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Group Services

BULLETIN

GROUP SERVICES BRANCH
DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION

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CONSUMER DIVISION
OFFICE OF PRICE ADMINISTRATION

NUMBER 6

JANUARY 1944

You Are Invited To

MEET YOUR PRICE PANEL



The MEN and WOMEN of your WAR PRICE and RATIONING BOARD
Who, with their VOLUNTEER ASSISTANTS,

Are making PRICE CONTROL WORK In your COMMUNITY

Suggestions for the Leaders of all Women's Groups

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WARTIME PRICE CONTROL, 1939-1943

- Sept. 1939 - *War Front: Germany Invades Poland, and World War II Begins Soon After.*
 U.S. HOME FRONT: Wholesale prices rise rapidly; 25 percent in one month; later they fall off.
- May 1940 - *War Front: Germany Blitzkriegs France*
 U.S. HOME FRONT: Appointment of Advisory Commission, National Defense Council, responsible for, War Production, Price Stabilization, Consumer Protection, Transportation, Agriculture, Labor. Price rises slowed down on strategic defense materials, such as machine tools, iron & steel, aluminum, zinc, etc.
- April 1941
 Price Stabilization Division becomes Office of Price Administration and Civilian Supply, and starts program of obtaining voluntary agreements by industries to hold prices at fair levels, thus placing informal controls on prices of metal products, paper & pulp, rubber products, textiles, foods, hides & leather, lumber, building materials, house furnishings. Formal ceilings placed on cotton yarn, gray goods, nickel and brass scrap.
- June 1941 - *War Front: Germany Attacks Russia and Sweeps Eastward.*
- Aug. 1941 - U.S. HOME FRONT:
 OPACS becomes Office of Price Administration; control of civilian supply transferred to War Production Board.
- Dec. 1941 - *War Front: Japan Bombs Pearl Harbor and U. S. Enters World War II*
 U.S. HOME FRONT: OPA acts to limit price rises on wool, feed, coffee, sugar, fats and oils, reclaimed rubber, tires and tubes.
- Jan. 1942 -
 Mounting war expenditures and consumer incomes, and decreasing supplies of civilian goods increase danger of inflation. Congress passes Emergency Price Control Act authorizing regulation of prices by OPA.
- April 1942 - *War Front: Japan Occupies Philippines, Malaya, and the East Indies.*
 U.S. HOME FRONT: President's anti-inflation program announced: 1. Heavier taxes, 2. Price control, 3. Stable wages, 4. Stable farm prices, 5. War Bond buying, 6. Rationing, 7. Less consumer credit. General Maximum Prices Regulation issued, putting ceilings at highest March prices on most consumer goods. Rent control program initiated in some 300 defense rental areas.
- Oct. 1942 -
 Rising farm prices and wages push cost of living upward. Emergency Price Control Act passed, providing for stabilization of wages and prices at levels prevailing on Sept. 15, 1942. Price Control extended to cover more foods. Maximum price regulations issued on specific groups of articles, taking these from under General Maximum Price Regulation.
- Nov. &
 Dec. 1942 - *War Front: American Troops Land on North Africa; Offensive Against Axis Forces Begins.*
 U.S. HOME FRONT: OPA develops new price program, calling for replacement of fixed percentage margins by dollars-and-cents ceilings when setting top legal prices.
- April &
 May 1943 -
 OPA establishes cents-per-pound ceiling prices on pork, beef, veal, lamb & mutton according to grades, cuts and geographic zones. Price Panels set up in War Price and Rationing Boards.
 OPA launches new food price program and issues top legal prices on most foods according to brand name and container size, and according to yearly volume of business done by food stores.
- June 1943 -
 Meat and butter prices "rolled back" to consumers by means of subsidy paid to processors and by them to producers.
- Sept. &
 Oct. 1943 - *War Front: American and British Forces Conquer Sicily, Invade Southern Italy, Bomb-Blitz Hitler's Europe; Russian Armies Advance Toward Dnieper River Line.*
 U.S. HOME FRONT: OPA announces new ceilings will soon be set for all most popular fresh fruits and vegetables, thus preventing price rises as high as those occurring between September 1942 and May 1943.

PRICE PANELS AND PRICE PANEL ASSISTANTS WORK FOR YOU

War Price and Rationing Boards -- these words call to mind the place in your community where you go to see about your gas ration, to find out if you are entitled to a new stove, to get a certificate for your canning sugar, to report a lost ration book -- all rationing activities. But what about the first two words -- "War Price"? They are just as important as the "Rationing."

