



NEWS from U.S. Senator Bob Dole

(R.—Kans.)

New Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 224-6521

OPENING STATEMENT BY SEN. BOB DOLE -- HEARINGS ON FEDERALLY SUPPORTED FOOD PROGRAMS
WICHITA, KANSAS, TUESDAY, AUGUST 9, 1977

Today is the second of three days of Senate hearings in six Kansas communities on the major federally supported food assistance programs. This afternoon's session on behalf of the Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs will focus on four programs that are budgeted for 5 billion 781 million dollars in the current fiscal year. The growth of these programs can be illustrated by the fact that the comparable appropriation for the same programs was a little over 750 million dollars in 1970. So the spending is eight times as great over a seven-year period.

We members of Congress sit in Washington and crank out these programs with the best of intentions -- but often without having a very good idea of how they fit into the existing activities of public and private agencies. And afterwards we don't always watch too closely how they are actually working at the community level. It's one thing to talk about the impressive funding levels and the millions of beneficiaries. It's another to talk to the people who run the programs and those who are intended to benefit from them -- to trace the federal dollars to their ultimate disposal and judge whether the good intentions are actually being fulfilled in a sensible and economical fashion.

The four programs that are the subject of this morning's hearing are: Food Stamps; the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program; the Title 7 Nutrition Program for the Elderly; and the Community Food and Nutrition Program.

FOOD STAMPS

The first of these -- food stamps is by far the biggest and most expensive of the federal food and nutrition programs. It has also been subject to a great deal of public misunderstanding. Coupons can be purchased by eligible low-income households who are then able to exchange the stamps for food at less cost to themselves. The program is administered at the national level by the U.S. Department of Agriculture; at the state and local levels by the welfare agencies.

The farm bill that will be before Congress for final action shortly after Labor Day would make a significant change in the program by eliminating the requirement that poor people pay cash for their allotment of stamps. In the past, the people who need help the most -- namely those without much money -- have sometimes been unable to take advantage of the savings on food because they lacked the few dollars needed to obtain the stamps they were entitled to at the beginning of the month. Combined with a reduction in the monthly allotment of stamps, and other provisions that are expected to weed out the higher income people who have sometimes abused the food stamp program -- I think the changes are desirable and will be an improvement.

Serious questions still remain. Because the program is administered by the state welfare system, many deserving elderly people in Kansas would rather go hungry than suffer the indignity of applying for anything connected with welfare. It is estimated that only about 20 per cent of eligible Kansans use food stamps.

FOOD AND NUTRITION EDUCATION

The second of these programs is the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, more commonly known as EFNEP. It is run by the USDA Extension Service. Aides who are often recruited from the community they serve, are trained to help low-income people stretch their food dollars and improve their diets.

NUTRITION AID FOR ELDERLY

The third program we're concerned with today is Title 7 of the Older Americans Act -- nutrition assistance for the elderly. Administered by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, through the state agencies on aging, this is an attempt to provide at least one hot meal a day to groups of elderly Americans. The appropriation for the Title 7 program this year is \$203.5 million -- including \$2.3 in the State of Kansas.

COMMUNITY FOOD AND NUTRITION

And, finally, we will be inquiring into the Community Food and Nutrition Program, which is run by the Community Services Administration, originally the Office of Economic Opportunity. Nutrition projects are funded through Community Action Agencies, Indian tribal councils, migrant groups, and other agencies. Poverty and poor nutrition are grave problems in rural as well as urban areas, but the dispersal of the needy population over many miles makes it more difficult to reach these people with food assistance. If an elderly couple has to drive 20 miles for a free hot meal, the cost of gasoline would be considerably more than the cost of the meal.

So one of the questions we will be exploring is whether our federal food programs are designed to give rural residents a reasonable chance to participate.

We want to know whether the money is reaching the people who need help -- whether the administration at the state and local level is efficient -- whether any red tape can be cut away -- whether the nutritional benefits can be enhanced -- whether the impact at the local level is what Congress intended when the law passed in the first place.

I welcome those of you who are here to testify. Food, nutrition and health professionals; state, county and municipal officials, academic authorities from colleges and universities; and program recipients themselves can all help us understand what is being done and whether it can be done more effectively. Good nutrition is the concern of all Americans. Producers and consumers of food have a vital interest in what we learn in Kansas this week.

#####