

ADP1828

*Food supply*

Food Policy  
and the  
Church:  
Specific Proposals

Statement  
of the  
Administrative Board  
United States  
Catholic Conference

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME  
MEMORIAL LIBRARY

FEB 13 1979

COLLEGE LIBRARY  
VERTICAL FILE  
SEPTEMBER 11, 1975



## **FOOD POLICY AND THE CHURCH: SPECIFIC PROPOSALS**

### **A Statement of the USCC Administrative Board**

September 11, 1975

In October 1974, the Fourth International Synod of Bishops described "the right to eat" as fundamental to human dignity. In November 1974, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops adopted a Pastoral Plan of Action designed to mobilize the Catholic community in the United States in an effort to realize the right to eat for millions threatened last year by starvation and malnutrition.

One year later it is evident that "the right to eat" is still denied to many in our own country and to many more throughout the globe. Although the threat of starvation has been reduced significantly during the past year, the presence of hunger and malnutrition continue to stalk many lives in several regions of the globe; at home many of the unemployed, the elderly and the poor are forced to subsist on inadequate diets.

In the past year, however, many helpful steps were taken in the religious communities and in the wider society. Perhaps the most significant was the meeting of the World Food Conference held in Rome last November. Throughout the United States, programs were conducted in our dioceses, parishes and schools, and policies and practices adopted by individuals, Catholic families, priests' senates and religious communities to help alleviate the problem of global and domestic hunger. The media used its powers of persuasion and education to publicize the issue of hunger. Finally, in the Congress and in parts of the Administration initial efforts have been made to shape a coherent, just and generous food policy.

All these actions are significant, but public policy has a unique importance. Personal, vol-

untary efforts are essential, but they will prove inadequate to the scope of the hunger question if they are not encompassed in a broader public policy which links them to a systematic program of action. In this statement, continuing the effort of policy debate, public education and pastoral leadership we began last year, we seek to address the national policy issues which are needed to make a more just food policy a reality in our country.

### **A. Food and Foreign Policy**


The World Food Conference produced a series of proposals for combatting hunger and malnutrition on a global basis. The unique position which the United States holds as the largest food exporting nation in the world means that our response to these proposals has supreme importance for the hungry of the world.

Since the Food Conference, a serious and sustained debate has been carried on in the Congress and within the Administration about our food policy. Some of the fruits of the debate are now taking the form of specific legislative proposals. We believe the following ideas contained in some of these proposals deserve serious public consideration and support.

*I. Food Aid* The restructuring of U.S. food aid policy should include: 1) clear policy guidelines separating food aid from strategic and political considerations; 2) a specific policy commitment to give priority in food aid to the U.N.-designated "most severely affected nations"; this commitment should be specified in the language of the law; 3) the establishment of a guaranteed minimum of food aid to be provided each year; 4) the establishment of a guaranteed minimum of food aid to be provided on a donation basis through non-governmental agencies rather than through concessional sales.

*II. Grain Reserve* The World Food Conference proposal for an international system of national grain reserves needs the continued support and leadership of our government and should receive whatever legislative support is needed to allow the United States to participate in the system.

*III. International Fund for Agricultural Development* Our government's pledge to con-



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2016

tribute 200 million dollars to the Fund is most welcome; this pledge should receive Congressional support and implementation.

*IV. Foreign Assistance* The foreign assistance program presently being debated in Congress should include several of the elements which have been proposed: 1) the separation of economic from military aid; 2) the support for multilateral aid programs; 3) the focusing of U.S. aid programs on the needs of the small farmer and the rural poor.

## **B. Domestic Food Policy**

Many Americans face the reality of hunger and malnutrition intensified by high levels of unemployment, inflated food prices and persistent poverty. Two federal programs are now under governmental review: food stamps and child nutrition programs.

*I. Food Stamps* We support a major review of the food stamp program. Yet, we are concerned that reform efforts not lead to a diminished commitment to assist poor and working poor families. True reform seeks to make adequate assistance available where it is needed, but protects against abuses and excesses.

Unfortunately, the current debate over the value of the food stamp program is clouded by misunderstandings. Opponents maintain that the program is growing at uncontrollable rates and that affluent families and students are taking advantage of it. Some problems and abuses do exist; however, the evidence does not support these sweeping indictments.

*a. Growth of the Program* The growth of food stamps is the result of three factors: the introduction of food stamps to additional counties, the conversion of many counties from food commodities programs to food stamps, and the increase in unemployment. Begun as a pilot program in 1961, food stamps or food commodities were available in virtually every county in the nation by 1971. Between that year and mid-1974, the number of participants in the two programs remained at 14.9 million. In the last year, however, the serious rise in unemployment brought participants to a level of 19.5 million. Since April the num-

ber of people receiving stamps has declined, and the USDA projects a lower level of participants and costs by 1980. These figures indicate that the program is not out of control, but is responding to the severe economic stress of the last year.

*b. Income of Participants* According to USDA, 87 percent of all food stamp participants have family incomes of less than \$6,000 after taxes and the average cash income of a family of four on food stamps is \$3,456 a year. Congress has already acted to prohibit the eligibility of students who are dependents of affluent families, and this provision will take full effect this month. The evidence suggests that food stamps continue to offer nutritional assistance to the poor and near-poor who are least able to afford a nutritional diet.

*c. Policy Reform* The food stamp program must be maintained and improved. We oppose drastic cuts and attempts to eliminate the working poor or unemployed from its coverage.

We support measures that will tighten up administration, improve responsiveness, and reduce certification errors. We do not support modifications that will penalize the working poor and result in disincentives for participants to work.

Any changes in the family asset limitations should not require the elderly or recently unemployed to sell their automobile, necessary household goods and personal effects in order to become eligible for food stamps.

We have opposed and will continue to oppose increases in food stamp prices that will have an adverse impact on the ability of needy families to obtain adequate nutrition.

Although the evidence indicates there are very few non-needy families on food stamps, we would support a reasonable gross income limit that would disqualify affluent families from receiving food stamps under any circumstances. We would oppose efforts to set this limit so low that it would eliminate families actually in need.



Ultimately, the future of food stamps is linked to reform of the welfare system. Fundamentally, our nation must provide jobs for those who can and should work and an adequate income for those who cannot. Until such a policy is implemented, the food stamp program deserves the support of our country's public officials and citizens.

*II. Child Nutrition* We have consistently supported efforts to improve and extend the Child Nutrition programs, including the School Lunch and Breakfast, the Special Supplemental Feeding Program for Women, Infants and Small Children, and the Special Milk Program. These programs provide particularly important health and education benefits for children in public and non-public schools. We support recent Congressional efforts to strengthen these programs. We urge Congress to act swiftly and the President to sign this legislation into law.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Enlightened government food policies and individual generosity are necessary to alleviate the world food problem, but they alone are not sufficient. Christians believe that despite the most inventive programs and the best of intentions, there remains an extra measure beyond human power, that is, God's active presence in the world. Christians also believe that prayer can solicit God's presence. The complexities of the food problem tax human ingenuity and invite Christians' efficacious prayers. Our Lord's belief in the power of prayer is enlightening and consoling; he instructed us to pray for our daily bread with confidence in the knowledge that when we ask our heavenly Father, he will give us neither a stone for bread nor a serpent for fish.

1975

Publications Office

UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

1312 Massachusetts Avenue N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20005