

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

U.S. food relief at all time high

Twenty-five million Americans were getting government food assistance in 1991 as more and more can't afford to eat.

While national headlines focus on the desperate food situation in the former Soviet bloc, the need for food relief at home in the United States is also growing. Both private and government programs are under pressure to provide more. And the results of malnutrition are showing up in the form of preventable childhood and elderly illnesses, and mortality rates.

As of year-end, at least 25 million Americans are now getting some form of government food aid. The U.S. Conference of Mayors reported a 25% increase last year in requests for emergency food and shelter assistance, and the figures don't include the new layoffs and impoverishment worsening in the new year.

Since Bush took office, participation in the food stamp program, run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), has grown by 5.79 million people, from 18.77 million in February 1989 to 24.56 million in November 1991. Last year, national participation swelled by 3.27 million.

Other forms of food relief are also rapidly growing. On Dec. 7, 1991, the USDA announced a 13% increase in fiscal year 1991 caseload allocations for food aid to women, infants, and children, and for elderly persons, all in the USDA category of low-income. The USDA program is called Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), and it now provides food relief to 330,490 persons, compared to last year's total of 291,973.

However, this is a gross undercounting of those going hungry. There is a long waiting list for CSFP aid,

which is administered through the states, whose social services officials can only administer as much aid as the USDA makes available, at present, a far lower level than required.

The USDA is trying to appear concerned. The agency's Dec. 7 press release on the increase in 1991 CSFP caseload quoted Betty Jo Nelson, administrator of the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (which oversees CSFP), saying, "I am pleased that we can accommodate a significant increase in the number of CSFP participants. This means FNS can provide nourishing food packages for thousands of needy people not previously served." However, in Louisiana, for example, thousands are waiting in line for a place at the USDA table. Moreover, the lines are growing by the day. The state with the largest number of CSFP recipients is Michigan, the formerly industrialized state, where over 89,000 people rely on food supplements.

CSFP operates through 18 states, the District of Columbia, and on some Indian reservations. Of the 18 states, six serve only low-income women, infants, and children (up to the age of six), and the other 12 serve these categories, plus the elderly.

The CSFP makes food packages available, tailored to different categories of participants. The packages include: infant formula and cereal, non-fat dry and evaporated milk, juice, cereal, farina, rice, pasta, egg mix, dehydrated potatoes, peanut butter, dry beans and peas, canned meat and poultry, and canned fruits and vege-

tables.

Many of these foodstuffs are from farm commodities that the USDA insists are being "overproduced," despite the pressing need at home and abroad. For example, the USDA presided over the elimination of thousands of family farms last year, arguing that there is a milk "surplus" that must be reduced. This view represents the 1980s policy of the select cartel companies that dominate the USDA, such as Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland, Iowa Beef Processors, Philip Morris (Kraft), Louis Dreyfus, Nestles, and Kohlberg Kravis Roberts (which owns Beatrice), which practice food control and favor food scarcity. The continuation of the cartel food policies now spells genocide.

Betty Jo Nelson admitted in December that the USDA was able to expand the 1991 CSFP numbers of recipients by donating the entire amount of nonfat milk needed for the program, instead of buying it on the open market with government money. But where will the milk powder come from next year if the USDA is eliminating farms and herds?

The 24.56 million Americans now utilizing food stamps is also a gross understatement of the need for food aid. Millions who qualify for help do not know about the possibility of getting it. Nevertheless, the numbers receiving food stamps are rising.

Food stamp use in New Hampshire grew by 47% during 1991.

New Jersey's food stamp roster rose from 424,361 to 535,536 people from November 1990 to November 1991. The 26.2% increase leads the mid-Atlantic region, where participation increased 17% overall.

Not only city residents are turning to food stamps. Parts of the farm belt are as bad, or worse. Last year, food stamp use jumped 10% in Iowa's 37 agricultural counties.