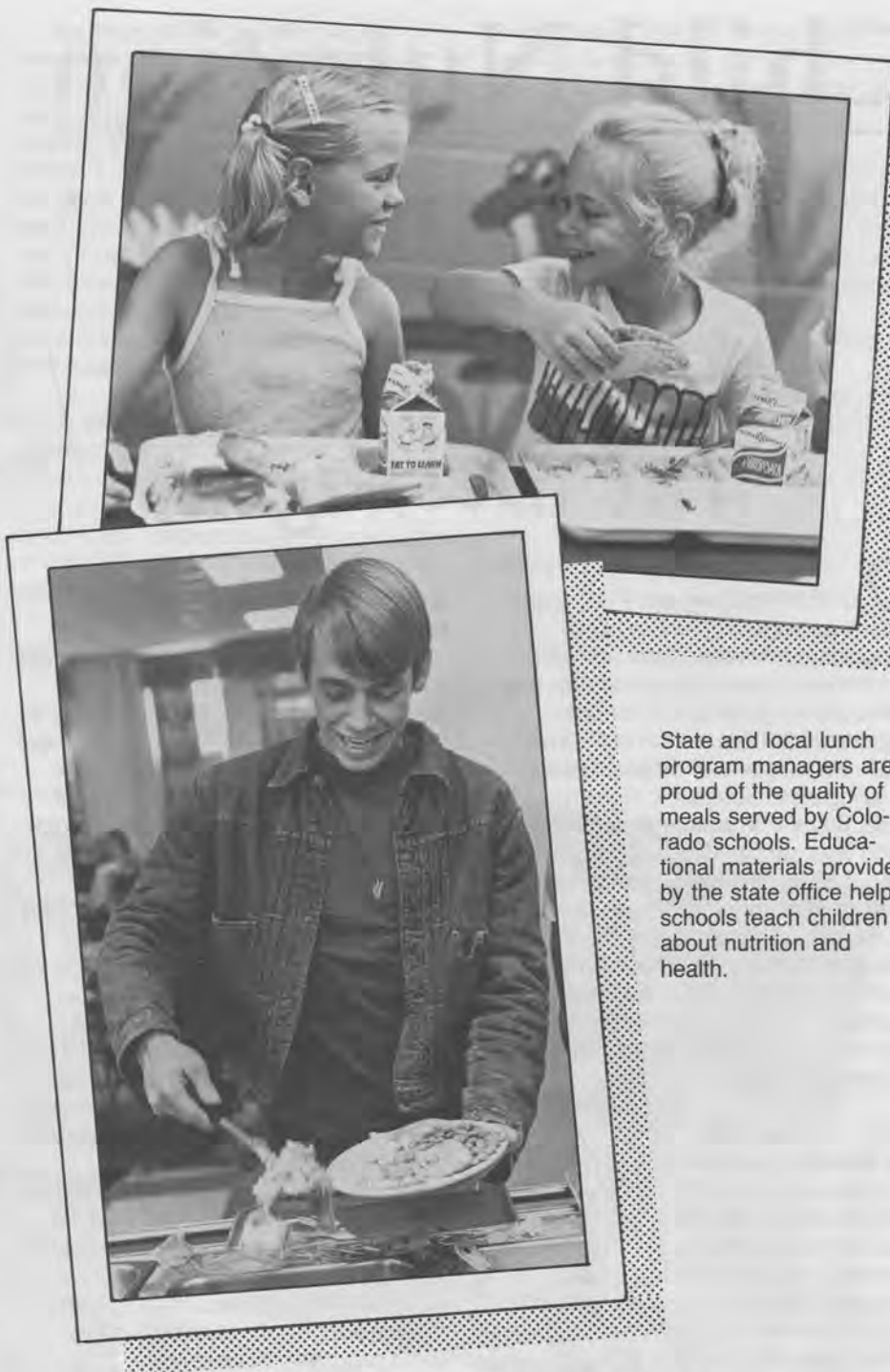
"The regional office has recognized that there are people at the state level with knowledge and expertise—and vice versa," he says. He emphasizes the fact that states appreciate technical help and support given them by the regional office.

