



“Food Will Win the War”

MINNESOTA CONSERVATION EFFORTS, 1917–18

RAE KATHERINE EIGHMEY

On April 2, 1917, folks across Minnesota and the nation waited to learn President Woodrow Wilson’s decision. Would it be war with Germany? Eager to know before the next day’s paper was printed, crowds gathered at newspaper offices reading the news posted on window bulletin boards. The next day the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reported that nearby streets were almost blocked at times with people reading and commenting:

“That means war all right, all right.”

“Say, Germany will have to look out when we get our boys over there.”

“You bet.”¹

But before American troops could take the field, there was significant work to be done on the home front. In March President Wilson had discussed the importance of food in the coming campaign with Herbert C. Hoover, then heading the private Commission for Relief in Belgium. In Hoover’s analysis, food would be a dominant factor in the success of the war.

On April 15, less than two weeks after his initial call to war, Wilson asked all Americans to become citizen soldiers. “We must supply abundant food for ourselves and

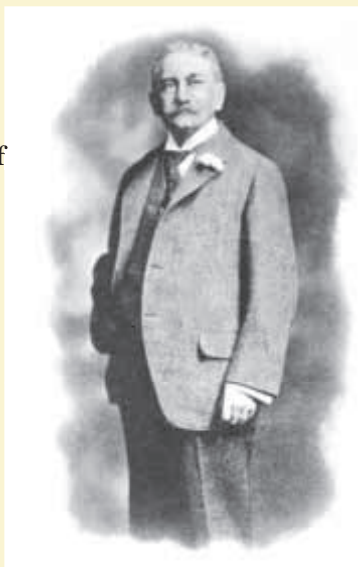
for our armies . . . but also for a large part of the nations with whom we have now made common cause. . . . Without abundant food . . . the whole great enterprise upon which we have embarked will break down and fail.”²

The idea that “food will win the war” was not new to Minnesotans. Since 1914, at the beginning of the European conflict, Minnesota wheat had helped feed the “starving Belgians” and others whose plights were described in scores of newspaper and magazine articles. Such contributions may not have won the war “over there,” but they provided essential energy to strengthen the resolve of the embattled populations.

William C. Edgar, editor of the Minneapolis-based weekly *Northwestern Miller*, had headed up one of the

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first private relief efforts. Working through Hoover's relief commission, Edgar had delivered 7,000 tons of flour valued at \$600,000 from the millers of the northwestern states in January 1915.³ Accompanying the cargo across the Atlantic under threat of German submarine attack was not without risks. As Edgar wrote to his wife, "Now that it's over, I don't mind telling you that the trip from Deal to Rotterdam was risky business. . . . In my satchel I carried a pack of cards. . . . On the back was Washburn Crosby's advertisement 'Eventually'. . . . So I sat in the cabin playing solitaire. . . . 'Eventually—Why not now?' kept running in my mind—whimsically—apropos of mine-hitting."⁴



William C. Edgar, editor of the Northwestern Miller

Until 1917 America had adopted a deliberately neutral stance. Across the Atlantic from the latest skirmishes in age-old battles among warring empires, the outcome seemed, to many, irrelevant to national concerns. The U.S. had settled its own Civil War 57 years earlier. Now Americans were fully engaged in building a prosperous and progressive nation.

Germany's January 1917 declaration of unconditional submarine warfare against all ships in the North Atlantic—peaceful, neutral, or warrior—changed Americans' attitudes. As Germany made good its threat, sinking American relief ships, Wilson recognized: "We are provincials no longer. . . . There can be no turning back. Our own fortunes as a nation are involved whether we would have it so or not."⁵

Many Minnesotans realized the state's strategic role in the war immediately after the president's call to arms. Management of food would be critically important. Soon local boys would be fighting on the fields of France and Germany. America would be called upon to send even more wheat and flour overseas, not only for

the citizens and armies of European allies, but now for its own soldiers. State agricultural leaders and educators recognized that Minnesota had the resources and expertise to make a significant contribution in the three essential areas for food conservation: increasing production, limiting consumption, and shifting cooking and eating habits.⁶

Planting for the 1917 harvest was already underway when President Wilson called upon Congress to declare war with Germany. Professor A. D. Wilson, director of the agricultural extension division at the University of Minnesota, immediately urged farmers to shift from their usual oat, alfalfa, and corn crops to wheat. Mid-April reports of the drought-driven failure of the Kansas winter-wheat crop added urgency to the efforts.⁷

A. D. Wilson called for careful balancing of crops between human and animal needs, including an assessment of what could be shipped most efficiently. Corn did not store as well as wheat, and European tastes and mills were not equipped to accept other grains. U.S. appetites and mills were more flexible. Consequently, America would ship as much wheat and flour as possible. Wilson outlined three ways to increase the flour supply: grow more wheat; shift home-front consumption to grains such as corn, rye, and barley; and get more flour out of each bushel of wheat by milling "whole wheat" instead of refined white flour, thus increasing volume by as much as 15 to 20 percent.⁸

Management of food would be critically important.

The professor's suggestions for bringing in a bountiful, war-winning crop underscore the differences between his era's agricultural practices and those of today. In 1917 there were 175,000 farms in Minnesota but only 15,525 tractors in the entire United States.⁹ Grain was planted and harvested by animal and human power. Huge steam- and gas-powered threshing machines helped with the process, as men traveled among their neighbors' farms in the fall to bring in the crops while women cooked table-groaning threshers' meals to keep them going. Now, the men would be needed to fight the war, and eating habits would have to change dramatically.

