

especially children. Of the Nation's 100 poorest counties, all but 15 have food assistance programs. On the other hand, more than one-fourth of the 1,200 counties in the poverty stricken category, are still without food assistance programs.

Only six States, one of them Mississippi, have food assistance programs in all their counties. In Alabama, next door to Mississippi, only half the counties provide food assistance.

These programs are extremely valuable. More than 3.4 million persons are now taking part in the direct food distribution program. From the food provided they can get over half of their daily calorie requirements, about 90 percent of the protein, 60 percent of the iron, and more than enough calcium, thiamine, and riboflavin.

An additional 1.7 million persons are participating in the food stamp program.

Their diets, too, are vastly improved.

OEO is financing the administrative costs of direct food distribution in a number of counties in Mississippi and other States. But OEO has indicated it would be unable to continue this assistance beyond this year.

To assure the continuance of the programs in these counties and also that we reach needy families in the 331 low-income counties where no program is now available, USDA will provide financial aid.

I have directed our TAP's to work with State and local officials to encourage and help these counties set up food assistance programs. We are also reducing the cost of food stamps for the very lowest income families.

This committee fully understands that rural poverty is a challenge not only to rural America but to all of America. Rural poverty too long neglected is at the root of much of our urban poverty.

The rural poor of yesterday have become many of the city's poor of today and if we do not succeed in revitalizing rural America, the rural poor of today will become many of the urban poor of tomorrow.

Space-starved cities and job-starved rural areas are not two isolated phenomena. They are twins. The human alienation and physical dissolution so prevalent in our greatest cities are closely linked to the depopulation and civic hopelessness that have plagued our small cities and rural areas.

It is time that the Nation as a whole recognized this fact and acted on it.

It is time that the Nation as a whole faced up to the basic questions.

For example:

Is there a desirable maximum size for any one metropolitan area—if so, what is it?

What are the real economic and social costs of continued depopulation of rural areas and of increased crowding in urban areas?

How much longer can we afford to pay these costs?

I have referred again and again to what I saw on my recent trip to poverty areas. I have done so because I was so deeply moved—moved by the plight of the poor and their need—and moved by the extent of our opportunity.

One cannot see the way these people live—one cannot talk with them about their problems and what they want out of life—without