

W. Post letter 12/9/95

Food Stamp A23

Fraud: No Joke (131)

By focusing on things like how many times the word "fraud" appeared in a Department of Agriculture news release [front page, Nov. 28], your article "Food Stamp Probe Overstated" missed the significance of the groundbreaking efforts we are making to prevent fraud.

While our commitment to fighting fraud is simple, the problem itself is complex. Fraud is a broad term that covers several types of program abuse. The most visible, the most costly and the most egregious type of fraud is trafficking—the exchange of food stamps for cash, drugs or other illegal goods at a fraction of their face value. Trafficking diverts an estimated \$900 million a year that should be spent feeding the needy.

Since October the Department of Agriculture has announced the withdrawal of 1,400 stores nationwide from the food stamp program. While your article states that "most of the stores caught in the department's 'crackdown' ... weren't engaging in fraud," it's important to note that more than 200 of those cases have been referred to authorities for investigation into possible criminal activity.

We know that many stores continue to accept food stamps even when they are no longer eligible to do so, and experience has shown us that ineligible stores present the greatest risk of trafficking. Removing these marginal stores helps us attack trafficking at its source.

By continuing to use every resource available to fight fraud, we protect taxpayers' investment in our national nutrition programs and ensure that the food stamp program will accomplish its health mission: getting food to people who need it.

—Dan Glickman  
The writer is secretary  
of agriculture.

February 27, 1996 The Delmarva Farmer, Easton, Maryland

# UMES to host USDA execs for retreat

CAROL KINSLEY

Vardell Townsend, USDA assistant secretary for administration, stopped by the offices of The Delmarva Farmer on Feb. 21, on his way to Princess Anne, Md. He is setting up a meeting at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore for senior USDA managers who will be reviewing administrative structure.

Townsend said UMES was an ideal site, not just because of its proximity to Washington.

"We have a statutory relationship with the 1890 land-grant universities," he said. "This facility was built with USDA capacity building funds." With the university's curriculum in hotel management, the meeting would give students a chance to practice what they're learning. "We may be one of the first major groups to use the facility," Townsend noted.

University president Dr. William T. Hytche plans to host a reception for the USDA group.

"It's great that we have this kind

of relationship," Townsend continued. "We're supporting one of our own, so to speak — and at a very reasonable cost."

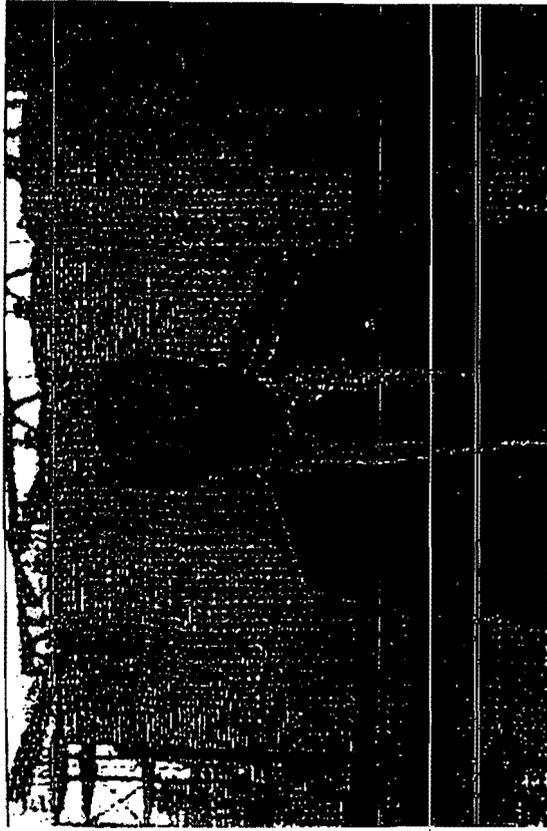
Townsend said it is important for these managers of information technology, information management, human resources, procurement, contracting and civil rights to get away from the capitol.

"It's mentally healthy. I want no distractions. I want all attention focused on the issues — how to operate more effectively and more efficiently with fewer resources."

Townsend said the group would develop policies and processes and streamline them so it will take less money to transact the business

of the various program areas. One change being tied to the financial process is the use of a government "purchase card" like a credit card which will eliminate much of the paperwork involved in purchases. Over a five-year period, use of the card could save nearly \$50 million, Townsend said.

"Generally, it cost \$72 for every paper transaction — whether we're buying pencils or a \$200,000 item. With the card, we'll bring the cost down to \$37." The \$72 cost includes time allotted by every government employee involved in the transaction, he explained.



Vardell Townsend, USDA assistant secretary of agriculture, stopped to visit The Delmarva Farmer last week. (Photo by Carol Kinsley)

2/9/9 (Item 1 from file: 705)  
DIALOG(R)File 705: The Orlando Sentinel  
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10993190  
USDA TO CUT 1,320 JOBS  
Orlando Sentinel (OS) - Saturday, July 12, 1997  
Edition: METRO Section: BUSINESS Page: C1  
Word Count: 59

MEMO:  
Compiled from staff and wire reports.  
COLUMN: BRIEFCASE

TEXT:  
The U.S. Department of Agriculture aims to cut about 1,320 administrative jobs over the next five years, mostly in the rural offices that help farmers with government programs. The planned job cuts would save an estimated \$449 million, according to a memo by Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, which was made public Friday.

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DESCRIPTORS: EMPLOYMENT DECREASE

2/9/11 (Item 2 from file: 706)  
DIALOG(R)File 706:(New Orleans)Times Picayune  
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AGRICULTURE TO CUT 1,320 POSITIONS

New Orleans Times Picayune (NO) - Sunday, July 13, 1997

By: STEPHEN BARR The Washington Post

Edition: THIRD Section: NATIONAL Page: A7

Word Count: 297

TEXT:

WASHINGTON - The Agriculture Department plans to cut about 1,320 administrative jobs at its county, state and national offices in the next five years in an attempt to shift money into computer modernization and to protect basic services, according to an internal memo prepared for Secretary Dan Glickman.

Between 500 and 600 administrative positions in personnel, procurement and other support activities would be lost at the department's Washington headquarters.

Glickman informed key deputies of the cuts this week and then called department representatives in several states to explain his proposal, sources said. The sources estimated savings from the proposed reduction and consolidation of administrative staff could run as high as \$449 million during the next five years.

The brunt of the cuts would come in the Farm Service Agency, which helps farmers qualify for and comply with programs; the Natural Resources Conservation Service, which provides technical expertise to farmers; and rural development agencies that provide housing, business and utilities services.

In most counties and states, each of the agency's offices has its own personnel, procurement and accounting staff. The proposal would consolidate these staffs into one, providing savings in payroll, rents, vehicles and equipment.

"Unless we simplify our administrative overhead and reduce costs, we will not have credibility when we ask the Congress to appropriate funds for our programs and we will ultimately be unable to provide adequate services to our customers," the memo said.

