

Who Gets The Money?

H. E. C. BRYANT, in Country Gentleman.

War conditions and the nationwide demand for the conservation of every bit of food seem to have had little or no effect, early in the season, on the green-goods markets. In mid-June, when the people of the city of Washington were paying from ten to thirty-five cents a box for strawberries, from a dollar and a half to five dollars a bushel for peas, and a dollar a peck for Irish potatoes, producers in some localities within fifty miles of the National Capital refused to harvest their crops through fear that they would lose money disposing of them.

Herbert C. Hoover, National Food Administrator, when told of this condition of the markets, explained how his office hopes to help both producer and consumer by the elimination of speculation and waste in distribution, so that prices may be stabilized and profits regulated.

An inquiry into conditions in the District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia, and other states near Washington, made at the time the Administration's food bill was being fought over in congress, revealed that while thousands of people in the large cities were hungry for fresh vegetables and fruits, the farmers of the Southern and Middle-Atlantic States were letting crops go to waste in their fields because of discouraging marketing conditions.

Food's Effect on Law.

There are great possibilities in the food supply of the District of Columbia. A well-fed congressman will pass better laws than one poorly provided for and suffering from indigestion or disordered stomach.

Food prices in Washington go from the highest to the lowest in a single day; there is no regularity about values. A crate of tomatoes that sells for three dollars at five o'clock in the morning may not bring more than twenty-five cents at nine. The local demand for perishable foodstuffs is for immediate use on the consumers' tables.

Experts of the Department of Agriculture and the district of Columbia government claim that the absence of canning plants to take care of surplus food crops on rush market days influences prices in Washington, and thereby makes Baltimore, Philadelphia and other large cities better markets.

Recently a select committee composed of trained business men and investigators, was appointed by the commissioners of the District of Columbia to look into the food conditions in Washington and the surrounding country. C. F. Nesbit, Superintendent of Insurance for the District, was a member of the committee and, becoming thoroughly interested in the subject of getting food crops from the producer to the consumer with an increased profit to the farmer and a reduced cost to the eater, he continued his inquiries after a report had been made to the commissioners.

Mr. Nesbit was brought up on a farm in the Middle West, and is versed in the possibilities of the soil, while his later life has acquainted him with city demands.

In his efforts to get at the reasons for the high cost of living Mr. Nesbit went back to the farm and began to study conditions there. He followed food crops from the field to the table, making note of the round-about way they traveled, and the number of rake-offs between the farmer and the ultimate consumer. Here are some of the things he discovered:

1. That the farm warehouse has practically disappeared.
 2. That the farmer lacks confidence in the man who goes between him and the consumer of his product.
 3. That conditions have so changed that it is impossible for the farmer to market his produce at a profit unless he makes a house-to-house canvass.
 4. That there is a demand for wholesale houses under government supervision to see that the farmer gets a square deal in order to encourage production.
 5. That one of the principal causes for the high cost of living to the city resident is the expensive system of delivery which is maintained by the consumer.
 6. That something must be done to bring the producer and the consumer together in a fair and honest trading relationship.
- "A most serious problem has arisen in recent years," said Mr. Nesbit, "because of the elimination of the farm warehouse. Let us see just what that means."

The Speculator Rules.

"When I was a boy every farmer of consequence had his smokehouse for meats, his storage bins for wheat, oats and rye, his cribs for corn, and his cellars for dried fruits and vegetables. On most farms, especially in the South before the Civil War, the farmer killed and stored enough hog meat for a year, killed his potatoes, pitted his cabbages and dried his fruits. He had food supplies in great abundance.

"In those days it was the rule to lay by for the winter and spring months great quantities of foodstuffs, such as honey, dried and canned apples, peaches, cherries and peppers, pickled cucumbers, and other products of the farm. In some instances dried beef, bacon and corned beef were stored away. Ice was cut in the winter, and kept throughout the year. Every good housewife had her jellies, preserves and jams.

"The rapid transportation system brought in by steam railroads has carried the products of the farm to the great centers. But there they are under the control of neither producer nor consumer, but of speculators.

"In some communities about Washington I found great stores of canned things, but few smokehouses, granaries and potato hills. Our people look to Chicago, or other packing or storing centers, for their out-of-season supplies.

"The quantities of canned goods in private homes is a tribute to the campaign made by the Department of Agriculture to get the women and children to conserve food by canning

it. The South has been taught to save hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of stuff annually by the Department of Agriculture.

