

Mr. Bryan's Proffer of Service

Acknowledging Mr. Bryan's proffer of service to aid in the movement to increase the nation's food supply, Secretary Houston sent the following letter, accompanied by a memorandum briefly outlining some of the work of the United States department of agriculture is undertaking in behalf of the people. The letter and memorandum follow:

Department of Agriculture,
Washington, April 24, 1917.

Dear Mr. Bryan:

First let me again express my great appreciation of your proffer of service to this department in accomplishing the purposes the government has in view through its activities in this emergency.

I am enclosing a copy of my statement to the senate, marked "A." This statement contains the suggestion of the department of lines of activity and of legislation which seem necessary to deal adequately with the problem of food production, distribution and conservation. I would especially ask you to read carefully what is said about organization, handling of the labor situation, and distribution. In reference to price-fixing, it should be especially noted that all we ask for now is that the government have power to deal with this matter so that it may act as the emergency may require. Farmers should clearly understand that a minimum price does not mean the lowest possible price, but a price to producers which will give them a reasonable return. The object of this is to stimulate production and to remove from the mind of the farmer the apprehension that he will lose if conditions should change. Whether it will be necessary or not to fix such a minimum price, of course, I can not now say. It probably would not be necessary to fix a minimum price except for a very few staples, such as for instance, wheat or potatoes. It is not suggested that a maximum price be fixed to producers of farm products. The suggestion regarding a maximum price has reference to the possibility of "corners" and unwarranted speculation. The authority would enable the government to prevent this to some extent.

You will note also the suggestion that the department be given authority to get facts about the food supply at any particular time, to know the amount, its location, and its ownership. It is essential for the nation to have this information in this emergency and it would be well for it to have power to get it in normal times as well. We are increasingly giving out information to the farmers through the Market News Service, and it is highly desirable that it should be accurate. At present we have no power to check the returns. What we get is given voluntarily. This is good as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. It is also important to have this information in order that we may judge whether or not individuals are manipulating the market. It would include full and accurate returns from packers, elevators, storages, and so forth.

You will also notice the suggestion that the department be given power to license and supervise agencies handling foodstuffs. This would be an additional aid to the department in promoting orderly and economical distribution and in preventing manipulation.

I cite these matters especially to show that the government recognizes the bearing of just distribution on production and to indicate its determination to improve distribution.

The department is emphasizing the wisdom and morality of economy and is calling particular attention to the great part that women can play not only in producing something (this would apply especially to the women in rural districts), but also,—especially among the well-to-do—in conserving food through household methods, preserving, drying, and canning fruits, and so forth, and in the elimination of waste. Boys and girls also can render great service. You know that we now have an army of 300,000

in the different clubs—poultry, pig, canning, etc.—and this army could be greatly increased.

The need of organization and co-operation among farmers in the different communities can not be too strongly emphasized. This spirit and course we have persistently urged for four years. I regard co-operative action among farmers in different areas as essential for the solution not only of many problems of production, but also of distribution. The co-operation should center upon a few special problems confronting the farmers. They may co-operate to produce particular types or standards of products in their communities, to promote economy in the purchase of supplies, in securing market news which enables them to ship to advantage, in the handling and packing of their products, and in securing reasonable transportation rates through shipments in carload or broken carload lots. I am simply suggesting these things by way of illustration. The individual farmer is at a great disadvantage in these matters. The average farm is conducted on a very small scale. The average farm in the United States is only a little over seventy acres, and in some parts of the country, especially in the south, not over thirty-five acres. Clearly, if the nation is to have the benefit of satisfactory and economical production and distribution of farm products, there must be organization along these lines.

The present emergency emphasizes the need of promoting effective organizations for such purposes. At this time particular consideration should be given by such bodies to the selection of seed, especially to the securing of seed stocks for next year, and to making sure that the labor remaining on the farms in any given district is fully utilized and that any deficits in one area may be made up by surpluses from another. Even in a given community the load comes at different times on different farms, and co-operation might be useful in labor direction in very small areas.

I am also sending you some memoranda marked "B," which may be useful to you.

With highest regards,

Cordially and faithfully yours,

D. F. HOUSTON, Secretary.

Mr. W. J. Bryan,
Lincoln, Neb.