Nutritional quality remains a priority

As responsive as FNS to public concerns, Colorado plans to take a critical look at fat content in school meals during this year's reviews. Even without the authority to dictate radical changes, Wisotzkey feels the state's suggestions for improvement will carry a lot of weight at the district and local levels.

Judy Schure, Colorado's nutrition, education and training (NET) coordinator, exerts a positive influence on nutrition in the schools. Since the 1985-86 school year, Colorado has issued monographs on nutrition education topics to some 15,000 classroom teachers throughout the state about five times a year.

From their inception, the monographs have emphasized the effects of nutrition on a child's learning ability. They include reference and resource material suggestions for teachers, who can then develop programs for classroom use based on units featured in each issue: specific nutrients and their role for the child; healthy snacks; how to recognize various food groups; and special activities such as tasting sessions, simple cooking demonstrations, and crafts projects like making decorated



State and local lunch program managers are proud of the quality of meals served by Colorado schools. Educational materials provided by the state office help schools teach children about nutrition and health.

place mats or paper plates.

Despite financial problems in some districts today, the lunch program has continued to develop as an integral part of Colorado's educational system. This accomplishment leaves some slack in Wisotzkey's schedule for efforts to expand the breakfast program, another of his pet projects. During the past 5 years, breakfast participation has grown from 20 to 39 districts, encompassing nearly a fourth of

Colorado's schools.

Wisotzkey praises the summer program, too, for meeting the needs of communities from big cities like Denver to rural areas like Alamosa in the San Luis Valley. He thinks the program's bad image of the 1970's has been overcome, partly because of the change in sponsorship rules.

Colorado's summer program has been fairly constant over the past 10 years and is largely sponsored by schools, whose knowledge of their

constituency and existing need is firmly established.

Although he's pretty proud of the Colorado school food programs, Wisotzkey does have a wish list. He'd like to see equipment assistance restored to the lunch program, for example. Equipment costs have

escalated since 1946 when the ledger showed \$39,000 for nonfood assistance in the first year of the lunch program. Now some older equipment needs to be replaced.

School budgets, unfortunately, are under siege. It's often impossible to stretch them to cover what may be

perceived as extras. From the perspective of his 20-year association with FNS, Daniel Wisotzkey views child nutrition programs as having come a long way, but he thinks there's still room for improvement.

article by Joanne Widner

Rosebud Sioux Are Proud Of Their Distribution Program

Dallas Walking Eagle, director of the Rosebud Sioux's newly independent food distribution program, has been providing commodities to recipients on the Rosebud Reservation and surrounding area for more than 20 years.

He first joined the tribal staff as a warehouseman in October 1968 and has seen a number of program changes since then—mostly improvements, he says.

In the early days, federally donated commodities were the main source of food help for approximately 6,800 Rosebud Sioux. No food stamps were available to reservation residents then, since they were provided through counties and required purchase of bonus stamps. Most of the Indian population who could have used food stamps could not afford the small cost.

At the time, only about 13 to 16 food items were available for distribution, and picking up and delivering the foods was a big job. The small food distribution staff—consisting of a program director and a staff of two to four helpers—had to haul the commodities from the nearest railhead,

about 32 miles from the reservation. Since there was only one pick-up truck, they used the tribe's cattle trucks, which frequently had to be cleaned before they could be filled.

Boxcars were unloaded by hand in the open, even during the coldest South Dakota winter weather. If unloading was not completed promptly, the tribe had to pay to have the rail cars held over.

Many changes have been made

Today, the program is better funded, there are more foods available, and the reservation runs its own operation. (In October 1988, Rosebud achieved state agency status, taking over administration of the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations from the South Dakota Department of Education and Cultural Affairs.)

Recipients can choose from a vastly improved variety of foods. In the early years, the package usually contained only one vegetable and a few canned fruits. Now, many more choices are available, including fruit packed in natural juice or light syrup rather than

heavy syrup. This is especially helpful to diabetic recipients and others on restricted diets.

