FOOD AND THE WAR

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD FOOD SITUATION

I. Food resources before the war.

In order to understand the food problem and to realize its full significance in relation to the war, it is necessary to know the many phases of the normal supply and distribution of food, as well as the changes brought about by the war and the measures taken by the different countries to secure an adequate supply for their people. Many countries produce the greater part of their food supply, especially those staples which make up the bulk of the diet — cereals, animal products, potatoes, and beans.

A. Europe.

1. Europe has always been a great agricultural region. France, Germany, and Austria-Hungary produced nearly all the food they required, and Russia produced more than enough for herself. But England and Belgium were so densely populated that even with intensive cultivation they produced only slightly over 50% of their food.

2. The important foods imported were wheat, meat, fats, and sugar.
I. Food resources before the war (continued).
   a. Part of these was supplied by intra-European commerce; e.g., Russia exported wheat and dairy products to England.
   b. But the chief sources of food imports were the United States, Canada, Argentina, and Australia. Wheat was imported from India also, and sugar from Cuba and Java.

3. Though nearly independent of food imports, some of the European countries were dependent upon the importation of certain materials essential for food production—fertilizer and cattle feed. This was especially true of Germany.

B. The United States.

1. Our fundamental available resources are larger than those of any other country. "The United States is the greatest granary, food store, and butcher shop in the world."

2. But these resources had not, before the war, nearly attained their maximum yield. Our food imports even exceeded slightly our food exports in money value.

II. The changes brought about during the war.

A. Low average yield of crops in 1915–16. This happened in nearly all parts of the world and was due chiefly to unfavorable weather conditions.

B. Steadily diminishing production of food in Europe.
II. Changes brought about during the war (continued).

1. Due to —
   a. Diversion of men from the farms to the army and the navy.
   b. Decreased importation of fertilizer, which is especially necessary on lands which have been intensively cultivated for centuries.
   c. Decreased importation of cattle feed. More feed could not be grown at home because the land available had to be used for bread cereals.
   d. Devastation of farm and cattle-grazing land. One-fifth of France has been fought over.
   e. Decrease in the available farm machinery in some countries especially because of lack of means for repairing it.

2. Resulted in —
   a. A cereal crop in 1917 for the Allies 525,000,000 bushels below normal.
   b. A decrease in the number of animals in the Allied countries by over 100,000,000 head during the first three years of the war.
   c. A greatly reduced production of fats and sugar.

C. Greatly increased difficulty of importation into European countries due to —

1. The submarine campaign, resulting in —
   a. Decreased tonnage and the consequent
II. Changes brought about during the war (continued). cutting off of distant markets. It takes twice as much tonnage to bring supplies from Argentina as from the United States and three times as much from Australia. About 1,500,000 tons of shipping could be saved if it were possible to withdraw ships now taking food from Australia, India, and South America to Europe. (See the frontispiece.)

b. The sinking of food. Earlier in the war this was perhaps 10% of the shipments of food.

2. Interruption of intra-European commerce.

a. The Western Allies cannot obtain supplies as formerly from Russia. The Balkan countries are themselves in a destitute condition and are separated from the Allies by the enemies’ lines.

b. Supplies from surrounding neutrals have been reduced by the demands of Germany.

c. The railroads are in such great demand for military purposes that their normal pre-war functions are greatly limited.

D. Therefore, the main burden is thrown upon North America, which must export much more than ever before. “Ours is the splendid burden of feeding the world.” This obligation has been met in part by increased production and in part by conservation by the people of the United States and Canada.
II. Changes brought about during the war (continued).

E. This shortage has resulted in one food crisis after another in the warring countries of Europe, with actual starvation in large parts of Roumania, Russia, Poland, and Belgium. In
II. Changes brought about during the war (continued). England, France, and Italy there is enough to live on, but the margin is so small that at times the situation threatens to be of vital military importance. The responsibilities of the United States are very heavy and are of peculiarly personal significance, as it is only by the realization and sharing of this responsibility by each one of us that it can be fully met.

III. Need for some kind of food control because of these extraordinary conditions.

A. To provide an equitable distribution between the different groups to be supplied, the civilian population, the Army and Navy, and neutral nations.