PRICE PANELS



Among the men and women who serve on the War Price and Rationing Boards is a group known as the price panel. Like the other members of the Boards, they are volunteers -- your friends and neighbors who give their time and untiring efforts to help keep the Home Front strong. These people take care of all the price control problems in your community. There are always three of them and sometimes several more. One is a business man and one is a consumer. The other members may be lawyers, preachers, teachers, labor leaders, or other outstanding citizens. They have one paid helper known as the price clerk, who keeps records, sends out notices, and is on duty regularly at the Board office.



The members of the price panel meet once or more each week to perform three principal functions. (1) They review the price complaints they have received from both housewives and merchants, and make every effort to adjust these complaints with fairness and satisfaction. (2) They give advice to merchants on pricing problems and try to answer the questions of other interested citizens. (2) They plan for further educational activity in their community on problems of price control.



PRICE PANEL ASSISTANTS

Many volunteer assistants are needed to carry on the compliance work of the price panels. An assistant always receives careful training for this war service job, and is usually a housewife. She walks into a store, introduces herself, hands out price regulations if the storekeeper doesn't already have them, then checks prices on a dozen or so items. A most important part of her work is the investigation of the complaints which have been sent in to the price panel by shoppers who find they have been overcharged. If the assistant finds the merchant is charging too much she calls his attention to the oversight. Most grocers are willing to correct the price right on the spot.



Each price panel assistant has a list of stores, and she gets around to see each one about once every two or three weeks to make sure that he understands Government price regulations, and is conforming with them. Several months' operation of this system has shown that most grocers want to abide by price regulations if they understand them, but sometimes in the past they haven't been quite clear on what was expected of them.

(Continued on Page 10)

"SO YOU'RE GOING TO BE A PRICE PANEL ASSISTANT....."



"Here's where starvation sets in", said my husband. If you go snooping around the butcher, baker and candlestick maker, peering behind the counter and asking them nasty questions about ceiling prices, how do you expect them to sell you any food? They'll probably put us on the boycott list."

I must admit I had a few misgivings as I started out on my first round of the ten stores to which I had been assigned as official OPA price assistant. True, they weren't my own dealers so there was no fear of starvation. But I was prepared for a rebuff or two.

The first assignment was distributing price regulations and my first stop was Mr. Hanson's grocery. "I'm from the OPA," I told him and he drew back sharply. "Gosh, what did I do wrong?" He looked a bit happier when I explained that this time I was just bringing information and price ceiling schedules. It seemed Mr. Hanson had been wanting a look at those for a long time, and OPA had not managed to get them to him. He accepted the schedules and information eagerly and I left promising to return in ten days.

The experience was about the same in all stores. I had a couple of supermarkets, the rest small independent stores. They all grabbed my material and treated me with a deference to which I had become totally unaccustomed as an ordinary shopper. In fact, when I got back to Mr. Hanson ten days later, he told me of a friend down the street who felt discriminated against because he didn't have an OPA price assistant.

The second time around, I checked the ceiling prices on 25 foods -- checked to see if the prices were posted, if the community price list was up and if the goods

were actually selling at the ceiling price. Usually I found the price list tucked behind a counter. "Bring it out where the customers can see it," I would urge. "If you keep it back there they'll think you're trying to hide it and you won't get full credit for observing ceilings." The argument always worked. And I found in practically every case, the ceiling was observed. Two stores held out on a couple of items -- canned peaches and shortening -- because they said my price list wasn't right, they'd been so informed by their wholesalers. A call for information got cooperation in both cases. Some of the stores backed later, but they certainly had clean and shining faces for the first round-up.

After the first two times around, I've found the job a cinch, taking one or two hours a week instead of the 6 or 8 forecast by OPA. The main reason is the storekeepers' cooperation. I check a different list of foods each time to make sure of getting a fair sample. They could make it tough by letting me hunt out the items. But instead, they eagerly point out each product.

One week I was out of town and I had to skip my checking. "Where were you?" reproached a supermarket manager next week. "We made a mistake on our egg price and got called down by an OPA inspector. That wouldn't have happened if you'd been around to check us up." This particular manager prided himself on ceiling observance. Once I pointed out a one cent overcharge on meat. He made me go over every other meat price with him to make sure there were no more mistakes.

Most merchants want to obey the law, I find. But I have a feeling that regular checking acts as an added stimulus. They never know when I am going to pop in on them.

