

But Farmers Can Meet Need, USDA Says

Hunger Still Exists in U.S.

That hunger can have the face of a child in Chicago or the face of a farmer in Maine shocks many Americans. How can there be hunger in this age of affluence in this land of plenty? And what can be done to assure every American a nutritionally adequate diet?

The Department of Agriculture has been grappling with the problem of hunger and malnutrition for years, according to the USDA Farm Index. The Commodity Distribution Program, which distributes food free to schools, needy families, and charitable institutions, was begun in the 1930's. And USDA initiated a pilot food stamp program in 1961.

Last fiscal year, an average of 29 million people received \$603 million worth of food stamps. For these, the recipients paid \$374 million and the government provided \$229 million.

Aside from these two major programs for needy families, USDA also sponsors others. One

provides supplemental foods for needy mothers. Another donates food for more than 12 million persons living in institutions. In addition, both food and money are supplied to lunches and breakfasts in schools.

The National School Lunch Program, in existence for 23 years, served nearly 34 billion noon meals to 20 million children in fiscal 1969. About 15 percent of these meals were provided free or at reduced cost to children of needy families.

A second breakfast program was instituted in more than 3,000 schools in 1968. Nearly three-fourths of the breakfasts were provided free of charge.

But while these cost figures seem substantial, USDA's food programs actually amount to only a small part of the total food market in our country.

Food spending by all consumers in the United States totaled around \$104 billion in 1969. Thus the \$603 million in food stamps was only six-tenths of one per

cent of total food expenditures. And since over three-fifths of the value of food stamps is contributed by recipients, the net addition to food spending represented by "bonus" stamps could not have exceeded two-tenths of one per cent of total U.S. food spending last year.

The food donated directly to needy families, schools, and institutions amounted to around one per cent of all food consumed. And the total value of food and monetary assistance given to schools average out to 15 cents per lunch.

Assistance under all of USDA's food programs therefore added up to perhaps 1 1/2 per cent of the total food market in the United States.

Recently a number of other methods of closing the food and nutrition gap have been proposed. One of these, income supplements, would allow recipients free choice to purchase food, clothing, housing, an automobile,

or whatever they need or desire. But income supplements would be an expensive means of improving the quality of needy families' diets for it takes a relatively large increase in income to generate only a small increase in food expenditures.

Analysis of data from the 1965 survey of household food consumption indicates that a 10 per cent increase in the income, etc. in the income of families earning less than \$3,000 annually would be expected to boost their food spending by only one or two per cent.

And the same would be an even

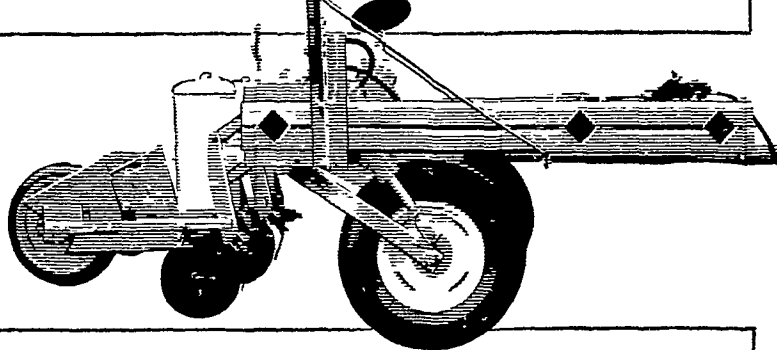
food purchased. Part of increased food expenditures usually goes for higher quality or perhaps only more expensive foods rather than for an increase in the quantity of food or essential nutrients.

ERS researchers have estimated that it would take a \$20 billion income supplement to raise food consumption of families smaller, rise in the quantity of with incomes below \$3,000 up to that of all families with incomes over \$3,000.

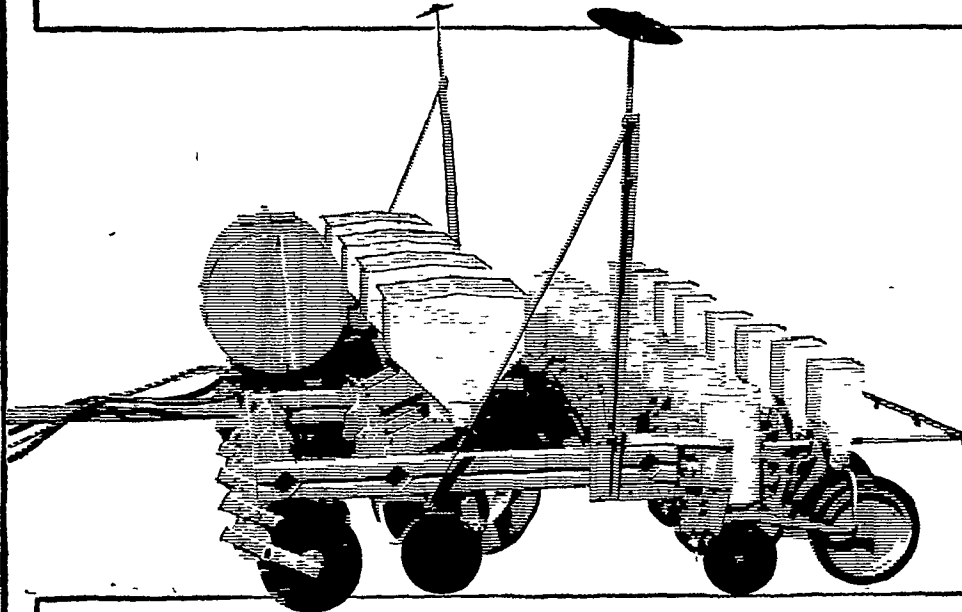
The nutritional quality of U.S. diets is only loosely associated with family incomes.

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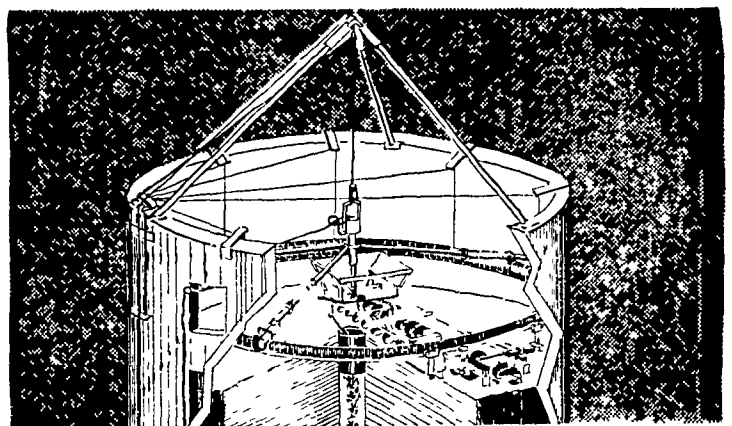
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