

THE AVAILABILITY OF FEDERAL AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES  
AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR  
COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS FEEDING THE HUNGRY IN BOSTON

by

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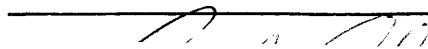
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NANCY J. WAGMAN

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
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of the requirements for the degree of  
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ABSTRACT

This thesis documents the relationship between U.S. agricultural policy and anti-hunger legislation under the Reagan Administration, in the context of diminished federal support for established social programs. In particular, the thesis examines the impacts that federal policies have had on community organizations in Boston that run emergency food programs.

The Reagan Administration's approach to hunger has been "supply-driven" — motivated by a need to empty federal warehouses of surplus agricultural commodities. In 1981, the U.S. Department of Agriculture initiated an ongoing program of mass public distribution of surplus food. In March 1983, Public Law 98-8 (the Jobs Bill) institutionalized the distributions, but provided minimal funding for implementation at the local level. The Jobs Bill also initiated an emergency food and shelter program, exemplifying another aspect of the Reagan Administration's approach to hunger: reliance on the voluntary sector. Providing the services mandated by these regulations has been difficult for many informal soup kitchens, food pantries, and for many social service agencies.

Community organizations in Boston have had to absorb many of the costs associated with implementing these emergency food programs. Faced with increasing demand for their services, these organizations are over-burdened, and are changing the nature of their operations in order to adapt to the requirements of these programs. The availability of the federal resources may be making the organizations worse off than they were.

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Lisa R. Peattie  
Title: Professor of Urban Anthropology

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, an uncomfortable partnership has developed between community organizations and the United States Department of Agriculture. A growing number of non-profit organizations and agencies are using federally-owned agricultural commodities in serving their clientele. Organizations that had little previous experience participating in federal food programs now find themselves directly affected by federal agricultural policy and the availability of surplus agricultural products.

The growing role of the federal government in making food available for use by community organizations has coincided with an increased demand for the food. A changing economic situation, widespread unemployment and poverty at the local level have all contributed to the numbers of needy people in America. Increased numbers of the homeless and the hungry combined with dwindling financial support for publicly-funded social service programs have made the role of non-profit community organizations even more crucial.

Commodities have become available as the needs of the organizations have changed; and at the same time the availability of the commodities has changed the needs of the organizations. Because of this, the federal government as a provider of agricultural commodities has taken on a particular importance to community organizations working to combat hunger in their neighborhoods.

Recent federal policies relating to hunger have had a dual nature, sometimes trying to solve two separate and distinct problems simultaneously. In general, the Reagan Administration has conceptualized these programs "from the top" in order to solve a set of federal-level problems. Community organizations, on the other hand, have implemented these programs "from the bottom" with the intention of solving an entirely different set of community-level problems.

Because of this ambiguity in program rationale, the policies have paid little attention to the realities of implementation. With the two simultaneous focuses, it has been the implementors — the community organizations — that have gotten squeezed in the middle.

The complexity of recent anti-hunger legislation combined with the complexity of implementation have contributed to making federal feeding programs very controversial. Community organizations have been discovering that the benefits of having new resources available for their clientele have not been without their costs.

Policy-makers sometimes neglect the organizational interests of community groups, and treat them as mere conduits for funds and services. Without support for organizational maintenance, community organizations often sacrifice their long-run development for the short-run provision of services in the interests of providing services to their clientele.

Looking at organizations that implement policy is a way of focussing on the effectiveness of policy, and on the capabilities of policies and programs to deliver services successfully and equitably to people. Attention to the

needs of organizations responsible for implementation at the local level has an impact on service delivery and has an impact on the recipients of the services themselves.



**PART ONE: THE SUPPLY SIDE AND DEMAND SIDE OF FOOD POLICY**

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE SUPPLY SIDE OF FOOD POLICY

On December 22, 1981, three events occurred defining the focus of the Reagan Administration in creating a new program for feeding the hungry. The simultaneity of these three events was not coincidental; on the contrary, understanding their interrelationship is crucial to understanding the impacts of recent food policy. It is also crucial to understanding the impact that recent food policy has had on community organizations.

On December 22, 1981, the Secretary of Agriculture, John Block, received a legislative mandate to reduce the stocks of surplus dairy commodities stored in federally-owned warehouses. Also on that day, legislation significantly changed a pilot project set up under the Carter Administration that had been established to support community organizations feeding the hungry. The legislation changed this project into an on-going program capable of large-scale distribution of excess agricultural products to needy individuals and families. And also on that one day, President Reagan announced that he would release thirty million pounds of surplus cheese from federal warehouses. This cheese would be available to nonprofit organizations for distribution to the needy.

Two of these three events occurred when President Reagan signed into law the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981.<sup>1</sup> Although relatively minor within the context of the entire legislation, two of the provisions of this Act were

to have a significant impact on community organizations. Through these provisions, local agencies would feel the impacts of U.S. agricultural policy.

Title I of the Act regulated the dairy industry. A short paragraph within the title (section 106) crystallized the connections between the dairy industry and dairy policy and the Administration's concern over the high cost of government. Section 106 reinforced the authority of the Secretary of Agriculture to "reduce inventories of dairy products" held by the federally owned and rented storehouses of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). The law encouraged the Secretary to use this authority "to the fullest extent practicable . . . so as to reduce net Commodity Credit Corporation expenditures" for storage costs connected to the Administration's milk price support program.<sup>2</sup>

The legislation mandated Secretary Block to take action to reduce the government's cost of storing dairy products. Congress and the Reagan Administration were notably concerned that the amount of food in the warehouses was growing rapidly, and the costs associated with storage were escalating as well.

The enormous stocks of dairy products held in the CCC warehouses were a direct result of the existing dairy price support system. This system, established in 1949 to cushion the dairy industry from market price fluctuations, "explicitly puts a floor under the price of manufacturing grade milk and thus maintains a floor under all milk prices."<sup>3</sup> Under the price support system, the CCC purchases any butter, cheese and nonfat dry milk that commercial producers will not (or cannot) purchase at the government-set purchase prices. In other words, the government sets a price, and then

purchases enough dairy products in the market to maintain that price. The government holds the dairy products at its own expense in warehouses owned or leased by the CCC.<sup>4</sup>

At the time of the Congressional debates on the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981, the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry reported that the federal government would donate to various food programs (including the School Lunch Program and foreign aid) over 250 billion pounds of milk from the CCC inventories. These donations, however, would represent only 15% of the total CCC-owned dairy stocks.<sup>5</sup> USDA estimated that the value of the remaining 85% of the dairy products held in CCC's storage facilities was over \$1.1 billion.<sup>6</sup> Given the storage costs associated with these massive inventories, Congressional alarm was not surprising.

The obvious method to control the costs of commodity storage would be to reduce the inventory. Inventory reduction could happen either by decreasing the amount going into storage, or increasing the amount going out.

Significantly decreasing the amount of agricultural commodities purchased by the government going into storage would require significantly restructuring the entire dairy and price support system. Since this radical change would not happen at this point under the Reagan Administration, Congress could only slightly affect the commodity flows going into storage. The Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 had a small effect by slightly changing the price support level.<sup>7</sup>

The Act made a more significant change, however, by trying to increase the quantity of commodities pulled out of storage. In fact, there were four

recommendations (besides the change in the level of price support) included in the Senate Committee's report. Three of the recommendations suggested minor shifts in the CCC's accounting procedures. The fourth recommendation suggested increasing the quantities of surplus dairy products removed from the inventories. "In summary," the report read, "it is the Committee's belief that the cost expenditures of the dairy program can be reduced. . . . The Committee feels that consideration should be given to actions such as . . . **[recognizing]** that outlets for CCC dairy inventories are limited and pursue aggressively additional outlets."<sup>8</sup>

Because of these concerns, section 106 of the 1981 Act pushed the Secretary of Agriculture to reduce the amounts of food held by the CCC, and encouraged him to develop new channels for the use of the food. According to a fact sheet published by the USDA at this time, the government-held dairy products had already saturated their current markets. Existing outlets for cheese (in particular), including all of the domestic food programs (such as the School Lunch Program) and including federal sales to the military, could absorb a maximum of approximately 134 million pounds a year. There were still 560 million pounds of cheese left in the warehouses in "uncommitted inventory." Furthermore, during the coming year (1982), the CCC would have to purchase additional dairy products (cheese, butter, milk) under the price support system, and add these products to the inventories.<sup>9</sup> Current markets for the dairy commodities were hardly making a dent in the surpluses in storage.

Market saturation was not the only problem faced by the Secretary in finding new channels for the food. Some of the existing food was spoiling.

Of the 560 million pounds of surplus cheese, 325 million was processed "American" cheese, and 235 million pounds was unprocessed Cheddar.<sup>10</sup> The American cheese has a long shelf life because of the extra processing it undergoes; the Cheddar is prone to spoilage. This meant that in order not to waste the food, the Secretary would have to find new "outlets" quickly. Implicit in section 106, therefore, was also the need for speed.

Section 106 of the 1981 Agriculture and Food Act provided the mandate to reduce stored agricultural surplus, but it did not provide the mechanism. Section 1114 of Title XI in the Act, however, created the mechanism by slightly (but significantly) modifying an existing federal project.

Section 1114 was entitled: "Distribution of Surplus Commodities; Special Nutrition Projects." In part (a) of this section, Congress determined that surplus agricultural commodities "acquired under the price support programs" would be "available without charge or credit" to a variety of nutrition programs including "food banks participating in the special nutrition projects established under section 211 of the Agricultural Act of 1980."<sup>11</sup> The important part of section 1114 is that it included "food banks" among those organizations and programs eligible for the "free" commodities.

"Food bank" is a term usually used to describe a particular type of organization serving as a clearinghouse for surplus or salvage food, and offering this low-cost food to nonprofit organizations serving those in need. As used in section 211 of the Agricultural Act of 1980, the term "food bank" most probably referred to that type of clearinghouse. As referenced by section 1114 of the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981, however, the term was never clearly defined. It was unclear whether the 1981 legislation

referred to true food "banks," or whether it referred simply to any organization providing food to those in need. The lack of clarity, although confusing, gave the USDA latitude in designing a mechanism for distributing its surplus commodities.

It is significant that section 1114 of the 1981 Act specifically mentions food banks. Food banks — when defined liberally — could be the new and expanded outlet for agricultural commodities. In order to use the food banks for this purpose, however, section 1114 had to modify section 211 of the Agricultural Act of 1980. As it stood, section 211 of the 1980 Act would not provide the needed mechanism for distributing agricultural surplus on a large scale.

Although it was the first time federal legislation ever mentioned "food banks," section 211 of the Agricultural Act of 1980 was a relatively insignificant section of the 1980 law. It was a small section in Title II, never once mentioned in the five House reports submitted with the bill.<sup>12</sup> The section set up "demonstration projects to provide agricultural commodities and other foods . . . to community food banks for emergency food box distribution to needy individuals and families."<sup>13</sup>

In modifying the Food Bank Demonstration Project of 1980 so as to use food banks as a mechanism for distributing surplus, section 1114 of the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 made two basic changes. First, the 1981 amendments turned the short-term pilot project into an on-going established program. And second, the 1981 amendments shifted the focus of the modified projects away from an experiment on the role of food banks towards a more narrow focus on the distribution of agricultural surplus.

Whereas the 1980 Act clearly described a short-term experiment, section 1114 of the 1981 Act changed the language of the project in a variety of ways. First of all, throughout the section the words "special nutrition projects" replaced the words "demonstration projects."<sup>14</sup> Whereas a "demonstration project" is an experiment, a "special nutrition project" is the name given to any of a number of on-going federal food programs. Congress also shifted the time frame of the project, extending it until (at least) January 1, 1984. The funding available for the project expanded from \$356,000 to "such sums as may be necessary" to carry out the program.<sup>15</sup> These amendments were all evidence that the pilot project was soon to become the mechanism for a new federal food program.

Not only did the modifications in section 1114 subsume the original food bank demonstration project, it also changed the focus. The most obvious modification was that the 1981 Act changed the title of the food bank project. No longer would the title of section 106 be "Food Bank Demonstration Projects"; instead, section 1114 stated that "the heading for sec. 211 of the Agriculture Act of 1980 is amended to read as follows: 'Distribution of Excess Agricultural Commodities Through Community Food Banks.'"<sup>16</sup>

Under this legislation, the term "food banking" as used in legislation and regulations took on both a new meaning and a new purpose. The Food and Agriculture Act of 1981 described a shift in emphasis by focussing on the community food banks' role in providing assistance to the federal government as distributors of federally-owned agricultural surplus.

On December 22, 1981, the U.S. Department of Agriculture received both a mandate and a mechanism to lessen the burden of federally-owned



agricultural surplus. Secretary Block received a legislative push to "reduce inventories", and legislation transformed the Food Bank Demonstration Project into a "special nutrition project" for the "Distribution of Excess Agricultural Commodities." With a mandate to distribute, and a mechanism for distribution, all that was remaining was the mobilization of the commodities.

Later on, on that same day, President Reagan formally mobilized agricultural commodities for distribution. He said:

The Dairy Price Support Program in this country has resulted in the stockpiling of millions upon millions of pounds of cheese by the Commodity Credit Corporation. At a time when American families are under increasing financial pressure, their government cannot sit by and watch millions of pounds of food turn to waste.

I am authorizing today the immediate release of 30 million pounds from the CCC inventory. The cheese will be delivered to the States that request it and will be distributed free to the needy by nonprofit groups.

The 1981 farm bill I signed today will slow the rise in price support levels, but even under this bill, surpluses will continue to pile up. A total of more than 560 million pounds of cheese has already been consigned to warehouses, so more distributions may be necessary as we continue our drive to root out waste in government and make the best possible use of our Nation's resources.<sup>17</sup>

This presidential statement was the third and final piece that initiated the process newly bringing community organizations into the sphere of influence of U.S. agricultural policy. President Reagan made it very clear in his announcement that his major concern was the existence of persistent agricultural surplus. The purpose of feeding the hungry with agricultural surplus was that it would reduce the storage costs of the stockpiled food.

Under these assumptions, feeding the needy was a means to an end, not an end in itself. The existence of "American families under increasing

financial pressure" did not prompt the release of the food. It was a push from the supply side of food policy that gave momentum to the availability of surplus commodities for the needy.

CHAPTER ONE — NOTES

<sup>1</sup> U.S., Congress, Public Law 97-98, Agriculture and Food Act of 1981, 97th Cong., 1st sess., 1981 (Washington: GPO), 95 Stat. 1213-1358.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 95 Stat. 1220.

<sup>3</sup> U.S., Congress, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, Senate Report No. 126 on S. 884, Agriculture and Food Act of 1981, 97th Cong., 1st sess., 1981 (Washington: GPO), p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas B. Smith, "Dairy Industry Price Supports: The Story of an Expensive Failure," Food Monitor, No. 25 (January/February 1982), p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> U.S., Congress, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, Senate Report No. 126 on S. 884, Agriculture and Food Act of 1981, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> U.S., General Accounting Office, Report to the Honorable Dennis E. Eckart, House of Representatives, "Public and Private Efforts to Feed America's Poor," June 23, 1983 (Washington: GPO), p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> U.S., Congress, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, Senate Report No. 126 on S. 884, Agriculture and Food Act of 1981, p. 46.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> U.S., Department of Agriculture, "Distribution of Surplus Cheese," December 23, 1981. (Typewritten.)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> U.S., Congress, Public Law 97-98, Agriculture and Food Act of 1981, 95 Stat. 1269.

<sup>12</sup> See United States Code: Congressional and Administrative News, 96th Cong., 2nd sess., 1980, Vol. 5, (St. Paul: West Publishing Co., 1981), Legislative History P.L. 96-494, Agricultural Act of 1980, pp. 5402-5507.

<sup>13</sup> U.S., Congress, Public Law 96-494, Agricultural Act of 1980, 96th Cong., 2nd sess., 1980 (Washington: GPO), 94 Stat. 2577.

<sup>14</sup> U.S., Congress, Public Law 97-98, Agriculture and Food Act of 1981, 95 Stat. 1269.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 U.S., President, Statement, "Cheese Inventory of the Commodity Credit Corporation," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, Vol. 17, No. 52 (Washington: GPO, 1981), pp. 1398-1399.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A SUPPLY SIDE FOOD PROGRAM

Between December 22, 1981 and March 24, 1983 the Reagan Administration continued to make efforts to empty its stocks of surplus agricultural commodities. One week after the December 22 announcement, the first 30 million pounds of cheese were available.<sup>1</sup> Each state designated an agency for managing the distribution, usually the state agency experienced in distributing federal commodities for use in established group meals programs (school food programs, charitable meals programs, elderly meals programs).

In Massachusetts, for example, the Bureau of Nutrition Education and School Food Services at the Department of Education was responsible for overseeing the federal food donations to the school food programs as well as the donations to other "eligible outlets." According to a "Legislative Outline of the Food Distribution Program" compiled by the USDA in December 1979, these "outlets" included schools, child care institutions, nonprofit summer camps, service institutions for the summer food programs, and charitable institutions providing prepared group meals to needy individuals.<sup>2</sup> Because the Department of Education was the only agency dealing with USDA-donated food, when the dairy distribution program began it went to that agency (rather than to the Department of Public Welfare or a purchasing department).<sup>3</sup>

By administering the surplus dairy distributions through the same department responsible for child care feeding programs and meals programs for senior citizens, the organizational agenda for this program was shifting. People concerned with administering programs meant primarily to feed people were running a program clearly established as a means of lowering federal storage costs.

In the view of Ed Stockwell, the regional administrator of the program for the entire USDA Northeast Region, the program's purpose was equally divided between reducing federal surpluses and feeding the needy.<sup>4</sup> At the next level down the chain of implementation, in the view of Education Specialist Joanne Morrissey, the official at the Massachusetts Department of Education administering the commodities distributions, the distributions were the President's emergency response to a public demand for the release of surplus food.<sup>5</sup> At the top of the policy chain, the program was supply driven. As the process filtered down the state administrative apparatus, it began to acquire the characteristics of a program generated by public demand.

Partly because the program was generated from this "top-down" perspective, there was no federal funding available for implementation. The federal government paid the costs of transporting the food from the federally-owned CCC storehouses to the centralized warehouses run by the states. Individual states were responsible for all of the costs incurred at the state and local levels, and they were fully responsible for arranging and financing their own distributions.<sup>6</sup>

As further evidence that the concerns of the Reagan Administration focussed more on an emergency need to release the food than on an

emergency need to distribute it to the hungry, USDA made its public announcement about releasing the cheese before having notified the states that they were going to have to distribute it. Morrissey at the Department of Education was deluged with calls from the public about the free cheese; this put pressure on her to implement a distribution quickly, without the opportunity for careful planning.<sup>7</sup>

It was very difficult for the state administrators to find agencies willing to handle the distributions, even though the flexibility built into the regulations gave the state administrators latitude in finding suitable outlets. With the broadened meaning of "food bank," there was no urgency to convince the existing true food banks in Massachusetts (Boston and Worcester) to participate in the program. It would be appropriate within the scope of the legislation to look for agencies other than true "food banks" to manage the distributions. This was particularly necessary in Boston since the true "food bank" in the area, the Boston Food Bank, refused to participate.

