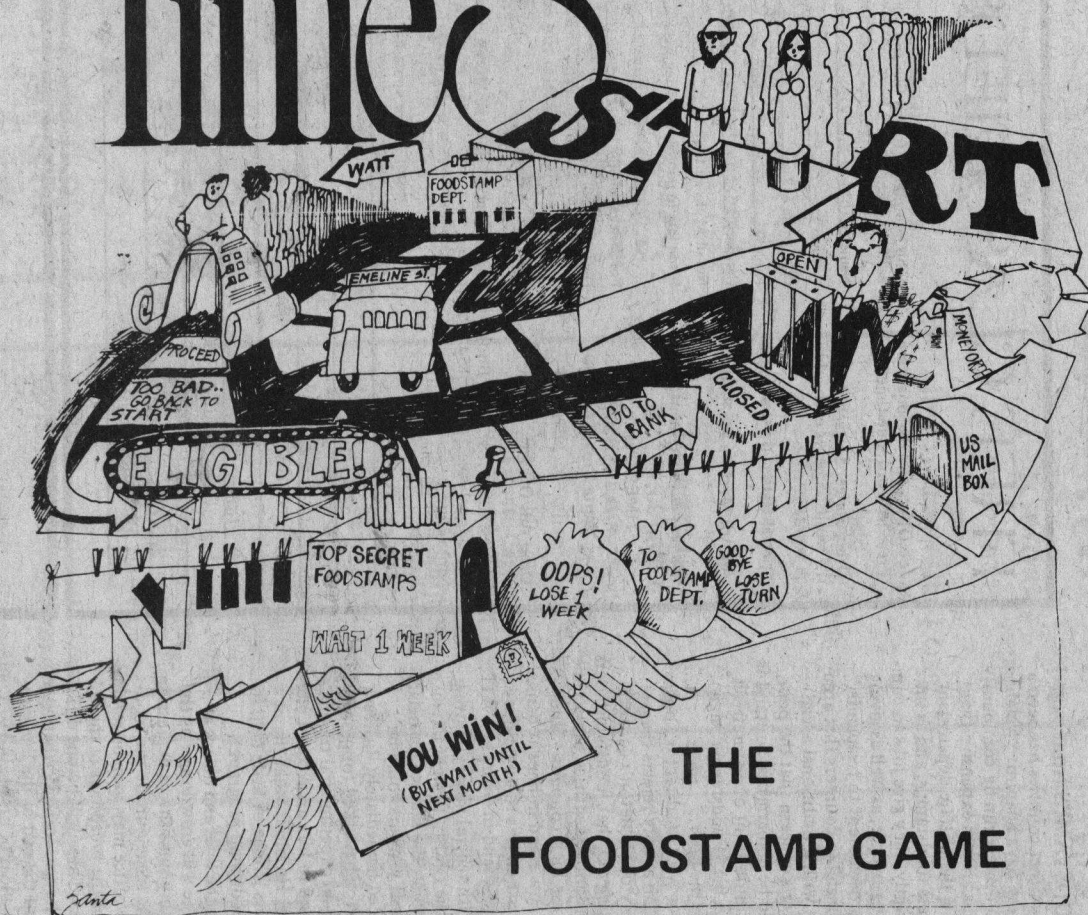


The masthead for the Santa Cruz Times. The word "Times" is in a large, bold, black serif font. Above the "i" in "Times", the words "santa cruz" are written in a smaller, black, cursive script font. The background is a light, textured grey.

by Richard Cole

The "mail order" foodstamps system has come to Santa Cruz, adding up to another week's delay for recipients who are rapidly acclimating themselves to a staple diet of red tape and confusion.

The new state-mandated system is overloading a program which Food-stamps Director Dorothea Latta says already requires "emergency measures" to keep it going.

If you receive mail order foodstamps as administered by Santa Cruz County, you now have another layer of bureaucracy between yourself and an adequate supply of food — a layer impossible to contact directly, and whose very location the social welfare department keeps a secret in the name of security.

