The "Contract" and "Block Grants": The End of Federal Food Programs?

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The "Contract" and "Block Grants": The End of Federal Food Programs?

An Analysis of the Effect of
The Personal Responsibility Act
On Hungry People in California

By Edward Steinman, Professor of Law,
Santa Clara University School of Law,
And California Food Policy Advocates

February 1995
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Introduction

As most individuals and groups involved with issues of hunger and malnutrition know, the United States Congress will soon be making decisions that promise to impact the lives of millions of low-income people in California. Deliberations have already begun regarding the Personal Responsibility Act (PRA), part of the Contract With America. This Act (H.R. 4) contains provisions that would end the federal food programs and replace them with nutrition block grants to states.

The PRA nutrition block grant proposal represents part of a serious and determined effort to dismantle the basic floor under poor families -- a safety net that has been in place since the Great Depression. If passed and signed by the President, California will experience an unprecedented upsurge in hunger. The human and social costs will affect all of us.

Within the space of a few months, anti-hunger advocates face the task of educating elected officials about the details, consequences, and long-term costs of
the PRA nutrition block grant. Many of them are largely unaware of the hunger and poverty that exist in their districts, and of the proven success of the federal nutrition programs in providing basic assistance to millions of Americans. The California Congressional Delegation, the Governor and all state legislators must be urged to look long and hard at the fine print of the PRA — and thoroughly assess its likely impact on their districts and the state as a whole before supporting such a radical reversal of federal policy.

Through a thoughtful and coordinated effort, advocates can tap Congressional zeal for reform and turn a set of negative proposals into a creative blueprint for making nutrition programs work better and do more. Failure to act now, however, will result in the likely dismantling of federal food assistance and more hungry and desperate Californians.

This paper is designed to help you respond immediately to the proposals contained in the PRA by providing analysis, information, and strategic tips. Because the process is unfolding quickly and changing rapidly, California Food Policy Advocates will provide regular updates, information and current analysis through a consolidated mailing of Hunger Action Alerts to all networks and a special "California PRA Fight Back" folder on HandsNet. Please share these resources widely, and work with allies in your community in an all-out effort to inform the public about the PRA.

Before exploring in great detail this goals and effect of the PRA on poor residents of California, this paper will first describe the steps you and your organizations can take now to ensure the PRA does not succeed.
Immediate Action Needed

Who?

The single most important action is to contact your Representatives and Senators, and urge everyone you know to do the same. They need to hear from service providers, program administrators, community organizations, concerned citizens and clients that the drastic reductions and block grants proposed are a bad idea.

The members listed on the yellow Handy Dandy Guide, which has already been distributed to you, sit on key committees -- and are particularly important to target -- but the entire California delegation must hear a strong grass-roots message. Refer to the 104th Congressional Guide, Californians in Key Food Policy Committees for the name, address and telephone numbers of key members and their staff.

When?

Although details about when committees are planning to discuss various aspects of the Contract With America (including the PRA) are unclear, the legislative calendar is moving forward rapidly, and the Republican leadership promised to vote on the Contract within the first 100 days. All California House members need to receive calls, personal letters or faxes from their district constituents as soon as possible.

What?

Your message should be that a nutrition block grant proposal is a bad idea, since it would:

- Shift the responsibility, but not the funding necessary, for vital nutrition programs for California's low-income families and children.
- Result in less overall funding for nutrition programs in California.
- Eliminate all federal standards protecting quality nutrition programs.
- Increase hunger in California.
Your message should also emphasize that:

- The Private Sector cannot fill the gaps that the PRA will create.
- There is no turning back once programs are block granted.

Accompanying this paper (in the Appendix) is a reprint of a statement opposing the Congressional proposals to dismantle the child nutrition programs. The statement appeared as a full-page ad in the Western Edition of The New York Times on Tuesday, January 31, 1995, and has since been widely reprinted in newspapers throughout both California and the United States. It also has been used to create postcards for a massive mailing to Congress from all over the Western states and for petitions to Congress that are being signed in a number of Western states.

Please use this ad. For example, the advertisement can be

- Reprinted it in your own organization’s magazine, newsletter or convention program. Contact California Food Policy Advocates if you want a camera-ready version; one will be fed ex to you immediately.
- Included it in mailings to your members.
- Placed it as a paid advertisement in your local newspaper. Feel free to take off the name of California Food Policy Advocates and put yours on.

Please contact Edward Steinman at California Food Policy Advocates (415-291-0282, extension 106) to learn about other ways to use the ad.

What Next?

- Call, write or fax Governor Pete Wilson and Health and Welfare Secretary Sandra Smoley. The Governor will play a key role in decisions regarding block grants.

  Governor Pete Wilson  
  Phone: 916/445-2841  
  Fax: 916/445-4633

  Secretary Sandra Smoley  
  Phone: 916/654-3454  
  Fax: 916/654-3343

- Urge state representatives to oppose proposals to merge all federal nutrition programs into a single state block grant. Ask them to support the continuation of entitlement funding for nutrition safety net programs
that protect people from hunger and the state from fiscal harm during recessions and disasters.

- Educate your organization, its board of directors and your community by copying these materials, speaking at meetings and calling CFPA for assistance. Don't forget to ask the following types of organizations for help: children's and human service coalitions; business and retail food industry representatives; church groups, particularly Bread for the World; health care providers; nutrition professionals; and universities.

- Participate in a national grassroots campaign. Help generate a public outcry against the Personal Responsibility Act by activating your networks, mailing lists and clients. Alert local media — particularly the editorial page editors of local newspapers -- about the impact of block grants on local economies and hungry kids. The enclosed sample op-ed piece and letter can be adopted for local use.

- Finally, please keep CFPA staff informed of all your efforts, and let us know how we can be of further assistance.

With thoughtful, thorough and coordinated efforts, anti-hunger advocates and their allies throughout California and the nation can make a difference in the ultimate outcome of proposals pending in Congress.
The Contract With America's Nutrition Block Grant Proposal

Summary

In January 1995, the 104th Congress began work on the much publicized Contract with America. The Contract is a series of 10 proposals which will be considered by the new Congress over the next 100 days. One of the 10 proposals in the Contract is a welfare reform proposal, known as the Personal Responsibility Act (PRA). Title V of the PRA repeals all federal food programs and replaces them with a block grant or single payment to the states.

Federal Food Programs Repealed

The Personal Responsibility Act (PRA) would consolidate all the major federal nutrition programs into a block grant and end their entitlement status. If passed and signed by the President, the bill would take effect October 1, 1995. Programs in the PRA are:

- The Food Stamp Program
- The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
- The National School Lunch Program
- The School Breakfast Program
- The Summer Food Service Program for Children
- The Child and Adult Care Food Program
- The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)
- The Congregate Meals Program (Elderly Meals)
- The Home-Delivered Meals Program ("Meals on Wheels")
- The USDA Commodity Distribution Program

Also included in the block grant proposal is a requirement that the states spend at least 12 percent of the funds for food assistance and nutrition education for pregnant women, breastfeeding and post-partum women, infants and children under the age of five, and at least 20 percent on child nutrition. The balance of the block grant funds can be spent by the states on food assistance programs of their own design. States are prohibited from spending more than five percent of the funds on administration.

The PRA also prohibits all legal immigrants from receiving any food benefits, including school meals, and eliminates meal reimbursements for non-poor children.
Deep Funding Cuts

The Contract calls for balancing the budget, lowering taxes and increasing defense spending -- all of which will require massive budget cuts to programs that assist low -- income persons with basic assistance: cash, food, housing, medical and child care, veteran's benefits, etc. These cuts are unprecedented in their severity. For example, if the PRA's proposed changes in Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) were fully in effect today, more than five million children would be kicked off the program. Overall, the benefit cuts in means-tested entitlement programs under the Contract are three times deeper than those made during the Reagan "revolution" in 1981-82.

In particular, the Personal Responsibility Act would merge funding for nutrition programs into a single payment to the states at sharply reduced funding levels. The maximum funding level for the first year of the total block grant is approximately $3.4 billion -- nine percent below the levels required to maintain current levels of assistance under the existing food programs. This funding level would reduce the child nutrition portion of the block grant from $8.6 billion to $7.1 billion, a 17 percent reduction.

The block grant ends the entitlement status of the food programs. Their funding would be set by Congress in an annual appropriations process and consequently would not increase automatically in response to state economic circumstances. Furthermore, the PRA establishes a ceiling on how much can be appropriated each year. Each year, the amount appropriated could be less than the ceiling would allow, as nutrition programs compete for funding with all other federal discretionary programs, in what are expected to be increasingly brutal annual appropriation battles.

Lost Entitlements

Loss of entitlement status for food programs means that funding would be discretionary, subject to yearly budget battles or across-the-board cuts to meet deficit or balanced budget targets. Programs currently entitled -- such as Food Stamps, School Lunch and Breakfast, Child and Adult Care Food and Summer Food -- could not grow to meet increased need during any given year, such as after a natural or civil disaster, or from year to year, such as during a recession.

