

Preliminary Report of the French delegation on the cereals supply of Europe (London, 3 April 1946)

Caption: On 3 April 1946, the French Delegation to the Emergency Conference on European Cereals Supplies paints a picture of the agricultural situation in France.

Source: Emergency Conference on European Cereals Supplies held in London from 3rd to 6th April 1946. London: 1946.

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Preliminary Report of the French Delegation to the Cereals Conference, London, 3rd April, 1946

I. The Cereals Supply Position

Introduction

The cereals position in France on 1st April, 1946, is as follows:

There are in stock, in silos, flour mills and bakeries, approximately 372,000 tons of wheat. There may be a residue in the possession of farmers which would probably yield a further 220,000 tons. France thus disposes of a total of 588,000 tons, in home grown resources, to cover the carryover period to about the 1st August.

During these four months, consumption, at the rate of 300 grams of bread a day, will amount to 380,000 tons per month. A minimum balance at the carry-over of approximately 200,000 tons must be added to this figure. The total minimum need is, therefore, 1,720,000 tons, against resources of 588,000 tons, thus leaving a deficit of 1,132,000 tons to be covered by imports.

In French North Africa, the harvest occurs earlier, about the 1st June. Here the two months plan shows local resources as nil, against monthly requirements of 165,000 tons, thus leaving a deficit of 330,000 tons, also to be covered by imports.

How has this situation arisen? What steps have been taken to combat the scarcity? What are future prospects? This brief outline attempts to answer these questions.

A. Origin and causes of the present situation

In France, the 1945 harvest was about 50 per cent, of the pre war average, for the following reasons:

The sowings at the end of autumn, 1944 were made in excessively rainy weather, "in the mud." This was also a period of great difficulties following upon the liberation: certain of the most fertile areas were still under occupation scenes of recent fighting were still mined or devastated workers who were unwilling to accept forced labour in Germany, including the younger men, had left the countryside to fight on the Alsace or Atlantic fronts, whilst no prisoners had yet returned. The scarcity of fertilisers, due as much to actual deficiency as to the difficulties of inland transport, had never been so serious.

In these circumstances the areas sown with wheat amounted to 3,684,018 hectares, 3,404,010 with winter wheat and 280,008 hectares with spring wheat, instead of the pre war average of 5,150,000 hectares.

If France had obtained a normal pre-war yield from this area, the harvest would have reached 5,530,000 tons. But the weather conditions became gradually more and more unfavourable: after the severe frost of 2nd 3rd May a drought set in, the effects of which were magnified by the impoverishment of the exhausted land; finally, parching reduced the weight of ripe grain to an average of only 11.7 quintals per hectare. At the end of August, 1945, when it was possible to determine the actual harvest fairly precisely on the basis of many thrashings, it transpired that the real harvest amounted to only approximately 4,315,000 tons (instead of a pre-war five-year average of 8,000,000 tons). From this must be deducted the irreducible needs for seed, normal wastage and losses by drying, the legal share of the farmer for barter, leaving for collection a balance of 2,800,000 tons, of which 2,480,000 had actually been collected at the 1st March, leaving 320,000 tons still to be collected after the 1st March, 1946. To this must be added the use of the carry-over balance at the 1st August, 1945, which amounted to approximately 445,000 tons.

It should be stressed that this situation of scarcity applied to all other commodities. This simultaneous

occurrence of scarcities is a rare climatic phenomenon but we must, unhappily admit its reality instead of an average of 50 *milliards* pre war fodder units (including imports of 1.5 to 2 *milliards*) the 1945 harvest for various fodders, hay, coarse grains, etc. did not exceed 25 *milliards*. *Meat* (cattle, sheep and pigs); instead of the average pre war production of 1,750,000 tons, the total 1945 production did not exceed 850,000 tons. *Sugar*: instead of the pre-war average production of 850,000 tons, plus 100,000 to 150,000 tons of imports, metropolitan production was only 407,000 tons notwithstanding the greatest economy in use for alcohol. *Potatoes*: instead of an average of 13 15 million tons, the harvest did not exceed 5-7 million tons, including the produce of private gardens.

During this period the world scarcity in fats permitted only reduced quantities to be imported into France: even before the war France imported nearly three quarters of her food requirements of fats and oils, half from the Empire and half from abroad. In 1945-1946 the consumption of these commodities did not amount to half that of the pre-war period.

The general decrease by about a half in the availability of food stuffs of all kinds therefore coincides with the very severe reduction in the wheat harvest.

In North Africa, the situation is still worse. The cereals harvest, was disastrous as a result of an unparalleled drought following on several other dry years: Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco harvested in 1945 only 639,900 tons of wheat and 490,300 tons of barley fit for human consumption, whilst, on the reduced basis of 7 kgs. 700 of grain per month, the need amounted to 1,901,022 tons of food cereals for the year. Since the month of October, 1945, North Africa has existed exclusively on imported cereals.

