

FOOD CRISIS

Address  
by  
Chester C. Davis  
President, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis  
and  
Chairman, President's Famine Emergency Committee

Before the  
Women Broadcasters, Institute for Education by Radio  
Deshler-Wallick Hotel, Columbus, Ohio  
Saturday evening, May 4, 1946

## FOOD CRISIS

I appreciate this opportunity to talk with you tonight. You women broadcasters who are in daily contact with millions of homes occupy a key place in the mobilization of individual effort and devotion to help avert starvation. You played a valiant part in the management of food which was so outstanding a part of America's wartime program. Now you are continuing in this crucial battle of the peace -- the fight against hunger.

Around the globe today more people are hungry, more are threatened with death, more are unable to work because of lack of food than ever before in the memory of living men.

The people in country after country have now used up the stocks of food they produced in 1945. Only imports from the rest of the world will carry them through until their own 1946 harvests come in.

The United States has the largest single stock of exportable wheat and fats -- the basic foods for famine relief -- in the world today. Therefore, to this country falls a large part of the duty of feeding the afflicted. This country of course cannot carry the whole load. All countries with exportable supplies must contribute. Even if all of them do their utmost, the supplies of cereals and fats will not be large enough to avert famine completely. There still will be suffering. There still will be death. There still will be lowered working efficiency. In the circumstances it is up to Americans -- and all other peoples -- to set aside every bushel of grain, every pound of fat that can be obtained, so that it may be used to keep people alive. We can't eat and waste all our wheat; we can't eat and waste all our butter and lard and oleo; and at the same time leave enough to keep our neighbors alive. But reducing our own use of grain and fats, and by shipping the food we are committed to ship, we can save lives and build for

peace and recovery in the world. If we fail, we insure unrest and retard progress.

As the stupendous size of the famine emergency became plain early in 1946, President Truman and his lieutenants in the Governmental agencies which deal with food matters moved to make sure that the commitments of the United States are met in this period of crisis. This country has undertaken to ship 6 million tons of wheat in the first six months of the year. This is half of the world's exports for the period. It is far more than we normally ship in a whole export year. Because of the heavy demand for wheat in this country, and the relatively short supply, it will take self-denial by consumers, restriction of livestock feeding, and cutting down the year-end carryover to an unusually low amount to reach this goal.

The Government has taken a number of steps aimed to get wheat on the ships for export. The President on March 1 appointed the Famine Emergency Committee to help the Governmental agencies mobilize the individual effort and self-denial of consumers who will have to change their eating habits and forego some of their accustomed amounts of cereals and fats in order to get the export job done. The Famine Emergency Committee is not asking for severe sacrifice at the American family's table. We have in this country enough and to spare to keep up health and strength. All that is required is that we make greater use of the plentiful foods and go easier on wheat and fats.

By early April it had become plain that self-denial alone would not put enough wheat and fats on the ships in time to ward off famine in the weeks immediately ahead. Hence the Government moved to get the grain off the farms into Government hands by a special certificate and bonus plan for the early marketing of wheat and of corn. Farmers are responding well. I was in Washington earlier this week and talked with Secretary of

Agriculture Anderson and his aides who had just returned from a visit to the grain regions where they talked at first hand with the people who will have to do this job -- the farmers and the farmer committeemen. Secretary Anderson, Mr. Shields of the Production and Marketing Administration, and others who were on the tour were greatly heartened by their experience. They returned hopeful that farmers will deliver from 100 to 110 million bushels of wheat in time to get it on the ships before July 1. They are hopeful, too, that the corn will come in quickly too.

If 110 million bushels of wheat do come in and do go on the ships, we will have met our shipping goals. This amount, combined with what has been shipped in the first four months of the year will put us over the top in this drive against famine.

