

Agriculture Dept. Cuts Off Funds For Alaska's Food Stamp Program

JUNEAU—Gov. Walter J. Hickel accused the federal government of being "either unaware—or uncaring—about Alaska's unique problems," as he disclosed that the U. S. Department of Agriculture now says it "no longer has funds" to expand Alaska's Food Stamp program for the current fiscal year.

Hickel's sharp words were prompted, he said, "because this is apparently only the latest blow from the federal government in the way of budget cuts."

In recent weeks, federal

cuts in Alaska's allotments in highway funds and funds for educational programs also have been announced.

The Alaska Legislature last week approved a \$50,000 appropriation to expand the Food Stamp program "on the understanding," Hickel said, "that the Department of Agriculture had funds to redeem the stamps.

"The announcement means the department will withhold redemption."

The Governor added, "This federal action will certainly create a hardship on the low

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income families that the legislature intended to assist with food stamps."

Alaska began participating in the food stamp program in December 1965 with a small pilot project in the Nome-Teller-Brevig Mission area.

By late fall it was considered such a success that statewide interest developed.

At that time the state Division of Public Welfare approached the U. S. Department of Agriculture about expanding the program.

Hickel said the department approved the request pending an appropriation from the legislature to administer the program.

"Now the division will receive assistance during the current fiscal year to qualify persons as being eligible to buy food stamps," the Governor said, "however, the stamps cannot be used until July 1, the beginning of the next fiscal year.

"This is a rough blow for rural Alaska."