States could react to increased need and/or substantially reduced funding by reducing or eliminating benefits in any number of ways, including further eligibility restrictions, across the board cuts to all recipients, creation of waiting lists and curtailed benefits. At a time when states are seeking to move more poor mothers from welfare to work, the numbers of low-income children in child care will rise -- correspondingly increasing the need for funding the child care
Without entitlement funding, states will likely be forced to cut one food program in order to fund another.

The effect of such cuts is clear. Studies have repeatedly shown that without adequate income, families cannot purchase enough food to prevent hunger. For households living at very low incomes (especially below the poverty level income, such as $14,400 for a family of three), food purchases are the only major elastic part of a family budget. When incomes are reduced, food purchasing and intake is curtailed and hunger increases. These families face intermittent, chronic or stark hunger, depending on community resources and their coping skills.

**Gutted Programs**

Federal rules that ensure equal access and maintain nutritional and program quality assurance standards would disappear under the block grant proposal. These include meal pattern requirements, WIC nutrition package design, requirements for nutrition education and dietary quality. There could be different nutrition block grant programs in each of the 50 states.

While the Personal Responsibility Act requires specific set asides for WIC and child nutrition, it also permits states to request waivers to reduce or eliminate the federal standards. For example, if the state block grant funds go to a welfare or social services agency, that agency could sharply reduce WIC benefits and raise food stamp allotments for pregnant women, infants and children. Conversely, the state could simply eliminate the Food Stamp Program entirely. Should state's choose the "cash out" alternative, there would be no assurance that federal block grant funds actually went for food.

**State Responsibility**

The block grant proposal would require states to invest considerable time and money to attempt to reinvent state programs that are already working well as federal ones. For example, states would have to establish their own eligibility criteria, meal patterns or WIC food prescription requirements. Food Stamp and WIC coupons would be specific to California and necessitate a state redemption process. With sharply reduced administrative funding, it is unlikely that states will choose to maintain the same standards currently required under federal law. Millions of dollars spent improving and automating programs, such as California WIC's ISIS Project and the state Department of Education's "Shaping Healthy Choices," would be wasted.

Finally, the Personal Responsibility Act would require states to run workfare programs and reduce the amount of food assistance provided to a large category
of people (those not elderly, disabled or caring young children) unless they perform 32 hours of unpaid work during the previous month. States would only receive $20 per non-exempt participant per month to implement this requirement.
The Contract With America's Nutrition Block Grant Proposal

*Particular Impact on California Nutrition Programs*

The Personal Responsibility Act (PRA) proposal would consolidate all the major federal nutrition programs into a block grant to states. Other nutrition block grant proposals are also being discussed in Congress, most notably a proposal supported by the Republican Governors. It is likely that the House will vote on a final block grant bill that is an amalgam of several different proposals.

**What Kind of Cuts are We Talking About?**

The table below, based on United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) expenditure data from fiscal year 1994, illustrates the size and scope of federal spending to feed hungry Californians -- over $4 billion dollars annually -- which assists millions of families. While the figures are preliminary and participation in some cases is estimated, these data reflect the vast importance of federal food dollars to California's low-income residents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Funds</th>
<th>Average Participation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food Stamps</td>
<td>$2.6 billion</td>
<td>3.2 million per month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Lunch</td>
<td>$587 million</td>
<td>2.1 million per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIC</td>
<td>$417 million</td>
<td>837,700 per month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CACFP</td>
<td>$160 million</td>
<td>238,700 per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Breakfast</td>
<td>$130 million</td>
<td>597,666 per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEFAP</td>
<td>$22.2 million</td>
<td>1.4 million per month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer Food</td>
<td>$15.4 million</td>
<td>148,300 per day (July)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Meals</td>
<td>$11.6 million</td>
<td>238,000 per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSFP</td>
<td>$4.5 million</td>
<td>17,735 per month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State SAE &amp; NET</td>
<td>$9.65 million</td>
<td></td>
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Total Amount of Federal Food Dollars to CA in 1994: $4,001 billion

The PRA nutrition block grant, if it were appropriated at 100 percent of its authorization, actually contains modest increases in overall nutrition funding for California in the first year. However, especially if the Balanced Budget Amendment passes, the pressure will be intense for Congress to appropriate much less than the full authorization. The likelihood that the nutrition block grant would continue to suffer
further, deeper cuts is extremely high, and will increase over time. The chart below spells out what these cuts could look like for California.

**PRA Nutrition Block Grant Funding At Three Different Levels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>California Federal Nutrition Funds in FY 1995</th>
<th>100% PRA</th>
<th>75% PRA</th>
<th>50% PRA</th>
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<tr>
<td>(unlikely)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.17 (unlikely)</td>
<td>4.82 (+16%)</td>
<td>3.62 (-13%)</td>
<td>2.41 (-42%)</td>
</tr>
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The Republican Governor's block grant proposal uses a formula that divides the total nutrition funding between the states based on their FY 1994 spending levels and FY 1993 state proportions of the total (with inflation adjustments). However, since block grants fail to take recessions into account, California would soon feel the pain with this formula. For example, had this proposal had been implemented in 1989, prior to this state's last recession, California would be facing increased need this year — with 48 percent less nutrition funding than it received last year.

The bottom line is this: the proposed block grant would eliminate the entitlement status of food programs and subject each year's nutrition program funding to the Congressional appropriations process. Congress could choose in any given year to eliminate part or all of the funding for nutrition programs.

**What Would Block Grants Be Like?**

The block grant proposal would repeal ten programs which currently constitute California's federal food safety net, which today protects millions of California low-income families and children from hunger. The proposal would severely damage this safety net — and hurt local jobs and businesses. The following provides a projected scenario of what could happen to the major programs:
• The Food Stamp Program

During the last fiscal year, the California Department of Social Services received $2.6 billion from the federal government. This allowed over 3.2 million low-income persons -- over two-thirds of them children -- to receive coupons which helped their families purchase nutritious food every month. Food stamps are currently a means-tested entitlement, which means that anyone who meets the eligibility criteria can apply for and get the benefits.

Worst Cuts. Under the PRA proposal, there is no requirement for states to run a food stamp program. Moreover, because WIC and Child Nutrition programs have at least nominal "set aside" protections, the funding available to provide some form of food assistance to the population now served by food stamps would take a much worse hit. Under the PRA, a food stamp-type program would bear at least two-thirds of the cuts that will sooner or later be imposed.

Lost Entitlements, Lost Safety Net. By eliminating individual entitlement in the food stamp program, Congress would unravel the food safety net that prevents the kind of widespread and stark hunger that was common during the Great Depression. Not only will this cause individual harm and needless hunger, but it will have severe consequences on the state and local economy during economic downturns and natural disasters.

Cash Out. To save money and eliminate fraud, California administrators will be strongly tempted to simply "cash out" food stamps -- that is, increase cash welfare benefits to households, and assume they will be spent on groceries or meals. Studies of cash-out experiments have demonstrated that families end up spending less money on food when using cash instead of coupons, which negatively impacts nutritional intake. This would be especially true in California, where housing costs are higher than any state in the nation.

Curtailed Eligibility. Under current law, families with gross incomes up to 130 percent of the poverty line may qualify for food stamps; many of the households between 100 percent and 130 percent of poverty are likely to be working at low-wage or part-time jobs. California could decide to save money by limiting eligibility to only the poorest households. If participation were limited to 75 percent of poverty, almost a third of those currently qualified would be terminated. Terminating food benefits to working households is not likely to be a work incentive -- and will certainly increase hunger.

Reduced Benefits. Another way to save money would be to reduce the value of food coupons across the board. Maximum food stamp benefits are currently worth 70 cents per person per meal in California, and typically last poor families about two weeks. USDA data shows it takes $1.90 per meal to ensure an adequate intake of nutritious food. Less food will mean more hunger.
Waiting Lists. Under a combination of block grant funding and yearly cuts to meet deficit reduction or balanced budget targets, a food stamp-type program in California will eventually face a time when all applicants cannot be served. Ironically, this is more likely to happen during a recession or disaster, when need is greater but money is tighter. What criteria will be used to decide who will be terminated from the program, or placed on a waiting list? What will it be like in local county welfare offices when these decisions are made?

Hurt Economies. The food stamp program performs a critical function as what economists call an "automatic stabilizer" -- it moderates economic downturns by infusing more purchasing power into state and local economies when jobs are lost. Converting this key recession-fighting program into a block grant is likely to make future recessions deeper and more protracted. Ironically, a recession would be a time when California would face increased need for food assistance, but also large revenue declines, and thus be least able to supplement inadequate federal block grant funding.

• Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants,and Children (WIC)

This fiscal year, the California Department of Health Services' WIC program will receive over $464 million from USDA to provide food coupons, nutrition counseling and referrals to nearly 1 million pregnant women, infants, and young children. WIC is a cost-effective, preventive health program that has enjoyed bi-partisan support in Congress and has been headed towards "full funding" for the past two years.

Popular Now -- Protected Forever? PRA proponents claim that the block grant proposal would allow the program to continue growing towards full funding. However, since the 12 percent set-aside can be lowered or eliminated by waiver, there is no guarantee that a "WIC-type" program would continue to grow. Without a separate identity and track record, the odds are high that WIC funding will be reduced sharply over time as part of a larger block grant. Meanwhile, California politicians are reassuring the WIC community that WIC is popular and favored, and will be protected. But when the money runs out and the "crumb fight" begins in earnest, this tune may change. And what about future politicians -- will WIC always remain a favorite?

Program Quality Standards Gutted. WIC provides more than food coupons. WIC works because it is a preventive, public-health oriented program designed to assess risks and provide individual counseling and support, referrals and nutrition education. With funding for administration curtailed, the program's renowned and proven-effective approach would be gutted. The federal standards that ensure WIC's high quality would be abolished. The PRA proposal requires nothing but "food assistance and nutrition education"; the GOP Governor's proposal has no requirements. In fact, in order to save costs, the temptation will be to simply replace WIC with higher food stamp or cash
allotments -- along with a few pamphlets -- for pregnant women and infants, and fold the two programs into one.

**Punitive Approach.** The PRA would force local WIC providers to deny benefits to undocumented persons, lower the income eligibility to below 185 percent of poverty, and enforce work requirements among some participants. The new rules would create an entirely different atmosphere in local WIC clinics. Support and empowerment would be replaced by fear and mistrust. WIC's "user friendly" approach, which has had a tremendously positive impact on women's lives, would be lost.

**Many Participants Worse Off.** National data shows that about 40 percent of WIC participants receive food stamps, and 27 percent receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Older children of WIC participants undoubtedly participate in child nutrition programs, particularly school lunch. The PRA would make deep cuts to all of these programs, and make up to five million children ineligible for AFDC. Even if WIC were to survive relatively unscathed, how much good will WIC vouchers do for families facing increased hunger, homelessness, and destitution?

- **School Lunch and Breakfast Program**

  Last year, $644 million in federal funding enabled over 9,000 California schools to serve over 2.2 million kids a nutritious daily lunch. In 5,100 schools, 641,000 kids ate breakfast and began the day ready to learn. About 75 percent of the lunches and 95 percent of the breakfasts went to low-income children. California's general fund matched the federal meal reimbursements with $49 million, and $87 million worth of federal commodities helped schools cut food costs. The School Lunch program was started "as a measure of national security" after World War II. Fifty years later, the diminishment of this program will make it virtually impossible for California schools to reach the Education 2000 goal of all children entering school "ready to learn."

- **Curtailed Eligibility and Funding.** Currently, federal funds not only reimburse schools for meals served to poor children, but also partially subsidize the costs of meals in the "paid" and "reduced-price" category. The PRA proposal would limit the use of block grant funds to poor children only -- and at lower income levels than currently used. Children whose parents are working but poor, or newly unemployed, would be hurt the most by this provision. Limited reimbursements, along with elimination of the commodity programs, would drastically reduce funding, forcing many school meal programs into a fiscal crisis. Many would probably drop their breakfast programs; others would raise prices for paying students. The PRA would also force schools to deny meals to undocumented children.
Declining Meal Quality. All federal standards for meal quality would be abolished, undoing years of progress in improving school meals. Nutrition education and training of kids, teachers and foodservice workers would be eliminated, and school meals would no longer be a model for lifelong healthy eating habits. Privatization is a real possibility, with Burger King or Taco Bell operating school cafeterias. In California, a state meal mandate, unless repealed, would still protect the requirement that a lunch be served to all needy kids. However, without federal guidelines ensuring meal quality, this lunch could well end up being a daily hot dog with "ketchup as a vegetable."

More Hungry Kids as Times Get Harder. Block grant funding will not allow more hungry kids to eat free or low-cost meals at school when their families are coping with recessions, local economic problems (such as plant closures) or natural disasters. There simply would not be enough money for schools to feed more kids. School meal programs and commodity supplies have played a little-known, but critically important, role in helping communities cope with disasters. If the PRA passes, this capacity won't be there when the Big One hits.

Fewer Children Ready to Learn. Without the high-quality comprehensive nutrition programs California schools now operate, student health status and academic performance will begin to suffer. School breakfast programs will cease operating due to lack of funds. Poor attendance, increased discipline problems, and lower test scores will result.

- The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

Last year, $160 million in federal funding allowed the Department of Education to reimburse providers (including Head Start providers) in 2,800 child care centers and 28,000 family day care homes for more than 156 million nutritious meals and snacks. On an average day, this funding allowed about 238,720 preschoolers to participate. California contributed about $8 million in matching meal reimbursements. (About 1,600 frail seniors also eat CACFP meals each day in 84 adult day health centers.)

All of the Above. Curtailed eligibility, declining meal quality, more hungry kids, fewer children ready to learn -- all of the negative impacts felt by school meal programs (and described above) also apply to the Child Care Food Program.

Funding Cuts -- Cruel Choices. The PRA would merge funding for CCFP into the larger block grant, and the program’s regulations and identity as a separate program would be abolished. In 1994, CCFP funds amounted to less than four percent of the total nutrition funds flowing into California. So, despite being the fourth largest nutrition program in the state, and funding millions of meals, CCFP would be extremely vulnerable to cuts -- especially when the pot drastically "shrinks." The decisions that the Governor and the Legislature would
have to make would force intolerable choices between breakfast for some kids and any meals at all for their younger brothers and sisters.

**Possible Loss of Family Day Care Component.** Language in the PRA currently refers only to food funding for meals served in child care institutions, completely ignoring the fact that millions of children receive care in a family day care setting. The PRA would also impose individual income-eligibility testing, which is not currently required for family day care meals. The ultimate outcome may be the total elimination of this crucial component of CCFP.

**Quality Child Care Undermined.** Providers of high quality child care, in both centers and homes, rely on CCFP as a small but steady subsidy, that not only allows them to provide healthy food, but frees up money that they can spend on improving their facilities and activities. Furthermore, the required monitoring visits and staff education — is a vital part of CCFP — is generally the only oversight and quality control that providers receive. Especially in family day care, cuts or elimination of CCFP would seriously undermine quality child care -- just when Congress is saying all poor women must work!

- **The Summer Food Service Program for Children**

Last summer, 148,373 needy kids in camps, recreation programs and neighborhood parks got a healthy summer lunch when school was out from the Summer Food Service Program. While this program is very small and quite complex, hunger advocates have been working hard to improve and expand it, so that more children can participate in this small but crucial entitled meal program.

**Future in Jeopardy.** In block grant situations, the smaller programs are the most vulnerable. In California, Summer Food would be particularly vulnerable to complete elimination, because the state only this year began administrating the program. USDA's Western Regional Office has had to run the program directly in California since 1978. Once Summer Food is merged into a single, non-entitlement block grant, with administrative decisions being made in California,

- **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**

TEFAP provides donated surplus and purchased commodities to food banks across the state, along with a small amount of funding to cover storage, transportation and administration costs. In FY 1993, over $22 million in food was distributed to an estimated 1.4 million people. Low-income people, especially seniors, often appreciate TEFAP because the food is distributed in more supportive and friendly environments -- like local churches and community centers -- instead of the sometimes intimidating welfare offices. The TEFAP system of warehouses and food banks is also a critical part of California's disaster response system.
Future in Jeopardy. TEFAP barely made it intact through the last Congressional budget process, with TEFAP advocates fighting hard to gain back a proposed elimination of their food budget. This year, while California food banks are struggling to meet burgeoning need, they are receiving less than half the TEFAP commodities than in the previous several years. Without more Congressional and federal support, the TEFAP program as it now exists would probably not survive a block grant.

- Senior Meals

Since 1973, limited federal funds have been available for programs operating both congregate and home-delivered meals to low-income seniors. Administered through the Department on Aging, these programs used about $12 million dollars to feed approximately 238,000 seniors. Senior meals have suffered from lack of funding for the past decade, and only reach a small portion (about seven percent) of needy elderly. Many home-delivered meals programs routinely place seniors on waiting lists, due to capped funding.

Future in Jeopardy. Once again, the smaller programs are the most vulnerable to deep cuts or elimination. In a block grant scenario, senior meal programs would be in grave danger. When cuts have to be made, who will decide? The specter of seniors pitted against kids, fighting for crumbs in the Legislature, could become a reality.
Impact of PRA on the Food Industry and Agriculture

The Personal Responsibility Act (PRA) would replace all nutrition programs -- including the Food Stamp Program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), the school lunch and breakfast programs, the Summer Food Service Program and the Elderly Meals Program -- with a block grant to the states. Not only would this act significantly reduce funding to these programs, but the PRA would have a dramatic -- and negative -- impact on this country’s food industry and agriculture.