According to Nan Johnson, Agency Relations Manager at the Boston Food Bank, the Boston Food Bank chose not to participate in the surplus distributions for three main reasons. First of all, they were politically opposed to a program that, in effect, supported the federal agricultural price support system. To the people at the Food Bank, the supply driven focus of the commodity distributions was incompatible with an attempt to fill real needs at the local level. A second concern they had about the distributions was that they felt it "ridiculous" for women with children and for the elderly to stand in line for five pounds of cheese (the allocation for a small family). Furthermore, the people at the Food Bank thought that participating in the

surplus dairy distributions would be an "unbearable burden" to the Food Bank's staff. According to their calculations, the costs to the organization in terms of staff time used and the opportunity costs of shutting down their operations to do the distributions — thereby foregoing operating revenues — exceeded the benefits of the value of the small amounts of food distributed to the needy.<sup>8</sup>

Larry Meyer, Executive Director of the Boston Food Bank, recalled discussing participation in the first dairy distribution at an East Coast Regional Food Bank Directors' meeting. The food banks participating in that meeting decided that participation would have been very expensive, and that because of the lack of federal funds available for implementation, the individual organizations would have had to heavily subsidize the program from their own funds. According to Meyer, the program had minimal benefits for anyone, and was just a "little bit of public relations for Reagan."<sup>9</sup> The local level agency directors that were critics of the program (like Meyer) determined that the program, because of the way it was set up from the start, would never provide any substantial benefit to the poor and hungry, nor to the organizations distributing the commodities. In their analysis, the prime beneficiaries were the price support system and the federal government's storage bills. They were particularly suspicious of the Reagan Administration's motives for initiating the commodities distributions given the drastic reductions in other food and nutrition programs. There were rumors at the time that commodities distributions would expand at the expense of other programs like School Lunch and Food Stamps.

The concerns of most agencies, however, were pragmatic rather than political. The lack of funding for storage and staff meant that it would



actually cost the agencies a substantial amount to distribute the "free" product. At this early point in the program in Massachusetts (early 1982), not only were there no federal funds forthcoming for distribution, the state legislature was not yet authorizing funds to pay for the storage of the cheese in its five warehouses (Charlestown, South Boston, Brockton, Worcester, Springfield). Federal funds paid to put the cheese into those warehouses, but state funds were necessary to keep it there. The uncertainty about state funding and the uncertainty about local funding made it difficult to plan at both levels.

Morrissey's concern, in identifying agencies to handle the distribution, was to serve the entire state. Persuaded by the state Executive Office of Communities and Development, she attempted to use the Community Action Program (CAP) agencies because of their distribution state-wide.<sup>10</sup> The lack of enthusiasm for participating on the part of the CAPs forced the state to diversify. Some CAP agencies in some areas participated, but Morrissey had to rely on other agencies as well. In Framingham, for example, the Boy Scouts ran the distributions. In Boston, the Community Schools ran them.

Being able to use the Community Schools as distributors of the commodities is a clear example of the organizational discretion left in the regulations. Community Schools are in no way "food banks," at least in the traditional sense of the word. They are not even food "pantries" — organizations giving several days' worth of groceries to needy individuals on an emergency basis. Community Schools are not emergency food providers at all; they are community educational centers that offer a wide variety of adult and continuing education courses. And incidentally, some Community Schools also serve as sites for hot meals programs for senior citizens.

Because this was a program designed to relieve the federal warehouses of surplus commodities, the choice of the Community Schools — although seemingly illogical — was perfectly rational. The idea was to use whatever existing network was available, whether it was an emergency food providing network or not. The Community School network effectively covered the entire city, meaning they would be able to get the surplus food out to all the neighborhoods. Furthermore, the schools were familiar with the Department of Education, and were familiar with federal commodities since they used donated commodities in their elderly meals programs.

The first 30 million pounds of cheese released in the beginning of 1982 hardly made a dent in the dairy surpluses in federal storage. Just over two months after the first release of food, USDA announced that "at least an additional 70 million pounds of surplus process cheese" was available for distribution. The interesting addition to this announcement was that the USDA notice specifically said that "there is no limitation on the amount of cheese which may be requested by a State agency."<sup>11</sup>

That there was (essentially) an unlimited amount of food available was distinctive of this sort program — a program pulled along by the availability of supply rather than by the exigencies of demand. In most federal food programs designed expressly to meet a popular need, regulations cap the supply of the available service in some way, either by defining limited eligibility standards for an entitlement or by limiting funding to restrict the numbers of participants. (The Food Stamp program is an example of the former, and the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children an example of the latter.) The dynamic in this surplus dairy program

was reversed: USDA hoped that the available supply would be able to generate a demand for the commodities, thereby reducing the surpluses.

The Presidential order originally releasing the cheese stated nothing about eligibility for the commodities. His statement simply said that people must be "needy." In the first months of 1982, the New England Regional Office of the USDA gave suggestions to the various state commodities distribution agencies as to what sorts of people might be "needy."<sup>12</sup> Each state, however, was able to use its own discretion in setting criteria for eligibility.

For the first round of deliveries in Massachusetts in early 1982, the Department of Education made the determination that there would be state-wide eligibility requirements for anyone wishing to receive the cheese. This first round of surplus cheese could go to anyone already participating in one of approximately nine entitlement programs. After the distribution, however, the Department of Education recognized that this system was not allowing large numbers of potentially eligible low-income people (especially senior citizens) to receive the cheese, particularly those people not already participating in entitlement programs.

At the same time that Massachusetts was trying to expand their distribution, the regional office of the USDA was pushing the individual states to distribute as much cheese as possible. In the second round of cheese distribution, Massachusetts expanded the definition of program eligibility. This time anyone whose income fell within the guidelines for eligibility to receive fuel assistance (whether they received fuel assistance or not) would be eligible to receive cheese. People could "self-declare" their income (that

is, sign an affidavit declaring that they were within income eligibility guidelines, without having to provide written documentation of income). This second round of distribution extended the program — the Department of Education opened up the eligibility restrictions and expanded the publicity about the distributions to agencies around the state.<sup>13</sup>

The availability of the supply continued to push along the program. On June 15, 1982, the USDA made available another 120 million pounds of surplus cheese. Again, the amount was really just a low estimate of the quantity available because again, there was no limit on the amount of cheese the states could request.<sup>14</sup> According to Morrissey, at this point there really was no limit — she was able to order as much cheese as she wanted.<sup>15</sup> On July 23, USDA also made available "at least 50 million pounds of surplus butter."<sup>16</sup> Not only was the USDA trying to decrease its stocks of the 500 pound barrels of cheese in its warehouses, but also its stocks of 68 pound blocks of butter.

Seven months after the initial release of surplus dairy commodities, the USDA started to tighten the implementation of the program. Although there were still no provisions supporting local distribution, the regulations required that "food banks" receiving surplus butter have "adequate freezer facilities or the ability to distribute [the butter] within 48 hours of receipt."<sup>17</sup> The perishability of the commodities demanded swift local response.

The state and local agencies, however, would still have to bear the costs of implementing these requirements. There was still no support available to buy freezers, pay electric bills to keep the freezers running, or hire staff to distribute the products.

On September 8, 1982, Congress passed the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1982. Although this Act did not release more commodities, it did include a provision further regularizing the availability of the supply. Section 110 of the Act provided that the CCC add "distribution to needy households in the U.S." to the list of eligible recipients for dairy products acquired under the price support programs.<sup>18</sup> This provision formally established the ongoing authority of the federal government to include household distribution as a means of "preventing waste" of surplus commodities.

One year after the release of the first commodities for household distribution, on December 3, 1982 the USDA announced the release of another "unlimited" amount of butter and cheese. There would be "at least 280 million pounds of process cheese and 75 million pounds of butter to agencies of State governments which request it for distribution to eligible recipients. . . . There is no limitation on the amount of cheese and butter which may be requested by a State agency."<sup>19</sup>

Joanne Morrissey at the Massachusetts Department of Education initially thought that the dairy distribution was going to be a temporary, one-time-only program.<sup>20</sup> She soon realized that although impermanent and episodic, the program was ongoing. USDA continued to release commodities, and there was no real indication that they were going to stop.

An analysis of the surplus dairy program by the General Accounting Office stated:

In December 1981, USDA initiated a special program to distribute federally owned cheese and butter to needy households throughout the Nation. . . . Despite this use,

quantities purchased under the dairy price support program have been mounting rapidly. . . . Despite USDA's distributing during 1982 of 135 million pounds of cheese and 8.2 million pounds of butter, collectively valued at \$275 million, USDA was holding in its uncommitted inventory a year later about 776 million pounds of cheese valued at about \$1 billion and about 368 million pounds of butter worth about \$560 million.

The Secretary of Agriculture stated in December 1982 that "The increasing size of the inventories makes it imperative that we do all we can to use these surpluses." In this regard, he announced that the distribution of surplus cheese and butter would continue through December 1983. He also claimed that the distribution of these products in 1982 had reached nearly 10 million people.<sup>21</sup>

Pushed on by a seemingly endless supply, the only limits on the distributions were the logistical limits of getting the food out. As an article in the New York Times pointed out in early 1983, "The Agriculture Department, in its latest efforts to reduce huge grain and dairy surpluses, has found it neither cheap nor easy to give them away." The article pointed out that it cost over \$1.50 to acquire, package and distribute each pound of butter or cheese to the states.<sup>22</sup> And these costs were only the federal costs; a true estimate of the cost of the program would have to include all of the state costs and all of the costs to the local agencies actually doing the distributions.

Along with hidden costs, there were other logistical limits to the program as well. The logistical problems at all levels were the major inhibitors to the program's expansion. At the federal level, the government had to process and package the food into units appropriate for household consumption. They had to cut five hundred pound barrels of cheese into five pound blocks. They had to process Cheddar cheese into American cheese. They had to cut butter into two pound pieces. The USDA had contracts with commercial food

manufacturers to do the processing, but factory capacity limited the food industry's involvement. According to one source at the USDA, the capital investment required for these particular processing operations is quite extensive. With the unreliability of a continuous supply, the food processors were hesitant to invest in capital expansion.<sup>23</sup>

At the state level, administrators had to ready warehouses and storage space, and had to develop consistent local distribution networks. The state already had a network of warehouses, but the funding for them was dependent upon the state's budgetary cycle. Even more fundamentally, the state needed to be sure it had storage space for millions of pounds of cheese.

At the local level, community organizations had to find donated space, donated personnel, donated publicity, and available time to administer mass public distributions. The distributions usually required extensive coordinated effort of several agencies and the shared contributions of halls for the distribution, publicity, and volunteers. These limitations on the program at the local level were starting to limit the speed of the implementation of the program.

The dairy surpluses, in spite of mass distributions, were still growing. Because of the pressures placed by the supply, the distribution program — designed to reduce these surpluses — would have to continue. During the next year, however, there were going to be social, political, and economic changes that would have a significant impact on the other side of food policy. The coming year would see increased pressure from the demand side.

## CHAPTER TWO — NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> U.S., Federal Register, Vol. 46, No. 249, December 29, 1981 (Washington: GPO), p. 62882.
- <sup>2</sup> U.S., Department of Agriculture, "A Legislative Outline of the Food Distribution Program," December 4, 1979. (Typewritten.)
- <sup>3</sup> Interview with Joanne Morrissey, Bureau of Nutrition, Department of Education, Quincy, Massachusetts, November 17, 1983.
- <sup>4</sup> Discussion with Edward Stockwell, Northeast Region U.S. Department of Agriculture in Cambridge, Massachusetts, April 19, 1984.
- <sup>5</sup> Interview with Joanne Morrissey, November 17, 1983.
- <sup>6</sup> U.S., Federal Register, Vol. 46, No. 249, December 29, 1981, p. 62882.
- <sup>7</sup> Interview with Joanne Morrissey, November 17, 1983.
- <sup>8</sup> Interview with Nan Johnson, Boston Food Bank, Boston, Massachusetts, November 22, 1983.
- <sup>9</sup> Interview with Larry Meyer, Boston Food Bank, Boston, Massachusetts, March 15, 1984.
- <sup>10</sup> Interview with Ted Live, formerly with the Executive Office of Communities and Development, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, October 4, 1983, and Interview with Joanne Morrissey, November 17, 1983.
- <sup>11</sup> U.S., Federal Register, Vol. 47, No. 46, March 9, 1982 (Washington: GPO), p. 10068.
- <sup>12</sup> Discussion with Edward Stockwell, April 19, 1984.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview with Joanne Morrissey, November 17, 1983.
- <sup>14</sup> U.S., Federal Register, Vol. 47, No. 115, June 15, 1982 (Washington: GPO), p. 25752.
- <sup>15</sup> Interview with Joanne Morrissey, November 17, 1983.
- <sup>16</sup> U.S., Federal Register, Vol. 47, No. 142, July 23, 1982 (Washington: GPO), p. 31905.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.



18 U.S., Congress, Public Law 97-253, Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1982, 97th Cong., 2nd sess., 1982 (Washington: GPO) 96 Stat. 763-807.

19 U.S., Federal Register, Vol. 47, No. 233, December 3, 1982 (Washington: GPO), p. 54525.

20 Interview with Joanne Morrissey, November 17, 1983.

21 U.S., General Accounting Office, Report to the Honorable Dennis E. Eckart, House of Representatives, "Public and Private Efforts to Feed America's Poor," June 23, 1983 (Washington: GPO), p. 14-15.

22 Seth S. King, "U.S. Finds it Costly to Give Food Surpluses to Poor," New York Times, February 13, 1983, p. 31.

23 Discussion with Peter Gallagher, Northeast Region U.S. Department of Agriculture, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, April 19, 1984.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE DEMAND SIDE OF FOOD POLICY

During the time that the federal government was making available surplus dairy commodities for household distribution, other trends were also having an important impact on the politics of food. The Reagan Administration was making deep cuts in the funding of established social programs, and there was a growing awareness of and a growing concern about the existence of hunger in the United States.

In 1981 and 1982, Congress and the Reagan Administration made significant reductions in the federal funding available for human service programs. Included in the reductions were more than two billion dollars worth of services cut from the Food Stamp program, 1.5 billion dollars a year cut from the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, and a nearly 30% reduction in the school lunch program.<sup>1</sup> According to an analysis made in early 1983 by staff members of the Washington-based Center on Budget and Policy Priorities:

Two years of budget cuts, along with the most severe recession in forty years, have lowered the standard of living of millions of Americans who are already below the poverty line. A third year of budget cuts would aggravate this situation further for millions of elderly, disabled, children, and women raising children where no other parent is present — the groups who constitute the bulk of America's poor.<sup>2</sup>

The cuts in the human services budget were very controversial, and the media continually reminded the public of the potential impacts of service

reductions on the health and well-being of the American people. There was public debate about the impact of the reductions in social services on the public health. A study by another Washington-based advocacy group, the Food Research and Action Center, noted that some states were experiencing a rise in their infant mortality rates. According to an article in the New York Times, "after years of progress, there are signs that the death rates are edging up again. And some critics say that the Reagan Administration's priorities — its economic policies as well as budget cutbacks it has sought in health care programs — are to blame."<sup>3</sup>

Numerous community organizations across the country reported increased demand for their services. In November 1982 a report on domestic hunger cited an example:

St. Ignatius Roman Catholic Church in Baltimore, Md., opens its social services center at 6 a.m. every day. But lately, homeless and poor people have been arriving even earlier. They wait outside because they have no other place to go and they know they won't be turned away.

The center's policy of helping all people who seek it is becoming harder to maintain. Since cutbacks in federal assistance program benefits began taking effect in October 1981, the number of people requesting food, clothing, cash or simply a warm place to stay has tripled.<sup>4</sup>

A survey of emergency food programs conducted in the spring of 1983 demonstrated that between February 1982 and February 1983, more than half of the 161 programs surveyed experienced at least a 50% increase in the number of meals provided.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the nation, local organizations were feeling the impact of increased demands for their services.

There was growing public concern about increased poverty, and there was growing public concern about increased hunger brought about by the poverty.

On November 12, 1982 the Wall Street Journal published an article about the "new poor" subtitled "Soup Kitchens and Suicides." This article described the "ugly specter of the homeless poor" in the Sun Belt states — newly-unemployed people who migrated south in the hopes of finding jobs. According to the article, "A recent report by the U.S. Conference of Mayors says thousands of families have been evicted from their homes and are living in cars, campgrounds, tents and rescue missions. The report notes that federal welfare programs that would have once kept such families afloat have been sharply cut back."<sup>6</sup>

The report by the U.S. Conference of Mayors also highlighted severe emergency needs for food in major American cities. It looked at the combined effects of the reductions in federal support for human service programs, the current economic situation, and the instances of widespread unemployment. In the 55 cities surveyed, the report found that "in none of the human service areas examined was even 50 percent of the eligible population served in FY81 or FY82."<sup>7</sup>

On December 7, 1982 the Mayor of Detroit, Coleman Young, declared a "State of Emergency" for Detroit, and announced that the city was going to initiate a survival program to help poor and hungry Detroiters through the coming "winter of crisis."<sup>8</sup>

One month later, a major article in the New York Times Magazine on January 2, 1983 was entitled: "Once Again, Hunger Troubles America." According to this article:

Although no one knows precisely how many Americans are going hungry or how many are malnourished, there is evidence that, as poverty is increasing, so is hunger. A sluggish

economy and the highest unemployment rate since the Depression have aggravated the hardships of the poor and added to their ranks. And according to many experts, the Reagan Administration's budget cuts have also hurt the poor.<sup>9</sup>

The increasing attention of the media and the growing involvement of major-city mayors in publicizing the growing incidence of hunger were crucial in pushing Congress to acknowledge that there was a growing "demand side" of food and hunger policy.

By the end of February, 1983 Representative Leon Panetta, chair of the House Subcommittee on Domestic Marketing, Consumer Relations and Nutrition began a series of public hearings "in an effort to take an objective look at the issue of hunger in America."<sup>10</sup> At one of the hearings, John Mattingly of the Cleveland Interchurch Council testified: "We served [food to] 17,000 in June, 1982. In December, we served 48,000. We are facing a true hunger crisis in Cleveland. Five years ago . . . we were serving 65 people a night a free meal. Right now we are serving between 200-300 people a night."<sup>11</sup> At that same hearing, Major Paul Kelly of the Salvation Army asserted that "never has hunger been more active in Northern Ohio than right now."<sup>12</sup>

Along with testimony on the extent of hunger throughout the U.S., testimony at Rep. Panetta's hearing also discussed the role of surplus dairy distributions in combatting hunger. Many of the witnesses cited the inadequacy of commodities distributions in alleviating the chronic hunger problem. Major Kelly of Cleveland asserted: "The Salvation Army distributed a little over one million pounds of food in Cuyahoga County this past year and we really cannot satisfy the cry for more. . . . I think the situation is so desperate that almost any food you have available we will take and use."<sup>13</sup> John Mattingly, also of Cleveland, stated, "Last year we faced 102 percent

increase in the amount of food we distributed . . . . I think indeed we should provide access to surplus commodities of all sorts."<sup>14</sup>

In Boston as well, there was evidence of increased hunger, and local organizations were feeling the push of increasing demand for their services. On November 4, 1982 columnist Ian Menzies wrote about hunger in Boston. "Hunger in Boston is not a myth. It exists," he wrote, "and is growing." Menzies went on to describe a recent meeting sponsored by the United Community Planning Council, the independent planning and research arm of the United Way. This meeting "revealed . . . a network of volunteers, plus a few paid personnel struggling to meet an escalating human need, without help from Boston, municipalities, or the Legislature."<sup>15</sup>

At the end of this article, Menzies published the phone number of Project Bread, a nonprofit organization that provides funding to groups that feed the needy. Within a week of the publication of this article, Project Bread received over \$3000 in donations from individuals concerned about hunger. On November 25, Menzies wrote another column, remarking on the public's rapid response. He also noted the impact that this sudden publicity was having on local community organizations. He mentioned that Geno Ballotti, director of the Permanent Charity Fund — a local foundation — was "well aware that that the existing network of local agencies is the one best equipped to do their job. But the men and women who work without fanfare for the agencies are a bit overwhelmed by the sudden attention, as well as a bit concerned that they could lose their identity." Permanent Charity intended to donate several thousand dollars to Project Bread for the use of local feeding organizations and, according to Menzies, "it is hoped that the

help offered by the Permanent Charities Fund can be comfortably accepted for the benefit of those who need it most."<sup>16</sup> Even though the public awareness was important for these community organizations working to feed the hungry, their very limited resources, and limited organizational capacities provided them little room for expansion.

