

Document Background Both of the documents used in this lesson are located in the Working Papers for Delaware's Role in World War II Collection, Record Group 1325.236, Box 395254. The documents are located in the folder titled Chapter 22, Rationing Coupons.

Background Information

Where any important article becomes scarce, rationing is the democratic, equitable solution. Franklin D. Roosevelt, April 27, 1942ⁱ

Price and product controls have been instituted on a national scale four times in the 20th century: World Wars I and II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam Conflict. While shortages are often natural offshoots of war the Federal government overtly involved itself in the effort to curb profiteering and heartache within the United States during these specific conflicts. The Korean and Vietnam experiences are beyond the scope of this essay.

Shortages occurred during World War I in foodstuffs, in manpower, in materials, and in weaponry. Many of the shortages were exacerbated as numerous ships carrying goods to the British or to the Germans were captured and diverted to respective enemy nations or were sunk. Because of the shortages and the involvement of the government in conservation efforts, a large bureaucracy evolved to prevent the profiteering that had occurred during the Civil War. Many of the agencies that came into existence under President Wilson derived from governmental efforts to minimize shortages in specific commodities.

Coal (used to power the factories that produced munitions and clothing as well as coke, an essential element in steel) was in short supply during the winter of 1917-18. However, it was not because of "the inability of the mines to produce the required tonnage but because of inadequate railroad transportation facilities and severe weather conditions."ⁱⁱ

The United States Fuel Administration worked in concert with the Quartermaster General to insure that coal stores were not used for less essential enterprises. Soldiers were stationed in federally defined districts to interface munitions factory needs with coal supplies, guaranteeing the successful implementation of the government's coal usage plan. This monitoring was so successful that few armament factories were forced to curtail production for more than a day. Wool was another commodity that sparked government intervention. Vast quantities were needed to provide clothing for the troops involved in the War. The military purchases effectively ended the civilian wool trade, wool market, and wool manufacturing except for use by the military for uniforms, blankets, and other essentials needed by the American Expeditionary Forces. Again, the government was involved through the appointment of a wool administrator and various regional headquarters.

Foodstuffs were the most publicized of the shortages, and it was in this area that President Wilson perhaps had his most publicized successes. "On August 10, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson issued Executive Order 279-A creating the U. S. Food Administration. In doing so, he created a government entity to replace an existing volunteer organization. The U. S. Food Administration, operating in each state, was to

a. Assure the supply, distribution, and conservation of food during the war, b. Facilitate transportation of food and prevent monopolies and hoarding, and c. Maintain governmental power over foods by using voluntary agreements and a licensing system."ⁱⁱⁱ Herbert Hoover was appointed the Food Administrator and, by connecting sacrifice with patriotism, was able to secure general voluntary support for reducing intake/usage of certain products. The Committee of Public Information, created in April 1917, promoted sacrificing for the troops and allies overseas as a patriotic duty. This was the time period of "Meatless Mondays" and "Wheatless Wednesdays," and "Porkless Saturdays," the time when sugarless gum was invented to replace regular gum and its need for sugar, the time when Crisco, invented in 1910, became a mainstay in America's kitchens to overcome shortages of lard. Children learned the following verse to stir support at home for the conservation movement: Child's No Waste Pledge

I pledge my allegiance to my flag, in service true I will not lag, I'll not despise my crusts of bread, nor make complaint, whatever fed; On

wheatless days I'll eat no wheat, on other days eat less of sweet; I'll waste no pennies, spoil no clothes, and so I'll battle 'against our foes; No slackard, but a soldier keen, to do my best in the year eighteen.^{iv}

Backyards became Victory Gardens as Americans ate more vegetables and less meat. Law did not mandate rationing; volunteers, usually women, went house-to-house eliciting support. Participants signed pledges and received posters to place in their windows. Children were given flyers reminding them to eat foods like corn and oatmeal, saving high-energy foods for the men overseas. Hoover called upon the American spirit to contribute to the war effort, not through governmental controls but rather through the prevailing sense of voluntarism that characterized the Progressive era. Hoover believed that "Food will win the war." In his memoirs, he saw his job as asking the people to "Go back to simple food, simple clothes, simple pleasures. Pray hard, work hard, sleep hard and play hard. Do it all courageously and cheerfully."^v Approximately 20,000,000 American families pledged to eat less meat, butter, milk, sugar and wheat. Children had their own pledge sheets. Families were given cards to hang in their kitchen telling them exactly what to save and why. Children were asked to eat all of the food on their plate and substitute other foods.^{vi}

While illegal activities most certainly existed, tracking such actions is not easy. Hugh Rockoff in his article in the **Journal of Economic History** "Price and Wage Controls in Four Wartime Periods" noted that the enforcement of controls was not through the courts but rather through licensing and revocation of those licenses for violations of government

imposed conditions. The "Food Administration revoked licenses for trading for all commodities or for with specific reference to the items being black marketed." In all, 8,603 sanctions were imposed during the period of the Food Administration's existence.^{vii}

Under President Roosevelt in World War II, attempts were made to circumvent the often-devastating shortages of the First World War by imposing strict governmental controls. Price controls for the Second World War were in effect from April 1942 through June 1946. The country, just entering the recovery period from the Depression,

was determined not to allow certain segments of society to get richer on the backs of those who had just suffered so much during the preceding years. Roosevelt's aim was to prevent this from happening by requiring industry to sacrifice as much as the citizenry.