The Block Grant Will Reduce The Ability Of Families To Purchase Food

- Food stamp benefits comprise a significant portion of poor families' monthly budgets, particularly in states with lower Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) benefit levels. For example, food stamp benefits equal or exceed monthly AFDC benefits in 13 states; in 28 states, food stamp benefits account for more than 40 percent or more of a family's combined monthly AFDC and food stamp benefit grant. Since these budgets are already quite low and very difficult to live on, a cash-out of food stamps will most likely mean that families will shift money from food purchases to other necessities.

- In addition, USDA-sponsored research has demonstrated that food stamp dollars translate into significantly more food purchase dollars than do cash dollars. These findings confirm that strong probability that cash-out will mean families spend less of their money on food.

- Passage of the PRA would immediately reduce federal dollars going to the states for food purchases in food stamps and the child nutrition programs by $3.5 billion. This, in turn, would ultimately jeopardize an even larger proportion of the current $39 billion food program budget. This is because loss of entitlement status -- and elimination of the current national nutrition standards which serve as a basis for the determination of funding levels -- will mean that these food funds are much more vulnerable to deep and arbitrary cuts each ensuing year.

- Even if states choose to run some kind of food stamp or cash-out programs, the PRA makes it impossible for participation and benefits in these programs to increase -- even during a recession. This will mean that the food industry will suffer more than it currently does during bad economic times, because fewer real dollars will be available for food purchases during these periods than there are now.

- Many supermarkets in neighborhoods with significant numbers of low-income families may have to close because of the devastating combination of immediate and continuing reductions in government expenditures on food
programs; the likelihood that many states will cash-out their food stamp programs, resulting in reduced food purchases; the increased administrative costs to the retail industry of different programs being operated in each state; and the decrease in food dollars available during bad economic times.

The Block Grant Would Radically Change The Way Current Programs Run

- Because the PRA ends national nutrition program standards, it could easily result in 50 different variations of the Food Stamp Program, the WIC Program and the other child nutrition programs -- depending on unpredictable variables in each state. This will make it much more difficult for the food industry to work efficiently on a national basis and is likely to increase its administrative costs as well as other costs.

- The PRA eliminates the Commodity Distribution Program and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP); it will also almost completely eliminate the major source of funding for current commodity purchases. Under the PRA, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) may sell surplus commodities to the states to provide food assistance to poor people, but there is no requirement that the states must purchase any of these commodities. This reduction in funding will mean that fewer commodities are purchased by the states for food assistance programs, including the child nutrition programs, which have been major users of commodities in the preparation of school meals.

- For retailers involved in Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT), the block grant approach could create chaos. For states that do not cash out food stamps, the possibility exists that each state will utilize a different approach to EBT. Further, states could use EBT to restrict the types of food that recipients could purchase with their benefits.

The Private Sector Will Not Be Able To Fill The Gaps

If federal nutrition programs are block granted, hungry California families will have to find private resources to meet food needs. Charities will not be able to meet this level of need:

- According to a 1993 study by Second Harvest, the largest hunger relief organization in the United States, 10.4 percent of the United States population already relies on soup kitchens and food pantries for food assistance; significantly, 42.9 percent of food pantry and soup kitchen clients are children. In 1993, 46 percent of food pantries had to decrease the amounts of food given to each individual. Second Harvest projected that a 15 percent increase in food was needed to meet current demand.
• The U.S. Conference of Mayors documented that the number of requests for emergency food increased 13 percent in 1993. On average, 17 percent of those requests went unmet.

• A national survey by Catholic Charities shows that three-fourths of the people who went to the organization in 1992 needed emergency food or shelter. Ten years earlier, only one in four sought those services.
The Contract With America's Nutrition Block Grant Proposal

**Summary "Talking Points"**

On January 4, 1995, the House Republican Leadership began work on a portion of the Contract with America: the Personal Responsibility Act (H.R. 4). The Personal Responsibility Act (PRA) "block-grants" the federal nutrition programs --the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) among them -- and ends the entitlement status of food stamps, school lunch, school breakfast, summer food, the child and adult care program and the special milk program. The following are summary "talking points" that could be used to explain the dire consequences of the PRA for low-income adults and children in California.

I. A Block Grant Would Shift The Responsibility -- but Not the Necessary Funding -- to the States for Low-Income Families And Children.

A discretionary block grant would eliminate the entitlement status of food programs and subject each year's nutrition program funding to the Congressional appropriations process. Congress could choose in any given year to eliminate part or all of the funding for nutrition programs.

Block grant funding would not increase in slower economic times. Funding for entitlement federal food programs increases to meet demand during economic downturns when state budgets are financially strapped. With no entitlements, during a state recession, local plant closure or natural disaster there would actually be less food assistance available per hungry family.

Even if no recession occurred, a block grant would leave the state with inadequate resources to meet food assistance needs likely to be driven upward by an increased need for school lunches and breakfasts as school enrollments rise. Similarly, as welfare reform measures require more parents to work, the number of low-income children in child care and participating in the child care food program will go up -- with no corresponding increases in federal funds.

II. A Block Grant Would Result In Less Overall Funding For Nutrition Programs.

The appropriation ceiling that will be set for the block grant for fiscal year 1996 is approximately $3.4 billion below the level required to maintain current levels of assistance under the existing food programs.

In fact, less than the ceiling is likely to be appropriated. Over time, the balanced budget constitutional amendment and other provisions expected to be passed by Congress are likely to force large reductions in appropriations for domestic non-
entitlement programs. This will make it extremely difficult to avoid further cuts in the appropriations for the block grant.

III. A Block Grant Would Eliminate All Federal Standards Governing Nutrition Programs.

Federal rules that ensure equal access and maintain nutritional and program quality would disappear. The five percent limit on expenditures for administration in the proposal would make it hard for states to provide the same level of services as currently mandated by federal regulation in all nutrition programs.

Under the grant, California would receive a single payment from the federal government that could be provided as food assistance in any number of ways, including cash benefits. Thus, there is no guarantee that appropriated funds would actually be used for food, nor would there be any way to evaluate the effectiveness of the block grant in alleviating hunger. As a result, support for block grant funding will erode over time and less funding will be appropriated each year.

IV. The Personal Responsibility Act Will Increase Hunger in California.

Implementing the Personal Responsibility Act will mean massive budget cuts to programs that provide low-income families with basic assistance: cash, food, housing and child care. If the Act's proposed changes to Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) were fully in effect today, more than five million children would be kicked off the program. Overall, the benefit cuts in means-tested entitlement programs are three times deeper than those made during the Reagan years.

California families who receive both AFDC and food stamps are already living $2,000 below poverty level income (currently set at $14,460 for a family of three). The PRA's benefit cuts -- coupled with cuts to a whole range of other food, housing and, medical assistance programs -- will clearly create more hunger among children on welfare.

Studies have repeatedly shown that without adequate income, families cannot purchase enough food to prevent hunger. For households living at very low incomes, food purchases are the only major elastic part of a family budget.

V. The Private Sector Cannot Fill the Gaps.

If federal nutrition programs are block granted and cut, hungry California families will have to find private resources to meet food needs. Charities will not be able to meet this level of need.

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Charitable organizations, including Second Harvest, have repeatedly documented their difficulty in meeting current demands for direct food assistance, let alone demand exacerbated by the elimination or reduction in federal food assistance.

VI. There Is No Turning Back.

The Personal Responsibility Act would essentially dismantle the federal food safety net, and turn back our nation's 60 year commitment to alleviating and ending the needless, preventable tragedy of hunger. Once these nutrition programs lose their entitlement status and are converted to block grants, there will be no turning back, despite whatever problems may ensue. Given the federal government's fiscal problems -- and the political climate in Washington -- it would be virtually impossible to regain entitlement status for critical nutrition programs for years to come.
Sample Op-Ed Piece on the Personal Responsibility Act
(Use in January/February of 1995)

Contract With America: Read the Fine Print

As part of its workplan for the first hundred days of the 104th Congress, the new House Republican leadership has included in its much-publicized "Contract With America" a lesser-known proposal to eliminate this nation's nutrition programs.

If it weren't such a travesty of our nation's founding values, the Contract would be comic: something like a "going out of business" sale that catches the attention and support of voters but — when carefully examined — is actually a cruel hoax played out on this nation's poorest and most vulnerable citizens.

California decision-makers are well advised to read the fine print of this contract before signing on the bottom line.

On the Contract Hit List: Hungry Kids

Most voters and Gingrich supporters don't know about the Contract's fine print, some of which can be found in one of the bills in the package: the Personal Responsibility Act (PRA). The PRA merges ten federal food assistance programs into a single payment or block grant -- at sharply reduced funding to the states.

