

Food Production Report to Senate

[Below is printed the food production report referred to as Exhibit "A" in Secretary Houston's letter to Mr. Bryan, printed on another page.—Ed.]

In compliance with senate resolution No. 26, adopted April 6, 1917, the secretary of agriculture, on April 18, submitted to the senate the following report:

Department of Agriculture,
Washington, April 18, 1917.

The President of the Senate.

Sir: I take pleasure in complying with the request of the senate embodied in senate resolution No. 26, to submit a comprehensive plan for increasing the production of food supplies, especially by the cultivation of town lots and unused lands adjacent to towns, and of the arid or semiarid lands, and by promoting the raising of all classes of food or food-producing animals, and for the creation of an organization to promote and in a practical and effective way carry out the purposes aforesaid, together with an estimate of the amount of moneys necessary to be appropriated by congress for the promotion of these purposes.

This department has for some time been giving careful consideration to all the matters covered by the resolution. It has issued a number of statements designed to stimulate increased production and to indicate what crops should receive particular attention in the different areas and the best methods to be employed to secure increased efficiency. It has also laid special emphasis on the need of conserving the food supply through better handling, through the elimination of waste, and through economy, especially on the part of the well-to-do. At recent conferences of official bodies, including the commissioners of agriculture or representatives of state boards of agriculture and representatives of the land-grant colleges, called by the department at St. Louis, Mo., and Berkeley, Cal., problems of production, conservation distribution, and organization were fully considered and important conclusions were reached. These conclusions were embodied in a report, a copy of which is attached hereto, marked "Exhibit A." (See "Program for Food Production and Conservation," printed on another page.)

ORGANIZATION

In the federal department of agriculture, the state departments of agriculture, and the land-grant colleges, the nation already possesses official organized agencies which, for many years, have been actively studying all agricultural problems. These agencies are working in very close co-operation and are actively directing their energies to the handling of problems present by this emergency. The nation is also fortunate in possessing many important farmers' organizations, such as the Grange, the Farmers' Union, the American Society of Equity, the Gleaners, the Farmers' National Congress, the American National Live Stock Association, the National Wool Growers' Association, and many others. It is believed that additional machinery should be created, and steps already have been taken to develop it along these lines:

(1) As special developments and particular problems demand it, the secretary of agriculture will call to his assistance in Washington a few men of special training and broad experience who may advise with him in further projecting the activities of the department, in keeping in touch with the problems and machinery over the nation, and in promoting particular large activities. It would seem desirable that this body should take shape as circumstances require, and that the department should have funds available to meet any necessary expenses in connection with the services of such a body. Through its regular machinery and through this small advisory body the department will undertake to keep in touch not only with state agencies but also with the great farmers' organizations of the nation, whose assistance and co-operation and the advice of whose leaders will be constantly sought.

(2) The creation in each state, either separately or, preferably, in connection with the state council of safety, of a small central di-

vision of food production and conservation, composed of representatives of the state boards of agriculture, of the land-grant colleges, of such farmers' organizations as the Grange, the Farmers Union, the American Society of Equity, the Gleaners, the Farmers' National Congress, and others as may exist in a particular state, and of bankers' and business agencies. In a number of the states these central bodies already have been created and others are being rapidly formed.

(3) County, township, or urban bodies of similar constitution, working in close co-operation with the state central agency, to study and deal with problems of food production and conservation.

PRODUCTION

The increase of food production this year must come about largely through increased efficiency on the farms and ranges already in operation. This is not a time for experiment in new areas and with new or untried crops and processes. Concentration of effort should be made in areas already developed and on enterprises already under way. The problem is not that of securing more land to cultivate. The difficulty confronting the farmer is rather that of securing an ample supply of labor. In fact, one of the principal limiting factors in food production this year may be a restricted labor supply. In many sections of the west and south, the supply, relatively speaking, will not fall far short of normal. The effect will be felt more in the northeast, in the neighborhood of the great industrial centers.