B. To limit consumption of special foods when necessary.

C. To prevent exorbitant prices due to hoarding, to speculation, to excess profits, and to the breaking down of the law of supply and demand.

D. To effect coöperation between diverse yet closely related activities, such as those of grain production and the railroads.

E. To educate the public to the need and method of food conservation.

IV. Methods of food control.

A. Control of the food industries.

1. Partially, by setting a price; by making agreements with the members of the industry as
IV. Methods of food control (*continued*).

...to the distribution of their output; by making a government license a necessity for doing business, and if the regulations are not obeyed, by taking away the license, etc.

2. Completely, by the taking over of the industry by the Government.

B. Restriction of sale of food by dealers. This is the method usually first adopted as interfering less directly with the personal freedom of consumers. Some illustrations of the methods are:

1. Prohibition of the sale of certain articles; e.g., through the closing of meat shops in France for three days each week; the prohibition of the sale of cream in England except in special cases.

2. Control of the quantity and character of the food sold. This method has been adopted for one commodity or another in all the countries at war; e.g., the composition of baker’s bread; the 50–50 rule for the purchase of cereals in this country.

3. Limitation on the amount and kind of food sold in hotels and restaurants. This is in force in all the warring countries.

C. Rations — the restriction of purchase by the consumer.

1. Adopted early in the war by the Central Powers, gradually forced upon most bellig-
IV. Methods of food control (continued).

erents and neutrals, at least in regard to a few staples. All individuals or family groups are registered and issued some form of purchasing license showing the quantity of the rationed food allowed. These are usually in the form of a card or a book of coupons and must be presented to the dealer before the rationed article can be bought. Strict control of the distribution of rations is maintained, providing a more equitable distribution between rich and poor.

2. The adoption by the United States of compulsory rationing as it is known abroad bristles with difficulties.

a. Fifty per cent of our population are either producers or live in direct contact with the producer, and their consumption cannot be restrained by any rationing system.

b. The population varies greatly in its food habits in different sections of the country. For example, the Southern worker consumes perhaps not more than two pounds of wheat per week, whereas the Northern worker sometimes consumes eight pounds. Any rationing of wheat, therefore, might increase consumption in the South and unnecessarily decrease it in the North.

c. A compulsory system would be undemocratic because it would put the burden on those who could bear it least well.
IV. Methods of food control (continued).

d. Very intricate regulations are necessary to meet different cases; e.g., the variations in the rations allowed persons doing different kinds of physical labor, provisions for meals taken away from home, etc.

e. The cost of instituting and administering a rationing system would approximate $10,000,000 to $15,000,000 annually, and would require the services of a small army to carry it out.

D. High prices as a method of limiting consumption. The national tendency in war-time toward heavy inflation of prices, unless kept down by control, results in conservation by the poor but has no effect on the rich.

E. Voluntary regulation of individual consumption under government direction. This may take the form of —

1. Omission or general cutting down of certain foods, or the substitution of other foods, wholly or at specified times; e.g., wheatless or meatless days or meals.

2. Voluntary rationing — limiting the quantity of certain staples which an individual will consume per week.

V. Food control abroad. (Details of the regulations are given under the different commodities.)

The Allies, as well as Germany and Austria-Hungary, have had to establish a Ministry of Food
V. Food control abroad (continued).

with a Food Controller in charge. They have all adopted a compulsory rationing system for one food or another and all exercise a large measure of control over food industries and dealers in food, including hotels and restaurants. The baking industry is especially subject to careful and often detailed regulation.

A. Until recently, Great Britain, more than any of the Continental countries, relied on voluntary coöperation. But in November, 1917, a scale of voluntary rations of bread, cereals, meat, fats, and sugar was introduced and widely adopted. Later the consumption of meat, fat, and sugar was limited by compulsory rations.

B. France made no attempt at government control of consumption during the first years of the war. Then sugar and bread were rationed. Both meat rations and compulsory meatless days have been enforced at different times.

C. The European neutrals have not escaped the food shortage, and most of them have rationed the most important food staples.

D. Germany's foods of almost every variety are rationed. The system is carried farther than in any other country, and in addition all the food industries are working under the strictest government control and supervision. Besides the ordinary staples—meat, fat, bread, and sugar—such foods as potatoes, eggs, cheese, and jam, and even coffee substitutes, artificial
V. Food control abroad (continued).

honey, and sauerkraut, are rationed in some cities.

