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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Thursday, November 23, 1944

Subject: "Disposal of Government-owned Foods". Information from Office of Distribution officials, War Food Administration.

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Has it ever occurred to you how dependent most of us are on the grocery store? Unless you live in an isolated part of the country you probably make rather regular jaunts to buy the groceries you need.

With the Armed Forces it's different. A squad of marines on the Island of Saipan can't send to the corner grocery store for a bag of potatoes...or whatever they need for lunch. They depend upon somebody thousands of miles away who will know what they need and see that they get it.

From your own experience you know how difficult it is to judge the amount of food to buy for your family...especially over the weekend. If your plans change at the last minute you have to do some quick adjusting. Unexpected company means stretching the supply on hand. And an invitation for Sunday dinner calls for some ingenuity, too...to keep your food for use later.

As the general would say, one of the primary elements in successful warfare is surprise. That's true now, as always. But no matter how many sudden changes are made in military plans, supplies of food must be kept moving into camps and battle lines...enough food and the right kinds of food. No doubt you remember back to the early months of the war when German submarines sank so many of our supply ships. Gaging the amount of food to buy for the Armed Forces in view of the possible loss through submarine warfare was quite a job. The only intelligent decision to make was just what the Government did...to build up reserves in supply depots...shipside and beachhead. No one wants an American soldier or sailor to go hungry.

Fortunately the submarine menace was finally under control...the sea lanes were kept comparatively clear for supply ships to go through. Danger from air attack continues and trucks of food are often bombed as they wind their way to the front lines. But when one ship load or one truck load of food is lost another is close behind to take its place.

Government warehouses are kept filled with meat and vegetables, fruit and cereals...everything the Army and Navy cooks need to feed our forces well. Careful inventories are made frequently...just as you check up on your refrigerator and pantry supplies every few days. Occasionally you find the carrots have shriveled and the celery withered a little, but of course, if you're a thrifty housekeeper you don't throw them away...you use them in soup or stew.

The men who buy for the Government don't find the problem so simple to solve. When they buy tanks and planes they sign a contract for a certain number, and they get what they order. But contracts can't be made with every farmer. So in order to be sure that the farmers will raise enough food for all the Armed Forces and civilians, the Government has supported the price on several commodities. Well, the farmer can't plant an acre of corn and be sure he will harvest 50 bushels. He might get 30 and he may get 60 bushels to the acre. If conditions are favorable and he raises more than he expected perhaps he can't sell it all...even when home-makers cooperate in buying abundant foods. So the Government must buy the extra food to support its price agreement.

Having bought the food, what's to be done with it? Several solutions have worked out satisfactorily. Schools and institutions are glad to have the surplus food. The past summer when extra carrots, green beans and beets were distributed to schools, hundreds of parents, teachers and students got busy and canned it for school lunches. Perhaps you were one of the canners who helped.

There's another kind of emergency the Government must meet. As we mentioned Army plans are subject to quick change. Their effect ripples back across the

waters to this country and upsets many a well laid plan. About the time of the invasion of France ships that were to carry cargoes of beef from the U. S. to Europe...were ordered to load ammunitions instead. The problem was what to do with this limited and temporary supply of meat. The wholesale meat dealers assured the Government office that civilians would be glad to buy. The meat was offered for sale to the packers who originally sold it to the Government. They in turn gave their usual customers the chance to buy the meat, and it was soon released into ordinary trade channels, and eaten by home front workers.

The policy of not dumping merchandise on the open market is strictly followed in disposing of Government owned goods. Turning food back into the customary channels of distribution is similar to loading a canoe. Have you ever had the experience of getting 4 persons into a canoe? As long as they are evenly distributed through the boat, it balances nicely and paddles easily. But the minute you put extra weight on one side over you go. Our economic ship can be tipped over just as easily. Distributing too much food in one place upsets the even keel of trade and makes for much confusion. By a careful, orderly plan Government owned food, which is no longer needed by the Armed Forces, can be distributed to you and other families in the customary fashion, by way of the grocery store, thereby serving a useful purpose to everyone along the route...the farmer, wholesaler, retailer and you.

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