

American Friends Service Committee

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BULLETIN ON RELIEF IN FRANCE

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LETTER FROM THE FRENCH FOOD MINISTER TO THE DIRECTOR OF RELIEF

AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

TRANSLATION

MINISTÈRE DU RAVITAILLEMENT

Service du Ravitaillement
General

Direction des Affaires Economiques

3 Bureau

VICHY, 16th September 1940

Sir,

In order to permit you to base the activity of your organisation on positive facts, you asked me to forward to you a memorandum on the various needs of France regarding food.

As M. le Secrétaire Général du Ravitaillement told you when you visited him on the 22nd of July, I beg to confirm that the food products which are most necessary for the French people are:

condensed milk
sugar
lard and other fat products
tinned meat (corned beef)
dry vegetables
rice

I think it useful to relate briefly hereunder the general situation regarding the victualling of the country in regard to these various products:

Condensed Milk

France used to import, in normal years, about 2,500 quintals of condensed milk, chiefly from Holland and Switzerland. Importations from Holland are at the moment impossible and those from Switzerland are becoming very difficult due to the rise of the Swiss franc on the exchange market.

On the other hand, owing to the scarcity of fats, the largest quantity of French milk is kept to make butter. Thus follows a notable decrease in the national production of condensed milk. That means that every outside help will be greatly appreciated in this matter, so much the more as recent strict rules have restricted the consumption of non-skimmed milk to children and ill people who even so are only accorded very small rations.

Sugar

Needs of French consumption (Algeria included) are estimated to be about 1 million tons, and were normally assured by metropolitan and colonial production. Furthermore, it seems that for this year the French crop will be one third less than formerly and will probably not exceed 350,000 tons. Moreover, only a very small part of the surplus of colonial production, which could have attained 200,000 tons, will be brought into France.

On the other hand, the foreign importations of sugar used to be in normal times about 130,000 tons to 150,000 tons. This sugar, after having been admitted under temporary permission, and refined, was sent to Morocco and Tunisia.

In order to estimate the whole needs of the French empire, it is necessary to add to these different weights the 100,000 tons imported directly to Morocco and the 30,000 tons necessary for the revictualling of the Pays du Levant under French mandate.

These few indications show clearly that it will be very difficult to supply the country with sugar during the next winter. One must note that the monthly allowance for French people (500 gr. per person) is half of what the Germans receive per person (1.000 gr.).

Fat Products (animal and vegetable origin)

The revictualling situation of these products in France is particularly alarming. It is very doubtful if, under present conditions, any important help may be procured from either the French Colonies or from foreign countries.

One must not forget that before the war, the metropole received from its colonies and foreign countries, about 550,000 tons of oil for ordinary alimentation. To these amounts you have to add the importations of fat products intended for the manufacturing of industrial oil.

In order to remedy this nearly complete lack of fat products of vegetable origin, it would be most interesting that the maximum of fat products of animal origin (tallow, hog's lard, etc.) be given to the French population.

The fat ration envisaged for France is much lower than that for Germany, and the monthly quantity allowed for the French consumer (125 gr.) will be reduced again very shortly.

Canned Meat (Corned Beef)

The scarcity of cattle due to the war and the increased consumption occasioned by the presence of a great number of foreign refugees on French territory has led my department to ration the meat consumption very closely. Any help in the way of canned food would therefore be especially appreciated.

Dry Vegetables

French production of dried vegetables has always been insufficient to cover the needs. This insufficiency increases in wartime and during the periods when the lack of other food supplies tends to increase the consumption of dried vegetables. Moreover, the producing regions are on the whole in occupied territory, and it is not possible to know to what degree this zone will be able to take part in the revictualling of the free zone.

The program of importation for 1940 foresaw purchases in foreign countries up to 100,000 tons, but possibilities for revictualling next winter will probably be far from meeting these needs. As a matter of fact, it is quite probable that the Balkans will only dispose of small quantities, if it be at all possible to transport them.

It is the same for dry vegetables purchased in Chile, which cannot be imported into France because of the blockade.

The above remarks show that the revictualling of dry vegetables in France will also be deficient next winter.

Rice

Before the war France imported about 600,000 tons of rice from her colonies, especially Indo-China. There is no hope at the moment that any amount at all may be brought into France from that source.

Besides, the stocks are very low due to the difficulties of transport encountered since the beginning of the war, so that the monthly ration of August has not been more than 100 grammes per person, which is quite insignificant, and for September no rice at all has been accorded in order to keep the small amount left. This shows that whatever help may be given along this line would be especially appreciated.

Cereals

I may add that if this year's wheat crop added to our present supplies avoid the necessity of any immediate concern regarding bread, it is not certain that the period between this crop and that of 1941-42 may be taken care of without some trouble. Under these conditions, any help that may also be given along this line (shipments of flour, etc.) would help us to spare our available amounts and would be much appreciated by the Government.

The above is a summary of the needs of France in necessary food products.

In view of such a situation, I am personally grateful to you for the help that you are willing to give to the French authorities as regards revictualling the population of France.

(signed) MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND
REVICTUALLING