“Americans, they [Roosevelt’s advisors] noted, not only worried that more might be asked of them than of other groups but also demanded proof that their sacrifices would further the war effort and not fatten someone else’s wallet.”^{viii}

Unlike the voluntary participation in conservation efforts in World War I, Roosevelt mandated a program of rationing that affected both consumer and industry. Entering the war in the Pacific resulted in the cessation of rubber supplies. In December 1941, a ban was established prohibiting the sale of new tires. By 1942, fuel shortages were becoming real, not just projected. While supplies of coal appeared plentiful, transportation limitations and labor shortages influenced the amount that was actually available for use or sale. Major food rationing programs were in place by March 1943. Many other items were placed on the list of controlled products: shoes, sugar, coffee, milk, cigarettes and alcohol.

While the desired effect of the government controls was to protect availability of essential items for troop and civilian usage and ensure the existence of materials for production, two of the most noticeable offshoots were the increased bureaucracy of the Federal Government and the proliferation of black market distribution of goods and ration coupons. Bernard Baruch, in 1941, wrote “rationing was ‘a means of short circuiting the laws of supply and demand’ which, if left to itself, would result in inflation. On these grounds, Baruch argued for widespread price controls: ‘there are numerous reasons why the attempt to fix individual prices would be unwise and why the method of clamping the ceiling down on the whole structure would be both easier and more equitable.’”^{ix} Roosevelt established the War Production Board as the coordinating agency to identify commodities that were in scarce supply and determine the amount of goods available for civilian usage. One of the subsidiary agencies of the WPB was the Office of Price Administration, which enjoyed “relative autonomy in developing the “machinery

and rules of rationing” for those scarce goods”^x as well as monitoring retail sales of those same goods.

Coupons were counterfeited and used by consumers and retailers alike and were principally used in the sales of gasoline and meat. Widespread use of these stamps led to shortages and price inflation for customers with no access or no money with which to purchase the phony coupons. Ironically, in an effort to safeguard the American public from widespread price gouging and corruption, use of the mandated rationing books resulted in organized crime’s involvement. “Black markets were the targets of organized criminals only because of a widespread dissatisfaction amongst the gasoline-buying public. It was consumers’ willingness to buy black market gasoline that encouraged widespread counterfeiting.^{xi}”

Violation of the rationing system can be tracked during World War II by the number of cases brought to court. The number of cases shows that corruption of the system was widespread.

xii

Note the increase from the 42 cases in 1942 and the 32, 209 cases brought to court in 1946.

Rationing in Delaware ^{xiii}

In Delaware Governor Richard C. McMullen created the State Council of Defense that was to “coordinate and implement defense measures with the national government.”^{xiv} Within the first year of the war, approximately 8500 men had either enlisted or were drafted into the armed services. The spreading bureaucracy which characterized the rest of the nation also existed in Delaware: For instance, there were ten draft boards within the state, four in Wilmington and two each in the three counties. Within those draft

boards were subsidiary committees such as a medical team, a board of appeals and a government appeals agent.^{xv}

Likewise the administration of price controls and product distribution also spawned committees, bureaus, and agencies in each country and Wilmington to oversee the judicious application of all regulations. Like the draft boards, these agencies also fell under Delaware's State Council of Defense.

When, in 1942, rationing of tires began, each county received an allotment of tires that could be sold. These fell into three categories: new, retreads, and tubes for tires. In April of that year, New Castle was allotted 126 new tires, Kent 24, and Sussex 18. "The government, not market forces decided how raw materials and manufacturing capacity were allocated. Many products were rationed; others simply were not produced until existing inventories were depleted."^{xvi} Delawareans were prompted to participate in salvage drives and in the Victory Garden movement. Much like participants in World War I, Delawareans who participated in the scrap collections were given a "Victory Scrap Insignia" to post by the *Wilmington News Journal*. Promoting patriotism was seen as a way to possibly circumvent the mistrust of the government interventions in the economy. By July 1942 Delaware citizens collected 1,600,000 pounds of rubber; they collected 4724 pounds of cooking fats in the summer of 1942; this amount had increased to 15,499 pounds by January 1943.^{xvii} Patriotism and the support of Delaware's press were instrumental in the success of the entire buying control program in the state.^{xviii} In order to increase fats collection, for every pound of fat brought in, contributors were given four cents and two rationing points.