Food delivery has improved, too, with shipments trucked directly to the warehouse. The program's own truck is ready to "tailgate" deliveries to remote locations on the reservation. More funding is available for staff and "luxuries" such as a forklift to ease the manual labor.

The food distribution program currently serves fewer participants than it used to—an average of 3,600 to 3,800 people—because some families now receive food stamps instead of commodities. Although the program is smaller than in the early days, it's still an important part of the reservation's food help efforts.

The Rosebud Sioux are justly proud of their new commodity program and recently dedicated warehouse. Dallas Walking Eagle is proud, too, of 20 years of progress in feeding needy tribal residents.

article by Joanne Widner

Twenty Summers Of Food And Fun

Jean and Frank Kuta of Grand Rapids, Michigan, sure know how to have fun. Since 1968, they have spent 9 weeks of every summer supervising, entertaining, and feeding 800 8- to 13-year old boys and girls.

As directors of Camp Blodgett, a residential summer camp on the eastern shores of Lake Michigan, Jean and Frank have operated the camp with the assistance of USDA commodity and special milk programs for 20 years. They have participated in the Summer Food Service Program since 1976, the year when legislation expanded the program to residential camps.

Established in 1921 by the Babies Welfare Guild, a Grand Rapids orphanage, on property donated by the philanthropic John Blodgett family of Grand Rapids, the camp is currently maintained by the Guild and funded by United Way.

Sponsors USDA's summer program

Each April, Jean and Frank contact Midwest FNS food program specialist Jerry Marcoccia for an application to become a Summer Food Service Program sponsor. Most summer food programs are administered by a state agency, but some states, such as Michigan, have opted for FNS regional office administration.

"Although it's a very paper-intensive program to operate, it's also very rewarding," says Marcoccia, who, with other Midwest staff, approved more than 100 summer food program sponsor applications last year in Michigan alone.

Those sponsors served more than 2.5 million meals to more than 100,000 youngsters at 800 sites throughout the state. "Approving camps like Camp Blodgett helps needy children receive nutritionally balanced meals they might



not have gotten at home," says Marcoccia.

The Summer Food Program was created in 1968 as a component of a 3-year pilot program called the Special Food Service Program for Children, which later developed into two separate programs—the Child Care Food Program and the Summer Food Service Program.

"Congress developed the summer feeding component to provide federal grants to serve meals to needy children during the summer months when school was not in session," recalls Russ Circo, director of child nutrition programs for the Midwest region.

Twenty years later, the program has expanded nationwide. Last year, nearly 2,000 sponsors prepared more than 84 million meals at over 17,000 sites. More than 1.5 million children through age 18 participated.

Like many USDA food assistance programs, the summer food program is

Camp Blodgett is one of 100 summer food program sponsors in Michigan. The camp offers needy children from the Grand Rapids area a chance to spend 2 weeks on beautiful Lake Michigan.

operated at the local level. Sponsors can be public and private nonprofit school food authorities, community agencies, local municipal or county governments, churches, day camps, institutions providing day care for the handicapped, or residential camps such as Camp Blodgett.