Very quickly, and in large part prompted by publicity in the local media, hunger and the needs of organizations feeding the hungry became a major part of the local public agenda. With assistance from the Permanent Charity Fund, Project Bread set up the Hunger Hotline, an advocacy and referral organization created explicitly to assist local agencies feeding the hungry.

Establishing the Hotline was very significant for these small organizations. It was a statement that there needed to be some mechanism to connect and coordinate all the various actors in the emergency feeding network. It was a statement that this informal network of informal organizations was starting to play an important role in the delivery of social services. And furthermore, it was evident that without an organizational advocate like the Hotline, these small, isolated organizations would have no voice.

An additional impetus to public awareness of hunger was early in 1983 when the newly-elected Dukakis administration pledged to make homelessness and hunger a priority in the coming years. One of Governor Dukakis' first actions was to set up an Advisory Committee on the Homeless to determine actions that would be appropriate at the state level to combat homelessness and hunger.

Jo-Ann Eccher, Coordinator of the newly-formed Hunger Hotline, chaired the Food Subcommittee of the Governor's Advisory Committee. Of the nine

recommendations made by this subcommittee in the Interim Report to the Governor, one recommendation was about the surplus dairy distributions. The recommendation read:

The Department of Education must receive sufficient monies to develop an effective distribution plan for surplus government commodities. In addition, administrative and transportation costs of those private agencies involved in the distribution process must be met.<sup>17</sup>

The substance of this recommendation is crucial for understanding the important issues raised by the commodities programs in the light of the increasing public awareness of hunger in the U.S. One of the main problems with the distributions was their impact on local agencies. The distribution plan was by its very nature sporadic, and dependent upon the willingness of agencies to make the effort to participate in the program. The lack of funding for implementation — meaning the lack of administrative or transportation funds — made the program prohibitively expensive for most agencies. This in turn made it difficult for the surplus dairy distributions to have a meaningful impact on hunger.

On March 22, 1983, Eccher brought these concerns to Congress by submitting testimony to Rep. Panetta's Subcommittee for a public hearing in Washington, D.C. Her testimony stated:

Over one million pounds of surplus processed cheese and a half a million pounds of butter will be distributed to the poor of Massachusetts early this year. . . . Emergency soup kitchens, food banks and food pantries have not benefited from previous distribution due to lack of appropriated funds to cover administrative, storage and transportation costs of the Commodities. Food pantries and soup kitchens which are largely the noble efforts of churches, synagogues and nonprofit social service agencies have the volunteers but not the funds to cover distributing Commodities.<sup>18</sup>

Advocates for the poor and advocates for emergency food providers were



pushing the surplus distribution program to better meet the needs of the community. Congress, however, had not set up the program to meet the needs of the hungry, nor had it set up the program to meet the needs of community organizations. What the advocates were trying to do was to mold the commodities distribution program into an effective anti-hunger program: mold it into a program that would be a Congressional response to the demand for food, not the response to an excessive supply.

The public awareness of hunger and the demand for a federal response were the political climate and the context in which Congress met in March 1983. It was these sorts of issues that prompted Congress to propose, debate, and pass Public Law 98-8, the "Jobs Bill." The overwhelming needs of the demand side of food and hunger policy were pushing against the supply side.

### CHAPTER THREE — NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Robert Greenstein and John Bickerman, "The Effect of the Administration's Budget, Tax, and Military Policies on Low Income Americans," (Washington: Interreligious Taskforce on U.S. Food Policy, February 1983), p. 1-3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth A. Noble, "Are Program Cuts Linked to Increased Infant Deaths?" New York Times, February 13, 1983, p. E6.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Ruth Herbers, "Hunger at Home: Hard Times in the U.S.A.," Bread for the World Background Paper #63 (Washington: Bread for the World, November 1982), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Kathryn Porter Bishop, "Soup Lines and Food Baskets: A Survey of Increased Participation in Emergency Food Programs," (Washington: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, May 1983), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> George Getschow, "The Dispossessed: Homeless Northerners Unable to Find Work Crowd Sun Belt Cities," Wall Street Journal, November 12, 1982, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Honorable Ernest N. Morial, Statement before the Subcommittee on Domestic Marketing, Consumer Relations, and Nutrition, Committee on Agriculture, U.S. House of Representatives, August 3, 1983, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> U.S., Conference of Mayors, Hunger in American Cities: Eight Case Studies (U.S. Conference of Mayors, June 1983), p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Elin Schoen, "Once Again, Hunger Troubles America," New York Times Magazine, January 2, 1983, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> U.S., Congressional Record, Vol. 129, No. 78, "Hunger in America - A Summary of the Hearings of the Subcommittee on Domestic Marketing, Consumer Relations, and Nutrition," Extension of Remarks by Hon. Leon E. Panetta (Washington: GPO), p. E2728.

<sup>11</sup> Cited in Ibid., p. E2728.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Ibid., p. E2728.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Ibid., p. E2730.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in Ibid., p. E2729.

<sup>15</sup> Ian Menzies, "Just Look Around Us, the Hungry Here," Boston Globe, November 4, 1982, p. 17.

16 Ian Menzies, "A Response to Hunger," Boston Globe, November 25, 1982, p. 31.

17 Massachusetts, Governor's Office of Human Resources, "Governor's Advisory Committee on the Homeless: Interim Report," March 1983, p. 14.

18 Jo-Ann Eccher, Testimony submitted to the Subcommittee on Domestic Marketing, Consumer Relations, and Nutrition, Committee on Agriculture, U.S. House of Representatives, March 22, 1983.

**PART TWO: THE FEDERAL RESPONSE**

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A LIMITED RESPONSE TO THE DEMAND SIDE

On March 24, 1983 Congress passed Public Law 98-8, the Emergency Job Appropriations ("the Jobs Bill"). This bill was a reaction to public concerns about hunger in the U.S. The Jobs Bill was important in two ways: First, it expanded and increased some of the existing programs serving the needy; and second, it responded to some of the needs of the local organizations that were actually providing those services. In many ways, the Jobs Bill came about as a response to the demand side of social welfare and food policy. As stated March 7 in a report by the Senate Appropriations Committee, "in providing additional sums for humanitarian assistance, the Committee is responding to the plight of those who are ill-housed, hungry, or in need of health care."<sup>1</sup>

The Jobs Bill was a long and complex piece of legislation, with wide-ranging provisions establishing public works projects and expanding the participation levels of a several social service programs. There were three separate provisions, however, that were explicitly important for community organizations feeding the hungry.

The first of these provisions was in Title I, in a section entitled "Distribution of Agricultural Commodities." This section provided \$75 million "to acquire and distribute surplus agricultural commodities in areas of high unemployment for use in cooperative emergency feeding facilities for indigent persons."<sup>2</sup>

Title I commodities were not the surplus price support commodities distributed to households. Title I of the Jobs Bill gave the Secretary of Agriculture funds to buy specific commodities — called "nonbasic perishable" commodities — that were surplus in the market. These commodities were available only for use by organizations providing prepared meals in a group setting to needy individuals. Unlike the dairy products distributed for household consumption, an organization using the Title I commodities had to prepare and serve them on the organization's premises.

Organizations providing group meals to the poor had always been eligible for USDA commodities through the Food Distribution Program — a program which provided charitable organizations preparing group meals with a variety of USDA commodities (dairy, grain, cereal, peanut products, oil) purchased under USDA price support programs.<sup>3</sup> Title I of the Jobs Bill made a wider variety of commodities (such as meats, poultry, fruits and vegetables) available to these organizations.

Congress limited the allocation of funds for Title I foods, based on a formula derived from the number of unemployed persons in each state.<sup>4</sup> Just as with other federal programs designed to meet a demand, there was a limit to participation — this time in the form of a cap on available funds. The legislation not only limited funding, but also the duration of the Title I program. Under the Jobs Bill, the expanded availability of these nonbasic perishable surplus removal commodities would only last until September 30, 1983.<sup>5</sup> This provision in Title I was an "emergency" program, intended to address a supposedly acute hunger problem.

Because the Title I foods were available on a temporary basis under "emergency" circumstances, Title I had no provisions for funding for local

organizations. The \$75 million allotted in the legislation (of which Massachusetts received \$1,361,599) was to go entirely to pay for food. Although Title II of the Jobs Bill did include a provision for costs associated with distributing the food (see Chapter Five below), the Title II money went to pay for more than just the Title I commodities. Thus, under Title I the Bureau of Nutrition at the Massachusetts Department of Education (the agency responsible for the Title I commodities) was able to use the entire \$1.3 million to purchase the canned pork, canned beef, canned corn and other "surplus removal nonbasic perishable" commodities used by soup kitchens throughout Boston and the rest of Massachusetts. There was no intention, in this legislation, to set up new emergency food programs based on Title I commodities.

The second provision in the Jobs Bill that was important for community organizations feeding the hungry was another part of Title I labelled "Food Distribution and Emergency Shelters." The purpose of this section, according to the legislation, was "to carry out an emergency food and shelter program."<sup>6</sup> Congress appropriated a total of \$100 million for this program, to be administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Because of Congress' concern that the needs of the hungry be met as widely and as effectively as possible, Congress chose to distribute the \$100 million in two ways. FEMA would distribute the first \$50 million to local private voluntary organizations through the private voluntary sector, and the second \$50 million through the public sector.

To distribute money through the network of private voluntary organizations, FEMA distributed \$50 million to a national board composed of a

representative from FEMA, and a representative from each of the United Way of America, the Salvation Army, the Council of Churches, the National Conference of Catholic Churches, the Council of Jewish Federations, and the American Red Cross.<sup>7</sup> The national board would distribute its \$50 million (minus an amount up to 2% for the costs of an audit) to local boards organized by local United Way or Red Cross chapters across the nation. Of the \$50 million allocated to the national board, the Boston local board received \$220,416.52.

According to the implementation plan published on May 3 by the national board, the purpose of the \$50 million grant ("FEMA I") was explicitly to assist the work of local private voluntary organizations providing food and shelter to the needy:

The intent of Congress is to alleviate the strain on local volunteer agencies which, because of the severity and magnitude of the economic conditions on families, are unable to keep up with the needs for food and shelter.<sup>8</sup>

As mandated in the legislation, for these "local volunteer agencies" to be eligible to receive FEMA I funds, the agencies "should be nonprofit, have a voluntary board, have an accounting system, and practice nondiscrimination. Participation in the program should be based upon a private voluntary organization's ability to deliver emergency food and shelter to needy individuals."<sup>9</sup>

The implementation plan added an additional stipulation regarding the eligibility of local agencies for receiving FEMA I funds. The plan of the "Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program" determined that:

In case there is a local religious or service organization or agency with the capacity to deliver food or shelter, but which



does not have an adequate accounting system but meets all the other criteria, the local board may authorize funds to be channeled through an agency which does have an adequate accounting system and meets all the criteria.<sup>10</sup>

This option became important in Boston. Because of it, the local board was able to provide FEMA I funds to over twenty additional organizations, using the Permanent Charity Fund as the agency through which the local board channeled the money.

On May 18, Daniel Daley, the Executive Director of Project Bread, wrote a letter to the director of the United Way of Massachusetts Bay addressing the very issue of the inability of some small organizations to have the fiscal accountability requested in the regulations. The letter said: "Most of the small (but I stress most important) food providing places may very well have no audit since they really have no money or permanent paid staff."<sup>11</sup> Fortunately, the national board had made provisions for these relatively informal organizations by allowing the channelling of funds through a fiscal intermediary. This sort of flexibility recognized the particular circumstances of community organizations, and made some allowances for them.

The FEMA I money was available for the use of local organizations — and even small organizations — but only to the extent that those organizations expanded their operations. According to the implementation plan, the money was "intended for the purchase of food and provision of shelter, to supplement and extend current available resources and not for substitution or reimbursement for ongoing programs and services."<sup>12</sup> The funds, therefore, were not available for the costs associated with starting up a new program, nor were they available as a substitute for the current funding for a given organization.

Thus, for example, when the Project Review Committee of the Boston local board met to review the applications from local agencies, they asserted:

The funds allocated are to be used to supplement and increase the capacity of agencies to deliver food and shelter services to additional people. The committee took notice of programs already tied closely to other sources of funding such as meals programs for the elderly.<sup>13</sup>

The members of the Project Review Committee were concerned that after exhausting the FEMA I funds, the local organizations might not be able to maintain the level of service to which they had expanded with FEMA I funds.

The FEMA I funding did make allowances for some of the needs of local organizations, but mostly for their direct program needs, not their organizational needs. The amount of money available for administration was small (up to a maximum of 2% of the total grant), and the allowable administrative costs only included such items as publicity and utilities, but not personnel costs. A small food pantry receiving \$3400 from the FEMA I funds, for example, could request reimbursement for only up to \$68 worth of its \$600 utility bill.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, there was significant pressure on community organizations from both the national board and the local board not to use even the small amount of money that was available for administration. As stated by a recommendation from the Project Review Committee of the Boston local board, "Those agencies requesting administrative costs would be asked to absorb them and to use all funds for direct services."<sup>15</sup> These funds provided a rare opportunity for local agencies to receive reimbursement for some operating costs, but the pressing needs of the communities they serviced pushed them to continue to absorb administrative expenses and put all the

available resources into direct service delivery. Although extremely beneficial for the local organizations' abilities to provide services to their clientele, the FEMA I money did not provide for local organizations' own maintenance as organizations.

The remaining \$50 million appropriated through FEMA by the Jobs Bill went directly to the states for distribution ("FEMA/state"). The purpose of this money, according to the Emergency Food and Shelter Program Plan published by FEMA in April 1983, was "to supplement programs of food and shelter through voluntary organizations at the local level." And like the FEMA I money, the FEMA/state money was intended, according to the plan, to "alleviate the strain on local volunteer agencies."<sup>16</sup>

FEMA distributed the allocated funds for each state (Massachusetts' share was just under \$1.3 million) to the agency designated by the Governor as responsible for the funds. In Massachusetts, the Governor's Office of Human Resources managed the grant, and it was administered through the Department of Public Welfare. According to William Bartin, Policy Analyst for the Governor's Office of Human Resources, there had "never been a program like this." It was like a block grant for the provision of emergency services for a chronic problem, given to the state from the federal agency usually responsible for natural disasters.<sup>17</sup>

The actual allocation of the FEMA/state funds was the responsibility of the Planning Committee of the Governor's Committee on the Homeless. There were approximately ten people on this committee, including representatives from the United Way, CAP agencies, and food and shelter advocacy groups. The committee divided the \$1.3 million into three sections: \$300,000 for the

newly-opened City of Boston Long Island Shelter, \$200,000 to the new Department of Public Welfare shelters, and the remaining \$900,000 to be divided among 24 "convener agencies" state-wide.<sup>18</sup>

In Boston, one of the members of the Planning Committee requested that Action for Boston Community Development, Inc. (ABCD) play the role of the convener. ABCD was a logical choice in that through their network of Area Planning Action Councils (APACs) and Neighborhood Service Centers (NSCs) they had access to almost all the Boston neighborhoods. As the convener agency, ABCD served as the fiscal umbrella for the FEMA/state funds in Boston.<sup>19</sup>

Like the FEMA I money, the FEMA/state money had limitations and restrictions placed on it. According to the implementation plan for these funds:

States should select private nonprofit voluntary organizations (including churches) which have an accounting system and are nondiscriminatory. Local units of governments also may be selected. In selecting local recipient organizations consideration must be given to the demonstrated capability of the organization to provide food and shelter assistance, in a timely and efficient manner.<sup>20</sup>

Like the FEMA I funds, this money was available only for the expansion of existing services for existing agencies.

There were restrictions on the actual use of the money, similar to the restrictions placed on the FEMA I funds. And although the reimbursement level for administration this time was only 1% of the grant total, just as in the FEMA I grant the plan limited the reimbursements for administrative costs to publicity and operating costs.<sup>21</sup> Once again, personnel was not a reimbursable expense.

By allowing administrative expenses in the two FEMA grants, the legislation acknowledged that community organizations providing services need support for their own maintenance and organizational development; but the allocation attached to this acknowledgement was insufficient to fully meet the needs of the organizations, and the eligible costs were too restricted. According to Bartin in the Governor's office, however, these restrictions were not surprising given the structure of the legislation.

By channeling the money through FEMA, Congress put hunger and homelessness in the same category as the types of civil emergencies and natural disasters to which FEMA usually responds. The guidelines for the FEMA programs followed this "emergency" paradigm; they were guidelines, in Bartin's estimation, "suitable for six to eight weeks," not suitable for the establishment or support of long-term social programs.<sup>22</sup>

For this reason, the deadlines under which the organizations had to operate were extremely tight. The United Way's announcement of the Boston FEMA I award was on May 16, and on May 20 the local board met to discuss the allocations. The Project Review Committee determined the actual grant awards on May 24, just one week after United Way mailed the initial announcement. This short time frame for implementation of the grant, according to the United Way, was "in keeping with its emergency nature."<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the FEMA national board was requiring that the local boards return a complete plan of local implementation and expenditures within fifteen days of receiving their award notice from the national board.

This extremely condensed time frame posed significant difficulties for many small organizations. As Daniel Daley said in his May 18 letter to the

United Way:

Many of the most needy places are also the smallest and least extensively staffed; therefore, I hope the distribution committee will make every effort to stretch the very short time allowance made for grant applications. Many of the people who run these services do so on a part-time/volunteer basis and may not even see their mail before it is too late to apply.<sup>24</sup>

Thus for example, on a Friday afternoon at 5:00 the one half-time staff person at the food pantry and soup kitchen of the Mission Church of St. John the Evangelist happened, coincidentally, to be at the church when she received a call advising her to check the mail for the week. In this mail was a notice about the FEMA I funds, and an application that had to be completed by the following Monday. With a lot of work over the weekend, she was able to complete the application on time.<sup>25</sup>

Not all organizations were fortunate enough to have learned about the awards. For many of these agencies, the money channeled through the Permanent Charity Fund to set up the Project Bread Assisted Permanent Charity Emergency Hunger Fund enabled them to apply for and receive FEMA I money after the May 24 deadline had passed. In this instance, the flexibility built into the program was crucial for allowing small community organizations to take advantage of the resources. Had there not been groups such as Project Bread and the Hunger Hotline represented on the Project Review Committee, the committee might have overlooked the need for this flexibility.

One of the most consistent complaints about the FEMA I money was this short time frame in which organizations had to act. During the 26 site visits conducted by the United Way to the local organizations receiving FEMA I

funds, only five organizations did not volunteer criticism about the short time span for the award application process.<sup>26</sup>

Small voluntary organizations must work very hard to provide services, and most of their effort goes directly into providing services for the needy. These organizations frequently do not have well-developed accounting measures nor do they have formal program planning skills. To apply for a grant requiring program expansion, many organizations would have to consider their needs for expanded storage space, refrigeration, cooking facilities, seating capacity, transportation, publicity, and volunteer labor. Expecting these organizations to be able to respond overnight with detailed program expansion and expenditure plans is unrealistic. Even though the local board made a concerted effort to keep the process simple, determining how to quantify their operations is difficult for informal organizations.

The lack of time to plan services, and then the very short time in which organizations have had to expend their allotted funds (they had three months in which to encumber their FEMA awards) has meant that local organizations always operate on an ad hoc, as needed basis. It is hard for them to plan on-going services, because funding (like the FEMA money) comes in short-term clumps. They often do not know if services can be continuous, because they do not know how continuous their funding for those services will be.

