

Maryland's Eastern Shore, an area that traditionally had been a hotbed of sedition, proved most helpful to the British cruisers, trading fresh provisions for much-needed salt, but even Western Shore inhabitants were lured by the coveted supplies offered by the enemy. Writing to Governor Johnson on December 13, Richard Henry Lee noted that while passing through Maryland he had found it "the common talk....that many avaricious, inconsiderate, and illdesigning people, have practised largely the carrying [of] live stock and other provisions to the enemies ships of war, now in Potomac river opposite our Boyds Hole. In particular, I am told of many boats loaded with provisions going to these ships from your shore, somewhere, I think, about halfway between Cedar point and Wicomico." Similar reports poured in to the governor and Council, and on December 21 they addressed Col. Richard Barnes of St. Mary's County urging him to use his "utmost Vigilance to put a Stop to all Kind of Intercourse between the People and the Men of War." The following day the governor and Council dispatched a letter to Capt. George Cook, commander of the state's vessels on the bay, noting that they were "in Hopes, before this Time, you have been joined with two Gallies from Virginia, and that you have been able at least to prevent the infamous Intercourse which we hear has been carried on by our People with the Men of War."

The lure of salt, rum, sugar, and other provisions was too great for many of the inhabitants of the lower Eastern and Western Shores, however, who could not sell their cattle for decent prices and who desperately needed what the British had to offer. A basic staple of poor planters diet was pork, but without salt it could not be cured for preservation throughout the winter. The British could provide this precious commodity--some of the British vessels were allegedly ballasted with salt--but neither Congress nor the government of Maryland were able to do so.

Maryland's inability to supply its citizens with the basic necessities of life paralleled Congress's problems with providing Washington's army with food, shelter, and clothing. At best, Maryland officials could attempt to act in concert with Virginia to curb illicit traffic with the enemy, but people uncommitted to the American cause were unlikely to obey laws passed by the General Assembly. Most inhabitants probably would do whatever proved necessary to secure needed supplies, regardless of what their governing officials dictated. Nonetheless, the General Assembly passed two important bills during December 1777 designed to bolster the Continental Army and quell dissent within the state. The first act provided for a bounty of fifty acres of land for every man who would enlist in the Continental Army for three years. It also granted a