The proposal comes at a time when Congress has provided stable financing for farm programs but has made a series of cuts in departmental accounts used to pay salaries and expenses. Glickman's decision to cut overhead positions also comes in the midst of a broader downsizing at Agriculture, where about 11,000 workers had been scheduled to lose their jobs in the next four years.

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# Talk of past, future during State Fair

9-24-91 40

By JERRY PERKINS  
REGISTER FAIR EDITOR

for the Angus breed, Knop explained at the Iowa State Fair after the Angus show. That means all Angus bulls at the time were compared to him.

Knop collected Jetliner's semen and had it frozen.

Enter Gene Knop's son, Dan. Dan Knop manages Magnolia Plantation in McDonough, Ga., for an Atlanta real estate developer named Ron Thornton.

Dan Knop was looking to change the Angus herd's genetics at Magnolia.

For various reasons, Dan Knop said, he wanted genes for the herd that were a "throwback."

So, Jetliner's semen was thawed and used to sire Knop's Discovery, who was born in March 1995 and was destined to be the 1997 grand champion bull at the Iowa State Fair's Angus show.

Said Gene Knop with a smile: "Jetliner will be producing calves

for quite awhile."

Said Thornton, who was visiting Iowa for the first time:

"We really appreciate such a good welcome."

Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman had a great time when he visited the fair. The highlight of Glickman's visit? Obviously, it was seeing the Butter-Elvis sculpture in the Agriculture Building.

Glickman joked about how his heart started beating fast when he saw the effigy of the late, great "King of Rock 'n' Roll," but he re-

membered to say something proper about it, too.

"It's a very fitting thing," Glickman said. "Dairy is so important, and this gives a whole new importance to the dairy industry."

Glickman also took time to visit the booth showcasing the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, then he went upstairs to shake hands with the employees staffing the U.S. Agriculture Department's booths.

Earlier, in an interview with Register farm writers, Glickman said one of the reasons he wanted to visit the Iowa, Illinois, Kansas and New York state fairs during the August congressional recess was to spend some time with USDA employees.

Reorganization and cutbacks in the USDA's field offices in Iowa



**Glickman**  
Enjoyed himself Agriculture Building

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Reorganization and cutbacks in the USDA's field offices in Iowa

**Farm Fact**

28 pounds of cornish  
32 pounds of chicken  
13 pounds of retail pork  
5.6 pounds of retail beef

PRODUCED BY THE WORLD OF CORN '97  
The National Corn Growers Association

THE REGISTER

# Angus offspring, Ag official just some of the sightings at state fair

## FAIR

Continued from Page 4G

and other states have created morale problems in some of the offices, Glickman said.

Although there are fewer USDA employees, he said, the workload has not gone down.

Huge sign-ups under the 1995 Farm Act, which was implemented in 1996, and this year's sign-up for the newly revised Conservation Reserve Program have put a strain on many USDA people, he said, and he wanted them to know he was aware of that.

More budget cuts and "downsizing" are in the offing, he said.

At a public forum in the Pennington Center in the Cattle Barn, Glickman and his host, U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Ia., sat in the auctioneer's stand in the sale ring and tried to sell their policies to the 250 people who attended.

Of course, when a Secretary of Agriculture comes to Iowa, ethanol is bound to be on the agenda.

Max Smith of Knoxville, who is secretary of the Iowa Corn Promotion Board, thanked Glickman and Harkin for supporting an extension of the tax credits for ethanol but noted that the extension lasts only until 2000.

What is the plan to get the extension lengthened until 2007, Smith asked?

Harkin said he hoped to use a bill known as the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, nicknamed ISTEA or "ice tea" by the inside-the-Beltway crowd, to get ethanol's credits extended to 2007.

The problem, Harkin said, is that the bill will have to pass through the same committees in Congress that limited ethanol tax credits in the budget bill.

"We're going to have to see if we

**It's a very fitting thing. Dairy is so important, and this gives a whole new importance to the dairy industry."**

— Dan Glickman, U.S. secretary of agriculture, commenting on "Butter Elvis"

can get it in another bill," Harkin said. "We're going to fight tooth and nail to extend (the ethanol tax credits) till 2007."

Glickman paid a visit to the Iowa Pork Tent, where he talked with Iowa pork leaders about exports, crop prospects and the performance of the 1995 farm bill.

Then he walked over to the Iowa Cattlemen's Beef Quarters, where he talked with cattle industry leaders about opening up the Conservation Reserve Program to haying and grazing because of short pastures in parts of Iowa.

As he left for the airport, Glickman called his visit to the Iowa State Fair "fascinating."

And, he said, people he talked to

seemed to be in a pretty good mood.

"People seem to feel there's a future in agriculture," he said.

It was quite a State Fair for Lauren Christian, animal science professor and director of the Iowa Pork Industry Center at Iowa State University.

First, Christian and his nephew, Chad Christian, showed the grand champion Landrace gilt and the reserve champion Landrace boar at the fair's Landrace show.

Lauren and Chad Christian are partners in CVV Landrace, which produces purebred Landrace hogs.

Then, Christian and his three brothers — AJ, Duane and Dean — were given honorary lifetime memberships in the Duroc Breeders Association.

The presentation of the awards was made by the Christian brothers' father, Francis.

Finally, Lauren Christian was presented with the State 4-H Alumni Award during the 4-H market hog show.

Christian has long been active in 4-H as a student and a teacher, and met his wife, Nelda, at the National 4-H Congress, where both were delegates.

LEVEL 1 - 11 OF 18 STORIES

Copyright 1997 The Kansas City Star Co.  
THE KANSAS CITY STAR

August 7, 1997 Thursday METROPOLITAN EDITION

SECTION: NATIONAL/WORLD; Pg. A4

LENGTH: 731 words

HEADLINE: Clinton tabs Thompson for key job  
Kansas treasurer to be named to Agriculture Department position.

BYLINE: STEVE KRASKE, Political Correspondent

## BODY:

President Clinton announced Wednesday that he intended to nominate Kansas Treasurer Sally Thompson to the job of chief financial officer for the U.S. Agriculture Department.

The nomination will be made official once the Senate reconvenes in September.

Thompson, 57, said she was thrilled.

"I'm excited and honored, and I'm accepting the president's call to serve in his administration with the same commitment to good-quality public policy and sound financial practices that I worked for here in the treasurer's office," she said.

The Senate will consider the nomination. It was unclear Wednesday when confirmation hearings would begin.

Thompson's appointment came despite a two-year legislative controversy over her management of a state fund called the Municipal Investment Pool. The pool lost more than \$ 20 million in 1994 and 1995. The following year lawmakers stripped the treasurer's office of its power to make investment decisions.

