

hard. Comparing the first and last years of the decade of the 1980s, Iowa had an average of 23,712 more persons in the food stamp program in 1990 than in 1980. For 88 out of 99 counties, the percentage of residents in the program was higher in 1990 than in 1980.

The highest food stamp usage was in the middle-years of the decade, when a wave of farm families were dispossessed, and workers in Iowa's farm equipment manufacturing and supply outlets were put out of work. In 1986, twelve counties in Iowa had 10% or more of their population getting food stamps, and one county had fully 15.5% of its residents on food stamps. As of 1990, the statewide average food stamp use stood at 6.2% of Iowa's population, and this is rising as a new wave of layoffs and farm ruination are hitting again.

Over the decade, more and more of Iowa's school-children have come to be dependent on food relief. This came about despite the fact that school enrollment declined from 1983 to 1989, as the state lost population overall. During this same time period, the average numbers of students getting food relief increased. Three school years between 1985 and 1988 had over 25% of the students receiving food assistance. In 1990-91, 24.4% of students received either free or reduced-price meals.

Students qualify for nutrition assistance because their families qualify as low income; those with lower income can

be eligible for free meals, while others with somewhat higher income can receive meals at a reduced price.

Other categories of needy are also growing. The June 26 *Des Moines Register* reported an expansion this year of 5,000 more individuals being served by the WIC program (supplemental food for Women, Infants, and Children). The total number served in the state is to rise from 53,337 to more than 58,000 people.

State administrators of the program are also actively seeking ways to make the WIC dollar go further. Iowa uses federal WIC money to issue monthly coupons which participants use to buy formula—and other specified foods—at retail prices from Iowa grocers. Then the state receives a rebate from the formula manufacturer that is used to serve more people with WIC. Iowa food aid officials have joined forces with counterparts in Texas and Minnesota to negotiate with infant formula companies to use competitive bidding to drive down the costs to the program. Nationally, the WIC purchases add up to one-third to one-half of all infant formula sales.

Iowa has struck a three-year deal with Ross Laboratories, manufacturer of Similac and Isomil formulas. In exchange for an exclusive contract with Iowa starting in October to provide formula, Ross Laboratories will provide a rebate of 77% on the wholesale price per can of formula. As a result, Iowa will save \$5.9 million and try to provide more nutrition aid.

A profile of the U.S. food relief effort

Currently, well over 25 million Americans, over 1 in 10, are enrolled in the food stamps program. Ten million low-income children receive free school lunches. More than 5 million people participate in the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, one of five child nutritional programs operating nationally, while approximately 931,165 meals are served daily by the Nutrition Program for the Elderly. Estimates are that nearly 50 million Americans receive some kind of food assistance.

During the month of April, \$18.9 million was provided by Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) for soup kitchens and shelters of various kinds. The Commodity Distribution to Charitable Institutions spent \$88.4 million in 1991, for churches, orphanages, and the like. This year, a record \$65.6 million was spent in just the first four months, including \$9.9 million in April alone. These are only the highlights of the most familiar of the 13 programs that enable an increasing number of Americans to eat a meal.

The first attempt to rid this country of hunger occurred during the Great Depression. Then as now, farmers had more food than they could sell, while thousands stood in bread lines, waiting for food. The Food Stamp Plan was created, and by the late 1930s, families could exchange money for stamps and purchase designated surplus foods at retail stores.

However, World War II put an end to unemployment and food surplus. The program that served over 3 million people a month was put to rest in 1943, hopefully forever. But less than 20 years later, President Kennedy called upon the U.S. Department of Agriculture to implement a Pilot Food Stamp Program. By 1964 the current program was established, and all 50 states were authorized to take part. In 1969, about 2.9 million Americans were enrolled.

Now the enrollment is up to nearly 26 million, and the program barely keeps up with a growing population of hungry Americans. According to the latest statistics of the Children's Defense Fund, one in eight American children is suffering from hunger. Nearly one in four infants and toddlers is poor. Even with the programs we have, more children are hungry in the United States than there are total children in Angola, Somalia, Haiti, Zimbabwe, or Cambodia.