

Upsetting the Applecart:
Government and Food Control in the Union of South Africa
during World War II
c. 1939-1948

by
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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to evaluate the influence of the Second World War on the South African food position in the years 1939 to 1948 by studying a selection of specific foodstuffs and their availability on domestic markets during the war. The food control measures which were implemented were in a unique South African wartime context where both surpluses and shortages had developed, and the effectiveness of the implementation of these controls is evaluated. In regard to the surpluses of certain foodstuffs, the effect of relevant controls on new industrial development is discussed. The impact of public opinion on the Government's agricultural policy during the war is also assessed, and account is taken of how this impacted on the decision not to implement a formal system of rationing, despite the severe shortages of specific foodstuffs. Leading on from this, it is important to the argument to acknowledge the racially segregationist policies of South Africa, and thus a part of this story will discuss the various reasons why a conventional rationing system would not have worked in the wartime context of the Union.

This research seeks to open up a new vantage point from which to view the political position of South Africa after 1939 as its legislature and war policies reflected the country's prevailing complexities in subtle ways. It was politics which largely determined the extent of food control and the agricultural policy which was followed. In exploring this, press coverage of the food control measures is utilised, as well as the use of austerity campaigns in mass publicity. These sources present a distinctive view of public opinion in political life and thus provide an atmospheric understanding of the national mood at a major point in history. Furthermore, the coverage of food campaigns illuminates ways in which food control and the acceptance of those measures were promoted in order to encourage compliance and participation by consumers. Of equal relevance was the position of agriculture as support for the Union war effort and the imposition of food controls as a catalyst for resistance by consumers. Discussion of these themes provide further understanding of the underlying tensions which were given impetus by the stresses of war and restrictions on commodities on the home front.

Opsomming

Hierdie tesis fokus daarop om ondersoek in te stel na die invloed wat die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op die Suid-Afrikaanse voedselsituasie gedurende die jare 1939 tot 1948 gehad het. Dit word gedoen deur te kyk na 'n aantal spesifieke voedselsoorte en hul beskikbaarheid op die plaaslike mark. Die voedselbeheermaatreëls wat geimplimenteer is, was uniek binne die konteks van Suid-Afrika tydens die oorlog aangesien daar beide 'n oorvloed van en 'n tekort aan sekere voedelsoorte was. Die effektiwiteit van die implementering van hierdie voedselbeheermaatreëls word gevolglik bepaal. Waar daar sekere voedselsoorte in oorvloed was, word daar ook gekyk na hoe die maatreëls van die regering nuwe industriële ontwikkeling waarin hierdie voedsel gebruik word van stapel gestuur het. Die invloed van openbare opinie op die regering se landboubeleid gedurende hierdie tyd word ook geassesseer, met klem wat geplaas word op hoe hierdie diskors die regering genoop het om, ten spyte van ernstige voedseltekorte, van 'n formele rasioneringstelsel afstand te doen. Die Suid-Afrikaanse rassesegregasiebeleide is uiteraard ook hiermee verweef en vorm daarom deel van die argument oor waarom 'n konvensionele rasioneringstelsel waarskynlik nie in die Unie binne 'n oorlogskonteks sou werk nie.

Die navorsing is daarop gerig om die politieke landskap van post-1939 Suid-Afrika vanuit 'n nuwe hoek te bekou, aangesien wetgewing en oorlogsbeleide die land se politieke kompleksiteite op subtiele maniere geaffekteer het. Politiek was 'n enorme oorweging in die ontwikkeling van voedselbeheermaatreëls en die landboubeleide wat daarna gevolg is. Dit word verder ondersoek deur te let op hoe koerante van daardie tyd die maatreëls benader het en hoe besparingsveldtogte deur die massa media versprei is. Hierdie bronne bied 'n unieke blik op die openbare opinie rakende die Suid-Afrikaanse politieke landskap en gee dus 'n indruk van die heersende nasionale gemoed gedurende hierdie belangrike tydperk. Verder belig die mediadekking oor voedselveldtogte in hoeverre die Suid-Afrikaanse publiek voedselbeheermaatreëls aanvaar en ondersteun het, sowel as die maniere waarop die publiek aangemoedig is om tot hierdie pogings by te dra. Eweveel van belang was die posisie wat landbou beklee het as ondersteunende maatreël in die Unie se oorlogspoging. Terselfdertyd het die voedselbeheermaatreëls ook 'n weerstandsbeweging onder sekere gebruikers ontketen. Deur na al hierdie temas te kyk, word dit duidelik dat die streng beperkings wat daar op sekere voedselprodukte geplaas is ook die onderliggende spanning wat daar reeds op 'n politieke front was verder op die spits gedryf het.

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Chapter 1:

Food for Thought- Introduction to South African Food and Agriculture and the Development of Regulatory Agencies Regarding Foodstuffs.

Methodology and Historiography

From a historiographical standpoint, much research has been done on the effect of the World Wars on the food situation of affected countries. An example of would be *The Bread of Affliction* by William Moskoff, which deals with the food situation in the USSR in the time of the Second World War.¹ Another example would be *Food Supply and Nutrition in the Netherlands during and immediately after World War II*.² A recent study which encompasses the effects on various countries is *The Taste of war* by Lizzie Collingham. South Africa is, however, hardly mentioned in the study and when it is indeed listed, it is done so merely in reference to the goods that had been contributed to the food imports of the Allies.³ For the South African context, then, scant research is available on the subject. Indeed, few South African historians have been inclined to research the effects of the Second World War on the home front of the Union. The overall subject has been dominated by military and popular historians. Albert Grundlingh has stated that a possible reason for this historiographical gap could be the fact that South African historians have been more inclined to focus on the wars which took place on home soil, such as the South African War.⁴ It was perhaps not until more recent decades that South African historians have become interested in the Second World War and its influence on the local home front. Even then, within a developing field of study,

¹ W. Moskoff: *The Bread of Affliction. The Food Supply in the U.S.S.R During World War II*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1990.)

² M.J.L Dols and D.J.A.M van Arcken: Food Supply and Nutrition in the Netherlands during and immediately after World War II, *The Millbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, (24), (4), 1946.

³ L. Collingham: *The Taste of War*, (London: Penguin Books, 2012)

⁴A. Grundlingh: “The Kings Afrikaners? Enlistment and Ethnic Identity in the Union of South Africa’s Defence Force during the Second World War, 1939-1945.”, *Journal of African History*, (40), (3), 1999, p.351.

the impact of food control on the development of South African agriculture and industrialisation during the war period has, for the most part, been skimmed over.⁵

One study, invaluable to my own research, made up part of a Stanford University series which, completed in the years directly following the war, provided contemporary data on food and agriculture in World War Two in various countries. The volume on South Africa, compiled by J.M Tinley, proved to be extremely helpful when it came to quantitative data on the subject, especially concerning imports and exports and food control legislature for specific commodities. The South African National Defence Force archive proved equally fruitful for my research as the Union War Histories collection housed is wide-ranging and contained all the legislative information which I needed to make up the background of my argument.

Other than archival sources, the use of extracts from contemporary media, propagandist pamphlets and oral interviews based on questionnaires were utilized in the research so as to broaden its social perspective, instead of relying exclusively on departmental narratives and quantitative data as has long been the case in regard to a topic of this kind. When the individuals who had been willing to participate in the study via questionnaires are examined, it is evident that they had all come from a similar socio-economic and racial background, and had mostly been from rural parts of the country. This had not been intentional, but as time and resources available to me were limited, it was not possible to extend the scope of this group of sources. Theirs is a select ‘voice’. A partiality in the nature of these testimonies has obviously to be noted. Still, by expanding the scope of the influence of food control measures to their social impact, a wider human understanding of South Africa at a time of war has been attempted. By adding in people’s responses to the effects of legislation, the lens through which the reader views their workings in the 1940s can be both expanded and enhanced.

Introduction

During the Second World War, millions worldwide died from starvation, malnutrition and associated diseases, making the impact of the war on food supplies as deadly in its effect on

⁵ See Dubow, S and Jeeves A (eds): *South Africa's 1940s: World of Possibilities*, (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005)

the world population as military action.⁶ Food is a precious commodity especially in times of war, as none can live without it and it is as integral to the war effort as guns and ammunition. Food's importance to the war effort is emphasised by the words of the Secretary of Agriculture who believed that "food will win this war and determine peace."⁷ If one attempts to study its position in South Africa in war-time it has to be done comprehensively if the best understanding is to be achieved. For food supply affected the agricultural, economic and industrial development of the country, and legislation regarding the control of the precious commodity impacted strongly on the political sphere. All of these areas in unison influenced the social sphere. These elements have to be seen as feeding off one another, and understanding their interplay is essential to a proper understanding of South African war experience. It was a country rife with political tensions as well as being a developing industrial hub with strategic mineral resources at the outbreak of war.

The outbreak of the Second World War brought with it the inevitability that all spheres of society would be influenced. Within the South African context, agriculture would play a key role during a period filled with global upheaval and strife. Its national importance was not merely based on gross income. It was also as employment as a large percentage of the South African population resided in rural areas at the time of the Second World War.⁸ From the start, it was clear that changes needed to be made in order to transform South Africa from a peace time economy to one equipped to deal with the unique circumstances of war. Moll makes the argument that although agriculture is essential for job creation and state income it is also elementary in developing an independent system in which the natural resources of the country are utilized to their fullest extent in order to create a self-sustaining unit. This independence, although important in a time of peace, becomes imperative during wartime as channels of supply are often cut off without warning.⁹ South Africa was in a unique position during the war as it had both shortages and surpluses of specified foodstuffs. Many different factors caused their interplay, which will be a focus of discussion.

⁶ L. Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 1.

⁷ *Die Landbouweekblad*, Oorlogsinwerking op die Ekonomiese Lewe, 28 April 1943.

⁸ South African National Defence Force Archive (hereafter referred to as SANDFA), Union War Histories (hereafter referred to as UWH) , Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.1.

⁹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, Inleidende Oorsig tot die Oorlogs Geskiedenis by J. W Moll, p.400.

At the start of the First World War, South Africa was mostly dependent on imports to satisfy its food requirements. By the Second World War however, the Union had brought about many changes on the agricultural front, which had placed it in a position of being a producer of many essential raw materials and an exporter of specific foodstuffs. Production does however, need a constant market in which to best flourish and avoid problems of surpluses. In war-time, surpluses often lead to economic difficulties for countries such as South Africa which become dependent on the export of goods as they produce more than can be absorbed into domestic markets.¹⁰ The effects of international markets could be felt in the years preceding the war in which tariff policies influenced the South African economy. At the outbreak of war, these tariff policies were intensified and crucial international markets were cut-off to South Africa in its Allied position. Such markets included Germany, Holland, Italy and Belgium.¹¹

Whether or not South Africa entered the Second World War as an active combatant, the state of war created circumstances where changes in the country's agricultural economy and food consumption were inevitable. Before the war, South Africa had exported large quantities of maize, dried citrus and deciduous fruits, sugar and small quantities of butter, cheese and meat. Maize had mostly been exported to continental Europe, especially Germany, and the perishables had been sent to the United Kingdom.

Environmental Factors

In order to facilitate understanding of the extent of the influence the war had on South Africa's food position, it is important to have a grasp of the general environmental factors that limit or enhance South African agricultural capabilities. The general features of South African agriculture are influenced by the wide range of elevation and climatic conditions which make for a diverse agricultural pool of products. The western two thirds of the country have a temperate climate that favours livestock, grains and deciduous fruit. The subtropical climate found in the Eastern third is too hot for livestock but is ideal for the production of sugar, bananas, citrus fruit and tropical fruit such as pineapples. Taking all of this into account, South Africa could not be deemed a rich agricultural country at the time of war as much of its western area remained semiarid and was only suited to pastoral farming. The soil

¹⁰ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.1.

¹¹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Inleidende Oorsig tot die Oorlogs Geskiedenis p.402.

in the country is mostly of poor quality as it is deficient in phosphates that made the addition of imported fertiliser of great importance. Mild winters allowed pests and diseases to take hold and poor agricultural practices such as single cropping had weakened the agricultural position. The biggest detriment to South African agricultural strength was, however, the unreliability of rainfall. Severe droughts in some areas, and unseasonal storms and flooding in others, had for years, caused erratic productivity. There is also a high evaporation rate, especially in the summer rainfall districts.¹²

The Union's low level of production is evident when its yield of wheat is compared to other producing countries over the period 1934/35-1937/1938. Great Britain produced an average of 33.46 bushels per acre, Australia 11.90 and South Africa came in at 7.75. Still, even though production was low, the Union was still able to produce more than its domestic requirements in the pre-war years for barley, oats, rye and corn. Wheat production had however needed supplementation in most years. Domestic production of butter and cheese were such that supplementary imports from neighbouring territories such as South West Africa averaged at 4,600 tons and 300 tons respectively.¹³

There is evidence to suggest that the diet of the African population during the pre-war years was wholly inadequate especially when judged on variety. Maize and maize meal made up the bulk of the diet whilst consumption of meat, dairy, fruit and vegetables were very low. Most medical authorities were in agreement that large scale malnourishment existed among the local African population, with evidence of progressive deterioration of physique and stamina of Africans in certain areas.¹⁴ Several experts in the field of nutrition and the reports from the national nutrition council had given their opinion that the Union had in the pre-war years not produced sufficient foodstuffs in order to feed its people at an ideal nutritional level. The surpluses to which there was some link at this time were never surpluses in terms of need, but rather in terms of purchasing power. This is why the export of basic foodstuffs

¹² D.H Houghton: *The South African Economy*. (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.29.

¹³J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II, Studies on Food and Agriculture in World War II*, (Stanford California: Stanford University Press,1976), pp.9,14.

¹⁴J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, pp. 14-15.

from the Union seems to have been a contributing factor to the deteriorating health of the lower income groups in the country.¹⁵

Government Policy Regarding Agriculture

If war conditions were to lead to a decrease of British food imports, the South African economy would be bound to suffer as the only products from the Union that could be classified as non-luxury items were maize and sugar. This uncertainty created a cautious agricultural policy in South Africa and although alternatives were explored in the event of the loss of traditional markets, the main focus was shifted to creating self-sufficiency.¹⁶ The policy was based on the Marketing Act of 1937, which came about in response to the agricultural position of the First World War as well as the Depression years. The Marketing Act was of importance as it affected future food policy making and influenced the pattern of food control with which South Africa entered the war. The act had established the National Marketing Council, which advised the Minister of Agriculture and equipped the minister to appoint various marketing control boards. The boards had the producer's interest at heart by regulating production. They had the power to control prices and to be the sole buyer of the product under their control. It was customary that each board would prepare a comprehensive marketing program or scheme for submission to the Minister of Agriculture annually. After due consideration of supply and demand for each commodity, recommendations were made regarding the nature of anticipated supplies, imports and exports, producer prices and levies to be placed on consumers in order to finance losses brought on by storage or exports.¹⁷ It is important to note that the act was merely an enabling measure. It did not create control but rather legalised the bringing into being, without specific parliamentary sanctions, of schemes

¹⁵ Report of the Distribution Cost Commission: *The System of distribution prevailing in the Union with particular reference to essential foodstuffs and the principles of state controlled marketing*, Union Publication, 1947, p.33.

¹⁶ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 13, SA War Economy 1939-1945, Food policy and Import Problems: Maize and wheat, pp.1-2.

¹⁷ SANDFA, UWH Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die geskiedenis van die Tweede wereld oorlog op landbou gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.4.

for the better regulation and control of the marketing and distribution of specific farm products.¹⁸

By the end of 1939, the following agencies were operating under the terms of the Marketing Act of 1937: Wheat Industries Control Board, the Maize Industry Control Board, the Dairy Industry Control Board, the Dried Fruit Board and the Livestock and Meat Industries Control Board. No boards had been established for fresh fruit (both citrus and deciduous) and eggs. The reason for this was that these products had existing co-operative associations that were financially strong and moderately well organised. They were thus able to affect distributions reasonably well domestically and for international markets.¹⁹ It could be argued that the catering to producer interests had kept food prices above international levels through its protection of commercial white agriculture. In fact, there were so many control boards erected in the interwar years that the public was not all together happy with the development. During the 1938 *Voortrekker* celebrations, the poet Roy Campbell had remarked that the Afrikaner beard was the only crop grown in South Africa without government subsidy.²⁰

It can be understood that increased criticism of the Marketing Act and its intended purposes were largely influenced by the time in which it came about. Owing to the pressing necessity of increased production in a time of war, the purpose of the act, which was to promote sound agriculture, was largely neglected. Meanwhile, the grafting of emergency powers tended to paint rather a false picture of the extent to which schemes would have been intended to interfere and control private enterprise during times of peace. The act was implemented in conditions of looming turmoil and emergency and it reflected no long-term plans. In its operation, it manifested many of the weaknesses, which inevitably follow when new tasks are continuously, and at short notice imposed upon a public service with no previous experience

¹⁸ Report of the Distribution Cost Commission: *The System of distribution prevailing in the Union with particular reference to essential foodstuffs and the principles of state controlled marketing*, Union Publication, 1947, p.33.

¹⁹J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, pp.16-17.

²⁰ V. Bickford-Smith; E. van Heyningen; N. Worden: *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century*. (Cape Town: David Phillip Publishers, 1999), p.103.

of their execution, and when restraints are placed on a public, which is accustomed by habit and general outlook to a far greater degree of individual market freedom.²¹

Development of Regulatory Agencies in Food Control

The demand on South African agriculture was further increased as the Union was called upon to supply a large percentage of the food requirements of neighbouring territories which found themselves isolated and unable to provide for themselves.²² As the Mediterranean was closed to Britain as a source of food supply, South Africa had to undertake the responsibility of food requirements of convoys, which had frequented South African ports. As a result of these demands, the surpluses of certain foodstuffs soon disappeared and the government realised it would be necessary to devise plans to expand production of several agricultural items. The food situation was further complicated by the fact that South Africa had always been dependent on importation for its supplies of coffee, spices, tea and rice. Rice proved to be a particularly difficult foodstuff as it made up a large percentage of the diet of the Asiatic population within the Union. Agricultural machinery and fertilizers were also imported and without these products all cultivation would be negatively affected.²³

As the war progressed, it became necessary for the government to impose controls over production, distribution and prices of food products as shortages of specific foodstuffs had become evident. Although many of the production and supply problems were experienced by other countries during the war, some of the measures adopted in South Africa were unique. The favourable situation South Africa found herself in upon entering the war in September 1939 regarding her domestic food situation had created a false sense of security where there appeared to be little prospect that the country would experience any difficulty in feeding her population during the war. There were record crops of maize and sugar in 1939 and livestock numbers had been increasing over the preceding years. Furthermore, satisfactory supplies of imported foodstuffs such as tea, rice and coffee were at hand. Thus, the government focused solely on creating an expanding domestic market for previously exported foodstuffs. Not until early in 1942 did the food situation become serious. The excessive rainfall in some areas

²¹ Report of the Distribution Cost Commission: *The System of distribution prevailing in the Union with particular reference to essential foodstuffs and the principles of state controlled marketing*, Union Publication, 1947, p.35.

²² J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.3.

²³ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.4

and extreme drought in others had seriously reduced the output of staple foodstuffs such as wheat and maize in 1941-1942.²⁴

For the sake of the argument, it is necessary to engage in a discussion of the development of the governing agencies, which were put in place during various stages of the war in the spheres of food control and agriculture. It is important for the reader to have a grasp of how the agencies developed to acquire a better understanding of the place of specific foodstuffs in wartime food control as they are discussed in later parts of the thesis. By studying the evolution of the agencies, and how they were adapted to confront specific challenges of each stage of the war, the evaluation of their effectiveness will be easier to attain.

Adaptation of Pre-War Controls for a Wartime Economy (1939-1942)

The outbreak of war had created a realisation that a more thorough version of food policy needed to be manufactured, and thus the Cabinet Food Committee was created, and kept the control boards up to date on policy changes and served as an overseer of South Africa's food situation.²⁵ The body was comprised of The Ministers of Commerce and Industries, Agriculture and of Social Welfare. It was the most senior policy making agency of the government concerning wartime production policy, exports and imports of foodstuffs, producer, retail and wholesale price establishment and decisions regarding subsidies placed on different foodstuffs. Based on decisions taken by this body, legislation was presented to Parliament and appropriate action taken under War Measures Act, No. 13 of 1940. The body was, however, strictly policy making and it exercised no administrative function. The committee operated throughout the war and into the post war years.²⁶

During the first stage of the war crisis, there was no serious disruption of the internal economy of South Africa. During this time, several regulatory bodies were put in place largely as a precautionary measure and to facilitate minor adjustments. Control over production, distribution and prices continued to be exercised by agencies that had been in existence before 1939. Naturally, times of war call for the prompt making of decision and

²⁴ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.18.

²⁵ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 13, SA War Economy 1939-1945, Food Policy and Import Problems: Maize and Wheat, p.3.

²⁶ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: *Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied*, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.4.

therefore it is customary for countries to implement legislation that enables governments to take extraordinary measures to deal with unforeseen situations as they arise. South Africa was no different. Shortly after the commencement of war, the Cabinet published proclamation no.201 of September 14, 1939 empowering the government to adopt national emergency regulations, subsequently validated by the passing of War Measures Act no.13 of 1940 by parliament. In short, control over all phases of the South African war effort was executed through war measure proclamations issued by the cabinet.²⁷

The Minister of Agriculture had stated in 1941 that it was not the intention of the South African government to follow any agricultural policy which would be disruptive. If any disturbances should occur, they would be immediately counteracted to limit agricultural upheaval. He stated that, “It would be fatal to stimulate agriculture by artificial means solely to enable it to fulfil its rightful wartime functions”²⁸ This was a policy which was focused on mitigating the unstable internal political situation by minimising war time problems for producers so as to garner support for the war effort.

The National Supplies Control Board (NSCB) was established under the War Measures Act at a time when the international situation had become so threatening that it was urgently necessary to take immediate steps for organising and controlling all the Union resources and supplies. The NSCB was divided into various sections, which included the imports and exports section who dealt mainly with the prevention of enemy trade; price control section to regulate prices and adopt measures to prevent hoarding and profiteering; food supplies section concerned with food supplies and rationing. The last mentioned sectioned worked in close collaboration with the Department of Agriculture and the various marketing boards. The NSCB is a natural starting point if one wants to better comprehend the civil layer of the war economy, for it was the body responsible for instituting the various measures of control made necessary by the war emergency.²⁹ The main objectives of the NCSB was to determine, firstly, all available commodity supplies in the Union, secondly the capacity of existing industries for further production and, finally, the institution of measures to prevent the

²⁷ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.19.

²⁸ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 13, SA War Economy 1939-1945, Food Policy and Import Problems: Maize and Wheat, p.6.

²⁹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, Aspects of the South African War Economy 1939-1945, Vol. 2, National Supplies Control Board and Price Control, p.1.

profiteering of supplies.³⁰ During the first year of the war, the NCSB's price control activities had not reached an advanced stage as it applied only to retail prices of a limited number of commodities. Nonetheless, on the plus side, flagrant profiteering was prevented. The limited nature of the price control measures had, however, become a source of discontent for the public who felt that more thorough measures were required.³¹

The second year of hostilities saw a twofold problem developing with lower crop yields for most foodstuffs and the increasing shipping difficulty. The latter had led to the British Ministry of Food implementing a system whereby non-essential foodstuffs were removed from the import list to Britain in an effort to preserve shipping space. From January 1941, the Ministry of Food had stopped importing South African deciduous fruit, which caused a major backlash for the South African agricultural economy as deciduous fruit had accounted for £1,401,729 in the previous year. Citrus fruits and specifically oranges had also been curtailed as British refrigerated shipping space was reserved for meat and dairy products from Australia and New Zealand. The export decrease in these two groups of foodstuffs affected the economy by as much as £3,000,000. Collingham has argued that international shipping control such as this had become a means of international food control.³²

Troubled weather conditions starting in 1940 had also reduced the yields of essential foodstuffs such as maize.³³ The true test for the NSCB came in 1941 when imports from overseas were becoming more difficult to obtain. It could not meet the challenge and had proven to be increasingly ineffectual and unable to cope with the growing problems in distribution and shortages. Eventually, the NSCB was deemed to be ineffective administratively in coping with the increasingly difficult domestic supply situation and the board was completely reorganised. It was granted more extensive functions with the enactment of new emergency regulations in the proclamation of 24th March 1942 and was entrusted with the administration of the purchasing scheme of commodities in short supply in

³⁰ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, Aspects of the South African War Economy 1939-1945, Vol. 2, National Supplies Control Board and Price Control, p.2.