Now this hope of the Government officers in charge of getting the grain is heartening. But it may cause some people to think there is no longer need for self-denial on the part of consumers. This is not so. The facts of the matter are that if we do send 110 million more bushels of wheat abroad on its mission of mercy, we shall have to deny ourselves rigorously here at home. The stocks here are not big enough to allow us to eat wheat as we have been eating it, to feed wheat as we have been feeding it, and still send the requisite amounts overseas. In the next two months we shall have the shortest supplies of flour and bread and other wheat products that we have seen in many years. In the interest of equitable distribution among all our people, those who can go easy on wheat products must do so. Heavy workers, low income families, growing children ought to have the first call on the limited supply. In good conscience all of us whose incomes permit our making use of other foods in place of wheat products, and whose physical exertion in our daily work is light enough that we do not need to eat heavily of cereals for energy from now on will forego our accustomed amounts.

In short, the larger the shipments abroad the greater the need for self-denial at home. Please explain this thoroughly and often to the homemakers who comprise your audiences.

One other matter which has puzzled some people should also be explained. This is the relationship between meeting our export goals and consumer rationing by tickets or coupons. Some seem to assume that simply by installing ticket rationing of bread we could assure meeting the goals. Nothing could be farther off the mark. Consumer rationing is the end product of the process by which you cut down domestic supplies in order to increase exports. It is not the starting point. Think through what we did with food during the war and you will understand it.

Take meat. When our army began to grow to its wartime stature, and our allies called for meat, it became plain that there wasn't enough meat being produced (although output was stepped up enormously) to supply civilians with what they could buy and also to feed our troops and our allies. We had to feed our troops and our allies. We did it. How? Well, we set aside at the packing plants the meat required for overseas shipment and for use in the military camps here in the United States. This left for civilians here at home far less than they would buy with their incomes at that time at the prices set by the control measures. In the absence of rationing those with the most money or the most time to shop would get more than their fair share. Therefore, in order to divide the meat fairly among the people we installed rationing. But rationing did not produce the meat for military use and export. That was done by set-asides.

Please explain then to your listeners that the wheat problem in these famine months is being handled so as to make sure that we get the wheat and flour on ships headed to the hungry lands. The Government is

buying wheat for export. The Government has limited the deliveries of flour from the mills into domestic trade. The Government has limited inventories of wheat and flour. All these measures are intended to procure the wheat and flour to ship abroad. As and if they work, the domestic supply is reduced. This reduction in supply will continue only for a matter of weeks under the present orders. If that is the limit of the operation there is not time to install ticket rationing to consumers so we will have to share voluntarily.

There is every evidence that the people of America are resolutely in this fight against famine. The Famine Emergency Campaign has received a flood of letters outlining plans and offering suggestions to increase conservation of food. Many of these letters can be traced to the stimulation of radio broadcasts.

There are still some who are not fully aware of the extent of suffering and hunger abroad. There are still some who do not see that those in need are our neighbors, even though they live on the other side of the world; that we can neither stand silently by, nor be content to give less than enough to save our neighbors from starvation; that the first step toward building a peaceful world is to bring food to these hungry people.

There are others in your audiences who realize the need and who have a deep sympathy for the distressed people. But these listeners need daily reminders. Others need help in the way of suggestions for conserving food and ideas for using plentiful foods in the place of grains and fats and oils. Your practical, down-to-earth tips enable these homemakers to do a better job of conservation, while keeping their families well fed.

Though the food shortage will be the most critical within the next few weeks, it will continue in some degree through the following months.

In addition to conserving food, we must also produce it on the largest possible scale. To this end, the farmers of the United States have raised their production goals to an unprecedented peacetime level and Victory garden leaders have again mobilized their forces with 20 million gardens as the 1946 goal.

And once again, it is important that the surplus from these gardens be saved. Your help is needed to encourage canning, freezing and storing this food, and to supply information as to the best methods of conservation to be used.

So it is, that the woman broadcaster is in a strategic position to point up--dramatically--the need for a nationwide, day-by-day production and conservation program to continue as long as famine threatens the world. You are in a position to interpret to the women of this nation the actions the Government is taking to speed up shipments of food abroad. You know how to make suggestions clearly and persuasively that will mean food produced and food saved in every home where you are a radio visitor.

You are an important link in the chain that will carry food to desperately hungry people the world over. May your own profound convictions on the supreme importance of this task enable you to perform it brilliantly and magnificently. We are counting on you.