The FEMA program, as designed, was offering the short term solution appropriate for an acute problem. The local organizations, however, were not experiencing hunger in their communities as short term acute problems remedied with a few months of expanded services. The problem of hunger as faced by local organizations is a chronic problem.

The lack of available administrative funding from FEMA funds also fit into the "emergency" paradigm that treated the problems as short term acute ones. The FEMA money was available for the direct "emergency" services of food and emergency beds, but not for any capital expansion. Thus, the FEMA programs demanded expanded services, but provided no capital to back up or maintain the expansion. One church food pantry, for example, a FEMA recipient, complained during their site visit that in order to provide the expanded services as required by the legislation, they needed a freezer to store larger quantities of food. The FEMA money, however, did not allow the purchase of major equipment. Fortunately, the Project Bread Hunger Hotline — once again functioning as an advocate for the organizations — had been able to distribute emergency funds for the purchase of freezers. Even so, the food pantry felt that the government, in setting up the FEMA programs, did not realize "street needs" in putting explicit restrictions on funds.<sup>27</sup>

This unwillingness to fund administrative and capital costs, according to Bartin in the Governor's office, was completely consistent with the Reagan Administration's perception of "voluntarism."<sup>28</sup> Funding administrative costs, in the government's view, would be tantamount to creating new social services. The Reagan Administration, however, had been pushing the voluntary sector to fill in where federal spending on social services pulled back. The assumption was that the local agencies in the private nonprofit and voluntary sectors would be able to absorb the expanded costs of providing expanded services.

Even though the FEMA allocations were for the "emergency" provision of services, Congress passed legislation in the fall of 1983 to extend this



program. The Continuing Resolution, Public Law 98-151 and the Supplemental Appropriations Act, Public Law 98-181 together added \$40 million to the FEMA provisions in the Jobs Bill. Because the FEMA I money distributed through the charitable boards had reached local organizations more quickly than had the FEMA/state money (and because it was a successful example of a private sector initiative), Congress determined that the local board of private charitable organizations would distribute this subsequent \$40 million ("FEMA II").

Once again, FEMA published an implementation plan. This plan stated that Public Laws 98-151 and 98-181:

. . . provide for expenditures that will supplement emergency food and sheltering needs for the indigent and homeless through March 31, 1984. The intent of this supplemental funding is not to resolve structural poverty in the nation, but to attend to emergency needs that have arisen from the economic problems that have struck many parts of our country in the past year.<sup>29</sup>

The availability of money through the FEMA programs was clearly driven by pressing need in the country. FEMA, however, by focussing money on direct services, met the needs of individuals receiving services, more than the needs of organizations providing those services. Whereas the Title I program made federal commodities available to existing group meals programs, the FEMA allocations made actual money available — in many instances to agencies that had never before received federal money. Unlike the Title I program, the FEMA programs brought a new network of organizations into the realm of federal resources.

The FEMA programs were beneficial because they provided money. Unfortunately, however, the restrictions on the funds limited the benefits.

For many small agencies, unrestricted money is far more useful than restricted money, but both are more useful than actual goods. These agencies constantly rely on unpredictable and sporadic resources. They often receive donations to meet their immediate needs, but it is hard to plan around or rely on these donations. For example, an agency could receive money restricted for buying only pots and pans, and then the next day receive a call from a restaurant willing to donate an entire set of used pots and pans. Money given without restrictions allows agencies to adapt their resources to their needs as they see fit. Even so, and in spite of the problems and inadequacies with the FEMA allocations, they did make money available to some of the smallest and poorest emergency food providers.

## CHAPTER FOUR -- NOTES

<sup>1</sup> U.S., Congress, Senate Appropriations Committee, Senate Report No. 98-17 on H.R. 1718, Emergency Jobs Appropriations, 1983, 98th Cong., 1st sess., 1983 (Washington: GPO), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> U.S., Congress, Public Law 98-8, Emergency Job Appropriations, 98th Cong., 1st sess., 1983 (Washington: GPO), 97 Stat. 27.

<sup>3</sup> See U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, Title 7 - Agriculture, Chapter II - Food and Nutrition Service Part 250 (Washington: GPO).

<sup>4</sup> U.S., Federal Register, Vol. 48, No. 81, April 26, 1983 (Washington: GPO), p. 19005.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 19004.

<sup>6</sup> U.S., Congress, Public Law 98-8, Emergency Job Appropriations, 97 Stat. 28.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Emergency Food and Shelter National Board, "Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program," May 1983, Annex 3.5.b.

<sup>9</sup> U.S., Congress, Public Law 98-8, Emergency Job Appropriations, 97 Stat. 28.

<sup>10</sup> Emergency Food and Shelter National Board, "Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program," May 1983, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Correspondence from Daniel Daley, Executive Director, Project Bread to Robert Chandler, Director, United Way of Massachusetts Bay, May 18, 1983, Files of John King, United Ways of Massachusetts.

<sup>12</sup> Emergency Food and Shelter National Board, "Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program," May 1983, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Emergency Food and Shelter Local Board, "Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program: Local Board Plan," May 25, 1983, Files of John King, United Ways of Massachusetts.

<sup>14</sup> Local Private Voluntary Organization reports, Files of John King, United Ways of Massachusetts.

<sup>15</sup> Emergency Food and Shelter Local Board, "Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program: Local Board Plan," May 25, 1983, Files of John King, United Ways of Massachusetts.

16 U.S., Federal Emergency Management Agency, "Emergency Food and Shelter Program Plan," April 1983, Annex 3.5.a.

17 Interview with William Bartin, Governor's Office of Human Resources, Boston, Massachusetts, April 3, 1984.

18 Interview with William Bartin, April 3, 1984.

19 Interview with Loretta Williams, Action for Boston Community Development, Inc., Boston, Massachusetts, April 6, 1984.

20 U.S., Federal Emergency Management Agency, "Emergency Food and Shelter Program Plan," April 1983, pp. 3-4.

21 Ibid., pp. 4-5.

22 Interview with William Bartin, April 3, 1984.

23 Emergency Food and Shelter Local Board Program to All Interested Agencies (memorandum): "Emergency Food & Shelter Program: Award to Boston," May 16, 1983, Files of John King, United Ways of Massachusetts.

24 Correspondence from Daniel Daley, to Robert Chandler, May 18, 1983, Files of John King, United Ways of Massachusetts.

25 Interview with Reverend Mary Lucas, Mission Church of St. John the Evangelist, Boston, Massachusetts, March 16, 1984.

26 Protocol for Private Voluntary Organization Visits, Files of John King, United Ways of Massachusetts.

27 Ibid.

28 Interview with William Bartin, April 3, 1984.

29 Emergency Food and Shelter National Board, "Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program," Winter 1983/1984, p. 1.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE SUPPLY SIDE

The third relevant provision in the Jobs Bill was Title II which provided both commodities (as in Title I), and administrative funding (as in the FEMA allocations). The provisions of Title II, however, unlike Title I, did not simply increase the variety and decrease the cost of products already regularly used by the organizations. Title II, furthermore, unlike the FEMA allocations, did not provide money (with some restrictions) for the agencies to use for the services most appropriate for their communities. Title II of the Jobs Bill through the surplus dairy distribution most explicitly solidified the trend in the Reagan Administration's approach to food policy. Whereas Title I and the FEMA allocations were limited Congressional responses to the public demand for emergency food, Title II firmly established an ongoing strategy for distributing a surplus supply of agricultural commodities.

Title II of the Jobs Bill was called the "Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983." There were two sections of this "Act" that were particularly relevant to community organizations. Section 202(a) stated:

. . . commodities acquired by the Commodity Credit Corporation that are in excess of quantities needed for the fiscal year to carry out a payment-in-kind acreage diversion program, maintain U.S. share of world markets, and meet international market development and food aid commitments shall be made available by the Secretary of Agriculture . . . without charge or credit in such fiscal year for use by eligible recipient agencies.

Section 204(a) stated:

There is appropriated for the period ending September 30, 1983, \$50 million for the Secretary [of Agriculture] to make available to the States for storage and distribution costs, of which not less than \$10 million shall be made available for paying the actual costs incurred by charitable institutions, food banks, hunger centers, soup kitchens, and similar nonprofit organizations providing nutrition assistance to relieve situations of emergency and distress through the provision of food to needy persons, including low-income and unemployed persons, provided that in no case shall such payments exceed five percentum of the value of commodities distributed by any such agency.<sup>1</sup>

On April 26, the USDA published regulations governing the implementation of Title II of the Jobs Bill. These regulations set up an entire new part of the Code of Federal Regulations entitled "Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Programs." The intention of this part was to "set forth the terms and conditions under which (1) surplus food will be distributed to eligible recipient agencies under the emergency food assistance programs and (2) Federal funds will be provided to assist in such distribution."<sup>2</sup> This provision of the Jobs Bill explicitly expanded the types of organizations eligible to receive surplus agricultural commodities, and explicitly allowed for federal support for the organizations distributing the commodities.

For the first time, the legislation and the regulations identified a new class of agencies eligible to distribute commodities. The regulations determined that organizations traditionally eligible for USDA commodities, as well as "food banks and similar public or nonprofit institutions which distribute commodities to needy individuals for household consumption" would be the eligible recipient agencies able to receive the Title II surplus commodities.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike the provisions in the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981, Title II of the Jobs Bill clearly specified the role of community organizations providing

emergency food assistance for distributing commodities to the hungry. In addition and most significantly, Title II of the Jobs Bill responded to pressures from advocates for community agencies by addressing some of the organizational needs of emergency food providers. The legislation allotted \$50 million, divided among the states according to a formula based 40% on the number of unemployed persons in the states and 60% on the number of households with incomes below the poverty level. The rationale for this formula was that "Public Law 98-8 [the Jobs Bill] was enacted as an emergency relief measure to address problems created by poverty and unemployment."<sup>4</sup>

This was the first time that Congress made money available to "emergency feeding organizations" such as soup kitchens, food pantries and food banks specifically to offset some of the costs associated with distributing surplus commodities. Of the \$50 million allocated through Title II, at least \$10 million (but no more than 5% of the value of the commodities distributed) would be available to reimburse the direct costs of local agencies. According to the USDA, "Congress intended these funds to be used to defray costs of distribution to emergency and distress type feeding facilities whose primary purpose is the provision of food in emergency and distress situations to needy persons."<sup>5</sup> Title II would provide administrative support money for the emergency food providers using surplus USDA commodities in their operations. This meant that there would be administrative support money for the mass dairy distributions, and it also meant that soup kitchens and food pantries would have access to the surplus agricultural products.

The money was available specifically for storage and distribution costs. According to the regulations, "storage and distribution costs" included "direct costs incurred by an emergency feeding organization or by a state for intrastate storage and transportation of any Title I or II commodity donated for use by an emergency feeding organization."<sup>6</sup>

It is important to realize that this money was available to organizations exclusively in the context of their operations distributing surplus agricultural commodities. These funds were available to support the activities of only those organizations that used Title I and Title II commodities. The activities of those emergency feeding organizations running food programs with money from the FEMA allocations but which did not use USDA commodities, for example, would not be able to receive reimbursement under Title II of the Jobs Bill. The funding provision of Title II would meet the needs of the organizations operating on the demand side of food policy; but it would meet their needs only to the extent necessary for the implementation of policies designed to distribute agricultural surplus. In this way, Title II of the Jobs Bill continued to push current food policy from the supply side.

Even though Title II of the Jobs Bill ostensibly met some of the needs of local organizations, it was still evident that the primary purpose of the legislation was to support U.S. agricultural policy. In a press conference shortly after signing the legislation into law, President Reagan said, "We're adding to . . . the amount of those that is going to be redistributed to the people of need . . . . But . . . we have to be sure that in doing that, we don't just add further problems to the agricultural community by, in that disposing, interfering with or wiping out their potential markets."<sup>7</sup> The



cheese and butter could go to the needy if it would empty the warehouses, but not at the expense of the food and agriculture industry. Just prior to this press conference, President Reagan had stated:

Although our large surplus remains a problem, we can be grateful that even in economic downturns, America has an abundance of food. This bittersweet situation afforded us the opportunity, early last year, to initiate a program to help those hard-hit by the recession by giving away surplus cheese and other dairy products. . . .

I personally believe we shouldn't keep agricultural products locked up in storage that needy people require and cannot afford to buy. So I am asking [Agriculture] Secretary Block to explore ways some of the other commodities in Government warehouses can be distributed to the needy to alleviate unusual hardship without disturbing our farmers' markets.<sup>8</sup>

Even as the Jobs Bill expanded and prompted the distribution of agricultural commodities, the Reagan Administration was becoming concerned that its plan to empty the warehouses by giving away surplus food might have glutted the market. Secretary of Agriculture Block expressed the Reagan Administration's approach to this problem when he said: "We intend to design this program in such a manner to prevent displacement of normal commercial channels. We do not want these donated foods going to people who would have been buying them anyway."<sup>9</sup>

By the fall of 1983, the Reagan Administration's concerns about the commercial effects of the commodities distributions took concrete form on September 2 in the second Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983, Public Law 98-92 (P.L. 98-92). Apart from the oxymoron of being a second "Temporary Emergency" act, this legislation extended Title II of the Jobs Bill, more clearly defined participation standards for local organizations, even more firmly established the program, and made explicit specifications to ensure that the distribution did not disturb commercial markets.

The legislation mandated several changes that both restricted the people who might receive the food, and placed administrative burdens on the organizations distributing the food. The legislation required that each state agency "determine those persons in the State that shall qualify as needy persons eligible for such commodities."<sup>10</sup> For the first time, the program had limits (albeit nonspecific limits) placed on who might be classified as "needy." The legislation also stated that "No eligible recipient agency may receive commodities under this Act in excess of anticipated use, based on inventory records and controls."<sup>11</sup> Not only were local organizations going to have to document eligibility, but they were going to have to keep close inventory of the commodities as well.

Whereas the Jobs Bill had allocated \$50 million for some of the costs of implementation (at least \$10 million of which was for local agencies) for the six month period from March to September 1983, P.L. 98-92 allocated \$50 million for each of two fiscal years. The same amount of money had to go twice as far. The Jobs Bill had initiated a limited acknowledgement of the implementation needs of local organizations, but P.L. 98-92 constricted that acknowledgement.

Also included in P.L. 98-92 was a very explicit push to move the surplus commodities out of federal storage as quickly as possible. Section 203B of the Act, part (a), required that "The Secretary shall, as expeditiously as possible, provide the commodities made available under this Act in such quantities as can be used without waste to State agencies. . . ." Furthermore, in part (b), "State agencies receiving commodities under this Act shall, as expeditiously as possible, distribute such commodities, in the

quantities requested (to the extent practicable), to eligible recipient agencies within their respective States."<sup>12</sup>

Even though the legislation was pushing through a continuous supply of the surplus commodities, a final key provision in P.L. 98-92 responded to the dairy industry concerns that free surplus cheese displaced retail cheese sales in the market.<sup>13</sup> The law demanded that the Secretary of Agriculture "shall not make commodities available for donation in any quantity or manner that the Secretary, in the Secretary's discretion, determines may substitute for the same or any other agricultural produce that would otherwise be purchased in the market."<sup>14</sup> Just as the concerns and needs of the agricultural industry were critical at the program's inception in 1981, the concerns and needs of the agricultural industry were critical at the program's institutionalization in 1983.

During the debates on P.L. 98-92, the Senate Committee of Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry filed a report explaining the "need to expand domestic commodity distribution." This report crystallized the current federal approach to food policy as exemplified by Title II of the Jobs Bill and by P.L. 98-92:

The cornerstone of the program is to use existing surpluses as supplemental food assistance for needy persons during the current economically distressed period and for other nutrition programs historically assisted through commodity donations.

At the same time, the Committee emphasizes that this is a temporary program to utilize only those commodities that are in temporary surplus. It should not be the policy of the Federal Government to encourage the acquisition of surpluses that will dampen farm prices or to establish an expectation that such surpluses will be available in future years for distribution to organizations, though worthwhile, that are defined as eligible recipient agencies under the bill. . . .

The Committee commends the voluntary and local public commitment that has been so important to the success of the special dairy product distribution program, and wants to provide for further expansion of these efforts with existing surplus commodities, including dairy.<sup>15</sup>

Title II of the Jobs Bill and Public Law 98-92 were laws based on a desire to keep down the cost of government. The USDA gave federally-owned surplus food to people too poor to otherwise buy the foods, thereby not diminishing retail food sales. The local organizations distributing the food received minimal funding for their efforts, thereby encouraging voluntarism. Participating organizations received funding based on a percentage of food distributed, thereby encouraging the use of larger quantities of the commodities. The funding organizations received went to distribution of the commodities and not to organizational maintenance, thereby avoiding the institutionalization of a new social service. And finally, the legislation left a significant amount of discretion at the state level, thereby fostering the "New Federalism."

CHAPTER FIVE -- NOTES

<sup>1</sup> U.S., Congress, Public Law 98-8, Emergency Job Appropriations, 98th Cong., 1st sess., 1983 (Washington: GPO), 97 Stat. 35-36.

<sup>2</sup> U.S., Federal Register, Vol. 48, No. 81, April 26, 1983 (Washington: GPO), p. 19004.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 19006.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 19005.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> U.S., President, Remarks and Question and Answer Session with Reporters, March 25, 1983, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, Vol. 19, No. 12 (Washington: GPO, 1983), p. 452.

<sup>8</sup> American Institute of Food Distribution, Inc., "More Donated Food - USDA to Prevent Displacement of Commercial Channels," The Food Institute Report, March 26, 1983, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> U.S., Congress, Public Law 98-92, Supplemental Unemployment Benefits -- Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983, 98th Cong., 1st sess., 1983 (Washington: GPO), 97 Stat. 610.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> See Community Nutrition Institute, Nutrition Week, Vol. XIII, No. 28, July 14, 1983, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> U.S., Congress, Public Law 98-92, Supplemental Unemployment Benefits -- Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983, 97 Stat. 610.

<sup>15</sup> U.S., Congress, Senate Committee of Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, Senate Report No. 98-21 on S.17, Supplemental Unemployment Benefits - Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983, 98th Cong., 1st sess., 1983 (Washington: GPO), p. 8.

**PART THREE: THE LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION**

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE EMERGENCY FOOD NETWORK

The different titles of the Jobs Bill had a variety of impacts on community organizations. The legislation allowed the expansion of existing programs for some organizations, and created new programs for other organizations. To understand the impacts that the legislation had on the services provided to the hungry, it is essential to understand the nature of the organizations providing those services.

There are two main categories of organizations most affected by the emergency food and commodities provisions in the Jobs Bill. Social service or Community Action Program (CAP) agencies were the organizations in Boston that felt the effects of Title II of the Jobs Bill through its impact on the surplus dairy distributions. Food pantries felt the impacts of Title II through the availability of surplus commodities for their existing operations, and food pantries received allocations of money through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The FEMA money affected soup kitchens as well, as did the availability of commodities through Title I and the increment of funding for those commodities available through Title II. The extent of the impacts on these different organizations has depended upon the nature of the organizations, and the relationship of the provisions of the Jobs Bill to the services the organizations already provide.

The CAP agencies are multi-purpose social service agencies scattered throughout the different neighborhoods of Boston. Some of them are fiscally

autonomous agencies directed by a community board, others operate simply as field offices of a parent organization. In Boston, the CAP agencies function under the rubric of Action for Boston Community Development, Inc. (ABCD), Boston's anti-poverty agency.

These agencies provide a wide variety of services, particularly services aimed at fostering community self-reliance. These services include employment placement and training programs, day care programs, youth employment and activities programs, community gardening programs, and a variety of education programs. In some instances, the CAP agencies also provide direct assistance to the poor. The ABCD agencies administer the fuel assistance program and more recently, many of them now offer food and material aid to individuals and families in need.

