

Stamping Out Hunger: The Evolution of the American Food Stamp Program

While most of the world eats to live, Americans live to eat. Or at least this is what is portrayed by network television shows like *Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives* and *Guy's Grocery Games*. Food has become such a focal point in American culture that it has become entertainment, something whimsical, even a game. This characterization of American food habits, however, entirely disregards the daily realities of millions of food-insecure Americans. As a necessity of life, food is universally fundamental for both subsistence and personal well being. The ability to put food on the table is an objective deeply rooted in the American work ethic and spans all eras of American history. For millions of Americans, however, this objective is often not a feasible reality. From widespread starvation in Jamestown to the plight of the urban masses in the late 19th century, to 2020, which has witnessed record numbers of families seeking food assistance, hunger has relentlessly followed each and every generation of Americans.

After several years of decline in food insecurity, the coronavirus pandemic and ensuing economic downturn have left the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program (FSP), overwhelmed by the demand for assistance. In 2019, nearly 38 million Americans were considered food-insecure, lacking reliable access to sufficient nutritious food. Feeding America estimates that in 2020, amidst the pandemic, an additional 16 million Americans will be at risk of food insecurity. The lasting effects of this catastrophic economic downturn are likely to render more Americans in need of SNAP than ever before. Yet, as it often goes with federal programs, the FSP's quantifiable success has ebbed and flowed throughout its existence and the program undoubtedly has its flaws. While some legislators point to these shortcomings as cause to prevent expansion or even shrink the program, the federal Food

Stamp Program has been and continues to be effective and essential in America's fight against hunger and must expand its outreach as more Americans seek assistance. In order to enact sustainable changes, it is imperative to examine how the program has historically adapted to dynamic challenges.

Historical Background

Efforts to combat hunger are as old as our nation. In one of the first recorded organized efforts to provide food aid, the Humane Society of New York City provided meals for families of debtors beginning in 1787. The program expanded to give food assistance to the poor in 1791 and eventually established the nation's first soup kitchen in 1802 (Smith). For the next century, the responsibility of hunger alleviation fell on the shoulders of local organizations, often religiously affiliated, which sponsored local soup kitchens and food pantries. It wasn't until the Great Depression, when demand for food assistance went far beyond the capacity of localized efforts, that the federal government intervened in the battle against hunger.

Initially an outgrowth of the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), the first Food Stamp Program launched in Rochester, New York in 1939. By 1943, the issues that prompted the FSP, "widespread unemployment and unmarketable surpluses" (Short History), were virtually nonexistent, and the program met a brief demise. While on the campaign trail in 1960, having witnessed the horrors of poverty and malnutrition in West Virginia, presidential candidate John F. Kennedy vowed to expand food welfare if elected into office, a promise he kept in 1961, when an executive order revitalized and broadened the FSP. The subsequent Johnson and Nixon administrations continued to grow the program, passing the Food Stamp Act in 1964 and greatly expanding the FSP budget throughout the decade. The late seventies through the early 2000s

gave way to substantial revisions in the FSP's policies, most significantly a reduction in benefits and a fundamental change in name and function. As the demands of food-insecure Americans evolved, the FSP was rebranded as SNAP while Electronic Balance Transfer (EBT) cards allowed for simplified food distribution.

Young, Scrappy, and Hungry: The Birth of the Food Stamp Program (1939-1943)

In 1939, Milo Perkins, the first administrator of the Food Stamp Program, could not get past the irony of the decade: farmers had large surpluses and were being paid to leave fields fallow while thousands of city-dwellers starved across the nation's cities. Along with Henry Wallace, the Secretary of Agriculture at the time, Perkins founded the FSP, which was tremendously effective in closing the gap between surplus and starvation and would leave a crucial precedent of a welfare program that simultaneously benefited the economy.

The devastation of the Depression struck urban centers with unimaginable hunger and strife. At one point in 1932, New York City soup kitchens were dishing out eighty-five thousand meals daily (NYC by Numbers). Like Perkins, many Americans began to question why nothing was being done to "bridge the chasm" (Short History) between farmers and hungry citizens. To Perkins and Wallace, the answer was clear.

