

FORGING A NATIONAL DIET:
BEEF AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF PLENTY IN POSTWAR AMERICA

A Dissertation
presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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JULY 2018

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A large number of people made this dissertation possible. I would like to thank the many archivists who assisted and guided my work in the archives. Such trips always feel like mad dashes fueled by hope and desperation and the archivists who have helped me always managed to direct me to the best sources and ensured that I got the documents in a timely manner. Allen Fisher, who handled my FOIA request at the LBJ Archives, deserves special mention for his diligent processing of my request.

Organizations helped me complete this project. My home at the University of Missouri, the History Department, always made me feel welcomed and found countless ways to support my work, especially the hard work of Nancy Taube, Patty Eggleston, Lynn Summers, and Melinda Lockwood got me through my PhD. My other home, the Women's and Gender Studies Department, exposed me to whole worlds of scholarship that made me a better scholar. Being awarded the Harry S. Middleton Fellowship and a Moody Research Grant by the LBJ Foundation provided crucial support and was a great honor. This work was also made possible by a research grant the Truman Library Institute.

I have benefitted from support over the years that was too innumerable to count. At the University of Missouri, I always was humbled by the love and comradery I was shown by my fellow graduate students, whether it was during a class discussion, at a bar, or fighting for our rights as workers, we were a family and I would not have made it without them. At conferences that I have attended over the years, several scholars have given their time and improved this work as a result. They include Shane Hamilton, Kendra Smith-Howard, Nancy Langston, Sara Phillips, Philip Scranton, Thomas

Andrews, Gabriel Rosenberg, and Gabriella Petrick. I need to specially thank my writing partner Anastasia Day, a fellow traveler in the field of food history and a genuinely wonderful person.

My committee made me a better historian and helped me make this work something better than I had ever hoped it would be. Jerry Frank turned me onto environmental history and planted the seeds that became this project. Victor McFarland taught me how a young scholar might successfully navigate academia and pushed me to understand my work within the broader scholarship. Mary Hendrickson gave me important and necessary insights into farming and agriculture as seen by non-historians. Jay Saxton agreed to join late in the process but proved no less willing to help me for that. Robert Smale deserves special mention because, although he was not able to serve on my committee, he never let my analysis slack and pushed me to drive deeper into my subject. Finally, Catherine Rymph was the best advisor that I ever could have hoped to have. She never failed to support me, was always there to keep me on track, and even helped me pick up the pieces when broken. Her joy and encouragement has meant the world to me.

My family also helped me complete this project. To my siblings, siblings-in-law, and nieces and nephews, thank you for keeping me grounded and reminding that there is life outside of my work. To my parents, Sue and Steve, thank you for everything you have provided. And finally, Deidra, words fail to capture the depth of my feelings for you so I will settle for this approximation: thank you my love.

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ABSTRACT

Few foods items are more associated with the United States than beef yet it was not until the 1950s that Americans ate more beef than any other meat. The triumph of mass beef consumption was not accidental or a preordained event. As this dissertation argues, beef became the most consumed meat in America because of a policy enacted by a succession of presidential administrations and was aided by popular demand. Beef policy, as understood by its enactors, was an attempt at creating a nation undifferentiated by diet and unified by eating a meal fit for the leader of the free world. Drawing on primary research materials found at the National Archives in College Park, MD, and at five presidential archives, along with government publications and beef industry literature, this work shines a light on a policy of domestic security that went unnamed and uncelebrated yet had a profound effect on how Americans ate. Within the five presidential administrations between 1945 and 1974 could be found a dedication to securing economic peace between producers and consumers as each side battled over the shape of the economy after World War II. This work situates beef policy within several historical fields, including the history of policy and politics, food studies, environmental history, social history, and women's history. By drawing on a diverse group of fields, this dissertation uncovers the complex factors that transformed a nation of aspirational beef eaters into literal ones.

Introduction

“Americans who are as well fed as any people in the world are also prize specimens of what good feeding does to a people. Each generation is taller, bigger and healthier than the proceeding one—and each has a longer life expectancy,” was how the magazine *Life* framed its January 3, 1955 special issue on food and farming. It was a triumphant account and readers learned from the magazine about the recent arrival of a system of scientifically managed, intensive agriculture that was geared toward producing commodities and foodstuffs as cheaply as possible for a marketplace full of well-paid and hungry consumers. Modern agriculture, in this telling, was a marvel of innovation that served as a testament to the genius of the competitive market system. Agricultural innovations were so successful that even beef, once a rare food for most Americans, had become common. *Life* explained, “Nearly all Americans not only enjoy a national diet but a *luxury* diet. Their land is so increasingly productive that they can afford the luxury of using up 10 calories of corn and forage to produce *one* calory of beef. Moreover, they now eat more beef than any other meat.”¹ Beef may well have been wasteful to produce for mass consumption but agriculture output was such that it did not matter.

America’s beef production and consumption, as presented by the magazine, was not just a matter of a nation eating luxuriously, but a matter of global importance. The very success of the diet obliged the United States to reorder the way people across the

¹ “A Triumph and an Obligation: Some Thoughts to Preface an Issue about Food, the Nation’s Biggest Business,” *Life*, January 3, 1955, 2-3.

world ate. Locked in a Cold War with the Soviet Union, the consumer capitalist system for *Life* promised a global free-market revolution that would finally free everyone from tyranny. The preface ended on a global note by calling attention to the United States' need to export, not its food, but its production techniques. Accordingly, "The real challenge of American abundance is to find the means, through a bold and imaginative world economic program, not to *feed* the rest of the world but to spread the technology which will enable it to industrialize and feed itself."² Not surprisingly, *Life*'s take on U.S. agriculture reflected publisher Henry Luce's broader worldview of America's private industries providing global anticommunist leadership.³ After all, his own nation, only recently having crawled out of a depression and won a world war, was already in a peace so prosperous that beef was produced for mass consumption. Surely, as the food issue seemed to argue, if the United States could achieve this miracle of the free market, could not everyone else?

The answer was no, because the luxury diet was not a product of the free market alone but of government support of private production and consumption. The magazine even attempted to downplay the role of the government by quoting Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson disparaging government support of agriculture.⁴ Yet, Benson himself was even then helping ensure mass beef consumption. There was a program that the magazine could have used to illuminate the government's role in the

² "A Triumph and an Obligation: Some Thoughts to Preface an Issue about Food, the Nation's Biggest Business," *Life*, January 3, 1955, 2-3.

³ On Henry Luce and his vision of the American mission in the decades following World War II, see Alan Brinkley, *The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 283.

⁴ "Mr. Benson and Mr. Bruene Talk It Over," *Life*, January 3, 1955, 58.

American diet, if the magazine had seen fit to include it. In an effort to reduce the amount of cheap beef flooding the market in early 1953, Benson decided to help producers by having the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) purchase small quantities of beef for immediate use by various government agencies, including in the military and schools. His goal was to improve and then stabilize prices while reducing stocks of surplus meat.

Without his support, beef was otherwise locked in a seesaw that teetered between one extreme of low prices and abundant meat and another extreme of high prices and scarce meat. By intervening, he could freeze the seesaw in the middle point and create a stable and friendly capitalist system. In a letter to President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1953, Benson explained what buying beef could achieve. “The outlook for cattle has improved measurably,” he claimed, “The rate of slaughter has been stepped up to where cattlemen are more nearly on a pay-as-you-go basis, with current slaughter about equaling current production. This promises more stability in prices, though not necessarily any rapid or spectacular rises, in the future than recently.”⁵

The stability that Benson promised lay at the heart of a thirty-year policy that went unannounced and whose full scope has largely remained out of sight. From 1945 to 1974, the federal government used beef to forge a national diet with the understanding that the diet would be the basis of domestic security, which would fulfill the promise of the American dream on as broad a scale as possible. Beef policy during these decades was a public policy of prosperity through the gut. Although the end goal to sustain mass beef consumption, the explicit policy goal was to develop the tools for permanently

⁵ Ezra Taft Benson to Mr. President, July 23, 1953, Benson, Ezra 1953 (4), Box 5, Ann Whitman File, White House Central Files, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Archives, Abilene, KS.

balancing the needs of producers and consumers rather than let the needs of one trump the needs of the other. That balance was to lead to economic peace and, in that peace, Americans would prosper as never before. They would achieve this by marshaling economic policy tools related to the beef economy and employing them to smoothing out disruptions to production and consumption. The resultant diet of beef reflected not so much the calorie dominance of beef so much as its central role in agriculture and America's consumption habits, as hinted at by *Life*. This is what made it a political economic policy, which, in the descriptive sense, refers to the central government's role of creating the market for beef production and consumption in the first place and its role in regulating that economy. It was a national diet in the sense that the goal was to create an undifferentiated America where no one had special access to a food as essential as beef and that all Americans were equal under the law.

It is possible to visualize mass beef consumption as policymakers did. In doing so, we can come close to seeing beef policy as they did. In 1909, the Department of Agriculture began collecting the total amount of meat produced each year, by meat item. It was a power the department gained from the Meat Inspection Act of 1906 and represented a major expansion of the government's ability to collect and manage information about the economy. Civil servants within the department then developed a tool for visualizing the change in consumption over time and therefore made beef consumption legible to policymakers.⁶ They calculated total production per meat item and then divided those totals by the total population, allowing them to calculate the total

⁶ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 2.

disappearance of meat into the economy each year. The graph estimated an approximate amount of consumption by carcass weight (see figure 1.1). Carcass weight does not tell the whole story. It equaled about half the weight of the dead animal but included inedible parts like bones and offal or fat that would later be trimmed. But, the resultant carcass weight per capita approximated the total amount of meat consumed per person by showing the broader trends in consumption. Beef consumption began rising from its low-point during the Great Depression and generally continued to increase until the mid-1970s. Policymakers could look at the graph and, indeed, see their beef policy as a success. In addition to the clear visual clue about the success of beef, income ceased being the barrier to beef consumption that it once was. Beef prices for consumers dropped so much that, as the historian Roger Horowitz shows, the poorest third of urban-dwellers ate more beef in 1965 than the richest third had in 1942.⁷

⁷ Roger Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table: Taste, Technology, Transformation* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 12-16.

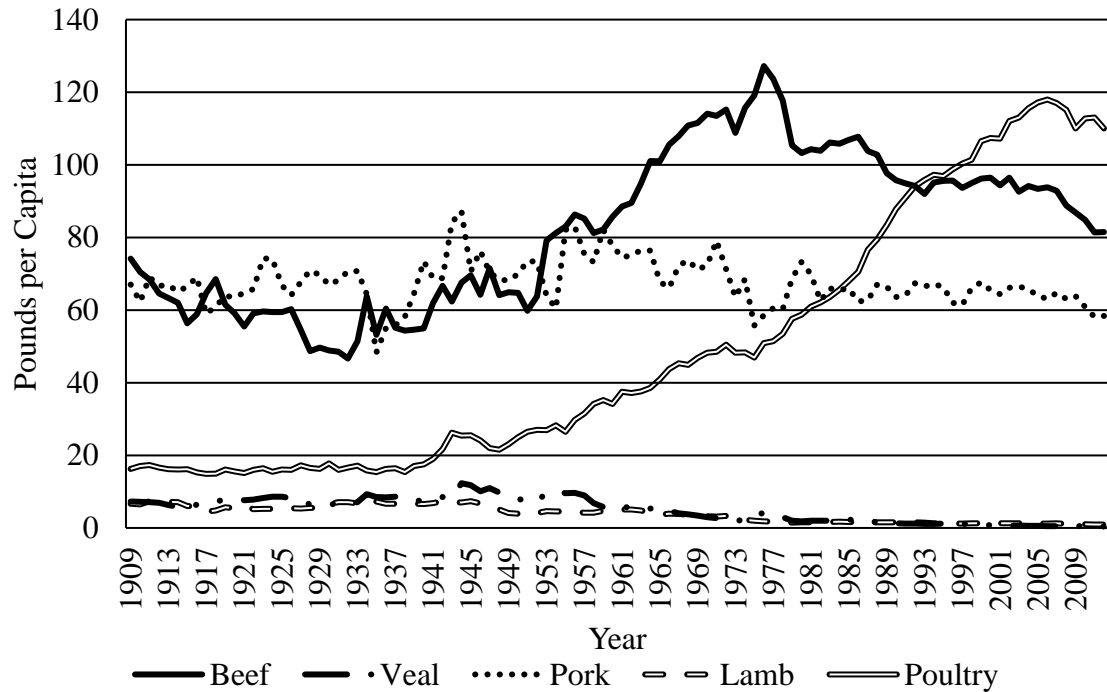


Figure 1.1: Estimated carcass weight of per capita meat consumption, 1909-2011. Source: US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, “Red Meat and Chicken (Carcass Weight),” by Jeanine Bentley and Jean Buzby, accessed December 18, 2014, [http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-\(per-capita\)-data-system](http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-(per-capita)-data-system).

Mass beef consumption succeeded within a specific political economic framework that shaped both production and consumption. That framework was a capitalist market system commonly known at that time as the American enterprise system. Capitalism has historically been a system of production for exchange at prices set by a market whereby a “competitive constraint” demands that producers continually increase productivity in order to remain profitable as costs continually climb.⁸ It was a world system that spread throughout the preceding century despite the continual

⁸ On the “competitive constraint,” see Robert Brenner, “Property and Progress: Where Adam Smith Went Wrong,” in *Marxist History-Writing for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Chris Wickham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 49-111.

impoverishment of workers and its threat to make consumption financial impossible.⁹ By the first half of the twentieth century, access to goods and services had spread considerably, but so had inequality.¹⁰ Inequality may have continued to worsen if not for an economic downturn in 1929 that led to worldwide collapse, creating the Great Depression, and the resultant political backlash.¹¹ In the United States, a political coalition emerged that successfully reoriented state power toward improving workers' quality of life and overall wealth while also empowering consumers under what has been called the New Deal Coalition.¹² The reorientation succeeded enough to create a "Great Exception" that lasted until the early 1970s. The historian Jefferson Cowie defined the Great Exception as follows: "The central government used its considerable resources in a systematic, if hardly consistent, fashion on behalf of the economic interests of nonelite Americans in a way that it had not done before or since."¹³ The exception was a political economy grounded in a more equitable sharing of wealth across class, if not racial, lines, which dulled the polarizing effects of the competitive constraint that had driven

⁹ For an exploration of the global spread of capitalism with attention paid to worker well-being, see Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015).

¹⁰ Thomas Piketty, *Capitalism in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2013). While scholars have debated Piketty's definition of capitalism and how to best calculate inequality, historians have found that, if anything, inequality leading up to the 1920s was even worse than he assumed. Richard Sutch, "The One Percent across Two Centuries: A Replication of Thomas Piketty's Data on the Concentration of Wealth in the United States," *Social Science History* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 587–613.

¹¹ On the coming of the Great Depression, see David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 43-69.

¹² On the political coalition and its successes and failures, see Steve Frasier and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright, 2013).

¹³ Jefferson Cowie, *The Great Exception: The New Deal and the Limits of American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 9.

inequality before 1929. The national income tax, to name just one of the government's tools, was used to redistribute income from the wealthy to the less so.¹⁴ The Great Exception involved, according to the historian Gary Gerstle, proving that “government could be an effective tool in managing and even democratizing capitalism.”¹⁵ It was an era in the history of capitalism in which “the sharp elbows had been tucked and the market forces tamed.”¹⁶ The Great Exception was not only about economic policy, though. As this work argues, it had a diet, a luxury diet even, and at that diet's core was stood beef.

In forging a national diet, the market was not to be overridden but perfected. No administration or civil servant sought to end the fundamental function of the market in their quest to get beef onto the dinner plate. Instead, the market system was meant to be improved enough to deliver beef on a regular and constant basis. Despite the claims of critics, even the most intrusive elements of beef policy sought to improve the market to ensure that supply and demand would ultimately determine how much beef cost and how much was available for purchase.¹⁷ Indeed, the policy was an attempt at balancing what one scholar noted was a “distinctly capitalist dynamic”: “cheapening goods and

¹⁴ On taxation, see Piketty and Saez, “Income Inequality in the United States, 1929-1998,” 21-24.

¹⁵ Gary Gerstle, *Liberty and Coercion: The Paradox of American Government from the Founding to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 275.

¹⁶ Nelson Lichtenstein, “Introduction: Social Theory and Capitalist Reality in the American Century,” in *American Capitalism: Social Thought and Political Economy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Nelson Lichtenstein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 2.

¹⁷ On the market-orientation of the most intrusive of these elements, see Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 183-95. On the opposition, see Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Business Crusade against the New Deal* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009).

expanding consumption.”¹⁸ Producers facing the competitive constraint had to continually find ways to both increase production and decrease costs while consumers had to find ways of affording what was offered at retail outlets. Prices threatened to pit consumers against producers in a battle over who would benefit from prosperity. With consumers and producers having such a fraught economic relationship, beef policy meant balancing their interests if a national diet built on beef and a prosperous peace was to be forged.

This work explores the hidden and myriad government programs that linked producers and consumers in the forging of a beef-centric diet. Driving this process were policymakers who took it upon themselves to innovate programs that would ensure economic tranquility and prosperity. For producers, beef policy aimed to ensure that the constant demands of competitive constraint did not upend the industry. Policymakers hoped to help the four main segments of the beef industry (cattle owners, feedlot operators, slaughterers, and processors) survive producing beef for mass consumption. A revolution intensified by World War II upended the older production system and set in motion a decades-long shift of production out of the industrial cities of the Midwest and into lower-wage rural areas. Additionally, feedlot finishing and processing overtook slaughtering as the leading edge of the industry, unleashing a storm that could have

¹⁸ John J. Clegg, “Slavery and Capitalism,” *Critical Historical Studies* 2, no. 2 (fall 2015): 299. John J. Clegg made this comment in regards to cotton production during the early years of the industrial revolution in order to provide an example of how historians could theorize capitalism. What made the global production of cotton by the mid-nineteenth century so new was the creation of a system of production and consumption that fed off itself. This freed the worldwide trade in goods from its previous limits. With wages rising and costs decreasing, more and more people, initially in England, could afford to buy more and more goods. Furthermore, increases in production were possible thanks to constant reductions in production costs.

destroyed the industry.¹⁹ Others involved in beef production had to endure the transition. Retailers, the ones responsible for selling beef to consumers, assisted the transition to mass consumption, which involved some supermarket chains starting to produce beef as a means to avoid regulation.²⁰ Transportation also played a crucial role in facilitating the transition with independent long-haul truckers quietly revolutionizing the country's "free enterprise" political economy in their shipping of cattle across the country.²¹ But, beef policy paid almost no attention to those who shipped and retailed beef. Instead, policymakers focused on producers as the group most needing support against the turmoil of the market. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was a point of view popular within the industry, with meat industry lobby groups such as the American Meat Institute (AMI) and the National Independent Meat Packers Association endorsing this focus.

For consumers, beef policy relied on the changing dynamics of gender and families in postwar America. It was through gendered labor and within the family that mass beef consumption succeeded. The key was the emergence of "the post-World War II male-breadwinner family," an idealized family type constructed by the reigning "gendered imagination" that obliged men to earn the family's income and obliged women to care for the family's emotional and bodily needs.²² Not only did this facilitate an

¹⁹ Jimmy M. Skaggs, *Prime Cut: Livestock Raising and Meatpacking in the United States, 1607-1983* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986), 179-82.

²⁰ Robert M. Aduddell and Louis P. Cain, "The Consent Decree in the Meat Packing Industry, 1920-1956," *Business History Review* 55, no. 3 (autumn 1981), 359-78.

²¹ Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 2008).

²² Stephanie Coontz, "Introduction to the 2016 Edition," *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, 2016 ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2016), xxiii. On the invention of the postwar family, see Jessica Weiss, *To Have and to Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). On the "gendered imagination," see Alice Kessler-Harris, *In*

unprecedented “baby boom,” but it also resulted in an idealization of home cooked meals as the place to eat dinner and, therefore, beef.²³ This put women at the center of beef consumption and as the unwaged labor that made beef consumption possible since consumption was work. In caring for their families, women adopted a new political identity, that of the housewife, which was an identity similar to, but distinct from, prior consumer political identities.²⁴ The housewife as a political identity mixed ideas of hygienic and efficient home keeping with ideas of maternalist caregiving to produce a political actor rooted in ideals of femininity and professional knowledge, which supported their daily labor.²⁵ A housewife could assert herself in public protests and at

Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Pursuit of Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5-6.

²³ On the baby boom, see Elaine Tylor May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 1-8. On diets of the 1950s and 1960s, Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Two USDA dietary surveys offer the strongest evidence of mass beef consumption and its family roots. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service, *Food Consumption and Dietary Levels of Households in the United States*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1956); U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service, *Food consumption of Families in the United States, Spring 1965* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1966).

²⁴ For an exploration of the political identity of the housewife that emerged out of shopping in the early twentieth century, see Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 13-42. On the role of the Great Depression and World War II shaping women's consumerist political identities, see Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*. Both historians emphasize the prewar origins of postwar consumer activism. On the long history of consumer activism, see Lawrence B. Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

²⁵ On the housewife as a political identity, see Emily E. LB. Twarog, *Politics of the Pantry: Housewives, Food, and Consumer Protest in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1-7. On hygiene and home keeping, see Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Housekeeping Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). Ideas of efficiency and home keeping can be seen in the efforts of home economists, see Megan J. Elias, *Stir It Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Carolyn M. Goldstein, *Creating Consumers: Home Economists in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014). On the politics of maternalism and women, see Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 55. For an exploration of women's caring, unpaid labor that fueled home cooking in the 1950s, in this case through cake baking, see Laura Shapiro, *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America* (New York: Viking, 2004), 68-83.

the polls in a way that played on existing gendered ideals of female dependency and allowed her to be as fierce as she was unoffending. When a woman claimed to be “just a housewife” while agitating for her family’s access to beef, she carved out a public space for her private concerns without seeming unfeminine. This housewife identity provided the grassroots energy, language, and cover needed for women to organize as a group and force politicians to support their family’s dietary rights without sacrificing their female sense of self. With meat, especially beef, serving, in the words of the historian Allen Matusow, as “the housewife’s personal inflation barometer,” beef prices warned the housewife when her family was threatened and gave her the impetus needed for direct political action.²⁶ The housewife thus alarmed knew it was time for policymakers and politicians to address their family’s need for low priced, available, and safe beef.

The civil servants and policymakers that housewives needed to reach worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It was that department that provided the source for the ideas and programs meant to achieve beef policy’s goal of a more democratic expansion of access to beef. The department employees responsible for beef policy found themselves well-positioned throughout the postwar era to make sweeping policy changes thanks to being initially located within the Bureau of Animal Industry and having an unmatched expertise in animal sciences and economics.²⁷ Supporting them were a succession of six secretaries of agriculture who unquestioningly supported beef policy and innovated new ways to achieve the dream of a beef-fed nation. These beef policy

²⁶ Allen Matusow, *Farm Policies and Politics in the Truman Years* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 232.

²⁷ Alan Olmstead and Paul W. Rhodes, *Arresting Contagion: Science, Policy and Conflicts over Animal Disease Control* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

champions enjoyed a unique position within the federal government by being able to innovate public policy and nurture political development.²⁸ Department expertise allowed secretaries of agriculture to spend decades shaping a policy that reached into, not merely the homes, but the bodies of almost every American. Beef policy succeeded because of the power of the Agriculture Department, which, in the words of two scholars of American political development, was “an island of state strength in an ocean of weakness.”²⁹ While the end of beef policy coincided with the rise of industry groups supplanting the department’s expertise along with the loss of the department’s once-vaulted political position, decades of beef policy were made possible by the aggressive policymaking of a department that stood out within the federal government.

I am identifying and labeling two ideological tenants that undergirded beef policy throughout its life. I am calling these dietary modernization and dietary citizenship, which identifies two broad yet intertwined concepts that fueled beef policy. Dietary modernism, the first ideology, was the concept that diets should be the product of the most efficient and technologically advanced systems possible.³⁰ Dietary modernism was a subset of the emergent ideology known as modernization that existed among a broad

²⁸ Brian Balogh, *The Associational State: American Governance in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

²⁹ Theda Skocpol and Kenneth Finegold, “State Capacity and Economic Intervention in Early New Deal,” *Political Science Quarterly* 97 (Summer 1982): 271.

³⁰ Modernization ideology implied a domestic ideal within the United States. Dietary modernization is a formulation of the process driving that vision. Historians of United States and the world have pointed to key role modernization played in the international relations of the United States, particularly in its Cold War context. See, Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Amy L. S. Staples, *The Birth of Development: How the World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization, and World Health Organization Changed the World, 1945-1965* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2006).

cohort of policymakers and social scientists. It linked social progress to the idea that all societies should aspire to be like the United States. The second, dietary citizenship, was the concept that Americans were owed a healthy and wholesome diet.³¹ A majority of Americans held fast to the idea that citizens had an unwritten right to eat and that the public policy should play a role in putting food on their tables. These two ideologies gained their power from the government's responses to two world wars, which crystalized the idea that the state had a responsibility to improve its citizens' diets through public policy.³² The entwined ideologies obtained mass support and fueled the idea that a developed economy ought to produce a healthy diet for all of its citizens. In other words, Americans expected that they had a right to enjoy the best foods at the best prices produced by the best factories and farms. From the 1940s until the 1970s, these two ideologies resulted in a demand that Americans have a diet of daily beef free of economic, environmental, or political disruptions. The postwar economic transformation, in short, had to be paired with an equally significant dietary transformation, which enshrined beef as the dietary core of the prosperous American diet.

³¹ Dietary citizenship is the food component to economic citizenship. As scholars of economic citizenship have explained, Americans struggled to delineate their non-enumerated economic rights and turn that into policy. See, Mg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*; Kessler-Harris. Each historian dealt with a term they described as economic citizenship. For Jacobs, it was the ability of politically-engaged Americans to afford the cost of living, as used by Caroline Ware in her 1940 testimony before Congress. Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 6. For Kessler-Harris, economic citizenship is her response to T. H. Marshall and his concept of social citizenship. Economic citizenship for Kessler-Harris meant that full citizenship was restricted along employment lines rather than social lines, as was the case in Europe. Kessler-Harris, 10-13. For both, race and gender influence who could be a full economic citizen, a similarity shared with dietary citizenship.

³² On World War II and the national diet, see Levenstein, 64-79.

To explore beef and the state, this work takes up Meg Jacobs's challenge that historians study "state power by integrating popular politics and elite policymaking."³³ The energy for beef policy came from Americans' interactions with political economy and making sense of the policy and its successes and failures demands investigating that interaction. That beef mattered so much gave policymakers the popular backing needed for the government's sweeping reach and audacious goal. The policy did not come solely from those ensconced in the White House or from those engaged in overt political activism, either. It was in the meeting of both that the policy of mass beef consumption took shape. Policymaking came not only from elites or the interest of the consuming public. I also integrate elements of the social history of public policy to explore the depth of the policy within the government. As Margot Canaday's defines it, such an approach concerns itself with "what officials do" by going beyond the elite-level of the bureaucracy and into the actions of the rank-and-file civil servants.³⁴ Aspects of the policy came to fruition because non-elected officials innovated programs from the tools at their disposal.

Of all things made and bought during the postwar era, what makes beef so special? After all, ownership of items built for mass consumption has marked popular understanding of prosperity of the era, whether it was of a detached, single-family house or of a personal automobile. These all connoted prosperity, and, rightfully, journalists and

³³ Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*.

³⁴ Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

scholars have long focused on these markers.³⁵ Yet, as useful as they are for explaining the dramatic transformation of those decades, each fail to let us see one of the ways in which prosperity was felt most personally and why prosperity remained such a potent political economic goal. Living prosperously was not just about external objects that signified wealth or status nor was it only about appearing prosperous. To take the full measure of prosperity requires grappling with its more intimate elements: the relationship a person has with the food they buy and eat. Beef was how Americans ate their prosperity. The everyday act of chomping down on a juicy steak or a handmade roast involved an act of political economic participation through the stomach. Beef consumption was a special way for citizens to ingest the proof that life was good and satisfying.

The drive to forge a national diet around beef, prosperous and good as it felt to eat, reflected its cultural significance. Cultural values and power dynamics have always shaped consumption practices and the desirability of any given food item.³⁶ Beef was no exception. It entered American's lives with a kind of sacredness attached to it that no other food could quite match.³⁷ Indeed, beef allowed Americans to construct a cultural identity defined by an aspirational view of affluence that was obtainable by most but not all Americans, as noted by *Life* in its 1955 food issue, when it called the United States a

³⁵ For a popular portrayal of homeownership and prosperity, see *Life*, January 5, 1953. On automobiles and the transformation of America, see James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987).

³⁶ On culture and food, see Megan Elias, *Food on the Page: American Cookbooks and Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

³⁷ On beef and cultural identity in the United States in the twentieth century, see Marvin Harris, *The Sacred Cow and the Abdominal Pig: Riddles of Food and Culture*, first touchstone ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 109-29.

“Beef-Eating Nation.”³⁸ The magazine even ran a feature titled, “How Beef Gets to a Beef-Eating Nation.”³⁹ The cultural meanings Americans attached to beef served also to set boundaries that consigned other meats to a lesser status. Pork, long the nation’s staple meat, was a “lower-status meat” that gained an “unyielding association” with soul food and southern cooking.⁴⁰ Chicken was once identified as a meat for either urban Jewish consumers or black families, were it served African American women “as a tool for self-expression, self-actualization, resistance, and even accommodation and power.”⁴¹ Such boundary setting reflected the centrality of beef as a marker of national identity. “But,” as Kathleen Leonard Turner argues, “our choice of food is not simply cultural. We are also constrained by material circumstances.” Beef policy, although rooted in cultural identity, addressed material conditions. Policymakers knew that there was no guarantee that the market system after the war could or ever would deliver the beef. So they ensured it would. While putting beef on the American table certainly involved people choosing beef, beef policy made its contributions by guaranteeing that material circumstances were no barrier to beef consumption.

³⁸ Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table*, 18-19. The beef-eating cultural identity was not unique to the United States. Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008), 27-32.

³⁹ “How Beef Gets to a Beef-Eating Nation,” *Life*, January 3, 1955, 78-79.

⁴⁰ Gabriel N. Rosenberg, “A Race Suicide among the Hogs: The Biopolitics of Pork in the United States, 1865-1930,” *American Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (March 2016): 56; Jennifer Jensen Wallach, *Dethroning the Deceitful Pork Chop: Rethinking African American Foodways from Slavery to Obama* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2015), xxii.

⁴¹ On Jewish consumption of chicken, see Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table*, 108-09. On African American and chicken consumption, see Psyche A. Williams-Forsen, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 2.

Nature in addition to culture had a role to play in the success of mass beef consumption.⁴² Non-human forces constrained what humans could achieve with beef. As the historian Roger Horowitz explained, cattle's bodies, with their long muscles and connective tissues and leanness, inhibited preservation or industrialization until producers could develop a system for processing cattle flesh while also preserving its flavor.⁴³ After World War II, freezing and long-haul trucks allowed producers to swiftly deliver beef to places increasingly distant to the point of production.⁴⁴ The fatty and well-marbled beef that consumers increasingly demanded throughout the postwar era required the use of hormones and feed additives that hijacked cattle's natural digestion in order to serve producers' economic needs of fattening done in the shortest time possible.⁴⁵ The role of nature does not end there, though. Policymakers tasked themselves with making mass production possible by eradicating the disease-causing agents that thrived in the environments created by producers. As the economic historians Alan Olmstead and Paul Rhodes argue, meat production is inherently dangerous and involves countless points of exposure of animal carcasses to threats that could, at any moment, turn that meat into a

⁴² This work draws the definition of "nature" from the historian William Cronon. Lacking a better word, nature captures well the ambiguous relationship between humans and non-humans. As he argues, English "really has no good alternative for describing the nonhuman systems which humanity acts upon." William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), xix. Years later, Cronon wrote an important clarification, explaining that "nature is a mirror onto which we project our own ideas and values; but it is also a material reality that sets limits...on the possibility of human ingenuity and storytelling." William Cronon, "Partings," *Uncommon Grounds: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 458.

⁴³ Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table*, 9-10.

⁴⁴ John Fraser Hart, *The Changing Scale of American Agriculture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 40-61.

⁴⁵ On the rise of marbled meat and consumer preferences, see Skaggs, 168-70.

disease vector.⁴⁶ Food consumption is one of the most intimate links that humans have to the natural world.⁴⁷ It is through food that humans consume nature the most intimately, “in the belly.”⁴⁸ Indeed, by digesting food, people turn nature into their bodies.⁴⁹

Throughout the history of beef policy, it is important to keep in mind that nature effected its outcome and shaped production and consumption at every step.

Beef policy was defined by what it did not do as much as by what it did do. Policymakers felt no obligation to guarantee that there was equity in the retail marketplace despite their goal of forging a national diet with beef at its center. Their concern was dietary rights and not dietary justice, which guided government action for three decades. Noting the differences between rights and justice helps explain why policymakers worried about average beef prices but paid scant attention to prices at markets serving poor or minority shoppers. I am employing an idea of dietary justice derived from the work of scholars and activists who are concerned about social justice.⁵⁰ They have noted that intersecting lines of oppression create barriers to full social

⁴⁶ Olmstead and Rhodes.

⁴⁷ On nature and food, see Robert N. Chester III and Nicolaas Mink, “Having Our Cake and Eating It Too: Food’s Place in Environmental History—A Forum,” *Environmental History* 14 (April 2009): 309-11.

⁴⁸ Nicolaas Mink, “Forum: It Begins in the Belly,” *Environmental History* 14 (April 2009): 312.

⁴⁹ As the historian Linda Nash argues, bodies are both of the environment and an environment of their own. Linda Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge* (Berkeley: University Press of California, 2006), 1-7.

⁵⁰ Dietary justice is analogous to the food justice put forth by Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman. As they argue, the early-twenty-first century food system includes intersections of race and class inequalities that prevent many from fully accessing their food rights. They note that this is a person’s positionality within the larger food economy. Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), xiii.

participation on an array of topics, such as reproductive or environmental policy.⁵¹ It is also so with diets. Throughout the thirty years covered in this work, enjoying beef depended on full access to the consumer market, despite existing barriers and hierarchies of access that divided citizens' access to consumption by their race, class, and even gender. This work traces policymakers' and politicians' efforts to secure dietary rights defined narrowly. Importantly, only briefly and intermittently were issues of sustainability, race, gender, poverty, or inequality addressed in the process of creating and implementing beef policy.⁵² Forging a diet of beef for the majority of Americans relied on a politics minimally addressing equality and social transformation. The invisibility of social justice facilitated the proliferation of dietary rights by allowing its proponents to ignore tougher questions about the fairness of the market and who gets to eat like an American.

The terms surrounding beef can be a bit slippery. In this study, beef refers to the flesh of cattle made into a commodity or a processed food product. Beef is a red meat that, along with pork, lamb, and mutton, are also called meat. The source of red meat are livestock animals: cattle, swine, sheep, and lamb. While historically a separate meat, veal is still a beef item and has mostly lost its once firm distinction as a separate meat.

Standing opposite red meat are seafood and poultry, two types of animal proteins eaten in

⁵¹ On reproductive justice, see Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger, *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017). On environmental justice, see David Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature: Theories, Movements, and Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). Feminist scholars and activists have explored the connection between the objectification of women and animals that allowed for the oppression of women and the mass consumption of meat. Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum, 1990).

⁵² On consumption and inequality in the postwar era, see Lizbeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

the postwar era as a luxury or a substitute for red meat. Poultry is the meat from chicken and turkey. Poultry, by not being a red meat, had belonged to a separate category although those distinctions have mostly disappeared. To call beef meat can minimize these important distinctions yet that is exactly how it has often been used. Meat by the 1940s had become a word that could mean any animal protein or serve as a shorthand for red meat. The most common usage for meat was as a way of referring mostly to beef but sometimes to pork. To study beef is to study meat but also to study strictly the flesh of cattle. As such, meat is occasionally used in this work as synonymous for beef, but in a way that mirrors the usage found in the sources.

The history of beef policy in this work follows a rough chronological order. Chapter 1 begins with the ending of World War II. President Harry S. Truman and his administration attempted to keep wartime programs in place in order to assist the economy in transitioning from a wartime to a peacetime one. He failed and poisoned direct economic control programs for future presidents while foreign aid offered his administration a chance to use markets and distribution methods to achieve his plan. Chapter 2 takes up the history of production-oriented programs that were meant to facilitate modernization and the rise of mass production. The largest effort took the form of a foot-and-mouth disease eradication campaign in Mexico, which lasted from 1947 to 1954. In chapter 3, Truman's inability to smooth the transition to peacetime ensured that beef production and consumption remained unstable despite turning to economic controls for the Korean War. Newly elected President Dwight D. Eisenhower ended both the war and the controls, allowing beef to flow into the consumer marketplace. Chapter 4 explores the golden era of beef. Eisenhower embraced a business-oriented form of beef

policy and helped ensure mass consumption before rising prices caused the strife over prices caused Congress to pass a beef import quota law. The shift to a consumer-oriented strategy is covered in Chapter 5, particularly President Lyndon Baines Johnson's embrace of a plan to expand federal meat inspection with the Wholesome Meat Act of 1967. In Chapter 6, beef policy under President Richard M. Nixon ended. Success contained the seeds of failure. The Nixon administration attempted, but failed, to maintain the beef status quo but failed to keep prices in check and managed to alienate both producers and consumers. A massive boycott in 1973 marked the final moment of consumer faith in public policy to address their dietary rights. Americans stopped consuming beef as they once had and the president was unable to salvage a policy based on a beef consensus.

Chapter 1

Beef for the Multitudes:

Reconversion and the Origins of Beef Policy, 1945-1948

The National Provisioner, the meat industry trade journal, declared in a 1981 special issue that 1946 marked a monumental moment: “meat for the multitudes.”¹ Looking back, it was then that the meat industry had finally made mass produced meat affordable for Americans at all income levels to afford. The journal drew inspiration for this theme from an annual meeting of the trade group the American Meat Institute (AMI) in Chicago at the Stevens Hotel in 1946. “Meat for the Multitudes,” in its original use, was aspirational yet predictive. During the meeting, as if to prove that mass consumption was within reach for workers, strikers from the CIO-affiliated union the United Packing House Workers circled the hotel demanding, “We Want Meat.” The magazine quoted from a speech by O. E. Jones, vice president in charge of advertising at Swift and Co., who spoke to the industry about the upside of labor agitation and quipped, “When John L. Lewis, among others, wired President Truman recently that his miners would walk out of the pits if they didn’t get some meat to eat, you knew meat was really in demand.”²

¹ “Meat for the Multitudes,” *The National Provisioner*, July 4, 1981, 263. This was volume one of a special edition, itself named “Meat for the Multitudes,” that celebrated the industry’s ability to deliver meat to the multitudes who would have never had a chance to eat a meat-based diet were it not for producers’ centuries-long drive to find innovative ways to produce the most meat possible at the lowest cost possible. Historians have previously used the term to signify the birth of modern urban meat consumption patterns. Roger Horowitz, Jeffrey M. Pilcher and Sydney Watts, “Meat for the Multitudes: Market Culture in Paris, New York City, and Mexico City over the Long Nineteenth Century,” *The American Historical Review* 109, no. 4 (October 2004): 1055-1083.

² E. O. Jones quoted in *The National Provisioner*, July 4, 1981, 261-263.

Jones explained to his fellow industry members that the industry was poised to make the theme a reality. In a year marked by a fierce battle over meat prices and federal regulations, the demand for meat was stronger than ever and was only going improve. The exploding demand had causes related to the recently ended World War II and resultant economic prosperity. It was a matter of poor Americans being able to afford meat. The lowest income group had increased their meat purchases by 38 percent between the war years of 1942 and 1944, an increase he attributed to rising wages and the nearly full employment, and their purchasing increase was greater than from any other income group. The addition of lower income Americans to the ranks of meat consumers had permanently expanded demand more than could ever have happened if wealthy Americans alone were experiencing rising incomes. Furthermore, veterans came home having eaten, perhaps for the first time, a diet with “high quality meat for the main dish” and were likely to continue wanting more.³ Additionally, the industry’s nutrition research and outreach efforts were stoking demand by teaching consumers how to buy and cook meat. Taken together, the future for meat looked good. However, the meat industry had as its main task the need to make the expanded consumption permanent, particularly by overcoming distribution inefficiencies. He warned, “Backed by the tremendously increased demand for meat, the industry can well afford to face the future optimistically and to think more aggressively about meat’s proper place in the nation’s eating pattern than was done before the war.”⁴

³ E. O. Jones quoted in *The National Provisioner*, July 4, 1981, 263.

⁴ E. O. Jones quoted in *The National Provisioner*, July 4, 1981, 263-64.

Members of the meat industry, like Jones, were not alone in 1946 in contemplating the future of meat and its place within the national diet, and they were not alone in strategizing how to make the changes in meat consumption permanent. Members of President Harry S. Truman's administration were at that very same time formulating a policy of enshrining beef as the meat for the multitudes. There was a policy of mass beef consumption built on postwar economic security. In linking beef and security, these politicians, policymakers, and civil servants kicked off a three-decade effort of balancing production and consumption in the name of the public interest. Beginning in the same year that Jones called the industry to action, the executive branch heeded their own call to make mass beef consumption possible. As one prominent figure within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) put it, "With the increase in incomes during the war years, the American people have placed meat in an increasingly important position in their diets. In fact, under the impetus of wartime wages the demand for meat has grown at a great rate and I feel confident that the high level of consumption will be maintained and further increased."⁵

The Truman administration's beef policy was an effort at transforming and modernizing the national diet, to guarantee meat for the multitudes through beef. His administration struggled for years after the war to smooth out the transition to a peacetime economy and set the nation on the eventual path of mass beef consumption. Meanwhile, his administration failed to address the domestic problems of supply and prices that prevented mass beef consumption. Despite failing to fix the economic

⁵ N. E. Dodd to C. L. Jamison, October 30, 1946, Animals, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

problems, they found more success in managing feed grains, a critical resource for beef producers hoping to ramp up production to meet demand. In addition, the administration turned to international food assistance to help domestic food producers. It was not the wartime emergency economic controls of the beef industry that became the policy tools for mass beef consumption but the ad hoc use of executive power to support domestic consumption. For failing to secure mass beef consumption in the turmoil of reconversion, Truman and the Democratic Party received a stinging rebuke in the “Beefsteak” election of 1946. But, by the following election, Democrats and Truman rebounded and renewed their commitment forging a national diet around beef.

The historian Robert J. Matusow best captured the mentality that emerged out of the Truman administration’s battles of the first few years after the end of the war. He argued, “The liberal vision, therefore, was of an America free of malnutrition and a farm population producing for use at a profit. Abundance rather than restriction, subsidized consumption rather than surpluses, free market prices instead of parity prices, and in depression, income payments rather than price supports.”⁶ Their vision of the free enterprise system was one with a vigilant state constantly acting to correct disruptive events and smooth over ruptures between supply and demand. It was a vision of political economy that fit neatly into a society undergoing a significant drop in income inequality and the emergence of a strong middle class.⁷ Not that the liberal political economy

⁶ Allen Matusow, *Farm Policies and Politics in the Truman Years* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 119.

⁷ Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez, “Income Inequality in the United States,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118, no. 1 (February 2003): 1-39. Piketty later developed the argument into a critique of global inequality under capitalism. Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2014).

remained uncontested or that race, class, and gender inequalities disappeared.⁸ Instead, policymakers had built new state apparatuses to guide the nation's beef economy toward more people than ever before.

The push for mass beef consumption began with labor struggles in 1946. The end of World War II gave meatpacking workers an opportunity to push for their economic rights, which in turn pushed the Department of Agriculture toward developing the policy of mass beef consumption. Industrial unionization at meat packing plants had recently gained new life among workers, leading to the creation of the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) in October 1943, which proved itself to be a shop-floor oriented union ready to battle for workers' rights.⁹ The new union's militancy and dedication to local participation generated a real sense of possibility that was soon confirmed by successes at the bargaining table. Along with the American Federation of

⁸ On the conservative response to the political economy of the postwar era, see Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade against the New Deal* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009). For contemporary discussions, see Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1958); Michael Harrington, *The Other America* (New York: Macmillan Publishers, 1962). The historian Lizbeth Cohen's work on postwar consumer political culture integrates race, class, and gender inequality into a singular narrative, Lizbeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2003), 112-344. On race, see Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (1995; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). On class, see Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*, revised and expanded ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 244-265. On gender, see Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Pursuit of Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 117-289; Nancy Woloch, *A Class by Herself: Protective Laws for Women Workers, 1890s-1990s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 152-234. On the role of social science knowledge and the understanding of poverty, see Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁹ Roger Horowitz, "*Negro and White, United and Fight!*": *A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930-90* (Urbana: University Illinois Press, 1997), 144-147. Horowitz argues that the local and shop floor emphasis of the UPWA gave it a distinctly liberal and progressive character, enabling the union membership to participate in postwar civil rights struggles to benefit its members.

Labor-affiliate Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen and the National Brotherhood of Packinghouse Workers (NBPW), the UPWA succeeded at getting the largest meatpackers to accept unionization and create an industry-wide master agreement on wages, which lasted decades and allowed meatpackers to afford to have a diet rich in beef. The unions working together drove up the overall level of meatpacking wages compared to other industrial jobs, with wages rising from being almost 3 percent less than other manufacturing workers (\$1.40 to \$1.44) in 1950 to being 15 percent more (\$2.60 to \$2.26) in 1960.¹⁰ Fed by successes, unionization spread through the industry, after being recognized by the big four meatpacking firms (Armour, Cudahay, Swift, and Wilson). Before too long, the UPWA had 60,000 members in 70 plants while the older Amalgamated had 7,700 members in 22 plants and the NBPW had 7,900 members in 9 plants for a total of 75,600 union members across 101 meatpacking plants.¹¹

At the start of the year, meat industry workers were not the only ones embracing a more militant and organized posture. The recent gains made by labor under the Roosevelt administration were fragile and the ending of the war opened up the possibility that employers might undo the recent victories as supported by the New Deal.¹² In anticipation of the looming counterattack, unions tried several tactics to strengthen their position. One was Operation Dixie, organized by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), which was an organization drive to unionize the south with the goal

¹⁰ Horowitz, *Negro and White, United and Fight!*, 276.

¹¹ Horowitz, *Negro and White, United and Fight!*, 147.

¹² On the gains unions made from 1933 to 1945, see Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 54-97.

of creating a bulwark against Southern antiunion activity.¹³ In another example, workers from the United Automobile Workers (UAW) struck for 113 days in the winter of 1945-46 with the slogan of “Purchasing Power for Prosperity.”¹⁴ UAW leader Walter Reuther hoped the campaign would dramatize the idea that labors were consumers who needed their paychecks to rise greater than the rate of inflation.

Meatpacking workers were ready to join their fellow unions in fighting for their prosperity. The workers had plenty to be unhappy about. Weakly earnings at packing plants had tumbled 9.5 percent between January 1944 and fall 1945 as a result of wartime curtailment of overtime pay and their hourly wages started lagging behind those found in other industrial jobs.¹⁵ Rumblings of a strike began in mid-1945, starting with UPWA-represented plants. By January 1946, workers from the UPWA were ready to call a strike and were joined by workers from the smaller unions, Amalgamated and NBPW. That month, workers at a total of one-hundred plants turned their energy into action and went on strike. Their demand was for the industry wage level, as set by the master agreement on wages, to be increased. The strike effected the four major meat packers most but also included several other plants but had a major effect on total output. The plants effected by the strike were responsible for producing a significant portion of the nation’s meat supply, estimated at 60 percent of the federally inspected slaughter and 40 percent of the total national slaughter.

¹³ Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 103-04.

¹⁴ Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 103.

¹⁵ Horowitz, “*Negro and White, United and Fight!*”, 168.

Because the strike occurred at meatpacking plants, responsibility for resolving it fell to the Department of Agriculture instead of the Department of Labor. Secretary of Agriculture Clinton P. Anderson viewed the strike as inhibiting the creation of a stable peacetime food order and responded accordingly. If the strike was allowed to continue for even one week, he learned, production in federal inspected plants would drop for cattle by 57 percent and for hogs by 67 percent.¹⁶ Additionally, slowed down slaughter meant that cattlemen would keep their animals on feed longer, thus putting more pressure on grain prices and further destabilize the economy.¹⁷ With the federal government only able to procure meat it had inspected, Anderson worried a strike would also threaten his department's military commitments. As he wrote to Director Harold D. Smith of the Bureau of the Budget, his department needed production to continue at full pace because full production of meat and meat by-products was "needed in connection with the war effort."¹⁸ Peacetime stability, initially built on temporary wartime powers, would only be assured if meat industry workers were satisfied enough to return to work.

Anderson turned to an emergency wartime power to resolve the looming crisis that let his department seize plants with labor problems. Anderson tasked H. E. Reed, director of the Livestock Branch within the Production and Marketing Administration,

¹⁶ Slaughter reduction was estimated at 170,000 out of 298,246 cattle and 995,000 out of 1,485,075 hogs. "Estimated Number of Livestock which Will Be Withheld from Slaughter if Packing House Strike Lasts One Week," [January 16, 1946?], Packing Plants, Box 10, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁷ "Estimated Quantities of Feed Required to Feed Livestock withheld from Market because of Strike (One Week)," [January 16, 1946?], Packing Plants, Box 10, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO; "Summary of the Feed Situation," January 18, 1946, Packing Plants, Box 10, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁸ Clinton P. Anderson to Harold D. Smith, January 23, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits (1 of 3) Jan 1-Mar 9, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

with developing a plan for seizing meatpacking plants and stockyards with labor troubles. Reed responded on January 11 by warning that such a plan was both risky and costly. Labor and management would have to agree to work under government direction, which labor would only do if it could get the requested wage increases while management would only do if the government would cover all losses accrued during the seizure.¹⁹ Reed provided Anderson a full report of the process on January 21. The president would first have to issue an executive order before the USDA could go forward with the seizure. Then, a governing structure would have to be established while also needing to be fully staffed. He claimed that management cooperation was not needed even if management would remain in control. But, he warned, labor was key because their opposition would ruin the whole plan since “there is no way to compel any large number of people to work.”²⁰

On January 26, President Truman issued executive orders providing Anderson the authority he needed to seize the striking plants, turning the federal government into the nation’s main beef manufacturer. Executive Orders 9685 and 9690 gave Anderson the ability to seize striking plants under the auspices of the War Labor Disputes Act.²¹ Anderson appointed fellow New Mexican Gayle G. Armstrong as the Government Representative for the Meat Supply. Armstrong initially proved to be a controversial appointment with New Mexican labor groups opposing his appointment over his running

¹⁹ Memorandum, H. E. Reed to The Secretary, January 11, 1946, Packing Plants, Box 10, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

²⁰ Memorandum, H. E. Reed to The Secretary, January 21, 1946, Packing Plants, Box 10, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

²¹ Executive Order 9685, February 2, 1946, Truman Presidential Library, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://trumanlibrary.org/executiveorders/index.php?pid=427&st=9685&st1=>.

an open shop factory in Gallup, NM, during the war. According to Anderson, Armstrong had to run it as an open shop because the Army had made it a requirement so that Navajo could be employed and not as an anti-labor measure as the unions argued. Anderson wrote a friend in New Mexico in response to labor groups' opposition, saying, "As a matter of fact, I don't quite understand a lot of people in this world."²² Anderson was aware of the need to keep labor satisfied with whoever he chose but controversies like the one surrounding Armstrong seemed to arise inevitably, "We could never hope for a situation where we will avoid criticism, but we just can't help that in this world."²³ Following Armstrong's appointment, he set up his office in Chicago and began working on administrating the seizure while waiting for a proposal for addressing labor's central complaint without further complaint about his record in New Mexico.

Anderson turned to the Department of Labor for assistance with the hopes that the department could issue a report on the strikers' grievances. Secretary of Labor Lewis B. Schwellenbach appointed Edwin E. Witte, Raymond W. Starr, and Clark Kerr to determine the merits of the union's claim.²⁴ The three-person board worked quickly by conducting hearings in Chicago from January 22 to 26 and in Washington, D.C., on January 31 and releasing "The Report and Recommendations of the Fact-Finding Board

²² Clinton P. Anderson to Clyde Oden, January 2, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits (1 of 3) Jan 1-Mar 9, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

²³ Clinton P. Anderson to Clyde Oden, January 2, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits (1 of 3) Jan 1-Mar 9, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

²⁴ Edwin E. Witte, Raymond W. Starr, and Clark Kerr, "Report and Recommendations of the Fact-Finding Board in the Meat Packing Industry Case," February 7, 1946, OF 407-B Meat Packers Strike, Box 1331, OF 407-B, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO [hereafter cited as Witte, et al., "Report and Recommendations."].

in the Meat Packing Industry Case” on February 7. The board sought to defend the interests of the nation’s third-largest industry by weighing labor’s request for a wage increase against management’s claim that such an increase would ruin the industry. The core demand made by the UPWA was for a raise of 17.5 cents per hour and the board considered what it would mean for workers and the industry if approved. To begin with, the board observed that work at meatpacking plants had changed little in the prior fifty years and was still done largely by manual labor, which they described as “hard, disagreeable, unpleasant.”²⁵ During the war, though, pay for meatpacking workers had recently risen above the pay for manufacturing jobs with weekly “take-home” pay averaging \$40.89, thanks to a longer-than-average work week of 47.6 hours.²⁶ But, the hourly pay rate had recently declined relative to other industries, and packinghouse workers’ pay now ranging between 74.6 cents and 87.5 cents per hour, compared to an average of 82.2 cents per hour for all manufacturing jobs.²⁷ Compounding the problem was the large portion of workers classified as unskilled or common laborers that earned less than the average and had a high turn-over rate. This category included most of the women meatpackers, who comprised 20 percent of the meatpacking workforce.²⁸ While the board seemed to side mostly with meatpacking workers, legislative mandates meant that the board had to take special pains to protect the industry, even if that meant making recommendations that would force less competitive firms out of business or workers to

²⁵ Witte, et al., “Report and Recommendations,” 14.

²⁶ Witte, et al., “Report and Recommendations,” 6. The average weekly pay across the industry just four years earlier had been \$26.84 with an average of 39.3 hours of work per week.

²⁷ Witte, et al., “Report and Recommendations,” 5.

²⁸ Witte, et al., “Report and Recommendations,” 8-10.

settle for less.²⁹ The board recommended a \$0.16 per hour increase, \$0.05 of which was to be absorbed by the companies and \$0.11 of which was to come from federal subsidies through price controls.³⁰

The Department of Agriculture pledged its support to the report. With the major packing plants under the department's control, Anderson through Armstrong had the power to implement the order. Anderson wrote Schwellenbach following the release of the report to announce that he would implement the recommended raise in accordance with the War Labor Disputes Act and the National Wage Stabilization Board. He added that his department would work with labor and management on an agreeable solution to ensure "an uninterrupted supply of meat from the plants and the Government's possession of the plants terminated as soon as practicable."³¹ Anderson explained that the wage increase order was to be paired with an increase in maximum prices to allow companies to cover the costs of the increases, which would require Armstrong to assist the smaller packing firms in its implementation.³² The secretary pressed for ways to pay for the wage increases, hoping that perhaps the Reconstruction Finance Corporation or the Commodity Credit Corporation could pay the difference between the old and new

²⁹ Witte, et al., "Report and Recommendations," 11. The report explained that "the free enterprise system" meant that those unable to absorb the increased labor costs would go out of business. Witte, et al., "Report and Recommendations," 17.

³⁰ Witte, et al., "Report and Recommendations," 20-21.

³¹ Clinton P. Anderson to the Honorable Secretary of Labor, February 9, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits (1 of 3) Jan 1-Mar 9, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

³² Clinton P. Anderson to Gayle G. Armstrong, February 13, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits (1 of 3) Jan 1-Mar 9, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

wages, retroactively applied to October. This was not to be, though, with the solicitor of the department informing him that Congress had prevented such an action through limiting the amount of funds available for each meatpacking firm.³³ The meatpackers would be left to pay the difference themselves, particularly for the retroactive part of the pay raise. On February 25, the National Wage Stabilization Board issued its approval of the 16 cents per hour increase for all meat packers and, in the same order, required firms seeking to raise the price ceilings for their products to ask the Office of Price Administration (OPA) for relief.³⁴

Anderson began issuing orders withdrawing federal oversight of meatpacking plants as early as February 15, starting with forty plants belonging to Armour, Swift, or Wilson.³⁵ The rest followed soon after with some holdouts stretching out the process into the coming months. The Kohrs Packing Company of Davenport, IA, lost federal oversight on March 9 when the company reached an agreement with its union to follow the board's wage increase guidelines and the union agreed to drop its case for the pay raise being retroactive.³⁶ Of particular concern by March was getting enough cattle to the

³³ The Solicitor to The Secretary of Agriculture, February 19, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits (1 of 3) Jan 1-Mar 9, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

³⁴ National Wage Stabilization Board, “General Pattern Approval No. 1: Meat Packing Industry,” February 25, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits (2 of 3) Mar 10-May 1, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

³⁵ Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, “Order Terminating Possession,” February 14, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits (1 of 3) Jan 1-Mar 9, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

³⁶ Clinton P. Anderson to The President, March 9, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits (2 of 3) Mar 10-May 1, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

remaining government-operated plants for full production to proceed.³⁷ One union leader even suggested that eastern meat marketers purchased cattle illegally at prices above ceiling, funneling animals out of the western packings plants.³⁸ To end the oversight that still remained, Anderson in March and April used federal price control mechanisms to approve subsidy payments to cover the costs of increased wages.³⁹ The final plant to lose federal oversight was the Saint Paul Union Stock Yards Company on May 22.⁴⁰ Thus ended the only time that the federal government directly oversaw meat production.

With both workers and managers accepting the compromise pay raises and government oversight of meat production ended, the administration soon turned toward price and supply management in its goal of making mass beef consumption as reality. Economic controls were the next tools to be marshalled, which were the product of the crisis-oriented political economy of the Great Depression and World War II. The Truman administration hoped to turn them toward serving a political economy of stability and

³⁷ Clinton P. Anderson to Ernest Kanatzar, March 29, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits (1 of 3) Jan 1-Mar 9, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

³⁸ Jerome Scaglione to Hon. Scott W. Lucas, March 28, 1946, Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, “Order Terminating Possession,” February 14, 1946, The Solicitor to The Secretary of Agriculture, February 19, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits (2 of 3) Mar 10-May 1, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

³⁹ Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, “Compensatory Wage Adjustment Subsidy for Slaughterers,” April 22, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits (2 of 3) Mar 10-May 1, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD; Robert H. Shields to the Secretary, April 19, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits (2 of 3) Mar 10-May 1, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁴⁰ Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, “Order Terminating Possession,” May 22, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits (3 of 3) May 18-June 13, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

prosperity. “Purchasing power,” an economic concept favored by the liberal economists who worked for the Roosevelt administration, was used to measure economic recovery since it gauged how much stuff each consumer dollar could buy. It was a concept that held the promise of permanent economic security during the peacetime reconversion, as the UAW had revealed at in its strike slogan.⁴¹ President Franklin D. Roosevelt had relied on purchasing power to achieve the domestic security that was the leitmotif of the New Deal.⁴² Security in this way was of an all-encompassing kind that included domestic tranquility and economic prosperity, which had fostered the creation of a labyrinth of social welfare and political economic agencies during World War II, such as the Office of Price Administration, the War Food Administration, and the War Manpower Commission.

The Roosevelt administration through the Office of Price Administration developed a new way for managing the food economy and supporting purchasing power, which the Truman administration hoped to maintain after the war ended. Under the OPA, retailers were required to set prices no higher than a specified amount, called the ceiling price, and were required to sell items under a rationing system and thus keep agricultural production in-line with consumer demand. With prices creeping up only slowly, President Franklin D. Roosevelt dubbed this “holding the line” on prices.⁴³ The OPA’s lack of a formal fulltime enforcers echoed President Herbert Hoover’s tactic for the Food

⁴¹ On purchasing power and the Roosevelt administration, see Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 136-37.

⁴² David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 365.

⁴³ Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 197.

Administration during World War I by relying on volunteers to enforce federal government regulations.⁴⁴ Volunteers kept the state seemingly smaller and less intrusive, rendering its political economy policy less visible despite its heavy presence.⁴⁵ During the war, millions of women volunteered to be enforcers while over twenty million signed the OPA's Home Front Pledge, which grew the OPA into a nationwide "dense web" of volunteers working for one of the 5,525 local War Price and Rationing Boards.⁴⁶ "OPA supporters," in the words of the historian Meg Jacobs, "identified themselves as consumers who belonged to one big group of underrepresented citizens."⁴⁷ The process of enforcing radicalized shopping and gave women the formal power to demand that prices match a specific number. Volunteering for the OPA went as follows: women went from store to store with the power of the federal government clutched in their hands, in the form of the price books, checking to see if retailers were violating local price board rulings. The volunteers then cajoled retailers to abide by price ceilings by using their power as consumers-deputies to get retailers to agree to the rules. OPA work resulted in meat consumption rising from 127 to 159 pounds per capita while also successfully fighting inflation.⁴⁸ Jacobs further summarized the OPA by focusing how innovative its

⁴⁴ On volunteers and World War I food programs, see Robert D. Cuff, "The Ideology of Voluntarism and War Organization During the Great War," *The Journal of American History* 64, no. 2 (September 1977): 358-72.

⁴⁵ On the concept of a visible state, see Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁴⁶ Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 180 and 202.

⁴⁷ Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 219.

⁴⁸ Harvey A. Levenstien, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 87; Memorandum, Chester Bowles to Members of OPA Industry Advisory Committee, September 15, 1946, Rationing, Termination of, Box 11, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO. Wholesale prices rose 148 percent in the seventy months after the start of World War I while only rising 41.5 percent for a similar time span after

structure had been. It “served,” Jacobs explained, “as a radical model of state management: a popular government agency working in alliance with a coalition of labor, consumers, and social liberals that challenged the right of private industries to set their own prices and sell their own items freely.”⁴⁹

The OPA did more than transform economic citizenship for its supporters, the controls also provided the federal government with the power to manage the food economy at an unprecedented scale.⁵⁰ Not even the political developments during the previous world war gave the federal government as much influence over the nation’s food supply or the national diet as did those developed during the later one.⁵¹ But the successes of the controls as well as the increases in employment and wages forced the Truman administration to confront what the administrator of the OPA, Chester Bowles, described as “a strong hand on a coiled spring.”⁵² With the end of the war, the hand was about to release the spring and possibly allow the economy to reach new levels of inflation. As he saw it, he and Anderson had to decide how fast it should uncoil. Their collective answer was for the coil to unwind slowly, which beef would help them achieve. In December 1945, members of the OPA and USDA met in the office of John W. Snyder, director of the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion, and agreed that

the start of World War II. The cost of living over the same period for World War I rose 106 percent but for World War II rose only 30.8 percent.

⁴⁹ Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 180.

⁵⁰ On OPA and agriculture production, see Robert J. Matusow, *Farm Policies and Politics in the Truman Years* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).

⁵¹ On World War I and Herbert Hoover’s Food Administration, see David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

⁵² Memorandum, Chester Bowles to Members of OPA Industry Advisory Committee, September 15, 1946, Rationing, Termination of, Box 11, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

price controls would remain on cattle and beef, as would subsidy payments, while rationing would end in January.⁵³ Enforcement concerns had forced the end rationing with the OPA rapidly losing its ability to enforce meat rationing. An estimated two-hundred local OPA boards were closing each week with only three-thousand left by December. Despite the loss of rationing, USDA officials had a favorable view of the compromise because they thought that focusing on production management would slow the coil.⁵⁴

By March, the slowly eroding wartime regulatory system no longer sufficiently kept inflation in check according to Paul A. Porter, a senior OPA administrator. He explained at length to Anderson how the current regulatory landscape was no longer able to fight the looming inflation crisis even though the OPA had improved the meat situation during a previous eight months.⁵⁵ The problem, as he saw it, came from regulations unable to stop the problem of excessive supply of high-priced slaughter-ready cattle from entering the nation's meatpacking plants. It began with a postwar spending spree of cattle purchases by buyers entering the cattle business for the first time seeking a quick fortune and therefore driving up the total demand for cattle. The surging demand for cattle then

⁵³ Clinton P. Anderson to Walter Winchell, April 22, 1946, Rationing, Termination of, Box 11, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁵⁴ Memorandum, D. A. FitzGerald to the Secretary, September 21, 1945, Rationing, Termination of, Box 11, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO. FitzGerald predicted the forthcoming meat consumption rates: fourth quarter 1945 meat consumption at 145 to 150 pounds per person annual rate; first quarter 1946 consumption at 140 to 145 pounds per person annual rate; and second quarter 1946 consumption at 135 to 140 pounds per person annual rate. Another memorandum predicted a gap between total supply per person versus total demand per person at two pounds per person more demand than supply. Memorandum, Interagency Committee on Red Point Foods to H. E. Reed, October 10, 1945, Rationing, Termination of, Box 11, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁵⁵ Paul A. Porter to Clinton P. Anderson, March 29, 1946, Animal Products 2 Meat-Meat Products (1 of 2) Jan. 1 – May 28, Box 1247, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

drove up cattle prices right as a seasonal price increase hit, further escalating prices. Those new owners then sold their cattle for custom slaughter at a variety of places that the USDA was unlikely to reach, such as packing plants not under federal inspection or those that failed to comply with federal regulations but had nevertheless still claimed a federal meat subsidy through the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. The OPA was not likely to help either, with it now employing only 350 investigators to oversee thousands of sales of cattle, but Porter doubted that even ten times as many enforcement agents would be enough. Even the 1,285 pending lawsuits against wrongful production was unlikely to stem the tide that was driving up prices. He left Anderson with a dark warning that too much of a fundamental transformation had occurred for the administration to be able to rely the wartime regulatory system to achieve economic stability. Despite this gloomy warning, Anderson remained committed to the wartime system. He boasted to a member of Congress of the successes in dietary management made possible by the wartime controls: total calorie consumption per person per day in the United States had been 3,250 before the war but had recently risen to 3,360 at the same time that nutrition had also improved, particularly in proteins, minerals, and vitamins. He also noted that annual per capita consumption of meat before the war had been 126 pounds but had recently reached an estimated 150 pounds per person.⁵⁶

As economic controls crumbled, the Truman administration planned for postwar stability on the assumption that full employment would give Americans the incomes needed to support mass beef consumption. Armed with adequate family incomes,

⁵⁶ Clinton P. Anderson to Hon. Walter C. Ploeser, March 15, 1946, Food 5 Distribution Mar. 15 – April 14, 1946, Box 1280, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

American women were to shop for their family's food needs without price regulations supporting them. The basic outline of the general thinking can be seen in a report from 1945. Anderson had appointed a group chaired by Raymond C. Smith to study the looming reconversion effort. The report focused on providing a blueprint for a unified action by the various federal agencies responsible for political economic policy. Under the heading "Distribution and Consumption," the report explained that "in agriculture the big problem will be to find profitable market outlets of what is produced, to replace disappearing wartime demand. Full employment and high purchasing power of all consuming groups are essential."⁵⁷ In other words, economic stability through employment and rising incomes had to be the ultimate source of social stability, once inflation had been conquered. Nevertheless, Congress extended beef price controls set to expire in April to now expire on June 30 but only after a contentious debate.⁵⁸ Snyder explained to lawmakers that the administration wanted to rely on price controls through June to ensure that the expanding production could be absorbed by consumers in a way that would avoid a replay of the crash that had occurred at the end of World War I. Prices at the end of that war rose 30 percent while production only rose 15 percent before even those modest production gains were completely wiped out.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ USDA, "Report of the Interbureau Committee on Post-War Programs at the War's End," September 27, 1945, Pattern for Agriculture, Box 4, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁵⁸ Matusow, 49.