For many of these organizations, their entry into the network of emergency food providers was only to meet a growing need in their communities. As one agency director put it, by 1982 they started to receive requests for food, and were the only agency in the neighborhood with the "response capability" to meet the demand. In this way, they were "elected by default" to answer the need.<sup>1</sup> Providing emergency food became an adjunct to their other operations.

The increased diversity of their services has placed a real strain on the capacity of many of these agencies. As one local staff member explained, "We're down to one person per task area now."<sup>2</sup> Recent decreased funding for the Community Services Administration included in the Reagan Administration's budget cuts forced ABCD to significantly decrease staff in the local agencies. At the same time that they were operating with a



reduced staff, the demand for their services was increasing. The same programmatic cuts that decreased the staff of these agencies decreased the level of a wide variety of social programs that had provided services for the poor. These agencies serving the poor were being asked to do more with less.

Receiving relatively less compensation for relatively more work exacerbated already difficult working conditions for these organizations. Typically, these agencies are located in run-down buildings with insufficient furnishings and inadequately paid (and sometimes inadequately trained) staff. There is never enough money (and now there was even less) to meet all the needs of the communities right outside their doors and windows. The phones are always ringing —either with constituents making impossible requests, or with supervisors making seemingly impossible demands. The staff usually must document every activity and every service, leaving "paper trails" wherever they go. Never mind that documenting the lives of the poor — people whose lives are incredibly complicated as it is — is often easier demanded than implemented.

With the passage of the Jobs Bill, these organizations became responsible for another program, the surplus dairy distributions. Although some of the agencies had initiated emergency food programs on a small scale, none had experience with large scale food distribution. The impact of the Jobs Bill was that it established a new realm of activities for already over-burdened and under-compensated agencies.

The Jobs Bill also had impacts on other community organizations, but these are different sorts of organizations and the programmatic impacts were

different as well. The other main category of organizations affected by the legislation was the "emergency feeding organizations" — the food pantries and the soup kitchens.

A food pantry typically provides a three-day supply of groceries — usually nonperishable — to individuals or families without food. Pantries vary widely in their size and organization; often they are nothing more than a few shelves of donated food in the corner of a church or synagogue, but sometimes they are independent programs with a paid staffperson and an operating budget.

Many organizations for many years have had food pantries. Historically, organizations like the churches or the Salvation Army had small amounts of food they could provide to individuals or families in need. As Tim Morris, Director of the Family Services Bureau at Boston's Salvation Army explained, the Salvation Army's food pantry had "always been here."<sup>3</sup>

Most frequently, these pantries were very informal, and stocked entirely with donated food. The St. Joseph's Parish Church in Roxbury, for example, started its food pantry in the end of 1979. This very small pantry was stocked solely from charitable donations. On an as-needed basis the pastor would determine whether an individual was "needy" or not.<sup>4</sup> In many other churches, social service agencies, and health centers, the staff would respond as best they could to the occasional request for food.

Demand for services at these food pantries has been steadily increasing. A survey of eleven Boston food pantries showed that the number of people served between January 1983 and January 1984 more than doubled.<sup>5</sup> Since

January of 1980, the Salvation Army in Boston has seen an increase of 253% in the number of people they are serving. In 1980 they served 3860 cases, and in 1983 they served 10,513.<sup>6</sup> In 1982 the Jamaica Plain APAC started receiving referrals for emergency food from other neighborhood agencies. They went from serving approximately five families a month to serving an average of over 90 families a month.<sup>7</sup> The St. Joseph's Parish Church food pantry which started as a very small and informal pantry, now runs a weekly program, serving over 100 families.<sup>8</sup> Four or five years ago, people requesting food from the Salvation Army's Family Service Bureau were primarily the victims of fire, theft or other one-time acute emergencies. Now, over 70% of the people requesting food are the victims of "chronic" emergencies — people whose income cannot last long enough to keep food on the table for an entire month.<sup>9</sup> Although these are isolated examples, there is a shared trend among all emergency food providers in Boston: the demand for their services has increased sharply over the past few years.

In spite of increasing demand, and in spite of the recent establishment of new food pantries, they are often small and isolated from each other. In many cases, neighboring food pantries do not even know of each other's existence. A directory of emergency food pantries put together in December 1982 by the Jamaica Plain Area Planning Action Council (APAC) and the Boston Food Bank listed 62 food pantries known to them in the Greater Boston area.<sup>10</sup> During that same time, a survey conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health monitored services at 172 food pantries in Greater Boston.<sup>11</sup> The discrepancy in numbers between the two surveys is indicative of the nature of these organizations: they rarely publicize their activities, and they are often just a small part of a larger organization's activities.

Many of the people running food pantries will not publicize their pantries, specifically because they are concerned that they would be overwhelmed by the demand. When asked about his agency's food pantry, one agency director first denied he had one, and then said he had a "quiet" food pantry stocked with donations from a suburban church.<sup>12</sup> Another staff member at an emergency food center mentioned that they had a food pantry, but even though demand was increasing, their own limited energy as an all-volunteer organization curtailed the amount of food they could provide.<sup>13</sup>

Like food pantries, soup kitchens have sprung up because of a felt need in the community. Particularly for people who are homeless and would therefore have no means to prepare or store groceries from a food pantry, the soup kitchens have often meant the difference between starvation and survival.

Many soup kitchens started from informal "door-bell ministeries" where someone would run to the kitchen to make a sandwich for a person knocking at the door. In one church-run Boston soup kitchen, as the number of people knocking on the door started to increase rapidly, the church staff tired of running up and down the stairs to throw together sandwiches with whatever food they had available. They decided to set up an organized soup and sandwich line. They now serve soup and sandwiches every day to approximately thirty people.<sup>14</sup>

Soup kitchens may vary widely, depending upon their clientele. The guests at some soup kitchens are senior citizens, who enjoy the opportunity to share a hot meal with other people. Still other soup kitchens serve primarily "street people," many of whom have no homes and some of whom have

recently been deinstitutionalized. Soup kitchens, however, are now feeding more than the elderly and the alcoholics and "street people" usually associated with feeding centers. Major Charles Williams of the Salvation Army recently testified before the Citizens' Commission on Hunger in New England that the soup kitchens at the Salvation Army are now feeding more children and parents than single people and alcoholics.<sup>15</sup>

The increasing number of families at soup kitchens is a new phenomenon. These are the "new poor" — the newly unemployed families and the families on welfare whose budgets cannot provide enough for them to feed themselves. Having small children at a soup kitchen creates a peculiar situation for soup kitchen workers. The staff at the soup kitchens are committed to providing a safe and secure enclave for their guests, but they worry about the potential danger to children of being in such environments. Very often, the "street people" who come to the soup kitchens have a history of emotional problems. Many times, they carry weapons. The workers at soup kitchens are not only service providers, but they often must perform as peace-keepers as well.

There is a certain amount of danger inherent in working in any of these organizations. They are often located in poor sections of the city, and workers at the evening meal or volunteers going home after evening meetings often run the real risk of being mugged. People who come for meals at soup kitchens or come for food from food pantries are often desperate, frustrated, and angry. They are often humiliated for having had to ask for help, to have had to publicly acknowledge that they are in need of something as basic as food. Several workers at emergency food centers in Boston have reported

being assaulted; one was held up at knifepoint while in the church where she operates a soup kitchen.<sup>16</sup>

Because of increased demand for their services and because of the urgency of the demand, the food pantries and soup kitchens have had to tap as many of the available resources they can find to acquire the food that they need. To provide emergency food packages for twenty two-person households in a week (three meals a day for three days), for example, a pantry might need:

- 20 pounds of ground beef
- 20 cans of beef
- 20 macaroni dinners
- 80 cans of vegetables
- 20 bags of noodles
- 40 cans of fruit
- 20 cans of fruit juice
- 20 packages of oatmeal
- 20 bags of dried beans
- 80 cans of soup
- 20 loaves of bread
- 20 packages of cheese
- 40 envelopes of dried milk
- 20 jars of peanut butter<sup>17</sup>

As a guide for people setting up emergency food centers points out:

It is important that the best foods possible are in that package, because while we might say 'this is just for an emergency few days' it is very often the case that these people have already been living on potatoes for a week or cornflakes for three days. Many poor people have diet-related health problems: high blood pressure, vitamin deficiencies, diabetes, obesity, low infant birth weight, and so on — and have been ordered by their doctors to eat food they cannot afford.<sup>18</sup>

Because the needs of their clients are so urgent, the pantries and soup kitchens have needed to find some way to maintain a consistent supply of food.

Food pantries usually stock their shelves with food they purchase at a food bank or with food they obtain from donations or from solicitations at local stores and restaurants. Recently, many food pantries in Boston have also received USDA-provided surplus commodities.

Soup kitchens also rely heavily on donated food, and also rely on the church, synagogue, and community groups who often make a regular commitment to donate food and prepare and serve a meal once a week or once a month. The donations are helpful for the soup kitchen, and the opportunity to prepare a meal helps the donors understand and feel connected to the people they are serving. Soup kitchens have historically been eligible for USDA commodities, and the Jobs Bill made even more commodities available. Soup kitchens also rely heavily on the Boston Food Bank.

Most emergency food centers take advantage of the Boston Food Bank to "purchase" food. Like all food banks, the Boston Food Bank serves as a clearinghouse for industry-donated salvage and surplus food. Individuals may not use the Food Bank; it is open only to soup kitchens, food pantries, and other organizations providing emergency food services.

At the end of 1983, there were approximately 350 agencies in the Greater Boston area that were members of the Boston Food Bank, and there were more agencies waiting to become members.<sup>19</sup> As the demand for use of the Food Bank has increased, so has the volume of food that the Food Bank has distributed. In 1982 the Food Bank distributed 763,512 pounds of food. In 1983, they distributed over twice that amount.<sup>20</sup>

The Food Bank acquires food in a variety of ways. The Food Bank picks up truckloads of salvage food from supermarket reclamation centers. These

are foods that for a variety of reasons are not saleable — the cans are dented, the wrappers are torn, the boxes are crushed. The Food Bank then sorts the food, throwing away anything that violates health and safety standards (such as a very badly dented can or an opened box). Another major source of food is large-scale donations of food from producers and wholesalers. These donations are foods that do not meet the industry's criteria for retail sale: the labels may be misprinted, the food color balance may be slightly off.

Industries that donate to the Food Bank and the retail markets that provide salvage and surplus foods get the benefits of positive publicity, and they get certain tax breaks for their donations. These types of donations to the Food Bank improved when Massachusetts passed legislation ("Good Samaritan" legislation) in May 1983, limiting the liability of donors to emergency food centers if the donation was made in good faith.<sup>21</sup>

Over the past year, the resources available to the Food Bank and ultimately to emergency food centers have expanded significantly: in the month of January 1983, the Food Bank received 176,081 pounds of food from a variety of sources (mostly industry donations); in December of that year, they received 475,327 pounds.<sup>22</sup>

To become a member of the Food Bank, organizations must be incorporated as non-profit and tax-exempt, they must complete a Food Bank application, and they must vouch that they distribute their food for free.<sup>23</sup> Once a member, a food center "shops" at the Food Bank, selecting from whatever foods are available on that day. The variety of foods available is often unpredictable, and the quantities usually limited. The food, however, is



inexpensive to the pantries and soup kitchens. For every pound of food taken from the Food Bank, the agencies contribute 12¢ "shared maintenance." The "contribution" is the primary operating revenue of the Food Bank, and pays the costs (such as personnel and transportation) of keeping the Food Bank open. The more food the Food Bank distributes, the quicker it can become self-sustaining. This is important to the staff of the Food Bank; they do not want to find themselves competing against their member agencies for dwindling public or private monies.<sup>24</sup>

There are problems for some organizations, particularly the smaller ones, in using the Food Bank to stock their pantries. Because of the unreliability of the Food Bank's food supply, the St. Joseph's Parish food pantry has found it difficult to count on the Food Bank for the foods they need. Donations from the food industry are often packaged in institutional-sized containers, making them inappropriate for distribution to individual households. According to Maureen Prochaska, Pastoral Associate at St. Joseph's, the focus of the Food Bank is more on "tonnage," and less on meeting the needs of small pantries trying to put together appropriate emergency food packages for individuals and families.<sup>25</sup> Another emergency food provider, the Mission Church of St. John the Evangelist, mentioned that their primary food source must come from somewhere that has the facilities to deliver the food because transportation is a problem for them.<sup>26</sup>

For agencies that do not have vehicles, that do not have someone to send to the Food Bank, do not have tax-exempt status or cannot fill out the application, the Food Bank is not a helpful resource. For most agencies, however, the Food Bank has been a critical source of food.

Most of these organizations have exhausted all the resources for food they feel that they have access to, and have exhausted other resources as well. A staff person at one center acknowledged that they have not applied for many grants simply because that is not where their skills lie.<sup>27</sup> Another person at a different center holds down two jobs while running a growing food pantry, a newly-established soup line, and a weekly dinner. She does what she can to get as many resources as possible, but she can only do so much as one person. "When do I do the laundry?" she asks.<sup>28</sup> According to testimony in October 1983 at the public hearing sponsored by the Citizen's Commission on Hunger in New England, there are "pastors from churches in Roxbury and Dorchester [who have] become, in effect, part-time fund-raisers, simply to get enough money to keep up with the more acute needs in their congregations."<sup>29</sup>

In spite of the fact that they are often overworked, when resources are available, they take what they can get. Their freezers are usually donated, their cabinets, vehicles, copying machines, desks and file cabinets usually are donated. When money is available for a specific purpose, they usually take it, even if it is not what they need most. When they have an opportunity to expand, they usually do so because they are dedicated to their work and do not want to turn down resources for their communities, even though they are already pushed beyond reasonable limits.

Most emergency food providers rely heavily on volunteers, partly because there is limited funding available to pay for personnel. Volunteer organizations have numerous advantages as well as disadvantages, as cited by a report published by the U.S. General Accounting Office in 1983:

Volunteers were considered to be a valuable resource of most emergency food centers. It was recognized that many of these workers have a high sense of dedication and commitment to helping those less fortunate than themselves. We were told at one food center, for example, that volunteers make the best workers because they believe in what they are doing. Officials at a number of other food centers told us, however, of problems they have experienced with volunteers who tend to be less than reliable, work irregular hours, do not possess needed skills, and whose enthusiasm wanes over time. We were further told at a number of the organizations we visited that the need is great for additional paid staffers who are (1) on the job each day to coordinate and direct activities and (2) generally more skillful than volunteers in soliciting donations of food and other resources.<sup>30</sup>

A report by Senator Edward Kennedy on the increase in hunger in America described the dilemma of the neighborhood organization relying on volunteers, trying to provide emergency food to a hungry community:

The food distribution effort is primarily a voluntary undertaking to meet a need that suddenly emerged; it is not a permanent system and there is reason to believe that it is strained to the breaking point. Volunteers are overworked, the hungry are underfed; and providers are fearful that they cannot sustain even present efforts if demand does not decline.<sup>31</sup>

The people who run the emergency centers often take on these responsibilities because they are genuinely concerned about fighting hunger. The people who run these pantries often work long, hard hours for little or no pay, and do so willingly. They are often masters at "making do" with nothing, and making very little go a long way. For many of these people, working in these organizations is part of their commitment to live among those "on the edge" of the social geography,<sup>32</sup> where they struggle for social change with a battle cry of "Bread and Justice."

They write and speak about peace and justice, hunger and charity, and about struggle and the empowerment of the poor. Their newsletters and

their publications are often filled with quotations from the Bible and from other spiritual writings. They are deeply committed to the justness of their activities, and feel that they are providing the quality of services that social policy will not. One emergency food center worker noted they did not choose to publicize their activities or participate in governmental programs because this way they could provide a level of "personal" service they otherwise could not.<sup>33</sup> As a long-time advocate for the poor recently said, "we are like bright and colorful weeds in a stone jungle."<sup>34</sup>

Many of these workers, often for political and moral reasons, earn little more money than the people for whom they provide services. Some of them have middle class backgrounds and they have chosen to stand side-by-side and identify with the disenfranchised. A handbook providing guidelines for people setting up emergency food centers has a set of group exercises to sensitize people to the lives of the people they are assisting. The group exercises include trying to live for three days on a typical emergency food package or trying to survive on a Food Stamp budget (43¢ per person per meal).<sup>35</sup>

These types of exercises are a way for the workers to feel connected to each other and to feel that their work, although poorly compensated, is valuable. At the same time, however, the people working in these centers often stop for a moment to acknowledge that their work and their organizations are not the answer to hunger and poverty, and that the causes of hunger are deeply rooted in social inequity.

The centers are also often staffed with volunteers from the neighborhood. Sometimes these are people who, at some in their lives, have themselves relied on the centers for assistance. For some it is a chance to help

neighbors in need. The volunteers often have few formal skills in management or program coordination, but they offer energy and they offer knowledge of and concern for the community.

Given the nature of these organizations and the personal commitment of the people who work there, as demand for their services has increased, they have felt obligated to try to do what they can to meet that demand. The agenda for a meeting of volunteers running a growing church-based food program identified sixteen areas of responsibility for which they needed volunteers. And this was an already well-organized group of six or seven volunteers.<sup>36</sup>

Emergency feeding centers are organizations "on the margin" because they choose to stand among and identify with people marginalized by society. They are organizations that operate without the usual framework of eligibility standards, accountability measures and monitoring procedures typical of other social service providers.

These are the organizations — small, informal, voluntary, hardworking emergency feeding organizations "on the margin", and over-burdened and bitter social service agencies — onto which the recent federal legislation overlaid a series of policies providing resources and federally-owned agricultural surplus commodities. For some of these organizations, the resources have been a boon. For some of these organizations, the resources have not been beneficial. The difference in impact has been directly related to the attention that the legislation paid to the needs of the organizations implementing the policies.

## CHAPTER SIX — NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Mary Thomson, Jamaica Plain Area Planning Action Council, Boston, Massachusetts, March 13, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Discussion with Rena Johnson, Parker Hill/Fenway Neighborhood Service Center, Boston, Massachusetts, May 3, 1984.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Tim Morris, Family Service Bureau, Salvation Army, Boston, Massachusetts, April 13, 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Maureen Prochaska, St. Joseph's Parish Church, Boston, Massachusetts, March 19, 1984.

<sup>5</sup> Citizens' Commission on Hunger in New England, American Hunger Crisis: Poverty and Health in New England (Boston: Harvard University School of Public Health, 1984), p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Major Charles Williams, Salvation Army, Boston, Massachusetts, April 3, 1984.

<sup>7</sup> Files of Mary Thomson, Jamaica Plain Area Planning Action Council.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Maureen Prochaska, March 19, 1984.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Tim Morris, April 13, 1984.

<sup>10</sup> Mary H. Thomson and Nan Johnson, Directory of food pantries in Greater Boston, December 1982.

<sup>11</sup> Citizens' Commission on Hunger in New England, American Hunger Crisis: Poverty and Health in New England, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Patrick Cusick, South End Neighborhood Action Program, Boston, Massachusetts, April 2, 1984.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Kathleen McKenna, Haley House, Boston, Massachusetts, March 22, 1984.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Reverend Mary Lucas, Mission Church of St. John the Evangelist, Boston, Massachusetts, March 16, 1984.

<sup>15</sup> Spoken testimony of Major Charles Williams, Director of Social Services, Salvation Army of Massachusetts at a hearing before the Citizens' Commission on Hunger in New England at Faneuil Hall, Boston, Massachusetts, October 31, 1983.

<sup>16</sup> Anonymous emergency food center worker.

17 Maryland Food Committee, Inc., "Plain Talk About Emergency Food Centers: How to Start, Build, and Maintain a Center," May 1983, p. 38.

