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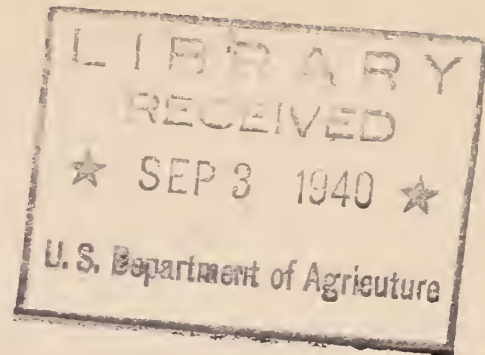
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, D. C.

August 27, 1940

TO: All Information Advisers
FROM: John Fischer, Director of Information
SUBJECT: Special Memorandum on National Defense



Harlan Cleveland of this office has prepared the attached memorandum, which develops further the ideas which we discussed in our recent memo, on Farm Security Administration's part in national defense. You may be able to adapt many of the facts included in this memo. for the talks and radio broadcasts which you are preparing on this subject.

Additional copies of this memorandum are available, if you need them.

Farm Security Administration and Defense

The nation's whole strength is being mobilized and put to the task of national defense. Tanks, guns, and airplanes are the outward signs of this effort, but they are only a small part of total defense. One of its most important aspects is the wise conservation of human and material resources.

The last war took an incalculable toll of America's human resources -- not alone through death on the battlefield, but through the aftermath of physical disease and economic depression. It also ate deeply into our land resources. Forty million acres which had never before felt the plow -- many of them unsuited for farming -- were placed in cultivation. It has been estimated by H. H. Bennett, Chief of the Soil Conservation Service, that as a result of this indiscriminate cultivation, 34,000,000 acres were damaged by erosion, and an additional 4,000,000 acres were ruined outright.

A war emergency would mean a sudden and tremendous drain on the reservoir of our national resources. Therefore, the reservoir must be well filled to begin with, and it must be capable of replenishing itself while the drain continues. In the task of getting the reservoir ready, the Farm Security Administration is already making a significant contribution, and could continue to do so if unhappily war should come.

There are two sides to conservation -- material resources and human resources. The two billion acres of American land constitute the most valuable of our material resources; and the most pressing problem on the human side is the down-and-out Americans in the lowest income groups.

Land Conservation

Conservation is to agriculture what the machine-tool industry is to

manufacturing. No industrial manager would think of concentrating on immediate production of consumer goods to the exclusion of production in the underlying machine-tool industry, upon which future production depends. Similarly, to neglect the land is to sign the death warrant of future agricultural production.

A central fact in American history has been the land and its treatment. We have used our national resources wastefully and without thought of the future. Of the original 816,158,000 acres of virgin forest, there remain only 494,398,000 acres. Besides this loss, there are about 120,000,000 acres of burned-over and cut-over forest lands. Soil erosion has injured 775,000,000 acres of land in the nation, and ruined or severely damaged 282,000,000 more. Ten percent of all farms in the United States are on land not fit for cultivation. The productive value of 75 percent of our tilled soil has been reduced by wind, water, or human ignorance. Much of this record can be traced to short-sighted land use, cash-cropping, and insecurity of tenure.

Most government agencies which deal with agriculture are already deeply concerned with the prevention of erosion and the encouragement of soil-building practices. Farm Security Administration, which is charged with the rehabilitation of low-income rural people, puts much of its effort into soil conservation and into educating farmers in the necessity of protecting their land; for FSA recognizes that the land and the people on it improve or grow poor together.

Farm Security Administration makes its contribution to the conservation of our land resources in many different ways — through giving farmers a chance to get on their feet, through helping tenants become

owners, through improving tenure arrangements -- but all point in the same direction: toward helping farmers attain security and permanence on the land. The reason for this is simple -- until farmers feel secure on the land they farm, they will not be interested in insuring future production, **by** guarding against erosion and increasing the fertility of the soil.

Take an example. The improvement of tenure arrangements is only a relatively small part of the work of FSA. Yet this program alone has been responsible for a very considerable measure of soil conservation, as is shown by figures recently published for the State of Tennessee. As a direct result of written leases and landlord-tenant agreements under the FSA tenure improvement program, nearly 300,000 tons of lime are to be placed on the farms of Tennessee this year, and millions of pounds of the new TVA triple-strength phosphate will be used by tenants who have written leases.

The conservation of land seems a long and slow process, the more so in time of rapid crises and the "blitzkrieg" technique. However, the land is basic to the health and strength of the 54,000,000 rural people in the United States, and the entire population depends on the land for its food and for the raw materials which underlie industrial production. Even to keep in production the 360,000,000 acres now under the plow means continuous effort. To bring into cultivation additional land, or indeed to render really useful the large amount of submarginal land now being farmed, means a gigantic planned effort, which can only be carried through by the national government

After all, there is not much use in spending billions to defend our

land, if we are going to let it wash down the rivers into the sea.

Human Conservation

Conservation of our human resources has two aspects. One is the purely physical manpower problem. The other is the problem of maintaining the spirit of the people -- what in the Army would be called "morale."

Manpower

Everybody knows that the poorest people generally have the poorest health. Years of effort to eke out a miserable living on impoverished land, years of neglect and inaction by other portions of American society, have taken a tremendous toll in rural health standards. Pellagra, rickets, hookworm, tuberculosis -- these and a host of other diseases are startlingly prevalent in the poorer areas; moreover, many farm people who have no acute disease are suffering from what an M. D. would call "general run-down condition," the result of malnutrition, poor shelter, and lack of sanitary and medical facilities.