The pair saw an opportunity to solve the trifold problems of agricultural surpluses, struggling grocers, and starving citizens. For every one dollar of "orange stamps" that could purchase any food product, families received fifty cents of "blue stamps" that could only be used to buy USDA designated surplus items (United 2). This plan was heartily welcomed by Rochester residents. A column from the Danville Register Bee recorded shoppers' thoughts, with the first food stamp recipient commenting that he would "certainly take advantage" of the

government program, and another customer claiming that she thought the “program would work fine” (Food Stamps). The program did not just work fine; it worked great. Families now had a 50% increase in purchasing power, grocers were receiving more business, and agricultural surpluses decreased (United 2). Responding to the popularity of the stamps in Rochester, the program expanded across the nation over the next four years, reaching an astounding 20 million hungry Americans (Caswell).

The FSP could not have achieved such quantitative success without its goal of economic recovery and a model of dynamism and regulation. The 1939 Report of the Secretary of Agriculture outlined the guiding principles of the program, citing restrictions on the purchase of tobacco and alcohol as a necessary precaution against program abuse. To this day, a widely held misconception is that SNAP benefits can be misused. However, from the very birth of the FSP, regulation has made it so that food stamps can only buy necessary items. Beyond regulation, the food stamp plan was built “upon a flexible basis,” making it possible “in times of stress to stabilize [our] whole economy” (United 2). The FSP not only set out to feed families, but to create a program that would have far-reaching effects for farmers, businesses, and ultimately, the national economy.

While the circumstances of economic fallout today are vastly different from the Great Depression, hunger among the unemployed is consistent. The FSP was fundamentally made to expand in times of crisis and it must continue to do so today, just as it did in 1939. Food stamp benefits were put on pause in 1943 as demand for food assistance dwindled due to mobilization for war (Klein), yet the FSP and similar welfare of the era undoubtedly contributed to national recovery. The triumph of the first FSP owes nothing to luck, but rather careful innovation and

recognition by Perkins and Wallace that a social safety net also had the capability to remedy an economic downturn - a lesson that is just as critical today as legislators work to mend the nation's multifaceted problems.

“Food is strength, food is peace, food is freedom”: JFK & LBJ Revitalization (1961-1971)

In West Virginia in 1961, more than a quarter of a million residents lived on the edge, malnourished and in dire need of assistance. The gravity of the situation weighed heavily on the mind of Senator John F. Kennedy. In 1959, the Eisenhower administration had distributed twenty dollars a year per family in need (Kennedy 2). To Kennedy, this was “a shocking figure,” a figure that could “not drive off hunger or disease, a figure which the next Democratic Administration would change” (Kennedy 2). Following the precedent set by the first FSP, Presidents Kennedy and Johnson recognized the unique needs of their decade and utilized the program not only to eliminate hunger, but also as a method of diplomatic goodwill.

True to his word on the campaign trail, Kennedy made food assistance a top priority. In fact, his very first executive order revitalized the FSP for the first time since the Depression. The order focused on increasing the nutritional variety of distributed food and made an amendment to the original FSP that excluded surplus items as part of the program (United 3). For families in West Virginia, Kennedy's pilot food stamp program was a godsend. Grace Strain, a facilitator of one of the first programs, “used to worry about children going hungry,” but felt confident that once food stamps were firmly established, “no child would ever go to bed hungry in West Virginia” (First Food). Following the legacy Kennedy left behind, President Johnson swiftly passed the Food Stamp Act of 1964 to pull FSP regulation under Congressional jurisdiction (United). With a flexible growth model mirroring that of Perkins and Wallaces' program, the

renewed FSP grew exponentially in its first few years, reaching 6 million participants by 1970 (Short History). Though this era of reborn food stamps did not eliminate the need for food aid in America, it did play a significant role in reducing malnutrition. By the mid-70s, the starvation that Kennedy was so shocked by in West Virginia had nearly been erased, now replaced by the concept of food insecurity. Despite the persistence of food insecurity to this day, the most extreme ends of poverty have been alleviated, thanks to the pilot programs and subsequent Food Stamp Act guaranteeing American citizens the most basic necessities.