The mysterious brick building somewhere in Santa Cruz is now handing up to \$500,000 in negotiable foodstamp coupons, and Social Welfare Department Director David Singleton indicates that the county cannot now afford guards and full security for the office necessitated by the mail order system.

The almost impregnable office is evidently having problems handling its workload, despite the department's original rosy forecasts about the mail order system. Foodstamp eligibility worker (EW) Jim McAdams told the **Times** that EWs who called the mysterious office to find out whether their clients' coupons had been processed were met with decreasing cooperation

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way. Instead of acting with vision, the city operates by reaction to each developer's questionable offer. We're supposed to be-

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this month until finally on Tuesday the office shut off its phones entirely.

"We had people with children sitting here for hours while we tried to find out where their stamps were sent — but we couldn't get through." Some staff members finally cornered Singleton in the hallways Wednesday and the phones were turned on again.

Meanwhile, Emergency Food Program Director Al DiLudivico reports that his office is now trying to find food for several hundred families who have yet to see their foodstamps. Says DiLudivico, "We've been able to feed them all so far, but we're scrounging around every day to find more."

This cumbersome new foodstamps process replaces the older and simpler procedure in which recipients were mailed out a computerized authorization card (ATP) on the first of the month, which could be cashed immediately at the nearest post office for foodstamp coupons. Now, after ATPs are received they must be mailed back to the welfare department, along with a certified check or money order to cover the purchase cost, and the invisible bureaucrats then mail foodstamp booklets back to you. If you get to your mailbox before someone else does, you will have suffered at the minimum a two-day delay — and with the help of weekends and holidays your wait could be stretched out to as much as a week.

If, however, some clerk loses your money order, or your foodstamps stick to the bottom of your mailman's pouch, or an unscrupulous neighbor raids your mailbox while you are working, you can look forward to additional days or weeks of subsisting on emergency food rations — if there are enough to go around.

If you cannot for one reason or another

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exist on rice and peanut butter, you may choose to borrow money from a friend wealthy enough to have escaped the foodstamp system — but you can't pay him back with your foodstamps when you finally receive them because it would be illegal for him to use the coupons.

Foodstamp recipients are usually indoctrinated into this Rube Goldberg-Franz Kafka theory of organization the first day they apply for stamps. Should you show up at 1060 Emeline St. on the wrong day, particularly toward the first of the month, you can wait for two hours in a 50 or 60 person line before reaching the reception desk, where a marginally sympathetic older woman will tell you that you are in the wrong line; it is the recertification and general assistance line.

With luck, you may wait only another hour in the correct line, but when you finally reach the desk the reception clerk will disappear into the inner sanctums on a mysterious errand. Upon her emergence, you will be told that it is impossible to schedule another new application appointment today, and you will have to come back tomorrow.

If you have maintained both your sanity and civility, she may also clue you in that it is necessary to arrive as early as 7:30 a.m. on a busy day to get an appointment with an intake worker.

One thing she will not do, no matter how civil you have remained, is take your name and give you an appointment time for the next day.

If you have held onto 25 cents, you can plan to rise early the next morning and ride the Harvey West Park bus out to Emeline St. But this procedure is a mistake — the first bus of the day does not arrive at Emeline until shortly after 8 a.m. If you live in Santa Cruz, this means a long, early morning walk with an opportunity to enjoy a spectacular sunrise or a pouring rain, depending upon the time of year.

If you are from San Lorenzo Valley, however, this option is somewhat less attractive, and sleeping overnight on the doorstep may merit examination.

But if you are from the other side of Park Avenue in Capitola, no matter which

people who actually run the city. For example, who is Police Chief Gino Pini

of these methods you employ, to win, place or show in the foodstamp line, you are doomed to disappointment because you are applying in the wrong office — you should be filling out your forms in Watsonville, not in Santa Cruz.

