

FOOD FOR PEOPLE

Margaret G. Reid

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By

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PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS

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Preface

THIS book is concerned with food, families, and economy as a whole. The social objective visualized is an abundant food supply for all. The existence in peace time of malnutrition and restriction on food production has challenged responsible leaders to discover ways of securing fuller utilization of resources. The war has brought many problems of producing adequate supplies and meeting shortages that arise.

The book is divided into three main parts. In the first part production is examined. The expansion of commercial production is discussed with special reference to changes in method and their bearing on nutrition and social control. Considerable space is given to food production carried on by families for their own use. In the second part food consumption is discussed, attention being directed mainly to its status and to the factors affecting it, including price, income, and education. Status of nutritional health is examined. In the third section current problems bearing on food are considered, for example, taxes on food, the ever-normal granary, soil conservation, the food stamp plan, advertising, sanitation, grading, restraints of trade. Finally, controls to meet wartime food problems are discussed.

Attention throughout the book is concentrated on understanding situations. As a result, it has been necessary to draw on many sciences, on economics, psychology, nutrition, and on other subject-matter fields.

Those acquainted even vaguely with the ramifications of these topics will know that no one book on the subject can do more than deal broadly with important issues. It is hoped, however, that the discussion will serve to quicken the interest in placing welfare with reference to food more clearly before those whose decisions direct our economy, both those in private enterprise and those responsible for government policy.

The book should be of value to all interested in economics and social policy as they impinge on consumers. To those working in the field of consumption, it should provide a comprehensive introduction to food. Food producers, both agriculturalists and manufacturers, should find much to interest them in the discussion of market practices, market trends, food preferences, and ways of increasing adequacy. And, finally, it is felt that

much of the discussion should be useful to nutritionists who feel the need of visualizing more precisely the status of food habits and factors influencing them and the various programs designed to bring about improvement in dietary habits.

The author wishes to express her appreciation to the many people who have contributed to this analysis. Assistance on aspects related to the sciences of chemistry, bacteriology, and nutrition was received from Dr. R. E. Buchanan, Dr. B. W. Hammer, Dr. W. J. Shannon, Dr. Margaret A. Ohlson, Dr. Pearl P. Swanson, Professor C. A. Iverson. Many colleagues in the social sciences have made valuable contributions. The author especially wishes to thank Dr. A. Kozlik for his suggestions on Chapters 13 and 15, Dr. H. V. Gaskill for suggestions on Chapters 10 and 11, Dr. G. S. Sheperd for suggestions on Chapters 29 and 30, Dr. Mary Jean Bowman for suggestions on Chapters 2, 4, 10, 11, and 31, and Miss Elizabeth Fautz for suggestions on Chapters 22 and 25.

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I

Introduction

I

Food in the National Economy

THE role of food in the migration of peoples, in tragic, devastating wars, in the rise and fall of nations, makes a fascinating story. Hundreds of queries arise concerning half-told tales. Why did the Neanderthal man disappear from the face of the earth? Did the unfortunate combination of cave dwelling, foggy weather, and a diet poor in Vitamin D lead to a rachitic condition, making child-bearing hazardous and enfeebling the race as a whole? Did the successive hordes of conquering people who swept out of Asia into Europe come mainly because of prolonged droughts which forced mounted warriors with their caravans and herds to press westward in search of pastures? Did the amazing adventures and exploits of Genghis Khan find their initial spark in the search for food? And to come closer to the present: To what extent has the military policy of Germany been affected by a desire for more adequate food supplies within its national economy? Will the United States because of her food reserves be able to play an important part in establishing a lasting peace?

The wandering of the humble potato, its spread from equatorial regions to hinterlands far within the Arctic Circle, the increased population coming in its wake, when visualized over centuries, bear a hint of magic. So also does the story of spices and their role in the development of trade and national power.

The Food Problem of the United States

Critical moments with respect to the food supply characterized the early settlements on the Atlantic seaboard. Again and again isolated communities were decimated by the dread scourge of scurvy. Incidents are vividly portrayed by Bell:¹

The Salem settlement was all but destitute of food. Eighty of the Endicott colony had perished in the last year from the old enemy, scurvy, which had run so disastrously through the Plymouth plantation ten years before.

¹ M. Bell, *Women of the Wilderness*, 1938, p. 163.

Increased knowledge of foods suitable for human consumption and greater variety in foods produced plus improved transportation between regions have eliminated the specter of famine in Western countries so long as trade relations are maintained.

Cases of pellagra in Southern communities or of scurvy in Maine² still occur. But for the most part extreme food deficiencies are newsworthy because of their rarity. Food habits to promote perfect health now occupy the center of the stage. Attention has shifted from the obvious fact that "an army marches on its stomach" to the conviction that food governs alike the strength and determination of the fighting forces, the alertness of children at school, and the output of the worker on the assembly line. The present food problem, at least as it exists in the United States, is well described by the Mixed Committee of the League of Nations.³

Throughout many parts of the world, it practically ceased to be a problem of hunger and became rather a problem of nutrition. It is, of course, impossible to say exactly when this transition occurred; the process was gradual and imperceptible. It is, however, sufficient to compare our present preoccupations about the qualitative adequacy of diets even with the famines which decimated whole communities even as late as the first half of the nineteenth century, to realize the enormous progress that has taken place.

The maintenance of a high level of health now occupies the foreground. In describing the change which has occurred, Nourse⁴ in his study, *America's Capacity to Produce*, states:

Poverty has always been the lot of the great majority of mankind. It has been only within the very recent past that geographic exploration and scientific development have encouraged the human family seriously to entertain the idea that life could be so organized and conducted as to achieve general well-being.

Interest in a Higher Standard of Nutrition

The defense program launched in 1940 has popularized the slogan: "The strength of a nation depends on the strength of the people." Again and again the idea has been voiced that a people can be expected to accept democracy as good only if democracy makes it possible for them to have a

² Maine is cited here only because of a recent news story noted. The author has no reason to assume that similar cases are not just as common in many other states.

³ Final Report of the Mixed Committee of the League of Nations, *The Relation of Nutrition to Health, Agriculture and Economic Policy*, 1937, p. 97.

⁴ E. G. Nourse and others, 1934, p. 1.