³¹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, Aspects of the South African War Economy 1939-1945, Vol. 2, National Supplies Control Board and Price Control, p.19.

³² L. Collingham,: *The Taste of War*, p.69.

³³ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 13, SA War Economy 1939-1945, Food Policy and Import Problems: Maize and Wheat, pp.4, 6.

July of 1942. The new responsibility enabled the control of bottles and the distribution specifically of bread and confectionary and finally the matter of rationing.³⁴

The Department of Commerce and Industries detailed a memorandum in which the necessity for a priorities board in South Africa was emphasised. It stated the importance for the Union of South Africa to have a policy closely resembling those of the United Kingdom and of the other Dominions as it was an Allied country and should conform to the position of its sister belligerent countries. The need to develop a concrete definition of the term ‘essentiality’ was made imperative by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.³⁵ War measures No. 30 of 1941 made provision for the creation of an Import and Export Control Board in the Union as well as a South African purchasing commission in New York. The Secretary for Commerce and Industries was appointed as the Controller of the Board. The Controller had the right to appoint inspectors to govern regulations, and to determine the priority and order in which goods would be imported into the Union and South West Africa. Control over prices was delegated to a price controller in 1941.

The Department of Agriculture and Food Control (1942-1944)

By the time South Africa entered the second phase of control there was still little to no change in the government’s approach to wartime food problems.³⁶ Several factors played a part in changing governmental opinions about food control at this juncture. By 1941, any hope that the war would be over in a short amount of time was shattered by the entry of the USA and Japan into the arena of conflict, immediately enlarging the scale of world hostilities.

The situation was worsened by the fact that the maize yields were struggling under the drought South Africa was experiencing. The need to control production and consumption became a necessity.³⁷ With this came the realisation that the food situation would become

³⁴ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, L. Fourie : Civilian Supply and Commodity Controls, 1951, pp.638-639.

³⁵ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, L. Fourie : Civilian Supply and Commodity Controls, 1951, pp.613-614.

³⁶ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 13, SA War Economy 1939-1945, Food Policy and Import Problems: Maize and Wheat, p.7.

³⁷ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.7.

worse before it became better, as sooner or later the most essential food imports would be dictated by the Anglo American allocation system. The London Food Committee had been set up in 1942 and, by then, the Union's interest in combined food planning was that of a consumer seeking vital allocations rather than a contributor to the common pool.³⁸

Serious shortages had developed of most foodstuffs, especially meat and dairy, because of the increased buying power and rising consumption of inhabitants with increased wage earnings. The dissatisfaction of consumers in regard to the shortages was growing steadily.

Furthermore, as already mentioned, the unseasonal weather in the form of droughts and excessive rainfall had weakened the 1941-1942 maize, wheat and sugar cane harvests. Lastly, the government was finding it increasingly difficult to procure fertilizer and agricultural supplies from abroad and it had become obvious that more planning would be appropriate when it came to control over food supplies and future production.³⁹

When it came to the allocation of shipping space for imports, priority was given to products which were either not produced domestically or where the supplies were not sufficient to satisfy the needs of the consumers. The growing forces of the South African military and the increased consumption of civilians made the need for supplies even larger. As war requirements grew, so also did industrialisation in order to meet the needs which arose. This in turn led to an even larger buyers' market as employment growth blossomed. These factors, together with the large number of Allied convoys, which visited the ports and the tens of thousands of prisoners of war who needed to be fed, led to the creation of the Food Control Organisation. With the shipping space problem becoming imminent, the Food Control Organisation decided to follow British example and set up a priority list by which to import accordingly.⁴⁰

The Food Control Organisation would work in close affiliation with the Department of Agriculture.⁴¹ The Minister of Agriculture was designated as the Controller of Food Supplies

³⁸ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 13, SA War Economy 1939-1945, Food Policy and Import Problems: Maize and Wheat, p.10.

³⁹ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, pp.23-24

⁴⁰ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: *Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied*, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.28.

⁴¹ Proclamation No.55 of 1942. War Measure No.22 of 1942.

or Food Controller for short. These changes had, however, limited the power of the National Supplies Control Board and by 1946 it was disbanded. The Food Controller was assisted by an advisory council made up of various heads of the Food Control Organisation. This body was better equipped to deal with the ever deteriorating food situation in the Union.⁴² The Food Controller was tasked with the following: granting financial assistance to farmers for the promotion of production, to fix prices for producers, processors and consumers, control the marketing of food supplies, regulate and take over the provisioning of the military and ships' supplies, and the regulation of cold storage facilities.⁴³

Within his extensive powers, he was authorised to detain any foodstuffs from any individual if he deemed it necessary, and to control the quantity of a foodstuff in any area or market place. He may also have prohibited the sale or presence of any foodstuff in designated areas should he have deemed it necessary and could determine the maximum quantity of a foodstuff which may be sold on any day or to any one person, and determine what quantity was given to persons in a particular class or group. He was allowed to import any foodstuff and to prohibit anyone else of importing that specific foodstuff. It was, however, stipulated that the Controller could only prohibit the importation of a foodstuff if he intended to import that specific product himself. This was done to ensure a supply of the product in the country and to have an equitable distribution. The policy applied in regards to tea, coffee, rice and spices, which were especially difficult to obtain during the war.⁴⁴

In addition to the aforementioned, there were several sections under the authority of a deputy controller. The administrative section, as the name would obviously suggest, dealt with general administrative matters and issues relating to the fishing industry, such as the distribution of fresh fish and the organisation of canned fish. The division was also responsible for the drafting of posters and advertisements for newspapers containing educational propaganda on the food position. This included nutritional information and

⁴² SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 13, SA War Economy 1939-1945, Food Policy and Import Problems: Maize and Wheat, p.7.

⁴³ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied , Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.8.

⁴⁴ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing, p.14.

substitute information for specific foodstuffs in short supply and information regarding the preparation of food.⁴⁵ The influence of which will be discussed later in the thesis.

The production section's main function was the formulation of production policies and programmes in order to help farmers to expand, or to maintain, production of certain needed commodities. Its other important function was the development of new advances in the preservation of specific foodstuffs such as fruit and vegetables, thereby encouraging the creation of several dehydration plants. Technical advice and assistance with the procurement of tin plate for jam manufacturers as well as for vegetable and fruit canners were also given.

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The agricultural section was charged with the responsibilities of import, export and the distribution of agricultural products such as beans and eggs. Another important function was the requisitioning of supplies to be held and re-distributed during times of short supply.⁴⁷ The purchasing section was tasked with procuring perishable commodities, which were not controlled by marketing boards. It had a twofold objective, which comprised of purchasing food items such as eggs, fruit and potatoes in the chief marketing centres of the country and in that way attempting to stabilize prices. The second objective was to serve as the main supplier of these commodities to military camps and convoys.⁴⁸

The publicity section was the fourth of the main sections of the Food Control Organisation and was tasked with giving the widest possible publicity to the production programmes of the Department of Agriculture with regard to the food situation. The section made use of departmental publications, radio, newspapers and public meetings to get its message out and it paid special attention to housewives in the form of advice on food conservation, wastage prevention, balanced diets and purchasing.⁴⁹ One example of this included advisory programs on the actions to be taken to minimise the effects of the fertilizer shortage, in response to

⁴⁵ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing, pp.7-8.

⁴⁶ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.25.

⁴⁷ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. p.9.

⁴⁸ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: *Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied*, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.30.

⁴⁹ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.26.

which a nationwide campaign was put into action to produce the Union's own compost. This was done by educating farmers on the making of compost, while municipalities were encouraged to manufacture compost from various forms of waste. During the compost campaign, the publicity section did valuable work in order to maintain production levels. The annual consumption of bone meal in 1942 was 30, 000 tons, of which more than half was imported. The problems in shipping had necessitated home front production of the fertilizer and it was of crucial importance. Municipalities, schools and military camps were approached to help in this regard. To further help in the campaign the food control organisation called in the help of the wartime anti-wastage organisation and a prohibition was placed on the usage of bone meal as compost.⁵⁰ Another example of the promotion of frugality, was information submitted to housewives, whereby they were advised as to which foodstuffs could be used to replace those in short supply. How to traverse the issue of sustaining a healthy diet even when faced with shortages was also given some attention.⁵¹

Separation of Production and Food Control

During 1942 and 1943 considerable criticism was received from consumers regarding the operations of the Food Control Organisation. It was argued that the close association between the Food Control Organisation and the Department of Agriculture had opened the door to the advancement of the interests of the farming sector above those of the consumers. The widespread dissatisfaction saw a call by consumers and the press for the separation of the two organisations, to which the government acceded in 1944. The supervision and direction of agricultural production was separated from the distribution of foodstuffs, leaving the aforementioned in the control of the Secretary of Agriculture. The Minister of Agriculture could appoint an independent controller of food supplies. The Food Supplies Advisory Board would assist both the Secretary of Agriculture and the Controller of Food.⁵²

The reconstituted Food Control Organisation had only a small number of sections which included an Administrative Division and an Agricultural Division which dealt with imports,

⁵⁰ KAB, 1/WME, 17/25/3/8, War Measures. Control of Food Supplies. Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Publicity Series No.63, 15 January 1943, Rationing Bonemeal and Stocklicks.

⁵¹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953 p.30-31.

⁵² SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.8.

exports and the domestic distribution of beans, peas, eggs and other commodities not under the control of the marketing boards. In 1944, the divisions were entrusted with supplying essential foodstuffs to low income groups. This had been done previously by the Department of Social Welfare with the aim of finding an outlet for unmarketable surpluses and with aiding needy families. However, as surpluses had all but disappeared by 1944 it became increasingly urgent that subsidised distribution of food be undertaken by the Food Control Organisation.⁵³

Action was taken in this regard by erecting central food depots in the important urban areas. From there, mobile units transported sugar, tea, rice, condensed milk, jams, canned meat and maize meal into suburban areas, country districts, the various African locations and reserves. The declared objective was to supply needy groups with foodstuffs at affordable prices and in so doing to create an opportunity for low income groups to obtain products which were in short supply. Meanwhile, a commercial division was mainly in control of obtaining the goods needed for the preservation of foodstuffs such as tin plate, and the export of foodstuffs to neighbouring countries. Finally, the meat section was entrusted to coordinate the movement of livestock to the main centres and to control the distribution of meat.⁵⁴

The Controller of Food appointed the South African Food Canners council as his agent to control all matters regarding the production, import, export, storage and distribution of canned goods. Its headquarters were in Cape Town and several advisory committees were set up to assist the Controller of Food in the distribution of certain goods. These included, among others, a bean panel and a Sweet Manufacturing Industry National Advisory Committee. The reorganized Food Control Organisation, with separate controls, continued in operation until October 1946, when food control was transferred to the Ministers of Finance and Agriculture.

Conclusion

This chapter is intended to introduce the reader to South Africa's food and agricultural position and this is placed within the wider context of the war. The various developments brought about by the crisis, which influenced South African agricultural policy, were introduced briefly to provide an entry into discussions of the issues and themes in the chapters to follow. These include shipping difficulties and their effect on surpluses in the

⁵³ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.28.

⁵⁴ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.29.

country as well as the industrial expansion, which came about largely as an effect of the war, as well as the influence it had on the shortages, which can be seen in later stages of the argument. In order to facilitate a wider perspective on the issue, environmental factors that influenced production in South Africa are briefly discussed. The largest part of the first chapter has been devoted to an overview of the development of the agencies that had been put in place to regulate food control boards and agricultural policies at governmental level. There was consideration of their role and effectiveness at various stages of the war, a factor that will have a bearing on the discussion of specific foodstuffs in subsequent chapters. By laying this early groundwork in the argument, it should hopefully be easier to evaluate the effectiveness of various government policies in regard to wartime food and agriculture.

Chapter 2:

The Challenges of a Cornucopia- Surpluses and Utilization

South Africa has always been a rich producer of fruit in its western and tropical eastern regions. By the 1930s it had built up a lucrative export network with continental European markets and especially with the United Kingdom. War invariably stimulates the need for food and commodities and for the South African economy this might have been beneficial in the early stages had the country remained neutral. For, having ensured favourable prices for goods sent to its customary markets, there might have been prospects of rising gains. The Union's war declaration, however, obliged it to sever its ties with continental markets and the lack of shipping space and inevitable prioritization of space for war goods led to the virtual demise of exports of fruit to the United Kingdom.

The most pressing problem faced by the Union at the start of the war was thus to expand the domestic market in order to absorb local fruit supplies as much as possible.¹ The problem of shipping space was aggravated by economic warfare as the shipping of cargo came under attack. Freighters and other merchant ships were sabotaged, attacked at sea and sometimes seized, which intensified shipping stock losses and deterred the arrival of essential items. Inevitably, this led to the development that insurance on freight was significantly increased and thus also the cost of goods which were to be transported.² This had a specific impact on the agricultural front as much of the country's fertilizer and machinery was imported. Without a steady supply of these agricultural requirements, yields of yearly crops would take a downward turn and there were fears that some might be lost altogether.³

South Africa grew dramatically on the industrial front after 1939. The reason for this expansion was partly in order to produce urgent war supplies but was also due to the need to produce goods domestically that had been imported pre-war but could no longer be attained via normal channels. So, industrial expansion was mainly due to war related endeavours although the lack of imports to the Union and some other colonial African countries

¹ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.3.

² SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.24.

³ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Inleidende Oorsig tot die Oorlogs Geskiedenis, p.403.

facilitated import-substitution growth in particular.⁴ Economically, the war also encouraged a shift away from the country's previous dependence on the mining industry towards one led increasingly by secondary industry.⁵ Although the production of industrial goods were not directly linked to agriculture, it did nonetheless have an influence on agricultural production through its impact on consumption markets.

Large numbers of men and women had enrolled in the Union Defence Forces and support services to serve in Africa as well as in Europe and soon a labour shortage developed with the expansion of the industrial sector. The wages of both white and black South African workers also began to rise in the early years of hostilities. The subsequent increased buying power which developed as a result of the increased earnings created an expanded consumption market which needed to be constantly supplied with foodstuffs such as meat, sugar, dairy and fresh produce.⁶ The increased production on the industrial front thus influenced the entire economy and specifically agriculture in a double-edged way. For, while it may have relieved the burden of surpluses to some degree, it also caused eventual shortages as well, an issue that will be discussed in further detail in chapter 3.⁷ The added pressure of military food requirements from troops in and around South Africa also went a considerable way towards ensuring that surpluses were not as heavy a burden as might once have been anticipated. Equally, shipping convoys and arriving prisoners of war also made demands on foodstuffs which were not always those which were available in surplus amounts.⁸

It could be assumed, that farmers could be biased towards producing products, which were in higher demand at this time in order to have made a larger profit. However, war is a temporary situation and with the coming of peace the agricultural needs of a country might sway in a different direction entirely. The relationship between the respective sectors of agriculture exists as a delicate balance in order to achieve optimal production and price stabilisation. In order to achieve optimal production, the different sectors must work in a synchronisation with one another. However, with the development of certain demands being

⁴ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.9.

⁵ C. Walker: *Women and Resistance in South Africa*. (London: Onyx Press, 1982) , p.69.

⁶ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.3.

⁷ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Inleidende Oorsig tot die Oorlogs Geskiedenis, p.405.

⁸ Governmental Publication: A Record of the Organisation of the Director-General of Supplies, 1943-1945, (Johannesburg: L.S Greay and co), p.87.

increased drastically more than others during the war, it needed to be regulated so that one sector would not grow at the expense of another. An example of this would have been wheat over that of deciduous fruit. Ultimately, the less needed agricultural sectors still needed to be kept alive in wartime to ensure that there would be a fully functioning agricultural sector on returning to a time of peace. It was with this in mind that the provision of guaranteed bank loans to the citrus and deciduous fruit trade came into being.⁹

South Africa's social services expanded greatly during the war in order to meet the needs of those civilians experiencing hardships. A state aided feeding scheme was one of the results of the loss of the Union's export markets. It provided milk, butter, eggs, citrus and deciduous fruit to schools at low prices. Concerning citrus fruit, the smaller sized oranges were made available for distribution at a lower price to individuals in Native Reserves. These were selected for disposal to African buyers as they were often viewed by white consumers as '*rubbish*', and when inferior quality fruit was sold on the open market it tended to depress the price of the larger, more desirable fruits.¹⁰ The school-feeding scheme was formally instituted in 1943. It was decided that these same foods should be provided to lower income groups at an affordable price, and depots were set up to distribute the foodstuffs. Towards the end of the war, the Food Controller took over the organisation of these depots from the Social Welfare Department.¹¹

The excellent crop year of 1938-1939 had left South Africa in the advantageous position at the start of the war where the only pressing issue was the marketing of exportable surpluses of maize, deciduous and citrus fruits. The crop years 1939-1940 and 1940-1941 were less favourable, although the only shortage which had started to develop was for wheat, in which the country had barely able to maintain self-sufficiency before the war. The government policy of avoiding serious distortion of the general long-term pattern of agriculture in wartime resulted in it having to ensure producer prices to compensate producers for increases in production costs. Those farmers who were seriously affected by the loss of foreign markets

⁹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.10.

¹⁰ NAB, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/330, 179/16, 3854, Sale of Citrus fruit to Natives. Various letters between Pietermaritzburg Town Council and Deciduous Fruit Board.

¹¹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 20, South African War Economy 1939-1945, Security and Social Services, p.1.

such as citrus fruits had to be paid subsidies and alternative avenues for their produce were investigated, both foreign and domestic.¹²

This chapter will give detailed evaluations of a selection of specific foodstuffs, which experienced problems of surplus production during the war, namely deciduous and citrus fruit. Food controls and the utilization of these commodities will be given attention to illuminate the direction of the Union's overall agricultural policy during the war, specifically the issue of government utilization as a means of solving the surplus dilemma.

It's All Going Pear-shaped: Deciduous Fruit

Deciduous fruit was the branch of South Africa's agrarian economy most affected by the outbreak of war. The amount of fruit produced was too large to be utilised in domestic markets and selling agents and importers from the United Kingdom could no longer grant loans to the fruit farmers in the Union. The Union government was, however, willing to help utilise the surplus where possible, and to try to limit the extent of deterioration and neglect of orchards.¹³ The British authorities classified deciduous fruit as a luxury item, of which imports would be reduced if shipping difficulties arose. In an attempt to reduce wastage, the British government had agreed to accept fruit pulp, jam and canned fruit.¹⁴ Seeing as deciduous fruit had various alternate uses such as wine, jams, dried fruit, juices and the like, the alternate outlets made for a measure of stability of the industry as a whole.¹⁵

In October 1939, a Deciduous Fruit Board was established under the Marketing Act and it was tasked with the acquisition of possible international markets and to register all the domestic market agents. Grape farmers felt the influence of the war in the harvest year of 1939-1940 when their crop was ripe early due to weather conditions and no avenue could be found for their fruit. In response, the government guaranteed the producers a minimum

¹² J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.33.

¹³ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.103.

¹⁴ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.36.

¹⁵ Report of the Distribution Cost Commission: *The System of distribution prevailing in the Union with particular reference to essential foodstuffs and the principles of state controlled marketing*, Union Publication, 1947, p.41.

income based on the requirement to keep their fields in production. In return, the farmers had to save as much as possible on production by reducing labour costs to the minimum, thereby tightening the belt on the already low living standards of rural workers. Farmers were also encouraged to find other avenues for income, such as the production of vegetables. However the government was still left with the pressing problem of finding ways of expanding the domestic market in order to prevent widespread wastage.¹⁶

With the fate of the continuation of export hanging in the balance, the board aimed to achieve three objectives. Firstly, to provide financial assistance for production and marketing in the place of credit which would have come from overseas trade channels; secondly, to regulate the diversion of the export fruit crop to alternative channels such as canning drying, jam and wine making, and to local markets in order to give producers the best returns and to avoid waste; and, finally, to make best use of the remaining export opportunities still available to the Union.¹⁷

The bulk of the fruit supplies went to the large municipal markets in Cape Town, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Bloemfontein, East London and the Rand. There, the fruit was stacked according to variety and quality in order to be inspected by the Department of Economics and Markets. The board erected retail depots in Cape Town and Pretoria in 1943. Representatives of the board advised the relevant persons on the amounts of supplies that needed to be delivered daily.¹⁸ The Department of Defence and the Department of Social Welfare undertook to help with the surplus problem by supplying fruit to lower income groups, schools, hospitals and the like at a lower price in the form of a scheme. The remaining fruit which could not be sold fresh was diverted to drying yards, wineries and canneries.

The authorities wanted to ensure that deciduous fruit producers' income would not reduce to such an extent that orchards or vineyards deteriorated or were abandoned. The financial assistance rendered to the Deciduous Fruit Board by the Land Bank prevented serious losses

¹⁶ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.103.

¹⁷ Report of the Distribution Cost Commission: *The System of distribution prevailing in the Union with particular reference to essential foodstuffs and the principles of state controlled marketing*, Union Publication, 1947, pp.41-42.

¹⁸ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.105.

to producers and helped to save the deciduous fruit industry from major curtailment.¹⁹ Such government-guaranteed bank loans were intended to serve as production finance for growers in order to fund operations, which had previously been subsidised by overseas selling agents. This amounted to guaranteeing loans to the board through the Land Bank to finance the marketing of fruit for growers, and effectively to subsidize producers out of public funds. The board itself had power over prices and the purchase of fruit and could erect drying yards and wineries with capital supplied by the Land Bank.²⁰ Funds had also been made available for the procurement of packing materials, which were scarce and expensive during the war.²¹

Producers of grapes, peaches and apples were allowed to sell the export portion of their fruit to the board at fixed prices.²² In 1940-1941 the exporters were granted a minimum price for their product which was determined from the average amount exported by them in previous years, and this went a long way towards ensuring the survival of their businesses.

Furthermore, the export growers could market their goods directly. It is interesting to note, that non-export growers were not supported by the government and were at a marked disadvantage. By contrast, export growers were ensured of a minimum price and were allowed to also sell privately. This was done at the expense of the non-exporters who were dependent on the domestic market to make a living.²³

Table 2.1: The Tonnage of fruit and the means in which it was utilized by the Deciduous Fruit Board. Measured in tons.²⁴

Year	Local Markets	Social Welfare	Defence	Fruit Canners	Drying Yards	Wineries	Export	Total
40/41	3,756	—	1,106	5,141	774	21,006	21	31,804
41/42	9,244	525	2,258	6,934	9,677	19,130	—	47,768
42/43	10,095	304	2,462	5,406	7,345	21,029	21	46,662
43/44	18,359	1,705	2,226	10,623	7,835	25,409	19	66,176
44/45	19,921	2,889	1,681	12,523	6,928	19,412	103	63,457

¹⁹ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, pp.37-38.

²⁰ Bevindings van die sagtevrugte-ondersoekkomitee, *Die Landbouweekblad*, 22 December 1943.

²¹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 41, *Report of the National Marketing Council on the Marketing Boards, 1938-1946*, Union of South Africa Publication, 1947, p.71.

²², J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, pp.36-37.
The amount of the grant was £35,000

²³SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.104.

²⁴ Adapted from J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.37.