Assuming you are now in the correct office and have been farsighted enough to bring with you rent, income, and utility receipts, you will be allowed to check boxes and write words on an eight-page form that demands to know, among other things, the value of your aircraft.

If you are not self-employed and do not have to fill out Supplemental form number DFA 285.1, your worker will then evaluate your application and send you your ATPs in a matter of days or weeks, depending upon his or her perseverance, the mood of the computer, and the vagaries of the post office.

When you finally receive your foodstamps you will also receive a piece of paper that entitles you to repeat the entire application process — renamed "recertification" — every month, two months, three months or six months. Your worker accepts recertifications only on certain days, however, and a telephone call to him or her may be in order to avoid an embarrassing situation.

Last October, for instance, the foodstamps department changed workers' recertification days without notifying recipients until they reached the reception desk on the wrong day.

INEVITABLY THERE ARE THOSE who are left somewhat cold — and possibly hungry — by the intricacies of the present foodstamps system. Among them are the staff of the Welfare Legal Assistance Center (WELAC), the organization which intercedes on behalf of the poor and unemployed in their struggles with the welfare bureaucracy.

WELAC staffer Sarada Hopkins can reel off complaint after complaint about the slow and understaffed reception desk, and incompetent or insensitive workers who mislead their clients. Many workers fail to inform their clients that people in need can

He says his campaign will focus on UCSC students. •

receive foodstamps on an emergency basis the same day they apply.

Desk clerks have been known to make on-the-spot — and sometimes incorrect — decisions that a new applicant would not be eligible for foodstamps, despite the clerk's lack of legal authority to do so. Applicants have also been told, incorrectly, that they cannot take home an application form to fill out and sign to save time.

But Hopkins and her WELAC associates are now having as difficult a time with the department as are their clients — the last few letters WELAC has sent to the department have never been answered.

WELAC has now begun collecting complaints about the new mail order system in use, the one which David Singleton assured those involved had been tried with splendid success in several other counties, including neighboring San Mateo.

But the TIMES checked with that county and discovered an essential difference between their system and that now in use in Santa Cruz. San Mateo has indeed had success with a mail order system — because it is optional, not mandatory.

Along with mail order foodstamps San Mateo has a county-wide system of neighborhood distribution centers run by community groups, where recipients can immediately cash ATPs for foodstamps. And San Mateo Legal Aid, which handles complaints against the welfare department there, estimates that well over half to three-quarters of the county's foodstamps are distributed through the neighborhood centers rather than the mails.

Although Singleton says he is willing to discuss the possibility of neighborhood centers in Santa Cruz, he is cool to the idea. "There is no provision for the over-the-counter foodstamps transactions run by the county," he says. "I think it would be too costly."

But Community Action Board Coordinator Bob Shapiro points out that the system of neighborhood centers in use in

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many other counties has been a success. Says Shapiro: "Neighborhood centers run by community groups are less expensive than having the welfare department process foodstamps, and as importantly, they give jobs to community people, as well as giving better treatment to recipients."

Singleton counters that argument with a traditional social worker's concern that the poor would be embarrassed to stand in line out in front of a storefront with a big "Foodstamps" sign above the door.

But WELAC director Cookie Johnson angrily rejects the validity of Singleton's concern, pointing out that foodstamp users are instantly identified every time they use their coupons — and they now stand in lines at banks and post offices to buy money orders to send in with their ATPs.

With federal money pouring into the county to fight unemployment, the salaries for neighborhood workers could be financed immediately. Instead, Singleton has asked for money to set up an experimental training unit and to hire an account clerk or two. He admits that the new workers will be of little help to the foodstamp program.

So the lines and delays at Emeline will grow longer as the economy sinks into a depression, and the scene outside the foodstamp office may soon be reminiscent of the breadlines of the thirties. There will be one difference though. In 1935 when you reached the end of the line you found a loaf of bread. In 1975, all you'll get is a computer punch-card and a one-week delay. ●