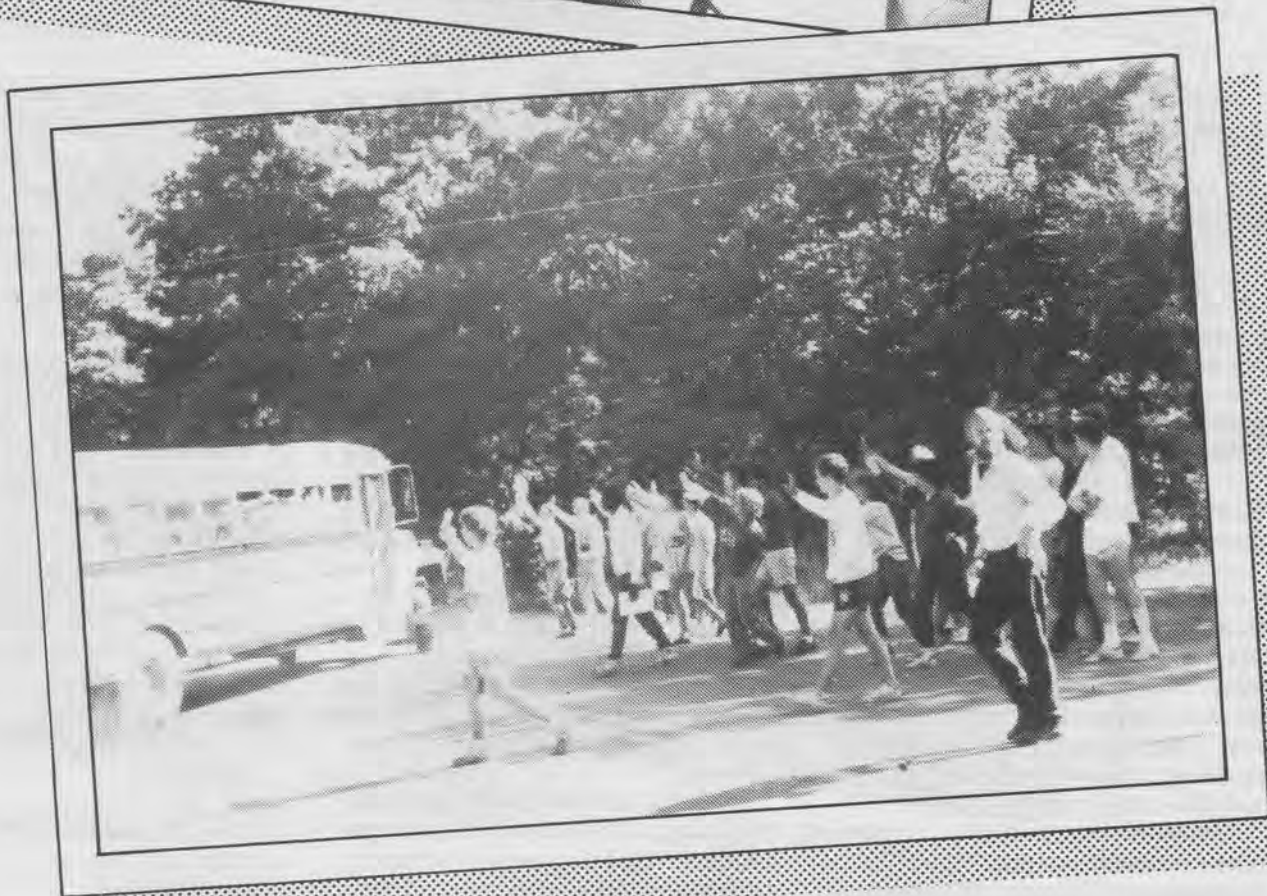
Running a residential camp has meant that Jean Kuta and husband Frank haven't spent a summer at home in 21 years. "It becomes a part of your life. It means an extended family. We love it," she says.

Children come for 2 weeks

Located on 80 acres of land along Lake Michigan, the camp offers low-income youth from the Grand Rapids area a 2-week no-television camping experience filled with nature study, arts and crafts, archery, swimming, games, and good food. Every 2 weeks, beginning in June and ending in August, another group of 160 kids arrive.

"We recruit the kids from the schools, and get referrals from churches and local social workers," says Jean. "My husband hires the staff of about 45 and I hire the 16 cooks, mostly from local high school lunch programs."

For Camp Blodgett campers, the summer food program is more than just an extension of school lunch. Kuta says that for many of the kids it's their first consistent experience in eating three nutritionally balanced meals a day.



Nourishing meals and a variety of activities enrich campers' summers. Every 2 weeks, beginning in June and ending in August, another group of 8- to 13-year-old children arrive at the camp.



"Without the summer food program, we wouldn't be able to operate," she says. "When you sit down to eat with 200 kids, the food you serve had better be good."

Kuta explains that all Camp Blodgett meals are served family style, 10 kids and a camp counselor to a table. "I try to serve the kind of food I'd serve at home, and the way I'd serve it at home," she says. Kuta and her camp staff also make special efforts to increase the children's nutritional awareness.