18 Ibid., p. 37.

19 Interview with Nan Johnson, Boston Food Bank, Boston, Massachusetts, November 22, 1983.

20 Files of Larry Meyer, Boston Food Bank.

21 Massachusetts, Acts of the General Court 1983, Chapter 99, Donated Food - Liability: "An Act Limiting the Liability of Certain Persons Who Donate Food," 1983 Regular Session.

22 Files of Larry Meyer, Boston Food Bank.

23 Interview with Nan Johnson, November 22, 1983.

24 Boston Food Bank, Food News, March 1984, p. 6.

25 Interview with Maureen Prochaska, March 19, 1984.

26 Interview with Reverend Mary Lucas, March 16, 1984.

27 Interview with Kathleen McKenna, March 22, 1984.

28 Interview with Reverend Mary Lucas, March 16, 1984.

29 Nan Johnson, testimony submitted to the Citizens' Commission on Hunger in New England, October 31, 1983.

30 U.S., General Accounting Office, Report to the Honorable Dennis E. Eckart, House of Representatives, "Public and Private Efforts to Feed America's Poor," June 23, 1983 (Washington: GPO), p. 29.

31 Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Report to the Committee on Labor and Human Resources "Going Hungry in America," December 22, 1983 (Washington: GPO), p. 18.

32 Speech by Kip Tiernan, Director of Rosie's Place at the Boston Food Bank, May 3, 1984.

33 Interview with Kathleen McKenna, March 22, 1984.

34 Speech by Kip Tiernan, May 3, 1984.

35 Maryland Food Committee, Inc., "Plain Talk About Emergency Food Centers: How to Start, Build, and Maintain a Center," May 1983.

36 Files of Maureen Prochaska, St. Joseph's Parish Church.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES

The passage of the Jobs Bill and the Temporary Emergency Food and Assistance Act of 1983 (P.L. 98-92) had a significant impact on the surplus dairy distributions. The program quickly expanded, the implementation became more regular, and the distributions became more established as an ongoing food program. At the same time that local implementation was becoming more routine, the regulations governing the program were becoming stricter -- limiting the supply of available commodities, and restricting the eligibility of recipients.

In Boston, the most important change in the dairy distribution program was that the responsibility for the distributions transferred from the Community Schools, to Action for Boston Community Development, Inc. (ABCD), Boston's anti-poverty agency. After one year of being responsible for the program, the Community Schools chose not to continue participating. According to one of the people responsible for the distribution at ABCD, even with administrative funds forthcoming from Title II in the Jobs Bill, the schools did not want to be part of the program, asserting that they were "in the education business, not the food distribution business."<sup>1</sup>

The decision of the Community Schools not to participate meant that the Bureau of Nutrition at the Department of Education needed to find another Boston distribution network. The ABCD network of Area Planning Action



Councils (APACs) and the Neighborhood Service Centers (NSCs) was a logical choice. The local ABCD organizations effectively covered the entire city (with the exception of Hyde Park and West Roxbury), the APACs and NSCs would be able to mobilize a contingent of community volunteers to assist in the distributions, and the APACs and NSCs were experienced in the delivery of social services to the low-income clientele that were eligible for the cheese and butter.

In an informal contract with the Department of Education, ABCD agreed to provide distribution of surplus agricultural commodities, starting in the fall (November) of 1983. Since P.L. 98-92 stipulated that the program had funding through November 1985, ABCD would be responsible for the first distribution in November 1983, and then distributions every three months thereafter.<sup>2</sup> The State had been pushing local agencies to distribute more frequently than once every three months (since the State itself is required to distribute the commodities "as expeditiously as possible"), but the agencies have unequivocally refused. There would be a nine-month hiatus between the last Community Schools-sponsored distribution in February and the first ABCD-sponsored distribution in November, but this interim would allow ABCD time to set up an on-going system for surplus food distribution.

Using a portion of the 5% of the value of the commodities distributed allocated for "storage and distribution costs," ABCD hired two full-time staff people to coordinate the program. ABCD had to convince the Department of Education that this was reimbursable as a direct cost of the distributions. The responsibilities of these staff people have included setting up an ordering schedule, ensuring timely delivery of adequate amounts of the foods, and setting up a system to ensure that recipients of the food are indeed "needy."

Having centralized and supportive administration at ABCD to help with the program logistics has been extremely beneficial for the local organizations. Even with this support, however, the worst part of the program for the agencies has been the actual implementation of the surplus food distributions.

Local agency employees throughout Boston have described the distribution days in different ways: "ugly," "horrendous," "chaotic," "obscene." Local organizations shut down their entire activities for the whole day — perhaps leaving one person to answer the phone. Everyone else becomes what one staff member called an "involuntary volunteer." In addition, a battery of over a dozen community volunteers filter in throughout the day. (Some volunteers receive \$4.00 an hour from the ABCD general program funds, others work purely as volunteers.)

Usually around three hours before a distribution opens at a typical distribution site, a line of people starts to form. The people who come early are usually the most elderly, the most infirm, those who cannot stand up long enough to wait in a line outside. Meanwhile, volunteers haul the cases of food (in November, cheese and butter; in March, cheese, butter and dry milk) off the delivery trucks. Hundreds of cases of cheese, butter and milk fill the distribution halls. The volunteers rip open the cases, and stack the food along the tables. Five pounds of cheese, two pounds of butter and four pounds of dry milk for households of four or under. Twice that amount for a larger household.

The lines of people grow longer. By the time the distributions begin, people have been waiting for hours. Their hands are too cold and stiff to

sign the forms. (The weather was cold during the distribution weeks in November and March.) Some people are concerned that they are too frail to carry home their allotment of food. People press around the tables, anxious and agitated.

Recordkeeping systems and accountability systems go awry — no one's eligibility is questioned; when the line gets too long people are let in without signing the registration forms. The inventory system goes awry — the plan for monitoring how much is actually distributed may never get implemented. People unpacking cartons break some boxes of milk. When no one is looking some people slip a few extra sticks of butter or blocks of cheese into their bags.

The volunteers work extremely hard, unloading and unpacking thousands of pounds of food. The people receiving food are angry for having had to wait in line, for having had to sign so many forms. The hall is littered with empty boxes. The floor is wet from the cardboard that wrapped the frozen butter. One person tries to go through the line twice, but is recognized by a staff person. Maybe another person does go twice through the line unrecognized.

Many of the problems of implementation are inherent in the program itself, and policies made at the central office of ABCD for implementation by the APACs and NSCs can provide little assistance. The central office, for example, set up specific and standardized procedures for verifying eligibility. ABCD had decided that eligibility would mean Boston residency and low income according to current fuel assistance guidelines (\$14,850 for a family of four). Any Boston resident who receives welfare, Medicaid, Veteran's

Benefits, Fuel Assistance, Supplemental Security Income, Head Start, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Food Stamps, the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children, subsidized general housing, unemployment or General Relief would automatically be eligible. Although not publicized as such, ABCD also allows people to "self-declare" their income without documentation by signing an affidavit asserting that their income falls within the guidelines. During the November distribution, a "verifier" would go down the line of people waiting for food to inform people of what constituted eligibility. This would speed up the process of eligibility determination and prevent people who were not eligible from remaining in line.

The central office of ABCD also takes the main responsibility for monitoring publicity about the program.<sup>3</sup> Publicity is an aspect of the program that is difficult to regulate, but absolutely crucial to successful implementation. Two factors affecting the amount of appropriate publicity operate simultaneously. First of all, according to the administrators at ABCD, it is important that ABCD spread program information equitably throughout all neighborhoods of Boston. It is very important that the publicity be widespread, and that a large number of people come to the distribution. Since ABCD receives an administrative reimbursement of up to 5% of the value of the commodities distributed, there is a strong incentive to distribute as much as possible. Publicity, therefore, needs to be extensive.

Similarly, local agency directors are concerned that their agencies might overestimate the amount of food they will need and have cheese and butter left over at the end of a distribution. According to Richard Murphy, the

director of ABCD's surplus food distribution, only two of the APACs or NSCs in the city have refrigeration facilities, and the agencies without refrigeration would have to find a means to transport undistributed food to Community Schools or emergency food centers that could store it.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, it is important that there be sufficient publicity to ensure that enough people come to receive the food.

At the same time, one of the greatest fears of both the central office of ABCD and the local agencies is that they underestimate the amount of food they will need, and on the day of a distribution they run out of cheese or butter. If more people show up than are expected, the local agency might run out of food. Program participants would become very angry, having waited in line for hours to receive their cheese and butter, and then not receiving anything. Given a simple concern for public safety, it is important that there not be too much publicity in order that too many people do not attend the distribution.

One of the major difficulties for the neighborhood organizations is this problem of trying to estimate how many people will show up for a distribution and how much food to order. The only guidelines the central ABCD office could offer were very general. The Community Schools had left very incomplete and sketchy written records of the amounts of food each neighborhood had received. The best ABCD could do to estimate participation was to try to estimate the relationship of the Community School's neighborhoods to the catchment areas of the APACs and NSCs. During the first ABCD distribution in November, the South End Neighborhood Action Program (SNAP) ran out of food an hour before the distribution was

over. Fortunately, there were upcoming distributions in other neighborhoods, and SNAP sent the people without cheese and butter to the other distributions.<sup>5</sup> When the food ran out at a different agency's distribution in November, fights broke out and several people were arrested.<sup>6</sup>

ABCD made some significant changes between the November distribution and the March distribution that it hoped would alleviate some of the problems they had experienced in November. The major change it made was instituting a pre-registration system. Under this pre-registration system, approximately two weeks before a distribution, the central office of ABCD and the APACs and NSCs advertise the program, advising people to go to their neighborhood ABCD offices to pre-register. At the local agency, staff members complete a registration form for each eligible household. Once pre-registered, a person receives a uniquely-numbered eligibility card good for the entire year. Then, at the distribution the person would bring the card, and have it punched indicating that he or she had received food for that month. A person's card would be valid only in the neighborhood where issued.

In instituting the pre-registration system, ABCD was responding to several pressures simultaneously. First, there was a strong implication in P.L. 98-92 that eligibility standards were going to be getting stricter and intimations that USDA would soon publish regulations requiring more extensive documentation of participation. In December 1983, the USDA had published regulations for P.L. 98-92 stating, "The Department plans to publish additional provisions that will increase the effectiveness of the assistance . . . and will strengthen the accountability and monitoring requirements."<sup>7</sup> By initiating standards at this point requiring stricter monitoring of program participation,

ABCD would have a model system already in place when the USDA actually did impose tougher regulations.

ABCD was also responding to official concern that there was some fraud in the program. Under the previous system, a person could go from distribution to distribution, collecting commodities at each one. A pre-registration system would allow people only to receive commodities in their own neighborhood, and it would theoretically guarantee that they receive commodities only once.

The pre-registration process would also eliminate long lines of people waiting in the cold for their food. By having people declare and document their eligibility before the actual distribution, it would take less time for each person to actually receive their food. On distribution day, people would only have to sign for their food, not prove their eligibility.

Another advantage of the pre-registration is that it would facilitate the local agencies' estimation of the number of people coming to the distribution. The agencies would have the benefit of their pre-registration figures upon which to base how much food to order.

ABCD had hoped that the pre-registration process would simplify the distributions considerably. "With a program that distributes commodities to over 60,000 low-income households over a very short time period, a pre-registration process is essential," [ABCD Executive Director Robert Coard] said. "Obtaining an eligibility card good for an entire year will reduce waiting time and make the process easier for all involved."<sup>8</sup> Pre-registered individuals would be able to go through an "express line" at the distribution, and would not have to wait as long as people who had not pre-registered.

The implementation of the process, however, has not been without complications; this has made estimating participation even more difficult. In Boston's South End, for example, there was pre-registration the two weeks preceding the distribution in mid-March. The pre-registration was well publicized because the agency (SNAP) had hired two community outreach workers for two weeks out of their 5% allocation for administration. The agency director, Pat Cusick, decided that having people work on publicity would be more beneficial for the agency than having them work exclusively on pre-registration. According to Cusick, he would be turning the distribution to his agency's advantage by using the opportunity to spread information throughout the neighborhood about the existence of SNAP.<sup>9</sup> Most agencies, however, used their two-week supplemental staff people to work solely on pre-registering people.

As it turned out, the pre-registration this first time did not work quite as well as anticipated. According to Cusick, the publicity about pre-registration had been intentionally ambiguous, and people were confused. Since the idea was to encourage pre-registration, the publicity could not realistically advertise pre-registration, and also say that people who did not pre-register should come to the distribution anyway. Similarly, after pre-registration closed a few days before the distribution, SNAP could not advertise the distribution for those who had not pre-registered: this would imply that pre-registration was pointless.<sup>10</sup>

The net result of this was that on the day of the distribution, many eligible people who had not pre-registered stayed away, thinking they could not get the commodities without having first registered. At the distribution



in the South End, because most of the actual participants had pre-registered, the line for people who had pre-registered was much longer than the line for those who had not. This meant that there was no "express line" for those who had taken the extra time and made the extra effort to pre-register. They had to wait just as long outside in the cold as did those who did not pre-register.

Because of the ambiguity in the publicity, there were far fewer people than anticipated. ABCD had delivered commodities to approximately 58,000 households in November,<sup>11</sup> and expected somewhat more than that number in March. SNAP had expected close to 4000 people in March, but at the end of the distribution day, almost half of the commodities they had ordered were left undistributed. It was up to Cusick to find some way to dispose of the leftover food. Again, the community organization was caught by policies made without understanding their ramifications in implementation. Cusick could not simply dump the commodities at a housing project (whose residents would automatically be eligible for the food), because this would have negated all of the energy put into the distribution by subverting ABCD's entire pre-registration process. Another problem was that because of the push to distribute the commodities as quickly as possible, all the emergency shelters in the area had already received their allotments of the products. As Cusick put it, "every refrigerator in the South End was already filled with the stuff."<sup>12</sup>

The pre-registration process was supposed to facilitate participation, but as one agency employee said, it is "making poor people jump through hoops for services." The pre-registration process is also supposed to make the

program run more smoothly at the agency level, but one agency employee described it as a real "strain on us." It does not prevent program "abuse," because the system is easily subverted. It does not improve accountability, because strict accountability is impossible for the community agencies. As Mary Thomson, the Executive Director of the Jamaica Plain APAC claimed, USDA demands total accountability from local agencies, and they do the best they can. But frankly, she said, they cannot possibly be accountable.<sup>13</sup>

The worst part of the program for the agencies, however, has not been the pre-registration. Most agencies have found ways to integrate the pre-registration into their existing program structure. (There actually may be a side benefit of pre-registration in that it brings people into the agencies.) The worst part of the program for the agencies is not the paperwork — most social service and CAP agencies are familiar with paperwork. As with many programs, in the process of implementation local agencies find ways to simplify the process and take shortcuts on the paperwork. The bureaucracy of the program is not the real complaint; instead, the complaints are more fundamental. The agencies' complaints emanate from the fact that the program was not designed with either the needs of the recipients nor the needs of the implementing agencies in mind.

As ABCD program director Richard Murphy said, the community organizations do not like the distributions because the staff is already overworked, having suffered budgetary cuts while having to maintain the same service level. To the local agencies, the surplus distribution is another example of being required to run one more program without additional compensation.

Murphy also mentioned that the lack of lead time for planning has made program implementation difficult; the November distribution coincided with the fuel assistance program (one of ABCD's biggest services), and the March distribution coincided with the beginning of ABCD's summer youth employment program (ABCD's second big service).<sup>14</sup> As Thomson in Jamaica Plain said, the program places unrealistic demands on local time and resources.<sup>15</sup>

The community organizations do not like the distributions because they are expensive to the organizations. There is minimal allowance for implementation. In one neighborhood, the agency director had to coordinate the distribution with the fifteen neighborhood agencies serving the elderly. Through the cooperation of those agencies' social workers, each home-bound elderly person in the neighborhood was pre-registered for the surplus food distribution. The City's department of Elder Affairs had helped with the registration, but not with the food delivery. This left the responsibility of getting a delivery system to the agency director. There are over 200 home-bound elderly in this community, and it took four or five vans borrowed from different agencies to deliver the food to all of them. This ad hoc delivery system worked this one time, but the agency director is sure that the system "will break down." The agencies donating the vans cannot afford to give up their own staff time and to give up their vans every three months to deliver surplus foods.<sup>16</sup> Although transportation costs would theoretically be an allowable expense reimbursable under the 5% administrative allocation in Title II of the Jobs Bill, the costs of printing the pre-registration forms and eligibility cards necessary for an accountability system and the costs of hiring outreach and pre-registration workers essential to move the commodities as quickly as possible, used up the available administrative money. Costs such as

the extra transportation expenses have to be absorbed by the local organizations.

Complaints in other areas have mirrored the complaints in Boston. A community organization in Maine's Oxford County made the following cost estimates for their commodities distribution program: they used a total of 175 volunteers between April 1982 and April 1983, and served 10,940 families; it cost the agency \$12,000 to run the distribution, for which they received \$2000 in reimbursement. According to this agency:

The fact of the matter is that with 175 volunteers there are costs involved. Agency staff must organize and supervise, there is extensive travel of both staff and volunteers and there are program demands: planning, organizing, and implementing; postage and mail handling costs to notify clients; and more. Ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) of local funds have been expended to provide this commodity program over the past year.<sup>17</sup>

Christopher Robstock of the Pittsburgh Community Food Bank described his agency's concerns about the commodities distributions in a report by Senator Kennedy on hunger in America: "Even if the program were operated efficiently and equitably . . . the types and amounts of commodities available are insignificant in light of the nutritional needs of our citizens. . . . their value is cancelled out by the costs involved in making them available at the local level."<sup>18</sup>

The agencies that participate in the distribution believe that their time could be better spent in other, more productive activities. Oxford County Community Services in South Paris, Maine noted:

As an agency we are willing to participate yet we have difficulty with expending local funds on a project which has given a meager total of 20 or so pounds of surplus food per needy family. . . . In addition, the funds which we expend are

funds which would otherwise be used in areas of far greater potential such as health and dental screening, cottage industry development and other activities which focus on helping the low-income and elderly help themselves out of poverty.<sup>19</sup>

In Maryland, the director of the Maryland Food Bank recently explained why the Food Bank was discontinuing the program. "We'd like to be able to cooperate in distributing the cheese and butter, [but] these punitive regulations make it impossible for low budget voluntary organizations to work with federal programs. . . . It is impossible to do the monitoring necessary for the federal audit."<sup>20</sup>

Unlike the Maryland Food Bank, the Boston agencies do not have the independent option of discontinuing participation in the program. They too, however, recognize that the reimbursement rate does not cover the costs of the program. They cannot even use program funds, for example, for food for volunteers on the day of the distribution.<sup>21</sup> Both Pat Cusick in the South End and Mary Thomson in Jamaica Plain averred that the time their respective agencies spend on pre-registering recipients and actually distributing food could be spent in other ways that would be more useful to the agencies in the long run. Thomson especially noted that since the pre-registration began she has had to sacrifice the kinds of inter-agency cooperation and communication that are critical to long-run organizational development.<sup>22</sup>

Most of all, however, the agencies do not like the distributions because they do not see any real long-run benefits for their communities. It is not always clear that the people who could most benefit from the surplus cheese, butter and nonfat dry milk are the ones who receive it. According to

requirements published by the Department of Education, even pre-registered people have to sign for their food — providing name, address and social security number. Some people do not have social security numbers, some people do not have permanent addresses, some people cannot read or write their own name. These people may very well be those most in need of food, the people most hungry. Most agencies will not turn them away at a distribution, but demanding documentation becomes a burden to the organization and an insult to the people from whom it is asked, and may deter participation by the most needy.

