

THE ELEANOR AND ANNA ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

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Description: In this segment, ER discusses French farming habits and the responsibility of French farm wives.

Participants: ER

[ER:] I wonder whether-- thank you, Anna. I wonder whether you have been--seen any pictures or been conscious of the fact that we've had some farmers travelling 'round in European countries and trying to find out what they could about European agriculture and what our agriculture could do to help them and whether there was anything we could learn from them. This has interested me because I've wondered sometimes how farmers lived on the small amount of land they cultivated and how they ever put in the work to make some of the fields I've seen in Switzerland and other European countries. But today I wanted to tell you a little about what the French feel and also a little about the French farmer's wife. Uh the French tell me that they've shown their very best farms to our visiting farmers. Naturally, they wanted to show what they did that was really good. But down in the bottom of their hearts they knew that our farmers would be saying, "How do they accomplish what they do with so little machinery?" Almost all the work being done by men's hands and using, in many ways, very ancient methods. In addition, of course, in all the parts of France which were invaded and where actual fighting went on, the farmers might be driven away, their houses might be injured. But just as soon as it was possible, they went back to the land, they plowed the land. Some of them were blown up in doing it. But they sowed the crops and reaped them. When, however, the war was still on, most of the army had peasants, farmers in the army and there was no one left on the farms but the women. And the women, not only did their customary work--and on a French farm I'm told that the French farmer's wife takes charge of the dairy, the chickens, and at the same time, does a great deal in her house. She lives in a village, not separated the way we are; the French people live together in a village and they go out to their fields. So she has for her children the church and the school, the post office, and perhaps a railroad station.

So the things are nearby and she doesn't have her children go off as our farmers wives do for a good part of the day. But nevertheless she works hard. Her children eat every meal at home. They don't eat in the school. And she keeps that family going. Well during the war, she did the plowing, and the sowing, and the reaping as well as all the work she ordinarily did and she got the--kept the family together. If she was driven out, they were driven out together but they came back just as soon as it was possible to come. And, they tell me, which amuses me, that they counted on the farm woman to do her work cheerfully. And after long waiting, sometimes her man came home. Because many of the farmers were among the prisoners in Germany who spent a long time in prison camps, even in forced labor camps. And she went on working and hoping. Finally her man did come home, perhaps he was well; perhaps he was ill, in which case she had to nurse him back to health. And always she had to be cheerful, that's stressed in everything they write about it. And I think that's something that will interest us because we know how difficult it is to be cheerful in circumstances when your whole life is being torn up all the time. And after she nursed her husband back, and he was able to take up his usual duties, she acquired a new duty. First of all, there were rules now as to how much from the farm had to go into the city. How much must be sent to the city in order to keep the city going and the workers going. Then there were new taxations, taxations on all kinds of things which the French had never heard of before. And she was supposed to uh work those out and see what could be done. Well, if she did all the things she was expected to do, her children admired her and her husband trusted her. And I'm told that the French farm wife feels that's she's done as big a job as even the men who went to war. And many of the other people in

France feel the same way about it. It's an essential job that had to be done and the French farm wife did it.
And now back to my daughter, Anna, in Hollywood. (6:16)

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