[Exhibit "A," referred to in Secretary Houston's letter, is published in another part of The Commoner, under the title, "Food Production Report Submitted to Senate." President Wilson's appeal to the people of the United States, referred to in Exhibit "B," was printed in the April issue. The "Program for Food Production and Conservation," as developed at the meeting held in St. Louis, Mo., is published on another page of this issue.—Ed.]

EXHIBIT "B"—MEMORANDUM

The work of the department of agriculture is now so far-reaching that it will be somewhat difficult to condense its activities in its relations to the people in any very compact way. It might be said that, broadly speaking, the functions of the department, aside from its regulatory activities, are two-fold: First, to secure or acquire, by all practical means, information that will be useful and valuable to the people of the whole country, and especially to the farmers of the nation, and second, to apply this information in the broadest possible way, with the intent of eventually reaching the last man on the land.

Under the terms of the Smith-Lever Act, commonly known as the "Extension Act," the department has direct and close relationships with all the states in the Union, operating through the state agricultural colleges and experiment stations. Through an elaborate system of articulated effort the department is now able to carry direct messages to the farmers everywhere, and these messages can be augmented and supplemented by local facts coming directly from the local agencies, namely, the agricultural colleges and the experiment stations. In addition to the agencies located in the states, the department has established very close and direct relations with the people in many other ways.

It must be constantly borne in mind that the department's functions extend not only to those who live in the open country, but its activities reach in many ways into the homes of nearly all of our people. As the constructive work of

the department has proceeded and progressed it has more and more come to be looked upon as the proper agency for carrying out very far-reaching regulatory laws. Thus, out of the work of the department on animal production, the prevention of diseases of animals and losses of live stock through various agencies, there gradually developed a sentiment which finally crystallized in a very elaborate system of meat inspection which is now in operation and which affects the entire country. There have also developed many other lines of work involving regulatory functions, such as the Cotton Futures Act, the U. S. Grain Standards Act, the U. S. Warehouse Act, and the Federal Road Act. In all these matters the department has come to be more closely tied to the people, so that it is now looked upon as the chief agency in all matters relating to food supply, food distribution, food marketing and handling, and food conservation.

It will be impracticable to give even a bare outline of the activities of the department on these matters in this memorandum. Attention is especially directed to certain exhibits which will give you some data for use in your effort to focus the attention of the country on the need for greater food production in this emergency.

First there is submitted the appeal made by the President to the people of the United States. Attention is particularly called to the parts addressed to farmers. At a recent meeting held in St. Louis, Missouri, where thirty-two states were represented by sixty-five officials, state and federal, an elaborate program for food production and conservation was developed. A copy of this program is attached. Special attention is directed to the material under the headings of "Increasing the Food Supply"; "The Survey of the Food Supply"; and "Increased Economies in the Home."

A copy of a letter to the president of the senate, indicating somewhat in detail the plans of the department for stimulating production, improving distribution, and promoting conservation of food supplies, also is attached.

Accompanying the above memorandum were the following extracts covering different topics of importance as set forth in President Wilson's Appeal and in statements sent out by the department of agriculture:

NEED FOR MORE FOOD

"We must supply abundant food for ourselves and for our armies and our seamen not only, but also for a large part of the nations with whom we have now made common cause, in whose support and by whose sides we shall be fighting."—(President Wilson's Appeal.)

"It is obvious that the greatest and most important service that is required of our agriculture, under existing circumstances, is an enlarged production of the staple food crops."—(Secretary Houston's statement, April 7.)

"The world's food reserve is very low. Not only our own consumers but much of the world at large must rely more completely than ever before on the American farmer."—(St. Louis program for food production and conservation.)

"The American farmer has long shown his ability to produce more food per man and at lower cost per unit than any other farmer in the world, but he has never had to do his best. He needs to do his best now."—(St. Louis program for food production and conservation.)

NO FEAR OF OVERPRODUCTION

"Because of the world's shortage of food it is scarcely possible that the production of staple crops by the farmers of the United States can be too great this year. There is every reason to believe that a generous price will be paid for the harvest of their fields."—(St. Louis program for food production and conservation.)

"There is no risk in the near future of excessive production, such as sometimes has resulted in unremunerative prices to producers. This is particularly true of the cereals and of peas, beans, cowpeas, soy beans and buckwheat."—(Secretary Houston, April 7.)

INCREASED ACREAGE

"The most effective step that may be taken to increase the production of these crops (staple food crops) is to enlarge the acreage devoted to them in the regions where they are grown habitually. This expansion of acreage should be