People who work in the community agencies know their neighborhoods well; they often live there themselves, and the agencies's clients are often their families, friends, and neighbors. The staff people see people they know and care about stand in line for over an hour, waiting for less than \$15.00 worth of food. Even though participants have obviously decided that the program is worth their time, it bothers people working at the distribution that the program is so "degrading" and "demoralizing."

Furthermore, many people do not see any long-run nutritional benefits for the hungry and malnourished. In fact, nutrition advocates have been concerned that the surplus commodities may not be healthy. For Southeast Asian refugees, who are among the neediest people in the state, dairy products are not customary in the diet, and some refugees may not be adapted physiologically to digest lactose, the natural sugar present in milk products.

There are other more general nutritional problems as well. An article in the Maine Times in August, 1983 voiced the concerns of numerous people

when it noted that processed cheese and butter are not healthful nutrition supplements for most people. The high cholesterol and saturated animal fat is a problem for the elderly and for the overweight. The sodium content of American processed cheese is extremely high — a danger to people with high blood pressure.<sup>23</sup>

The recipients of the commodities decide to participate simply because they are poor and hungry. (One man who has no address is asked if he has documentation of his income. He empties his pockets on the table to reveal a few coins, a paper clip, a key, a cigarette stub. "This is all my income," he pleads. When he receives his cheese he remarks to another man, "I won't be hungry tonight.") Jo-Ann Eccher, Coordinator of Project Bread's Hunger Hotline, asks whether five pounds of cheese four times a year is really the way to feed the hungry.<sup>24</sup>

The surplus distributions are not effective in meeting the demands of the poor because that goal was never predominant when the Reagan Administration designed the program. The program's primary goal is to decrease an excess supply of certain foods, and only secondarily to provide that food to the hungry. As the program matured Congress tacked on some of the accouterments (eligibility and monitoring requirements) of the sorts of programs that define the limits on programs that actually are established to answer a true popular demand. In this case, the community organizations responsible for carrying through the implementation felt the pressure at both ends: the pressure from above to distribute food "as expeditiously as possible," and the pressure from below to provide food in a humane fashion to hungry and poor communities. In this case, the "supply side" needs and

"demand side" needs of the policy are inconsistent, and the burden of the inconsistency falls on the community organizations.



## CHAPTER SEVEN -- NOTES

- 1 Interview with Lisa Barnes, Action for Boston Community Development, Boston, Massachusetts, October 18, 1983.
- 2 Interview with Lisa Barnes, October 18, 1983.
- 3 Interview with Richard Murphy, Action for Boston Community Development, Boston, Massachusetts, October 18, 1983.
- 4 Interview with Richard Murphy, October 18, 1983.
- 5 Interview with Patrick Cusick, South End Neighborhood Action Program, Boston, Massachusetts, April 2, 1984.
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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### IMPLICATIONS FOR FOOD PANTRIES

The mass distribution of the surplus food was not the only program that developed out of Title II of the Jobs Bill and the amendments in Public Law 98-92. The other mechanism for distributing Title II commodities has been through emergency food pantries. Whereas the mass distribution of Title II commodities has not been able to have a significant impact on meeting emergency food needs, the food pantries have played an important role. At the same time, the availability of Title II foods has been crucial in the operations of the pantries.

Recent federal legislation had an impact on the food pantries' operations in two ways. First, the money allocated through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA I, FEMA/state, FEMA II) helped food pantries throughout Boston expand the services they provide. Second, Title II of the Jobs Bill made available a small variety of federal commodities for the food pantries' use.

When the FEMA I money became available in August 1983, for example, the Jamaica Plain APAC food pantry expanded from serving 198 individuals in August to serving 302 individuals in September.<sup>1</sup> The APAC had initially intended to spend \$1000 of their \$2400 allocation on providing emergency shelter, but the needs of the food pantry demanded that they spend the entire allocation on food and on shelves to store the food. According to

their estimates, by early September they had spent close to \$650, and had provided over 3000 meals with the FEMA I funds.<sup>2</sup>

Through the receipt of the FEMA I funds, the St. Joseph's Parish food pantry was able to expand operations from providing seven pounds of food a week for 52 people to providing thirteen pounds of food a week for 75 people. St. Joseph's was luckier than many pantries in that they were able to expand their food program into a fully-equipped kitchen that had been idle at the church. They spent their \$2400 from FEMA I in just 2½ months. In one month they had spent almost \$900, providing more than an estimated 10,000 meals (100 families per week x 3.6 people per family x 3 meals per person per day x 3 days' worth of food).<sup>3</sup>

For many agencies, the FEMA monies simply allowed them to continue or improve their current operations. As one agency director put it, "we couldn't live without" the FEMA money.<sup>4</sup> The Family Services Bureau at the Salvation Army spent \$13,000 of their \$20,000 FEMA I grant on food — providing better quality food packages to their clients. For them, the FEMA money meant that they could set up an account with local wholesalers, in order to increase the protein allocation in their emergency food baskets.<sup>5</sup>

Particularly for the smaller agencies, the "expansion" of services as required by the regulations would be impossible. For many of the organizations, the federal money meant simple operational survival. As stated by John King of the United Way in a letter to agencies implementing the FEMA program:

Sentiment was expressed that most shelters and feeding/pantry programs are 'flat out' already. This brings into question the reality of requiring programs to expand services where there

is a facility and/or personnel limitation built into the award. Also it should be noted that some programs were able to improve their menus nutritionally as a result of these funds.<sup>6</sup>

The FEMA/state money, because of the timing, allowed many of the organizations to continue the "expanded" level of services initiated with FEMA I money. As Hogar Hispano, a Jamaica Plain-based shelter and feeding center explained in their application for FEMA/state funds, the FEMA I money they received would cover their needs only through September, and they were asking for FEMA/state money to last through the end of the year.<sup>7</sup>

Many agencies that had received FEMA I money could not apply for FEMA/state funds because it would have been very difficult for them to spend more money so quickly. As Tim Morris at the Salvation Army said, his food pantry did not apply for the money because it "would have been too much."<sup>8</sup>

Even though agencies are desperate for whatever resources there are, it is hard for some of them to spend the money (or even encumber it) in a short period of time. A \$500 FEMA/state grant to one food pantry represented an amount equal to half of their entire cash income for the previous six months. The \$2000 from FEMA I and the \$2000 from FEMA/state for another small center represented fully one-third of their year's projected income.<sup>9</sup> They need the money, but they also need time in which to spend it.

Fortunately, the Boston Food Bank facilitated spending the FEMA money for many organizations. Member agencies were allowed to set up accounts at the Food Bank with the FEMA money upon which the agencies could draw as

they "bought" food at the Food Bank. The arrangement with the Food Bank was particularly helpful for the FEMA/state money which was available only as reimbursement and not as cash up front. For small organizations with no cash flow, it is often impossible to operate on a reimbursement basis. As a letter from one food pantry said, they would "be hesitant to administer a second FEMA grant unless up front monies were provided."<sup>10</sup>

The problems with the FEMA II grants were similar, yet further exacerbated by the timing of the FEMA II money. The local board announced the award December 22, 1983 and local agencies had until January 5, 1984 to return applications. The pressure on local organizations was even greater this time, because the Christmas season is always a time of high activity and high demand for services from emergency food providers.

In spite of some of the drawbacks of the FEMA program, the food pantries appreciated the money, and quickly put it to good use. The timing of the awards was good for most agencies in that the money came when their other sources of funding were running out. The local board administering the FEMA money had worked very hard to keep the paperwork to a minimum, and the majority of agencies were able to fill out the required forms.<sup>11</sup> On the whole, in spite of the restrictions on how the food pantries could spend their FEMA funds (especially the restriction that they could not spend the money on personnel), the contribution to food pantries from the FEMA allocations of the Jobs Bill was significant. FEMA required no new programs, and did not require that organizations handle commodities or other resources that were not part of their present operations. For most agencies, the FEMA money gave them a much-appreciated opportunity to try to better meet the demand they face in their communities.

The other major impact of the Jobs Bill on food pantries was the new availability of federal commodities. Since the passage of the Jobs Bill, a small variety of surplus price-support agricultural products have been available for distribution to needy individuals. These commodities have included American processed cheese, butter, nonfat dry milk, all-purpose flour, cornmeal, rice, honey, and most recently, Cheddar cheese. The Title II commodities are available for household consumption either through mass public distribution (as in the surplus dairy distributions), or they are available to needy individuals through emergency food pantries.

In Massachusetts, all of the commodities have been available to food pantries, but only a few have been available for mass public distribution. According to Joanne Morrissey at the Department of Education, the policy at the Bureau of Nutrition is to allow mass public distribution of only those commodities stockpiled in sufficient quantities to distribute to everyone. All other commodities are available to emergency food pantries through the food banks. For example, nonfat dry milk is a Title II commodity that has been available to emergency food pantries since the summer of 1983. By March 1984 there was a sufficient quantity to distribute it state-wide in a mass distribution. For that reason, the ABCD surplus dairy distribution in November did not include milk, but the March distribution did.<sup>12</sup> Because of this set-up, the Title II commodities have played an important role in providing a consistent supply of food for many food pantries.

The Department of Education needed to find an effective means for distributing the commodities to the food pantries, to ensure that the commodities would be available on demand. The obvious distribution point

was the Food Bank. The Boston Food Bank had originally refused to participate in the mass public distributions of commodities because they believed that the program's costs significantly exceeded its benefits. However, when the Jobs Bill allocated money for expenses associated with storage and distribution of the Title II commodities, the Food Bank decided that they would be willing to serve as a warehouse for the commodities, for their membership's — the food pantries' — benefit.

The Department of Education arranged for the Food Bank to draw the commodities out of the state's warehouses on demand by the food pantries.<sup>13</sup> The pantries let the Food Bank know ahead of time that they are coming to get USDA commodities, and the Food Bank arranges to have an adequate supply on hand. Whereas the pantries have a limit on the amount of food they may "purchase" at the Food Bank at any one time, the USDA commodities do not count against that limit.<sup>14</sup>

These commodities are then available free of charge to the food pantries, with the Department of Education (and eventually the USDA) paying the 12¢ per pound "shared maintenance." Serving as a clearinghouse for these commodities actually costs the Food Bank very little. Unlike the foods obtained from supermarket salvage, the USDA commodities require no sorting, and they require minimal handling. And since the Food Bank receives the commodities in amounts they know they will distribute to the pantries, there are minimal costs associated with holding the commodities.

Unlike their other donations, however, the USDA Title II commodities require extensive recordkeeping. In Massachusetts, the Bureau of Nutrition at the Department of Education has assumed that role — removing most of the



"headaches" associated with distributing the commodities from the Food Bank.<sup>15</sup> The role of the Food Bank is simply to keep a running inventory of the commodities, and notify the Department of Education of the amounts distributed. Recently, the Food Bank received a donation of a personal computer, and has computerized its inventory system.

Although the paperwork in handling the commodities is minimal for the Food Bank, the paperwork required by agencies wishing to use the federal commodities is significant, and has been prohibitive for some agencies. To register with the Department of Education as a food pantry eligible to receive Title II commodities, the agency must complete an application agreeing, among other things:

Records to document the receipt, disposal and inventory of commodities you receive under such Agreement are maintained.

Complete financial records documenting actual storage and handling costs incurred in providing donated commodities received under this agreement to needy persons will be maintained.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, community organizations must completely document each pound of federally-owned food, from its receipt at the Food Bank through its distribution in a package of emergency food for a needy individual. And at the point of distribution to households, according to the agreement signed by the participating food pantries, among other things the pantry must:

Maintain a log of recipients and food distributed by name, address, signature, date, and indication of need. . . .

Maintain records to document the receipt, disposal and inventory of commodities received under this program and submit reports covering distribution operations that may be required by the State Distributing Agency. Records must be maintained for a period of three years or until turned over to the State Distributing Agency.

. . . .

Allow representatives of the State Distributing Agency and the United States Department of Agriculture to inspect foods and review or audit records required by this Agreement at any reasonable time.<sup>17</sup>

The pantry must document the name, address, and social security number of each recipient, and the actual amount of commodities given to the individual. For most food pantries, this level of documentation has been quite burdensome. One small pantry, much as they would have appreciated the food, could not participate in the Title II program. The recordkeeping and the paperwork were way beyond their capabilities with a severely limited staff. Furthermore, they serve primarily "street people," many of whom have histories of emotional disabilities, and have criminal records, and they felt that it would be physically dangerous to ask their clients personal information about who they are and their "indication of need."<sup>18</sup>

Several other food pantries that do participate have found ways to minimize the burden of the paperwork. Some pantries have chosen to estimate their inventory rather than record it precisely, others have chosen to estimate the amounts distributed so that it matches the inventory. Most agencies that rely on volunteers have found that the recordkeeping is mostly estimation anyway, as the volunteers find the precise documentation requirement confusing.

In addition to the logistical problem of maintaining documentation, other agencies have chosen not to participate as a Title II food pantry because they objected philosophically to the documentation requirements — particularly the requirement for the social security numbers of all recipients.<sup>19</sup> These

agencies are concerned that these regulations compromise their role as advocates for their clients.

In spite of the problems, however, these foods have been essential for the functioning of many of Boston's food pantries. In January 1984 alone, food pantries took 49,349 pounds of USDA Title II commodities from the Boston Food Bank, 40,752 going to Boston food pantries. In December 1983 food pantries took 70,708 pounds, 27,656 going to Boston food pantries. Between October 1983 and January 1984, USDA commodities represented over one-quarter (by weight) of all food distributed by the Food Bank.<sup>20</sup>

The Food Bank distributes to many organizations that are not pantries, and there are many pantries that do not distribute Title II commodities. It is possible, therefore, that up to one-half of the emergency food provided by those pantries that take Title II commodities consists of the federally-owned surplus foods. The implication, therefore, is that without these commodities these pantries would have to contract their services significantly. Because of the pressures of increasing demand, and because of the moral commitment of the staff to meet the demand to the best of their capabilities, these pantries have had to rely more and more on the free USDA-provided food.

The Title II commodities are useful to the pantries because they are integrated into their normal operations. Food pantries are organizations that, because they are set up to distribute food, can adequately use the commodities. Assuming they have the bookkeeping capabilities, these organizations have to make few modifications in their normal food distribution activities. The food pantries pick up the commodities when they do their "shopping" at the Food Bank, and they integrate the commodities into their

normal food package (although some agencies have found that commodities such as cornmeal and flour have limited use for a population unaccustomed to doing its own baking<sup>21</sup> and pantries without refrigerators or freezers cannot make use of the perishable items). Most important to the agencies, however, is that the commodities are free.

One of the advantages of distributing commodities through the food pantries is that the pantries have been able to regulate the flow of commodities into their operations. This is where having an agency that operates as a service provider for the needs of community organizations — the Boston Food Bank — is so important. Because the Food Bank operates as a distributing point for the commodities, the food pantries need only take as many of the surplus foods as they know they can readily use.

The commodities, then, are a significant opportunity for food pantries, but they also are an obligation. With the availability of the free federal foods comes the requirements of extensive recordkeeping, monitoring, and accountability. For an agency to be able to take advantage of this new resource, they must be an agency equipped to handle an inventory system and a client documentation system. With the commodities, they may have more food available, but they will have to devote more time to administrative tasks. Without the commodities, they lose out on free food, but they can give clients what they want, no questions asked. For most pantries, they recognize that there is a direct trade-off.

It might seem that the food pantries could be an effective means for the federal government to dispose of its surplus commodities, while at the same time providing a significant and useful resource for emergency feeding

organizations. The volume of commodities distributed through pantries, however, has been minimal compared to the amounts distributed in the mass public distributions. In six months, Boston food pantries distributed 174,546 pounds of Title II commodities. In the one week mass distribution of surplus butter, cheese and dry milk during March, ABCD distributed three and one-half times as much food: 626,730 pounds.<sup>22</sup>

Even though the volume of commodities distributed by the food pantries is nowhere near as large as the volume distributed in the mass distributions, the distribution of the commodities through the food pantries is much more effective in combatting hunger (at least for some individuals) than is their mass distribution once every three months. Through the food pantries, the Title II commodities become a benefit to local organizations and a useful mechanism to meet an urgent demand.

## CHAPTER EIGHT — NOTES

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## CHAPTER NINE

### IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUP KITCHENS

Just as the Jobs Bill had a dual impact on food pantries, the importance of the Jobs Bill on the operations of soup kitchens was also two-fold. It made available (at no direct cost to the organization) the variety of Title I "nonbasic perishable" commodities, and it made funding available through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) allocations. In addition, Title II of the Jobs Bill provided a small increment of money to pay for the distribution of the Title I commodities.

The USDA made the Title I commodities available only between the passage of the Jobs Bill in March, 1983 and the title's expiration in September. During this time, soup kitchens and other group meals programs were able to take advantage of a wider variety of food at a lower cost. Unlike the other emergency feeding provisions in the Jobs Bill (the FEMA allocations and Title II), Congress did not renew the provisions of Title I regarding the "Distribution of Agricultural Commodities"; these provisions expired on September 30. Nevertheless, because the Department of Education received delivery of the commodities to their own warehouses through September, their actual availability to local soup kitchens extended into 1984.

To be eligible for Title I commodities, an organization would have to provide prepared food in a group setting.<sup>1</sup> These two characteristics distinguished the organizations eligible for Title I commodities from the



organizations eligible for Title II commodities: Title I commodities are not available packaged for individual consumption, and the commodities are not for household use.

Like any other program designed to meet an existing demand, the Title I commodities are available only in limited quantities. The state receives a limited allotment, based on the amounts of food as purchased by the USDA.<sup>2</sup> The eligible organizations in turn each receive a limited allotment, based on the number of people for whom they provide meals. In each agency's application to receive Title I commodities, the agency must estimate the number of people served per month. The soup kitchens receive an order form for the commodities, and guidelines for the allotment of those commodities per person served per month. Organizations may order more than their allotment, assuming they can use the commodities "without waste."<sup>3</sup> Even so, the supply of the commodities is clearly limited by the total allotment received by Massachusetts (\$1.3 million worth of institutional-sized containers of prunes, canned corn, canned beef, canned pork, applesauce, sweet potatoes, vegetarian beans, egg mix, canned poultry, peaches, and grapefruit juice).<sup>4</sup>

The variety of the USDA commodities available to soup kitchens through the Jobs Bill has been helpful in their operations. Two years ago, for example, under the Food Distribution Program for charitable organizations soup kitchens received only dairy products, flour, pasta, peanut butter, and oils.<sup>5</sup> Now, the soup kitchens can base entire meals (protein foods, vegetables, and desserts) around the USDA commodities.

The funding for the commodities under Title II of the Jobs Bill has been helpful for many soup kitchens, especially the smallest ones. Prior to these

funds for "storage and distribution," soup kitchens receiving USDA commodities had to pay a service charge for the food — anywhere from 2-10% of the value of the commodities ordered. For the larger and better-endowed organizations such as the Salvation Army, the subsidy on the service charge did not make a significant difference in their food budget.<sup>6</sup> For the smaller organizations, however, every penny of the organizations' expenses that the subsidy saved was extremely helpful in stretching limited food dollars.<sup>7</sup>

As of August 1983, there were eighteen organizations in Boston officially receiving Title I commodities.<sup>8</sup> Some of the smallest organizations, however, the ones that have the most limited resources, were not able to take advantage of the availability of Title I foods. As with all federal programs, the Title I program requires a measure of accountability from the soup kitchens. The application for eligibility requires that the organization be incorporated as a tax-exempt nonprofit organization. For the smallest and most informal organizations that do not have the resources — or choose not — to incorporate, this requirement has prohibited their formal involvement and has effectively denied them access to the commodities.