At the same time, the drought caused immense damage to North African livestock. The number of sheep which have died of hunger on the dried up pastures is estimated at 50 per cent., and this situation did not even result in supplies of meat for consumption as the laws of Islam forbid the consumption of such animals.

B. Measures taken to relieve the wheat deficit

The provisional derationing of bread in France only lasted two months. It resulted from undertakings given to the country at a time when the new Minister believed Metropolitan and, above all, world resources were greater than has proved to be the case. This derationing lasted through November and December 1945: it had the character and merits of an experiment. Since January 1946 and in certain respects, since last August, France has taken a series of measures which constitute a total effort probably unequalled in other countries. Certain countries may, in isolated instances, be in a more difficult position or have taken stricter measures; it is doubtful if any country has taken more effective collective measures to combat the wheat deficit.

First series of measures concerning rationing.

(a) *Rationing* was re-established on 1st January 1946 and the ration reduced to 300 grams of bread per day, that is to say to a lower level than during the previous months in 1945 and equal to that reached during the hardest period of the German occupation.

(b) *The extraction rate* was raised from 85 to 90-92 per cent, to reduce the wheat consumption for the same apparent weight of bread. No country has a higher extraction rate at the moment.

(c) *Soya bean oil cake* instead of being fed to cattle has been milled into flour and added in a proportion of 5 per cent, to bread in large towns, thus relieving the wheat flour scarcity and slightly raising the protein value of the bread.

(d) *Part of the maize and barley* stocks originally destined for cattle feed have been used for bread-making. These measures will be intensified in future months if imports make this possible.

(e) *Lime*, at the rate of 1.5 per 1,000 has also been added to bread in large towns to counteract

decalcification caused by the high rate of extraction.

(f) The manufacture and sale of *confectionery* made from food cereals has been totally prohibited since 1st January, 1946.

(g) No wheat, however small the quantity, has been used for *industrial purposes* such as distilling or starch manufacture for other than food purposes.

(h) Brewing has been restricted to such limits as will reduce the use of barley in order to avoid animal feeding being diverted to wheat; French beer is limited to a 1 per cent, alcohol content; up to 1st March, 1946 only 15,000 tons of barley were allotted as against 250,000 tons in the pre-war period.

Second Series of measures concerning harvesting.

(a) Payment of a *diminishing premium on prompt delivery*, started at 30 frs. per quintal from August 1945 and ceased in February.

(b) *Supplementary wine issues* were granted for the harvesting and threshing periods.

(c) *Collection of wheat, notably in August*, were, in effect, carried out at an extraordinarily rapid rate: 13.2 per cent, of the estimated crop was collected in this one month, as against 7 to 10 per cent, during the same month in other years.

(d) *The use of wheat as livestock feed is prohibited* and compulsory measures ensure a real observance of this prohibition on a large scale. The harvest in France is estimated by experts, village by village and even farm by farm. Although, properly speaking, there is no "levy" on the wheat the farmer is obliged to deliver, since the regulations provide for the delivery of the whole crop, investigation and ultimately coercive measures are nevertheless undertaken with respect to farmers who fail to make sufficiently prompt delivery (local conditions being taken into account) of at least the estimated wheat crop.

While *the livestock consumption of wheat is very low*, this is not the case for coarse grains. Two characteristics of French agriculture may, however, be mentioned here:

(1.) By and large, *commercial poultry breeding was brought to a stop* with the beginning of restrictions. There only remain the establishments for maintaining special breeding stock and a large number of farmyard poultry scattered about the countryside which, for many months of the year-feed on fallow land and on scraps which would otherwise be wasted.

(2.) *French cattle* lives, to a great extent, within a self-supporting farm community. It feeds on barley, oats and maize as well as on forage usually obtained on the farm where the cattle is reared. As a result it is extremely difficult to ration cattle as is done in certain countries where animal feed is imported or derived from other regions and distributed under regulation.

In North Africa agriculture is much less developed, and necessarily less easy to control in the native holdings. The realization of measures as coherent as those in practice in France is impossible. Statistics are less exact and certain items of the questionnaire submitted for the present Conference cannot be accurately adapted to our knowledge of the North African native agricultural resources. Nevertheless, the general outline of the position is well known, and equally severe measures have been taken. The ration has been reduced to 7 kg. 700 of grain; the extraction rate has also been raised to 90-92 per cent. Coarse grains, notably barley, have been largely used, in conformity with local custom, in the place of wheat for human consumption.

Supplies received from imports.-In spite of the measures indicated above, France, and still less North Africa, could not have subsisted so long without the help of imports.

From August, 1945, to 1st April, 1946, France received from overseas, particularly from the United States (from 1st July, 1945), 1,187,000 tons of wheat.

