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PROCEEDINGS

of the

WESTERN FARM ECONOMICS ASSOCIATION

Sixteenth Annual Meeting

June 24, 25 and 26, 1943

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THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON FOOD AND AGRICULTURE <sup>1/</sup>

by

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The food conference held at Hot Springs in May, 1943, was said to represent three fourths of the population of the world. The only official statement which has come to my attention is a mimeographed statement entitled "Final Act," dated June 3, 1943, and apparently supplied to persons in attendance. The following comments are based on this fifty-page mimeographed document.

The conference consisted of something like one hundred fifty delegates from the various countries plus a considerable group of technical personnel from the various countries.

Organization of the Conference.-- The conference was organized into sections with special committees organized under each of the four sections. Section I dealt with "Consumption Levels and Requirements." Committee 1 dealing with food considered (1) character and extent of consumption deficiencies in each country, (2) causes and consequences of malnutrition, and (3) reasonable national and international goals for improved food consumption.

Committee 2 on food dealt with "measures for improving standards of consumption (education, etc.)"; Committee 3 dealt with "other essential agricultural products, considering pre-war consumption levels and reasonable national and international goals for improvement in consumption with sustained employment and expanded industrial activity."

Section II dealt with "Expansion of Production and Adaptation to Consumption Needs." Committee 1 considered (a) measures for direction of production toward commodities, the supply of which should be increased, and (b) measures for shifting production out of commodities in chronic surplus. Committee 2 considered measures for improving agricultural productivity and efficiency. Committee 3 considered measures for development and conservation of agricultural resources, and Committee 4 considered opportunities for occupational adjustments in agricultural populations.

Section III dealt with "Facilitation and Improvement of Distribution." Committee 1 considered expansion of international trade and broad policies for insuring increased production and consumption in general. Committee 2 considered improvement of agricultural marketing, processing, and distribution. Committee 3 considered special measures for wider food distribution including (1) improvement

<sup>1/</sup> Summary of talk given at the meeting of the Western Farm Economics Association. Berkeley, California. June 24, 25, and 26, 1943.

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of consumption of low-income groups, and (2) international disposition of commodities of over-supply. Committee 4 considered buffer stocks and commodity arrangements to assure equitable prices and adequate supplies.

Section IV dealt with "Recommendations for Continuing and Carrying Forward the Work of the Conference."

Judging by comments I have heard, there were apparently numerous well-prepared papers presented during the meeting, and it is to be anticipated that sooner or later the proceedings will be published, although no official intimation has been given to that effect.

The keynote of the whole conference seems to be the formulation of a program for the development of freedom from want, and the establishment of an international organization designed to promote that result. The first step in the development of such an organization is to be an "interim commission" to be established at Washington, D.C., not later than July 15, 1943. This topic is of sufficient importance to justify quoting both the "whereas" and the "resolves" of the section on "Interim and Permanent Commissions for Carrying Out the Recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture."

#### WHEREAS:

1. Freedom from want is difficult to achieve without concerted action among all like-minded nations to expand and improve production, to increase employment, to raise levels of consumption, and to establish greater freedom in international commerce;

2. The successful carrying out of the recommendations of the Conference in the field of production, distribution, and consumption of food and other agricultural products in the post-war period will be the most important prerequisite for the achievement of freedom from want, and requires the creation by the governments and authorities here represented of a permanent organization in the field of food and agriculture; therefore

#### THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON FOOD AND AGRICULTURE RECOMMENDS:

1. That the governments and authorities here represented recognize and embody in a formal declaration or agreement the obligation to their respective peoples and to one another, henceforth to collaborate in raising levels of nutrition and standards of living of their peoples, and to report to one another on the progress achieved;

2. That the governments and authorities here represented establish a permanent organization in the field of food and agriculture; and

#### RESOLVES:

1. That in order that every practicable step may be taken to attain these and the other appropriate objectives set forth in the declaration and specific recommendations of the Conference, an Interim Commission for carrying out the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture be established.

2. That each of the governments and authorities here represented be entitled to designate a representative on the Interim Commission, and that the Interim Commission be installed in Washington not later than July 15, 1943;

3. That the Interim Commission perform its work with due regard to the exigencies of the war, through such form of organization and personnel as it may deem appropriate; and formulate regulations covering its expenditures and submit to the member governments and authorities a budget and allocation of quota contributions;

4. That the functions of the Interim Commission be to formulate and recommend for consideration by each member government or authority:

(a) A specific plan for a permanent organization in the field of food and agriculture;

(b) The formal declaration or agreement referred to in the first recommendation, in which each participant shall recognize its obligation;

(i) To raise the levels of nutrition and standards of living of its own people;

(ii) To improve the efficiency of agricultural production and distribution;

(iii) To cooperate, so far as may be possible, with other nations for the achievement of these ends;

(iv) To undertake to submit periodically to the other participants, through the permanent organization, reports on the action taken and the progress achieved toward these ends;

(c) Such proposals or reports as are necessary to give effect to the recommendations of the Conference;

5. That in the preparation of a plan for the permanent organization the Interim Commission give full consideration to the following:

