School lunch and the bicentennial
In the spring, Sylvia Bell went shopping at her local supermarket in Norwich, New York, and came away with a lot of bargains. She bought about $2,000 worth of fruits and vegetables for $10.

"I bought enough then to get us through the whole year," Ms. Bell said. Then, she tilted her head ever so slightly upward and said softly, "I hope."

The amount of food she purchased might suggest that Ms. Bell needed a very large truck to carry the groceries. And the amount she paid might lead one to believe the truck arrived very late at night, while the store manager and his employees were home watching television.

Actually, Sylvia Bell is a home gardener. The seeds and plants she purchased for her two garden plots on a 1-acre tract in Sherburne, New York, came to about $40. But Sylvia Bell is also a food stamp recipient, and based on her income, she buys her monthly allotment of coupons at about one-fourth their face value.

"I have been in the program for several years," she said. "But now that I can buy plants and seeds, food stamps mean a lot more to my family."

Ms. Bell was referring to the 2-year-old change in food stamp regulations that permits program participants to use their coupons to purchase seeds and plants to grow food for home consumption. Participants can buy the seeds and plants at any authorized food store that sells them, and the procedure is exactly the same as using stamps to purchase food items.

Ms. Bell pointed out that food stamps will enable the family to have enough from their garden to last the whole year. "In fact, when the harvest season comes," she said, "our freezer is going to get mighty crowded. Don't get me wrong, though, I'm not complaining about having too much."

In Uniontown, Pennsylvania, Barbara Jordan spent about $20 in food stamps to buy leafy starter plants for tomatoes, eggplants, and peppers.
"The fella down at Moss’ Food and Garden Center told me that I could use my stamps to purchase plants," Ms. Jordan said. "It sure comes in handy, too, because the garden keeps on giving each day."

Jerry Byers, manager of the Moss store, placed a sign atop his large display of starter vegetable plants and vegetable seeds advising food stamp customers they could use coupons to purchase the items for their home gardens.

He said the number of customers purchasing plants and seeds rose from around 40 last year to well over 100 this spring.

"My biggest sales have been in cabbage, tomato plants and onion sets," the store manager explained.

In the central New York area, managers of Victory Markets, where Sylvia Bell purchased many of her plants and seeds, took the food stamp theme and made it a major campaign in an attempt to increase sales in their 75 stores.

The idea for the campaign came from H.L. Gilliam, FNS food stamp officer-in-charge for Syracuse. Realizing his area was mostly rural and that vegetable gardens played a key part in the everyday existence of the rural poor, Mr. Gilliam suggested that Victory undertake an all-out effort that would focus the attention of food stamp recipients on the store’s garden center displays. Company officials readily accepted the idea.

"We notified our buyers to purchase much more than we had originally intended," said Jules Fox, Victory's director of personnel and training. "But we still couldn't get as much as we wanted."

The result of the campaign, which included large multi-colored posters throughout all stores, was a 25-percent increase in plant and seed sales over last year. In addition, the inventory was sold out well ahead of last year's schedule.

At first, Mr. Fox pointed out, supermarket officials were a little wary of how the sale of plants and seeds would affect their own produce department.
"But we realized that even if people have their own produce from their seeds during harvest season, they'll still have the same amount of stamps," Fox explained. "If they come to our store, we’ll simply get their business in another department."

And Sylvia Bell proved the company official was right.

"With the savings we have made by purchasing plants and seeds, we will now be able to buy fruit and other things we don’t grow and wouldn’t ordinarily buy," she said.

There is little waste in Ms. Bell’s two garden plots that measure 30 by 100 feet and 30 by 40 feet. Her crops include tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage, corn, potatoes, peppers, carrots, beets, peas, beans, pumpkins, squash, onions, and rhubarb.

"We’ve had our garden for several years," Sylvia Bell said. "But I’m able to do a lot more now that we can use food stamps."

Aline Oliver, food stamp director for Chenango County where Ms. Bell lives, said the seed regulation has been a big help to area residents.

"We are a very rural county," the director said. "Many of our participants have home garden plots and this purchasing aspect is important to them."

In Mt. Braddock, Pennsylvania, John and Lorraine Landman purchased enough vegetable seeds and plants with food stamps at the Moss Center to cover half an acre. Seed potatoes were a major buy.

"We purchased 100 pounds of seed potatoes and we expect to harvest about 600 pounds," Ms. Landman said. "That is, if the bugs don’t get them first."

Ruth and Clyde Morris’ 20 by 40 foot garden plot in Adah, Pennsylvania, is considerably smaller than the Landman’s, but it’s a major source of food for the family.

“When I went down to Moss’ store this spring, I noticed the seeds and food stamp sign and made my purchase on the spot,” Mr. Morris said. "Growing our own food is going to make our food stamps last longer."

Many food stamp recipients who
What’s Happening in School Food Service?

By Michael McAteer

In the 1974–75 school year, the National School Lunch Program was available to more than 43 million children, the largest number in the history of the program.

That’s just one of the conclusions in an FNS report on the status of school food service programs. The report is the third annual profile of school feeding, based on data collected by States and regional offices each October. It includes information on all U.S. schools—both those with and without food service.

Here are some highlights from the 1974–75 report:

- The National School Lunch Program is available to children in more schools than ever before. Of the more than 45.6 million children enrolled in schools with some form of food service, 43,499,837 children or 95.5 percent attended schools which take part in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).
- There were 50,048,237 children attending all U.S. schools. This represents a decrease of 370,000 or 0.7 percent below the previous year. In spite of this decline, there was an increase of 415,000 children attending NSLP schools over 1973–74. Most of this increase came from schools joining the NSLP which previously had taken part in one of the other Federal-State-local child nutrition programs.
- A total of 85,053 schools were participating in the National School Lunch Program in October 1974—an increase of 776 schools over the previous October. These schools made up 79.5 percent of all U.S. schools, but enrolled 87.2 percent of the total student population.
- The increase in the number of NSLP schools is especially significant in light of the decrease in the total number of public and private schools—from 107,735 to 106,927—a decline of 808 schools.
- Ninety-one percent of all school children had some food service program available to them: 86.9 percent were enrolled in NSLP schools, 4.1 percent were in schools with some other form of food service. A total of 5.3 percent were enrolled in schools with only the Special Milk Program. That leaves only 3.7 percent of the total school enrollment with no milk or food program in their schools.
- The number of eligible schools not participating in any of the child nutrition programs dropped from 17,794 to 16,516. The total enrollment in these schools also decreased—by 647,000 children. Some 507,000 of these children were in public schools and 140,000 were in private schools.
- There are now 4.4 million children, down from 5 million, in schools without food service. This figure includes 2.6 million children attending the 8,400 schools which operate the Special Milk Program only. This represents a slight change from the comparable 1973–74 totals of 2.5 million children in 9,000 schools which have only that program.
- Of all those children attending schools without food service: 94.8 percent attended schools with enrollments greater than 100; 4.5 percent attended schools with enrollments of 26 to 100; and 0.7 percent attended schools with enrollments of 25 or less.

FNS will be examining similar factors in program participation in the annual report on school food service for the 1975–76 school year. States and regional offices are currently collecting data for that report, which will be published in the spring.
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