

ECONOMICS

Food Stamps Get Trial

Pilot program under way. Limited now to eight unemployment-stricken areas. Full-scale application might raise nutritional level for low-income families.

► DEPARTMENT of Agriculture economists are hopeful that a pilot food stamp program now under way may lead to nationwide benefits for low-income consumers, farm producers and taxpayers.

The pilot program, limited to eight unemployment-stricken "distressed areas," is too small to have any impact on national economy. Full-scale application, however, might raise the nutritional level for low-income groups and boost farm income by redirecting farm productivity toward supplying proved needs, rather than piling up surpluses of crops not in demand.

The taxpayer? He might get a break by paying less for a food stamp program than for direct Government distribution of surplus foods. Stamps are exchanged for food at commercial markets, whose highly developed distribution system probably is capable of operating much less expensively than an untried Government-run system.

Food stamp operations began in June in sections of Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

Frederick V. Waugh, head of the task force for the pilot study, and Howard P. Davis, deputy director of the food distribution division of U. S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service, report on the project in the current issue of *Agricultural Economics Research*, 13:74, 1961, a USDA publication.

They stress that the "essential thing" about the program is that low-income people can buy food at reduced prices, not that

people can buy food with stamps instead of money.

Needy families are allowed to take part after first being certified by state and local welfare agencies. Families with no income get the stamps free of cost. Most of the participants have some income, however, and are charged varying amounts for the stamps, depending on what they can afford to pay. The Government makes up the difference with Federal subsidy funds.

Participation by families and retail stores accepting the stamps is entirely voluntary. The stores can cash the coupons for face value.

A family must take enough stamps to assure an improvement in diet. They are not compelled to buy foods high in nutritional value, but are urged to spend their stamps as wisely as possible. They are allowed to buy "any food or food product" other than coffee, tea, cocoa (as such), alcoholic beverages, tobacco and products "clearly identifiable from the package as being imported from foreign sources."

The food stamp program was set up in part to help farmers sell nonbasic perishable commodities, such as meats, poultry and eggs, dairy products, and fruits and vegetables. There is indirect aid to corn and other feed grains.

The main surplus commodities, wheat, feed grains and cotton, are not affected. But programs extended to all needy families could "help to meet the general problem of overcapacity in agriculture," Mr. Waugh and Mr. Davis point out.

• Science News Letter, 80:84 August 5, 1961

"This latter task has become an impossibility for the physician," the editorial says, because of the rapid increase in volume of medical research.

Computers already are playing roles in medicine that include the statistical analysis of research data, simulation of physiologic systems, analogue-to-digital data conversion and interpretation, storage and retrieval of clinical records, and filing of information on drug action.

• Science News Letter, 80:84 August 5, 1961

Cotton must be planted on the Texas high plains as soon as the danger of frost is past because of the short growing season.

During the last half century a total of 1,027,332 *whales* have been killed, yielding 70,180,796 barrels of oil.

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MEDICINE

Computers to Aid MD's

► THE ELECTRONIC computer is seen as restoring the general practitioner to his former pre-eminence so that he can handle the bulk of medical practice once again.

An editorial in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 177:205, 1961, states imagination and personal relationships between doctor and patient are the only two areas in which computers would not function in the future.

"The medical student of the future may not be burdened with learning the great mass of statistical information" he now is expected to learn, the editorial predicts. Instead, he may put emphasis on accurate data collection and the patient's psychological and emotional needs as well as administration of particular forms of treatment.

In performing its tasks, the computer does just as well at two in the morning as at noon. It will not weigh most heavily its most recent experience as physicians are prone to do. It has the advantage of recalling accurately the correct statistics upon which to base its conclusion, and this conclusion will not be biased by irrelevant factors.

Another advantage, the editorial points out, is that once a program and statistical matrix of symptoms and diseases has been worked out for a particular group of diseases, this information may easily be used by most other computers.

As new information is published this may be inserted into the data matrix, allowing the computer to use this information with every subsequent decision it makes.