Since the Great Depression, these programs -- including food stamps, school lunch and breakfast, the supplemental food program for women, infants and children (WIC), meals for the elderly and commodities for food banks -- have constituted the nation's most basic safety net against abject poverty and stark hunger. Moreover, countless evaluations have found that the healthy food and nutrition education provided by federal food programs provided are a smart investment. They are cost-effective and targeted to those most in need. These programs save billions of dollars in health and education costs every year. If there's anything to feel "personally responsible" about, it is that there are still thousands of hungry California kids and seniors who are not receiving the benefits of these nutrition programs.

The PRA block grant proposal would eliminate the entitlement status of these critical food safety net programs and subject them to yearly pressures (sure to be intense, especially with the Balanced Budget Amendment in the works) and political whims of the Congressional appropriations process. Federal rules that ensure equal access and maintain nutritional and program quality would disappear.
Read Before You Sign: What it Means to California

Before signing on to this contract, Governor Wilson and California legislators should consider the heavy financial burden a block grant will place on state government. Shifting responsibility for providing vital nutrition programs to low-income families and children from the federal government to the state -- without providing adequate funding to meet the need -- means California decision-makers will ultimately have to decide how to divide up inadequate nutrition funds. This will result in pitting seniors against children, school lunch against food coupons and day care centers against schools.

Under a block grant system, California decision-makers will be unable to rely on federal programs to respond to increased need during economic downturns or natural disasters. For example, federally funded food stamp benefits automatically flow into our state when a recession hits and more families are out of work and apply for food assistance. These benefits not only currently ensure that nearly two million California children can eat, but actually moderate economic recessions by infusing more purchasing power ($2.2 billion during FY 1993) into state and local economies when jobs are lost. Between November 1989 and November 1993, as the state's unemployment rate rose from 5 percent to 10 percent, the number of people receiving food stamps in California doubled -- rising by over one million, but with all benefits paid for with 100 percent federal dollars. The PRA proposal would mean California would have to bear all of these additional costs, just when revenues are scarcest.

If federal nutrition programs are block granted, hungry California families will have to find private resources to meet their most basic food needs. Charities throughout the state have publicly rejected the contract, stressing that emergency food programs are hard pressed to meet current demands, let alone new ones, caused by the wholesale removal of federal nutrition services.

Once The Contract Is Signed There Is No Turning Back

The nutrition block grant proposal will radically change the role of the federal government in assuring basic nutrition resources for low-income families. It would essentially dismantle the federal food safety net and turn back this nation's 60-year commitment to alleviating and ending the needless, preventable tragedy of hunger.

Children who don't eat enough nutritious food risk serious limitations on their growth and development; they are less able to concentrate in school and more susceptible to illness and infection. The elderly are especially vulnerable to nutrition related disorders, including anorexia. The social and psychological costs of hunger, although harder to measure, are no less devastating: shame, fear, family disintegration, violence and crime.
The Contract With America is a bad deal for children, their families, and the elderly. It is clearly a bad deal for California. Buyer beware: read before you sign.
Fact Sheets

on the

Federal Food Assistance Programs

• Food Stamp Program
• Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
• National School Lunch Program
• School Breakfast Program
• Child and Adult Care Food Program
• Summer Food Service Program
• The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)
• Other Commodities
• Nutrition Program for the Elderly (NPE)

By Edward Steinman, Professor of Law,
Santa Clara University School of Law,
and California Food Policy Advocates
California Food Stamp Facts

Program Description

The Food Stamp Program is designed to improve the nutrition of people with low incomes by providing coupons to cover part or all of their household’s food budget. The Food Stamp Program was first developed in the late 1930s and is currently authorized by the Food Stamp Act of 1977; in 1971, Congress established uniform national standards of eligibility, and the program was expanded nationwide in 1974. In 1993, the Mickey Leland Childhood Hunger Relief Act made important changes to the food stamp program to assist families with children. The Food Stamp Program is slated to be reauthorized by Congress in 1995 as part of The Farm Bill.

The Food Stamp Program is the nation's single most important program in the fight against hunger. It is also the only entitlement food program that is available to all who meet eligibility standards regardless of their age or family composition. Improvements in the program are the most direct and effective way to ameliorate hunger in California.

Administration

The program is administered nationally by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and in California by the state Department of Social Services and 58 county social services offices. The federal government pays the full cost of food stamp benefits and half of the program's administrative costs. The balance of expenses is picked up by the state and local governments.

Eligibility

Eligibility is determined on the basis of both financial (income and resources) and non-financial (citizenship, social security number, work requirements) factors. A household is generally defined as a person or a group of people living together, but not necessarily related, who buy and cook food together. The Food Stamp Program is an entitlement program: anyone who meets eligibility requirements is entitled to receive benefits.

Most households -- except in California those receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) -- must have gross incomes below 130 percent of the poverty line ($1,335/month for a family of three). All households, including those with elderly and disabled members, must have net incomes below 100 percent ($1,027/month for a family of three) of the poverty line to qualify for benefits.
Net income constitutes all the household's income that counts in figuring food stamps minus the deductions for which they are eligible.

Most households may have up to $2,000 in countable resources (checking or savings account, cash, stocks/bonds, some cars or trucks); households with at least one household member age 60 or older may have up to $3,000. Many resources do not count toward these limits.

Everyone has a right to apply for the Food Stamp Program. The application process includes filing and completing an application form, being interviewed and verifying certain information. Mandatory verification includes: identification (library card, voter's I.D., driver's license, etc.); alien status; documentation of income and resources (pay stub, bank book, etc.); and deductible expenses (lease, utility bill, etc.)

At the time of application and once every 12 months, all able-bodied household members between 18 and 60 years of age and 16 and 17-year-old heads of households who are not in school must register to work. Many adult participants must participate in employment and training programs.

Benefits

Households are issued a monthly food stamp allotment, based on the size and income level of the household. The maximum household allotment is based on the Thrifty Food Plan, a low-cost food budget designed by USDA. The maximum allotment for a three-person household with zero net income is $304.

Participation Levels

Nearly 3.4 million Californians receive an average $57.29 in food stamp benefits each month. Of those receiving benefits, 60.5 percent are children living in households with a gross monthly income of $592. Most food stamp households are headed by women (72.8 percent), and 70.6 percent of all recipients own no vehicle.

Funding

California receives $2.323 billion in federal funds for food stamps. Since the Food Stamp Program is an entitlement, federal funds are provided to all eligible individuals who apply.
California WIC Facts

Program Description

WIC is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, a 100 percent federally funded program that provides nutritious food, individual counseling and referrals to health care to high-risk, low-income women and children up to the age of five. The purpose of the WIC program is to prevent poor birth outcomes, such as infant mortality and low birth weight, and to improve the nutrition and health of participants. Dozens of scientific studies have shown WIC to be a cost-effective and positive public health intervention.

Eligibility

Participants in the WIC program must:

- be pregnant, postpartum or breast-feeding, or under the age of five;
- have a household income below 185 percent of poverty ($1900/month for a family of three);
- be certified by a health professional to be at nutritional risk;
- and meet state residency requirements.

Benefits

WIC provides vouchers for a monthly package of nutritious foods tailored to the dietary needs of its target population. Authorized WIC foods include iron-fortified infant formula, infant cereal, milk, eggs, cheese, iron-fortified breakfast cereal, vitamin C-rich juice, beans and peanut butter.

Offering nutrition education to the WIC participant is an essential program requirement. Within each certification period, a participant must receive two nutrition education contacts.

Numerous studies have shown the benefits of the WIC program. Researchers have found that for every dollar spent on pregnant women in the WIC program, the associated savings in Medicaid costs for both mother and newborn, during the first 60 days after the child's birth, ranged from $1.77 to $3.13. The federal Government Accounting Office estimates that in 1990, the federal government spent $296 million on prenatal WIC benefits, which resulted in a savings of $853 million in health-related expenditures for WIC infants in the first year of life, with total savings estimated at $1.036 billion.
Participation

Nationwide, WIC currently serves about 6.8 million low-income, nutritionally at-risk participants with a $3.5 billion budget. In California, 80 local agencies served 98,000 participants in March 1995, with a FY 95 budget of $464.6 million. Approximately 27 percent of the participants are pregnant and post-partum women, 27 percent are infants and 46 percent are children ages 1-5.

Because WIC is not an entitlement program, not all participants can be served. Limited funding prevents millions of low-income, nutritionally at-risk women, infants and children from receiving program benefits. Nationally, WIC is serving only about 71 percent of the eligible women, infants and children.

Presently only 66 percent of California's eligible women and children are being served. The state Department of Health Services estimates that there are over 1.47 million women, infants and children in need of WIC benefits. Thus some 490,000 participants are shut out of the program due to limited funding. Despite recent funding increases and substantial growth over the past several years, California's percentage of need being met is one of the lowest in the nation.

