UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Radio Service

OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Saturday, January 2, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NEWS NOTES FROM WASHINGTON." Information from the Office of Information, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Seems to me that the second day of January is a good day to talk about the weather. And apparently that's the opinion of our Department-of-Agriculture correspondent, because she starts her letter this week with news from the Weather Bureau.

She writes: "My curiosity got the better of me the other day, so I took myself over to the Weather Bureau to see what I could find out about the winter that is ahead of us. I asked the forecasters what kind of weather we were in for -- lots of snow and ice and bitter cold, or a short, mild season? The forecasters are always most obliging if you inquire about tomorrow's weather. But they never commit themselves to any opinions about the weather very far in the future. So they just replied, as they always do, that no reliable rule for forecasting the weather for months ahead has been formulated yet. And that's that.

"However, I did learn a few facts that you might take as a hint about the weather to come -- or not, as you please. The weather men say that this winter has started off like last winter. In fact, they say that weather conditions at the beginning of this winter were almost identical with those of last year at this time. But whether the pattern set in 1935 will hold for this year is anyone's guess.

"To go into details and use Weather-Bureau language, the 1936 Fall season -- that is, September, October, and November -- had, on the average, nearly normal temperatures throughout the country with precipitation distinctly scanty in the central northern States and Far West, though more than normal over a wide area from the lower Great Lakes region southwest to Texas. And this is the same picture which the Weather Bureau gave a year ago of the Fall of 1935. As for December, so far it has brought more than usual of early snow to some northeastern States. Snowfall has reached almost a foot in central and northern New England and up to about 8 inches in New York. But in the mountains farther west, snowfall has been less than normal this year.

"The generous rains which in September broke the drought of 1936 over much of the interior of the country, especially in the Ohio and middle Mississippi valleys and in the southern plains, did not continue through October and November. Precipitation in the Midwest has been generally light since September. Most States from the Great Plains westward now need moisture.

Soil, especially the subsoil, is very dry in most of the Pacific area and in the North Central States. In speaking of this dry condition of the subsoil, Weather Bureau men say that the winter wheat outlook in the Northwest is not good, but from the Mississippi Valley eastward it is favorable. And they add that the outlook for spring wheat depends on the snow-fall this winter, and the rainfall next spring and early summer.

"Heavy winter snows relieved a similar condition last year at this time. The snow cover in January 1936 reached nearly 3 inches as far south as Vicksburg, Mississippi, with a depth of more than 40 inches in northern Wisconsin. This, with May rains, helped to save the 1936 winter-wheat crop and favored spring wheat in the early growing season by restoring the top soils moisture lost during the preceding abnormally hot, dry summer and fall. But this moisture could not build up a reserve in the spring-wheat belt large enough to last through the succeeding drought of 1936.

"And that's all the information I could collect for you about the weather.

"Now that the season of candlelight is here, perhaps you'll be interested in a little news from the entomologists about beeswax candles. These scientists report that the way beeswax candles burn in winter depends on the way the bees build their honeycombs in summer. As perhaps you know, the better candles, especially those for church altars, are made of beeswax. But in this country beeswax varies so much that candle-makers here are inclined to prefer foreign waxes because they are easier to bleach and give better results generally.

"Department-of-Agriculture entomologists and chemists of the California State Experiment Station are now cooperating on a study of the composition of beeswax to find out why some waxes make better candles than others. (Incidentally, they also want to find out why some waxes are better bases for cosmetics than others. Wouldn't the bees be surprised if they knew that they were contributing to milady's lipstick or eye-brow pencil?

"Mr. J. I. Hambleton, who is in charge of the Department's bee-culture investigations, says that though beeswax is one of our oldest commodities, curiously little is known about its true structure. He says that more complete information on the chemistry of the waxes of the world should make it possible to improve this country's output.

"Pure beeswax is white, not yellow, no matter what the diet of the bees may have been. The yellow color, which most of us associate with beeswax, comes from contamination -- from pollen of certain flowers, or from the cement which the bees use for weather-proofing their hives, or from iron vats or presses during processing. These colors are often dissolved in the beeswax in its crude form. Then, insects or straw or dust or other insoluble substances may be suspended in the wax. These impurities cause great variation in the characteristics of the wax such as its color and its texture and its ability to take bleaching."

That concludes our Washington news letter for today. Next Saturday we'll look for more news from the Department of Agriculture, as reported by our correspondent there.

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