(Continued on Page 10)

GRASS ROOTS DEMOCRACY ON A MIDWEST PRICE PANEL



A CORRESPONDENT TELLS US OF A MEETING SHE RECENTLY ATTENDED

"There's a price panel meeting in Boonboro this evening, Miss C----. Would it interest you to go?" Would it interest me! I was ready to start at once.

When we came to the meeting that evening we found about 25 to 30 butchers and the "meat experts" from the District OPA office in session with the local price panel. The price panel assistants were there, too, as attentive listeners. They were all members of one local group who, as deeply concerned housewives, had volunteered for this war service. They were eager to get members of other local groups to join them in their efforts and later in the week held a highly successful rally to arouse general interest.

The price panel chairman was the husband of one of the assistants and had become interested in price control work through realizing how much his wife and her fellow-members were accomplishing. He was an active labor leader in his region, skilled in the ways of gaining men's confidence and cooperation.

The OPA meat experts were men with years of practical experience as butchers. At the chairman's request, one of them explained what hamburger is, according to the OPA, and I was sure no merchant there would ever again be in doubt on this point.

After a brief talk on the functions of the price panel and the assistants, the chairman turned to the butchers. He asked each one to explain how he happened to be selling meat at 6¢ -- 10¢ -- 14¢ above the ceiling price -- or why his OPA group number sign was not on display -- or his ceiling prices not posted.

Some were "too busy to read regulations." Others sheepishly professed ignorance of ceiling prices. And several butchers had obviously disregarded regulations because "everybody else is doing it; why shouldn't I? OPA, with its limited staff will never catch up with me!"

Each one of these butchers needed education -- and each one got it. He got general education when the meat officials explained regulations and standards, and when the panel chairman told why price controls were necessary. He got individual, personal education when the chairman took each case up separately and gave each butcher a chance to explain his side of the story. He was made to feel that price controls in his community were his personal responsibility, that he was an important part of the whole picture -- not just another little fellow whom the law could knock about to no good purpose.

The price panel, too, learned some new things. The merchants were free to discuss their difficulties and suggest ways of correcting inequities. Several stated that they were unable to buy from wholesalers at legal prices. This uncovered information the price officials had previously been unable to get. They assured the merchants that the wholesale situation would now be cleared up.

When the meeting adjourned every butcher present made a special point of shaking hands with the price panel members and thanking them for their help. Each merchant left the meeting with a sense of the importance of his own efforts in holding the line.

It was nearly midnight. The chairman, I knew, would be off to his railroad job before five in the morning. He had given this long evening, as he would give many more hours of his time, because of his firm belief that the price line must be held, with retailers and their customers working together.