Camp makes meals special

In addition to a special "Christmas" turkey meal complete with Christmas tree and trimmings, kids also enjoy "theme" meals such as a "Wild West" menu of chili and beans served by Jean as Miss Kitty and Frank as the Sheriff. Also, each Sunday there is a special candlelight dinner restaurant-style, with the camp staff as waiters.

"When the kids first arrive at camp, a nurse checks them all for any nutritional deficiencies, and special diets are then planned."

Kuta says there is very little food

wasted for several reasons. "For one thing, cooks keep their eyes open for what the kids aren't eating, and adjust the recipes," she says. Also, a counselor, who eats everything on her plate, is seated with the children as a mealtime role model. And, the young campers are very hungry from all their daily activities, and when they see their peers eating, they adapt.

Kuta says that both food variety and quality is what distinguishes today's summer food program from the early years. "I remember when all we had was canned government meat," she says. "We'd serve it three times a day."

She credits the school lunch program for positive changes in the children's eating habits. "Now they are more experienced with eating vegetables such as broccoli, and new foods like burritos. Years ago, all kids wanted for lunch was peanut butter and jelly."

As with the National School Lunch Program, all meals served under the Summer Food Program must meet USDA nutrition standards. Also, as a residential camp sponsor, Kuta can only claim reimbursement for meals

served to children who would qualify for free or reduced-priced school lunch program meals. Kuta says that covers about 80 percent of her campers.

USDA-donated foods also help

In addition to reimbursement for meals, Kuta says her camp cooks also make wise use of donated USDA commodities provided through the Michigan Department of Education.

Polly Wolff, Food and Nutrition Service's officer-in-charge (OIC) for Grand Rapids, has monitored Camp Blodgett for many years. "Jean and Frank are committed to giving kids a good camping experience, and a good camping experience means good food."

"The Summer Food Service Program helps them and hundreds of other sponsors across the country accomplish that good food experience," she says.

*article by Lawrence Rudman
photos courtesy of
Camp Blodgett*

Food Distribution In Oregon:

Changing With The Times

USDA's earliest food assistance effort was the direct distribution of surplus commodities. When the Food and Nutrition Service was set up in 1969, some of the agency's first partners were people who were running their states' food distribution operations.

Ralph Calkins was one of them. Calkins retired in 1982 after 33 years with the Oregon feeding programs. For the last 20 years of his career, he directed the flow of commodities to families, charitable institutions, summer camps, and other organizations.

The most dramatic changes Calkins saw in his 30-plus year career occurred in the state's Needy Family Feeding Program. "From the mid-1960's to the mid-70's," he says, "we helped the program pretty much come from nowhere to where it was our major program. Then we watched as it was replaced, county by county, by food stamps.

"For a time, we had all 36 counties in the state participating, and we were moving millions of pounds of food through here every month.

"It was interesting, fulfilling work establishing a statewide distribution network," Calkins says. "We felt we were all doing a good job of providing food to needy people. It was nice to see an older couple come in and receive their food, or a young family with lots of little kids. It was a good program—accessible to families, and simple."

Help to schools has increased

While Calkins saw food distribution to families peak and then level off as the Food Stamp Program grew, Mark

Tischer has seen commodity help to schools increase dramatically.

For 15 years, Tischer, food distribution manager for Oregon's Department of Education, has watched the state's school lunch program become more efficient and more responsive to schools and students.

Many food distribution changes have helped both school districts and the

state reduce costs. "For example," says Tischer, "today we deliver twice the amount of commodities to half as many locations as when I started here.

"The districts recommended the change. Over the past 10 years, they have found they need to have better control of their own costs. In order to do so, they have gone to cycle menus, central purchasing, central receiving, and making deliveries from central



Changes in food distribution have helped schools save on meal costs and improve food quality.

warehouses to central and individual kitchens.

"The continual decline in the number of locations we're delivering to, coupled with the increase in the volume we're delivering, has allowed us to economize by shipping larger quantities with fewer stops in transit."

Although the volume of commodities has doubled, the state's per-unit delivery charge has increased only 13 percent—from \$1.45 to only \$1.65—over the past 15 years.

