Bruckart's Washington Digest

Amazing Decline in American Farm Crop Exports Is Reported

Falling Off Is Largely in Cotton Shipments; Blame Is Laid To Trick Remedies Fostered by Agriculture Department; New Program Involves More Spending.

By WILLIAM BRUCKART

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WASHINGTON.—The department of agriculture issued a report the other day that showed an amazing decline in exports of American farm crops. Specifically, the report said that export shipments of agricultural crops were 21 per cent less in the last 10 months than they were in the same 10 months ending in May, 1938. Or, if calculated in fractions, American farmers were able to sell abroad less than four-fifths as much this year as last year.

Further examination of the figures placed the falling off of exports largely in the sales of cotton. So bad have our sales of cotton become abroad that the authorities now are expecting total exports of cotton this fiscal year to be the lowest in the last 50 years of American history.

It is a sad state of affairs and does no credit to Secretary Wallace and his subordinates in the department of agriculture. They must take the blame because they have conceived and promoted and executed all of the nostrums and trick remedies that were to lead American agriculture to the more abundant life. So, what we have today is a low mark of which none can be proud, and that remarkable record has been attained after billions of dollars have been wasted in one way or another from the ploughing under of thousands of acres of crops and the killing of 6,000,000 pigs through all of the stages of crop control, regimentation of farmers and creation of unprecedented bureaucracy.

But the real shock seems yet to come. There is more money to be spent and a new program to be carried out. Mr. Wallace has now initiated an effort by which export bounties will be paid and this will enable the sale of cotton abroad—so Mr. Wallace believes. President Roosevelt believes so. He has indorsed the scheme.

Doomed to Failure Like Earlier Crackpot Ideas

Thus, we have come to a new phase in a long string of governmental failures—because this one is doomed to failure like the earlier crackpot ideas. Since 1933, when the administration embarked upon its price-raising campaign, cotton sales abroad have steadily dropped lower. When the efforts to hold the price up by means of a reduced acreage failed, brilliant minds in the administration turned to loans to the holders of cotton so that the price could be held above the world level. Thereafter, and almost at once, cotton goods of a cheaper kind and made by the worst types of serfdom labor, and cotton, itself, from lands where labor works for a piece of black bread crowded American cotton out of the world market.

When I say, as I did above, that the latest scheme for artificial maintenance of prices will fail, an explanation of the reasons therefor obviously is required. In some quarters around Washington, however, it is asserted that no explanation is necessary because the thing is ridiculous in the extreme. I do not believe the situation is as clear as that. It may seem to some that payment of subsidies to those owning cotton will permit those holders to sell at a lower level than their competitors from foreign lands. That is to say, the cotton could be sold at whatever price was required to get it marketed—with the United States government making up the difference by a direct payment to the seller. When this happens, however, other factors and forces begin to operate, and there is where the selling machinery stalls.

I believe no one can safely dispute the statement that the drop in our cotton exports—and other farm products, too—has resulted from the various price control policies that have been used. Whenever there is an attempt to control prices artificially, there is bound to be grief since that action represents an interference with the law of supply and demand. A horse will not drink and a buyer will not buy unless he wants the drink or the product.

Better to Sell at Lower Prices Than Not at All

What is the result? It is plain to see that prices are propped up by various sticks, most of them furnished out of the federal treasury. Now, there is no sign at all that either President Roosevelt or congress is willing to withdraw those sticks which hold the prices up. Since they are apparently to remain, then it is equally apparent that none of our cotton will be sold at prices competing with foreign cotton. Naturally, the foreign cotton gets into the markets and stays there just as long as our own silly policies are maintained.

It seems strange to me why the government continues to harp away on these artificial supports for prices and crop control methods and other devices which some bright young man thinks will work. There could be an elimination of nearly all of them and, if there were, it is likely that American cotton exports would again be taken in the world market. Of course, the price would be lower. But it strikes me as common sense that it is better to sell at a lower price than never to sell at all. And unless all of nature's teachings are to go awry at once, the price level would control the amount of cotton planted very much better than Secretary Wallace or Assistant Secretary Brown can do.

There is, however, another phase to be considered. Mr. Wallace and the President talk about payment of the bounties so that our producers will get a full price, even though the foreign buyers get the stuff dirt cheap. While this policy is being fostered, another agency of the government is promoting international treaties designed to do away with just such policies. I refer, of course, to the reciprocal trade treaties that are the especial pet of Secretary Hull, of the department of state.

Hull Has Worked Hard to Recreate Flow of Commerce

Mr. Hull has worked long and faithfully in his campaign to eliminate the barriers to trade between nations. He has sought to get other nations to eliminate restrictions on quantities of imports from the United States; he has battled against special tariff charges and has used every argument available to recreate a free flow of commerce between the United States and as many nations as will enter into such trade agreements.

