

What you should know about

## SURPLUS FOOD PROGRAMS

### What they are

"Surplus food" is some of the food the farmer grows but cannot sell at the price he wants to get for it. It is available for distribution to people who need it but cannot buy it because they are out of work, unable to work, or paid too little when they are working to carry them over the off-season, or because disaster strikes.

The Department of Agriculture buys or takes over this food under price support and other governmental programs and, through the Agricultural Marketing Service, gives it to state and local welfare agencies and to schools. The federal government usually does not distribute this food directly to the persons who need it, and the Department of Agriculture does not have the money or the staff to do this except on an emergency basis.

### How the food is distributed

1. Direct distribution through local public welfare agencies. The Agricultural Marketing Service packages the food and delivers it without charge to central distribution points within a cooperating state. Local public welfare officials decide whether or not they want to participate, to what extent, and for what period of the year. As they pay the cost of collecting the food from the central depots in the state and of distributing it to the persons entitled to it (sometimes with help from the state), there is no way legally to force a local community to take part in the program—or continue in it—if it does not want to do so. Occasionally, a local community has permitted a private welfare agency to assume the responsibility for (and the costs of) local distribution, but the public officials still must supervise the program with the help of AMS workers.

If a local community does take part in the direct food distribution program, it must follow the standards set by the federal government. It can distribute the food only to those in need, and it determines what families are in need. However, it cannot apply different tests to different families. It cannot deny food to persons because of their color or punish them by withdrawing food because of their civil rights or other political activities.

If your community is not taking part in the program or if it ends the program altogether at the end of the off-season, only negotiation or public pressure can bring it to take part or continue in the program. Sometimes local civic and religious groups can be persuaded to intervene. Sometimes a private welfare agency will take up the burden with the consent of the local officials. Sometimes state officials of the Department of Agriculture will intercede.

2. National School Lunch Program. Any public or nonprofit private school can take part in this program if it operates its lunch program on a nonprofit basis, serves lunches free or at a reduced cost to those who cannot pay the full price, and serves lunches that meet the Department of Agriculture's nutritional standards. The federal government will pay \$1 out of every \$4 paid for some of the food bought locally for the lunch program and will contribute most of the rest of the food needed. Any group, such as a parent-teacher association, church, or fraternal or other service club, can help the local school start and carry on the program.

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If your local school does not have a school lunch program, find out why from the school board. Interest local individuals and groups in helping to get a program launched. Seek help from the state Department of Education, which supervises the program in each state.

3. Special Milk Program. Even if a school does not take part in the school lunch program, it can still get federal assistance to serve milk free or at a reduced cost. This aid is also available for camps, orphanages, and other child care institutions. For information, write to Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington 25, D. C.

4. Disaster Relief. Substantial supplies of federally-donated food are almost always quickly available to whole communities when such disasters as hurricanes, floods, drought, and widespread fire strike. But disasters sometimes strike single families too, and the same relief is often available if quickly sought. Check in time of need with local welfare officials and the local chapter of the American Red Cross.

#### The Food Stamp Program

This is an experimental program operating on a limited budget, and it is not now being expanded to new communities. It permits low-income families to spend their food money to buy food stamps of higher value. The family can then use the stamps to purchase food at any grocery. If you think that your community has a great need for this program, rally local backing and write to the Secretary of Agriculture urging that you be included in it.

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If you find that any federally-assisted food program is not being administered fairly and you cannot work it out with local and state officials, gather your facts carefully and send a full account of them to the Secretary of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.