

PRICES GOING UP, UP, UP, UP, UP, UP! FAMINE THREATENS

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Rice, oatmeal, cornmeal and prunes are the only commodities that have shown no appreciable rise in price. No foodstuffs on the market have decreased in price, and every other article shows a substantial increase within the last week. "Famine prices will be here in spring unless we have a bumper spring crop," said Joseph Hartigan, commissioner of weights and measures and secretary of the mayor's commission on food supply, yesterday.

The following three reasons are offered by the commissioner for the present high food prices:

Subnormal production. The failure or partial failure of certain crops has greatly decreased the supply of food products.

An abnormal amount of exports. Since the war began, and especially within the last six months, an excessive amount of food products has gone out of the country to help feed Europe.

A large increase in the consumption of foodstuffs in this country, due primarily to the general prosperity caused by the war, which has supplied men with work and caused American families to increase expenditures.

Inquiry Sent Broadcast

A letter will be sent out tomorrow morning to the departments of agriculture and the commissioners of foods and markets in every state asking the following questions:

What producers are there in your state who are not sending food to New York? What action is being taken to conserve the food supply and by whom is the action being taken? Are there any organizations of producers in your state? Is there any state supervision?

The purpose of these letters is to call official attention of all the states to the fact that New York is a market where high prices are being paid for all foods. New York is thus widely advertised as a food consuming center and by this means the commissioner hopes to bring in the "bumper crop" that he declares necessary to save us from famine prices.

Another step is being taken by Hartigan to stop illegitimate speculation. A bill has been prepared and drawn up by three lawyers to prohibit illegitimate speculation, and will be introduced in the Legislature of every state in the union.

20,000 Speculators Rob Us

"This bill would be brought before Congress except for the fact that Congress cannot reach cities like Chicago and New York. It is a matter for state legislation," he said.

"There are 20,000 offices where this speculation is going on, and every speculator increases the price of the food speculated upon. There are only 300 legitimate brokers in the country who act as agent for miller, producer and grain dealer."

In regard to an embargo to lower the price of food, Mr. Hartigan said, "The farmers have too much influence in Congress to let an embargo be declared. Besides it would discourage production. And if an embargo is declared in event of military necessity, the United States would get into trouble with the allies, who have already bought a billion dollars' worth of food in advance. It would be practically a confiscation of Europe's food.

"There is not a doubt, however, that an embargo would shorten the war."

Predicts Alarming Conditions

"I am afraid that the city will be confronted by an alarming situation within the next three months, because there is no hope of any immediate relief in inquiries or investigation or any other official action. Potatoes, cabbages and onions are the scarcest of all the fresh food products at present and that is why the price of onions has shot up to \$14 for a 100-pound bag, potatoes to \$9.50 a bag and cabbage to 12 cents a pound retail.

"Wholesale dealers state that canned foods are disappearing from the market and that reserve stocks are entirely wiped out. This condition is due, it is said, to the vast amount of canned and preserved foodstuffs purchased here by foreign countries for future shipment. The situation is particularly serious in view of the acknowledged shortage.

"Cereals in enormous quantities are being shipped out of the country. Wholesale dealers complain that they cannot fill retail orders. One large cereal concern is reported to have contracted for 100,000 barrels of prepared oats, to be delivered at seaboard before June 1, 1917.

"Retail dealers in all parts of the city state that they are obliged to pay cash, their credit being cut out altogether by wholesalers."

Abraham Rosenblum, called the "onion king" of Wallabrut market, expressed the wish recently that he could corner the nation' supply of onions.

"If I had all the onions in my control, I would set the price at \$25 a bag instead of \$15, and I bet that I could sell the whole at this figure," he is quoted as saying.

"The department of agriculture has recently put forth the following theory in regard to the high price of eggs and poultry," said F. Q. Foy, market expert for the state department of foods and markets, yesterday. "Different scientists of the department claim that the early pullets of last year refused to lay, but moulted instead, on account of the chemical peculiarities of the air, due to the war in Europe. I won't vouch for this explanation myself.

"Today eggs are selling for 49 cents a dozen that cost 30 cents last year. Chickens are twice as high as they were a year ago. I believe, however, that butter and eggs will go down in price with the coming of spring."