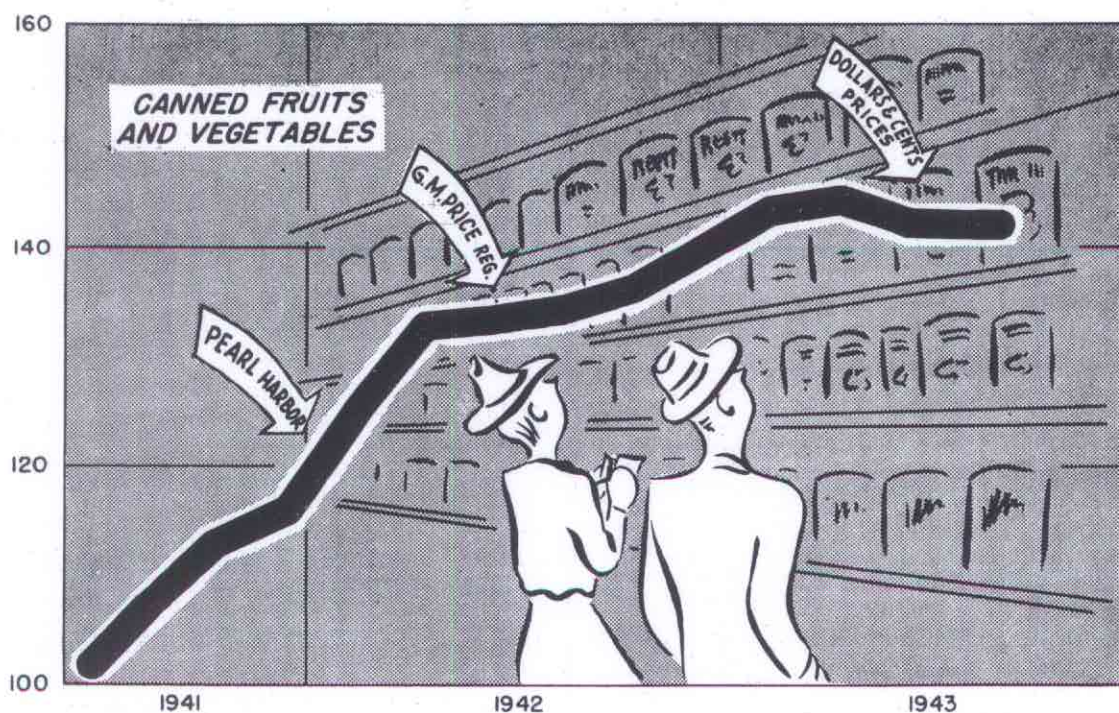
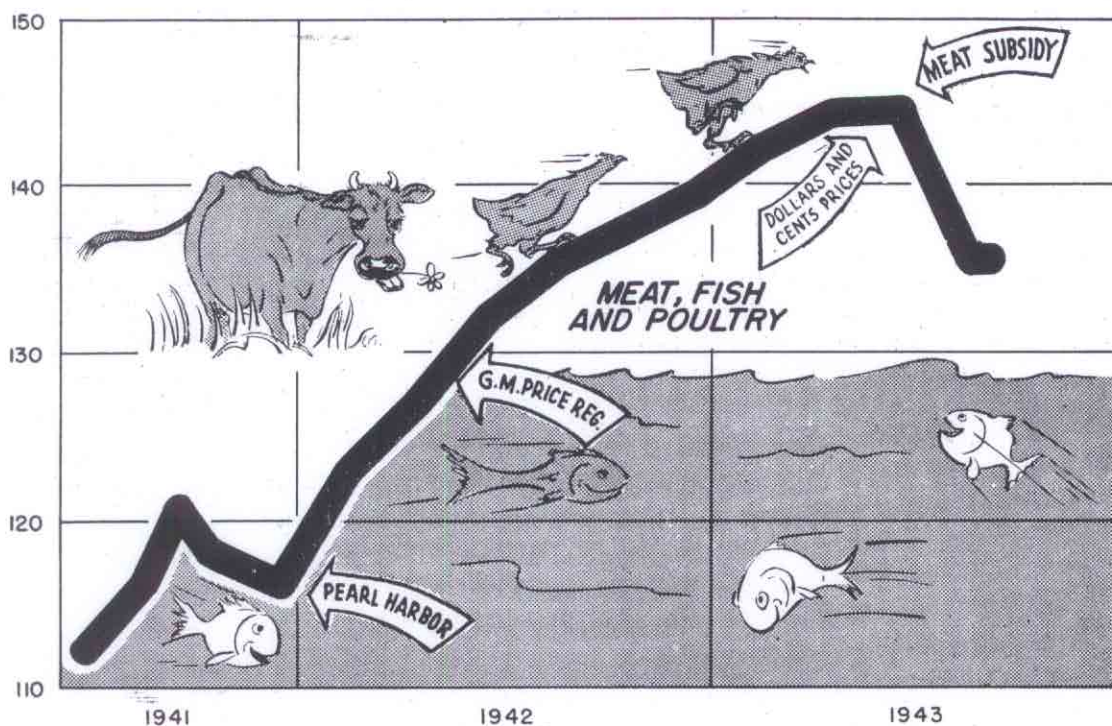
I was glad that I could be at this peculiarly American kind of meeting -- that I had been privileged to see democracy at work among the grassroots.



