

FOOD STAMPS PLAN - PAID BY DIVIDENDS

COPY
Statement by
Senator Robert H. Humphrey
July 25, 1953

Mr. President, I am pleased to join the distinguished Senator from Vermont (Mr. Aiken) as co-sponsor of his food allotment plan designed to promote fuller use of our agricultural resources and safeguard the health, efficiency and morale of the American people, by bringing our food abundance within closer reach of low income families most urgently needing improved nutrition.

The able chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee has performed a service to American agriculture and the American people by introducing this bill, for it focuses the spotlight of attention where it belongs in endeavoring to protect the agricultural stability of the country. It provides new and broader outlets for America's increasing agricultural production. It makes wise use of the abundance we are now capable of producing.

COPY

It is in that realm that we face a real challenge; it is in that realm that agriculture's opportunities for the future must be further explored.

It goes against the grain of farmers -- and I think against the grain for most Americans -- to have to talk about cutting down food production. We should be looking in the other direction. We should be finding new ways to wisely use our abundance, instead of being forced to take the negative approach of curbs on our ability to produce.

That is the real intent of this bill. I hope it can at least be the starting point for channeling our efforts in that direction.

We must open new doors for the use of our farm products.

That is why I have so vigorously fought for sharing America's great agricultural abundance to combat hunger throughout the world.

-3-
COPY

Because some of my recent testimony before the Senate Agricultural Committee in regard to finding new world outlets for our farm products applies equally to carrying on similar efforts right here at home, I ask that some extracts from that testimony appear at this point in my remarks.

USING OUR ABUNDANCE

I regard America's tremendous agricultural production, the "know-how" of our farmers, as a great national asset, and an important contribution to the total strength of our economy.

Of course I recognize fully the acute problems that are created by temporary over-supply of some farm products.

We are now in the midst of such conditions.

Some people are inclined to become overly alarmed by warehouses bulging with food. I am not among them. The American people should be proud of our blessings of abundance, and proud of the productivity achievements of American agriculture.

We should thank God that America's farmers have more than kept pace with our population, and kept away from our doors the kind of food shortages that have created hunger and chronic starvation in many parts of the world.

It is better, I am sure, to have too much than not enough.

I have always felt that we should recognize this problem as not just a farm problem, for the farmers alone to solve.

The farmers have done their work well. They have met every national need, through depressions and through wars.

COPY

The fault, if there is any, is with the rest of us — we have not kept pace in making wise use of all that our farmers can produce. We have not yet learned to live with the abundance with which we are blessed.

That is our present challenge.

Farmers must not be penalized for creating a land of plenty. They should be rewarded, instead.

By now, that should be accepted as national policy, in the consumer's interest as well as the farmer's interest.

Unfortunately, there are always those with less foresight who fail to fully appreciate the vital importance to our nation of a strong agriculture. They are too shortsighted to realize that protecting agriculture is protecting America's lifeline of food and fiber, and protecting the strength of our entire economy.

Unfamiliar with the complexities of agriculture, they fail to understand as fully as they should their own stake in our support programs and our storage programs that guarantee the nation an adequate food supply at all times, good season or bad.

Congress has had the wisdom and foresight to protect the public's stake by encouraging agricultural abundance, and seeking to provide means whereby the burden of serving the public interest through abundant production does not fall upon the farmer alone.

We have not adopted public programs of price protection and storage of safe reserves of basic food and fiber supplies for the farmer alone — rather, we have done it because we were convinced it was in the interest of the entire nation.

It is time we got away from the old concept of "farm relief," and regarded our farm programs instead as a means of maximum, efficient utilization of our agricultural resources — for the good of all the American people.

COPY

Our problem, of course, and agriculture's problem, has long been that of gaining such public understanding and acceptance.

Mainly because of misunderstanding, there is admittedly considerable difference of opinion among the American people in regard to the sound reasoning behind our food and fiber storage program for maintenance of safe reserves.

But everyone can and will understand and approve making use of American food and fiber to feed and clothe hungry and suffering people...

They will not only understand such efforts -- they will welcome them. It is something that they can share.

a
It is/simple, Christian, humanitarian approach...

It is the kind of helpful neighborliness that is traditionally American. We grumble and groan about tax burdens, but we are quick to dig deep into our pockets to help a friend in need. We have proved it over and over.

Understandably, some of our non-farmpeople resent public expenditure for huge accumulation of foodstuffs in storage, especially when they are led to believe much of it may eventually be wasted.

But these same people, I am sure, would look far more favorably upon government price/support operations if they knew the end use of accumulated excess stocks was for humanitarian purposes, saving lives and alleviating human suffering, instead of deteriorating or wasting in storage.

