

WORLD FOOD AND CONSERVATION

Address

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Before the
Friends of The Land Annual Meeting
Chamber of Commerce, Omaha, Nebraska
Thursday noon, October 17, 1946

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Less than seven years have passed since the Friends of the Land was organized as a non-partisan, non-profit society dedicated to the conservation of land, water and man. Looking back, it seems like a century, so much has happened. Organized human society has had another warning -- which may be its last -- that man's social and economic and political development is lagging thousands of years behind his scientific and technological progress. We have taken a long stride nearer to an answer to the question whether, after all, man is going to be able to master the machines he has built before they destroy him-- and only those of purest faith are confident of an affirmative answer to that question.

These intervening years have seen miracles of food production wrought by American agriculture, with the help of the benevolent Providence which dispenses weather. With only 15 percent of the nation's labor force in their ranks, the farmers of the United States brought food production 30 percent above the pre-war level and held it there. During the war the food and fiber sustained our armed forces and those of our Allies, and helped keep civilian life going in friendly lands abroad.

Then after five years of war had exhausted food stores abroad, and general drought had teamed up with war's exhaustion to cut world food production by one-eighth in 1945, it was the food production of the United States, particularly our wheat, that played a major part in averting the mass starvation that threatened many millions of the earth's population.

In treating this subject today, I want first to deal briefly with the 1946 famine crisis, and then I want to take a look at some longer range questions which the current battle with starvation has raised.

The total of all food shipped from the United States in the year that ended June 30 amounted to 16 and a half million long tons. Never in the history of the world has there been any movement of food to compare with it. When the Famine Emergency Committee first met last March, the task of making up for a serious lag, and attaining the goal of 6,000,000 long tons of wheat set for relief exports during the first six months of 1946 looked almost impossible to perform. That was 225,000,000 bushels of wheat. The goal was reached and passed by the middle of July. From July, 1945 to July, 1946, this country exported 417,000,000 bushels of wheat, along with huge quantities of fats and oils, meats, dairy products, and other foods. It was truly a colossal accomplishment, due to the splendid cooperation of consumers, farmers, the trades, the press and radio, with the agencies of government.

Once more fortune has smiled on our farms and fields. Another corn crop and wheat crop have set new records. The world needs what we can spare from this abundance. Its famine crisis has not ended. Even with favorable weather abroad, it will not end until the 1947 crops are ready to eat. Supplies in the four principal grain exporting countries this season are actually less than they were last year; a 250 million bushel increase in production was offset by a 450 million bushel decline in the supply carried over.

We are gaining a breathing spell as the crops are harvested in Europe and Asia this summer and fall. People who have been face-to-face with starvation are eating more. But reserve stocks are dangerously low, and North America once more will be called on to make heavy shipments. The shadow of hunger is likely to spread over the world again as the winter wears away. Europe and Asia will still be dependent on heavy food shipments from North America to keep going. If the United States exports the equivalent of 400,000,000 bushels of all cereals from the 1946 crop, and if we build back our reserves so that the carryover next July is not dangerously low as it was this year, there will be no wheat for us to waste. There will not be enough to go around if we eat it and feed it and use it

up at the rate we did in 1943 and 1944 and 1945. So while the need to save and share the wheat is not as apparent now as it was last winter and spring, we cannot with safety ignore it.

When we turn to its long-range aspects, the world food problem presents many questions, as varied almost as human life itself. Within the limits of this talk, it is only possible to touch them with a very broad brush. People are asking whether China and India, with their combined population of 890 millions straining at the limits of food resources, must always live perilously close to the border line of famine; whether new sources of food supply can be developed, particularly in Latin America; and finally, how long will the major food relief burden rest on the United States, and in what direction are longer-term forces moving us in terms of food production and use.

These questions leave untouched one of perhaps greater immediate importance - how soon will Europe regain pre-war status in food production? It did not take long after World War I, but this war left a far greater legacy of weakness, of uprooted peoples, destruction of human and animal life, machines, transportation, factories and seed stocks.

The process of recovery will be slower, but restoration of farm production will have A-1 priority. Shipments of food from the United States to Europe will diminish as rapidly as Europe can replace them with food grown at home or purchased by barter elsewhere. My guess is that will happen in less time than now seems possible.

In India and China, with their hundreds of millions pressing always up to and beyond the means of subsistence, a fall in food production from any cause means famine and death. We in this country are inescapably involved with them. In lands where hunger, pestilence and war remain the major controls of population growth, recurrent disasters will shock the conscience of the world. The United States and other nations with relative abundance can help moderate the effects of these catastrophes, but large imports of food, even if they could be maintained indefinitely, would work no permanent cure. Unless some basic

changes are made, population would merely move up to absorb the new supplies.

The problem is not hopeless. There is an answer, although it is not a simple one. A large expansion of food production is possible in India and China as a result of new techniques, better seeds and livestock, improved implements, better transportation and more capital. But to raise the level of living and to have a margin of safety from famine demand a far-reaching, integrated program of modernization in which eventually the individual human being will assume dignity and importance. Human fertility will yield place to better living only when people develop new interests, wants, and aspirations as a result of contact with foreign cultures.

Notwithstanding more remote prospects, our immediate interests in the United States lie in the direction of modernization of backward peoples. Such a program to succeed must modify the colonial arrangement where regions are developed and held merely as sources of raw materials. It calls for intelligent cooperation between the dominant powers and leaders of the areas concerned.

Broad international machinery must be developed under which this development can be guided and hastened. The process admittedly will be difficult. We can contribute more to its solution by exporting our farming know-how, our machines and tools, than by continuing to supply large quantities of relief food after this emergency has passed. The challenge to international leadership involved in helping India and China increase their production and hold the gain in higher living standards, is no greater than the one nations must meet anyway if they are going to survive in this atomic age.