Schools benefit in many ways

School food service managers are finding their operations have to be cost-effective to survive, says Tischer. "In Oregon, 48 school districts are being held to their prior years' budgets because voters will not approve their new budgets," he explains. "With their incomes in effect frozen and costs going up, schools are having to cut programs. Food service is usually one of the first things school administrators consider cutting."

In other ways, too, being a school lunch manager is a more stressful job than it used to be. "Today, managers face more stringent nutritional guidelines, more general public awareness about nutrition, and student customers who are more mobile and more likely to eat elsewhere if they don't see what they want in the cafeteria," says Tischer.

Providing commodities as well as processed items made with USDA foods allows the state to help districts save on meal costs and provide more nourishing food. "For example," says Tischer, "we have a low-calorie processed mayonnaise that is 43 percent instead of 80 percent oil."

"We also offer burritos that are not deep-fat fried and breaded chicken nuggets that are deep-fat fried only long enough to make the bread adhere before being actually cooked in an oven." Several similar new offerings are pending, including a low-fat mozzarella cheese pizza.

Today, using a computer to do the labor-intensive number crunching he used to do by hand frees Tischer to spend more time with school staff.

"We're getting out to the field," he says, "doing food preference studies at schools, working more with the processing advisory committee, and attending school administrators' and

business managers' meetings. We're getting their input about how we might make this program more effective."

Tischer, while proud of the improvements already made, says there need to be more. This will depend, he says, upon communication among all the participants. "Everyone involved in commodities, from purchasing to delivering to cooking, needs to understand how everyone else's system works, what their needs and timeframes are, too. We work in an era when fine-tuned systems are really a necessity."

Tischer feels the Secretary of Agriculture's tri-agency task force provides an opportunity to improve understanding among federal, state,

and local managers. "One of the concerns of the task force is to suggest ways to improve communication," he says.

"Customized" service for nutrition projects

Betty Kay Jacobs is aware of the need to improve communication. She is director of program operations for Loaves and Fishes, a nonprofit senior services agency in Portland, which operates one of Oregon's largest nutrition programs for the elderly.

As in most states, the Nutrition Program for the Elderly (NPE) in Oregon is sophisticated and far-reaching. Participation has more than doubled in the last 10 years. Nonprofit





Loaves and Fishes, a nonprofit senior services agency in Portland, runs one of Oregon's largest nutrition programs for the elderly. Meals are served in centers and delivered to shut-ins by volunteers.

groups and government and municipal organizations prepare the meals. Half the meals are served in "multi-service" centers, half are delivered by volunteers to people in their homes.

In the early 1970's, before the program's dramatic expansion in the middle of the decade, Jacobs was director of another elderly nutrition project. She remembers receiving small amounts of the most basic commodity foods.

"There were dried beans, lentils, some canned beef—two or three items each year with very little variety. The food was helpful, to be sure, but using some of it required intense imagination," she says.

"At the time," Jacobs recalls, "the commodities were more a supplement than a major source of food for the programs. They amounted to 2 or 3 cents worth per meal."

Today, in contrast, Loaves and Fishes and other providers choose cash or commodities and, on the average, receive through the food distribution program 40 to 65 percent of the food they serve.

The commodities option allows a great deal more flexibility than it used to. "We choose more than 25 items today, including some processed products," explains Jacobs, "and receive monthly rather than quarterly shipments."

Loaves and Fishes works closely with the state distributing agent to assemble a "customized" commodity order—passing up the french fries and burritos that are more popular with the school programs in favor of the canned stewed tomatoes and green beans their seniors prefer.

"Fifteen years ago, what we got tended to be foods that were challenging to use. I remember searching for a way to use split peas in something besides soup and finding a chocolate cake recipe that used them."

For 20 years, the partnership between FNS and local program operators has continued. FNS makes the programs available, and local people make them work.

"I think everyone is working hard at doing the best job they can," says Tischer. "And the only way the programs are going to continue to get better is if we get better at what we do. All of us."

article and photos by Tino Serrano

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