As the school year was almost over, Professor Wilson recommended dismissing boys from high school to work on farms. He also outlined specific steps to boost farm yields: Increase wheat acreage at the expense of oats. Increase corn acreage. Use all manure available. Increase

FACING PAGE: *Window display in St. Paul's Golden Rule department store, 1918, promoting patriotic food conservation*



Threshing wheat, about 1918

acreage of clover and alfalfa to feed to livestock instead of their usual grain ration. Run tractors 24 hours a day, where possible, to break 500,000 acres of timothy sod. Plant potatoes. Keep a garden. Can or otherwise preserve fruit and vegetables enough for two years.¹⁰

Hoover's successes in Belgian relief made him an expert on war food supply even before the president asked him in early May to head the soon-to-be-formed U.S. Food Administration. Hoover accepted but stipulated that he not be paid a salary, as he felt the position "would carry more moral leadership if he were a volunteer alongside his countrymen in war." Hoover explained the agency's goals to Edgar in a May letter: "If we can effect better transportation conditions, economy and savings of waste in manufacture and consumption together with stabilizing prices and stimulation of production we will have accomplished everything for which the food administration was designed."¹¹

While it would take several months for Congress to enact funding for the Food Administration, conservation needed to begin immediately. Seeking to take advantage of the nation's patriotic sentiments during the first weeks of declared war, Hoover had the U.S. Department of Agriculture send out press releases and publish simple brochures and colorful posters with information and persuasive messages.

In the spring of 1917, the federal recommendations were relatively simple. The USDA urged homemakers to reduce food waste. Purchase food thoughtfully. Cook it carefully. Serve only what families would eat and save

any leftovers for soups or hash on another day. Eat less meat, fats, and flour. Plant gardens so families would have enough food to carry through the winter.¹² While some youngsters, no doubt, thought these waste-reduction efforts a ploy to get them to eat all of their vegetables, there was the very real prospect of starving children in Europe. Conservation in every household would make a difference.

Realizing the significance of quick action, Minnesotans had not waited for Hoover's official appointment and recommendations. From big cities to small towns, everyone was encouraged to grow and preserve food. By the middle of April, T. A. Erickson, director of boys and girls club work at the University Farm in St. Paul, offered a complete plan for children's involvement. It included one class a week to train children to raise a small garden at home or care for the family plot and then can rhubarb, sweet potatoes, carrots, strawberries, or any article the market afforded.¹³

Conservation in every household would make a difference.

In the fervor to join the war effort, newspapers across the state offered their own ideas. The *Duluth Herald* called for citizens to "Farm Your Back Yard" in its lead editorial on April 13, 1917. "Every bushel of potatoes, every pint of beans, every bunch of radishes, every dollar's worth of fresh vegetables raised in the home gardens this year will make the world's burden that much lighter; and if backyard and vacant lot gardening are pushed as they



USDA poster, probably 1917, outlining the many ways in which “food is wasted,” including preparing, serving, and eating too much, burning or otherwise ruining it in cooking, and causing spoilage through careless handling

should be, they will become a mighty factor in easing the lot of war-plagued humanity.”

In Albert Lea, nearly every family was making plans to put in gardens. In some cases, two or three families joined together and rented large plots of land near the city to raise enough vegetables for their entire winter use.¹⁴

The April 27, 1917, edition of the *Roseau County Times* featured several food-conservation articles. It related that members of the Roseau Commercial Club decided to meet with farmers “to discuss matters of mutual interest.” Meaning it as a “day of recreation,” the businessmen organized an “auto run” with a band to provide music and speakers who would give short talks at various stops. The paper also reported on eliminating food waste: “As a nation we seem to have a disdain of economizing. In many households there is a strong feeling that it is ‘only decent’

to provide more food than will be eaten and that is it’s demeaning to reckon closely. . . . Of course the waste in families of very limited means is slight, but in families of modest and ample means the waste is considerable.”

After teaching conservation, the next important step was to change eating and cooking habits. A survey of recipes in women’s magazines and cookbooks of the World War I era provides insight into the significant changes the voluntary guidelines would make in homes across America. Each month *Good Housekeeping* magazine published a chart of “Balanced Menus” for “Three Meals a Day.” For middle-class households in 1916, breakfasts were hearty and usually included cereal, eggs, fruit, some sort of bread and, frequently, meat. Lunch was a lighter meal of a soup or stew with salad, fruit or vegetable, and bread. Dinners, whether fancy or simple, were meat-and-potato menus with one or two additional vegetables, breads, and desserts. The potatoes were usually white, the breads were made with refined flour, and meat was served at almost every meal. Rice, sweet potatoes, and baked goods made from cornmeal and whole-wheat flour were rarely mentioned. The *Crisco Cookbook* (1914) offers lunch and dinner menus for every day of the year. White potatoes were on the menu for 242 meals, sweet potatoes for 32, and rice for only 30. There were just 12 recipes using spaghetti or macaroni. In Minnesota, the



Members of the University Farm’s Boys and Girls Club busily engaged in cold-pack canning, 1918. “The boys, who at first held back on the principle that canning is a girl’s business, have joined the effort after having watched men demonstrate,” reported a club leader.