The areas of the world where fertile and productive soil exists are known with reasonable accuracy. Many of the countries having the highest undeveloped potential for food production also have great need for more food themselves. It is so with many of the Latin American countries. The trouble there is not shortage of natural resources but poor farming methods, primitive transportation and one-crop production for export.

The solution is neither simple nor easy, but the job hasn't really been tackled yet. There is need for the know-how in producing, storing, transporting, and processing food. This we are able to supply and it is in our long-run interest to do it. Even though their products are much like our own, 11 million Canadians, because they produce more and have more money to spend, buy from us only slightly less than do 133 million Latin Americans.

The world will continue to fall far short of reaching the limit of its ability to produce food as long as the surface is scarcely scratched in Latin America and in other undeveloped areas of the earth. I repeat, the know-how exists, the tools and capital are or can be made available. The task cannot be performed without intelligently directed, integrated international cooperation.

Now let's take a look at the situation here at home. During the last four years of war the food production of the United States climbed and climbed until it reached a high of about 70 percent above pre-war levels. The average this year has been large enough and the weather so far has been good enough, to yield another near-record food crop. There will be demand, at home and abroad, for more food than we can possibly produce in 1946.

The market at home will be strong as long as consumer purchasing power is high. Abroad it will last in volume only as long as foreign production is low. When Europe and Asia can grow their food, or can get it from newer countries in exchange for their exports, they will no longer depend on large shipments from the United States.

The world needed the largest crop we could grow in 1946. Next year the needs will still be great, but the American farmer should be able to pay more attention to soil protection and restoration than was possible during the war. After 1947, the large volume export demand may persist for a while, but I doubt if it will be long. Foreign countries will hunt their food where they can pay for it with their exports, preferring not to spend all their dollar exchange for our wheat and lard if they can use it to buy some of our machines.

I do not believe that in the long run world hunger will force the consumers in this country to cut down their consumption of dairy products, meat, and poultry in favor of a diet more heavily loaded with cereals. On the contrary, if industrial production and employment remain high, I would expect an accelerated trend toward the consumption of more animal products, more protective foods, and a more diversified diet. It is true that an acre of wheat will keep 10 to 13 times as many people alive as an acre of feed turned into meat, but if our people can command the income, they are going to eat meat and milk, fresh fruits and vegetables, and the American farmers will be able to produce plenty of these things.

For we haven't yet begun to use our soil resources to their best advantage in the United States. We know how to do a much better job than we are doing, but too many of us are like the old farmer who answered an invitation to attend a soil conservation meeting by saying: "There's no use in my going there to hear that young men talk about farming better, I don't farm as good as I know how to now."

Good grass should be growing on hundreds of thousands of hills and slopes which are now row-cropped but are too steep for safe farming. The air is full of nitrogen which the soil needs, and we have the plants that will put it there. Limestone deposits are nearly everywhere, and most of our farm lands badly need lime. We have enormous deposits of phosphate rock in the Northwest that have never been touched, and yet much of our pasture and crop land is starving for phosphorus.

We have enough idle capital and the potential labor in this country to build a revolution in farming methods, and bring new vitality and vigor to our soil and to the people who live on it.

Across the middle and southern belts, all-year-round pasture systems capable of feeding vastly increased numbers of livestock can be maintained.

New capital invested in complete programs of soil and water management pays rich returns in increased production and lower unit costs. Recently the Soil Conservation Service conducted a survey of 9,348 farms scattered throughout the United States on which complete farm programs based on proper use of land and water had been adopted. These farms showed an increase of 35.7% in the average annual production of all major crops, and an increase of 26.6% in the number of dairy cows and 38.2% in the number of beef cattle carried on these farms.

In an experiment in Western Kentucky, carried out on similar 10-acre pasture lots since 1929, pastures treated with lime and phosphate have produced over three times the amount of beef gain per acre and at less than one-third the cost per pound, than untreated pasture with identical seeding.

An Arkansas experiment has demonstrated a gain in beef production per acre of 103 pounds per season as a result of mowing pastures alone. These examples could be multiplied indefinitely.

In our short life as a nation we haven't managed our soil well. We have destroyed a hundred million or more acres of once fertile land, and are going ahead blindly wasting more of it. We have used up soil minerals without replacing them, and even though the depleted fields grow crops, the animals and human beings that feed on them are deficient in health.

There is no sense in getting alarmed over prospective inability of American farms to produce in abundance all the food this nation will require, when even now we have not begun to use our soil resources to our best national advantage.

We know how to stop soil erosion; we have the lime, the phosphorus, the nitrogen, and we have, or can get, the other minerals we need for complete healthy soils. Poor land means poor people, and our land does not need to be poor. Healthy soil means healthy people, and we can have healthy soil if we are willing to work for it and to pay for it.

The world will not move in the direction of fuller use of its food resources except as it progresses in world cooperation and organization. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has the opportunity and the obligation to move forward in that field. Organized cooperation will be necessary at home, too, in order to meet the tremendous problems of adjustment that lie ahead. The peace time world may not require billion bushel wheat crops from us but it will require many other forms of food that can be absorbed in higher standards of living.

In conclusion: I have been surprised to realize, as I have been talking to you, how frequently that word "cooperate" has cropped up. That is because it is the keynote of satisfactory human behavior. The inhabitants of this planet are going to have to practice international cooperation, not just intermittently and by jerks, but eternally and with ceaseless vigilance, if civilized and organized institutions of mankind are to be saved from destruction. It is so with food - access to which is so essential to the peace of the world. We of the United States have much to share and contribute, but it isn't a one-nation job or responsibility - it is a number one subject for world cooperation, and I am privileged to be able to discuss it with the Friends of the Land, and with their friends here in Omaha today in the very heart of agricultural America.

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