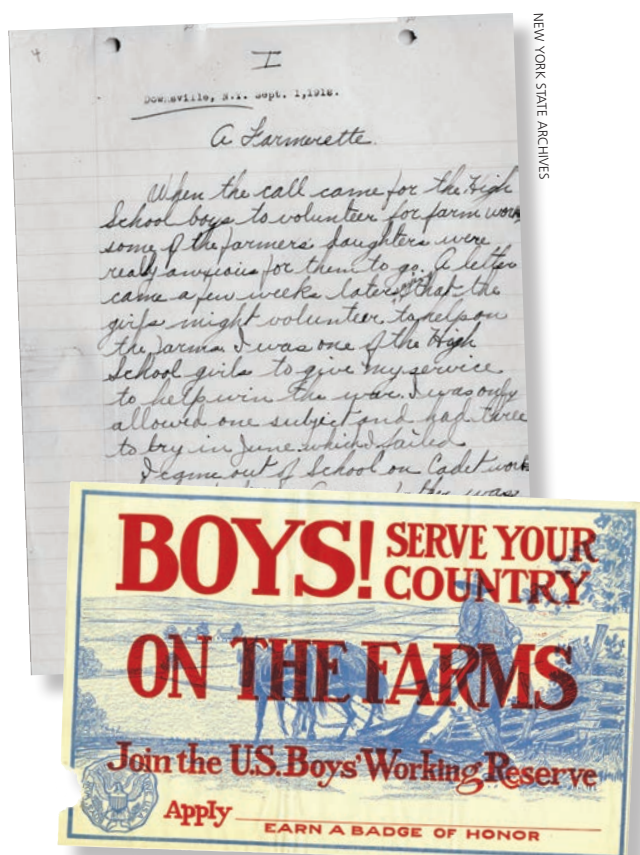


KITCHEN and GARDEN SOLDIERS

BY LIBBY O'CONNELL

“Food Will Win the War” became a domestic battle cry during WWI.



The New York Farm Cadet program, part of the US Boys Working Reserve, organized young people to work for modest wages plus room and board. Girl Cadets, known as “Farmerettes,” also participated.

Soon after the Congressional declaration of World War I on April 6, 1917, national, state, and local agencies began an information campaign aimed at the civilian population, declaring, “Food Will Win the War.” With the communications power of the Committee on Public Information (CPI) combined with the administrative efficiency of the United States Food Administration (USFA), the way Americans produced, cooked, and conserved food was transformed from a humdrum chore into a celebrated act of patriotism. Food became the centerpiece of home-front support for the war.

Patriotic Meals

New Yorkers were no exception to the effectiveness of this appeal. Gardening, cooking, and conserving the right foods provided a platform for displaying engaged patriotism. Nut loaf and egg casseroles

replaced meat dishes. A fragile and fascinating scrapbook compiled during the Great War, now held by the New York State Library, contains a variety of “war-winning” recipes clipped from periodicals.

Increasing food production was as important as reducing meat and wheat consumption, but with farm hands called up for military service, farmers faced labor shortages. With the goal of mobilizing civilian youth, the USFA worked with the Departments of Labor and Agriculture to encourage high school students to spend their summers working as farm hands. The New York Farm Cadet program, part of the US Boys’ Working Reserve, organized young people between the ages of sixteen and eighteen in good academic standing from around the state to work for modest wages plus room and board. Girl Cadets, known as “Farmerettes,” also participated. The state required the Cadets



and Farmerettes to write memoirs in order to receive academic credit for any school they may have missed while working as farmhands.

The New York State Archives contains several of these handwritten memoirs, earnest records of long days and hard work on New York farms in the summers of 1917 and 1918. Written as assignments, not as personal journals, the students expressed an apparently sincere desire to contribute to the war effort—and their conviction that they had accomplished this goal. As Farmerette Vera Bennett wrote proudly in September 1918, "I was one of the High School girls to give my service to help win the war."

At the federal level, one week after the declaration of war, President Woodrow Wilson established the CPI, more commonly known as the "Creel Committee for Commission" after its chairman, George Creel. Creel was a former journalist with a law enforcement background, who believed strongly in the unifying power of words and images. He would later write in his memoirs that he asked Wilson to create the government agency to coordinate "not propaganda as the Germans defined it, but propaganda in the true sense of the world, meaning the 'propagation of faith.'" Creel appointed experts in the growing fields of public relations and advertising to convince Americans

from all walks of life to support the war effort.

Citizen Farmers

Government propaganda in popular magazines, newspapers, and the colorful posters for which the era is justly famed, encouraged civilians' active involvement in achieving victory. Often, these platforms were designed and written by the CPI, but stamped with the name of state commissions or local groups, to be more regional and neighborly. Draped in patriotism, almost all of the materials focused on getting civilians to take action. Creel recognized that most citizens who actively participated would do more than simply accomplish war-related tasks. They would strengthen their emotional commitment to support the war.