Hennepin Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church's 40-page *Culinary Guide* offered nine recipes using white potatoes, one for spaghetti, and none for rice.¹⁵

Even before war restrictions, the poor 1916 fall harvest had challenged many households. What some writers called H.C.L., or High Cost of Living, had housewives across the nation changing menus. The potato crop had been less than one-third the usual, and the prospect for 1917 was even worse. Minnesotans read of potato riots in New York City in February, when tenement dwellers upset vegetable-sellers' pushcarts to protest exorbitant prices. Prices were high in Minnesota, too. Cooks might have stretched a wartime meal by throwing extra potatoes into the stewpot, but now H.C.L. made that an unaffordable alternative. University of Minnesota home economists suggested a substitution: "Rice at 9 cents a pound is the equivalent of potatoes at \$1 per bushel. With potatoes at \$3 or \$4 per bushel, rice would be a friend in need if only we knew how to use it; and under the present conditions, it becomes our patriotic duty to learn."¹⁶

Minnesota newspapers published recipes and suggestions to help homemakers cook husband-pleasing meals while doing their patriotic duty. In May and June 1917, the university's home economics department sent a series of news releases to Twin Cities and Duluth newspapers with recipes they had developed for breads, muffins, and griddle cakes using corn, oatmeal, and other flours in combination with wheat flour. They also developed recipes using rice in main dishes, as a way to stretch meat and conserve potatoes and wheat.¹⁷

Not every recipe printed in newspapers seemed appropriate for Minnesota kitchens, as some listed ingredients more common in New England than the Midwest. Beginning on June 6, 1917, the *Mankato Free Press* printed "Today's War Recipe," often at the top of the Society column. These recipes included fish cutlets, cheese

charlotte, fish pie, bacon soup, stuffed onions, eggplant, and meat pie. Frequently the recipes ended with an aphorism such as "Masticate more and need half as much."¹⁸

For an August 1917 article, "American Housewives are Frugal and Saving of Food," a *Free Press* reporter interviewed several unnamed Mankato homemakers and found "unanimous agreement between the women of the moderate and work-a-day homes. 'I don't want any "high-toned" women coming around here telling me to save,' stated one mother of six who pays the rent and contrives to buy the household necessities and clothes for her family on her husband's magnificent salary of \$2 per day." Another woman asserted, "We working people don't need to be told to save. . . . We have always saved. There is nothing that goes to waste around our house."¹⁹ Today's War Recipe stopped appearing in the *Mankato Free Press*.

By summer, the war was becoming very real to Minnesotans. On June 5, 1917, all men between the ages of 21 and 30 were required to register for the draft, and on July 20 the first men were called up. On July 28 the first units of the Minnesota National Guard shipped out for France to begin preparing bases for the enlisted and drafted men who would follow.²⁰

Each summer week brought more ripe fruit and vegetables to be preserved by canning or drying.

Throughout the spring and summer, the University of Minnesota farm staff, agricultural extension, and home economics department were busy building a network of leaders in every county for organization, education, and action. Initially called the Food Conservation Committee,

A Taste of World War I Cookery

Eager to do their bit for the war effort, Minnesotans from many walks of life developed and shared their own "war food" recipes. Some of these introduced relatively unfamiliar staples, such as rice, to standard household menus. Others skimped

on precious ingredients or stretched them with substitutes to concoct a version of more familiar cakes, breads, and muffins.

For a taste of wartime cookery, visit www.mnhs.org/recipes. The recipes found there—Rice au Gratin,

Dried Peas with Rice and Tomatoes, Yeast Corn Bread, Oatmeal Muffins, Chocolate Whole-Wheat Cookies, Lumberjack's Cake, and Chocolate Cake—have been slightly updated for today's kitchens but preserve the flavors and textures of 1917–18.



Food-conservation demonstration, its message underscored by Food Administration wall posters

the group was a division of a state committee working to increase food production and conservation. Once the U.S. Food Administration was funded in August, the conservation committee moved under it, and A. D. Wilson became to federal food administrator for Minnesota. The letters and copies of replies in the files of Josephine Berry and Mildred Weigley, directors of the home economics subcommittee, illustrate the challenges they faced in spreading information about the best ways to preserve garden bounty, reduce food waste, and change eating habits.²¹

Each summer week brought more ripe fruit and vegetables to be preserved by canning or drying. It was one thing to plant gardens; now homemakers needed to make sure the produce did not go to waste. They fought battles against the tyranny of the harvest each and every day. The USDA published booklets on the new method of cold-pack home canning: Blanch fruits and vegetables briefly in boiling water, then cool and pack them in

glass jars. Fill the jars with water or syrup, cap them, and process in boiling water for specified times—up to 3 hours—to kill bacteria. Even farm wives who canned home produce every summer found the wartime goal of putting up a jar of fruit, a jar of vegetables, and a jar of jam for each day of the year daunting. City homemakers who typically limited their food preserving to a few jars of jam, jelly, and pickles benefited from the university extension office's help.

For example, on May 22, 1917, Vera Smollett of Fergus Falls High School wrote to the program directors in St. Paul: "The school has purchased a steam pressure canner which will be at the disposal of the ladies of the community during the summer. We have two bread making clubs composed of high school girls and we are interesting them in garden and canning work during the summer. I have talked with the girls in my classes and they are eager to do their part."

While willing to do their part, some Minnesota homemakers were not so simply convinced that they needed to learn new kitchen skills. Extension-service volunteers who traveled across the state demonstrating canning and baking combination-flour breads found that their classes met with mixed reactions. As the Becker County chair wrote at the end of July, “Our best workers can see nothing but the Red Cross and are so entirely absorbed by it that food conservation as yet does not seem to have touched them. Largest population is in rural settlements. They contend that at the present time they cannot take time from hay-ing, canning and other duties to attend meetings.”

She went on to report a general lack of concern in her community.

