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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PROGRESS ON PRESIDENT'S COMMITMENT  
TO END HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION IN AMERICA

Mr. President:

I cannot leave unchallenged the recent charges that have been made on the floor and to the press that the President and his Administration have reneged on their commitment to end poverty-related hunger and malnutrition in America.

I cannot leave unchallenged the statement "...what the Nixon Administration is doing (is): All rhetoric and no action, and running in the wrong direction." And, I cannot leave unchallenged the statement that the Congress itself should "quit cutting back" on food programs.

This Administration and this Congress are not only running in the RIGHT direction on food programs, its record of progress cannot be equalled. It should not be buried under rhetoric of the neglect of previous Administrations.

RECORD PROGRESS IN FOOD PROGRAMS

Every progress report of the U.S. Department of Agriculture reports a record high in the food programs:

--- In September, 11.7 million people were being helped by USDA family food programs. A new record high -- up some 70 percent in a year.

--- The dramatic increase has come in the Food Stamp Program. In September, 8.2 million persons were participating under the liberalized benefits initiated by this Administration.

A new record high -- participation up from only 3.3 million people a year ago.

--- In September alone, a total of \$116 million worth of bonus food stamps were distributed, about \$14 for each participant.

A new record high -- five times greater than the \$23 million distributed last September. Then, the average food stamp family received a bonus worth only about \$6 per person.

---The Nixon 1971 budget request for USDA food programs is \$2.6 billion. A new record high -- one billion dollars more than the expanded Nixon budget for 1970; more than double 1961 expenditures of \$1.2 billion.

--- In September, USDA family feeding programs were operating in over 3,000 counties and independent cities -- where 99 percent of our population resides. A new record high -- we began 1970 with some 279 counties which had no program, neither food stamps or commodities. Right now, there are only 10 very small counties that have not made a commitment to operate a family food program.

The Department of Agriculture recently released a report showing that 12 million persons were receiving food assistance under its family feeding programs. The 12 million figure is a new record high participation. Last October these programs reached only 7 million needy persons. This sharp increase evidences real progress toward fulfilling the President's commitment to eliminate poverty-related malnutrition.

#### FOOD PROGRAMS REACH "HARD-CORE" POOR

A recent charge was made that USDA's family feeding programs are not reaching "hard-core" poor. I checked into this charge, because, if true, it would be a most disturbing situation needing correction. I requested the Department of Agriculture to provide me with any available data about the incomes of the over 8 million persons who are now receiving food stamps.

USDA reported that they had collected sample data to estimate the national income profile of food stamp families. These profiles showed, for example, that:

1. Over 50 percent of the single-person food stamp households had incomes of less than \$100 a month.

2. Nearly 40 percent of the two-person households had incomes of less than \$100 a month.

Those households contain some of the most vulnerable of the poor -- the aging who live alone, and the childless couple. Some rely on limited pensions; others are too old to find work but yet not old enough for the old age assistance.

3. USDA reported that its profile showed that of the four-person households using food stamps:

---12 percent had incomes below \$600 a year

---40 percent had incomes below \$1,800 a year

--- 79 percent had incomes below \$3000 a year

--- 96 percent had incomes below \$4,320 a year

These data are an impressive demonstration that the food stamp program is, in fact, reaching the poor and, especially the "hard-core" poor.

#### RESPONSIVE PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

The turn-about in administrative management of these programs is equally dramatic under this Administration's commitment to end hunger "for all time."

--- Two days after the Congress approved the Administration's request to nearly double food stamp funds in 1970, the Department of Agriculture announced sweeping food stamp reform. (It had already asked Congress to amend the food stamp act to authorize still more reforms.)

--- Immediately following the passage of the School Lunch Reform Bill, P.L. 91-248, the Administration requested that an already record-high 1971 school lunch budget request be increased another \$217 million.

--- Two months following a White House Conference on Nutrition recommendation in December 1969, the Department of Agriculture had designed and implemented the first of five pilot food certificate programs to test out the food stamp approach to provide supplemental food assistance to pregnant mothers and infants.

These pilot programs furnish special foods through regular commercial channels which supplement food stamps or commodities to this high risk group of women and children.

--- For the first time in 1970 Federal grants were made available to the states to help localities improve the family commodity distribution programs.

---In a move that broke a 25-year precedent, the Department of Agriculture issued its revised school lunch regulations in proposed form -- inviting public comment. For the first time in the entire history of the school lunch program, concerned public and private groups had an opportunity to participate in the formulation of federal school lunch guidelines.

#### SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM STATISTICS

The Administration has been accused of using misleading statistics and avoiding the facts. I say the Administration's statistics have been misinterpreted and distorted. An invalid comparison was made regarding the number of needy children served by contrasting the figures for May -- a month of maximum participation since all schools are in session -- with September, a month in which many schools have their lowest participation.

Schools convene over a three week period from late August to mid September which further makes September a non-representative month for comparison.

/ The charge that only 50 percent of needy children eligible to receive free or reduced priced lunches are not being fed is also unfounded. In October, 5.3 million needy children were served free or reduced priced school lunches. A new record high -- up 23 percent from October of last year.

The actual number of needy children eligible for these lunches is not presently known. USDA will compile the local estimates of eligible children which are currently being gathered by school districts throughout the states. Only then will a realistic figure be known.

At the time of the December 1969 White House Conference on Nutrition, the best available estimate was 6.6 million. The Department of Agriculture anticipates that, when the November figures are tallied, they will be reaching approximately 6.6 million. USDA acknowledges that there are still schools without food service, and that all children are not reached, and their priority challenge is extension of the school lunch program to all schools.

#### NATIONAL NUTRITION SURVEY

Contrary to recent statements, there has been no muzzling by the Administration of data from the national nutritional survey. Every effort is being made to complete the data processing and final review as soon as possible. Following this review and consultation with concerned state and local officials, the survey results will be available for public review and will be furnished to all governmental agencies with nutrition interests.

The transfer of the national nutrition survey to the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, and the processing of the survey data are in keeping with the recommendations of the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition and Health.

President Nixon announced yesterday that the follow-up conference to the December 1969 Conference on Food, Nutrition and Health will be Feb. 5 in Williamsburg, Va.

Panel chairmen and vice chairmen from the original conference will meet to discuss progress of food programs and progress on the implementation of 1969 conference recommendations.