⁵⁹ John W. Snyder to Senator Wagner, April 15, 1946, Price Fixing and Price Levels; Price Reduction; McQuire Bill HR 5767 (1945-April 1946), Box 11 47, OF 327, WHOF, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

Anderson struggled afterward with developing options that would let him reduce the total beef supply without an accompanying rise in prices. One solution was to maintain meat allocated by the federal government as overseas aid and continuing to rely on wartime controls to stabilize the market. Yet, as he discovered, meatpackers had their own strategies for avoiding his designs. They avoided having to fulfill their federal procurement quotas by manipulating their production schedules by letting a portion of their quotas roll over each week, which allowed them to remain constantly in debt to the government without having to actually fulfill the quota with market prices higher than federal reimbursements making this profitable. He planned on fighting the meatpackers by allowing the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, which paid a subsidy to meat firms that followed the slaughter quotas, to withhold payments to those firms that failed to hand over to the federal government the allocated amount of meat each week.⁶⁰ The new rule required them to provide the federal government's cut of that prior week's production before the end of the following week and thus end their ability to constantly roll over their meat debt. On June 21, his office issued the order under the powers provided by the War Food Order.⁶¹ While he intended for the plan to stabilize and lower consumer prices, as he soon discovered, the order helped reduce the total amount of meat available for consumers and led to prices rising.⁶²

⁶⁰ Clinton P. Anderson to Chester Bowles, June 10, 1946, Food 5, Distribution, June 1-July 12, 1946, Box 1279, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁶¹ Title 32—National Defense, Chapter 28—Office of Economic Stabilization, Part 4003—Support Prices: Subsidies (Amendment No. 5 to Directive No. 41), Livestock Slaughter Payments, June 21, 1946, Food 5, Distribution, June 1-July 12, 1946, Box 1279, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁶² Memorandum, the administrator, Production and Marketing Administration, USDA, to the Secretary, June 14, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits June 14-Dec.,

Soon after the order went into effect, meat prices began rising and supply began shrinking forced Anderson to take a defensive posture. Several difficulties coincided to confound his dream of a stable beef economy. A backlash against overseas food aid forced Department of Agriculture officials to defend aid against charges that overseas shipments were the main cause of the rising prices.⁶³ On top of the negative press, consumers' wartime increases in purchasing power fueled a surge in beef consumption to levels never before seen as Americans, suddenly flush with money, overwhelmed government controls.⁶⁴ Acting Secretary of Agriculture Norris. E. Dodd explained the situation as he understood it in a response to Member of Congress Luis Ludlow's (D-IN) inquiry about the factors that drove up meat prices, particularly the role of meat exports on domestic prices. Dodd wrote, "It is estimated that about 147 pounds per person will be available to civilians in the country in 1946 compared with only 125 pounds in 1935-39 but consumer incomes are so high that much more than the amount available would be taken at ceiling prices. Exports are a comparatively small factor, amounting to 7 to 8 percent of total production."⁶⁵

Department of Agriculture leadership developed another plan to even out supply and prices, with the hope of guiding production into the proper channels to create a more

Box 1247, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁶³ Arnold Erickson, "World Flow of Meat Shifts; U. S. Hikes Export to Canada," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 24, 1946.

⁶⁴ Clinton P. Anderson to Walter Winchell, April 22, 1946, Rationing, Termination of, Box 11, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁶⁵ N. E. Dodd to Hon. Louis Ludlow, June 27, 1946, Food 5 Distribution June 1 – July 12, 1946, Box 1279, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

healthy production system. With slaughter rates rising and with the new year threatening to bring even more beef to market, a crash in prices threatened the large urban markets. Production patterns that year also threatened to undermine the USDA's ability to take its cut for shipment overseas. In response, the USDA issued War Food Order 75.7 in April, which limited cattle and calf slaughter at federally inspected plants to 100 percent of 1944 levels.⁶⁶ The hope was that the order would redistribute meat production more evenly across the nation to prevent the concentration of slaughter while also freeing up more meat for overseas aid shipments.⁶⁷ Under Secretary of Agriculture Norris Dodd described it as being "in reality a 'share-the-livestock' program" and it would drive production "back into normal channels."⁶⁸ While some plants may have reduced weekly allocation for production, total production would be unharmed. Producers did not necessarily agree with his rosy vision. Over five-hundred packing plants requested relief from the order soon after it went into effect. Producers voiced their opposition to their Congressional representatives that the order represented an unfair burden on the market.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Memorandum, The Administrator to the Secretary, May 6, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits (2 of 3) Jan 1-Mar 9, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁶⁷ Memorandum, the administrator, Production and Marketing Administration, USDA, to the Secretary, June 14, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits June 14-Dec., Box 1247, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD; the administrator of the Production and Marketing Administration to the secretary, May 7, 1946, Animal Products 2 Meat-Meat Products (1 of 2), May 29-Sept. 30, Box 1247, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁶⁸ N. E. Dodd to Honorable Frank R. Havenner, May 24, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits (3 of 3) Jan 1-Mar 9, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁶⁹ For examples, see Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits (3 of 3) Jan 1-Mar 9, Box 1248, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

Producer resistance helped ensure that only the worst aspect of the order took effect.

Dodd and the USDA leadership had initially counted on there being sixty days of painful adjustment before the benefits could be felt, but the timing did not allow for such a grace period. The politics around meat heated up between April and June as the fate of federal economic controls came up for debate in Congress.

The April order pitted the department against the meat industry, angering a constituency with strong Congressional support and setting the stage for a legislative showdown over the future of price controls. The opportunity for action came in the form of the reauthorization of the OPA, which was set to expire at the end of June thanks to the failure of liberal lawmakers to get a stronger bill out of Congress earlier.⁷⁰ Meat producers and representatives from meat producing states argued against the OPA and economic controls as being an unnecessary intrusion into the free market and as being a violation of producer's private property rights. The bill that made it out of Congress and to President Truman was watered down with an amendment inserted by Senators Robert Taft (R-OH) and Kenneth Wherry (R-NE) that would have fatally weakened the OPA's ability to set consumer prices. Truman vetoed the bill on June 29, on the assumption that Congress would quickly send him a new bill without the amendment but Congress took no further action. On July 1, the OPA expired and with it expired the single most powerful public policy tool for securing mass beef consumption. Chaos soon reigned. Slaughter at federal plants soon collapsed. In June 1945, it had been 1 million head of

⁷⁰ Matusow, 49.

cattle for the month, but, in June 1946, it fell to just half that.⁷¹ Americans immediately felt the pinch in their pocketbooks. Beef prices rose steadily through July 17, with an increase of wholesale beef prices by 63 percent and retail prices by 70 percent while food prices rose as much as 33 percent.⁷² Purchasing power eroded further with the cost of living going up from June 15 to July 15 by 5.5 percent.⁷³

The chaos unleashed by the ending of the OPA rippled throughout the country and forced the creation of another, weaker, OPA. Cattlemen hoping to take advantage of rising prices sent their cattle to slaughter in record numbers. In one day in July, three times the number of cattle from that day last year entered the nation's stockyards in one day, 12,000 in total.⁷⁴ Inundated and free of controls, cattle prices started rising, reaching \$6 above ceiling prices. To combat the retail price rise and put a cap on cattle prices, Congress sent Truman a new OPA bill remarkably similar to the one that he had just vetoed, which he signed on July 25. This renewed OPA was a shell of its former self, unable to establish price controls as it once had.⁷⁵ Several features of the law handicapped the OPA. The bill required the renewed agency to set price levels at higher levels for consumers by forcing the OPA to include profits when setting the price level, something that had not previously been done. Furthermore, the new OPA could declare

⁷¹ Charles F. Brannan to G. J. Bates, October 10, 1946, Animal Products 3 Packers – Packing Houses-Slaughter Permits June 14-Dec., Box 1247, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁷² OPA Daily Price Summary for July 18, 1946, July 18, 1946, OF 28 Daily Reports on Price Movements Folder, Box 213, OF 28, WHOF, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO. The totals include the effects of the end of the subsidy on beef, which amounted to \$4 to \$5 per hundred pounds of carcass weight. Without the subsidy included, the increase was 40 percent.

⁷³ Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 226.

⁷⁴ Matusow, 56. Hog owners sent 14,000 hogs to market as well.

⁷⁵ On the July 25th reauthorization bill, see Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 225-28.

controls but only if the Department of Agriculture had certified that the commodity in question was officially “in short supply.” But not all commodities that went into meat production were short. With a bumper wheat crop and a record corn crop in 1946, grains were unlikely to be controlled even if cattle or beef could be.⁷⁶ This guaranteed that cattlemen would feel a squeeze once a cattle price ceiling was set, which the OPA could do after a period of study. Nor were consumers happy with the profit-plus ceilings. These halfhearted controls ensured that the administration would have to undo the recent price rises if it wanted to win back voters’ trust in time for the mid-term elections in November.

The administration set about studying the cattle price situation so that it could announce new controls. The task fell to a three-man decontrol board consisting of Roy L. Thompson, president of the Federal Land Bank of New Orleans; George H. Mead, a paper pulp manufacturer; and Daniel W. Bell, former undersecretary of the treasury.⁷⁷ Over the month of August, they met to decide the fate of meat and livestock price controls and to choose who would win the battle that had emerged between Anderson and OPA administrator Porter. Following a month of hearings, the three-man board declared cattle and beef to be in short supply on August 20, clearing the way for meat and livestock to be placed back under controls.⁷⁸ At issue was the price of live cattle sold at

⁷⁶ “Americans Will Get 14% More Food In 1946 Than Before War, But Bread, Meat To Be Scarce, Says U.S. Report,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 10, 1946; “Wheat Crop Held Too Little for ‘46,” *New York Times*, June 11 1946; “Record Corn Crop Forecast for 1946,” *New York Times*, July 11, 1946. The USDA released estimates in July that pegged the 1946 wheat crop at 1,090,092,000 bushels. Predicted usage totaled 1,250,000,000 bushels, with 125 million bushels expected to go for feed and 450 million bushels for consumptions.

⁷⁷ Matusow, 57.

⁷⁸ Matusow, 57.

the stockyards for slaughter. Uncontrolled, prices spiked in July and into August for top grade cattle and climbed as high as \$35 per one-hundred pounds or hundred weight of cattle. This represented a 50 percent price spike. Porter wanted lower prices and to bring back the June 30 price ceiling of \$19 pounds per hundred weight while Anderson favored a higher price ceiling of \$22 per hundred weight.⁷⁹ Anderson recommended a compromise of \$20.25 for top grade cattle, which the OPA adopted on August 30 on the advice of H. E. Reed, Director of the Production and Marketing Administration at the USDA.⁸⁰ Anderson claimed in a press release that the new price ceiling “recognizes the need for a large beef supply” for consumers and the need to incentivize cattle owners to sell their stock.⁸¹ The USDA then added cattle and beef to its official “in short supply” list, allowing the controls to continue.⁸²

The renewed cattle price controls received a mix reaction from cattle owners. Some, such as a group of eight cattlemen from Amarillo, TX, wrote to Anderson thanking him for the higher ceiling prices.⁸³ Others, however, were unsatisfied with the

⁷⁹ Nelson G. Kraschel to Honorable Harry S. Truman, August 26, 1946, Prices 1-6 Livestock-Meat-Meat Prices (2 of 6) Mar 18-Aug 29, Box 1339, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁸⁰ H. E. Reed to the Administrator, August 22, 1946, Prices 1-6 Livestock-Meat-Meat Prices (3 of 6) Aug 30-Sept 13, Box 1339, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD. It is attached to a copy of the OPA order: Section 1445.2, Part 1445, Chapter XI, Title 32.

⁸¹ Unnamed press release, United States Department of Agriculture, Secretary of Agriculture, Washington, August [24?], 1946, Prices 1-6 Livestock-Meat-Meat Prices (2 of 6) Mar 18-Aug 29, Box 1339, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁸² Charles F. Brannan to Honorable Kenneth McKellar, September 11, 1946, Prices 1-6 Livestock-Meat-Meat Prices (3 of 6) Aug 30-Sept 13, Box 1339, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁸³ Art L. Wagoner, Bill Jones, Geo. L. Simms, George Porter, Odus Turner, Lloyd Otten, Charles Ford, and Grady O’Hair to Clinton P. Anderson, August 28, 1946, Prices 1-6 Livestock-Meat-Meat Prices

new controls, even at Anderson's higher levels. E. W. Fallentine of Ogden, UT, argued that, with livestock under price controls while grain was not, livestock owners faced a price squeeze. They found themselves paying higher prices for feed but getting less back from selling their animals. The grain was "free to go wherever the market sends it," most likely not to livestock owners as he warned.⁸⁴ The problem, though, came from the OPA reauthorization bill. As Anderson's press release on the renewal of controls made clear, the administration could only put controls on commodities deemed "short supply," and feed grains were most certainly not in short supply with an historic record of 130.2 million tons being produced by August, making it impossible to ration feed grains on the basis of shortage.⁸⁵

Opinions within the cattle industry hardened and turned into action. They demonstrated their growing displeasure of the new OPA by holding back their cattle from slaughter in September, initiating a "producer's strike."⁸⁶ Owners unhappy with current

(2 of 6) Mar 18-Aug 29, Box 1339, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁸⁴ E. W. Fallentine to Clinton P. Anderson, August 28, 1946, Prices 1-6 Livestock-Meat-Meat Prices (2 of 6) Mar 18-Aug 29, Box 1339, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁸⁵ USDA, Untitled press release, August 1946, Prices 1-6 Livestock-Meat-Meat Prices (2 of 6) Mar 18-Aug 29, Box 1339, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD. On grain production, see Appraisal of Supply and Price Position of Feed Grains and Byproduct Feeds, [August 3, 1946?], Price Decontrol Bill, Box 10, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO; memorandum, Leroy K. Smith to the Administrator, August 3, 1946, Price Decontrol Bill, Box 10, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO. Feed grains do not include wheat and hogs ate more corn than cattle did. In fact, the key ratio for determining corn policy was the corn-hog ratio, or the bushel amount equal in value to one hundred pounds of live hog. It was at 13.7 in the Corn Belt states while the ideal was 12.8, indicating that corn prices were depressed because it took cost more to feed a hog to one hundred pounds. "Corn Hog," [August 3, 1946?], Price Decontrol Bill, Box 10, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO; memorandum, Leroy K. Smith to the Administrator, August 3, 1946, Price Decontrol Bill, Box 10, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁸⁶ Matusow, 49.

prices slaughterers were paying took advantage of the nature of beef production in their protest. They chose to keep their cattle on feed and at pasture rather than selling them to meat packers. It was a protest that relied on using feeding to undermine beef output. Despite accusation to the contrary, meatpackers were slaughtering all the animals sold to them, there was just not enough cattle available to buy.⁸⁷ In the Chicago Stockyards, on August 19 cattlemen sold slightly over 10,000 head of cattle, which jumped to nearly 40,000 on August 26, after the new price ceilings for cattle were announced. By the time the price ceilings were set to go into effect on September 3, selling dropped to 2,500.⁸⁸ Slaughterers had fewer animals on hand and, the ones that they had, had less meat on them. The resulting “meat famine” stung consumers as meat counters across the nation in September turned up empty.

Anderson’s response to the chaos surrounding the OPA renewal was to focus not on beef prices but on balancing cattle populations with expected future demand even if that meant abandoning the OPA and price controls. For the first forty years of the twentieth century, the total U.S. cattle population for dairy and beef animals varied between 50 and 70 million head of cattle each year, which was the nation’s total cattle inventory.⁸⁹ The recent war had thrown the population off balance and cattle were more numerous than ever. The largest population of cattle in U.S. history came in 1944 when

⁸⁷ Preston Richards to Nathan Koenig, October 3, 1948, Prices 1-6 Livestock-Meat-Meat Prices (5 of 6) Sept 28-Oct 16, Box 1339, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁸⁸ Numbers from “Predict Worst Meat Famine on OPA’s Return,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 4, 1946.

⁸⁹ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1957*, Series K 195-212, “Number, Value per Head, Production, and Prices of Livestock: 1867 to 1957,” prepared by the Bureau of the Census with the cooperation of the Social Science Research Council, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1960), 289.

the total cattle population reached 82.4 million.⁹⁰ This total had led to the removal of beef controls in 1944, since enough cattle existed to satisfy the predicted demands of both civilians and the military while keeping prices low. The total had gone down slightly in two years, with the January 1, 1946 total inventory at nearly 79.8 million.⁹¹ Of that total, 40.9 million were available for feeding and slaughter. By September, however, the producer's strike had taken its toll. The department calculated that the likely inventory of beef cattle ready for slaughter had climbed to 52 million. These numbers foretold a problem of too much beef being produced for future consumption, which could break the economy as badly as underproduction currently was. That many cattle on pastures also threatened to overgraze and ruin the department's conservation efforts. For Anderson, the only real solution could be found in permanently scaling back cattle numbers to more accurately reflect demand. By October, he recommended ending all cattle and beef controls to allow as many cattle as possible to be slaughtered. He presented the removal of controls as being able to "promote the earliest possible balance between production and demand for livestock products and facilitate a successful transition of the livestock industry to a sound peacetime basis."⁹²

In the months after the renewal of the OPA, media coverage helped inflame public opinion about the meat shortage. Media outlets presented the problem as a

⁹⁰ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1957*, 289.

⁹¹ USDA numbers come from O.P.A. Beef Industry Advisory Committee, "In the Matter of the Decontrol of Cattle and Calves and Food and Feed Products Processed or Manufactured in Whole or Substantial Part Therefore," p. 29, Decontrol Material, Box 6, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁹² Press release, Clinton P. Anderson, October 15, 1946, Decontrol Material, Box 6, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

government-created crisis. Newspapers made dire claims about the consequences of renewed price controls in headlines proclaiming “Meat Famine,” “Meat Scarcity,” and “Meat Crisis.” Writing years later, *New Yorker* writer A. J. Liebling described this coverage as helping create a sense of what he called “gouamba,” or what he called an African word meaning something like “meat hunger.”⁹³ The *Chicago Daily Tribune*, under the guidance of anti-New Dealer Robert McCormick, hit hard on the theme of government-created famine, warning as early as September 4 that a famine was in the works thanks to the OPA meddling in the free market.⁹⁴ Such press coverage heightened the political tensions over beef policy while reflecting a sense of the genuine panic that beef was really becoming scarce.

Prominent African American newspapers sent a different message to their readers, however, by focusing on the actions of the beef producers. In late July, the *Chicago Defender* warned its readers of an impending “Buyer Strike,” thanks to the OPA price holiday in July and August, as a result of cattlemen selling fewer animals in the wake of re-imposed controls.⁹⁵ In August, a headline claimed that a “Hopeless OPA Passes; Buyers’ Strike Looms” while the article placed the blame squarely on producers and not the Democratic administration.⁹⁶ Finally, in the run-up to the election, the paper ran the headline, “GOP Ruins OPA: Blames Truman.”⁹⁷ The final article warned its readers that,

⁹³ A. J. Liebling, *The Press* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1961), 90-97. The historian Harvey Levenstein described the headlines as “shrieking.” Levenstein, 99.

⁹⁴ “Predict Worst Meat Famine on OPA’s Return,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 4, 1946.

⁹⁵ “Buyer Strike, Weak OPA Bill Mark Price Battle,” *The Chicago Defender*, July 27, 1946.

⁹⁶ “Hopeless OPA Passes; Buyers’ Strike Looms,” *The Chicago Defender*, August 3, 1946.

⁹⁷ “GOP Ruins OPA: Blames Truman,” *The Chicago Defender*, October 26, 1946.

according to Jack Kroll of the CIO-PAC, the Republican Party shared the blame for the meat shortage because its members encouraged the “packers’ sit-down strike,” which was a “body blow to Negroes.” The only solution for its readers was to “get smart” and vote for Democrats.

Democratic lawmakers pushed the secretary to fix the nation’s beef troubles. Member of Congress John H. Kerr (D-NC) explained to the secretary that there would be political consequences when voters lost the “satisfactory food and standard food which citizens of this Country have always been able to obtain.”⁹⁸ Member of Congress James J. Delaney (D-NY) wrote in a telegram that an “actual meat famine now exists in Queens County, NY,” before urging the secretary to “see that an adequate supply of meats is provided for the people.”⁹⁹ Senator W. Lee O’Daniel (D-TX) shared a letter to the secretary of agriculture from the local president of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of Houston requesting an immediate end to the “dismal failure” that was the OPA.¹⁰⁰ Controls had quickly become a political liability even in progressive circles.

The battle over maintaining government intervention into the beef economy turned dietary citizenship into a November 1946 campaign issue and led to the final defeat of price controls. Republican politicians and candidates rallied to the producers’

⁹⁸ John H. Kerr, M.C. to Honorable Charles F. Brannan, September 26, 1946, Prices 1 Control-Adjustment Sept. 7 to Sept. 30, Box 1334, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁹⁹ James J. Delaney to Clinton P. Anderson, September 23, 1946, Animal Products 2 Meat-Meat Products (2 of 2), May 29-Sept. 30, Box 1247, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁰ Telegram, I. A. Collier to W. Lee O’Daniel, September 17, 1946, Prices 1-6 Livestock-Meat-Meat Prices (4 of 6) Sept 14-27, Box 1333, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

side during the September strike and blamed the government for creating the famine through price controls. The party chose as “Had Enough?” as its slogan for the coming election, a term that appealed to voters’ sense of dietary citizenship by reminding them that they likely had enough thanks to the Democratic Party fumbling.¹⁰¹ Democratic Party members of Congress, some facing tough Republican opponents, sent a flood of letters to Truman asking that voters get a reprieve from price controls, warning, as A. Willis Robertson’s (D-VA) did, that “the current price control of beef is not working.”¹⁰² Facing so much animus, the administration acknowledged defeat in an attempt to salvage the election for the Democrats. OPA chief Porter and Anderson agreed to end all livestock and meat controls on October 14, 1946 and, with it, the OPA.¹⁰³ During a radio address announcing the termination of controls, President Truman claimed that ending controls was the only way to break the producers’ strike, explaining to the American public, and to women specifically, that his administration backed their claim to dietary citizenship by noting, “I know that our children, as well as those persons engaged in manual labor, need meat in their diet.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ On the “Got Enough?” campaign and meat, see Robert J. Donovan, *The Presidency of Harry S. Truman: Conflict and Crisis: 1945-1948* (New York: Norton, 1977), 240. The 1946 was also a referendum on domestic anticommunism efforts, with the final point of the slogan being “Got enough communism?”. Anticommunist Republicans Richard M. Nixon (R-CA) and Joseph McCarthy (R-WI) both entered Congress in the 1946 election.

¹⁰² A. Willis Robertson to Hon. Clinton Anderson, September 25, 1946, Prices 1-6 Livestock-Meat-Meat Prices (5 of 6) Mar 18-Aug 29, Box 1339, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹⁰³ Levenstein, 99.

¹⁰⁴ Harry S. Truman, “Radio Report to the Nation Announcing the Lifting of Major Price Controls,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States 1946* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961), 451.

Beef would eventually come to define the 1946 elections thanks to an offhanded comment reported years later. Member of Congress Sam Rayburn (D-TX) rode with Truman on his train ride back to Missouri to vote. A train was chosen, it should be noted, instead of his airplane *The Sacred Cow* because the president hoped to avoid seeming indifferent to the meat-starved public or other economic suffering by indulging in the luxury of flying. Sitting in the last car of the train talking to an unnamed friend, Rayburn lamented his party's likely imminent loss by observing "with bitterness: This is going to be a damn *beefsteak* election."¹⁰⁵ His comment proved prescient: voters sent record numbers of Republicans to Congress, enough to give control of both houses to the GOP for the first time in decades. As Rayburn correctly guessed, American voters had, in effect, voted in favor of beefsteaks and not the party associated with the meat famine. This was even though Democrats like Robertson who lost that year had sought relief from his party's signature domestic economic program.

In particular, women voters rebuked the radical state that they had helped build. President Truman acknowledged as much when he wrote in an undelivered speech that he felt betrayed by women who had traded his party for "a piece of beef."¹⁰⁶ If they did indeed betray him, it was over their deeply held conviction that they deserved beef, and it mattered not how, just that it was delivered. The beefsteak election, the opening round of postwar electoral politics, enshrined beef as an electoral issue for the coming decades,

¹⁰⁵ William S. White, *The Taft Story* (New York: Harper, 1954), 56. White provides the only known written account of Rayburn having said "beefsteak election." Decades later, Robert J. Donovan appears to have popularized the concept of 1946 as the Beefsteak Election, using White as his source for the quote. Donovan, 229-38.

¹⁰⁶ Truman quoted in Levenstein, 99. For a full picture of the OPA and the 1946 election, which includes inflation more broadly construed, see Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 225-231. For the OPA and agriculture and the 1946 election, see Matusow, 38-62.

imbuing all of the elections from 1946 to 1972 with the potential to be beefsteak elections. Simultaneously, the Republican win signified the death of the federal government's singular most powerful tool for guaranteeing dietary citizenship and achieving dietary modernism. Americans had affirmed their commitment to those ideals but had left the government with one less tool to fulfill its mandate. As the historian Harvey Levenstein explained it, by the end of 1946, "the wartime and postwar meat shortages had taken its toll, reinforcing and perpetuating the beef-centeredness of a very carnivorous country."¹⁰⁷

The Congress elected in 1946, the 80th Congress, set about cutting the costs of the federal government and triggered a policy fight over federal beef policy as it recovered from the loss of controls. During its 1947 appropriations process, the House cut all funding for the Meat Inspection Division and shifted the burden of paying inspectors salaries to the individual firms under inspection, against the wishes of the Senate.¹⁰⁸ Despite some opposition, meatpackers began paying for inspection starting in June 1947 but the fight did not end there. The outcry led to a Congressional showdown in 1948. The alteration of funding had its champions. Member of Congress Everett Dirksen (R-II), chair of the Subcommittee on the Department of Agriculture of the House Committee on Appropriations, defended the move by claiming that the federal government saved \$12 million by having the industry pay for its own inspection services. As he saw it, inspection was a service that benefitted producers and it was only fair for them to pay for

¹⁰⁷ Levenstein, 100.

¹⁰⁸ "Agriculture Department Appropriation," in *CQ Almanac 1947*, 3rd ed., 03-411-03-414 (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1948), accessed May 1, 2015, <http://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/cqal47-1398170>.

it.¹⁰⁹ His case for supporting having companies pay for inspection came right as the federal U.S. tax system was undergoing a massive reorganization, which had imbued funding decisions like this with a populist-tinge for the first time. The income tax had replaced excise taxes the major source of federal revenue, with the number of tax returns handled by the Internal Revenue Service within the Treasury Department grew from 19.2 million in 1940 to 83.8 million in 1945.¹¹⁰ The very structure of federal finances shifted to general income taxes, sustaining the wartime state during the coming peacetime and spreading fiscal responsibility for the federal government broadly.¹¹¹ Dirksen sought to reduce the general tax load by having beneficiaries pay the cost directly; although, in this effort, he severely misjudged the situation.

The forty-year old federal meat inspection system had become such a core component of meat production and consumption that a broad coalition of industry-related groups fought to return meat inspection to federal funding. They wanted the cost and control of inspection fully back to the hands of the Meat Inspection Division. Before the war, 66 percent of all meat produced for commercial sale within the United States had federal inspection. After the war, the number rose to 75 percent, thanks in part to a law allowing plants doing business in intrastate commerce to opt into federal inspection.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Everett Dirksen quoted in House Committee on Agriculture, *Federal Meat Inspection: Hearings on H.R. 5675, H.R. 6259, and S. 2256*, 80th Cong., 2nd sess., 1948, 2.

¹¹⁰ Clara Penniman, "Reorganization and the Internal Review Service," *Public Administration Review* 21, no. 3 (Summer 1961): 122.

¹¹¹ On taxpaying in the postwar era, see Carolyn C. Jones, "Mass-Based Income Taxation: Creating a Tax Paying Culture, 1940-1952," in *Funding the Modern American State, 1941-1995*, ed. W. Elliot Brownlee (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 107-47.

¹¹² House Committee on Agriculture, *Federal Meat Inspection: Hearings on H.R. 5675, H.R. 6259, and S. 2256*, 80th Cong., 2nd sess., 1948, 12, 28. If farm slaughter is included, the percentage of federal inspection dropped to 69 percent.

The industry was unified in opposing Dirksen's plan. Meatpacking unions, the largest manufacturers, the smallest firms, and cattlemen were all in agreement that inspection was, in reality, an expensive and necessary consumer safety program even though industry experts were still unsure if the meat inspection label had any noticeable effect on consumer choices.¹¹³ The expansion of federal inspection remained tenuous, however, because, although federal inspection allowed for the final meat product to enter into interstate commerce, non-federally inspected plants were much more profitable than their federally-inspected counterparts.¹¹⁴ Industry representatives appearing at a Congressional hearing unanimously wanted the federal government to continue to pay for inspection because they painted the issue as a public health problem with consumers as the main beneficiaries of inspection.¹¹⁵ A witness from the American Meat Institute argued in favor of the federal government taking back full authority for meat inspection by explaining that the approximate cost to the entire industry for federal inspectors condemning meat was \$23 million, which the AMI representative presented as exacerbated by the addition of the \$12 million cost to run its own inspection system. Even smaller producers wanted federal inspection. The position taken by the Independent National Meat Packers Association was that small- and medium-sized firms could ill afford to pay the cost of full inspection and would inevitably pass the cost on to the consumer if they had to pay for their own inspection.

¹¹³ House Committee, *Federal Meat Inspection*, 28.

¹¹⁴ House Committee, *Federal Meat Inspection*, 28. In 1946, non-federally inspected plants had a net worth 240 percent of federally inspected plants, according to the Packers and Stockyards Division of the USDA.

¹¹⁵ House Committee, *Federal Meat Inspection*, 12, 30, 37.

There was an unseen side effect to the funding shift. By ending federal funding of meat inspection, Dirksen had increased the autonomy of the department even if its leadership had initially opposed his plan. As reported in the *Wall Street Journal*, Anderson and Bureau of Animal Industry chief A. R. Miller appreciated no longer “being ‘at the mercy of’ Congress ” every year during budget negotiations.¹¹⁶ Miller commented that the shifting of costs from the federal government allowed the program to level off at \$13 million without having to go through annual budget battles with Congress while allowing the 2,850 inspectors from the Meat Inspection Division to no longer fear jobs being cut if Congress cut the budget for political reasons. However, industry groups carried the day and Congress undid the 1947 change with the 1948 appropriations, setting the Meat Inspection Division budget at \$11 million.¹¹⁷ Dirksen’s failed attempt at reducing the cost of the federal government had instead revealed just how much the industry craved a stable relationship with the federal government once controls were dead.

Consumers, for their part, continued to press for their dietary rights even after November. In doing so, women demonstrated that the politics of beef was not reserved for elections alone. They were even willing to engage in direct action to be heard. Congressional hearings on inflation held in New York City in 1947 provided the first chance for women to broaden their fight for their dietary rights following the November elections. A group calling itself the Housewives League of Rockville Centre, led by Jean

¹¹⁶ Albert Clark, “Taxpayers (Including Vegetarians) May Pay Meat Inspection Costs,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 5, 1948.

¹¹⁷ "Agriculture," in *CQ Almanac 1948*, 4th ed., 75-78 (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1949), accessed May 1, 2015, <http://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/cqal48-1407526>.

H. Ayers, attempted to spark a three-week beef boycott over high prices.¹¹⁸ They did not try to go it alone. Turning to political allies, they worked with an anti-inflation progressive coalition including members of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the Americans for Democratic Action, and the American Veterans Committee. The boycotters remained committed to a progressive political economy even if many women had abandoned the OPA the prior year.

The logic behind the 1947 boycott reflected the work women had done at the OPA. Women's shopping expertise and their power over the family purse strings, which had justified their contributions to the OPA during the war, meant that they alone understood low prices and had the expertise to understand what low cost looked like. Following the defeat of the OPA, no standard price guide was needed nor did they need public policy support. Instead, the would-be boycotters turned to their authority as consuming citizens to force retailers to change their prices.¹¹⁹ The goal of the boycott was to force retailers to set prices that better reflected wholesale prices, which had just dropped without effecting retail prices. In a mass mailing sent days before the boycott was to begin, they stressed the need to bottleneck beef at the retail level in order to demonstrate the true cause of high prices. The mailer concluded with a note for health conscious consumers that doctors had said that three weeks without beef "would hurt no

¹¹⁸ Charles Grutzner, "Protests Planned in City to Impress U.S. Price Hearing," *New York Times*, September 22, 1947.

¹¹⁹ On gender and food shopping during the postwar era, see Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Government and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

one's health" as long as another meat item was eaten in its place.¹²⁰ Despite the call for a national boycott, one failed to emerge.

By the end of 1947, the Department of Agriculture leadership struggled to recapture its ability support dietary citizenship. At a hearing before the Senate Committee on Banking and Currency on inflation in January 1948, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Charles F. Brannan explained his support for pending legislation that would create targeted price controls.¹²¹ He explained that American families in 1947 paid 6.4 percent of their income for meat, which was comparable to the percentages paid during the high inflation postwar years of 1920 and 1921. The problem was that meat prices played a critical role in driving up the cost living. He then made a case for meat price controls, and in the process revealed that he understood meat to have a central place within the American diet. At length, he explained:

The sponsors of this legislation are correct in seeing meat as the key to inflation control in foods. This view is rightly founded on a pair of related circumstances. Meat's pre-eminent position in the American diet is the essential fact. The second but equally important fact is that our meat supply this year is decreasing. Consumer preference for meat, combined with a shorter supply, makes meat *the* food product most sensitive to inflation. It is really an "appetite" distress, because American meals traditionally are built around meat.¹²²

Americans had the income to buy more meat but not enough was being produced to meet demand, thus driving up prices. Despite Brannan making an impassioned plea for

¹²⁰ Jean H. Ayers to All Interested Parties, September 19, 1947, O.F. 174-F Miscellaneous, OF: 174 [thru C], Box 789, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹²¹ "Statement of Charles F. Brannan, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, Before the Senate Committee on Banking and Currency at 2:00 PM, January 29, 1948," January 29, 1948, Meat Rationing, Box 35, Charles F. Brannan Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹²² "Statement of Charles F. Brannan, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, Before the Senate Committee on Banking and Currency at 2:00 PM, January 29, 1948," January 29, 1948, Meat Rationing, Box 35, Charles F. Brannan Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

consumer relief, the legislation failed, thanks to the 1946 beefsteak election having poisoned price controls. The reduced ability of the department to intervene in the beef economy became clear months after Brannan's legislative defeat.

Labor troubles in the meat industry flared back up on March 16, 1948, leading to a sixteen week strike of UPWA workers. Between November 1947 and January 1948, the three major meatpacking unions had reached out to Swift to reopen negotiations on the master agreement on wages but they failed to reach an agreement. The UPWA hoped to advance a new way of calculating wage increases that was different from the one used in June. The union suggested using the concept of the family budget as the basis for future wage increases and a 29 cent raise to meet the new baseline, which was an idea from a Labor Department report on the family budget by Lester S. Kellogg and Dorothy S. Brady, titled "The City Worker's Family Budget."¹²³ The Kellogg and Brady report provided total monthly budgets for families in thirty-four cities by tallying costs for what a hypothetical family of four would pay for a month's worth of goods and services. The authors used March 1946 and June 1947 as the sample months and found that food was the single largest cost of the family budget, accounting for 32.7 percent of the total in 1946 and 36.4 percent in 1947.¹²⁴ An impasse developed when the UPWA refused a

¹²³ Nathan P. Feinsinger, Pearce Davis, and Walter V. Shaefer, "Report to the President on the Labor Dispute in the Meat Packing Industry by the Board of Inquiry Created by Executive Order No. 9934 and Dated March 15, 1948," April 8, 1948, OF 407-B Meat Packing Board of Inquiry MAR 1948 (1 of 2), Box 1332, OF 407-B, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO [hereafter cited as "Report on the Labor Dispute 1948"]; Lester S. Kellogg and Dorothy S. Brady, "The City Worker's Family Budget," February 1948, OF 407-B Meat Packing Board of Inquiry MAR 1948 (1 of 2), Box 1332, OF 407-B, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO [hereafter cited as Kellogg and Brady].

¹²⁴ Kellogg and Brady, 16, 25, 29-30. The budget for 1946 was \$2,521 and the budget for 1947 was \$2,904. It appears that the family of four pounds per capita of all meat consumption for at-home meals was calculated for a meat consumption of 115.9 pounds per person per year. The authors also calculated for 80.4 meals at home and 3.6 meals away from home per week.

wage increase in place of the new wage calculation, triggering a new type of grievance process unlike the one used for the 1946 strike. Workers affiliated with the UPWA went on strike on March 17 alone because workers from Amalgamated and NBPW had settled on a 9 cents an hour raise in January.¹²⁵ The strike ended when a 9 cents raise was agreed to on May 22 for the workers of every firm except Wilson, which had its workers agree to return to work June 5 for a 9 cents raise as well.¹²⁶

This was no replay of 1946, however. The administration had lost the authority to seize striking plants. The Department of Agriculture could only monitor the strike and was legally unable to implement any report recommendations to ensure full production. Republican lawmakers had hobbled the executive branch with the Labor Management Relations Act of 1947, or the Taft-Hartley Act, and its mandate under Section 206 prevented mediating report from making recommendations.¹²⁷ Truman appointed a board on March 15 as he appealed to the unions and producers to avoid hurting the nation's meat supply by resolving the wage grievance for the nation's one-hundred thousand meatpacking workers.¹²⁸ The three-person board, consisting of Nathan P. Feinsinger, Pearce Davis, and Walter V. Shaefer, held meetings shortly thereafter and, after an exhaustive survey of the industry, presented the family-budget strategy favored by the UPWA as a valid basis for wage increases while also claiming that having three unions to

¹²⁵ "Nation's Meat Output Is Cut 50% as CIO Workers Strike; Next Move Appears Up to President Truman," *Wall Street Journal*, March 17, 1948.

¹²⁶ "End Meat Strike in All Plants Except Wilson," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 22, 1948; "Wilson Meat Tie-Up Ends: CIO Says 8,000 Will Return, Accepting 9c Hourly Rise," *New York Times*, June 22, 1948.

¹²⁷ "Report on the Labor Dispute 1948."

¹²⁸ "Truman Creates Board," *New York Times*, March 16, 1948.

deal with was two unions too many.¹²⁹ Armed with the knowledge that the industry could support a wage-based system, Anderson could do little more than read reports about what the strike did to the industry. As he learned, the strikers drove up prices for meat while simultaneously driving down livestock prices with farmers being particularly hard hit.¹³⁰

The administration's investigation into the 1948 strike exposed the problems facing African Americans and shone a rare light on the limits of a beef policy for address racial issues. Before the Board of Inquiry on March 22, Robert Weaver, a PhD in economics who specialized in labor and race, explained that black consumers paid a higher price for their food than did Americans living in better areas. He cited NAACP investigations into the cost of living for the black residents of Chicago's South Side and New York's Harlem found that food costs were higher than for comparable items in white neighborhoods.¹³¹ He made these claims as part of a general presentation of the housing and cost of living that poorer blacks suffered as a result of discrimination and lack of legal protection. The union submitted as part of their evidence the findings of the investigations into Chicago prices.¹³² Weaver's testimony and the union's evidence pointed to the limitations of seeing meat supplies in terms of aggregate numbers. The Kellogg and Brady report's focus on aggregate price needs for family budgets

¹²⁹ "Report on the Labor Dispute 1948."

¹³⁰ "Developments in Meat Packing House Strike March 16-April 6, 1948," OF 407-B Meat Packers Strike, Box 1331, OF 407-B, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹³¹ Robert Weaver, "Testimony of Robert Weaver before the Board of Inquiry," March 22, 1948, OF 407-B Meat Packing Board of Inquiry MAR 1948 (1 of 2), Box 1332, OF 407-B, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹³² United Packing Workers of America – C.I.O., "Exhibit No. 5," March 23, 1948, OF 407-B Meat Packing Board of Inquiry MAR 1948 (1 of 2), Box 1332, OF 407-B, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

represented the whiteness of federal beef policy because it reproduced the lack of attention to specific community needs. Notably missing from their calculations was a section covering residents of black areas of cities, such as South Side Chicago or Harlem in New York. Indeed, the report issued for the Truman administration even admitted that the UPWA strategy of attempting to address issues like race had undermined its bargaining position, seeing race problems as unrelated to worker's pay and public policy.¹³³ The failure of the department to seriously address many black families' and workers' specific food issues festered in the subsequent decades as public policy continually failed to address their economic and dietary citizenship needs.¹³⁴

The strike, as Anderson had feared, contributed to a spike in meat prices that summer, which led to a national boycott. Organized during August under the slogan "Buy No Meat for One Week," ad hoc grassroots picketed local markets in a show of national solidarity against rising prices.¹³⁵ The protest originated with a woman identified in the press as Mrs. R. D. Vaughn, the president of the Dallas Women's Chamber of Commerce. She initiated the protest with a telephone-based organizing drive that involved her speaking on the phone so much that she soon exhausted her voice.¹³⁶ Her voice-draining calls soon inspired a national campaign. Consumers in other cities joined the meat boycott in what *The New York Times* soon dubbed "the housewife protest."¹³⁷

¹³³ "Report on the Labor Dispute 1948."

¹³⁴ On the effects of public policy on black consumers in the postwar era, see Cohen, 355-406.

¹³⁵ "Housewives in Nation begin Meat Boycott," *New York Times*, August 4, 1948; "Housewives' Meat Boycott begins Today," *Washington Post*, August 9, 1948.

¹³⁶ "Behind the Inertia on Inflation," *Newsweek*, August 16, 1948, 61; "More Recruits Enlist in Meat Boycott but Butchers Find Business Unchanged," August 11, 1948.

¹³⁷ "Boycotts on Meat Spread Widely," August 10, 1948.

The local boycotts did not necessarily have the same start and end dates but were thought of as being part of the same action. Women unleashed their anger over the rising cost of living and troubled reconversion efforts. In New York City, the New York Tenant Councils of Rent and Housing organized pickets, baby carriage parades, and leaflet distribution while also distributing bags with “Don’t Buy Meat” printed on them.¹³⁸ Some retailers even threw in their support for the boycotters by closing down in protest to what they argued was actually a production-driven price squeeze that hurt retailers as much as consumers.¹³⁹ The boycotts reflected frustration that the end of the war had not yet created stability and security in their diets and in their pocketbooks. The women involved demonstrated what their dietary citizenship meant to them through taking the political fight for meat into the streets and beyond the realm of electoral politics.

As the boycotts ended, Truman faced a tough reelection fight but prevailed, in part, by putting the blame for the recent high meat prices squarely on the Republican-controlled “Do-Nothing Congress” of 1947-48. That there was no “meat famine” certainly helped his case even if cattle prices continued to run high, to almost \$40 per hundred rate by late October.¹⁴⁰ He continued to fight back against the charge that high meat prices were his fault. His campaign’s take on prices was that there was an “organized conspiracy against the American consumer” by producers and their

¹³⁸ “More Recruits Enlist in Meat Boycott but Butchers Find Business Unchanged,” August 11, 1948.

¹³⁹ Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 240.

¹⁴⁰ Market News Division, Livestock Branch, Production and Marketing Administration, “Salable Receipts – Tuesday – October 26, 1948,” October 26, 1948, Marketing 1 Market News Service, Box 1603, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

Republican Party allies in Congress.¹⁴¹ It was a charge that stuck. Consumers and labor voters sided with him in this election, ignoring the Republican National Committee claim that electing Truman would mean the “same old 50-cent price tag in the empty steak counter that we had under OPA.”¹⁴² Indeed, Truman with the strong support of labor won over voters to the idea that Democrats “held the key to mass prosperity.”¹⁴³ Voters also turned control of both houses of Congress to the Democrats but economic controls had become so poisoned that even a federal government as thoroughly Democrat as the one that took office in January 1949 refused to turn to them. By that time, the Democrats had developed another tool for fostering prosperity through beef security.

All through the period that the Truman administration struggled to secure a steady supply of beef for the nation, it similarly struggled to secure food for the world. In the process, it developed a short-term process that provided a stabilizing force for the beef economy. In the winter of 1946-47 and again in 1947-48, the Truman administration crafted a program for feeding the war-torn parts of Europe and Asia as a means of propping up friendly governments and providing a place to send excess production but only in a way that would not threaten its domestic food efforts.¹⁴⁴ Those two winters put the war survivors in Europe in danger of mass starvation. The administration helped stave off the famine through emergency food aid. Secretary Anderson warned Truman, “We have also known that hunger is a fertile ground for anarchy, and not for the building of a

¹⁴¹ “Truman Denounces NAM as Destroyer of Price Controls,” *New York Times*, October 2, 1948.

¹⁴² Republican National Committee quoted in Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 241.

¹⁴³ Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 242.

¹⁴⁴ Matusow, 115.

stable world and a durable peace.”¹⁴⁵ These efforts would help convince the administration that using food aid as a tool of modernization and development of other nations would ensure that only the right kind of revolution—a modern one—would occur.¹⁴⁶ As that later use of food aid came into being, food aid in the immediate postwar years became a tool to prevent a return of the farm depression when crop prices remained low and more food was on the market than consumers would buy. Food aid took from production amounts in excess of predicted use, particularly of feed grains that might spur beef production. As the historian Allen Matusow argues, “Only the famine in Europe and the Korean War saved the farmer from depression in the Truman years.”¹⁴⁷

Truman gave priority to the world’s food problems in September 1946 when he created the Cabinet Committee on World Food Programs. He appointed Anderson as the chair and added Acting Secretary of Commerce Alfred Schindler (later Secretary of Commerce W. Averell Harriman) and Secretary of State James F. Byrnes. The president tasked this cabinet committee with meeting regularly and formulating an emergency plan to free up wheat for overseas shipping, mostly to the United Kingdom and the U.K.-occupied area of Germany.¹⁴⁸ The Cabinet Committee searched for a tool to help them

¹⁴⁵ Clinton Anderson, “Report to the President on 1946-47 Famine Relief Food Shipments,” July 8, 1946, OF 426 (1945-46), Box 1420, WHOF 426, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁴⁶ Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 30, 61, and 94; Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009), 110-12; David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 129-44.

¹⁴⁷ Matusow, 115.

¹⁴⁸ Harry S. Truman to the Secretary of Agriculture, September 23, 1946, O.F. 174 C, Box 789, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO; Memo, OMGUS,

make sense of the world's food needs and turned to the field of human nutrition and the calorie.¹⁴⁹ The Food and Nutrition Board of the National Research Council provided the Cabinet Committee with just such a model. Food aid could be counted in terms of total potential calories for the whole amount shipped overseas divided by the number of people who would actually eat the food. The amount of calories necessary to rebuild workers' and their families' bodily health could then be calibrated to ensure maximum recovery.¹⁵⁰ In 1947, the Cabinet Committee determined the per calorie costs of food aid: grains cost \$3.24 per calorie to export, beans and peas (plant sources of protein) cost \$4.81 per calorie to export, while meat, poultry products, and fish cost \$46.02 per calorie to export.¹⁵¹ Plant-based proteins would have to be the main fuel for Europe's recovery.

The administration developed a shipment system that would ship enough beef to meet its international commitments, feed certain parts of Europe seen as deserving of beef, and shore up the beef industry for domestic consumption. With the troubles of 1946 having shrunk total domestic consumption, the Cabinet Committee adjusted its meat export program. Low production meant that any meat withdrawn from the domestic market would potentially have explosive political consequences. As the Cabinet

Berlin Germany and Clay to War Department, October 31, 1946, O.F. 174 C, Box 789, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁴⁹ For a history of the calorie that focuses on its policy use in the 1910s to the 1930s, see Nick Cullather, "Foreign Policy of the Calorie," *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 2 (April 2007): 337-364.

¹⁵⁰ Food and Nutrition Board, "Memorandum on Questions Submitted by the Cabinet Committee on World Food Programs, Part 1: Calorie Consumption Levels and Their Relation to Health, Well-Being, and Capacity for Work," December 13, 1946, O.F. 174 C, Box 789, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁵¹ "Report on the Food Situation", September 22, 1947, O.F. 174-C Mar.-Aug. 1947, Box 789, OF 174, White House Central Files, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

Committee understood it, “While the actual drain on the market would be relatively small, the psychological effect might be extensive.” Commercial exports were the only exports recommended for the coming year, lest the government been seen taking beef out of the mouths of Americans and shipping it to Europeans.¹⁵² In fiscal year 1947-1948, expected meat exports shrunk from 223 million long tons in the previous year to 69 million long tons.¹⁵³ The majority that year went to the United Kingdom, with the next largest portion ending up in Greece. The disruption of domestic production reduced available stocks for export and the two countries to receive the most meat were important recipients of U.S. aid more generally.

The news remained bad. Department of Agriculture representative Omer W. Harrman explained to the Cabinet Committee in early November 1946 “that there is little possibility of export until the fourth quarter of 1947, since low slaughtering and a poor cotton crop will put production at a minimum during the first three quarters.”¹⁵⁴ At a later meeting, department representatives still recommended avoiding exporting fats and oils

¹⁵² Cabinet Committee on World Food Programs Officials’ Subcommittee, “Draft Summary Record of Fourteenth Meeting of the Committee – January 21, 1947,” HST Paper: Confidential File Subject Files: Cabinet Committee on World Food Programs, January to March 1947 [2 of 2], Box 8, Confidential File, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁵³ For fiscal year 1946-47 estimates, see “Report to the President by the Cabinet Committee on World Food Programs,” “Estimated Food Exports from the United States, by Destination, Fiscal Year 1946-47,” July 1, 1947, O.F. 174-C Mar.-Aug. 1947, O.F. 174 C, Box 789, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO. For fiscal year 1947-48 estimates, see “Report to the President by the Cabinet Committee on World Food Programs,” “Estimated Food Exports from the United States, by Destination, Fiscal Year 1947-48,” July 1948, O.F. 174-C (September 1947-48) [2 of 2], O.F. 174 C, Box 790, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁵⁴ “Cabinet Committee on World Food Programs, Officials’ Subcommittee” “Draft Summary Record of Fourth Meeting of the Committee – November 5, 1946,” O.F. 174 C, Box 789, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

in the face of continued high demand and low supply of livestock products.¹⁵⁵ Grain shortages continued to plague the meat industry, and Secretary General of the International Emergency Food Council D. A. FitzGerald reported to the committee in April 1947 that there was not as “rapid progress of livestock rehabilitation as had been anticipated.”¹⁵⁶ He continued to explain the European meat situation. European production of all meat stood at 7.5 million tons against a 12.5 million ton prewar level. The Department of Agriculture estimated that Europe had received 60 percent of all food exports, or 11.1 million long tons, but 80 percent of all meat exports, or 195,000 long tons, between 1946 and 1947.¹⁵⁷ Overall, meat was in low demand in Europe in 1947 because of high prices and lack of foreign exchange. In the face of low quantity, high-cost meat, Europeans were choosing beans and peas for their protein. He concluded, “Since meat will continue to be in short supply and high priced in 1948, what would otherwise to an abnormal demand for beans and peas may be expected to continue.”¹⁵⁸

The situation in Europe for the upcoming winter looked even bleaker to the Truman administration by September 1947. The previous winter had not ended in starvation in Europe but the coming one might. The Cabinet Committee warned that

¹⁵⁵ “Cabinet Committee on World Food Programs, Officials’ Subcommittee” “Draft Summary Record of Sixth Meeting of the Committee – November 19, 1946,” O.F. 174 C, Box 789, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁵⁶ Memo, D. A. FitzGerald to Special Policy Committee, April 2, 1947, O.F. 174-C Mar.-Aug. 1947, O.F. 174 C, Box 789, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁵⁷ Percentages calculated from “Estimated Food Exports from the United States, by Destination, fiscal year 1946-47 (preliminary) (In thousands of long tons),” September 9, 1947, O.F. 147-C Sept. 1947-48 [1 of 2], box 789, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁵⁸ Memo, D. A. FitzGerald to Special Policy Committee, April 2, 1947, O.F. 174-C Mar.-Aug. 1947, O.F. 174 C, Box 789, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

Europe faced another difficult winter and recommended that 12.6 million tons a grains be set as the export goal. Europe's impending food woes came from two sources. One was the continent's reduced dollar and gold reserves. The other was the poor corn harvest in the United States, which had driven up corn prices, above wheat for the year.¹⁵⁹

Additionally, a bumper crop that year provided such a bounty that wheat prices threatened to tumble and made feeding an attractive option for farmers, pitting human consumers against cattle. Cattle prices surged as a result of the feed irregularities, as much as 10 to 30 percent in a single day. The predicted harvest for European countries was low, which further stressed supplies. Stung by the previous battles, Anderson's committee recommended voluntary reductions rather than returning to rationing or controls with the hope that voluntary action would avoid "an inflationary price spiral."¹⁶⁰

Heeding Anderson's advice, Truman developed a voluntary food aid program for 1947-48 that would leave critical food resources in place for domestic consumption while still meeting foreign need. He created the Citizens Food Committee and appointed Charles Luckman, the former president of Lever Brothers, as its chief.¹⁶¹ Consumers, vigilant against attempts to strip them of their dietary rights, pushed back against Luckman's appointment. Protest letters started arriving to Truman immediately. The anti-Luckman writers felt betrayed at the appointment of a businessman. Louis Wiener wrote,

¹⁵⁹ On the worsening European situation and the Truman administration, see Matusow, 154-56.

¹⁶⁰ Memorandum, "Cabinet Committee on World Food Programs," September 24, 1947, O.F. 147-C Sept. 1947-48 [1 of 2], Box 789, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁶¹ "Head of Citizens' Food Group Says We Will Win Again in World Battle—140,000,000 Called a 'Real' Committee," *New York Times*, September 26, 1947.

“I do not think that he is capable or even interested in holding down prices.”¹⁶² Glenna Hartling wanted, not Luckman, but someone who “knows something about food conservation,” signing her letter. “Just an American Housewife and Mother.”¹⁶³ Clara Mark warned of the power possessed by consumers, claiming, “There are more of us than you think,” and she ended her letter by asking, “Is the United States always to run our economic affairs for the producer and not the consumer?”¹⁶⁴ Despite these letters, Truman appointed Luckman and tasked his committee with freeing up 100 million bushels of wheat for export overseas to make up for a “poor world harvest” caused by droughts and floods in Western Europe the prior season.¹⁶⁵

Luckman and the Citizen’s Food Committee formulated a voluntarist food program to reduce consumer usage in ways that preserved the economy and is mostly noted for generating good will. For October and November, the Committee developed popular programs to voluntarily reduce consumption of meat and poultry.¹⁶⁶ One of the programs was the Clean Plate Club with the motto, “Save Wheat, Save Meat, Save the Peace,” which called on children to only take what they could eat and eat everything they took. Luckman sold voluntary food reductions by describing food the *key* to world peace

¹⁶² Louis Wiener to Harry S. Truman, September 30, 1947, O.F. 174-F Miscellaneous, OF: 174 [thru C], Box 789, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁶³ Glenna Hartling to Harry S. Truman, October 22, 1947, O.F. 174-F Miscellaneous, OF: 174 [thru C], Box 789, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁶⁴ Clara Gould Mark to Harry S. Truman, October 10, 1947, Food Conservation – Miscellaneous (Con) “A-Z”, Box 1426, OF 426, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁶⁵ “Truman Remarks to Citizen Food Committee,” *New York Times*, October 2, 1947.

¹⁶⁶ Charles Luckman to Harry S. Truman, November 20, 1947, O. F. 174-D Citizens Food Committee [1 of 2], Box 790, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

and security, which every American shared as a duty to protect.¹⁶⁷ Secretary of State George C. Marshall made the same case for food being indispensable for world peace and added that “the Citizens Food Committee has laid down the challenge: ‘buy wisely, eat sensibly, waste nothing.’ In short, all of us must ‘declare war on waste’ in this country in order to win the ‘war against hunger’ in Europe, and its menace to world stability.”¹⁶⁸ By mid-November, the nation sent the 100 million bushels called for by Truman. Luckman credited citizen involvement for allowing this to happen and made sure to commend “the far reaching livestock program now being administered by the Department of Agriculture. The probable saving under this program alone may more than match the savings of all other sources.”¹⁶⁹

Foreign food aid transformed beef policy even as domestic tools became unusable. The policymakers in the administration led by Anderson constructed a new way forward. No longer would controls be possible and the ability of the federal government to take production defined as surplus out of the market would only grow more pronounced. Mass beef consumption inched ever closer to reality. Numbers amassed by the Department of Agriculture suggested that beef policy worked. The per capita numbers looked poised to promise permanent production-consumption balance

¹⁶⁷ Charles Luckman, “Closed Circuit Broadcast, Governors and Mayors Committees, CBS – Tuesday, November 25, 1947, 2:30 – 2:45 PM EST,” November 25, 1947, O. F. 174-D Citizens Food Committee [1 of 2], Box 790, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁶⁸ George Marshall, “Statement by Secretary Marshall Concerning Conservation Program Inaugurated by the Citizens Food Committee,” October 1, 1947, O. F. 174-D Citizens Food Committee [1 of 2], Box 790, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁶⁹ Charles Luckman to Harry S. Truman, November 20, 1947, O. F. 174-D Citizens Food Committee [1 of 2], Box 790, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

was just around the corner. In 1949, the availability of beef stood 63.5 pounds per capita while pork stood at 67.6, continuing the trend of more pork produced than beef, and total per capita stood at 143.9, pounds per capita.¹⁷⁰ This was drop from the 1947 highs but still more than during the Great Depression and a possible new equilibrium. The recent spike in meat prices had ended by December 1948, with a pound of chuck roast dropping from a high of 70 cents in September 1948 to a low of 57 cents in December 1949.¹⁷¹ A 1948 investigation by Faith Clark for the Home Economics Research Branch into urban American's household food consumption provided statistics to that effect. The investigators found that urban consumption of meat was at 10.5 pounds per week with meat accounting something between 29 and 30 percent of the household food budget for most American households.¹⁷² Americans from the poorest urban households had increased their meat consumption from 4.84 pounds in 1942 to 6.23 pounds per week in 1948, experiencing the largest gains in consumption during those years out of any household income bracket.¹⁷³ E. O. Jones's prediction from earlier that the beef industry had entered a new phase of mass consumption seemed poised to become a reality.

¹⁷⁰ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1952*, "No. 780.—Meats and Lard—Production, Foreign Trade, and Consumption by Kind: 1941 to 1949," by Morris B. Ullman (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1952), 648.

¹⁷¹ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1950*, "No. 330.—Wholesale Prices—Indexes, by Groups and Subgroups of Commodities: 1929 to 1949," 280. Prices across the board spiked in June 1948 with only lumber exceeding all animal-related prices in the percentage increases of 1926 price: lumber: 305; cattle feed: 292; all meat and poultry: 241.4; livestock and poultry: 210.8. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1950*, "No 240.—Average Retail Prices of Selected Foods: 1913 to 1949," 290.

¹⁷² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Home Economics Research Branch, Agriculture Research Service, "Food Consumption of Urban Families in the United States...with an Appraisal of Methods of Analysis," by Faith Clark, et al., (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1954), Table 1 and 3.

¹⁷³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Home Economics Research Branch, Agriculture Research Service, "Food Consumption of Urban Families in the United States...with an Appraisal of Methods of Analysis," Table 24, 48.

As the 1940s gave way to the 1950s, beef had not yet been secured despite how promising consumption numbers appeared to be. Beef consumption per capita still lagged behind pork and the overall beef economy remained precarious. The Department of Agriculture had yet to find replacements that were popularly acceptable to both producers and consumers. To do that, it would take a cascade of events: the Korean War, the use of controls that were a pale shadow of their former incarnation, the election of Dwight D. Eisenhower, and the implementation of Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson's new policy methods. Before those events could happen, though, the department under Anderson launched an all-out modernization of the nation's cattle industry through launching an eradication campaign in Mexico against one of the most feared contagious livestock diseases.

Chapter 2

Making Cattle Modern:

Disease and Chemical Management in the Era of Mass Beef Consumption

In 1947, an outbreak of Foot-and-mouth disease, or *fiebre aftosa*, in Mexico sent a wave of panic rippling through the United States. Cattle owners found themselves facing the most pressing crisis since the last outbreak of the disease in California in 1928. Fearing the disease would spread uncontrollably north and infect domestic cattle, federally employed veterinarians in the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) proposed a drastic solution: a fence that would stretch across the board of the two countries to seal in the disease. Focused on protecting the domestic livestock industries, they proposed that Congress allocate the funds necessary to complete a border fence that had been already been started but never finished.¹ Several state governments sent their support for the fence to Washington but none matched the Alabama legislature's request for the fence to be electrified.² Private voices chimed in as well. Richard Kleberg of Kings Ranch, Texas, wrote to President Harry S. Truman that "the border fence proposal would be immeasurably helpful if

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Animal Industry, "Summary of Developments in the Mexican Outbreak of Foot-and-Mouth Disease," January 28, 1947, Quarantine on Imported Cattle, Foot and Mouth Disease, Hoof and Mouth Disease – Rinderpest, Box 1217, White House Office Files 395, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

² Telegram, T. Werth Thagard and Preston C. Clayton to President Harry S. Truman, February 17, 1947, Quarantine on Imported Cattle, Foot and Mouth Disease, Hoof and Mouth Disease – Rinderpest, Box 1217, OF 395, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

undertaken at this time.”³ In this letter, he described the threat posed by the disease as “second only to a great war.” In a separate address to Congress he added that “if the disease was widespread enough, and it will if it gets out on that long border, you will find this economy absolutely paralyzed.”⁴

The anti-disease border fence was never built but Kleberg’s point about economic destruction reflected the changing nature of beef production. With demand for beef surging, producers were racing rapidly to intensify production, and they needed to be able to be able to concentrate cattle in close quarters without fear of a contagious disease outbreak. While the prior chapter dealt with the initial political battles following the war, this chapter dives deep into the operations of a key part of beef policy: making mass beef production possible. While this pulls the focus away from the centralized actions to stabilize the postwar economy, it demonstrates how a policy concern that started with the president cascaded down through the Department of Agriculture, reaching, eventually, out into the industry itself. Dealing with disease and border management meant, for the department, saving the nation, which required a direct approach to the threat of the contagious disease in Mexico. Instead of walling the cattle and physically isolating the two nations, U.S. veterinarians agreed to a plan suggested by their counterparts in the Mexican government to have the two countries cooperate to eradicate the disease in Mexico and thus spare both countries. Their joint effort succeeded and ensured that cattle

³ Richard Kleberg to Harry Truman, January 18, 1947, Quarantine on Imported Cattle, Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Rinderpest, Box 1217, OF 395, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁴ Richard Kleberg quoted in House Committee on Agriculture, *Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Hearings on H.R. 1819 (S. 568) to Authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to Cooperate with Other American Countries in the Control and Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease and Rinderpest*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., 1947, 38.

could continue flowing between the two countries without fear of spreading the disease. In eradicating foot-and-mouth disease in Mexico, the Department of Agriculture and their Mexican counterparts created the preconditions for the development of the modern beef industry. Only the continued freedom from contagious cattle disease like foot-and-mouth disease allowed for the emergence of a separate and distinct feedlot industry built on massive confinement and year-round feeding. As S. O. Fladness, a senior veterinarian at the Department of Agriculture, noted shortly after the initial outbreak, “I do not see how the feeding industry could survive under conditions of foot-and-mouth disease.”⁵

Making cattle healthy enough for mass beef consumption did not mean that all threats were treated equally. Policymakers, veterinarians, and civil servants within the federal government enjoyed many successes with keeping the industry safe from contagious diseases during the postwar era. Indeed, foot-and-mouth eradication inspired a global effort at eradicating contagious livestock disease threats as the techniques developed by others countries and adopted by the United States. However, other threats emerging within the industry received a different treatment by public officials. Rather than rely on public power as it did with eradicating contagious diseases, policymakers at the Department of Agriculture decided to let private actors handle other diseases and chemical threats, preferring to observe and to study each problem as it arose while ignoring the larger picture. As with contagious diseases a century earlier, further economic development caused chemical and consumer-harming diseases to infect the

⁵ S. O. Fladness quoted in House Committee on Appropriations, *Hearings on H. J. Res. 154: A Joint Resolution Making an Appropriation for Expenses Incident to the Control and Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease and Rinderpest*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., 1947, 11.

whole beef industry, only this time, there was no concerted public investment in combating the problem.

Though far removed from the Truman administration's efforts at fixing prices and production issues, the beef industry as it emerged in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries created a new relationship between cattle, the environment, and humans that beef policy had to address for mass beef consumption to succeed. Cattle (*Bos taurus*) are the herd-dwelling even-toed ruminants whose domestication ten-thousand years ago in Eurasia and subsequent transplanting to the Americas made possible the creation of a meat production system that proved so successful that it provided the biological fuel for the emergence of an urban and economically diversified nation.⁶ It was a system developed by farmers, ranchers, and meatpackers that harnessed cattle's reproductive and digestive energies to power the industrialization of meat production.⁷ In creating a beef industry, though, they created the very environments that soon threatened the industry. Concentrating cattle from different pastures together in confined spaces like the pens at the Union Stockyards at Chicago or the cars towed by

⁶ On the domestication of cattle, see R. Bollongino, et al., "Modern Taurine Cattle Descended from Small Number of Near-Eastern Founders," *Molecular Biology and Evolution* 29, no. 9 (2012): 2101–2104. On the global spread of cattle, see Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). On the transformation of the Great Plains of the United States for cattle grazing, see Elliott West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), 237-70; William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 218-24. On the spread of cattle grazing to the tropics, see Richard P. Tucker, *Insatiable Appetite: The United States and the Ecological Degradation of the Tropical World*, Concise revised ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 151-83.

⁷ On livestock reproduction and meat production, see Gabriel N. Rosenberg, "A Race Suicide among the Hogs: The Biopolitics of Pork in the United States, 1865–1930," *American Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (March 2016): 70.

trains gave disease-causing organisms new animals to infect, which facilitated the spread of contagious diseases. The economic historians Allen Olmstead and Paul Rhode summarized the situation thusly: “Economic progress brought in its wake forces that contributed to the spread of contagious diseases.”⁸ To save the fledgling industry, Congress passed the Animal Industry Act of 1884, which created the Bureau of Animal Industry within the Department of Agriculture and gave the government the tools it needed to save the industry. Immediately, the bureau began eradicating livestock diseases, starting with contagious bovine pleuro-pneumonia in 1892.⁹ From there, a relationship emerged between the bureau and the industry wherein the industry tolerated the bureau closely monitoring livestock for diseases and immediately acting to eradicate any that were detected. At the end of World War II, the industry turned to that relationship when confronted with an international disease threat it had lacked the power to control.

While industrial beef production was developed, cattle became the center of a transcontinental trade that united North America’s animal industries. In the nineteenth century, cattle from the United States, Canada, and Mexico flowed across borders as part of a larger project of building up and improve national populations and local industries.¹⁰ By the 1890s, hundreds of thousands of head of cattle, maybe more than a million, crossed the borders between the three countries with the U.S. Midwest serving as a

⁸ Alan A. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, *Arresting Contagion: Science, Policy, and Conflicts over Animal Disease Control* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 22.

⁹ Olmstead and Rhode, 22, 60-61, and 63-64.

¹⁰ Transnational here draws on Chris Bayly’s defining the word as capturing “a sense of movement and interpenetration.” C. A. Bayly, et al., “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (December 2006): 1442.

middle ground in a process that the historian Kristin Hoganson described as “meat in the middle.”¹¹ The farms, ranches, and, particularly, feedlots of that region began acting as a kind of borderlands for the industry that provided a meeting area for cattle heading north from Mexico and cattle heading south from Canada.¹² The cattle, then, enabled associated breeding cultures to flow back and forth between the nations as a type of “agrarian crossing,” which kept the national industries entwined and dependent on each other even into the following century.¹³ The crossings meant the transfer was never one way, a relationship reflected in the later eradication campaign. Even as the center of the cattle industry shift west and south within the United States, feedlots remained non-adjacent borderlands despite the subsequent hardening of the border between the United States and Mexico.¹⁴

From this point, it is helpful to take a quick turn into the biology of foot and mouth disease in order to understand why the disease posed a threat to further industrialization. The disease, known as FMD in the modern medical literature or hoof-and-mouth in some colloquial settings, is a contagious disease that primarily effects

¹¹ Kristin Hoganson, “Meat in the Middle: Converging Borderlands in the U.S. Midwest, 1865–1900,” *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 4 (March 2012): 1034 and 1045.

¹² On the origins of the borderlands as a historical concept, see Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History,” *American Historical Review*, 104 (June 1999), 814–41; Ramón A. Gutiérrez and Elliott Young, “Transnationalizing Borderlands History,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 26-53.

¹³ On agrarian crossing between the United States and Mexico during the 1970s and 1930s, see Tore C. Olsson, *Agrarian Crossings: Reformers and the Remaking of the US and Mexican Countryside* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 3-9.