Forty million persons in this country are members of families with incomes of less than \$800 per year. The health problems of this lowest "third of a nation" are described in "The Nation's Health," the Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Health and Welfare":

"Half of them (over 20 million people) are in families already dependent on Federal, State or local Government in one way or another--on work-relief rolls, receiving general relief, or receiving special types of public assistance. They are all largely dependent on public aid or private philanthropy for medical care in sickness.

"Half of them (another 20 million people) are in self-sustaining families of the marginal-income class above the relief group. They have enough to support a family of four persons at an emergency level; but if taken sick they can purchase medical care only at the risk of curtailing food, clothing, shelter, and other essentials to health and decency."

In considerable measure, defense must rest upon manpower. Through its medical program, through its constant emphasis on production of food to be consumed at home, and through its sanitation program, the FSA is helping to build a healthier rural population, starting just where the problem is most acute -- at the lowest income levels.

The medical program has gotten under way on a large scale only within the last couple of years. Its local health cooperatives have been set up with the collaboration of state and county medical associations, and the American Medical Association has recently indicated its support of this phase of FSA's rehabilitation work. Through the medical program, FSA has already brought adequate medical care within the reach of 80,000 farm families in 634 counties -- families to whom doctors had formerly been almost an unknown luxury.

Many an ounce of prevention is also provided by FSA's emphasis on "live at home" practices. Subsistence gardens are encouraged and the importance of canning home-produced food for use during the winter is emphasized. In these ways FSA is helping to build up the nation's manpower to a point where it will be physically able to defend our country.

Morale

Morale is directly related to manpower. It is difficult to exhibit wholehearted patriotism on an empty stomach. Sick people make neither a good army nor a good cheering-section. Idle people, people with no function in society, become "pioneers without a frontier." Their morale is low and is bound to get lower as they continue in their idleness. Labor, agricultural or otherwise, is a perishable commodity. It must be used or it deteriorates. With its deterioration, the reservoir of our

national resources is cheated of so much potential usefulness.

Farmers are traditionally the most loyal and patriotic element in the country. Thomas Jefferson in 1786 wrote that "cultivators of the earth are the most virtuous citizens and possess most of amor patriae." The following year he wrote in similar vein to General Washington: "The moderate and sure income of husbandry begets permanent improvement, quiet life, and orderly conduct, both public and private." Yet dispossessed and destitute farmers, who have lost their "sure income" and their stake in the land could constitute fertile soil for Fifth Column activity, which depends largely on fomenting of internal dissension. In a country where 1,703,000 families have less than \$500 a year to live on, and 817,000 of these have to struggle along on less than \$250 a year, the problem of morale could become a serious one.

An incident in the history of the fall of the Roman Empire is in point here. You will recall how the barbarians swept down upon the proud capital of the Empire, destroying and pillaging as they went. When they came upon the farmers working in the fields, they asked: "Which way is the road to Rome?" The farmers pointed "That way," and added "Take it if you want to. It's nothing to us." It was the ancestors of these farmers who had built Rome up from a little village on the riverside to be mistress of the world. But when the barbarians came down, the farmers were working somebody else's land for starvation wages, and the fate of Rome meant nothing to them one way or the other.

If people feel that they have a country worth defending, they will be more than willing to defend it. But if the "American way of life" for millions of people means misery and insecurity, then these millions will

not be impressed by flags or a brass band. If their democratic Government ignores their distress and forgets pressing human needs, then democracy itself is discredited.

Farm Security Administration is dealing with just these problems, cheaply and effectively. To despairing people, living on the land but without a stake in it, FSA is bringing aid and guidance and the opportunity to help themselves. From this they derive hope in their time of greatest need, and for them the idea of American opportunity takes on a new meaning.

Nor is this a relief program. Under direct relief, the people helped are no better off the next year than they were before. Farm Security Administration aims at permanent rehabilitation, works directly to get people off the relief rolls and back on their own feet.

This is a truly American method. It is also economical. As Secretary Wallace told the Senate Appropriations Committee in May, "Work relief in the cities costs about \$800 per family per year. Even rural work relief costs from \$350 per year upward. Rehabilitation, counting all losses on loans, the cost of supervision and every other item of expense, costs only about \$72 a year per family. The fact that the program operates through loans makes it largely self-liquidating, and thus imposes a relatively small burden on the federal treasury."

Farm Security Administration, in short, is democracy in action. The outward forms of political liberty seem hollow and meaningless to people who have neither food to eat nor clothes to wear. On the other hand, if we can make democracy work here, the defense of America is half accomplished. We need worry about the seeds of discontent only as long as there remains the fertile soil of despair and disillusionment in which

they can too easily take root.

Finally, FSA is more than a conservation agency. It has an efficient action program, and to carry out that program, it has an organization which includes full-time field representatives for every agricultural county in the United States. Farm Security Administration county offices already have data on land use and productive capacity of farms in their respective counties. Thus each of these offices would be able to make an immediate, effective contribution to the more efficient organization of American agricultural production; no inefficient emergency organization would have to be set up in wartime, for the organization is already in operation.

If production had to be increased in an emergency, the FSA organization could help to plan the increase so that there would be a minimum of disorganization and over-cropping, and most of the grave mistakes of the last war would be avoided. In England organizations had to be set up in every agricultural county for the specific purpose of encouraging farm production; in America we already have such an organization operating on a county basis. In England, too, subsistence gardens were promoted, to grow potatoes and vegetables to increase the income of urban workers. Farm Security Administration has already had wide and successful experience in the encouragement of subsistence farming. The expansion of its program along the same lines would not be difficult.

Hand in hand with conservation of resources go farsighted planning and sound organization for their most efficient use. The local FSA setup can contribute materially to such planning and organization, and thus aid in the national task of converting paper potentials into actual strength if it should become necessary.