It fails to make sense to me, therefore, to see Mr. Hull struggling along one road and Mr. Wallace, with the President's approval, carrying out in behalf of the United States the very policies which Mr. Hull finds objectionable on the part of other nations.

What must the reaction of the Argentines be, for example, when we say through Mr. Hull that we don't want any restrictions on our shipments to their country—and then say through Mr. Wallace that we are going to pay cash subsidies to our growers of wheat so that they can undersell the Argentines in the world market at Liverpool, England. Of course, wheat has not been included in the initial proposal for subsidies, but will all of those please stand up who believe a subsidy can be limited to one kind of farm crop! I would feel, if I were a citizen of Argentina, that even the kindly words of President Roosevelt about being good neighbors were liberally sprinkled with hokum.

Above and beyond the contradictory character of these policies as I have attempted to point them out, there is still another national policy which mixes with the Wallace subsidy idea as oil mixes with water. Through many, many years, one of our fundamental laws governing imports inflicts retaliation upon those who attempt to gain entrance into the American market by use of a government subsidy.

Tap Treasury for Subsidy To Pay Holders of Cotton

The tariff laws say that whenever shipments of any commodity from any foreign nation is sold or offered for sale in our market at prices below the selling prices in the homeland of production, our customs officers shall at once apply a countervailing duty. Now, the countervailing duty is nothing more nor less than a retaliation and it is intended to offset the use of such subsidies as are paid by the government of the land from which the shipment came. We have used it many times; only lately it was used against Germany. The amount of the duty that was assessed was more than enough to make the price of the imported article higher than our American market quotations on like articles.

Here in the Wallace subsidy idea, however, it is proposed to take money out of the federal treasury to pay holders of cotton a subsidy that will enable sales abroad at low prices. The self-same treasury at the very same time must act through its customs officers to see that no other nation does the same thing to us.

While all of these things are bad enough, I think we ought not overlook the possibilities contained in any subsidy program—the extent to which it undoubtedly will go. As I said above, if there is an export bounty on cotton sales, does anyone think for a moment the wheat farmers will not ask for similar treatment? And if wheat gets that treatment, how about corn and hogs and tobacco and rice and potatoes and peanuts and dairy products?

When all of those are in, why not a subsidy out of the treasury to be paid to me and to others who work, and to one storekeeper who is competing with the fellow in the next block?

(Released by Western Newspaper Union.)

ADVENTUROUS AMERICANS

By

Elmo Scott Watson

Hero of Shimonoseki

WHILE the sloop Natchez was in the harbor at Pensacola, Fla., more than a hundred years ago, a cry of "Man overboard!" rang throughout the vessel with unusual frenzy because sharks had been swarming around the ship in hungry schools.

While others prepared to launch a boat, David Stockton McDougal, a young midshipman, dived into the water, swam to the foundering man and kept him afloat. He churned the water and was able to frighten off the sharks until the rescue boat arrived.

This incident shows the fearless courage that ruled his adventurous career in the United States navy. His exploits came to a climax while he was commander of the steam frigate Wyoming during the Civil war.

Ordered to patrol Asiatic waters in search of Confederate vessels preying upon Union commerce, he found that a greater threat to United States shipping came from the Japanese. The Mikado had ordered all foreigners expelled from Japan and the surrounding waters. Fanatical Japanese had already made several attacks on American vessels when Commander McDougal arrived at the Straits of Shimonoseki.

Along the shore were high bluffs fortified with several batteries of heavy artillery. Ahead of him were three Japanese war vessels. In spite of the heavy opposition, he steamed into the straits past the blazing shore batteries and engaged the three vessels.

The first fire of the Wyoming sank two of the ships and then silenced the third. This allowed McDougal to turn his attention to the batteries along the shore. Reversing his course through the straits, he deliberately invited continued fire, but silenced all the Japanese guns.

Had this incident occurred at any other time than when attention was centered on Gettysburg and Vicksburg, the fame of this dauntless navy officer who fought a good-sized naval engagement with one ship, would have rung 'round the world.

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'Brings 'Em Back Alive'

NOT so many years ago a mother punished her son for trying to capture a buzzing rattlesnake near their home in the outskirts of Dallas, Texas. He wanted it to sell to a man in Minneapolis, Minn., who made snake oil.

When the family moved to Chicago this young fellow was no longer able to catch animals and birds as he could in Texas. But he often went to the Lincoln Park zoo to satisfy his desire to own strange animals.

That was years ago. Now he can go into almost any zoo or circus menagerie in the United States and greet those behind the bars as past acquaintances. His name is Frank Buck and wherever there are wild animals in captivity in this country, some of them are there because "Buck brought 'em back alive."

Some of the rarest animals Buck has ever brought back were obtained, not only with courage, but with this friendly diplomacy. His skill in handling the native people of the jungle and his ability to make friends with Oriental potentates account for his opportunities to go where animals are to be had.