The problems of shipping and the newly increased volume of fruit available for the domestic market during the war brought about increased sales of 154, 00 tons in 1944 compared to 53,000 tons annually during the pre-war period. Equally, the domestic sale of fruit by the Deciduous Fruit Board cannot be taken as fully indicative of total sales as there was no control over apricots, apples and fruit grown in the Transvaal. However, it can offer a glimpse of the trend of sales during the war years. The quantity of plums, pears, peaches and grapes sold on the domestic market rose nearly fivefold from 1940-1944.²⁵ Fruit was processed into jams, jellies and also canned. The output of these products expanded greatly during the war, a boost that was also motivated by export opportunities. Significantly, the increase in the availability of fresh fruit may have had the effect of improving the rural diet of the African population in the reserves as the government sent shipments of citrus fruits to these areas. This was the first time that fruit was available to buy there, an innovation which would have raised some vitamin levels on the reserves.²⁶

When War hands you Lemons

Before 1939, more than 75% of citrus fruit produced in the Union was exported, primarily to Britain as international markets proved to be much more lucrative than domestically. After the outbreak of hostilities, the British Ministry of Food stated that it would only be willing to import oranges and would no longer have a need for grapefruit, lemons and *naartjies*. After problems with shipping emerged, it soon became evident that even exports of oranges would need to be curtailed. The surplus problem was also intensified as there was an anticipated increase in yield in the years after 1939 as the newly planted acreage of 1930 started to bear fruit.²⁷ The Union confronted a looming crisis of over-production.

In order to stimulate British consumer interest in South African produce such as citrus fruit, publicity was organised by the South African representative on the London Food Committee, the Union's Senior Trade Commissioner. Firstly, South African products were kept on permanent view in the exhibition hall at *South Africa House*, which was easily accessible to

²⁵ 4,900 tons in 1940 and 24,500 tons in 1944.

²⁶ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, pp.87-88.

²⁷ SANDF, UWH, Civil Section, Box10, A.P van der Post: British South African Trade in Transition, 1934-1945, 1951, pp.7-8.

the public. Then, a large window display in the same building was set up which prominently displayed various commodities. The building was the perfect site to obtain mass interest as it was located in a heavy pedestrian area that looked out on to Trafalgar Square underground station. Thirdly, the Senior Trade Commissioner on behalf of the Union government participated in important exhibitions at industrial and commercial fairs, while advertisements about South African products had regularly been placed in trade papers. These exhibits, advertisements and displays drew ample attention, which usually resulted in trade enquiries that were passed on to the Union for the attention of exporters.²⁸

A Citrus Board was erected in 1939 and a citrus scheme followed only a year later in 1940, over which the board held advisory powers. Britain's Ministry of Food established a maximum price for South African oranges in May 1940; however, no maximum prices were established for other citrus fruits. Before the start of the 1941 harvest, when London's Ministry of Food cut the import of any citrus fruits except oranges, the maximum price of oranges rose again.²⁹ War Measure No 15, proclamation 68 of 1941 established a common pool for citrus exporters, which included all sales for that year abroad and domestically. All exporters shared the pool in relation to the size of harvest they had available for marketing. The size of the pool was determined by the Citrus Board. One crate of export quality fruit was equal in payment to four crates of second rate, un-exportable fruit. This was done to accommodate the possibility that exports remained high in 1941 and 1942 in spite of decreased merchant shipping space. The principal reason for this was that convoys moving along the Cape in these years loaded oranges headed for the British market.³⁰

From 1943, however, more convoys followed routes through the Mediterranean and the sea route along the Cape was visited less frequently. This, in turn, caused export levels to decrease considerably. The opportunities for export improved again from 1945, but still only consisted of oranges for the most part, which were shipped to Britain. During periods when export opportunities were limited, the focus of the board shifted towards the domestic market as an avenue of revenue. In order to try to expand and improve the home market, the

²⁸ SANDF, UWH, Civil Section, Box 10, A.P van der Post : British South African Trade in Transition, 1934-1945, 1951, p.21.

²⁹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 41, Report of the National Marketing Council on the Marketing Boards, 1938-1946, Union of South Africa Publication, 1947, p.100.

³⁰SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.99.

Department of Agriculture established gradation to be applied to the main urban centres in May 1941. The structure of markets was adapted further in 1942 when the board authorized the creation of wholesale depots. In this system, smaller markets used market agents to sell on behalf of the Citrus Board.³¹

By 1942, as indicated earlier, the Citrus Board had no control over sales of fruit by non-exporting producers. Even though they only made up 7% of the total yield, the influx of unknown quantities into the markets at unexpected times could be seriously detrimental to the board's distribution plan. This was remedied by requesting that non-exporters give the Citrus Board a fortnight's notice of their produce entering the market. The deviations in market quantities and subsequent prices were effectively overcome when the board gained control over all citrus fruit in the Union in 1943. This brought the supply of all domestic markets into a system, which was centrally organized. The board divided the Union into 19 urban market areas, which received 80% of the fruit and 23 rural outlets which received the remainder. The areas of production were divided into 23 regions, each with a local warehouse manager or another agent who would serve as a coordinator of the growers in the region. The assigned coordinators had to liaise with selling agents in their specific rural market to determine the necessary supply requirements and then to meet the demand.³²

Although local sales increased, they did not make up for the steep reduction in exports. The inter-departmental committee appointed in 1943 to report on 'The Utilisation and Distribution of Surplus Citrus Fruit' found that wastage of fruit had occurred in 1941 and 1942 to an extent of over 3,000,000 pockets in each season. That the situation had deteriorated and become progressively worse can be seen from the 1944 position, which revealed an astronomical loss of 17,800,000 pockets. The committee found that the local selling prices of oranges barely covered costs. It was subsequently recommended that sub-economic distribution schemes be organised to take up the surplus fruit in order to avoid wastage.³³

³¹SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.100.

³²SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.101.

³³ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 41, Report of the National Marketing Council on the Marketing Boards, 1938-1946, Union of South Africa Publication, 1947, p.103.

The Department of Social Welfare organised such a distribution scheme and in cooperation with the Citrus Board supplied quantities of oranges to charitable programmes, schools and hospitals at lower prices.³⁴ Applications for citrus fruit were processed by local welfare officers and the rail freight was paid by the Department of Social Welfare. In 1943-1944, an expanded version of the scheme was put in place, which also made oranges available to poorer consumer groups. This was initiated as the scheme in its original form had absorbed merely 130,000 of the surplus pockets. It further recommended that the Native Affairs Department distribute surplus fruit in urban locations and in rural Black areas or ‘native reserves’.³⁵ The increased processing of citrus fruits during the war in this way helped to curb the surplus situation to some extent. Citrus producers who were struggling financially with the wartime shipping situation were supported by the government, which is made evident by the fact that in 1945 and 1946 no citrus fruit had gone to waste.³⁶

Grape Expectations: Utilization and Industrial Expansion

With the stimulus of war, the food processing industry experienced great expansion and development and preserved foodstuffs was the sector that enjoyed most growth. From these products, Allied forces, convoys, prisoners of war and civilians came to be fed. Beyond the Union’s borders, other African countries also benefitted from rising South African production at this time, including Kenya, the Rhodesias, Uganda and Congo.³⁷ As already mentioned, this was a beneficial consequence of necessary agricultural adaptation. In order to address the problem of surplus fruit supplies in the Union, the Deciduous Fruit Board and the Citrus Board decided to divert products to more economically sustainable avenues such as canning, drying, jam and wine production.³⁸

³⁴ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.40.

³⁵ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 41, Report of the National Marketing Council on the Marketing Boards, 1938-1946, Union of South Africa Publication, 1947, p.103.

³⁶ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: *Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied*, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.102.

³⁷ Anon: A Record of the organisation of the Director-General of War Supplies, 1939-1943, and Director General of Supplies, 1943-1945, p.99.

³⁸ Bevindinge van die sagtevrugte-ondersoekkomitee, *Die Landbouweekblad*, 22 December 1943.

Fruit pulp, jams and canned fruit

The fruit processing industry developed in leaps and bounds during the war. The canning industry had largely produced only for the domestic market before the conflict, with some exports to Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), but the amount exported by the earlier 1930s had been minimal. In December 1940, a Canning Board was created under the supervision of the Minister of Trade and Industry to encourage the wartime production of jams and jellies as processing was considered a fruitful option in helping to maintain export prospects. The motivation for this was that the amount of space needed to transport processed goods was much less than for the produce in its fresh state. With shipping space allocation being in crisis, the preserving of produce also preserved precious space. Furthermore, the product in a preserved state was better suited to long journeys at sea which removed the necessity for refrigerated containers. In due course, the export of the processed product increased overall to sixty times that of the pre-war figures. Two thirds of the exports consisted of marmalade made from lemons and grapefruit as the British Ministry of Food had agreed to import a substantial amount of marmalade in 1940.³⁹ In this way, the Union not only helped to maintain a prized British breakfast table tradition. It also provided vitamin C and helped to maintain household morale.

Initially, the British government had requested the export of basic fruit pulp in order to make domestic jams and thus keep British jam manufacturers in business. The Union had argued that with the lack of shipping space it would be more feasible to export not bulk supplies, but the condensed finished product. With expanding manufacturing industry and a vast surplus of fruit, local jam manufacturers offered to double exports of marmalade to Britain. There were some difficulties, however. These included the fact that the marmalade brand was not always popular with British consumers, as it was made from sweet varieties of oranges and grapefruit and not from the preferred more bitter Seville orange.⁴⁰

Moreover, there was also no demand for South African prune or watermelon jams in Britain. After long deliberations, 49,000 tons were exported in 1944 but in the following year this

³⁹ 10,000-20,000 tons .

SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.112.

⁴⁰ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.112.

dropped to only 25,000 tons of deciduous fruit jam, and only 7,500 tons of grapefruit marmalade. In an exchange between Whitehall's Minister of Food and the Union's London High Commissioner over South African fruit available for shipping to the United Kingdom, in the view of the British Minister,

*"As regards the grapefruit marmalade you offer, I recognise that during the war conditions have denied South Africa her normal outlet for citrus fruits, and largely as a result of this the jam, and more particularly the marmalade industry, has been greatly developed. Our own present supplies of raw materials for making marmalade are, however, sufficient to last us for three years, and for obvious reasons, including the wasteful use of shipping, we cannot aggravate that embarrassment by taking further supplies of manufactured marmalade."*⁴¹

It should be noted that Britain's request for fruit pulp had been dictated entirely by the needs of a distorted war market, as it usually acquired its pulp from Southern Europe. With this source temporarily closed, it had to look to imports from the Union. Apart from other considerations, a large problem was that Britain had basically requested apricot pulp, a fruit which was in the shortest domestic supply due to unsure harvests. Apricot was also the most popular fruit used for pulp in the domestic market of the Union. South Africa thus requested that the British Ministry of Food import other canned fruits but as the ministry had deemed these to be luxury items, they had not been inclined to do so. The ministry had however consented to the import of some for use in military camps.

Food processing was varied in its wartime impact. For instance, the expanded market for canned fruit for the military and the surge in demand in domestic markets stimulated the overall growth of the canning industry. By 1942, the supply to domestic consumers had to be limited as there was already a shortage of canning materials in the Union.⁴²

⁴¹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 30, Supporting documents. Narrative foodstuffs in short supply. Jam, marmalade, fruit pulp and canned fruit. Correspondence between Ministry of Food and High Commissioner, 5 March 1945.

⁴² SANDF, UWH, Civil Section, Box 14, A.P van der Post: Foodstuffs in Short Supply, 1951, pp.227-229.

Image 2.1: Advertisement announcing shortage of tin and packaging materials.⁴³



The canning industry was entirely dependent on the overseas supply of tinplate and of highly specialised food machinery. As tinplate was rationed, the can-making industry improvised in creative ways, evolving an alternative paper and metal container that attempted to meet the needs of the jam industry. Innovation went some way towards reducing the severity of the manufacturing problem.⁴⁴

The production of vegetables during the war kept pace with other production. Predictably, there were some periodic shortages, but it was not deemed necessary to enact price controls for domestic markets. More broadly, some stabilisation was achieved through regular purchases for the military and for shipping convoys. This organisation was undertaken from 1942 onwards by the purchasing section food controller, a unit that enthusiastically encouraged the dehydration of vegetables from 1943 onwards, and provided advice to factories about the newest techniques in production. If one takes into account that no dehydration factories were in operation before the war, the quantity of dehydrated vegetables that was attained in wartime was an enormous feat, amounting to 3,000,000 lbs.⁴⁵ Official aid was also furnished in erecting four major factories for dehydration that undertook large scale

⁴³ The shortage of tin and packaging material influenced all food processing section which included the tinned fish industry. *The Woman's Domain*, October 1942.

⁴⁴ Anon : *South Africa on Service: A pictoral record of the Union of South Africa's work on the Home Front, 1939-1943*, Pamphlet U.S Afrikana , government printer, Pretoria,1943.

⁴⁵ Anon: *A record of organisation of the Director General of War Supplies, 1939-1945, and Director General of Supplies, 1943-194*, U.S Afrikana, p.102.

production. Thus, the vegetable dehydration industry had experienced tremendous development during the war as well as in the years following. This may largely be attributed to the fact that dehydration was the only way to meet military food needs in a situation of can shortages.⁴⁶

Dried fruit

With the expansion of the preserving and processing of food supplies available in surplus amounts in the Union, the drying of fruit became another notable sector. In 1938, a Dried Fruit Board was established under the Marketing Act, its main goal being to improve the production quality of dried fruit by means of grading to increase demand for the product in international and domestic markets. The board subsequently acquired the sole right to export raisins and sultanas by War Measure No.8, Proclamation 32 of 1941, which established a consistency between the prices of distilled wine and those of dried vineyard fruits.⁴⁷ By then, the Churchill government's Food Ministry had agreed to purchase annual quantities of dried vine fruits and apricots. The Dried Fruit Board appointed processing and packing firms locally as its agents for procuring fruit from producers, and for the processing and packaging of the commodity for both export and domestic sales. Later, in 1945 revised gradation and packaging regulations were put in place under the Marketing Act, which had harmonised fruit regulations for international and domestic markets.⁴⁸

To increase producer prices, the board decided to enforce itself as a monopoly, collecting all the fruit supplies that could not be utilised. This predictably stimulated the market, but as it was obliged to buy some sub-par products at a predetermined price, this resulted in a financial loss. In general terms, it was impossible to be, as the saying goes, all things to all men. Annually, the board planned to determine the prices to be paid by packers for fruit of good quality and would then, such as in the previous year, use its authority to buy up the surplus that producers could not sell. This would, however, mean that the packers had the premium quality goods and the Board was left with disposal of the lower quality fruit.

⁴⁶ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.97.

⁴⁷ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 72, Food and Agriculture, p.4.

⁴⁸ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.108.

Some dried apricots were exported to Great Britain in 1941 but this was discontinued and was only exported again in 1944 and 1945. Production of dried apricots did not increase during the interim period, but a demand existed for the canning of the fruit. In 1941, the Price Controller fixed the prices of dried apricots and fresh apricots which were destined for the purpose of processing. In November 1942, the Dried Fruit Board acquired control of all apricots by War Measure No.104, Proclamation 287, including those for the purposes of canning and drying. This assisted the equal division of supplies between the two areas of production. Although no wartime control had been determined for other tree fruits, the price controller still set maximum prices for each variety. Interestingly, the production of raisins, a highly durable dried product, did not become a large industry in wartime as most table variety grapes that were in surplus were sold to the wine industry. A minor raisin scheme was undertaken by the government from 1940, which delivered the product at a reduced price to schools and was subsidised by the KVV and the Department of Social Welfare.⁴⁹

Generally speaking, the prices obtained for exported dried fruit were insufficient to cover all costs and domestic prices had to be kept high in order to offset losses. Little difficulty was, however, encountered with getting rid of the dried fruit at higher domestic prices because of increased buying power and increased wage earnings. It is also notable that while exports of fresh fruit dwindled in wartime, those of dried fruit stayed on par with pre-war figures. Nonetheless, after 1942 export levels were scaled back in order to cater for increased domestic consumption demands. Meanwhile, exports of canned fruit and bottled fruit increased threefold in the years 1943-1945. Jams and jellies also showed phenomenal growth, as is evident in the escalation from 19.223 tons annually in 1940-1942 to 45,291 tons annually by 1943-1945.⁵⁰

Public Criticism of the Policies Regarding Surplus Utilization

Beneath all of this there lay, however, a tricky public problem. It was a consequence of the increased demand from rapidly expanding canneries, wineries, jam and drying factories. By and large, the best quality fruit was being supplied to the processing industry, leaving the

⁴⁹SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.111.

⁵⁰J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.39.

domestic markets with low-grade goods. For example, in one committee investigation of the distribution of fresh fruit in the Union, it was found that the Deciduous Fruit Board should have known it was not possible to supply the public with the quality of fruit which had been represented in advertisements. Furthermore, it should have realised that the grading certificate on the fruit was absurdly inflated and could not be relied upon. With wartime morale much on the mind, public perceptions became a worry for the Union's food authorities.

The committee report concluded that the enormous number of complaints received was sufficient evidence of the poorness of the quality. It believed that consumption would increase if the board were to market fruit of good quality, which should have been suitably packed and graded, and been accompanied by a grading mark which could be relied upon. In its recommendation, "a standard of good quality must be maintained and then the public will respond liberally but the fiasco of the present season must not be repeated."⁵¹ Clearly, the consumer blamed the Deciduous Fruit Board for the domestic market's fruit supplies and set it up as a target for hostile political criticism. Thus, the left-wing publication, *The Guardian* asserted in 1945 that it was suspiciously convenient for the board to starve local markets and to allow only sufficient fruit through in order to maintain a high price level in the interests of bureaucratic profiteering at the expense of ordinary working people. In the same year, there was a particular public outcry over press claims that since the inception of the Deciduous Fruit Board, producers had actually been receiving less and consumers were continually paying more.⁵²

Public opinion focused on a sense of costly mismanagement on the part of the food authorities, leaving consumers disgruntled by the prevailing food situation. Even if industry was growing, the ordinary shopper was not happy with increased prices of a commodity which was known to be in ample supply in their own country. Typically, one retailer from Cape Town expressed his concern over the low consumption of fruit. He did not believe that the decrease had been caused by a weakened appetite for fruit, but rather because of what were perceived to be exorbitant prices. He was appalled by the large quantity of fruit supplies which had to be thrown out as a result of rotting on the shelves.⁵³ Nor was this all, farmers

⁵¹ NAB, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/255-256, 78/5, Minute paper: Report on the Distribution of Fresh fruit in the Union, p.2

⁵² Where is all the fruit? Deciduous fruit board discussed, *The Guardian*, 8 February 1945.

⁵³ Huisvroue sien nie kans vir vrugte: Pryse in kleinhandel bly buitensporig, *Die Burger*, 24 January 1945.

had been paid only for the fruit which he was ordered to pack and, if necessary, could leave blemished fruit on the trees to rot. Providing ammunition to anti-war nationalist forces, this wastage was condemned by the *Ossewabrandwag* newspaper as the “*Lê en vrot beleid*” which translated to a deliberate ‘leave to rot’ policy pursued by the government.⁵⁴

There were further resentments as consumers were blaming high prices and poor quality on the Deciduous Fruit Board. The board was also blamed for the existence of the black market which arose as a means by which to secure cheaper fruit. For *The Guardian* again, it was a case not being surprised if the consumer should turn willingly to the “*black market and let the Deciduous Fruit Board stew in its own juice-the juice of thousands of tons of rotting wasted fruit.*”⁵⁵ In this respect, it clearly voiced the feelings of innumerable consumers who believed the board had done a national disservice by forcing up prices, causing large-scale wastage of perfectly usable fruit and by dumping inferior fruit on the public. The board’s view, of course, was that it was following a policy aimed at keeping big exporters going through the war years so they could resume their normal business when peacetime returned. For discontented consumers on the other hand, the board had sacrificed the interests of smaller home growers, the distribution trade and the public need in order to spoon-feed the country’s wealthier exporters.⁵⁶

Conclusion

The war soon caused shipping problems for the usual export of deciduous and citrus fruit from the Union, leading to the development of a fruit surplus. The dilemma of what to do about these surpluses was the first major food crisis faced by the Union government at the start of the war. For in South Africa, the coming of war was associated not with a fear of sudden shortage, but more with what to do about a burden of sudden plenty. Yet, an expanding domestic market lifted by wartime industrial growth and increased earnings by workers assisted considerably in easing the surplus issue. Crucially, too, demand was increased elsewhere, as the Union also had to supply foodstuffs to meet military needs.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Fruit Board faces utter chaos: waste and black marketing, *The Guardian*, 6 January 1946, And *Die O.B* 20 April 1945.

⁵⁵ Fruit Board faces utter chaos: waste and black marketing, *The Guardian*, 6 January 1946.

⁵⁶ Re-organise fruit board demand: Consumers must be represented, *The Guardian*, 3 February 1946.

⁵⁷SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.10.

Although these avenues proved to be highly advantageous to the absorption of surpluses, they were by no means sufficient to mop up the bulk of products, which had previously been exported. Accordingly, expanding the Union's fruit processing industry proved to be a further lucrative development in producing commodities to meet demand both from Allied convoys and from the domestic market. Yet certain problems still persisted, ranging from the market unpopularity of certain South African fruit products in Britain to shortages of vital metal and packing materials which needed to be imported. This curbed growth from possibly attaining even higher levels.

Various bureaucratic bodies were established to regulate the production, grading and distribution of foodstuffs in their fresh as well as processed forms. These worked, overwhelmingly, in the interests of larger commercial producers as government policy on surpluses was not to permit them to cheapen food in general, but to sustain the agricultural export sector through wartime difficulties. Inevitably, there were costs to be borne. Through its agricultural boards, the state absorbed some of these costs itself. The weight was felt by the Union's domestic markets and its increasingly disgruntled consumers. With most of the good quality fruit removed for export and for processing, home markets had to be satisfied with very low quality yet relatively high prices to compensate commercial agriculture for export losses. Unsurprisingly, public opinion blamed the Deciduous Fruit Board, which had to bear the brunt of negative press reporting.

In the next chapter, we turn to the opposite problem of shortages and examine how government policy was adapted to try to resolve a rather different kind of wartime food supply difficulty.

Chapter 3:

“Pie-Crust Promises”- Shortages and Food Control

It was not until 1942, following Japan’s overrunning of Britain’s imperial supply areas in the Far East, that real concerns over food shortages in South Africa developed. Initially, the concerns focussed on products that needed to be imported, such as rice and tea. Thereafter, though, as the war dragged on, urban labouring classes and the rural poor found it increasingly difficult to obtain basic foodstuffs. Indeed, meat, dairy, wheat and maize were already becoming in short supply to all households by 1942. The lack of an imposed early austerity as part of the Union’s war footing necessitated the implementation of a haphazard system of rationing, according to a speedily-improvised quota system for retailers.¹

In the South African context, there was no implementing of a system of curtailment of consumption or of a rationing system in the first few years of the war, as could be seen in Britain, or in other Dominions such as New Zealand or Australia. The phenomenon of increasing consumption was explained to the London Food Committee in 1942 as the consequence of the large number of refugees in the Union, as well as of a rising number of prisoner of war camps as the country accommodated Axis captives from the Middle Eastern theatre of war. In reality, the largest proportion of the absorption was the general population’s increased consumption and their expanding purchasing market. Saddled with a lukewarm war mandate from its divided white electorate, the Smuts administration had to be mindful of the conflict becoming associated with daily deprivation. Thus, in an effort to cultivate support for the war effort, little to no austerity was advocated. In itself, the absence of a rationing system did not boost food buying, but it did leave the new urban purchasing power of the industrial working population to run freely. A last major limitation of export surpluses was the heavy stop-over of convoys at South African harbours which led to a complete cessation of meat and dairy exports to the United Kingdom after 1941.² Consumers grew discontented with the food control measures which had been put in place, especially the control boards, which were deemed to be ineffectual. Revealingly, these boards were treated with scorn by a critical

¹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 13, SA War Economy 1939-1945, Food Policy and Import Problems: Maize and Wheat, p.8.

² SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 13, SA War Economy 1939-1945, Food Policy and Import Problems: Maize and Wheat, p.5.

press, accusing them of having made “promises like pie-crusts (which were) made to be broken.”³

This chapter will provide the reader with a detailed evaluation of specific foodstuffs and their place within the shortage problem that developed in South Africa during the latter stages of the war. The steps taken by regulatory agencies and the Union government in regard to the shortage crisis will also be discussed. Understanding of the effect of these policies on consumer opinion of the war effort and on the workings of the control boards will be explored through a specific focus on the meat scheme and its effects on the social atmosphere in wartime. As a useful case study, it clearly illustrates where government policy was lacking and how the press reacted to the unequal distribution which had become prevalent in the country during this phase of the conflict.

The Bread of Adversity: Maize, Wheat and Alternative Winter Grains

Here, again, the wartime crisis of shipping can hardly be exaggerated and the lack of sea-freight was a limiting factor for both crop imports and exports throughout the hostilities. However, few countries experienced the double effect of freight shortages as much as South Africa did with maize. In 1941, the Union was concerned about the unavailability of sufficient shipping space to carry an exportable surplus of maize. Merely a year later, in 1942 (and again in 1945 and 1946), the government was faced with the need to import large quantities of this crucial commodity from South America to supplement a short domestic supply as a result of extreme weather conditions, mainly in the form of droughts.⁴ Maize was widely considered the most important cereal produced in South Africa when volume and production dispersion were considered, with its overall output up to six times that of wheat during the war years. One of the factors which influenced maize’s high demand was the fact that it was used for animal as well as human consumption.⁵

³ Pie-Crust Promises, *The Guardian*, 29 March 1945.

⁴ SANDF,UWH, Civil Section, Box 14, A.P van der Post: Foodstuffs in Short Supply, 1951, pp.104-105.

⁵ Report of the Distribution Cost Commission: *The System of distribution prevailing in the Union with particular reference to essential foodstuffs and the principles of state controlled marketing*, Union Publication, 1947, p.36.

In the pre-war years of 1935-1939, about 40% of the output was utilized on farms as animal feed, seed and for local human consumption; 27% was exported, and 30% was sold on the domestic market.⁶ The Maize Industry Control Board had been installed under the Marketing Act of 1937. Its main functions were to issue permits for legal export, to impose a levy on all maize purchased from producers, to pay compensation for all exported maize, to undertake the purchase and selling of maize for its own account, and to monitor closely all maize transactions. In 1941, these functions expanded significantly to include price fixing and the determination of maximum prices.⁷ A large proportion of the Union's maize export had gone to Germany and other European countries in the pre-war period but the loss of continental European markets now left the control board with the problem of dealing with an accumulating surplus by 1940.

At first, then, the maize issue looked as if it would be one of excess. What made the picture even worse was Argentina. It had dumped a vast consignment of maize on the British market at a reduced price at the outbreak of war, aggravating the problem for South Africa. Still, over the first few years of hostilities, the Union managed to export some of its surplus to the United Kingdom and with increased annual domestic consumption, producer prices remained relatively stable until 1942. In that crop year, maize had a weak yield. The 1941-1942 crop year saw harsh weather conditions characterised by heavy rains in the Cape and extreme droughts in the rest of the country.⁸ All indications showed that South Africa was now facing a maize shortage for the 1942-1943 marketing year. The lack of by-products of maize such as animal feed also affected livestock numbers and the same poor weather conditions affected sugar, potatoes and wheat crops. Signs all pointed towards a deterioration of the entire food situation in South Africa.⁹

June 1942 saw the first steps towards combined food planning and by this time the Union was no longer a maize exporter. The brief period in modern South African history had begun when the country could barely meet its own maize needs and it lasted two years. This was

⁶J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.45.

⁷ Report of the Distribution Cost Commission: *The System of distribution prevailing in the Union with particular reference to essential foodstuffs and the principles of state controlled marketing*, Union Publication, 1947, p.33.

⁸ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: *Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied*, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.28.

⁹ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, pp.46-47.

followed by a two year period when the Union needed supplementary supplies in order to meet the needs of its population.¹⁰

Government notice No.1033 of June 1942 announced that the Food Controller would introduce a rationing scheme in which exports of maize and maize products would be discontinued (except in the case of neighbouring territories).¹¹ The purchase of maize by civilian consumers was limited to two bags a month and farmers were allowed 25 bags for human consumption. In February 1943, when the situation deteriorated further, the amounts reduced to 1 and 10 bags respectively. This was also the case for maize products such as maize rice and samp, which were limited to 100 pounds a month to purchasers from November 1942.¹² In December 1942, sifting regulations were put in place, which stipulated that only the sale of un-sifted flour would be allowed which was to be enforced during times of serious shortages.¹³ Sale of maize to millers and traders was done on a permit basis only, and the use of maize for feed was prohibited. Allocation of maize for stock feed was only permitted for purposes of producing essential foods and the use of maize for feeding slaughter animals was prohibited. These restrictions provide an indication of just how serious the supply position had become. The administration of these measures placed a tremendous strain on the staff of the Maize Board, and the Marketing Council was of the opinion that were it not for their efforts, mal-distribution and possibly even starvation may have been the outcome. As the government concluded in the early post-war years, it was clear that the board had fulfilled an important national function during a difficult time.¹⁴

In spite of all these measures, though, the short supply of maize became increasingly chronic in the absence of maize imports. In a bid to try to increase maize stocks, farmers were encouraged to harvest the next crop as soon as possible and increased moisture levels in the product was allowed due to the heavy rains experienced in the season. An increased price incentive was also promised to producers if the product was delivered early. Fortunately, the

¹⁰ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 13, SA War Economy 1939-1945, Food Policy and Import Problems: Maize and Wheat, p.11.

¹¹ Die afset van die 1942-mielie-oes, *Die Landbouweekblad*, 6 May 1942.

¹² J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.47.

¹³ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.50.

¹⁴ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 41, Report of the National Marketing Council on the Marketing Boards, 1938-1946, Union of South Africa Publication, 1947, p.55.

crop yield of 1943 improved and assistance provided by military transport and the requisitioning of Italian prisoners of war for work helped to ease the problem of a labour shortage on farms caused by the flow of workers to factories in urban areas and by the option of auxiliary military service for blacks on white commercial farms. The speedy harvest, however, still caused other unforeseen difficulties for the maize industry. A shortage of storage space left much of the crop to be stored in the open, and a considerable percentage was lost to deterioration caused by rainfall and had to be sold as cattle feed. Thereafter, the food control plan inaugurated in the previous year, was continued on a modified basis.¹⁵

It was assumed at first that importing wheat crops from Argentina would be sufficient to hold the Union over until the new crop year of 1943. With the rise in consumption due to POW war camps and large convoys, the situation seemed to necessitate enlarged shipments from Latin America. The expanded shipping needs to which this would lead implied panic by the Union, particularly as it had not consulted the customary imperial channels through the London Food Committee.¹⁶

Table 3.1: Maize production, imports, exports and domestic consumption. Measured in thousand ton increments.¹⁷

Year	Production	Export	Import	Domestic Consumption
1938/39	2,910	712	---	1,550
1939/40	2,070	470	---	1,580
1940/41	2,430	101	---	1,830
1941/42	1,630	35	---	2,010
1942/43	2,430	2	---	2,020
1943/44	1,840	6	---	2,120
1944/45	1,840	1	71	1,990
1945/46	1,780	1	410	2,050

In the event, the maize crop of 1943 was adequate to supply national need and no importation was necessary. Furthermore, the carry-over of a surplus augmented the 1944 crop sufficiently

¹⁵ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 41, Report of the National Marketing Council on the Marketing Boards, 1938-1946, Union of South Africa Publication, 1947, p.56.

¹⁶ SANDF, UWH, Civil Section, Box 14, A.P van der Post: Foodstuffs in Short Supply, 1951, p.107.

¹⁷ Adapted from SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 13, SA War Economy 1939-1945, Food Policy and Import Problems: Maize and Wheat, pp.12, 13.

to minimise imports to a negligible level, while even permitting a small export of 60,000 bags to drought-stricken Portuguese East Africa.¹⁸

In the case of wheat, the authorities had followed a programme in pre-war years that aimed to make South Africa self-sufficient in wheat production. While wheat could only be imported on a permit basis, it took time to attain adequate domestic productive capacity. Thus, although home production had expanded considerably by the 1930s, it was only in the 1935-1936 crop year that the yield exceeded domestic requirements. In other years, supply needed to be supplemented via imports. A Wheat Industry Control Board was implemented to control prices, and the grading and licensing of millers.¹⁹ Even though wheat crops were adequate for four out of the six war years, troubled weather conditions in 1941-1942 and increased wartime consumption warranted strict conservation.

In the early 1930s, the Union had secured most of its external wheat supplies from Canada. However, with the outbreak of war, it was to the advantage of Allied shipping planning for Australia to supply South Africa, allowing Canada to feed Britain. Prior to 1941, the Union had little difficulty in obtaining its wheat requirements. As the war deepened and shipping problems intensified, the Union government became alarmed over the necessary acquisition of wheat and flour, especially during years of significantly lower harvests.²⁰

During the war years, wheat imports averaged at 750,833 bags of 200 pounds each, annually, but these figures had a tendency to fluctuate greatly as can be seen from the related table. In the 1940-1941 season, bread grades were introduced and labelling was made compulsory. Maximum wholesale prices for meal and flour as well as retail prices of bread were established, which were based on the cost of meal and baking, as ascertained in periodic costing investigations undertaken first, by the Board of Trade and Industries, and then by the Marketing Council.²¹

¹⁸ SANDF, UWH, Civil Section, Box 14, A.P van der Post: Foodstuffs in Short Supply, 1951, p.119.

¹⁹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 41, Report of the National Marketing Council on the Marketing Boards, 1938-1946, Union of South Africa Publication, 1947, pp.28-30.

²⁰ SANDF, UWH, Civil Section, Box 14, A.P van der Post: Foodstuffs in Short Supply, 1951, pp.92-93.

²¹ Report of the Distribution Cost Commission: *The System of distribution prevailing in the Union with particular reference to essential foodstuffs and the principles of state controlled marketing*, Union Publication, 1947, p.38.

Table 3.2: South African wheat position from 1938-1946. Measured in bags of 200 pounds net weight.²²

		Wheat Position	1938-1946		
Years	Opening Stocks	Production	Imports	Total Supply	Domestic Consumption
1938/1939	1,191,000	4,987,000	150,000	6,328,000	5,321,000
1939/1940	1,007,000	4,343,000	997,000	6,347,000	5,327,000
1940/1941	1,020,000	4,625,000	548,000	6,193,000	5,056,000
1941/1942	1,137,000	3,903,000	1,384,000	6,424,000	4,736,000
1942/1943	1,688,000	6,158,000	164,000	8,010,000	5,700,000
1943/1944	2,310,000	5,336,000	264,000	7,910,000	5,515,000
1944/1945	2,395,000	3,373,000	1,148,000	6,916,000	5,816,000
1945/1946	1,100,000	3,000,000	3,500,000	7,600,000	6,250,000

Consumer rationing of bread was discarded as impractical, although it was decided to limit the milling of finer grades of flour and to require bakers to produce a standard loaf made of un-sifted flour. The sale of bread was permitted only in three sizes and the return of unsold bread from retailers to bakers was prohibited, together with the deliveries of bread on Wednesdays. These regulations had some cost reducing effects, as did the large increase in the consumption of bread. The major element in the bread market was the wartime increase in wages.²³ Maximum retail prices for various flours were determined and listed in the Government Gazette in October 1941.²⁴ For a time, bakeries were allowed to sell a loaf made up of a mixture of grains at a lower price, but its unpopularity led to its withdrawal in 1942.²⁵

At another broad policy level, government assistance was offered to encourage farmers to increase wheat production. Producer prices were guaranteed in 1942, and wheat producers received special attention in fertilizer supplies. To limit any inflated increase in bread prices, the authorities also agreed to finance the increase paid to producers during the first few years of the war, and to cover the higher prices of imported wheat. However, in November 1943

²² Adapted from: SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 14, A.P van der Post: Foodstuffs in Short Supply, 1951, p.91.

²³ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 41, Report of the National Marketing Council on the Marketing Boards, 1938-1946, Union of South Africa Publication, 1947, p.34.

²⁴ NAB, 1/MAT, 6/1/60-61, 4/8/4 Wheat control, Government Gazette, October 1941, Government Notices, Department of Agriculture and forestry. Wheat control Scheme.

²⁵ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, pp.50-51.

bread prices rose, with consumers having to bear part of the board's cost in that year. Costs increased again in 1944/1945.²⁶

Table 3.3: The Union's wheat supply and consumption from 1938-1946 in million bag quantities.²⁷

Year	Stocks	Output	Imports	Total	Usage	Export	Closing Stock
38/39	1.19	4.99	0.15	6.33	5.32	-----	1.01
39/40	1.01	4.34	1	6.35	5.33	-----	1.02
40/41	1.02	4.63	0.55	6.19	5.06	-----	1.14
41/42	1.14	3.9	1.38	6.42	4.74	-----	1.69
42/43	1.67	6.16	0.16	8.01	5.7	-----	2.31
43/44	2.31	5.34	0.26	7.91	5.52	-----	2.4
44/45	2.4	3.37	1.15	6.92	6.19	-----	0.73
45/46	0.73	2.81	2.35	5.89	5.63	-----	0.26

While the above table shows the number of bags of wheat used in the Union during the war, it should also be noted that a larger quantity of bran than usual was utilised for human consumption. This was due to the measures adopted early in the war and administered fairly effectively by the Wheat Board. When actions were taken to conserve wheat stocks in April 1941, milling extractions were divided as follows:

Table 3.4: Milling extraction quotas of all wheat supplies in 1941.²⁸

Product	Extraction Ratio	% of Total Output
Patent Flour, Semolina etc	60	8.9
Baker's Flour	70	15
Household Flour	75	21.6
Sifted Meal	80	6.3
No.1 Unsifted Meal	90	43.2
No. 2 Unsifted Meal	100	5

Clearly, sifted meal was now being avoided, and cruder, No.1 un-sifted meal had become the staple flour to compensate during periods of short wheat supply.

²⁶ Adapted from: J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, pp.51-.52.

²⁷ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 41, Report of the National Marketing Council on the Marketing Boards, 1938-1946, Union of South Africa Publication, 1947, p.36.

²⁸ Adapted from: SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 41, Report of the National Marketing Council on the Marketing Boards, 1938-1946, Union of South Africa Publication, 1947, p.36.

While other cereals such as barley, oats and rye were produced in the Union, no marketing or price controls existed for them. That implied that opportunity begged. During the first two years of the war, the prices of these cereals increased, causing farmers to sell their yield rather than keep it for feed. This created competition for wheat, which was under strict controls. Predictably, this raised worrying prospects that other grain acreage would be expanded at the expense of wheat. Subsequently, the Food Controller placed wide control over the supply of these commodities in the hands of the Wheat Industry Control Board from October 1942.²⁹

With the shortage of grain supplies being affected by unstable weather conditions, pests and increased consumption, the production of winter grains was encouraged in 1942 by the Director of Food Production, Prof. A.M Bosman. Farmers in areas where winter grain production was most successful were encouraged to expand production. Furthermore, with the imminent threat of a deteriorating food situation, the Food Controller also turned to farmers in more marginal grain growing areas to branch out into the production of any grain varietals which appeared to be viable. Introduced in an atmosphere of mild emergency, the aim was to ensure full cultivation of any land that could produce foodstuffs.

The Department of Agriculture launched a press and radio campaign stressing the benefits of cultivating rye in the winter months. The imperative was to get uncultivated lands into strategic production, and more wavering or doubtful producers were directed to nearby agricultural colleges.³⁰ The feed demand for oats, barley and rye had always been a dominant element in agriculture, but it now increased to an abnormal extent owing to the wartime shortage of maize. The lack of starchy foods further increased the demand for these winter grains for human consumption.³¹

Not unexpectedly, the pressure of war encouraged improvisation. Trials at the Elsenburg Agricultural College showed that the addition of rye flour or corn flour to white flour had no adverse effects on bread. Still, the prejudice of consumers towards flour mixtures had to be considered. Something which hung over the Union in the Second World War was memories of the unfavourable popular reaction towards the so-called '*Burton Bread*' which had been

²⁹ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.53.

³⁰ Plant meer wintergrane, *Die Landbouweekblad*, 29 April 1942.

³¹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 41, Report of the National Marketing Council on the Marketing Boards, 1938-1946, Union of South Africa Publication, 1947, p.39.

supplied during the First World War. The difficulties of bread issues in wartime could not be avoided. A standard bread or a ‘national loaf’ was distributed from May 1941, made from unsifted flour. This loaf was mouldy-looking and grey in colour, often described as tasting akin to damp sawdust. Its texture was so rough that anyone who could produce medical evidence that they suffered from gastric afflictions was permitted to buy white bread. It went sour overnight and had gelatinous blobs in its texture. The loaf was such a source of dissatisfaction and urban folklore, that many housewives were said to have spent the remainder of the war years illegally sifting flour. In that small way, the war may have helped to stimulate a return to home baking ingenuity and skilful improvisation.

As sieves for the purpose of removing the bran needed to be fine and many households were not equipped with the appropriate kitchen implement, creative household cooks made their own sieves from various articles. One common sieve was constructed from women’s stockings as the mesh enabled the fine sieving of standard flour.³² Fortunately, unlike Britain, France or Germany, South Africa did not run short of female stockings. Other homemade sieves were made from mesh wire or were made as hand mills with wood and cheese cloth and equipped with cranks. In popular memory, these were recalled as having been effective if families did not have stockings at their disposal.³³ Bryant has argued that the national loaf might have increased the health of many as it limited the consumption of pure starch. On the other hand, those who suffered from the product most were the poor for whom its low-grade roughness made up a large portion of their staple diet.³⁴

With the prohibition on the manufacturing of white bread and the implementation of a quota system on the sale of wheat flour, the need for rye increased considerably, especially with white rye bread becoming a substitute for white wheat bread. Sure enough, the increased use of rye flour by bakeries raised its price, to the inevitable detriment of purchasers. Given such developments, the worrying prospect for the Smuts administration was that farmers would swap controlled grain production for uncontrolled and more profitable crops, such as rye. With wheat remaining of primary importance to national food supplies, early in 1942 there was strategic movement by the Food Control Organisation towards the formation of controls, including the enactment of grading standards for subsidiary winter grains for another official

³² Interview, M van Zyl, 19 June 2013, conducted by Y Albertyn, (via questionnaire).

³³ Interview, Anon, 17 June 2013, conducted by Y Albertyn, (via questionnaire); Interview D Uys, 14 June 2013, Conducted by Y. Albertyn, (via questionnaire).

³⁴ M. Bryant: *As we were: South Africa 1939-1941*. (Johannesburg: Keartland publishers, 1974), p.81.

marketing scheme. From the harvests of 1942-1943, the regulation of supplies was entrusted to the Wheat Control Board to oversee common production and marketing problems in conjunction with wheat.³⁵

Spilt milk: Dairy Controls

A Dairy Board had been established in September 1930, representing the formation of the Union's first agricultural product board. It emerged, as was frequently the case, in the aftermath of large supply accumulation – butter and cheese. The difficult dairy farming position in the 1930s was worsened by Depression era decreases in world market prices. To try to stabilise the sector, the board had the responsibility for butter and cheese imports and exports, and for the imposing of levies on butter, cheese and substitutes on domestic markets to compensate manufacturers for export costs. Lastly, it controlled the growth of butter and cheese plants in South Africa.³⁶

The main aims of the Dairy Control Board were to sustain industry profitability and to improve its efficiency. While it subsidised exports, being foodstuffs this was contentious and in 1935 a state-supported butter and milk scheme was established to try to placate widespread grievances over the overseas trade in dairy products.³⁷

As wartime conditions took hold, consumers grew increasingly agitated, the more so when the Union itself began to confront a shortage. Despite government denial of continuing butter exports, it was under pressure.³⁸ Critics asked how much profit stood to be made by large wholesale firms which were sending the butter to Britain when the country's own cities appeared to be facing a shortage. The household view of one suspicious woman exemplified consumer mistrust of the authorities, declaring that, "*a butterless week would be a good idea if the creameries agreed to give the butter thus saved as a gift to starving Europe-but will*

³⁵ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 41, Report of the National Marketing Council on the Marketing Boards, 1938-1946, Union of South Africa Publication, 1947, p.40.

³⁶ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 30, Report by secretary for Agriculture, p.5.

³⁷ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.55.

³⁸ Butterless people demand margarine, *The Guardian*, 8 November 1945.

they? Probably (the government) hope to get more from the British Government than we would pay.”³⁹ Anger over butter was further fuelled by perceptions of profiteering.

Under the official dairy scheme, free milk or cheese was provided to schoolchildren and creches, and butter was distributed to designated poorer groups at minimal cost. The sources utilised do not specify if the distribution was racially oriented or which schools benefitted from the schemes. If one views the context in which the schemes were implemented it could be assumed that the distribution would have been racially minded to a certain extent within the segregationist society. However, with the other schemes implemented one does see a move towards a more inclusive welfare structure and it could be deduced that some semblance of an attempt was made by the government to have a non-racial distribution scheme. The source makes reference to the fact that those eligible for the scheme were very low wage families and workers of the South African Railways and Harbours Administration with dependents. Tuberculosis patients on low incomes were also eligible.⁴⁰ It should however, be noted that within the segregationist society some measure of racial discrimination regarding supplies would have been common place. Supplies were packaged as ‘state aided butter’ and contained a product grade and price. At the end of each month, the creameries which supplied the butter were paid from funds provided by a scheme subsidy.⁴¹ These supplies, though, were neither regular nor dependable. When the commercial demand for milk, butter and cheese could be met, schools secured supplies. However, when domestic supplies were low, schools went without.⁴² The Dairy Board administered this scheme until 1944, after which it was undertaken by the Department of Social Welfare.⁴³

During the war, overall domestic production of butter was 17% higher than in the closing pre-war years. Exports during the first two years of hostilities were mainly for convoy ships’ stores and were about 2% higher than before the war, but, in the last three years, the level fell

³⁹ Durban fears food shortage, *The Guardian*, 5 July 1945.

⁴⁰ NAB, 3/PMB, 4/3/298. Official correspondence between Dairy Industry control Board and the Pietermaritzburg town clerk RE State Aided milk and butter scheme with specific reference to the distribution of state aided butter, 9 March 1938.

⁴¹ NAB, 3/PMB, 4/3/356-357, City of Pietermaritzburg Minute Paper: Interdepartmental committee on State Aided milk and butter scheme. Memorandum outlining the scope and nature of the scheme, pp.3-5.

⁴² Women’s interests: A meal a day for every child in the Union?, *The Women’s Domain*, 24 June 1943.

⁴³ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.83.

to one-fourth of pre-war exports. The drought in 1942 also influenced the dairy industry adversely, and butter production in 1942 and in 1944-1945 was well below average. The demand on butter became so weighty that exports were eventually cut drastically.⁴⁴ Wholesalers only received 75% of their original supply in the months from June to August 1942, and had to maintain retailers with limited consumer supplies.⁴⁵ Shortages prompted pamphlets promoting the use of fruit jams, available in plentiful supply, as a substitute for butter on bread.⁴⁶

The butter crisis came at a time when domestic consumption had increased by nearly 9000 tons annually from the 1930s to mid-way in the war. It also had wider food implications. Thus, the sale of cream was prohibited in 1942 in order to ease the effects of the butter shortage. Equally, there were commodities which were kept going in tight production circumstances. The production of ice-cream continued, using unsalted butter. From 1943/1944, the government started to subsidise butter and sought to limit its price.