Both Kennedy and Johnson saw the potential of the FSP beyond domestic benefits; they recognized and seized the opportunity to ingratiate the nation with the rest of the world during a rather incendiary decade. Kennedy noted that food aid to other countries was “a helping hand to people whose goodwill and friendship we want,” (Kennedy) a platform that appealed to voters both for its promise of domestic assistance and improved international relations. Similarly, President Johnson, upon signing the Food Stamp Act, proudly reported that the US would be “sharing 7% more of [our] food with other peoples than in 1960” (Johnson), a diplomacy milestone that put America at the forefront of the global fight against hunger.

While naturally diverging from the FSP’s economic and surplus elimination goals of 1939, Kennedy followed in the footsteps of Perkins and Wallace in using the program’s innate flexibility to combat multiple challenges specific to the decade. Kennedy envisioned not only a stronger American future but a brighter global one as well. “Food is strength, food is peace, food is freedom,” he remarked while campaigning (Kennedy). Put best by the World Food Program, “Kennedy’s time on earth may have been cut short, but his impact on the world’s hungry will

live forever” (History’s Hunger). The power of the FSP lies within its radiating effects on society. Kennedy used the program to combat malnutrition in a strained domestic and global environment, while Perkins and Wallace targeted agricultural surplus, hunger, and struggling businesses. Both eras provide examples of how an up-to-date FSP program can address multiple challenges at once.

Legislation & Legacy: The Future of Food Stamps (1974-Present)

President Nixon is not remembered particularly fondly by American history, yet his indispensable contribution to the FSP paved the way for the system that it is today. In a May 1969 speech to Congress, Nixon proclaimed that the fact that “hunger should persist in a land such as ours is embarrassing and intolerable” (Samuels). Alarmed by the rates of food insecurity in the US, the Nixon administration rolled out the FSP to all fifty states and expanded the program budget to match benefit amounts to the cost of a nutritionally adequate diet. Most critically, Nixon laid the groundwork for a major overhaul of the FSP that would be completed in 1977.

SNAP, as it functions today, is the product of bipartisan collaboration between Senators George McGovern and Bob Dole. The joint effort culminated in the Food Stamp Act of 1977, which improved accessibility by outlining eligibility qualifications and establishing anti-fraud protocol. Most importantly, the FSP no longer required payment for stamps, meaning the assistance was finally reaching the lowest-income Americans (Short History). The FSP flourished under these new regulations until President Reagan enacted substantial cutbacks as part of his “bootstrap” economic plan. While campaigning, Reagan used the imagery of a

“strapping young buck” using food stamps to purchase steaks to attack the FSP as an agent for unnecessary government handouts and a promoter of laziness. Following Reagan’s implementation of income tests, work requirements, and a freeze on federal funding, by the end of his time in office, hunger rates had once again soared - except this time, under reduced eligibility, fewer Americans were able to access FSP benefits.

Bearing witness to the damage the budget cutbacks caused the FSP, Congress passed the Hunger Prevention Act of 1988, reversing the changes Reagan made, once again expanding the program (Short History). A noteworthy accomplishment of this new legislation was the introduction of Electronic Balance Transfers (EBT), which promised to reduce fraud and ease transactions, allowing beneficiaries to pay in the same manner as customers not using food stamps would.

The FSP, having been renamed SNAP under the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act, reached peak participation in the years following the 2008 recession, topping out at 48 million beneficiaries in 2013 (Bauer). The budget for benefits expanded nationwide as families increasingly sought aid, which proved to be remarkably successful; the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that SNAP prevented 10 million Americans from going hungry in the worst years of the recession (Rosenbaum). Since 2013, food insecurity rates have steadily decreased. The current pandemic, however, not only threatens this progress but also rivals all previous records of food insecurity.

SNAP now faces an astonishing 54 million Americans potentially in need of assistance, with 23% of households reporting not having enough money for food, compared to 16% at the

height of the 2008 recession (Bauer). This March, the USDA increased benefits by 40% under the economic stimulus and relief bill known as the CARES Act. States are taking advantage of this expanded budget through P-EBT, benefits specifically for children who are unable to receive their free or reduced-cost meals at school. Despite the unprecedented unemployment and food insecurity of this pandemic, the Trump administration continues to insist that SNAP funds be cut by 30%. To historian Andrew Coe, Trump's alternative suggestion of distributing "harvest boxes" is reminiscent of Depression-era food lines —the very crisis that birthed the food stamp program — and demands that beneficiaries "humiliate themselves for their poverty and need" (Coe). Yet, those on the front lines of fighting hunger maintain that the "program is the single most powerful anti-hunger tool that we have" as well as "one of the most important economic development tools" (DeParle). The disconnect between the current administration and the realities of food-insecure citizens has the potential to add to the economic and social consequences if SNAP is not maintained.

