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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT
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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

Monday, August 14, 1944

Subject: "Bread Enrichment" Information from distribution officials of the War
Food Administration

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If you had mentioned the Dutch East Indies several years ago, nine out of ten people would have been a little uncertain just where these islands were. But since Pearl Harbor and our activities in the Pacific, most of us have read a great deal about Java and the rest of the Dutch East Indies.

This little island of Java attracted quite a bit of attention about fifty years ago. The natives of these Dutch possessions were dying like flies from a disease called Beriberi. The Netherlands Government sent Dr. Eijkman (ike-man) out to the islands to get the disease under control. The sick natives had been on a continuous diet of polished rice. The young doctor discovered, quite by accident, that if the people were fed brown rice instead of white rice, they did not get Beriberi. And even patients who had the disease were cured if they ate the unpolished rice. Many years later other doctors discovered that the vital element in the outside coating of the rice...the substance that helps to keep people well...is Vitamin B₁.

Dr. Robert Williams, an American chemist, became interested in this vital substance in rice polishings and he worked over twenty-five years to find a way to make Vitamin B₁ cheaply and in large quantities. The old method of stewing rice polishings was too slow and too expensive. Dr. Williams thought it would be a good idea to add this vitamin to white bread. The milling of white flour does the same thing to wheat that polishing does to rice...it removes the natural Vitamin B₁.

But the whole wheat grain gives us more than Vitamin B₁. It's a good source of other B vitamins and it gives us iron and some of the other minerals we need. These

