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Food Stamp Dollars Not Nutritious

THE United States Department of Agriculture now spends considerably more money to increase consumption of food than it does to get farmers to grow more food.

This is not necessarily the fault of USDA but is the result of programs assigned to the department by Congress and the ratio of appropriations provided to support them.

USDA appropriations for this fiscal year total \$15.5 billion. Of this amount, \$6.2 billion is for agricultural programs, \$831 million for Rural Development programs, \$1.3 billion for environmental programs, and \$5.1 billion for consumer programs.

The latter includes the food stamp program, which now provides subsidized food purchases for more than 18 million Americans. This is up 4.5 million since last June and although costs are running ahead of the \$4 billion budgeted, various groups are campaigning to enlarge the recipients' lists.

The Select Senate Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs estimates that only 38 per cent of those eligible for stamps are getting them. If this estimate is correct, 50 million people should have part of their food bills paid by the government.

High unemployment has increased the load in Detroit and other industrial areas. Nearly one in seven residents of San Francisco, which has a reputation as "hippy headquarters," are on the eligible lists, with 3,000 new applications filed each month.

More middle-class people are applying because of inflation and unemployment. In Fairfax County, Va., near Washington, D.C., families with incomes above \$20,000 a year are among the applicants. College students are enrolling, also. A few weeks ago, a review of Cleveland

County rolls turned up 82 University of Oklahoma students, and there may be more in other counties.

Food stamps do little to improve the nutrition of the poor, serving chiefly as an income subsidy to those who use them, says Kenneth W. Clarkson, University of Virginia economist. He has just completed a study published by the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, described as a "non-partisan, non-profit, publicly supported educational and research organization."

Clarkson found recipients are able to buy more food but few of them showed any nutritional gain because their increased buying power was used primarily to buy more prepared or convenience foods, soft drinks or other expensive but less nutritious items.

Instead of helping, Clarkson reported evidence that the nutritional level of some participants declined because they bought less cheese, meat and eggs, and more sweets and fatty foods.

His calculations showed that it costs the government in excess of \$1.09 to provide \$1.00 in food income which is worth about 82 cents, on the average, to food stamp recipients.

"Income supplementation does not appear to be the best path to the elimination of malnutrition," Clarkson observed as he compared food stamp recipients' diets with the national average. Limited data indicate that only about half of the total U.S. population, including those well above the poverty line, have adequate diets as measured by nutritionists' recommendations.