The future of some SNAP participants is in limbo as the first coronavirus relief bill expires and Congress stalls over details on the second. Hunger will not wait for Congress to catch up. Most imminently, legislators must push for the SNAP benefit expansion to span not just the length of the pandemic, but the length of the economic downturn that will outlive the pandemic crisis. Just as the FSP provided support for economic recovery at the time of its creation, SNAP today has the power to be a cornerstone of rebuilding both nutritional and financial health. Beyond this, SNAP has to leverage the technological tools of the times, a tradition the program has maintained throughout its evolution, such as with the use of EBT systems to curb fraud. Software developers in Chicago have already produced an app that

determines one's eligibility for SNAP within minutes, a twenty-first-century adaptation that could be the next major step taken by the program (Free). SNAP's unique historical ability to conform to the needs of an era while simultaneously pushing the limits of innovation must continue to guide legislative changes forward for the betterment of the American public.

From reducing agricultural surplus in the Depression, to its use as a diplomacy tool in the sixties, to its adaptations for a pandemic, SNAP's outreach stretches far beyond providing meals for the needy. If food security is critical to a nation's success, then the affordable availability of that food will pay powerful dividends back to society. In the midst of a health crisis, subsequent economic fallout and social unrest, we cannot forget the hungry. We must look to the ingenuity of Perkins and Wallace, Kennedy, Johnson, McGovern, and Dole to improve national food security. Their legacy — addressing the most fundamental concerns of America's neediest citizens — must live on through SNAP today.

Bibliography

- Bauer, Lauren. "The COVID-19 Crisis Has Already Left Too Many Children Hungry in America." *The Hamilton Project*, 6 May 2020,
https://www.hamiltonproject.org/blog/the_covid_19_crisis_has_already_left_too_many_children_hungry_in_america#_ftnref2.
- Caswell, Julie, et al. "History, Background, and Goals of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program." *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Examining the Evidence to Define Benefit Adequacy*. National Academies Press (US), 2013.
- Coe, Andrew. "Free Produce, With a Side of Shaming." *The New York Times*, 25 June 2020,
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/25/opinion/snap-food-pantry-aid.html>.
- Delaney, Arthur. "The Food Stamp Program is An Overwhelming Success; That Might Also Be Its Downfall." *The Huffington Post*, 11 June 2017,
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/trump-food-stamps_n_593b62f3e4b0240268799ddf.
- DeParle, Jason. "As Hunger Swells, Food Stamps Become a Partisan Flashpoint." *The New York Times*, 6 May 2020,
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/06/us/politics/coronavirus-hunger-food-stamps.html>.
- Dewey, Caitlin. "What Americans Get Wrong About Food Stamps." *The Washington Post*, 4 Apr. 2017,
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/04/04/what-many-americans-get-wrong-about-food-stamps-according-to-an-economist/>.
- "Facts About Hunger and Poverty in America." *Feeding America*, 2020.

<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/facts>.

“First Food Stamp Families Remember 1961.” *The New York Times*. 20 Oct. 1979, p. 10.

“Food Stamps Put \$50,000 in Business.” *The Register Bee* [Danville, VA], 20 May 1939, p. 12.

Free, Cathy. “The Pandemic has Left Millions Hungry.” *The Washington Post*, 8 July 2020,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2020/07/08/snap-food-stamps-hunger-mrelief/>

“History’s Hunger Heroes: JFK.” *World Food Program USA*. 18 June 2020.

<https://www.wfpusa.org/articles/historys-hunger-heroes-jfk/>.

Johnson, Lyndon B. “Remarks Upon Signing the Food Stamp Act.” *The American Presidency Project*, 31 Aug. 1964, Washington D.C.

Kennedy, John F. “Remarks of Senator John F. Kennedy.” *The American Presidency Project*, 22 Sept. 1960, Corn Palace, Mitchell, SD.

Kennedy, John F. “The White House’s Answer to West Virginia.” *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library*, 1 May 1960, Parkersburg, West Virginia.