"The farmer's attitude toward the city market varies according to the locality. If the crop is produced near enough to market to be sold from wagon or automobile the farmer may fare very well; but if he has to depend upon somebody else—a middleman—to sell it for him on commission the result is often unsatisfactory and discouraging.

"Washington buys about twenty-five per cent of her farm food supplies from people who bring their products to town by private conveyance. Ten per cent of them come from a radius of fifty miles. Seventy-five per cent of our food comes from various sections of the country.

"In the investigation I found that the man at a distance from our market distrusted the stranger upon whom he had to depend for the disposal of his crops. He had been bitten by the food speculator or unscrupulous commission man in a number of cities. I met one man who had such a disastrous experience with a crop of potatoes raised on a 200-acre farm that he had sold his place and had quit farming in disgust. He charged that his potatoes cost him more than they came to, although the price in the cities was high and his product was fine.

"I came upon many like instances covering peas, tomatoes, eggs, chickens, and a great number of other foodstuffs. In fact, that is the common complaint among the farmers who have tried to ship their products to market and trust to a middleman to sell them for them.

"The sharper operates on every market, and his activities have done much to put farmers out of the food business.

"We got evidence showing that innocent farmers who shipped their food crops to Washington paid double commissions and other extras to have their stuff sold. It was discovered that some commission merchants sold to other commission merchants, each getting a commission, and the farmer's product kept passing along until it had gone through six hands between the field and the table.

"The usual course is: From farmer to commission merchant; from commission merchant to wholesaler; from wholesaler to retailer or huckster. We found that it was the rarest thing for a consumer to get the farm product at a cost less than fifty per cent in advance of what the farmer received for it. More often the advance over the farm price was sixty-five per cent."

A Rough Road to Market.

"In other words, Farmer Smith receives twenty dollars for a lot of produce, and the same stuff, divided into small lots, costs consumer at least thirty dollars and often thirty-three dollars. In some instances the price is doubled. The farmer gets his less freight and drayage, and the commission men and the merchants get the difference between the sum received by the farmer and the sum paid by the consumers.

"We found that a bad feeling had grown up between the producer and the consumer. That should not be the case, for both are robbed by the system. They should pool their interests, and profit thereby."

Mr. Nesbit thinks that the conditions that prevail in and around Washington are general throughout the nation, influenced somewhat in individual cases by local peculiarities.

"The first important step to remedy the high cost of living in this country," said he, "is to get a careful survey and a report on the facts. I have found that the task of securing reliable information, even in a limited territory, is so great that unless the effort is nation-wide and supported by the Federal Government it cannot be carried out satisfactorily.

"I doubt if Washington or any other American city could do more than guess or approximately estimate the amount of food normally on hand at a certain time of the year, or the amount of food required for the community. In making an inquiry into conditions influencing the cost of living in the District of Columbia we found the first drawback was a lack of facts for a working basis.

"The food situation in the District of Columbia today is merely a part of the food problem of the world. In our investigation we were unable to go into the question of 'corners,' but the fact that food is always to be had, if a sufficient price is offered, suggests the existence of them.

"The journey of the crude food crop from the farm to the table of the consumer is a rough one. There are few roses on the way for the producer, especially if he has to market by train and through middlemen. Very little of the food marketed in Washington by the producer goes direct to the consumer.

"The Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina or Delaware potatoes, peas and tomatoes that come to the Washington consumer pass through three, four or five different hands, and before the man who grew them is through he may find himself in debt for the freight without having anything to show for his labor in the fields and the shipping of his produce.

"The journey of the potato from the plant on the farm to the table in the home of the city consumer would make a readable romance. First, the farmer digs it, crates it and hauls it to the train at considerable expense in money and time. Second, the railroad takes it to the depot in the city, the farmer paying the freight. Third, the commission merchant to whom it is consigned takes it to his office, charging the farmer with the drayage. Fourth, a purchaser is found, and the potato is carted to his place of business at the expense of the farmer.

"That closes the deal so far as the farmer is concerned, but when the settlement is made his share is very small compared with the profits between the farm and the table."

A typical case of discouraged producer is that of F. L. Burdick, of

Hampton, Virginia, who, in a letter to a food expert, refers to the demand on the farmer to increase his production, and tells of his experience.

"We have raised and shipped 133 hampers—a hamper contains five pecks—of green peas this season," Mr. Burdick wrote.

Our seed cost	\$31.00
Hampers cost	13.33
Picking cost	27.60
Total	\$71.93

"Please note that no labor of planting or cultivation and no interest on land investment is included in the above.

