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PROCEEDINGS

of the

WESTERN FARM ECONOMICS ASSOCIATION

Fifteenth Annual Meeting

June 24, 25 and 26, 1942

Stanford University
Palo Alto, California

Symposium on

WESTERN AGRICULTURE IN THE POST-WAR WORLD*

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As chairman of this session, my initial function is to provide a backdrop and floor for the main speakers and scheduled discussants.

We intend and assume that the United Nations will emerge successful from this titanic struggle that we call World War II. Today, this is no easy, nonchalant assumption. To make it a reality bids fair to call for all we've got, first to avert awful defeat, and then to achieve decisive victory. Our allies have fought hard and bravely, but have not won. We have begun to fight, but we have not yet begun to win. To our credit are redoubtable resistances, finally overborne, and recent inspiring victories in the Coral Sea and off Midway. But the stark fact is that the campaigns are still going against the United Nations. We have still to turn this mighty tide, and then to help follow it through to victory. We have the resources and the grim determination to discharge this task, but it calls for vastly more powerful efforts than we have yet been able to mobilize and put forth.

When hostilities will end, no one can safely predict. How long the war lasts, as well as how it turns out, will profoundly influence the conditions that must then be faced. We must repeatedly reappraise the prospective conditions, as a basis for detailed provisional plans for relief and reconstruction. When it comes, the end of hostilities may well be sudden; but an early ending, I venture to assert, could not be in our favor. An over-all length of ten years or more must be reckoned conceivable, but it would be dangerous now to plan for so long a war. We must do our best to win soon; but we had best proceed on the assumption that an armistice acceptable to the United Nations will not come earlier than November 1943, and that it may require fully two years longer than that.

Why, then, discuss the post-war world now, in these critical days? As an escape from present harsh realities, it is utterly unjustifiable. If it represents merely the freely chosen use of time and energy that have not yet been drawn into the war effort, it is at best temporarily pardonable. The only sound reason for such discussions is that, rightly directed, they may constitute part of the war effort itself. This is the test that our symposium has to meet.

In a larger sense, the armistice will not end the war. A transitional period must follow before real peace is achieved and durably organized. Even the peace treaty itself may be several years in the making. Truly to win the war, we must also "win the peace." It is a condition

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of victory" "to decide upon the world that must follow the peace."¹ The victorious United Nations must do their utmost to plan for and provide the kind of a post-war world that is worth fighting and working for--a free, progressive world demonstrably superior to the inter-war world of 1919-39.

Now, in the midst of war, we must get ready to meet these requirements, as the victors failed to do in 1914-18. Here in the United States, economically the most powerful nation in all the world, we have crucial responsibilities to history, to mankind. We have been reluctant to accept those responsibilities, until first Dunkirk and then Pearl Harbor "stabbed us broad awake." The current responsibilities we are increasingly discharging, but all our wartime sacrifices--thus far relatively insignificant--will be futile unless we also discharge the others. Alone we can win neither the war nor the peace, but neither can be won without the wholehearted collaboration and leadership of this country.

It is not too much to say that the post-war world is even now in the making, and we have part of the making to do. Merely to speculate on what that world will be, and how we can make the best of it for ourselves, is damnably shortsighted. Every group such as ours needs to consider what kind of post-war world can and should be achieved, how the interests we know best can contribute to that achievement, and how we individually can maximize that contribution.

The progress that is being made in this direction, in private groups and official circles, is to me highly encouraging. We need more and more expert studies, more and more effective and thoroughgoing public education, more and more wise official decisions on fundamental principles and broad policies. But already we have evidence of cumulative results. The mutual-aid agreements signed between the United States and our three major allies (Great Britain, China, and Soviet Russia) are most promising far-reaching commitments. However much remains to be done to insure this outcome, it is no longer rash or idealistic to assume that the United States has outgrown isolationism, is taking its full share in constructive world leadership, and will help safeguard and underpin the peace that follows victory.

Moreover, "one consensus seems in process of crystallization: the normal, over-all objective of individual effort and social policy--local, national, and international--is the persistent if irregular advance in planes of living, for families, communities, states, and mankind, according to their several standards and preferences except as these may endanger advances elsewhere."²

I submit these suggestions toward a common floor for specific discussions of various aspects of Western Agriculture in the Post-War World. Individual speakers may reject one or more, or add some that I have not mentioned. In conclusion I would urge one additional point: that speakers try to distinguish fairly clearly the transition period of relief, conversion, reconstruction, and reorganization, from the peace period proper that we may expect to emerge after a lapse of some years.

¹ Economist (London), May 16, 1942, p. 669.

² J. S. Davis, "International Commodity Agreements in the Postwar World," American Economic Review, Supplement, March 1942, XXXII, 396.