¹⁴ On the transformation of the U.S.-Mexican border in the twentieth century, see Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

cloven-footed mammals and is understood as being among the most contagious animal diseases ever encountered. The causative virus, which comes from the genus *Aphthovirus*, also called foot-and-mouth disease virus, or FMDV in the modern medical literature, does its damage to its host animals as a consequence of its reproduction cycle, as do all viruses.¹⁵ It reproduces by hijacking the cells of the animals it has infected and makes those cells produce more viruses before bursting open and thus spreading the virus. It reproduces, according to researchers, “with high efficiency,” making it effective at sickening an animal with even the slightest infection and spreading to even more animals.¹⁶ Not only does *Aphthovirus* spread through physical contact or airborne particles, recovered animals carry active viruses for years after infection and animals that are infected but not enough to show symptoms are particularly virulent.¹⁷ Humans rarely become sick from the disease but can help spread it on their clothing or even from their actions. The outbreak of foot-and-mouth in 1928 occurred because of the seemingly innocuous action of sailors tossing tainted meat scraps overboard from a ship docked in San Francisco.

Compounding this problem, when *Aphthovirus* reproduces, it follows an “error-prone replication” pattern, making it highly mutagenic and impossible for animals to

¹⁵ Graham J. Belsham and Encarnacion Martinez-Salas, “Genome Organisation, Translation and Replication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease Virus RNA,” in *Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Current Perspectives*, ed. Francisco Sobrino and Esteban Domingo (Wymondham, Norfolk, UK: Horizon Bioscience, 2004), 19.

¹⁶ Belsham and Martinez-Salas, “Genome Organisation, Translation and Replication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease Virus RNA,” 21.

¹⁷ P. Suttmoller and O.R. Casas, “Unapparent Foot and Mouth Disease Infection (Sub-Clinical Infections and Carrier): Implications for Control,” *Revue Scientifique et Technique* 21, no. 3 (December 2002): 519-29.

develop long-term immunities or for people to develop vaccines.¹⁸ This kind of rapid evolution makes it difficult to immunize against and helps the virus survive what might be an inhospitable environment for one generation but not for future generations.¹⁹ Once infected, incubation of the disease lasts between one and fourteen days and then symptoms first appear.²⁰ Symptoms are evident, as the name suggests, on the foot and in the mouth, with vesicles, or blisters, erupting in those areas. The pain of these vesicles leads to a characteristic frothy, ropey drool and to difficulty moving. Symptoms usually last for several months and reinfections frequently occur in the same animal as the virus spreads. Cattle typically deal with the disease by standing still and eating less, hindering feeding operations. With a death rate of no more than 10 percent in grown animals, which was 3 to 5 percent in the 1940s, most infected animals experience the illness as a time of discomfort but survive to be infected again.²¹ The disease, then, is a problem mostly for its economic consequences for industrial meat production.

The cattle industries of North America developed in a way that left them vulnerable to a disease that infects rapidly and leaves cattle sickened but not dead. Mexico and the United States worked to prevent the disease from becoming established,

¹⁸ Estaban Domingo, et al., "Quasispecies Dynamics and Evolution of Foot-and-Mouth," in *Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Current Perspectives*, ed. Francisco Sobrino and Esteban Domingo (Wymondham, Norfolk, UK: Horizon Bioscience, 2004), 261.

¹⁹ On evolutionary history and disease eradication in general, see Edmond Russell, *Evolutionary History: Uniting History and Biology to Understand Life on Earth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 31-41. Russell focuses on bacteria and antibiotic resistance. As foot-and-mouth disease demonstrates, though, rapidly evolving viruses also proved difficult to protect against.

²⁰ Alex Donaldsen, "Clinical Signs of Foot-and-Mouth Disease," in *Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Current Perspectives*, ed. Francisco Sobrino and Esteban Domingo (Wymondham, Norfolk, UK: Horizon Bioscience, 2004), 93.

²¹ Donaldson, "Clinical Signs of Foot-and-Mouth Disease," 96-97.

even before the outbreak in Mexico in 1947. Mexican and U.S. veterinarians had kept the disease from becoming endemic despite some brief outbreaks despite being endemic just about everywhere else.²² During the 1920s, a spat of unrelated outbreaks in the United States and Mexico led the presidential administrations of each country to decide to create a binding legal framework that would compel either country to assist the other should the disease reappear in either country.²³ The plan came to fruition in 1930 when representatives of the two countries signed a convention on animal health and sanitation, creating a formal procedure for responding to future outbreaks within either country. The basic outlines of the agreement was to first isolate and then eradicate the disease. Either of the country's secretaries of agriculture could shut down all livestock exports for sixty days if the mere presence of foot-and-mouth disease was suspected in any animal being shipped from that country and, if the disease was found, the ban on trade could last until the disease was no longer present. Furthermore, either country had permission to lend technical and material assistance to the other country in their disease eradication plan.

The Mexican government, with the support of local industry, wanted to use the 1930 agreement as part of a broader plan for the rapid modernization of beef production, which also included the improvement of local cattle breeds. Years of revolutionary conflict and subsequent disasters had taken their toll on the cattle of Mexico. The total

²² For Mexican government efforts against foot-and-mouth disease, see Manuel A. Machado, Jr., *An Industry in Crisis: Mexican-United States Cooperation in the Control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968). For the U.S. government efforts against foot-and-mouth disease, see Olmstead and Rhode, 115-137.

²³ The outbreaks occurred in Texas and California in 1924 and the Mexican state of Tabasco in 1928. Manuel A. Machado, Jr., "An Industry in Limbo: The Mexican Cattle Industry 1920-1924," *Agricultural History* 50, no. 4 (October 1976): 622. On the treaty, see U.S. State Department, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1928, Volume III* (Government Printing Office, 1943), 308-321.

cattle population declined by 67 percent (from 5.1 million to 1.7 million) between 1910 and 1924 meanwhile exports to the United States in 1923 amounted to slightly more than 34,000 head compared to the 400,000 a year in the 1890s.²⁴ The plan called for refashioning the industry to be the equal of the one found in the United States by adopting an improved breeding system and a capital-intensive slaughter system to be accomplished by boosting the cattle population and implementing safeguards against future losses.²⁵ Mexican cattle owners in the 1920s pushed for an industry-wide plan of importing cattle for stocking purposes with government funding to bring into the country experts on business and management techniques.²⁶ As part of the plan, they bred local cows with imported bulls to create calves understood to be better at feedlot feeding and easier to slaughter in factories, hoping to reach what those in the U.S. cattle industry called conformity. The crash modernization program that followed the agreement succeeded on these points and allowed the cattle population to recover and trade with the United States to resume by the 1940s. The Mexican cattle population in 1940 reached ten

²⁴ Manuel A. Machado, Jr., "An Industry in Limbo: The Mexican Cattle Industry 1920-1924," *Agricultural History* 50, no. 4 (October 1976): 615. On the imposition of the quota, see Hoganson, "Meat in the Middle: Converging Borderlands in the U.S. Midwest, 1865-1900," 1445.

²⁵ For the efforts to rebuild the Mexican industry, see Machado, Jr., "An Industry in Limbo: The Mexican Cattle Industry 1920-1924," 618-20. The border had historically been rather porous. Paul Sabin characterizes the border as being, in the words of Mira Wilkins, "effectively meaningless" to U.S. capital. Sabin, "Home and Abroad: The Two 'West's' of Twentieth-Century United States History," 321. The quote comes from Mira Wilkins, *The Emergence of Multinational Enterprise: American Business abroad from the Colonial Era to 1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 120-24. On breeding and the U.S. beef industry, see Terry G. Jordon, *North-American Cattle-Ranching Frontiers: Origins, Diffusion, and Differentiation* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 307, 312-14.

²⁶ For the efforts to rebuild the Mexican industry, see Machado, Jr., "An Industry in Limbo: The Mexican Cattle Industry 1920-1924," 618-20.

million and exports were nearly 500,000 head of cattle per year, the maximum allowed by Mexican law.²⁷

The 1930 agreement in Mexican meant a modern beef industry connected to the one in the United States. In the states, the plan for the agreement was for it to provide a disease-shielding boundary that would help rationalize and regulate the southern border. The agreement gave to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and the chief of the Bureau of Animal Industry a formal timeline for closing the border if a quarantine was announced plus a system for resolving the threat. It allowed these officials to turn the border into a virtual fence against the global march of disease, with U.S. negotiators, according to economic historians Alan Olmstead and Paul Rhode, hoping that the agreement would transform Mexico into “a southern buffer zone to block the virus.”²⁸ That an entire nation could be seen as a fixed and permanent boundary speaks to the once-popular vision of the U.S. South extending all the way to the southern tip of Mexico and the direct purview of U.S. policymakers.²⁹ Congress soon enhanced the border as buffer zone concept with the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930. Passed shortly after the convention was announced, the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930 made it illegal to import any livestock or meat from a country confirmed to have foot-and-mouth disease or rinderpest (another contagious livestock disease) until the secretary of agriculture deemed that the risk of

²⁷ Machado, Jr., “An Industry in Limbo: The Mexican Cattle Industry 1920-1924,” 618-20.

²⁸ Olmstead and Rhode, 133.

²⁹ On the U.S. South as part of the global south, see Olsson, 5.

infection has abated.³⁰ The agreement, with legislative backing, was to allow the nation to maintain its modernity by using another country to keep the forces of chaos at bay.

Aphthovirus was not endemic to North America when it made its way into Mexico sometime by fall 1946. The host animal or animals remain a mystery but the most likely suspects were Brahman bulls that had been imported to the port city of Vera Cruz from Brazil despite the 1930 agreement including a ban on importing animals from countries known to harbor the disease as Brazil did. Brahman cattle, referred to at the time as Zebu or *cebu* in Spanish, are a cattle species native to India that were used in breed improvement programs because of their ability to thrive in tropical climates found in Mexico or the U.S. South. Two United States citizens, it seems, had set up a smuggling operation of importing Brazilian bulls to Mexico and keeping them there enough for the bulls be classified as Mexican under the agreement and then the now-Mexican cattle were brought up to Texas for breeding purposes. The cattle in question arrived in Mexico in June 1946 despite protests by Secretary of State James F. Byrnes and Secretary of Agriculture Clifford P. Anderson of the United States as well as Secretary of Agriculture and Development Marte R. Gomez of Mexico.³¹ The shipment immediately alarmed each governments' offices responsible for administering the agreement, and they immediately enacted one of its provisions.

With cattle in the Gulf Coast of Mexico now suspected of harboring foot-and-mouth disease, Anderson announced a six month ban as allowed by the bilateral animal

³⁰ *Tariff Act of 1930*, Public Law 497, 71st Cong., 2nd sess. (June 17, 1930), 689.

³¹ Machado, Jr., *An Industry in Crisis*, 10.

health agreement of 1930 in May 1946.³² The timing of the announcement could not have been worse for the secretary because President Truman was locked in a battle over consumer meat regulations that sparked a producer's boycott, which resulted in reduced supplies and inflated prices.³³ Urban areas with high amounts of beef consumption experienced a "meat famine" beginning in July, putting pressure on the Truman administration to find another source of cattle as fast as possible before the next election. One popular demand was for the administration to allow imports of meat from Argentina. This was a proposal with a thorny international dimension since importing extra meat would imperil the international food system that the country was working to establish. Secretary-General D. A. Fitzgerald of the International Emergency Food Council warned Anderson that the council had not approved of the United States receiving any meat from Argentina.³⁴ Other issues existed as well. E. E. Reed, director of the Production and Marketing Administration within the Department of Agriculture, noted that, since Argentina was known to harbor foot-and-mouth disease, imports from there were banned even though Argentina had declared the area where the factory was located to be free of the disease.³⁵ The search for extra sources of meat continued, with Reed's office recommending

³² Memorandum, Guy Ray to Ellis Briggs and Spruille Braden, January 17, 1947, printed in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946*, Vol. 9, 1049.

³³ On Truman and his domestic policy fight, see Chapter 1.

³⁴ D. A. Fitzgerald to Clinton Anderson, October 10, 1946, Meat, Box 9, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

³⁵ E. E. Reed to Clinton Anderson, October 10, 1946, Meat, Box 9, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

finding a way to get the Commodity Credit Corporation or the U.S. Army to purchase cattle for slaughter directly from ranches in Mexico that were north of the Vera Cruz.³⁶

President Truman and President Manuel Ávila Camacho of Mexico struggled during the crisis to keep trade between their two nations from collapsing. Their communication was the start of a long digression away from the White House as elements of the USDA expanded the reach of beef policy outward from its central origins. They each hoped to devise a diplomatic solution to prevent a quarantine from hardening into a long-term ban on imports. The chief conflict revolved around whether or not the U.S. Bureau of Animal Industry would allow Mexican cattle into the United States. Ávila Camacho requested, in a personal letter to Truman dated June 27, 1946, that, at the upcoming Mexico-United States Agriculture Commission meeting in Los Angeles, the U.S. delegation please consider amending the earlier agreement to allow cattle imports from Mexico despite the suspected presence of the disease. Furthermore, Ávila Camacho offered the amendment in what he called the “broadest spirit of cooperation” between the two nations.³⁷ This proposal, if adopted, would have immediately freed cattle from northern Mexico from the import restrictions, which was the main cattle export region of the country. Truman’s response on July 20 sidestepped Ávila Camacho’s request. In place of the proposed amendment, Truman recommended, at the suggestion of the Department of Agriculture, the creation of an international

³⁶ Administrator of the Production and Marketing Administration to Secretary, [1946?], Meat, Box 9, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

³⁷ Manuel Ávila Camacho to Harry S. Truman, June 27, 1946, Quarantine on Imported Cattle, Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Hoof and Mouth Disease, Rinderpest, OF 395, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

quarantine station off the coast of Honduras at Swan Island.³⁸ Cattle from nations with foot-and-mouth could then be shipped to that island for quarantine, testing, and treatment before being allowed to enter the nation. The Swan Island suggestion was a compromise solution that would satisfy the law with minimum impediments to trade by moving the quarantine from Mexico to the island and removing the need for the nationwide quarantine. Mexico could continue to ship its cattle north and the United States could keep its cattle free of foot-and-mouth infection. However, while Truman did end up signing the legislation that allowed the Swan Island station to be built, it never was.³⁹

By November, a joint team of Mexican and U.S. veterinarians tested the cattle, and, finding a lack of *Aphthovirus*, Anderson cleared them for importation from Mexico as required by the law. A total of 150,000 head of cattle were shipped north, including the bulls originally from Brazil.⁴⁰ Shortly after, Mexican presidential elections brought a new administration to power and unleashed a change in the political approach to the disease. President Miguel Alemán Véldez won the December 1946 election for a six-year term and undertook to transform Mexico into a modern republic. The historian Stephen R. Niblo characterizes Alemán's presidency as a "counterrevolution" and that the new president's "central motivating concept was to pursue industrial modernization as rapidly

³⁸ Harry S. Truman to Manuel Ávila Camacho, July 20, 1946, Quarantine on Imported Cattle, Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Hoof and Mouth Disease, Rinderpest, OF 395, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

³⁹ U.S. Code 60 Stat. 633. Truman signed the law on July 24, 1946. It was repealed on July 31, 1949 by U.S. Code 63 Stat. 410.

⁴⁰ U.S. Agriculture Research Service, "Summary of Developments in the Mexican Outbreak of Foot-and-Mouth Disease with Supplementary Information on the United States Cooperation in Control Methods," January 27, 1947, Foot-and-Mouth, Official Correspondence, Box 7, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

as possible.”⁴¹ The Alemán administration reorganized his nation’s political economy, which helped sustain the “robust economic growth” rate of 6 percent that had begun in 1940 and lasted until 1970.⁴² His government fostered closer relationships with international businessmen and the U.S. Export-Import Bank with the hopes of shifting from “economic nationalism” to “international integration.”⁴³ Over \$3.7 billion in foreign investment entered Mexico between 1947 and 1952.⁴⁴ It was in this era of increasing access by international businesses that the 1946 opening of Sears Roebuck’s first store in Mexico was such a success, with over one-hundred thousand customers visiting in the first three days.⁴⁵ Alemán’s political economic policy bundled import substitution with the call for Yankees not to go home.

At the same time, the Alemán administration pushed for a rural program that undid the land reforms of the previous administrations.⁴⁶ The new direction meant the building of a private landowner class that would then implement business-oriented reforms that would transform the country’s agriculture to more closely resemble the one developing in the United States. In a clear sign of his intention to roll back the revolution, one of his first legislative successes was the passage of a law exempting private

⁴¹ Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, DE, Scholarly Resources, 1999), 170.

⁴² Aaron W. Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 145-46.

⁴³ Stephen R. Niblo, *War, Diplomacy, and Development: The United States and Mexico, 1938-1954* (Wilmington, DE, Scholarly Resources, 1995), 283.

⁴⁴ Navarro, 146.

⁴⁵ Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don’t Go Home!: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 1.

⁴⁶ On the agrarian project of the 1930s, see Olsson, ch. 3.

landholders to collectivization of farmland. He signed it two days after his inauguration.⁴⁷ His attitude toward the beef industry was similarly focused on modernizing the industry so that it could provide enough meat to match the demand for beef of urban consumers. His interest in modernity and internal improvements informed his response to news that was about to come out of Vera Cruz.

Trade between the two countries began returning to normal with the test in November returning a negative result. Nevertheless, rumors reached Anderson that a mysterious disease spreading among the cattle of Vera Cruz was, in fact, foot-and-mouth disease. To quell the rumors, he sent Bureau of Animal Industry veterinarians back to Mexico to conduct new tests. These tests, done at the end of December, confirmed the rumors and everyone's worst fears: the unknown malady in Vera Cruz was foot-and-mouth disease. By the end of that month, the virus spread out from that state and infected the local area (see figure 2.1). Eventually, it reached seventeen states and approximately 220,000 square miles of central Mexico all the way to the Pacific Ocean.⁴⁸ Despite an agreement designed to prevent just such an event from ever occurring, foot-and-mouth was now in North America and racing through animals at an uncontrolled pace. The historian John Ledbetter captured the sense of tragedy: "Foot-and-mouth virus invaded Mexico in 1946, sickening and killing Mexican livestock and robbing Mexican citizens of food, draft animals, and savings."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption*, 184.

⁴⁸ Manuel A. Machado, Jr., *Aftosa: A Historical Survey of Foot-and-Mouth Disease and Inter-American Relations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1969), 40.

⁴⁹ John Ledbetter, "Fighting Foot-and-Mouth Disease in Mexico: Popular Protest against Diplomatic Decisions," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 104, no. 3 (January 2001): 387.

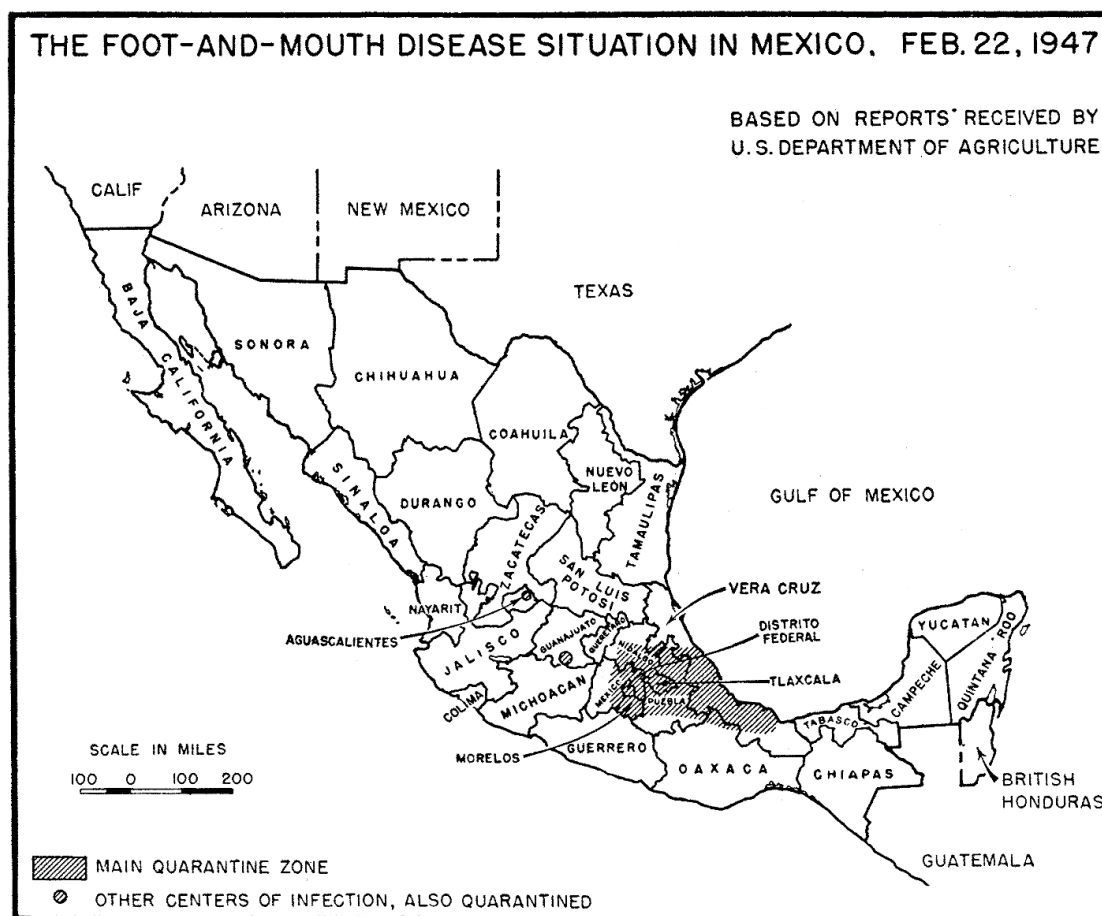


Figure 2.1: Department of Agriculture map of foot-and-mouth disease in Mexico as of February 22, 1947.

Source: Earl B. Shaw, "Mexico's Foot-and-Mouth Disease Problem," *Economic Geography* 25, no. 1 (January 1949): 2.

Why had the agreement failed? As the historian Manuel A. Machado, Jr. argues, the U.S. and Mexican governments inconsistently enforced the 1930 agreement because both had allowed the agreement to be violated repeatedly by importers from Brazil with each seeking to foster better relations with the country through letting their cattle be imported to North America.⁵⁰ Yet, even the strongest, most stringent regulatory regimes may not have been enough to protect the continent forever. The increased volume of trade of the valuable breeding stock meant that the very same movement of cattle that

⁵⁰ Machado, Jr., *An Industry in Crisis*, 12.

was allowing cattle owners in Mexico and the U.S. South improve their herds also meant that disease-causing organisms had even more chances to spread, which is exactly the process behind the 1946 outbreak. Both countries had risked outbreaks by ignoring the strict quarantines imposed by the agreement but the return of world trade made any scheme to permanently keep diseases at bay increasingly unlikely to work.

In early 1947, Secretary Anderson approached Congress to grant his department the necessary authorization and financial support to engage in direct eradication of the disease in Mexico. By doing so, he cemented beef policy as a concern of the Department of Agriculture and not just of the White House as it had been during the initial postwar reconversion efforts. His initial idea was for Congress to authorize the secretary to help Mexico or any nation in the hemisphere battle *Aphthovirus* with direct scientific and technological support. Anderson's request was introduced into the House by Member of Congress George Gillie (R-IN), himself a veterinarian with experience fighting foot-and-mouth in the twenties, which was a disease that he called the "dread disease" and a "direct threat" to the nation's prosperity.⁵¹ He justified Anderson's request on the floor of the House by noting that prior eradication campaigns in the United States had cost more than \$200 million all together and that the proposed cost of \$9 million was miniscule compared to what was about to happen if *Aphthovirus* made its way north.⁵² Not satisfied with authorizing the eradication of the disease, Gillie also called for building a border

⁵¹ George Gillie quoted in House Committee on Agriculture, *Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Hearings on H.R. 1819 (S. 568) to Authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to Cooperate with Other American Countries in the Control and Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease and Rinderpest*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., 1947, 2.

⁵² George Gillie in *Congressional Record—House*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., February 10, 1947, 959.

fence and strengthening border patrols.⁵³ In this, he joined the voices of Kings Ranch owner Kleberg and the many state governments warning that the only way to truly save the United States was by building a border fence.

The eradication element enjoyed broad support but opposition to the fence was immediate. Chester Gross (R-PA) responded by needling Sam Rayburn (D-TX) about the effectiveness of building the fence. Gross asked Rayburn, who had just requested that the federal government pay the state of Texas to fight the disease, why did he not trust his own state government to eradicate the disease, then should the federal government distract itself from eradicate the disease by building the fence? Rayburn responded that the state of Texas lacked the resources to eradicate the disease by itself and implied that the federal government could do both. Gross dismissed his fellow lawmaker's answer with the retort that the fence was a distraction and that only true option was to fully fund eradication because "there is only one way to do it, and that is to do it."⁵⁴ With the disease now threatening the nation, calls came for a coercive and visible state to save the beef industry.⁵⁵ As in transportation policy, land improvement, and rural youth clubs, the Department of Agriculture had long enjoyed support to both shape and create policy that no other arm of the executive branch could match.⁵⁶ The crisis renewed popular support

⁵³ George Gillie from *Congressional Record—House*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., February 10, 1947, 960.

⁵⁴ Chester Gross quoted in *Congressional Record—House*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., February 10, 1947, 940.

⁵⁵ On the development of a non-visible government and the eventual emergence of an associational state, see Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Brian Balogh, *The Associational State: American Governance in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

⁵⁶ On transportation, see Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 43-98; on land conservation, see Sarah T. Phillips, *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal* (New York: Cambridge

for a department capable of eradicating what the California Legislature, in a letter opposing the fence, libeled a “disastrous disease” and “a serious threat to the livestock industries of the two countries.”⁵⁷

Anderson explained his own view on *Aphthovirus* by calling it a “seriously threaten our national food supply.”⁵⁸ Industry leaders and groups agreed, and demanded that his department take immediate action.⁵⁹ Members of the House and Senate acquiesced. Both houses of Congress held hearings on versions of Anderson’s bill. The House hearings, conducted by the full Committee on Agriculture, involved some worrying about the cost but the overall tone was in favor of eradication. Edwin Hall (R-NY) asked Chief Bennet T. Simms of the Bureau of Animal Industry how much an eradication campaign would cost but Simms could not provide an answer.⁶⁰ Not that this slowed down support of the bill. The Senate held smaller hearings on the bill that were conducted by a subcommittee of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry. Raymond

University Press, 2007), 9; on rural youth clubs, see Gabe Rosenberg, *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

⁵⁷ A copy of California State Senate Joint Resolution 2 was sent to President Truman. Telegram, J. A. Beck to Harry Truman, January 16, 1947, Quarantine on Imported Cattle, Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Rinderpest, Box 1217, OF 395, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁵⁸ Clinton P. Anderson to Speaker of the House, February 7, 1947, in House Committee on Agriculture, *Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Hearings on H.R. 1819 (S. 568) to Authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to Cooperate with Other American Countries in the Control and Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease and Rinderpest*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., 1947, 2.

⁵⁹ Groups including the National Wool Growers’ Association, Arizona Cattle Growers’ Association, California Dairy Council, New Mexico Cattle Growers Association, Florida State Cattlemen’s Association sent letters to the House Committee on Agriculture describing the disease as a massive threat, see House Committee, *Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease*, 9-34. F. E. Mollin, Executive Secretary of the American National Livestock Association, appeared before Senate hearings on the issue, agreeing that foot-and-mouth posed a serious threat, the most important in the prior eighteen years, Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Subcommittee on Foot-and-Mouth Disease, *Foot-and-Mouth Disease in Mexico*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., 1947, 102.

⁶⁰ House Committee, *Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease*, 18-19.

Bell, a U.S. rancher with cattle in Mexico, appeared before the subcommittee as the spokesperson for President Alemán and presented the Mexican government's understanding of how eradication would work. The plan was to create a quarantine area around central Mexico followed by the slaughtering of all of the infected cattle within the quarantine zone.⁶¹ Northern Mexican cattle would continue to be imported to the United States with this plan. Of the animals in the infected zone, those that were healthy enough for human consumption would be salvaged for slaughter and domestic consumption within Mexico City at a cost to the owner of 25 percent of the animal's current market value. After eradication was completed, repopulation would come from bringing cattle into the formerly-infected areas of Mexico from northern Mexico and the United States.

The final outlines of an eradication plan came into focus during the Senate hearings. During the hearings, Bell sold the idea of direct intervention to lawmakers by claiming that the only alternative to eradication was cohabitation with the disease in what he called the "Argentine-Brazil Plan."⁶² The Argentine-Brazil Plan entailed controlling occasional outbreaks with vaccines but otherwise accommodating the virus, meaning that *Apthovirus* was never fully extirpated from within the country. When asked what would be the problem with Mexican cattle with the disease, he responded that "there would be no reason to keep them from coming north."⁶³ The disease, then, had the added element of being associated with premodern production and foreign invasion. Senator Edward J. Thye (R-MN) developed this point further: "if the infection was established in

⁶¹ Senate Subcommittee, *Foot-and-Mouth Disease in Mexico*, 77-100.

⁶² Raymond Bell quoted in Senate Subcommittee, *Foot-and-Mouth Disease in Mexico*, 98.

⁶³ Raymond Bell quoted in Senate Subcommittee, *Foot-and-Mouth Disease in Mexico*, 99.

Mexico...that would immediately break down all the arguments that the United States has used against importation of their beef or any kind of livestock from the Argentine or Uruguay or any areas in South America.”⁶⁴ This line of reasoning was later repeated in a House debate when William Poage (D-TX) remarked that foot-and-mouth disease justified the continued ban on all meat imports from South America.⁶⁵ The economic security of the domestic industry demanded immediate eradication of the disease.

Congress passed two bills in support of the eradication plan: one bill to allow the direct involvement in eradication in Mexico and another bill to fund the work at \$9 million for the fiscal year that ended in September.⁶⁶ Following the Congressional appropriation, the newly created Joint Mexican United States Commission to Eradicate Foot-and-Mouth Disease, or the *Comision Mexico-Americana Para La Erradicacion De La Fiebre Afotsa* (hereafter called the Commission) and was led by an eight-member board split between the two countries with Mexico assuming the lead. The U.S. members of the commission were Dr. M. S. Shahan serving as co-director along with commissioners U.S. Under-Secretary N. E. Dodd, Chief of the Bureau of Animal Industry Bennet Simms, and Don Stoops.⁶⁷ The Mexican members were Director and Under-Secretary of Agriculture Oscar Flores along with commissioners Ignacio de la

⁶⁴ Edward Thye quoted in Senate Subcommittee, *Foot-and-Mouth Disease in Mexico*, 99.

⁶⁵ *Congressional Record—House*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., February 20, 1947, 1308-09.

⁶⁶ The bill granting permission to the USDA to conduct slaughter operations in Mexico was signed in February and the appropriation of \$9 million was signed in March. “Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease,” in *CQ Almanac 1947*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1948), <http://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/cqal47-1398384>, accessed May 20, 2015.

⁶⁷ Bureau of Animal Industry, Supplement 3, Summary of Development in the Mexican Outbreak of Foot-and-Mouth Disease, April 10, 1947, Quarantine on Imported Cattle, Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Hoof-and-Mouth Disease-Rinderpest, Box 1217, OF 395, White House Office Files, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

Torre, Federico Rubio Lozano, and Jose Figueroa.⁶⁸ The eradication plan was known in Mexico as the Alemán-Ortiz Garza Plan (named after the president and the Secretary of Agriculture Nazario Ortiz Garza).⁶⁹

The joint leadership board began establishing a financially sustainable system to allow its eradication work to begin. Of the \$9 million authorized by the U.S. Congress, \$1.5 million was for buying equipment and paying salaries with the remaining \$7.5 million being saved specifically for cattle indemnity payments to reimburse the owners of the dead cattle.⁷⁰ The other animals, swine, goats, and sheep, would be handled by the Mexican government.⁷¹ The official plan for the other important farm animal in central Mexico, mules, was for farmers to replace them with oxen as part of a general drive to modernize agriculture and the peasantry of the area. Cattle were the most expensive animal to replace and the United States picking up the tab seemed to have reflected the general obsession within the United States of the threat cattle were expected to pose if

⁶⁸ Bureau of Animal Industry, Supplement 3, Summary of Development in the Mexican Outbreak of Foot-and-Mouth Disease, April 10, 1947, Quarantine on Imported Cattle, Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Hoof-and-Mouth Disease-Rinderpest, Box 1217, OF 395, White House Office Files, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO; Minutes of Meetings of the Comision Mexico-Americana Para La Erradicacion De La Fiebre Afotsa, [September 1947 (?)], Minutes of Meeting and Directives Joint Commission for Prevention of Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 1, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD; Minute of the Meetings of the Mexican-United States Commission for the Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease, February 20-22, 1948, Minutes of Meeting and Directives Joint Commission for Prevention of Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 1, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

⁶⁹ Machado, Jr., *An Industry in Crisis*, 20.

⁷⁰ Bureau of Animal Industry, United States with Mexico in the Control and Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease under Terms of Public Law 8, 80th Congress, Approved February 28, 1947 (Chapter 8—1st Session) Report for 30-Day Period Ended April 29, 1947, May 1, 1947, Quarantine on Imported Cattle, Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Hoof-and-Mouth Disease-Rinderpest, Box 1217, OF 395, White House Office Files, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO

⁷¹ Minutes of Meeting of Mexican-United States Commission for the Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease,” March 1-April 2, 1947, Minutes of Meeting and Directives Joint Commission for Prevention of Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 1, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD; Machado, Jr., *An Industry in Crisis*, 41.

they headed north. Payment problems soon emerged with concerns about variations in breed values holding up payments. In July, the Commission leadership amended preexisting rules to clarify indemnity payments procedures for purebred animals and capping indemnity payments for swine, goat, and sheep at three-times the “utility value” and for cattle at four times the value.⁷² Indemnity payments for non-cattle animals still took months before becoming regularly available. It was not until September that Director Flores received approval from President Alemán to spend three million pesos per month on indemnities.⁷³ Even after that appropriations approval, the Mexican government still had trouble meeting its fiduciary responsibilities to the campaign.⁷⁴ Fears about affording eradication was not new in Mexico and, indeed, the issue of money was the justification for seeking U.S assistance in the first place.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, both countries continued to work on developing a funding solution and decided that the indemnities come from a pool created by both countries without distinction of the animal type or the specific country providing the funding.

⁷² Minutes of Meetings of the Comision Mexico-Americana Para La Erradicacion De La Fiebre Afotsa, [September 1947 (?)], Minutes of Meeting and Directives Joint Commission for Prevention of Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 1, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

⁷³ Memorandum, Mexican Section to the United States Section, July 26, 1947, in Minutes of Meetings of the Comision Mexico-Americana Para La Erradicacion De La Fiebre Afotsa, [September 1947 (?)], Minutes of Meeting and Directives Joint Commission for Prevention of Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 1, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

⁷⁴ Memorandum, Charles Corlett to Clinton Anderson, September 9, 1947, Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Official Correspondence, Box 7, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁷⁵ Rancher Raymond Bell, who claimed to have the confidence of President Aleman on the subject, strongly emphasized this point in his testimony before the House and Senate in February 1947. House of Committee, *Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease*, 84; Senate Subcommittee, *Foot-and-Mouth Disease in Mexico*, 89.

The Alemán-Ortiz Garza Plan approved by both governments called for all infected animals to be slaughtered in a system known as area eradication. It involved sealing off an area and sending in veterinarians to test all suspected animals. Animals testing positive were killed, likely with a rifle, and then the corpse would be disposed of in a giant ditch that was treated to prevent reinfection. Many elements of state building were needed for area eradication to succeed. The economic historians Alan Olmstead and Paul Rhode emphasize that area eradication involves a strong central government getting permission from state and municipal governments for it to assume police powers sufficient enough for its agents to be able to interfere with animal owners' rights over their own property, which would otherwise have been protected from such an egregious use of power.⁷⁶ Particularly, they identify cattle owners' consent and support as key ingredients for area eradication to work.⁷⁷ In keeping with the Department of Agriculture's singular powers within the federal government, area eradication dated to the very founding of the Bureau of Animal Industry and the successful eradication of contagious bovine pleuropneumonia. The newly-formed bureau eradicated that disease by indemnifying and slaughtering twenty-five thousand cattle across five states in the 1890s.⁷⁸ Reflecting the successes of that campaign, area eradication in Mexico similarly called for the infected area cleansed of all possible infections and the animals within slaughtered. This meant sending veterinarians out for field testing suspect animals, the mass slaughter of the infected, disinfecting the area, and then the paying indemnities to

⁷⁶ Olmstead and Rhode, 63-64.

⁷⁷ Olmstead and Rhode, 43.

⁷⁸ Olmstead and Rhode, 83.

the owners (or the arranging of oxen to be shipped in to replace mules). The plan was formulated on the assumption that local governments and livestock owners would willingly help with the area eradication efforts and the commission prepared for active eradication to begin as soon as possible.

The Commission's field agents immediately began eradicating the disease, moving beef policy into the Mexican hinterlands. The basic field work for conducting the slaughter plan involved personnel from both countries using surplus military equipment sold to the Commission by the United States, such as earthmoving equipment to dig massive trenches or build roads to the various isolated farms of central Mexico. The Commission's area eradication entailed having the U.S. personnel overseeing the testing of each animal and the Mexican veterinarians overseeing the slaughtering of the infected animals. Rifles, though if not rifles than certainly pistols, were used in the killings. Before the Commission began its work, the Mexican government had done some slaughtering but the work was slow and inefficient. By mid-1947, the pace of slaughter began reaching industrial levels.⁷⁹ By the end of April, over two-hundred Mexican veterinarians were slaughtering over one-hundred animals each day with total slaughter numbers reported as follows. Commission personnel slaughtered 32,815 livestock, consisting of cattle, swine, sheep, and goats (oxen were not listed). Of that total, 19,121 had *aftosa* while the rest were slaughtered as a precaution and were not for consumption. The total first month cattle slaughter stood at 14,685 head.⁸⁰ By June, the Bureau

⁷⁹ On the differences in eradication before and after the Commission, see Machado, Jr., *An Industry in Crisis*.

⁸⁰ "Report to Congress on Cooperation of United States with Mexico in the Control and Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease under Terms of Public Law 8, 80th Congress, Approved February 28, 1947, Report of 30-day Period Ended April 29, 1947," Quarantine on Imported Cattle, Foot and Mouth

predicted that, if slaughter rates continued to be close to twenty-thousand a week, a total of 19,000 cattle could be slaughtered in the next fiscal year. It also predicted that the initial \$9 million budget would grow to \$60 million for the next year.⁸¹ Soon the Commission's use of rifles became so ubiquitous that they began being known as the "*rifle sanitario*" or the "sanitary rifle."⁸²

While the campaign was unfolding, Secretary Anderson developed an alternative structure for monitoring the Commission's progress and to make recommendations to him for improving its operation. He turned to retired General Charles Corlett for this task and created a separate advisory committee that reported to Albert Mitchel, a ranch manager from Anderson's home state of New Mexico, to provide insight into the campaign and track its progress.⁸³ Corlett's initial prognosis was grim and the Commission seemed to be losing ground with each passing day. The situation was so bad that Corlett recommended that the Bureau may need to build the border fence after all, and then retreat behind it and aurally strafe any animals that wondered too close.⁸⁴ The advisory committee assessed the situation equally as grimly but they held onto hope, writing, "We are losing ground," yet recommended that "the program be expanded and

Disease, Hoof and Mouth Disease – Rinderpest, Box 1217, OF 395, White House Office Files, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁸¹ Bureau of Animal Industry, Statement giving latest information available with regard to the campaign for the eradication of foot-and-mouth disease in Mexico, June 10, 1947, Foot-and-Mouth, Official Correspondence, Box 7, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁸² Fred Gibson, "*The Cow Killers*"; *with the Aftosa Commission in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1956), 31.

⁸³ "Corlett to Help Direct War on Disease in Mexican Cattle," *The Evening Star*, July 23, 1947;

⁸⁴ Memorandum, Charles Corlett to Clinton Anderson, September 9, 1947, Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Official Correspondence, Box 7, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

intensified.”⁸⁵ With these reports in hand, Anderson asked the Commission leaders what could be done next to regain the lost ground. The leadership’s answer was to reaffirm their dedication to area eradication as the ultimate solution, affirming during one of three meetings held in late in July that “a vaccination program is contrary to the slaughter program.”⁸⁶ Not everyone within the advisory committee agreed. C. U. Duckworth from the California Bureau of Animal Industry found that the Commission’s plan to ramp up slaughter to fifty-thousand a week amounted to a “terrific force as to completely nullify our efforts and expenditures” and recommended that the commission seriously consider using vaccines for control in order to spare Mexican citizens the losses that would occur if eradication ever ramped up to that level.⁸⁷

Area eradication within the central quarantine zone continued through the summer and into September when resistance to the Commission turned violent. From the beginning, Commission personnel faced passive resistance from owners hiding their animals, lying about their value, or threatening the workers. But, events took a deadly turn as part of a brief but bloody wave of violence against the campaign in the fall of 1947.⁸⁸ On September 1, near Ciudad Hidalgo in Michoacán, local people attacked and

⁸⁵ Elmer Brock to Albert Mitchell, July 23, 1947, Foot-and-Mouth, Official Correspondence, Box 7, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO. The report was from a sub-committee of the Advisory Committee for the American Section of the Committee on Foot-and-Mouth Disease in Mexico. Mitchell chaired the committee while Brock chaired the sub-committee.

⁸⁶ Minutes of Meetings of the Comision Mexico-Americana Para La Erradicacion De La Fiebre Afotsa, [September 1947 (?)], Minutes of Meeting and Directives Joint Commission for Prevention of Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 1, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

⁸⁷ C. U. Duckworth to Albert Mitchell, August 13, 1947, Foot-and-Mouth, Official Correspondence, Box 7, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁸⁸ On the broader violence, Ledbetter, 404-06.

murdered commission scientist Dr. Juarez Medina as well as his military accompaniment, which included an army captain and six soldiers.⁸⁹ Medina and the soldiers apparently were met in the town plaza by five-hundred men and women from the nearby village of La Huerta, all armed with firearms and machetes with several on horseback. The violence started with an attack on the captain, who ordered his men to hold their fire, an order they obeyed to their end. The five soldiers were then attacked, with one managing to escape before dying of his wounds in a nearby home. Medina was shot and begged for his life as members of the crowd descended on him, stabbing him to death. The crowd mutilated the dead: when the bodies were recovered days later, Medina was found with over twenty-seven stab wounds. Authorities, for their part, killed eight civilians and arrested nearly fifty.⁹⁰ The overall violence of this time left one hundred and seven killed and most were from Mexico: sixty-six were Mexican soldiers, thirty-four were Mexican citizens, and seven were U.S. citizens.⁹¹

The violence left U.S. policymakers demoralized and searching for a new way forward. With domestic turmoil on the rise, Bureau of Animal Industry Chief and commission member Simms worried that the Commission could no longer fulfill its role and therefore the bureau's official position remained firmly in support of the border

⁸⁹ Richard E. Omohundro to M. S. Shahan, September 2, 1947, Foot-and-Mouth, Official Correspondence, Box 7, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO. The report of the details came from someone who "was in the center of all the activity." Within the same packet of information sent to Anderson and preserved in the Truman Library was the English-language transcript of a flyer found in Apaxtla from the nearby state of Guerrero. It called on Mexicans to rebel against the revolutionary government of President Aleman and against the U.S. incursion. It ended with a call of support for disposed Mexican president Porfirio Díaz. Anonymous Circulars Posted in Apaxtia, GRO., translated by Filberto Castillo, August 28, 1947, Foot-and-Mouth, Official Correspondence, Box 7, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁹⁰ Ledbetter, 405.

⁹¹ John Ledbetter, 405-06.

fence. Faced with fierce opposition throughout the countryside, eradication slowed down with only ten thousand animals slaughtered in the week ending September 6 (which was the week of the murders).⁹² Mexican resistance proved to be too much and, in November 1947, both governments agreed to begin restructuring the campaign.⁹³ Representatives of the U.S. cattle industry strongly disagreed before the new direction was even finalized. The president of the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers, C. E. Weymouth, requested that President Truman take into account the organization's position before agreeing the proposed changes since "food is of vital importance to the peace and happiness of the world" and saw the proposal as "gravely dangerous."⁹⁴ Agricultural writer Alfred D. Stedman summarized the popular sentiment of one-hundred thirty-four cattle organization that the announced shift was a collapse of eradication, requiring the immediate construction of the-long requested "tight-mesh fence, 7 feet high, along 2,000 miles of the Mexican border at a cost of around \$6,000."⁹⁵ In Congress, opposition was equally fierce. Herman Carl Andersen (R-MN) called the change a "practical abandonment" of eradication.⁹⁶ The Subcommittee on Foot-and-Mouth Disease, chaired by Representative Gillie, produced a report that emphasized the main way to fight the

⁹² Memorandum, B. T. Simms to Clinton P. Anderson, September 15, 1947, Foot-and-Mouth, Official Correspondence, Box 7, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁹³ Machado, Jr., *An Industry in Crisis*, 33-34. Machado titled his chapter on this transition, "The Scientific Contribution."

⁹⁴ Telegram, C. E. Weyworth to Harry S. Truman, November 25, 1947, Quarantine on Imported Cattle, Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Hoof-and-Mouth Disease-Rinderpest, Box 1217, OF 395, White House Office Files, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁹⁵ Alfred D. Stedman, "Foot-and-Mouth War Collapse Perils Cattle Industry," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, November 30.

⁹⁶ Herman Carl Andersen quoted in *Congressional Record—House*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., December 2, 1947, 11,000.

disease was for the Commission to slaughter all infected animals plus his subcommittee wanted Mexico to begin paying half the cost of the program.⁹⁷

Regardless of the discontent in the United States, both nations agreed to a new plan in December. The disease had spread across central Mexico and seemed more entrenched than before (see figure 2.2). The plan, developed by the Mexican government and dubbed the “Alemán-Ortiz Garza Plan” after the president and the secretary of agriculture, was the product of consultations with the Latin American and European governments who had already learned to manage the disease with vaccinations. The idea was a modified eradication model that added in a final step of vaccinating all non-infected animals with repeated follow up vaccinations until the entire area was deemed absolutely clear of the disease.⁹⁸ Supplies of the vaccine initially came from Europe until the Commission could build its own vaccine production facilities in Mexico. From that time until 1954, the commission operated a heavily modified form of area eradication: cattle in areas with known infections were vaccinated in multiple waves every six months.

⁹⁷ House Committee on Agriculture, Subcommittee on Foot-and-Mouth Disease, *Report and Recommendation on Future Foot-and-Mouth-Disease Program*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., 1947.

⁹⁸ Machado, Jr., *An Industry in Crisis*, 35-36. Machado claims that a consequence of the plan was that northern Mexican cattle of better stock were brought in to replace reduced stock in central and southern Mexico. Machado, Jr., *An Industry in Crisis*, 41.

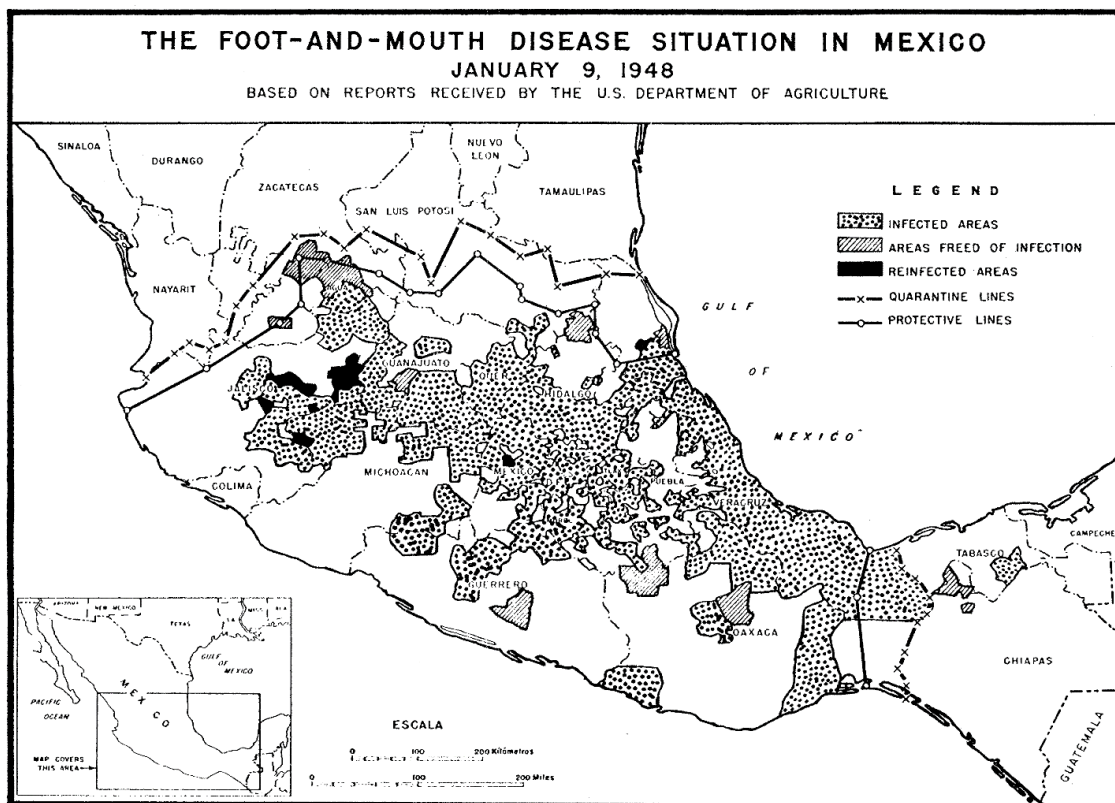


Figure 2.2: Department of Agriculture map of foot-and-mouth disease eradication showing large areas of infection and reinfection in Mexico as of January 9, 1948. Source: Earl B. Shaw, "Mexico's Foot-and-Mouth Disease Problem," *Economic Geography* 25, no. 1 (January 1949): 3.

The Alemán-Ortiz Garza Plan could succeed, but only if enough animals developed an immunity to *Aphthovirus*. If enough were immune, the virus, lacking in suitable host animals to infect, would die out. It meant turning cattle and other cloven animals into a hostile and unwelcoming environment. Yet, as mentioned earlier, the virus is highly mutagenic and vaccines must be created from local infections. In Mexico, the virus came from Type "A" but even vaccines developed from other Type "A" strains that were found in South America might not have worked because, while they were similar, the replication pattern meant that each generation's differences culminated in virus

strains that the antibodies would not attack.⁹⁹ To counter the rapid evolution, cattle needed to receive multiple doses with each derived from the local virus strain. This is why the cattle industry assumed that vaccines were doomed to fail. Even if they did not know the science behind it, they knew that vaccines imparted only a partial immunity.

The Commission adopted vaccination into a field work that would aggressively respond to any local outbreaks. Initially, the Commission used imported vaccines while Mexico built up its manufacturing capabilities, which occurred rapidly. Aggregate production of the vaccine approached 7,724,000 doses by the end January 1949, with the one-month production in December 1948 totaling two million,¹⁰⁰ All this stock allowed the commission to vaccinate twenty-five million animals in 1948.¹⁰¹ By 1950, the Commission divided central Mexico into ten total control zones for regulating the necessary repeated vaccinations required to confer immunity (see figure 2.3). Progress was immediate and appreciated by the observers from the United States. The advisory committee to the secretary of agriculture reported to Anderson's replacement, Secretary of Agriculture Charles F. Brannan, in July 1949 that "the most significant development at this dates is the result obtained from the use of the vaccine."¹⁰² In 1951, the commission officially became the Mexican-American Commission for the Prevention of Foot-and-

⁹⁹ Machado, Jr., *An Industry in Crisis*, 35.

¹⁰⁰ Machado, Jr., *An Industry in Crisis*, 38.

¹⁰¹ Johnson to B. T. Simms, September 30, 1949, Minutes of Meeting and Directives Joint Commission for Prevention of Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 1, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

¹⁰² Members of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease Advisory Committee to Charles F. Brannan, July 1, 1949, Foot-and-Mouth, Official Correspondence, Box 7, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO. Advisory committee chair Albert K. Mitchell also sent Anderson a copy, hence it ending up being preserved in the Anderson papers at the Truman Library. On Charles Brannan's replacement of Anderson as secretary of agriculture, see chapter 3.

Mouth Disease.¹⁰³ No major changes within the campaign occurred despite a brief outbreak in Canada until success was declared in 1954, with the U.S. government having spent over \$135 million for a project with an initial budget of \$9 million in 1947.¹⁰⁴ *Aphthovirus* eradication succeeded through the vaccination and limited slaughter plan. The initial plan of area eradication was unworkable with a population who depended on their livestock as their main source of wealth and labor, which the indemnity payments could not repay. Despite the pushback and violence in Mexico, the adaption of vaccines did end up furthering President Alemán's goals to mechanize farming and beef production in the Mexico.¹⁰⁵ Notably, this success entailed not the one-way flow of ideas into Mexico but a crossing between the nations.

¹⁰³ Machado, Jr., *Aftosa*, 47.

¹⁰⁴ On the closing of the campaign, see Agreements of the Meetings of the Mexico-United States Commission for the Prevention of Foot-and-Mouth Disease, April 6-7, 1954, Minutes, Meetings, and Directives Joint Commission for Preventing Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 1, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD. On the total cost, see Report to Congress on Cooperation of the United States and Mexico in the Control and Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease under Terms of Public Law 8, 80th Congress, Approved February 28, 1947, Report for the Month Ending November 30, 1954, Box 1, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

¹⁰⁵ Ledbetter, 413-15; Steven E. Sanderson, *The Transformation of Mexican Agriculture: International Structure and the Politics of Rural Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 134-36.



Figure 2.3: Map of vaccinations as of August 1950.

Source: Untitled Report to the President, August 15, 1950, Quarantine on Imported Cattle, Foot and Mouth Disease, Hoof and Mouth Disease – Rinderpest, Box 1217, White House Central Files, OF 395, White House Office Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

Inspired by the Commission's use of vaccines, members of the Bureau of Animal Industry started calling for the United States to create its own contagious disease research program. This lower-level development of the federal government cemented the growth of beef policy to include parts of the government distant its centralized origins. A research-focused advisory committee within the bureau wanted bureau Chief Simms to consider supporting the department developing its own research arm, which could increase the base of knowledge for improving treatment options.¹⁰⁶ The idea for Congress

¹⁰⁶ Memorandum, The Advisory Committee for Foot-and-Mouth Disease Research to Chief of the Bureau of Animal Industry, October 21, 1947, Research on Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 1, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

to fund a research agency that would initially work with English and other European research teams before developing into an independent program. Simms agreed to the proposal and directed the bureau to dedicate itself to developing the internal capability to research foot-and-mouth disease. In February 1948, Anderson signed an emergency request of \$225,000 to fund the initial effort.¹⁰⁷ By November, the Bureau began lobbying Congress for legislative support to allow the Bureau to engage in studying the disease on domestic soil since prior law made it illegal to import the disease intentionally, even with the goal of studying it.¹⁰⁸ Bureau scientists appealed to lawmakers to grant them permission to build a national research institution and to be allowed to manage its own vaccination programs.¹⁰⁹

Bureau scientists planned on using the establishment of the proposed foot-and-mouth research center as be the basis for research into other vascular diseases, such as vascular stomatitis. Simms struggled to find permanent funding since the initial forays into research had been funded by redirecting moneys allocated for eradication toward the establishment of short-term research programs.¹¹⁰ The transfer of funds reflected the growing acceptance within the bureau that researching the disease to understand its

¹⁰⁷ Memorandum, W. V. Lambert to the Secretary, February 12, 1948, Research on Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 1, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

¹⁰⁸ Bureau of Animal Industry, "Measures for Maintaining the United States Free from Foot-and-Mouth Disease of Livestock, with Special Reference to Research Needs," November 1948, Maintaining the United States Free from Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 2, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

¹⁰⁹ House Committee on Agriculture, Subcommittee on Foot-and-Mouth Disease, *Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Hearings*, 80th Cong., 2nd sess., 1948, 22-23.

¹¹⁰ Memorandum, B. T. Simms to P. V. Cadon, June 5, 1950, Research on Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 1, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD; Memorandum, B. T. Simms to Charles F. Brannan, December 31, 1948, Research on Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 1, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

virology contributed to eradication efforts rather than replacing them.¹¹¹ Simms wanted a research program that would be “on as large a scale as possible.”¹¹² That is exactly what happened. By the time eradication was completed in Mexico, the Department of Agriculture had gained permission to import the disease and the funding to study contagious diseases in its new facility being built on Plum Island, near Long Island, NY. While never getting a border fence, the bureau did get a research institute that helped create a worldwide archipelago of contagious-disease research laboratories.¹¹³

Even if the eradication campaign resulted in the United States building its vaccination research capabilities, area eradication and slaughter remained the favored domestic approach. By 1954, the after having its research agenda realized, the Bureau of Animal Industry ceased to exist with Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson having broken up the bureau and distributed its component parts within the Agriculture Research Service. As construction commenced on the research center, two branches (Animal Disease Eradication and Animal Disease and Parasite Research) published a series of lessons that had been learned from the eradication campaign in Mexico. Despite the successful use of vaccines, the USDA remained committed to slaughter-based area

¹¹¹ Memorandum, B. T. Simms to B. T. Shaw, May 8, 1950, Research on Foot-and-Mouth Disease, M.C. 375, Box 1, USDA Foot-and-Mouth Research Laboratory Records, 1943-1956, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

¹¹² Memorandum, B. T. Simms to Charles F. Brannan, December 31, 1948, Research on Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 1, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

¹¹³ The United States joined a host of international research groups, including the International Conference on Foot-and-Mouth Disease, the Pan-American Foot-and-Mouth Disease Center, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Organization for Animal Health, in addition to bilateral agreements. Machado, Jr., *Aftosa*). Successes took decades but are notable. These research laboratories announced in 2011 that rinderpest had been extirpated completely. Olmstead and Rhode, *Arresting Contagion*, 1.

eradication. The reason provided was two-fold: “(1) slaughter is the only effective means of eradicating the disease; and (2) the disease has never been eradicated by vaccines.”¹¹⁴

Vaccines may have worked for poor Mexican farmers but cattle owners in the United States could absorb the losses incurred by slaughter.¹¹⁵ As they argued, “the uses of vaccines merely adds to the expense of operations and lengthens the effort if the disease is being eradicated.”¹¹⁶ To support the use of slaughter to control a domestic outbreak, indemnities of 50 percent of retail value were approved for to all cattle owners.¹¹⁷ This domestic focus may have compromised hemispheric security retreated from eradicating the disease in Latin America.¹¹⁸

Aftosa eradication was not the only large-scale eradication program conducted during the early postwar years. Domestic eradication efforts against a series of diseases allowed the government to continue its support for the beef industry by ensuring that production-oriented diseases, like the one it had helped eradicate in Mexico, failed to make beef too expensive form mass production. These efforts included eradication of tick

¹¹⁴ Agriculture Research Service, “Vaccination for Foot-and-Mouth Disease in Europe,” November 1954, ARS 22-6, Minutes of Meetings and Directives Joint Commission for Preventing Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 2, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

¹¹⁵ Agriculture Research Service, “Why Cures Are Not Used for the Control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease in the United States,” November 1954, ARS 22-7, Minutes of Meetings and Directives Joint Commission for Preventing Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 2, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

¹¹⁶ Agriculture Research Service, “Questions and Answers on Foot-and-Mouth Disease,” November 1954, ARS 22-8, Minutes of Meetings and Directives Joint Commission for Preventing Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 2, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

¹¹⁷ Agriculture Research Service, “Questions and Answers on Foot-and-Mouth Disease,” November 1954, ARS 22-8, Minutes of Meetings and Directives Joint Commission for Preventing Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Box 2, MC 375, USDA Foot and Mouth Research Laboratory, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

¹¹⁸ Machado, Jr., *Aftosa*, 113.

fever, cattle tuberculosis, and brucellosis, which involved eradication similar to the program used in Mexico. The federal government began its eradication of fever-causing ticks in 1906 and soon put roughly three-quarters of the nation under quarantine to isolate the disease-causing arachnids.¹¹⁹ The disease, known most outside of Texas as Texas fever, was the first disease to have been identified as being spread by a tick, which allowed for area control to be implemented because federal agents now had the ability to track its dispersion. Eradication lasted into the 1960s, when the federal program proved to be so successful that only a band of land adjacent to the southern border were under official supervision and quarantine.¹²⁰ Besides tick fever, another disease that the Bureau of Animal Industry had in its crosshairs was tuberculosis, which launched in 1921 on the recommendation of the Child Welfare Committee of the League of Women Voters and supported by the Sheppard-Towner bill.¹²¹ The initial goal of eradication was to clean up milk and thus improve human child health, however the disease also effected beef cattle. In 1965, eradication progressed so that, of the 141 herds known to have tubercular cattle, 18 percent were beef while another 6 percent were mixed dairy and beef.¹²² Area eradication continued as the disease became increasingly rare. In 1920, federal meat

¹¹⁹ Olmstead and Rhode, 251-52.

¹²⁰ Disease Eradication Division, Agriculture Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, "Report of Cooperative Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Activities, Fiscal Year 1962," October 11, 1962, Restricted by Products, M.C. 60, USDA Animal Inspection and Quarantine Branch Records, Bureau of Animal Industry: Animal Diseases, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

¹²¹ Olmstead and Rhode, 219.

¹²² A. F. Ranney, "The Status of the State-Federal Tuberculosis Eradication Program," Export Livestock, M.C. 60, USDA Animal Inspection and Quarantine Branch Records, Bureau of Animal Industry: Animal Diseases, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

inspectors rejected .368 percent of all beef cattle for tuberculosis infection but by 1965 that rate was down to .001 percent.¹²³

A third disease tackled by the Department of Agriculture was brucellosis, a contagious diseases also known by several other names, including Malta fever, cattle abortion, and Bang's disease. The cause was *Brucella abortus* bacterium instead of a virus, making vaccination particularly effective. Eradication efforts began in the early part of the century and were carried on after World War II nationally through area eradication. The bureau worked in conjunction with state agents to establish zones of eradication that were organized around the rate of infection so that the most pressing areas received the quickest attention. As eradication succeeded, states with less than 1 percent infection rate would be listed as "modified brucellosis-free areas."¹²⁴ The eradication method eventually became a program of extensive vaccination instead of outright slaughter. The Department of Agriculture directed vaccination development, even going so far as to set rules for what were acceptable vaccines out of the available one made by private companies. The government also made its own vaccines. Relying on the internal expertise acquired with foot-and-mouth diseases research, the bureau in the mid-1940s developed and promulgated *Brucella abortus strain 19* as the most effective vaccine.¹²⁵ Bureau scientists did not set out to manufacture the vaccine but, in the process

¹²³ Paul J. Brandly, et al., *Meat Hygiene*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1966), 122.

¹²⁴ Roscoe R. Snapp and A. L. Neumann, *Beef Cattle*, 5th ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1952), 619.

¹²⁵ Animal Disease Station of Pathological Division, Bureau of Animal Industry, "Production of *Brucella abortus strain 19* Vaccine," July 1944, Historical Records, Old Virus-Serum Control Division, M.C. 60, USDA Animal Inspection and Quarantine Branch Records, Bureau of Animal Industry: Animal Diseases, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD; Snapp and Neumann, 619.

of developing standardization requirements, decided it would be easier to make it themselves. The development of the vaccine represented the acquiescence within the department of the need to employ long-term programs that managed diseases through extensive surveillance and targeted interventions. Even then, the diseases managed to survive. In 1964, the Animal Disease Eradication Division of the Agriculture Research Service reported that over sixty-three thousand lots of cattle were still infected with brucellosis and over three-thousand herds were infected with tuberculosis.¹²⁶

Yet, the attention given to contagious diseases like foot-and-mouth, fever ticks, tuberculosis, and brucellosis masked other threats. Whole categories of problems would arise within the industry during the decades that followed World War II that would be seen as part of production and as costs of doing business. Having as a policy goal mass production and consumption of beef did not motivate experts to exercise their considerable police powers as did the contagious disease threats. The first category of new threats were contagious diseases arising with the new transportation and feeding techniques developed in the west. The other category were the synthetic chemicals being dumped into the food system at an unprecedented scale. As the Department of Agriculture observed these changes, department veterinarians and the policymakers in Washington decided that these threats were merely part of the landscape of production and not problems to be addressed, as foot-and-mouth had been. These threats emerged in tandem with beneficial developments that pushed beef production forward, masking the danger until decades later.

¹²⁶ Animal Disease Eradication Division, Agriculture Research Service, "Animal Morbidity Report, October 26, 1964, M.C. 60, USDA Animal Inspection and Quarantine Branch Records, Bureau of Animal Industry: Animal Diseases, USDA Library, Beltsville, MD.

A new phase of beef production emerged with the of the war that involved having cattle trucked to sprawling feeding, slaughtering, and processing plants and helped spread diseases that had never before been so prevalent.¹²⁷ The rise of this architype of industry created a new environment for diseases to take hold. At the feedlot, diseases relating to the new shipping and feeding methods found a welcome environment among the cramped and stressing out cattle, which included diseases like shipping fever, infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (typically called IBR), and foot rot. At the new type of slaughter facilities, disease-causing organisms like *Salmonella*, *Listeria*, and *E. coli* were becoming endemic. While the overwhelming response to foot-and-mouth suggested that the federal government could take an active role in disease eradication, with these newer diseases, research took priority over eradication. Individual cattlemen and firms developed techniques to reduce the incidents of the diseases or to minimize the outward symptoms before slaughter. A livestock veterinarian captured well the life cattle began living and the threat it brought:

Cattle originating from many locations are congregated, sexed, classed, shuffled, and sorted into appropriate groups. They are introduced to strange surroundings and unfamiliar feed and water. With these stresses, they are often also castrated, dehorned, dipped, and wormed. It is amazing that they survive and perform as well as they do. Many of these procedures are vital in order to keep the feedlot functioning in an organized and efficient manner. Getting the cattle through the processing, with a minimum of problems is the responsibility of the foreman, veterinarian, cowboys, feed truck drivers, and all other persons handling the cattle.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ For a theoretical analysis on the transformations in the cattle industry that brought about the new system by the 1970s, see Azzeddine M. Azzam and Dale G. Anderson, *Assessing Competition in Meatpacking: Economic History, Theory, and Evidence*, GIPSA-RR 96-6 (Lincoln: Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1996), 16-19.

¹²⁸ Edward G. Johnson, "Control of Feedlot Disease and Parasites," in *The Feedlot*, ed. Irwin A. Dyer and C. C. O'Mary (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1972), 178.

The modern production system traumatized cattle and exposed them to a host of threats precisely when they were at their most vulnerable. He went on to recommend that managers adopt techniques to manage and not mask diseases, warning that high doses of antibiotics hid symptoms and were no substitute for better handling of the cattle.¹²⁹ Veterinarians within the California Department of Agriculture recognized that the dry, dusty feedlots operating within their state contributed to the spread of respiratory infections but offered only advice and support to feedlot owners hoping to prevent the diseases from becoming endemic.¹³⁰ Minimal interference by the government appears to have been preferred with these diseases.

The disease salmonellosis was once an important disease to be eradicated but eradication efforts soon fell away. *Salmonella* was a key part of the history of the Department of Agriculture even before the war. Daniel Salmon, the first to have a Doctorate of Veterinarian Medicine granted by a U.S. college and the first chief of the Bureau of Animal Industry, discovered the *Salmonella* bacterium through the use of artificially heat-killed cultures in 1885, thus providing evidence for the germ theory of disease.¹³¹ The department had known of bacterium for over eighty years, including identifying two dozen serotypes of *Salmonella* that were dangerous to humans, when it became a problem for the beef industry.¹³² By the early 1960s, scientists from various agencies within the federal government began noticing a connection between food

¹²⁹ Johnson, 183.

¹³⁰ R. V. Lewis, "Salmonellosis in Cattle," in *Proceedings of the Salmonella Seminar*, Agriculture Research Service, ARS 91-50, 1964, 14-15.

¹³¹ Olmstead and Rhode, 6, 21; Brandly, et al., 343.