North Africa in the same period received 1,400,000 tons of wheat.

C. Prospects for the coming months

Spring Wheat : A further effort has been made in France to increase the sowing of spring wheat by every possible means. With this in view, a subsidy of 2,000 francs per hectare has been granted to farmers.

Crop acreage : In these conditions there are approximately 3,951,600 hectares sown with various grains (of which, it is true, a small portion, perhaps 5 per cent., was damaged by frost, but which will be doubtless resown). It is hoped that a further 50,000 ha. will be sown with spring wheat. It has been possible to distribute fertilisers on a basis of 60 per cent, to 80 per cent, of pre-war rates. This is still too little to restore the land's fertility. There is, nevertheless, a sober assurance of a better crop than in 1945.

Prospects of the 1946 harvest: There is certainly a better prospect of the 1946 spring and summer weather being more favourable than the extraordinarily dry weather which was the cause of the 1945 harvest disaster. As the sown acreages are greater and fertilization has been better, the crop prospects are certainly higher, without, nevertheless promising to reach the pre-war average, in view of the time required completely to restore the fertility of the land. Under present conditions, the 1946 grain crops in France can be estimated at approximately 5,600,000 tons, though it must be emphasized that this estimate is extremely tentative.

In North Africa : The coming harvest is more advanced and the estimates which can be given are approximately the following: 1,740,000 tons of wheat, 900,000 tons of barley, with the same reservation that the position must remain uncertain until the date of the harvest.

There is a reasonable prospect that the French and North African cereals scarcity will be considerably less in 1946-1947 than in 1945-1946. Nevertheless, a French wheat deficit, in relation to pre-war consumption, will continue and it should be noted now and borne in mind.

Smallness of the balance at the end of the crop year-Finally, it is important to stress that in its forecast the French Government has allowed for only an extremely small stock, approximately 200,000 tons of wheat, i.e., 18 days' consumption. Such a small stock will certainly cause a breakdown in supplies in many localities, but in view of the serious world shortage France has felt bound to make an effort to limit her demands to the lowest minimum. France considers that a reduction of emergency stocks and balances at the end of the season is the most effective measure for immediately releasing more grain to satisfy, at once, the most urgent needs of the rest of the world.

Import needs for the 120 days' plan

On many occasions France has drawn attention to her wheat deficit as well as to that of North Africa. The figures have been modified as more precise statistics replaced less exact provisional estimates.

Faced with the difficulty of obtaining delivery of wheat which had been, in principle, allocated to her, France gratefully accepted an offer of substantial supplies from Russia. Nevertheless, the late date of this supply, the slow shipment or rather the continual falling off in movements from America, endangered the April ration which can only be assured if an immediate effort is made in the East as well as the West.

France, therefore, urgently asks that the rate of wheat arrivals which she, as well as North Africa, should receive, shall in no event fall below the established minimum, namely:

For France :

320,000 tons	for	April	arrival
320,000	„	„	May
320,000	„	„	June
172,000	„	„	July

Total: 1,132,000 tons.

For North Africa :

170,000 tons	for	April	arrival
160,000	„	„	May

Total: 330,000 tons.

This programme should be implemented whatever may be the source of the expected wheat. Shipments from America should not be reduced until the equivalent quantities of Russian wheat actually arrive, and vice-versa. Let it not be overlooked that France has undertaken not to increase her demands or the bread ration until the next carry-over period.

France hopes that her request will be heard. Full and accurate account should be taken of the true French food position and of the public health. It should be noted that the strict rationing imposed at present in France, in a country which before the war was the greatest bread consumer, makes this privation the harder and more difficult to bear. It will be noted above all that these many privations are imposed upon a situation when official and total rationing in the towns provides for only 1,300 to 1,350 calories per day. It is well known that the majority of townspeople obtain small additional supplies in free commodities and from private deals, which are not always on the prohibited black market but are simply derived from legitimate sharing out of available country produce among relations and needy friends in the towns. Nevertheless, the most accurate estimates, enquiries and rigorous investigations have established that, at the end of this winter, the rations consumed in towns, everything included, averaged considerably less than 2,000 calories a day compared with at least 3,200 pre-war, and even less than 1,800 in many large towns.

The health situation, which improved slightly with the improvement in rationing in the first months following liberation, has suffered a fresh set-back: morbidity, infant mortality due to under-nourishment of the parents, grow daily. Any further restrictions would have disastrous consequences.

In concluding, it is important to emphasise that these restrictions are applied to a population which has been undernourished for five years. As President Hoover noted recently, this situation cannot be compared to that of enemy or ex-enemy countries, whose food position may be now equal or slightly worse than that of France, but who are experiencing it for the first time. However regrettable may be the state of affairs in these

countries, rationing has not yet endangered public health to the extent of the accumulation of uninterrupted privations over many years in France. This accumulation gives to the food shortage from which France suffers to the highest degree amongst the Allied Nations an exceptionally serious character.

