

Statement by

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before the

Committee on Agriculture

United States House of Representatives

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Mr. Chairman and members of this Committee:

My name is Stephen Kurzman, and I am appearing on behalf of the Urban Coalition Action Council. We appreciate the opportunity to appear before this Committee on the critical question of domestic food programs and their impact on continuing hunger and malnutrition in the United States. Our basic thrust here today is to urge you to act promptly and favorably on S.2547, the Senate-passed Food Stamp bill and to go forward, beyond that measure, to consider a broad range of further objectives.

The documentation is overwhelming at this point that, despite unprecedented prosperity and despite a number of well-intentioned food programs, hunger and malnutrition do continue to exist in this country. A partial listing of this documentation includes the following:

Hearings, Senate Subcommittee on Employment,
Manpower and Poverty, April, 1967

Hunger U.S.A., Citizens Board of Inquiry Into
Hunger and Malnutrition in the United States,
1968

"Hunger in America", C.B.S. documentary,
Produced by Martin Carr, May, 1968

Hearings, Senate, "Hunger and Malnutrition"
before Senate Subcommittee on Employment,
Manpower and Poverty, May & June, 1968

Hearings, Senate Select Committee on Nutrition
and Human Needs, "Nutrition and Human Needs",
12 volumes of hearings, December 1968-1969

"The Food Gap: Poverty and Malnutrition in the
United States," Committee Print, Senate
Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs,
August 1969

Report, Subcommittee on Food and Nutrition,
President's Urban Affairs Council, March, 1969

Report of Dr. Arnold Shaefer, Director, National
Nutrition Survey, U.S. Public Health Service

Poverty, Malnutrition and Federal Funding Assistance
Programs, "A Statistical Summary", Committee Print,
Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs,
September, 1969

The findings in all these studies and all these reports have electrified the Nation. Dr. Arnold Shaefer, Director, National Nutrition Survey, U.S. Public Health Service, has testified before this Committee that preliminary data from his survey indicated, "Malnutrition is a health problem in the United States, and our preliminary findings clearly indicate that there is malnutrition in an expectedly large portion of the sampled population." Shockingly, Dr. Shaefer's survey also uncovered 7 cases of marasmus and kwashiakor which we did not believe existed in this rich country. The Subcommittee on Food and Nutrition of the President's Urban Affairs Council estimated that half of all infants from poor families in the United States are likely to suffer from under-

nutrition and that there is no significant proportion of the poor who do not suffer from under-nutrition. Moreover, it estimates that half of the poor in the Southern states and a fifth of the poor in non-Southern states suffer from malnutrition and that "scattered evidence indicates five to ten million (persons) are suffering from severe hunger and malnutrition."

Despite the crying need, documented in all of the forums cited above and beginning over two years ago, our current food programs are still not reaching three fourths of the poor, many of whom suffer extreme poverty. At present, the direct distribution program is operating in 1187 counties and serving approximately 3.1 million individual recipients. Under this program, 22 commodities are made available to the states with a retail value of \$15 per person per month. These commodities have less than adequate amounts for energy and Vitamin A according to the National Research Council's Recommended Dietary Allowances. Moreover, the average number of commodities distributed in the states is 18, which means that even those poor persons participating in this federal food program are being denied an adequate diet.

The food stamp program provides a bonus for food purchases which varies with the income and family size of the recipient with an average bonus of \$6.73 per person per month in food purchasing power. 3.2 million persons participate in this program. This program provides only 60% of the minimum needs of those in extreme poverty who participate. Both programs fall far below the Department of Agriculture's own economy food plan which calls for \$25 per

person per month or \$1200 per year for a family of four -- an amount USDA admits can be utilized by only the most ingenious of the poor to gain a balanced diet. Moreover, there remain approximately 470 counties and independent cities with no food programs at all, and which include about 8% of the poor. In areas where food programs operate, less than one third of the poor are being reached -- around 6 million of 20 million persons living in families with less than \$3000 annual income.