¹³² Brandly, et al., 342.

processing developments of the prior decade and the rising prevalence of the disease. The Communicable Disease Center (CDC) of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) and the Animal Disease Eradication Division both organized national conferences on *Salmonella* that year. At the National Conference on Salmonellosis organized by the CDC, Mildred Galton presented evidence of the connection between production and the disease, arguing that the current evidence suggested “that food processing plays a major role in the dissemination of salmonellae originating in animals, birds, or human carriers.”¹³³ She identified “ready to eat” poultry as a main culprit that started spreading the disease to other meats. The main solution that she identified was to have individual plants adopt improved sanitation measures that would break the “chain of transmission” under the guidance of federal or state agencies.¹³⁴ There was to be no public policy investment in cleaning up meat processing plants, it fell to individual plant owners to stop the spread of the disease.

At the Animal Disease Eradication Division seminar on *Salmonella*, the debate on the disease included acknowledgement of the looming problem. Poultry was the focus at the seminar because it was primarily a poultry disease and a problem of the poultry industry.¹³⁵ But, the disease was now endemic to all species thanks to changing production techniques. It was noted in swine that infection rates increased as the swine made their way through “concentration points” that forced many animals together for

¹³³ Mildred Galton quoted in Brandly, et al., 349.

¹³⁴ Mildred Galton quoted in Brandly, et al., 349.

¹³⁵ “Preface,” in *Proceedings of the Salmonella Seminar*, Agriculture Research Service, ARS 91-50, 1964, 1-2; B. S. Pomeroy, “Salmonellosis in Poultry and Swine,” in *Proceedings of the Salmonella Seminar*, Agriculture Research Service, ARS 91-50, 1964, 7-8.

intense but brief moments.¹³⁶ Cattle infections received attention as well. R. V. Lewis, a veterinarian from the California Department of Agriculture gave a presentation on the rising rates of infection within cattle in his state. It was a problem of both dairy and beef industries with dairy being of concern since the disease spread to humans through raw milk consumption.¹³⁷ For beef cattle, his concern was how the feed lot was helping spread the disease. It had a lot to do with how the cattle were treated. The shipping of cattle from pasture to feed lot created stresses “inherent in gathering, assembling lots, and shipping” that made it easier for *Salmonella* to successfully infect cattle.¹³⁸ Once delivered to a feedlot, the dry conditions of California made the situation worse since the dusty atmosphere facilitated the spread of infectious diseases, which in turn made cattle more susceptible to *Salmonella* infection. He warned that cattle were now arriving at feedlots already having been infected and “the intrinsic factor of infection at birth from carrier animals cannot be overlooked or eliminated.”¹³⁹ The seminar concluded with a proposal not to fight the rising threat as had other contagious diseases but confront the problem with further research.¹⁴⁰ Eradication had to wait until more was known. With *Salmonella*, the Department of Agriculture took the opposite approach that it had taken with *Aphthovirus*, with research into foot-and-mouth disease coming long after

¹³⁶ “Preface,” in *Proceedings of the Salmonella Seminar*, 2.

¹³⁷ R. V. Lewis, “Salmonellosis in Cattle,” in *Proceedings of the Salmonella Seminar*, Agriculture Research Service, ARS 91-50, 1964, 12.

¹³⁸ Lewis, 14.

¹³⁹ Lewis, 17.

¹⁴⁰ “Preface,” in *Proceedings of the Salmonella Seminar*, 2. The attendees broke into workshop groups to recommend solutions. The groupings reflected the research focus: “Laboratory Support and Reporting,” “Animal Byproducts and Feeds and Fish Meals,” and “Epidemiology and Research.” *Proceedings of the Salmonella Seminar*, Agriculture Research Service, ARS 91-50, 1964, 49.

eradication efforts had begun. There was nothing stopping an all-out slaughter-based eradication campaign except for *Salmonella* was too well entrenched to avoid killing the entire nation's livestock population, which had parallels to the Mexican farmers being unable to endure the area eradication system. Modern cattle may have been free of foot-and-mouth disease but they were certainly not free of other diseases.

Changing agricultural practices created more than just new disease threats, they also created a new type of chemical threat. Chemicals had long been used in agriculture and were typically made of elements found in nature like heavy metals such as lead arsenate, which are toxic but whose dispersion into the environment rarely posed a chronic threat to the beef industry or to meat consumers.¹⁴¹ By the end of World War II, though, farmers began using a new type chemical whose properties made them a threat human and animal health, which had not been encountered before.¹⁴² In pursuing chemical products able to support the monocrop farming that dominated the nation's food and fiber production, farmers needed even cheaper and more potent category of chemicals that could kill the quick-adapting insects that threatened their livelihood. They ended up choosing to use synthetically produced organic chemicals derived from fossil fuels. Famous examples of these new synthetic chemicals include dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (or DDT), diethylstilbestrol (or DES), and parathion.

¹⁴¹ On pesticide use before the 1930s, see James C. Whorton, *Before Silent Spring: Pesticides and Public Health in Pre-DDT America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Steven Stoll, *The Fruits of Natural Advantage: Making the Industrial Countryside in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), ch. 4.

¹⁴² On the role that wars played in the development of chemical agriculture, see Edmund Russell, *War and Nature: Fighting Humans and Insects with Chemicals from World War I to Silent Spring* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

These new chemicals fall into roughly two main groups and both would prove to be dangerous: chlorinated hydrocarbon like DDT, or organophosphates like parathion.¹⁴³

Democrats in Congress took the lead in regulating toxic foods and chemical use in agriculture after the war. From 1950 to 1952, the House Select Committee to Investigate the Use of Chemicals in Food Products held public hearings under the leadership of James J. Delaney (D-NY). Delaney's goal was to determine the effects chemicals had on "the health and welfare of the Nation, and upon the stability and well-being of our agricultural economy."¹⁴⁴ The hearings made clear to Delaney the dangers of these new chemicals and led to the passage of the Food Additives Amendment of 1958, with a proviso within it called the Delaney Clause.¹⁴⁵ The clause required the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, the Cabinet-level administrator for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), to identify specific, known carcinogens, and then set tolerance levels to zero for any edible portion of any food item. Beef and dairy products, incidentally, were important to the political battle over residues and may have pushed the USDA to investigate meat residues in detail later in the decade.¹⁴⁶ Congress authored the bill in an attempt to push the executive branch to adopt a more hostile relationship with

¹⁴³ Frederick Rowe Davis, *Banned: A History of Pesticides and the Science of Toxicology* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

¹⁴⁴ House Select Committee to Investigate the Use of Chemicals in Food and Cosmetics, *Chemicals in Food Products: Hearings before the Select Committee to Investigate the Use of Chemicals in Food and Cosmetics*, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., 1.

¹⁴⁵ For discussions of the Delaney Clause and consumers and producers, see Nancy Langston, *Toxic Bodies: Hormone Disruptors and the Legacy of DES* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 81; Thomas Dunlap, *DDT: Scientists, Citizens, and Public Policy* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1981), 67-68.

¹⁴⁶ Kendra Smith-Howard, *Pure and Modern Milk: An Environmental History since 1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 121-49.

regulated industries than it had currently taken. A company's right to include specific ingredients in their products was now limited in the name of public health. The Eisenhower administration responded by trying to assess the residue problem and decide the appropriate way to preserve the industries it regulated.

After the law went into effect, White House and senior Department Agriculture officials began reviewing chemical contamination of the nation's meat supply. Meat, the department's sole responsibility for food safety, was a main focus for both. Secretary of Agriculture Benson recommended how to best handle residues contamination in meat by studying the problem before issuing any recommendations. He handed the work to senior department official Herrell DeGraff. In January of 1959, DeGraff met with several knowledgeable observers of the industry, including the senior leadership of the Meat Inspection Division and its chemical residue scientists. He also met with animal health scientists at Cornell and with the leadership of American Meat Institute, which was the leading industry lobby group. His goal was to determine if chemical residues had anything at all to do with the nation's meat supply, which might provide some clue as to how widespread the problem of residues was. After all, as DeGraff put it, the "cattle and meat industry [is] the biggest single factor in the food supply."¹⁴⁷ Whatever they expected the answer to be, though, did not prepared them for what they found. The investigators discovered that the chemicals introduced after the war had already infused the landscape and had become part of cattle's bodies. This was shocking enough for him to report that the Meat Inspection Division had discovered in its eight years of residue testing that

¹⁴⁷ Confidential memorandum, Herrell DeGraff to John Marble, January 31, 1959, Foodstuff, Cranberries (1), OF 110-N-11, Box 463, Official File, White House Central Files, 1953-61, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

“residues of DDT and related materials now to be an almost universal contaminate of our food supply”¹⁴⁸

DDT and “related materials” referred to a specific type organic chemicals, chlorinated hydrocarbons. These chemical compounds have broad powers to disrupt regular biological processes and also bio accumulate, meaning they concentrate, within animals’ fat cells after being consumed. DDT had been introduced because it is a broad spectrum insecticide, killing insects on contact by causing neurological chaos and eventually death. The toxicity problems for mammals are chronic in nature and not acute. In addition to causing cancer, DDT is an endocrine disruptor, which means that it interrupts regular hormonal processes in mammals while also passing through the placenta of pregnant women.¹⁴⁹ DDT, seen as a safe broad-spectrum insecticide, gained widespread use even as scientists had already begun to discover evidence that pointed to its long-term dangers. In 1958 alone, DDT accounted for the majority of the three million tons of the chlorinated hydrocarbons used in the United States.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the chemical had its champions, with DeGraff explaining that, “we could not have our present abundance, quality, and low cost of food without chlorinated hydrocarbon insecticides.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Confidential memorandum, Herrell DeGraff to John Marble, January 31, 1959, Foodstuff, Cranberries (1), OF 110-N-11, Box 463, Official File, White House Central Files, 1953-61, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

¹⁴⁹ Langston, 89-90.

¹⁵⁰ For the history of DDT, see Dunlap.

¹⁵¹ Confidential memorandum, Herrell DeGraff to John Marble, January 31, 1959, Foodstuff, Cranberries (1), OF 110-N-11, Box 463, Official File, White House Central Files, 1953-61, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

During the Meat Inspection Division's eight years of testing chemical residues, the chief chemist, John McCoy, had discovered that chemicals had made its way into the nation's beef supply. The process for testing was that McCoy's laboratory received samples from meat inspectors in the field and tested them for residue. As of 1959, it took weeks to process the results and the tested meats would have already entered the consumer market and have potentially been eaten by the time the residue levels were determined. His tests provided evidence that pesticide residues of DDT and chlorinated hydrocarbons existed at levels far exceeding federal safety levels. An example that McCoy provided to DeGraff was of one cattle which tested as having DDT residue levels at seven-hundred parts per million, and with another hydrocarbon showing up at one-thousand parts per million. At the time, FDA tolerance for DDT was set at 7 parts per million and the safety threshold was 350 parts per million. McCoy described the results as higher than he had previously thought possible and joked that "this animal must have been eating straight insecticide."¹⁵² He further commented that, "if any considerable amount of that fat was eaten, some folks must have had digestive distress for a day or two"—from DDT.¹⁵³ By 1959, in general, cattle's bodies were suffused with pesticides at amounts that were, in his own words, "shockingly high."¹⁵⁴ Cattle from the South and Southwest were the ones with the worst residue problems. If he was correct, then, as

¹⁵² Confidential memorandum, Herrell DeGraff to John Marble, January 31, 1959, Foodstuff, Cranberries (1), OF 110-N-11, Box 463, Official File, White House Central Files, 1953-61, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS. The other chemical was benzenhexachloride.

¹⁵³ Confidential memorandum, Herrell DeGraff to John Marble, January 31, 1959, Foodstuff, Cranberries (1), OF 110-N-11, Box 463, Official File, White House Central Files, 1953-61, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

¹⁵⁴ Confidential memorandum, Herrell DeGraff to John Marble, January 31, 1959, Foodstuff, Cranberries (1), OF 110-N-11, Box 463, Official File, White House Central Files, 1953-61, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

much as 38 percent of the nation's 95 million head of beef cattle in 1959 had residue levels within their bodies high enough to cause physical discomfort to anyone eating their meat, to say nothing of any cancers that the consumers may have developed.¹⁵⁵

Top officials preferred risking cattle and human health rather than risk the nation's food abundance, particularly in beef. DeGraff's findings remained confidential. The Republican administration took the position that, since chemicals were indispensable to agriculture, no further action was needed. If anything, these encounters with the reality of chemical use in agriculture only served to reinforce the notion that the current successes of food production mandated the chemicals. As Secretary of Agriculture Benson saw it, there were no real conflicts between consumers and producers over chemical use. Chemicals had actually helped both. He claimed after reviewing the evidence that chemicals had made the nation's food "the safest, cleanest, and most wholesome in the world."¹⁵⁶ It was within his power to develop a program for handling the threat posed by these synthetic chemicals but it was a power that he yielded to private actors. This left the Meat Inspection Division measuring residue levels after the fact. A Cabinet-level document agreed with Benson's approach, claiming that "the United States cannot continue to produce adequate amounts of safe and wholesome foods and protect them from deterioration without chemicals."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Calculated from U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Marketing Service, Crop Reporting Board, "Meat Animals: Farm Production, Disposition, and Income, by States, 1958-1959," (Washington, DC, April 1960), 6.

¹⁵⁶ "Secretary Benson Gives Highlights of Statement on 'Chemicals and Foods,'" January 14, 1960, Foodstuff, Cranberries (3), OF 110-N-11, Box 463, Official File, White House Central Files, 1953-61, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

¹⁵⁷ "For the Cabinet," [December 1959?], Foodstuff, Cranberries (5), OF 110-N-11, Box 463, Official File, White House Central Files, 1953-61, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

At the end of World War II, an extensive campaign to eradicate foot-and-mouth disease in Mexico resulted in modern production techniques spreading through both countries with the additional outcome of the U.S. Department of Agriculture building a new disease researching institution. Aided by modernized production, new disease and chemical threats emerged and the choice made by policymakers was to surveil and retreat from enforcement in favor of having private actors police themselves. The new threats soon became endemic problems. Beef policy meant encouraging mass production and both eradication and surveillance served that goal. But, as the 1940s ended and the 1950s began, the Truman administration found itself struggling to keep producers and consumers happy with the price of beef. With the conversion to a peacetime economy well underway, his administration faced a future that might have mass beef consumption in its future but only if he could secure a peace based on security and prosperity.

Chapter 3

Securing the Peace:

The Korean War and the Transformation of Beef Policy, 1948-1954

In February 1949, a ship named the *SS Golden Eagle* loaded four million tons of Argentine beef that had been purchased by the U.S. Army to feed soldiers still stationed in the Pacific.¹ With the economic outlook particularly grim for western state cattle raisers, the shipment alarmed the eleven members of the Conference of Western Senators. Senator Pat McCarran (D-NV) led his western state senators in protesting the executive branch's decision to purchase meat from a foreign government in order to feed U.S. soldiers. They sent a collective telegram as well as individual ones to the White House and to Secretary of Defense James Forrestal. In them, the Senators wrote that Truman ought not to have approved the purchase since Argentina had failed to live up to its postwar commitments to send meat to England. Truman had rewarded their bad behavior and harmed domestic beef producers. As a result of Truman allowing this purchase, to their constituents' detriment, western state feedlots were overflowing with un-slaughtered cattle. They warned, "Unless there is this stabilizing factor from the government, a further decline of prices will occur which will be disastrous to the feeders and packers and to the producers of cattle."²

¹ Memorandum, Russell P. Andrews for Dr. Steelman, February 24, 1949, Meat [3 of 3], OF 174-D, Box 790, White House Office Files, Papers of the President, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

² Telegram, Pat McCarran to the President, February 22, 1949, OF 144-D Meat [3 of 3], Box 790, White House Office Files, Papers of the President, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

As McCarran and his fellow cattle state representatives had conveyed, the beef industry was an industry in need of saving. With the turmoil of the postwar reconversion dragging on for years with no end in sight, they were not the only ones longing for economic peace. The Truman administration struggled to find a stable beef policy that would satisfy producers' demands for higher prices but to do so in a way that satisfied consumers, too. President Harry S. Truman and both of his secretaries of agriculture held it as their duty to serve both producers and consumers so, whatever form postwar beef policy would take, it would worry about prices being both too low and too high. The tools his administration had initially relied on most, economic controls, had been defeated by the meat industry and its Congressional allies in 1946 and no permanent replacement had yet been found. Without the controls, Truman had no way of sustaining the wartime beef boom that had once held out the promise of allowing for mass beef consumption. The numbers revealed the pace of change. In 1945, each American had eaten as much as forty-eight pounds of beef that year but after the removal of controls that number dropped to an average of forty-four pounds for the years 1948, 1949, and 1950.³ Meanwhile, cattle slaughter rates dropped from a high of 21 million in 1945 to 18 million in 1949.⁴ With stores bereft of beef, consumers demonstrated their displeasure in the "beefsteak election" of 1946 by voting for Republicans who put the blame squarely on the president and his party.⁵

³ US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, "Red Meat and Chicken (Carcass Weight)," by Jeanine Bentley and Jean Buzby, accessed December 18, 2014, [http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-\(per-capita\)-data-system](http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-(per-capita)-data-system).

⁴ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C., 1975), 291.

⁵ Chapter 1.

Whereas the prior chapter dealt with a dive into the messy policymaking within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), this one returns to the higher echelons of the federal government. The beef industry struggled for years as the Truman administration and newly appointed Secretary of Agriculture Charles F. Brannan worked to develop the tools needed to create the economic conditions for beef to become an affordable part of every American's diet. Brannan continued his predecessor Clinton P. Anderson's dedication to developing a policy of mass beef consumption that would respect consumer's dietary rights while sustaining the nation's dietary modernism. Despite his intentions, it was to prove to be a policy that he was never able to enact. He requested peacetime economic controls be reinstated but was denied by a Congress not eager to return to the federal government a power it had just lost. But before he could devote serious energy to developing a different plan, the United States went back to war. The domestic issues of the Korean War resembled the ones from World War II closely enough for the secretary to ask, once again, for retail price controls on meat, which Congress granted him. While these were economic controls that were a pale imitation of what had been, Brannan and the Truman administration enforced the controls for two full years, even though it contributed to the Democrats losing the White House in 1952.

The first Republican Party president to manage beef policy did so by innovating new ways forward for the policy. Neither President Dwight D. Eisenhower nor Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson could stand controls, and, indeed, Eisenhower had run explicitly promising to end controls. They continued to support mass beef consumption and agreed with the underlying principles behind beef policy. Instead of abolishing beef policy, the new administration implemented a beef policy that turned consumption into a

way to secure production. This was done by diverting lower value cuts of beef out of the economy and into government programs and by launching a campaign to encourage increased beef consumption. These tools came from drought management and from foreign aid but formed a new basis for guaranteeing Americans their favorite meat. By moving the operation of beef policy away from programs visible to the consumer and distasteful to the industry, Eisenhower and Benson shifted the locus of the policy to a more industry-friendly position and, by doing so, made it possible for the government to continue to dedicate itself to mass beef consumption.

Under Truman's first secretary of agriculture, the naturalization of market forces gave beef policy its direction. Anderson's understanding of the cattle economy offers insight into how the administration's beef policy supported the market. He thought that cattle production flowed from a properly functioning economy. The overall production of beef, as he saw it, was that it tended toward predictability and stability with the government required to keep it that way. This would provide food to consumers that was both affordable and healthy. He based this understanding on the "cattle cycle," an agricultural economics concept that focused on cattle reproduction and farmers' management of their yearly cattle crop. The cycle tracked the rise and fall in total U.S. cattle populations starting with 1880 and covering the repeated pattern of cattle numbers rising and falling (see figure 3.1). Agriculture economists within the Department of Agriculture charted out four prior cycles, each lasting around fourteen years which included a Great Depression cycle that was disrupted by New Deal commodity support

programs.⁶ The point of the cattle cycle was to provide a policy guide that used historic data in order to predict future outcomes, which could then serve as a model for future policymaking. The hope was to boil down the complex and multifaceted decisions made by cattle owners as well as the reproductive capacity of cattle into a single moment on a chart. Furthermore, by framing it as a cycle, the changes in the total cattle population seemed to follow a pattern that were a natural and normal part of the well-functioning economy that were not portents of future disasters or of an economy in perilous shape.

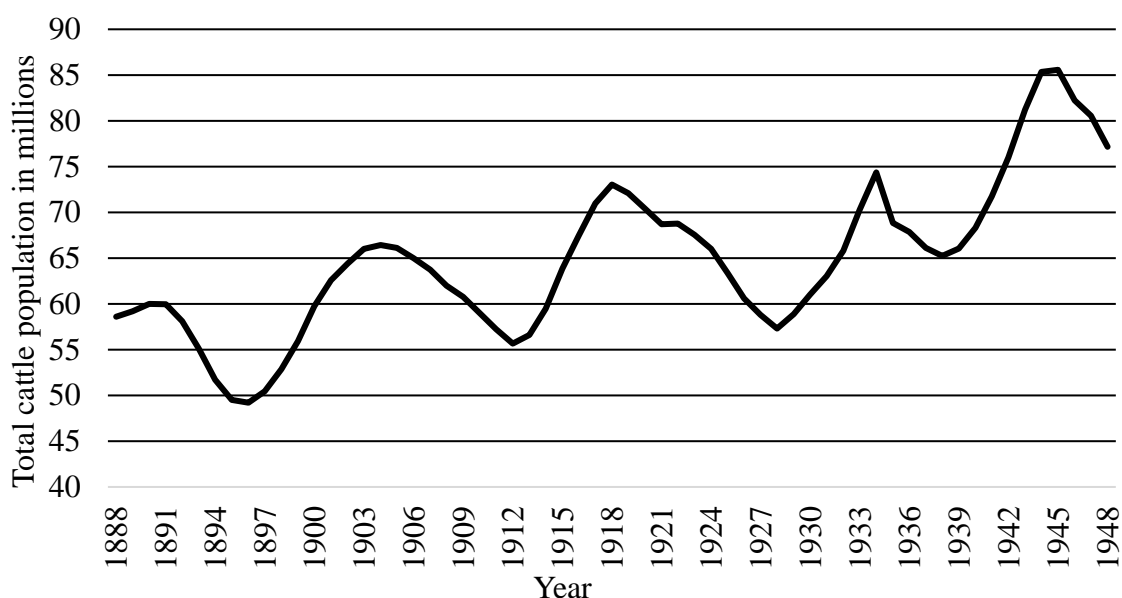


Figure 3.1: Total cattle population in millions of head of cattle, 1888-1948.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C., 1975), 519-20.

Anderson and others in the department pulled from the cycle a metric to measure reality. Department agricultural economist Louis H. Bean claimed as much when he shared with Anderson an analysis of the cattle cycle in October 1947, explaining that the

⁶ Louis H. Bean to Secretary of Agriculture, October 29, 1947, Animals 2-1 Cattle, Box 1429, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

cycle was thus far proving to be accurate guide for the future, “unless during that period the Department’s long-range livestock program does something to ‘spoil’ it.”⁷ Bean, analyzing current market trends, concluded that the cycle “has been sufficiently regular to warrant the foregoing expectations....The effect of a program to iron out the cattle cycle should show up in a ‘bottom’ well above 70 million in 1953 and a peak well below 92 million in 1959.” He recommended the department focus its efforts at keeping the swing between supply highs and lows to a minimum to secure a more orderly change in supply over the years. It was a form of economic intervention aimed at blunting the market’s sharp twists and preventing yearly changes from causing pain to either producers or consumers. Bean updated Anderson in March of the following year about how well the cycle was doing. This time Bean focused on the connection between cattle prices and the total cattle population, noting that the two were cyclically related and that prices needed to begin to climb within the next year or two for the cycle to continue to hold true.⁸ Even though the administration had previously sought to reduce the pain of rising price, Bean cautioned that the health of the market demanded that prices continue to rise.

The embrace of the cattle cycle to guide beef policy forged a link between cattle population numbers and economic outcomes that forced policymakers to base their future policy decisions on projected cattle population totals as predicted by the model. This translation of a biological function into a form legible to policymakers injected a

⁷ Memorandum, Louis H. Bean to Under Secretary Norris E. Dodd, October 29, 1947, Animals 2-1 Cattle, Box 1429, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁸ Louis H. Bean to Secretary of Agriculture, March 5, 1948, Animals 3 Cattle, Box 1565, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

biopolitics of food into beef policy at a moment when the secretary sought an intellectual foundation for the policy.⁹ The graph and the concept of the cycle froze the reproductive energy of cattle at fixed moments in time and turned reproduction toward industrial production marking it as a biopolitical project. The nature of the biopolitics found in beef policy echoes Gabriel Rosenberg's adaption of Foucault's concept in explaining the national 4-H program and shares his approach to the theoretical concept.¹⁰ Rosenberg interprets biopolitics as being "the political strategy that takes the management of life as both its fundamental object and means."¹¹ In the biopolitics of beef policy, Bean, Anderson, and others at the Department of Agriculture understood cattle reproduction as the basis for creating a population of healthy humans and beef cattle, which would ensure that Americans had the bodily health needed to thrive the reconversion to a peacetime economy. If enough cattle were born in a regular cycle, it would sustain mass beef consumption and consumers simply buy the nourishing meat that the market would naturally provide without the need for conflicts over prices or supplies. The graphed out cycle pointed toward a need to curb excesses in the increase or decrease of the total cattle population every year to ensure that no rise or fall would interrupt the steady flow of beef or its consumer price tag. After the war, the need for regular cattle cycles took on a whole new urgency as policymakers pinned the health of the nation to its human population being able to afford a beef-based diet.

⁹ On states and legibility, see James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 2-3.

¹⁰ On the 4-H as a project of biopolitics, see Gabriel N. Rosenberg, *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

¹¹ Rosenberg, *The 4-H Harvest*, 3. On his adaption of Foucault, see Rosenberg, *The 4-H Harvest*, 233fn1.

While the Department of Agriculture focused on the naturalizing the cattle cycle, the beef industry in the late-1940s was undergoing a series of rapid changes that undermined the predictive usefulness of the cattle. By the end of World War II, the once-all powerful meat trust began losing out to smaller firms that were beginning to special in specific types of meat slaughter while processors emerged that could produce specialized consumer products at lower prices than the major meatpacking firms could. Swift, Cudahy, Armour, and Wilson were names infamous for their once iron hold on the nation's meat, a grip that they built in meatpacking cities like St. Joseph, MO, and Kansas City by tapping into an immigrant workforce and using massive brick vertically-layered packing plants. Newer firms had begun to push slaughtering and processing out west, past the Missouri River, and onto the arid Great Plains areas, using a non-union rural workforce and immense horizontal facilities. Connected to the westward movement of production was the westward movement of cattle out of the Midwestern Corn Belt system first built in the nineteenth century. Specialized feeders begin to dot the dry landscapes alongside these new plants. Additionally, distributors and transportation companies undermined the grip of the original trust companies. The outcome was a system of cattle production capable of putting more beef than ever before onto the nation's tables.¹² The cycle's designers did not consider this transition with their modeling because they could not know in 1948 the full scope of the transformation even if the cattle population changes had already begun reflecting the nation's growing

¹² Jimmy Skaggs, *Prime Cut: Livestock Raising and Meat Packing in the United States* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986), 130-69; Roger Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table: Taste, Technology, Transformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 129-53; Maureen Ogle, *In Meat We Trust: An Unexpected History of Carnivore America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 123-52; Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 139-60.

capacity for cattle feeding and slaughter. With the industry sprawling out into the Great Plains, the total cattle population climbed to over one-hundred million head of cattle.¹³

Even with the cycle as a guide, cattle prices remained a problem for the industry as reconversion remained volatile. Cattle prices remained unsteady but climbed in 1948 to an historic high of \$117 on average per head of cattle (see figure 3.2). The feeding industry further drove up cattle prices as grain prices rose above wartime levels, which forced cattle owners to curtail feeding or pay more for feed and then pass the costs along to consumers. Demand for grains squeezed the industry and pushed cattle owners to compete for feed made scarce by a drought in 1947 and foreign aid shipments. Truman's foreign grain policy put upward pressure on prices as did that year's low corn harvest. A year later things turned around with a record harvest promising relief, but it would take years for the increased grain availability to make its way to consumers as meat. Executive Assistant to the Secretary of Agriculture Wesley McCune estimated in 1948 that it would be at least two-years before consumer meat prices recovered, pointing out that the shortage of livestock and increased national purchasing power would continue to drive up meat prices.¹⁴

¹³ Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1970*, 519.

¹⁴ Wesley McCune to Mrs. Helen L. Porter, November 11, 1948, Meat, Box 1603, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

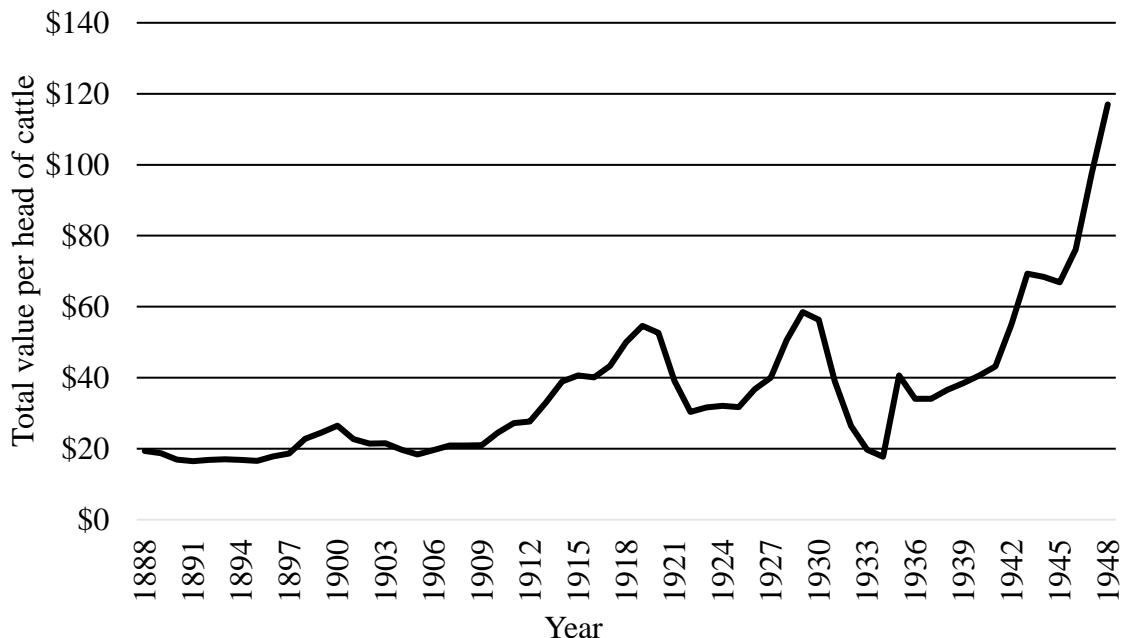


Figure 3.2: The average value of cattle per head as measured in nominal dollars, 1888-1948.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C., 1975), 519-20.

Complaints sent to the White House offer a glimpse of the pain consumers felt at not having a beef policy that would reduce and stabilize retail prices. Fears of losing their right to a healthy meal led several to suggest other ways to control prices. Bogden M. Glinski of Cleveland, OH, shared his ideas on a plan that he claimed would “combat the spiral of meat prices” and prevent both price speculation and a black market from forming, and all without the need for an expanding the federal bureaucracy, a hint at the kind of innovation Truman needed for the policy to survive backlash.¹⁵ Lee Pressman of Brooklyn from NY, suggested the president could ease consumer suffering by releasing the entire stock of cold-storage meat held by the USDA, all forty-five million pounds of

¹⁵ Memorandum, William D. Hassart, August 10, 1948, O.F. 174-D Meat [Folder 2 of 3], Box 790, White House Office Files, Papers of the President, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

it.¹⁶ The cattle industry joined in. Mark W. Pickell, the secretary of the Corn Belt Livestock Feeders Association, wrote to the president to request that the federal government expand exports of lard and of heavy cattle carcasses since only 2 percent of cattle sales produced a profit. He feared that that year's cattle crop was in danger if federal action failed to save the industry. Fred Hatch, the president of the Chicago Livestock Exchange, shared with the president the concerns of cattle feeders. As he explained it, the wives of cattle feeders had decided to share with him what their husbands were too proud to admit: the recent drop in the price for cattle kept their husbands up at night worrying "financial ruin."¹⁷ His solution called for the federal government to purchase excess meat for frozen storage and use it to feed the Army during the summer. This would stabilize prices by pulling unsold meat off the market. The more market-friendly policy of government purchasing excess production stayed popular with cattle owners.

In the middle of 1948, Anderson resigned as Secretary of Agriculture to run for a Senate seat representing New Mexico and his replacement came into office ready to reinvent the administration's approach to beef. Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Charles F. Brannan took over the department and immediately aimed to use farm prices and farmer welfare as a means for creating a new agriculture system. He proposed having his department guarantee farm commodity prices at "parity" with the government ensuring

¹⁶ Telegram, Lee Pressman to Harry S. Truman, August 28, 1948, O.F. 174-D Meat [Folder 1 of 3], Box 790, White House Office Files, Papers of the President, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

¹⁷ Fred Hatch to Honorable Harry S. Truman, February 5, 1949, OF 144-D Meat [2 of 3], Box 790, White House Office Files, Papers of the President, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

that market prices would remain fixed.¹⁸ Parity, a popular concept for measuring farmer well-being, was the ratio of money farmers received for each specific farm product compared to their share of the overall wealth levels that used 1910 to 1914 as the base level. It was meant to be the baseline required for a healthy farm economy and the optimal ratio of consumers' and farmers' purchasing power. His plan, the so-called "Brannan Plan," stalled in a Congress unwilling to take up this complex and controversial plan, but the plan reflected his dedication to providing prosperity for consumers, workers, and farmers (three coveted components of the New Deal coalition). This pro-consumer and pro-farmer applied to meat. As assistant secretary, one of his recent jobs was to develop the department's response to the possibility of reestablishing meat price controls and rationing, what the administration labelled an "allocation" plan. By allocation, what was meant was that producers would be guaranteed a portion of total production commiserate to their capabilities but the department would guide their product into the proper retail channels to ensure a more even distribution of consumption. It would also prevent hoarding or local area famines. This heavy-handed plan lacked support from the industry but reflected Brannan's interest in drastic proposals. Brannan continued to pursue this meat plan only for it to suffer the same kind of defeat as his more famous farm plan.¹⁹

As high-level public officials pondered beef policy, a major meatpacker broke ranks with the industry's unified opposition to the administration and suggested that a

¹⁸ On the Brannan plan, see Allen J. Matusow, *Farm Policies and Politics in the Truman Years* (Harvard University Press, 1967), 191-221.

¹⁹ "The Administration's Meat Plan," [June 1948?], Meat Rationing, Box 35, Papers of Charles F. Brannan, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

different way was possible. The row began when Samuel Slotkin publically charged the American Meat Institute (AMI) of obstructing the creation of a national meat board to set prices at all levels of the industry and, in turn, harming the economy. The founder of Hygrade Food Products Corporation, the company that would later launch Ball Park Franks brand of hotdogs but at the time was the fifth largest packing company, proposed a twelve-person board of producers, consumers, farmers, workers, and government representatives would meet every month and set minimum and maximum meat prices.²⁰ His plan explicitly avoided a return to price controls but still provided a mechanism for stabilizing and lowering prices, by as much as 25 percent he assumed, which was a goal he had been publically championing for years.²¹ Slotkin expressed his anger at his fellow meat producers be resigning from the institute on August 5 and made his resignation letter public. His frustration with the AMI stemmed from what he felt were its obstructionist approach to policy and its unwillingness to work with Truman, writing, “Institute leaders have failed to cooperate with the government on its reasonable endeavors to achieve economic stability.”²² He argued that the institute actively harmed farmers, consumers, processors, and distributors by working against the Truman

²⁰ “Joint Action Asked to Stabilize Meat,” *New York Times*, August 5, 1949. For a personal take on Hygrade Foods with a particular emphasis on the role of branded meat in the company’s history in the 1960s and 1970s, see David Clyde Riley, *Speaking Frankly: A Southern Boy's Journey from Slaughterhouse to Creation of the World's Top Hot Dog Brand* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2014). According to David Clyde Riley, who ran the company in the 1970s, Slotkin saw himself as an artist more than a businessman. Riley, 34.

²¹ On Slotkin’s earlier attempts to convince his fellow packers to coordinate prices, see “Big Packer Calls on the Food Industry to Stabilize Costs—Need for Self-Regulation to Prevent U. S. Curbs Seen,” *New York Times*, April 24, 1947; “Meat Price Curbs Urged by Packer,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1947; “Prices and Supply of Meat Studied,” *New York Times*, September 22, 1948.

²² Samuel Slotkin to Wesley Hardenbergh, August 2, 1949, OF 144-D Meat [3 of 3], Box 790, White House Office Files, Papers of the President, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

administration. A week later, his son Hugo, the president of Hygrade Foods, reiterated his father's claims and demanded that steps be taken to stabilize sales and to reduce prices.²³ In response, the AMI offered a rebuttal by describing itself as a champion of the "American competitive system" and of the American consumer.²⁴ For them, it was the market that should determine prices and not government entities. As this event revealed, the industry was not yet willing to declare an end to their opposition to the administration.

The future of beef may have remained uncertain and American's access to beef may have never reached the heights it did if not for the Korean War. The termination years later of active hostilities resulted in a beef policy that would prove to be fully compatible with peacetime prosperity and mass consumption. While the Truman administration failed to find the right approach to beef that kept both producers and consumers happy, his successor succeeded. Before turning to the transformation of beef policy under that later president, it will be helpful to explore the Truman administration's broader approach to political economy and their hopes for the American prosperity in order to understand how they approached beef policy and why they failed. By early 1950, inflation and the cost of living were national political scandal.²⁵ Consumers fretted about rising prices as the administration sought to counter inflation by shoring up and expanding consumers' purchasing power, which initially included efforts to extend

²³ "Meat Trade again Called Monopoly," *New York Times*, August 9, 1948.

²⁴ "Institute Defends Itself," *New York Times*, August 5, 1949.

²⁵ Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 246-48.

economic prosperity to African Americans and other excluded groups.²⁶ Food was at the center of the fight because it was the single largest cost to families.²⁷ Responding to the troubles, Truman and his economic advisors sought to expand economic opportunity by growing the economy, even threatening in his 1949 State of the Union address to have the federal government enter steel production if the companies did not hire more workers and therefor produce more.²⁸ He called this a “democratic foundation” for the economy, what would be the building of an economy protected “against the evils of ‘boom and bust,’ ” which others called his “Fair Deal.”²⁹ The Fair Deal was not only domestic, it guided his approach to diplomacy and even influenced the strategy and end goal of the Cold War. A Fair Deal for the globe meant that people everywhere were free to turn their natural wealth into the foundations of modern living that was anchored by purchasing power and gainful employment. Free trade would play a significant role as a force for world peace and prosperity.³⁰

²⁶ For an example of the Truman administration seeking to expand purchasing power and economic rights to black Americans, see President's Committee on Civil Rights, *To Secure These Rights: The Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947). As the historian Carol Anderson explains, Truman and the Democratic Party retreated from a broader definition of rights that had originally included an economic component to a more narrow one that emphasized political rights above all else. Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African-American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-14.

²⁷ Joseph A. Loftus, “Cost of Living Declining Slowly,” *New York Times*, February 26, 1950.

²⁸ On Truman's dedication to a growth-oriented political economy, see Robert Collins, *More: The Politics of Economic Growth in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 18; Harry S. Truman, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 5, 1949, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed August 2, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13293>. The historian Meg Jacobs described this as a doing what the Tennessee Valley Authority did for electricity but for steel. Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 242.

²⁹ Truman, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union;” Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 242.

³⁰ Anthony Leviero, “Truman Aims at Golden Era of Free Flowing Commerce,” *New York Times*, April 9, 1950.

In ways not apparent at the time, the struggle over economic controls would eventually prove monumental. The Korean War played an essential role in shaping the future of meat policy and left a dietary legacy that lasted for decades after hostilities ended in 1953. This was a side of the war not always appreciated by historians or food scholars, who have commented far more on World War II and food. The earlier war certainly deserves the attention it has received, for it unleashed the modern, high-tech, processed food industry and imbued consumerism with political meaning. The historian Meg Jacobs correctly points to World War II as unleashing a “policy revolution” with women’s mass participation in the Office of Price Administration.³¹ Historians note the introduction of newer, processed foods as a result of the war since wartime emergencies and field rations made Americans learned how to incorporating processed foods into their diets.³² Historians of food have reinforced the war as transformative by exploring the resultant changes in food production and the American diet.³³ Even historians focusing exclusively on meat credit World War II for serving as the starting point of the modern meat industry and associated consumption patterns.³⁴ While these historians have correctly given World War II its due, the role played by the Korean War in shaping the American diet and meat production and consumption demands further historical analysis.

³¹ Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 207.

³² David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 713; William L. O’Niell, *A Democracy at War: America’s Fight at Home and Abroad in World War II* (New York: Free Press, 1993).

³³ Warren Balasco, *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007); Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

³⁴ Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table*; Ogle.

North Korea's invasion of South Korea on June 25, 1950 unleashed a long chain of events that ended with the arrival of mass beef consumption but only after several years of turmoil and policy conflicts. Weeks after the initial invasion, on July 19, he sent to congress an economic mobilization bill, described by the Associated Press as a "limited bill."³⁵ The language of the bill fit into the president's broader attempt to minimize the domestic consequences of the war. Indeed, Truman's whole approach remained rooted in a "self-limiting effort" grounded in a smaller government than had existed under Roosevelt.³⁶ The initial bill authorized loans from the Federal Reserve to spur the expansion of production and productive capacity while also curbing speculation and inflation. He explicitly added language to the bill that banned rationing. The draft bill's language hinted at his administration's desire to distance themselves from the failures of 1946. The draft bill provided limited powers to induce businesses to support the war effort while allowing consumers to act as they had before, a stark divorce from the citizen engagement that had drawn in consumer citizens during the prior war yet reflecting the ambivalence of 1950.³⁷

Truman's draft bill reflected recommendations made by Brannan that the president needed to control inflation while encouraging an increase in food production. The secretary provided Truman with reports that supported an optimistic outlook of the

³⁵ The *New York Times* printed the entire text of the bill. "Text of Administration's Summary of Economic, Mobilization Bill," *New York Times*, July 20, 1950.

³⁶ Paul Pierpaoli, Jr., *Truman and Korea: The Political Culture of the Early Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 158.

³⁷ I am borrowing lightly from Lizabeth Cohen the concept of citizen consumer. For her definition, see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption* (New York: Vintage, 2003), 8-13, 18-19. By using her term, I intend to invoke the pursuit of Americans for economic rights that hinged upon their own understanding of themselves as consumers.

economy and of the nation's ability to support both domestic and war needs. The Department of Agriculture, Brannan guaranteed Truman, would ensure that there was enough food to win the war. In one report, "The U.S. Food Situation: 1941 and 1950," department officials explained the current situation using 1941 terms and used the beginning of World War II as the benchmark for policy recommendations in 1950. The report began with a positive comparison between both years. While the situation was similar, the food per capita availability in 1950 was higher than in 1941, with an estimated 5 percent more per capita available and an estimated total consumption in 1950 at 11 percent higher than the 1935-39 baseline compared 9 percent in 1941. As the department understood it, there was more food available for more people who would eat more and their key task was to balance military and consumer needs. Disposable income had increased from \$686 to \$1,300 per person and spending on food per person had increased from \$150 to \$335, indicating that food occupied a slightly larger share of disposable income in 1950 than 1941. This meant that consumer demand was strong and any attempt at balance the military and civilian needs would have to take into account consumer's purchasing power.

Beef in particular looked to have the potential to do well with the start of the war. January 1950 stocks of beef cattle had never been higher, with 4.5 million cattle on feed readying for slaughter and 80 million total cattle on all farms and ranches in the U.S.³⁸ The main downside, which the report did not discuss, was that, while all meat production

³⁸ For cattle on feed, see "Cattle and Calves on Feed January 1, 1943-50," October 18, 1950, Animals 2-1, Box 1825, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD; for total cattle numbers, see "Agriculture Production Potentials: Current Situation and Prospects," "Numbers of Livestock on Farms, January 1, and Production of Livestock and Livestock Products," July 12, 1950, HST Paper: Confidential File Subject Files Agriculture (Dept. of) 1948-50, Box 1, Confidential File, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

was expected to be the highest ever at 22.37 million pounds, beef production was expected to be less than the year before, at 9.49 million pounds.³⁹ This put per capita beef consumption at 62 pounds per person, down from the 1947 high of 69.1 pounds per person.⁴⁰ As would later prove to be the case, reduced beef production and high prices were disastrous for the administration but the 1950 report presented the beef situation positively by focusing on the total cattle population, which had never been larger. Per capita consumption was poised to rise once the cattle made their way to feedlots and into slaughtering facilities. In the report shared with the president, though, the author emphasized the increase in 1950 over 1941 without taking into account the recent beef market troubles.

For the Department of Agriculture, the Korean War was a battle not only against communist forces but it was also a battle to maintain the nation's beef-centric diet. American fighting strength demanded plenty of meat, so a beef-based diet had national security dimensions, at least this was the view of a department official. He warned the president that food was a wartime need that should not be sacrificed for other wartime needs. It would do no good, he cautioned, to sacrifice food for guns since it was food that made soldiers able to use those guns effectively. Further cuts could be made in total food consumption, but the overall national diet needed to be protected. The department official explained to the president that the Americans diet was one that it be called a "high-level"

³⁹ "Agriculture Production Potentials: Current Situation and Prospects," "Numbers of Livestock on Farms, January 1, and Production of Livestock and Livestock Products," July 12, 1950, HST Paper: Confidential File Subject Files Agriculture (Dept. of) 1948-50, Box 1, Confidential File, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁴⁰ "Beef: Per Capita Disappearances, 1940-50," October 18, 1950, Animals 2-1, Box 1825, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

diet. While not clarifying what exactly a high-level diet was, the high-level part came from the large amount of inputs required to maintain agriculture output and was a diet that was expensive. Another diet was possible but it would be one that required the country to scale back its use of farm inputs and capital investments. It would cost far less to produce while also expanding the food supply and still would meet minimum nutrition needs. But this was impossible in July 1950 because it required a revolution in the American diet away from beef. The official noted that the ending the high-level diet would entail “shifting resources from livestock products to direct food crops” and would result in Americans eating different more plant foods. He explained his analysis on why such a shift was impossible:

But such shifts would mean change in food habits of American consumers and sacrifices in wants and tastes. Food needs have to be determined on the basis of the seriousness of the emergency and its probable duration. In a democracy it is essential that the people be informed concerning the real requirements of the emergency. Otherwise, public opinion will not support a cutting down of diets to provide for other war essentials.⁴¹

Using public power to force Americans to change their diets would cause such disruptions that only a dire emergency would be enough to justify the drastic action and the Korean War was not that dire. With Americans unlikely to reduce the amount of beef that they ate, the Truman administration was stuck supporting the capital-intensive agriculture system that made the diet a possibility instead of having Americans scale back their beef consumption.

⁴¹ Report attached to Secretary Brannan to Mr. President, July 13, 1950, HST Paper: Confidential File Subject Files Agriculture (Dept. of) 1948-50, Box 1, Confidential File, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

Despite these optimistic reports, by June, consumers had already begun feeling the pinch of inflation on the pocketbooks. The Department of Agriculture continued to attribute high costs to consumer demand and not as product of the war. A constituent's letter forwarded by Congressman Mike Mansfield (D-MT) to the secretary gave his office the chance to explain its point of view. The constituent, Peyton C. Register of Billings, wrote to Mansfield to complain of the high price of meat in his rural area. Local beef prices had increased by 25 percent in the prior six months with the per pound price of round beefsteaks rising from 69 cents to over \$1, three times higher than Office of Price Administration prices. He requested the federal government do whatever it could to reduce prices and concluded by reminding the representative that "the general public is entitled to a break in the high cost of a favorite dish—meat."⁴² Acting Secretary K. T. Hutchinson responded to Mansfield by explaining the political economy of meat as understood by the secretary's office. It was consumers that drove inflation. According to Hutchinson, the market at any given time reflected a balance of total supply and total demand with prices being "the total demand for the available supply of meat."⁴³ Two main things drove up prices: consumers' ability and willingness to pay. He supported his assertion by explaining that since incomes had never been higher, consumers had never had so much ability to buy meat. Industrial workers' total wages were now three times the 1935-39 average and the per capita wages were two-and-one-half times higher than

⁴² Peyton C. Register to Congressman Mansfield, June 13, 1950, Meat 6 Price Support, Box 1873, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁴³ K. T. Hutchinson to Hon. Mike Mansfield, July 13, 1950, Meat 6 Price Support, Box 1873, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

during the same period.⁴⁴ Furthermore, he explained that consumer studies proved that an increase in income meant increases in beef purchases and thus implied a link between ability to buy and desire to eat meat. Therefore, it was consumers' ability and willingness to buy meat that had driven up prices.

Hutchinson provided further clues to the Department of Agriculture's beef policy at the beginning of the Korean War. He made clear in his letter that the department considered there to be a good supply of cattle, which was not easily adjusted at any rate. To begin with, there were no federal support programs to regulate the economy. On top of that, the high consumer demand matched the high production output of meat products. He listed the total expected beef output that year at 9.4 million pounds, 36 percent higher than the 1935-39 average.⁴⁵ Ranchers had put lightweight and young cattle on feed last year, reducing the total current supply of beef. His department expected ranchers to be building up stock by holding off on sending cattle to feed yards. Their actions reduced the total supply for immediate use but held out the promise of more beef in the next few years. After all, it took more than one year for newborns to come of feedlot age. And he stressed that point: increases in beef production come but slowly. Overall, though, Hutchinson painted a picture of a beef economy that was basically healthy and essentially functioning. It was the cycle in action.

⁴⁴ K. T. Hutchinson to Hon. Mike Mansfield, July 13, 1950, Meat 6 Price Support, Box 1873, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁴⁵ K. T. Hutchinson to Hon. Mike Mansfield, July 13, 1950, Meat 6 Price Support, Box 1873, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

The return of economic controls occupied American concerns about the war. By August 1, Congressmen had begun introducing various pieces of legislation that would each institute some form of rationing, wage, and price control.⁴⁶ With support of some Republicans in an apparent effort to sink the Democrats' electoral chances in November, the idea that controls would help the war effort circulated Washington. Yet Truman demurred and rejected controls as unnecessary. They were still politically toxic and were associated with famine and failure. Just as important, he saw the economic situation as different enough from 1941 to reject the immediate imposition of controls on the level that the Office of Price Administration had been in 1942. It was a stand he had taken weeks earlier, on July 14. He justified his opposition based on the nation's food abundance, shored up by record corn and wheat harvests that year, which would be fed to livestock and provide all the protection consumers would ever need against possible future shortages caused by government purchases and overseas shipments.⁴⁷ His administration's position was that controls should be implemented only if needed and only after the necessary administrative infrastructure had been built, which would take months. Department of Agriculture warnings seemed to have convinced him to remain optimistic about the future.

Secretary Brannan and his office approached the question of economic controls by looking at broader questions of the nation's economic health with a particular emphasis on how overall meat consumption would suffer during the war. In their

⁴⁶ Alfred Friendly, "Full Controls Authority for Truman Gains Favor," *Washington Post*, August 1, 1950

⁴⁷ "Truman Sees No Food Rationing, Lays Price Rises to Profiteering," *New York Times*, July 14, 1950.

understanding, worker's wages made it possible for retailers to charge more at the store counter and then pass the costs back up the supply chain, all the way to the farmers and ranchers who owned the cattle, inflating the total costs. Producers also seemed able to keep up putting more and more meat onto the market. It was a matter of too much money chasing too much meat. This was a problem even before the June invasion, one with electoral implications for the Democratic Party. Thomas H. Burke (D-OH) wrote Brannan on May 30 asking about rumors of an impending meat shortage, one that might be reminiscent of the one that had "assisted in the election of the 80th Congress" in 1946.⁴⁸ Assistant Secretary K.T. Hutchinson⁴⁹ replied to Burke that even though price spiked during the summers of both 1946 and 1948, the 1950 meat situation looked good. The main driver of the good fortunes were record crops of wheat and corn combined with increased stocks of cattle on farm and feed. The nation's ever increasing population and the increases in income fueled beef purchases so there was little to be done that would regulate prices successfully.⁴⁹ It would take some time for equilibrium to reassert itself. After the invasion, Brannan continued to focus on consumer purchasing power as the key component in driving up prices as a pound of Choice cut beef reaching 77.9 cents per pound in July.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Thomas H. Burke to Charles F. Brannan, May 30, 1950, Prices 1 Control – Decontrol, Box 1897, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁴⁹ K.T. Hutchinson to Thomas H. Burke, June 13, 1950, Prices 1 Control – Decontrol, Box 1897, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁵⁰ Table 10: Average Retail Prices and Marketing Margins for Beef and Pork, United States, 1947-51," PMA—Livestock [2 of 3], Papers of Charles F. Brannan, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

Press coverage of a meeting between Truman and Brannan stoked fears of economic controls and a meat famine even as both men sought to calm the situation. The *New York Times* ran a headline that proclaimed, “Truman Sees No Food Rationing, Lays Price Rises to Profiteering.”⁵¹ According to the article, Truman wanted Americans to know that “there was nothing to worry about as far as food” and agreed when prompted that profiteering was a “reasonable deduction” as a cause for any currently rising prices.⁵² The pro-business *Wall Street Journal* pounced. The editors published a condemnation that accused Secretary Brannan of confirming that profiteering was occurring and, by so confirming, making it seem like “all food processors and distributors” were guilty of driving up prices.⁵³ The editorial writer responded twofold: first, pointing out that meat prices were low, with a recently eaten steak costing his family 69 cents per pound; and second, by putting the blame for inflating prices squarely on the government for its farm supports.⁵⁴ The resulting kerfuffle was not restricted to the press. Chas Bauer, president of the National Association of Retail Meat and Food Chains, immediately fired off a telegram demanding that the secretary clarify his accusations of profiteering.⁵⁵ Brannan’s office must have responded too slowly because six days later, George T. Nepil, the secretary of the association, sent another telegram to Brannan, this time demanding that

⁵¹ “Truman Sees No Food Rationing, Lays Price Rises to Profiteering,” *New York Times*, July 14, 1950.

⁵² “Truman Sees No Food Rationing, Lays Price Rises to Profiteering,” *New York Times*, July 14, 1950.

⁵³ “Lest We Forget,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 14, 1950.

⁵⁴ “Lest We Forget,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 14, 1950.

⁵⁵ Telegram, Chas Bauer to Charles Brannan, July 14, 1950, Meat, Box 1872, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

he clarify his position on the subject of meat prices.⁵⁶ The secretary personally replied with a conciliatory letter the very day he received the second telegram. In the letter, he claimed that he had made no such accusations and blamed the press for twisting his words to make it seem like he had blamed retailers. Included in his letter was the full quote: “a strong purchasing power evidently is the main factor of the general rise at this time.”⁵⁷ He ended his correspondence by asking Bauer to be this quick and demanding with helpful policy suggestions and not just when he was worried about the secretary’s policy positions.

Still, the threat of controls hung in the air. Industry groups reached out to the secretary’s office with letters of protest, concern, or even praise. Ralph E. Kittinger, Secretary of the Wholesale Food Institute of Iowa, chided the secretary about the possible return of price controls and called rationing and the associated price controls “difficult and expensive,” and “unfair and unjust.”⁵⁸ While some may have feared the establishment of national price controls, production quotas, or rationing as a result of the war, the American Meat Institute leadership remained a good deal more sanguine by the end of August. Brannan had recently recommended against the imposition of controls and the AMI leadership viewed the recommendation as evidence that their members would not tolerate a return of the dreaded controls. Vice President H.R. Davison of the institute

⁵⁶ Telegram, George T. Nepil to Charles F. Brannan, July 20, 1950, Meat, Box 1872, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁵⁷ Charles F. Brannan to Charles Bauer, July 20, 1950, Meat, Box 1872, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁵⁸ Ralph E. Kittinger to Charles F. Brannan, August 7, 1950, Prices 1 Control – Decontrol, Box 1897, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

praised Brannan's stand against bringing back controls, noting that the institute's leadership was "very impressed with and thoroughly agree with" his opinion that "controls are not needed at the present time."⁵⁹

In September, Truman signed the Defense Production Act of 1950, a law much modified from his initial form, that gave his administration broad powers to impose the very same economic controls that he had recently rejected.⁶⁰ The earlier fears expressed by the press and industry groups ended up being warranted after all. After the passage of the act, spikes in meat prices sparked further public outcry for something to be done to keep prices down. Senators in the Agriculture and Forrester Committee responded by holding hearings in September and November on meat prices and called Department of Agriculture officials, meat producers, and retailers to appear as witnesses. In a November session, George T. Nepil, Secretary of the National Association of Retail Meat and Food Dealers, defended the retail sector against charges of profiteering on the crisis by explaining that it was the fierce competition between retailers that set every company's pricing scheme and not some conspiracy to profit from panicked shoppers.⁶¹ The price of

⁵⁹ H.R. Davison to Charles F. Brannan, August 31, 1950, Prices 1 Control – Decontrol, Box 1897, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD; American Meat Institute, "Secretary of Agriculture Brannan Says Controls on Agriculture Commodities Are Not Needed," August 30, 1950, Prices 1 Control – Decontrol, Box 1897, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁶⁰ For a detailed history on the passage of the bill, see Paul Pierpaoli, Jr., *Truman and Korea: The Political Culture of the Early Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 82-118.

⁶¹ Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Subcommittee on Resolution 38, *Utilization of Farm Crops—Meat Products: Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 36 and S. Res. 198, A Resolution Authorizing an Investigation Relative to Expanding Use of Farm Crops and Price Spreads*, Part 5, 81st Cong., 1st sess., 1950, 2479.

meat was becoming a national political topic again just in time for Bean's cyclical hikes to arrive.

Bean hinted to the secretary of a grim future and explained in August that there were similarities in food price inflation between 1946 and 1950. In both years, prices rose starkly from June to August with the brief resumption of controls in October 1946 leveling prices for bit, which indicated to Bean that the remainder of 1950 promised a leveling off of prices. He warned, however, that early 1951 would see a sudden rise in prices.⁶² Perhaps with this warning in mind, Brannan hoped to stabilize prices during the war. This would impose the kind of order on the market that he felt was a precondition for meeting domestic and military needs, which would simultaneously pave the way for the cattle cycle would be preserved. The administration had the Office of Price Stabilization (OPS), directed by Michael V. DiSalle, for this task but it turned out to be, as with the controls it administered, a "pale imitation" of what had existed in the prior war.⁶³ Controls were initiated but on an uneven basis. The OPS announced them on beef in January 1951 but spared live cattle. The controls allowed profits to be maintained so companies were free to pass the costs down the chain of production, all the way to consumers. The order followed on the heels of rising food prices, which were up 9.9 percent between June and January.⁶⁴ In an attempt at shoring up to its potential weakness,

⁶² Memorandum, Louis H. Bean to the Secretary, August 15, 1950, Prices, Box 1891, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁶³ Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 247.

⁶⁴ Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 247.

Truman further strengthened the new office through issuing price control orders that included a general price freeze on specific items, including beef products.⁶⁵

Brannan's office advised the OPS on meat prices by supplying data to help Administrator DiSalle determine if controls were needed to help him balance prices and wages.⁶⁶ Despite these actions, Department of Agriculture officials remained skeptical about the feasibility of a large-scale control program. Two agricultural economists at the department, O.V. Wells and J. P. Cavin, explained to the secretary that the earlier control scheme run by the OPA in the previous war had succeeded only because of the time and money spent to ensure success. Furthermore, the federal government spent over \$1.5 billion on meat during that war through the Reconstruction Finance Corporation with another \$35 million spent on cattle.⁶⁷ A report from the Producers and Marketing Administration of the department to the secretary captured well the overall approach to the crisis taken by the administration in general by January. The writer argued that livestock numbers were so great and the idea of rationing so unpopular that the key to surviving the crisis and planning for the end of the war was to expand total meat

⁶⁵ Office of Price, Production and Marketing Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture, "Summary of OPS Regulations Affecting Domestic Sales Prices of Agriculture Commodities and Products Thereof," February 14, 1952, Defense Mobilization—General, Box 19, Papers of Charles F. Brannan, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁶⁶ O.V. Wells to Michael V. DiSalle, January 15, 1951, Price Stabilization [1 of 2], Box 41, Papers of Charles F. Brannan, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁶⁷ Memorandum, O.V. Wells and J. P. Cavin to the secretary, January 16, 1951, Price Stabilization [1 of 2], Box 41, Papers of Charles F. Brannan, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

production capacity, especially since incomes and employment were allowing consumers to buy all the meat that they could get their hands on.⁶⁸

The administration continued to fight inflation throughout 1951 but failed to overcome Congressional and industry resistance. One major roadblock was a Congressional amendment that barred the OPS from setting slaughter quotas, which meant that production could not be rolled back to assist in price setting.⁶⁹ In April, the OPS issued a rollback on beef prices and faced so much resistance that the new order was repealed.⁷⁰ Brannan presented Congress in May with a massive report on the need to allow the administration to maintain its current beef policy. He warned that retail prices remained high but would drop soon. His two main reasons were the total cattle population, which had never been larger, and that the expanding production capacity of the industry could meet America's domestic and military needs. He further commented that rising incomes throughout the war might create too much demand unless controls were preserved. He offered as an example the consumption the difference of a family with an income of \$3,000 versus one with earning \$2,000 per year, with the extra \$1,000 resulting in the consumption of 25 percent more beef.⁷¹ Additionally, incomes were two-and-one-half higher in 1950 than in 1935-39 and along with that came a two-and-one-half

⁶⁸ "Action of the Federal Government Affecting Livestock and Meat in the Present Emergency," January 1951, PMA—Livestock [1 of 3], Box 45, Papers of Charles F. Brannan, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁶⁹ James A. Durham, "Congressional Response to Administrative Regulation: The 1951 and 1952 Price Control Amendments," *Yale Law Journal* 62, no. 1 (December 1952): 50.

⁷⁰ Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 247.

⁷¹ Charles F. Brannan, "Some Facts Relating to Current Meat Situation," May 17, 1951, p. 7, PMA—Livestock [2 of 3], Box 45, Papers of Charles F. Brannan, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

increase in the retail value of meat consumed by families.⁷² This created a fundamental problem: “production of beef and veal has never caught up with the big ground swell in population growth and consumer income which built up during World War II and has since persisted.”⁷³ With consumers preferring beef, expanding cattle production was essential. He concluded by explaining that beef prices would rise and only controls could stop it. He offered a final plea, commenting that “in view of the mutual stake of farmers, consumers, labor, and business in economic stabilization, I believe we should give the price orders a fair chance to work, or those who now complain should come forward with a better plan.”⁷⁴ Congress chose not to renew the Defense Production Act of 1950, and prices immediately began to climb.⁷⁵

By mid-1952, the Truman administration’s continued support of even the limited controls still available to them posed a problem for the coming presidential election even though Truman chose not to run for reelection. The Department of Agriculture through several enabling acts maintained limited controls on beef, which included price controls on frozen and fresh beef as well as processed beef products and all forms of sausages.⁷⁶

⁷² Charles F. Brannan, “Some Facts Relating to Current Meat Situation,” May 17, 1951, p. 8, PMA—Livestock [2 of 3], Box 45, Papers of Charles F. Brannan, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁷³ Charles F. Brannan, “Some Facts Relating to Current Meat Situation,” May 17, 1951, pp. 11-12, PMA—Livestock [2 of 3], Box 45, Papers of Charles F. Brannan, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁷⁴ Charles F. Brannan, “Some Facts Relating to Current Meat Situation,” May 17, 1951, p. 15, PMA—Livestock [2 of 3], Box 45, Papers of Charles F. Brannan, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁷⁵ Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 247.

⁷⁶ Office of Price, Production and Marketing Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Summary of OPS Regulations Affecting Domestic Sales Prices of Agriculture Commodities and Products Thereof,” February 14, 1952, Defense Mobilization—General, Box 19, Papers of Charles F. Brannan, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

Growing dissatisfaction with Democratic Party management of the economy and the war gave the Republican challenger Dwight D. Eisenhower a powerful campaign issue to use against his Democratic opponent Adlai Stevenson. Eisenhower ran television spots that featured baskets of grocers in order emphasize how much consumers' purchasing power had shrunk over the course of the war. He even played on the gender dynamics of the politics of the pantry by explaining that his wife Mamie constantly harangued him about inflation and food costs. In one ad, a voter asked which party will bring prices down, to which Eisenhower responded that it was time to stop asking which party will bring prices down and begin asking "which party has put prices up?"⁷⁷ The majority of voters answered by supporting the Republican candidate, sending him to the White House with a mandate to end the war and the remaining controls on beef.

If World War II had ushered in the modern diet, it was the Korean War that secured it. The later war finished what the prior war had started by providing the final push needed to make the wartime developments into a new peacetime normal. After World War II, food production remained precariously poised over a chasm of recession with wild fluctuations each year threatening to grow more serious. The Korean War, despite the economic turmoil during the war, ended the fluctuations. The war increased demand for all agricultural products and stimulated a new efficiency in production.⁷⁸ The war also paved the way for supermarkets and processed foods as part of an emerging Cold War food-industrial complex.⁷⁹ Yet, perhaps the most significant outcome was the

⁷⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower quoted in Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 253.

⁷⁸ Matusow, 115.

⁷⁹ Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Shane Hamilton

arrival of a truly beef-eating nation for the first time in U.S. history. Only after the Korean War did beef finally ascend to become America's actual meat of choice instead of the aspirational meat it had been (see figure 3.3). Pork until the mid-1950s topped beef almost every year, this was even despite the cultural dominance and symbolic power of beef as the "high status" meat. Only after the Korean War, though, could American consumers transform their desires for beef into stomachs full of cattle flesh. The economy of the 1950s was noted for bringing relatively stable, if inflating, prices and for having meat counters loaded with meat. What made this possible was the end of the political-economic war industry leaders had waged against two subsequent Democratic administrations. The contest ended in 1953 when a newly elected Republican administration run by Dwight D. Eisenhower ended the Korean War and all meat controls, setting a friendly tone with an industry more used to an antagonistic White House.

and Sarah T. Phillips, "Introduction," *The Kitchen Debate and Cold War Consumer Politics: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2014), 1-32.

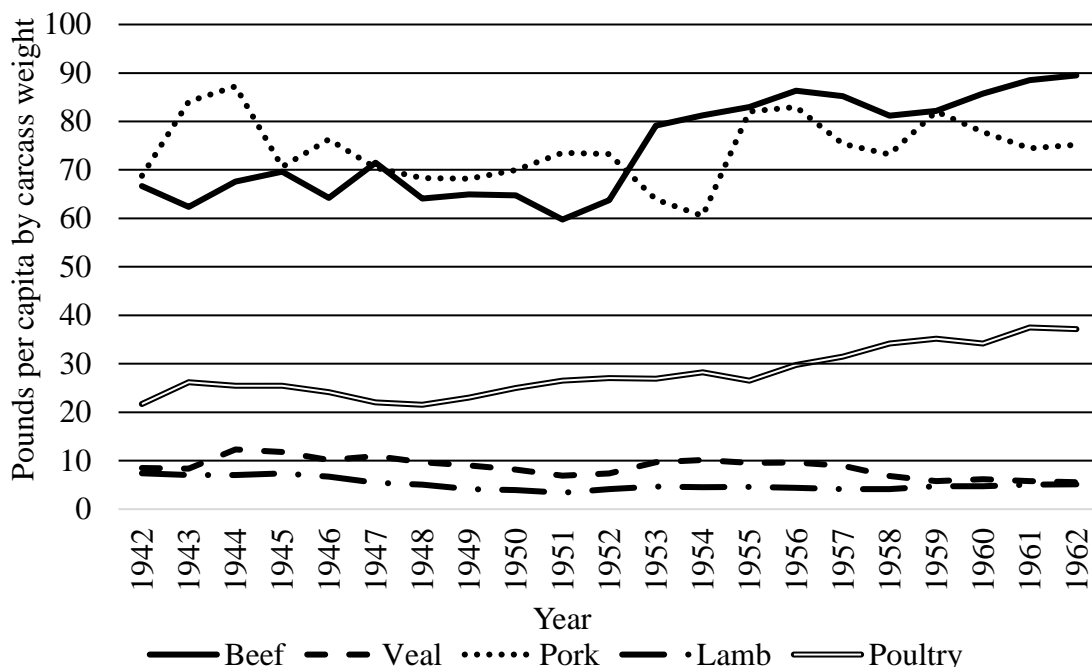


Figure 3.3: Estimated pounds per capita meat consumption by carcass weight, 1942-1962. Source: US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, "Red Meat and Chicken (Carcass Weight)," by Jeanine Bentley and Jean Buzby, accessed December 18, 2014, [http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-\(per-capita\)-data-system](http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-(per-capita)-data-system).