E. Belgium has its food supply more entirely controlled than any other country and it is this control that is saving Belgium from starvation. The Commission for Relief in Belgium imports the necessities — mostly wheat, fats, bacon, sugar, dried beans, and peas — and divides them equitably among the millions of people. The whole business of flour milling and baking, as well as the distribution of bread and the profits of the men handling it, is under the immediate control of the commission.¹

VI. Food control in the United States — the United States Food Administration.

A. President Wilson, on May 19, 1917, outlined the food control program and asked Mr. Hoover to become the Food Administrator. Mr. Hoover accepted on condition that Congress grant powers on which a competent administration could be set up.

B. The Food Control Bill was passed by Congress on August 8 and signed by the President on August 10.² The act authorized government control of food, feeds, and fuel, from the time they leave the producer to the small retail shop.

¹ Kellogg, V. Fighting Starvation in Belgium. Doubleday, Page, 1918.
VI. Food control in the United States (continued).

C. The policy of the Food Administration.

1. To accomplish its work in accordance with our democratic traditions and therefore as much as possible by voluntary coöperation rather than by autocratic control.

2. To use compulsion only on those individuals or organizations that refuse to coöperate.

D. Its great task — so to administrate America's food resources that the American and Allied morale will not be lowered through lack of food.

E. Organization.

1. National headquarters in Washington consisting of the Food Administrator and his aids. The Food Administrator calls to his assistance experts to deal with various problems as they arise.

2. Federal Food Administration in the States.

This is designed to decentralize the work of the Food Administration and to coördinate the state and federal activities. The organizations vary according to local needs, but, in general, each Federal Food Administrator has among other members of his staff a Home Economics Director, and has appointed County Food Administrators who also have their staffs.

3. Coöperation with established agencies such as the government departments, state agencies,
VI. Food control in the United States (continued).

 educational institutions, commercial houses, religious and fraternal organizations, etc.

F. The work of the Food Administration—a few of its accomplishments. (Details are given in later chapters.)

1. The teaching of the people.

In order to secure intelligent coöperation in its work a large amount of education was necessary to acquaint the people with the details of the situation, and to keep them informed of the constantly changing conditions. Many of the results which the Food Administration has accomplished have been made possible because of the knowledge spread broadcast throughout the country by the newspapers and magazines, by Food Administration speakers, and by the effective coöperation of the women of the country and the managements of hotels and dining-cars.

2. The maintenance of an even distribution of food and the keeping down of prices.

Food riots due either to lack of food or high prices are a mark of failure of a food administration. The Food Administration has not only accomplished an even distribution of food through such agencies as the Grain Corporation, but it has prevented the rise in price of indispensable commodities such as bread and sugar, and it has done this in the face of an unprecedented demand.
VI. Food control in the United States (continued).

3. The shipping of food abroad.

During our first year as a belligerent (April 1, 1917, to April 1, 1918) we exported fifteen billion pounds of food—an increase of more than 200% over the pre-war average. The food shipped was enough to ration completely over 21,000,000 men, and to supply a considerable surplus of protein-rich foods and fats besides. Much of this surplus was the result of the saving of the American people. This was done in spite of the fact that the estimated total production of the country for the fiscal year, in terms of nutritional units was from 7% to 10% below the average of the previous years. In a letter written on July 11, 1918, to President Wilson, Mr. Hoover says that he is “sure that all the millions of our people, agricultural as well as urban, who have contributed to these results should feel a very definite satisfaction that in a year of universal food shortages in the northern hemisphere all of those people joined together against Germany have come through into sight of the coming harvest not only with health and strength fully maintained, but with only temporary periods of hardship. The European allies have been compelled to sacrifice more than our own people but we have not failed to load every steamer since the delays of the storm months last winter. Our contributions to this end could not have been
VI. Food control in the United States (continued).
accomplished without effort and sacrifice and it is a matter for further satisfaction that it has been accomplished voluntarily and individually. It is difficult to distinguish between various sections of our people — the homes, public eating places, food trades, urban or agricultural populations — in assessing credit for these results but no one will deny the dominant part of the American women."

REFERENCES

United States Food Administration, Bulletins 1 to 16.