Had one canning demonstration scheduled, canceled at the last minute as “it was so hot.” Some of those expected to be present wanted to attend the circus. Such simple excuses seem to be the rule. I truly think our women ought to be awakened. It is astonishing how few women even have their eyes open to the certain stringent measures that the U.S. will soon have to make and it may be that we shall have to await the results of one month of active fight before they will respond.

Agnes Bobb Adsit, coordinator for Dakota County, reported in early August:

Interest in the demonstrations themselves is not as intensive. Hastings housewives are somewhat above average I think in their skill in handling and preparation of food. I rather imagine they take it as a reflection on their ability to cope with the present emergency that they are asked to pledge money for a “new fangled” demonstration to teach them any cooking even war time cooking. And many of them do not like dark flour and seem to feel (from their manner) that no use of dark flour could make it palatable to them.

Adsit was referring to whole-wheat flour. Few people recognized the nutritional advantages of the whole-wheat kernel; many saw only “unacceptable” roughage. Even William Edgar, who had urged all citizens to do their part in the war effort, agreed. He editorialized in no uncertain terms: “By whatever sophistry it may be supported, every argument for increased extraction flour, mixed flour, or flour otherwise debased, is an argument for diluted flour—a deceptive gain in volume at cost of more than commensurate loss in nutritive value.”²²



Esther Moran, supervisor of domestic services for the St. Paul schools, published one of the few whole-wheat recipes to appear in the popular media. Her December 9, 1917, *Pioneer Press* cooking column titled “Cookies for Dessert” featured chocolate whole-wheat cookies, which also used less sugar and fat than a cake or pie.

By the end of July 1917, the challenge of supplying the Allies while feeding the nation led the federal government to issue more specific directives. Josephine Berry reported the results of a Food Administration meeting in Washington to pastors across the state. U.S. and Canadian consumption would require 700 million bushels of wheat, she related, while the Allies needed 550 million bushels—at a time when the wheat crop in Argentina had largely failed. The Food Administration, therefore, had issued seven voluntary conservation measures: use local foodstuffs to avoid unnecessary transportation of goods; use perishable foods to save staples; eliminate waste in all possible ways; conserve wheat;

conserve meats, fats, and sugars; increase the use of milk and milk products; and set forth the principles underlying adequate feeding for health. William Edgar summed up the challenge: “We of North America now face the very serious task of being obliged to feed the entire world, an undertaking not beyond our ability.”²³

It would not be an easy task. Farms across Belgium and France had been out of production since the war began. America’s wheat crops in 1916 and 1917 were significantly below normal. As Hoover put it, the United States was expected to be the world’s granary, yet the statistics suggested there was no wheat to spare.²⁴

The hot dish had yet to take its place in American cuisine.

Reconnecting the nation with cornmeal seemed a good place to start. This traditional American staple had fallen out of favor during the early part of the nineteenth century. In the 1914 *Crisco Cookbook* bread chapter, 48 recipes call for white flour but only 16 for all other grains including whole wheat, rye, graham, and cornmeal. The ratios were similar in Minnesota, where the Hennepin M. E. Church’s *Culinary Guide* shows 30 bread recipes using wheat flour, six for other flours, and none using cornmeal.

But now Americans were called upon to voluntarily make all breads with some proportion of alternative flour. The need to stretch the wheat harvest was pressing. In addition to offering a number of recipes for corn muffins, cakes, and waffles, food scientists at the University of Minnesota home economics department began experimenting with ways to replace at least 20 percent of the flour in all manner of breads and baked goods with non-wheat grains. The resulting Minnesota Liberty Breads, including cornmeal yeast bread and oatmeal muffins, became the standard of commercial and home bakers across the nation.²⁵

In August 1917 Congress both funded the U.S. Food Administration and passed the Food and Fuel Control Act. Also known as the Lever Act, this law provided guarantees to farmers and had provisions to prevent speculation and hoarding, fix trade margins, eliminate waste in manufacture and distribution, and buy and sell essential foods such as wheat and sugar. It also specified penalties for noncompliance, in essence putting offending retailers

and wholesalers out of business. Hoover thought these punishments too great. In September 1917 he explained his conclusions on the best way to motivate the public changes needed to win the war with food: “With our people there can be no force used on production, and no force used in consumption. There can be intelligent leadership and there can be a stimulation of patriotism to effect ends for the common good.”²⁶

Beginning that fall, the Food Administration issued schedules for meatless and wheatless days and meals. As with mixed-grain baked goods, the meatless menus were a significant change to the typical American’s diet. The hot dish had yet to take its place in American cuisine. *Good Housekeeping* had published a few recipes in 1916 for “meals from the oven,” especially useful when the stove was needed “for heating the irons on ironing-day.” Recipes for casseroles of any kind were scarce; the Minneapolis churchwomen offered only one—veal in casserole—in their *Culinary Guide*. For the new meatless days, homemakers—who had just begun to master hot dishes that stretched a pound of meat with rice or other starches

Food Schedule			
	BREAKFAST	NOON DAY MEAL	EVENING MEAL
Monday	MEATLESS WHEATLESS	Wheatless	Wheatless
Tuesday	MEATLESS	MEATLESS	WHEATLESS MEATLESS
Wed'day	MEATLESS WHEATLESS	Wheatless	Wheatless
Thursday	MEATLESS		Wheatless
Friday	MEATLESS		Wheatless
Saturday	MEATLESS	PORKLESS	WHEATLESS PORKLESS
Sunday	MEATLESS		Wheatless

BREAKFAST, - - 4:00 a. m. to 10:30 a. m.
 NOON DAY MEAL, 10:30 a. m. to 4:30 p. m.
 EVENING MEAL, 4:30 p. m. to 11:30 p. m.
 OPEN HOURS, - 11:30 p. m. to 4:00 a. m.