Some of these small groups, however, have managed to circumvent this requirement by making an arrangement with a formally-registered Title I soup kitchen. The Title I recipient orders enough of the commodities for both groups. In this way, the eligible organization is able to act as a conduit for other organizations that, although they serve eligible populations, do not have the organizational structure to take advantage of all available resources. This type of arrangement does, however, place a burden on the recipient

agency. Each agency receiving Title I foods must provide its own transportation to the state warehouses to pick up the food. As one organization starts to order for another, the amount of food to be picked up at one time becomes quite substantial.

Unlike other federal programs, the recordkeeping requirements for Title I commodities are not complicated, although they can be confusing. As the coordinator of a soup kitchen at a church said, government programs and the paperwork involved are not designed with "programs like ours in mind." The forms she received asked her for the number of "patients" served by her agency, and the "per patient costs." She noted that it required some "creativity" on her part to adapt the forms for her own use.<sup>9</sup>

Because there are several commodities donation programs occurring simultaneously, some of the soup kitchens are never quite sure which program their food comes from.<sup>10</sup> Since the different programs carry different service charges on the commodities (2% for senior citizens' meals, 8% for normal charitable institutions, and none on Title I), the soup kitchens are most likely to order the foods from the order form that has the smallest charge. As one person said, "we can never find out what's going on."<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the Title I commodities, many soup kitchens benefitted from the FEMA allocations in the Jobs Bill. Like the food pantries, the FEMA money benefitted the soup kitchens by allowing them to expand their meal services. Also like the food pantries, however, the soup kitchens were concerned that they would not be able to maintain the expanded service level once the FEMA funds were exhausted.

The concern about maintaining an expanded level of services was even more dramatic for the soup kitchens than it was for the food pantries. The soup kitchens were providing regular meals to (in many cases) a regular clientele. As the manager of one of Boston's larger soup kitchens said, "People are getting used to coming here and eating. . . . How do you just close the door?"<sup>12</sup>

There are some agencies that chose not to participate in the FEMA programs for that reason: they simply did not want to raise a level of expectation and then be forced to pull back. Some agencies simply could not "expand" their services as required by the legislation. According to a staff member at Haley House, one of the oldest soup kitchens in Boston (18 years), an all-volunteer organization like theirs is working as hard as they possibly can to maintain the same level of service that they currently provide. They have no space or labor to spare; at this point they certainly cannot expand.<sup>13</sup>

The Title I commodities and the FEMA money met important needs for many soup kitchens, but they did not always meet the most pressing needs. As one person said, although money is always a concern, money for food is not the biggest concern. When necessary, they have always been able to get money for food from donations, and food from the Food Bank is extremely inexpensive. Free commodities from Title I are helpful, and the money from FEMA is useful for paying for small equipment. However, what they really need is money for administrative time (that is, staff to keep up with the paperwork and to supervise the volunteers) and money for capital costs (large equipment and repairs).<sup>14</sup> The Jobs Bill and its extensions, intentionally

limited in this, had no provisions for the needs crucial to the maintenance and survival of the community organizations. The Jobs Bill funding tended to view the organizations as mere service providers, rather than as whole organizations with needs for organizational survival and maintenance.

The impact of the Jobs Bill on soup kitchens was limited, and it was limited for two reasons. First, soup kitchens had a history of participating in federal commodities programs, and the Jobs Bill continued that involvement. Title I made no qualitative difference in the types of services provided to their clientele. The availability of the money distributed through FEMA encouraged expanded services, but not to the detriment or at the expense of other activities. And second, unlike the food pantries or the social service agencies responsible for distributing surplus commodities to households, the soup kitchens did not get involved in the new program designed to empty federal warehouses.

Unlike the food pantries and agencies distributing surplus dairy, the soup kitchens were affected only by the provisions of the Jobs Bill that Congress had added to respond to the increasing awareness about hunger in America and the increased demand for food by the needy. The soup kitchens were able to continue to function as they had, operating exclusively for the benefit of their clients within the demand side of food policy.

## CHAPTER NINE -- NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> U.S., Federal Register, Vol. 48, No. 81, April 26, 1983 (Washington: GPO), p. 19006.
- <sup>2</sup> Interview with Joanne Morrissey, Bureau of Nutrition, Department of Education, Quincy, Massachusetts, November 17, 1983.
- <sup>3</sup> "Commodity Ordering and Inventory Form," Files of Louise Cochran, Haley House, dated 1984.
- <sup>4</sup> Massachusetts, Department of Education, "Title I Foods," Files of Joanne Morrissey, Bureau of Nutrition, Department of Education.
- <sup>5</sup> "Commodity Ordering and Inventory Form," Files of Louise Cochran, Haley House, dated 1982.
- <sup>6</sup> Interview with Mrs. Major Smith, Salvation Army Harbor Light, Boston, Massachusetts, April 10, 1984.
- <sup>7</sup> Interview with Reverend Mary Lucas, Mission Church of St. John the Evangelist, Boston, Massachusetts, March 16, 1984.
- <sup>8</sup> Files of Joanne Morrissey, Bureau of Nutrition, Department of Education.
- <sup>9</sup> Interview with Reverend Mary Lucas, March 16, 1984.
- <sup>10</sup> Phone conversation with Louise Cochran, Haley House, Boston, Massachusetts, March 23, 1984.
- <sup>11</sup> Interview with Reverend Mary Lucas, March 16, 1984.
- <sup>12</sup> Interview with Mrs. Major Smith, April 10, 1984.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview with Kathleen McKenna, Haley House, Boston, Massachusetts, March 22, 1984.
- <sup>14</sup> Interview with Reverend Mary Lucas, March 16, 1984.

**PART FOUR: CONCLUSION**

## CHAPTER TEN

### THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE NETWORK

The recent availability of surplus agricultural commodities to feed the hungry has had significant impacts on many community organizations. To understand the implications of this for the operations of these organizations, it is important to understand the nature of the implementation of the commodities programs at the community level, and the nature of the organizations responsible for the implementation.

(In analyzing the impacts of the commodities programs, it is most useful to look primarily at the surplus dairy distributions and the Title II programs. The Title I program was altogether less significant. The Title I program has been short-lived — the only emergency food provision in the Jobs Bill that Congress did not extend beyond its initial expiration date in the end of September 1983. Title I has been helpful for soup kitchens, but nevertheless has not significantly altered their existing patterns of commodities utilization. Compared to the other programs (the mass distributions and Title II), the impact of Title I on community organizations has been minimal.)

The commodities made available through the surplus dairy distributions beginning in 1981, and made available through the Jobs Bill and its extensions, have been part of a particular federal response to hunger in America. On the one hand, the federal government in 1981 and 1982 was decreasing federal support to a wide variety of food and nutrition programs.



On the other hand, the federal government was also allowing the release of surplus agricultural commodities locked in federal storage. The decreased support for federal social service programs had generated an increased demand at the community level for services for the poor and the hungry. The Reagan Administration was responding to this demand by distributing surplus food and by trying to expand the voluntary feeding centers. Although the federal government was ostensibly filling the gaps left by reductions in the human services budget, it was filling those gaps inadequately and even inappropriately.

It is useful to compare the implementation of the FEMA programs with the implementation of the commodities programs. Whereas their similarities exemplify the current federal response to domestic hunger, their differences point out the particular role that agricultural commodities are playing in the operations of community organizations.

Both programs have been episodic in their implementation, but the commodities programs — although episodic — have, over time, become institutionalized. Congress designed the FEMA allocations under a very explicit "emergency" paradigm. The short term sporadic nature of the allocations has mitigated against the ability of community organizations to plan for long range organizational strategies or even to plan the delivery of continuous services to their communities.

The mass distributions of commodities have also been characterized by sporadic implementation. Particularly in the first two years, the availability of food was erratic. The distributions involve episodes of intense activity, followed by a lull. Over time, however, the distributions have become more

routine and institutionalized — yet institutionalized as episodic activity. Providing regular and routine services is easier for community organizations than providing sporadic services, but it has not been the timing of the implementation that the federal government has made more routine. Instead, the institutionalization of the program has made more of a burden for community organizations rather than less; the documentation, monitoring, and accountability standards have become stricter, imposing extensive administrative requirements on the community organizations.

Another similarity between the FEMA programs and the commodities distributions is that both programs have neglected to provide sufficient resources for administrative or organizational support. The allowances for administrative reimbursement are insufficient, and they are restricted in such a way that the community organizations must absorb much of the financial impact of program implementation, particularly the costs associated with personnel. The FEMA allocations have provided only a very small increment for administration, and only administrative costs connected to the expansion of direct services. This restriction promotes increased services, enforcing the requirement that community organizations take on a relatively larger role as providers of social services.

The administrative costs for the commodities distributions have been even more inadequate than the costs associated with the FEMA programs. The commodities program allows reimbursement for only those costs directly related to the actual distribution of the surplus food. The FEMA programs have provided money for organizations to use in the context of their existing operations, whereas the commodities distributions impose a new program on

the organizations, and then do not provide enough money to support the costs of running the program. Although making available commodities for the use of food pantries, unlike the mass distributions, does not create a new program as such, it does, however, create a whole new realm of bookkeeping and accountability standards to which the pantries must adhere. Although distributing food is not new to pantries, detailed eligibility and inventory requirements are.

The FEMA programs and the commodities distributions are also similar in that there is an implicit assumption in both of them that the voluntary sector and private charitable contributions will absorb those parts of the programs that are under-funded or over-burdened. Congress designed the FEMA allocations to promote activities by voluntary organizations. The money has pushed these existing organizations to expand their current activities, thereby expanding the role of the voluntary sector in providing services.

The commodities distributions as well rely on volunteers to actually distribute the food. In Boston, the agencies responsible for the mass distributions are not voluntary organizations. Nevertheless, agency staff all become "involuntary volunteers" on distribution days.

The distribution of commodities through food pantries has also had strong implications for the Reagan Administration's emphasis on "voluntarism." Distributing surplus agricultural commodities has incorporated these organizations into the amalgam of U.S. agricultural policy. By supporting existing price policies that generate agricultural surpluses, and then by using emergency feeding organizations to "dispose" of those surpluses, Congress has effectively linked food pantries and other community organizations into U.S.

agricultural policy. As long as the federal government needs a politically acceptable method of disposing of surplus, the emergency feeding organizations will play a significant role.

Both the FEMA programs and the commodities programs take a short term and episodic approach to hunger, push short run service delivery at the expense of organizational needs, and emphasize the role of informal voluntary organizations to provide social services. These characteristics are consistent with the Reagan Administration's official view of hunger in America as a short term acute and temporary social anomaly. This approach to hunger puts an exceptional burden on community organizations: they confront and recognize hunger in their communities daily as a long term chronic structural problem.

The community organizations are left with trying to cure a deeply rooted ailment with a superficial remedy. The commodities programs and the FEMA programs have insisted that community organizations tend to the needs of their clients, but not to their own needs for organizational development. The programs have demanded that some very small and informal voluntary organizations attempt to fill the wide gaps left by a decreased commitment to social services. The programs have forced community organizations to try and solve long term problems with short term solutions. The programs have placed the community organizations between the push of a surplus agricultural supply and the pull of the demands of a needy community.

A major difference, however, between the FEMA programs and the commodities programs is the connection that the commodities programs have with U.S. agricultural policy. The commodities programs developed out of the

push of excess agricultural supply, whereas the FEMA allocations were a limited response to the pull of the demands of the needy. Because the commodities programs grew from the federal level response to a federal level problem, the programs have not significantly incorporated concerns for demands at the community level.

The federal government dumped the commodities on the states, and the states, in turn, dumped the commodities on community organizations. The community organizations were faced with enormous quantities of food on one hand, and enormous numbers of hungry people on the other. Unfortunately, the two are not necessarily complementary. Although surplus commodities might keep some people from going hungry for a few days, the commodities program does nothing to identify, combat, or solve the real causes of hunger.

Many of the people working for community organizations, however, recognize that hunger derives from poverty, and poverty derives from the unequal distribution of resources. Because of this, the community organizations operate within the context of the demand in their community. They are organizations predisposed to identify with the problems of their constituents, rather than with the storage problems of the Reagan Administration.

The contradiction of running a supply driven program through organizations committed to the issues on the demand side of food policy means that community organizations will never be able to distribute all of the surplus commodities, at low cost to the government, with total accountability. The organizations do not have the capacity to move a large volume of commodities; as all organizations do, they incur significant costs in running

their activities; they do not have the bureaucratic capability of maintaining thorough accountability at the organizational level; and they do not have the inclination to demand total accountability from their clients. The organizations take the commodities because they want to provide services for their communities, not because they want to participate in a program serving U.S. agricultural interests. The organizations play the game because they feel they should, but they do not want to play by the same rules that the federal government wants them to use.

It is unreasonable and unrealistic to presume that informal voluntary organizations can fill the needs left by drastic human services budget cuts. It is also unreasonable and unrealistic to presume that these same organizations have the capacity or the will to maintain the sophisticated level of bureaucratic accountability that goes along with receiving federal resources. Even as these community organizations learn to become more accountable, and even as groups like the Project Bread Hunger Hotline and the Boston Food Bank rise to meet the service needs of emergency food providers, the level of service they can provide will never meet the level of service that the federal government could.

One of the dangers of this new federal response to hunger is that this federal involvement in the operations of the emergency food network may be at the expense of federal support for the major social programs. The more effort that Congress and the federal government put into the commodities distributions to institutionalize them, and the greater their attempt to legitimize the informal feeding network, the less attention they are likely to pay to the already-established (but suffering) feeding programs such as Food Stamps and the child nutrition programs.

This new federal response to hunger may also be at the expense of support for other programs more beneficial to the community. Assistance for urban gardening programs, farmers' markets, cottage industry development, and food cooperatives would be valuable initiatives working towards community food self-reliance, and working counter to the "give-away" focus of the Reagan Administration's current approach. Commodities distributions and the food programs within the emergency food network do nothing to combat the root causes of hunger. As an article published in England critiquing the Reagan Administration's food policies declared:

Making the handout machinery more efficient won't make it more effective. Hunger, as we all know, derives from poverty, which is a symptom of some basic imbalance in the distribution of resources within a society. Giveaways do nothing to alter that imbalance; indeed in a good many cases they exacerbate it, as any development worker worth his salt will tell you.<sup>1</sup>

The Reagan Administration has used commodities distributions as a very public way of appearing to respond to concerns about decreased federal support for social programs and about increased incidence of hunger. The federal government has settled upon the emergency food network as the instrument for these distributions, and community organizations have borne the brunt of the complexity of the implementation of these programs. These are organizations that have little capability to withstand the ever-increasing demand for their services, and have little experience to help them adjust to their ever-widening role as the provider of services.

The federal government has paid inadequate attention to the needs of community organizations, and inadequate attention to realities of program implementation. In struggling to meet the needs of their clients, community

organizations have pushed themselves organizationally beyond their capacity. The federal government has demanded service from these organizations to fill a void left by the government's own negligence. And the service response demanded from the emergency feeding network has been way beyond what the network can and should provide.

Not only are these organizations limited logistically in their ability to provide services, but they are also fundamentally limited by virtue of the type of organizations they are. Once an informal emergency food center starts to maintain documentation of its activities and starts to require documentation from its clients, the center is no longer "informal." With legitimation, it may no longer be able to meet the same community needs it was able to meet as an informal organization. Informal organizations are successful and fill an important (albeit small) role primarily because they are informal. They are able to work outside of the established social service system and provide services to people who do not fit into the established social service system's standard framework of eligibility criteria.

Once an organization chooses, because of a high level of demand for its services, to accept federal surplus commodities to distribute to its clients, the organization implicitly accepts the responsibility to maintain an inventory system, and also accepts the responsibility to monitor and document client eligibility. In making a commitment to distribute commodities, organizations are diverting some of their efforts away from service provision and towards administrative tasks.

These responsibilities adherent to accepting the new resource have an impact on how the community organizations allocate their services. The



organizations may no longer be able to serve the same constituents that they had been able to provide for in the past.

By instituting documentation procedures and eligibility standards, organizations may be cutting off services to the poorest segment of society. People without social security numbers, people with limited literacy intimidated by filling out forms, people confronting a language barrier, people who live on the streets with no income and no documentation: these are all people eliminated from a system that emphasizes documentation and standards of accountability.

Traditionally, the emergency food network has been the only recourse for the poor who live, for one reason or another, outside the system of established social services. If the emergency food network, in response to the Reagan Administration's truncation of social policies, becomes overly bureaucratic and administratively oriented, it will not be able to provide the same services, as it was before, to the very poor.

Formal eligibility determination, ironically, may serve to limit client participation at the upper end of the income scale as well. The people affected are the "working poor" -- the people whose income is often just above the eligibility standard for established social programs. The informal food network is frequently the only resource available for these people who may be very needy, even though they are working. They are doubly hurt: first, because they are the ones cut from participation in social programs through the Reagan Administration's budget cuts; and second, because they are the ones denied participation in the emergency food network that, when informal, had traditionally provided for those in need regardless of formal eligibility standards.

The availability of these federal commodities, therefore, threatens to transform the emergency fooding network. The organizations in this network now face a paradox: by participating in these programs, the organizations in effect participate in and condone their own transformation. Their participation further institutionalizes emergency feeding centers as an ongoing and legitimate instrument of social policy. And yet any country that views emergency soup kitchens, emergency food pantries, and free mass distributions of butter and cheese as appropriate mechanisms for the implementation of food and nutrition policy at the expense of more established food programs, is a country that has thrown its entire social policy agenda into question.

The Reagan Administration's social policies generated a demand for food, and then its agricultural policies created a supply driven program to ostensibly meet that demand. Making the federal agricultural commodities available through this supply driven program has had significant implications for many of the community organizations feeding the hungry in Boston. The organizations have had to rely on the commodities as one of the very few public resources available to meet the needs of the hungry. When demand was less, informal feeding centers could rely exclusively on private contributions. With the explosion of demand, the organizations must depend on public resources, although inadequate and inappropriate.

The high level of demand at emergency food centers and the long lines of people waiting for the distribution of surplus commodities do not indicate that there is a specific need for the expansion of these types of programs. On the contrary, the increasing level of demand by the poor and hungry is only an indicator of the lack of other resources available. Emergency food

is, and should be, only a last resort for people, not a regular means of support.

In looking at the operations of the emergency food network, therefore, and in looking at the implementation of the commodities distribution program, it is essential to look at the impacts that policies have on the actual functioning of the organizations responsible for implementation, and to look at the impacts that policies and programs have on the organizations' role in the community.

Using the emergency food network to replace some of the functions of established social service programs fails in several important ways. First, the commodities distributions and the emergency food network can never work towards alleviating structural poverty or the hunger that accompanies it. These emergency food programs operate entirely outside the economic and social structure, and therefore never function as a way of integrating the poor back into the workings of society.

Second, emergency food programs do not have the same capacity to provide massive ongoing support that the federal feeding programs do. Under-funded social service agencies and the voluntary private sector can never generate a level of services to match the federal government's service reductions.

Finally, commodities distribution and bureaucratization threaten to change the emergency food network, and threaten to restrict it from providing the types of services that only an informal network can provide. The emergency food network plays an extremely important role in society, but there is a

danger that, because of transforming influences, emergency food providers will lose their special and crucial place.

The Reagan Administration's particular blend of agricultural policies and social policies have provided expanded resources for community organizations that ultimately constrain these organizations' ability to provide crucial services for their communities. The irony is that by providing food for the hungry in the form of surplus agricultural commodities, and by expanding services to the hungry in the form of legitimizing the informal feeding network, the Reagan Administration may be making many of the hungry — and the organizations that feed the hungry — worse off than they were.

CHAPTER TEN -- NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Food Policy, Vol, No.1 (February 1984), "Hunger: American as Apple Pie?", p. 4.

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