Received on net account sales, \$40.47

"We are curious to know how any farmer can continue farming on that basis. This instance, while it is extreme, is not a lone case, nor is it unwarranted as an item of consideration of the farmer's experience with perishable crops.

"While we are poultrymen primarily we are in the midst of a trucking section and every farmer has the same tale to tell—he is at the mercy of the commission man. The produce cited above brought a gross average of about sixty-five cents a hamper, or thirteen cents a peck; in all probability it sold to the consumer at not less than forty cents a peck.

"In shipping eggs we find it almost impossible to reach a market with whole goods. In May we were compelled to discontinue shipments to New York because over fifty per cent of our shipments were either lost or so damaged in transit by express that the consignee refused them, and since March we have not been able to get a claim settled or a tracer reported on a single shipment. At the same time we could not ship by freight because an embargo by both rail and boat existed north of Washington on perishable freight.

"Yet the consumer was paying from ninety to one hundred per cent more than normal prices for his eggs because of the scarcity of receipts, and less than normal storage was in progress, which means high eggs next fall and winter.

"We think we are patriots—we would give away our produce to help if we could—but being the victims of existing conditions it is going to be mighty hard to do our bit."

Mr. Nesbit made these suggestions to improve conditions on the farm, save the consumer and eliminate the middleman:

1. That the Federal Government purchase and store sufficient food to protect the nation at all times against want and to stabilize the market. Such an act would be justified as a military precaution.
2. Maintain a widespread propaganda for the conservation of foodstuffs.
3. A food survey of the nation.
4. The establishment of Government wholesale markets, so that farmers living remote from market can send their products with the assurance that they will be sold at the prevailing prices, the purpose of this being to encourage production and shipment of food crops.

"After all the causes which may reasonably tend to increase prices are considered," said Mr. Nesbit, "there appears no just ground for such high prices of many products as are demanded of the consumer at this time."

Herbert C. Hoover, Food Administrator, and Dr. B. L. Wilbur, chief of his conservation staff, are ready to meet the very situation that Mr. Nesbit describes. They will have the answer for the farmer in the food acts, and meantime they are getting the women and children of the nation to work saving food.

"First," said Doctor Wilbur, "Mr. Hoover will urge the people to use local products, thereby saving the strain on transportation and utilizing food materials that will perish if kept long. Millions of dollars can be saved that way."

"Under the Food-Survey Bill the Department of Agriculture will begin at once to gather facts as to supplies of food, their quantities and whereabouts. Then we can tell how much there is to be saved, and can go about it in a systematic way.

"The great thing at this time is to get the people to use local products instead of stuffs that have to be transported from one section to another.

"We are now preparing to organize the women to have them conserve food. A little later we shall bring the children, and then the men, to our aid. It is our purpose to study the food situation, and then get the best results locally, nationally and internationally.

"The food laws will give authority to cut out the man who speculates or hoards. Their passage will enable the food administrator to ask all agencies to extract no profits from food by speculation. Mr. Hoover can then make war speculation out of food transactions.

"We believe that the food administration has the support of the people of the nation. Our mails are filled with offers to help. There is a ready response from every section of the country. All classes seem willing to support the movement to produce more, waste less and waste less

press of the country has subjected itself. Assurances have been given both by navy and army officials that the disasters will not be hidden under the veil of this censorship, and presumably under the new regulations also, the American people will be expected to understand that no news is good news in this respect.

No official explanation has been made of the reason underlying the decision to withhold from publication announcement of the arrival of troops. It is understood, however, that Secretary Baker believes that with large troop movements in prospect as the new army or the national guard is made ready for the front, it would be unwise to call the attention of the German authorities to what is going on.

Postmaster General Burleson has ordered an investigation of Senator McCumber's charges that the postmaster at Boman, N. D., was guilty of disloyal utterances. In a speech in the senate McCumber charged that the postmaster and his wife had entertained a speaker guilty of disloyal utterances and had advertised his meeting in the postoffice.

No man ever got a pain in his back from carrying his neighbor's burdens.

VEIL OF SECRECY TO SURROUND MOVEMENTS

No Publicity Will Be Given to the Transfer of Troops to Europe.

Washington, July 29.—The movement of American troops to France will be carried on absolutely without publicity, if the present policy of the war department remains unaltered.

Secretary Baker and some of his military advisers believe that no word should be published of the arrival of troops abroad and it is probable that this will be made clear to all newspapers and press associations in forthcoming regulations under the voluntary censorship to which the

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