

THEODORE S. JOHNSON TELLS WHY STAMPS CANCELLED

Theodore S. Johnson, district director of the Office of Price Administration, in a special exclusive release to The Herald today explains why the unused ration stamps were cancelled. Said Mr. Johnson:

"No one regrets the cancellation without notice more than OPA. But the simple fact is that the supplies of canned food and sugar for 1945 were too low on December 1 to permit spending the large backlog of stamps which would have occurred when the new point values were announced.

"The only alternative would have been to take a large slice of the rationed foods away from the many people who do not have unspent stamps and who are on a current basis.

"It is important that American consumers understand the reasons for our action in cancelling certain ration currency. Those who do—and most are beginning to—are in wholehearted support of it.

"I want to say to every housewife," Johnson continued, "that we genuinely wanted to give them notice of stamp cancellation. We had expected to do so. We had to act without notice for very real and compelling reasons. The public is entitled to know what these reasons were."

"In a survey made several weeks ago, we found that the average ration book holder had 2½ months supply of blue stamps good for buying canned foods, about the same quantity of red stamps good for buying rationed meats, and a two-months supply of sugar.

Stamps and Home-Canning Coupons

"The supplies of canned foods and of sugar for 1945 were too low by December 1 to permit the use of this large backlog or excess ration currency without depleting stocks to the point of critical shortages. Rationing was necessary to spread stocks of canned goods evenly over the several months remaining before the new packs of fruit and vegetables are available next summer. But even with rationing, the use of outstanding surplus ration currency would have cleaned out the canned food stocks from many a store several months before new packs would reach grocers' shelves next fall. Thus the families who must depend on canned goods for an important part of their food supply would have suffered a real hardship.

"This could have been prevented only by placing point values on canned fruits and vegetables high enough to "soak up" excess points in consumers hands. But to do this would mean point values so high that families needing each month's stamps as they are issued would not have been able to buy nearly as much as they needed."

"In its simplest terms, our problem as we faced the new year was that, with a tight 12-month supply of certain foods in prospect, we had a 14½ month supply of ration currency to absorb unless we cancelled the backlog of unspent stamps. Our conclusion was that, in the interest of the general good, we had to cancel.

"Our survey showed that the surplus stamps were held mainly by four kinds of families.

"One was the family producing a good deal of its own food from a garden, such as a suburban family or rural family with a victory garden or the farm family. Families of this kind which didn't need all of their ration stamps in 1944 probably will go right along adding in an important way to the nation's food supply by producing a large share of their own food. They likely will wind up the next year with a lot of unused ration stamps. None of these people will think it a hardship to begin the new year on an even basis with all other families.

"Another kind of family had some accumulated ration stamps on hand for the simple reason that they felt the thing to do was to draw on the nation's limited wartime food supply to as little extent

as possible. These people will continue to act in this fashion. They will not feel unhappy at the thought that in buying rationed foods in 1945 they will have used only the stamps to be made good in 1945, and are sharing equally with all others in these supplies.

"A third large group of families holding accumulated stamps was made up of people, war workers for example, whose wartime way of living demands that they eat a good many meals in restaurants. This same way of living is still open to them, and this group, like the others, will not deem it a hardship to have to depend only on 1945 ration currency to buy 1945 foods.

"Still another group was made up of people who had been saving stamps to buy a roast, or a ham, or a can of pineapple for use on some special occasion. For the moment, these people will feel a keen disappointment. We sympathize with them. But had we not wiped out the old currency, and had a buying spree developed this very same housewife probably would not have been able, after all, to get the roast or the ham or the can of fruit. While our action seemingly deprived her of the special item she wanted at the moment, actually it preserved for her the opportunity to meet her day-to-day needs for rationed foods in an orderly way through the months ahead.

"These, then, are the types of families who feel the momentary disappointment of cancelled stamp. In each case, however, we believe as Americans they would have us make no other decision.

"We have looked at the four types of families who appeared to lose by this cancellation. We ought not to overlook the many who would have been placed under severe hardship had we not canceled these unused stamps. If we had raised point values or had

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cut the value of stamps, families wholly dependent on current stamps simply would not have had the food they needed.

"Again, had we failed to cancel, a rush of heavy buying was a distinct probability, since the published facts on food supplies with the return of many foods to rationing would have stimulated buying by those holding excess stamps. This would make more difficult the job of distributing the scarce supplies available. It would deprive many small families and city families of foods they will need during the winter and spring.

"Faced with the alternative of advanced buying by some, with resulting hardships for others, we

believed that the general good of the public would be served best by cancelling stamps validated before December, leaving in consumers' hands only the most recent

stamps. "With sugar, consumers in some parts of the country were having difficulty in finding it available in the stores. Immediately ahead is a much tighter sugar supply situation than that of the last year. Old sugar stamps and 1944 home-canning coupons in consumers' hands represented between 500 and 600 million pounds. We reasoned that when the story on 1945 sugar supply was published, advance buying of sugar beyond current needs would be stimulated, depleting stocks already low. The result would have been more stores out of sugar and unable to meet consumers immediate needs as the year advanced.

"This, too, was a difficult step for OPA to take. We regret being compelled to take it. But, the fact is the public welfare demanded it.

"In the meat program our problem is somewhat the same. We are convinced that the greatest good can only result from getting surplus ration currency out of circulation, broadening rationing control, and thus giving each consumer an equal opportunity to share.

"We feel that all who stop to consider the reasons behind what seems to be an unpleasant action will agree that as Americans they are glad to face cheerfully whatever personal sacrifices are involved," Johnson said.

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