Mobilized civilians engaged on the home front in a variety of ways. With male factory workers headed off to war, posters and brochures encouraged young women to work at munitions factories and other wartime-related industries in a fashion we often associate with World War II and "Rosie the Riveter." Newspapers and posters encouraged people of all ages to buy war bonds and con-



In an effort to conserve food, recipes for wheatless bread, meatless main dishes, and low-sugar treats were published in periodicals.

The issue of food production and food conservation became a double-pronged theme to win the war.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Kitchen Gardens, Kitchen Soldiers

Even President Wilson announced that “everyone who creates or cultivates a garden helps, and helps greatly, to solve the problem of feeding the nations—and that every housewife who practices strict economy puts herself in the ranks of those who serve the nation.” Women became the “kitchen soldiers.”

Wilson appointed Hoover as the head of the newly created US Food Administration (USFA) in August 1917. The younger man’s remarkable organizational abilities, combined with American generosity, had resulted in a uniquely successful global relief effort. He would lead a vast, national bureaucracy with 3,000 paid staff and 800,000 volunteers across the country. The USFA’s enacting legislation, known as the Lever Act, enabled Hoover to implement a system of rationing and other food requirements. However, Hoover firmly believed that the job could be done on a voluntary basis.

Throughout the eighteen months of the American participation in the Great War, the government urged frugal food practices but never legally required them for citizens. Sometimes, peer and community pressure made this voluntary rationing barely optional. Overall, however, the campaign that “Food Will Win the War” proved immensely successful, both in bringing a sturdy patriotism

Throughout the eighteen months of the American participation in the Great War, the government urged frugal food practices but never legally required them for citizens.

tribute to charitable agencies such as the Salvation Army, the YWCA, and the American Red Cross.

Relief Effort

The theme of food production and consumption waved perhaps the largest and most striking banner for civilian mobilization. Even before the US officially entered the war, Americans from diverse backgrounds—society ladies to immigrant laborers—participated in world hunger relief to help starving Belgians and other civilian populations. Herbert Hoover, a wealthy and charismatic engineer, organized this massive food drive, formally known as the Committee for the Relief of Belgium. The CRB ultimately shipped five million tons of food to the Belgians and the French whose homes and farms had been devastated by the most catastrophic war the

world had ever known. The actions of the CRB set high standards for efficiency and scale of volume that became the pattern for other large scale relief efforts before and after the war.

Once the United States joined the allies, the issue of food production and food conservation became a double-pronged theme to win the war. First, the allies and our military needed the extra provisions. The food supplies in Britain and France were running dangerously low, due to the German submarine blockade, bad weather, and the devastation of farms on the continent. Secondly, the voluntary participation by women and children in the campaigns for decreased consumption seems to have increased their fervor for war efforts. They weren’t simply cheering on the men, but were active domestic participants.



During the war, five million tons of food was shipped to Belgium and France, where homes and farms had been devastated.

into the domestic sphere of kitchens and schools, and by achieving the specific wartime food production aims.

The Creel Committee expanded the impact of Hoover's USFA work. The two organizations worked together to increase agricultural production and decrease home-front consumption of the types of food needed overseas by our allies and by our troops at training camps.

The press played a vital role in encouraging volunteerism, donating space for nationally-created messaging that linked good citizenship and patriotism with saving food at home and increasing food production at farms, school yards, and home gardens.

The State Archives' remarkable collections include many examples of these strong voices from the World War I era. Newspaper inserts proclaimed, "Our Food Gospel: Eat Less, Serve Less, Waste Nothing" and "Loyalty in Little Things last Proof of Patriotism." The Albany County Home Defense Committee published a brochure from the USFA. In a column titled "Win the War By Giving Your Daily Service," they reminded New Yorkers to "save the wheat, save the meat, save the milk" and other daily foods, recommending wheatless days and meatless days. Perishable items such as local fruits and vegetables were to fill in any gaps on the plate.

NEW YORK STATE FOOD EFFORTS

(Adapted from A Spirit of Sacrifice: New York State in World War I. This exhibit is on view at the New York State Museum through June 1, 2018.)

In New York State, Governor Charles Whitman established the New York State Food Commission to oversee conservation efforts. Much of the effort in New York State focused on increasing production by New York farms. This was accomplished through a variety of educational campaigns to inform the state's farmers on the most productive seed grains and how to increase the supply of eggs and milk. State farm experiment stations and agricultural colleges were tasked with preventing and controlling plant diseases and pests. The Commission also assisted with loans for struggling farmers, provided tractors and mechanized equipment to be lent to farms to improve crop yields, and assistance with shipping products to be sent overseas.

The efforts of the State Food Commission and New York State farmers resulted in a marked increase in agricultural production statewide between 1917 and 1918. According to the commission's final report in 1919, grain crop acreage increased 10 percent. The

yield per acre was expected to be significantly greater as "the farmers have also paid unusual attention this year to the preparation of the soil, fertilization, and the selection of seeds." The spring harvest of 1918 produced nine million bushels of wheat and two million bushels of rye. Oat production increased 15 percent to more than 60 million bushels (15 million bushels more than was produced in 1917). Farmers also reported an increase in the number of pigs being raised on New York farms by over 30 percent. More than 33,000 cows were being milked daily. In 1918, New York State was once again listed by the US Department of Agriculture as a leader in wheat production alongside the Midwestern states. The efforts of New York State's agricultural industry were a crucial component in the nation's efforts to feed American soldiers and the people of Europe during the war.