II—The agricultural position in France

Before the war, France's food requirements were met as to 13 per cent, from abroad and 87 per cent, from home agricultural production. France's future food supply therefore depends essentially on metropolitan production. It would thus be true to say that if her agricultural potential could be re-established on the 1939 basis, France would not be faced with such serious difficulties in the field of food supply.

Since 1940, the essential characteristic of France's agricultural output has been constantly diminishing harvests. 1945 was, in this respect, one of the worst years that French agriculture has ever known. A comparison of the average production of 1930/1939 and of 1945 is sufficient proof of this.

The 1945 yield in cereals and root crops, represented about 50 per cent, of the 1939 average.

In livestock feed, available resources have decreased by 46 to 52 per cent, of cultivated acreage, compared to the period 1929-1938. France is thus faced with a deficit in forage of approximately 12 milliard forage units, or 8 milliard starch units and 1 milliard digestible proteins.

There is every reason to hope that France will enjoy more favourable climatic conditions in 1946 and that drought will not largely destroy the labours of the farming community. Even so, the best possible weather conditions will not enable France to regain her pre-war agricultural potential.

The war and the occupation greatly reduced her resources in means of production, and account for 50 per cent, of the deficit.

In the first instance, during the period 1940-1945, she was without a large proportion of her agricultural labour, who were prisoners in enemy hands.

The return of prisoners of war admittedly helped to reduce the labour shortage, but during their absence in captivity there was a loosening of the ties which had held many labourers to the land. Further, with the problem of the flight from the land becoming more acute, France is faced with the immediate necessity of mechanization; the fall in numbers (500,000 compared with 2,500,000 before the war) and the younger age of horses, accentuating this need.

In order to meet this labour shortage, France had to appeal to the allies for assistance. During hostilities, it was impossible either to increase the supplies or to service the available tractors, which were already inadequate in 1939 (amounting at that time to 39,000 machines).

An import programme of agricultural machinery for the 1945/1946 season, called for 89,000 tons. On February 28, only 18 per cent, of the programme, or 15,000 tons, had been realized.

The 1946/1947 programme calling for 122,000 tons, 67,340 tons of which consist of tractors (36,000 units), must be realized in the best possible conditions, so that the re-equipment of French agriculture in tractors and agricultural machinery may be achieved. But the French farmer must not only have more numerous and more modern means of production, but enough manure to nourish the land, starved through lack of it during four years of war, and adequate supplies of fertilizing and other material.

Supplies of nitrates, phosphoric acid and potash have been constantly on the decrease, and for 1944/1945 represent respectively 15.52 per cent., 4.76 per cent, and 2.26 per cent, of the amount applied before the war.

As far as agriculture is concerned, the difficulties in the way of industrial reconstruction give no grounds for hope that the output of fertilisers will be enough to meet French requirements.

For the period 1 March to 31 December, 1946, these requirements are:

200,000	tons of pure nitrates
1,000,000	tons of superphosphates
125,000	tons of ground phosphate
600,000	tons of basic slag (Thomas)

To meet these requirements, imports will be required as follows:

110,000 tons of pure phosphates
400,000 tons of superphosphates
240,000 tons of ground phosphate

If France can obtain sufficient help in tractors and fertilisers, there is no question but that the resultant crops will lead to a decrease in the shortage of feed and to a consequent improvement in the livestock position. In this connection, the deficit in the production of cereals and livestock feed since 1945 has caused further deterioration in the livestock position, and, consequently, in the supply of milk and meat.

To meet this deficit, imports would have been required as follows:

2,094,000 tons of oats
498,000 tons of barley
528,000 tons of maize
60,000 tons of rice

The import programme provides only:

200,000 tons for the second half of 1945
620,000 tons for the second half of 1946

of which, from 1 April to 1 March, only 108,737 tons arrived at their destination due to difficulties in the supply of shipping.

The position in regard to oil-cake was the same. Whilst 535,000 tons of imported oil-cake would have been required, allocations from the Combined Food Board for the second half of 1945 only amounted to 81,000 tons for foreign oil-cake and 25,000 tons of Empire origin.

There is no question that for the 1946/1947 period and in spite of the prospects of an improved harvest, France will have to rely largely on imports for the upkeep and reconstitution of its cattle.

Exhausted by war, France will only be able to reconstitute its agricultural potential to the extent that assistance from the allies enables her to recover from the accumulated burden of 5 years of occupation.

If she had tomorrow tractors, agricultural machinery, fertilizers, anticytogenic products and cattle feed, not only could she guarantee her own supplies but she could provide economic help to her neighbours.