Thompson said she thought the president's staff knew about the issue and was convinced that market forces, not problems in her office, caused the problem. She was confident that the Senate would confirm her.

"I have no reason to believe that I won't have ultimately the support of all the senators," the Democrat said.

Thompson, who would be the first Kansas treasurer to resign since 1938, will continue in the post until the Senate votes on her confirmation. Gov. Bill Graves, a Republican, would appoint a successor to complete the final 17 months of Thompson's term.

In her new job, which is expected to pay more than \$ 100,000 a year, Thompson would oversee the department's accounting and financial management activities, including its \$ 81 billion budget.

THE KANSAS CITY STAR, August 7, 1997, Thursday

She will report directly to Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, a former U.S. House member from Kansas.

First elected in 1990, Thompson succeeded Joan Finney, who was elected governor that year. Thompson was re-elected in 1994.

Last year she was defeated in a run for the U.S. Senate by Republican Pat Roberts. He polled 62 percent and Thompson 34 percent in a sometimes bitter race.

On the night of her loss, Thompson said she planned to leave politics.

Ironically, the fate of Thompson's nomination now rests at least partly in Roberts' hands. Roberts is a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, which will conduct Thompson's confirmation hearings.

In a telephone conversation last week, Roberts assured Thompson that he would not stand in her way and would, in fact, work to speed up the confirmation process, a Roberts spokeswoman said.

In their Senate campaign, Roberts regularly accused Thompson of mismanaging the Municipal Investment Pool. But Roberts' support of Thompson probably would eliminate the issue as an obstacle for her.

Thompson's intention to leave her job is another blow to the Kansas Democratic Party, which holds only two statewide offices - treasurer and insurance commissioner, a post held by Kathleen Sebelius.

Graves almost certainly would fill Thompson's job with a Republican.

Asked Wednesday whether Graves would appoint a caretaker to hold the job until the next election or someone who would seek election to the job, spokesman Mike Matson said no decision had been made.

He also demurred when asked whether the governor would consider appointing House Speaker Tim Shallenburger, a political rival, to the job. Shallenburger announced Tuesday he would run for treasurer next year.

"We'll look at all the options available," Matson said.

Graves will not make any appointment until the Senate has decided Thompson's fate, Matson said.

Since Kansas became a state in 1861, six state treasurers, all Republicans, have resigned before their terms ended. The most recent was J.J. Rhodes of Council Grove, who quit on Oct. 14, 1938.

In the state's history, only four Democrats have been treasurers.

THE KANSAS CITY STAR, August 7, 1997, Thursday

PAGE 25

Two of them, Finney and Thompson, have held the office continuously since January 1975.

LOAD-DATE: August 07, 1997

FAX TRANSMITTAL

To	RO	From	MBS PAO
Dist Agency	PAO	Phone	206 744-3571
Fax		Fax	

"The government needs to provide services where the people are," said Bob Stone, project director for Gore's effort, formally called the National Performance Review. "American Express and Citibank make it easier for customers to get in touch with them, and government has to do the same thing. The IRS and Social Security are going into shopping malls."

Stone said he wasn't worried that REI might gain a competitive advantage by having government recreation information available inside the store. "If there is another (similar) store in Seattle with 1 million customers per year, we'll go there too," he said.

Agency officials said the move has been a big success. "We see this as a fantastic opportunity to serve thousands of potential park and forest service visitors, and in the seven months we've been here, that's exactly what we've done," said Joanne Conrad, an information assistant for the Forest Service who works inside the store. "This is where the action is."

Store officials also are pleased. "Our customers have access to information that would be hard for us to duplicate," said REI operations manager John Sheppard. "The feedback has been extremely positive."

Gore also cited a reorganization of the General Services Administration's paints and chemicals center in Auburn as an example of how government can improve. The center is essentially a giant phone bank that buys all paints, chemicals and sealants used by federal government agencies worldwide.

"They reinvented their inventory system by adopting a vendor-managed system developed by General Electric," Gore said. "In the process, they reduced their holding inventory by \$32 million and provided better service at lower cost for their customers."

PI reporter Michael Paulson can be reached at 202-943-9229 or michaelpaulson@seattlepi.com

# Gore: He teams up with Dilbert

From Page 1

About his effort at reinventing government, an effort that he said has led to the smallest federal work force since 1981. The government has 310,000 fewer employees than it did when President Clinton took office in 1993, Gore said.

"Our goal is to restore the public's confidence in self-government, and that means improving the quality of services, improving the performance of the federal government," Gore said. "For the average citizen whose mail isn't getting delivered on time and who couldn't get a straight answer over the telephone, we want changes that will convince that person that the government has actually changed and has improved."

Gore's effort began with much fanfare in 1993, when he used a hammer to smash an overpriced government-purchased ashtray on the David Letterman show.

Since then, attention on the reinventing-government project has faded, to this year Gore turned to cartoonist Scott Adams, whose Dilbert comic strip lampoons inefficient workplaces and slick managers, to illustrate the fourth annual report on the effort.

Gore cited two examples of government improvement in the Seattle area — the move of the federal office to the REI store and a cost-cutting measure at a government paint center in Auburn.

The forest and park agencies moved into REI in March, about six months after the 98,863-square-foot store opened. At the government booth, visitors can find information on snow and avalanche conditions, trails and weather or just get general outdoor recreation advice.

*See H by Paulson 11-11-97*

# Two federal offices set up camp in REI

Vice President Gore lauds idea of bringing service to the people

By MICHAEL PAULSON  
PI/STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON — Among the hiking boots and bicycle helmets at the REI Seattle flagship store is an unusual feature for a retailer: a government office.

The Forest Service and National Park Service, which for 22 years ran an information center from the fourth floor of the downtown Seattle federal building, have moved the operation into the trip-planning center at the REI store.

The move allows the government to reach the 2.5 million people who are expected to pass through the REI store this year, and allows the store to provide customers with information that would be hard to get without access to government computers.

Yesterday, Vice President Al Gore cited the relationship between REI and the two federal agencies as an example of how the federal government can increase its focus on customer service.

"It's a neat building, and that's where their (the government agencies') customers are, or a lot of them," Gore said. "Before this move, their Seattle field office was in a government building behind metal detectors and infrequently visited."

Gore used the REI example during a conversation

See GORE, Page A8

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 Austin American-Statesman

December 19, 1997

SECTION: News; Pg. A24

LENGTH: 390 words

HEADLINE: Police use different kind of net; Food stamp lists lead to arrest of

BODY:

WASHINGTON -- Police in 24 cities captured almost 2,200 fugitives after checking food stamp rolls, a sweep that will save taxpayers \$3.1 million, administration officials said Thursday.

Vice President Al Gore announced that the computer cross-matching program, made legal by last year's welfare reform law, will be expanded nationwide in the coming months.

We want to provide a safety net for the needy, not a hammock for fugitives and felons," Gore said at a White House event attended by state and local police officials.

