

Grand Jury Indicts 12 in Food Stamp Misuse

The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced that a Federal Grand Jury in Philadelphia has indicted two ex-welfare office case workers, Esther Smith and Cleo Harlee, on charges of violation of the Food Stamp Act or conspiracy in connection with more than \$100,000 worth of food stamps.

Ten other persons were also indicted for helping these two improperly obtain food stamps, convert them to cash, or for other food stamp violations. The ten included one bread and three

daily route salesmen who mixed food stamps with cash collections.

The indictments were based on investigation by the Agriculture Department's Office of the Inspector General. First indications of the fraudulent operation came through the regular enforcement activity of the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, which cooperates with USDA's Food and Nutrition Service in administering the food stamp program.

U.S. Attorney Louis C. Bechtle

said over 2,500 blank forms for authorizing purchase of food stamps were fraudulently obtained from February 1969 through January 1970. They were then illegally filled out to authorize local banks to issue the more than \$100,000 in food stamps to the conspirators at a fraction of their face value. Food stamps are regularly available only to low-income families and individuals who first must be certified eligible by local welfare offices. These persons then buy food stamps at reduced cost

and use them like cash in grocery stores.

Esther Smith was charged with four counts of violating the Food Stamp Act and along with Cleo Harlee on one count of conspiracy.

Route salesmen Herman Maxwell, Amos Clay and Clifford Howell were indicted on two counts and William Wigginton on three counts of violating the Food Stamp Act and all four on one count of conspiracy.

Chauncey Harlee, Alphonso Brown, Geraldine Bailey, and

Anne Crosby were indicted on four counts of violating the Food Stamp Act, Elizabeth Smith, on two counts, and John Rollins, on one count. All six were also indicted on one count of conspiracy.

Each count for a felony violation of the Food Stamp Act carries a maximum penalty of \$10,000 fine, five years imprisonment, or both. Each count for a misdemeanor food stamp violation carries a maximum penalty of a \$5,000 fine, imprisonment for one year, or both.



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