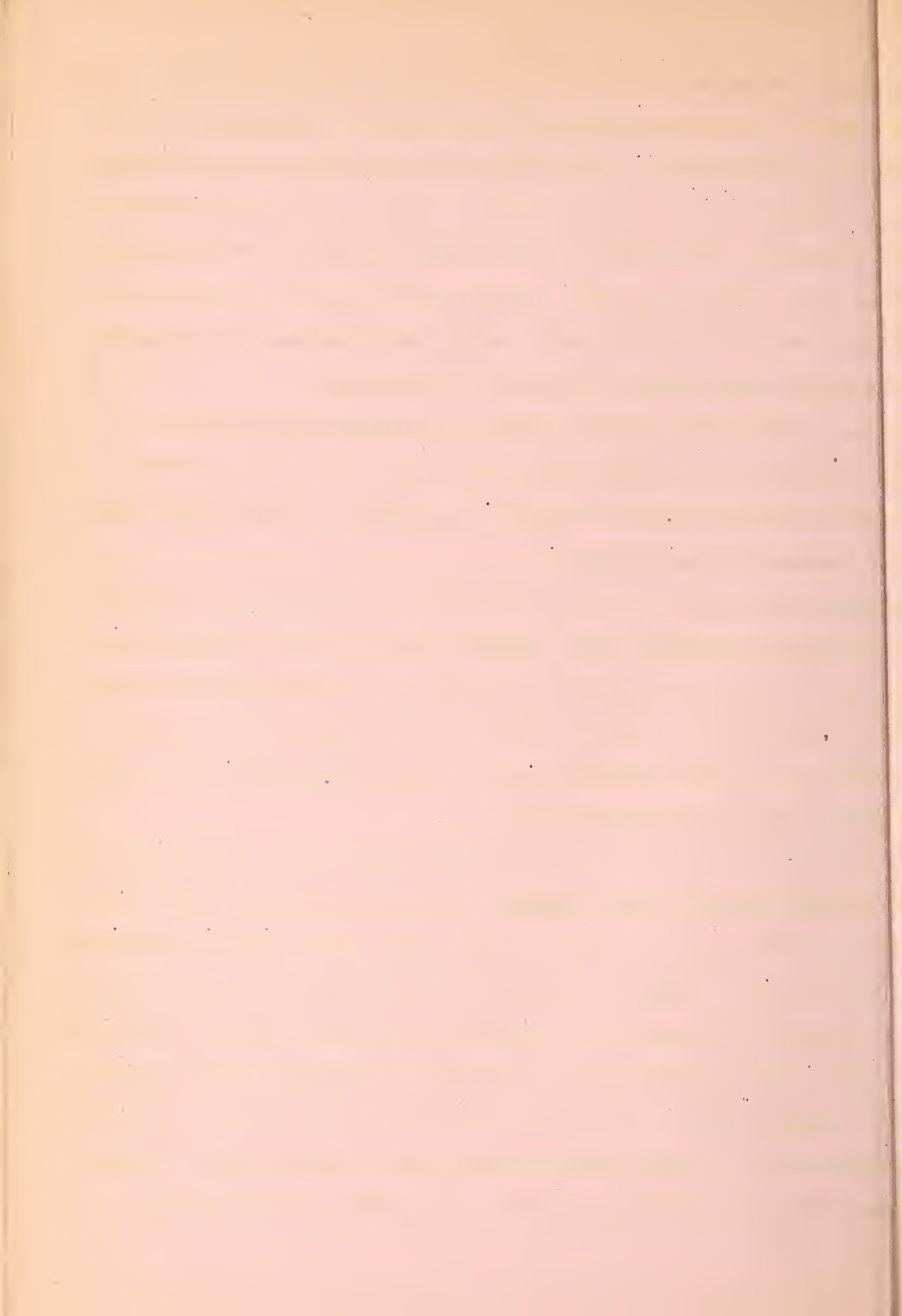


other nutrients are removed by the milling process, too. So when this bread enrichment idea spread, the scientists decided that it would be a good plan to add more than Vitamin B₁ to white flour. They asked the millers and bakers to add niacin (which is another B vitamin) and iron as well as Vitamin B₁ to all flour bearing the label "enriched". The millers and bakers agreed and enriched flour and bread came on the market. That was in 1941. Some people feel that the introduction of enriched flour and bread was the greatest single step we've ever made in improving the diets of a large number of the people of this country.

October 1, 1943 marked another milestone in the progress of nutrition. On that date the standards for enriched flour were raised and the millers started adding more B₁, niacin, and iron than before. The improved standards added another vitamin to enriched flour...riboflavin.

Of course, the enriched bread and other products made from this new standard enriched flour will be higher in these nutrients, too. But here's something to remember, all the white flour you buy is not enriched. In fact, only about 70 percent of all family flour on the market today has been enriched. So if you want to get the benefit of all this scientific work we've been talking about...make a point of asking your grocer for "enriched" flour.

The preference for white bread was very plainly shown in the experiences of the Canadian Government and their bread program. The Canadian Government barred synthetic vitamins from flour and started a milling program which used the greater part of the wheat berry. The Canadian Government looked with hopeful eyes on the "Canada Approved" flour and visualized all the important food elements helping to keep their people healthy. BUT they didn't count on one thing. The Canadian people wouldn't buy "Canada Approved" flour. It produced a darker loaf and the Canadian housewives wanted white bread. The greater demand for white flour and bread was so obvious that Canada abandoned her "Canada Approved" milling program and instituted one



similar to ours...enriching the white flour with vitamins and minerals.

White bread and flour have been non-existent in most of Nazi Europe since the start of the war. The arrival of white bread in liberated countries has often been a signal of widespread rejoicing and sometimes near riots. Bread is worthy of headlines....it has become a symbol of hope in the countries which have been without it for the last few years.

The women of Naples wept tears of joy and kissed the American Doughboys and British Tommies who first gave them white bread baked by G.I. bakers from American white flour. Some of the accounts from prisoners of war tell us that during the long weary hours of waiting in Nazi prison camps, one of the most pleasant pastimes is dreaming of food from back home and one of the items most desired is white bread. One of the repatriated civilians from a Japanese internment camp brought back on the Gripsholm said that one of the most appreciated parts of the first meal he received was the "wonderful white bread." It's these human reports hot off the typewriters of front-line correspondents that show us what an important item white bread is all over the world.

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