Another significant element was milk. The domestic demand for drinking milk increased notably during the war years, something that could be attributed to urbanisation, as well as to the presence of the military, refugees and POWs. With increased milk demand, many cream and condensed milk producers switched to fresh production. The areas from which urban districts could acquire fresh milk also expanded considerably. Another trend was that of former cream producers supplying milk to cheese factories, sustaining cheese production at comparatively higher levels than that of butter during these war years.⁴⁷

Even though production was increased and exports were cut, there were still some critical periods when the supply of dairy products fell especially short. During these tight periods, as in 1941-1942 when butter supplies were down by a quarter, the board resorted to a system of retail rationing. The effect of its implementation was uneven, as the Union did not have in place a network of registered rationing as in, for example, Britain. As no customers were

⁴⁴ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 30, Supporting Documents. Narrative- Foodstuffs in Short supply. Butter and cheese: Cablegram from Department of Agriculture and Forestry, 2 April 1942.

⁴⁵ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.90.

⁴⁶ M. Higham & R.A Davis: *A plea for war time economy in South Africa*, Pamphlet U.S Afrikana.

⁴⁷ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J. W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, pp.89.

registered, some were able to obtain more than their share simply by visiting several retailers whilst others were left with a deficit.⁴⁸ Not surprisingly, the issue of fairness and fair shares became an issue. Even for consumers who did follow the rules by only visiting one retailer, the rationing applied did not necessarily ensure a family or an individual their normal purchase allocation. Often there was short measure, and at times even no supply. It was also more difficult for cash purchasers to acquire supplies as retailers preferred account customers who they knew and believed would be easier to supply with correct allotments. New residents of a town often struggled to open an account at a retailer. Shop owners were also known to favour certain customers and even to hoard butter supplies when these were temporarily plentiful.

If one compares butter sales in Pietermaritzburg for 1943 and 1944, it can be deduced that the high fixed price regime influenced supplies. A report on the market made the point that supplies normally increased in October, and would have done so had the price not raised to a level that could not be afforded by the majority of consumers.

Table 3.5: Comparative sales of farm butter in Pietermaritzburg in July to October of 1943 and 1944 measured in pounds.⁴⁹

Year	July	August	September	October
1943	7380	9368	9192	11161
1944	4145	5496	4881	3768

By 1945, with increased butter shortages biting, the government faced appeals to make margarine available to the public. The strength of popular opinion could no longer be ignored, with pressure coming from various sides, from welfare liberal interests to the Communist Party. A wave of protest meetings, petitions, street demonstrations and mass resolutions forced the government's hand.⁵⁰ Under War Measure No. 26 1945, the production

⁴⁸ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, pp.56-57.

⁴⁹ NAB, 4/4/2/255-256, 78/18, *Minute paper*: Natal Regional Food Committee: Investigation RE food distribution, Pietermaritzburg market, 8 November 1944.

⁵⁰ Margarine held back- Peoples health sacrificed to vested interests, *The Guardian*, 22 November 1945.

of margarine was authorised, with the intention of making it available to labouring classes.⁵¹ Several firms offered to commence immediate production, but were restrained by the authorities who insisted that special regulations would have to be devised and that various interests needed to be taken into account. From the left, there was outrage. *The Guardian*, for example, exclaimed that those ‘interests’ were those of the monopolising Dairy Control Board which feared competition from the production of cheaper margarine. Dairy farmers had, in fact, been protesting themselves against the manufacture of margarine. Inescapably, wartime food control was much more than merely an agricultural issue, but was also deeply rooted in political contestations.

In the event, although opposition was overcome, it took a long time to establish factory production and to acquire the key machinery for margarine manufacturing. It was also difficult to obtain all the plant oils required for production. Still, margarine made some impact. Wartime recipes which substituted vegetable fat for butter could be found in many instances in women’s magazines.⁵² Before margarine became more widely available, some people had been substituting for butter with pork fat on bread or for their baking needs.⁵³ Increasingly, margarine began to supplant this.

At the same time, its impact was largely regional. By 1945, only one factory in the Western Cape had the capability to manufacture margarine and it was only distributed in the Cape Peninsula. In the Cape, the position among poorer families was better than in other regions because under the state aided butter scheme, margarine as well as butter was sold by the Social Welfare Department. On the other hand, margarine issuing was also accompanied by some rumbling social discontent over rights. Better-off individuals would not have access to margarine should they have wanted to use a substitute to conserve their butter supplies.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, expansion was slow. Essential oil seeds were only made more widely available in 1947, enabling production to replace state-supported butter in other main urban centres. The distribution of state-supported butter was eventually withdrawn in 1948 for rural areas.⁵⁵

⁵¹ No Margarine? Dairy Industry fears competition, *The Guardian*, 15 February, 1945.

⁵² Baking without butter? *Femina (previously Women’s Domain)*, September 1944.

⁵³ Interview, W. Steenkamp, 17 June 2013, conducted by Y. Albertyn (via questionnaire).

⁵⁴ Butterless people demand margarine, *The Guardian*, 8 November 1945.

⁵⁵ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.91.

Such actions were a long time in coming. In these, as well as in other ways, in public opinion the Dairy Control Board symbolised what it was that made government agencies widely mistrusted and suspected of mismanaging food control in the Union.

Counting your Chickens: Poultry and Eggs

Poultry farming expanded in wartime, despite feed shortages hampering other agricultural areas. Before hostilities, the Union had been exporting 300,000 cases of eggs annually to Great Britain. In some years, poultry was also exported overseas and eggs and poultry also made their way to Southern Rhodesian markets. To secure continuing poultry and egg exports to Britain after the outbreak of war, a new agreement was made with its Ministry of Food. By 1940, export quantities actually increased while contract prices decreased as the British carried extra wartime costs. Meanwhile, domestic market prices remained stable. The country's Egg Levy Board worked to stimulate increased domestic consumption, with prospects of an increasingly lengthy war likely to affect exports. Indeed, after 1941 the Union's British exports ceased, and the only remaining shipments were to forces in North Africa and to other African markets.⁵⁶

In 1943, faced by a shortage, the Food Controller took over all egg supplies in cold storage. By then, the government ideal of growing domestic consumption was being undermined by a lack of maize and nitrogenous feed which had become serious by 1942-1943. Eggs which were being hoarded by traders in refrigeration units were then requisitioned and redistributed, lessening some of the effect of shortages. Refrigerated egg supplies were bought at predetermined prices and sold in times of shortage. In addition, a large quantity of eggs which were purchased officially was turned into powdered egg for consumption by soldiers. Compulsory grading of eggs sold in the 9 urban centres was put in place in July 1943, and the Price Controller established prices for wholesale and retailers. Although in 1945 a small quantity of eggs was exported to Britain for the first time since 1942, it was not until 1948 that the routine export of eggs and poultry abroad resumed.⁵⁷

⁵⁶, SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.93.

⁵⁷ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.94.

At the beginning of hostilities, the Egg Levy Board had intervened financially in support of efforts to improve the quality of production. Producers were encouraged to expand their scale, to store eggs in refrigerated spaces and to market them in good quality packaging. The poultry industry advanced during the war through improved marketing, mandatory grading and interventionist controls in fluctuating supply periods. Furthermore, advance determination of maximum monthly prices according to availability also helped to stabilize the industry and to ensure its profitability.⁵⁸

Food Freedom at Steak

Paradoxically, even though South Africa was a largely pastoral country, by the end of the 1930s it had still not developed a substantial meat industry. On average, almost half of its cattle in the pre-war years were held in impoverished African reserves, where overstocking and poor grazing lands produced animals of inferior quality.⁵⁹ Cattle owned by white farmers were mainly used as dairy varieties, whilst sheep were mainly for wool production. Meat was, in other words, largely a by-product of other, more lucrative, animal husbandry. During the interwar years, the Department of Agriculture had embarked on a scheme to improve the breeding and feeding of cattle for meat, with indifferent results. On the eve of war, a Meat and Livestock Industries Control Board was established under the 1938 Marketing Act which became an agency of the Food Control Organization in 1942. From the beginning, it struggled to deal with developments brought about by the war.⁶⁰

Pre-war exports of meat were variable as the average over the years 1935-1939 was 14 million lbs. with a maximum of 23 million lbs. in 1936 and a minimum of 5 million lbs. in 1938. Exports then increased considerably from 1940, attributable largely to the supply of convoys moved along the Cape coast.⁶¹ Domestically, the war boosted overall meat consumption. Increased demand on meat supplies for the domestic market and for ships' stores created substantial fluctuations in availability and in prices. Such pressures also placed

⁵⁸ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, pp. 95-96.

⁵⁹ For more information on 'tribal overstocking' see D.H Houghton: *The South African Economy*, p.68.

⁶⁰ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.60.

⁶¹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, Oorsig van die geskiedenis van die Tweede wêreldoorlog op landbougebied by J. W Moll, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.71.

strain on home supply, which could only be maintained until August 1941, after which the Union could only meet its domestic needs and some requirements from other African colonial territories. The view conveyed by the Secretary for Agriculture to the London High Commissioner clearly illustrated the difficulties experienced by South Africa at this time.

*"As a result of a combination of various factors such as subnormal grazing conditions, sharp wintry climate conditions and especially heavy demands created by military forces, prisoners of war, refugees and passing convoys, internal consumption has increased beyond expectations, resulting in supplies being on the short side and bringing about sharp rise in prices... In order to relieve position in meantime export of beef will have to be suspended during next few months."*⁶²

Prices increased with rising demand, and farmers thus supplied more of their cattle to more profitable meat markets. A problem with this was that breeding cattle ended up being sold for meat, limiting the number of new stock. Adding to the serious drought of 1941-1942, it had an adverse impact on the Union's cattle situation. There was also another detrimental factor. This was a marked decrease in meat from oxen, which were now being used increasingly as draught animals, substituting for tractors which had become less effective because of the war-related shortage of machine spares and fuel imports. Just as tractors had earlier replaced oxen, now the war saw to it that oxen replaced tractors.

Before the meat scheme there had been no fixed producer prices. The first serious attempt at price control was in October 1942 when it was put in place by the Price Controller, along with grading established by the Food Controller for beef and mutton in Pretoria, Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg. Publication of a recommended retail price sought to stabilise the meat trade in the Union by limiting excessive livestock prices.⁶³ These measures came, however, at an inopportune time for market imperatives. As the meat shortage had been worsening, stiff competition for stock saw retailers ignoring official listed prices and, as these rose, butchers, too, priced meat above recommended scales. In effect, there was widespread evasion of price regulations as well as a serious misdistribution of supplies between butchers and consumers. In 1943, a special war measure was taken by the Minister of Agriculture whereby quotas were imposed on the slaughter of livestock in markets situated on the

⁶² SANDF, UWH, Civil Section, Box 14, A.P van der Post: Foodstuffs in Short Supply, 1951, p.205.

⁶³ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.76.

Witwatersrand, and in Cape Town and Durban. In October of that year, the quota was extended to include various other markets, and towards the end of the war all municipal abattoirs were included.⁶⁴

To try to enforce greater adherence to official guidelines, a Macdonald Commission of Enquiry, undertaken in 1942, recommended the more stringent setting of stock and meat prices in urban areas. Firmer measures along these lines were needed to try to alleviate the troublesome meat question. In due course, the government moved to implement the meat scheme.⁶⁵

Table 3.6: Meat and meat products: Import and export including shipping cargoes. Measured in 1000 pound increments.⁶⁶

Meat and Meat Products		
Years	Import	Export: Including Shipping Cargoes
1938-1939	9,790	792
1940	11,399	5,323
1941	16,620	24,931
1942	16,444	41,925
1943	11,633	22,351
1944	7,016	6,795
1945	14,961	4,709
1946-1949	—	3,800

Meat scheme

As noted earlier, the reorganisation of the Food Control Organisation in 1944 placed the Food Controller under the Minister of Agriculture but in function separate from the Department of Agriculture. Administration of the Livestock and Meat Industries Control Board was entrusted to a Deputy Controller in the meat division of the new Food Control Organisation. There were a number of factors which led to the introduction of the meat scheme. In 1942 and 1943, livestock and meat prices were rising alarmingly, and the restoration of some

⁶⁴J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.61.

⁶⁵SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 41, Report of the National Marketing Council on the Marketing Boards, 1938-1946, Union of South Africa Publication, 1947, p.19.

⁶⁶SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.71.

balance between various sections of the agricultural industry became increasingly urgent. Supply shortages due to heavy slaughtering since 1940, and auction price fluctuations led to highly uneven and irregular supply fluctuations to controlled centres. The result was mounting resentment between producers and consumers. To provide reassurance of some official oversight of the meat situation, areas were designated to receive supplies of slaughtering stock controlled by permits issued by the Meat Control Board and were known as controlled areas.⁶⁷

All cattle that entering controlled areas had to be sold to the Meat Section of the Food Control Organisation at a price predetermined by the Minister of Agriculture. The Meat Board assisted with liaison with agents who were usually auctioneers linked to producer cooperatives. Butchering and distribution were undertaken by the Food Control Organisation.⁶⁸ It sold meat to butchers under what was proclaimed to be an equitable rationing scheme. The key principles of the meat scheme were grading and price control in order to control the meat supply.⁶⁹ In purpose, the new meat control plan was to control the seasonal supply of meat, to divide it between markets, and also to regulate prices from producer to consumer.⁷⁰

The six months preceding the implementation of official regulation saw a sharp increase in the slaughtering of stock, no doubt in anticipation of what the meat scheme would mean for business. Inevitably, this meant lower meat supplies than might usually have been experienced. Although reasonably adequate supplies were drawn to controlled areas during the first few weeks of the scheme, supplies soon dwindled and by the end of July 1942 the controlled areas were acutely short of meat.

Although the authorities declared the food situation to be satisfactory, consumers did not agree. Once again, *The Guardian's* voice was prominent, scorning food control as a fantasy. Cape Town, the paper reported, was rife with purchasers who were standing in meat queues

⁶⁷ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Annexure A: Meat scheme, p.1.

⁶⁸ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, Oorsig van die geskiedenis van die Tweede wêreldoorlog op landbougebied by J. W Moll, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.77.

⁶⁹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, *Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Annexure A: Meat scheme*, pp.2-4.

⁷⁰ J.M Tinley, *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.63.

and were then often having to leave butchers' shops empty-handed or with canned meat. The problem was exacerbated by unfair treatment based on racial discrimination. The paper relayed a story in which it was witnessed how a white woman had entered a butcher's shop to immediately be served various large cuts of meat of her choosing, while a coloured woman with three small children had been told there was no available meat left in stock.⁷¹ Jan Smuts's own opinions did little to help matters when it came to soothing public anger. When the Prime Minister was asked about the government's food policy, he suggested that people in Johannesburg and Natal ate too much meat. For *The Guardian*, "the public are not fooled by bulletins and official statements. They know some people get all the meat they want, others none at all. And they want to know-why not rationing?"⁷²

Most of all, it was the nutrition of workers which was being impacted. The situation in Cape Town in January 1945 was so precarious that poorer purchasers were only receiving soup bones on some days, and local hospitals had to consider canned meats for patients.⁷³

Predictably, meat shortages led to much black market or other irregular dealing. An increasing number of consumers obtained their meat supplies from butchers just outside controlled areas which created an enlarged market for producers who were dissatisfied with their fixed price levels. In other cases, butchers operating outside controlled areas even delivered meat to within these areas.⁷⁴ Wealthier urban consumers could travel from cities to outside controlled areas to pick and choose meat. As critics pointed out, this affected the poor the hardest as it reduced the already small supplies which were available to them.⁷⁵ As an incensed *Guardian* correspondent complained, the government did not fully grasp the effect that food shortages were having on the Union's lowest-paid workers. For them, "it does not

⁷¹ Food Control Fantasies, *The Guardian*, 11 January 1945.

⁷² Food Control Fantasies, *The Guardian*, 11 January 1945.

⁷³ Hospitale begin dink aan blikkies vleis. Normale voorrade nie meer beskikbaar, *Die Burger*, 24 January 1945 and Sopbene vir mense wat vleis kom vra. Ergste tekort in geskiedenis van Kaapstad, *Die Burger* 24 January 1945.

⁷⁴ SANDF, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Annexure A: Meat scheme, p.12.

⁷⁵ Meat Shortage Hits the poor says Cape Town butchers, *The Guardian*, 1 February 1945.

mean curtailing the menu; it does not mean using substitutes- it means going without, starving.”⁷⁶

The first step taken to counter black market developments was to prohibit hotels and boarding houses from obtaining meat from outside the controlled areas without a permit.⁷⁷ At this stage, it was still legal for household consumers to obtain supplies from outside controlled areas or to receive postal meat shipments from rural districts. Naturally, this was not what the scheme had envisaged. As its position continued to weaken rapidly, apprehension grew that the whole system might collapse. To shore things up, it became compulsory to obtain permits from the deputy food controller for the introduction of meat from outside controlled areas.⁷⁸ From 1944, these were only granted on a discretionary basis to those who had verifiable meat supply links from outside controlled or who received meat from friends, families or from their own farms which fell outside controlled areas.⁷⁹

That still left butchers who operated on the fringe of controlled areas to continue with dubious and more profitable transactions if their supply was not curtailed. Another concern was health. Significant quantities of uninspected meat were being sold without having been inspected and graded within controlled areas. Unsurprisingly, from September 1944, it was decided to expand controlled areas to include butchers on their periphery so they would be compelled to comply with all meat scheme guidelines.⁸⁰

Quotas were determined by obliging all the butchers in controlled areas to register with the Food Control Organisation and to give a summary of their estimated consumption. This, though, did nothing to lessen popular grievances over inequality of access to meat. This is seen in supply comparisons between cities and smaller towns. In one observation, a Stellenbosch butchery was seen by a reporter as being full of meat, whilst there were undernourished inhabitants in Cape Town. In this outraged view, “it is a good thing some of the half-starved coloured community from Cape Town were not there. If they had been, under

⁷⁶ Food Shortage hits these workers, *The Guardian*, 5 October 1944.

⁷⁷ July 14, 1944, Government notice 1178.

⁷⁸ September 15 1944 Government Notice 1542

⁷⁹ SANDF, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Annexure A: Meat scheme, p.12.

⁸⁰ SANDF, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Annexure A: Meat scheme, p.12.

present conditions, surely no court could have condemned them if they had demonstrated and taken what they wanted.”⁸¹ The underlying issue of unequal distribution was brought up at the 1945 annual general meeting of the committee of the Cape Retail Butchers Association, which urged the Food Controller to review and improve the flawed meat scheme.⁸² With regard to unequal supplies to different categories of customers, in one butcher’s view, “If there wasn’t enough to go around, we had to supply those whom we knew got their supplies only from us. Some people have been sending their children around to every shop whilst others have been going without. The whole system has been most unfair.”⁸³

Image 3.1: A Comic depicting consumer resistance to the Meat Scheme which appeared in *Die Burger*. Smuts and Strauss are depicted as housekeepers who are not equipped to clean house. Strauss is shown to have made a mess of the Meat Scheme, which is depicted by the tray he is carrying. He is shown to have dropped the meat on the floor and in so doing, failed at his task.⁸⁴



Angry Communist observers asserted that the government was deliberately withholding meat from consumers. This charge was based on the fact that there was no meat shortage in South West Africa, and supplies could have been secured from the country's Mandate territory. Why was this avenue not being explored? In the view of one municipal Party councillor, Dryburgh, an influx of cattle from South West Africa would mean lower prices and would antagonise the big capitalist farmers in the Union.⁸⁵ Meat, too, became a charged political issue on the right, as a mixed assortment of dissidents and speculators, alongside anti-war and

⁸¹ There's more meat in the country, *The Guardian*, 25 January 1945.

⁸² Meat Shortage Hits the poor says Cape Town butchers, *The Guardian*, 1 February 1945

⁸³ Rationing welcomed. Rand views, *The Guardian*, 15 February 1945.

⁸⁴ *Die Burger*, 2 February 1945

⁸⁵ Meat! Communists force action, *The Guardian*, 8 March 1945.

pro-fascist Nationalists, sought an end to all controls in the interests of free market capitalism. In response, news bulletins of the Bureau of Information commented,

“Meat continues to be scarce in all urban centres. The Rand Daily Mail says that it is no longer possible to conceal it and the control scheme is in danger. The country is being held to ransom by a determined group of speculators who cannot be prosecuted because speculation is not a legal offence. Rarely has the Government of a democratic country been so openly challenged. If the scheme breaks down then more meat may be available, but at a price outside the range of the poorer families. The opposition press takes the line that the scheme is benefitting neither producer nor consumer, but only the middleman and the big interests.”⁸⁶

The meat scheme's key problem lay in price determination. There was a set of minimum beef prices to producers, which differed according to centres, being higher in urban localities most distant from supply areas. These premiums were intended to provide the necessary inducement to draw cattle from surplus to deficit areas. The intention was to induce and sustain a more regular flow of provisioning. However, there were steep fluctuations as well as bottlenecks, and the imposition of rigid price-fixing even in situations of shortage was, as the Marketing Council itself acknowledged, one of the many faults that needed to be rectified.⁸⁷

Military Meat Requirements

Due to the growth of military requirements for foodstuffs and the specialized nature of the production work involved, it was decided in August 1943 that an army food supplies department would be founded to work in close consultation with the Food Controller. Besides being responsible for military food requirements, it was also responsible for the running of the government food cannery which produced the meat and vegetable ration.⁸⁸ The authorities took ownership of a cannery outside of Durban in 1941 for the production of a canned meat and vegetable mixture.⁸⁹ This meat and vegetable ration contained 10

⁸⁶ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 30, Supplementary documents: A.P van der Post: Foodstuffs in short supply, , Meat and meat products. Bureau of information news bulletin No.303.

⁸⁷ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 41, Report of the National Marketing Council on the Marketing Boards, 1938-1946, Union of South Africa Publication, 1947, pp.19-20.

⁸⁸ Anon: *A record of the organisation of the Director General of War Supplies, 1939-1943 and the Director General of Supplies, 1943-1945*, U.S Afrikana, p.101.

⁸⁹ Anon: *South Africa on Service: A pictoral record of the Union of South Africa's work on the Home Front, 1939-1943*, Pamphlet U.S Afrikana, Government Printer, Pretoria,1943.

ounces of meat in a fat rich sauce together with beans, peas, potato and carrot. This factory produced more than 12 million 30 ounce cans from 1941 to 1944 when production was stopped due to chronic meat shortages. Earlier, canning had been interrupted by seasonal winter meat shortages, while at other, easier, times, a portion of the production was even exported to Britain.⁹⁰

During the opening years of the war, strategic needs could be met by fresh imports from other areas such as South West Africa, and through the import of canned and preserved meats from Argentina and South Rhodesia which increased from 1940. Joint purchasing of meat in Allied and neutral countries was undertaken by the Food Control Board and the London Food Committee in 1942. Countries that needed imports had to submit programmes to these committees which then determined the allocation of meat to each country. South Africa requested canned corned beef for the large requirements of its military camps and for Allied convoys, but the London Food Committee was unsympathetic. As world supplies of canned meat were limited, and it would only be made available to armies in the field. So the Union was obliged to resort to its own internal manufacturing arrangements. By 1943, other preserved meat imports were coming mainly from Southern Rhodesia, Uruguay and Argentina. It was always going to be difficult for the London Food Committee to satisfy the meat requirements of the Union, especially since the meat consumption of the white population was considerably higher than the ration in Great Britain. The Smuts administration, nonetheless, remained concerned about shortages of meat because of its political impact on the opinion of the country's white electorate. This is most probably what lay behind persistent Union requests to the London Food Committee to allow it to make 'private' national purchases in 1944 and 1945.⁹¹ London, however, continued to deny such requests. On the other hand, for its part the Union government actually declined some meat allocations in 1944 as it considered them too expensive.

⁹⁰ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.74.

⁹¹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953 p.73.

