

REFERENCE PAPERS

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Canadian Food and Agriculture in the War

In peacetime Canada was one of the world's great food producing countries. For many years before the war wheat, meat and dairy products from Canada had a place in world markets.

In peacetime a great food producer is the world's benefactor - even though sometimes faults in national and international economies have resulted in the piling up of food in one country while in another many people went hungry.

In wartime food becomes a weapon. It feeds fighting men and war workers; it upholds home front morale. The mere presence of food stocks can have an effect in hastening the end of a war.

As long ago as August 20, 1940, Prime Minister Winston Churchill made it plain that the allies had in mind a time when allied food stocks would exercise a direct influence on the outcome of the war. He told the British House of Commons:

"We shall do our best to encourage the building up of reserves of food all over the world, so that there will always be held up before the eyes of the people of Europe, including -- I say it deliberately -- the German and Australian peoples, the certainty that the shattering of the Nazi power will bring to them all immediate food, freedom and peace."

Word of allied food stocks is now filtering into a hungry Europe. That the allies have a strong psychological weapon in these food stocks cannot be doubted.

The food weapon which Canada has been able to furnish the allies has been many years in the making.

HISTORY OF CANADIAN AGRICULTURE

Jacques Cartier in 1535 reported that the Indians around Hochelaga, at the foot of Mount Royal, where Montreal now stands, were cultivating small patches of land for the production of maize. The Huron Indians, living in the area close to Lake Huron and Georgian Bay, are also reported to have been growing corn, peas and beans when first visited by white men.

Since the arrival of the first French colonists in Acadia, on Canada's eastern shore, Canadian agriculture has gone through several rather distinct stages: Early settlement took place in what is now the Maritime Provinces - Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick - and Quebec, with comparatively slow development until 1750. From 1750 to 1850 settlement of Upper and Lower Canada was in full swing and agricultural growth was steady if not rapid. After Confederation in 1867 and the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1886, the development of western Canada was rapid, and agriculture in eastern Canada went through a period of adjustment in the light of the development in the west.

Growth in the Acadian region was slow. The census of 1671 showed only 441 Acadians, having 429 arpents (an arpent equals 0.84 acre) under cultivation with 866 cattle, 407 sheep and 36 goats. Early in the 18th century the French began to dyke the marshes of the Minas Basin where they were able to secure level lands which did not require clearing and which proved very fertile for the production of grains and grasses.

In the lower St. Lawrence Valley some attempts at agriculture appear to have begun as early as 1608 when Champlain, the founder of Quebec, came to the country. The first real farmer is said to have been Louis Hebert, who began farming in 1617 on the site of what is now Quebec City. Small settlements developed at various points along the St. Lawrence during these early days, but clearing was difficult and slow, and it was a considerable time