Gas rationing began in the eastern states, and Delaware was among those targeted for participation in May 1942. By December, the rationing of gas had spread to the entire nation. Drivers were in one of four categories determined by the role the person played in the war effort. Those with an A sticker received four gallons per week. Those in categories B and C were allowed more gallons per week, depending upon the profession or the war related industry in which the person was working. T stickers were given to truckers; they were allotted an unlimited amount of fuel. The immediate impact of this program was the reduction of up to 80% in the traffic on Delaware roads. Black market

counterfeiting did occur in Delaware: 90% of the stations were in compliance. Of the others, 35 were suspended from selling gasoline and 55 received limited suspensions. "In addition to the problems at the service stations, there were two thefts of gas and fuel oil coupons from the Wilmington Rationing Office in late 1943. Ten million gallons worth of coupons were stolen the first time, twelve to fourteen thousand the second."^{xix} People began to use alternative forms of transportation: public, where it existed, bicycling, or walking. The average age of a car in Delaware during the war years was eight years.^{xx}

Sugar was one of the first foodstuffs to be rationed. Everyone received a ration coupon book, infants and older people alike. Initially, each person was allotted eight ounces per week, significantly less than the 24 ounces per week consumed before the program started. Frustration built among the public as the allotment to the state in the month of July was 1/3 less than received in June. This resulted in citizens storming the Wilmington rationing office in protest.^{xxi}

ⁱ "First Quarterly Report for the Period Ended April 30," *Office of Price Administration*, (Washington: United States, 1942) 56 [Online] <http://www.gtexts.com/college/papers/j2.html> February 3, 2002. ⁱⁱ Quartermaster Activities in World War I, extracted from America's Munitions 1917-1918. [Online] http://www.qmfound.com/americas_munitions.htm#FUEL, OIL, AND PAINTS February 3, 2002. ⁱⁱⁱ "Administration During World War I" *The Constitution Community, National Archives and Records Administration*.

<http://www.nara.gov/education/cc/foodww1.html> February 3, 2002. ^{iv} "Food

Administrator," *The Roll Call of Presidents: Herbert Hoover*.

<http://www.nara.gov/education/cc/foodww1.html> February 3, 2002.

^v "Sow the Seeds of Victory! Posters from the Food Administration During World War I." *The Constitution Community, National Archives and Records Administration*.

<http://www.nara.gov/education/cc/foodww1.html> February 3, 2002. vi "Food Conservation,"

The Roll Call of Presidents: Herbert Hoover. <http://www.iowa-city.k12.ia.us/hoover/fdconserv.html>

February 3, 2002. vii Rockoff, Hugh. "Price and Wage Controls in Four Wartime Periods," *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 41, No. 2. (Jun., 1981), pp. 381-401. [Online] <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sicid=0022-0507%28198106%2941%3A2%3C381%3APAWCIF%3E2.0.CO%3B2-J> February 3, 2002. viii Leff, Mark

H. "The Politics of Sacrifice on the American Home Front in World War II," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (March, 1991) pp. 1296 – 1318. University of Delaware Electronic Journals [Online] <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sicid=0021-8723%28199103%2977%3A4%3C1296%3ATPOSOT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-H>

ix Baruch, Bernard. "Priorities: The Synchronizing Force," *Harvard Business Review*. Volume XIX No. 3 Spring 1941: p. 267. Cited in Moritz's article: *Coupons and Counterfeits: World War II and the U.S. Black Market* [Online] http://www.gtexts.com/college/papers/j2.html#_ftn5 February 3, 2002. x Mortiz, Garrett. : *Coupons and Counterfeits: World War II and the U.S. Black Market*. [Online]

http://www.gtexts.com/college/papers/j2.html#_ftn5 February 3, 2002. xi Ibid. xii Rockoff, Hugh. "Price

and Wage Controls in Four Wartime Periods," *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 41, No. 2. (Jun., 1981), pp. 381-401. [Online] <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sicid=0022-0507%28198106%2941%3A2%3C381%3APAWCIF%3E2.0.CO%3B2-J> February 3,

2002. xiii xiv Benson, Barbara E. "Delaware Goes to War," *Delaware History*. Vol. 26, Wilmington:

Historical Society, 1997. p. 147 xv Ibid., p. 150. xvi Cooper, Constance J. "Make it Do or Do Without:

Delawareans and Rationing During World War II," *Delaware History*. Vol. 26. Wilmington: Historical

Society, 1997. pp. 207-210. xvii Ibid., p. 212. xviii Conner, William H. and Leon DeValinger. *Delaware's*

Role in World War II: 1940-1946. Vol. II. Dover: Public Archives Commission, 1955. xix Ibid., p. 216. xx

Ibid., p. 217. xxi Ibid., p. 218.