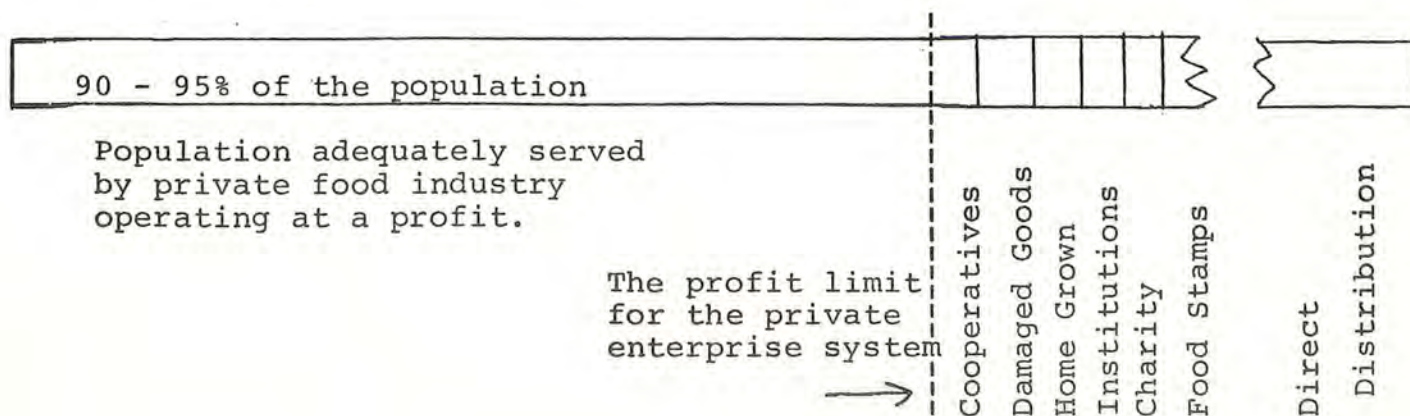
The Census Bureau estimates that 907,000 families have an income of less than \$1000, \$200 less than the \$1200 rock-bottom USDA requirement for food alone per year. Another 1.7 million families have incomes under \$2000. It is safe to assume that many members of these families are going hungry. A family of four with incomes of \$2000 would have to spend 60% of that income on food in order to meet USDA's economy plan standards. Clearly with the costs of clothing, shelter, medicine, utilities and other fixed necessary expenses, these people cannot eat adequately. After all, the average American spends only 17.4% of his income for food.

Nor are poor children being reached by the school lunch program. There are 32.5 million school children who do not have access to school lunches. The House Committee on Education and Labor says 3 and a quarter million of these children need free lunches and another 19 and a half million need reduced price lunches.

In sum, current family food programs offer little assistance and fail to reach the great majority of the poor. 14 million of

the poor consume food not meeting recommended dietary allowances and 8 million more are on diets with less than two-thirds of the recommended allowances for one or more essential nutrients. Nor are our welfare programs reaching them. Only 10.2 million of the country's 25.4 million persons living below the poverty line receive any form of welfare assistance. The Family Assistance Program proposed by President Nixon will, we hope, help to remedy this situation, but at the \$1,600 per year level which has been proposed for a family of four, it is clear that improved and expanded food programs will remain an urgent need for many of these families.

A graphic way of illustrating what all these studies and hearings show was presented by a witness before the Senate Agriculture Committee last May. Mr. Robert Choate, who is an expert in this field and currently a consultant to the White House Conference on Food and Nutrition, introduced the following bar graph:



He pointed out that the private food industry adequately serves 90 to 95 percent of the Nation's population. The remaining 5 to 10 percent still must eat, but lack the cash to do so adequately. The alternatives developed to provide for this 5 to 10 percent only reach a portion of the need: cooperatives, soup kitchens and charity feeding houses, home grown foods, occasional sales of damaged goods at a loss. Governmental programs have to fill the remaining gap. The largest are the Food Stamp and direct distribution commodities programs. But as the graph illustrates, a substantial gap remains.