Never before had peacetime consumption seemed so limitless and permanent.

Some statistics hint at the sweeping nature of the transformation and why it seemed as if this would be a permanent development. After the war, the U.S. cattle population finally broke the former upper limit of 65 million and began climbing even higher than 100 million.⁸⁰ The cost per hundred weight of live cattle in the nation's stockyard in Chicago climbed in tandem, reflecting the era's inflation and industrial stability.⁸¹ The total number of cattle slaughtered every year reached new highs starting in 1953, when a record-high of 24 million were slaughtered.⁸² Even per capita consumption, the formula

⁸⁰ Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1970*, 519-20.

⁸¹ Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1970*, 520-21.

⁸² Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1970*, 520-21.

of success most favored by the Department of Agriculture and the meat industry, hit new heights, even as a boom in population drove up the total number of consumers. In 1953, Americans ate approximately sixty-two pounds of beef per capita, a record-setting amount.⁸³ Except for briefly in 1960, beef per capita began exceeding pork per capita consumption starting with 1953, marking the undisputed arrival of mass beef consumption.⁸⁴

Electoral discontent over failed food policies left the fate of beef policy undecided. Would the new president continue the policy given its origins in Democratic Party politics and economic priorities? Controls were unthinkable, and the policy could only continue if the Eisenhower administration could devise other tools for implementing it. The administration needed to develop an approach that would support the expansion of the beef industry but do so in a way that seemed like they did not exist or that appeared merely to be the operation of the free market. It was a tall order. Yet, his campaign and actions as president-elect demonstrated his dedication to continue supporting mass beef consumption. His very election hinged in part on his stance on the Korean War price controls. His campaign promised to end both immediately: the war wasted lives needlessly while controls deprived Americans of their nightly beef. Eisenhower and his entire administration believed in supporting beef policy and its ideological underpinnings. They innovated news ways for achieving both as soon as it was clear that they had won in November.

⁸³ Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1970*, 329-30.

⁸⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, "Red Meat and Chicken (Retail Weight): Per Capita availability," by Jeanine Bentley and Jean Buzby, accessed December 18, 2014, [http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-\(per-capita\)-data-system/food-availability-documentation.aspx](http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-(per-capita)-data-system/food-availability-documentation.aspx).

Eisenhower made ending controls an early priority of his administration, having begun thinking about it as president-elect. He received an internal OPS memorandum to help guide his future policy before he took the oath of office. Assistant Director Edward F. Phelps, Jr., reviewed the outgoing administration's economic stabilization efforts and concluded that, while the OPS did break inflation in the latter half of 1950, economic stability had arrived and controls were now economically unhealthy. He recommended replacing direct controls with "indirect controls" but never defined what those might be.⁸⁵ Others weighed in, too. The future secretary of commerce, Sinclair Weeks, wrote Eisenhower to explain that controls "distort and impede our productive effort," and, even though ending controls would cause chaos, "free market prices are essential if we are to have a dynamic economy to meet our changing and growing needs."⁸⁶ Until his inauguration, Eisenhower received literature and support from groups hoping to reform the current price control system.⁸⁷ His administration immediately began working with Congress to end controls, successfully done in February 6.⁸⁸ On February 17, Eisenhower held his first press conference to address this initial success. In it, he defended removing

⁸⁵ Robert Taft to Dwight D. Eisenhower, January 8, 1953, Price Levels – Price Fixing, 1953 (3), OF 13-A, Box 153, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS; memorandum, Edward F. Phelps to Tighe E. Woods and Roger L. Putnam, November 25, 1952, Price Levels – Price Fixing, 1953 (2), Office of Price Stabilization, OF 13-A, Box 153, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

⁸⁶ Memorandum, Sinclair Weeks to Dwight D. Eisenhower, [December 1952?], Price Levels – Price Fixing, 1953 (3), OF 13-A, Box 153, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS

⁸⁷ The Committee for Economic Development, a conservative business think tank, sent Eisenhower several volumes of reports critical of controls. See Nate White to Gabriel Hauge, January 5, 1953, Price Levels – Price Fixing, 1953 (1), OF 114-E, Box 481, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

⁸⁸ Memorandum for the President, Arthur Flemming, February 5, 1953, Price Levels – Price Fixing, 1953 (3), OF 114-E, Box 481, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

controls as keeping consumer prices the same but allowing live cattle prices to rise, thus narrowing the gap between what farmers received and what consumers paid. He implied that this squeezed excessive costs out of the economy and fought inflation at its source. He did not address how this was to reverse the trend in the meat industry toward more capital-intensive processing and distributing that had caused the gap to form in the first place. Nevertheless, he reiterated his administration's early success: "We, of course, are moving in the direction of attempting to unshackle the economy and to allow it to operate so as to keep up standards of living....The workings of the economic laws will keep prices in their proper relationship one to the other."⁸⁹

Eisenhower made a fateful choice for his secretary of state when he tapped Ezra Taft Benson for the cabinet post. Benson was an elder with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a trained agricultural economist, and an anti-statist, anticommunist.⁹⁰ He was a man so anticommunist that he willingly turned against Eisenhower in the early 1960s and wrote to J. Edgar Hoover that the John Birch Society was correct in claiming that the former president had been a Communist Party dupe all along since he had taken a soft approach against the Soviet Union while in office.⁹¹ Years later, in 1985, Benson became the thirteenth president of the Mormon Church but this was long after he had severed his ties to electoral politics and ceased playing a role in agricultural policy. His

⁸⁹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "The President's News Conference," February 17, 1953, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9623>.

⁹⁰ "Ezra Taft Benson," *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Vol. 1, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), 100-04.

⁹¹ According to a Freedom of Information Act request for Benson's FBI file, the former secretary wanted Hoover to seriously investigate Eisenhower for abetting the spread of communism by being weak. Lee Davidson, "FBI Files Shed Light on Ezra Taft Benson, Ike, and the Birch Society," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, November 16, 2010, <http://archive.sltrib.com/story.php?ref=/sltrib/news/50349153-78/benson-hoover-fbi-society.html.csp>.

general approach to government can be seen in his “General Statement on Agricultural Policy,” released during his first month in office. He dedicated the Department of Agriculture to preserving the family farm and emphasized rural people’s special role in American life; they were “a bulwark against all that is weakening and destroying our American way of life.”⁹² In making these comments, he tapped into a very potent myth of rural Americans as a more wholesome breed of Americans who were anchored to their wholesomeness by their families but who also needed department support to survive these harsh times.⁹³ He also pledged the department to ensure that farmers received parity prices for their commodities to ensure that farming could remain a profitable family affair.⁹⁴ His vision for the department was as an organization dedicated to a core mission of research and education and not as an organization dictating the national economy. As he saw it, “individual freedom and citizenship responsibility depend upon the principle of helping the individual to help himself.... We will seek ways and means of improving the operations of free markets.”⁹⁵

With Benson presiding over the first Republican administration of beef policy, it is important to explore how he understood public policy and what he thought of

⁹² Ezra Taft Benson, “General Statement on Agricultural Policy,” February 5, 1953, Senate, 1953 (2), Box 40, Series IV, Papers of Ezra Taft Benson, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

⁹³ On the USDA and the myth of rural purity and wholesomeness, see Gabe Rosenberg, *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

⁹⁴ On the postwar obsession with the family farm, see Shane Hamilton, “Agribusiness, the Family Farm, and the Politics of Technological Determinism in the Post-World War II United States,” *Technology and Culture* 55 (July 2014): 560-90.

⁹⁵ Ezra Taft Benson, “General Statement on Agricultural Policy,” February 5, 1953, Senate, 1953 (2), Box 40, Series IV, Papers of Ezra Taft Benson, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

economic activity. While prior secretaries turned to agricultural economics or politics, Benson let his religious ideas directly and publically influence his approach to public policy, which kept with the general aim of the Eisenhower administration of introducing the concept of “Under God to public service.”⁹⁶ In Benson’s first statement about public service after assuming the office, he made clear that God operated on earth and said that “freedom is a God-given, eternal principle vouchsafed to us under the Constitution....A completely planned and subsidized economy weakens initiative, discourages industry, destroys character, and demoralizes the people.”⁹⁷ As this general statement made clear, his mission was to unshackle the economy from its government chains and, by doing so, shepherding the American people closer to God. Clues to his spiritual approach to policy can be seen in the speeches throughout his tenure. He warned that direct intervention into the economy corrupted the free market and spiritually corrupted its recipients. He had this to say about the agriculture crises of the mid-1950s and government intervention, “We suddenly find we have not achieved the material security we sought and that we have seriously weakened the spiritual resources upon which security must ultimately be built.”⁹⁸ Benson further explained how spiritual salvation came from farmers and producers enduring free market pressures when he claimed that “cattlemen kept their freedom. Markets expanded. Prices recovered....It is that government should not—should

⁹⁶ Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 81-84.

⁹⁷ Ezra Taft Benson, “General Statement on Agricultural Policy,” February 5, 1953, Senate, 1953 (2), Box 40, Series IV, Papers of Ezra Taft Benson, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

⁹⁸ Ezra Taft Benson, “Address by Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson, before the Margarine All-Industry Conference, Hot Springs, Virginia, May 24, 1956, 11:00 a.m. EST (12 noon EDT),” OF 1—May 1956, Box 1, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

never—be your master. May God in his infinite wisdom grant us the ability to meet the great challenges of our time. May we all recognize the great truth that freedom and responsibility are inseparable”⁹⁹ For beef, this meant that the only acceptable public policy was one that rejected earthly authority in favor of the grace of God and the belief in markets as ordained by His authority. Government intervention inherently restricted free will and robbed men of their responsibility to make morally and economically good choices for themselves and their dependents. The goal was to minimize the intrusion in order to avoid defeating men spiritually and thus undo any good work done by the intervention. Even if prices stabilized, farmers and rural Americans would have suffered for the support. It would be an earthly success but a spiritual failure. He may have adhered to some aspects of the cattle-cycle thinking that had guided prior secretaries, but he relied more on his ideas about spirituality and grace.

Benson focused on helping producers and fixing supply-side problems as the Eisenhower administration tackled food production. One of Benson’s initial concerns was that the total cattle population might be growing too large and that prices for live cattle were too low. He saw a solution in a protectionist program to limit trade, which would not violate the free market, individual effort, or God’s will but would alter the supply of cattle in order to aid producers. To Eisenhower, he argued that the administration needed to reinstate tariffs on Canadian and Mexican cattle now that foot-and-mouth disease was under control and imports were about to rise. The secretary planned on shaping the

⁹⁹ Ezra Taft Benson, “Address by Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson at the National Mechanical Corn Picking Contest, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, October 10, 1957, 2:00 p.m. (CST),” OF 1—October, Box 1, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

market by limiting the reintroduction of cheaper cattle before the three North American countries return to their previous relationship in a high-volume trade in cattle.¹⁰⁰ He encouraged the president to announce the termination of an “abnormal situation” in cattle, a legal term under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade that formally blocked tariffs from being imposed.¹⁰¹ While this approach to choking off cattle imports would later become a leading issue for beef policy, in 1953, the idea sparked little interest at the time.

A massive drought in the early 1950s similarly provided a means for the administration to build its own beef policy. Not quite twenty years after the last major drought, another drought struck the Great Plains states. This time, though, farmers in the area were developing modern irrigation techniques, such as tapping the Ogallala Aquifer under the Great Plains, while ranchers continued their practice of relying on grass as a major feed crop for cattle on the hoof.¹⁰² In July, the president asked his cabinet to assist the cattle industry during the drought, noting that the drought was causing low-weight cattle to be sold for slaughter and not feed to standard weights.¹⁰³ This threatened to flood the market with cheap, low-fat meat, which would drive down prices. Benson explained to the president that his department could only provide indirect help. The cattle situation

¹⁰⁰ Chapter 2.

¹⁰¹ Ezra Taft Benson to the President, February 27, 1953, Benson, Ezra 1953 (5), Box 5, Ann Whitman File, Administration Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers as President of the United States, 1953-1960, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

¹⁰² Geoff Cunfer, *On the Great Plains: Agriculture and the Environment* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005).

¹⁰³ Memorandum, Dwight D. Eisenhower to the Secretary of Defense, July 8, 1953, OF 110-N-6 Foodstuffs, Meat, Box 463, OF, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

was bad enough for ranchers to seek help but “the cattlemen have clearly indicated their opposition to the introduction of support-price measures.”¹⁰⁴ The secretary described the help his department did provide, such as the stepping up of government purchases of beef for donation to the school lunch program.

With Benson’s main focus on beef policy shifted to production, his approach to consumption was to use it as a means to assist production. On March 9, 1953, the chairman of the National Live Stock and Meat Board approached the secretary with a request that the secretary fix the nation’s beef price problem.¹⁰⁵ Over the course of two days, representatives from the Department of Agriculture and industry groups decided that the solution to their problems was to encourage the consumption of more beef. The plan called for the department to support industry groups in running meat promotions at stores in order to drive up overall demand for beef. The department developed an extensive media campaign including radio and television spots as well as printing pamphlets on the benefits of beef that were distributed through agriculture extension services.¹⁰⁶ Retailers were happy with its short-term boosts to consumption. In March, the National Association of Food Chains reported that food chains sold almost 60 percent

¹⁰⁴ Ezra Taft Benson to the President, July 23, 1953, OF 106-D Livestock, 1953 (1), Box 427, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

¹⁰⁵ R.C. Pollock to Ezra Taft Benson, May 12, 1953, Meat March 10 to June 30, Box 2260, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁶ Memorandum, R. L. Webster to Richard D. Alpin, April 24, 1953, Meat March 10 to June 30, Box 2260, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

more beef that month than the same month the year before.¹⁰⁷ In correspondence with the group, Benson praised the campaign as a successful public-private partnership that was “proof of what can be accomplished by farmers and businessmen working together in solving their own problems, thus limiting the need for Government action.”¹⁰⁸ He congratulated the association members but also warned that the increased number of cattle entering slaughterhouses was only going to continue to run as high as it recently did and that driving up demand would have to continue. State departments of agriculture also crafted their own programs to drive up beef consumption, with the chairman of the Utah Department of Agriculture estimating that his state program had increased beef consumption 30 percent in a few months.¹⁰⁹ The USDA continued the program to smooth out problems in September and October.¹¹⁰

The administration—the first Republican one since 1932—struggled to develop a path forward that would satisfy their key constituencies in the Midwest and Great Plains. They settled on a plan of indirectly modifying supply and demand. Cattle owners and their Congressional representatives expressed a clear distaste for the tools that had been developed by the prior administrations, understood by them as being nothing more than

¹⁰⁷ National Association of Retail Chains, “Food Chains Sell More Beef,” [April 1953?], Meat March 10 to June 30, Box 2260, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁸ Ezra Taft Benson to John A. Logan, May 8, 1953, Meat March 10 to June 30, Box 2260, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁹ Alden K. Barton to Ezra Taft Benson, April 30, 1953, Meat March 10 to June 30, Box 2260, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁰ Ezra Taft Benson to John A. Logan, September 8, 1953, Meat July 1 to Sept. 8, Box 2260, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

the complete surrender of freedom for a false promise of security. By the middle of 1953, Benson and the president's advisors settled on a combination of less-than-visible programs that would shore up the beef industry and spread consumption even further. The first portion was "an intensive industry-Government promotional effort to increase the demand for beef by consumers as a better means for providing a sound basis for alleviating the price problems facing cattle."¹¹¹ The plan called for the government to help fund a program to encourage Americans to eat the industry out of its problems. The twin method, as was hinted at in regards to the drought, involved the federal government simply removing the excess production from the market. According to a Department of Agriculture official, "As a surplus diversion method, we are purchasing a large quantity of low-grade beef which is being donated to the non-profit school lunch program and other eligible outlets. In addition, we are purchasing a large quantity of beef for export to Greece under the Mutual Security Program."¹¹² The department stepped up its purchasing program, and, during a crucial period of time in the fall, purchased 731,417 pounds of beef and veal from August to November 1953 compared with 489,389 pounds for the same period in 1952 during the war.¹¹³ Benson offered other benefits to producers through consumption programs. With lower grade beef dropping in price as drought-stricken cattlemen put underfed cattle on the market, he had his department specifically

¹¹¹ Memorandum, Gabe H. to Samuel Carroll, August 6, 1953, OF 106-D Livestock, 1953 (1), Box 427, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

¹¹² True D. Morse to Harold Munson, July 28, 1953, OF 106-D Livestock, 1953 (1), Box 427, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

¹¹³ Memorandum, J.M. Woodard to J.W. Marriott, December 14, 1953, Meat Nov. 6 to, Box 2260, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

target the lower grades to encourage consumption of these lower grade cuts of beef. As he explained it to the press, a study demonstrated that his department's program helped consumers: "Thus, the study revealed, housewives can avail themselves of resulting economy buys in retail stores which handle the lower grade cuts."¹¹⁴

A major issue for understanding beef prices was the breakdown in what retailers paid for beef and what consumer prices supported. This was an educational position endorsed by the Department of Agriculture. The department was worried during the fall that prices had dropped low enough to threaten the retailers' profits even with an aggressive consumption-boosting campaign underway. According to their own calculations, it costs 30 cents out of every consumers' dollar to convert a full-grown steer into a slice of beef. Yet, cattle owners and meatpackers were losing ground. Overall production costs had increased 76 percent from the 1935-39 period, most of it from labor.¹¹⁵ An editorial from the *American Agriculturalist* further explained the concerns about modern beef pricing. The editorial cited Raymond V. Hemming, of the Empire Livestock Marketing Cooperative, in blaming high wages and quoted from him a hypothetical scenario playing out in households across the nation: "The old man comes home from the job and raises Cain if he doesn't get the best quality beef every night, usually in the form of a sirloin."¹¹⁶ The problem had to do with the entire way beef was

¹¹⁴ "Preliminary Retail Beef Price Survey Shows Wide Price Differences," November 11, 1953, OF 1-P-1 Agricultural Marketing Services, Livestock Marketing Reports & Summaries (1), Box 11, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

¹¹⁵ Memorandum, John H. Davis to Aled P. Davies, September 24, 1953, Meat Sept. 9 to Nov. 5, Box 2260, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁶ Raymond V. Hemming quoted in "Explains Why Some Beef Prices Are High," *American Agriculturalist*, September 19, 1953.

bought and sold. If a packer purchased a 1,000 pound steer for 25 cents per pound (the going Chicago rate), about 600 pounds of that steer would be sellable meat, or the dressed weight. The packer sells the dressed meat to a wholesaler for an average of 41 cents per pound. Then, the butcher is looking to buy only loin, since that is what he can charge the most for, and buys the meat for 80 to 90 cents per pound. On average, maybe 100 pounds was loin, leaving that butcher to charge over \$1 per pound for his steaks and roasts to make up the costs of a purchase that was made with the interest of buying the loin meat. The answer for Hemming was to get the government out of people's lives, although this did not include Benson's marketing support. The National Association of Food Chains followed a similar line of argument and released a pamphlet titled, "The Retailers' Report on America's Beef Problem."¹¹⁷ The pamphlet praised the department for helping retailers increase beef consumption but warned that affordable beef was a difficult prospect because out of the 600 pound carcass purchased by retailers, only 444 pounds of that were usable meat and no more than 160 pounds were steaks or fancy roasts.¹¹⁸

During the fall of 1954, the Department of Agriculture collaborated with industry groups to drive up sales by running several promotions of various foods.¹¹⁹ The first campaign centered on beef and vegetables. The Food Distribution Division released a

¹¹⁷ R.B. Corbett to Lorenzo Hoopes, December 11, 1953, Meat Nov. 6 to, Box 2260, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁸ National Association of Food Chains, "The Retailers' Report on America's Beef Problem," pp. 4, 5, 10, and 11, Meat Nov. 6 to, Box 2260, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Information, "Beef Is Plentiful—Vegetables, Too!," August 1954, Meat, Box 2443, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

pamphlet announcing the campaign by highlighting the shopping experience of a white woman interacting with a knowledgeable butcher who took delight in showing her the news that beef and vegetables were affordable and plentiful (see figure 3.4). This imagined interaction spoke to how Benson and others at the department understood the beef economy functioning, as an extension of the nuclear family anchored by women shopping without having to haggle or to fight the retailer over prices or quality. This demonstrated the strength of the myth that supermarkets had been building about women finding shopping to be apolitical and pleasing.¹²⁰ The history of shopping for meat, though, revealed it to be a rough and tumble affair, as demonstrated by the OPA during World War II as well as the subsequent consumer activism of the late-1940s.¹²¹ Women physically confronted retailers when prices were not right and took to the streets to protest when they could not find other ways to lower prices. Despite the mythic image imbedded into the campaign of women shoppers as sedate and pacific, shopping maintained that edge as later protests would reveal.¹²² In the meantime, though, the American Meat Institute supported the campaign, noting instances of support, such as Ida Bailey Allen donating space to discuss it in her “Let’s Eat” column with its daily circulation of 15 million and daily readership of 35 million.¹²³

¹²⁰ On the myth of women as passive shoppers as created by supermarket owners, see Deusch, *Building a Housewife’s Paradise*.

¹²¹ On meat and women after the war, see Chapter 1.

¹²² On later protests, see Chapters 5 and 6.

¹²³ H.R. Davison to Ezra Taft Benson, Meat, Box 2443, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.



Figure 3.4: An image of consumption that emphasized it as a pleasing and non-political activity.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service, Food Distribution Division, "Plentiful Foods Special Program," August 23, 1954, Meat, Box 2443, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

With these promotional and purchasing support programs, Benson continued to refashion beef policy to fit his vision of government. The drought of the early 1950s continued to put pressure on the cattle industry and forced Benson to develop further his concept of indirect controls. The trouble reached its peak in 1956 when a heavy cattle

price decline created pressures for price supports of live cattle. He responded by increasing his department's support for beef and explicitly avoiding direct controls. He began an intensive purchasing program that he would later explain as his department succeeding in defending the market. In a speech in 1957, he explained why he avoided controls in favor of government meat purchases and marketing supports, arguing, "We knew that such supports would have led to controls over cattle producers – would have disrupted the market for beef—and would have lost customers. Instead of bowing to the pressure for price supports, we cooperated with cattlemen in intensive sales promotion—we launched a program of beef purchases and diversion, of emergency credit, and of drought relief."¹²⁴

The Truman administration had hoped to secure a permanent domestic economic peace with mass beef consumption satiating Americans' cravings for the "high status" meat. Instead, war and the return of weak economic controls derailed their plans as they continued to battle the industry. Eisenhower's electoral campaign against war and controls won him the support of producers and even consumers frustrated with twenty years of Democratic Party governance. With his election and the ending of controls, beef policy headed in a new direction. It was a path made clear as early summer 1953 when Benson promised cattlemen to support them without having to battle them or fight their representatives in Congress. Not only did this fit his spiritual vision of public policy but it

¹²⁴ Ezra Taft Benson, "Address by Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson at the National Mechanical Corn Picking Contest, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, October 10, 1957, 2:00 p.m. (CST)," OF 1—October, Box 1, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

also soothed cattlemen's fears of a peacetime price control or rationing program. Instead, Benson sent beef policy in a new direction, which with beef purchases and diversion, emergency credit, and drought relief. While tests remained to be faced, particularly over imports, the future of mass beef consumption never seemed more secure now that cattlemen finally had an administration that they trusted.

Chapter 4

“Fabulous Fifties”:

The Social and Policy Underpinnings of Mass Beef Consumption

John G. Patterson, Jr., writing to President Dwight D. Eisenhower in late 1953, asked the new president a question that would haunt the nation in the coming decade when he inquired, “Can we maintain a high standard of living without war?”¹ The Virginian state representative’s question reflected his fear that the nation’s economic well-being was inexorably connected to the recent world war and the global Cold War conflicts, such as the recently ended Korean War. It bothered him that his own constituents seem decidedly unconcerned about the connection between their quality of life and war and maybe he was alone in his worry. Signs, such as low cattle prices, pointed to turmoil ahead now that the wars had ended.² He hoped the president could provide some reassurances that prosperity could survive the peace.

President Eisenhower had his answer conveyed through his administration assistant Gabriel Hauge, and, in the response, Hauge commented that war was “cruel stupidity” with peace “essential” to maintain prosperity. Notably, the kind of peace Eisenhower had in mind was one defined by the absence of a world war, allowing for the continuation of military mobilization during the Cold War. Based on this definition, 1953

¹ Gabriel Hauge to John G. Patterson, Jr., December 17, 1953, OF 114-F Standard of Living, Box 482, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

² John G. Patterson, Jr., to the President of the U.S.A., November 27, 1953, OF 114-F Standard of Living, Box 482, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

fit his definition of a peaceful year of record prosperity, a situation he described as “very good.” That was proof, Hauge suggested, that prosperity under the new president would survive the peace. He added that future “opportunities and new horizons ahead for America’s productive capacity are limitless.” This brief line hinted at his administration’s actual plan for securing the peace through a political economy oriented toward stoking production rather than demand. But his focus remained the ability of peace to save prosperity. He ended his reply by noting that “it is the determination of this Administration to be vigilant in pursuing policies consistent with maintaining a stable, growing economy.”³

Patterson’s brief correspondence with the president touched on the most significant challenges facing the federal government following the end of the Korean War in 1953. This chapter takes up the challenge of explaining how the economy could survive peace by leaving public policy behind for a journey through social systems that made mass beef consumption possible before turning back to explore how public policy structured the beef economy before returning to beef policy at the end of the decade. The development of a high-wage economy with large amounts of consumption and almost full employment supported by high levels of government spending was a revolution in American life, one that set the global standard for modern living. But this had followed a world war and a follow up war in Asia, which potentially tied this prosperity to eternal war. Patterson’s question reflected an acknowledgement of this unprecedented social transformation and a realization that war was the key to domestic prosperity. Recent

³ Gabriel Hauge to John G. Patterson, Jr., December 17, 1953, OF 114-F Standard of Living, Box 482, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

Democratic administrations created this problem by entwining high levels of spending on both domestic and foreign affairs into a new form liberal political economy, what one historian called “international liberalism.”⁴ International liberalism had seemingly delivered President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s promise of providing freedom from want to the nation, but was this to be a permanent or temporary achievement?

That central question—can prosperity survive peace—drove the Eisenhower administration’s approach to beef policy, a policy to deliver economic stability and prosperity. From 1953 to 1960, Eisenhower presided over a prosperous peace while governing from a decidedly more conservative position than had either president before him. Eisenhower’s focus to the question posed by the Virginia state lawmaker was hinted at in his response: ramping up production, which was to be accompanied by shifting the locus of political economy away from the consumer and toward the producer. His secretary of agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson, agreed with this focus. Benson in his eight years in office similarly moved his department’s emphasis on beef from the consumer to the producer. Under his guidance, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) developed programs aimed at providing economic security to producers with the understanding that producers were more vulnerable to the vagaries economic chance.

It was not only the Eisenhower administration that grappled with peacetime prosperity for all. The subsequent Democratic Party administrations similarly struggled to formulate peacetime prosperity policies, including adapting beef policy to new and emerging circumstances. President John F. Kennedy and his secretary of agriculture,

⁴ Julian Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security – From World War II to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 5.

Orville Freeman, focused on trade liberalization policy in order to facilitate the creation of an open world market as a bulwark against both protectionism and communism. After taking office, President Lyndon B. Johnson and Freeman carried this plan forward, culminating in the Kennedy round of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT). Despite their international successes, Johnson and Freeman found themselves losing a domestic battle with cattle raisers, who successfully lobbied Congress to pass an import quota law on beef in order to increase live cattle prices.

Together, these three administrations oversaw America's most prosperous decade. Beef was the dietary cornerstone of a new America of high wages, high consumption, and high production. Suburbanizing Americans living in a distinct type of family, the nuclear family, made beef a key part of the American diet. Women, as housewives, quietly labored to feed their nuclear families all the meat that they could afford to eat. The gendered division of family labor baked within the nuclear family made it possible for two parents to afford beef and to serve it as a dietary staple. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1950s, cracks began to appear that would challenge beef policy and threaten to knock beef out of its hallowed place in the American diet. Throughout the period, cattle prices dropped even as retail prices for beef rose. On top of that, health scares roiled the meat industry and, for the first time, made people question the wisdom of beef consumption. Furthermore, Congress threatened to reduce the secretary of agriculture's powers over beef in order improve the safety of the meat of the multitudes. The secretaries of agriculture fought back against what they understood to be attacks on their beef policymaking powers and attempted to preserve their department's authority over all aspects of beef. While not completely successful, their efforts ensured that responsibility

for managing the nation's beef supply would remain within the Department of Agriculture.

As beef policy transitioned under the Eisenhower administration to serve producers and calm their anger at the federal government, the consequences of beef becoming a dietary staple could be felt throughout society. Transformations of everyday life in America during the 1950s cemented beef as the most consumed meat in America and exploring some of the social dynamics reveal how beef entered the American diet as it did during that pivotal decade. After 1952, beef production and consumption triumphed over its meat rivals, which the *National Provisioner* would later describe the decade as the “Fabulous Fifties.”⁵ The high point of the decade was 1956, when approximately fourteen billion pounds of dressed beef was produced and approximately sixty-six pounds per capita was consumed as measured by retail weight.⁶ Rather than simply valuing beef over pork, though, American consumers chose beef as a meat for all occasions. Beef ceased being a “high status” meat and started being the meat for all statuses and all occasions. Several factors served as the social basis for mass beef consumption. They were increasing suburbanization, the unprecedented redistribution of wealth toward the middle, a revolution in gender roles, and the creation of a new way to shop for food.

⁵ “Meat for the Multitudes,” *The National Provisioner* 185, no. 1, (1981), 271.

⁶ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C., 1975), 520; US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, “Red Meat and Chicken (Carcass Weight),” by Jeanine Bentley and Jean Buzby, accessed December 18, 2014, [http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-\(per-capita\)-data-system](http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-(per-capita)-data-system).

Suburban American emerged as the most potent force within the American economy during the 1950s in a process that all but closed “crabgrass frontier.”⁷ Affluent and working class Americans moved into detached single-family houses that encircled urban cores and made a new life for themselves. Despite claims to the contrary, federal funding made possible the expansion of metropolitan areas that were now defined by low-density housing, home-ownership, exclusivity, and their separation from the workplace.⁸ Led by the Federal Housing Administration, but also including the Veterans Administration, federal money made possible a new way to finance homeownership: mortgages that required 5 percent down and were repaid over a thirty year period. It was these mortgages that the majority of class Americans used to afford houses within commuting distance to well-paid jobs that allowed them to participate in the “great compression” of wages, a time when the difference between high and low incomes shrunk.⁹ Compressed wage differences and affordable housing made suburbanites the main beneficiaries of the Great Exception. Suburban residents generally, flush with more disposable income than ever, spent more on food and more on beef than any other meat, especially as incomes rose.¹⁰ As the social critic and economist John Kenneth Galbraith noted in his seminal critique of 1950s suburban culture, *The Affluent Society*, the beef

⁷ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁸ Jackson, 6, 224-30.

⁹ Claudia Goldin and Robert A. Margo, “The Great Compression: The Wage Structure in the United States at Mid- Century,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 107, no. 1 (February 1992): 1-34.

¹⁰ Stewart H. Fowler, *The Marketing of Livestock and Meat*, 2nd ed. (Danville, IL: Interstates, 1961), 535-37.

producer was “the beneficiary of the well-known and statistically quite demonstrable tendency of people who have an increase in pay to celebrate with red meat.”¹¹

Even though the suburbanization of America’s metropolitan areas generated immense redistributive pressure throughout society, all was not equal. Poor Americans continued to lack access to the social systems that had made mass beef consumption a reality to most Americans. Additionally, the rush to suburban housing drove residential segregation as various legal means were used to create residential areas that supported homogeneity and preserved property values mostly by excluded minorities.¹² These barriers included a variety of tactics, such as insurance-based red lines, realtor groups and companies directing minority home shoppers toward lower value areas, limited access to loans, and white residents harassing minority home owners.¹³ While segregated housing has been seen traditionally as a *de facto* problem, meaning a problem of fact or happenstance, the creation of a segregated housing system happened because public funding and local regulations empowered homebuyers and the housing industry to discriminate on the basis of skin color or race.¹⁴ For example, the famous Levittowns of New York and Pennsylvania—the nation’s most famous suburban developments—were

¹¹ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, 40th anniversary ed. (New York: Mariner Books, 1998), 163.

¹² On race and suburbia, see Andrew Wise, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in Twentieth Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹³ On this process explored in one city, see Colin Gordon, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

¹⁴ Tom Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 183.

closed to black applicants for decades.¹⁵ Residential segregation led to a general inequality in consumption that beef policy failed to address.¹⁶

While class and race could prove a barrier to entering the suburban middle class and eating diet of plenty, gender served a different role. Gender structured the food economy of mass beef consumption: women's labor created the unwaged core that sustained meat consumption during the heyday of beef. As feminist scholars have explained, women's unpaid, affective household labor provided their family's nutritional sustenance as well as their emotional and physical wellbeing.¹⁷ The division was so ensconced in family life that even women working for wages served their families in this fashion, which was increasingly common in the 1950s. By the end of the decade, nearly one-third of all married women worked for a wage as did nearly one in four women with school age children.¹⁸ Wage work meant that women contributed income in addition to their unpaid labor that sustained their families. Not that waged work was new to all women and their waged work had long been critical to the nation's economic well-

¹⁵ Lizbeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 217.

¹⁶ Cohen, 195. On inequality in meat consumption, see Roger Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table: Taste, Technology, Transformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 14-15.

¹⁷ Marjorie L. DeVault, *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 300-06.

¹⁸ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 161; Susan M. Hartmann, "Women's Employment and the Domestic Ideal in the Early Cold War Years" in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 84.

being.¹⁹ This was particularly true for black women, who historically have much higher rates of waged work.²⁰

The postwar nuclear family was no retreat to traditional gender roles, but, rather, it was the result of women building new gender roles out of their collective embrace of a family life centered on detached housing, distance from their own parents, inward-looking social relations, and dietary self-sufficiency—a radical break with previous family patterns.²¹ The historian Jessica Weiss calls the marriage pattern of the 1950s “contested egalitarianism” since power within the marriage remained a source of struggle between men and women even as they committed themselves to mutual trust and affection.²² This mutual bond of love with power between spouses uncertain imbued things like meal planning with an affective aura. The historian Elaine Tyler May offers a critical insight on American women in the 1950s, “They made clear choices for the life they felt would make them and their children happy, healthy, and strong. They felt enthusiasm for building these great homes, living these prescribed gender roles.”²³ Even

¹⁹ Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*.

²⁰ On black women and the double burden of wage and family work, see Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 46.

²¹ On the 1950s as a retreat to gender roles, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 20th Anniversary Ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 5. On the 1950s and the invention of new gender standards, see Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 43-45; Jessica Weiss, *To Have and to Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 15-48.

²² Weiss, 16.

²³ Elaine Tyler May quoted in Public Broadcasting Corporation, “Tupperware!,” *American Experience*, accessed October 21, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/interview/tupperware-may/>. For further insight on women’s relationship to their food labor, see Laura Shapiro, *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America* (New York: Viking, 2004).

if May's generalization does not encompass the full sweep of women's wide ranging experiences, she expressed an important truth about the women who fed their families during that decade: they chose to find within their labors a source of happiness as well as a way to express what they considered to be their innate womanliness.²⁴ Not that these choices remained uncritically embraced as highlighted by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* and women all too often found their opportunities curtailed.²⁵ It is important to remember, then, that women in the 1950s made choices but not in the conditions of their choosing. Nevertheless, their choices built family life and provided the unpaid labor for the nation's continued consumption of beef, providing the bottom-up energy that subsidized the mass beef consumption.

Women giving birth to an unprecedented number of children created a sudden and unexpected boom in the population, one that might have threatened the American diet or even led to starvation if not for the equally unprecedented expansion in agricultural output. Americans continued to eat throughout the baby boom as if no population threats existed to the total available food. In 1945, there were approximately 139.9 million people living in the United States, by 1960, that number had risen to 180.6 million people, an increase of 29 percent over those fifteen years yet Americans continued to consume increasing amounts of meat.²⁶ Birth rates began rising toward the end of World

²⁴ On food and emotional labor in the 1950s, see Shapiro, 142-44.

²⁵ Women reading Betty Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique* found the language in the book to make sense of their postwar experiences. Betty Freidan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963). For a historical analysis of the book, see Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York: Basic, 2011). On women losing opportunities after World War II, see Cohen, 112-65.

²⁶ Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1970*, 8.

War II and remained high until the mid-1960s, with overall birth rates rising from a 1930s low of 18.4 per 1,000 women to a 1950s high of 25.3 per 1,000 women in 1957.²⁷ It was younger women who reversed the historic declines in the number of children had by women on average. For women coming of age in the 1930s, they averaged 2.4 children while women coming of age in the 1940s and 1950s averaged 3.2 children.²⁸ It was not just white or economically secure American women giving birth to more children, but non-white and less-well-off women as well. As a result, young people began occupying a larger share of the total population. Young Americans, defined as those under the age of 15, increased their share of the total population, from 25 percent of the population to 33 percent of the population.²⁹ Yet, this population growth did not lead to a national disaster. While the total calories per person available dropped during the decade, overall access to protein rose with beef occupying a central place in their diets.³⁰ Americans choosing to, and being more able to, eat beef turned cattle flesh into a fuel of the baby boom.

The politic identity behind women's engagement with the consumer economy and family labor was that of the housewife. Housewife was a political identity women developed by being the non-waged experts of the domestic sphere and family life.³¹ The

²⁷ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 24.

²⁸ May, *Homeward Bound*, 121.

²⁹ Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1970*, 10.

³⁰ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, *Nutrient Content of the U.S. Food Supply, 1909-2000*, by Shirley Gerrior and Lisa Bente, Home Economic Research Report 56 (November 2004), 20, 22.

³¹ Emily E. LB. Twarog, *Politics of the Pantry: Housewives, Food, and Consumer Protest in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2-5.

housewife's political side was most visible when women engaged in direct political actions. Several examples of this can be seen before the mid-1950s, and include women's Office of Price Administration volunteerism during World War II, their electoral revolt against the Truman and the Democratic Party in 1946 and 1952, and with local protests and boycotts over meat prices.³² Women's sense of their own dietary citizenship drove these forays into political activism, which hinged on women demanding that they and their families must have their right to a healthy, beef-centered diet taken seriously. Between 1952 and 1965, housewives organized no national meat protests while meat simmered as a subject of national political importance. The sudden return of organized and ad hoc meat protests in the 1960s suggests that the silence was not a retreat but reflected housewives' deciding that consumer activism was unnecessary. It should be noted that anticommunists' successful demonization of the left might have harmed consumer activists since leading consumer groups, like the League of Women Shoppers, had communist connections in the 1930s.³³ Regardless, housewives turned their political energy toward their families' dietary well-being and reserved the right to protest should the need arise.

Before turning to federal policy and the structure of the beef industry, it will be helpful to examine federal efforts to measure diets in America. The federal government conducted food surveys that measured the outcome of housewives' labors. Not that such surveys were new. The Home Economics branch of the Department of Agriculture had begun collecting dietary and food information during the Great Depression and later

³² More detailed discussions of these events can be found in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3.

³³ On postwar anticommunism and consumer political activism, see Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 252-53.

surveys were a continuation of the earlier efforts at measuring the American diet. In the spring of 1955, the department organized the most complete food consumption survey ever taken, which also made it the first of two national surveys to thoroughly explore postwar American food habits.³⁴ The key designers of the survey, Faith Clark, Janet Murray, and Ennis C. Blake, worked as home economists at the Household Economic Research Branch of the Agriculture Research Service at the USDA. They tasked regional offices to coordinate local volunteers visiting and interviewing a total of 6,060 “housekeeping households” across the nation over the course of a week. The department employed volunteers in every state to count food being used by “eating units” by interviewing one person from each unit who could answer questions about food purchasing and food use for that week. Clark and the others designed the survey to measure households as “eating units,” which they defined as one or more peoples eating in common in a dwelling regardless of their familial connections eating at least ten meals together over the course of one week. They then arranged the survey results by national region—North East, South, North Central, and West—and by income brackets, with the lowest one being \$2,000 per year and the highest one at over \$10,000 per year. Furthermore, households were divided by population size of their area. Those were urban: those dwelling in either communities of 2,500 or more people or within the metropolitan areas of 50,000 or more people regardless of the number living in the actual community; non-farm rural: those dwelling in communities of less than 2,500 people; or

³⁴ Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table*, 152.

farm families: those who earned \$150 or more in 1954 on crop sales. Approximately 83 percent of visited households responded.³⁵

The survey conducted in 1955 revealed the dietary transformations unleashed by economic prosperity. For the survey organizers, diets in America seemed fundamentally sound because Americans consumed on average 3,200 calories per person per day.³⁶ Americans ate on average 28.875 pounds of food per week of homemade food and around 4.125 pounds of meat, of which one pound of that was beef.³⁷ The value of all food used in American households came to \$31 throughout the week and \$7.50 per person for households of two or more persons (\$279.26 and \$67.56 respectively in recent dollars).³⁸ Nearly \$0.36 of the weekly budget went to meat and egg purchases and formed the single largest portion of the average family food budget.³⁹ Urban households spent more on food and ate differently than non-farm rural and farm households, mainly

³⁵ The USDA published the results in thirteen volumes, with five publications covering the total volume of food by region, five publications covering nutrition by region, and three final volumes covering home food production. For descriptions of the survey and its methodology, see U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service, *Food Consumption and Dietary Levels of Households in the United States*, Report 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1956), 1, 186-88, 193-94.

³⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service, *Food Consumption and Dietary Levels of Households in the United States*, Report 6 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1956), 14. The total for non-farm was 3,120 calories while farm consumption averaged 3,660 calories per person per day.

³⁷ Molly Orshansky, "Food Consumption," in U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service, *Food Consumption and Dietary Levels of Households in the United States...Some Highlights from the Household Food Consumption Survey, Spring 1955*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1957), 1.

³⁸ Molly Orshansky, "Food Consumption," in Agriculture Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Food Consumption and Dietary Levels of Households in the United States...Some Highlights from the Household Food Consumption Survey, Spring 1955*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1957), 1; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "CPI Inflation Calculator," accessed November 8, 2016, http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

³⁹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service, *Food Consumption and Dietary Levels of Households in the United States*, Report 6 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1956), 24.

because urban Americans ate more beef and vegetables and less pork and grains. This came along with unprecedented access to beef for urban households, with 94 percent having beef at least once each week, more so than non-urban families.⁴⁰ The lowest earning urban households in 1955, those earning less than \$1,000 per year, consumed 3.5 pounds of meat and eggs per person per week, which was as much as consumed per person by families in 1942 and 1948 that earned \$5,000 or more per year.⁴¹ Overall, the picture painted by the results for the department was one of uniform satisfactory dietary abundance (see figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1: Under the title “We have built a better living for all...”, this image represents an idealized scene of domestic consumption that the results of food surveys seemed to confirm for Department of Agriculture personnel in the mid-1950s.

⁴⁰ Molly Orshansky, “Food Consumption,” in Agriculture Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Food Consumption and Dietary Levels of Households in the United States...Some Highlights from the Household Food Consumption Survey, Spring 1955*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1957), 3.

⁴¹ Molly Orshansky, “Food Consumption,” in Agriculture Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Food Consumption and Dietary Levels of Households in the United States...Some Highlights from the Household Food Consumption Survey, Spring 1955*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1957), 10.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Food for the Future—through Research*, Information Bulletin 220 (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1960), 14.

The arrangement of the survey had the effect of translating the messy reality of food consumption into a form legible to politicians and policy makers with the shape of the survey influencing its policy usefulness.⁴² Most significantly, the survey results reinforced the idea that the family unit should be the central target for national food policy even though the survey designers used the family as a measure not of blood ties but as a measure of who ate together. The findings, presented in terms of household units, ensured that the family would be the delivery method and target of state aid. Not that a focus on the family was unique to food policy. As historians of women's political and economic rights explain, policies considered to be women's issue often targeted women by targeting families, following the bread-winning family ideal and as ways to secure patriarchal authority.⁴³ Additionally, the survey results presented the findings as aggregates that minimized, if not erased, most of the significant regional or community-based inequality that might otherwise have been more prominently presented. The survey results suggested that the percentage of American families too poor to provide an abundant diet to its members was around 10 percent, a revelation that later helped launch anti-hunger initiatives but failed to spark much action when initially reported.⁴⁴

⁴² On legibility and policy, see James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 2. On the explicit goal of making the survey results legible to policymakers, see Agriculture Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Food Consumption and Dietary Levels of Households in the United States*, Report 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1956), 1.

⁴³ Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998); Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁴⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service, *Food Consumption and Dietary Levels of Households in the United States...Some Highlights from the Household Food Consumption*

The survey organizers continued to contribute to policies that addressed food issues. Faith Clark speaking at the Nutrition Education Conference in April 1957 summarized her team's findings in terms of nutrition and education, noting, "Average amounts of food brought into household kitchens were sufficient in all region of the United States to provide more than the allowances recommended by the National Research Council for calories and eight key nutrients."⁴⁵ Faith's views as with the rest of the survey team reflected what the historian Harvey Levenstein termed "newer nutrition," which was a focus on food and diet as nutritional components rather than as a whole.⁴⁶ Because of this, she focused most on individual components and found room for improvements across the nation. Even if the averages were acceptable, all was not well, she warned, since individual families still seemed to not know how to improve their nutrition.⁴⁷ For her, income and increased purchasing power provided some needed improvements to diets because households spending more on food would likely find themselves purchasing enough food, and in enough variety, to inadvertently eat well. The results, she stressed, pointed to a need to continue education and outreach programs since

Survey, Spring 1955, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1957), 11; Faith Clark, "Contributions of Sociologists and Cultural Anthropologists to Analysis of U.S. Demand for Food," *Journal of Farm Economics* 45, no. 5 (December 1963): 1428-29; Susan Levine, *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America's Favorite Welfare Program* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 108. On later efforts to address poverty with food, see Chapter 5 and 6.

⁴⁵ Faith Clark, "Dietary Levels," in U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service, *Food Consumption and Dietary Levels of Households in the United States...Some Highlights from the Household Food Consumption Survey, Spring 1955*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1957), 10.

⁴⁶ Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), vii and 31.

⁴⁷ Faith Clark, "Dietary Levels," in U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service, *Food Consumption and Dietary Levels of Households in the United States...Some Highlights from the Household Food Consumption Survey, Spring 1955*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1957), 11.

the lowest third of income earners and those in the South still lacked an adequate diet. Hers was a national education plan with purchasing power support playing a decidedly secondary role.

It was not just family life and consumption that underwent massive changes after the war but meat production did as well. In order to better understand how policymakers hoped to secure mass beef consumption, it will be helpful to explore these changes. Larger firms began losing their market shares to smaller firms, which succeeded by branding their meats and by producing smaller volumes of specialty products. Allowing for this to happen was the emergence of two related structural changes in the production of meat. The first was the growth of processing as a separate function of production; a splitting off of packaging from slaughtering and the creation specialized facilities offering consumers specific items. The other change was the emergence of supermarkets and self-service meat counters. Supermarkets were corporations with stores across multiple states that altered retailing by offering a large volume of self-service food items, including meat. Their economic position allowed them to put a downward pressure on butchers' skills and pay, which put control of meat retailing more firmly in the hands of the companies. Self-service meat departments emerged and allowed consumers being able to grab wrapped meat cuts or pre-processed meat products directly from a display case without the need for further preparation by a butcher. The historian Roger Horowitz describes the consequences of the changes: "The growth of supermarkets and their self-service meat departments in the 1940s and 1950s undermined the power of the old Chicago-based packing firms and permanently altered power relations between food

business sectors.”⁴⁸ By the end of the 1950s, the integrated packer-processors that had formed the core of the meat economy since the 1880s lost much of their economic power while the new retail outlets now set, through a monopoly of purchasing power called a monopsony, the terms that the rest of the meat industry had to follow.⁴⁹ This was a change not lost on Secretary of Agriculture Benson and the rest of the Department of Agriculture officials, who recognized in the changes a potential threat to the meat industry. Members of Congress also took notice of the problems besetting the industry and offered their own solutions. The ensuing political battle shaped the future beef policy.

The Department of Agriculture had historically played a crucial role by providing the legal structure and regulatory environment for the industry to thrive. The federal government by the end of World War II had two main regulatory tools for managing the industry, the Meat Inspection Act of 1906 and the Packers and Stockyard Act of 1921. The first was an act passed in response to mass popular revulsion at meat industry practices but had been the consequence of an even longer battle to clean up the nation’s meat supply.⁵⁰ The act resulted in the creation of the Meat Inspection Division within the Bureau of Animal Industry within the Department of Agriculture. Staffed with veterinarians, the division inspected every animal slaughtered for interstate commerce

⁴⁸ Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table*, 150.

⁴⁹ On monopsony and supermarkets, see Shane Hamilton, “Supermarkets, Free Markets, and The Problem of Buyer Power in the Postwar United States,” in *What’s Good For Business: Business And Politics Since World War II*, ed. Julian Zelizer and Kim Phillips-Fein (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 179. On the term “oligopsony,” see Joan Robinson, *The Economics of Imperfect Competition* (London: Macmillan, 1933).

⁵⁰ Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, *Arresting Contagion: Science, Policy, and Conflicts over Animal Disease Control* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 172-218.

before, during, and after slaughter. They also regulated facilities through requiring inspected packing plants have their blueprints approved. Finally, the division regulated the contents and labels of all meat products made for human consumption under inspection. An example of what these regulations looked like was the requirement that all slaughtering facilities be made of “impermeable materials” and have floors with specific pitches to enable the proper drainage of blood and other remains.⁵¹ Facilities not meeting these kinds of specifications had to be corrected before federally-inspected slaughter could be approved.⁵² The division also ruled on procedures relating to cleaning and maintenance, such as when it specified exactly how processing firms were to clean their sausage stuffing machines each day.⁵³ Ingredient regulations abound. For example, hamburgers had to be a meat patty made from fresh chopped beef with no more than 30 percent fat.⁵⁴ In another example, products labeled “Chow Mein Vegetables with Meat” and “Chop Suey with Meat” had to have no less than 12 percent of the total weight of the raw ingredients be meat.⁵⁵

⁵¹ J. T. Johnstone, “Sanitation in Food Processing Industries,” January 31, 1950, (Meat Inspection) Index to Memorandums Series 49-53; Unnumbered Memos; Letters (W. Cuplinger), Box 2, Records Relating to Meat Inspection, 1906-1980, RG 462, Records of the Food and Consumer Services, National Archives Location 2, College Park, MD.

⁵² For an example of the Meat Inspection Division cited building material and floor conditions as a condition for inspection, see E.N. Tierney to H.A. Schneider, January 19, 1949, Hapsburg, Penn. Dr. H. A. Schneider, Box 54, Central Correspondence Files (Green Copies), 1946-1953, RG 17, Records of the Bureau of Animal Industries, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁵³ Memorandum, C. H. Pals to Inspectors in Charge of Meat Inspection, April 29, 1949, Meat Inspection Memo. MID 50-13 to MID 49-2, Box 3, Records Relating to Meat Inspection, 1906-1980, RG 462, Records of the Food and Consumer Services, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁵⁴ Memorandum, G. E. Totten to Inspectors in Charge of Meat Inspection, Proprietors and Operators of Official Establishments, and Importers of Meat and Meat Food Products, MID Memo 37, May 26, 1944, Numbered Meat Inspection Memos (W. Caplinger), Box 3, Records Relating to Meat Inspection, 1906-1980, RG 462, Records of the Food and Consumer Services, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁵⁵ A. R. Miller to Inspectors in Charge of Meat Inspection and Owners and Operators of Official Establishments and Importers of Meat and Meat Food Products, MID Memo 137, January 16, 1950,

The other major law granting the Department of Agriculture oversight of the meat industry, the Packers and Stockyard Act, allowed the department to investigate the buying and selling of animals at stockyards as well as regulate monopolies in the meatpacking industry. Congress passed the act in 1921 in response to anti-trust investigations by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) of the meat industry over the issue of collusion between the major firms that resulted in a report calling for the federal government to take over parts of the meat industry.⁵⁶ Initially, the bill called for just that remedy by treating the stockyards as public utilities and granting public control of them. The final version of the bill retreated from those more revolutionary ideas and settled on creating a regulatory regime within the Department of Agriculture. The act tasked the department with regulating terminal livestock markets, also called stockyards, and meatpacking plants with the department granted power over “rates, charges, and business practices.”⁵⁷ The law shifted the regulation of antimonopoly out from the Federal Trade Commission and into the department, a boon for the largest firms in the meat industry. The economic historians Robert M. Aduddell and Louis P. Cain argue that the act was relatively ineffective since the department spent more defending the act in court than enforcing its provisions, a dramatic reversal of what the act had promised to deliver.⁵⁸

Regardless of its use in anti-monopoly cases, though, the act had far-reaching

Numbered Meat Inspection Memos (W. Caplinger), Records Relating to Meat Inspection, 1906-1980, RG 462, Records of the Food and Consumer Services, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁵⁶ Robert M. Aduddell and Louis P. Cain, “Public Policy toward ‘The Greatest Trust in the World,’ ” *The Business History Review* 55, no. 2 (summer 1981): 234-38; Jimmy Skaggs, *Prime Cut: Livestock Raising and Meatpacking in the United States, 1607-1983* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986), 189.

⁵⁷ Aduddell and Cain, “Public Policy toward ‘The Greatest Trust in the World,’ ” 237.

⁵⁸ Aduddell and Cain, “Public Policy toward ‘The Greatest Trust in the World,’ ” 238.

consequences for meat production. The act created the structure for gaining information about the meat industry and for enacting broad policy goals. Without the act, the White House would have been unable to pursue its postwar beef policy.⁵⁹ Policy decisions often relied on the gathering of information at stockyards and packing plants as authorized by the act.

Federal oversight of meat production was not limited to inspections or stockyard regulations, though, and included two other areas. The first was the Consent Decree of 1920, which was an agreement between the federal government and the five major meat packers (later four) that the meat packing firms subject to the decree would not engage in any meat retailing activities.⁶⁰ The purpose of the decree for the federal government was to block and roll back the power of the “meat trust,” preventing Armour, Swift, Cudahy, and Wilson from expanding into food retailing. These firms brought a lawsuit in 1956 in order to end the decree by arguing that it no longer made sense because they were no longer as powerful as they once were and the decree no longer protected the nation’s consumers from a monopoly controlling the nation’s food supply.⁶¹ The court sided with the government and the major four producers remained beholden to the decree.

The final piece of federal meat policy was meat grading. The Department of Agriculture offered meatpackers the option of having the department grade the quality of

⁵⁹ In 1946, Secretary of Agriculture Clinton P. Anderson relied on the Packers and Stockyard Administration monitoring of meat prices to help him make policy decisions. For example, see *Appraisal of Supply and Price Position of Feed Grains and Byproduct Feeds*, [August 3, 1946?], Price Decontrol Bill, Box 10, Papers of Clinton P. Anderson, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

⁶⁰ Aduddell and Cain, “Public Policy toward ‘The Greatest Trust in the World,’ ” 238.

⁶¹ Robert M. Aduddell and Louis P. Cain, “Consent Decree in the Meatpacking Industry, 1920-1956,” *The Business History Review* 55, no. 3 (autumn 1981): 359-61.

meat and mark it with an official grade. It was an optional program separate and distinct from meat inspection, with the later focusing on the sanitation while the former on quality. Begun in the late-1920s, grading services expanded during World War II. The main consequence of meat grading was the upward pressure on the prices of cattle and meat cuts shot through with fat, called marbling, which drove demand for feedlot-finished cattle. To get the best marbled meat required feeding cattle grains and carefully controlling movement, thus helping to fuel the spread of the year-round, mass-confinement feedlot industry in the West.

Taken together—meat inspection, stockyard regulation, the decree, and grading services—these Department of Agriculture programs provided the infrastructure for federal beef policy and governed the industry as a whole. The powers granted by Congress and upheld by the Supreme Court enable the Executive Branch to be the driving force behind beef policy. These programs structured the meat industry and gave it its shape, especially after World War II, when processing and feeding grew increasingly important to the overall industry. Large stockyards had once provided centralizing force for the geographic concentration of the industry by serving as the best place for buying and selling livestock, a place under constant federal surveillance since 1921. Meat inspectors at plants across the nation oversaw the slaughtering and processing of meat and became a core component of production. The Consent Decree included within it a tacit approval of the meat trust's economic concentration of slaughtering and processing by blocking of expansion into retailing but allowing the largest firms to remain unbusted. Grading put economic pressure on the meat industry to produce marbled meat, with top graded cattle and meats worth the most and providing the widest margins. But the meat

industry was never static and changes began to undercut the foundations for the very programs that had once provided the infrastructure of regulation.

The transformation of the meat industry and the subsequent challenge to the Department of Agriculture can be seen in an internal review that the Meat Inspection Division conducted sometime in 1966 or 1967. The investigators worked to identify how packing and inspection had changed over the years, which allow us to see what happened to production and regulation throughout the 1950s. The changes were numerous with both extensive and intensive increases in overall meatpacking activity, which is to say that both the reach and the depth of that reach increased over the decade. The division went from inspecting 928 establishments at the end of fiscal year 1950 to inspecting 1,396 establishment by the end of fiscal year 1960.⁶² The total pounds of annually inspected meats went from 59.5 billion pounds in 1950 to 97 billion pounds in 1960, an increase of 61.3 percent over the decade.⁶³ A notable portion of that came from the inspection of processed meat foods, which rose from 11 billion pounds to 18.4 billion pounds over those ten years and reflected the rise of meat processing companies that helped knock down the previous meat trust firms.⁶⁴ The number of new labels approved for retail use went from 29,726 to 39,669.⁶⁵

⁶² "Distribution and Cost," n.d., Post Mortem, Box 4, Records Relating to Meat Inspection, 1906-1980, RG 462, Records of the Food and Consumer Services, College Park, MD.

⁶³ "Total Pounds of Each Specific including the [?]," n.d., Post Mortem, Box 4, Records Relating to Meat Inspection, 1906-1980, RG 462, Records of the Food and Consumer Services, College Park, MD.

⁶⁴ "Processing Inspection," n.d., Post Mortem, Box 4, Records Relating to Meat Inspection, 1906-1980, RG 462, Records of the Food and Consumer Services, College Park, MD.

⁶⁵ "Label Activities," n.d., Post Mortem, Box 4, Records Relating to Meat Inspection, 1906-1980, RG 462, Records of the Food and Consumer Services, College Park, MD.

The rise in processing and the demands it put on meat inspection both reflected the effects of federal meat policy and threatened it. The industry's overall need for federal regulation stretched the division thin. The total calculated years of worker powers, noted as "man years," grew from 3048.3 man years in 1950 to 3172 man years in 1960 while the total man years per establishment dropped from 3.28 to 2.27, hinting at the strain of keeping pace with the expanding industry.⁶⁶ The emergence of a separate processing industry further pressured federal inspection by forcing the department to send inspectors to more facilities but also by allowing processors to avoid federal inspections, and their rules, by producing the final product for intrastate commerce. In short, it gave inspectors both too much to do and too little. A battle over the amount of water added to cured, smoked hams revealed how processing could threaten inspection. In the early 1950s, the Meat Inspection Division issued a rule that limited the amount of water in a cured, smoked ham to 10 percent of the weight of the original meat, which stood until large meatpackers pressured the division to end the regulation. A subsequent investigation led to the division to conclude that processing was slipping from their grasp and, in December 1960, the division rescinded the earlier ruling with the understanding that the rule had unduly burdened federally-inspected processors and made their canned, cured hams uncompetitive.⁶⁷ As will be discussed in the following chapter, this investigation eventually resulted in a massive expansion of meat inspection but the

⁶⁶ "Distribution and Cost," n.d., Post Mortem, Box 4, Records Relating to Meat Inspection, 1906-1980, RG 462, Records of the Food and Consumer Services, College Park, MD.

⁶⁷ Memorandum, Lloyd I. Holmes to Dr. John R. Scott, November 16, 1960, (3) Review of Situation, Ham-Water Added – Task Force – (7), Box 2, Meat Inspection Division Subject Number Files, 1958, RG 463, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, National Archives, College Park, MD.

immediate consequence was that meat inspectors revealed how regulation altered the industry and its products.

With regulators within the Department of Agriculture struggling to keep pace with the rapidly changing industry, the Eisenhower administration's vision of beef policy required it to lead to the creation of a stable yet competitive marketplace and provide a safe space for production to peacefully expand. Eisenhower entered the White House concerned about economic conflict and chaos and therefore hoped to use his office to ameliorate the class conflict he saw as created by industrialization, which he called a "middle way."⁶⁸ He made a sort of peace with the Keynesian state in his administration's recognition of the expanded federal power of the prior two decades as permanent. He decided to keep certain federal economic programs around to ensure social harmony. This meant that the powers granted since the New Deal of the 1930s were to be retained and used where appropriate. Eisenhower described this to his brother as a compromise with political realities, writing, "Should any political party attempt to abolish social security, unemployment insurance, and eliminate labor laws and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history."⁶⁹ As the historian Kim Phillips-Fein put it, the Eisenhower administration "actively embraced the idea that government could play a positive role in society by transcending the narrow self-interest

⁶⁸ Robert Griffith, "Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth," *The American History Review* 87, no. 1 (February 1982): 89-91.

⁶⁹ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Edgar Eisenhower, November 8, 1954, quoted in L. Galambos and D. Van Ee, eds., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower* 15, part VI, ch. 13 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 1386.

of economic classes and mediating conflicts between social groups.”⁷⁰ The goal of domestic peace meant pragmatically embracing the tools created by the other party.

Across the executive branch, including at the Department of Agriculture, Eisenhower appointees shifted political economic policy toward this moderate conservative position. Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz in testimony before a Congressional hearing on agricultural regulations of the meat industry illuminated his department’s contribution to the middle way. He described the administration as working for “the assurance of fair competition and fair trade practices” and that the administration sought “the prevention and correction of irregularities and abuses” in interstate meat production, which meant ending “unfair, discriminatory, and deceptive practices or the control of prices and the development of monopolies.” He suggested that meat industry regulations worked for the benefit of producers, specifically, farmers and ranchers, in creating “open competitive market conditions and reasonable marketing costs.” Finally, he claimed, the administration viewed its regulatory goal as protecting industry “from unfair, deceptive, unjustly discriminatory or monopolistic tendencies of competitors, large or small.”⁷¹

The administration believed in a version of good governance when it came to its regulatory goals, which guided their enactment of beef policy. As an ideal, “good governance” came out of progressive reformers searching for a means of achieving the

⁷⁰ Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen’s Crusade against the New Deal* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 56-57.

⁷¹ Earl L. Butz, “Statement by Earl L. Butz, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Before the Anti-Trust and Monopoly Subcommittee of the Senate Committee of the Judiciary, May 22, 1957,” Senate (1), Box 39, Series VI, Ezra Taft Benson Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

order and industrial peace that seemed impossible under urban machines and their powers of patronage.⁷² Good governance, as the historian Elizabeth Tandy Shermer demonstrates, formed a core of the later rise of conservative politicians in the Sunbelt during the postwar era.⁷³ It made its way into the Republican administration. The administration used good governance as an ideal, even if they avoided using the label, to guide their approach to implementing federal regulations. Their understanding of regulation meant the government being open, honest, fair, and responsive to industry demands while avoiding an outright assault on regulations as their conservative wanted. There was a moderate's view of regulation, seeing it as serving best when serving the needs of both the regulated and the public while trying in good faith to sustain the free market. Public peace and wellbeing was to be maintained and the industry being regulated was to be improved by the regulatory process. Notably, their goals included neither penalizing private businesses for failing to meet regulations nor encouraging democratic engagement with the regulatory process.

The Department of Agriculture's commitment to good governance can be seen in two related celebrations of meat regulatory programs. The first was the "National Pure Food, Drug, Cosmetic, and Meat Inspection Laws Week" timed in 1956 to correspond with the fiftieth anniversary of the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act.

⁷² Although not a significant part of the historiography of progressivism, the idea of "good governance" shares a similar source as ideals like the "public good," in that both propose to distill what is best for society into a singular essence. On the public good, see Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper, 2009), 9, 136, and 158; Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 28. The concept emerged from the family as a metaphor for government and society and became a source of urban reform and a template to be imposed on other nations. Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 4, 83, and 242.

⁷³ Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 130 and 138.

The president signed a resolution supporting these progressive achievements, which had the support of federal regulators, industry leaders, and citizen groups.⁷⁴ The celebration originated from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), so the main focus was on the Pure Food and Drug Act and its 1938 amendment, the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. Benson's Department of Agriculture had little to add or critique about the public proclamation except to recommend that meat inspection receive its due. The overall message of the celebration was that, since 1906, citizens were protected by a modern and progressive federal consumer safety net that was so good that no one even had to notice it.

The other celebration was for the fiftieth anniversary of the Meat Inspection Act. This one focused exclusively on how the department and the industry worked together to the public safety. The department's public outreach emphasized the fiftieth anniversary as a reflection of how the act created a public health system in which the government and the regulated industry were essentially partners in protecting the public.⁷⁵ This spirit of cooperation suffused the literature, a work of both the federal government and industry groups like the American Meat Institute and the National Live Stock and Meat Board under the leadership of Wesley Hardenbergh of the AMI. Private industry, according to Hardenbergh, used promotional tie-in materials "for pushing meats from plants under

⁷⁴ M. B. Folsom to Mr. Hughes, January 4, 1956, OF 236-C, Food and Drug Administration, Box 742, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

⁷⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service, "Fiftieth Anniversary Commemoration," 1956, Box 5, RG 462, Records of the Food and Consumer Services, National Archives Location 2, College Park, MD.

Federal inspection,” hoping to raise the profile of federally inspected meat.⁷⁶ The associated literature promoted the harmonious nature of inspection services and the overall benevolence of their work (see figure 4.2). In a June letter published as part of the celebration, Eisenhower wrote to Benson to say that federal meat inspection “has contributed markedly to the development of the great American meat packing industry, and has assured livestock producers that the products of their industry are being properly merchandized.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service, “Fiftieth Anniversary Commemoration,” 1956, Box 5, RG 462, Records of the Food and Consumer Services, National Archives Location 2, College Park, MD.

⁷⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Ezra T. Benson, June 23, 1956, published in U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service, “Fiftieth Anniversary Commemoration,” 1956, Box 5, RG 462, Records of the Food and Consumer Services, National Archives Location 2, College Park, MD.

