

By USDA, Local Agencies

# Seneca County Cited for Lack of Food Stamp Outreach

By MARTIN TOOMBS

Seneca Falls—Seneca County's "public assistance food stamp participation rate is incredibly low, one of the lowest in the state," Sally Daniels, of the Cayuga County Community Action Program (CAP) stated.

The problem, she explained, is with the county Department of Social Services, which is charged with operating the program. "They have no outreach, they have nothing," she reported in an interview here. "Their outreach consists of answering the telephone. Outreach is not letting people know who enquire on the phone about the food stamp program. Those are the people who already know. Outreach is finding the people who might not know about this program."

The Auburn-based agency has been involved in the food stamp effort in Seneca County for two years. A recent study released by the United States Department of Agriculture was done partially because of testimony presented before a Congressional committee by Cayuga CAP on the situation in Seneca County. Ms. Daniels said.

That report, released March 20, criticized the county's operation of the food stamp program, and especially its outreach efforts. The report was not the first censure of the county; in September 1977, the county was reprimanded for its lack of outreach. That resulted in a six month contract, which began Nov. 1, 1977, for an outreach effort, done by Kathy

Jacot of Cayuga CAP, Ms. Daniels said.

Earlier in 1977, the agency had been rebuffed by the county board of supervisors in its attempts to assist the outreach effort in the county.

No local funding is involved in the food stamp program. Outreach, an organized effort to bring the program to the attention of those who might be eligible, is a program requirement. Agencies such as Cayuga CAP also do outreach work, funded by state and federal grants.

Contacted at his office, Richard Dombrowski, Seneca County Social Services Commissioner, declined to speak with the Courier-Journal about the USDA allegations.

Ms. Daniels pointed out that it has been estimated that there are 4,200 persons in Seneca County eligible for food stamps and not receiving them. As of December 1977, 732 county residents were benefiting from the stamps. Although all families that receive public assistance are automatically eligible for food stamps, only 46.8 percent of them received food stamps that month, she noted, and only 11.3 percent of those who do not receive public assistance but are estimated to be eligible for the program received the stamps, she said.

The USDA report stated that "the general consensus among advocate and other outside groups is that outreach, in terms of actively enrolling non-participating eligibles, does not exist" in the county. The examiners also found evidence

supporting that belief. The report states that a review of the log of the social services worker who also is outreach coordinator "for July and August showed only two hours spent on talking with clients about Food Stamps, which is apparently the extent of the county outreach effort."

The report also scored the social services office location, four miles outside Waterloo, commenting that "it is not within walking distance to anything."

"Also, in contacting the Red Cross, we were informed that persons sometimes are turned away from DSS (Department of Social Services) because they have not lived in the county long enough," the report notes. Such a requirement is forbidden in the national program.

Liza Huntington, Seneca County Red Cross director, repeated her statements recently at the Seneca Falls Red Cross office. "We did have several people who came to Red Cross, she said, who said they could not get assistance at DSS because they had not lived in the state long enough."

"And, by the way, they are not supposed" to refer people to Red Cross as they have done, "because it is not Red Cross responsibility to take care of people who are not eligible for public assistance. We don't have funds" for such assistance, she explained.

She also noted that she didn't know about emergency food stamps, which are provided at no cost on the day of application under certain circumstances. "I was

very much unaware at the time that there was such a thing as emergency food stamps; we were doing everything we could to try to provide food to people who were without it in a crisis situation, not knowing that food stamps were available."

"This is where we see a big gap at DSS," she commented; "people who apply there are not referred to the food stamp office to pick up emergency stamps."

Mrs. Huntington noted that just such a situation had occurred the previous week. A woman had applied for public assistance but had not been referred to the food stamp office, and had gone to Red Cross for emergency aid. She called the caseworker involved, Mrs. Huntington said, who admitted to not having followed through by sending the client to the food stamp office.

The USDA report noted the same problem, concluding its section on staffing by stating "the Public Assistance eligibility workers are not knowledgeable in the area of food stamp certification procedures."

The report also comments that "the general feeling expressed by the outside groups contacted is that the outreach efforts are hampered primarily by the political climate that exists within the county. The CAP group was not allowed to set up a toll-free hotline in DSS building, even though the CAP group was willing to pay for the phone," a decision reached by the county board of supervisors. "The overall situation is caused at a higher level than the

outreach coordinator," the report states.