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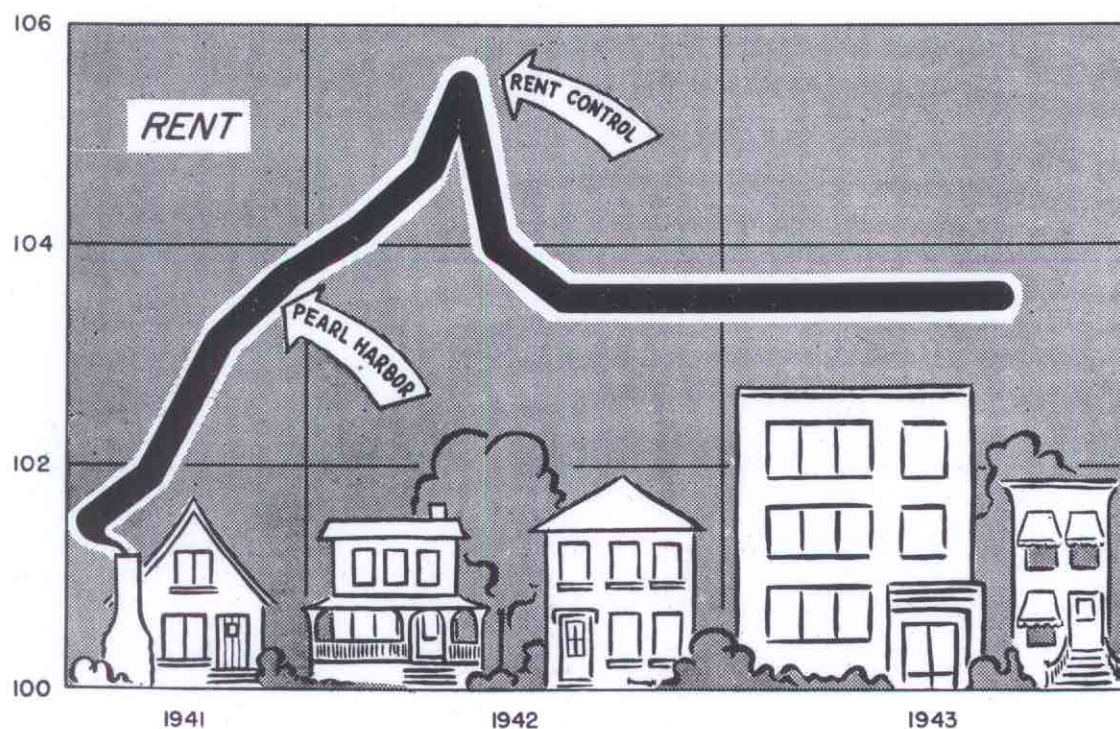
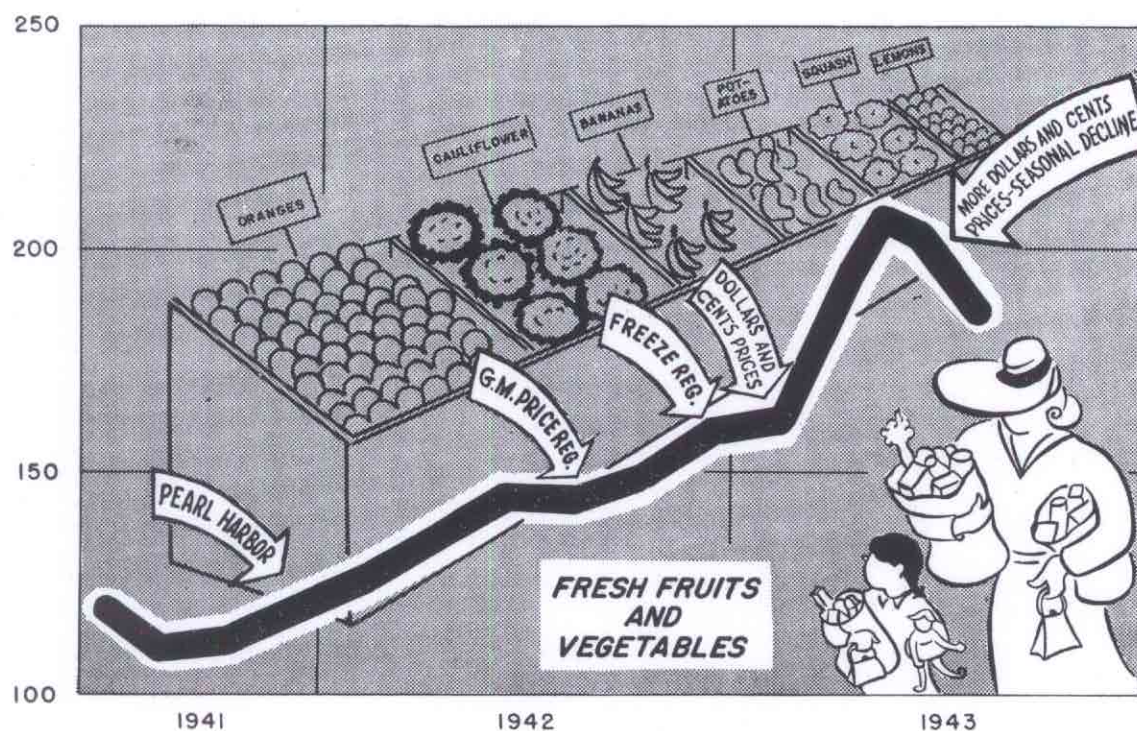
RETAIL

FROM JULY 1941 THRU



PRICES

1943 SEPTEMBER 1943



OPA RESEARCH DIVISION

GPO—OPA 6344—p. 7

ACTION AND STUDY PROGRAM SUGGESTIONS

Enlist your membership to volunteer as price panel members or assistants!

