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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT DIVISION



MAY 16 1972

Dear Mr. Hekman:

We have made a limited review of the effectiveness and administration of the food stamp program. Our review was made at the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) headquarters office in Washington, D.C.; the FNS regional office in Atlanta, Georgia; the FNS area offices in Norfolk, Virginia, and Charleston, South Carolina; the State welfare offices of Virginia and South Carolina; and the project area offices in Norfolk and Portsmouth, Virginia, and Beaufort and Jasper Counties, South Carolina. In addition we reviewed selected reports of the Department's Office of the Inspector General on the food stamp program.

We have deferred further review of the program at this time to allow States and project areas sufficient time to implement and operate under the regulations issued on July 29, 1971, to incorporate the provisions of Public Law 91-671, which amended the Food Stamp Act of 1964, as amended (7 U.S.C. 2011-2025). We plan to resume our review at a later date and will advise members of your staff of the issues and geographic areas to be covered when we do.

At the offices we visited during this review, we concentrated primarily on determining why participation in the food stamp program by eligible households was not higher. We noted a lack of counseling of eligible individuals on program benefits and requirements, an attitude of indifference toward getting individuals enrolled and keeping them in the program, and insufficient time devoted by FNS field office employees to outreach activities. Also very little work had been done to define that portion of the population eligible to participate in the program and to determine those in greatest need of the program.

We are reporting these observations at this time for your consideration in evaluating the administration of the provisions of Public Law 91-671, which requires, among other things, increased outreach and promotion of the program.

During our review in Portsmouth, some Authorization-To-Purchase Cards could not be accounted for by local project area officials. Subsequently some of these cards were returned used to the project office

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although they had not been issued by the office. On June 11, 1971, we reported this matter to the Director, Southeast Region, FNS, and to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The Southeast Regional Office subsequently requested an investigation by the Office of the Inspector General which reported its findings in Audit Report Number 2714-43-W dated August 31, 1971.

We wish to acknowledge the cooperation extended to our representatives during the review. A copy of this letter is being furnished to the Inspector General, Department of Agriculture.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard J. Woods". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Richard J. Woods
Assistant Director

Mr. Edward J. Hekman, Administrator
Food and Nutrition Service
Department of Agriculture