

# **THE FOOD PROBLEM**

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The Food Problem by Vernon Kellogg & Alonzo E. Taylor & Herbert Hoover

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**VERNON KELLOGG & ALONZO E. TAYLOR & HERBERT HOOVER**

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**THE FOOD PROBLEM**

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## PREFACE

Today the war has entered a phase in which food dominates the economics, strategy and statesmanship, not only of the countries at war but of neutrals as well. The Allies are blockading Germany, and its population is living in an era of food control hitherto undreamed of. The adjacent neutrals are under many restraints and pressures to yield their food to either side and are striving with every resource to protect their vital supplies. The Germans are trying to starve the Allies by sinking their supplies at sea. All are desperately trying to maintain production and reduce consumption. In consequence food problems in balancing vegetable and animal production, in imports, exports, and price controls, in protein, fat and carbohydrate content, are all silhouetted against a background of destruction and tragedy.

The American people as a nation and as individuals are face to face with a great special problem in connection with the whole war problem the solution of which they have undertaken in common with their Allies. A failure to solve this problem with its thousand complexities will certainly involve a

failure to solve the war problem in the only way we and the civilized world must have it solved.

From three years of contact with this problem of food some phases of it perhaps not too familiar to casual students of food regulation are very clear to me. These parts, or special features, are manifest from any examination, however casual, of the endeavours and experience of the countries engaged with the problem.

Any control of prices or distribution is the lesser of evils; a fight against something worse. And any form of control leads into economic reactions that are disconcerting. Another feature is the great rôle which what may be termed the psychology of food supply plays in the situation. However carefully national food supply may be adjusted, from the point of view of the physiology of nutrition and from that of nutritional economics, yet no mere sufficiency of the needed calories and balanced protein, fats and carbohydrate content in the ration will necessarily make it a satisfactory one. People of different kinds, with different traditions and habits of food use, must have, in some measure at least, the particular kinds of food they are used to. They eat more effectively, one may say, the kinds of food they like than the kinds they do not like. Taste and appetite must be consulted and satisfied in some degree.

Another observation that experience, especially in Belgium, brings clearly to my mind is that famine does not occur according to popular ideas. In a country on a food supply below normal necessity all the people do not suffer in the same measure, nor die at the same time. The rich continue to live, despite any rigour in division; the poor get weak, and weaker, and die — of something else than famine. They die of tuberculosis; they die of epidemic disease; they die of whatever it is that finds fertile soil for its fatal growth among a people weakened by mal-nutrition or under-nutrition. The immediate factor in famine is the death rate, from whatever determining cause. This death rate is the measure of the intensity of weakening, and it does not necessarily depend exclusively upon the amount of food that is available.

Another impressive observation brought out by food difficulties is that of our intimate dependence on our domestic animals. We are likely to think first of the supply of cereals, and, indeed, it must be admitted that bread is the very basis of the food supply of a people. But we do not sufficiently realize the equally critical importance of maintenance of our domestic animals in a period of food shortage. We cannot even raise our own young without them. Nor if a nation is robbed of its animals can you keep the death rate of that nation down to normal