

LOS ANGELES TIMES

Editorial

Los Angeles, California

December 4, 1969

## Free Milk for Needy Youngsters

*ISSUE: Should California farm workers have to seek court action to obtain free or low cost milk for their hungry children?*

Attorneys for the California Rural Legal Assistance charge in a new court action that the federal school milk program is a failure as far as the nation's needy youngsters are concerned.

Specifically, the CRLA contends poor families are required to provide a "children's milk tax" of \$10 a year by paying five cents for a half-pint of milk that should be free, or nearly free.

Only 7% of the needy children in California and the rest of the nation, the suit declares, benefited from the \$104 million spent last year by the federal government on milk for young students.

If these accusations are true, they furnish a serious and disturbing commentary, not only on the milk program but on the national school lunch program which has cost the nation more than \$4 billion in the past 23 years.

This is especially ironic at a time when the White House has called a conference on hunger and nutrition with the avowed aim of wiping out these flaws in a nation that gives millions annually in subsidies to farmers not to plant food crops, and whose foreign aid programs often are designed to alleviate hunger elsewhere in the world.

In a suit brought on behalf of 13 Northern California farm workers and their families, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the California Department of Education stand accused of ignoring a 1936 congressional mandate to provide free or almost free food.

Six months ago the CRLA made equally disturbing accusations against the federal lunch program, pointing out, fairly we believe, that all too often federal funds are used to make all students eligible for cheaper food, although the lower price is still too high for many poverty families.

Contending the Department of Agriculture could provide ample milk for every child if it followed the congressional mandate, the suit asks the court to require federal and state governments to offer milk free or at greatly reduced prices.

We find it absurd that needy families must petition the courts to enforce congressional rules that presumably mandate widespread distribution of free and cut-rate nutrition.

It is time for the federal and state officials involved to take a fast and thorough look at the total school lunch program. There should be no need for any legal arm-twisting.

Nor is there any legitimate reason in this nation of abundant farms and dairies for any school child to go hungry.