There are 5,100 price panels in existence now. There should be a price panel on every War Price and Rationing Board in the U. S. Price panels cannot be made in Washington; they cannot be made in the OPA Regional or District offices. They can be made in every community -- urban, suburban, rural -- by the people who live there and are concerned with keeping prices at or under the ceilings, with holding the cost of living down.

The price panel assistants now at work are making 150,000 calls on local stores each month. Every store in the country should have a price panel assistant to come in and help the manager and clerks understand the regulations, to check over the prices to make sure no mistakes are creeping in. This form of activity is a war service as important as any to be done. Your members who engage in it will be proud to tell their fighting men that they are doing this job to make the Home Front secure.

Invite a member of your price panel, or an official from your District OPA office to speak to your group. Inform your membership of the value of this practical method of securing compliance and keeping prices under control.

Hold a study group meeting at which the compliance and enforcement problems of OPA are discussed. Send to your District or Regional OPA office for material to use at this meeting.

If the price panel in your locality is not utilizing the services of assistants, point out to them the advantages of enlisting housewives to help with the local compliance work. Your District OPA office will be glad to advise and help to get this work under way.

Family Purchase Plan

A price checking project has recently been put into operation in Connecticut which is having the effect of reducing the cost of living there by keeping prices well within the ceiling limits.

A group of women in each community has been asked to keep track of the daily purchases for her family for a period of two weeks once every two months. Special forms are provided on which items purchased are tabulated at the end of each day.

Each woman participating sends her tabulations to her War Price and Rationing Board where the price panel checks them to determine whether or not these families have been charged higher than ceiling prices.

The project is well publicized and every merchant is eager to have the records show that he has a clean bill of health.

Start a similar project among your membership and ask your local Board to cooperate with you. For further details, both on the operation and results of the Family Purchase Plan, write to the OPA Regional office at 55 Fremont St., Boston 8, Mass.

TOKENS ARE COMING!

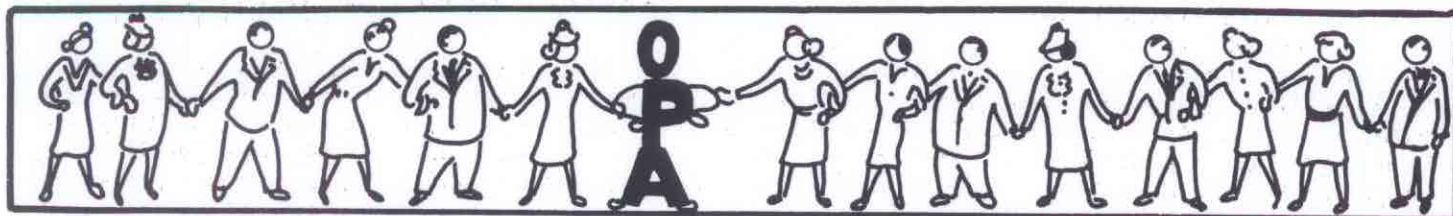
A new and simplified plan for the rationing of processed foods, and of meats, fats and oils will be put into operation on Sunday, February 27, 1944. The new plan involves three important changes. First, each stamp will have a point value of 10 points. Second, tokens will be given as "change." Third, the stamps will have a longer validity period, i.e., approximately 12 weeks, and will be made valid and expire in accordance with a uniform schedule.

The most conspicuous of these changes is the use of tokens. Red tokens will be used for meats, fats and oils, and the blue tokens for processed foods. Each will have a 1-point value and will be used in making change just as the 1-point brown stamps are now used, except that the tokens will be valid indefinitely.

This modification of rationing gives housewives a longer time over which to budget their points and avoids the last minute rushes which have been so prevalent just before expiration dates. Only one ration book will be in use -- Book 4 -- and it is to last for two years. Retailers will benefit because the number of stamps they must handle will be reduced by 60 percent and it will no longer be necessary to sort stamps for anything but color.

Complete details of the token plan will be given in the daily press, and the next issue of Group Services Bulletin will carry program suggestions to help groups acquaint their membership with the use of the new plan.

THE VOICE OF THE CONSUMER



A Consumer Advisory Committee has been appointed to the OPA. This means that representatives of the household -- you who purchase the hundreds of different commodities in daily use in our homes -- are to be given a stronger voice in rationing and in war-time controls on prices and rents.