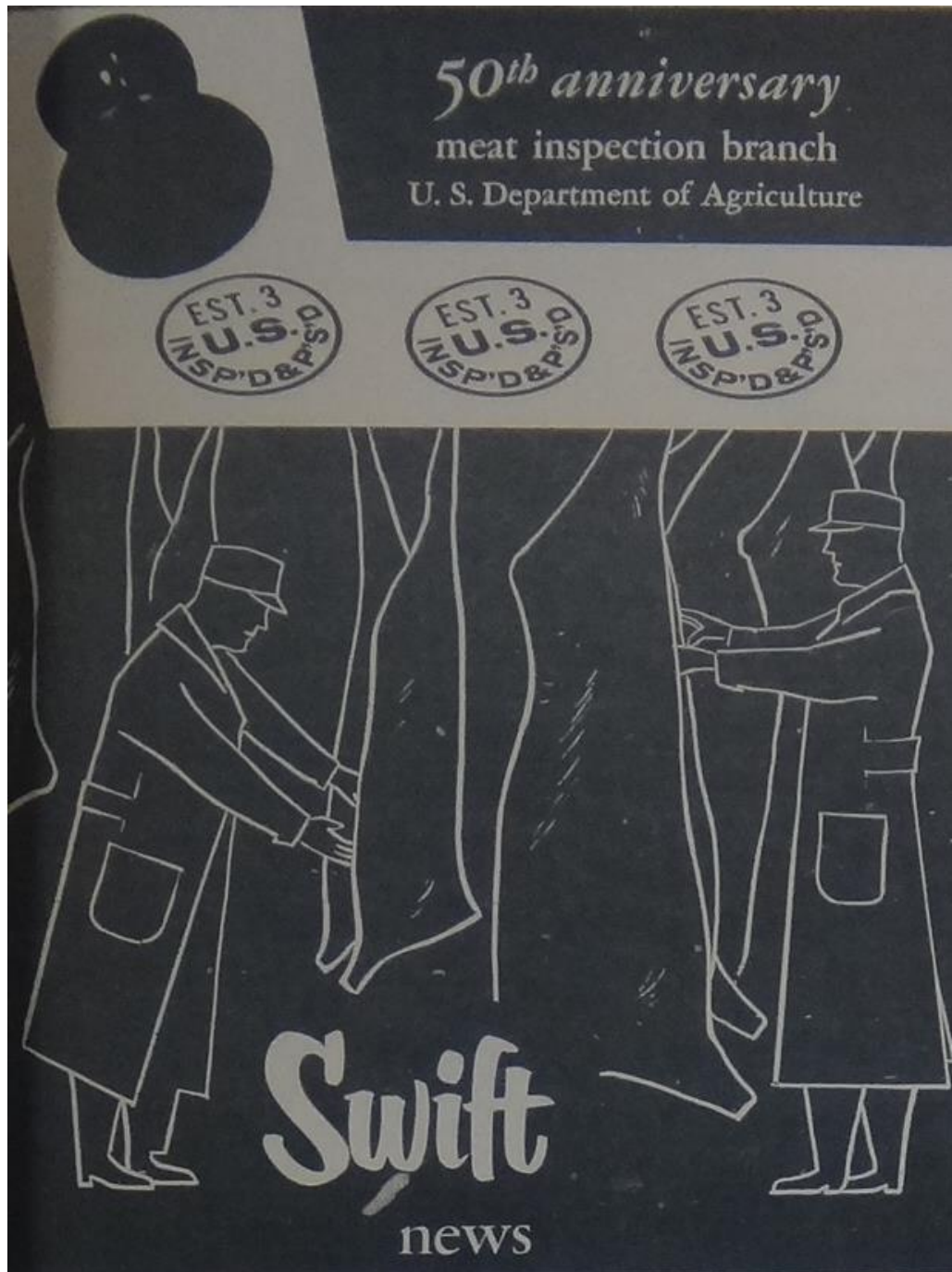


Figure 4.2: Example of a meat company celebrating meat inspection as part of the production process.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, *Fiftieth Anniversary Commemoration* (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1956).

The fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Meat Inspection Act revealed what good governance could mean to an administration seeking to shore up its right flank

while still demonstrating its belief in government. It meant boosting consumption in order to support private enterprise, the essence of beef policy under Eisenhower and Benson. The anniversary celebration included a multimedia campaign titled, “Meats with Approval,” that had the express goal of “stressing the wholesomeness of the meats available to American consumers and the importance of meat in the diet.”⁷⁸ The campaign was meant to promote the idea that, although meat inspection exists and should not be discontinued, American consumers ought to realize that they had nothing to fear from meat even without inspection. This was a tight ideological rope for the Republican administration to walk since it meant embracing a progressive policy initiative that constituted one of the most intrusive yet common ways for Americans to interact with the federal government while also championing the idea the meat industry did not need to be inspected. To oppose the measure would have required reinventing meat policy from the ground up, which Eisenhower had no interest in doing. The Department of Agriculture under Benson chose, instead, to portray its existing programs, like meat inspection, as boosting consumption in order to provide economic security for producers and the industry. The celebrations championed a responsible government that refused to burden producers even when given the powers over the meat industry.

While celebrating the Department of Agriculture’s good governance of the meat industry, Benson still had to contend with the politically explosive problem of farm

⁷⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service, “Fiftieth Anniversary Commemoration,” 1956, Box 5, RG 462, Records of the Food and Consumer Services, National Archives Location 2, College Park, MD. “Meats with Approval” was also the name of a 1946 film made by the Meat Inspection Division to explain the meat inspection process to a broader audience. Memorandum, A.R. Miller to Owners and Operators of Official Establishments, September 23, 1949, Numbered Meat Inspection Memos (W. Caplinger), Box 3, Records Relating to Meat Inspection, 1906-1980, RG 462, Records of the Food and Consumer Services, National Archives Location 2, College Park, MD.

policy. In this, Benson demonstrated what he meant by securing economic stability through governing in a fair and responsible way. For him, it meant fixing the so-called “farm problem” by doing away with the current programs of sending payments directly to farmers. During the late-1940s, farmers were trapped in spiral of earning less income for producing more crops, which was exacerbated by the debt incurred by borrowing to afford to buy modern farming equipment like mechanical harvesters, chemical fertilizers, and irrigation pumps that had let them keep up with the demand for growing more crops.⁷⁹ The Truman administration dealt with farmers’ economic distress through providing a supplementary income in order to preserve farmers’ purchasing power parity with other Americans’.⁸⁰ This was a violation of good governance to Benson, who viewed direct payments as irresponsible. He hoped to innovate a new way of saving farmers that would not make them into the government’s dependents, an outcome that violated his spiritual conviction that men ought never to be robbed of their freedom to fail since freely choosing the righteous path was the key to heaven.⁸¹ Instead, he had a vision of the federal government removing itself from agriculture by making farmers self-sufficient. It would be a government-free farming built on good governance, market-friendly programs, and conservative Mormon doctrine.

To achieve his goals, Benson argued that farmers should have a “banking system” for farmland and pasturage. Farmers would be able to take parts of their land temporarily

⁷⁹ R. Douglas Hurt, *Problems of Plenty: The American Farmer in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 97-123.

⁸⁰ On farm policy under Truman, see Robert J. Matusow, *Farm Policies and Politics in the Truman Years* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).

⁸¹ On Benson’s spirituality and his ideas of free will and failure, see Chapter 3.

out of production by setting it aside for a period of ten years to allow it to rest and regain its nutritional value. This would allow the land to once again be able to provide for plants needs once farmers withdrew the land from the bank and farmed it again.⁸² Benson's plan became law when Eisenhower signed the Soil Bank Act of 1956, which created a system of paying farmers and ranchers to set land aside to for future use.⁸³ Thus was Benson able to shift farm policy away from its New Deal roots and into a new area. Instead of paying farmers directly when the price of a commodity dropped, the new program allowed land to be taken out of production without decreasing incomes. Total production would drop and individual commodity prices would rise. Benson defended this approach in several places throughout 1956 and 1957. To an industry group, he explained what ending direct farm payments would accomplish: "All of us hope that this is another indication that farmers will share more fully in the nation's high level of prosperity. *We are* a prosperous nation of people. We are peaceful people living in peace. We have an abundance of good things to eat, to wear, to shelter ourselves."⁸⁴ He warned about the threats of failing to scale back government spending and the need for programs such as his soil bank: "We have unlocked the secret of abundance. I pray to God that this generation may not, through fear of the very abundance which we have created, lose the freedom and responsibility won at so great a price by those who laid the foundations of

⁸² Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Macmillan, 2003).

⁸³ *Agricultural Act of 1956*, Public Law 84-540, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 70 (1957): 327-213. The Soil Bank Act was Title I of the larger act.

⁸⁴ Ezra Taft Benson, "Address by Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson, before the Margarine All-Industry Conference, Hot Springs, Virginia, May 24, 1956, 11:00 a.m. EST (12 noon EDT)," OF 1—May 1956, Box 1, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

this choice land...God forbid that we should basely lose that which has been so gloriously won.”⁸⁵ The soil bank was an act of market-friendly good governance that protected the supply-side of the economy and did so in a way that preserved farmers’ freedom to choose.

Benson’s prior celebrations of meat inspection and his success with the farm bill prepared him to handle a legislative battle over the Packers and Stockyard Act in 1957. The fight began when several lawmakers introduced five bills in the House of Representatives and two in the Senate to return the responsibility of regulating meat packers and stockyards to the Federal Trade Commission. The Department of Agriculture was seen as unable and unwilling to handle the responsibility of regulating trade and monopoly within the meat industry. According to one of the sponsors, Emmanuel Celler (D-NY), the stakes were too high for anything less than full protection because of “the vital place that the cost of meat occupies in the American family budget,” which only the FTC could provide.⁸⁶ The key issue was the department allowing chain stores to avoid commission regulation by claiming “packer” as their legal status and thus falling under department oversight. The commission sparked the legislative interest by admitting that there were food retailers it could no longer regulate such as the chain store Food Fair, which had acquired a 20 percent stake in a meat packer in 1943 and was no regulated as

⁸⁵ Ezra Taft Benson, “Address by Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson, before the Margarine All-Industry Conference, Hot Springs, Virginia, May 24, 1956, 11:00 a.m. EST (12 noon EDT),” OF 1—May 1956, Box 1, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

⁸⁶ Emanuel Celler quoted in U.S. Congress, House, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Antitrust, and Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, Subcommittee on Commerce and Finance, *Meat Packers*, 85th Cong., 1st session (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), 3.

if it was a meatpacker.⁸⁷ The proposed change split the industry. Smaller meat packers represented by the Western States Meat Packers Association supported the move while the larger meat packers represented by the American Meat Institute opposed any changes in the law.⁸⁸

The Department of Agriculture fought back against what Benson understood to be an assault on his office's rightful regulatory purview. Benson hoped to maintain departmental oversight of the industry. The health of the economy, as he understood it, rested on maintaining the act since he preferred it be used to keep packing plants in check. They were two parts of the meat industry that were in a position to be used by businesses to price squeeze both farms and consumers and only the department had the expertise and interest to prevent that from happening. As a spokesman for the department explained it in testimony before a Senate committee, removing regulatory jurisdiction from the Department of Agriculture over packers, as was being considered, would undermine the very purpose of the act.⁸⁹ But Benson also had to contend with developments within the industry when deciding how to respond to the legislation. With smaller packers favoring Federal Trade Commission oversight and larger ones favoring his department, he reached out to a friend who worked as an agriculture economist at the University of Minnesota for advice. What should he do to support the meat industry's

⁸⁷ Frank Wooley to Allen J. Ellender, August 14, 1957, Agriculture – Meat Packers, Box 1, Files of Jack Z. Anderson, Files of Administrative Assistant to the President, Staff Files, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

⁸⁸ E. F. Forbes quoted in Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly, *Unfair Trade Practices in the Meat Industry*, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 95-96. Forbes was the Western States Meat Packers Association president, which had 462 member companies in 1957 and was first formed in 1946 as a voice of the smaller firms not represented by the American Meat Institute.

⁸⁹ True D. Morse quoted in Senate Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly, *Unfair Trade Practices in the Meat Industry*, 350.

best interests?⁹⁰ His friend responded not with an answer but with a series of questions and insights into the regulation of the industry. Did the department even wanted the burden and responsibility for investigating unfair business practices at all, and, if not, would it disrupt the industry to transfer power to the Federal Trade Commission? After all, he explained, the major reason for the larger packers to oppose the transfer was because of lingering memories of the commission investigation from forty years ago that had launched the Consent Decree, which large packers desired to avoid. Finally, he asked Benson to consider “whether or not the transfer will serve the interests not only of livestock producers but of the industry as a whole and of the general welfare.”⁹¹ Benson appreciated the thoughtful response and considered his options.⁹²

As much as Benson wished to preserve his department’s authority over the meat industry, even he admitted that there was a problem. The changing structure of the meat industry had begun to undermine the regulatory apparatus within the Department of Agriculture. An internal report finished in April 1957 revealed just how thin the department was stretched.⁹³ The task of regulating the trade practices of an industry with over two-thousand stockyards and another two thousand meatpacking establishments fell to a branch with 93 personnel. As a result, the Packers and Stockyards Branch had been

⁹⁰ Ezra T. Benson to Dr. O. B. Jesness, February 27, 1957, Universities (1), Box 40, Series VI, Papers of Ezra Taft Benson, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

⁹¹ O. B. Jesness to Secretary Ezra Taft Benson, March 5, 1957, Universities (1), Box 40, Series VI, Papers of Ezra Taft Benson, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

⁹² Ezra T. Benson to Dr. O. B. Jesness, March 12, 1957, Universities (1), Box 40, Series VI, Papers of Ezra Taft Benson, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

⁹³ US Department of Agriculture, “Report on Current Activities and Problem under the Packers and Stockyards Act,” April 4, 1957, Agriculture – Meat Packers, Box 1, Files of Jack Z. Anderson, Files of Administrative Assistant to the President, Staff Files, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS. It is unclear which branch or division within the USDA was responsible for the report.

rationing its investigatory power by historically focusing on the largest stockyards, which amounted to a little over four-hundred stockyards. On top of that, the total amount of cattle slaughter in the hands of the largest slaughterers decreased from 1950 to 1955 by 5 percent and the dispersion of the industry meant that the number of meatpacking plants was likely to grow even as each plant handled less product.

Further complicating the problem were the fourteen chain stores registering as packers to avoid the harsher oversight of the Federal Trade Commission. These stores included six of the leading national chains with a total of more than ten-thousand retail locations in addition to their packing activities. Additionally, interstate long-haul trucking had eroded the importance of stockyards as terminal markets for livestock by allowing ranchers and packing plant owners to trade cattle directly with each other without the need to congregate at centralized locations.⁹⁴ With trucks undermining the traditional stockyards and chain stores masquerading as packers, the Department of Agriculture appeared to be overwhelmed. Nevertheless, the report to Benson put the problems in as positive a light as possible by focusing on recent improvements. Not only had Congress approved a larger budget for the next fiscal year, which mostly meant hiring more personnel, but it also meant having the funds to pursue packers as well as stockyards, which indicated that the ability of the department to manage the interstate commerce of meat could only improve. By earlier 1957, the department was already taking a more aggressive stance: the branch was currently bringing seventeen cases against packers, out of a total of forty-six cases then active.

⁹⁴ Historians would later recognize the magnitude of trucking's ability to reshape the industry. Hamilton, *Trucking Country*, 151.

Armed with a positive assessment of the Packers and Stockyard Branch, Benson was prepared to defend the Department of Agriculture as being the proper department to regulate stockyards and packing plants. He had Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Earl L. Butz argue for the department in Congressional hearings. Butz's prepared statement, delivered in some form at three different subcommittee hearings, made the case that the original 1921 act had been so important that altering it was dangerous and jurisdiction needed to remain within the department in order to preserve anti-trust aims of the original act. According to the prepared statements, the act, by having regulatory oversight at two key geographic points within the industry, provided for the means of protecting the public by a department that specialized in agriculture. As Butz put it, "The Act seeks to assure farmers and ranchers of open competitive market conditions and reasonable marketing costs in the livestock and meat packing industry.... The Act provides protection to the livestock and meat industry itself from unfair, deceptive, unjustly discriminatory or monopolistic tendencies of competitors, large or small."⁹⁵ In the same prepared testimony, he described the act as carefully integrated, mirroring the meat industry layout, and splitting the regulatory functions would hinder the operations of each. Decentralization within the industry as well as the expanding number of both stockyards and packing plants made administration more difficult. Additionally, he acknowledged uneven enforcement, with packing plants, or Title III, receiving less attention than

⁹⁵ "Statement by Earl L. Butz, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Before the Anti-Trust and Monopoly Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, May 22, 1957," Senate, 1957 (1), Box 39, Series VI, Papers of Ezra Taft Benson, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

stockyard enforcement, or Title II.⁹⁶ But, he only recommended amending the act to allow for the Federal Trade Commission to investigate chain stores classifying themselves as packers since they were still largely a retailing company hiding behind packing operations.

What began as a challenge to the Department of Agriculture's regulatory powers ended up reaffirming them. The bill the president signed, H.R. 9020, amended the 1921 act to allow the Federal Trade Commission to investigate meatpackers, provided that it coordinate with the Department of Agriculture. The amendment also expanded the department's oversight of stockyards by removing the requirement that a stockyard under federal regulation had to be more than twenty-thousand square feet.⁹⁷ This legislative victory came for Benson as two court cases in 1956 upheld the Consent Decree and the Packers and Stockyard Act.⁹⁸ While the commission would now share some of the burden for regulating meatpacking, the department retained the core of its regulatory power over meat production through the amended act and continuation of the Consent Decree. The purpose of these regulatory programs remained unchanged: the prevention of a small handful of meatpacking firms forming a monopoly to dominate the food production and retail industries. It was a devil's bargain struck in the early 1920s. The largest meatpackers were forced to stay away from food retailing but were allowed to

⁹⁶ The economic historians Robert M. Aduddell and Louis P. Cain argue that the Department of Agriculture abandoned completely Title II enforcement during the 1920s. Aduddell and Cain, "Public Policy toward 'The Greatest Trust in the World,'" 238.

⁹⁷ *An Act to Amend the Packers and Stockyards Act, 1921, as Amended, and for Other Purposes*, Public Law 85-909, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 72, (1958): 1749-1751.

⁹⁸ Aduddell and Cain, "Consent Decree in the Meatpacking Industry, 1920-1956," 359-61; *Producers Livestock Marketing Association v. United States of America and Ezra Taft Benson, Secretary of Agriculture, Respondents, and Denver Union Stock Yard Company, Intervenor, Respondent* 241 F.2d 192 (10th Cir. 1956).

monopolize meatpacking. The department's regulatory infrastructure remained and allowed the department to monitor and assess developments with the industry since the Packers and Stockyard Act along with the Consent Decree empowered the department to collect information about packing operations beyond the inspection authorized by the Meat Inspection Act. It continued to matter to the department not only that meat be clean and facilities well-made, but that the industries remained healthy and profitable. Under Benson, this meant that the department had an obligation to protecting the free and competitive market.

Two bills signed into law by Eisenhower in the late-1950s reflected the popular appeal of beef policy. In 1957, he signed into law the Poultry Inspection Act, which expanded mandatory inspection to include interstate poultry productions and products.⁹⁹ Federal poultry inspection at that time was only twenty-five years old and voluntary but the rapid growth of the poultry industry pressured lawmakers to authorize the department to treat poultry as analogous to red meat, a realization that poultry was becoming a meat for most Americans.¹⁰⁰ The law aimed to protect the poultry industry by protecting both consumers and workers from harmful or unsafe meat as had been done with red meat in 1906. The new act, though, addressed the interests of smaller producers. The act allowed the secretary of agriculture to exempt low-volume plants from portions of the law. For these reasons, the Eisenhower administration and the Department of Agriculture

⁹⁹ *An Act to Provide for the Compulsory Inspection by the United States Department of Agriculture of Poultry and Poultry Products*, Public Law 85-172, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 72, (1958): 441-449.

¹⁰⁰ On poultry becoming a meat, see Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table*, 103-29.

leadership approved of the law.¹⁰¹ By approving the small-business carve out, the administration signaled its contention that there could be too much regulation and that good policy treated businesses differently based on how much regulation that they could afford to handle.

The other bill, the Humane Slaughter Act of 1958—ostensibly an act of animal welfare—enjoyed the support of the administration. Initially, the bill required immediate implementation but, in its final form, the law gave Benson the choice to implement humane slaughter standards at his leisure.¹⁰² Humane slaughter was a concept that came to national prominence in the 1950s through the efforts of animal welfare groups’ interest in improved production techniques that minimized animal suffering as they died. Testifying before Congressional hearings on humane slaughter methods, a spokesperson for a humane society said, “In a country as modern as we pride ourselves to be, how can we in conscience and decency continue to condone such senseless, un-businesslike, impractical means of slaughter.”¹⁰³ M. R. Clarkson, Deputy Administration of the Agriculture Research Service within the Department of Agriculture, responded to the mandatory legislation favored by humane societies by saying that the department needed the law to instead have the department study the issue first without the mandating

¹⁰¹ “Some Considerations Relating to Enactment of Compulsory Poultry Inspection Legislation,” [July 1957?], OF 122-J Poultry Industry, Box 530, Official File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

¹⁰² *An Act to Establish the Use of Humane Methods of Slaughter of Livestock as a Policy of the United States, and for Other Purposes*, Public Law 85-765, *US Statutes at Large* 72 (1959), 862.

¹⁰³ Statement by Raymond J. Hanfield in House Committee on Agriculture, Subcommittee on Livestock and Feed Grains, *Humane Slaughter: Hearings on H.R. 176, H.R. 2880, H.R. 3029, H.R. 3049, HR 5671, H.R. 5820, H.R. 6422, and H.R. 6303*, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 22.

humane slaughter.¹⁰⁴ Clarkson's version would have had the department play a minimal role. But the humane societies mostly won with the bill in its final form including a mandate that the department would set humane slaughter standards after a two year study of the issue. Benson approved of the two-year gap. He wrote President Pro Tempore of the Senate Lyndon Baines Johnson (D-TX) to explain his endorsement of the bill: "The strongest personal convictions favor adoption of the best and surest way to bring real and lasting improvement in this field. To do this requires the evaluation of methods with scientific knowledge to assure that the measures adopted are humane." Benson thought that "this would provide the Congress with a fully objective proposal substantiated by fact and scientific judgement on which constructive compulsory legislation could be based."¹⁰⁵ In other words, if his department was to force production standards on the industry, at least the humane slaughter ones would be the result of scientific inquiry and implemented before he left office.

By the end of the 1950s, the Department of Agriculture maintained its ability to set beef policy through its regulatory infrastructure yet cracks soon appeared that threatened to turn into fissures large enough to topple the government's efforts at securing access to beef for Americans. The two cracks were a fight over trade and the sudden fear that beef may not be that healthy. Benson tackled those problems as he tackled all of the problems that appeared during his time as secretary of agriculture: through focusing on production volume with the hope of finding the right tool for tamping down soaring production and stabilize prices. His dedication to what he saw as

¹⁰⁴ House Subcommittee on Livestock and Feed Grains, *Humane Slaughter*, 133.

¹⁰⁵ Ezra T. Benson to Lyndon B. Johnson, July 29, 1958, Senate, 1959 (2), Box 39, Series VI, Papers of Ezra Taft Benson, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

American's innate right to the diet of their choosing—their dietary citizenship—and to keeping the nation's food production and consumption economy the envy of the world—dietary modernism—drove him to attempt to fix both so that the beef would continue to flow to markets and into consumer's bellies. Media reports of heart disease research suggested that high amounts of beef consumption could lead to an early death but Benson took no action to confront this possible threat the beef industry.¹⁰⁶ While the public health threat faded from view by 1960, the trade issue did not end when he left office. His successor for secretary of state, Orville Freeman, spent three years after taking office fighting over trade issues. Before it reach that point, though, Benson began battling trade as a part of his battle over surplus production.

Trade grew as a problem toward the end of the 1950s and posed a fundamental threat to the logic of beef policy. Could the executive branch be relied upon to look out for the meat industry, even if the industry itself lacked a singular policy perspective? A favored tool for disposing of excess crops was to find way of disposing them without driving up prices, to make it seem like the excess production did not exist at all. Farmers had been unable to find a use for all of their agricultural products and needed a creative way to find new markets for products that would not otherwise be used.¹⁰⁷ The idea was to use policy to let farmers grow as much as they could and then shield them from prices dropping due to oversupply. To this end, Eisenhower signed the Agricultural Trade

¹⁰⁶ "Fat of the Land," *Time*, January 13, 1961, 48.

¹⁰⁷ Interagency Committee on Agricultural Surplus Disposal, "Prospects of Foreign Disposal Domestic Agricultural Surpluses," 1955, p. 14, Interagency Committee on Agricultural Surplus Disposal (2), Box 33, Subject File, Confidential File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

Development and Assistance Act of 1954, commonly called P.L. 480.¹⁰⁸ The law created a system of having the Department of Agriculture, through Title I of the act, pay private companies to ship grain overseas and allow the recipient governments to pay the department in their local currency, which was then used by other government agencies to pay for local projects.¹⁰⁹ PL 480 cheapened agricultural exports and helped fund development projects across the decolonizing world while facilitating the emergence of an international system of food production with U.S. grains as its core.¹¹⁰ It also contributed to the Cold War by serving as a reason for countries to align with the U.S.¹¹¹ Eisenhower summarized his administration's plan for the law in his signing statement when he explained that his administration had "recommended that the burdensome stocks which had already accumulated be liquidated over a period of time, through disposal programs that would create new markets for United States products, and assist friendly countries."¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ *An Act to Increase the Consumption of United States Agricultural Commodities in Foreign Countries, to Improve the Foreign Relations of the United States, and for Other Purposes*, Public Law 83-480, *US Statutes at Large* 68 (1955), 454-59.

¹⁰⁹ Harriet Friedmann, "The Origins of Third World Food Dependence," in *The Food Question: Profits vs. People*, ed. Harriet Bernstein, et al. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 18; Amy L. S. Staples, *The Birth of Development: How the World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization, and World Health Organization Changed the World, 1945-1965* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2006), 98; Robert G. Stanley, *Food for Peace: Hope and Reality of U.S. Food Aid* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1973).

¹¹⁰ Bill Winders, *The Politics of Food Supply: U.S. Agricultural Policy in the World Economy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 148.

¹¹¹ For example, President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt pressured the Kennedy administration to expand the limited food aid provided by the Eisenhower administration by putting his country on the list of PL 480 recipients. Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), 79.

¹¹² Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Statement by the President upon Signing the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954," July 10, 1954, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed August 5, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=24605>.

While exporting excess grains were acceptable, Benson did not favor exporting beef, for, as he noted, “there is a very large potential demand here at home.”¹¹³ The federal government purchased 288 million pounds of beef between 1953 and 1960 while the total beef production during the same time amounted to more than 109 billion pounds.¹¹⁴ Meat industry demand for grains put upward pressure on production and pushed farmers to produce more grains than they ever had before, which contributed to surplus production. Indeed, cheap grains facilitated the creation of a highly-capitalized, intensive domestic food industry. Beef heated up the market for feed grains. The White House worried that the “improvement in diet” that had recently led Americans to consume more meat presented further complications “as meat consumption has increased, the tendency to favor beef over pork further increases requirements for agricultural resources.”¹¹⁵ With more people eating more beef, cattle, who ate more grains than hogs to reach slaughter weight, became a lucrative market for farmers. It was a system later termed the “livestock complex” by the sociologist Harriet Friedmann, a process by which foodstuffs like maize (corn), soya (soybeans), and tapioca became both food and feed and

¹¹³ Memorandum, Benson to Robert J. Kleberg, Jr., November 26, 1954, Benson, Ezra 1953 (1), Box 5, Whitman File, Administration File, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower as President, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

¹¹⁴ The Record for Achievement for the “Direct Distribution Program” for Surplus Food, Agriculture Department File No. 2 (7), Alpha Subject Files, Paarlberg, Don, Records 1954-61, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS. Total beef production calculated from Percival Thomas Ziegler, *The Meat We Eat*, 1962 ed. (Danville, IL: Interstate Printers and Publishers, 1962), 255. The Eisenhower Administration had initiated a program the used government purchases to stabilize and shore up beef prices, which lasted throughout his term in office. Gabriel Hauge to Magnus Wefald, October 31, 1956, OF 106-D Livestock, 1953 (2), Box 427, Official File, White House Central Files 1953-61, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

¹¹⁵ Interagency Committee on Agricultural Surplus Disposal, “Prospects of Foreign Disposal Domestic Agricultural Surpluses,” 1955, p. 16, Interagency Committee on Agricultural Surplus Disposal (2), Box 33, Subject File, Confidential File, White House Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

thereby forcing humans and animals to compete for same calories.¹¹⁶ P.L. 480 made this complex possible by giving a mechanism for dumping cheap grains into foreign markets and rewarding U.S. farmers for chasing the humans and animals demand for more grains.

Agricultural exports, whether grain or meat, were never only about the political economy of production but also about using “the American way of life” in the Cold War. The administration turned to the concept as a way of shoring up weaknesses elsewhere. With the Soviet Union launching its Sputnik satellite in 1957, Americans it seemed in that year had lost the space race before it had even started. The administration’s response was to weaponize, in a sense, the nation’s agriculture abundance and use that against the Soviet Union. This led to the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959, where Vice President Richard M. Nixon declared that the goal of the demonstration American consumer living was so that the average Soviet citizen could get “a clearer picture of life within the United States.”¹¹⁷ While the Soviet Union may have beaten the United States to space but the average Soviet citizen ate about one-half the amount of beef in 1953 that Americans ate in 1955.¹¹⁸ In 1957, Premier Nikita Khrushchev responded to this deficit by promising that his country would out produce the United States in agriculture in a few

¹¹⁶ Harriet Friedmann, “Distance and Durability: Shaky Foundations of the World Food Economy,” *Third World Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1992): 376-79.

¹¹⁷ Richard M. Nixon, “Nixon Speech in Moscow,” *New York Times*, July 24, 1959.

¹¹⁸ Comparison drawn from Edmund Nash, “Purchasing Power of Soviet Workers, 1953,” August 1953, in *The Kitchen Debate and Cold War Consumer Politics: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Shane Hamilton and Sarah Phillips (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2014), 86; Molly Orshansky, “Food Consumption,” in U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service, *Food Consumption and Dietary Levels of Households in the United States...Some Highlights from the Household Food Consumption Survey, Spring 1955*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1957), 1.

years, particularly of animal-related products: “meat, butter, and milk.”¹¹⁹ Their meeting at the exhibition in Moscow led to the famous Kitchen Debate over the merits of each country’s domestic achievements. According to White House aide Don Paarlberg, it was a unique blend of public policy and human ingenuity because “for the first time in history we dare to think about overcoming, around the world, man’s ancient enemy, hunger. This is an American accomplishment, the result of our Land Grant College work, our enterprise system, our resourceful farm families.” He added, “The underdeveloped nations need our agricultural science and our food far more than they need Communist Sputniks and moon rockets”¹²⁰

Grain exports helped sustain industrial beef production but it was beef imports that proved most consequential for sustaining a policy toward beef. Imports of livestock and meat had long been an important part of the industry, and imports of all meats began rising throughout the postwar era, going from 61 million pounds in 1946 to 870.3 million pounds in 1960.¹²¹ For beef production, the role of imported cattle and meat changed as the feedlot and independent slaughter and processing became more important to the industry. Before the 1940s, imported cattle largely served stock building purposes and imported beef served specific consumer markets but that changed as new markets opened

¹¹⁹ Nikita Krushchev quoted in *The Kitchen Debate and Cold War Consumer Politics: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Shane Hamilton and Sarah Phillips (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2014), 10.

¹²⁰ Memorandum, Don Paarlberg to Ezra T. Benson, May 20, 1960, OF 106 Agriculture-Farming, 1960 (2), Box 427, Official File, White House Central Files 1953-61, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

¹²¹ “Foreign Meat Offered for Importation into the United States,” n.d., Post Mortem, Box 4, Records Relating to Meat Inspection, 1906-1980, RG 462, Records of the Food and Consumer Services, National Archives, College Park, MD.

up within the United States for cattle and beef from elsewhere.¹²² With the end of World War II came the need for cheap feeder cattle and lower grade beef for processing to support an industry attempting to rapidly grow. The total pounds of live cattle and beef imported into the United States rose. In 1947, of the 11.5 billion pounds of total beef produced in the United States, 64 million pounds came from imported cattle and meat; in 1960, the total pounds stood at 15.3 billion pounds with 938 million pounds coming from imported cattle and meat.¹²³ Imports of live cattle failed to earn the ire of domestic producers, with animal health laws and programs, such as the foot-and-mouth eradication, serving as an effective tool for keep unwanted animals at bay.¹²⁴ The same could not be said of imported beef. While beef fell under similar laws as livestock, imported beef became a battleground for beef policy once certain industry groups decided to oppose imports.

It was not Benson who had to deal with the beef industry turning against imports but his successor as secretary of agriculture, Orville Freeman. Freeman served as the secretary under both John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, from 1961 to 1968, and had to establish a stance on trade soon after taking office. He responded to producer's concerns about foreign meat imports by adhering to the Kennedy administration's broader embrace of free trade. The Kennedy administration came into office promising to

¹²² Kristin Hoganson, "Meat in the Middle: Converging Borderlands in the U.S. Midwest, 1865-1900," *Journal of American History* 98, no. 4 (2012): 1025-51; Skaggs.

¹²³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Marketing Service, *Live Stock and Meat Situation*, November 1963 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1963), 36.

¹²⁴ On animal import laws in the 1950s, see U.S. Tariff Commission, "Proposed Items for Possible Negotiation under Authority of Sec. 212 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962," August 12, 1963, Agriculture-Trade Expansion Act Section 212, Box 8, Subject, File, White House Staff Files for Christian A. Herter, Presidential Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA.

reinvigorate the country's position in the world by working domestically to "build a society of strength and vigor" and then to use that vigor and strength to spread freedom and prosperity to the rest of the world.¹²⁵ Trade figured into this goal by being the vehicle for advancing the kinds of economic freedoms seen as core components of the American free enterprise system. Indeed, as Kennedy made clear in his first State of the Union address in January 1961, he considered trade without barriers to be the singular way that Americans could show their commitment to freedom and fighting communism.¹²⁶ He argued that the country needed to be vigorous and robust if it was to lead the free world through building a healthy economy that was free of protectionist trade barriers. Kennedy supported agriculture as a tool of the Cold War through transforming PL 480 into the Food for Peace program and by supporting the Trade Expansion Act of 1962. Both programs sought to create a world trade system with the United States at its core while also becoming the basis for later food-related trade policies.

Secretary of Agriculture Freeman agreed with the president's sentiment. As he explained to his top staff, "It is the basic policy of this Administration and this Department to emphasize the use of our agriculture abundance, both domestically and to meet human needs everywhere and as part of economic assistance and American foreign policy."¹²⁷ Freeman expressed his sense of the popularity of the administration's trade

¹²⁵ John F. Kennedy, "Remarks of Senator John F. Kennedy, Trade Union Council of Liberal Party, New York, NY," October 27, 1960, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=74246>.

¹²⁶ John F. Kennedy, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," January 30, 1961, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=8045>.

¹²⁷ Memorandum, From the Secretary, September 13, 1961, September 1961, Box 1, Orville Freeman Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA.

policy, saying, “I believe the American public is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of our agricultural abundance as an instrument in foreign policy.”¹²⁸ In the same speech, which was to a Lutheran group, he also made clear that animal proteins would most improve the people’s diets across the world and prevent them from sinking into communism. Liberalizing agricultural trade meant constructing a world system that would allow commodities to flow around the globe without interruption, not just about exporting agricultural surpluses. To this end, he worked with foreign governments through the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to create a system of free trade in agriculture.¹²⁹ While this stance later put him at odds with the meat industry over imports, his overarching concern was to create a world system that allowed for the nation’s excess production to flow to people who needed it.

The Department of Agriculture under Freeman’s leadership treated beef policy as a part of a policy of abundance being developed in the administration, meaning “(1) a high rate of employment and economic growth to provide good incomes, and high levels of consumption and (2) a prosperous, flexible agriculture, capable of supplying abundant food and fiber supplies at reasonable prices.”¹³⁰ Mass beef consumption for the new secretary required maintaining a high-wage, high-employment economy along with an agriculture sector that made beef abundant enough for the masses to afford. It meant that

¹²⁸ Orville Freeman, “Remarks Prepared for Delivery by Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman before Lutheran Brotherhood, Shoreham Hotel, Washington, D. C., April 19, 1961, 7:00 p.m., EST,” Speeches 4/61, Box 11, Orville Freeman Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA.

¹²⁹ Memorandum, Orville L. Freeman to the President, November 15, 1961, November 1961, Box 1, Orville Freeman Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA.

¹³⁰ U.S. Department of Agriculture, “An Agricultural Program for the 1960’s,” November 15, 1961, p. 25, Handwritten Notes—Unsorted – 2, Box 3 Orville Freeman Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA.

the farm problem and surplus production could not be allowed to deter the free flow of beef. As he understood it, American farmers had become so successful at growing crops that they threatened themselves with financial ruin but consumption could only increase so much. He explained it this way to a journalist: a car or television manufacturer can always get Americans to buy ten of either product if they need excess demand absorbed but farmers could not get consumers to eat ten meals per day.¹³¹ Farmers were now producing more efficiently than ever before, with one farmer in 1941 feeding eleven people while one farmer in 1961 could feed twenty-five. Farmers were simply too good at producing food. Not just any food, but the kind of food that provided for a beef-based diet. Freeman testified before Congress that an average industrial worker needed to work for an hour to afford “a normal meal for four persons—a good meal consisting of beef sirloin, potatoes, cabbage, bread, butter, milk, and a serving of fruit.” As a comparison, he explained that it took anywhere from two to five hours’ pay for workers across Europe to afford a similar beef-centric meal.¹³² Only through expanding and liberalizing trade could farmers avoid the price squeeze that he understood to be a real long-term threat to the nation’s agriculture economy.

The Kennedy administration focused on trade as a means for saving agriculture as imports erupted as a political issue in 1963. The problem started in 1961 when beef prices began to fall for live cattle, which continued into early 1963 as Choice grade steers at the

¹³¹ Freeman to David Lawrence, December 11, 1961, December 1961, Box 1, Orville Freeman Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA.

¹³² Orville Freeman, “Statement by Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman before Subcommittee on Equipment, Supplies and Manpower, Committee on Agriculture, March 29, 1961,” Notebooks: General Information, Box 4, Orville Freeman Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA.

Chicago stockyard dropped to \$23.96 per hundred weight in 1963.¹³³ On top of that, imports as a percentage of all beef in the United States rose by five times over five years, reaching approximately 10 percent in 1963.¹³⁴ By April 1963, Freeman sensed a problem looming that threatened the administration's most important farm and trade policies. He warned the president that cattlemen were receiving less than average for their livestock and were blaming imports for forcing prices down through cheap competition. But, as the secretary of agriculture explained, imported cattle, while at record highs, were of the lower, less fatty grades and the prices of those grades that directly competed with imported cattle were holding steady. It was the higher grade and the more fatty cuts that had dropped in price.¹³⁵ In his last weekly report to Kennedy before the president's death in November 1963, Freeman explained the cattle crisis in detail. The cattle cycle was in a downward swing, meaning that the 20 to 25 percent price decline from last year was economically natural, as could be expected, and the recent rise of imports was a result of economic choices made by domestic and foreign cattle owners. Cattle owners chasing higher prices were withholding their cattle from feedlots and slaughter to build up their total stock, with total cattle population topping 100 million for the first time in 1962, opening up a market for imports to fill the shortages of cheaper, less fatty grades of cattle. The related problem was that the United States was the only country to lack a protectionist beef policy and had recently become the importer of over 50 percent of all

¹³³ John A. Edwards, *Beef Imports and the U.S. Cattle Market*, Special Report 178 (Corvallis: Agricultural Experiment Station, Oregon State University, 1964), 1.

¹³⁴ Edwards, 1.

¹³⁵ Memorandum, Orville L. Freeman to the President, April 5, 1963, April 1963, Box 2, Orville Freeman Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA.

of the world's beef exports.¹³⁶ As Freeman warned, cattlemen continued to protest cattle imports as the new president, Lyndon Baines Johnson, took over later that month.

Cattle owners' protests led to Congress passing a law that limited part of the executive branch's beef authority. Months of political wrangling after Johnson assumed the presidency allowed the industry's Congressional allies, including Senators Karl E. Mundt (R-SD) and Roman L. Hruska (R-NE), to propose a quota system for all beef coming into the country. Supported by livestock associations but opposed by meatpacking ones, the idea was to restrict competition in order to raise farmers' incomes. The administration and its allies pushed back by, first, coordinating a voluntary system of quotas to be negotiated with individual countries and, second, by explaining that the Kennedy Round of negotiations of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs would create a world system of cattle trade favorable to the United States. They warned that an official quota system would undo the nation's leadership role at the meeting. But, Freeman and the administration failed and Johnson signed the beef quota act in 1964.¹³⁷ The compromise bill required that the secretary of agriculture impose a quota if imports climbed above a target number set by the secretary but based on the average imports from 1959 to 1963.¹³⁸ While a later administration would use quotas to reshape beef policy, for

¹³⁶ Memorandum, Orville L. Freeman to the President, November 12, 1963, November 1963, Box 2, Orville Freeman Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA. For the total cattle population, see Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1970*, 519.

¹³⁷ *An Act to Provide for the Free Importation of Certain Wild Animals, and to Provide of the Imposition of Quotas on Certain Meat and Meat Products*, Public Law 88-482, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 78, (1964): 594.

¹³⁸ "Meat Import Quota Compromise Enacted," in *CQ Almanac* 1964, 20th ed. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1965), 133-38. <http://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/cqal64-1303981>. On the administration's opposition to import quotas, see Folder EX BE 4, Box 10, EX, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Presidential Papers, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

Johnson and Freeman, the quotas were a defeat of the system of free trade that they thought would sustain mass beef consumption.

As 1964 ended, Secretary of Agriculture Freeman faced a defeat of his department's freedom to set beef-related policy. He supported the goal of mass beef consumption first set during the Truman administration and maintained by the Eisenhower administration but now had to contend with the quota law. The administration as a result lost some flexibility in their beef policy and would spend the remainder of his time in office trying to secure Kennedy's promise of a free world built on expanding markets and well-fed people. This loss, though, did little to dissuade Freeman from perusing a goal more important to his vision of mass beef consumption: expanding the Department of Agriculture's meat inspection powers from the 1906 restriction and into intrastate commerce. It was a goal that did not emerge as a national issue until 1967 but slowly burned during his entire tenure as secretary. The chances of his success depended on him finding the right political framework to justify the expansion.

Chapter 5
“Something Priceless”:
Managing Abundance, 1960-1967

President Lyndon Baines Johnson stood in the Rose Garden of the White House on December 15, 1967 and presented for his audience a scene of horror recently uncovered at a meatpacking plant: “beef was being broken on an open dock, by a dirt road, in 95-degree weather. There were flies in the meat. Drums of bones and meat scraps were covered with maggots.” As disgusting as this was, he was presenting not a one-off event but an example of modern beef production gone awry common in too many meatpacking plants across the nation. Thanks to the lack of federal meat inspection, the plant owners engaged in extreme cost-cutting by cutting back on sanitation standards. The situation had reached a tipping point now that 15 percent of all slaughtered meat and 25 percent of all processed meat, totaling 8 3/4 billion pounds of meat per year, lacked federal inspection. Millions of Americans ate those billions of pounds and possibly suffered for it. He was signing the Wholesome Meat Act of 1967 that day to clean up the nation’s meat supply. The situation had become inexcusable, as he explained:

This is an intolerable condition in the 20th century in a modern nation that prides itself on reputed leadership of the world. I have been urging and I have been asking for a strong meat inspection bill since 1964. The Wholesome Meat Act of 1967—which has been brought to me by the good work of the Congress—will give something priceless, I think, to American housewives. It will give them assurance that the meat that they put on the dinner table for their husbands and their children is pure; that it has been packed and it has been processed in a sanitary plant.¹

¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Signing Statement 541 - Remarks upon Signing Bill Amending the Meat Inspection Act,” December 15, 1967, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed December 30, 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28607>.

By phrasing the act as “something priceless...to American housewives,” he revealed his administration’s intent for the law. It was to be the ultimate fulfillment of the idea of an undifferentiated America, unified in their equally wholesome diets.

Although Johnson signed the bill, the idea predated his presidency. The fight to expand inspection dated back to first year of John F. Kennedy’s administration when newly-appointed Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman faced the limits of his department’s ability to regulate the nation’s meat supply. Freeman became convinced that the Meat Inspection Act of 1906 desperately needed an update since meatpackers had begun shifting production out of interstate commerce and into the intrastate commerce, which was not inspected by the federal government. This began a struggle that lasted seven years. Congressional allies, notably Neal Smith (D-IA), had also tried to convince Congress to pass a bill to expand inspection but the idea remained stalled for years. Even the national scandal of a meat processor passing off horse meat as beef failed to move the legislation out of committee. Only in the last months of 1967, which followed months of reports on unwholesome conditions in non-federally inspected meatpacking plants, did the legislation have the popular backing needed to move it forward. With newfound public support, the Johnson administration was then able to successfully get Congress to send a bill for the president for his signature. The fear of a return to *The Jungle* ultimately gave the bill the energy required to escape Congress and make its way to Johnson’s desk.

Johnson’s signing of the Wholesome Meat Act marked the climax of the unnamed federal policy of forging a national diet built around mass beef consumption. While the act covered all red meat (beef, pork, lamb, and goat), beef was by far the most consumed meat in America and the driving force behind the passage of the bill. It was no accident

that the president used an example of beef processing as his anecdote of horrors of non-federally inspected production. Indeed, beef processing shifting production out of federally inspected plants and into intrastate plants was seen as a public health crisis and proved to be a critical driver of the bill. In addition to targeting producers, the bill was also extended to all Americans a singular standard of living predicated on the idea that all Americans who ate beef (as almost all Americans did) deserved that beef to be wholesome. It was a vision of an American diet anchored by mass beef consumption that had no state, regional, or local standards. A single federal meat inspection system ensured that no American ought to worry if their meat might be tainted because their local producers were not required to follow the best health and safety standards possible. With the passage of the bill, the Johnson administration successfully shifted absolute responsibility for ensuring wholesome meat out of the hands of the private sector, be they producers' or consumers', and into hands of the public sector. From then on, each and every meat item for sale within the United States would bear the stamp of federal approval.

The Wholesome Meat Act of 1967 advanced a policy of mass beef consumption by focusing on cleaning up the supply of beef, which this chapter will explore in detail. Predicated on the idea that federal inspection was the most stringent in the nation, the logic behind the bill was that government had the power and obligation to ensure economic security while also preserving market-based relationships essential to the free-market system. With economic security in mind, the goal of the bill was not to advance equality but, rather, to advance the opportunity of all Americans to be able to buy the same quality of beef as anyone else might and, in doing so, enjoy the same standards of

living regardless of local standards or economic conditions. Throughout most of the 1960s, price and inflation only a few times became a issues regarding beef. Even a national consumer boycott in 1966 represented only the briefest flare up of price concerns. Instead, supply management in the name of consumer health and safety was the way to support beef consumption. The administration planned to use federal power to deny producers the ability cut costs through producing a substandard product. By doing so, every producer would be forced to produce their product under the same conditions and every consumer would be assured that every piece of meat, whether beef or some other meat, was fit for their family to consume. In the hands of the Johnson administration, beef policy meant creating a competitive and functioning marketplace that produced healthy and wholesome beef that any American could enjoy without fearing for their wellbeing.

The Johnson administration's long road to the Wholesome Meat Act of 1967 began with an investigation by the Meat Inspection Division (MID) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) into a meatpacking technique for producing smoke-cured ham products. It started not with beef but with ham. Smoke cured hams had long been a key part of the pork industry and were originally manufactured by having workers pump a salt solution through holes punctured into the meat and then having those hams cure in a special smokehouse for a lengthy period of time, as long as three months in some cases. It was a time consuming and labor-intensive process that left unsightly holes in the meat. By the 1920s, though, producers began developing a different way to cure smoked pork. Meatpackers started pumping salt water mixtures into the arteries of the

meat using machines and the brine mixture circulating through the meat's own tubing cured the meat in a matter of days, in a process known as artery or vein pumping.² The pre-cured weight was known as the "green weight," since pumping added the brine to the total weight of the cured product although the solution could be drained out of the finished product. Additionally, sodium nitrite, nitrates, and phosphates were added to the brine solution to assist in the curing process and to enhance the flavor of the final product. Producers favored the new method since the rapid production time meant having less stock on hand while also reducing overall production costs.

At first, few plants used the new process in making smoked hams but, by the late-1940s, its use began spreading rapidly through the industry. The Meat Inspection Division responded to the growing popularity artery pumped hams in 1950 by mandating that all smoked hams made under federal inspection had to be reduced to their green weight.³ For those produced outside of federal inspection, it remained up to state or municipal governments to set the legal weight limits, if any at all, of smoked hams. Minus the regulation, processors created hams at varying degrees of weights above pre-cured, green weight with federal meat inspectors finding smoked ham products made without federal inspection in Chicago with weights as much as 22 percent above green weight.⁴ This resulted in a two-tier system with one set of rules for federally inspected

² For a history of ham pump curing, see Roger Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table: Taste, Technology, Transformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 60-62.

³ C. H. Pals to Inspectors in Charge of Meat Inspection and Others and Operators of Official Establishments, "Meat Inspection Division Memorandum, No. 155 (Revised)," October 10, 1950, Meat Inspection Division Memo, 1945-1950, Box 2, RG 462, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁴ "Smoked Hams," [1960?], p. 2, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-(3 of 7), Box 2, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

meats and a multitude of rules for non-federally inspected meats.⁵ It was an inconsistent market for meats requiring producers to compete against each other regardless of which tier their product was inspected under and requiring consumers to pay close attention to the label of any ham products they bought in order to be sure of which type of meat they were purchasing.

Consumer demand for all pork, not just smoked products, began to decline in the mid-1950s and continued on a downward path as beef consumption rose (see figure 5.1). To some in the industry, artery pumped hams offered a way to stem, if not reverse, the loss in demand.⁶ Pork could shed its reputation as the “poor man’s meat” if only processors were free to use the new pumping technique to make the moist smoked hams that consumers seemed to demand.⁷ Indeed, the most profitable portion of the pork industry was in non-federally inspected plants that made small batches of smoked hams under a specific brand label for consumption in local markets.⁸

⁵ The foundations of federal meat inspection rested on distinguishing between interstate and intrastate commerce thanks to the Meat Inspection Act of 1906. On passage of the act, see Alan L. Olmstead and Paul M. Rhodes, *Arresting Contagion: Science, Policy, and Conflicts over Animal Disease Control* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 172-218.

⁶ “No Easy Answer,” *National Provisioner*, September 24, 1960, 2.

⁷ On ham as the “poor man’s meat,” see W. F. O’Dell, “Creating a New Image for Pork, Third National Swine Industry Conference,” October 1960, p. 7, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-(3 of 7), Box 2, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁸ Willard Williams, “Structural Changes in the Meat Wholesaling Industry,” December 30, 1957, Ham-Water Added – Task Force – (7 folders) (3) Review of Situation, Box 2, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

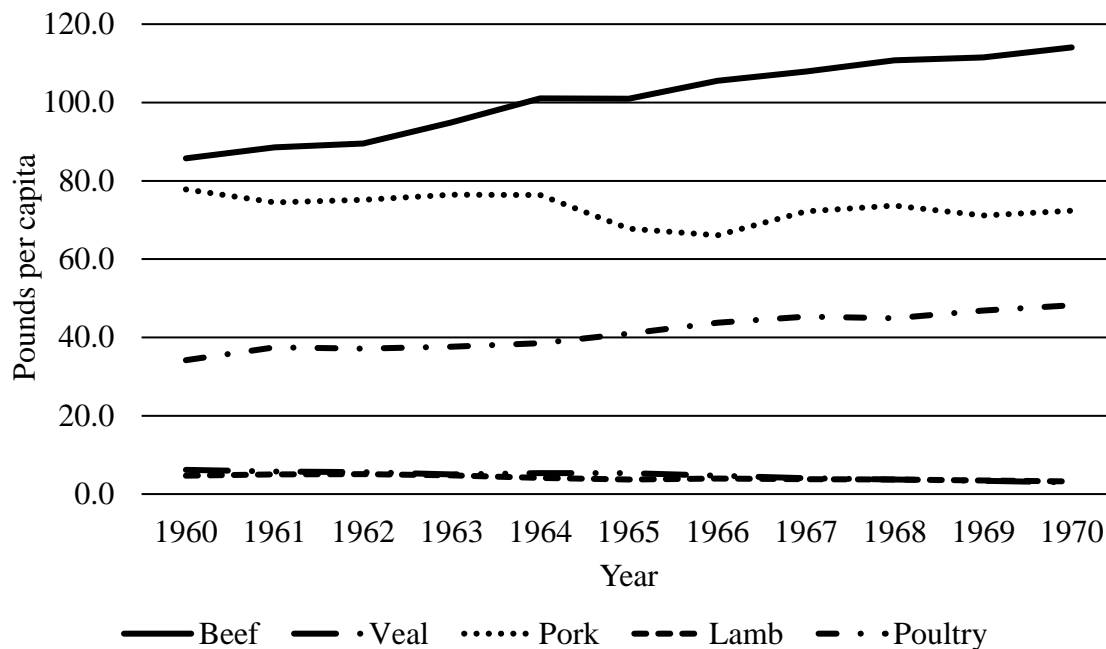


Figure 5.1: Estimated Carcass Weight of per Capita Meat Consumption, 1960-1970. Source: US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, “Red Meat and Chicken (Carcass Weight),” by Jeanine Bentley and Jean Buzby, accessed December 18, 2014, [http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-\(per-capita\)-data-system](http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-(per-capita)-data-system).

Hoping to save the broader pork industry, meatpacker representatives requested that the Meat Inspection Division reconsider the pre-cured, green-weight requirement for smoked hams. The division agreed and announced on September 20, 1960 in the Federal Register that the division had created a task force that was soliciting public feedback on the green-weight requirement. Meatpackers, having coordinated a responses at a meeting in the offices of Robert Byrd (D-WV), responded by arranging meetings with the task force members that would be held in the following month in order to give direct feedback in favor of rescinding the ban completely.⁹ The American Meat Institute (AMI), the industry’s largest lobby and research group, laid out the meatpackers’ argument by

⁹ Memorandum, J. R. Scott, September 23, 1960, , Task Force Reports, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-(7 of 7), Meat Packing Industry, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

emphasizing discrimination and consumer taste as the main reason for ending the regulation. The federal ban discriminated, they argued, because it forced meat firms that chose to ship their products across state lines to compete against intrastate firms on an unequal basis.

To prove its case, the AMI showed data collected by the Meat Inspection Division revealed that meatpacking firms were increasingly shifting production of smoked products out of interstate commerce and into the intrastate market. Armour, one of the largest meat packing firms, produced all of its smoked hams under federal inspection in 1953 but by 1960 the total percentage dropped to 27 percent.¹⁰ The institute was defensive about meatpackers fleeing regulations by explaining the meatpackers were simply following the dictates of the market in seeking profits, as any good capitalist should do. In this telling, it was up to the federal government to abandon regulations that made it impossible for companies provide consumers with a sound product.¹¹ To demonstrate that consumers really did want their hams with added moisture, the AMI presented the findings of a taste test conducted by home economists working for Market Facts, Inc., which suggested that consumers preferred the taste of hams weighing 10 to 20 percent above green weight to the taste of green weight hams. Consumers reportedly

¹⁰ "Meeting with a Group of Packers to Discuss Information which the Task Force Needs – October 4, 1960," p. 3, October 4, 1960, Ham-Water Added – Task Force – (7 folders) (3) Review of Situation, Box 2, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹¹ Homer Davison to Director of the Meat Inspection Division, November 18, 1960, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-American Meat Institute Request for Withdrawal of "Return to Green Weight" Regulation and Related Reports, Box 1, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

enjoyed the rich flavor and juicy feeling of the moist hams.¹² According to the AMI, the regulation did not just harm producers but also denied consumers their favored ham.

With the industry's argument in hand, the Meat Inspection Division task force began investigating the rule to limit moisture in smoked ham products. The review, which lasted until December, was led by J. R. Scott and entailed examining the AMI's material against the solicited opinions from a range of groups. Most meat producers supported the AMI position and wanted less regulation.¹³ Meat worker unions supported consumers' right to know about moisture levels in their hams but were more concerned about smoked production moving into non-federally inspected plants. They therefore urged the task force to rescind the regulation but institute other consumer protections.¹⁴ The General Federation of Women's Clubs, providing the most unified consumer voice, opposed rescinding the ban over concerns of price and taste. As the president Mrs. E. Lee Ozbrin explained, the brine solution was an adulterant that tricked consumers into buying water for the price of ham. In contradiction to what the AMI argued, she noted that modern pork production techniques resulted in smoked hams that tasted terrible, which

¹² Marketing Facts, Inc., "Interim Report: Consumer Ham Preference Test," November 1960, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-American Meat Institute Request for Withdrawal of "Return to Green Weight" Regulation and Related Reports, Box 1, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹³ Representatives of the small meatpacking firm Tobin Packing Company of New York suggested to division inspectors that the company wanted to retain the regulations. The reason seemed to be that the newer production techniques produced an inferior product and harmed Tobin's reputation as a producer of quality meats. Memo, J. R. Scott to F. K. Johnson, November 17, 1960, Task Force Reports, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-(7 of 7), Meat Packing Industry, Box 3, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹⁴ The United Packinghouse Workers of America in particular worried about the regulation hampering federally inspected plants from competing with non-federally inspected plants. Ralph Helstein to Dr. C. H. Pals, November 15, 1960, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-(1 of 7), Consumer Comments, Box 1, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

had the effect of pushing consumers toward eating more beef rather than allowing consumers to purchase the best product for their family.¹⁵ Local federation chapters followed the central office's lead by sending letters in support of strengthening the ban to the task force. While the federation was the only group to take a strong stand against removing the regulations, some consumers weighed in on their own. Mrs. Charles M. Lucas of PA complained that smoked hams no longer tasted like they used to and even gave off a noxious odor when cooked.¹⁶ Anne Hunter of NJ worried that rolling back the regulations would represent the federal government siding with producers against consumers and claimed, "I want federal controls to remain."¹⁷

Even though the task force was to explore the need for the ban on added moisture in smoked hams, the task force soon found itself contemplating the very structure of the federal meat inspection system. Under Scott, the task force probed the pork industry to determine what effects federal regulations had on producers and consumers by focusing on the AMI's main contentions. To test consumer preferences, the task force coordinated with the Human Nutrition Research Division at the Department of Agriculture to have researchers test hams for how much they shrunk during cooking and to have them run an informal taste test on the cooked hams. The researchers reported that smoked hams with a final weight that was 105 percent (or more) over the pre-cured, green weight were more

¹⁵ Mrs. E. Lee Ozbrin to Dr. C. H. Pals, October 31, 1960, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-(1 of 7), Consumer Comments, Box 1, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹⁶ Mrs. Charles M. Lucas to Meat Inspection Division, November 5, 1960, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-(1 of 7), Consumer Comments, Box 1, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹⁷ Anne Hunter to Dr. C. H. Pals, November 11, 1960, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-(1 of 7), Consumer Comments, Box 1, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

juicy and flavorful after cooking.¹⁸ The task force also examined the charge that the ban discriminated against federally inspected smoked ham producers. While the task force avoided directly addressing the charge of discrimination, it had livestock economic specialists at the Agricultural Marketing Service examine the most recent trends in pork production to see if non-federally inspected pork processing plants had become a more important source of smoked pork. The subsequent reports and memoranda to the task force revealed an overall “decentralization” of ham production, with “a much smaller volume of cured and smoked pork is being produced in federally inspected plants.”¹⁹ It was a trend most apparent in the urban northeast, the nation’s most important market for food, where smoked ham production under federal inspection dropped 5 percent in 1960 but, as the task force understood it, this drop foretold the likely future of pork production.²⁰ The problem was that hog slaughter stayed under federal inspection but smaller processing firms without federal inspection were more economically competitive at turning the slaughtered hogs into smoked hams, which were likely to be sold under a brand name.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service, Human Nutrition Research Division, Food Quality Laboratory, “Report on Cooking Quality of Cured Hams of Different Weights in Relation to Green Weight,” Olive M. Matcher, et al., p. 3, November 11, 1960, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-(4 of 7), Information Developed by Task Force, Box 2, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service, Livestock Division, “An Economic Appraisal of Ham Production, Distribution, and Prices,” p. 17, October 27, 1960, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-(3 of 7), Box 2, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD; memorandum, Lloyd I. Holms to John R. Scott, November 16, 1960, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-(3 of 7), Box 2, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

²⁰ “Supplement No.1 to a Report Entitled An Economic Appraisal of Ham Production, Distribution, and Prices,” p. 3, November 16, 1960, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-(3 of 7), Box 2, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

The act of investigating the industry began a shift within the Department of Agriculture on the role of federal meat inspection. The task force found with pork producers adapting to the rapidly changing mass consumer economy of the postwar era, which resulted in overall demand dropping while the demand specifically for processed ham increasing. Ham production moved into smaller, specialized processing plants that were unlikely to be federally inspected even if the animals were still slaughtered under federal inspection before being trucked into the processing plant, a process occurring in beef production as well.²¹ Decentralization gave producers a lot of freedom from the iron-clad law of the federal system. An agriculture economist at the department captured the growing sense of fear that producers' freedom could harm consumers, warning that, while pumping above green weight could legitimately serve consumers' desire for moist smoked hams, producers could also pump hams as a way of filling their hams with water weight at the expense of pork meat. He called this "morally wrong," potentially disastrous if the excess pumping drove consumers further away from pork, and if " 'pumping' is resorted to merely as an expedient to compete price wise or undersell a competitor without some degree of regulation and control, the entire swine industry could eventually suffer incalculable losses."²² Producers and consumers were locked in a battle over meat and it was the federal government's job to maintain the economic peace. Adequate regulation would serve both, as he concluded, noting that "this appears to be

²¹ On the rise of processing after World War II, see Jimmy Skaggs, *Prime Cut: Livestock Raising and Meat Packing in the United States, 1607-1983* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986), 187-88.

²² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service, Livestock Division, "An Economic Appraisal of Ham Production, Distribution, and Prices," p. 27, October 27, 1960, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-(3 of 7), Box 2, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

the real problem area; that is, of providing adequate incentive to producers for producing high quality pork and then encourage increased consumption by consumers.”²³

For meat inspectors, the health of the postwar society hung in the balance and their regulations could tip the scales either way and tumble the whole thing. The investigation would end up moving beyond pork but, in 1960, smoked ham remained the focus. On November 28, Scott gave his final recommendation to Meat Inspection Division Director C. H. Pals. The main recommendation was that, with above-green weight hams with added phosphates being the new standard, smoked products should be allowed to have up to 10 percent above green weight. It was not the department’s role to stand in the way of this seemingly healthy economic activity as long as consumers understood what they were buying. As he put it, “the Meat Inspection Division has no legal right to deny the industry the right to process and sell any or all smoked meats or any meat products which are wholesome and truthfully labeled.”²⁴ While the Johnson administration would later latch onto the concept of wholesomeness in its efforts at strengthening meat inspection, Scott used it to justify a compromise with producers even though he received a warning that “there was no evidence” that the ban harmed ham production.²⁵ He did note, though, that further research was needed, particularly to help

²³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service, Livestock Division, “An Economic Appraisal of Ham Production, Distribution, and Prices,” p. 28, October 27, 1960, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-(3 of 7), Box 2, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

²⁴ Memorandum, J. R. Scott to C.H. Pals, November 28, 1960, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-(3 of 7), Box 2, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

²⁵ Memorandum, R. H. Philbeck to J. R. Scott, November 18, 1960, Ham-Water Added-Task Force-(4 of 7), Box 2, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

understand consumers' preferences and ideas about smoked products. On December 20, Acting Administrator of the Agricultural Research Service M. R. Clarkson announced the new 10 percent limitation.²⁶ The matter seemed settled, at least it did for the following months, as that sought after peace seemed to settle in.

The investigation and the accompanying fear of economic conflict between producers and consumers might have been forgotten if not for a report in the following spring. In the March 1961 *Consumer Reports* cover story on the recent decision about them, the consumer advocacy group Consumers Union lambasted the rule change.²⁷ The title of the article, "The Great Ham Robbery"—a reference the 1903 silent film *The Great Train Robbery*—captured the main argument of the article: each individual consumer was being robbed by ham producers thanks to the federal government siding with producers against consumer. The magazine warned consumers that "on the 30th of last December, the United States Department of Agriculture officially redefined federally inspected ham as a food that may be diluted with water. The order, issued without a public hearing and without a public record, became law when it was published in the *Federal Register* that day."²⁸ The consumer group wanted its readers to see the federal government regulation as theft now that food processors were free to sell water for the price of ham. Processors had free reign to turn water into a food adulterant, if not a pollutant, thanks to the

²⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, "Rules and Regulations: Cured Meat Products; Labeling, Reinspection, and Preparation of Products," *Federal Register* 25, no. 253 (December 30, 1960): 13952.

²⁷ "The Great Ham Robbery," *Consumer Reports*, March 1961, 120-125. For the rise of the Consumers Union and its connections to the long history of consumer activism, see Lawrence B. Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

²⁸ "The Great Ham Robbery," 120.

chemical additives. The Consumers Union complaint indicted the process as well as the outcome. The Meat Inspection Division, by failing to consult with a consumer group like the union, had locked consumers out of important decision making. Indeed, what the union did not know was that the new rule resulted from a challenge issued by a group of well-organized producers who had appealed directly to the leadership of the division. It was propitious timing for the consumer group since a new administration with a political commitment to consumers had taken over in January.

All this angst over meat inspection in modern America may have amounted to nothing if not for the election of John F. Kennedy as president and his subsequent appointment of Orville Freeman as secretary of agriculture. In 1960, Kennedy ran against Vice President Richard M. Nixon in a contentious campaign and won an upset victory by focusing on Cold War issues and not his party's historic commitment to consumer politics.²⁹ Kennedy appointed ex-Minnesota governor Freeman, a key figure in the state's Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, to the position of secretary of agriculture. Freeman promised in his confirmation hearing to promote consumer interests while in charge of the Department of Agriculture and, to that end, he appointed Rodney Leonard as a special assistant whose portfolio included consumer issues.³⁰ Consumer affairs may have been a minor issue in national politics at the time but the Consumers Union report exploded the issue. Even before the report, consumers complained to Freeman's office that the rule on

²⁹ On the 1960 election, see Gary A. Donaldson, *The First Modern Campaign: Kennedy, Nixon, and the Election of 1960* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007); William J. Rorabaugh, *The Real Making of the President: Kennedy, Nixon and the 1960 Election* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009); Edmund F. Kallina, Jr., *Kennedy v. Nixon: The Presidential Election of 1960* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010).

³⁰ Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *The Anticipated Nomination of the Honorable Orville L. Freeman, of Minnesota to Be Secretary of Agriculture* 87th Cong., 1st sess., 1961, 31-32.

smoked hams represented a betrayal of the department's responsibilities to protect consumer rights, which only escalated after the article was published.³¹

Freeman's response to the "Great Ham Robbery" and the accompanying consumer outrage was to turn the question of smoked ham regulation into a subject of public debate. Freeman had the Meat Inspection Division organize the first ever public discussion of a meat regulation. His goal was to solicit feedback directly from consumers and to use their responses to help him shape policy. It was to open, in a sense, policymaking to general scrutiny and public input. This experiment in democratic policymaking occurred in public hearings held in eight cities from April to May while the Meat Inspection Division collected thousands of letters from organized groups and individual consumers.³² The division inspectors in charge of assessing public opinion made the notable decision to place the industry's own opinions at the same level as consumers' and thus created a level plane between the two sides, as opposed to the earlier process that had elevated producers' concerns over that of consumers. Overwhelmingly, consumers rejected the 10 percent rule change and felt that the department had betrayed them since "nearly all indicated that they look to the Department for protection against food adulteration and other fraudulent practices that may occur in the meat industry."³³

³¹ On the immediate response by consumers to the December 30 rule change announcement, see the folders Ham-Water Added-Letters from Public on 10 Percent Water 1 of 7 to Ham-Water Added-Letters from Public on 10 Percent Water 7 of 7, Box 3, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

³² "Hearings on Watered Ham," *Consumer Reports*, July 1961, 462. For a summary of the correspondence received by the USDA during the hearings, see "Summary of Statements and Testimony Presented during Eight Public Hearings on the Subject of Moisture Content of Smoked Pork Products," July 17, 1961, Box 8, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD. The cities were Philadelphia, Atlanta, Chicago, Minneapolis, Denver, Portland, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C.