Before the new welfare law, privacy protections made it illegal for police to check food stamp rolls, and fugitives were not specifically prohibited from gaining the benefits.

That was changed effective in August 1996. The Agriculture Department's inspector general then launched Operation Talon" 11 months ago in cooperation with specific local police departments. The first 85 fugitives were arrested in June in Louisville and Lexington, Ky.

Some of the roundups were elaborate sting operations. In Chicago, Cook County Sheriff Michael Sheahan said his officers set up a fake government consulting firm" to contact fugitives and tell them their food stamp benefits would run out unless they came down for an interview.

Once the offenders believed their benefits were in jeopardy, the calls started pouring in," Sheahan said.

The fictitious firm's name was Tsera & Marant," a play on the words arrest warrant." Some fugitives even accepted free rides in what turned out to be a police van that took them straight to jail.

The Chicago sweep was responsible for 470 of the 2,199 arrests made under the program. Among those arrested were 19 people accused of murder or attempted murder, 10 fleeing child molestation charges and seven accused of rape. More than 600 of the cases involved drugs.

We knew it would work," Gore said. They want that address to be honest when it is put on an envelope with money in it."

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said the arrests saved taxpayers \$3.1 million, assuming each fugitive obtained food stamps for a full year. More

Austin American-Statesman, December 19, 1997

important, he said, the program helps keep public confidence and trust'' in the  
9 billion program that is helping feed 20.1 million Americans this year.

LOAD-DATE: December 19, 1997

LEVEL 1 - 10 OF 34 STORIES

Copyright 1997 News & Record (Greensboro, NC)  
News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

December 19, 1997, Friday, ALL EDITIONS

SECTION: GENERAL NEWS, Pg. A1

LENGTH: 384 words

HEADLINE: 2,200 FUGITIVES CAPTURED THROUGH FOOD STAMP ROLLS

BYLINE: BY CURT ANDERSON; The Associated Press WASHINGTON -

## BODY:

Police in 24 cities captured almost 2,200 fugitives after checking food stamp rolls, a sweep that will save taxpayers \$ 3.1 million, administration officials said Thursday.

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News & Record (Greensboro, NC), December 19, 1997

"We knew it would work," Gore said. "They want that address to be honest on it is put on an envelope with money in it."

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said the arrests saved taxpayers \$ 3.1 million, assuming each fugitive obtained food stamps for a full year.

More importantly, he said, the program helps keep public "confidence and trust" in the \$ 1.9 billion program that is helping feed 20.1 million Americans this year.

LOAD-DATE: December 21, 1997

Barbara, 49, a former addict who asked that her last name not be used, described her street corner transactions with drug dealers. "I would give them a \$65 book of stamps, and I could buy a \$20 bag of heroin and a \$10 of 'caine," she said. "You always knew you were going to get half ce. If they were nice, they may give you \$5 in change."

D.C. police say stamps are such common currency in the drug world that heroin and crack cocaine dealers routinely operate in the shadows of the food stamp office on H street.

Low Priority

In a city that this year has experienced more than 5,000 assaults, 7,600 burglaries and 7,200 auto thefts, and where the homicide rate is one of the highest in the nation, pursuing people who profit from illegal trafficking in food stamps is a low priority.

"We have done \$50,000 (illegal food stamp) deals, and they won't prosecute," said D.C. police Sgt. Jehru Brown, a veteran in the narcotics and special investigations division who has done joint investigations with the USDA.

Roger Viadero, inspector general for the USDA, said he understands the city's dilemma. "Food stamp fraud is not personal crime; it's a property crime, and as a result in the grand scheme of things, it is not a big priority issue," Viadero said. "In the District, they are really overburdened with the cases they already have to handle."

The failure to aggressively prosecute food stamp violations is the result of a fragmented enforcement system in which no single agency bears all responsibility.

The office of the D.C. corporation counsel prosecutes people who fraudulently apply to receive food stamps. The USDA is responsible for cracking down on illegal trafficking in food stamps, forwarding its cases to the U.S. attorney for prosecution. Minor trafficking cases are handled by the USDA inspector general with administrative hearings that may lead to revocation of a merchant's right to handle stamps.

From October 1996 to September of this year, five District stores were permanently disqualified from the food stamp program because of illegal food stamp trafficking, USDA officials said. They say about six other stores are expected to be disqualified soon.

Viadero said that two District retailers have been prosecuted criminally this year and that 10 other merchants are under criminal investigation. He said that in Maryland, there were 20 indictments last year and that in Virginia, there were 12 indictments.

Officials in the D.C. corporation counsel's office say their interest in expanding their authority to allow prosecution of trafficking cases was defeated by the inaction of the D.C. Council.

"Food stamp trafficking is a federal responsibility," Deputy Corporation Counsel Jo Anne Robinson said. "We submitted legislation to the D.C. Council in 1993 and 1995 to establish a local anti-food-stamp-trafficking ] . . . In both instances, no action was taken by the council."

Replacing Coupons

Food stamps are about to go the way of vinyl records and rotary phones.

They are being replaced by an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card

that looks like an ATM card and is used in much the same fashion as a prepaid telephone calling card. The cards give the bearers a predetermined amount of buying power each month with merchants who have the electronic machinery required to accept them.

Maryland was one of the first states in the country to use the cards when it made the switch in 1993. The District plans to spend \$4.5 million to phase in use of the cards next year.

"Once you have the Electronic Benefit Transfer card, it gives you a better audit trail," said Cathy Calimer, director of automation for the Maryland Department of Human Services, which supervises the food stamp program. "With coupons, you never can really track fraud."

Maryland officials say the electronic trail created by the use of EBT cards has allowed them to move aggressively in prosecuting fraud.

They cite the example of a Baltimore grocery store owner who was ordered to pay \$1.3 million in fines after EBT tracking revealed that he had illegally trafficked in food stamps to the tune of \$400,000. Investigators determined that the store was taking in far more revenue from EBT cards than its inventory made possible. They said 10 EBT card-holders confessed to selling benefits for cash on 203 occasions.

At best, however, the EBT program will make it more difficult to traffic illegally rather than put a stop to the practice, many officials and food stamp recipients say. Merchants and drug dealers still will be able to profit by trading cash for cards, and card-holders who need cash have yet another avenue.

"They can just take someone to the grocery store and buy their groceries" with the card in exchange for cash, said Catrina Cook, 28, who has been receiving food stamps since she was 16. "It's not going to make a difference."

The practice of using food stamps to shop for others and then pocketing their cash precedes the EBT card. One former crack addict said he roamed the supermarket aisles with stamps in hand, seeking out people who would give him cash once he bought groceries for them. He said that friends in Maryland now lend their cards and personal identification numbers to others for a price.

Catherine Bego, deputy administrator of the District's Addiction Prevention and Recovery Administration, said she does not believe the new cards will stop people from using stamps to buy drugs.

