

PAN-AMERICAN COFFEE BUREAU SERIES

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Description: ER discusses the wartime food supply with Secretary of Agriculture Claude Wickard.

Participants: ER, Dan Seymour, Claude Wickard

[Dan Seymour:] This is Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt's regular Sunday evening broadcast, sponsored by the Pan-American Coffee Bureau, representing seven good-neighbor coffee-growing nations. This evening, Mrs. Roosevelt has as her guest Secretary of Agriculture Claude R. Wickard, who will tell you what the war is going to do to your family's food supply. But first, we'd like to tell you a little story about a man we'll call Joe Smith. Joe lives in the little town outside New York City and commutes to his office where he puts in a good hard day's work. Joe is over fifty and did his bit in the last war. But when the posters went up in his town asking for civilian defense volunteers, Joe picked the job of watcher, and night after night, from twelve to three in the morning, Joe is on duty at his air defense spotter's post on the alert for enemy planes. It's a tough job, especially when Joe has to get up and catch that 8:15 to town, but Joe says he gets a kick out of it, knowing he's doing something for Uncle Sam. And then he says that he has a trick to make it easier: he drinks a couple of cups of coffee with his evening meal to refresh and relax him, catches a couple of hours of sleep before it's time to report for duty, and then when he comes home, that thoughtful wife of his has a fresh pot of delicious, steaming coffee ready, and he takes another cup or two before he goes back to bed. Coffee helps Joe Smith in his home defense work, just as coffee helps hundreds of thousands of men and women in defense work everywhere. How lucky we are that our good neighbors of Latin America can assure us of a plentiful supply of coffee during these difficult times. For these days, coffee is more than America's favorite drink; coffee is America's most necessary drink - for the Army, for the Navy, for the factory workers, for all of us in this great national drive for victory. And now, we present Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt. (1:45)

[ER:] Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. There is no subject, I'm sure, of greater interest to every one of you than the problem of food supplies during the present wartime emergency. So, I'm very happy this evening to have as my guest the Secretary of Agriculture, Mr. Claude R. Wickard, who is of course the best authority on that subject. Mr. Wickard, I suppose- suppose I ask you some questions which I know the families of the nation would like to have you answer? (2:24)

[Claude Wickard:] Fine, Mrs. Roosevelt. I'll be delighted to answer them.

[ER:] Mr. Secretary, during the First World War, we had a slogan: "Food will win the war". Should we revive this slogan, or do you have a better one to offer?

[Claude Wickard:] Several months ago, Mrs. Roosevelt, I started using a modification of that slogan, which I think makes it more indicative of the job we're trying to do. The slogan I have been using is: "Food will win the war and write the peace".

[ER:] That's a grand slogan, Mr. Secretary, better than the one we used in the last war. I think it indicates a real growth in our thinking. All of us are now bent on winning the peace as well as the war, and we know the things which we must do which will help rehabilitate other countries. Food will be the first necessity. Won't you tell us, Mr. Secretary, about our own food supply? Are we going to have shortages of any foods?

[Claude Wickard:] Uh so far as our total food supply is concerned, we have more food on hand today than we've ever had at this time of year. We have large supplies of meat, milk, eggs, grain, vegetables, and so on. But in one or two certain lines, we'd better prepare for some belt tightening.

[ER:][laughs] I'm glad you're speaking so frankly, Mr. Secretary. I think all of us want to know the truth, officially, about the situation - even if the truth may be unpleasant. What are the foods in which we need to be prepared for shortages? (4:03)

[Claude Wickard:] The principal ones are sugar, uh fats, and oils.

[ER:] These are all commodities which we import, at least in part. And some of these commodities are produced in areas surrounded by warzones. Would you outline the sugar situation for us, Mr. Wickard?

[Claude Wickard:] The sugar situation is perhaps the most critical because ordinarily we produce only about a third of our national requirement, and we depend on Cuba, the Philippines, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico for much of our supply.

[ER:] Will our imports from Cuba and Puerto Rico be reduced?

[Claude Wickard:] We're counting on their being just as large or perhaps increasing somewhat. We may also be able to buy sugar from countries of South and Central America. But out of the large Cuban crop, some of the sugar is being used to make industrial alcohol. Furthermore, we must share the sugar with others of the United Nations. So, without our usual amount of sugar from the Philippines and Hawaii, there just won't be enough sugar for our usual consumption.

[ER:] That may be hard for some of us, Mr. Wickard, for sugar is supposed to give us energy. I understand, however, we really consume more sugar than we need for that purpose. I'm wondering if we cannot use honey in greater quantity, and of course, there is no shortage in other foods which are excellent sources of energy: the grains, potatoes, and sweet potatoes, for example.

[Claude Wickard:] That's very true. We have abundant supplies of most of those foods.

[ER:] Now, won't you tell us about the supply of fats and oils for shortening, salad dressing, soap, and other purposes?

[Claude Wickard:] We import each year about a billion and a half pounds of fats and oils, many of them from the areas involved in this war. We have a big supply on hand now, enough to meet our needs for a year uh if we get only our ordinary production. But by 1943, unless we produce more fats and oils at home, our total supply may grow short. So farmers are being asked this year to increase their production of peanuts for oil by two and a half times and their acreage of soybeans by 50% over last year. (6:28)

[ER:] Then, Mr. Secretary, the only food in which there is any real likelihood of shortage in 1942 is sugar. Is that the situation?

[Claude Wickard:] Well I wish I could be sure of that, Mrs. Roosevelt. We do have big supplies on hand, and we're setting our goals for still greater production in 1942. But now, we are just one of the twenty-six United Nations whose resources for winning the war are to be shared and placed wherever there is need. We don't know how many people we shall be called on to feed outside the borders of the United States. Neither do we know how great the difficulties in the way of increasing our farm production may become through shortages of rubber, steel, fertilizer, and so on. But farmers and the processors and handlers of farm products are going to do their level best to meet the goals for higher production in 1942.

