

Everybody likes food stamp idea

By LEE QUARNSTROM

The growing popularity of the food stamp program adopted in Santa Cruz County last Dec. 1 has necessitated a request from the county welfare department for transfer of funds to handle increased costs, mostly salaries.

Of the \$33,000 transfer supervisors considered Tuesday, only \$8,250 is in county costs, with the rest coming from state and federal sources.

The need for the extra employees is mainly due to the large increase in the caseload since the county replaced the surplus food program with the food stamps.

The surplus commodities program served an average of 9,000 persons a month, while January figures show that 13,584 received food stamps. Nearly everybody, including recipients, county officials, and local merchants, is happier with the food stamp program than with the old program, according to Dorothea Latta, chief of special programs in the county welfare department.

"I like this program," Mrs. Latta says. She notes that the food stamps are particularly beneficial for persons on special diets who could not participate in the surplus commodities program.

The surplus commodities program resulted in distribution of many starchy foods and staples while the food stamps can be spent on most foodstuffs with the exception of imported products.

The food stamps are sold at every post office in Santa Cruz County. Cost of the stamps and amount of the "bonus" to recipients depends on the individual income of each recipient.

The eligibility requirements are about the same as those for the surplus commodities program. Mrs. Latta notes that many persons who were eligible but did not apply for surplus foods — including many elderly persons — are now receiving food stamps. She said her office receives about 60 new applications a day for the food stamps.

The average bonus to a recipient, she says, is about \$10 a month.

She notes that a single person with an income in the \$140-\$150 per month range pays \$26 of his own money to receive food stamps valued at \$36.

An individual with no income can receive \$36 in food stamps for no outlay.

A family of five with an adjusted net income of \$390-\$420 per month pays \$102 and receives food stamps valued at \$132, a \$30 bonus.

In January, recipients paid \$181,822 and received \$402,000 in food stamp purchasing power, a bonus of \$220,178.

Mrs. Latta stresses that the food stamp program is not the welfare program.

The program is supported by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture and administered through the social welfare department as a convenience, she says.

"There is still some stigma about welfare," Mrs. Latta says, 'but persons reluctant to apply for welfare are now participating in this program because they realize they are not receiving welfare when they get the food stamps.'

The home visits by social workers required under the surplus commodities program have been eliminated in most cases with the introduction of food stamps.

A followup nutritional education program is being offered in the county for persons who wish to learn how to spend their food stamps most wisely.

The fact that some students and some persons living in communal arrangements have been certified eligible for food stamps has received publicity.

Mrs. Latta points out that if these persons meet the income eligibility requirements, they are handled like any other food stamp recipients.

She also says that persons living communally are generally considered as one economic unit — like a family — rather than a group of individual recipients.

Student applicants are checked for scholarships and loan funds as well as other income sources, she said. And students who live in dormitories and eat in cafeterias are ineligible because food stamps cannot be used to purchase meals in restaurants.

Almost 99 per cent of the retail food stores in the county have been certified eligible to accept the food stamps — which are actually coupons — in trade.

Mrs. Latta says one supermarket manager she knows originally opposed the food stamp concept but is now enthusiastic about it because, he has told her, he sees that the stamps are helping people purchase "good nutritional food."