Among the strange people with whom he deals, he is a great "tuan" or chief—both to the coolies of the Malay peninsula and to the rajahs of India. But more important of all, perhaps, is that he no longer has any fear of his mother punishing him for catching snakes.

* * *

Emperor Norton

IN 1858 Joshua A. Norton, wearing a poorly fitting navy officer's uniform set off with gold braid, and with a saber at his belt, rode a bicycle up Market street in San Francisco. He stopped at a main corner and said to the crowd: "I proclaim myself Norton I, Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico."

There was no doubt that he was crazy. But for the next 22 years, until he died in 1880, the people of San Francisco paid respect to the "Emperor," who was a familiar figure in the streets.

Even the straight-laced bankers of the day cashed the small notes the self-styled ruler issued. He passed them out in restaurants and stores but none of them ever was for more than 50 cents.

Not only were his requests for money small, but all the demands he made as a result of his wide "authority" were reasonable — so reasonable that the people of San Francisco had no trouble giving in to them and thus humoring him.

When he died of heart disease on the cobblestones of Kearny street, 30,000 people heard prominent citizens praise him for his good character. In Woodlawn Memorial cemetery is a shaft bearing this inscription: "Norton I, Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico. Joshua A. Norton, 1819-1880."

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ASK ME ANOTHER ?

A Quiz With Answers Offering Information on Various Subjects

The Questions

1. What was the Holy Grail?
2. What is meant by fiscal year?
3. Does the term dirigible refer only to aircraft?
4. Do landing or starting planes have the right of way at an airport?
5. Are the stars motionless in space?
6. Why can a fly walk on a ceiling without falling?
7. What is the difference between a chuckle, a giggle and a laugh?
8. Why don't ducks get wet?
9. A bale of cotton weighs how many pounds?
10. What is the difference between a buffalo and a bison?

The Answers

1. The platter or cup which, according to legend, was used by Christ at the Last Supper.
2. A year which starts at a designated date for financial figuring.
3. No. Dirigible means capable of being directed, as an automobile or bicycle.
4. Descending planes have the right-of-way.
5. No. If there is anything in the universe that is actually motionless astronomers have not yet discovered it.
6. It has suction cups on its legs.
7. A chuckle is a small noise, giggling comes in short spasms, and a laugh is everything.
8. Because of oil in their feathers.
9. A bale of cotton weighs 480 pounds.
10. Buffalo is the general term given to many species of wild oxen, including the bison. The American buffalo may properly be called a bison.

WNU Service.

And the Mistress Grew Red With Indignation

The housemaid was under notice to leave, and her mistress summoned her to tell her a few truths.

"So I'm a flirt, am I?" demanded the maid, after a few preliminaries. "Well, I knows them as flirts more than I do. And another thing, I'm better-looking than you. Your husband told me."

"That's enough!" snapped her mistress.

"Oh, no, it ain't," the girl went on. "I can kiss better than you can, too. Do you know who told me that?"

"Don't you dare to suggest that my husband——"

"Oh, no," interrupted the maid, "it was the butler."

Head Hunters of New Guinea Are Particular About Child Training

HEADHUNTERS of New Guinea, going without clothing, yet very particular about training their children in habits of cleanliness and modesty, were the subject of study by Dr. John Whiting and S. W. Reed, graduate students of Yale university, who lived for seven months among a small primitive tribe of less than 400 persons in a mountain range far up the Sepik river.

Spankings and rewards are the basis of child discipline among these primitives, the Yale investigators discovered, but early in life the child learns to recognize a word of praise or a scolding as an effective substitute for physical punishment or caress.

Food taboos and cleanliness are taught early in childhood and these "morals" are almost never neglected in after life, they found. Sexual and aggressive activities are controlled primarily at adolescence and later, and the restrictions in these matters are never so binding—they are quite often violated.

The tribe still hunt human heads and Doctor Whiting participated in a spear dance which the natives performed before setting out on a raid against a neighboring tribe. No male is accepted as being fully adult and manly unless he has accomplished the feat of spearing an enemy and bringing back his head as a trophy, Doctor Whiting said.

The tribe live on the produce of their yam gardens, the boiled pith of the sago palm, and the roasted meat of the wild pig. Snakes and lizards also form part of their diet, and roasted white grubs are considered a delicacy. Doctor Whiting and Mr. Reed found it difficult to overcome their own food prejudices when the grubs were served them, but were surprised to find that they were "indeed excellent."
—Science Service.

By Number

Several American towns are named with numbers, such as Six, W. Va.; Seventy Six, Ky., and Ninety Six, S. C., according to Collier's. A species of fish in South Africa is named Seventy-four after the 74 guns on Nelson's flagship, the Victory; and a toilet water is named 4711 after the street address in Cologne, Germany, where it was first compounded.