Klein, Christopher. “How Did Food Stamps Begin?” *History.com*, 27 Aug. 2019.

<https://www.history.com/news/food-stamps-great-depression>.

Nord, Mark. “Food Security Improved Following the 2009 ARRA Increase in SNAP Benefit.”

United States Department of Agriculture, April 2011,

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=44839>.

“NYC by the Numbers: Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens.” *Hunter College Food Policy Center*, 3 March 2020. <https://www.nycfoodpolicy.org/nyc-by-the-numbers-food-pantries/>.

Rosenbaum, Dottie. “Boost SNAP to Capitalize on Program’s Effectiveness and Ability to

Respond to Need.” *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, 18 July 2020,

https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/boost-snap-to-capitalize-on-programs-effectiveness-and-ability-to-respond#_ftn3.

Samuels, Dorothy. “There Was a Time When Ending Hunger Was a Goal for Republicans and Democrats.” *The New York Times*, 20 May 2013,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/21/opinion/food-stamp-politics.html>.

“A Short History of SNAP.” *USDA, FNS*, 2014.

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/short-history-snap>.

Smith, Andrew. *New York City: A Food Biography*. Rowman and Littlefield, 26 Nov. 2013.

United States, Congress. Public Law 88-525: The Food Stamp Act of 1964. *United States*

Statutes at Large, vol. 78, 1964, pp. 703-709, Government Printing Office, 31 Aug. 1964.

United States, Department of Agriculture. *Report of the Secretary of Agriculture*. Government Printing Office, Jan. 1939.

United States, Executive Office of the President [John F. Kennedy]. Executive Order 10914:

Providing for an Expanded Program of Food Distribution to Needy Families. 21 Jan.

1961. *Federal Register*, vol. 26, 24 Jan. 1961, p. 639.

“USDA Increases Monthly SNAP Benefits by 40%.” *United States Department of Agriculture*, 22 Apr. 2020,

<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2020/04/22/usda-increases-monthly-snap-benefits-40>.

Primary Documents

"Food Stamps Put \$50,000 in Business." *The Register Bee* [Danville, VA], 20 May 1939, p. 12.

FOOD STAMPS PUT \$50,000 IN BUSINESS Federal Experiment in Moving Surplus Commodities Succeeding ROCHESTER, N. Y., May 20.—(AP)—Four days' operation of the government's first experimental food stamp plan for moving surplus commodities today had started nearly \$50,000 through Rochester's business channels, as more than half the city's eligible home relief clients participated.	FSCC officials said approximately 4,600 persons had purchased \$31,792 worth of stamps, and have been given \$15,896 in blue stamps. Relief clients express approval of the method. Ralston Thayer, 36, jobless since last July and a veterans' relief recipient, was the first to buy the stamps. "I never received surplus foods before," he said, "but the procedure seems simple enough and I certainly intend to take advantage of it." Miss Mabel McFiggin, 36, on relief for three years, explained "This way you don't have to carry groceries so far since you can buy them at your grocery store. (Previously, surplus foods were distributed from a central warehouse.) Everything they give you is good. I think the plan will work fine."
---	---

United States, Department of Agriculture. *Report of the Secretary of Agriculture*. U.S.

Government Printing Office, Jan. 1939.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE, 1939

spend at least \$1.50 for food, instead of the \$1 which was being spent in most instances before food stamps were available.

In addition to providing a wider market for the farmer and supplementing the diet of needy families, the operations of the stamp-plan program help all business by bringing about an increased flow of foodstuffs through the normal channels of trade.

Following the inauguration of the stamp plan in Rochester, N. Y., the program was put in operation on an experimental basis in five other cities during the summer of 1939. By the end of the summer preliminary studies showed that the mechanical operation of the plan was satisfactory and that the results accomplished were encouraging enough to warrant gradual expansion of the plan to other cities throughout the country. It was evident that a much longer period would be necessary to determine definitely the complete economic effect of the program. Continued close study and observation, therefore, will accompany the gradual expansion.

BENEFITS TO AGRICULTURE

Evidence at hand now, in the fall of 1939, shows clearly that the stamp plan promises significant new markets for various agricultural commodities. Actual purchases made with the blue surplus stamps up to this time indicate that low-income consumers, given increased buying power, will purchase sharply increased amounts of dairy and poultry products, and fruits and vegetables, as well as other agricultural commodities. The potential new market for these elastic demand commodities, if the stamp plan were in operation on a national basis, is of vital interest to agricultural producers.