For more on the activities of the New York State Food Commission, see "In Their Own Words" on page 37 of this issue.



Above: Posters and programs encouraged conservation of products like wheat and sugar and promoted substitutes like corn, which was comparatively plentiful.

Left: Throughout 1917 and 1918, Americans participated in a multitude of food-themed programs.

Home Economics

The young science of home economics, popular among Progressives, flourished during this era. Trained home economists and “experienced housewives” presented workshops on nutrition and home canning, now a safer, easier process thanks to technological improvements.

They also wrote USFA-approved recipes for wheatless bread, meatless main dishes, and low-sugar treats, published in women’s magazines and other periodicals. From large national publications such as *Good Housekeeping* to regional favorites such as the Midwest’s *The Farmer’s Wife* to local women’s bulletins, the USFA proclaimed its message that food would help win the war.

Throughout 1917 and 1918, Americans participated in a multitude of food-themed programs on a vast scale. USFA communications encouraged back yard “Liberty Gardens” for growing vegetables and fruits. The US School Garden Army campaign urged children to “enlist” to grow vegetables for school consumption, presaging Michelle Obama’s “Edible Schoolyard” programs. Vegetable gardening, cooking “war-winning recipes,” and home canning became patriotic acts.

Under the banner of food, the Creel Committee and the USFA inspired farmers, women, and children to work hard for the cause. They were encouraged to perceive themselves as competent activists in the pursuit of victory, not just flag-wavers. Through these civilian efforts, America was able to provide much needed food for the Allies and for its own troops. As a weapon against starvation, malnourishment, and unrest overseas, and disaffection at home, food would help win the war. ■

THE ARCHIVES CONNECTION

The New York State Archives maintains a number of collections related to food efforts during WWI, including the enlistment papers, reports, administrative records, and manuals of the Farm Cadet Program; a scrapbook of records relating to the New York State Food Supply Commission; and the New York State Defense Council administrative and correspondence files, which contains reports on the work of the Commission. Manuscripts and Special Collections at the New York State Library holds a number of posters produced in conjunction with food supply efforts, along with an account book, originally kept by Coopers Plaine, New York, postmaster Francis Cooper in the late 1850s. Later generations covered over pages of the account book with “war-winning” recipes clipped from periodicals during the Great War.



NEW YORK STATE FOOD COMMISSION

COMMISSIONERS:

JOHN MITCHELL, President
JACOB GOULD SCHURMAN
CHARLES A. WIETING

CHARLES H. BETTS, Secretary
Agricultural Hall, Albany, N. Y.

CALVIN J. HUSON
Director Bureau of Production
Agricultural Hall, Albany, N. Y.

Patriotic Emergency Farm Labor Enrollment Card

The undersigned, desiring to contribute his share towards food production, hereby enrolls for emergency farm labor for _____ days during the month of _____ 1918, upon some farm or farms within six miles

of the Village of _____ at the current price for farm labor and to be conveyed to and from the farm where such labor is to be performed. It is understood I am not to be called upon only in case of such emergency arising as will render my services necessary to the planting, cultivating and harvesting of farm crops.

Dated _____
The undersigned employer of the person signing this card hereby consents thereto.

Name _____
Residence _____

Feb. 7th 1918

Food Will Win the War

BY JOSIE MADISON

The presence of over four million American soldiers in Europe during WWI meant the absence of those same individuals from the American workforce. Certain areas of the country noticed a significant decline in the number of active farms due to the absent farm labor. State officials feared that if too many farms became inactive during the war, a severe food shortage would follow. In 1917, Governor Charles S. Whitman called a special session of the New York State Legislature to establish a commission that could deal with the food situation. The New York State Food Commission coordinated with the United States Food Administration to mobilize the resources of the state to ensure adequate food production throughout the war.

The Commission addressed the problem of food supply in three areas: production, distribution and transportation, and conservation, but the problem of food production was considered fundamental. Farmers immediately responded to the need to produce more food during the 1917 growing season, but faced a labor shortage that made harvesting their increased crops very

difficult. The Commission addressed the labor shortage by allowing necessary farm laborers to defer military service in the draft. In addition, the Commission established local offices for farm labor placement in almost every agricultural county and many cities in the state. Boys under draft age were recruited to work on farms, as were women. By June 1918, 6,896 boys and 984 women had been recruited and placed.

To additionally ensure adequate labor, Patriotic Emergency Farm Labor committees were organized in small towns and villages throughout the state to secure patriotic pledges from retired farmers, tradespeople, and others with farming experience to work on farms for a certain number of days in the spring and fall to sow and harvest farmers' crops. Similar plans had been successful in Maine and Canada the previous year. The call for patriotic pledges began in November of 1917. It was initially estimated that a total of 25,000 emergency hours would be offered but, by December of 1917, the Commission estimated that more than double those hours had been pledged. ■