[ER:] Are there any ways in which consumers can help meet the situation, Mr. Secretary? (7:35)

[Claude Wickard:] Yes, there are many things consumers can do to help. So far as sugar's concerned, they may find it advisable to use more of other kinds of sweetening, such as honey, uh maple sugar or syrups made from corn or sorghum. Then, and there are many foods that require extra processing, or additional materials: canned vegetables, canned fruits, and canned meats, for example. If consumers can make a practice of using fresh fruits and vegetables so long as they are available, and using fresh or smoked meats in place of canned meats, the demands on tin and steel may be reduced somewhat, and a larger share of the foods preserved this way can be used by the fighting forces and by our allies.

[ER:] Of course, this does not imply a reduction in the total amount of food to be consumed, does it?

[Claude Wickard:] No, I didn't mean to imply that at all. I think we shall continue to have plenty of health-giving food, so far as the total supply is concerned. For example, eggs will be very plentiful this year, and should be well within the reach of everyone's pocketbook. And uh we're certain to have more chicken to eat than we've ever had before. By using foods which do not compete with war goods for materials or labor, consumers can help greatly in meeting the food situation without lowering the nutritional standards of the nation.

[ER:] I am very anxious, Mr. Secretary, that we should increase our general knowledge of the various plans in the Department of Agriculture, to keep up the nutrition standards of the nation. For instance, the food stamp plan, the school lunch program, the penny milk program -- these will be especially important in areas where we have temporary unemployment, and where people will need help to be able to remain well-nourished while they are not receiving their full wages. I am sorry, Mr. Wickard, that I was not able to attend the Garden Conference which the Department of Agriculture and the Federal Security Agency held recently. I particularly like the slogan you suggested there: "The three Vs".

[Claude Wickard:] Vegetables, for vitality and victory. (10:08)

[ER:] That program interests me, for wherever we have good soil families can raise vegetables for themselves and for the school lunch program in their district. These vegetables will raise the standard of health. If there is any surplus, we can distribute wh-whatever there is among the private and public welfare agencies, so we should not be burdened by any surplus of foods.

[Claude Wickard:] And I think an increasing number of Americans are coming round to the point of view that there is no such thing as a surplus until every human need has been filled. And if we adopt that as a standard, we're a long way from having any surpluses.

[ER:] Of course, Mr. Secretary. I do not think we should start out on a campaign to have people plow up their lawns and parks and golf courses to grow vegetables, so long as we still have plenty of land for production. All we need are farm home gardens, community gardens, and the gardens of the small town and village residents who really know how to grow vegetables. I am anxious to know, however, if we have a shortage of vegetable seeds, fertilizer, and other materials necessary to the trained gardener.

[Claude Wickard:] Well in most of those things, uh I'd say we have just about enough to meet our needs, if we use the materials well. But we don't have enough that we can afford to be wasteful. That's why the Department of Agriculture is putting the emphasis on increases in commercial vegetable growing, an increase of fifteen million cases in the commercial pack of fruits and vegetables, in farm home gardens, and in school and community gardens.

[ER:] Well Mr. Secretary, I think you've answered just about all the questions we have time for. I know our listeners have learned a great deal of valuable information from you this evening, and I'm sure your department will receive many requests for detailed explanations of how best to conserve food and to grow food as the result of our discussion. (12:22)

[Claude Wickard:] Well Mrs. Roosevelt, I'm very glad to have had the opportunity to talk with you and to your great listening audience, and I certainly hope that they will make every use of the information our department has available for them.

[ER:] Thank you, Mr. Secretary. And now, before closing, I'd like to tell you that on January 19, tomorrow, there will be a broadcast and a reception at the White House for the National Committee for the Infantile Paralysis Campaign. This has become an annual affair and leads to the final celebration on the President's birthday, when parties are given all over the country. This war against a dread disease must go on in spite of other wars. Every time we carry through something which indicates that we still mean to meet on the community level and fight the ills which beset different groups of people, we demonstrate that our nation is able, not only to fight a war, but to keep on fighting, to meet all the needs which are with us, even in peacetime, and which must be met by the average citizen, you and I, if this democracy is to prove itself the answer to the hopes and the prayers throughout the world.

[Dan Seymour:] Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt and Secretary Wickard, for your informative discussion of a problem vital to us all. Mr. Secretary, the Pan-American Coffee Bureau was particularly grateful to you for joining Mrs. Roosevelt on our program this evening, for your department represents the farmers of the nation, and farmers are great coffee drinkers. It takes a fellow who is used to hard work, to getting his living right out of the good earth itself, to appreciate the worth of coffee, for coffee warms the heart of the man who has to get up at dawn to start a long day of toil. Coffee gives the extra energy he needs as he battles nature itself to grow the food of the nation. Coffee brings good cheer and comfort during the evening as our friend the farmer relaxes from his day of toil. Coffee is the farmer's favorite drink, the farmer's most necessary drink. So may we offer a good neighbor handclasp to the farmers of the United States, from the coffee-growers of the republics we represent: seven good neighbor coffee-growing nations of Latin America. (14:42)

Next week, Mrs. Roosevelt will be with us again at this same time. Until then, this is Dan Seymour saying good evening for the Pan-American Coffee Bureau. And remember, for extra energy, for steady nerves during the hard days ahead, it's always a good idea to take time out for coffee.

[Unknown announcer:] This is the Blue Network.

[NBC chimes]

(15:08)

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