Pantry Politics: Shortages of Imported Products

For the Smuts government, another important commodity to be controlled was tea, particularly as its consumption had been increasing rapidly in the 1930s. Consumption did not slow down with the outbreak of war. On the contrary, the Union attracted a temporary wartime population, including tea-drinking convoys. Massive growth in consumption can be seen in import figures which rose from 11,370,626 pounds in 1934 to 20,533,787 pounds in 1941. Although small quantities of tea had been produced in Natal for at least 50 years before the war, this local production never exceeded 5% of annual consumption. With the fall of the Far East to the Japanese, the main sources of tea supply changed to India, Ceylon and some East African countries. This meant that from 1942 onwards, neutral countries had to rely on restricted tea-producing territories of the British Empire.⁹²

Following Britain's setbacks against Japan, its tea-importing imperial countries met in London to formulate a co-ordinated purchasing scheme to stabilize prices and to allocate available supplies. South Africa was granted a quota of 80% of its estimated requirements. The importation of tea was undertaken by the Food Controller, acting through the Senior Trade Commissioner. This involved negotiations with the British Ministry of Food on all tea matters, as it served as the sole buyer of tea on behalf of Allied nations.⁹³ Locally, a government decree of July 1941 provided regulations to govern tea distribution. Each wholesaler and retailer was granted 75% of their sales during fixed periods. Retailers were only permitted to sell 75% of their allotment of tea to customers. A maximum of one pound could be sold to each consumer. This system of trade control under the supervision of the Food Controller seemed to be both effective and fair in allocating a scarce commodity.⁹⁴ In addition, the use of indigenous bush teas was encouraged in popular publications when shortages of tea were most felt.⁹⁵ It grew increasingly popular in wartime for consumers to substitute for unavailable Ceylon tea, drink of the *Rooibos* variety.⁹⁶

⁹² SANDF,UWH, Civil Section, Box 14, A.P van der Post: *Foodstuffs in Short Supply*, 1951, p.32.

⁹³ SANDF,UWH, Civil Section, Box 14,A.P van der Post: *Foodstuffs in Short Supply*, 1951, pp.34-36.

⁹⁴J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, pp. 66-67.

⁹⁵ Bossiestee: Die tee uit ons eie land, *Die Landbouweekblad*, 4 March 1942.

⁹⁶ Interview with W. Steenkamp,17 June 2013, conducted by Y. Albertyn (via questionnaire).

Another product not grown in South Africa at the outbreak of hostilities was coffee. Like tea, it experienced similar import difficulties. Before the war, the Union had obtained its coffee supplies from two primary sources, namely Brazil and British East Africa. Becoming increasingly popular through the 1930s into the 1940s, imports rose from 13,460 tons in 1934 to 36,000 tons by 1944. This considerable increase in consumption was, accompanied by a later decrease in supplies from Brazil, which halved its export figure from 1941 to 1942, and shipped an all-time low of 109 tons to the Union in 1945. Supplies from British East Africa increased, but these were prone to fluctuations and the Union had to look to the Belgian Congo and to Angola to meet expanding demand. The war was, of course, entirely responsible for the coffee shortage. For the crisis was not a lack of supply in producing countries, but the shortage of available shipping space.⁹⁷

Adaptation to shortages involved substitution. In South Africa, a coffee substitute in the form of chicory root began that was used more and more extensively, as it was produced domestically and could be mixed with low-grade coffee. Further chicory imports were controlled by the Food Controller along similar lines to those of rice and tea.⁹⁸.

Image 3.2: Luxury items such as Coffee were difficult to obtain outside of urban centres.⁹⁹



The supply of rice was an acute problem during the second half of the war as it was affected by both shipping and supply. Certain sources were open to the Union via their connections to

⁹⁷ SANDF, UWH, Civil Section, Box 14, A.P van der Post: Foodstuffs in Short Supply, 1951, pp.61-64

⁹⁸ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.67.

⁹⁹ Advertisement, *Femina (previously Women's Domain)*, July 1944.

the Combined Food Board and in the London Food Council joint planning, but it was not until June 1944 that adequate freight transportation became available. Before 1943, when co-ordinated rice purchases were implemented, rice had been bought by private importers against government import permits. Not produced in the country, the Union had been importing up to 78 000 tons annually by 1939. Then, with Far East Japanese occupation, South Africa found itself cut off from almost half of its requirements. Together with declining exports from India and elsewhere, it left the Union confronting a serious problem of supply.¹⁰⁰

When war struck, rice was a grain consumed in fair quantities by the white population and was, of course, a fundamental staple in the diet of Hindu and Muslim communities. Initially, imports of the commodity held up well, but fell to a meagre 20,700 tons annually after 1942 as shipping space also became very limited. In May 1942, Britain's Food Ministry again tried to deal with the coordination of rice purchases. In view of the seriousness of the supply situation, governments were urged to restrict consumption in their countries as much as possible. The Union was granted India as a supply area. This was accepted by the Smuts administration on the basis that South Africa be supplied with a minimum of 31,250 tons, which would amount to half the level of previous rice imports. The Union stressed that stringent rationing had already been implemented. For the Ministry of Food, this was, "a great contribution to an endeavour to solve the extremely difficult problem with which we are faced."¹⁰¹ Problems, however, arose, as the Indian government proved unable to supply South Africa's rice needs. This obliged the Union to look to other sources, such as Brazil. By 1943, rice imports had dropped to 14% of pre-war imports. Two years later, the country managed to creep back up to 24,821 tons, still 5000 tons short of what it considered to be the minimum requirement in war conditions. Again, there was a search for alternatives. The outcome was the introduction of a substitute for rice, known as maize rice, which filled some consumer need.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ SANDF, UWH, Civil Section, Box 14, A.P van der Post: Foodstuffs in Short Supply, 1951, pp.74-75.

¹⁰¹ SANDF, UWH, Civil Section, Box 14, A.P van der Post: Foodstuffs in Short Supply, 1951, pp.77-78.

¹⁰² J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.67.

In the years, 1930-1939, the national surplus of sugar had reached 200,000 tons, most of which was exported to Britain. Production had soared especially between 1935 and 1939, creating large surpluses for export abroad.¹⁰³

Table 3.7: Production and sales of sugar in tonnage of 2000 pounds during the war years.¹⁰⁴

		Sugar Production and Sales		
Year	Production	Domestic Sales	Export	Import
1939-1940	595,556	290,919	308,827	1,114
1940-1941	572,580	328,835	234,025	1,295
1941-1942	452,119	378,547	59,336	2,013
1942-1943	524,975	455,696	60,826	1,062
1943-1944	585,392	440,999	154,408	1,036
1944-1945	614,158	483,767	111,990	1,360

To the dismay of the British Ministry of Food, however, when war arrived the Union could not keep up its sugar exports at the healthy level of pre-war quantities. From 1942, Britain acquired its routine sugar supplies from the West Indies, whilst South Africa was left to supply African regions and the Middle East.¹⁰⁵ The most notable reason for the decrease in exports was the country's increased domestic consumption. Here, the increased processing of fruit and the making of jams played a major role in the enhanced use of sugar domestically. Indeed, between 1939 and 1945, the use of white sugar by factories increased by a massive 129%.

¹⁰³ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.119.

¹⁰⁴ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.119.

¹⁰⁵ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.119.

In the same period, the household consumption of white sugar increased by 36% and that of brown sugar by an extraordinary 98%. Given these pressures, in 1944 consumers experienced a sugar shortage as the authorities were reluctant to limit the sugar supply to fruit processing factories to avoid fruit supplies being wasted.¹⁰⁶ In December 1944, a sugar distribution scheme was eventually put in place, whereby retailers would only receive restricted supplies of white sugar.¹⁰⁷ Rural localities seemed to suffer most from the sugar shortage, and a familiar food picture emerged. According to one Paarl shopkeeper, “the moment people hear of a probable shortage, there is an all-out rush to buy as much of the existing stocks as possible. We supply customers with a certain quota but there is nothing to stop them from going to another shop and buying more there.”¹⁰⁸

Driving Home the Policy: Food Trucks and Depots

When it became apparent that the food situation would remain abnormal for some time to come, a scheme was established to make foodstuffs available at reasonable prices and to try to improve the distribution of fruit and vegetables. Under this distribution scheme, in December 1944 a central supply store was established in Pretoria from where trucks delivered foodstuffs to 19 fixed selling points in the city. There, these would have weekly hours as regular selling sessions. Fresh fruit, vegetables, dried peas, beans and certain canned foods which came from the Department of Defence were lodged at these official depots.

Scarce and more prized products such as tea, condensed milk and maize products were also sold at depots but only in more impoverished localities where inhabitants would not otherwise have had access to such items. These depots were not intended to make a profit but merely to cover their operating costs. The scheme therefore did something to make some foodstuffs in short supply available to many urban consumers and it had a stabilizing effect on prices.¹⁰⁹ Later, similar depots were opened in Cape Town and East London, working on

¹⁰⁶ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-195, p.120.

¹⁰⁷ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 14, A.P van der Post: Foodstuffs in Short Supply, 1951, p.218.

¹⁰⁸ Sugar shortage severe? *The Guardian*, 28 June 1945.

¹⁰⁹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. pp.9-10.

roughly similar guidelines.¹¹⁰ Still, rosy accounts of the scheme's effectiveness in catering to all inhabitants, based on an optimistic departmental narrative, contrasted with more mixed consumer experiences of the depot scheme. It left a picture which did not always add up. One cause of dissatisfaction was racial discrimination in food queues at depots. Accounts emerged of instances where those in food queues designated for 'non-Europeans' were ignored and those in white queues were served first. Africans in queues frequently found that when their turn came to be served, little to no food was left. There were also reports of disgruntled shopkeepers vandalising or sabotaging the food depots which they believed to be stealing away their business.¹¹¹

There was even the danger of rioting by angry crowds. One such instance was the Booth Road riot in Durban on 26 December 1945, where five depot officers narrowly escaped an infuriated crowd which seized the depot and its foodstuffs following growing anger about incidents of racial discrimination. Here, it was an allegation of racial preference or favouritism. The story was that ten Indians were served for every two Africans. After standing in the food queue for two hours in blistering heat, an angry African woman was said to have demanded to be served. In reaction, she was allegedly hit on the head by an official. An angry crowd gathered and reportedly went to her assistance. What followed was the wholesale commandeering of the depot.¹¹² Opposition of another kind to the food depots came from established business interests which felt threatened by state intervention in the market. Thus, for the slogan-carrying Chamber of Commerce, it heralded, "Democracy is in danger- private enterprise is being destroyed." Still, whatever the basis of these and other attacks and criticisms, the food depots appear to have been viable and largely effective, enabling many who had been deprived of essential foodstuffs for months to obtain supplies. This was recognised even by *The Guardian*, an instinctive press supporter of state provision over commercial capitalism.¹¹³

In a 1943 address by Dr. H.J van der Bijl, Director General of Supplies, to the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Civilian Supplies Conference, he emphasised that the

¹¹⁰ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. p.10.

¹¹¹ Discrimination in food queues, *The Guardian*, 29 November 1945.

¹¹² Durban fears food riots, *The Guardian*, 27 December 1945.

¹¹³ Commerce fights food depots, *The Guardian*, 6 December 1945.

approach to provisioning would have to be that of trial and error, hit or miss, a tricky environment governed by improvisation:

*"The first thing that we must all realize and face is that it just is not possible for us to have all we want because the shipping is not available. We are therefore, compelled to cut our coat according to our cloth. It is General Smuts' desire that the restricted supply be carried out in such a manner as to cause the least amount of economic dislocation possible under the circumstances and that where hardships must perforce be suffered, such suffering shall be equitable. We admit that in the past there has been a considerable amount of complaint and criticism-some of which was justified...No doubt some complaints and criticism were due to a lack of appreciation of the seriousness of our civilian supplies position...Here let me say that the path of our controllers has certainly not been a bed of roses. I believed they have accomplished a great deal and have rendered the Government and the Country signal services under what must be extremely trying."*¹¹⁴

Figure 1: A comic which appeared in Die Burger which depicts the public discontent with the current food situation and the Prime Minister is shown to be a scared mouse hiding from the wrath of the public. The comic's translated title is "Scared Jan (Smuts) tries to hide." The Caption is an extract from a speech made by C. R Swart in parliament. It translates to: "*The food situation has become so dire that the Government had to place constables at the gates this afternoon to keep the public out. The Government is scared of the people.*"¹¹⁵



Conclusion

The government's agricultural policy continued to be producer-minded in approach, with the needs of the consumer playing second fiddle once again in the case of any surpluses. The emergence of shortages of maize and wheat pressed particularly hard, causing a real wartime

¹¹⁴ SANDFA, UWH,Civil Section, Box 52, Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce and Industries: Rationing General 1. Civilian Supplies Conference, 11-12 January 1943. Addressed by Dr. H.J van der Bijl, Director General of Supplies. pp.1-2.

¹¹⁵ *Die Burger*, 31 January 1945.

food crisis. Unlike the relative luxury of fruit, these were essential foodstuffs in the diet of the majority, and adequate controls represented a major challenge for the Smuts administration.

Measures were taken to ease the effects of shortages, such as the search for import supplies from other countries and the introduction of preservation contingencies, such as sifting regulations and flour modification with the creation of standard flour and the national loaf. Imaginatively, producers were encouraged to try winter grains to supplement low supplies of more popular grains, but it was a risky innovation as it carried the effect of one harvest being promoted at the expense of another. Whatever the difficulties which emerged, though, the Wheat Board and the Maize Board clearly mitigated some of the damage brought by severe shortages. Unlike in the case of the Deciduous Fruit Board, government assistance was given to increase wheat production in order to limit price increases to the public.

On the other hand, measures taken by the Dairy Industry Control Board regarding the compulsory export provisions on butter further angered an already perturbed and dissatisfied public, feeding a growing general mistrust of control boards as a whole. Attempts were made to counteract criticism by implementing relief schemes, but this proved to be of little help in subduing negative publicity. Government ineptitude in getting margarine availability underway increased the public uproar, making the control board even more controversial and unpopular. Once again, business interests had been placed before those of a consuming public.

Elsewhere, mismanagement of meat supplies and the implementation of the meat scheme to counteract rising prices and poor supply created popular resentment over unequal distribution, issues of fairness, and black market dealing outside of controlled areas. Public demand on the meat scheme was for stricter controls to ensure more fair and more equal distribution in support of common need. Instead, relaxed controls and a lack of legal repercussions for transgressions was the position of a government concerned with keeping up producer prices to steady pastoral agriculture. Equally, there was also a more collective, common welfare kind of social initiative. A scheme of food depots and food trucks represented a measure to try to soften the effects of shortages on sections of the urban poor which had been most affected by other ineffectual measures and a deteriorating food situation. Through all of this, inhabitants and a supporting press urged for a proper system of rationing to ensure the effective distribution which was required. It was at no stage imposed,

not even, as the following chapter explores, when South Africa's food dilemmas continued into the post-war context.

Chapter 4:

Walking on Eggshells- Post-War Food Problems and Consumer Rationing

Contrary to what might have been expected, the food position in South Africa did not improve after the cessation of hostilities. Rather, as if it had been a war-torn country, like Britain or France, it worsened in the first few years following 1945. The problems which came about in the post-war period can, however, not be blamed on the war, although the shortage of fertilizer played a role in the shortage of some crop production. The main agricultural factor was bad weather conditions, a cycle which had been plaguing the Union since 1942, as already noted earlier in this dissertation. In wartime, a specific commodity would have been in short supply periodically, and the shortage could be eased by an improved crop in the following year. In the post-war era, the problem was exacerbated because numerous shortages emerged simultaneously. Nonetheless, the fear of extended food deficits began to abate by 1947 when yields improved for all important food items, and the wartime food crisis was over by 1948. Still, due to the deteriorating food situation in 1945-1948, food controls were continued after 1945, applying to production, distribution and prices. Furthermore, overseas grain imports were pursued, while domestic prices continued to rise.¹

Crumb Crisis: Maize and Wheat in a Post-war Period

Maize and wheat experienced most difficulty due to shortages in the post-war era. A shortage of white maize prompted the proportion of yellow maize in maize meal to be increased to 60%, and the Smuts administration agreed to a blanket maize subsidy on all maize entering trade channels. A clear concern was African nutrition. Local committees were set up in African locations and other living areas to regulate distribution and sales among dealers. At the same time, the unauthorised manufacture of maize meal and maize rice was prohibited.²

Severe drought in the years 1943 - 1946 made substantial imports essential, especially as the 1945 harvest was the second successive short maize crop, leaving barely any surplus margin.³

¹ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, pp.103-105.

² J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.106.

³ SANDF, UWH, Civil Section, Box 14, A.P van der Post: Foodstuffs in Short Supply, 1951, p.119.

Confronting yet another small yield, the Maize Board fostered a maize scheme, dividing up the Union into two large regions in which to conduct distribution and trading. Here, too, a concern about Africans' food needs was evident. Thus, the Commissioner of Native Affairs proposed that a low yield should necessitate maize rationing, to ensure that there would be sufficient supplies for human consumption. Quantities available to traders would be monitored carefully, especially in rural 'native areas' where drought had left supplies nearly exhausted.⁴ Further board circulars also backed flexibility in maize supply allocation in areas of most acute need. Thus, in individual cases, "although all traders were placed on quotas as far as sales in permit free quantities are concerned, my board is still prepared to consider increases in such quotas as recommended by Native Commissioners."⁵

With the small yield in 1945-1946, the London Food Council requested an allotment to the Union of 2 million bags. As shortages were being felt in other countries as well, South Africa could only obtain 0.4 million bags from Angola and Kenya and 0.3 million bags from Argentina. Helped by strict rationing, these supplies nonetheless managed to hold the Union over for the year. The further difficult 1946-1947 year saw the import of 4.5 million bags of maize from Argentina by means of a maize for coal barter, although this amounted to a very high cost.⁶ Thereafter, the harvest of 1947 was sufficient to satisfy the needs of the domestic population and even for an export of a surplus to Southern Rhodesia. The start of 1948 experienced a record harvest of 32.1 million bags, which both ended the wartime shortage problems as well as boosting a corn for maize trade with the United States.⁷

The wheat situation was even more complex. Although considerable overseas supplies were ordered from the Antipodes, shipment was severely delayed as Australia's own poor yield coincided with South Africa's low crops. Meanwhile, the consumption of bread had been increasing considerably because of low supplies of rice, with poor maize provision adding to the problem.⁸ Bread consumption had increased by 40% in the year following the end of the

⁴ NAB, 1/HMK, 3/1/3/1/5-6, *CNC circular No.9/1945 to All Native Commissioners RE Maize*.

⁵ NAB, 1/HMK, 3/1/3/1/5-6, *Official circular from Secretary of Native Affairs to all Native Commissioners RE supply of mealies and mealie products for human consumption in native areas, 19 April 1945*.

⁶ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 14, A.P van der Post: Foodstuffs in Short Supply, 1951, p.120.

⁷ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-195 p.51.

⁸ SANDF, UWH, Civil Section, Box 14, A.P van der Post: Foodstuffs in Short Supply, 1951, p.100.

war, attributable mainly to accelerated African urbanisation and to the increased purchasing capacity of black populations in areas such as the Witwatersrand.

Restrictions were soon in force and in December 1945, the use of No.1 un-sifted wheaten flour and rye flour for confection, biscuits and cakes was prohibited. By April 1946, milling quotas were reduced by 25% and by the start of May stiff measures were implemented to limit consumption and wastage of wheaten products. These measures were not short of creativity or oddness, including the prohibiting of the use of bread between 3-4pm, and on the making of toast. It was also prohibited to use bread for any function other than human consumption. The quota of flour and sifted meal to confectioners was reduced by 50%, and by over 60% to macaroni factories. Lastly, the weight of the standard loaf was reduced from 32 to 29 ounces. The press, radio and cinema were employed to encourage reduced consumption and the cutting of the wastage of bread and wheaten products.⁹ In due course, these restrictions were eased somewhat with increased wheat supply.¹⁰

Pretoria's appeals to the London Food Council and to the Combined Food Board for increased grain allocations had, naturally, to be weighed against requests from other countries which were in many cases worse off in a situation of world supply shortages. South Africa's position was made marginal because it had no system of consumer rationing and was in acute need of only one commodity – maize. Its barter agreement with Argentina in 1946 and 1947 brought in supplies, but this proved to be a very mixed bag. Much of the grain landed was of such bad quality that it had to be diverted to animal feed, while usable supplies only arrived very late into the post-war period.¹¹ With maize supplies were running critically low, it was African communities once again which were most affected. One such instance could be seen in an exchange between the Town Clerk of Graaff Reinet and the Secretary of the Maize Industry Control Board. The Town Clerk requested a larger allowance of maize for the town. He pointed out that its impoverished African population was suffering most. Not only was it too poor to buy maize. The town's white consumers were being served almost all the flour available. The board's view was critical. Its secretary criticised the favouring of the lesser

⁹ M. Higham & R.A Davis: *A plea for a war time economy*, Pamphlet U.S Afrikaana.

¹⁰J. M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.106.

¹¹ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, pp.107-108.

needs of white citizens over the greater needs of the African poor, and instructed the Town Clerk to divide the limited available supplies.¹²

Meanwhile, other short measures took effect, aimed at ensuring the largest possible bread availability to supply low income households groups and at cutting wastage. These were backed by a prominent radio broadcast campaign on bread frugality, featuring the personal voice of Jan Smuts himself. This was estimated to have had positive effects. At the same time, actual bread demand showed no sign of easing, with increased need from Africans in urban areas creating a shift towards wheat bread. Bread use in the first 3 months of 1946 in the Witwatersrand was 40% higher than in the corresponding months of the previous year.¹³

Other general food dilemmas continued. While the improved harvest of 1946-1947 enabled more strict controls to ease, post-war consumption was continuing to rise. The return of large numbers of discharged troops also added to pressure on domestic supplies. There can be little doubt that large sections of the Union's population, especially labouring Africans, struggled to meet their family needs.¹⁴

Outside South Africa's borders, the overall world food position was still poor as grain shortages squeezed world markets but there was some local relief. From July 1948, a quota of un-sifted flour was distributed to the public through an exchange of corn for maize with the United States. Furthermore, the sale of higher weight white bread made from 80% extracted flour was re-established by 1948-1949.¹⁵

Consumer Rationing

No formal system of wartime food rationing had been implemented in South Africa in the form of individual or family ration books, or through the registration of consumers at food stores. The closest it came to actual rationing were the methods developed by the various

¹² KAB, 3/GR, 4/1/1/33, Letter from Town Clerk Graaff Reinet to Secretary of the Wheat Industry Control Board, 17/06/1946 and Reply from Secretary of Wheat Industry Control Board to Town Clerk Graaff Reinett, RE Provision of unsifted Flour. 25/06/1946.

¹³, SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-195, p.60.

¹⁴ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.109.

¹⁵ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-195, p.61.

marketing boards, whereby consumption of commodities in short supply were controlled via permits and a system of retail rationing by retailers. It was effective in controlling and restricting consumption to some degree, but it was demonstrably flawed.

The government had considered implementing a rationing system at various stages of the war, but its political and practical problems were considered too daunting.¹⁶ One of the obvious arguments in favour was that it might have cut food queues and reduced the extent of unequal distribution. However, unless rationed amounts fell within the purchasing power of every family, rationing would not achieve equal distribution.¹⁷ In the South African context, though, rationing might actually have intensified food distribution inequality. Even taking into account mining and manufacturing wage increases to white and black workers in the 1939-1944 period, and increases in minimum black wages, white earnings remained substantially higher than those of blacks.¹⁸

Racial disparities in earnings were eased slightly during the war, as Wage Bargaining Councils sought to maintain labour peace and productivity by lifting African workers' wages specifically, and more so than those of white workers. But food purchasing capacities were far from becoming more equal. Political restrictions on the bargaining power of black workers and the huge reserve of available black workers also kept down unskilled wages. At the same time, the war had also increased the cost of living, which had placed strain on black workers financially.¹⁹

Given that background, it is poignant to note one African woman's response when asked about the supply of food and her opinion of food rationing. For her, "It doesn't matter to me. We eat mostly mielie meal...we can't afford other food"²⁰ That view was underlined by G.K. Hemming, Native Representative of the Transkei, who questioned the perception that protective foods were available in African reserves. "The food is not there- and if it was they

¹⁶ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, pp.30-31.

¹⁷ Sir John Orr & David Lubbock: *Feeding the people in war-time*, (London: Macmillan and co, 1940), p.2.