Referring to the report at the county supervisors' meeting, one supervisor was quoted to have said "I'd think they'd all be damn glad that we are conservative enough not to be giving away all the government's money."

Another illustration of the problem, Mrs. Huntington said, is the fact that while the national Farm Bureau supports the food stamp program, the Seneca County chapter has expressed its opposition to it. Sally Daniels pointed out that the USDA study was conducted last September, and that some items in the report, especially the cooperation with local agencies, have improved since then. That resulted, she believes, both from the reprimand the county received and to the outreach efforts of Kathy Jacot since Nov. 1, 1977. The relationships have improved, she said, because "Kathy's effort has been so positive."

Mrs. Huntington commented that the reprimand last fall "shook them up out there enough" that progress has occurred in the way they treat clients.

The future of food stamp outreach in Seneca County is uncertain. Ms. Jacot's effort will end on June 2, when the current grant expires. That will effectively return the

county to the situation before November last year. Ms. Daniels noted, when no outreach was being done. She added that she has seen "no indication that any more time will be spent" by DSS employees on outreach.

The publicity surrounding the USDA study also has set back her outreach effort, Ms. Jacot said. Many people have concluded that she is the one being criticized in the report, she said, which is not the case.

Ms. Daniels noted that the current effort has been an effective one, and she hopes to develop alternatives to continue the work after June 2. She reported that she met with Commissioner Dombrowski about getting board of supervisors approval for CETA workers to continue the outreach project, but he did not appear willing to approach the board with such a request.

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## The Church 1978

By Father Andrew Greeley

### NCR Inaccurate



The problem of the National Catholic Reporter's apparent influence on American Catholicism grows more acute. The Fr. Greeley Reporter's recent attack on the president of the National Council of Catholic Bishops is an excellent example of how the Reporter's journalistic incompetence confuses issues, injures reputations and increases alienation and conflict in the Church.

It may appear strange for me to be cast in the role of defender of the hierarchy (though I have played the part against journalistic inaccuracy previously), but everybody—priest or bishop, laity or cleric—has the right to his or her reputation. False witness is false witness whether it

is done in the name of liberalism or orthodoxy.

I've never met Archbishop Quinn of San Francisco, but I would judge by some of his public papers that he is a consistent and intelligent conservative. I also would gather from what I have heard that his administrative style might be characterized as cautious. Finally, I know of one particular case (and I will embarrass no one by going into details) when the archbishop vigorously defended a friend of mine against the injustice of higher ecclesiastical oppression. I will concede that I am inclined to be in favor of anyone who proves himself to be a friend of my friend. Nevertheless, Archbishop Quinn's stand on matters ecclesiastical and religious, is, I suspect, very different from mine; and if I had had a vote at the last election of hierarchical officials, my vote would have gone elsewhere.

But the issue is not whether Archbishop Quinn is conservative.

The issue is rather whether the National Catholic Reporter's description of recent changes in the faculty at the seminary in San Francisco was factually accurate. On the basis of a San Francisco source whom I consider to be absolutely unimpeachable, it would appear that once again the NCR has managed to bungle factual reporting, particularly in the situation in the San Francisco seminary at Menlo Park. I am given to understand by those who know that while the archbishop might not necessarily have been opposed to the changes at that seminary, he did not in fact order them — any more than he ordered the appointment of a liberal dean, on the faculty at the seminary, a point which the NCR seems completely to have missed.

Perhaps because the NCR manages to print inaccuracies about me every couple of weeks, I'm especially inclined to sympathize with Archbishop Quinn. (I trust that his position in the hierarchy will not be notably damaged by my sympathy.) But the issue is not that an archbishop's feelings are hurt; the issue

is rather that the clerical and lay reading public which looks to the National Catholic Reporter for information and guidance on the national scene is entitled to accurate reporting, and that anyone, liberal or conservative, has the right to have his reputation protected from sloppy journalism.

There may have been a time, perhaps as recently as the early '70s, when the deterioration in American Catholicism could have been arrested by dramatic ecclesiastical leadership. That time is long past. The Church now needs new ideas, new theories, new perspective and—you should excuse the expression—a new agenda.

Going after the president of the hierarchy may be great fun for the National Catholic Reporter and great entertainment for its readers. It makes no contribution, however, to the development of a new agenda, and it muddles the issue by suggesting that the personality, style and ideas of the president of the National Conference can, under ordinary circumstances, make all that much difference.

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