“Help Win the War”

This card is furnished to the trade to assist them in observing the food regulations. Additional copies may be had by applying to

The LICENSED RETAIL LIQUOR DEALERS ASS'N.
MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.

Display card to “assist in observing the food regulations,” furnished “to the trade” by Minneapolis’s Licensed Retail Liquor Dealers Association

to feed a family of five—now had to consider preparing recipes such as dried peas with rice and tomatoes, pimento and cottage-cheese roast, and baked cowpeas and cheese to keep their families strong and healthy.²⁷

Restrictions varied over the next year to reflect changes in actual supplies. Local businesses teamed with the Food Administration to keep the public updated, distributing and displaying food-schedule cards.

Supporting this effort, the university's A. D. Wilson in November suggested this menu for a meatless day: Breakfast—cream of rye with figs, poached egg on toast, toast and butter, coffee; lunch—scalloped cabbage with cream, rye muffins with butter, fruit; and dinner—baked sweet potatoes, buttered beets, spinach with vinegar, oatmeal bread with butter, and raspberry shortcake. For a wheatless day, the good professor recommended a breakfast of oranges, oatmeal, soft-cooked eggs, and corn muffins. Lunch could be cream of celery soup, rye crackers, tuna salad garnished with cucumber pickles, and rye bread. For dinner, he suggested baked salmon or beef,

creamed potatoes, relish, buttered string beans, cabbage, beets, horseradish, oatmeal bread, jellied apples, and honey cookies.²⁸

As for the double whammy of meatless and wheatless breakfasts, Wilson offered: “Goodbye to bacon, roll and coffee a highly wasteful breakfast. You could eat six rolls and all the bacon you would allow and still not be satisfied. Instead, substitute a corn muffin for the roll and add a generous dish of locally grown perishables and apples, potatoes or hominy grits.”²⁹

Official publications were one way of getting the word out, but in the days before far-reaching mass media, both the federal and Minnesota food-conservation agencies actively pursued alternative avenues for spreading information and persuasion. They provided material to libraries, businesses, and churches to be used in displays and newsletters, perhaps even as homily topics. They erected huge street-level billboards at busy intersections. Motion-picture theaters ran special war films sometimes preceded by a live speaker who



Publicity and persuasion: Posters displayed in businesses and prominent billboards (this one in Minneapolis) reminded citizens of their home-front duties.



Well-attended cooking school in Plainview, southeastern Minnesota, where women learned to bake bread with rice and barley flour

would give a “Four Minute” talk on food conservation or other war-related issues.

All across Minnesota, county fairs put on canning and Liberty Bread demonstrations and exhibits. Organizers of the state fair promised to do everything they could to “encourage food production and conservation.” Mildred Weigley even applied this mandate to the judging of canned goods. Instead of opening the jars for judging and then putting them on display to spoil, she found a way to re-process them so the food would not be wasted.³⁰

As summer turned to fall, the university’s home economists continued to work with county agents and to train the state’s home economists, students, and others who wanted to learn “war cookery.” Again the correspondence tells of trials and triumphs.

In August Eleanor Nutchell of the St. Cloud American Red Cross chapter wrote, telling of ways to combine Red Cross and food-conservation efforts.

Will you kindly look over the book of recipes I am sending . . . and suggest some others to have printed in the local papers. . . . I have sold these for fifty cents, forty cents going to Red Cross as we have folded and covered them ourselves. “High Finance” I call that, but I think too that people are more likely to seriously consider the

things they have to pay for than those too accessible.

They are selling fast and I do hope will keep up the interest in food conservation.

The Mankato chair reported, “Our requests (for information) are far in excess of anything we can take care of,” and her Mille Lacs compatriot wrote for menu suggestions, as her group “would like to set up a Hoover restaurant or lunch counter at our county fair.” Mayme K. Bohlander of Montevideo explained, “Our agricultural instructor has been giving quite a number of canning demonstrations this summer and fall. Quite a good many people have attended and have also brought vegetables and done the work at the school.”

Some county chairs needed more support than others. From Becker County came a request in September 1917: “I am to have a public safety exhibit . . . the week of our county fair. If possible will you send me one dozen loaves of ‘war bread’ for exhibition and sampling. Whatever expense is incurred I will meet. Should like to have the bread by Thursday afternoon if possible.” To this, the acting chair of the state food commission replied: “I am sorry that we cannot furnish you with samples. . . . We are not equipped for turning out bread here. I am sending you, however, copies of the recipe. You may find someone in

Detroit [Lakes] to make them for you. . . . One of the Minneapolis teachers . . . found that so long as she followed the directions carefully she had good results even with inexperienced classes.”

Mrs. C. B. Watkins of Cloquet wrote of extensive activities and the lesson she learned in Carlton County. The Cloquet board of education hired a teacher for courses in “canning and drying, &c,” who was sent into the county districts and small towns.

Thus far the schedule includes Moose Lake, Carlton, Barnum, Mahtowa, Scanlon, Knife Falls, Sawyer, and Fond-du-lac village. The latter are Indian villages and the lessons offered there are the request of the Indian agent, whose wife had taken the course in town. At each lesson receipts for meat-substitutes, etc., are also given. We have found that the women simply want the canning and drying, and that they will not turn out when the lesson is on war-bread, meat-substitutes, or anything they can get by following a receipt. So we work these in incidentally.

