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USDA Continues Guam's Lunch Program

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Guam schools this year will provide hot lunches cooked with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) food, Lt. Gov. Kurt Moylan said yesterday.

Continuation of the lunch program was uncertain last month when the local Department of Education (DOE) was notified that surplus food commodities would not be available this school year because USDA was phasing out the program.

USDA then told DOE it was limiting its assistance to compensation of seven cents for each meal served. Previously, USDA assistance included a similar compensation in addition to food commodities.

Moylan, who recently returned from Washington where he discussed the lunch program and other matters, said USDA is extending the program to Guam "until further notice."

Moylan said USDA gave the favorable decision after he explained that DOE has no other food source and therefore no USDA food commodities would have meant no lunches for the more than 25,000 island students.

Assistance from Washington officials was sought by the Governor's office after DOE and administration efforts to obtain Navy assistance in purchasing commodities from the Navy Exchange failed, Moylan said.

The extension, made only to Guam, followed interior department urging, Moylan said.

Moylan also said USDA has agreed to help Guam devise a plan which would enable the education department to continue the program without USDA food commodities. The plan will be discussed when a USDA representative arrives here later this year. It may include increasing USDA compensation to 20 cents a meal instead of the current seven cents, Moylan added.

The school lunch program here also is subsidized by GovGuam. A \$1,361,763 appropriation was made last year because USDA assistance and a 35-cents-a-meal charge to students do not cover the entire meal cost—some 97 cents, Moylan said.

He said the program is not subsidized by states on the Mainland. USDA now is more aware of Guam's high cost of living, he added.

Included in the island program are private school students, about 300 Head Start students and about 475 elderly—part of the "Servicio Para I Man'Amko."

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