It will be impossible to secure a large army without some further disturbances of labor. Agricultural operations not only must be maintained at their normal level but must be extended. This can be accomplished only by making the labor remaining on the farms more efficient and by drawing into the field forces not heretofore regularly or fully used. The time of special stress will be during the harvest season, and every step should be taken by the state and federal agencies and organizations to furnish relief when it is needed. I am not yet prepared to submit a definite or satisfactory suggestion, but the problem is receiving the earnest consideration not only of the department of agriculture and the department of labor, but also of state and local agencies throughout the country. A joint committee of the department of agriculture and of the department of labor is actively studying the matter and a number of suggestions are under consideration. In the south the existing labor supply can be more fully utilized through increased agricultural diversification. At present the south's agriculture is based largely on the two-crop system—cotton and corn. It has been estimated that in some sections, because of too exclusive reliance on the two-crop system, the labor of man and animals is utilized only 50 or 60 per cent of the time. If diversification were more generally practiced, this labor would be more effectively and economically applied. It is stated that there are more than 2,000,000 boys between the ages of 15 and 19 years in cities and towns not now engaged in productive work vital to the nation in the present emergency. Many of these boys have had contact with rural life and know something about farming operations. This constituted the most important unorganized and unutilized labor resource available. The department and the state agricultural colleges have, in the boys' and girls' clubs, more than 300,000 members. Large additional numbers could be enrolled in these clubs and their services could be utilized in additional directions. It has been suggested also that high schools and colleges in rural communities might suspend operations before the end of the regular terms and might resume their activities later in the fall. This would be a possible means of addition.

Other suggestions worthy of serious consideration are that industrial plants should, so far as possible, arrange to do their repairing during the harvest season and that certain kinds of public and private undertakings of relatively less importance should be suspended temporarily, thereby making possible some ad-

ditional liberation of labor. The mobilizing in particular districts of groups of labor for emergency assistance is by no means beyond the range of possibility. State and local organizations especially should give this problem their most earnest consideration, and no doubt they will find means in their various communities of furnishing assurances that farming operations will not only be continued on their normal scale, but will even be extended.

The department, through the office of farm management, will undertake to place a competent man in each state to keep in touch with the state's central board of food production and conservation to assist it in devising the best means of furnishing relief to communities that need additional labor. Through the state boards, this representative will keep intimately in touch with the local organizations. A special effort will be made to ascertain the labor needs of the different communities and the available supplies of labor not fully utilized in the region, and also to ascertain these facts over large areas. The stress comes at different times in different states and communities. Information will be conveyed to the boards in states where there is a lack of labor regarding surplus labor supplies in surrounding states or districts. The problem of securing favorable transportation facilities and rates will be taken up with the various transportation companies. This department will co-operate also with the department of labor and keep in touch with its field agencies.

It is especially important that emphasis be laid on the increased production of the staple crops, particularly in the regions where they are usually grown. There is yet time to increase the acreage not only of corn, oats, barley, rice and the sorghums, but also of spring wheat in certain areas, as well as to extend the acreage of peas, beans, cowpeas, and soy beans. The live stock and poultry resources of the country need to be carefully considered and encouragement given to permit recovery from the unusual drafts upon them during the past year, with particular reference to the production of meat, dairy products, and eggs. The marked activity in home gardening will result in considerable additional production of perishable crops for local use. The department and state agricultural agencies are lending their assistance to local bodies which are organizing systematic home garden work.

Further to stimulate production, to improve distribution, and to promote conservation, the following recommendations are offered:

(1) Prompt enlargement of the co-operative demonstration forces of the department and the states, through the state relations service, to insure the most effective instruction with reference to crop and animal production and the economic and effective use of food in the home.

(2) Immediate enlargement of the existing force of experts in home economics in order that widespread instruction may be given in urban and rural communities regarding the proper preparation and economic utilization of foodstuffs. Some of the greatest preventable wastes are in the home. The women, and particularly the housekeepers, of the nation can be of great assistance not only in increasing the production of foodstuffs along certain lines, but especially in the conservation of food, the elimination of wastes, and, particularly in the case of the well-to-do, in practicing rigid economy. The women of the nation have control of the larger part of its consumption expenditure, and one of their first tasks should be to see that this is directed in the most efficient and economical manner.

(3) Prompt enlargement of the department's forces and facilities for aiding farmers to combat destructive insects and diseases of both animals and plants, through instruction and assistance to the general extension workers of the department and the states. The losses through animal diseases and insects run into the millions. With effective and efficient organization the forces in the department already engaged in the work of this kind could be greatly enlarged and utilized. This undoubtedly would result in the saving of great quantities of food materials that now go to waste.

It is estimated that the flour supply, on the basis of a normal crop, could be increased by 18,000,000 barrels a year through the milling