What that food gap means in human terms extends far beyond the jurisdictional lines of this or any other single Committee of the Congress. Hunger and malnutrition are in many instances the underlying causes of illness and public health problems, of inability to learn and educational problems, of unemployment, underemployment and a loss of productivity. With its action on improving and expanding Federal programs that fill the food gap, this Committee can have a profound effect on the whole range of related problems which would otherwise be left to piecemeal consideration by other Committees. Conversely, inaction by this Committee would create pressure upon the other Committees to consider the impact of food deficiencies on the problems with which they must deal.

We urge this Committee to devise a strategy for closing the food and nutrition gap. We recommend a series of objectives which we believe should be sought by that strategy. A substantial step toward these objectives would be taken by enactment, with some adjustments, of S.2547, the Food Stamp bill passed on September 24, 1969 by a substantial bipartisan majority of Senators.

The Senate-passed bill was introduced by a bipartisan group including nine of the thirteen members of the Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, which had held hearings throughout the country over a ten-month period. Its sponsors were Senators McGovern, Javits, Percy, Cook, Hollings, Pell, Yarborough, Mondale, Kennedy, Hart, Spong and Goodell.

The following are the long-range objectives we believe the Committee should address itself to:

1. Nutrition Education and Information: There is a great need to improve knowledge among the poor, as well as among many families who are not poor, or healthful nutritional practices, of how to obtain nutritious foods and maintain a wholesome and balanced diet. S.2547 makes a start in this direction in Section 1(10), which would afford participants:

"such instruction and counseling as will best assure that they are able to use their increased purchasing power to obtain those nutritious foods most likely to insure that they receive a nutritionally adequate diet."

This is an effort which should not, in our view, be limited only to food stamp recipients or only to agencies concerned with food stamps. For example, HEW and OEO programs and the agencies and institutions they fund should also be enlisted in these efforts, along with the Cooperative Extension Service.

2. Nutrition Research: More precise knowledge is needed about the extent, incidence and location of malnutrition on a continuing basis. For example, HEW's National Nutrition Survey should be expanded so that its sample is adequate, its data are fully analyzed, and food program effectiveness is monitored and evaluated. Special consideration should be given to the particular nutritional needs of the rural poor, migrants, Eskimos, Indians and the elderly. S.2547 does not deal with this subject.

3. Outreach: A full range of supportive services is needed at the local level to reach more of the Nation's urban, rural and migrant poor with existing food assistance programs. In his May 6

message to the Congress, President Nixon pointed to OEO's "unique outreach among the poor themselves." S.2547 would expand availability of food stamps by permitting certain private non-profit institutions, including mobile food services, which provide meals to older persons to accept food stamps (Section 1(1) and 1(16)). It would spread awareness of the programs by authorizing the giving of instruction and counseling mentioned above at schools, retail food stores, in homes, through voluntary cooperation, in Federal, State, local or private agencies which carry out informational and educational programs for consumers, and particularly through the national school lunch program and its extension (Section 1(10)). The cumbersome pre-certification procedure would be amended so that an affidavit is sufficient, subject to subsequent disqualification for fraud (Section 1(12) and 1(17)); this parallels the technique long authorized for the Federal income tax system. Issuance of stamps and collection of payments for them would be facilitated by authorizing use of Post Offices, banks, credit unions, the mails and other agencies. (Sections 1(11) and 1(14)(3)). Under limited circumstances, where the Secretary of Agriculture determines there is a need and no food stamp program exists, USDA would be authorized to administer a food stamp program through a private nonprofit organization or a Federal, State or county agency approved by the Secretary. In line with President Nixon's reference to OEO's outreach capabilities, we would hope that OEO would be given a substantial role in providing the services necessary to fuller participation of the poor in all food assistance programs -- not solely the Food Stamp Program.