¹⁸ Whites had received £21, 100, 00 in wages in 1939 in comparison to £24,800,000 in 1944. Black wages increased from £14,100,000 in 1939 to £16,800,000 in 1944.

¹⁹ C. Walker: *Women and resistance in South Africa*, pp.69-70.

²⁰ Rationing welcomed. Rand views. *The Guardian*, 15 February, 1945.

couldn't afford to buy it.”²¹ For rationing to have been successful, according to the author, R. J Hammond, the following had to be in place:

“Rationing was not a mere restriction, nor the coupon a form of currency that of itself might act as a magnet to draw supplies where they were needed. On the contrary; rationing presupposed a complete mechanism which should put each consumer's supplies in a particular shop, where he might be certain, and where he alone was entitled, to obtain it. The tie of consumer to retailer, and its implications at earlier stages in the distributive chain, presupposed not only a control organisation for distributing each rationed food, but a series of local food offices that alone could maintain an up-to-date register of consumers.”²²

The Union would have had its work cut out if it had wanted an effective system of rationing. Complete and accurate population data was a problem as the last complete census had been conducted in 1936. There had been a census in 1941, but it had included only the white population. The first post-war census was taken in 1946. The lack of a reliable census of African households was an insurmountable obstacle to any formal system of rationing, to which could have been added other problems, such as illiteracy, regular migratory labour movements, and major urban and rural differences in food consumption. Had a complete census been undertaken, the results would only have been available at the end of 1946. It was thus decided in the early months of 1945 that at best some informal counting could be carried out with the assistance of District Food Committees.²³

This did not mean that there were no continuing calls for a system of rationing on the grounds of equality and social fairness. As *The Guardian*, again, declared in April 1945, “at present (South Africa) has all the evils of a black market, and none of the benefits of rationing. The rich are able to get all they want, as they do on black markets, while the working people are denied the claim to an equal share which they would get if goods were rationed.”²⁴

Aside from the issue of rationing, the Union had made few preparations for its food situation with regard to policy making or organisational planning to engage with wider Commonwealth Food Planning. Furthermore, resistance within the Department of

²¹ Mealie Shortage, *The Guardian*, 1 March 1945.

²² R.J Hammond: *Food. Vol. I The Growth of Policy*, (London: Longmans, Green and co.), 1951, p.6

²³ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: *Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied*, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1955p.38.

²⁴ Guardian comment: Ration now, *The Guardian*, 19 April 1945.

Agriculture also held back progress in food control policies.²⁵ Meanwhile, though, sentiment in favour of a rationing system had been quite widespread. Durban had even gone as far as to register its own consumers, and to formulate its own system of rationing which its Council planned to implement should increasingly difficult times have come about in the city.²⁶

At the end of the war, numerous bodies existed which dealt with the production, distribution and prices of food products, including a Controller of Fertilizer, a Controller of Agricultural Implements, Machinery and Requisites, and a Price Controller. All of these agencies and the various marketing boards continued to operate, although the Food Control Organisation was drastically reorganised. It had been separated from the Department of Agriculture in 1944, following public criticism of the close association between the two bodies, and the propensity for the favouring of producer interests. Still, after the separation, the Food Control Organisation was still under the personal supervision of the Minister of Agriculture, and after 1945 discontent intensified.²⁷

In response to a South African request for food organisational advice, the British Ministry of Food appointed two officials to evaluate the Union's situation. Included in their report were recommendations that the Food Controller be replaced by a Director General of Food Supplies and Distribution, who should have no compromising interests in agriculture or trade. The Director ought not to be under the control of other departments who could influence decisions, and should report directly to a cabinet minister other than the Minister of Agriculture.²⁸ The British report also advised that bread, wheat meal and maize products be rationed by coupon in urban areas.²⁹ It was recommended that urban consumers should register for products in short supply, such as bacon, tea, coffee and sugar.³⁰ This would be restricted to the Union's nine main urban areas for easy administration, and because the

²⁵ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 13, SA War Economy 1939-1945, Food Policy and Import Problems: Maize and Wheat, p.9.

²⁶ Durban plans rationing, *The Guardian*, 11 January 1945.

²⁷ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.103.

²⁸ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-195 p.37.

²⁹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Memorandum on rationing scheme p.1.

³⁰ J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.104.

greatest shortages were being experienced in these localities.³¹ The plea was made that the public relations service for food control be greatly strengthened to secure public confidence and co-operation, especially on the part of women and food traders. Lastly, the Ministry of Food officials urged that the Department of Agriculture and the Native Affairs Department redouble efforts to increase the production of maize and wheat. The report was accepted by the Smuts administration, and steps were taken for the implementation of many of its directives.³²

The government position was that the consumption of the wealthy could thereby be curbed, thus reducing wastage. With regard to wheat and maize, stricter control would have to be implemented throughout the country.³³ In May 1946, Dr H.J van Eck was appointed in the role of Director General of Food Supplies and Distribution. The Food Control Organisation was placed under the control of the Minister of Finance, excluding the meat scheme which was placed separately under the Minister of Agriculture.³⁴ Another important change was the establishment of a Director of Meat Supplies under the Minister of Agriculture, in the light of continuing post-war shortages.³⁵

One of the first tasks of the Director of Food Supplies and Distribution was the preparation of an organisation to deal with customer registration and rationing for designated urban areas. During the period from May 1946 to March 1947, the Directorate applied itself energetically. Food Committees were brought into the formation of a rationing scheme at a conference held in June 1946, which was attended by officials in charge of various divisions of economics and markets, representatives of the Wheat and Maize Industry Control Boards, and by staff from the Food Control Organisation.³⁶

³¹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Memorandum on rationing scheme p.18.

³² SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 59, Rationing, pp.1-2.

³³ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.36.

³⁴ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 59, Rationing, p.3.

³⁵ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Memorandum on rationing scheme p.1.

³⁶ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 59, Rationing, p.4

Irrational Expectations: Problems with the Implementation of a Rationing System

The idea of a rationing system made clear the peculiar difficulties of the South African situation, and underlined the predicament of the Union government. A national rationing scheme would have necessitated the printing of many thousands of coupon ration books and registration forms, together with the establishment of food offices in main consumer centres, wards in suburbs, and in official African Locations. It was decided that instead of a rationing card, consumers would be given a rationing book containing coupons for 3 months, with a second issue making provision for 6 months. All dealers in foodstuffs were required to be registered with the Food Control Organisation.³⁷ Each District Food Committee would be responsible for local rationing. A first obvious obstacle was the management of millions of coupons, requiring an enormous labour force, on top of which was the fact that a large proportion of consumers as well as traders were either semi-literate or illiterate.³⁸

Still, a survey of coupon book areas was undertaken in December 1946. Each family was requested to fill in a form stating every family member's personal details, including name, age, familial relation to the main member of the family, race, sex and occupation. This '*Residential Registration and Identification Form for Food Rationing*' was designed to serve as a complete inventory of households, including domestic employees. The identical form was to be used for all inhabitants, irrespective of their race. The implementation of food rationing in a segregationist system in wartime would have been a complex issue for the government. Just how complex could be seen from a Departmental memorandum which stated that simple discrimination between races would have created unnecessary confusion and resentments. As the authorities observed, "Some Natives and other Non-Europeans were living according to European standards, whereas many Europeans of the poorer classes again were through economic circumstances forced to adopt a standard more comparable with that

³⁷ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Memorandum on rationing scheme p.3.

³⁸ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953 p.39.

of the bulk of the Non-Europeans.³⁹ After the registration process was complete, each household member received a coupon booklet for transactions with suppliers.⁴⁰

A retailer's quota would have been determined according to the number of coupons deposited with the Food Control Organisation in the previous month. The retailer would have been prohibited from selling specifically designated commodities to unregistered customers. The retailer would also be prohibited from selling more than a specific quantity of a foodstuff to any one customer during an allotted time. The retailer would receive his allotted supplies according to the number of registered customers.⁴¹

A revised form of the coupon booklet was then designed as it was realised that nothing stopped customers from registering at various traders. For the issue of a booklet, a customer had first to register with a single trader. In this way, the consumer would have been unable to purchase a rationed commodity without his coupon booklet being marked off by the specific trader with which he had registered. The trader, in turn, would then have to cancel the number of commodities issued to the customer.⁴²

The initial plan was to issue coupon booklets via traders, but the main centres were densely populated, and there were worries over duplicate issues.⁴³ It was subsequently decided that a house-to-house distribution of the ration books would be preferable to other means such as the postal service, or for consumers to collect their books at Food Offices. Meanwhile, other arrangements had also to be made. Hotels, cafes and restaurants would have to provide monthly returns for meals and foodstuffs. At a subsequent conference, it was concluded that the handling of millions of coupons a month be likely to overwhelm the Food Control Organisation and in trading establishments. Moreover, they would have to contend with very large numbers of illiterate consumers. For the system to work, the consumer and retailer would have to have a general understanding of rationing principles. Lastly, account would

³⁹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Memorandum on rationing scheme p.3.

⁴⁰ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.40.

⁴¹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Memorandum on rationing scheme p.2.

⁴² SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Memorandum on rationing scheme p.16.

⁴³ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Memorandum on rationing scheme p.1.

have to be taken of the widely varying consumption preferences and purchasing trends of differing groups and areas. For example, a fixed national bread ration or wheat ration would be of little relevance to a part of the population that only used maize meal.

Equally, providing a choice between wheat, bread and maize meal might lead to a switch in consumption to more plentiful maize rations. Higher demand could then have led to other problems, such as the overconsumption, necessitating a reduction in maize meal rationing. Whichever route the Food Control Organisation decided to take would inevitably have an influence on the consumption habits of a large proportion of the population who were regarded as ignorant of why the government was interfering with their diets. Either way, the shortage of grains would have forced consumers to supplement with other foodstuffs which, in turn, threatened to create subsequent shortages. Taking all of these problems into account, it can be understood why the Food Control Organisation struggled with the implementation of a food rationing system for individuals.⁴⁴

It soon became evident that confining rationing to the nine primary centres would have exposed the scheme to abuse. Thus, provision was made for a coupon system in the designated nine centres, but that inhabitants in the rest of the country would have to register themselves with traders in their areas.⁴⁵ The problem in this regard would be there was no way to ensure that customers would not register with multiple traders. Numerous other potential problems also presented themselves, including massive printing costs. To these could be added the difficulty of ration books for casual household employees who were paid partly with food. Furthermore, what of those individuals who might be deserving of a larger ration? Those included heavy workers and pregnant women.⁴⁶ Despite everything, with the household family survey completed, by January 1947 the paper rationing system was ready.⁴⁷

At the same time, rationing for rural Africans remained a headache. Although it was envisaged that coupon booklets would be distributed to all areas, officials of the Native

⁴⁴ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Memorandum on rationing scheme p.4.

⁴⁵ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Memorandum on rationing scheme p.5.

⁴⁶ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Memorandum on rationing scheme p.12.

⁴⁷ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953 p.40.

Affairs Department cautioned that this would be neither effective nor appropriate in the “native areas” under their administration. Taking a predictably paternalistic view of Africans’ capability and vulnerability, one opinion emphasised that “the low standard of intelligence of the inhabitants would have made it difficult for them to understand the requirements of the regulations, and consequently they would not have been able to prevent abuse or irregularities by unscrupulous persons taking advantage of their ignorance.”⁴⁸ The Native Affairs Department also stressed that cultural custom and food rituals might undermine the objectives of rationing. Thus, in one gloomy calculation, it was suggested that the production of sorghum beer, the ceremonial slaughter of livestock and other traditional food uses by chiefs and headmen would use up all ration supplies and bring on possible starvation.⁴⁹

Food Committees, however, urged the Food Control Organisation to exercise discretion as many locations were situated close to the main centres where many of their inhabitants were employed. The real worry was that of employees being able to obtain double rations, through their urban booklets and at general traders within reserves, to the disadvantage of fixed reserve inhabitants. The rationing of mobile migrant workers was yet another potentially troublesome matter.⁵⁰

Such concerns never materialised, and can only be the subject of speculative interest. For the Union never implemented a rationing system. They do, nonetheless, help to explain some of the huge logistical problems perceived by the government in early planning, and the slow pace of development.

Ultimately, though, once the maize crop showed signs of improvement, the Smuts administration was given breathing space. For that enabled the Director General of Supplies and the Food Control Organisation to hold off on implementing the coupon rationing scheme. While in November 1946 the crop yield estimate had caused alarm, the 1947 crop was estimated at 25 million bags, easing the strain. Indeed, the maize yield was sufficient to see the Union through, and with that the decision was taken to free maize from permit controls.

⁴⁸ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Memorandum on rationing scheme p.18.

⁴⁹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 1, J.W Moll: Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Wêreld Oorlog op Landbou Gebied, Department of Agriculture, 1952-1953, p.41-42.

⁵⁰ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Memorandum on rationing scheme p.19.

This, to all intents and purposes, cancelled any implementation of the rationing scheme.⁵¹ The Union had also gained access to maize from Argentina which further helped to make good its shortages

In all likelihood, anxiety over creating further consumer dissatisfaction after 1945 and its political implications for electoral support would have played some role in the holding back of the programme. The earlier lack of popular support for the war from a large section of the population would also have weighed on the mind of the government.

The South African authorities had in any event been ill-equipped to deal with a consolidated rationing system at the actual time of war. Before the daunting implementation of a scheme after 1945, the food situation had thankfully improved sufficiently for consumer rationing provision to be abandoned. According to Tinley, a rationing system could have been highly effective had it been implemented earlier. In the event, the abortive rationing venture still cost hundreds of thousands of pounds. It remained as a kind of insurance policy, and might well have been implemented in some form had the food situation not improved by 1948.⁵²

As mentioned earlier the government propensity for dragging its heels on rationing, was probably not just because of administrative demands but also for political reasons. South Africa remained a politically divided country when it came to participation in the war. A large section of the Afrikaner population was still gripped by anti-British imperialist feelings following the 1938 *Voortrekker* centenary celebrations which had brought back many of the resentments over the South African War. A war on the side of the British did not go down well with many white voters, whose vocal factions declared repeatedly that the war had been forced upon them.⁵³ Radical nationalist bodies such as the *Ossewabrandwag* had grown in membership with collective opposition to the pro-British war effort. Black opinion ranged from outright opposition to mostly lukewarm support. Arguably, only English-speaking whites and loyalist Anglo-Afrikaners generally supported the war. They were a white minority of a white minority. For Smuts, it was always a balancing act of keeping the war

⁵¹ SANDFA, UWH, Civil Section, Box 21, Departmental Narratives: Department of Agriculture. Food Control. Including Rationing. Annexure F, Food Supplies and Distribution: The Rationing Scheme, p.2.

⁵² J.M Tinley: *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II*, p.105.

⁵³ Marx, C: The Ossewabrandwag as a Mass Movement, 1939-1941. *Journal of Southern African studies*, (20), (2), June 1994, p.195.

effort going and of not antagonizing the anti-war factions on the home front so as to try to avoid serious trouble.⁵⁴

In effect, the government was waging a war on two fronts- one in North Africa and Europe and another on the home front against subversive elements.⁵⁵ With Smuts having to juggle domestic opinion, pushing ahead with a radical rationing system might have further annoyed an already increasingly restive voting public. Many Afrikaners had come to feel victimized by the way in which the government had chosen to enforce war controls, regardless of their opinion of the war.⁵⁶ A vivid example of how sour war sentiment was reflected in opinions of food control can be seen in *Die Burger* in February 1945. A piece which condemned the food situation in the Union observed that this was the first time since the Anglo Boer War that women were being forced to queue for food. The subtle implication was evident: Britain was the cause of the problem, and if its war continued to be supported, the consequence would be further food problems.⁵⁷ When Durban had made provision for rationing, the Food Controller had expressed fears that anti-war factions would undermine any plan.⁵⁸

Conclusion

One cannot know to what hypothetical extent rationing would have influenced public opinion of the war and its immediate aftermath. It is clear that its implementation would have been rife with major logistical difficulties and considerable political dilemmas. Smuts was faced with a double-edged sword when it came to handling the food supply situation and implementing relevant controls. Government steps needed to be taken with regard to food in the Union. Achieving a balance between various group interests and deciding on what the extent of food controls would be, was a difficult undertaking.

The imposition of further increased food control might have upset the delicate balance amongst the home front populace. Faced with this, the government tried to tread water for as long as was possible. The hope was that the agricultural position of essential foodstuffs

⁵⁴ N. Roos: The Second World War, The Army Education System and the discipline of the poor white in South Africa, *Journal of the History of Education Society*, (32), (6), 2010, p.649.

⁵⁵ B. Moore: Unwanted Guests in Troubled Times: German Prisoners of War in the Union of South Africa, 1942-1943, *The Journal of Military History*, Vol.70, no.1, Jan 2006, p.69.

⁵⁶ H. Gilliomee : *The Afrikaners*, (London: C. Hurst and Co, 2003) p.443

⁵⁷ Oorsake van voedseltekort aangedui, *Die Burger*, 1 February 1945.

⁵⁸ Durban demands rationing, *The Guardian*, 13 July 1945.

would improve, and that the tight situation would remedy itself. Indeed, the extent of national food problems was largely kept out of public announcements. As Strauss, the Minister of Agriculture, insisted in April 1945, there had never been a shortage of food in the Union.⁵⁹

The preference for lukewarm controls should be seen in the light of the authorities' hope of keeping the political situation on a steady equilibrium. That notwithstanding, consumer dissatisfaction with the food position was not without a considerable social effect, as will be seen in the following chapter which deals with the social impact of food controls.

⁵⁹ South Africa sits back and imports food, *The Guardian*, 19 April 1945.

Chapter 5:

Fighting for Food in the Tavern of the Seas- The Social Impact of Food Controls

Buttering them up: Food as Support for the War

Food production and the expansion of industry it inspired were used to garner support for the war effort, as could be seen in government publications such as *South Africa on Service*, published in 1943 with a foreword by Jan Smuts and his Director General of Supplies, Dr H.J van der Bijl. The message of this pictorial booklet was that a key part of South Africa's part in the war effort was to help feed the Allied Nations and their fighting men. "From her orchards and her wheat lands, from her grassy plains and her coastal waters, comes a vast supply of food. The farmer and the fisherman alike are in the service of South Africa at war"¹, was the reassurance provided by *South Africa on Service*. Despite having to live with domestic food controls, the Union was not only managing its shortages but had the heroic capacity to supply foodstuffs to Allied convoys.

For *South Africa on Service*, the Union's war effort was production, not so much of armaments but of food, relaying the pressures placed on wheat production to supply the country's defence needs as 'agriculture's war effort'. South Africa was also portrayed in traditional seafaring imagery as the 'tavern to the seas', feeding the armies voyaging to war. A vastly increased output from canneries was a prominent point of pride, as was the technology being utilized, noted as being of a quality that rivalled that of British manufacturing counterparts. The Supplies propaganda booklet urged everyone to pull together to best help the war effort. Its patriotic message singled out every role in the production line, as machinists, foresters, metallurgists and farmers were urged to pull together to optimise production on every level. Overcoming shortages of tin and of packaging materials, it was everyone's duty to strive to serve the country's war effort through the production of foodstuffs.

The connection between food and the war was underlined by reference to South Africa's early history of European settlement. Grape production, the booklet declared, was associated

¹ Anon: *South Africa on Service: A pictorial record of the Union of South Africa's work on the Home Front, 1939-1943*, Pamphlet U.S Afrikana, Government Printer, Pretoria, 1943.

with the French *Huguenots* who had brought vines to the Cape in their search for freedom². In South Africa, they had found rich soil in which to cultivate for freedom. By invoking the past, the Second World War and its connection to freedom from the yoke of Nazi oppression provided local booklet readers with an imaginative link between food and freedom.

Food-Fight: Food Controls as a Catalyst for Resistance

In many ways, wartime created a national basis for being politically aware and for adopting a political stance on the issues which affected the home front of a country at war. Naturally, there were heightened levels of awareness around common material grievances that encompassed more than just food shortages. Even though expanded industrialisation had increased workers' wages the cost of living went up considerably in wartime, and the living standards and living conditions of many labouring sectors of society were worsened instead of being improved. Furthermore, mechanisation and more concentrated, semi-skilled industry cut prospects for many unskilled, casual workers, especially from the coastal Coloured population working in garment shops or in the fishing industry. The number of Ciskeian and Transkeian Africans who migrated to the Cape Peninsula in search of wartime work was so large that even a rapidly industrialising local processing economy was unable to absorb them. That added a further high percentage of unemployed workers to an already large poor population.³ Here and in many other areas, the war years put pressure on the living standards of the labouring black population, although as we have seen, large numbers of urban African workers not only maintained but increased consumption in the wartime economic boom.⁴

For the ordinary public, food shortages seemed to arise from sheer mismanagement for, despite the plethora of control boards, prices kept increasing and food regularly disappeared from shelves. At first, only imports were affected but, by 1942, the costs of local foods were increasing. By July 1943, a meat shortage had developed and 'meatless days' were introduced on Wednesdays.⁵ Some viewed the '*meatlessness*' as a measure of necessary

² Anon: *South Africa on Service: A pictorial record of the Union of South Africa's work on the Home Front, 1939-1943*, Pamphlet U.S Afrikana , Government Printer, Pretoria,1943.

³ V. Bickford-Smith; E. van Heyningen; N. Worden: *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century*. p.107.

⁴ S. Dubow and A. Jeeves: *South Africa's 1940s*, pp.26-32.

⁵ M. Bryant: *As we were: South Africa 1939-1941*, p.81.

patriotic sacrifice, whilst others saw it as a sign of failure on the part of the government.

Although the middle classes could cope with one meatless day a week, the meat deprivation of the poor population became another cause taken up by *The Guardian*.⁶ By 1944, meat was scarce, butter and cheese were hard to come by, and fish was also in poor supply.⁷

Predictably, the rising living costs and food shortages had a particularly burdening effect on women as they were primarily involved in the feeding of their families. Accordingly, women featured prominently in grassroots movements of the 1940s which took up the practicalities of domestic living issues.

Given the social, economic and gender limitations on female influence in the public sphere, women's political interventions were highly localised. Here, the domestic domain of food shortages resonated strongly, and had a significance which inspired action. As a critical issue, food had already been serving as an important mobilizing factor for black women in the pre-war years. Thus, in one impassioned declaration, "The people are starving. Nothing drives the mass to action sooner. The doctors are busy writing our death certificates-T.B, T.B and still T.B- all due to a shortage of food. The Government cannot deal with the food shortages, and that is why we must help."⁸ These were the words of a leading radical member of the Cape Town Women's Food Committee, Cissie Gool, setting the stage for resistance and protest. Rising food prices and discontent over profiteering had already originated as a problem in the mid-1930s, when dissident newspapers urged women to boycott firms engaged in questionable business practices. In 1939, again, the Consumer Vigilance Council had campaigned against rising prices and the indifference of the authorities to such cost burdens.⁹ The onset of war then aggravated matters. By August 1943, trade unions and women's organisations were calling more and more vociferously for better management of food supplies. Dissatisfaction with the rise in living costs and with food shortages inspired protest meetings, street marches and numerous deputations to the authorities. A common call was for rationing to ensure fair shares for the whole population.

⁶ People starving: Danger of position stressed at meeting, *The Guardian*, 5 October 1944.

⁷ V. Bickford-Smith; E. van Heyningen; N. Worden: *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century*, p. 106. See also Fish shortage, *The Guardian*, 1 February 1945.

⁸ People starving: Danger of position stressed at meeting, *The Guardian*, 5 October 1944

⁹ C. Walker: *Women and resistance in South Africa*, pp.75, 77.