Present conditions seem to warrant the expansion of the food stamp plan to include 90 to 100 cities or areas by the end of the fiscal year. Prices of many surplus agricultural products are still so low that the returns to farmers do not provide a fair exchange value for the manufactured goods which farmers must buy, and there are millions of our own citizens who are existing on inadequate diets.

Within each city, however, there is a possibility that the number of families eligible to participate will decline if the current trend toward fuller employment continues. A man with a job at good wages provides the farmer with an even broader market than can be made possible through food stamps, and he provides the grocer with a greater volume of business than he is now getting even in cities where the stamp plan is in operation.

From the very beginning an effort has been made to build the administrative machinery of the food-stamp plan upon a flexible basis. In times of great agricultural surpluses, which usually are accompanied by great unemployment, it will be there to do a minimum job in terms of minimum diets below which the public health would be endangered. The broader market thus made possible for farmers in times of stress will help to stabilize our whole economy. In times of fuller employment, however, it can and should be re-

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE, 1939

stricted to the fewer families who would still be eligible for such assistance.

The stamp-plan program is flexible enough to meet changing conditions, and future decisions as to its expansion or contraction will be based upon these conditions. All of the increased distribution and surplus-removal programs are subject to this same adjustment. They are designed primarily to assist farmers in moving price-depressing surpluses and widening their markets, and the extent of operations under them will be governed by current conditions.

United States, Executive Office of the President [John F. Kennedy]. Executive Order 10914:

Providing for an Expanded Program of Food Distribution to Needy Families. 21 Jan.

1961. *Federal Register*, vol. 26, 24 Jan. 1961, p. 639.

Executive Order 10914

PROVIDING FOR AN EXPANDED PROGRAM
OF FOOD DISTRIBUTION TO NEEDY FAMILIES

Whereas one of the most important and urgent problems confronting this Nation today is the development of a positive food and nutrition program for all Americans;

Whereas I have received the report of the Task Force on Area Redevelopment under the chairmanship of Senator Douglas, in which special emphasis is placed upon the need for additional food to supplement the diets of needy persons in areas of chronic unemployment;

Whereas I am also advised that there are now almost 7 million persons receiving some form of public assistance, that 4.5 million persons are reported as being unemployed and that a substantial number of needy persons are not recipients in the present food distribution program;

Whereas the variety of foods currently being made available is limited and its nutritional content inadequate; and

Whereas despite an abundance of food, farm income has been in a period of decline, and a strengthening of farm prices is desirable.

NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, it is ordered as follows:

The Secretary of Agriculture shall take immediate steps to expand and improve the program of food distribution throughout the United States, utilizing funds and existing statutory authority available to him, including section 32 of the Act of August 24, 1935, as amended (7 U.S.C. 612), so as to make available for distribution, through appropriate State and local agencies, to all needy families a greater variety and quantity of food out of our agricultural abundance.

JOHN F. KENNEDY

THE WHITE HOUSE,
January 21, 1961.

Kennedy, John F. "The White House's Answer to West Virginia." *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library*, 1 May 1960, Parkersburg, West Virginia.

For the harsh fact of the matter is that the more than quarter of a million West Virginians who must struggle for existence on government surplus foods do not get a living diet -- they suffer from malnutrition and hunger. The children -- the youth of the richest and most abundant country on earth -- are deprived of their birthright of a sound body. The men and women have seen their health ruined and their hopes shattered. And nothing more clearly reveals the starkness of this condition than the Administration's own figures.

The White House proudly proclaimed that last year it had distributed more than five and one-half million dollars in food surpluses to the people of West Virginia. But this means that every man, woman and child in the program received little more than twenty dollars worth of food for the entire year -- twenty dollars worth of flour, corn-meal, rice and -- on special occasions -- a little lard, dried milk and eggs. These statistics are not an occasion for pride. Twenty dollars worth of this limited variety of food is not enough to maintain health or build strong bodies. Twenty dollars does not drive off hunger or disease. Twenty dollars is a shocking figure -- a figure which must be changed -- and a figure which the next Democratic Administration will change.