The appointment of the Consumer Advisory Committee greatly extends the procedure by which in the past OPA has asked special consumer committees to serve on particular problems or in connection with particular regulations. Members will advise on all OPA price, rent and rationing activities so far as they affect the consumer, and will have permanent, official status just as do the members of the various Industry Advisory Committees appointed by the Administrator.

There are twenty five members, chosen as individuals, not as representatives of organizations. They are persons either in national organizations carrying consumer programs, or in particular fields of consumer interest, such as food, clothing or housing. All members have an intimate knowledge of consumer problems and represent different backgrounds and kinds of experience.

In establishing the Committee, Chester Bowles, Administrator of OPA, said he believed it would "help OPA in several different ways."

"First, it can provide a general channel through which consumers can present problems they have with OPA regulations and activities.

"Second, it can provide specific suggestions on detailed regulations, not only after experience with them in the home, but also beforehand, when they are in the planning stage.

"Third, it can make helpful suggestions as to how those who buy for the family can be better informed, so that regulations are better understood and thus work better."

The first meeting of the Consumer Advisory Committee was held on November 30th and December 1st. Mr. Chester Bowles, Administrator, made a statement regarding the function and responsibility of the Committee, and presented for discussion the general policies of OPA regarding price control, rationing and enforcement, together with some of the more pressing current problems now facing OPA.

The members of the committee discussed with the heads of the various operating divisions such topics as

Enforcement policies and problems

Price control policies and problems:

Present policies of price control;

How price policies are made

Rationing policies and problems:

Present policies on rationing of civilian goods;

Problems and present issues in food rationing.

The committee also discussed the problem of using the same ration stamps for rationing meats, fats, oils, cheese and butter; the use of a Consumer Price Guide and Price Lists; and made various recommendations for the consideration of the Administrator and the Deputy Administrators.

The Consumer Advisory Committee effected its own organization and elected as chairman Miss Hazel Kyrk, Professor of Economics and Home Economics, University of Chicago.

PRICE PANEL ASSISTANTS

(Continued from Page 3)

Of course, if a retailer proves, after several visits from a price assistant, to be a willful violator, he can expect definite action. Price assistants make full reports to their price panels of each visit to each store. When these reports indicate a merchant is deliberately violating price regulations he is called in to a meeting of the price panel and the matter is discussed with him. If he still refuses to comply, his case is turned over to the enforcement officials in the OPA District office, and court action may be instituted. However, this is seldom necessary.



The qualifications of a good price panel assistant are friendliness and tact, the ability to understand the requirements of regulations and explain them to others, and a genuine desire to be helpful, both to the merchants on whom she calls and to her country in its efforts to control prices. She knows that she is a *teacher* in the finest sense of that word. She herself has received careful training from the price panel for her job as assistant.

Merchants welcome price assistants for many reasons. One is that they know their competitor down the street is being checked also; in this way all merchants are put on an equal plane. Another is that the price assistant actually saves the merchant's time. She comes to his store ready with answers to his questions.

Price panels have so far concentrated on grocers because the greatest rise in the cost of living has been in food. When they have the enforcement problem solved in that field they will expand into clothing, services, restaurants, household appliances, fuel, and others in which ceilings have been fixed.

Price panels and their assistants promote a spirit of friendly cooperation between retailers and housewives. As the work of the price panels expands both merchants and shoppers realize more fully that price controls are essential to holding down the cost of living, and gain a sense of the value of their individual efforts to keep prices within the legal limits.

"SO YOU'RE GOING TO BE A PRICE PANEL ASSISTANT...."

(Continued from Page 4)

The reception is entirely different from that given an ordinary customer who checks prices. Sometimes a storekeeper may seem hurried or reluctant with his customers. But the OPA volunteer is treated like royalty. In fact it's a problem to avoid being given gifts or special favors. With butter scarce, most of the stores I check try to sell me butter. It's not a bribe for they know I've never overlooked a violation.

Speaking of violations, I've had to report one or two to my price panel -- cases where the merchant would not lower his price to the legal ceiling because he himself was paying more than the ceiling to his wholesaler. Usually I was successful in getting the name of the wholesaler but once or twice it took a hearing before the price panel to get results.

It's been an interesting experience, this price checking job. I've come to know and understand the storekeepers' point of view and they've learned something about the importance of price control from me. I save on my own buying, because I know my ceilings to a T. The family seems to be thriving. And I have a sense of accomplishment, of doing a definite, clear part of the big job of ceiling price enforcement.

OUR NEIGHBORS IN CANADA....