In this unsettled atmosphere, a prominent consumer protection society which emerged was the People's Food Council (PFC), formed in Johannesburg in 1943. One of the Council's first actions was to call a public conference on the food situation. There, it condemned the chaotic food situation and profiteering by retailers. One of the council's main aims was to force the creation of a comprehensive Ministry of Food which, it asserted, should decide on the overall food requirements of the country in a comprehensive way. The needs of the civilian population and of the military should be based on advice from nutritionists, while measures should be put in place to protect the interests of consumers and producers equally. Most importantly, it was argued that conditions demanded the introduction of rationing.¹⁰ The Council also involved itself in the organisation of co-operative food clubs in working class districts and in black residential areas, which functioned to supply cheap vegetables. These clubs were not intended to be merely charitable, but rather also to instil collective action amongst the women of deprived households. By 1944, clubs were serving more than five hundred families.¹¹

Another notable left grouping was the Food Action Committee which described itself not as a political movement but as an organisation determined to see the government do its job in the vital matter of food. The FAC sent protests to the Department of Agriculture, deplored what it called a food muddle and demanding drastic immediate action which included fair and equal rationing of essential foods, and a more responsive organisation of supply, in which, "there may be a shortage of meat, but the fish in the sea haven't stopped breeding. If there is a shortage of one commodity it is up to the government to do what it can to substitute another."¹²

¹⁰ To solve food crisis. Why a Food Ministry is needed, *The Guardian*, 1 March 1945.

¹¹ C. Walker: *Women and resistance in South Africa*, pp.78-79.

¹² Rationing wanted, *The Guardian*, 1 February 1945.

Image 5.1: “Meat requested at Parliamentary Building.” A picture of the food protests held in Cape Town in 1945. The photograph was taken at the gates of the parliamentary building where women demanded to see the Minister of Agriculture regarding the meat shortages.¹³



By 1945, some had had enough and several hundred housewives in Cape Town decided to march on parliament to demand food rationing and the establishment of a Ministry of Food. The gates of the parliamentary building were barricaded against angry women, demanding to see Smut's most implicated cabinet minister, “We want to see Strauss, not the police!” and “Away with canned meat”. A similar noisy protest took place on the same day in nearby Salt River. It had an effect, for subsequently price controls were imposed and mobile markets were introduced in the poorer districts.¹⁴ Such protests against food shortages did not end with the end of the war. Standing in food queues for long hours had encouraged women to organise assertive campaigns of consumer protest, based on a shared sense of moral indignation over perceived injustice and unfairness, “standing in one of these queues it is possible to realise the angle from which the average woman views the shortage. Not one of these women would resent either the queuing or the shortage- providing it was actually necessary or the available supplies equally divided.”¹⁵

¹³ Vleis gevra by Parliaments gebou, *Die Burger*, 1 February 1945.

¹⁴ Vrouebetoging by parlementsgebou: Wil van die regering vleis hê, *Die Burger*, 1 February 1945.

¹⁵ Food Control Fantasies. *The Guardian*, 11 January 1945.

Image 5.2: Food Queues in Cape Town 1944.¹⁶

Assertiveness was born in queues. With organisation, each symbolic queue elected a queue committee to maintain order and fair dealings. A representative of the food queues was then elected to stand on the General Committee of the FAC. By the end of 1945, a Women's Queue Committee, later the Women's Food Committee (WFC), had been formed. The WFC played a significant role in mobilising Coloured women, as women of all races were urged to band together in a common demand for rationing. In that, the motto of the WFC echoed something of the sentiment of earlier suffragist movements, "today we fight for food, tomorrow for the vote and then for freedom for all."¹⁷

In March 1947, the WFC organised a conference at which various delegates who represented not only food queues but also trade unions gathered. There, delegates decided to organise a demonstration outside parliament on 1st Mayst. An immediate issue was the threat of the removal of food vans by the authorities, in response to which thousands of women gathered on the Grand Parade in front of the Cape Town city hall, carrying banners which proclaimed, "We fight for food". The Minister of Finance agreed to meet with the Food Committee, the Durban Housewives League, the Food and Canning Workers Union and the Sweet Workers Union, which all demanded that the food vans be retained until such time as rationing could

¹⁶ *The Guardian*, 5 October 1944.

¹⁷ C. Walker: *Women and resistance in South Africa*, pp.80-81.

be introduced. The government dismissed the call for rationing but agreed nonetheless to keeping the food vans.¹⁸

At the same time, the WFC organised food raids on profiteering merchants who were believed to be participating in black market dealings, including the hoarding of foodstuffs. Large numbers of Committee members would attempt to pressure identified merchants into unlocking their storerooms and selling accumulated stock. Thus, *The Guardian* reported a typical rice raid in May 1946. The food crisis of the 1940s arguably helped to raise the political awareness of black women who might otherwise have remained confined to the domestic sphere. The connections established during this time led to their becoming linked to influential political networks that would play a role among women in the emerging national liberation movement of the post-war decades. Significantly, for instance, the Food Committee resolved to create a Non-European Women's League to fight for the franchise. In its view, the food crisis and the franchise issue were inseparable, as 'whoever controlled the key to the food cupboard controlled the food'. The key lay in the right to vote.¹⁹

One commonplace radical opinion on the delay in introducing a rationing system came from *The Guardian*, which blamed the wealthy. Being able to afford all that they wanted, they did not want to see a rationing system. Theirs were the selfish interests which had an influence over government policy. On the other hand, the poor, who most wanted equal distribution, were almost entirely without the vote and held no influence on the legislature. At its root, the food problem was a problem of a lack of democracy. The only way that rationing could be implemented would be if democracy was established in South Africa. In these perspectives, food issues were deeply rooted in other political issues, and for women it opened a path to the voicing of wider grievances over various kinds of discrimination.²⁰

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the Women's Food Committee lost momentum when the food situation improved. Indeed, by the early 1950s it had been transformed into a charitable Christmas Club which supplied food baskets to the poor.

Food as a form of resistance could also be found in the form of legends relating to the anti-war militarist factions such as the *Ossewabrandwag*. One such a legend states that flour as be

¹⁸ C. Walker: *Women and resistance in South Africa*, pp.80-81.

¹⁹ C. Walker: *Women and resistance in South Africa*, p.82.

²⁰ *Guardian* Comment: Ration now, *The Guardian*, 19 April 1945.

used as a tool to protest against war as the women in the group would bake pancakes and raise money for their organisation.²¹ The notion of food, which is integral to survival, and its place within resistance movements became an interesting dynamic.

“And who wants puff pastry in war time?” The Promotion of Austerity

A pamphlet issued by the Union government as part of its campaign plea for austerity featured the head of a school for domestic science and a government horticulturalist, central to its attempts to reach its target, women who were in apparent need of austerity measures. The message was that of an appeal to the women of South Africa to adopt a wartime economy as their role in the war effort. It stressed the importance of being austere in a time of war when the demand for food was greater and the supply was less. The pamphlet’s message was that the women of South Africa could play their part in the war effort by supporting local industries and by fulfilling the dietary requirements of their families by making appropriate rather than extravagant food purchases. Directives by which to live included,

“She must not waste food, for there is a worldwide shortage, she must not buy imported goods, for the ships are needed for far more important purposes- It is a waste to bring English bottled fruits and Scotch marmalade to this land of fruits. She must instead buy the products of this country- and she must buy them intelligently.”²²

The shortage of wheaten flour was explained to readers and the adding of maize meal to wheat flour in order to stretch supplies was encouraged. The efficacy of which was illustrated by the results of tests done with wheat and maize mixture at the domestic science school. A list was given of baked goods such as scones and cakes made with the modified flour and their levels of success when the completed products were compared. All received positive results, except for puff pastry, which was described as a failure. This was, however, dismissed as an unpatriotic extravagance, for “ who wants puff pastry in war time?” Many consumers did not, however, seem to take such austerity appeals to heart, and sifting of standard flour for baking seemed to have remained widespread despite educative food campaigns in the war. Of course, the government’s austerity message went beyond the question of what to bake with. Further ways in which austerity could be practised included

²¹ Interview with S. Blignaut, 17 July 2012, conducted by Y. Albertyn.

²² M. Higham & R.A Davis: *A plea for war time economy in South Africa*, Pamphlet U.S Afrikana.

uses of stale bread, soups made from meat and vegetable scraps, the preservation of eggs and fruit, and ways in which cheaper cuts of meat could be prepared.²³

Utilisation of the Union's fruit supplies was encouraged by giving ways of incorporating supplies into the diet as jams, lemonades and preserves. The government pamphlet concluded by addressing a specific appeal to women from middle class households. Most of all, it was these consumers who needed to tighten their belts. After all, it was these women who were spending a big portion of their family income on food, and thus were spending a large proportion of the nation's wealth needlessly.

"Does she realise the enormous responsibility on her shoulder? Does she realise that as she spends, wisely or unwisely, so she is either helping or retarding the progress of her people and country, and possibly the success of those who are fighting for her?"

The message was that of avoiding the guilt of putting back the country's national war effort by being wasteful with a purse. Women needed to be austere and to think responsibly about food - that would be their contribution to the war effort. In that way, coping with the pressurised food supply situation and taking controls in their stride became not a grievance but a positive form of patriotism.

Newspapers, magazines, and other publications sustained many versions of austerity campaigns both during and after the war. A typical appeal in *The Guardian* from a Regional Food Committee urged 'every cook to do her duty'.²⁴ Publications such as *Die Landbouweekblad* carried regular articles on austerity, encouraging cooks to do their best in wartime. Rising prices necessitated frugality, and wastefulness should be avoided at all costs in order not to squander the Union's resources. One such article encouraged the use of cuts of meat which might have been avoided before the war, asking, "have you ever thought of the nutritional benefits of liver, heart, pig's trotters, and the large variety of dishes which could be made from offal? All of which bring variety to your menu but most importantly helps to reduce domestic expenditure." Recipes were provided for frugal dishes to try to draw readers into the austerity campaign as willing participants.²⁵

²³ M. Higham & R.A Davis: *A plea for war time economy in South Africa*, Pamphlet U.S Afrikana.

²⁴ South Africa expects every cook to do her duty, *The Guardian*, 29 March 1945.

²⁵ Ekonomiese vleisgeregte, *Die Landbouweekblad*, 7 January 1942.

Articles on the nutritional benefits of cuts like liver could also be found periodically. These provided hints on how to choose the best product in regard to colour and texture, and on various ways in which to best prepare cheaper cuts of meat and offal.²⁶ For “the lesson we learn from this time is that all foodstuffs must be used sparingly. To use the meat supplies in the Union to its utmost we must use all parts of the animal and educate ourselves on the various parts and how to best prepare them.” Women purchasers were urged to make up groups and to approach their butchers for advice on various cuts of cheaper meat varieties, instead of pushing for those which were in short supply.²⁷

The same techniques were used to encourage the use of standard flour or *Boermeeel* which was seen by the public as inferior. Recipes were circulated to encourage readers to substitute standard flour in cakes, breads and puddings.²⁸ In order to boost sales of *Royal* baking powder at a time when its use had decreased as a result of the shortage of flour, the brand regularly placed recipes for products using standard flour in magazines and newspapers.²⁹

The *Royal* brand also made the most of celebratory times of the year such as Christmas and Easter, reassuring customers that wartime cooking difficulties could still be overcome. To that end, the manufacturer popularised special edition recipes such as emergency ‘Easter buns’, and ‘Emergency Christmas cake’, which used standard flour as a substitute for white flour.³⁰ Some recipes which excluded the use of flour altogether sought to maximise the frugal use of available standard flour supplies.³¹ Recipes for so called *Oorlogskoek* or ‘war-cake’ were another common feature in women’s magazines which included standard flour, government issue sugar and vegetable fat instead of butter.³²

The *Landbouweekblad*, a mainly agricultural publication, also devoted itself to the promotion of the use of standard flour, on the grounds that it was actually beneficial to health. As the

²⁶ Die voedingswaarde van lewe, *Die Landbouweekblad*, 8 september 1943.

²⁷ Die huisvrou en die vleisprobleem, *Die Landbouweekblad*, 24 November 1943.

²⁸ Die gebruik van standard growwe meel, *Die Landbouweekblad*, 28 January 1942 And Resepte met Growwemeel, *The Woman’s Domain*, January 1942.

²⁹ Hier is n standaardmeel resep waarop u kan trots wees, *Die Landbouweekblad*, 25 November 1942.

³⁰ Ja lekkernye is onverkrybaar hierdie kersfees: Nood kersfeeskoe, *Die Landbouweekblad*, 23 December 1942 AND Een vir n pennie, twee vir n pennie paasbolletjies, *Die Landbouweekblad*, 21 April 1943.

³¹ Nageregte sonder Meelblom gemaak, *Die Landbouweekblad*, 18 February 1942.

³² Jeanette Slade se koekmaak-les: Oorlogtydse koek, *Womans’s Domain*, March 1944.

weekly pointed out, it contained vitamins and minerals which were absent from fine white flour, as a result of the removal of grain seed in milling. Although the majority of white farm women were accustomed to baking with white flour, it was possible to adapt pre-war recipes. To that end, homely hints were provided on ways to improve baking with standard flour.³³

Other hints in wartime publications concerned wastage. Wastefulness of any kind was strongly discouraged, with popular articles carrying ideas for using everything around the house when conventional staple items were scarce. The use of apple- and citrus peel and coffee rinds for the cleaning of aluminium pots and pans was one standard example.³⁴ As a well-known women's magazine declared in 1944:

*"Anti-waste campaigns are necessary in all South African kitchens. Start off with bread-Don't waste a crumb of it! Stale crusts and crumbs can be basic ingredients for delicious and economical dishes. During any time, any year, waste in the kitchen should be considered a criminal offence! But today when many household commodities are scarce, and difficult to obtain, the housewife should ascertain that nothing-not even a crust of bread-goes to waste in her kitchen."*³⁵

Femina magazine went beyond the issuing of kitchen advice on how bread crumbs should be utilized and not wasted to make various baked goods. Its other articles urged women at home to re-evaluate their spending habits and consumption. Readers were instructed to compile a list of items which they usually bought which could now be considered as luxuries which could be done without during war-time. Rice was an example, an item to be substituted with products grown in the Union, such as potatoes. The archetypal thrifty housewife was also urged to increase her use of fruit when the country was experiencing a surplus, by making jams and preserves to store for lean times ahead. With that in mind, she was also advised not to use first class sugar, a commodity in short supply and one which should have been considered a luxury.³⁶

At a more pressing or urgent level of food action, *The Guardian* backed the creation in 1945 of an African Food Fund Committee to provide relief for hunger in the rural Ciskei. Even before the war, such deprived regions had been battling to meet adequate dietary

³³ Wenke oor die gebruik van standard meel, *Die Landbouweekblad*, 9 June 1943.

³⁴ Moenie weggooi nie, *Die Landbouweekblad*, 18 February 1942.

³⁵ Don't waste a crumb, *Femina (previously Women's Domain)*, August 1944.

³⁶ Ons moet vandag besuinig, *Women's Domain*, June 1940.

requirements for many of their inhabitants. Inevitably, wartime shortages intensified their plight. The fund found it difficult to secure the necessary traditional food supplies for reserve inhabitants, being unable to circumvent maize rationing controls. So, it improvised by promoting the consumption of oatmeal instead. Oatmeal received wide acceptance given conditions of acute deprivation, and it had superior nutritional benefits over maize as it contained more protein. With meat shortages, the *Guardian's* Fund had to look further afield for sources of protein for Africans in the reserves. Interestingly, the Committee experimented with the introduction of shark biltong. The offer of protein in this form was accompanied by considerable trepidation, as shark meat was not exactly a customary item in local African food cultures. The results of distribution were, however, positive as biltong became easily consumed and demand increased. In fact, shark biltong became the cheapest form in which animal protein could be bought in South Africa in the 1940s, illustrating the truth of the saying that necessity is the mother of invention. As a *Guardian* reporter rightly observed, "perhaps hunger is helping to break down old prejudices about food."³⁷

Conclusion

In distinctive ways, these and other social responses to the Union's food situation illustrated the dilemmas of the time, as people looked for ways of getting by in conditions of food control. In confronting demands, food also became not just need but also a weapon with which to raise awareness and to mobilise for changed conditions. The use of food as a tool in creating a patriotic spirit and the paradox of it becoming a tool from which to unite and rally resistance is an interesting development during the war.

The need for austerity campaigns at an early junction becomes clear as none were available before 1942 and they only became prevalent after 1943. It could be argued that government had a responsibility of educating the consumers before the food situation was at a critical point which necessitated emergency measures.

The irony of encouraging consumers to tighten their belts when it came to spending but promoting the use of fruit available on domestic markets at exorbitant prices is one which needs to be noted. From the austerity campaigns it would appear the buying of domestically produced products were encouraged, irrespective of the expense, whilst the use of imported

³⁷ Hunger introduces new foods to Africans, *The Guardian*, 20 December 1945.

articles were vehemently disregarded as an unpatriotic waste. The propensity for the promotion of producer interests and its link to austerity campaigns is a link worth noting.

Chapter 6: Tidying the Table: Conclusion

The period in South African history marked by the Second World War can be described as turbulent. More often than not, the 1940s is viewed as the precursor to the transition to Apartheid, and the other experiences of these years as a developmental period is overlooked. Great industrial expansion, intensified urbanisation and political turmoil were markers of a decade fuelled by massive international and domestic developments. Taking a little-explored aspect, this dissertation has attempted to assess the role of agriculture and food production in the Union during the war. This could be attempted most effectively by exploring the development of state regulatory agencies and their roles within the unique South African context, one which was marked by the interconnected problems of both surpluses and shortages. The efficacy of Jan Smuts's Union government in managing the difficulties caused by these factors needs to be considered in more depth in these concluding remarks.

If one looks at the efficiency of the Union's wartime food control measures, it is clear that for the most part they were received negatively by consumers who did not accept their burden as a willing wartime sacrifice. In that sense, they could be considered successful only from an economic and producer interest point of view. The policies were successful in stabilizing producer prices and in sustaining the health of market agricultural industries that might arguably have been heavily damaged as a result of war-related difficulties and unstable weather. The fact is, however, that by subsidizing farmers with public funds, setting minimum producer prices and reserving the best products for export and processing, the commercial producer was sustained. When it came to pulling the short straw – it was the poor consumer most of all. The Smuts government's fumbling in dealing with already disgruntled voters played a large role in politicizing decisions over food supply and distribution in the country. Its food policies naturally fitted into the segregationist framework of the wartime 1940s, in which war-induced urbanisation and industrial expansion, and the requirements of white farming interests were all factors which had some effect on food control policy. In the light of the war itself, the Smuts administration may not have neglected the needs of grain farmers to the extent that is assumed in many writings on the outcome of the 1948 elections.

This dissertation has emphasised the role of various marketing board policies regarding the utilization of surpluses in the hope of turning what was widely viewed as a burden into a possible asset. The problem, though, was always political. The boards developed a negative

reputation of not having the consumer's best interests at heart. While Smuts displayed purpose on the international front, he tended to muddle along on the home front, letting things develop and ignoring problems so as not to further inflame an already restive electorate. Typically, he would stall on matters relating to domestic turmoil until the situation became so dire that it necessitated harsh measures.¹

Smuts's fleeting uncertainties over racial policies in wartime also created unease. While denying African nationalist demands for political rights, his government nonetheless conceded the case for practical welfare and other reforms in the atmosphere of the 1940s. This, again, produced mistrust, scepticism or confusion. That, inevitably, affected the way in which food control policies were received by sections of the public, for whom such matters as cost, access and entitlement were critical. That mistrust was further deepened by the negative opinion of the public towards marketing boards who were perceived to have been using false advertising and hollow promises to promote white farming interests. At the same time, half-hearted concessions intended to appease the black population were of only very limited effect. Indeed, unrealisable promises only increased frustration and anger. Still, for the government's Native Administration during the war, there could be no question of ignoring altogether the food needs of deprived rural Africans. This could, perhaps, be seen as part of the picture of the cautiously reformist Smuts government tinkering with the possible implementation of common social security reforms.² Again, the period covered by this dissertation is a difficult one to characterise briefly, as the 1940s were marked by a mixture of conservatism and reform, stagnation and rapid change.

Mobilising an economy in support of a war effort involves substantial state intervention within the market economy, involving such things as the introduction of wage and price control subsidies for industries, land bank loans and even strict rationing. In the case of the Union, economists writing on the 1940s come in two forms. Some see intervention as having been an undesirable but an unavoidable part of war, while some others have criticised the Smuts government for not having intervened on a more radical scale.³ Frankel believed that

¹ For examples of this other than in food control, see S. Dubow: *Introduction: South Africa's 1940s* in S. Dubow and A. Jeeves, (Eds): *South Africa's 1940s: World of Possibilities*, p.15.

² S. Dubow: *Introduction: South Africa's 1940s*, pp.15-16.

³ N. Nattrass: *Economic Growth and Transformation in the 1940s* in S. Dubow and A. Jeeves (Eds): *South Africa's 1940s: World of Possibilities*, p.21.

Smuts's budgets were not ones which were designed for a war waged merely on one front, but on two, as he was also fighting an opposition which saw no need for involvement in the war. These oppositional forces rejected the notion of judging Smuts' financial policy based on the war, and believed that the Union should have concerned itself only with its domestic needs. This had the effect of obliging the Minister of Finance to justify his loan expenditures as building on the future, and not on what it was attempting - making every effort to sustain a successful war effort.⁴ That can be seen with respect to the loans made to farmers and to the development of processing industry, and in how propaganda pamphlets placed these industries as points of economic pride for Union citizens. In that sense, the milk and butter schemes were not only a response to the war crisis, but were a means of building the health of the nation.

Food control, however varying its effectiveness in this or that commodity or place, had a direct social impact on ordinary people, and on their everyday consciousness. Rapid urbanisation placed mounting stress on already stretched state services and provision, and encouraged the emergence of new political and cultural associations. Wartime issues of hunger, of shortages, and of greed provided a new arena of protest for radical bodies, such as the Communist Party of South Africa. An increasingly volatile urban African population in cities was also starting to express themselves in various forms which had not been able to emerge before. The war and its issues featured among these newly assertive waves of intellectual leaders, women's bodies and other fringe groups which pushed for inclusion into a more common South African society.⁵ These included, as we have seen, food control grievances and food shortages, as a focus of discontent for political voices. For its part, the Smuts administration did what it could to try to improve its image, mobilising propaganda campaigns with the use of pamphlets and running cheerful austerity programmes, all aimed at cultivating pride in the Union's agricultural sector.

Given South Africa's segregationist structures, uneven development and enormous distances, any equitable distribution of commodities in wartime would always have remained no more than a pipe dream. Politically, too, any implementation of a universal austerity campaign and strict rationing based on 'fair shares' equality for all lay well beyond reach. In that sense, unlike some other Allied countries, the war experience of the 1940s did not turn the country

⁴ Frankel, S.H: An Economist's Testimony: An Autobiography of S. Herbert Frankel. (Oxford: Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 1992.)

⁵ Dubow, S: *Introduction: South Africa's 1940s*, p.4.

into a laboratory of modernity, when the lessons of a common ‘people’s war’ were put to work after 1945 in creating a new society of greater economic, social and racial equality.

What remains is to point to further dimensions that could be explored to add to the topic of food and war in the 1940s. The effect of food control measures geared towards the agricultural industry on the economic position of the country in the late-1940s and 1950s could be further investigated as a way of probing the legacy of the war for South African agriculture. More could be done on the question of the repercussions of malnourishment caused by inequitable distribution of foodstuffs, and on the topic of food provision and health, both urban and rural. It would also be interesting to further investigate the effectiveness of radio campaigns of food policy propaganda and of wastage campaigns in magazines in order to deepen understanding of the atmosphere and sentiment of this period. There is also the wartime food administration itself – were officials all in agreement over every measure, or were there divisions over how to cope with food issues ?

Lastly, there is the contradiction in perceptions of South Africa in wartime. For its inhabitants, there was regular uncertainty over provisions. For visitors - men from troopships – and for Allied servicemen and servicewomen posted here, the Union always seemed to be full of everything, fruit, beer, cigarettes, meat, fish and so on.⁶ One is left wondering how so great a contradiction in popular experience can be explained or accounted for.

⁶ B. Nasson: *South Africa at War, 1939-1945*. (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2012), p.46.

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