Meanwhile, the university home economics department continued to teach war-related cooking courses. In December John Raini and Edward Canute, “two woodsmen for life by choice,” came to campus to learn recipes and techniques to carry back to the north woods. A week later they sent back the recipe they developed for a milkless, butterless, eggless cake.³¹ The lumberjacks were not the only ones to send their own war recipes back to the university for sharing through the organization. Mrs. H. C. Hotaling from Blue Earth County, for example, offered her chocolate cake recipe that incorporated a significant percentage of barley flour.

As gardens were harvested and produce canned or dried, emphasis shifted to reinforcing 100-percent participation in food conservation by careful menu planning. Children were a significant part of these efforts. From the beginning, they had been urged to help grow gardens and clean their plates, as there were “starving children in Europe.” When school resumed, children were enlisted in gathering signatures on “Food Pledge Cards” carried home and to their neighbors, with the goal of having everyone pledge to conserve food. In St. Paul the plan was for all 40,000 schoolchildren to enroll 100,000 people.³²

For the slackers who did not join the mission whole-

heartedly, the U.S. Food Administration passed out ammunition in the form of brochures with messages such as this:

Uncle Sam is mighty big and strong, but he is not so big and strong that he can afford to break a promise. . . .

We have promised to “grub-stake” the Allies. We said: “You need not farm—you fight!”

And they did not farm, but how they did fight.

Winter is coming on. There were few for the sowing and there are fewer now for the harvest. The pinch has come. In France they are looking across the sea and saying: “How about that ‘grub-stake,’ Uncle Sam; how about that ‘grub-stake!’”

They are not whimpering, the Frenchmen, they are not that kind, but they are hungry and if we fail them with our “grub-stake” they will S-T-A-R-V-E! Thousands of them—men, women and little children.

It is food that will win the war!

How are we going to get it?

We are going to save it—save it to save our pals, because that’s what the Allies are in this fight.³³

In December, the first of the 17,000 Minnesota troops to serve in the war shipped out for the battlefields of France. Food-conservation fliers asked people to “add to your gift list the daily savings of wheat, meats, fats and sugar.”³⁴

By the beginning of 1918 it was clear that the various food-conservation campaigns worked, but Americans would need to practice their altered consumption habits at least through the 1918 harvest. Supplies of critical foods—wheat, some meats, sugar, and fats—continued to be tight. The administration again reached out to children to lead the way. They were encouraged to take the No Waste Pledge: “I pledge my allegiance to my flag, in service true I will not lag/ I’ll not despise my crusts of bread, nor make complaint, whatever fed/ On wheatless days I’ll eat no wheat, on other days eat less of sweet/ I’ll waste no pennies, spoil no clothes, and so I’ll battle against our foes/ No slackard, but a soldier keen, to do my best in the year eighteen.”³⁵

In February C. H. Benjamin wrote to the *Minnesota Farm*





Be Patriotic
sign your country's
pledge to save the food

Review, suggesting that city dwellers all “raise a hen”—or more than one: “For the average city dweller a dozen good hens, properly managed will furnish plenty of eggs. Just enough hens to turn kitchen waste material into food products. All you need,” he said, was a “6 x 8 foot house—an old wood shed would do fine.”³⁶

A balance of celebratory news stories and guilt-inducing press releases encouraged most families to continue eating their mixed-grain breads and meatless meals.

Fliers with recipes for meat pies and savory stews to “make a little meat go a long way,” among other topics, were available in a number of languages. In St. Paul alone orders were placed for cards with recipes in Lithuanian, Yiddish, Swedish, and Finnish for distribution in immigrant communities. In another measure to help assure voluntary compliance, the Food Administration required that for every pound of white, refined flour a homemaker bought, she would have to buy another pound of non-wheat flour: oatmeal, cornmeal, barley, or rye.³⁷

A balance of celebratory news stories telling of successes and guilt-inducing press releases reporting enforcement of Lever Act provisions against hoarding encouraged most families to continue eating their mixed-grain breads and meatless meals. As one 1918 brochure said: “Let those who murmur over mixed bread read this bill of fare: Breakfast—acorn coffee, 2 slices of bread made of rye, sawdust and potato flour. Dinner—soup with small piece of tough beef, coarse turnips and potato. Supper—Soup again with 2 slices of bread. This is the fate of 15 American prisoners of war in Germany. Captured last October and since then have been marched many miles on these rations. Exhibited in villages to show American soldiers no match for Germans.”³⁸

By early spring 1918, the Minnesota food commission network was able to spread the news that meat restrictions were being lifted. Homemakers still needed to conserve, but the official calendar of meatless days was suspended. Although wheat was still on the restricted list, there was now a bountiful supply of potatoes, and cooks were urged to use them instead of bread

