

# How Accountable Is Food Stamp Program?

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Editors note: This third and last article in the food stamp series is an analysis of the program.

Increasingly, the food stamp program in the United States has come under fire by a number of government officials and local people who deal with the project on a day to day basis.

Recently, David Swoap, director of the state's Department of Benefit Payments, called California's food stamp program "out of control," and submitted a report to

Gov. Ronald Reagan asking for a revamp of the entire project.

Noting its rapid growth over the past seven years, Swoap also labeled the program lacking in "accountability and administrative controls."

This appears to be the case in Santa Cruz County.

In Santa Cruz and in many parts of California, according to Swoap, food stamp abuse is becoming a critical problem.

He mentioned the case of a seven-member family in Riverside County with an \$11,000 annual income living legally on food stamps and added that in

many areas, such as Santa Cruz, Humboldt, Medocino and Monterey, there was a high incidence of young people subsisting on food stamps while living in communes.

Store owners, postal clerks and others who deal with the program tell many stories of food stamp misuse.

Yet, this program, because of its large size and complexity, invites this type of problem.

Once a quiet government project that involved only 50,000 people, the food stamp program has grown to include 14 million people in the U. S. annually

within 13 years. And with the 14 million people comes an almost overwhelming amount of paper work eligibility determinations and recertifications of those already receiving food stamp aid.

Under federal regulations, those who get the stamps for free—those who declare no income on their applications—must be recertified each month.

In addition, all other recipients must be recertified every three to six months. This presents a staggering amount of work to those involved in the

program.

In Santa Cruz just one unit of eligibility workers—consisting of one supervisor and four workers—handled 1,386 recertifications for the month of June in addition to the new applications that come each month.

According to Dortha Latta, chief of welfare, special services, each of her 21 eligibility workers handles between 200 and 250 cases each month plus all the paper work that accompanies any government program.

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# Food Stamps And Their Accountability

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This type of workload makes it virtually impossible to catch all instances of fraud that occur in the county.

Recently Gladys Agnew, 37 and her husband, Roberts, 39 both, of Scotts Valley, were brought to court on a welfare fraud charge after having received \$1,297 in food stamps with over \$20,000 in the bank.

It took more than nine months for the illegal payments to be discovered.

David Singleton, director of the Social Welfare Department in the county, called for a "sim-

plification of the food stamp process" as a means to reduce the incidence of fraud.

But more important than the abuse that occurs under the program is the regulation, built into the food stamp program by the federal government, denying senior citizens on welfare's new Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, use of food stamps.

While the new SSI program did raise seniors' incomes above that of the former Old Age Security program plus the \$10 bonus in food stamps there were getting, the loss of the stamps was critical to many seniors. "The small increase given by SSI, doesn't offset the value of stamps," said Connie Keefauver, office manager for Senior Legal Services in Santa Cruz. "They are in a worse position now than they ever were."

With rapidly rising rents and the inflation that has gripped the United States, many seniors are finding themselves in strangling situations.

Under SSI payment schedules, a single senior may receive \$225 each month, while a couple over 65 can get \$460 per month.

Yet, while consumer prices continue to rise — four per cent for the month of June — oldsters are having a hard time making it on their set incomes. The addition of food stamps could help seniors cope with spiraling prices.

Stories of older persons eating dog food because they can't afford meat are reported with increasing frequency, according to Keefauver.

She also told of instances of senior citizens shoplifting items they can't afford.

"I've know old ladies who go to the store and slip a package of lunch meat into their purses because they can't afford to buy meat," she said.

"I've also seen older people staring hungrily at the meat counter, then turn and walk away because prices are so expensive," she said.

The addition of the elderly to food stamp roles would cost the state \$36 million per year — only wight percent of the total, according to Jim Rumble,

attorney for the Senior Legal Services center.

Although there was a suit filed against the federal department of Health, Education and Welfare, designed to force HEW to include seniors under SSI in the food stamp program, it was later dropped by the defendants.

A compromise, which granted seniors a \$10 to \$12 raise in payments was granted.

In addition, Assemblyman William T. Bagley said he will sponsor legislation to give SSI recipients a cost of living raise, according to Robert Teets, attorney for the defendants in the senior's cast against HEW.

However, until the federal government takes a closer look at the expanding food stamp machine and considers some reform, the program will continue to be plagued with abuses and inequities.

## Miami Building Collapses

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Police said the rear section of the building collapsed when cars parked on the roof apparently caused the ceiling to give way and send the autos and tons of concrete crashing into the floors below.

Jackson Memorial Hospital said it had received nine patients injured in the collapse. "As far as we can tell no one is critically hurt," a spokesman said.

The area, near Biscayne Boulevard, was cordoned off as rescue workers struggled to clear the wreckage with the aid of heavy cranes.

The injured were carried out on stretchers and boards. One woman suffered face and leg injuries. The injured included David Costa, deputy director of the Miami office of the drug agency.

As he arrived at the hospital with his leg in a temporary splint and an intravenous injection dripping into his arm, Costa said:

"I closed my eyes when I saw it coming down. I bent over. When it stopped, I crawled out of there."

Ted Swift, a spokesman for the drug agency, said two or three of those trapped were men, the rest women.

Swift said about 125 people work in the building, but not all were there at the time. The section that collapsed, he said, housed an enforcement unit, a

## Griffin Asks Nixon To Resign

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ment moves against Nixon "an American tragedy."

"We (in Congress) are simply following the constitutional processes," he said. "As I see it, we have no choice in the matter."

House Speaker Carl Albert of Oklahoma said he has not changed his view that Nixon should not resign.

Albert, who has said he thinks the constitutional procedures should go on, was questioned at his news conference about Griffin's statement and about suggestions that Congress might enact legislation granting Nixon immunity from personal legal action if he did resign.

As to immunity legislation, Albert said "I have no feelings I would care to express."

"Nobody has mentioned to me any such thing," he said.

"I have had no indications from the White House."

Albert, said he has no plans to listen to the tapes now being played for House members. "I think the transcripts I have read have enlightened me sufficiently," he said.