State Funding

Fifteen states across the country have provided their WIC programs with supplemental funding, so that more eligible participants can be served. In five states (New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Massachusetts and Texas), the legislatures have provided from $6 million to $42 million in additional funds -- enabling WIC to reach substantially more low-income, nutritionally at-risk pregnant women, infants, and young children. Over the last 10 years, legislation which would supplement California's federal WIC monies has been repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, carried by a number of legislators. The Deukmejian administration routinely opposed WIC supplemental funding. While Governor Wilson has voiced support for WIC, he has not supported state supplemental or contingency funding.

Key Issues

Infant Formula Rebates: Since January 1, 1989, California's Department of Health Services has had a sole-source contract with Ross Laboratories (division of Abbott Labs) for the provision of infant formula at a reduced price, via a system of per-can rebates. However, effective August 1, 1995, a new rebate contract will go into effect, with Mead Johnson Nutritionalals (Bristol-Myers) supplying infant formula for WIC. The new rebate will allow the California WIC program to save $22 million per year -- and add 33,000 participants to the
program who would not otherwise be served. WIC also receives a rebate from Beechnut Foods on the infant cereal supplied by the program.

**Limited Funding:** When a state reaches the maximum number of participants that it can serve within its annual budget, individuals applying for program benefits are served on a "highest need" basis in compliance with a five-tiered priority system. The priority system ranks most pregnant women and infants before children -- including children with documented health problems. When the priority system is implemented, WIC agencies must turn away some eligible applicants who are in lower priority categories. For example, anemic children may not be served, in order to make room for pregnant women. In California, chronic and serious underfunding has resulted in fewer children participating in the program -- although this situation is improving. Despite improvements, however, California WIC is still ranked fifth from the bottom in the proportion of potential eligibles it is able to serve.
Program Description

The National School Lunch Program was created by Congress as a "measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being the Nation's children." The program was permanently authorized in 1946 through the National School Lunch Act. In 1970, Congress established national guidelines for free and reduced-price school lunches for needy children participating in the program. The Healthy Meals for Healthy Americans Act of 1994 requires schools to implement the Dietary Guidelines for Americans in menu planning beginning in 1996.

Administration

The National School Lunch Program is administered by the Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) at the federal level, by the California Department of Education, Child Nutrition and Food Distribution Division at the state level and by local school districts.

Eligibility

The School Lunch Program is an entitlement program, which means that any child who applies and meets the program's eligibility criteria will receive a free or reduced price meal. All public and non-profit private schools and all residential child care institutions can participate in the National School Lunch Program. California's state meal mandate, passed in 1977, requires all schools to provide at least one meal per day to all qualifying needy children. This meal must meet federal meal pattern requirements -- and is usually lunch.

Household income is used to determine whether a child will pay a substantial part of the cost for their lunch or will receive a reduced-price or free meal. To receive a reduced-price meal, household income must be below 185 percent of the federal poverty level. For free meals, household income must fall below 130 percent of poverty. Children in food stamp households or Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) assistance units are categorically eligible for free meals.
Benefits

Meals must meet specific nutritional requirements in order to qualify for federal funds. Lunch must include:

- 8 oz. fluid milk
- 2 oz. protein
- 3/4 cup serving consisting of two or more vegetables or fruits or both (juice can meet one-half of this requirement)
- 8 servings bread, pasta or grain per week

This meal pattern reflects a national nutritional standard that, over time, school lunches should provide one--third of the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA). Beginning in 1996, in order to qualify for federal reimbursement, lunches served by participating schools must comply with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and meet minimal nutrition standards.

Participation Levels

In California during FY 1994, 9,373 public and private schools and residential child care institutions offered school lunch; an average of 2.3 million children ate school lunch daily, totalling over 411 million meals. Of these students served, 70 percent received a free lunch, six percent received a reduced-price lunch and 24 percent participated in the paid-meal category.

Funding

Federal and state reimbursement funds and cash payments are used for preparing and serving meals and to cover administrative costs associated with the program. The federal per-meal reimbursement rates are $1.75 for free, $1.36 for reduced and $.17 for paid. The state reimburses schools $0.1135 for every free and reduced-price meal served. Federal meal reimbursement payments in FY 1994 totalled approximately $587 million, with an additional $66 million worth of federal commodities used by schools to lower food costs. Federal and state administrative funds, which cover all child nutrition programs operated by the state Department of Education, totalled $10.8 million (federal) and $666,000 (state).
Key Issues

Growing interest has now emerged among members of the nutrition community in the concept of "universal" school meals, i.e., offering all children school lunches and breakfast with no charges involved -- regardless of the household income of the children. Proponents argue that, although a costly proposition, this change would reduce paperwork, remove stigma from program participation, significantly cut administrative costs and increase program participation.
California School Breakfast Facts

Program Description

The School Breakfast Program was originally established in 1966 as a pilot program to provide meals to children in "poor areas where children had to travel a great distance to school." In 1975, amendments to the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 permanently authorized the program. Included in this legislation was a statement of Congressional intent that the program "be made available in all schools where it is needed to provide adequate nutrition for children in attendance."

Administration

The School Breakfast Program is administered nationally by the Food and Consumer Service (FCS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), at the state level by the California Department of Education, Child Nutrition and Food Distribution Division and by local school districts.

Eligibility

The School Breakfast Program is an entitlement program, which means that any child who applies and meets the program's eligibility criteria will receive a free or reduced price meal -- if the school they attend provides breakfasts. School and individual participation is exactly like the school lunch program. Parents must generally apply to the school in order for their children to receive a free or reduced-price breakfast. The same application covers both lunch and breakfast. School boards must apply to their state education agency in order to institute a program.

Benefits

Breakfast is a simple meal that can consist of many combinations of different foods but must include 1/2 pint milk, 1/2 cup of fruit, vegetable or juice, and one of the following: two servings of bread, or two servings of meat or one of each. This meal pattern reflects a national nutritional standard to ensure that, over time, school breakfast provide one-fourth of the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs).
Breakfast can be hot or cold, depending on a school's facilities. If a school does not have a cafeteria, an all-purpose room can double for one, or breakfast can be served in classrooms. In some areas, breakfast is served on the bus.

Participation Levels

In California, with rising child poverty, school enrollments and renewed support of the breakfast program, participation has been growing steadily in the past several years. According to FY 1994 data, more children than ever are eating school breakfast in California. Last year, the program was offered in 4,925 public schools in 600 districts, with an average daily participation of 635,000 low-income children. Only about 36.5 percent of the low-income children receiving school lunch also receive school breakfast. Many eat at home, but many attend schools that do not provide breakfasts. Latest figures show that there were still 480 schools in 219 districts that enroll more than 40 percent low-income children, yet do not participate in the School Breakfast Program.

Funding

Federal funds are provided to the state according to a reimbursement rate for each breakfast. Additional federal reimbursement for "severe need" schools goes to schools that serve 40 percent or more of their breakfast free or at a reduced price and can document inability to cover costs with regular funds. Commodity support is provided to school breakfast programs only when available. In FY 1994, $130 million in federal funds were received by the State of California for breakfast meals served. State meal funds reimburse an additional $0.1135 for every free and reduced-price breakfast served. Federal reimbursements are $0.975 for free, $0.675 for paid and $0.1925 for paid meals.

Federal grant funds are available to assist schools initiating breakfast programs. Between FY 1990 and FY 1994, USDA distributed $23 million on a competitive basis to state agencies, which then distributed the funds to targeted schools or school districts. California received funding for four out of five years, and plans to compete for additional funds authorized by Congress last year -- should they be appropriated.

Since FY 1992, Governor Wilson and the Legislature have allocated $3 million in the state budget to assist school districts with large numbers of low-income children to start new School Breakfast Programs. The start-up funds are available for non-recurring costs in grants of up to $10,000 per school site. To receive the funding, schools must commit to operate the breakfast program for at least three years.
Barriers

There is often local reluctance to implement the School Breakfast Program. When pressed by legislators, parents, teachers and community members, the three most common reasons a school district gives for not starting the program are: (1) logistical problems with busing, instructional, or personnel schedules; (2) fear of additional costs burdens to already strapped district budgets; and (3) dislike of federal and state programs perceived as welfare -- or belief that parents, not schools, should provide breakfast. California Food Policy Advocates has been conducting a multi-year grassroots campaign to counteract these "stumbling blocks" with facts, figures and community support.
California CACFP Facts

Program Description

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is designed to assure nutritious meals for children up to age 12, the elderly and certain handicapped individuals who participate in a non-profit, licensed or approved day care program. The program began in 1968 as part of the Special Food Service Program for Children; in 1975, Congress provided for a separate Child Care Food Program, which was permanently authorized in 1987. In 1987, the Older Americans Act was amended to allow the Child Care Food Program to serve the elderly and handicapped adults. The program's name was then changed to the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

Administration

The program is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture nationally and in California by the Department of Education, Child Nutrition and Food Distribution Division, working with local school districts and private agencies.

