

# The Welfare Production-Distribution Department

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The traditional Welfare Department was the forerunner of the Production-Distribution Department of Welfare Services. As in the past, efforts today in Welfare Production-Distribution are directed toward assisting priesthood officers and Relief Society leaders and the members of this worldwide church to fulfill the sacred obligation to care for the poor, the needy, the distressed, and those among us who are unable to care for themselves because of handicaps or other reasons, such as age.

Now to establish a perspective I would like to begin by reviewing the mission of the Welfare Production-Distribution Department and how it relates to total Welfare Services. Its mission is to foster the economic self-sufficiency of the Saints, thereby helping to erase poverty and need from among Latter-day Saint families. This will contribute to developing a Zion society like that of Enoch. Quoting from Moses, we read: “And the Lord called his people ZION, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them.” (Moses 7:18.)

To foster the economic self-sufficiency of the Latter-day Saint families, fathers and mothers, priesthood and Relief Society leaders are encouraged first to focus upon family preparedness, an important part of which is home production—canning, gardening, sewing, making household items—and also upon home storage, on the need for Saints to have a year’s supply of food, clothing, and, where possible, fuel. All this is accomplished as fathers, mothers, and children respond to priesthood direction and prepare for the eventualities that lie ahead. Fathers receive instruction through their priesthood quorums, mothers from their husbands and through Relief Society’s program for provident living.

The second focus, one which is within the framework of Church preparedness as set forth by Bishop Brown, is that of ward preparedness, wherein ward priesthood and Relief Society leaders help care for those ward members who do not have adequate means. The Welfare Production-Distribution Department has as its primary duties: (1) assisting in the development of ward preparedness by helping Church units acquire food and nonfood production projects, (2) managing the bishops storehouse system, and (3) giving direction to the Deseret Industries program, thereby making the wards, and thus the stakes and regions, as self-sustaining as possible so that they may, in fact, care for their own.

To highlight this area of concern, let us look at the results of a recent survey conducted by Utah State University among LDS people in Utah. The four basic food groups were surveyed: meats, fruits and vegetables, grains, and milk products.

The study revealed that only about 5 percent of our Church members had a year’s supply of meat products. Only 3 percent had a year’s supply of dried or canned fruits or vegetables. Approximately 18 percent had a year’s supply of grains. In the milk group, only three families in a hundred had a year’s supply of canned or powdered milk. On the average, about 30 percent of the Church had a two-months supply of food; the remainder had little or none.

These survey statistics indicate that most Church members are not prepared to meet month-to-month problems and future economic trials. Clearly, in this area of home production and storage, it is extremely important that priesthood and Relief Society leaders and all Latter-day Saints place greater emphasis on home storage—on obtaining and carefully storing a year’s supply of food, clothing, and, where possible, fuel. In the area of home production, we would hope that members would heed the admonition of the prophets and, where possible, grow a garden, sew their own clothing, make household items, and, in general, become as self-sufficient as possible to prepare against the days to come. In the words of President Kimball, “We are pleased that many people are planting gardens and fruit trees and are buying canning jars and lids. ... We congratulate those families who are listening and doing.

“We make a conscientious effort to look out for our own members, and we teach them to practice economy, to store a year’s supply of basic commodities.” (*Ensign*, May 1975, pp. 5–6.)

Let us shift our focus now from family preparedness to ward preparedness, which includes production projects.

Production projects are nonprofit activities that are operated by wards, stakes, or regions for the purpose of providing food and nonfood commodities to care for the poor and the needy of the kingdom. Food projects such as farms, orchards, dairies, ranches, feed-lot operations, canneries, and bakeries, and nonfood projects such as rug-making, handicrafts, furniture making, and sewing projects also provide a few of many opportunities where those receiving assistance may work as best they can, thereby maintaining their integrity in an age when there is more and more reliance upon so-called “free” government assistance. The projects also provide opportunities for families to learn to work together and to learn to sacrifice and to consecrate their energies to provide for those who are less fortunate.

The greatest number of Church welfare production projects were established in the 1940s. There followed a period of consolidation during the ‘50s and the ‘60s. In recent years, priesthood leaders have become increasingly conscious of the need for every ward to be involved in welfare production projects, and so we have seen the number of Church projects increase until today we have 671 of them.