(Excerpt from *Consumers' News*, issued by Consumer Branch, Wartime Prices & Trade Board)

"All of us remember how in the early days of price control there was considerable outcry at the idea that the housewives of Canada should be asked to undertake the task of checking on retail prices. The main criticism was that this would lead to a form of spying, with the housewife acting the unpopular role of a busybody concerning herself with affairs of the retailers or of the Government. Such exaggerated views have been proved entirely baseless, and all evidence goes to show that by taking an active part in the price control programme women have not only helped the Board but also the retailer who is giving his cooperation to wartime rules and regulations.

"One of the most striking tributes to Canadian housewives is perhaps the fact that shoppers of the United States are now being asked to watch prices and report increases on very much the same plan as we have been working."



1. How much butter is being produced this year?
2. How much butter is set aside for our Armed Forces, our Allies, and other Government uses?
3. How much butter is available for civilians?
4. Why was there so little butter in the stores during the spring and summer of 1943?
5. Will there be a substantial increase in the amount of butter available to civilians during the fall and winter?
6. Why does the butter shortage seem to be greater than the civilian supply figures would indicate?
7. Why doesn't the Government allocate butter to regions where supplies are usually short?
8. Why was the point value of butter raised?
9. Is the butter subsidy responsible for the present shortage?
1. It is estimated that 2,120 million pounds will be produced this year. This amount is only slightly under the record year of 1941.
2. An average of about 38 million pounds a month. This is equivalent to less than a pound a month for each family in the country.
3. Eight out of every 10 pounds produced this year, or an average of 13 pounds per year for each person in the U.S.
4. Government purchases of butter were heaviest during the season of peak production, spring and summer. The Government stopped butter purchases October 1, and is now using its reserves, so the entire production during the fall and winter will go to civilians.
5. No. Milk, and therefore butter production normally drops at this time of year.
6. Because of the increased demand. Many families have more work and therefore more money than ever before, and are buying more and better food. Even if the Government were buying no butter for war needs this year, there would not be enough butter to meet the civilian demand.
7. Allocation would require the Government to buy and resell all butter stocks. This would be a complicated and expensive operation.
8. To help distribute butter more evenly through the country, sending it from producing areas into shortage areas.
9. No. The subsidy does not alter the return to the producer, but it does reduce the price to the consumer and thus helps to hold the line on the cost of living.

PAPER GOES TO WAR

Paper is doing a tremendous war job for our boys overseas. Every economy we can make at home, every saving your dealer can make in wrapping and containers is that much more for Uncle Sam. The support of this program is one of the most important jobs you can do to insure the safe delivery of the vital war supplies to our fighting forces throughout the world.

- ..Accept Simpler Packaging
- ..Discourage Unnecessary Packaging
- ..Share the Printed Word
- ..Make Each Piece of Paper Count

January 5, 1944

Is the **SECOND BIRTHDAY** of your **WAR PRICE AND RATIONING BOARD**

Two years ago a mere handful of willing citizens volunteered to help with the rationing of tires. Today 200,000 members of local Boards are doing the vitally important job of rationing 15 different commodities and making price controls effective in their communities.

HELP CELEBRATE YOUR BOARD'S SECOND BIRTHDAY!
VOLUNTEER YOUR SERVICES!



Remember the Home Front Pledge --



I WILL PAY NO MORE THAN TOP LEGAL PRICES

**I WILL ACCEPT NO RATIONED GOODS WITHOUT
GIVING UP RATION STAMPS**

MATERIALS AVAILABLE

THIS IS YOUR PRICE PANEL. An informal dramatic skit on the work of price panels and assistants, done in the spirit of "Our Town." Order script from your nearest District OPA office.

YOUR OPA PROGRAM. Chart, 28" x 37"; for use at meetings and for study groups, and for general display purposes. Describes what is under ceiling prices; how you can know ceiling prices; what is rationed and how; what your obligations are; how you are benefited.

FOOD FOR VICTORY. 15-min. radio script, demonstrating the need for food rationing in a series of dramatic scenes. Order from your nearest OPA District office.

HOLDING THE HOME FRONT LINE. 21-min. slide film, with voice and music on a record; demonstrating dramatically the importance of observing the rationing and price control rules. Order through your nearest OPA District office (call local Board for address).

BLACK MARKETING. 18mm. sound film on black market in meats. Write Motion Picture Bureau, OWI, Washington 25, D.C. for name of nearest film distributor. Charge will not exceed 50¢.

OFFICE OF PRICE ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, D. C.
OFFICIAL BUSINESS

PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE TO AVOID
PAYMENT OF POSTAGE, \$300

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