Eligibility

Child and adult care centers and family day care homes that wish to participate must be licensed, tax-exempt, public or private nonprofit organizations and approved as sponsors by the State Department of Education; for-profits that serve 25 percent or more low-income children are also eligible. Participating organizations are required to provide meals according to the nutritional standards set by USDA.

Family day care homes operating under the supervisor of an approved "umbrella sponsor" may also participate. An umbrella sponsor is an organization that applies to the state agency to sponsor CACFP and proves it is capable of administering the program. The sponsor is then responsible to the state agency.

Any child or adult attending a participating institution is entitled to meals. Programs eligible for participation include non-residential child or adult care institutions, such as group or family day care, child or adult care centers, Head Start, recreation centers, settlement houses and after-school programs.

USDA has conducted several demonstration projects to determine the best ways to reduce the barriers to participation in day care facilities that serve predominately children from households with low incomes. To encourage the
use of the CACFP in low-income and rural areas, USDA provides additional reimbursement for start-up costs to sponsors who expand CACFP services into these areas.

Benefits

In the past, this program was authorized to provide funds for three meals and two snacks per day. However, as a result of legislation in 1981, reimbursement is limited to two meals and one snack per day for children attending participating family day care homes. This means that family day care homes must choose two meals from breakfast, lunch and dinner, and provide either a morning or afternoon snack. A child attending a day care center for more than eight hours a day is eligible to receive an additional meal or snack.

All meals served in participating facilities are subsidized with federal funds. The reimbursement rates are different for child and adult care centers and family day care homes. California contributes to the federal reimbursement by adding $0.1301 for 75 percent of the free and reduced price lunch and breakfasts served. Child and adult care centers' reimbursement rates are based on the family income of center participants. For family day care homes, there is no income testing, and they are reimbursed at the same rate for all children. Reimbursement rates for the CACFP are adjusted annually on July 1 to reflect any changes in the Consumer Price Index.

The funding and technical assistance provided by the program helps participating organizations provide nutritious meals. An additional benefit of the CACFP is that child care providers must be licensed in order to participate. This provides a way both for parents to find reliable child care and for state agencies to regulate child care standards.

Participation Levels

In 1994, CACFP served nearly 147 million meals to approximately 218,000 children and adults per day in California through a network of 3,667 child care centers, 26,573 family day care homes and 235 public school districts. The program serves over two million meals a day nationally.

Funding

California received $158 million in federal reimbursement for the Child and Adult Care Food Program in fiscal year 1994. Since the CACFP is an entitlement
program, funds were provided to all eligible institutions qualifying for participation.
California Summer Food Facts

Program Description

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a federally funded child nutrition program which provides reimbursement to local organizations that furnish free nutritious meals to low-income children during those periods when they cannot receive them at school. Originally, SFSP operated mainly during the summer, but now, as the number of year-round schools is increasing, the program operates throughout the year.

Summer Food is important for many low-income children. School breakfasts and lunches provide essential sources of nutrition for many children. When school is not in session, these meals are lost and may not easily be replaced. As children obviously do not stop growing and learning simply because they are not in school, Summer Food fills a crucial gap -- helping to ensure that students will return to school ready to learn.

Administration

The Summer Food Program is administered nationally by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA); the USDA's Western Regional Office administers the program in California. Beginning in 1996, the California Department of Education will assume program administration within the state. At the local level, schools, nonprofit organizations, summer camps and local or county governments (like park and recreation departments) serve as sponsors for any number of neighborhood sites.

Eligibility

Summer Food is free to children who live in areas in which poor economic conditions exist. Most Summer Food meals are served at "open sites," which are located in areas where at least 50 percent of the children qualify for free or reduced-price school meals. These are areas where family incomes are at 185 percent or less of the poverty level ($28,028 for a family of four). Open site eligibility is determined geographically and not by individual means-testing.

A smaller number of programs operate as "enrolled sites," at which 50 percent or more of the children who are enrolled in the program must qualify individually by satisfying the 185 percent means test. Once a site qualifies, either by area or by enrollment, all the children at the site may participate in the program without charge.
Benefits

Most Summer Food sponsors may serve lunch and either one snack or breakfast; camps may serve up to four meals daily. The meals are both simple and flexible; they may be cold or hot, served indoors or out. To be federally reimbursed, the meals must consist of the following components:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakfast</th>
<th>Lunch/Dinner</th>
<th>Snack</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>milk</td>
<td>milk</td>
<td>Two of the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bread or cereal</td>
<td>meat or alternative</td>
<td>Milk or juice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fruit, juice or vegetable</td>
<td>two or more fruits and/or vegetables</td>
<td>Meat or alternative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bread</td>
<td>fruit or vegetable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participation Levels

The Summer Food Program is severely underutilized. While more than two million children in California apply for free and reduced-price school lunches, only 148,462 (6.5 percent) participated in the Summer Food Program in 1994. (By comparison, using this measure, the national participation rate in 1994 was 15.7 percent.) In fact, as many as three million children may be eligible for this federal entitlement program, virtually all of whom go unserved.

Many counties should, but don’t, serve summer meals. In California, 20 counties failed to contain even a single sponsor for the program in 1994, while 10 counties did not have a single summer food site. Some counties have sites operated by sponsors from different counties.

Funding

In 1994, local communities in California received $16.7 million in federal reimbursement for operating SFSP sites. During 1995, program sponsors will be reimbursed on a per-meal basis as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operating Costs (in $)</th>
<th>Administrative Costs (in $)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban or Vended*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>1.1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch/Dinner</td>
<td>2.1200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snack</td>
<td>0.5550</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A vended program is one in which a sponsor contracts with another entity to prepare the meals. A self-prep site is one in which the sponsor prepares its own meals.
California TEFAP Facts

Program Description

The Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) was established in December 1981 in order to reduce the level of government-held dairy commodities and to provide a degree of hunger relief to low-income households. TEFAP supplies a limited amount and variety of commodities to low-income households to act as a supplement to their purchased food. While many rely on this program, it by no means provides a well-balanced diet. The 1990 Farm Bill reauthorized TEFAP for five years and dropped the word "Temporary" from the program's name.

Administration

TEFAP is administered nationally by the Food and Consumer Service (FCS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). In California, the Department of Social Services (DSS) administers the program.

Eligibility

Eligibility for TEFAP is means-tested, which requires a household's income to be below a certain percent of the federal poverty level. Each state sets its own eligibility criteria -- in California, that level is 130 percent of the federal poverty level.

Benefits

Participants receive a box of commodities once a month from a local distribution site. Since 1988, USDA's supply of surplus commodities has dropped dramatically, while funding for purchasing commodities has resulted in the addition of such items as canned meat, canned and dried fruit, peanut butter, dried potatoes, citrus juice and legumes.

Participation Levels

As of late 1993, monthly participation was nearly 1.4 million people in California, though close to 5 million were eligible. Nationally, over nine million people are served monthly. Participation in other food assistance programs does not affect TEFAP eligibility.
Funding

Federal appropriations for administration of TEFAP are distributed to each state based on population, poverty and unemployment rates. The funds can go to defray the state and local costs of distributing, handling and storing all (publicly or privately) donated commodities. The state must pass through at least 40 percent of the funds to local emergency feeding organizations participating in TEFAP. With the passage of the Hunger Prevention Act of 1988, Congress required that USDA purchase additional commodities for TEFAP and thus maintain both this food assistance program and the emergency food network it supports.

For FY 1989 through FY 1993, Congress has appropriated $120 million each year for the purchase of commodities. In FY 1993, this level was increased to $162.3 million. In FY 1994, Congress cut funding to $80 million for commodity purchases and reduced administrative funding to $40 million.
California CSFP Facts

Program Description

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) provides supplemental foods and nutrition education to low-income pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, infants, children up to the age of six and elderly persons. In 1994, 19 states served women, infants and children through CSFP, while 11 of these states also serve low-income elderly. California has two CSFP programs: San Francisco and Orange County.

Administration

The Food and Consumer Service (FCS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) administers this direct food distribution program. Foods are purchased by USDA, including some obtained by surplus removal, and shipped to the Department of Education. At the local level, CSFP projects are operated by a wide range of sponsoring organizations — including local social service or health departments, private nonprofits, food banks and community action agencies.

Eligibility

Women and children are eligible if they qualify for other assistance programs or have incomes below 185 percent of poverty. Elderly persons whose income is below 130 percent of poverty are eligible. Women who are pregnant, postpartum or breastfeeding and children under six years old and seniors over 60 are eligible. In addition, participants must reside in a designated service area.