"Absolutely not. The recipients have already demonstrated that they can beat the system. The same principles will be involved in that you pay \$1 in food stamps for 50 cents in cash," she said.

#### No Food Stamps Allowed

Amid the buzz of illegal business outside the food stamp center on H Street, Xzavea Tyre operates a licensed vendor's stand from which he sells shoes, scarves and toy dolls.

"I have people out here giving me dirty looks because I don't take food stamps," Tyre said. "It's like I have done something to them. The only thing I feel about selling food stamps is, I would rather see food stamps spent on kids."

CAPTIONS: Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, left, and USDA Inspector General Roger Viadero attend a White House event announcing a crackdown on stamp fraud.

KEY PERSONS: GLICKMAN, DAN

ORGANIZATION NAME: AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT; ELECTRONIC BENEFIT TRANSFER

DESCRIPTORS: District of Columbia; Welfare services; Food assistance; Fraud; Federal government; City government; Investigations and probes; Computer assisted operations

LEVEL 1 - 12 OF 34 STORIES

Copyright 1997 The State Journal-Register  
The State Journal-Register (Springfield, IL)

December 19, 1997, Wednesday, EARLY AND CITY EDITIONS

SECTION: NEWS, Pg. 14

LENGTH: 348 words

HEADLINE: More than 2,000 fugitives caught through food stamps

BYLINE: CURT ANDERSON THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

BODY:

Police in 24 cities captured almost 2,200 fugitives after checking food stamp rolls, a sweep that will save taxpayers \$ 3.1 million, officials said Thursday.

Vice President Al Gore announced that the computer cross-matching program, made legal by last year's welfare reform law, will be expanded nationwide in the coming months. "We want to provide a safety net for the needy, not a hammock for fugitives and felons," Gore said at a White House event attended by state and local police officials.

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The fictitious firm's name was "Tsera & Marant," a play on the words "arrest warrant." Some fugitives even accepted free rides in what turned out to be a police van that took them straight to jail.

The Chicago sweep was responsible for 470 of the 2,199 arrests made under the program. Among those arrested were 19 people accused of murder or attempted murder, 10 fleeing child molestation charges and seven accused of rape. More than 600 of the cases involved drugs.

"We knew it would work," Gore said. "They want that address to be honest it is put on an envelope with money in it."

The State Journal Register, December 19, 1997

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said the arrests saved taxpayers \$ 3.1 million, assuming each fugitive obtained food stamps for a full year.

TYPE: NEWS

LOAD-DATE: December 20, 1997

1/9/2 (Item 1 from file: 497)  
DIALOG(R) File 497: (Ft. Lauderdale) Sun-Sentinel  
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53111

STING CAPTURES 2,200 FUGITIVES ARRESTS STEM FROM FOOD STAMP RECORD CHECKS  
UNDER NEW LAW

Sun Sentinel (FL) - Friday, December 19, 1997

By: CURT ANDERSON The Associated Press

Edition: Palm Beach Section: NATIONAL Page: 14A

Word Count: 301

TEXT:

WASHINGTON - Police in 24 cities captured almost 2,200 fugitives after checking food stamp rolls, a sweep that will save taxpayers \$3.1 million, administration officials said on Thursday.

Vice President Al Gore announced that the computer cross-matching program, made legal by last year's welfare reform law, will be expanded nationwide in the coming months. We want to provide a safety net for the needy, not a hammock for fugitives and felons," Gore said at a White House event attended by state and local police officials.

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Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said the arrests saved taxpayers \$3.1 million, assuming each fugitive obtained food stamps for a full year.

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DESCRIPTORS: MULTIPLE ARREST;

LEVEL 1 - 12 OF 34 STORIES

Copyright 1997 The State Journal-Register  
The State Journal-Register (Springfield, IL)

December 19, 1997, Wednesday, EARLY AND CITY EDITIONS

SECTION: NEWS, Pg. 14

LENGTH: 348 words

HEADLINE: More than 2,000 fugitives caught through food stamps

BYLINE: CURT ANDERSON THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

BODY:

Police in 24 cities captured almost 2,200 fugitives after checking food stamp rolls, a sweep that will save taxpayers \$ 3.1 million, officials said Thursday.

Vice President Al Gore announced that the computer cross-matching program, made legal by last year's welfare reform law, will be expanded nationwide in the coming months. "We want to provide a safety net for the needy, not a hammock for fugitives and felons," Gore said at a White House event attended by state and local police officials.

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The State Journal Register, December 19, 1997

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said the arrests saved taxpayers \$ 3.1 million, assuming each fugitive obtained food stamps for a full year.

TYPE: NEWS

LOAD-DATE: December 20, 1997

1/9/1 (Item 1 from file: 427)  
LOG(R)File 427:Fort Worth Star-Telegram  
1997 Fort Worth Papers. All rts. reserv.

519 (THIS IS THE FULLTEXT)  
2,200 FUGITIVES SNARED AFTER FOOD STAMP CHECK  
Curt Anderson; Credits, Associated Press  
Fort Worth Star-Telegram, FINAL AM ED, P 1  
Friday, December 19, 1997  
DOCUMENT TYPE: NEWSPAPER JOURNAL CODE: FW LANGUAGE: ENGLISH  
RECORD TYPE: FULLTEXT SECTION HEADING: NEWS  
Word Count: 525

TEXT:

WASHINGTON - Law officers in 24 cities captured almost 2,200 fugitives - including more than 220 in Texas - after checking food stamp rolls, a sweep that will save taxpayers \$3.1 million, Clinton administration officials said yesterday.

Texas is one of only six states participating in "Operation Talon," rolling the program out in Tarrant, Dallas and McLennan counties.

"I am proud that Texas is one of the first states to kick felons off the food stamp rolls under a groundbreaking federal-state effort," said Texas Department of Human Services Commissioner Eric Bost.

ice President Al Gore announced that the computer cross-matching program, made legal by last year's welfare overhaul law, will be expanded nationwide in the coming months.

"We want to provide a safety net for the needy, not a hammock for fugitives and felons," Gore said at a White House event that state and local police officials attended.

Law enforcement officials in Texas had arrested 221 fugitives.

Removing ineligible felons from the food stamp rolls in those three counties alone should net \$324,000 in annual savings, state officials said.

About 45 fugitives were apprehended by sheriff's deputies in Tarrant County, said Cmdr. James Skidmore, a Sheriff's Department spokesman.

Over several days early this month, the sheriff's department provided databases and warrant files to federal officers, and sheriff's deputies accompanied the federal officials on arrests.

"We actually had addresses for some of the people," Skidmore said.

Before the new welfare law, privacy protections made it illegal police to check food stamp rolls, and fugitives were not officially prohibited from obtaining the benefits.

