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“UNIVERSAL MILITARY SERVICE” FOR FARMERS.

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In time of war the highest patriotic duty of farmers is to feed the country.

Napoleon said, “An army moves on its belly,” and the same is true of a community or a nation.

The present conditions in all the warring countries of Europe prove it again—if proof is needed. Men and arms and munitions have not failed on either side, but each of the warring alliances is basing the hope of victory more and more on their enemy’s shortage of food and on its effects, both moral and physical, on armies and the populations behind them.

In July, 1916, a committee of the Royal Society calculated that Britain’s food supply was only 5 per cent. above the minimum necessity for proper nutrition. The Committee adds:

“The Committee, as physiologists, desire to lay stress on the fact that in buying food the laboring population is buying energy—the power to do work. Increased cost of food (other things

being equal) means increased cost of production. If the rising prices curtail for any class in the community its accustomed supply of food, its output of work will, of necessity, be reduced. It is important to remember that a slight reduction of food below the necessary amount causes a large diminution in the working efficiency of the individual."

England and France suffered in the beginning from the mistake—a noble and patriotic mistake—of allowing men to go to the front who were indispensable at home and who had to be called back to support the armies by making needed supplies.

We shall face this year and probably in the succeeding year a great shortage of food throughout the world.

The food situation everywhere is most critical. In our own country the situation regarding our staple food, wheat, is thus in substance stated in the New York Times:

The 1915 wheat crop, deducting exports, was 767,000,000 bushels. The 1916 crop, deducting exports, left only 526,000,000 for home use. The estimated annual home consumption (for seed and food) is 700,000,000 bushels. So that our 1916 crop left for home consumption was 200,000,000 bushels short. The forecast for the 1917 crop of winter wheat is not encouraging.

The urgency of the case is well stated in the following extract of a letter printed in the New York Times:

* * * * "The 6,500,000 farms of the country must feed 100,000,000 people, or each farm an average of 15 people. To put it another way: There are an average of five persons to the farm, or 33,000,000 people who must feed themselves and 67,000,000 others. Therefore the mobilization of our skilled and unskilled labor necessary to meet the Government's labor requirements to prosecute its enormous military task tends to lessen the number of food producers, while no substantial plan is offered to encourage increased food supply. Nothing will be gained by becoming alarmed sixty days from now, after it is too late to plant. Crops are not like factories—they can only be started once in twelve months. Now is the time to act, or else face the consequences. Regardless of the final result of the war in Europe, it cannot now terminate in time for that country to produce this year sufficient to feed its population—it must draw heavily from us. If we are compelled to concentrate all our surplus energy on the production of munitions of war, to the

detriment of our farm products, we will have to decide between food disturbances at home or the shutting off of supplies to the allied nations." * * * *

"For every man who must shoulder a rifle for military duty we had better furnish inducement for another to take up a hoe for farm work. For every farm laborer who leaves the farm for the ammunitions factory to earn \$3.00 a day, we had better offer inducements to the farmers to speed up their efforts to feed the people, and show them how they will be justified in going to the labor market and paying good wages for the same class of labor for farm work as the gun and battleship factories pay labor to serve the Government." * * * *

"Universal service" does not mean universal service in the camp or on the sea. To each individual it means rendering to the country that service which he or she is best fitted to give and which will count for most in national defense and putting into that service his utmost energy.

The place for the farmer, that is, the man who has tillable land and the expert knowledge and machinery to make it produce food, is not in the training camp, but in the home field. His duty to his country is to supply protein and calories; not trinitrotoluol, or cartridges, nor at present to enter the ranks of soldiers.

Three years ago trinitrotoluol was a word scarcely recognized outside the chemical laboratory. Today its importance and awful significance are known wherever "preparedness" is considered, and it is even nicknamed "T. N. T." for readier use in common speech. We can remember when protein and calory were little more than laboratory words. Today their importance and significance are known wherever the supply of armies has to be managed.

"T. N. T." is the most powerful instrument of destruction. The protein and calory are the sole sources of physical strength and endurance, not only to the fighting line but to all who, with brain or muscle, are serving their country.

We are beginning too late to adequately prepare for 1917. We must do all that we can now and begin *now* our preparations for the next year.

The farm labor situation is deplorable. The prices of manure, commercial fertilizers and other agricultural supplies are very high. Our live stock has been decreasing, etc., etc.

But now, let us have done with discussing these things and "forgetting those things which are behind, press forward to those which are before."

Our job, "doing our bit," is to plant food crops, chiefly those which will bear permanent storage and transportation, such as oats, rye, corn, beans, soy beans and, in some cases, potatoes, and where it can be done, to raise such meat products as poultry and hogs, which yield an annual return.

Good farming in ordinary times is an intelligent gamble, or to use a better phrase, a business risk or venture, dependent like all business, for its success, partly on things beyond our knowledge and control. Our business is to make those conditions which are controllable as favorable as possible and to make such ventures as intelligent enterprise warrants.

Of course, it is preposterous to ask or expect a farmer with small capital to increase or maintain the production of his land without a fair immediate return for his work and for his risk. It is, however, his patriotic duty to consider whether he may not pay more for farm labor than before and put more of his own care into it, on the certainty of increased demand and higher prices for his product, and then to put into food crops all that he thinks he will be able to till and harvest.

All we would urge is that each farmer carefully consider what risk he can fairly take on labor and on acreage, and do his utmost.

War is an awful risk for every one. At such a time the producer may well take a risk which in less troublous times his conservatism would not approve. It is better to fit and plant all the land which it seems possible to handle, with the present expectation of summer help, at a risk of the loss of part of the crop, than to consult our fears and plant only what we are quite sure can be carried through.

Any law providing for a draft for military service should provide for the exemption of all those who are effectively engaged in producing the food supply. This is not a pacifist but a militant suggestion. Of course, the demand for farm laborers should not interfere with the voluntary enlistment of those who consider it their duty to answer that call and a call from the authorities to military service supersedes every other call.