Benefits

Participants receive monthly food packages which can include fruit juice, canned fruits and vegetables, hot cereal, nonfat dry milk, evaporated milk, dry beans or peanut butter, canned meat or poultry, dehydrated potatoes, rice, cheese, butter and honey. If available, other foods can be included. Infants receive formula and rice cereal. There are five different USDA-purchased food packages which are meant to reflect the health and nutritional requirements of each participant category. Nutrition education is provided with each monthly food box.

Generally, participants pick up the food packages at a local distribution site on a monthly basis. In some sparsely populated rural areas, the food is distributed
by truck from the central local agency once a month. Home delivery may be offered for homebound elderly persons.

Participation

California serves a total of 12,000 women and children and 3000 elderly. Nationally, 206,000 women and children and 147,000 elderly were served in 1994. The average value of food is around $55 per month. In FY 1993, CSFP averaged 370,000 participants per month -- of which 62 percent were women, infants and children and 38 percent were elderly persons.

Funding

Based on federal funds available, USDA determines the maximum monthly caseload that the program can serve in a given fiscal year and distributes the funds accordingly. USDA has estimated that $104.5 million would be spent in CSFP for FY 1994. Because CSFP is not an entitlement program, it is often forced to turn away eligible people or to place them on waiting lists.
California Commodities Facts

Program Description

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) administers several commodity food programs through the Food and Consumer Service (FCS). Historically, these programs have served a dual function: to support agricultural markets by removing surpluses and to provide food to those in need. The Food Distribution Program for Charitable Institutions (CI) provides surplus foods for non-profit organizations that serve food on a regular basis. The Soup Kitchen and Food Bank Commodities Program (SK/FB) provides purchased and surplus food to agencies directly feeding the hungry.

Administration

At the federal level, the USDA's Food and Consumer Service administers both programs. In California, the programs are administered by the state Department of Education, which charges a small handling fee for each case of food.

Benefits

The foods received for the Charitable Institutions program depend in part on what items are designated as "surplus" by USDA. These have included flour, cheese, pasta, nonfat dry milk, peanut butter and oil -- but lately have been reduced to cornmeal and butter. The amount and variety of commodities available through the CI program have dropped dramatically over the years as surpluses have been exhausted and farm policies altered.

The Soup Kitchen/Food Bank Program, which has funding for food purchases, has included dehydrated potatoes, canned fruits, vegetables and meats.

Participation

In California, the CI program provided over 900 charitable institutions and 250 summer camps with 30 million pounds of food in 1993; over half of the recipient agencies are correctional facilities. The Soup Kitchen/Food Bank program provided more that 6.1 million pounds of food valued at $3.4 million to 145 agencies in 1993.
Funding

The CI program receives no federal funding since all product is surplus. The SK/FB program received $40 million in funding in 1995; this was an increase of $10 million from the previous year, appropriated in part to offset the drastic decreases in commodities available to the CI program. However, it is estimated that the value of commodities received free through the CI program was close to $118 million.
California Senior Nutrition Facts

Program Description

Nutrition programs for the elderly are designed to provide older Americans with low cost, nutritious meals, nutrition education and an opportunity for social interaction. The Older Americans Act of 1965 authorized two programs -- the Congregate Meals Program and the Home-Delivered Meals Program. In addition, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) contributes to the Senior Nutrition Programs through its Nutrition Programs for the Elderly, which provide cash and commodities to local elderly nutrition centers for use in Congregate and Home-Delivered Meals Programs.

Administration

These programs are administered federally by the Administration on Aging of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Federal funds are distributed to Area Agencies of Aging in the state, which contract with local organizations to provide the congregate and home-delivered meals to participating seniors.

Eligibility

Anyone 60 years or older may participate in the Congregate Meals Program. Participants' spouses, regardless of age, may also participate. Participants in the Home Delivered Meals Program must be over 60 years of age, live in the program's service area and be unable to prepare a meal for themselves. These programs are not means-tested, but participants are asked to make a small contribution at each meal.

Services are targeted to two groups of seniors: those in "greatest economic need" (i.e., households with incomes below the poverty line) and those in "greatest social need" (i.e., seniors who suffer from problems that interfere with their ability to perform normal daily tasks or threaten one's capacity to live independently).

Benefits

Congregate meals are usually served once each weekday at a local site, like a senior center, community center, or church. The Home-Delivered Meals Program delivers nutritious meals to the homes of disabled elderly persons each
weekday; some programs provide two additional frozen meals for the weekend. The meals served for both programs must meet one-third of the Recommended Daily Allowances for older adults.

Participation

In FY 1993, a total of 189,000 Californians were served by congregate meal services and 49,000 were served by the home-delivered program. One third of the congregate meals and 20 percent of the home delivered meals were provided to low-income minorities. Nationally, over 244 million meals were served as part of the Nutrition Program for the Elderly in FY 1993.

Funding

In past years, federal funding for these services has decreased. In some cases, states and the private sector have supplied additional funds and implemented cost-saving techniques. In FY 1994, $376 million will be spent for the Congregate Meals Program, $93.7 million for Home-Delivered Meals Program and over $150 million in funds for the Nutrition Program for the Elderly.
NEWT GINGRICH'S CONTRACT WITH AMERICA WILL CUT OR CRIPPLE ANTI-HUNGER PROGRAMS SUSTAINING ONE IN EVERY TEN AMERICANS, INCLUDING MILLIONS OF CHILDREN.

IF WE LET MALNUTRITION BECOME OFFICIAL POLICY, AMERICA WILL SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE NEXT CENTURY.

D

espite bipartisan support spanning almost half a century, the new Congressional majority agenda aims to dismantle every U.S. nutrition program — not only lunches for schoolchildren but meals for the elderly and food supplements for pregnant women and infants.

The vital task of preventing malnutrition would become a job for the states to handle, through so-called "block grants."

- The problem: Block grants guarantee coupling cuts in anti-hunger aid at a time when hunger continues to threaten millions of Americans. The consequences!

1. DENYING OUR CHILDREN THE FOOD THEY NEED WILL DO LIFELONG DAMAGE.

In today's dollars-and-cents climate, everything has its costs. But a hungry childhood has more than most. Even a short period of mild malnutrition can have lifelong effects. Physical growth and cognitive development, once impaired, can be irreparable.

Children carry this damage throughout their schooling and into our society, where their adult problems are much more expensive. The lifelong price of childhood hunger is paid for by all. And it's no longer possible to "move away" from the problem.

Today, more than one in seven kids in our suburban schools go home to poverty. Hunger in America must be faced squarely and addressed sensibly, as it is now. This is not only our moral imperative but smart, hard-nosed public policy.

2. CHILDREN WILL HAVE TO FIGHT FOR FOOD IN SHRINKING PUBLIC BUDGETS.

Right now, federal food programs precisely pinpoint the people who need help. Kids have to qualify for food aid. Once they do, they receive the food they need. But block grants to states will remove this access to supplemental food assistance and force poor kids — who can't vote or lobby legislators — to compete for food funds against special interests. It's already expected that soaring public medical costs will eat up more and more of the limited funds available. Health costs will rise even higher to meet the needs of more malnourished children whose problems would have been prevented if food programs were fully funded.

3. BLOCK GRANTS WILL INCREASE THE NUMBER OF HUNGRY CHILDREN.

With reduced access to an adequate diet, children will pay the price of deficit reduction. While most of the public budget is locked in, block grants are not. Block grants of any type are easy targets for future spending cuts since they do not specify exactly where the aid goes. Congress could reduce them any time. Experts project that converting food programs to block grants will result in deep funding cuts in each of the next four years — an estimated loss of more than $17.5 billion by the year 2000, if the Balanced Budget Amendment called for by the Contract is passed, cuts will be even greater; in hard economic times, when tax revenues fall, there is more hunger but less aid will be available.

4. BLOCK GRANTS MEAN MORE FOOD MONEY WILL BE WASTED ON BUREAUCRACY.

Right now, most of our nation's anti-hunger aid is in the form of meals (like school lunches) or food Stamps usable only for groceries. If current national nutrition standards are removed, states may resort to cash grants. There will no longer be any guarantee that expenditures boost nutrition — as they do now. As for management costs, instead of consolidating and streamlining federal programs, as nutrition experts advocate, the Contract With America calls for 50 new and duplicative state-level food bureaucracies — all struggling to reinvent the wheel.

THE CLASSIC CASE

"If it's not broken, don't fix it."

If the Balanced Budget Amendment passed, cuts will be even greater; in hard economic times, when tax revenues fall, there is more hunger but less aid will be available.

California Committee on Child Nutrition

California Food Policy Advocates
57 Post Street, Suite 801, San Francisco, CA 94104

YES, I agree! House Speaker Newt Gingrich's plan to cut and cripple anti-hunger programs is a serious threat to our nation's health and well-being. Let me know how I can safeguard America's children and protect our future. Enclosed is my contribution to your national campaign to save U.S. nutrition programs.

$15 $25 $35 $50 $100 $500 $1,000 or $,__

Name

Address

City State Zip

Daytime Phone

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