That changed August 1996. The Agriculture Department's inspector general launched "Operation Talon" 11 months ago in cooperation with local police and sheriff's departments. The first 85 fugitives were arrested in June in Louisville, Ky., and Lexington, Ky.

Some of the roundups were elaborate sting operations. In Chicago, Cook County Sheriff Michael Sheahan said his officers set up a fake "government consulting firm" to contact fugitives and tell them that their food stamp benefits would run out unless they attended an interview.

"Once the offenders believed their benefits were in jeopardy, the calls started pouring in," Sheahan said.

The fictitious firm's name was "Tsera & Marant," a play on the words "arrest warrant." Some fugitives even accepted free rides in what turned out to be a police van that took them straight to jail.

The Chicago sweep was responsible for 470 of the 2,199 arrests made under the program. Among those arrested are 19 people accused of murder or attempted murder; 10 who were fleeing child molestation charges; and seven accused of rape. More than 600 of the cases involved drugs.

"We knew it would work," Gore said. "They want that address to be honest when it is put on an envelope with money in it."

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said the arrests saved taxpayers \$3.1 million, assuming that each fugitive had obtained food stamps for a full year.

More important, he said, the program helps keep public "confidence and trust" in the \$1.9 billion program that is helping feed 20.1 million Americans this year.

Staff writer Neil Strassman contributed to this report.

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COMPANY NAMES (Dialog Generated): Agriculture Department ; Human Services ; Sheriff's Department ; Talon ; Texas Department of Human Services ; WASHINGTON Law

1/9/2 (Item 1 from file: 497)  
LOG(R) File 497: (Ft. Lauderdale) Sun-Sentinel  
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53111

STING CAPTURES 2,200 FUGITIVES ARRESTS STEM FROM FOOD STAMP RECORD CHECKS  
UNDER NEW LAW

Sun Sentinel (FL) - Friday, December 19, 1997

By: CURT ANDERSON The Associated Press

Edition: Palm Beach Section: NATIONAL Page: 14A

Word Count: 301

TEXT:

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Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said the arrests saved taxpayers \$3.1 million, assuming each fugitive obtained food stamps for a full year.

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TRIPTORS: MULTIPLE ARREST;

1/9/3 (Item 1 from file: 631)  
DIALOG(R) File 631: Boston Globe  
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53141

FOOD-STAMP CHECKS IN 24 CITIES LEAD TO ARREST OF 2,200 FUGITIVES  
Boston Globe (BG) - FRIDAY, December 19, 1997  
By: Curt Anderson, Associated Press  
Edition: Third Section: National/Foreign Page: A15  
Word Count: 342

TEXT:  
WASHINGTON - Police in 24 cities have captured almost 2,200 fugitives after checking food stamp rolls, in a sweep that will save taxpayers \$3.1 million, administration officials said yesterday.

Vice President Al Gore announced that the computer cross-matching program, made legal by last year's welfare reform law, will be expanded nationwide in the coming months. "We want to provide a safety net for the needy, not a hammock for fugitives and felons," Gore said at a White House event attended by state and local police officials.

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588;12/18

CAWLEY;12/19,05:50

STAMPS19

1/9/4 (Item 1 from file: 633)  
DIALOG(R) File 633:Phil.Inquirer  
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53034

FOOD-STAMP SWEEP YIELDS FUGITIVES

Philadelphia Inquirer (PI) - Friday, December 19, 1997

By: Curt Anderson, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Edition: SF Section: NATIONAL Page: A04

Word Count: 224

TEXT:

WASHINGTON - Police in 24 cities captured almost 2,200 fugitives after checking food-stamp rolls, a sweep that will save taxpayers \$3.1 million, administration officials said yesterday.

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Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said the arrests saved taxpayers \$3.1 million, assuming each fugitive obtained food stamps for a full year.

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DESCRIPTORS: US WELFARE LAW RESULT FOUND CRIME COMPUTER INFORMATION  
PRIVACY

1/9/5 (Item 1 from file: 638)  
DIALOG(R) File 638:Newsday/New York Newsday  
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53116

Snagged in Food-Stamp Dragnet / Cross-check of computer files uncovers thousands of fugitives

Newsday (ND) - Friday December 19, 1997

By: THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Edition: ALL EDITIONS Section: NEWS Page: A25

Word Count: 345

MEMO:

MEMO: PD:

TEXT:

Washington - Washington - Police in 24 cities captured almost 2,200 fugitives after checking food-stamp rolls, a sweep that will save taxpayers \$3.1 million, administration officials said yesterday.

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Before the new welfare law, privacy protections made it illegal for police to check food-stamp rolls, and fugitives were not specifically prohibited from obtaining the benefits.

That was changed as of August, 1996. The Agriculture Department's inspector general launched "Operation Talon" 11 months ago in cooperation with some local police departments. The first 85 fugitives were arrested in June in Louisville and Lexington, Ky.

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"We knew it would work," Gore said. "They want that address to be honest when it is put on an envelope with money in it."

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said the arrests saved taxpayers \$1 million, assuming each fugitive obtained food stamps for a full year. He said the program would help keep public "confidence and trust" in the \$2.9-billion program that is helping feed 20.1 million Americans this year.

DESCRIPTORS: UNITED STATES; POLICE; ARREST; FUGITIVE; FOOD STAMPS;  
INVESTIGATION; WELFARE; REFORM

1/9/6 (Item 1 from file: 714)  
DIALOG(R) File 714: (Baltimore) The Sun  
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.53121

2,200 FUGITIVES CAUGHT IN 24-CITY FOOD STAMP ROUNDUP; COMPUTER  
CROSS-MATCHING MADE LEGAL BY NEW LAW  
BALTIMORE MORNING SUN (BS) - Friday December 19, 1997  
By: ASSOCIATED PRESS  
Edition: Final Section: News (National and Foreign) Page: 21A  
Word Count: 365

TEXT:

WASHINGTON - Police in 24 cities captured nearly 2,200 fugitives after checking food stamp rolls, a sweep that will save taxpayers \$3.1 million, administration officials said yesterday.

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Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said the arrests saved taxpayers \$3.1 million, assuming each fugitive obtained food stamps for a full year.

More important, Glickman said, the program helps keep public "confidence and trust" in the \$1.9 billion program that is helping feed 20.1 million Americans this year.

Pub Date: 12/19/97

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1/9/7 (Item 1 from file: 732)  
LOG(R) File 732:San Francisco Exam.  
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54032

NATION DATELINES

San Francisco Examiner (EX) - Friday, December 19, 1997  
By: Compiled from Examiner wire reports  
Edition: SECOND Section: NEWS Page: A35  
Word Count: 397

MEMO:

COLUMN: NATION DATELINES

Irving, Texas Kaiser Permanente has agreed to pay \$5.3 million to a Texas family that claimed the insurer's cost-cutting measures contributed to its father's fatal heart attack.