³³ Memorandum, Administrator, Agricultural Research Service [B.T. Shaw] to The Secretary [Orville Freeman], "Summary of Statements and Testimony Presented during Eight Public Hearings on the

A review of consumer attitudes revealed a previously undiscussed battle over public policy and regulation. In testimony delivered to the Agricultural Research Service, which oversaw the Meat Inspection Division, Consumer Union argued that the ruling represented the Meat Inspection giving into the industry it was meant to regulate, particularly because of the rising power of the chemical industry in food production. The group argued that phosphate makers had convinced both ham producers and the division that smoking hams needed to be soaked in the chemical, hence the rule change.³⁴ The only savior to the public interest would come from organized consumer action. As the Consumer Union portrayed in their magazine coverage of the hearings, it was white women, donning their political identity as housewives, who could berate the nameless government bureaucrats into respecting their right to a ham made without additives, be it of the chemical or water variety.³⁵ The Meat Inspection Division, however, saw in the decision a different problem altogether. Director Pals explained to Leonard in a memorandum titled “Advantage to Consumer When Product Is Prepared under Federal Meat Inspection” that producers now had the power to successfully shift significant amounts of production out of federal inspection, thus undermining the very promise of meat inspection to ensure consumers were always buying a wholesome product for their families. Since 1955, smoked pork processed under federal inspection declined by 20

Subjects of Moisture Content of Smoked Pork Products,” July 17, 1961, Smoked Pork Material, Box 8, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

³⁴ Consumers Union, “Statement of Consumers Union of U.S., Inc., Submitted to the Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., on the Amount of Moisture Permitted in Smoked Hams and Other Pork Products under Federal Meat Inspection on June 10, 1961,” Ham-Water Added-Consumers Union Statement, Box 8, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

³⁵ *Consumer Reports*, July 1961, 426.

percent. The new rule would reverse this trend, with one large meatpacker already promising that 80 percent of its smoked ham production would be back under federal inspection by May.³⁶ For Pals, the new rule was not an example of a government agency betraying consumers' trust but, rather, it was a government agency figuring out how to save itself from losing its oversight of that industry. Seen in this light, the ruling was made by an agency that had no way to foster the consumer support needed to forestall compromising with industry.

After reviewing the hearings, Director B.T. Shaw of the Agricultural Research Service offered Freeman a radical solution: expand federal inspection so that no processor would be able to dodge inspection. Shaw's draft bill for expanding meat inspection included language that made clear the fear exposed by the ham case by noting that non-federally inspected meat would be "injurious to the public welfare, result in sundry losses to producers, and destroy markets for meat and meat food products."³⁷ While expanding inspection would become Freeman's long-term goal, he resolved the ham case by reversing the ban and forcing ham produced above green weight to bear the label "imitation," apparently at Leonard behest and much to the consternation of meat inspectors and the industry.³⁸ Acting Administrator of the Meat Inspection Division Clarkson feared that the banning smoked pork products from being above green weight

³⁶ Memorandum, C.H. Pals to Rod Leonard, March 1961, Ham-Water Added-Briefing Memorandums for Administrator, Box 3, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

³⁷ "A Bill to Extend Federal Meat Inspection and For Other Purposes," July 17, 1961, in Smoked Pork Material, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Box 8, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

³⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, "Rules and Regulations: Smoked Ham and Other Smoked Meat Products; Labeling; Miscellaneous Amendments," *Federal Register* 26, no. 201 (October 18, 1961), 9772.

would only further push ham making out of federal inspection.³⁹ Producers responded by suing Freeman and the department, eventually winning an injunction against the order.⁴⁰ Even though Freeman lost the case, he took notice of the recommendation to expand inspection and, as the Kennedy administration adopted a pro-consumer stance, became committed to making it happen.

Expanding meat inspection fit into Freeman's broader aim of managing farming and the nation's total agricultural production. The Kennedy administration struggled, as did all postwar presidents, with managing excess farm production and the decreasing cost of production and decreasing price of commodities.⁴¹ For Freeman, this meant developing a policy of "managed abundance," which meant using federal commodity supports to ensure that farmers earned enough to keep up with inflation while also preventing them from growing so much that prices for individual commodities collapsed.⁴² He also wanted to implement a framework for farmers to coordinate national production in order to empower them to "adjust our abundance" on their own.⁴³ The bountiful farm production of the era threatened to hurt farmers economically but had

³⁹ Memorandum, Acting Administrator [M.R. Clarkson] to The Secretary [Orville Freeman], August 8, 1961, Ham-Water Added-Resume of Case through October 1961, Box 10, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, RG 463, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁴⁰ *Armour and Company v. Orville L. Freeman, Secretary of Agriculture, et al.*, 304 F.2d 404 (D.C. Cir. 1962).

⁴¹ On the postwar farm crisis, see R. Douglas Hurt, *Problems of Plenty: The American Farmer in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 97-123.

⁴² Memorandum, Orville Freeman to The President [John F. Kennedy], November 27, 1961, November 1961, Orville Freeman Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston, MA.

⁴³ Orville Freeman, "Address by Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman at the Animal Health Institute, Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D.C., April 26, 1961, 3:00 p.m., EST," p. 7, Speeches 4/61, Box 11, Orville Freeman Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston, MA.

benefitted consumers while allowing for the American diet to be the envy of the world. As he described to a farm group in 1961, “a meal of beef, potatoes, cabbage, bread, butter, milk, and fruit for four can be bought by the average industrial worker in the United States for one hour’s wages,” but two to five hour’s wages for industrial workers in Western European countries.⁴⁴ Furthermore, abundance needed to be exported because exports would mean “using our abundance to lighten the load of suffering humanity. Where human need exists, abundance unused is abundance abused.”⁴⁵ His hope was to allow farmers to produce all that they needed, allow consumers to eat their fill, then export this to the rest of the world.

Just as managing abundance was the centerpiece of the administration’s farm policy, so too did expanding inspection propose to manage the bountiful production of meat. In each, Freeman hoped to develop programs that would sustain the diet of plenty that was mass beef consumption, which came from the agricultural abundance of the postwar era. The investigation into smoked pork products handed the secretary a means for just that: he now had a market-friendly way to protect the record-setting beef consumption rates of the 1960s if he could only generate support from politicians.⁴⁶ By the end of 1961, he began sharing his idea of expanding federal inspection with

⁴⁴ Orville Freeman, “Address by Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman at the Animal Health Institute, Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D.C., April 26, 1961, 3:00 p.m., EST,” p. 6, Speeches 4/61, Box 11, Orville Freeman Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston, MA.

⁴⁵ Orville Freeman, “Remarks Prepared for Delivery by Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman before Lutheran Brotherhood, Shoreham Hotel, Washington, D.C., April 19, 1961, 7:00 p.m., EST,” p. 1, Speeches 4/61, Box 11, Orville Freeman Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston, MA.

⁴⁶ On beef consumption rates after World War II, see Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table*, 14-17.

lawmakers in Congress in hopes of generating Congressional interest in the idea.⁴⁷ He also worked with the president to add his idea to the administration's consumer program. In March 1962, the administration publically adopted Freeman's position on meat inspection when President Kennedy included an expanded and more active meat inspection system as part of his special announcement on consumers' rights. He listed several things that consumers were owed, including truth-in-lending and truth-in-advertising, but, by adding Freeman's plans for meat inspection to the list, the president presented the right to a clean supply of meat as a core consumer right, which publically infused the expansion of meat inspection with consumer politics.⁴⁸ Expanding federal meat inspection was no longer a dream of beleaguered meat inspectors or the hopeful idea of the secretary, but now it enjoyed the imprimatur of the president's public approval and became part of the Democratic Party's push for consumer rights. While the fight would last for another six years, now Freeman could present expansion as a consumer right.

Maintaining a wholesome supply of beef amid continued mass beef consumption remained Freeman's goal throughout the early 1960s even his plan to expand inspection stalled. Over a year after officially announcing his administration's support for expanding inspection, an assassin shot and killed President Kennedy, elevating Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson to the presidency. Johnson, a former Texas congressman with a history of ranching, understood consumers' access to beef as a core presidential issue, a

⁴⁷ Orville Freeman to Ralph Harvey, September 21, 1961, Correspondence September 1961, Orville Freeman Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston, MA.

⁴⁸ "Text of Kennedy's Message to Congress on Protections for Consumers," *New York Times*, March 16, 1962.

lesson he no doubt learned from his party's crushing defeat in the 1946 "beefsteak" elections.⁴⁹ As he geared up for his 1964 campaign, Johnson's understanding of beef politics led him to order Freeman in mid-April to begin providing the White House a weekly beef price report and to "step up beef merchandizing program – encourage people to eat more beef."⁵⁰ Freeman's office sent these reports throughout the year until the president ordered them stopped on November 13, the week after his successful election against the Republican candidate Senator Barry Goldwater (R-AZ).⁵¹ The reports told the president several things: the trend in beef prices, if slaughter had increased from that week last year, and of the USDA buying program. For example, on October 15, Freeman offered the president good news when describing a recent department purchase of 15.7 million pounds of beef as "largest volume of beef purchased to date."⁵² Meanwhile, the Meat Inspection Division continued its oversight of the nation's burgeoning meat supply. During Johnson's election year, the division employed over three thousand people, including eight-hundred and five veterinarians, and inspected forty slaughter-only establishments, five-hundred and thirty-five slaughter and processing establishments, and 1,104 processing establishments. They inspected 113.7 million animals and 19.64 billion

⁴⁹ On Johnson's ranching past, see Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982). On the 1946 election, see Chapter 1.

⁵⁰ Note attached to "Livestock and Poultry Market Summary, Tuesday – April 14, 1964," 4/1/64 – 5/25/64, Box 210, FG 150, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Presidential Papers, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

⁵¹ Note attached to "Livestock and Poultry Market Summary, Thursday – November 12, 1964," 11/22/63 – 12/3/65, Box 27, BE 5-1, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Presidential Papers, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

⁵² "Livestock and Poultry Market Summary, Thursday – October 15, 1964," 11/22/63 – 12/3/65, Box 27, BE 5-1, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Presidential Papers, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

pounds of meat, which included 27.7 million cattle and approximately 11.7 billion pounds of beef.⁵³

In spite of President Kennedy's consumer rights announcement and Johnson's focus on beef politics, the plan to expand inspection stalled for several years while another event pushed Freeman to add another goal to his meat inspection plan. This time, unlike with the investigation into smoked pork, beef was the center of the controversy. On December 17, 1964, a scandal erupted when New York City meat inspectors caught one of the largest processing plants in the city, Merkel Meats Inc., buying an order of twenty tons of boneless beef that contained 20 percent horse meat.⁵⁴ In addition, the plant was dealing in what was called "4D" beef, which stood for diseased, disable, dying, or dead cattle, meat that was unfit for human consumption and was typically sold cheaply only to renderers for non-human uses. City officials soon seized twenty tons of meat from the plant, which employed 530 and had a weekly output of one-hundred tons each week. As news of the seizure spread, city official Markets Commissioner Albert S. Pacetta claimed that "not one ounce" of horse or 4D meat ended up being sold to consumers and ate a slice of Merkel Bologna to prove his point.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, investigators cryptically noted years later that "except for a relatively small fraction of the total seized at the time

⁵³ The above statistics come from "Meat Inspection Division Report of Operations in Detail for Reference Use Only – F.Y. 1964," [1964?], Meat Inspection Division, Report of Operations in Detail, Fiscal Year 1964, Substantive Report, Box 1, Records Relating to Meat Inspection, 1906-1980, RG 462, Records of the Food and Consumer Services, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁵⁴ "Illegal Shipment of Meat Is Seized," *New York Times*, December 18, 1964; Will Lissner, "Merkel Lays Off Its Entire Plant," *New York Times*, January 28, 1965; Thomas Buckley, "Meat Plot Is Laid to Merkel Chief," *New York Times*, February 25, 1965.

⁵⁵ Thomas Buckley, "Meat Plot Is Laid to Merkel Chief," *New York Times*, February 25, 1965.

the operation was discovered, the meat was subsequently processed and sold to consumers as beef products.”⁵⁶

Investigators eventually uncovered a larger conspiracy that demonstrated to Freeman the need for adding to his department’s meat inspection powers of policing meatpacking plants engaged in criminal activity. A criminal investigation was soon launched. The Office of the Inspector General, working with the Meat Inspection Division and the Packers and Stockyard Division, investigated the supply chain and uncovered a black market that turned meat unfit for human consumption into legally processed food. It turned out that Merkel had bought the meat from a dealer using a fake name who had forged federal inspection seals in order to pass “unsound and contaminated” meat as wholesome and inspected meat. Investigators found the broker in December 1964 after they uncovered evidence that over five million pounds horse meat from Mexico was shipped to the northeast before it was shipped to plants in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York. Similarly, over one million pounds of horse meat made it into plants in over seven nearby states.⁵⁷ The Meat Inspection Division subsequently removed the suspected meat from interstate trade but was forced to rely on U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) seizure powers because the division lacked the police powers of the FDA. The investigation led to the federal indictments of six men in connection to the Merkel plant scandal, including a meat inspector and the plant owners,

⁵⁶ “Synopsis of Major Investigations (Including Operation Dragnet),” [1967?], July Survey—Department Position Paper, Box 2, Records Relating to the July 1967 Survey of Non-Federally Inspected Meat Plants, 1967 – 1967, RG 462, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁵⁷ “Synopsis of Major Investigations (Including Operation Dragnet),” [1967?], July Survey—Department Position Paper, Box 2, Records Relating to the July 1967 Survey of Non-Federally Inspected Meat Plants, 1967 – 1967, RG 462, National Archives, College Park, MD.

with several handed prison sentences.⁵⁸ Even with these convictions, the Merkel case had revealed the limits of the federal meat inspection since it was the FDA's police powers that had been used to seize the meat.

As stomach churning as the details may have been, the Merkel case and subsequent investigations offered Freeman a clear lesson: his department needed enhanced police powers in order to keep pace with the changes in the meat industry since 1906. This was a new facet to his plan to expand inspection. He described his fears to Johnson on June 9, 1965 in a memorandum about a bill his office had recently sent to Congress. Freeman first explained his intentions for the bill, noting that it "will provide a cooperative program with the States and necessary additional authority to include adulterated unwholesome meat in such places as rendering plants presently outside our jurisdiction. It will provide confiscation and destruction of unfit products." Because the meat from Merkel had shipped intrastate for processing, the meat was outside of the scope of Meat Inspection Act. The Department of Agriculture, therefore, could not seize the meat even though the actual slaughtering had been done under federal inspection. He added at length:

We are moving very swiftly on this because there could be new disclosures of inspection breakdown for with modern technology, particularly in the transportation and processing of meat in large frozen blocks, we are not always able to detect bad products under past procedures. We will continue to run down every rumor and every lead. I think we are in command of the situation, but I will

⁵⁸ "6 Indicted Here in Meat Inquiry," *New York Times*, January 26, 1966;" Horsemeat Dealer Is Given 18 Months," *New York Times*, June 3, 1966; Edith Evens Asbury, "Grand Jury Here Studying Possibility of Meat Fraud," *New York Times*, April 16, 1967; "Ex-Head of Jersey Packer Jailed in Horsemeat Case," *New York Times*, August 28, 1968.

not be completely comfortable until our reorganization is completed down to the last field office and we have new legislation with necessary authority.⁵⁹

Freeman desired to remain proactive, as he suggested to Johnson, by placing the Meat Inspection Division in the newly-formed Consumer and Marketing Service (CMS), thereby demonstrating his commitment to consumer safety as Kennedy had promised.⁶⁰ In 1966, three separate meat inspection bills introduced that sessions died in subcommittees that refused to debate them. Congress further frustrated his meat inspection plans when the House passed an appropriations bill specifically blocking his plan to combine meat and poultry inspection services into one consumer-oriented service.⁶¹

Freeman zeroing on meat inspection narrowed the focus of beef policy in the 1960s but price always lurked just below the surface, threatening to jump up, which is exactly what happened in 1966. Inflation that year hit consumers particularly hard and awakened an awareness that their dietary citizenship rights had gone awry despite postwar dietary plenty. By May, Johnson sought to develop a public policy focused on consumer empowerment and minimal government intrusion but still fight prices. With beef being such a core part of the American diet, he suggested that women had the power

⁵⁹ Memorandum, Orville Freeman to Lyndon Johnson, June 9, 1965, Legislative Process [Folder 1], Box 1, Legislative Background, Special Files, Presidential Papers, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

⁶⁰ Orville Freeman, "Diary," May 25, 1965, Volume 5, Personal Papers of Freeman, Orville L., LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX. The historian Alan Marcus locates the creation of the CMS within a shift in regulation toward a more adversarial role during the Johnson administration, Alan Marcus, *Cancer from Beef: DES, Federal Food Regulation, and Consumer Confidence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 77.

⁶¹ Department of Agriculture Administrative Histories, Volume 1, Chapter 5: The Consumer and the Market, pp. 15 and 18, Special Files, Presidential Papers, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

to fight inflation if they only chose to buy cheaper cuts of beef for their family meals instead of the more expensive cuts since all beef was nutritionally interchangeable regardless of cost. This idea put the onus on individual consumers to innovate their own solutions to rising costs. Outraged, cattle groups accused him of encouraging a meat boycott and harming the industry. His administration responded in private correspondence that this was not the case: with high- and low-priced cuts coming from the same steer, the president's suggestion would simply encourage the purchasing the parts of the cattle that were more difficult to sell.⁶²

Regardless of the president's suggestions, food prices climbed higher still, up a total of a 5 percent by August 1966 from one year earlier.⁶³ That August, the president began rethinking his previous policy stance against government intervention. He resurrected an idea that had become unthinkable in Democratic Party circles: national price and wage controls. Direct economic management had once been a key part of his party's political economic policies but since 1946 they had become too toxic to even consider.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, as reflected in his campaign-year tracking of beef prices and USDA beef purchasing, Johnson feared the effects of consumer outrage over beef prices during an election year. With mid-term elections looming, he had his staff spend the part of August working on plans to implement economic controls only to abandon the idea

⁶² Letter to George Stenner, Jr., May 4, 1966, CM/Beef, Box 8, CM/B, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Presidential Papers, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

⁶³ "Food Prices Anger Housewives," *New York Times*, August 15, 1966. The Johnson Administration moved against inflation through supply management earlier in 1966, William Blair, "Freeman Rebuts Critics of Policy," *New York Times*, May 4, 1966; William Blaire, "Johnson Supports Freeman's Policy," *New York Times*, May 9, 1966.

⁶⁴ On the political economy of economic controls in the 1940s, see Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 179-220.

soon into the process. Chief of Staff for Domestic Affairs Joseph Califano, Jr., later recounted that, at the final meeting on the subject, “the vehement opposition expressed by those who had helped administer economic controls during World War II and the Korean War was persuasive to Johnson. Besides, he couldn’t afford to ignite a congressional firestorm that might jeopardize his domestic programs.”⁶⁵ That final point was key: Americans as consumers and voters were no longer willing to tolerate such a visible and apparent government intervention in the economy and were also unlikely to push their lawmakers into voting for such a maligned program.

Esther Peterson, the president’s special assistant for consumer affairs, spent the year encouraging women to act up and develop their own consumer voice but, by August, worried publically that consumers had perhaps become too affluent to fight inflation aggressively.⁶⁶ Early in 1996, she had written to consumers who complained about meat prices that the administration planned would “seek to stabilize prices through the dynamics of a free and competitive economy.”⁶⁷ Nevertheless, women felt unhappy and abused by retailers, suggesting that housewives were primed for collective action despite Peterson’s fears. Loretta Arsenault in an interview with the *New York Times* spoke for those who felt their family’s costs of living rising faster than their incomes. She described her situation, “My husband got a beautiful raise recently—and then the higher prices hit

⁶⁵ Joseph Califano, Jr., *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson: The White House Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 146-147. On the collapse of prices controls, see Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 226-67, 246-47.

⁶⁶ For an example of Peterson’s encouragement of consumer activism, see Mary Phyllis Riedley, “Mrs. Peterson Eggs on Shoppers,” *Courier-Journal*, February 22, 1966; “Food Prices Anger Housewives,” *New York Times*, August 15, 1966.

⁶⁷ Esther Peterson to Mrs. Thomas G. Murray, January 14, 1966, Prices (Meat) 1966 EC, Box 93, President’s Commission on Consumer Interests and the Consumer Advocacy Council, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

us like a ton of bricks.”⁶⁸ Absent collective action, survival strategies to keep meat on the table relied on strategies similar to what the president had recommended. A woman identified only as a housewife from Minnesota claimed to be buying less whole cuts of veal, lamb, or pork, concluding, “We eat more hamburgers—it’s up too, but it’s still cheaper than most meat.”⁶⁹

The individual grumbling soon gave way to collective action when a national boycott of meat erupted in the fall. It started in Denver on October 17 when Rose West, identified in press coverage as a 52-year old grandmother, organized a local group called Housewives for Lower Food Prices to boycott five local supermarket chains for marketing gimmicks and artificially inflating prices.⁷⁰ Soon, coalitions in one-hundred other cities across twenty-one states joined in.⁷¹ Women, understanding themselves to be housewives and spokeswomen for their families, reinvented an older form of consumer protest when they expressed their outrage at the stores and earned attention in Washington, particularly with Peterson, who signaled support for the protests.⁷² Soon, ad hoc groups emerged across the country with names designed to grab headlines and demonstrate their fierce femininity. The names included HELP (Housewives to Enact Lower Prices), YELP (You are Enlisted to Lower Prices), Women on the Warpath, and

⁶⁸ Loretta Arsenault quoted in “Food Prices Anger Housewives,” *New York Times*, August 15, 1966.

⁶⁹ Quoted in “Food Prices Anger Housewives,” *New York Times*, August 15, 1966.

⁷⁰ Eva Hodges, “Supermart Boycott Effect Uncertain,” *Denver Post*, October 17, 1966.

⁷¹ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 367.

⁷² On the links between the 1966 boycott and consumer protests in postwar America, see Emily E. LB. Twarog, *Politics of the Pantry: Housewives, Food, and Consumer Protest in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 71-77.

the Pantry Penny Pinchers.⁷³ Consumer groups even held press conferences to generate support for their efforts. The boycotts lasted throughout the month as women struggled with their impromptu collective action. Kathleen Harrington from the Pantry Penny Pinchers had this to say by late October, “The trouble is, I’ve reached the point where I’m sick of the alternatives.” The alternatives she listed were “chicken, chuck steak, and hamburger.”⁷⁴

The boycotters focused their outrage on retailers. They claimed that it was supermarket policies that drove up prices and used in-store marketing gimmicks, such as stamp-based deals and lotteries to fool women into thinking that the store offered low prices.⁷⁵ By targeting retail outlets, women fought against private policy but used collective action and party politics to try and force policy change. Women came to know inflation and their family’s loss of their dietary right to beef through their daily unpaid affective labor as the family food procurer. This was the “housewives’ personal inflation barometer” in action, a tool forged in the countless and unrecorded exchanges at the cashier that produced this knowledge of the domestic economy.⁷⁶ “We are not economists,” claimed Mrs. Judson Smith of Chicago, “We’re just housewives and we’re striking at the only place we know where to strike.”⁷⁷ That place, the supermarket, a

⁷³ Cohen, 367-68.

⁷⁴ Kathleen Harrington quoted in James Sikes, “Boycotts Backed by Johnson Aide,” *New York Times*, October 28, 1966.

⁷⁵ Cohen, 367-68.

⁷⁶ Allen Matusow, *Farm Policies and Politics in the Truman Years* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 232. On the inflation and the housewives’ barometer, see Introduction.

⁷⁷ Mrs. Judson Smith quoted in “Food Boycotts Peril Jobs, Workers Say,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 29, 1966.

creation of a postwar oligopsony triumphing over labor and farmers, pitted supermarket owners against the very consumers that they had hoped to discipline into pliable shoppers.⁷⁸ By trying to pacify their customers, supermarket owners activated them.

The boycotts all but died out by late November and food prices went down, taking with them the reason for boycotting.⁷⁹ Hamburger prices dropped as opposed to inflating, from of 54.3 cents a pound in August to 54.1 cents in January.⁸⁰ Ruth Kane, who had become president of the National Housewives for Lower Prices because of the boycott, felt buoyed by her experience. She argued that the boycotts “showed us housewives could be organized and it pointed up an awareness of high prices.”⁸¹ Nevertheless, dropping prices and the pressures of life soon seemed to be robbing the movement of its organizing energy. An anonymous woman from Phoenix, AZ, quoted in the *New York Times* spoke to the drained momentum: “We aren’t politicians, we’re housewives. Some housewives may be fighters, but it’s hard to get enough of the fighting kind to fight over the same thing at the same time.”⁸²

⁷⁸ On supermarkets and oligopsony, see Shane Hamilton, “Why Supermarket Power Matters,” In Defense of Processed Foods, October 24, 2017, <https://processedfoodsite.com/2017/10/24/why-supermarket-power-matters/>; Shane Hamilton, “The Great American Supermarket Lie: Instead of Highlighting the Glories of Capitalism, Supermarkets Expose the Inequalities It Creates,” *Washington Post*, April 2018. On supermarket owners’ efforts to create a passive shopper, see Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife’s Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 11.

⁷⁹ James Nagle, “Housewives Look Back on Boycotts,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1967.

⁸⁰ James Nagle, “Housewives Look Back on Boycotts,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1967.

⁸¹ Ruth Kane quoted in James Nagle, “Housewives Look Back on Boycotts,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1967.

⁸² Anonymous woman quoted in James Nagle, “Housewives Look Back on Boycotts,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1967.

The battle over prices left the administration drained and defensive. Peterson was soon fired for her seeming embrace of the boycotts, figuratively in her comments about consumer activism and literally when she was photographed greeting Rose West with an embrace.⁸³ The administration tried to distance itself from the radicalism of the boycotters. Johnson's Great Society seemed to have entered a state of exhaustion when Republicans picked up forty-seven seats in the House and three seats in the Senate by Republicans in the November elections.⁸⁴ While his domestic agenda began to sputter, a subtle yet significant change within the White House had occurred and offered hope for Freeman's meat inspection program gaining new life. The Johnson administration adopted food as a key domestic framework, one which seemed to teem with near limitless potential and buzzed around the White House as various secretaries, aides, and task forces imagined how food might yet transform society. The president set the tone for this new place for food in domestic policy during a public speech before Congress in early 1965. The president speaking before gathered lawmakers described America as plentiful in agriculture and food products, saying, "The bounty of the earth was the foundation of our economy."⁸⁵ Food was the core of soaring successes reached during the postwar economy. Furthermore, food offered a hope of conquering the hunger recently rediscovered to have been plaguing the nation's poor and marginal communities in spite

⁸³ Twarog, 76.

⁸⁴ Julian E. Zelizer, *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Lyndon Johnson, Congress, and the Battle for the Great Society* (New York: Penguin, 2015), 257.

⁸⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Message to Congress," February 4, 1965, Message, Legislative Process, Box 1, Legislative Background, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX. On capitalism and changing agricultural production, see R. Douglas Hurt, *American Agriculture: A Brief History*, revised ed. (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2002), 331-76; John Fraser Hart, *The Changing Scale of American Agriculture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003).

of the fabled postwar agricultural abundance. Anti-hunger activists and investigative journalists demonstrated in the early 1960s that hunger had not gone away.⁸⁶ Yet, Johnson remained wedded to an optimistic view of food, bluntly telling Congress: “We have the means to conquer hunger.”⁸⁷

As his words revealed, his administration viewed food as having power. Diets and nutrition became top priorities within the White House, and policymakers hoped food could be used to improve the health and human potential of all Americans, if not the world. This would hopefully make it possible to make concrete steps toward the Great Society that Johnson had promised in 1965. Emergency aid took the first priority. An earlier bill, the Food Stamp Act of 1964, made permanent a revitalized but temporary program of direct food aid to needy Americans. It was a plan of Freeman’s even before assuming the office of secretary.⁸⁸ Nineteen-sixty-four was also a year for “sharing of our abundance on a scale unparalleled in the history of the world,” according to Johnson when he signed legislation extending the Food for Peace (P.L. 480) program.⁸⁹ Indeed, in fighting the Cold War abroad, food became a critical part of foreign policy in countries

⁸⁶ Susan Levine, *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America’s Favorite Welfare Program* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 106-08.

⁸⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Message to Congress,” February 4, 1965, Message, Legislative Process, Box 1, Legislative Background, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

⁸⁸ Memorandum, O.V. Wells to Governor Freeman, January 16, 1961, Notebooks: Power Use, Box 4, Orville Freeman Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston, MA; “Memorandum re Food Stamp Plan,” [January 1961?], Notebooks: Power Use, Box 4, Orville Freeman Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston, MA.

⁸⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Statement by the President upon Signing Bill Extending the Agricultural Trade and Assistance Act,” October 8, 1964, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed December 31, 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26578>.

like India and Vietnam, where food was used as a development tool to stem the tide of communism and shore up friendly governments.⁹⁰

The Johnson administration injected food into domestic policy in the hopes of developing a path forward for stalled ideas like rural uplift, antipoverty initiatives, and meat inspection. The Task Force of Programs and Policies, through its report “Agriculture and Rural Life: The Decade Ahead” in 1965, focused on the ways that rural Americans had been left behind by the general national progress and the market-based policies that would best help them catch up to the rest of the nation.⁹¹ However, food had a crucial role to play. The report writers dedicated fifteen pages to exploring rural Americans’ nutrition needs and recommending how the administration could use food to address their immediate needs. Some of the recommendations required non-market deliveries of food to the most vulnerable, which included expanding emergency aid to children. Programs useful to this were the school lunch program, free milk and free breakfast program, and having Head Start provide meals and snacks to children throughout the school day. This was to be accomplished by legislation that mandated that every child had a right to eat, enacted as the Child Nutrition Act of 1966.⁹² But, the main

⁹⁰ Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (Harvard University Press, 2010), 91 and 205.

⁹¹ Task Force on Programs and Policy “Agriculture and Rural Life: The Decade Ahead,” [1965?], Legislative Process, Box 1, Legislative Background, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

⁹² On the Child Nutrition Act of 1966, see Levine, *School Lunch Politics*, 113-116.

recommendation was to continue food production at a “progressively lower cost to consumers in relation to income.”⁹³

Two other task forces began the work of integrating food into domestic policy agenda. The two, the Task Force on Adequate Diet and Nutrition and the Task Force on Meat Inspection, had the same membership of high-ranking administration members, including Freeman and Chief of Staff for Domestic Affairs Califano and several other prominent administration figures, including Sergeant Shriver. The Task Force on Adequate Diet and Nutrition began its work on August 17, 1967, in response to a publicity trip taken by Senator Robert Kennedy to the Black Belt in Mississippi. The task force focused on developing policy for reaching the most vulnerable of Americans, including the rural poor of places like the Mississippi delta and Appalachia as well as urban Americans. As Califano wrote to its members, “This special Task Force effort reflects our deep conviction that every American should have an adequate nutritional diet. We hope to develop, with your help, a strong and imaginative program for consideration by the second session of the 90th Congress.”⁹⁴ Both the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) offered legislative reports, which the administration combined into a family food distribution

⁹³ Task Force on Programs and Policy “Agriculture and Rural Life: The Decade Ahead,” [1965?], Legislative Process, Box 1, Legislative Background, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX. The following quotations come from the report.

⁹⁴ Memorandum, Joseph Califano, Jr., to the Honorable Charles L. Shultze, Director of the Bureau of the Budget, August 17, 1967, Task Force Report, “Nutrition and Adequate Diets 1968,” Box 24, Task Force Reports, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX. The task force was a direct response to the Kennedy and Clark trip to Mississippi. Memorandum, Wilfred H. Rommel to Mr. Gaither, August 15, 1967, Task Force Report, “Nutrition and Adequate Diets 1968,” Box 24, Task Force Reports, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

program bill.⁹⁵ The bill went nowhere in Congress, even as the USDA and the HEW continued administering existing food programs.⁹⁶ The bill failed to attract supporters and died in committee.

The other task force, the Task Force on Meat Inspection, began on September 30, 1966, when Califano took up direct responsibility for guiding Freeman's stalled meat inspection bill through Congress. He began by asking Freeman to produce a taskforce study of the proposed legislation.⁹⁷ Freeman's taskforce report made it to Califano on November 1 and contained recommendations and observations that would become the basis for further action on meat inspection. It set the tone of the administration's approach to meat inspection and clarified the logic behind the need to expand inspection. The report began by claiming that "a healthy, vigorous United States depends upon an abundant meat supply. It must be of unquestionable wholesomeness, free from adulteration, and truthfully labeled. The goal is to insure a thorough inspection of all meat

⁹⁵ For the HEW recommendations, see "Health Programs," [1967?], Box 24, Task Force Reports, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX. Memorandum, James M. Frey to Mr. Gaither, November 22, 1967, Box 24, Task Force Reports, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

⁹⁶ A potential cause for the failure to create a singular and coordinated family food program as was hoped for might be the split responsibilities for food aid between the USDA and the HEW. The Bureau of the Budget recommended, and the administration agreed, to maintain the current divide between the two departments with the USDA to continue handling commodity support programs such as school lunch, food stamps, and state extension services. The HEW was seen as lacking in Congressional allies and unable to take up the programs run by the USDA, which enjoyed strong Congressional support. Memorandum, Charles Schultze to Joseph Califano, Jr., October 20, 1967, Box 24, Task Force Reports, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX; Memorandum, James Gaither to DeVier Pierson, October 23, 1967, Box 24, Task Force Reports, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

⁹⁷ Memorandum, Joseph Califano, Jr., to Orville Freeman, September 31, 1966, Meat and Poultry Inspection, Box 17, Task Force Reports, Special Files, Presidential Papers, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

and meat products.”⁹⁸ The administration took up meat inspection in earnest with its claim that the nation’s success hinged on managing the meat supply to ensure that private manufacturers did not cut corners on production by taking advantage of modern production techniques to deceive consumers. Meat was key to national vigor but supplies needed to be managed to ensure the public well-being. As always throughout the postwar era, meat referred to in this report basically meant beef and sort-of pork.⁹⁹

Freeman’s taskforce recommended two main proposals that would form the core of the proposed legislation, now to be called the Wholesome Meat Act of 1967. The newly christened legislation would clarify and enhance the USDA’s meat seizure powers, as revealed in the Merkel case. Also, state inspection would have to match federal inspection standards in every plant slaughtering, producing, or processing meat for human consumption even if that meat failed to cross state lines. This would happen with states upgrading their systems to match those of the federal government. To cover the cost of states upgrading their system, the federal government would also pay 50 percent of the costs needed to update state inspections, with training costs estimated at \$100,000. Despite providing these two planks and the sweeping rhetoric of the opening remarks, the task force recommended two scaled back proposals. It dropped a recommendation that would have granted federal authority to inspect facilities in states lacking an inspection system. It also recommended that companies who produced meat for non-human consumption register with the USDA but not receive inspection at the same level as other plants. Califano had the Bureau of the Budget assess the proposed legislation but they

⁹⁸ “Task Force on Meat Inspection,” October 31, 1966, Box 17, Task Force Reports, Special Files, Presidential Papers, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

⁹⁹ On the language of meat and its relation to beef and pork, see Introduction.

offered little hope of it passing. The administration's efforts seemed doomed "in the absence of major meat scandals."¹⁰⁰ While using food as a focal point for domestic policy injected a sense of possibility into the administration's flailing domestic agenda, it was an injection that went nowhere.

The proposed legislation by early 1967 seemed dead in Congress and it looked likely that Freeman's plan for beef policy might come to an end. The boycotts had left the administration hoping to shed its connection to consumer activism and using food to organize domestic policy had failed to yield results. The bill might have remained dead if not for the nation's meat supply suddenly seeming so unwholesome. That year became the year of that Americans were reawakened to the awful conditions that could be found in meat production and processing plants. In many ways it was a replay of *The Jungle*, in 1967 as in 1906, popular interest in federal meat inspection legislation surged only after the gross aspects of meat were revealed. Freeman had spent five years using technocratic language and evidence to generate interest in meat inspection but the argument that finally won over public and Congressional support was the blood and guts of it all. It would be reports of disgusting production conditions that finally unleashed the necessary support to move the legislation forward. While 1967 was the fateful year, a report from years earlier started it.

In 1962, Congress authorized a report to be conducted by the chief of the Agricultural Research Service, M. R. Clarkson, a veterinarian with over thirty years' experience in meat inspection, in order to determine how much federal meat inspection

¹⁰⁰ Memorandum, Resources and Civil Works Division to Director, Bureau of the Budget, November 10, 1966, Meat Inspection, Box 17, Task Force Reports, Special Files, Presidential Papers, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

could be scaled back and what kinds of savings would be enjoyed by doing so. His task was to cooperate with state departments of agriculture to develop a method for having states pick up the cost of enforcing regulations set by the Meat Inspection Division.¹⁰¹ To generate usable information for the final report, he had his regional inspectors assess the conditions found at non-federally inspected plants within their jurisdictions. These were later organized to present conditions according to what was found in each state. His office compiled a summary report, known as the Clarkson Report, and sent it to Congress in 1963. The summary as given to Congress supported the plan to have state governments enforce federal regulations—understood as the strictest in the nation—which would rely on state government to enforce those higher and nationally uniform standards.¹⁰² From reading just the final report, lawmakers got the impression that state agencies were overall doing a fine job of inspection and rules enforcement, and, even though problems might exist, the states could be expected to take up federal inspection and its associated costs with little to no problems.

The tentative plan to hand federal meat inspection to the states had resulted in the Talmadge-Aiken law that allowed for voluntary cooperation between federal and state inspectors but the details about non-federally inspected plants collected by the division, though withheld from lawmakers, suggested that something was awry. At facilities not under federal inspection, federal inspectors encountered numerous examples of

¹⁰¹ Clarkson joined the Meat Inspection Division in 1930. For his biography, see House Committee on Agriculture, Subcommittee on Livestock and Feed Grains, *Amend the Meat Inspection Act: Hearings on H.R. 1314, H.R. 1321, and H.R. 6168*, 90th Cong., 1st sess., 1967, 76-77.

¹⁰² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Services, “A Review of Certain Aspects of State and Federal Meat Inspection Services and Procedures,” January 1963, Survey and Investigation Staff #11 [1 of 2], Box 7, Records Relating to the July 1967 Survey of Non-Federally Inspected Meat Plants, 1967 – 1967, RG 462, National Archives, College Park, MD.

regulatory inadequacy and technical violations that alarmed them. In their individual reports, they recorded hundreds of examples of state and municipal inspection services failing to meet the local inspection standards far lower than the standards that they would be expected to enforce if the plan went forward. But there was more. Their reports also presented lurid, and often stomach-churning, accounts of flies, feces, and filth that gave an impression at odds with the report's positive summary assessment of state inspection. From just one facility in Kansas, near the Missouri border, one inspector found two examples in a plant that might one day become federally inspected: "Some of the rail rust had filtered down from the rails onto the hind quarters of the dressed [beef] carcasses," and, "The flies were excessive, and [the rendering room] definitely would provide a good breeding place for flies, roaches, and rats."¹⁰³ Other reports contradicted the summary opinion that many of the facilities could meet federal standards.¹⁰⁴ As one inspector describing non-federally inspected plants in his jurisdiction put it, "It is my opinion that no plant conducting slaughtering in Arizona or New Mexico could meet our minimum requirements of construction or facilities without a major remodeling program."¹⁰⁵

In sending only a summary to Congress, Clarkson held back the plant assessments and ugly details that might have sparked a broader reassessment of meat production and

¹⁰³ H. D. Ellis to H. J. Clary, "Menghini Brothers Packing Company," September 20, 1962, Survey and Investigation Staff #11 [1 of 2], Box 7, Records Relating to the July 1967 Survey of Non-Federally Inspected Meat Plants, 1967 – 1967, RG 462, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁴ For the summary, see U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Services, "A Review of Certain Aspects of State and Federal Meat Inspection Services and Procedures," p. 3, January 1963, Survey and Investigation Staff #11 [1 of 2], Box 7, Records Relating to the July 1967 Survey of Non-Federally Inspected Meat Plants, 1967 – 1967, RG 462, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁵ Memorandum, C. J. Prohal to R. K. Somers, September 27, 1962, Survey and Investigation Staff #11 [1 of 2], Box 7, Records Relating to the July 1967 Survey of Non-Federally Inspected Meat Plants, 1967 – 1967, RG 462, National Archives, College Park, MD.

modern production techniques. Even years later, the report's details were not well known and the efficacy of state or local inspection was not a controversial political topic. This was the situation going into the summer of 1967 when the Subcommittee on Livestock and Feed Grains of the House Committee on Agriculture held hearings on three pending meat inspection bills. The legislative outreach team at the Department of Agriculture had finally managed to convince the subcommittee leadership to hold hearings on expanding federal inspection, preparing Congress for the bombshell to come.¹⁰⁶ Subcommittee chair Graham Purcell (D-TX) opened the hearings with declaration of consumer rights:

“Primarily, I believe that the American consumer is entitled to know that the meat she is buying for her family is pure and wholesome.” He added that the Meat Inspection Act had done that but needed updating since “there has been a major revolution in the industry as a result of advancing technology, rapid transportation, along with communication and intensified marketing and new food preservation methods.” His comments concluded by noting that slaughtering and processing was leaving federal inspection, about 15 percent for slaughter (nineteen million animals) and 25 percent for processing (about eight and three-quarter billion pounds of meat). As he concluded, “This would be all right, I believe, if there were adequate State inspection.”¹⁰⁷

The subcommittee hearings were called so the lawmakers could consider H.R. 1314, H.R. 1321, and H.R. 6168 and introduce a single version to the full House for

¹⁰⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Wholesome Meat Act of 1967: Analysis of Legislation to Amend the Federal Meat Inspection Act,” June 1967, Folder 3 of 6, 90th Congress, Box 18, Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰⁷ House Subcommittee, *Amend the Meat Inspection Act*, 15.

consideration.¹⁰⁸ Leonor Sullivan (D-MO) introduced H.R. 1321, a brief bill that allowed the secretary of agriculture to hold hearings on meat suspected of being produced in poor conditions. Neal Smith, Congressional champion of extending meat inspection since the late 1950s, introduced H.R. 1314 and H.R. 6168. His bill, H.R. 1314, provided for extending meat inspection to all plants owned by a company engaged in interstate trade. He also introduced the administration's bill, H.R. 6168, which completely rewrote the Meat Inspection Act with modern language and new terms, notably expanding the definition of meat that could be inspected to include any meat item that could be consumed by humans in place of the original definition of meat meaning a meat item intended for human consumption. It was a point Smith emphasized in his testimony when he described the need to control the rendering industry since a renderer could sell chunks of a diseased cattle to a pet food plant, only to have it "trucked to someone who processes it into sausage or even puts it into hamburger."¹⁰⁹ The administration's bill also gave the secretary the explicit power to seize meat suspected of being adulterated or otherwise fraudulently prepared or labeled, regardless of if it crossed state lines or not. Leonard, sent by Freeman present the department's case for their bill, spoke of the consumer and claimed that "we must insure that every effort is made to provide [the housewife] with the full assurance that the meat she buys her family is safe and wholesome: a guarantee that today is taken for granted."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ For the full text of the bills, see House Subcommittee, *Amend the Meat Inspection Act*, 1-15.

¹⁰⁹ Neil Smith quoted in House Committee on Agriculture, Subcommittee, *Amend the Meat Inspection Act: Hearings on H.R. 1314, H.R. 1321, and H.R. 6168*, 90th Cong., 1st sess., 1967, 38.

¹¹⁰ Rodney Leonard quoted in House Subcommittee on Livestock and Grains, *Amend the Meat Inspection Act*, 16.

The push to expand inspection may still have died if not for consumer activists revealing the full details left out of the Clarkson Report. The consumer activist Ralph Nader was invited to the hearings and he used the them as a platform to publically shame the Department of Agriculture, state inspection systems, and the meat industry as being ardently anti-consumer while also demanding Congress pass stringent meat inspection legislation. In a letter to the subcommittee, he accused the department of deliberately deceiving Congress by withholding the full report, which he hoped might galvanize the public into supporting strongest federal inspection possible once the true horror was revealed. He accused the department of “coddling the industry” over fears that the revelations would hurt sales.¹¹¹ The publicity he gave the reports led Committee of Agriculture Chair William Poage (D-TX) to push the House Committee on Appropriations to release funds for the department to check and see if the poor conditions still existed at non-federally inspected facilities. His success led to the Consumer and Marketing Service to update the Clarkson Report. Between July 27 and August 3, federal inspectors raced across the nation, hurriedly visiting plants to see if the situation had improved, producing the Non-Federally Inspected Survey of 1967.

The inspectors reported tales of meatpacking woe. The inspectors provided evidence of state government maleficence regarding both facility conditions and the actual meat products themselves being not up to federal standards.¹¹² Conditions at 183

¹¹¹ Ralph Nader quoted in House Subcommittee, *Amend the Meat Inspection Act*, 239. It is not clear who alerted him to the existence of the report.

¹¹² For a summary of the survey and its aftermath, see “Survey of Federally Inspected Packing Plants,” [1968?], Survey and Investigation Staff #11 [1 of 2], Box 7, Records Relating to the July 1967 Survey of Non-Federally Inspected Meat Plants, 1967 – 1967, RG 462, National Archives, College Park, MD.

plants were surveyed in forty states. Examples of poor facility conditions poured in. In Pueblo, Colorado, Joseph J. Barrett found plants operating that could never match federal inspection standards: “The floor in the slaughtering room was rough broken cement, with very poor drainage. There were pools of rancid water, blood, and manure on the floor.”¹¹³ The survey also assessed whether unsanitary cleaning practices were generally accepted, attributable to an atmosphere allowed by non-federal inspection since federal inspection had strict cleaning standards. Inspectors returning to the Kansas facility from the Clarkson Report and noted that the plant was still not being cleaned properly and that “a great deal of work is necessary before this plant would meet federal standards.”¹¹⁴ The 1967 survey added a new dimension to the assessments when the organizers at instructed its staff to buy meat from non-federally inspected sources at local retail markets in order for the division to test the product. Of the 162 samples tested from non-federally inspected meat products, 123 were found to contain 259 total violations of federal law.¹¹⁵ Common violations included unlisted ingredients like flour, excessive water levels, and the presence of chemicals like sodium nitrite and sodium nitrate. Despite this large volume of violations, the survey tests failed to return even one example of a public health threat.

¹¹³ Memorandum, Joseph J. Barrett to Wilbur F. Michael, July 30, 1967, Colorado, Box 2, Records Relating to the July 1967 Survey of Non-Federally Inspected Meat Plants, 1967 – 1967, RG 462, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁴ Memorandum, P. L. Fairleigh to B. H. Rorem, July 27, 1967, Kansas, Box 2, Records Relating to the July 1967 Survey of Non-Federally Inspected Meat Plants, 1967 – 1967, RG 462, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁵ “Summary Sheet, Laboratory Analysis of Non-federally Inspected Products July 1967, Selected at Retail Level,” [1967?], Box 1, Records Relating to the July 1967 Survey of Non-Federally Inspected Meat Plants, 1967 – 1967, RG 462, National Archives, College Park, MD.

These findings were just what was needed to make Freeman's plan to expand and strengthen federal inspection seem so urgently needed. The evidence provided by the survey robbed opponents of their argument that non-federal inspection was just as good as federal inspection. After the finished survey results were publicly known, the only thing that opponents could claim with any amount of public sympathy was that the federal facility construction rules were too stringent for smaller plants to follow and too expensive to follow.¹¹⁶ Proponents sought as much detail as possible. Senator Walter Mondale (D-MN) requested that the department give him access to more of the details in order to bolster his own legislation to expand meat inspection (S. 2218).¹¹⁷ The lurid details from the signing statement came from this survey. The survey gave Freeman what he wanted but it did so at the cost of shifting the terms of the debate away from the more arcane discourse about Department of Agriculture authority and toward public outrage at the dreaded return of *The Jungle*.

Political backing for the Wholesome Meat Act came from the fear that an out-of-control industry, free of regulation, was sacrificing public welfare in the name of maximizing profits. Newspapers and magazines began covering meat production with an eye toward uncovering further horrors. Nick Kotz wrote a series of articles appearing in the *Des Moines Register* and the *Minneapolis Tribune* that exposed local packing plants as unsanitary. His 1968 Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting was awarded because he

¹¹⁶ Leonard as well as state secretaries of agriculture and union representatives expressed concern that facility regulations would force small businesses to close. Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Subcommittee on Agricultural Research and General Legislation, *Meat Inspection: Hearings on S. 2147, S. 2218, and H.R. 12144*, 90th Cong., 1st sess., 1967, 71, 174, and 288.

¹¹⁷ Cotys M. Mouser to Dave Pearce, March 29, 1968, H.R. 12144, Folder 3 of 6, 90th Congress, Box 18, Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

“helped insure the passage of the Federal Wholesome Meat Act of 1967.”¹¹⁸ The *Des Moines Register*, along with national papers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, quickly took editorial positions in favor of the strongest possible meat inspection legislation possible and put public pressure on Congress to pass something.¹¹⁹ In addition to raising awareness about the Clarkson Report, Nader contributed to the print debate through two articles in *The New Republic*. His article from July 15, 1967, “We’re Still in the Jungle,” explained that a segment of meat producers had been taking advantage of the limits of the 1906 law, using the intrastate meat trade to avoid federal inspection and thus gaining a market advantage over federally inspected plants.¹²⁰ Thanks to the survey and media coverage, meat never seemed so unsafe yet so modern. Despite what his title had suggested, it was no longer *The Jungle* but something else: “the likelihood is that the current situation is far worse!”¹²¹

Congressional support for the Wholesome Meat Act solidified to include Senator Mondale, Senator Joseph Montoya (D-NM) and Members of Congress Smith and Thomas S. Foley (D-WA). Supporters now had all the momentum that they needed to push past the remaining legislative resistance. After the hearings, the House subcommittee sent out H.R. 12144, a clean bill which closely matched the administration’s bill, for a full House vote. A voice vote passed it on October 31 and sent

¹¹⁸ “The Pulitzer Prizes 1968 Winners,” *The Pulitzer Prize*, accessed May 20, 2014, <http://www.pulitzer.org/awards/1968>.

¹¹⁹ Editorial, *The Des Moines Register*, July 14, 1967; editorial, “Still a Jungle,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1967; editorial, “Protecting Consumers,” *Washington Post and Times-Herald*, July 27, 1967.

¹²⁰ Ralph Nader, “We’re Still in the Jungle,” *The New Republic*, July 15, 1967, 11-12; Ralph Nader, “Watch That Hamburger,” *The New Republic*, August 19, 1967, 13.

¹²¹ Ralph Nader, “We’re Still in the Jungle,” *The New Republic*, July 15, 1967, 11.

it to the Senate for full consideration. Senate hearings commenced in the middle of November, with Mondale and Montoya each introducing their own bills to compete with the House bill.¹²² Mondale's bill (S. 2218) was the most extreme of the three and granted the Department of Agriculture full and immediate authority over all meat facilities located within the United States unless the secretary deemed the state the plant was located in as having an inspection system equivalent to the federal government's. Montoya's bill (S. 2147) resembled the House version and both tasked state inspection systems with handling intrastate meat but at federal standards and provided assistance to state inspection with an offer to pay 50 percent of the cost of implementing and improving their inspection systems. This was to be gradually phased in over the course of several years.

The Senate hearings generated considerably more interest than the House hearings. Over seventy witnesses testified before the Senate compared with the twenty-seven for the House. This time, the administration sent a representative, Special Assistant to the President for Consumer Affairs Betty Furness, to speak on behalf of the president. At the hearings, she argued that American women were owed meat that they could serve their families that was guaranteed to be wholesome without having the responsibility fall solely to them. She emphasized the growing trend of non-federally inspected plants and the threat it posed to the 50 million Americans who were currently eating such meat. Finally, she shocked the committee by endorsing Mondale's more drastic bill, claiming in her prepared statement that "it would safeguard the health of the American people

¹²² Senate Subcommittee, *Meat Inspection*. The text of the bills can be found on pages 1-14.

through mandatory Federal meat inspection—now!”¹²³ The administration officially hardened its commitment to meat inspection perhaps hoping to shore up consumer support since the firing of Peterson and her replacement by a woman who employed a personal shopper had angered consumers.¹²⁴

The Johnson administration was perhaps spurred on by consumers writing to Furness in favor of Mondale’s bill, such as Mrs. Rudolph S. Halley, who wrote, “It is inconceivable that in this, the twentieth century, people are offered tainted and treated meat, which is not fit for animals.”¹²⁵ Others also supported Mondale’s stronger bill, including the AFL-CIO and Washington, D.C., group Federation of Homemakers.¹²⁶ Leonard again represented his boss at the hearings and argued that expanding and strengthening the Department of Agriculture’s meat regulation would secure a healthier and wholesome diet for all Americans while also taming an industry that, as he put it, had proven itself to be “modern and aggressive.”¹²⁷ Even the major producers wanted to be seen as supporting the House bill with the vice president of the American Meat Institute, Aled P. Davies, claiming “our association stands firmly for meat inspection that will assure all consumers of a wholesome meat supply, processed under the most sanitary conditions, and truthfully and informatively labeled.”¹²⁸

¹²³ Betty Furness quoted in Senate Subcommittee, *Meat Inspection*, 226.

¹²⁴ On housewives’ opposition to Furness, see Furness, Betty, Name Files, White House Central File, Presidential Papers, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

¹²⁵ Mrs. Rudolph S. Halley quoted in Betty Furness to Joseph A. Califano, Jr., December 8, 1967, LE/AG 5, Box 27, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Presidential Papers, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

¹²⁶ Senate Subcommittee, *Meat Inspection*, 165 and 258.

¹²⁷ Rodney Leonard quoted in Senate Subcommittee, *Meat Inspection*, 66.

¹²⁸ Aled P. Davies quoted in Senate Subcommittee, *Meat Inspection*, 127.

At this point, with the AMI openly supporting H.R. 12144, only the Western Meat Packers Association and the State Secretaries of Agriculture offered organized opposition to expanding and strengthening federal inspection.¹²⁹ Mondale and Montoya worked out an agreement with Califano and Deputy special counsel to the President Larry Levinson to pass a strengthened version of Montoya's bill, with Purcell soon agreeing.¹³⁰ The new version of H.R. 12144 was stronger than the original House version: it granted the federal government full authority over state meat inspection after two years if the state had yet to match its system to the federal one. Yet, unlike with Mondale's bill, governors would not be able to instantly relinquish their state inspection to the federal government. In its place, the committee added a key phrase to the bill that was responsible for making the federal standards the minimum that all states had to follow. All state inspections has to be "at least equal" to U.S. Department of Agriculture standards. The Senate passed the new version H.R. 12144 with a rollcall vote. Two senators voted no, Richard B. Russell (D-GA) and Herman E. Talmadge (D-GA) in protest of federal government usurpation of state authority. Sent to the House, its members rejected the Senate version of the bill, which meant that the version passed by the House and the version passed by the Senate did not match each other and required reconciliation before the president could sign it.

With two bills to merge, it was still not clear what the final version of the bill would look like. A conference committee met December 5 to produce a final bill to be voted on by each chamber. The resulting bill was stronger than ever, with governors no

¹²⁹ Senate Subcommittee, *Meat Inspection*, 114 and 238.

¹³⁰ Memorandum, Larry Levinson to The President, November 20, 1967, LE/AG5, Box 27, Legislation, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Presidential Papers, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX

longer able to seek exemptions for their state and retailers who process no longer being exempted from inspection.¹³¹ The final version gave a legal definition to the term “meat food product” to mean “any product capable of being use as human food.”¹³²

Additionally, state meat inspection systems had two years to match federal standards or else the secretary of agriculture would assume command of the regulating the state. Once signed, all meat that could be eaten fell under the secretary of agriculture’s jurisdiction. Freeman’s desired seizure statute remained untouched and now allowed the secretary to seize even intrastate meat suspected of violating the law. The final bill maintained Montoya’s proposal to have the federal government cover half the cost of inspection while giving state inspection services until 1969 to be certified by the federal government. The Congress sent this final Wholesome Meat Act to the president, with a final House tally at 336 “yes” to 28 “no” votes and a Senate voice vote. The House “no” votes came from Southern Democrats protesting the expansion of federal power, reasons similar to those expressed by Senators Russell and Talmadge for their earlier “no” votes.

On December 15, 1967 Johnson signed the Wholesome Meat Act in a signing ceremony with over four-hundred attendees, including author of the book that had launched the original meat inspection act, Upton Sinclair. Invited to attend were members of labor groups and consumer groups as well as various industry representatives.¹³³

¹³¹ Memorandum, Mike Manatos to The President, December 5, 1967, LE/AG5, Box 27, Legislation, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Presidential Papers, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

¹³² *Wholesome Meat Act of 1967*, Public Law 90-201, 90th Cong., 1st sess. (December 1967), 1-2.

¹³³ Memorandum, Sherwin Markman to Tom Hughes and Eleanor Pollak, December 11, 1967, LE/AG5, Box 27, Legislation, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Presidential Papers, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX; Memorandum, Tom Hughes to Barefoot Sanders, December 6, 1967, LE/AG5, Box 27, Legislation, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Presidential Papers, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

Speechwriter Peter Benchley wrote the draft for Johnson's signing statement. The differences between the draft written by Benchley and the final one delivered by Johnson reflected the real tension between the faith that modern meat was fundamentally wholesome versus the real shock of the recent exposés. In the original, Benchley proposed having Johnson explain that "the average American eats forty-four pounds of uninspected red meat every year." In another example cut from the final statement, Benchley wrote, "It does not mean that we probably have at one time or another fed our children rancid meat."¹³⁴ The final remarks reflected a hopefulness and a grandiosity captured in Johnson's claim that the act will give consumers "something priceless." It was the federal government promising that, as Americans, they deserved to have a guarantee that no matter what they eat, it would be wholesome. The entire meat supply would be regulated for wholesomeness.

While Johnson enthusiastically signed the act with great fanfare, he had played only a small role in getting Congress to send him the bill. Within the White House, staff like Califano, DeVier Pierson, and James Gaither translated Johnson's pro-consumer message into policy as they saw fit, freely working with Freeman, Leonard, and the rest of the Department of Agriculture on the topics assigned to them. On top of that, Freeman's relatively cool relationship with Johnson, a president Freeman once described as "unpredictable," may have accounted for some of the president's distance from meat regulation.¹³⁵ It seems likely that the President's only real direct involvement in the meat

¹³⁴ Peter Benchley, "Draft," [December 13, 1967?], Consumer Assembly – Remarks by the President, 10-30-67, Office Files of Peter Benchley, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

¹³⁵ Orville Freeman, "Diary," May 25, 1965, Volume 5, Personal Papers of Freeman, Orville L., LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX; Freeman "Diary," January 1, 1964. For more on regulation policy

act was in late November when he discussed the bill with Purcell during an Air Force One flight to the Johnson family ranch.¹³⁶ Califano previously had urged the president to push Purcell into accepting the tougher version of the bill at the forthcoming conference committee and Johnson was supposed to push Purcell in the direction. Johnson's treatment of meat regulation was not unusual for him. Throughout his administration, as the political scientist David Wellborn has argued, Johnson designated larger policy aims and left it to White House aides to turn those grand visions into specific programs, directly contrasting his reputation as an overbearing executive.¹³⁷ On top of that, the president was generally distant on agricultural policy matters.¹³⁸ Perhaps it reflects the presidency becoming too complex to allow presidents to manage all areas of policymaking.¹³⁹ Regardless of his personal involvement, the act represented a major domestic achievement for his administration during a time when most scholars agree Vietnam and the conservative reaction to the Great Society had derailed major domestic achievements.

The Wholesome Meat Act of 1967 was the single legislative achievement of the policy of mass beef consumption. Its operating logic was that cleaning up the supply of

and their strained relationship, see David Wellborn, *Regulation in the White House: The Johnson Presidency* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 234-40.

¹³⁶ Memorandum, Joseph Califano, Jr. to Lyndon Johnson, November 21, 1967, Appointment File [Diary Backup], November 21, 1967, LBJ Ranch, Box 83, President's Appointment File, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

¹³⁷ Wellborn, 274-75. On Johnson and his relationship to the legislative process, particularly the myth of presidential power and "the Johnson treatment," see Zelizer, 5-7.

¹³⁸ Wellborn, 233-34.

¹³⁹ Jeremy Suri, *The Impossible Presidency: The Rise and Fall of America's Highest Office* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

beef would create a single standard of living for all Americans and create a national diet undifferentiated by quality. Modern production techniques had let producers evade federal inspection and gain a competitive advantage against inspected plants, and the bill was to end that practice. The path to its passage lay through the same route that had sparked its origins in smoked ham: consumer outrage over fears of adulteration and unregulated capitalism. It was not the spread of disease that motivated the passage but the idea that producers were passing along filthy and adulterated meat that sparked public outrage. Granted, the bill did not target beef specifically, but it did not have to. Beef was the most consumed meat by far and the centerpiece of the American meal.

The triumph of mass beef consumption would soon fall into trouble, with the next administration, helmed by President Richard M. Nixon, finding itself fighting to keep beef on the American plate. Their fight would involve struggling to reassert a balance between producers and consumer, which Johnson had abandoned in his pursuit of wholesome meat. Johnson's willingness to allow Freeman to antagonize producers in favor of serving consumers made the 1960s stand out. Even as beef consumption climbed ever higher, producers grew isolated from and irritated with the Democratic Party administrations Freeman served. Since beef policy fundamentally was about finding a balance of producer and consumer, the 1960s ended with beef policy unmoored from its roots even as the legislation allowed Johnson to claim a triumph for beef policy.

Chapter 6
End of an Era:
Economic Crisis and the Collapse of Beef Policy, 1968-1974

In June 1970, the Consumer and Marketing Service (CMS) within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) solicited public feedback on a proposed change to federal hamburger and beef patty standards. The service wanted to consider allowing additives like binders with proper labeling if the public agreed with the change. Over five-hundred responded with consumers and consumer groups expressing their clear preference for hamburger patties to be pure, unadulterated beef, harkening back to a fight the department had with consumers over smoked ham in 1961. In California, consumers learned incorrectly that the proposal was to allow the extenders but without labeling. Unsurprisingly, many were incensed at the prospect. Mrs. Jack E. Holbrook of Orland explained that this was an issue of her dietary rights, or, in her words, “The concern of the government over all the consumers’ rights should certainly include something as basic as the food we buy.”¹ Mrs. Edward J. Behrendt of Ventura added in her protest letter the importance of constraining businesses and regulating profits in order to protect consumers, arguing, “Ground beef is such a staple of the average American diet because of its versatility and comparatively low price, that the meat cutters preparing it for the retail market see in it an opportunity to make up for some of the smaller profits from

¹ Mrs. Jack E. Holbrook to the Hearing Clerk, September 11, 1970, 1970 – Comments on Patty Products, Box 17, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, RG 463, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, National Archives, College Park, MD.

other cuts such as steaks and roast unless they are rigidly governed by strict laws.”² For Mrs. Alfred P. Langlois of Thousand Oaks even poor Americans deserved beef that was free of adulterants, “Do you realize, Gentlemen, that ground beef is the staple protein of the low income family? We have every right to expect ground beef to be just that.”³

Their outrage was the kind of outrage only possible in the age of mass beef consumption. By 1970, beef had become what was once only a dream: the staple protein of the American diet. The transformation was remarkable. Beef was now a lower-status meat in addition to remaining a higher-status meat; it was now both. This made beef the most important part of Americans’ diets and the one item most likely to cause outrage when something threatened their daily beef like a misunderstood regulation proposal or sudden surges in prices. Even as beef became ensconced in the American diet, people struggled to be able to afford it. The president at the time, Richard M. Nixon, did not ignore them and sought ways to maintain the policy of making beef more affordable and more available to most Americans, which was by then a policy almost thirty years old. It was a policy that had largely succeeded in delivering beef to the multitudes and seemed unstoppable. But, it was a policy also in crisis. Beef prices rose at a rate exceeding that of other goods and of incomes while producers struggled to maintain profitable. In a way, the policy had helped create the very conditions that was about to end it.

² Edward J. Behrendt to the Hearing Clerk, September 10, 1970, 1970 – Comments on Patty Products, Box 17, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, RG 463, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, National Archives, College Park, MD.

³ Mrs. Alfred P. Langlois to the Hearing Clerk, September 15, 1970, 1970 – Comments on Patty Products, Box 17, Subject Files, 1958 – 1958, RG 463, Records of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 1868 – 1985, National Archives, College Park, MD.

Nixon, despite his best efforts, failed to keep beef policy alive throughout the turmoil of the early 1970s. That is not how his presidency started, though. The flush times of the late-1960s made it seem as if food had the power to cure the ills of poverty and that even the poorest Americans could eat as if they were middle class. But the administration's hope that food was an antipoverty tool dissipated as economic peace broke down. Soon, consumers and producers found themselves battling over beef imports and, in doing so, revealed that the domestic food system was fraught with conflict. It was up to the Nixon administration to find a way to balance the needs of these two groups and let both know that he was on their side. Nixon's responded by having Secretary of Agriculture Clifford M. Hardin triangulate a level of beef imports that satisfied both the beef producers who favored no imports and the consumers who favored unlimited imports. By 1971, though, rampant inflation began threatening the economy in general and beef in particular, which shattered the delicate peace they had built. Nixon embracing beef as a signature anti-inflation item leading up to his 1972 reelection campaign placed beef prices at the center of the battle against the high cost of living. As beef prices, held in check in 1972, rose suddenly in 1973, both producers and consumers lost faith in his administration's efforts. This rupture and loss of faith from both sides restricted the president's options and signaled a critical moment for beef policy. Consumer outrage flared in 1973, leading to a national beef boycott in April. Nixon, having promised that he could deliver low prices, failed and, in failing, revealed that he led a government that was incapable of fixing economic problems. To an oil-shocked economy, his failure to reverse rising beef prices was one failure too many. Abandoned by unhappy producers and

consumers, the administration let the unspoken thirty-year policy of beef for the multitudes quietly expire.

By 1969, beef policy had succeeded so well that it became possible to imagine a world in which even the poor ate a diet rooted in plenty. It was this idea that drove the Nixon White House to spend its first year attempting to use food to fix poverty and meet the needs of the poorest Americans. It was an unspoken aspect of this fight to end poverty by food that they would have made poor Americans into middle-class style consumers, who could likely be expected to join in on their fellow consumers in consuming beef as a dietary staple. They would join the ranks of the undifferentiated consumer. The Republican president and his staff spent initially attempted to use targeted anti-hunger programs that closely resembled the plans that the prior Democratic administration had dropped.⁴ The erstwhile conservative administration was willing to continue the liberal policy of government food aid because the American diet seemed so stuffed with abundance and production so bountiful that it was possible to see, even for a conservative administration, a public policy solution to the privations of poverty. Finding a role for the state came even though the administration employed a staff of free market radicals who saw the state as the enemy of the economy and who hoped to develop a new political economy founded on limited government and unrestrained capitalism.⁵ Nevertheless, Nixon wanted to steal poverty from the Democrats before the next elections and

⁴ On hunger policies in the Johnson administration, see Chapter 5.

⁵ On conservative political economy and the Nixon White House, see Meg Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump: The Energy Crisis and the Transformation of American Politics in the 1970s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2016), 102-08.

conservative ideas of smaller government at the expense of human health lacked the popularity needed to win elections.

The Nixon White House spent its first months in office formulating anti-hunger programs with the hope of capturing the Democratic Party's political momentum on the issue. Democrats in Congress, led by Senators Joseph Clark (D-PA) and Robert F. Kennedy (D-NY), catapulted the issue into the national spotlight with Congressional hearings in 1967 that explored the link between poverty and hunger, and, through trips to the Mississippi Delta, drew awareness to malnutrition as a widespread problem among poor and rural Americans.⁶ The senators hoped to prove that living in poverty rendered poor Americans too sickly to improve their situation thanks to nutrition-related diseases, such as anemia, and a reduction in mental acuity. Hunger and malnutrition, as they saw it, played a key role in sustaining and spreading the curse of poverty. They were not alone in this concern; Democrats in the White House had already linked poverty to hunger through President Johnson's War on Poverty. His administration supported the creation of national food stamp and school lunch programs to help recipients eat well enough to be able to reach their potential as human beings and become fit enough to take advantage of all the Great Society had to offer.

Connecting the War on Poverty to Nixon's agenda was an effort at raising Americans above the "poverty line." It was a concept that fueled efforts at combating poverty through food in both administrations. The poverty line was the yearly income that a family of four needed to pay its housing, food, and other needs, which provided a

⁶ Harvey Levenstein, *The Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 144-45.

concrete number needed for leaving poverty. Food occupied the largest portion of the family budget and was the key problem to solve. It was also the basis for the idea. Home economist Mollie Orshansky at the Social Security Administration developed the poverty line as a guide for researchers before the concept was adopted by administrators looking for a usable rule for establishing a welfare baseline. She derived the poverty line by drawing on the results of the 1955 Department of Agriculture national nutrition study, which found that Americans spent about one-third of their yearly income on food, and then she added in what it cost to meet the daily recommended nutritional allowance for each household member.⁷ The minimum was never meant to be a long-term goal even though it became the standard for measuring poverty. It was only meant to measure a temporary situation that a family might fall into.