Perhaps equally as significant as the number of projects are the acres under cultivation. We now have 143,000 acres in production. We are following the Savior’s counsel to provide food for our poor and needy brothers and sisters. This acreage is only sufficient to meet the current requirements to care for the poor and the needy in areas served by commodity storehouses. Under more difficult circumstances, at current levels of consumption, our food production projects will not be able to meet the needs of those who require assistance. Therefore, family preparedness, with home production and storage, must be the way the majority of our families take care of themselves. Ward preparedness, which means ward involvement in ward, stake, and multistake production projects, is only a back-up system for assisting those who are unable to care for themselves.

We have considerable work to do before we reach full ward preparedness, however. We have approximately 5,000 wards worldwide. Only 54 percent of these wards are involved in production projects on either a ward, stake, or regional level. Bishops and other priesthood leaders have a great challenge as they seek to involve all wards in production projects.

In summary, with regard to production projects, the Church is (1) maintaining sufficient production capacity to assist the poor and the needy under the current usage level; (2) fostering more production projects so that every ward will have access to and be involved in a project; and (3) encouraging families and each Church unit

to be as self-sufficient as possible.

In the last several years, the amount given in fast offerings increased about 15 percent a year over previous years. In response to the call of priesthood leaders, 1975 fast offering donations are up 47 percent over a similar eight-month period last year. You leaders might check the progress of your own units. It is our hope that this trend will continue and that our members everywhere will be encouraged to increase their fast offerings manyfold. Of fast offerings, President Kimball has said, "I think that when we are affluent, as many of us are, that we ought to be more generous. Instead of the amount saved by our two or more meals of fasting, perhaps much more—seven times more [should be given]—when we are in a position to do it." (Filmstrip: *Principles of Welfare Services*, "... in Mine Own Way.")

From fast offerings and the Commodity Production Budget, certain reserves of both commodities and fuel have been established to meet the needs of the poor and needy among us. We have on hand one year's supply of commodities in the distribution system for the poor and the needy. However, this supply would be quickly depleted by a major increase in demand. This fact further underscores the need for family preparedness.

On another front, there is cause for alarm. It is right to care for the poor and the needy. It is wrong to give them something if they do not work for it to the extent of their ability. To provide a family with assistance without expecting them to work to the extent of their ability for what they receive is not the Lord's way. Those who accept something for nothing lose their integrity and their self-respect, for they become parasites, living from the work and the efforts of others. The Lord has been firm in his instructions on this point. Everyone, both young and old, who receives assistance should work to the extent of his or her ability.

Yet, the statistics show that only about 25 percent of those families receiving assistance are working for what they receive. We feel that at least 75 percent of the families who receive assistance should be working in some measure for what they receive, in order to maintain their spiritual strength and earn the welfare assistance received. About 25 percent of those receiving help are not in a position to work, although perhaps even they could do something if priesthood leaders made creative and inspired efforts to find the service that could be done. The spiritual strength of God's children is destroyed when the program is not followed as the Lord has outlined it. Our people need to work for what they receive.

In summary, with respect to the distribution system, the Church is seeking to maintain reserve levels as indicated, to expand the number and accessibility of our physical bishops storehouses, and to encourage bishops and other priesthood leaders to see that those assisted work to the extent of their ability.

Regarding Deseret Industries, there are at present thirteen units in operation. The main purpose of Deseret Industries is to assist our handicapped and our elderly brothers and sisters by providing them with honorable employment. In Deseret Industries, the individual's labors are fitted to his capacity for labor.

Here, are found some of the happiest, kindest, and most serene people on the face of the earth. Because of Deseret Industries, these of our brothers and sisters are working, they are producing, and they are not accepting something for nothing.

The present plan of Deseret Industries calls for establishing more units where they are needed and in them to develop programs that will teach skills and attitudes and enable these workers to obtain productive outside employment. Deseret Industries "helps people help themselves." All members who can are encouraged to shop,

to buy, to donate, to help the Deseret Industries program accomplish its vital mission.

We have reviewed the activities associated with the mission of the Welfare Production-Distribution Department in the areas of family preparedness and ward preparedness. All of the efforts of this department are designed to help us provide food and nonfood commodity assistance to the poor and distressed, the elderly, the young, to all of our Father's children who are in need.

Brothers and Sisters, I testify that though we do all else and yet do not care for these needs of our people—"What doth it profit?" This work is the core—the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

*\* (excerpts only)*

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