

## MdSNA Is On The Web



### Calling All Interested Historians: CNP Through the Decades

Last article we looked at the various versions of school meals in different states and cities. It was becoming increasingly clear that these states and cities and private organizations needed a helping hand from the federal government. It was beginning to be a hardship on their resources as the programs grew. The early federal aid came from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation in 1932 and 1933 when it granted loans to several towns in southwestern Missouri to cover the cost of labor for preparing and serving school lunches. These efforts were expanded with the help of the Civil Works Administration and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration reaching into 39 states and covering the employment of 7,442 women. (Documentation says women.)

The depression hit in the 1930's. People lost their jobs and found it difficult to feed their families. On the other side of the problem, farmers had no buyers for their farm goods. It seemed like a common sense match for Congress to take action and they did. They passed PL 320 on August 24, 1936 to aid both agriculture and the school lunch program.

THIS IS IMPORTANT—READ CAREFULLY AND REMEMBER THIS NEXT SENTENCE.

*Per the new law the Secretary of Agriculture made available an amount of money equal to 30% of the gross receipts from duties collected under the CUSTOM LAWS during each calendar year.*

The sums were to be maintained in a separate fund to be used by the secretary to encourage the consumption of certain commodities (usually those in surplus supply) by diverting them from the normal channels of trade and commerce. The objective of the legislation was to remove price depressing surplus foods from the market through government purchases and dispose of them through exports and domestic donations to consumers in such a way as to not interfere with normal sales.

(A WIN-WIN situation for sure). The purchase and distribution program was assigned to the Surplus Commodity Corporation that was formerly the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation that distributed surplus

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pork, dairy products (cheese) and wheat (flour) to needy families. In March, 1937, 3,839 schools received commodities for lunch programs serving 342,031 children daily. Two years later the number grew to 14,075 schools and 892,259 students.

In a still further effort to assist, the federal government employed a special representative to each state to work with state and local food authorities. Parent-Teacher Associations and mothers clubs worked to expand the school lunch program. The growth of the program between 1939 and 1942 is evidence of the success of their efforts. Schools increased to 78,841 serving 5,272,540 students, using 454 million pounds of commodities before the effects of World War 11.

The operation of the **commodity program** required federal, state and local participation in the ordering, receiving, proper storing and distribution of the foods.

An agreement was developed spelling out the details of the contract in order to receive the commodity foods. At first, distribution was based on the number of needy or under nourished children but that quickly changed to the total number of students enrolled.

The federal government once again came up with a way to meet two needs. School lunch work was assigned to the Community Services Division of the Works Projects Administration (WPA) who matched unemployed women to schools all over the country to cook, bake and serve lunches to students. There was also work for clerks and typists to keep records. With labor being provided at no cost to the local schools, the program grew and the cost remained minimal. At the state level there was a supporting staff and each local district had someone in charge. Between them they developed recipes, menus, training and standards. Many employees canned fruits and vegetables from commodities or school gardens during the summer. In March of 1941 the WPA program was in operation in all states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico providing help to 23,160 schools serving 2 million lunches daily and employing 64,298 persons.

The National Youth Organization was another federal agency that employed needy students to be part time helpers in the lunchrooms or to build equipment such as tables and chairs for cafeterias. In 1941, 16,000 youths were employed in school lunch projects in 42 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

World War 11 had a profound effect on the supply of commodities since there was now a need for food for the military troops. The school supply dwindled dramatically as did the labor supply through the WPA. The need for more workers arose in the plants supplying military support items. By April, 1944, the labor supply from WPA and the Youth Organization was completely cut off. The program went from 454 million pounds of food to 93 million pounds in just a few years.

In July, 1943, Congress enacted PL 126 amending Section 32 of the Agricultural Act of 1935, authorizing the expenditure of Section 32 funds not to exceed \$60 million for the school lunch and school milk programs (new program) for the next school year. The assistance was in the form of cash payments for food only for the programs. No part of it could be used for labor. The program declined and some districts and schools even closed down the program.

The following year there was an improvement in legislation. Under PL 367, the 78th Congress again set aside \$60 million of Section 32 funds for carrying out the school lunch program in SY1944-45 and extended the authority to include child care centers. For the first time, the legislation provided some detail as to conditions under which federal assistance could be received such as:

- Cash payments could not exceed the cost of food.
- Accurate records of cost of food had to be kept.
- Total payments of federal funds in any state could not exceed the total amount provided for food purchases by the school lunch sponsors, school districts or other sponsors within the state, including the value of donated services and supplies.

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In 1945-46 the same amount was appropriated but the legislation provided a provision that not more than 2% of the funds allocated to the state could be used for lunches in child care centers. Because of the expansion of the programs it became necessary for Congress to allocate another \$7.5 million in order to finish the year. By April, 1946, the program had expanded to 45,199 schools serving 6.7 million students, an increase of 11,000 schools and 1.5 million students.

This summer article continues the beginnings of the program and starts showing federal involvement and support for the program. Given the extent of the increases over these few years reviewed, we will see in the next article how the federal government through legislation, known as the National School Lunch Act of 1946 picks up the responsibility for financing the program for the nations children.

**The most important take away from this article is the source of Child Nutrition funding.** It has always been and will continue to be from Section 32 funds that are collected under **CUSTOMS LAWS** each year. There will always be trade and exports and imports and there will always be tariffs on imports. These tariffs on customs imports are the source of funding for the Child Nutrition Programs. How much is allocated to Child Nutrition Programs depends on the specifics of the legislation. My point is that there is a ready source of funds available to us from the continuous customs tariffs that will never stop. We are not taking any money from any other programs to support ours.

**We will be facing Reauthorization in the next year and a half because Senate Agriculture Chairman Roberts plans to introduce it before he retires in 2020. Don't be shy, go after the funds we need to keep and improve the programs.** My first time as Legislative Chairman, 3 of us presented the first ever Maryland Legislative Action Conference. Rhonda Motley, President, Eulalia Muschik, President-Elect and I titled our first state workshop "Don't be a Mouse Around the House or the Senate". That phrase still applies. I'm getting ready for

the next Reauthorization cycle with a possible repeat phrase.

Our programs are supposed to be Reauthorized every 5 years but so far 9 years has elapsed since the last Reauthorization. It must happen soon.

Next article, I plan to start with the National School Lunch Act of 1946 followed by all of its additions, amendments and subsequent legislation through 1994. I have a great chart outlining the details that will be part of the fall article so stay tuned for the next edition of the History of the Child Nutrition Programs.

Again, I wish to thank Gordon W. Gunderson for his extensive study and documentation of the programs history and Robert Hunter who wrote the book entitled "Poverty".

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