

Agriculture by Patricia Salisbury

Cutbacks in food to the poor begin

Not only is the TEFAP program being cut back, but food distributed by private charities is also in short supply.

Aides to the Senate Agriculture Committee, which recently held hearings on the hunger problem in the United States, are reporting that they expect food going to the nation's needy through the Temporary Emergency Food Administration Program (TEFAP) to be cut from almost \$1 billion worth in fiscal 1988, to less than a quarter-million in fiscal 1989.

This means that one of the food distribution systems upon which the nation's poor depend for existence will virtually cease to exist over the next few months.

Cutbacks in the program, which began in April when key foods such as cheese, rice, and honey began to be phased out, are now reaching a critical phase, with whole networks of food banks in some states closing down, and with no certainty when, or if, they will reopen.

While the worst of the cutbacks will be felt beginning in January, a survey of these federally supplied food banks around the country indicates that the program is disintegrating, leaving hundreds of thousands of poor, elderly, and unemployed with nowhere to turn to supplement inadequate incomes.

The states of the Midwest will be very hard-hit by the cutbacks. In Minnesota, the entire public food bank network will not distribute any food at all for the months of October and November. The administrator told *EIR* that the effects of Department of Agriculture declarations that surpluses are not available to continue foods distributed through TEFAP are "just beginning to be felt." "I'm not telling you

that people will starve," she said, "but many, particularly the elderly, rely on our program to supplement their food. They will be hurt."

In Indiana, the TEFAP state office reports that its program, which distributed 25 million lbs. of food in 1987, distributed only 11 million lbs. in 1988. While the administrators are hopeful that they will be able to maintain the 11 million lb. level for 1989, they explain that the program is so much in flux that it is impossible to say what will happen.

The Indiana program, which previously served 110,000 households per month, now serves only 60,000 per month. In October and November, they will distribute cornmeal, flour, and butter. Then, with supplies exhausted, they will have to suspend distribution.

In Iowa, the state TEFAP office, which this year distributed 11.3 million lbs. of food, is projecting that it will distribute only 4.8 million lbs. in fiscal 1989, a 57% cutback, and will have to go from a six times per year distribution schedule to a quarterly distribution schedule.

Program coordinators in many of these states report that food distributed by private charities is also in short supply. The coordinator for the Iowa TEFAP program reported, "The level of food available is decreasing, and the level of need is increasing." Private food donations from companies such as Pillsbury are also falling off, as are donations directly from farmers in agricultural areas. Some private charities in the Midwestern states are reporting that donations have fallen

off by at least 25%.

In the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, food banks and private charities scattered throughout the states of the region report shortages and early closings. In Pennsylvania, private charities report the worst-ever collapse in public donations of food, with one official saying, "We're overwhelmed. I've been 12 years in emergency services and I've never run out of food as we're running out now in Darby." In Chester County, Pennsylvania, more than 100 people were turned away in one day from a food bank which normally serves more than 2,000 people per month.

Another charity reports collecting only 10% of the funds it expected, and has postponed an expansion of warehouse facilities. This charity, serving 16 central Pennsylvania counties, reports that 13% of the region's people live below the poverty level, with about 75,500 children and 41,000 elderly at risk of hunger.

In Maryland's Prince Georges County, church distribution sites are reporting shortages, particularly of non-fat dry milk. The Virginia state TEFAP office reports that while they have maintained cheese on hand through October, they do not know what will be available beyond that month. The director of the program is fearful that local distribution agencies will decide that the quantity and quality of food available for next year will not sustain a distribution program, and are hesitating to make commitments to maintain the program.

The director of the Oklahoma TEFAP program reported a similar problem. Missouri is considering changing distribution to a network of already established private charities if supplies prove inadequate to maintain distribution through the rural welfare staffs.