

AGNEW GOT FOOD FREE FROM CHAIN

'Gift Among Friends' Was
in Effect for Years

By BEN A. FRANKLIN
Special to The New York Times

BALTIMORE, Sept. 13—Vice President Agnew and his family have for years received gifts of food from a friend here who is a wealthy, politically active supermarket executive, according to a Maryland political figure with contacts in the Vice President's staff.

The shipments were not denied by Mr. Agnew's office in Washington or by the reported donor, Joseph H. Rash, a vice president of Food Fair Stores Inc., the nation's third largest supermarket chain.

Mr. Rash, in an arm-waving, emotion-filled interview at his corporate office in suburban Towson, would say only, "Look, we're friends. Good friends! It's a love affair. He sent me gifts, and I have sent him gifts. That's all I can say."

Asked whether he felt that long-standing, regular shipments of food to the Agnews by a food distributor would be widely understood as a "gift among friends"—a phrase Mr. Rash used repeatedly—he responded by proclaiming his "12-or 13-year friendship" with the Agnew family.

"I love his kids, he loves my kids—we're buddies, really,"

Mr. Rash said with outstretched hands.

'Never Had Enough'

one significance of the disclosure of what several Maryland sources called "the Agnew food baskets" lay in suggestions by lawyers here that Mr. Agnew, himself, might invoke the food gifts should he ever be brought to trial here on allegations that he accepted bribes or kickbacks from contractors.

Mr. Agnew might seek to show that he has been "a poor man," these sources said, calling it "a classic defense that asks: Where are the supposedly ill-gotten gains."

Mr. Rash, among others here, said that Mr. Agnew "has never had enough money."

Mr. Agnew's salary as Governor of Maryland from 1967 to 1969 was \$25,000, about the same annual income he received during the prior four years as Baltimore County Executive.

As Vice President since 1969, he has been paid \$62,500 a year plus a \$10,000 annual expense account, all of it taxable. Many of his friends are millionaires.

The theme of the Agnews' self-denial is a recurring one among their friends. As one of them put it in commenting on gifts to the Agnews today:

"People who know him have followed the kind of careers that have allowed them to benefit substantially. The group has been very close for a long number of years, and they continue to see each other. I suppose a number of them could very well see the growing difference in theirs and the Agnews' material comforts.

"So I think you find the notion of a 'poor man' defense very believable, yes. He has lived a very austere life as far as luxuries are concerned. His wealthy friends want to bend

over backwards to satisfy their friend, who is making a sacrifice for public service."

Mr. Rash told a reporter: "I have never asked him for any favors. I've never made any money with him, if that's what you're thinking. I've never lost any, either. But what else can I say? I am just going to refuse to comment on anything like that, except to say that we are personal friends and we exchange gifts among friends. So this is a personal matter really, and any comment will have to come from him."

Reached in Washington, J. Marsh Thomson, Mr. Agnew's press secretary, said after speaking to the Vice President that "to remain consistent in not commenting on anything in the realm of gifts exchanged between friends" the Vice President would "not open the door, as it were, and begin commenting" now on the gifts of food.

C.B.S. News said today that the Agnews had been granted a "special celebrity discount rate" while living for four and a half years at Washington's Sheraton-Park Hotel, owned by the I.T.T. Sheraton Corporation.

The Westinghouse Corporation, one of this city's major employers, also confirmed a report today that its executives had given a television set to Mr. Agnew when he was Governor in 1967. The executives were said to have been aware of Mr. Agnew's fondness for viewing sports broadcasts, particularly those of the Baltimore Colts football team. A Westinghouse spokesman said that "a small black and white television set" had been presented to Mr. Agnew "as a memento" of his 1967 tour of a Westinghouse mass transit exhibition at the corporation's headquarters in Pittsburgh.

The extent, volume and regularity of food gifts by Mr. Rash to the Agnews could not be learned. Mr. Rash did not elaborate, either, on the gifts that he said Mr. Agnew had sent to him.