(a) The relation of the permanent organization to, and methods of associating it with, other institutions, national as well as international, which already exist or which may hereafter be established, in the field of food and agriculture and in related scientific, economic, and other fields;

(b) Provision for membership in the permanent organization, in due course, of governments not represented on the Interim Commission;

6. That in considering the functions and duties to be assigned to the permanent organization the Interim Commission take into account:

(a) The promotion of scientific, technological, social, and economic research;

(b) The collection and dissemination of information and provision for the exchange of services;

(c) The submission to member governments and authorities of recommendations for action with regard to the following:

- (i) Nutrition;
- (ii) Standards of consumption of food and other agricultural products;
- (iii) Agricultural production, distribution, and conservation;
- (iv) Statistics and economic studies in the field of agriculture and food; including the study of the relation of agriculture to world economy;
- (v) Education and extension work in the field of food and agriculture;
- (vi) Agricultural credit;
- (vii) Problems of agricultural population and farm labor.

7. That the Interim Commission further consider the desirability of assigning to the permanent organization functions in the field of:

- (a) Development of agricultural resources and orientation of production, where necessary;
- (b) Agricultural commodity arrangements;
- (c) Agricultural cooperative movements;
- (d) Land tenure;
- (e) Other subjects on which recommendations have been made by the Conference.

8. That the Interim Commission also consider the initiation of preliminary statistical investigations and research into the problems with which the permanent organization will deal;

9. That the Interim Commission be deemed to have been dissolved when the permanent organization has been established;

10. That the Government of the United States of America be invited to take whatever preliminary action may be necessary for the establishment of the Interim Commission after the United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture has completed its work. 3/

It is interesting to note that plans include a short-time and a long-time program with frequent reference to a transition period. It is interesting

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3/ United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture. Final Act. Hot Springs, Virginia. May 18 - June 3, 1943. p. 40.

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also to note that paragraphs and topic headings include ideas which give much of this document a close resemblance to programs of divisions of agricultural economics or indeed the Bureau of Agricultural Economics itself. Thus there are references to agricultural credit, to marketing, cooperation, farm management, increased efficiency, land economics and population movements, even though the great emphasis seems to be on dietary and nutritional problems.

An "economy of abundance" is to be attained in part by freer trade so that surplus of one region may be used in international trade to round out the dietary needs of other countries. There is also the idea of fostering the growth of industries in many countries which in turn shall play their part in the development of "purchasing power." Thus the sound expansion of industry in undeveloped areas, with equality of access to materials and markets, serves also to expand production and purchasing power and is therefore indispensable to any comprehensive program for the advancement of agriculture; tariffs and other barriers to international trade, and abnormal fluctuations in exchange rates, restrict the production, distribution, and consumption of foodstuffs and of other commodities.

With all this discussion of an economy of abundance it is interesting to note the occasional references to "surplus" and to "commodity arrangements." Thus there is a section entitled "The United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture Recommends":

1. That international commodity arrangements should be designed so as promote the expansion of an orderly world economy;

2. That, to this end, a body of broad principles should, through further international discussion, be agreed upon regarding the formulation, the provisions, and the administration of such international commodity arrangements as may be deemed feasible and desirable and should include assurance that:

- (a) Such arrangements will include effective representation of consumers as well as producers;

- (b) Increasing opportunities will be afforded for supplying consumption needs from the most efficient sources of production at prices fair to both consumers and producers and with due regard to such transitional adjustments in production as may be required to prevent serious economic and social dislocations;

- (c) Adequate reserves will be maintained to meet all consumption needs;

- (d) Provision will be made, when applicable, for the orderly disposal of surpluses;

3. That international organization should be created at an early date to study the feasibility and desirability of such arrangements with reference to individual commodities and, in appropriate cases, to initiate or review such arrangements to be entered into between governments, and to guide and coordinate the operations of such arrangements in accordance with agreed principles, maintaining close relations with such programs as may be undertaken in other fields of international economic activity to the end that the

objective of raising consumption levels of all peoples may be most effectively served. 4/

The interesting thought strikes the reader as he goes through this document that there is an utter absence of any discussion of the ultimate diffusion of the results of efforts to improve diet and general well-being. Thus aside from a reference in one or two places to the removal of surplus populations from certain areas, there is no application of the Malthusian doctrine that populations seem to press upon the food supply. Yet experience in India and Java and perhaps elsewhere would certainly appear to confirm the tendency of the human race to multiply where the restrictions of hunger and disease are alleviated.

There is no indication as to whether it is contemplated that the permanent organization which the Interim Commission may set up is to replace the International Institute of Agriculture or the work carried on by sections of the League of Nations, but such would appear to be the case. Whether the very elaborate program envisioned by the conferees at the Hot Springs conferences can be set up, the program it contemplated represents the most ambitious approach to world-wide human well-being that has ever been formulated by a body of human beings outside of "Utopias" under the authorships of individual idealists.

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4/ United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture. Final Act. Hot Springs, Virginia. May 18 - June 3, 1943. p. 42-43.

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