4. Private Enterprise: A principal advantage of the Food Stamp Program is that it utilizes the private food distribution system rather than creating another distribution system as required by other types of food assistance programs, particularly commodity distribution. S.2547 would permit more of the poor to be reached by the private system by improving the current payment and value schedules, which require payment in advance on a rigid monthly basis of up to 47 percent of income to participate in the program. Free food stamps would be issued to families earning less than one-half the amount determined by the Secretary of Agriculture to be necessary to purchase a nutritionally adequate diet, at this time approximately \$60 per month for a family of 4, or \$720 a year. In no event would more than 25 percent of a household's income be charged for stamps; again, this is still higher than the 17.4 percent of income paid for food by the average family. State eligibility requirements, which now range from \$1,920 to \$4,140 for a family of 4 and bear no relation to geographic differentials in food prices, would be replaced by a more equitable national minimum standard of \$4,000 adjusted to take regional variations into account.

As important as these changes would be, a number of other programs should also be initiated to enlist the private sector more fully in the distribution and education processes. Current governmental efforts with food companies to provide foreign developing nations with enriched and fortified foods should be extended to this country as well. Production, processing and

distribution by small food businesses in low-income areas should be encouraged by the Small Business Administration, the Department of Commerce, and OEO, especially with the aid of local development corporations. As the President's May 6 Message recommended, "an advisory committee of major food processing and food distribution companies" should be established.

5. Maternal and Child Nutrition: As the President stated and as Dr. Shaefer emphasized in his testimony before this Committee, malnutrition during pregnancy and in the infant and young child can cause physical and mental retardation. The President called for special package and pilot voucher programs by HEW and these should be authorized by legislation. Participation in free or reduced-price school lunch programs should be increased by establishing national eligibility and funding standards for local school districts so that all needy children, less than half of whom now benefit from these funds, can participate. Similar emphasis on poor children should be mandated upon the special milk program. Private food companies should bring their expertise in processing and distribution to low-income area schools which lack adequate facilities for preparation of meals. Again, S.2547 does not cover these subjects.

6. Direct Commodity Distribution: New direction should be given to commodity distribution so that it supplements food stamp and school feeding programs. Together these programs should ensure that low-income families have available to them a range of foods necessary for a nutritious and well-balanced diet. National standards of eligibility, cash payments to States, grants to public

and private agencies and use of Section 32 funds for purchase of nutritional foods not otherwise available under Federal food programs, should be authorized. USDA should assist State and local agencies in outreach efforts to insure maximum participation of low-income families, and distribution should be facilitated, in conjunction with OEO, HEW, and HUD, through neighborhood centers. S.2547 makes one important advance by permitting a combination of food stamp and commodity programs under certain narrowly defined circumstances (Section 1(7)).

The objectives we have outlined are not ours alone, by any means. Most were identified and recommended to the President by the Food and Nutrition Committee of the Urban Affairs Council. Many were embodied in the President's May 6 Message. Many are embodied in bills already introduced in both Houses of Congress, such as S.2789, introduced by Senator Javits and a bipartisan group of co-sponsors; S.1864, by Senator Talmadge; H.R. 13423, the Foley-Green bill; and H.R. 12222, the Administration bill introduced by Congresswoman May.

We recognize that these objectives will incur additional cost to the U.S. Treasury; for food stamps alone, \$1.25 billion in the current fiscal year instead of \$750 million under the current projections, and a similar \$500,000,000 difference in fiscal years 1971 and 1972. But as Senator Hollings stated on the Senate floor when S.2547 was passed, "This is no time to holler 'chaos' and 'the end of the world is coming' over the expenditure of \$500 million in the next fiscal year," particularly when compared with expenditures

for other purposes. It has been estimated that the objectives other than those relating to food stamps would cost approximately \$415 million in the first year. Again, matched against other expenditures, including some \$3 billion in agricultural subsidies annually, this does not appear to require a major wrenching of national priorities. The comprehensive approach to food assistance we recommend is well worth the additional cost and may well cost less than the loss of productivity and wasted lives caused by hunger and malnutrition.

For the record we would like to offer a number of editorials, local news stories and columns from newspapers, both large and small, in many parts of the Nation in recent months. These indicate a growing national awareness and concern about food shortages and deficiencies and the need for expanded and improved food programs.