Ever since opening of this session of Congress, as it became obvious we were confronted with dwindling farm exports and a dangerously falling farm income, I have consistently urged that we look in the direction of expanded use for our farm products -- rather than turn back to a restrictive philosophy of merely seeking to curtail the farmer's normal and natural desire to produce to the best of his ability.

COPY

Mr. President, we must be as concerned about hardship and deprivation within our own country as we are about human suffering elsewhere.

It is a reflection upon our wisdom that we permit need to exist in the midst of plenty; that we do not find a way to make sure everyone has the opportunity to obtain the essentials of a healthy diet, as long as we have ample food to provide it.

I fully recognize the many administrative problems in a program as broad and sweeping as this bill envisions. I think ways can be found to overcome them.

I have been giving considerable study to possible opportunities of expanding outlets for essential food among our low-income families now lacking proper diets, as this bill proposed.

It may be that we might have to start with a few, specified food products most seriously needed in diets, and

COPY

that we might better confine the start of any consumer subsidy efforts to specified groups already established as eligible for and requiring some form of public assistance.

Because new outlets for dairy products must be developed to stabilize that vast and important segment of the agricultural economy making up the dairy industry, and because dairy products offer the greatest possibilities for overcoming known deficiencies in the diets of America's low-income families, I have concentrated my studies on finding ways to bring fresh milk, butter, and cheese within the reach of the pocketbooks of families now unable to afford these health-giving foods, and at the same time protect the dairy producers so we can be assured of continued production the nation requires for adequate health standards.

Our aim should not be merely the disposal of government butter stocks so many seem worried about.

⁸
COPY

We must look further ahead, toward increasing consumption through normal trade channels of the dairy delivery man and the corner grocer to such an extent that the government will not have to buy any butter in the future to maintain adequate price levels for the producer.

Our aim should not be to give away these food products.

We must endeavor, instead, to explore ways of providing a parity of purchasing power to those now on public assistance, such as establishing price differentials through partial consumer subsidies that would enable them to buy dairy products at a level they could afford, a level proportionate to the differential between their available income and the average income.

Because we already have established administrative machinery for determining eligibility and administering assistance checks through the various states to the needy aged, dependent children, the blind, and the permanently totally disabled, I

COPY

have sought to explore the opportunities for raising the dairy product consumption among these specific groups now unable to buy such products in the quantities needed and desired for proper diets.

I have been fortunate in having the assistance of Dr. Francis Joseph Weiss, a recognized scientific consultant on food and nutrition, in the preparation of a study along these lines, as background to developing what might be termed a Dairy Diet Dividend plan for the aged needy and dependent children of the country.

Because it dramatically emphasises the urgent need for some constructive steps in this direction -- either broad enough to reach any low-income family as proposed in the food allotment plan for which I have joined the Senator from Vermont as a sponsor, or more restricted to bringing certain specified dairy products within reach of the pocketbooks of those already recognized as eligible for public assistance -- I believe this

study should be made generally available for study and consideration.

I therefore ask unanimous consent that it be printed in the body of the Record following these remarks as a factual contribution to the Senate's future consideration of measures aimed in this direction.

I urge the Senate Agriculture Committee to review it carefully.

I urge the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare to also review it carefully.

I know of no more constructive move the Public Welfare Committee could make in behalf of the nation's needy aged and dependant children than to explore the possibilities of making use of the nation's food abundance as a means of supplementing the admittedly meager public assistance allowances now provided.

I know of no greater service the Senate Agriculture Committee could perform for America's farmers during the interim while Congress is adjourned this fall, than to conduct studies and possibly even hearings into such plans for opening new avenues of utilizing our food abundance.

COPY
As I told the Agriculture Committee during its recent hearings on the President's request for authority to use American food to combat hunger abroad:

"The hope of American agriculture to pull out of its present recession and once again regain a firmer footing on parity with the rest of our economy may well rest with the foresight and initiative of you committee members".

I urged at that time the Committee undertake a study of all the constructive suggestions that have been made by various Senators with a view toward combining them into an over-all single package, a comprehensive new program for increased utilization of American farm products throughout the world.

I now add the urgent plea that consideration be given such methods as I have discussed today for increasing domestic food consumption, along with whatever action can be taken to step-up foreign consumption of American farm products.

COPY

I have strongly championed price protection for agriculture.

I shall certainly continue that fight. But I recognize, as all of us must recognize, that we can't long maintain a successful program encouraging abundance of farm production, unless we get busy providing useful means of improved distribution of such food for human consumption.

I hope we can have high priority for action toward such an objective when Congress reconvenes next year.

Between now and then, however, I shall be interested in the reaction of the dairy industry, my fellow farm state Senators, and farm organizations to the possibilities offered by the Dairy Diet Dividend ideas I have proposed, as outlined in the study conducted for me by Dr. Weiss.



Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



www.mnhs.org