Kaiser, based in Oakland, agreed to settle the wrongful death suit brought by the Irving, Texas, family of Ronald Henderson, whose heart disease allegedly was left untreated due to the HMO's plan to cut hospital admissions in North Texas.

The settlement came after it was revealed that high-ranking Kaiser officials devised the 1995 cost-cutting plan during an alcohol-laced brainstorming session on board a plane.

The HMO agreed to the settlement Tuesday after a test jury in Dallas it would have awarded the family more than 10 times that amount if the case had gone to trial.

Food stamp check finds 2,000 fugitives

Washington Police in 24 cities captured almost 2,200 fugitives after checking food stamp rolls, a sweep that will save taxpayers \$3.1 million, administration officials said.

Vice President Al Gore announced Thursday that the computer cross-matching program, made legal by last year's welfare reform law, will be expanded nationwide in the coming months.

Before the new welfare law, privacy protections made it illegal for police to check food stamp rolls, and fugitives were not specifically prohibited from obtaining the benefits.

That was changed effective in August 1996. The Agriculture Department's inspector general then launched "Operation Talon" 11 months ago in cooperation with specific local police departments. The stings included arrests of suspected murderers, rapists and child molesters.

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said the arrests saved taxpayers \$3.1 million, assuming each fugitive obtained food stamps for a full year.

Manhattan admits enslaving immigrants

New York A woman pleaded guilty to enslaving 60 deaf Mexican immigrants and forcing them to peddle trinkets in subways and on the streets of New York City.

Adriana Paoletti Lemus, 29, one of two alleged ringleaders in the

scheme, pocketed more than \$1 million in 1996 from sales of the key chains and other trinkets, federal prosecutors said.

The scheme was exposed last July when four of the victims fled their "workhouse" in Queens and told police about their plight.

Lemus pleaded guilty Thursday to involuntary servitude, money laundering conspiracy, alien smuggling, obstruction of justice and witness tampering, prosecutor Leslie Cornfeld said. She could receive up to 17 years in prison at her sentencing March 13.

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LEVEL 1 - 10 OF 34 STORIES

Copyright 1997 News & Record (Greensboro, NC)  
News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

December 19, 1997, Friday, ALL EDITIONS

SECTION: GENERAL NEWS, Pg. A1

LENGTH: 384 words

HEADLINE: 2,200 FUGITIVES CAPTURED THROUGH FOOD STAMP ROLLS

BYLINE: BY CURT ANDERSON; The Associated Press WASHINGTON -

## BODY:

Police in 24 cities captured almost 2,200 fugitives after checking food stamp rolls, a sweep that will save taxpayers \$ 3.1 million, administration officials said Thursday.

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News & Record (Greensboro, NC), December 19, 1997

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More importantly, he said, the program helps keep public 'confidence and  
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LOAD-DATE: December 21, 1997

LEVEL 1 - 7 OF 34 STORIES

Copyright 1997 The Austin American-Statesman  
Austin American-Statesman

December 19, 1997

SECTION: News; Pg. A24

LENGTH: 390 words

HEADLINE: Police use different kind of net; Food stamp lists lead to arrest of

BODY:

WASHINGTON -- Police in 24 cities captured almost 2,200 fugitives after checking food stamp rolls, a sweep that will save taxpayers \$3.1 million, administration officials said Thursday.

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Austin American-Statesman, December 19, 1997

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7 billion program that is helping feed 20.1 million Americans this year.

LOAD-DATE: December 19, 1997

USDA to seek to recruit more Hispanic employees

WASHINGTON, May 4 (Reuters) - Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman met with Hispanic groups on Thursday to hammer out a plan to increase the number of Hispanic employees at the department.

Glickman, whose department last year agreed to pay \$2 billion to settle a class-action lawsuit for discrimination against black farmers, has acknowledged racial problems at the USDA.

The agriculture secretary, who has made civil rights a priority, said Hispanics were better represented in the private sector than they were at the USDA. In September 1999, Hispanics constituted about 5 percent of the USDA work force, or 4,017 employees out of 84,049.

Glickman said this year the USDA has hired 103 Hispanics, but less than a handful were in top administrative jobs.

"We know that we have plenty of work still to do," Glickman said at the USDA Hispanic Leadership Summit.

Glickman's Hispanic recruitment plan includes the creation of a new USDA position specifically for recruiting Hispanics into the department. A similar position exists for recruiting blacks.

Nancy Robinson, the newly appointed Hispanic employment program manager, said there were major minority recruiting problems at the USDA and the first step to resolving them was for department-wide coordination.

The department has been the target of a slew of lawsuits and racial discrimination complaints from employees and farmers over the past decade.

Last month marked the one-year anniversary of the USDA's billion-dollar settlement for years of discriminating against black farmers.

In the class-action lawsuit, thousands of black farmers accused the USDA of shutting them out of loan programs, disaster assistance and other farm aid because of their race. The suit resulted in a \$2 billion settlement.

More than 3,000 black farmers so far have received settlement money and forgiven loans worth a total of \$190 million.

REUTERS

Rtr 21:12 05-04-00

:SUBJECT: DOAG USA GEN

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Received by NewsEDGE/LAN: 05/04/2000 9:21 PM

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bc-WH-govt-websites

Twenty Things You Can Do On U.S Government Web Sites

To: National Desk

Contact: White House Press Office, 202-456-2580

WASHINGTON, June 24 /U.S. Newswire/ -- The following was released today by the White House:

President Clinton is the first president of the Internet Age, and with the leadership of Vice President Gore has moved the U.S. government on-line. Government web sites make information and services available at the click of a mouse, helping Americans keep in touch with their government and making government work better for people. There are now over 20,000 government web sites -- here are just a few of the more popular ones.

1. Get tips on choosing a health plan, a doctor, a course of treatment, or a long-term care facility from the Department of Health and Human Service's Healthfinder service ([www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov)). Healthfinder also provides the information on the latest health research, different illnesses, and a host of medical resources designed to help families stay healthy. It served over 4.5 million visitors in 1999.

2. Teachers, parents, and students can access lessons and educational materials on any topic on to the Department of Education's new Gateway to Educational Materials ([www.thegateway.org](http://www.thegateway.org)). The Gateway makes finding materials on the Internet easy by connecting users to over 140 web sites.

3. Start your own business with help from the Small Business Administration ([www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov)), which offers everything from loans to outreach initiatives for women and minority-owned businesses. The site also provides e-mail counseling and mentoring, online educational courses, and a database of federal, state and private contracts available to small firms.

4. Protect yourself and your children from environmental hazards by finding out about drinking water quality, toxic and air releases, and hazardous waste in your neighborhood by signing on to the Environmental Protection Agency's ([www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)) Enviromapper site. You can also find out about water discharge permits and Superfund sites.

