

School Lunches

COMMUNITIES and parents and producers of food, almost as much as the children themselves, gain in the national school lunch program.

Figures, impressive as they are, reveal only part of the balance sheet of the project, which was authorized by the National School Lunch Act of 1946: Sixteen million children (one out of every three schoolchildren in the United States) in 68,500 public and nonprofit private schools in 1964 had balanced, nutritious lunches, at an average national cost to the child of 27 cents a day. Needy children, about one in ten, paid 5 or 10 cents or nothing.

The full balance sheet would bring out that two-thirds of American children do not receive lunches from the program. About half of those children are in schools that have the benefits of the program, but for one reason or another many of those in attendance do not participate. The other half of those children are in schools which have not become part of the program. Many of them are in sections where the need is greatest.

Federal, State, and local authorities stand ready to help communities and schools provide lunch service for children. For additional information, school officials should write to the State educational agency in their capital city. Since some States are able to administer the program only in public schools, private schools may be referred to an appropriate field office of the Department of Agriculture.

The community gains in the health

of its children and, therefore, in time, in community health, which are matters that can be measured and proved.

For those who want another kind of assessment, I point out that 883 million dollars' worth of food was used in preparing lunches in 1964; nearly four-fifths of that amount was spent by the schools in obtaining the food in local markets. Thus the program provides good markets for local businesses, food industries, and farmers.

Employment is provided also for some 300 thousand local workers who operate the individual programs.

LOCAL LUNCHROOMS participating in the program receive Federal donations of abundant agricultural products and cash assistance, which amounts to more than 23 percent of the total cost of the program. Children's payments take care of more than 50 percent of the cost. State and local sources pay the rest.

Federal funds for the school lunch programs are apportioned among the States to be used in reimbursing schools for part of the cost of the foods they purchase. The amount of money each State receives is determined by two factors: School lunch participation in the State, and per capita income for the State.

Federal funds used in a State for reimbursing school lunches must be matched with funds within the State at the rate of 3 dollars for each Federal dollar. State and locally appropriated funds, children's payments, and donated goods and services may be used as matching sources.

Under this program, any nonprofit public or private school is eligible to participate. Local schools may enter into agreements with State departments of education to operate lunch programs in accordance with certain standards and regulations. They are reimbursed at the rate of 1 to 9 cents per lunch for a portion of their food expenditures.

An especially needy school, having a high proportion of children unable

to pay for their lunches, may be reimbursed up to 15 cents per lunch.

THE MOST IMPORTANT operating standards established for the program are: The lunches shall meet the minimum requirements of a nutritional standard based on research, and established by the Department of Agriculture; the lunch program shall be operated on a nonprofit basis; and children who are unable to pay the full price of the lunch shall be served free or at a reduced cost.

The United States Department of Agriculture is authorized by the act to purchase foods that are in plentiful supply for distribution to schools participating in the national school lunch program. These foods usually include meat and poultry items, either frozen or canned, and a variety of canned fruits and vegetables which will help to assure nutritional adequacy.

Schools also receive foods acquired in the operation of surplus-removal and price support programs.

Distribution of these foods helps the farmer by removing surpluses from the market and providing increased consumption outside of normal market channels. These foods vary in kind from time to time according to crop and market conditions.

The foods received through the various distribution programs in the Department of Agriculture provide about 7 cents' worth of food per lunch. The other foods used are purchased by the schools in local markets throughout the country.

Each month the United States Department of Agriculture supplies a list of foods which are in plentiful supply. Local schools are encouraged to use these foods in their menus.

THE FIRST of the standards—the so-called Type A pattern—guides the planning of well-balanced lunches and helps to assure the nutritional quality of the lunches. It is based on the amount of food needed to provide at least one-third of the daily nutritive

requirements of 10-year-old children.

The lunches have five basic components: One-half pint of whole fluid milk; 2 ounces of meat or other protein-rich food; three-fourths cup of fruit or vegetable in at least two items; a serving of whole-grain or enriched bread; and 2 teaspoons of butter or fortified margarine.

Those five basic components form the foundation of the lunch. When those foods are used in the amounts specified and in combination with other foods needed to satisfy the appetite, the lunches generally will meet one-third of the daily nutritional needs of a child about 10 years old. Larger portions or seconds are recommended to meet the nutritional needs of teenagers. The regulations permit serving lesser amounts of certain foods in the lunch to younger children, provided the adjustment of portion is based on the lesser food needs of these children.

All schools that participate in the national school lunch program must meet the minimum requirements of the Type A pattern daily.

Besides, those who plan the lunches consider other factors, like the esthetic value of foods, the food habits of the community, the foods available in local markets, and the equipment available to produce the meal.

COMMUNITIES, schools, and parents derive benefit from the education in nutrition that accompanies the food service. Nutritionists tell us that a large part of the population have diets that furnish less than the recommended amounts of various nutrients. Sometimes inadequate diets reflect a lack of knowledge of what constitutes good nutrition or of good food habits.

The lunch program helps children form good food habits and increase their knowledge of the importance of food to good health. Teachers and lunch supervisors work together to encourage children to learn to eat and enjoy a variety of foods. (ANNE G. EIFLER)