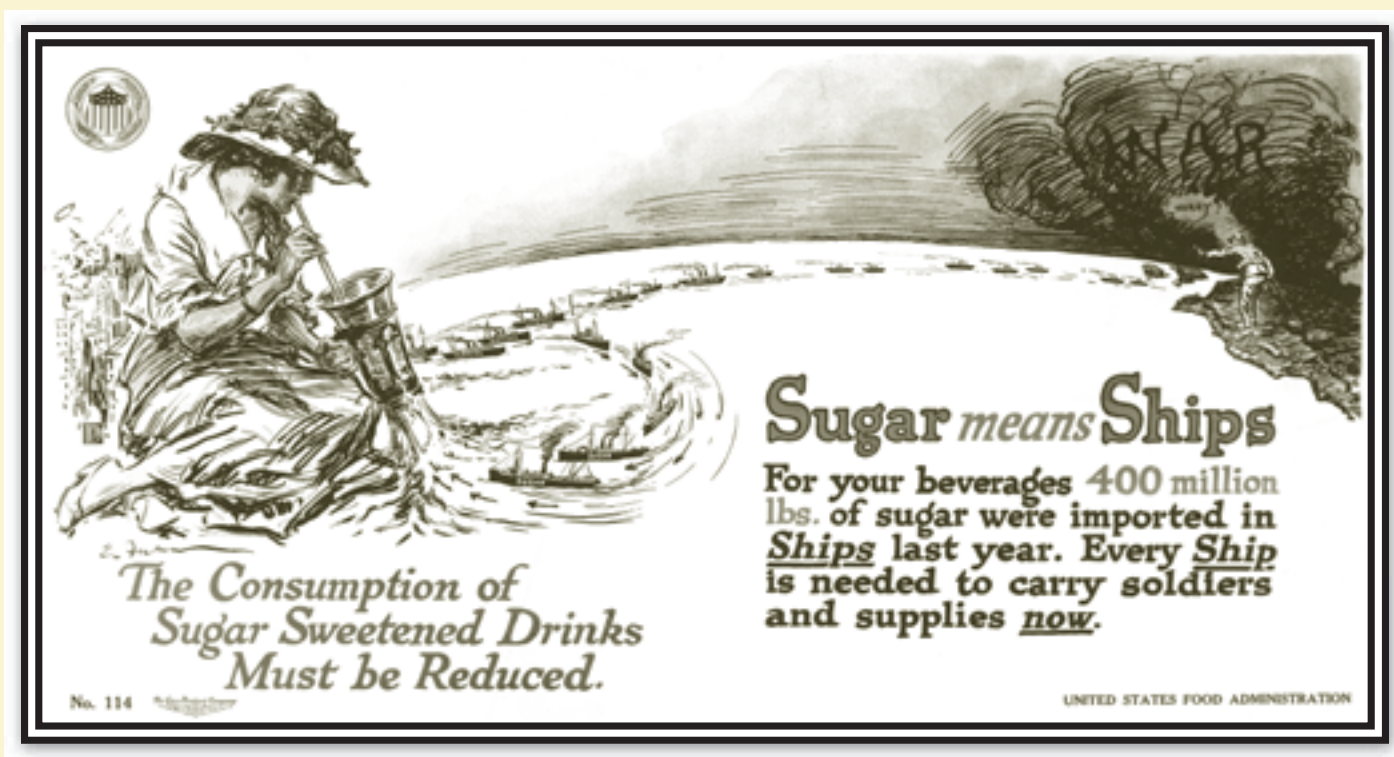
at many meals. Patriotic department-store window displays urged people to buy potatoes “by the bushel, not the peck” as “every spud [is] a bullet.”³⁹

Enterprising county committee chairs organized events to praise the newly powerful potato and plan for more production. As May Coppernall wrote to the state conservation office, “Potato week in Park Rapids was a decided success. Handed out recipes and made up new dishes which were very good even if they were original. We have all growers enthusiastic over the lowly potato.”

Controlling the supply of sugar in the spring and summer of 1918 finally led to a program of rationing. Voluntary restrictions—with some fines levied against hoarders—had worked for flour, but sugar seemed to require more stringent actions. Households were limited to 2 pounds per person each month. This may sound like a lot, but, as the *Minnesota Official Food News* explained, it amounted to “six level teaspoons a day, three for beverages and three for cooking.”⁴⁰ More sugar was allowed for those who were canning jams and jellies, but these



Minneapolis's Washburn-Crosby company did its bit by milling and promoting alternative flours. The deliveryman shown here would soon vanish as stores instituted cash-and-carry sales to free men for war work.



"Hurry!" implores the soldier under the cloud labeled "War."

allotments were strictly supervised. Like those who had hoarded wheat flour by amassing more than a 30-day supply, individuals who cheated with sugar found their names published in the newspapers. Fines were levied and frequently paid to the Red Cross.

In addition to encouraging cooperation from individual households, the Minnesota county food commissioners monitored commercial compliance with federal regulations among bakeries, hotels, grocery stores, and restaurants. Disseminating public information continued to be a primary goal to assure that fair prices for all foods were maintained. Price information indicating "average wholesale prices being paid by local retailers for the staples and the highest prices which may be charged to consumers for same" appeared on "Food Fair Price Lists" prepared by members of the state's food administration and published in local newspapers. "The cooperation in sending out price lists . . . will be of very material aid in maintaining fair prices to consumers and in protecting dealers from charges of profiteering." Indeed, food prices across the nation increased only 3.5 percent from 1917 to 1918.⁴¹

When the United States entered the "war to end all wars," President Wilson called it "the supreme test of the nation." When the war ended 18 months

later on November 11, 1918, America had emerged to take its place as a leader of nations. The country's strength and resolve were demonstrated on the battlefields and in the sacrifices made at every meal in every kitchen across the country. In 1918 alone, America shipped abroad nearly 12 million tons of bread, 3 million tons of meat, and 2 million tons of sugar.⁴²

Americans had truly demonstrated their essential national character, voluntarily, for the most part, conserving and doing without customary foods to help the war effort. President Wilson's vision for lasting world peace was quoted on one of the Food Administration posters: "Hunger does not breed reform; it breeds madness and all the ugly distemper that makes an ordered life impossible. The future belongs to those who prove themselves the true friends of mankind."