5. Need a government statistic? FedStats ([www.fedstats.gov](http://www.fedstats.gov)) provides the public a single point of entry to 40 Federal statistical programs. Since its inception in May 1997, FedStats has logged over 3.5 million user sessions.

6. Is it possible that you or someone you know may be owed pension benefits without knowing it? The Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation ([www.pbgc.gov](http://www.pbgc.gov)) reunites people with missing pensions, and features an online Pension Search Directory that allows you to find benefits that may be owed to you.

7. Learn how to get health insurance for your children through the Children's Health Insurance Program ([www.insurekidsnow.gov](http://www.insurekidsnow.gov)). CHIP's web page offers state-specific information on who is eligible and how to enroll to make sure children grow up strong and healthy.

8. Begin planning for retirement by computing your estimated Social Security benefits online at the Social Security Administration ([www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)). SSA's home page also provides information on obtaining a Social Security number as well as information for employers on reporting earnings.

9. Agencies from across the Federal government joined forces to provide Federal Resources for Academic Excellence ([www.ed.gov/free](http://www.ed.gov/free)), which makes hundreds of education resources

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available on the web for teachers, students, or parents. Subjects range from an architectural tour of the National Gallery of Art's East Building to a mutual fund cost calculator from the Securities and Exchange Commission.

10. Buy your first home with help from the Department of Housing and Urban Development ([www.hud.gov](http://www.hud.gov)). HUD's web page provides a comprehensive homebuyer's kit, complete with searchable databases of HUD homes for sale, condominiums and developments approved for FHA financing, and HUD approved lenders.

11. With Access America for Students ([www.students.gov](http://www.students.gov)) --students can gain information on how to obtain financial aid, pay their student loans, and get career information. This website is part of an initiative announced by Vice President Gore called "Access America."

12. Learn food safety and handling tips, proper cooking temperature for food, and how to test to see if your kitchen is safe from foodborne illness from the Department of Agriculture ([www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov)).

13. Find a fuel-efficient car with help from the Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency ([www.fueleconomy.gov/feg](http://www.fueleconomy.gov/feg)).

14. Kids, parents and coaches can get tips from the U.S. Women's Soccer Team (and other experts) on good reasons not to smoke -- like, not being able to run down the soccer field -- on the Smoke-Free Kids web site ([www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov)).

15. Curious about online trading? Learn how to invest wisely and avoid fraud on the Internet from the Securities and Exchange Commission ([www.sec.gov](http://www.sec.gov)).

16. Travelers can now check for weather-related delays using the Federal Aviation Administration's web site ([www.fly.faa.gov](http://www.fly.faa.gov)). The web site has received almost one million visitors since its launch on April 2000, with the number of visitors doubling every week.

17. Find help after a natural disaster from the Federal Emergency Management Agency ([www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)). FEMA's web site provides information on where to find temporary shelters, crisis counseling, or legal counseling. FEMA also provides help in applying for assistance for help in rebuilding your home

18. Find the Veterans' Medical Center nearest you, and find out what benefits you may qualify for, with help from the Department of Veterans' Affairs ([www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)).

19. Learn about your Medicare benefits, get information about nursing homes in your area, or report suspected Medicare fraud through the Health Care Financing Administration's ([www.hcfa.gov](http://www.hcfa.gov)) web page. HCFA also provides an on-line version of the Medicare & You 2000 handbook.

20. Learn how you can pay back student loans and volunteer in your community through the Corporation for National Service ([www.cns.gov](http://www.cns.gov)).

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Food Stamp Fraud, 1st Ld-Writethru, a0635,0696  
Electronic cards trim, but haven't eliminated, food stamp fraud

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erroneous percentages

By JESSE J. HOLLAND=

Associated Press Writer=

WASHINGTON (AP) Criminals are still swindling \$660 million a year in food stamp benefits from the government, despite the widespread use of electronic debit cards in place of the traditional, easy-to-traffic paper coupons, federal officials say.

Still, the amount of federal money stolen each year by criminals has decreased 19 percent, from \$815 million in 1993 to \$660 million annually from 1996-98, Agriculture Department officials say.

And the trafficking rate which compares dollars trafficked to benefits issued dropped 8 percent from 3.8 cents per dollar in 1993 to 3.5 cents in 1998, according to a new department report released last week.

"Food stamps are intended for food and we do not and we will not tolerate fraud and abuse in the Food Stamp Program," said Shirley Watkins, the Agriculture undersecretary of food, nutrition and consumer services.

Using electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards instead of paper coupons was supposed to help fight food stamp fraud and cut down on government paperwork. Currently, 37 states and the District of Columbia are using EBT cards for their statewide systems. All states have to be using the system by 2002, officials said.

But even though three-fourths of all American families using food stamps now use a card instead of coupons, criminals are still getting access to federal dollars, said Roger Viadero, the Agriculture Department's inspector general.

Just as they did with the paper coupons, recipients are selling their debit cards and personal identification numbers for drugs and money to traffickers, he told the House Budget Committee's welfare task force on Wednesday.

The street level traffickers may be having more difficulty using the cards, but "large-scale trafficking by retailers continues to be widespread," Viadero said. "Again, those involved often traffic in immense quantities of benefits, have large organizations and often use sophisticated schemes to carry out the crimes and conceal their illegal activities."

Part of the problem is that storeowners who willingly participate in fraud schemes are not being forced to pay the financial penalties they were assessed for trafficking, said Larry Dyckman, director of food and agricultural issues for the U.S. General Accounting Office, Congress's watchdog arm.

From 1993-98, stores were assessed \$78 million in penalties but only \$11.5 million was collected, he said. He said \$49 million was written off as "uncollectable" and the rest was pending collection.

"According to agency officials, this small percentage of fines collected reflects the difficulties involved in collecting this kind of debt, such as problems in locating debtors as well as their refusal to pay," he said. "However, weaknesses in the agency's debt collection procedures and practices also contributed to low collections."

In addition, most states with EBT systems aren't analyzing the data to find criminals, Dyckman said. As of last April, only Florida, Missouri, South Carolina and Texas were independently analyzing their electronic databases to identify suspect recipients, and Agriculture's inspector general provided 34,000

suspects to Maryland as well, he said.

During 1998 and 1999, these five states were responsible for disqualifying about 99 percent of the 6,873 individuals nationwide who were removed from the Food Stamp Program for trafficking," Dyckman said.

The Agriculture Department has its own anti-fraud computer system called "ALERT" which records EBT transactions and looks for trafficking patterns, Watkins said.

On the Net: House Budget Committee welfare task force:  
[http://www.house.gov/budget/hearings/taskforce\\_welfare.htm](http://www.house.gov/budget/hearings/taskforce_welfare.htm)  
USDA Food and Nutrition Service: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/>

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(CAT:Agriculture;)  
(CAT:Crime;)  
(SRC:AF; ST:US;)  
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