As the university's Professor A. D. Wilson wrote, "Peace will bring added responsibilities to America as the food source of the world. . . . Now we must feed hundreds of millions. When the day of peace comes, America must assume the role of the good Samaritan. . . . We must realize that it is our duty as well as our privilege to share and share alike with those who have fought our battles for world peace . . . and to share our food with the hungry Germans as readily as with any other suffering humans."⁴³

Food not only had the capacity to win the war, it could assure the peace. □

Notes

1. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Apr. 3, 1917, p. 4.
2. For Wilson's speech, see www.firstworldwar.com/source/doyourbit.htm.
3. "Belgian Relief Efficient," *New York Times*, Apr. 29, 1915, and "Northwest's Flour Landed for Belgians," *Minneapolis Journal*, in Newspaper Clippings, 1909–49, William Edgar and Family Papers, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS).
4. William Edgar to My dearest little Anne, Feb. 28, 1915, Edgar papers.
5. Wilson's second inaugural address, Mar. 5, 1917; see www.thisnation.com/library/inaugural/wilson2.html.
6. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Apr. 13, 1917, p. 1.
7. *Mankato Daily Free Press*, Apr. 18, 1917, p. 1.
8. *Pioneer Press*, Apr. 13, 1917, p. 1. Dr. Harvey Wiley, a leading food authority, concurred with Wilson on whole wheat: "Under present methods of milling there are 18 pounds of waste [for] every 60 pounds of flour milled." He further declared the "waste" to be the most nutritious part of the wheat, which was "being fed to cows"; *Minnesota Farm Review*, Sept. 8, 1917, p. 3.
9. Greg Kimmet, agricultural statistician, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, interview by the author, Apr. 19, 2005; *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture, 1919* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920), 745.
10. *Duluth Herald*, Apr. 13, 1917, p. 1.
11. Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 1:225; *Northwestern Miller*, May 23, 1917, p. 539.
12. See, for example, USDA food posters, MHS.
13. T. A. Erickson, memo, Apr. 20, 1917, in Federal Food Administration and State Food Conservation Committee files, War Records Commission, Minnesota State Archives, MHS, hereinafter cited as Food files.
14. Reported in the *Roseau County Times*, Apr. 27, 1917, p. 1.
15. Analysis based on *Good Housekeeping*, Jan.–Dec. 1916; *The Crisco Cookbook* (Cincinnati: Procter and Gamble, 1914); Louise Bennet Weaver and Helen Cowles LeCron, *1000 Ways to Please a Husband* (New York: A. L. Burt Company, 1917); and Hennepin Avenue M. E. Church, *Culinary Guide* (Minneapolis, ca. 1915).
16. *Roseau County Times*, Apr. 27, 1917, p. 1; "Bulletin No. 5, Conservation of Potatoes and Wheat: Use Rice," typescript, Food files.
17. "Bulletin No. 5," Food files.
18. *Mankato Daily Free Press*, June 27, 1917, p. 5.
19. *Mankato Daily Free Press*, Aug. 3, 1917, p. 5.
20. Franklin F. Holbrook and Livia Appel, *Minnesota in the War with Germany* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1932), 1:124, 136, 139, 347.
21. Unless otherwise noted, all correspondence quoted below is in Mildred Weigley's files, Food files.
22. *Northwestern Miller*, June 6, 1917, p. 687.
23. Berry Report, Food files; *Northwestern Miller*, June 13, 1917, p. 755.
24. Hoover, *Memoirs*, 1:267.
25. *Minnesota Farm Review*, Aug. 4, 1917, p. 1, 4.
26. *Minnesota Farm Review*, Sept. 1, 1917, p. 1; Hoover, *Memoirs*, 1:249.
27. *Good Housekeeping*, Jan. 1916, p. 106–09, 112–13; U.S. Food Administration, various fliers, Weigley files, Food files; U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, "Wheatless Meals," *Food Thrift Series No. 5*, p. 3.
28. *Minnesota Farm Review*, Nov. 15, 1917, p. 1.
29. *Minnesota Farm Review*, Sept. 29, 1917, p. 1.
30. *Minnesota Farm Review*, Sept. 8, 1917, p. 2.
31. *University Farm Press News*, Dec. 12, 1917, p. 1.
32. *Pioneer Press*, Nov. 7, 1917, p. 8.
33. U.S. Food Administration, "To All Active Workers Family Enrollment Campaign," Oct. 22, 1917, Food files.
34. "Food News Notes for Public Libraries," vol. 1, No. 2, Nov. 1917, p. 23, copy in Wilson Library government documents, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.



35. <http://www.iowa-city.k12.ia.us/Hoover/foodadmin.html>.
36. *Minnesota Farm Review*, Feb. 12, 1918, p. 4.
37. Holbrook and Appel, *Minnesota in the War with Germany*, 2:161. Copies of the recipes are in Food files.
38. Flier, Food files.
39. Golden Rule war window, photograph, in Holbrook and Appel, *Minnesota in the War with Germany*, 2:152.
40. *Minnesota Official Food News*, Sept. 15, 1918, p. 1, Wilson Library government documents.
41. *Official Food News*, Sept. 15, 1918, p. 1, Oct. 1, 1918, p. 3; Food Fair Price List, Food files.
42. Hoover, *Memoirs*, 1:270.
43. *Official Food News*, Nov. 15, 1918, p. 1.

The photo on p. 275 (bottom) is courtesy the University of Minnesota Archives; the poster on p. 284 is courtesy the General Mills Archives. All other images are in MHS collections, including the corn poster by Lloyd Harrison, the food-pledge poster by Paul Stahr, "Little Americans" by Cushman Parker, and "Fruits of Victory" by Geonebel Jacobs.