Nixon inherited from his predecessors a set of hunger policy tools drawn from antipoverty programs and he initially relied on them. The main drive to eliminate hunger under Johnson emerged from the remaking of “poverty knowledge” within the executive branch, which shifted to include Keynesian ideas about human capital development.⁸ Policymakers saw food as a stimulant that would rehabilitate the poverty-stricken eater by infusing much needed vital energy into a poor person’s waning body. This formed a biopolitics of food within the White House: hearty meals anchored by proteins like beef would serve to regenerate the needy and came to serve as a cure for the ills of poverty,

⁷ Susan Levine, *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America’s Favorite Welfare Program* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 120-21.

⁸ On “poverty knowledge” and the executive branch, see Alice O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 136-95.

thus making full social participation possible.⁹ The Great Society's arrival depended on all of the American people being well-fed. The key ways of undoing poverty through hunger included the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 and USDA support for local food distribution programs through the food stamp program.¹⁰ While the Great Society came under fire from grassroots activists for failing to address the structural and political economic roots of poverty, the food-based programs revealed the links that connected consumer and anti-poverty politics.¹¹ As beef policy over the prior decades had demonstrated, policymakers aimed to uplift not only poor Americans but all Americans by providing a healthier and more nutritious diet. Starting in 1969, it fell to Nixon to decide the fate of the nation's food policies.

The Nixon White House attempted to capture the politics of poverty eradication from Democrats by providing immediate aid to the most needy. By focusing on the most vulnerable, public policy would improve the operations of the economy by draining off the commodities most likely to harm the market. Secretary of Agriculture Hardin served as the main cabinet official for overseeing the White House's pro-market food distribution programs.¹² Hardin, an agricultural economist with a PhD from Purdue, came

⁹ On biopolitics and meat, see Gabriel N. Rosenberg, "A Race Suicide among the Hogs: The Biopolitics of Pork in the United States, 1865-1930," *American Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (March 2016): 49-73. On the Johnson administration's food policies, see "Food Assistance," [1967?], Box 24, Task Force Reports, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

¹⁰ Levine, 127-28.

¹¹ On the grassroots of the War on Poverty and community empowerment, see Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, eds., *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964-1980*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

¹² Memorandum, Richard M. Nixon to Clifford M. Hardin, February 5, 1969, EX FG 20 Department of Agriculture [1 of 10, Jan - Dec 1969], Box 1, FG, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

into office well-prepared to manage food distribution programs with a market-friendly touch.¹³ With Hardin at the helm, the administration initially focused hunger policies toward fixing food distribution problems. This meant shoring up the market to prevent downturns and limit supply disruptions. However, not all in the administration agreed with this approach. White House staffer, and future American Enterprise Institute president, Christopher DeMuth warned senior Nixon aide Patrick Moynihan that something more needed to be done, and fast, to counter the Democrats' hold on poverty and hunger issues and it needed to serve people first. He suggested a strong display of assistance that would rely on the Department of Agriculture's emergency food programs to help vulnerable groups of people, such as children or the elderly. The administration then needed to expand the key food programs—school lunch and food stamps—in order to demonstrate its firm commitment to ending hunger. Critically, DeMuth warned that the food programs related to hunger needed to be moved out of the Department of Agriculture and Hardin's oversight.¹⁴ He feared that Department of Agriculture employees' dedication to farmers made the department unable to properly tackle hunger, and he doubted that Hardin could change the department. Only the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) as led by Secretary Robert H. Finch could manage the nation's hunger-fighting programs because DeMuth believed that the department's employees put the needs of the poor above the needs of food producers. His efforts failed,

¹³ On Clifford M. Hardin's background, see Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *Prospective Nominations of Dr. Clifford M. Hardin, J. Phil Campbell, and Clarence D. Palmby*, 91st Cong., 1st Sess., 1969, 4.

¹⁴ Memorandum, Christopher DeMuth to Daniel P. Moynihan, February 11, 1969, [EX] HE 3-1 Hunger and Malnutrition, Box 13, HE, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

though, and hunger programs remained rooted in distribution, as with beef policy. Nevertheless, his argument reflected the tension within the administration between conservative economic ideas that favored producers and popular, liberal ones that put consumers first.

Regardless of where they stood on political economy, DeMuth, Moynihan, and others in the administration premised their proposals on the idea that hunger in the United States was ultimately a paradox to be fixed. In a draft speech for the president, Assistant Secretary for Marketing and Consumer Services Richard Edmund Lyng at the Department of Agriculture voiced the administration's logic when he described the country as "the richest nation in the world—the nation best fed, best housed, and best clothed." The American enterprise system fundamentally worked, it only needed to be perfected. As he put it, "Our food production and marketing systems are the envy of the world....And we produce [food] and sell it to those who have the means to buy it at a smaller share of 'take-home' pay than anywhere in the world." He advised waiting for a "total solution" soon to be suggested by the Urban Council.¹⁵ His draft speech proposed building up state power to supplement the free market but not replace it. Although the draft did not specifically mention beef, it was mass beef consumption more than anything else that stood as a testament to the proposition that American agriculture provided the best food in the world and that Americans were the wealthiest people thanks to the free

¹⁵ Richard Lyng, "Eradicating Poverty-Related Malnutrition," March 19, 1969, [EX] HE 3-1 Hunger and Malnutrition, Box 13, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

market. Notably, after serving in the Nixon White House, Lyng left to become the president of the American Meat Institute (AMI).¹⁶

Nixon offered his administration's justification for intervening into the market economy in the name of combating hunger and malnutrition found sound a conservative justification for its adoption of liberal programs. In remarks before the Congress in May 1969, he built on Lyng's concepts by defining hunger and malnutrition as an anomaly in modern America: Americans was simply too rich to be poor. The problem of poverty and hunger were problems that Americans had only recently been aware of, with the president noting, "We have long thought of America as the most bounteous of nations. In our conquest of the most elemental of human needs, we have set a standard that is a wonder and aspiration for the rest of the world." At stake was not only domestic security, though, but the country's reputation and self-image as well, with the president claiming, "That hunger and malnutrition should persist in a land such as ours is embarrassing and intolerable." It was embarrassing and intolerable because, as he saw it, the free market ought to have solved the hunger issue on its own. But all was not lost. He issued a clarion call to action to the Congress: "The moment is at hand to put an end to hunger in America itself. For all time."¹⁷ He then offered five steps to end hunger; three involved the use of Department of Agriculture programs to feed the neediest of families and children while the other two involved a coordinated effort between the private sector and other executive agencies to erase hunger and fix the American diet.

¹⁶ Courtney I. P. Thomas, *In Food We Trust: The Politics of Purity in American Food Regulation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 107.

¹⁷ Richard M. Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress Recommending a Program To End Hunger in America," May 6, 1969.

As the administration developed its anti-hunger programs, the shared logic between its anti-hunger programs and the continuation of beef policy became clearer. Jean Mayer, a leading nutritional chemist, tasked by Nixon with organizing the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health, argued for “a nutritional rights counterpart to civil voting rights.”¹⁸ This echoed a core ideological tenant of beef policy. Nixon’s remarks at the conference held in early December 1969 directly linked hunger rights and dietary citizenship and spelled out the stakes involved in his administration’s food policies. He framed hunger, as he had in prior speeches, as an anomaly in the land of plenty but, in this speech, he added a personal anecdote that clarified why the recent abundance was so important to protect. He had known hunger, as had the entire nation, during the Great Depression. “I recall in my native State of California in the thirties,” he explained, “families that I knew, that I went to school with, subsisting on bread and gravy, bread and milk, beans. And later on in the thirties, in North Carolina, families who knew nothing much more than black-eyed peas, turnip greens. We have come a long way since then, but we still have a long way to go.”¹⁹ His point was that beans and peas were the proteins of privation not the proteins of plenty. Although he did not clarify what the diet of plenty entailed, if he had the American diet in mind, he likely thought of beef as the protein of plenty since beef had never before consumed beef at the amounts it had during his administration (see figure 6.1). He ended with a promise that the nation had

¹⁸ Jean Mayer quoted in Levine, 152.

¹⁹ Richard Nixon, “Remarks at the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health,” December 2, 1969, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed October 20, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2349>.

the capacity produce enough for all. “This Nation,” Nixon proposed, “has the capacity to provide an adequate diet for every American.”²⁰

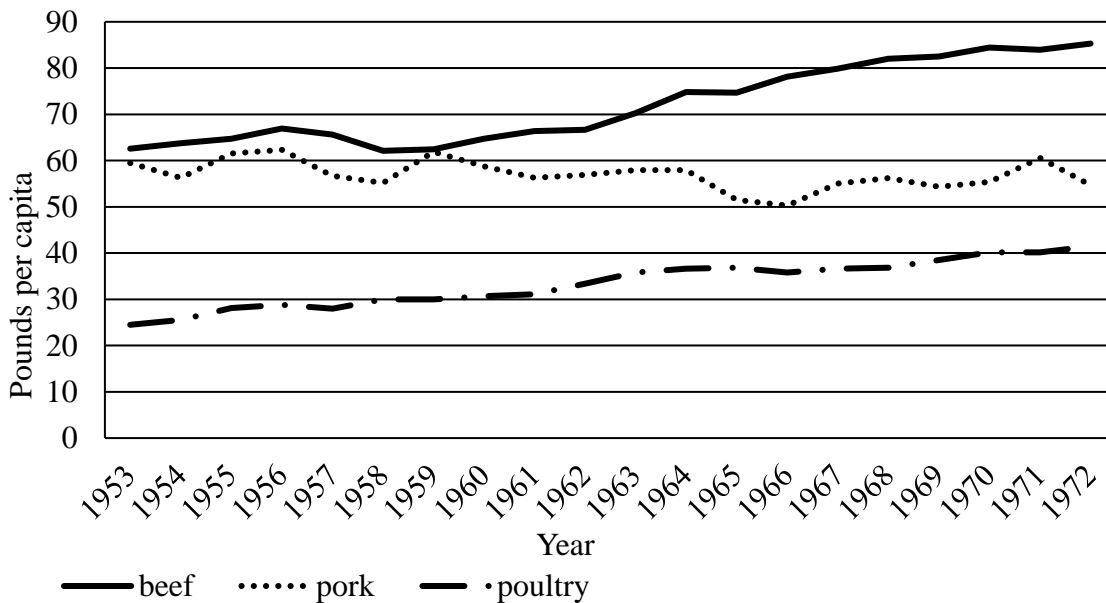


Figure 6.1: Estimated retail weight of per capita meat consumption, 1953-1972. Source: US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, “Red Meat and Chicken (Retail Weight),” by Jeanine Bentley and Jean Buzby, accessed December 18, 2014, [http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-\(per-capita\)-data-system](http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-(per-capita)-data-system).

Within days of taking office, Nixon put his administration’s plan to eliminate hunger in the hands of his cabinet officials. With his first two executive orders as president, Nixon created the Council for Urban Affairs and the Cabinet Committee on Economic Policy as advisory groups comprised of cabinet-level officials tasked with making policy recommendations on domestic issues. Legally, the policy recommendations had to be nationally relevant and not applicable to only a segment of the nation, despite the council’s ostensible focus on urban affairs. The council and the

²⁰ Richard Nixon, “Remarks at the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health,” December 2, 1969, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2349>.

committee shared key members, with the vice president and the secretaries of agriculture, commerce, and labor serving both, allowing them to speak with one voice. It therefore fell to the Council on Urban Affairs to address the nation's dietary needs. The council's Food and Nutrition Committee, chaired by Hardin, offered a set of cautious steps for the president to take to combat "poverty-related malnutrition."²¹ The first recommendation was to wait for the results of the national nutrition survey that was already then under way, which was a department effort to update the 1955 and 1965 national diet surveys that had previously guided national policy. The other main recommendation was for the president to address the Congress and offer a national plan of action to begin undoing the harm caused by poverty-related hunger and malnutrition. This meant using federal food programs to prioritize needy recipients.

In the wake of the proposal, the Nixon administration worked to develop a program that would change the economics of poverty through food. It was a program built around a universal diet meant to be consumed by all Americans regardless of anyone's individual needs, conditions, or geographic area. The core concept, which fit within their broader approach to domestic policy, required growing the economy and elevating poor people into the middle class and, thereby, erasing their economic problems.²² Federal programs would assist by reducing the cost of food for poor families to match the percentage paid by other families to ensure that everyone ate the same nutritious food as the same percentage of income. For poor people, the idea was that

²¹ "Report of the Committee of the Urban Affairs Council on Food and Nutrition," March 17, 1969, [EX] HE 3-1 Hunger and Malnutrition, Box 13, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

²² On Nixon and the role of growth within his domestic policy agenda, see Robert Collin, *More: The Politics of Economic Growth in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 98-132.

education and income would allow them to buy the right foods and the right costs by leaving individuals to choose their own foods. While food costs taking up as much as one-half the family budget of poor families, even with food stamp support, for middleclass Americans, the percentage was closer to 17 percent.²³ The goal was to get those two numbers closer together through stimulating economic expansion and thereby pushing all Americans into a beef-based diet.

Secretary Hardin shifted the Department of Agriculture away from his predecessor's focus on consumers and toward a focus on producers as a way of correcting the broader food and fiber political economy. In addition to his early efforts at ending hunger through increased commodity program, he immediately signaled his desire to support farmers by announcing shortly after taking the oath of office that "one of our foremost concerns in the department must be farmers' income. Furthermore as Americans we must endeavor as never before to eliminate malnutrition and to stimulate and revitalize rural America." His mission was simple: "to do our very best in representing agriculture and rural America to the President."²⁴ Policy proof of his dedication to farmers came two weeks later when he suggested that Nixon continue a federal program for paying farmers an immediate advance of 50 percent for entering into a land retirement program for feed grains, which Nixon agreed to despite his previously stated

²³ "Report of the Committee of the Urban Affairs Council on Food and Nutrition," March 17, 1969, p. 17, [EX] HE 3-1 Hunger and Malnutrition, Box 13, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

²⁴ Clifford Hardin quoted in "Hardin Sets Farm Income Rise as Goal," *Washington Post*, January 23, 1969.

opposition.²⁵ Internally, the administration hoped that Hardin would work closely with the Council of Economic Advisors and the Bureau of the Budget in developing and coordinating his department's producer-centric policies. According to Paul McCracken, Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, all of the secretary's "program and price" decisions needed prior approval from both the council and the bureau to prevent agricultural policy from harming other economic programs.²⁶

As the administration's anti-hunger push dried up, the Department of Agriculture moved onto tackling the department's biggest postwar legislative challenge: passing the agriculture act, or the so-called "farm bill," which was set to expire in 1970. Creating a new farm policy formed a backdrop for the looming need to reconfigure beef policy for the new administration. The legislation provided payments to farmers to cover parity, or an amount needed to maintain purchasing power parity between farmers and non-farmers.²⁷ The upcoming legislation provided the administration a chance to cut back on the cost of the farm policy and thus assert its conservative goal. Hardin began the process in September 1969 by presenting Nixon with several policy options designed to reduce farmers' reliance on the federal government. According to him, administrations since President Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s had hooked farmers on government funds as a

²⁵ "Advance Farm Aid Backed by Hardin," *New York Times*, February 4, 1969; "U.S. Checks to Farmers Continued," *Washington Post*, February 6, 1969.

²⁶ Memorandum, Paul McCracken to the president, February 4, 1969, EX FG 20 Department of Agriculture [1 of 10, Jan – Dec 1969], Box 1, FG, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

²⁷ On parity, see R. Douglas Hurt, *Problems of Plenty: The American Farmer in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 12; Vernon W. Ruttan, "Agricultural Policy in an Affluent Society," *Journal of Farm Economics* 48, no. 5, Proceedings Number (December 1966): 1100-20; Bill Winders, *The Politics of Food Supply: U.S. Agricultural Policy in the World Economy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 8-9.

means of wealth transference and, by doing so, reduced the influence of the market on their economic choices, leaving the farm economy broken.²⁸ Hardin, with Nixon's approval, negotiated a draft bill ready for introduction in 1970 but the bill stalled for most of the year as farm groups and legislators battled over its direction. Going into negotiations, the administration had the support of the cattle industry, who as a group favored the smaller land retirement program present in the draft bill.²⁹ By the end of autumn, lawmakers, farm groups, and the administration had negotiated a compromise bill acceptable to most, which Nixon signed on November 30.³⁰ Throughout the negotiation, the White House wanted to spur the food production system to be able to match Hardin's soaring rhetoric when he said, "American agriculture is the most efficient in the world. Consumers are supplied with the most wholesome, the most nutritious, and the most varied food supply ever enjoyed by any people. This superb diet is supplied at the cost of only 17 percent of the consumer's income, the lowest ever, here or elsewhere."³¹

While the battle over poverty and the farm bill occupied the first year of the Nixon administration, beef policy soon emerged as its own issue, and the administration

²⁸ Clifford Hardin, "Alternative Farm Program Proposals," September 11, 1969, p. 1, Ex AG Agriculture [1 of 10, 1969], Box 1, AG, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

²⁹ Don Paarlberg, "Political Assessment of the Farm Bill," [February 2, 1969?], Ex AG Agriculture [2 of 10, 1970], Box 1, AG, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

³⁰ "1970 Agricultural Act Cleared After 16-Month Debate" in *CQ Almanac 1970*, 26th ed. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1971), 634-44.

³¹ Clifford Hardin, "Alternative Farm Program Proposals," September 11, 1969, p. 1, Ex AG Agriculture [1 of 10, 1969], Box 1, AG, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

joined a fight that lasted Nixon's entire time as president. The issue was beef imports and it challenged his pro-producer stance on political economy. National beef import quotas, required by law, were meant to save the meat industry from a flood of imported, cheaper meats that were feared by domestic producers to be driving down meat producers' profits. The law, passed in 1964 over President Johnson's objections, required the secretary of agriculture to announce quarterly limits to the amount of imported beef allowed to enter the nation before a quota would be triggered. The fight over imports had heated up in the late-1950s as cattlemen began fearing that beef prices had dropped too low to support their industry, which lawmakers responded to by pushing for tighter controls on beef coming into the country. The result was an amendment to the Tariff Act of 1930 that added a quota system for fresh, frozen, and chilled beef imports (P.L. 88-482). The law set an import quota based on a formula that drew on the level of imports from 1959 to 1962, which totaled during those years 725 million pounds, or 4.6 percent of domestic production.³² The law also gave the president the power to make a public pronouncement about the quarterly quota, giving the reluctant, free-trade Johnson administration a tool it did not want. Nixon, however, embraced this power over meat trade and used it to garner votes and control inflation. By the end of his presidency, his administration refashioned the quota into a tool of mass beef consumption, costing him the support of the cattle industry.

The process of turning quotas into a tool of beef policy began with the Nixon administration reviewing the beef quota policy that it had inherited from the Johnson

³² Audrey H. Ensminger, et al., eds., *Foods and Nutrition Encyclopedia*, 2nd vol. (New York: CRC Press, 1993), 1414.

administration. The previous president had viewed quotas as an obstacle to be overcome in the maintenance of liberalized trade. President Johnson had vigorously worked to prevent quotas from triggering in the years after he reluctantly signed the bill. His State Department negotiated voluntary limitation agreements with every importing country each year.³³ This allowed the White House to extend its support for free-trade to agriculture while also giving him a chance to maintain control over imports against further Congressional interference. Under the guidance of Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman, the administration even helped block Congressional attempts to add lamb, pork, and processed meat to the beef quota system.³⁴ The Johnson administration's support of free trade was not shared by Nixon, who took office amid a controversy over Australian imports.³⁵ Freeman announced the 1969 importation limit during his final weeks in office and set it at slightly over one billion pounds for the year.³⁶

Shortly after taking office, Hardin began working on the administration's import policy, starting with calming Australia over its anger at beef import limitation. The Johnson administration had managed the previous November to get verbal guarantees for 1969 beef imports from all of major importing countries except Canada and the United Kingdom. They also created a schedule for allocating beef imports up to the total of the

³³ Memorandum, George W. Ball to the President, April 2, TA 6/Beef 3/6/64 – 8/15/64, Box 11, TA, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Presidential Papers, LBJ Library and Archives, Austin, TX.

³⁴ Memorandum, Orville L. Freeman to the President, May 5, 1967, April 1 – June 30, 1967 [2 of 2], Box 5, Personal Papers of Freeman, LBJ Library and Archives, Austin, TX.

³⁵ Memorandum, Aryness Joy Wickens to Esther Peterson, March 13, 1964, Meat Imports 1964, Box 65, RG 220, President's Committee on Consumer Interests; Consumer Advisory Council, 1962-1969, LBJ Library and Archives, Austin, TX.

³⁶ John A. Schnittker, "Meat Import Limitations," [December 31, 1969?], TA/6 Meat, Box 18, TA, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Presidential Papers, LBJ Library and Archives, Austin, TX; "Meat Import Rise Seen," *New York Times*, January 3, 1969.

quota-triggering cap, set at one-billion and thirty-four million pounds.³⁷ Australia enjoyed the largest share at five-hundred and five million pounds, nearly half of the total of all beef imported into the United States that year.³⁸ Yet, in early January, the government of Australia let the outgoing Johnson administration know that it was “disappointed” at its allocation because the new allocation forced a reduction in its total percentage of imported beef from 53 percent to 49 percent thanks to Central American countries like Honduras exceeding their limit.³⁹ Problems over Australian meat inspections standards for exported beef emerged and were handled through Department of Agriculture negotiations with their Australian counterparts, which Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger reported as being resolved in a way that pleased Australian government.⁴⁰ Enjoying the good will, later in the year, Australia cut back beef exports to the United States by 5 percent to avoid triggering quotas even though others raised their exports.⁴¹ Afterward, Australian Prime Minister John Gorton reached out to Nixon to ask the president to expand its allotment since Australia’s surging beef production meant that the domestic market was about to be flooded with excess

³⁷ Memorandum, Ray Ioanes to Orville Freeman, [December 31, 1969?], TA/6 Meat, Box 18, TA, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Presidential Papers, LBJ Library and Archives, Austin, TX.

³⁸ Appendix 1, “Meat Import Program (The Options)”, September 25, 1969, [CF] TA 4 Meat [1969-70], Box 62, Confidential Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

³⁹ “A Meaty Question,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 13, 1969.

⁴⁰ Memorandum, Clifford M. Hardon to Henry A. Kissinger, May 1, 1969, Ex AG Agriculture [1 of 10, 1969], Box 1, AG, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA; Memorandum, Henry A. Kissinger to Clifford M. Hardon, May 17, 1969, Ex AG Agriculture [1 of 10, 1969], Box 1, AG, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁴¹ Arnold Erickson, “Big Exporters May Activate Import Law,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 7, 1969.

meat, which would threaten his own country's economy. He was worried that the resulting collapse of beef prices would hurt his chances in the upcoming election and wanted Nixon to help him out.⁴²

Undergirding the fight between Australia and the United States over beef exports was the general shape of global agriculture trade and the general direction diets across the globe were heading in. A problem with grains, and wheat in particular, developed throughout the 1960s with the major grain producing countries growing ever more wheat while their domestic populations began eating more and more meat, thus ensuring that supply outpaced demand.⁴³ Productivity gains in wheat production between 1945 and 1970 raised the per acre yield of wheat from seventeen bushels per acre to thirty-one while domestic consumption per capita during the same period shrunk from 161 pounds per year to 112.⁴⁴ In 1969, together, the major exporting countries, the United States, Canada, Australia, Argentina, and France, had over three billion bushels of excess wheat available for exporting.⁴⁵ Hardin, hoping to reduce the government's presence in agriculture, wanted these countries to roll back supports as well, which had spread thanks to those countries mimicking postwar U.S. farm policy. The countries met to adjust the International Grains Arrangement but it ended without a firm commitment to reduce supports for wheat production despite Hardin's insistence. During negotiations, the

⁴² J. G. Gorton to Mr. President, [September 16, 1969?], EX TA 4/CM Tariff-Imports [Meat, 1969-70], Box 25, TA, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁴³ Winders, 146.

⁴⁴ Winders, 138; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1975), 331.

⁴⁵ Brendon Jones, "World's Food Glut Strains Trade Relations: Breakdown Feared for International Grain Pricing," *New York Times*, April 14, 1969.

Australian representatives pushed for policies like increased minimum prices that Hardin felt would only harm U.S. farmers by flooding the globe with subsidized wheat, thus forcing U.S. farmers to try to keep us by overproducing wheat at a time when he was trying to curb it.⁴⁶ On top of public policy, rising global postwar prosperity complicated the wheat market. Declining wheat consumption was a problem for wheat producing states, noted *New York Times* reporter Brendan Jones, “particularly as higher incomes increase preferences for meat instead of grains.”⁴⁷

During the conflicts with Australia in 1969, chair of the Council of Economic Advisors, Paul McCracken, workshopped an acceptable approach for the administration on beef quotas. Many members of the administration weighed in on the problem, which pitted consumers and foreign policy interests against those of domestic producers. The Department of State recommended getting rid of quotas completely because allied countries like Australia and Honduras relied on sending excess production to the United States in order to stabilize their own economies.⁴⁸ The President’s Committee on Consumer Interests suggested setting quotas at the highest possible rate to ensure that the greatest amount of beef possible was imported.⁴⁹ For McCracken, the president faced a

⁴⁶ Memorandum, Clifford M. Hardon to Henry A. Kissinger, May 1, 1969, Ex AG Agriculture [1 of 10, 1969], Box 1, AG, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁴⁷ Brendon Jones, “World’s Food Glut Strains Trade Relations: Breakdown Feared for International Grain Pricing,” *New York Times*, April 14, 1969.

⁴⁸ Memorandum, E – Phillips H. Trezise to CRA – Dr. Houthakker, September 24, 1969, [CF] TA 4 Meat [1969-60], Box 62, Subject Files, Confidential Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁴⁹ Memorandum, Elizabeth Hanford to Paul Wonnacott, September 24, 1969, [CF] TA 4 Meat [1969-60], Box 62, Subject Files, Confidential Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

political decision rather than an economic one since the amount of imported meat was negligible compared to the total amount of beef produced each year (between 5 and 8 percent). The president needed to weigh the support of consumers and foreign policy interests versus the support of domestic cattle producers.⁵⁰ The administration had to decide which groups it wanted for the 1970 and 1972 elections. The president, unwilling to choose either group, attempted to placate both sides: Hardin kept Freeman's January estimate in place for the fourth quarter estimate of imports while Nixon issued an executive order allowing the United States to store excessive beef imports from Honduras and roll over the total to next year.⁵¹

Hardin, as the chief administrator of the beef quotas, had his own ideas on what the administration should do. The secretary of agriculture recommended that Nixon remain committed to liberalizing trade in agriculture, starting by staving off the triggering of beef quotas. The president needed to force Central American countries to abide by their commitments to limit their exports, since he saw their actions as causing the crisis in the first place. If the voluntary limitations could be reestablished, then the administration could begin implementing their true goal: the shift of farm policy to a price-based, market footing that Hardin was about to unveil. The free-trade corollary meant that Hardin's vision for the future of American agriculture was one in which American produce was sold domestically at a price set by total global supply and total global demand. Cattle

⁵⁰ Memorandum for the President, Paul W. McCracken, September 25, 1969, [CF] TA 4 Meat [1969-60], Box 62, Confidential Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁵¹ Clifford M. Hardin to the President, October 1, 1969, [CF] TA 4 Meat [1969-60], Box 62, Confidential Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA; Executive Order no. 11,496, *Code of Federal Regulations*, title 3, p. 18799 [1966-1970].

producers would be angry, he reasoned, but their frustration would be ameliorated by the currently high cattle prices, which he thought would help them learn how to survive in a free-trade environment shorn of government support for feed grains. His hope was that unfettered access to the national markets across the planet would fix farming and save consumers by ensuring that only profitable farmers and ranchers would survive. He explained to the president that America's role in the world meat market was unique, since it was the most open market in the world, a status he hoped to keep. As he put it, "the United States has become by far the most rewarding market for beef exports in the world."⁵²

The threat of beef quotas split the meat industry. Hamburger-centered restaurants supported the importing of leaner, cheaper meats since processed meat producers relied on mixing leaner foreign meat with fatty domestic meat. D. M. Reints, a franchiser of Burger Chef restaurant in North Carolina, warned his representative that import quotas would hurt his business and claimed, "With 'hamburger stores' becoming a way of life to many persons, the price increase resulting from import quotas would surely cause a further reduction in the purchasing power of our dollars—in short, inflation."⁵³ He was right, hamburger restaurants were spreading across the nation. Burger Chef, owned by General Foods, consisted of one-thousand total stores compared with hamburger giant

⁵² Memorandum, Clifford M. Hardin to the President, September 24, 1969, [CF] TA 4 Meat [1969-60], Box 62, Confidential Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁵³ D. M. Reints, to Roy A. Taylor, February 19, 1969, GEN TA4/CM Tariff-Imports, Box 51, TA, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

McDonald's 1,292 total stores.⁵⁴ It is telling that a beef product could become such a staple of the less affluent who were forming the core of the hamburger store's clientele. But not everyone involved in the beef industry had the same use for imports. Senator Roman Hruska (R-NE) took to the Senator floor to defend quotas and spoke for the domestic cattle industry's desire for the president to use the quotas to exclude foreign competition. He blasted the administration for claiming that high beef prices justified allowing imports since prices had fallen in recent months, instability that quotas would prevent. Furthermore, he argued, the cattle industry was simply too large and too important to the agriculture economy for the administration to risk by allowing continued imports of beef, which by 1969 amounted to 8 percent of total U.S. domestic production. He warned the president in apocalyptic terms: "The danger we face today is a new flood of imports of foreign meat, which may have a catastrophic impact on our domestic livestock markets."⁵⁵

Complicating the debate was the dramatic shifts in the production and consumption of beef. Commercial feedlots, a term coined by the Department of Agriculture to distinguish them from the older style of seasonal, farmer-owned feedlot, fed cattle year-round in lots that housed thousands of cattle each year a diet of grains like corn or grain sorghum.⁵⁶ These lots were a small part of the industry after World War II but quickly overtook the competition: commercial feedlots went from feeding one-third

⁵⁴ "General Foods Set Fiscal 1st Period Highs," *Wall Street Journal*, July 18, 1969; "McDonald's Sees Net and Sales Increasing Substantially in 1970," *Wall Street Journal*, February 2, 1970.

⁵⁵ *Congressional Record—Senate*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., May 5, 1969, 11447.

⁵⁶ Maureen Ogle, *In Meat We Trust: An Unexpected History of Carnivore America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 123-24.

of all slaughter cattle in 1945 to 72 percent in 1970.⁵⁷ Similar to commercial feedlots, the federal grading of beef transformed the value of fattened cattle. Grading measured the fat, maturity, and bodily conformity of the animal with the aim of assessing the marbling of the meat (or the mixture of fat and muscle) of each cattle slaughtered and consumed in the country. The highest-rated government grades—Prime and Choice—proved to be the most lucrative and were produced easiest at commercial feedlots. With both producers and consumers chasing higher grades, the market share of Choice grew substantially, from 34 percent in 1946 to 53 percent by 1981.⁵⁸ Choice grade beef became the industry's as well as the consumer's preferred grade of beef.⁵⁹ The subsequent lack of domestic production of lower grades of meat gave imported beef a place within the economy that domestic producers were not filling. It was the lower grades that made up the bulk of hamburger meat and other processed beef products. Processors relied on cheaper low-fat beef cattle for their meat but mixed in beef fat and pricey high-fat beef to produce products that conformed to legal definitions and consumer preferences.⁶⁰ Federal hamburger regulations from 1946 defined a hamburger as an all-beef patty made of 30 percent added beef fat. Similarly, ground beef had to have 30 percent beef fat. Imported beef nevertheless remained a controversial part of the industry with pro-cattle legislators like Huskra hoping to restrict all imports.

⁵⁷ Lennart A. Palme, "Integration in the Feeding Industry," in *The Feedlot*, 2nd edition, ed. Irwin A. Dyer and C. C. O'Mary (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1977), 254.

⁵⁸ Jimmy Skaggs, *Prime Cut: Livestock Raising and Meatpacking in the United States, 1607-1983* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986), 170.

⁵⁹ Ogle, 130.

⁶⁰ D. M. Reints, to Roy A. Taylor, February 19, 1969, GEN TA4/CM Tariff-Imports, Box 51, TA, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

The White House spent the subsequent year searching for a way to balance competing interests. Hardin warned that meat producers from the major exporting countries would circumvent restrictions by using other countries to launder their meat shipments to circumvent the voluntary limits. Firms in Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland shipped fresh, chilled, or frozen beef to Canada and then had that meat shipped to the United States since Canada lacked a voluntary import limit.⁶¹ To end this problem, he suggested that Nixon issue an executive order that permitted the secretary to individual negotiate with each importing country an agreement to stop all imports that would trigger the quotas, including imports laundered through countries like Canada. Nixon did not issue the executive order in January; the State Department negotiated an agreement with all of the beef exporting countries that allowed the United States to block all fresh, chilled, or frozen beef imports from the agreeing countries, even if that meat was routed through an intermediary like Canada first. The State Department formalized the agreements with an exchange of notes, indicating an official decision had been reached.⁶² In January, Hardin announced his first quarter estimation for the total amount of imported beef expected to enter the United States to be one-billion and sixty-one million pounds, below the number needed to trigger quotas.⁶³ The president complained to White House aide Peter Flanigan that the recent increase in the beef import limits failed to earn his

⁶¹ Clifford M. Hardin to Robert P. Mayo, January 16, 1970, EX TA4/CM Tariff-Imports [Meat – Nickle, 1969-70], Box 25, TA, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁶² William P. Rogers to Australian Embassy, January 30, 1970, EX TA4/CM Tariff-Imports [Meat, 1969-70], Box 25, TA, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁶³ Clifford M. Hardin to the President, January 12, 1970, EX TA4/CM Tariff-Imports [Meat, 1969-70], Box 25, TA, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

administration support from consumers, an import amount Flanigan described as “a very substantial amount of low-priced beef.”⁶⁴ Throughout the year, the administration continued to raise quota limits and let more imported beef flow into the country.

Inflation entered the debate and eventually transformed imported beef as a political issue and forcing the Nixon administration to face an impossible task of saving beef policy from the consequences of success. Voters by the 1970s had long tired of postwar inflation and, as nothing else could, the fear of further inflation motivated voters. Successive administrations committed the federal government to continuing the New Deal promise of protecting consumers’ purchasing power while also mixing in a commitment to growing the economy.⁶⁵ As the postwar economic boom lagged, fears of inflation intensified and housewives were outraged that their inflation barometer, beef, warned of trouble. They pressured their lawmakers for relief and Congress in October 1969 held hearings on Choice-grade beef prices.⁶⁶ A few months later, it was clear to the Nixon administration that inflation would play an important part in the mid-term elections and they wanted to appear to be taking action on high prices. For Nixon, beating inflation was not only a political but a personal crusade. In his memories reflecting on his loss in the 1960 election, he claimed that the Eisenhower administration failed to take seriously his recommendation that immediate countercyclical spending was needed to

⁶⁴ Memorandum, Peter Flanigan to Herb Klein, February 16, 1970, EX TA4/CM Tariff-Imports [Meat, 1969-70], Box 25, TA, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁶⁵ On inflation and the Nixon administration, see Collins, 98-131.

⁶⁶ House Committee on Government Operations, *Federal Responsibility for Retail Price Increases for Beef: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Relations*, 91st Cong., 1st Sess., 1969, 1-3.

prevent an economic downturn. He warned that the Congressional elections of 1954 and 1958 had gone poorly for Republicans because of “ ‘pocketbook’ issues.”⁶⁷ Inflation had handed the election to the Democrats. According to Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman, Nixon explained why it was so important to get beef prices under control: “The whole point goes back to his concern with the 57-58 situation where the recession psychology was allowed to build up without adequate counter-action by those in the Administration who could have done so. He doesn’t want to let that happen to us this time.”⁶⁸

Nixon grew increasingly frustrated with inflation and began using beef as a key to fighting high prices and stabilizing the domestic economy. In February, he began pushing for a pro-consumerist beef policy while his cabinet encouraged the development a more concerted anti-inflation plan. Postmaster Winton M. Blount suggested that words would calm the nation and that Nixon should marshal the “moral leadership of the presidency” against the spiraling cost of living.⁶⁹ Blount followed up his advice by meeting with McCracken and other senior cabinet officials in order to discuss the administration’s next steps. They came out of the meeting agreeing that Nixon needed to start fighting inflation but without having to resort to wage and price controls which was suggested through cutting government spending in a clear attempt at furthering conservative policies.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Richard Nixon, *Six Crises* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 310.

⁶⁸ Memorandum, H. R. Haldeman to Mr. Flanigan, February 17, 1970, CFOA 163: CF TA 4/20-6 Meat Imports [and Meat Prices, 1970-71], Box 9, Oversize Attachments, Subject Files, White House Special Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁶⁹ William M. Blount to Mr. President, February 26, 1970, CFOA 163: CF TA 4/20-6 Meat Imports [and Meat Prices, 1970-71], Box 9, Oversize Attachments, Subject Files, White House Special Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁷⁰ Memorandum, Peter M. Flanigan to the President, March 4, 1970, CFOA 163: CF TA 4/20-6 Meat Imports [and Meat Prices, 1970-71], Box 9, Oversize Attachments, Subject Files, White House Special Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

Nixon struggled to marshal that moral leadership or cut enough spending. His administration's import decision had similarly failed to garner public support. Instead, he found inspiration in a Department of Agriculture report that the gap between wholesale and retail prices of Choice beef had increased in recent months. Hoping to garner further public support, the president added the price gap to his anti-inflation crusade. Initially, he floated the plan to have Congress investigate prices but Deputy Assistant to the President for Congressional Relations Richard Cook recommended against handing the issue to the "opposition" since Democrats in Congress would only use it as a pretext for establishing economic controls, which would harm the president's economic goals.⁷¹ Instead, Nixon requested that his administration scrutinize beef retailers for signs that they colluded to raise prices in violation of anti-trust laws. He hoped he could present to the public a story of his administration busting a retailer conspiracy to raise beef prices, preferably in time for the election

The administration moved immediately to investigate the beef industry. Investigators examined the relationship between production and retailing, searching for a cause for the gap in prices. The Antitrust Division within the Department of Justice found that a few factors explained the price spread though criminal activity was not one of them. Most significantly, prices had risen recently because the demand for beef had recently reached historic levels. Additionally, prices began rising because of shifts within

⁷¹ Memorandum, Dick Cook to Peter Flanigan, March 27, 1970, EX TA4/CM Tariff-Imports [Meat, 1969-70], Box 25, TA, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

the industry toward increased reliance on processing and packaging.⁷² The retail sector also contributed to prices. To compete with each other, supermarkets began relying on weekend specials as promotional tools, leaving retail price as reported to the Department of Agriculture higher than was actually charged to consumers. In addition, beef retailers had begun buying Choice beef in the more expensive “primal cuts” and, in doing so, reduced their purchases of carcasses, the metric that the department counted to determine wholesale costs. Therefore, the retail costs were lower and the wholesale costs were higher than initially reported. These two changes in the industry were related. Primal cuts allowed retailers to choose a specific cut of beef to be discounted during the weekend and then have enough in stock to cover the demand. The Antitrust Division warned that other factors contributed to driving up retail costs: rising pork prices, a general inflation of all prices, and a lag between wholesale and retail prices fluctuations. Not that retailers were above suspicion. In a final note, the president was warned that retailers, upon noticing that demand for beef was not effected by price increases, may very well have begun raising the price of Choice beef in order to profit from the increasing demand.⁷³ Ultimately, Deputy Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst concluded that “1969’s high meat prices were the result of normal supply and demand forces.”⁷⁴ The Council of

⁷² Richard G. Kleindienst to Peter Flanigan, April 17, 1970, CFOA 163: CF TA 4/20-6 Meat Imports [and Meat Prices, 1970-71], Box 9, Oversize Attachments, Subject Files, White House Special Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁷³ Memorandum, Hugh P. Morrison to Richard W. McLaren, April 1, 1970, CFOA 163: CF TA 4/20-6 Meat Imports [and Meat Prices, 1970-71], Box 9, Oversize Attachments, Subject Files, White House Special Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁷⁴ Richard G. Kleindienst to Peter Flanigan, April 17, 1970, CFOA 163: CF TA 4/20-6 Meat Imports [and Meat Prices, 1970-71], Box 9, Oversize Attachments, Subject Files, White House Special Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

Economic Advisors agreed.⁷⁵ With structural economic reasons accepted as the reason for the price gap, Nixon found his hope for a quick political solution dashed.

Lacking a criminal angle to pursue and hoping to forestall price controls, the administration turned to beef import quotas for a solution. Hardin, because of administrative retooling, lost primary responsibility for quotas when Nixon forced the secretary to work with the special representative for trade negotiations on quotas while the role of recommending quotas levels was transferred to the Task Force on Agricultural Trade.⁷⁶ By December, the administration vowed to never again let the quota issue cause them political problems and began producing extensive reports to guide future recommendations.⁷⁷ Various departments and agencies contributed to the final recommendations. Even National Security Advisor Kissinger felt the need to jump into the debate when he recommended a beef quota level set as high as possible in the interest of currying favor with Australia and the major beef exporting Latin American countries.⁷⁸ A month after the deadline, in January 1971, Nixon announced the new limit, set at 1.125 billion pounds for the year, which was lower than what the State Department and

⁷⁵ Memorandum, Hendrick S. Houthakker to Peter Flanigan, March 20, 1970, CFOA 163: CF TA 4/20-6 Meat Imports [and Meat Prices, 1970-71], Box 9, Oversize Attachments, Subject Files, White House Special Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁷⁶ Executive Order 11539, June 30, 1970.

⁷⁷ Memorandum, Hendrick Houthakker to the President, December 8, 1970, [CF] TA 4/20-6 Tariffs-Imports (Meat-Seafood-Poultry) [1971-74], Box 63, Confidential Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁷⁸ Memorandum, Dr. Kissinger to the President, December 22, 1970, [CF] TA 4/20-6 Tariffs-Imports (Meat-Seafood-Poultry) [1971-74], Box 63, Confidential Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

Kissinger had recommended.⁷⁹ This was done with the support of Hardin at the behest of domestic beef producers, who as a group felt that the administration had purposefully harmed them with the higher quota limit of 1970. Although the White House continued in the following years to shore up support among domestic producers, the anti-inflation crusade thoroughly dominated the decision.

Throughout 1971, in addition to managing beef import quotas, the administration developed plans to fix the economy in a way that respected their conservative economic beliefs while also keeping Congress at arm's length. An early example involved Hardin negotiating with the largest eight supermarkets to try to convince them to voluntarily lower their prices on Choice beef.⁸⁰ It was this "jawboning" that formed the core of the market-friendly approach meant to preserve the price mechanism from the encroachment of state power over the economy.⁸¹ The administration found itself in a defense posture and having to fend off controls Congress foisted on the president by the Defense Production Act Amendments of 1970. Nixon signed but opposed the act, also called the Economic Stabilization Act of 1970, claiming in his signing statement that "price and wage controls simply do not fit the economic conditions which exist today."⁸² Despite his

⁷⁹ Memorandum, C. Fred Bergsten to Dr. Kissinger, January 25, 1971, [CF] TA 4/20-6 Tariffs-Imports (Meat-Seafood-Poultry) [1971-74], Box 63, Confidential Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁸⁰ Memorandum, Bryce Harlow to Bob Haldeman, April 10, 1970, EX BE 5-2 Cost of Living [2 of 9] January – June 1970, Box 59, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁸¹ Memorandum, Robert P. Mayo to Kenneth Cole, January 25, 1970, EX BE 5-3 Inflation-Money Scarcity [4 of 8] February 1-20, 1970, Box 62, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁸² Richard Nixon, "Statement on Signing Bill Extending the Defense Production Act," August 17, 1970, *American Presidency Project*, accessed November 3, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2630>.

claim, White House planning in 1971 resulted in controls being used anyway. Nixon established the Cost of Living Council to handle the task of regulating the economy and for its chair chose Donald Rumsfeld, a former congressman with a history of opposing controls, and he was assisted by Richard Cheney. They developed a master plan that called for a two-phase rollout in 1972 with a subsequent phase for rolling back controls in 1973. This would allow the president to balance pro-control public sentiment against his anti-control philosophy by having them serve as an emergency fix to secure his reelection in 1972.⁸³ The work of the council took high priority within the White House as the election year drew near since the cost of living “will be undoubtedly some of the most important domestic policy and political issues for 1972.”⁸⁴

Despite this building of state power, Nixon struggled to manage an economy beginning to undergo a fundamental transformation as the postwar boom of a high-wage manufacturing base began to crumble. Male earning power reached its apex in 1972 but was beginning to stagnate.⁸⁵ Total unemployment reached 5.9 percent in 1971 and 5.4 percent in 1972 while inflation reached 4.4 and 3.3 percent respectively.⁸⁶ These hinted at stark changes ahead. The early 1970s marked the beginning of the end of the Great Exception, when individual rights and previous failures to provide economic security

⁸³ On the place of controls within the administration’s larger political economic philosophy, see Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump*, 30-35.

⁸⁴ Memorandum, Ed Harper to Ken Cole, August 17, 1971, FG 327 Cost of Living Council 1/1/71 – 12/31/71, Box 1, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁸⁵ Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010), 12.

⁸⁶ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1973*, by William Lerner (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1973), 224; 384.

worked in concert to end an era of political economic equality. As the historian Jefferson Cowie explains it, the focus on individual rights during the 1970s was “a politics that discouraged broader economic solidarity in favor of guaranteeing people an equal chance to compete in a tightening labor market.”⁸⁷ Labor-oriented liberalism, a central political force of the postwar era, failed to offer compelling political solutions to the “stagflation” that began emerging out of the chaos of the early 1970s. The decade marked a shift in American’s lives as women joined men as the breadwinners of families as men’s wages began stagnating in 1973-74, heralding the end of the postwar bread winner family type.⁸⁸ Inequality reemerged after having been kept in check by government action and labor’s successful organizing of the private workforce.⁸⁹ Even meat industry workers, a staple of working class success since the late-1930s, began crumpling back into the conditions that would eventually resemble the ones described by Upton Sinclair in *The Jungle*.⁹⁰

In the face of the worsening economic situation, Nixon remained committed to maintaining the nation’s standard of living and the free enterprise system. When he created the Cost of Living Council in August 1971, Nixon announced a New Economic Policy and defined it as a policy aimed at using minimal government power to secure prosperity for the multitudes, echoing the goal if not the means of President Franklin

⁸⁷ Jefferson Cowie, *The Great Exception: The New Deal and the Limits of American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 184.

⁸⁸ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic, 1993), 74

⁸⁹ Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez, “Income Inequality in the United States, 1913-1998,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118, no. 1 (February 2003), 11.

⁹⁰ Roger Horowitz, “*Negro and White, Unite and Fight!*”: A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930-90 (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 281-83.

Roosevelt did at the 1936 Democratic Party convention. Nixon explained what was at stake:

We are fortunate to live in a nation with an economic system capable of producing for its people the highest standard of living in the world; a system flexible enough to change its ways dramatically when circumstances call for change; and, most important, a system resourceful enough to produce prosperity with freedom and opportunity unmatched in the history of nations.⁹¹

In that same speech, he announced the end of the gold standard of exchange. Later that year, he expanded on his administration's understanding of the role government should play in securing prosperity for all. Controls would end by the end of April 1973, but "I hope and expect, however, that before that date we will see the end of the inflationary psychology that developed in the 1960s, achieve lasting price stability, end controls, and return to reliance on free market forces."⁹² Faced with reelection, he pulled out all the stops in attempting to stabilize the economy and calm voter dissatisfaction. Nixon, in wanting to stop the emergence of that dreaded psychology, tied his political fortunes to the cost of living and the federal government to the fight against inflation.

As the 1972 election approached, Nixon enlisted beef prices and government anti-inflation programs. He personally wrote to Secretary of State William P. Rogers on June 26 to request that all quotas for the year be ended. He justified his request by claiming that "we have now moved toward a freer market in meat for the remainder of this year, it is my hope that the effect of this action will be to increase the amount of imports entering

⁹¹ Richard Nixon, "Address to the Nation Outlining a New Economic Policy: 'The Challenge of Peace,'" August 15, 1971, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed November 5, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3115>.

⁹² Richard Nixon, "Statement on Signing the Economic Stabilization Act Amendments of 1971," December 22, 1971, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed November 5, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3273>.

the United States.”⁹³ Kissinger informed the president that he was working with the major exporting countries to have them step up their beef shipments as soon as possible but that delays were to be expected, a tactic which succeeded in record levels of imports beginning in August.⁹⁴ Imports were expected to reach 1.3 billion pounds that year, and he encouraged exporting nations to send as much beef as possible to the beleaguered beef-hungry nation.⁹⁵ That year, the United States imported about one-third of the world’s total beef exports.⁹⁶ The administration felt desperate enough to consider a price freeze but Cost of Living Council member Cheney cautioned against such a drastic action.⁹⁷ Chair of the Cost of Living Council Rumsfeld offered good news in August.⁹⁸ The wholesale price in July for cattle and beef dropped from 86.7 cents to 83.1 cents per pound. Slaughter rates for the coming months were expected to climb 5 percent above average and thus ensure an ample supply of Choice beef. The challenge, as Rumsfeld saw

⁹³ Richard Nixon to William P. Rogers, June 26, 1972, EX CM 20-6 Meat [1 of 2] 1971-June 1973, Box 8, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁹⁴ Memorandum, Henry A. Kissinger to the President, July 26, 1972, EX CM 20-6 Meat [1 of 2] 1971-June 1973, Box 8, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA; Carroll G. Brunthaver, “Meat Import Limits, Fourth Quarter Estimates,” September 28, 1973, Meat (Meat Imports-Exports), Box 5742, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁹⁵ Memorandum, George P. Shultz to John D. Ehrlichman, December 16, 1972, [CF] TA 4/20-6 Tariffs-Imports (Meat-Seafood-Poultry) [1971-74], Box 63, Confidential Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁹⁶ “Table 3: Beef and Veal: Consumption, production, and Imports for United States, EC, and United Kingdom, 1959, 1968 to date (Carcass Weight Equivalent),” March 1973, Meat 1 (Meat Import-Export) Jan. 1, 1973 to, Box 5743, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁹⁷ Memorandum, Dick Cheney to Donald Rumsfeld, August 12, 1972, [CF] BE 5-2 Cost of Living [1971-74], Box 2, Confidential Files, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁹⁸ Memorandum, Donald Rumsfeld to the President, August 15, 1972, EX CM 20-6 Meat [1 of 2] 1971-June 1973, Box 8, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

it, was to make sure that consumers benefited from the price reduction. To this end, his council and the National Association of Food Chains each sent letters to the top one-hundred retailers informing that that the council knew that wholesale prices were down and that they were expected to pass the benefits to costumers “as soon as possible.” Furthermore, the Internal Revenue Service was monitoring retail beef prices, ready to investigate any suspicious activity. This was Nixon’s market-friendly beef policy in action. His efforts paid off. In the midst of a calm beef economy in November, Nixon won one of the largest electoral victories ever against his Democratic opponent George McGovern.

As Nixon tackled these economic challenges, a new secretary of agriculture joined his administration. Hardin decided to leave the administration to take a position at Ralston-Purina as the Vice-Chairman of the Board in October 1971.⁹⁹ On November 11, Earl Butz replaced him as secretary. Butz, like Hardin, was an agricultural economist with his PhD from Purdue, and had previously worked in the Eisenhower administration as assistant secretary under Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson. The White House had been floating the idea of reworking the entire executive branch when Butz became secretary. The initial plan called for the department to be downgraded to an agency focused exclusively on farm and agriculture problems. Butz only agreed to join if the department would be spared the demotion. The administration agreed and released to the press a claim that Nixon and Butz “agreed that the nation and its farmers need a Department of Agriculture—not the old Department, but a new one which concentrates

⁹⁹ Clifford M. Hardin to the President, October 25, 1971, EX FG 20/A [1969 – 74], Box 3, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

on serving the farmers.”¹⁰⁰ The administration saw the change in leadership as a chance to recalibrate the secretary’s role to be friendlier to producers. Hardin was praised for a low-key leadership that took the most controversial cabinet job and turned into a bipartisan deal maker.¹⁰¹ Butz was seen as being poised to launch a new, visible phase of agricultural leadership in 1973.

As events were about to reveal, beef had become essential to the American way of life in the decades since the end of the Korean War in 1953 and the meat had entered the American diet to such a degree that even normal or slight downturns could turn catastrophic for millions. Beef policy had succeeded to an unexpected degree and now faced the consequences of its success. For the first four months of 1973, Nixon fought a public battle against beef prices as women increasingly refused to suffer in silence. Leading up to the conflict, beef consumption rose to the highest levels ever seen in American history. The administration’s controls from Phase Two ended in early 1973, after Nixon’s win, and he introduced Phase Three, which meant to relax controls until inflation dropped to 2.5 percent. Additionally, in January, he suspended the quota limit, which he justified as consumer relief.¹⁰² As prices heated up that winter, women across the country found themselves at the center of the fight over the slipping standard of living

¹⁰⁰ Memorandum, John C. Whitaker to the President, November 11, 1971, EX FG 20 Department of Agriculture [5 of 10, July – Dec 1971], Box 1, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

¹⁰¹ Memorandum for the President, November 10, 1971, Box 1, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

¹⁰² Memorandum, Henry H. Perritt, Jr. to the Cost of Living Council, April 2, 1973, Meat (Meat Imports-Exports), Box 5742, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

in what the historian Shane Hamilton called “a last-gasp renewal of consumer-driven economic liberalism within the food economy.”¹⁰³

These protests forced Nixon to uphold his promise to use the office’s power to reduce beef prices while unleashing the economy even as he found himself squeezed between producers’ and consumers’ competing interests. Consumers found themselves facing the prospect that the federal government might not be able to save the economy. Despite Nixon’s best efforts, the United States was beginning what the historian Robert Collins characterized as “vicious downward economic spiral,” and the odds were against the conservative politician.¹⁰⁴ Americans endured a consumer price index rise of 8.8 percent in 1973 as well as a wholesale price index rise of 18.3 percent.¹⁰⁵ In January, consumer prices for food rose 2.3 percent while in February they rose 2.4 percent.¹⁰⁶ Things only got worse as the year went on. On March 21, the federal government revealed that beef prices in one month had risen 5.4 percent nationally, with some areas, like the New York Metropolitan area, experiencing even sharper meat price increases.¹⁰⁷ Nixon’s efforts at stabilizing the economy for the November election exploded in his face by the next year. Between the election and March, retail prices for beef rose 16 percent. Nevertheless, cattle owners objected to any hint that quotas should be removed. In December, the actor John Wayne reached out to the president at the behest of cattle

¹⁰³ Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America’s Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 152.

¹⁰⁴ Collins, 127.

¹⁰⁵ Collins, 127.

¹⁰⁶ “Changing Farm Policy to Cut Food Prices,” *Time*, April 9, 1973.

¹⁰⁷ Will Lissner, “Consumers Rally for Meat Boycott,” March 30, 1973; Paul Montgomery, “Food Costs Pace Index in Metropolitan Area—Meat Gains 5.7 Percent,” *New York Times*, April 21, 1973.

owners worried about depressed prices. As the famous actor explained, import limitations “should have no marked effect on consumer beef prices, but would provide the right psychological atmosphere for cattlemen to continue to hold back cows which is the foundation for future beef production.”¹⁰⁸

The administration began studying the topic in January with the understanding that it could solve the problem and, even as late as March 15, Butz felt confident enough to tell the president that “I feel we are winning this battle.”¹⁰⁹ Despite this positive attitude, the administration concluded that the main problem was a significant drop in food supply at the same time that consumer purchasing power had never been higher.¹¹⁰ Efforts were taken to spur production such as suspending beef import quotas again and adjusting the farm program to allow full production of grains and soy to make it cheaper to feed cattle for slaughter. None of this worked and, in a panic, Nixon set price ceilings for meat on March 29 at the elevated February prices.¹¹¹ With the price freeze, the president reversed his New Economic Policy plan of rolling back controls under Phase Three, garnering negative coverage for setting the price controls at a high level.¹¹² He responded to the coverage by calling on women to use their individual and autonomous

¹⁰⁸ John Wayne to Gentlemen, December 27, 1972, EX TA4/CM Tariff-Imports [5 of 7, CM 20-6, 1973], Box 30, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

¹⁰⁹ Earl Butz to Mr. President [Nixon], March 15, 1973, EX BE 5-2 Cost of Living [7 of 9] January – June 1970, Box 60, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

¹¹⁰ Cost of Living Council, Committee on Food, “Food Prices,” March 20, 1973, EX BE 5-2 Cost of Living [7 of 9] January – June 1970, Box 60, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

¹¹¹ Edward Cowan, “Nixon Sets Meat Price Ceilings at Both Wholesale and Retail; Asserts Costs ‘Should Go Down,’ ” *New York Times*, March 30, 1973.

¹¹² Collins, 127.

shopping choices to curb inflation through buying cheaper grades of beef for their families, just as Johnson had done in 1966.¹¹³ The choice to reduce or alter beef purchasing habits were not that simple, though, since beef prices could affect the prices of other meats. President of Kentucky Fried Chicken James H. Wille made this point to Butz when describing how beef prices prop up or diminish the chicken industry: “It is a well-known fact that Americans are a nation of beef eaters. Demand for chicken, pork and other meats depend on their prices in relation to the price of beef.”¹¹⁴

Women began challenging the president over beef prices by taking increasingly public actions to pressure him to preserve their family’s dietary rights. In a *New York Times* interview, a woman identified as Mrs. Terry Hennesey of Harington Park, NJ, explained why she had recently begun organizing her fellow homemakers against increased prices and summarized much of the popular sentiment regarding their troubles: “ ‘While I don’t consider the increase drastic, the point is we are not eating like we used to,’ Mrs. Hennesey said, ‘I don’t buy roast beef, steaks, or even pork. A year ago, we ate very well, not now.’ ”¹¹⁵ Sheryl Stokes of Gettysberg, PA, wrote to Butz asking if the government was doing anything about prices and explained that “it is getting to the point that beef is a luxury item only.”¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Edward Cowen, “If Consumer League Springs Up,” *New York Times*, March 25, 1973.

¹¹⁴ James H. Wille to Earl Butz, August 1, 1973, Meat Aug 1, 1973 to Aug 20, 1973, Box 5743, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁵ Michael Monroe, “Consumers Mobilizing for a War on Food Prices,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1973.

¹¹⁶ Sheryl Stokes to Earl L. Butz, March 5, 1973, Meat Jan. 1, 1973 to March 31, 1973, Box 5742, General Correspondence, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, National Archives, College Park, MD.

A single impromptu call for action soon burgeoned into a national beef boycott. It started in February when Barbara Shuttleworth of Vernon, CT, broke down crying after reading a cartoon depicting a woman buying beef on an instalment plan. The cartoon spoke more truth to Shuttleworth than fiction and she resolved to action. A *New York Times* profile described her as “a young housewife and clubwoman,” who had voted for Nixon, a defiance of the popular image of protestors as radical leftists.¹¹⁷ She rallied her fellow junior members of the Connecticut Federation of Women’s Clubs to start a local beef boycott set to begin the first week of April. Soon, four-thousand members agreed to boycott and she even got local stores to promise to close their meat counters and local schools to promise not to serve meat for the duration of the boycott. She was not alone in her frustration or desire for action. Before long, women across the nation signed on to the boycott in a show of housewife discontent. Her representative invited her to report on women’s experiences with rising prices at a Congressional hearing. She argued that her boycott might not solve the problem but that this was the only action available to housewives that would make Washington listen. Inflation sapped her diet with her \$10 grocery budget once from buying ten or more packages of meat to merely five more recently. Furthermore, she noted that prices for ground chuck rose from 40 cents in December to \$1.29 in March, a pinch on the family budget felt in the wake of the president’s successful manipulation of 1972 beef prices. As her testimony indicated, the flat prices of 1972 made the sudden increases of 1973 even more dizzying. She lambasted the limits of the nation’s technological superiority and echoed Eisenhower administration

¹¹⁷ Lawrence Fellows, “Cartoon for Steak on Layaway Plan Stirred Connecticut Housewife to Call Meat Boycott,” *New York Times*, March 30, 1973; Linda Charlton, “How Was It Possible?,” *New York Times*, April 8, 1973.

logic, saying “If we can get men on the moon, we certainly should be able to solve problems here on earth.”¹¹⁸

By freezing prices at the elevated February prices, Nixon’s March price controls energized the very boycott that he had hoped to forestall and the boycott began as promised on Sunday, April 1. The boycott enjoyed broad support from housewives hoping that they could force a policy change in Washington, if only they collectively flexed their economic muscles. Ad hoc groups sprouted up across the nation, often in the same style that had been created for 1966 boycotts, mimicking the naming style.¹¹⁹ Three groups from Salt Lake City alone included Housewives Expect Lower Prices (HELP), Save Our Sanity (SOS), and Boycott All Meat (BAM).¹²⁰ No single group spoke for all boycotters, even though national groups like Fight Inflation Together (FIT) emerged as the most prominent. FIT had chapters spread out across the nation and a central organizing group to coordinate local activities.¹²¹ These local and nationwide groups drew their energy during the boycott for spontaneous actions from motivated individuals fed up with beef prices. Boycotts found an ally in unions, too, who lent their support to the protest and demonstrated the enduring strength of the New Deal-era alliance between consumers and labor that had been forged during the Great Depression.

¹¹⁸ Barbara Shuttleworth quoted in House Committee on Banking and Currency, *Economic Stabilization – 1973: Hearings on H.R. 2099 and H.R. 6168*, 93rd Cong., 1st Sess., 1973, 111.

¹¹⁹ On the links between the 1966 and 1973 boycotts, see Lizbeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2003), 367-69.

¹²⁰ “Consumers Hold Rallies at Shops on Eve of Rally,” *New York Times*, April 1, 1973.

¹²¹ Robert McFadden, “Boycott of Meat Ends with a Call for New Protests,” *New York Times*, April 8, 1973.

Boycotters felt the call to action. Some, like Mrs. Pat Downey of Keansburg, NJ, did not define herself as a “joiner” but as “just a home lady,” but she was “mad” so she joined the boycott.¹²² Ann Giordano of Staten Island, NY, found herself as leaders even though she had no prior experience with protesting. Giordano emerged as a local organizer of boycotts around Staten Island and was distributing fliers on a rainy day when a *New York Times* reporter interviewed her. Beginning with the claim that she was “just a housewife,” she recounted the event that had driven her to organize her fellow shoppers.¹²³ She had noticed after her weekly shopping trip that her cabinets were emptier than usual. Checking her purse to see if she had spent her full grocery budget, she discovered that indeed she had. Additionally, she also noticed that she was missing twenty dollars from her purse. In a panic, she returned to the store, seeking to find out if she had dropped the money. What she discovered, to her dismay, was that she had spent the missing twenty dollars at the grocery store. Giordano captured in her story an essential experience that fueled the boycott: the horror of buying less food for more money and the vulnerable political status of being an individual consumer.

African American women’s responses to the boycott revealed the problems faced by those with less economic security seeking to use their purchasing power to effect a policy change. The *Chicago Defender* reported the local community’s response to the boycott as supportive but influenced by the need to feed hungry kids.¹²⁴ The newspaper

¹²² Mrs. Pat Downey quoted in Michael Monroe, “Consumers Mobilizing for a War on Food Prices,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1973.

¹²³ Deirdre Carmody, “Determined S.I. Housewives Rally Shoppers to Back Boycott,” *New York Times*, April 3, 1973.

¹²⁴ Jonina Erwin, “Meat Moves, but Slowly,” *Chicago Defender*, April 3, 1973.

quoted several women forced to show their support in a way different from more affluent women. By listening to their own words, the different ways in which they understood their dietary rights emerges. A woman who wished to remain anonymous claimed that “I work every day. I didn’t have a chance to get to the store on the weekend. I support the boycott, but I have children,” Her purchases included turkey, which she might “kind of spice up.” In another case, a woman offered her support, but explained that “I need some meat. The kids are hungry.” Another said, “I didn’t have any money last week so I couldn’t buy any meat. Now I have money, and I’m going to buy some meat. I’m trying to find something cheap.” A different woman offered yet another reason for buying meat: “I’ve got a husband who wants meat for his dinner.” Women in more precarious economic situations had to support the boycott in ways that reflected their limited economic means, a discussion largely absent from the national reporting on the subject but captured by an African American newspaper in the voices of the women that they interviewed. If beef policy and the boycotts had been about justice instead of rights, issues of access and poverty might well have been addressed instead of the more narrow focus on prices.

The protesting consumers revealed that beef had deep meaning in their lives and, in the process, demonstrated their struggle’s connection to the administration’s anti-hunger policy goals. A New York protestor had a sign on her baby’s carriage on one side that read, “I want meat,” and on the other side that read, “I can’t eat less.”¹²⁵ Her signs suggested that she could not survive by cutting back on food without sacrificing her child’s health in the process. In New York City, one group posted placards that read,

¹²⁵ “Consumers Hold Rallies at Shops on Eve of Rally,” *New York Times*, April 1, 1973.

“Devalue Post Roast, Not Dollars.”¹²⁶ Inflation was not some abstract economic idea but something experienced during meal times and in the gut. Beef had become such a staple of the diet that newspapers felt the need to run articles on how to cook without beef and of doctors offering vitamin pills to assist people going without meat.¹²⁷ Some consumers even arrived at the conclusion that their struggle meant taking on the president, if needed. Ethel Rosen from Wilmette, Illinois, and leader of the group Women’s War on Prices, told a reported that if the higher price ceilings lasted any longer, “It’s going to be the housewives against Nixon I guess.”¹²⁸ But Rosen’s fellow housewives never got their battle against Nixon. The boycotts ended as planned on April 7, while some groups continued on with meatless Tuesdays and Thursdays or by entering local politics, the critical, nationwide energy for grassroots activism faded.¹²⁹ Housewives and their allies left behind their engagement with collective action yet again. The ending of the boycott fit a longer pattern of consumer activism centered on civil actions that remained discreet and used the very tools of capitalism—consumption—against itself.¹³⁰ Even though the boycott took place within a broader surge of consumer activism, the housewife was about to cease being a political identity that spoke to women’s domestic political economic

¹²⁶ Deirdre Carmody, “Consumers Scoff at Ceilings and Step Up Boycotts,” *New York Times*, March 31, 1973.

¹²⁷ Raymond A. Sokolov, “Meatless but Not Joyless: Eggplant Spaghetti and Other Delights,” *New York Times*, March 29, 1973.

¹²⁸ Lawrence Van Gelder, “Boycott in Third Day but Prices Remain the Same,” *New York Times*, April 4, 1973.

¹²⁹ Emily E. LB. Twarog, *Politics of the Pantry: Housewives, Food, and Consumer Protest in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), ch. 5.

¹³⁰ Lawrence B. Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 310.

needs and, in losing that sense of housewife, they stopped fighting publically and collectively for a consumer-oriented beef policy.¹³¹

The press focused their coverage of the boycott on measuring its effect on prices and on farmers. The *New York Times*, which covered the boycott extensively, offered a tepid but mostly negative assessment by noting that prices for prime steaks dropped somewhat but prices for the lower grades of meat and for the lesser cuts failed to move.¹³² The newspaper offered a more positive appraisal of the politics of the boycott by pointing to its gutsy nature, which had a stronger showing than in 1966. Shuttleworth's boycott idea, which she herself dismissed at first as a "little radical," maybe finally broke the idea of beef as the center of the American meal.¹³³ *Time* magazine offered a less friendly assessment. The cover story the week after the boycott derided the boycott as "Housewives' Lib," and called it "the most successful boycott by women since Lysistrata."¹³⁴ The cover dramatized the boycotters as stubborn and as taking on cattlemen rather than the administration or public policy. The magazine spent little attention on the boycott and instead emphasized the damage caused to farmers and the need to fix farm policy in order to bring down prices without harming producers. While *Time* certainly propelled a common narrative that boycotters had targeting the cattle industry, the main target of the boycott was Nixon and the failure of public policy to secure their dietary citizenship.

¹³¹ On the collapse of the housewife as a political identity with a coherent political economic orientation, see Twarog, 115.

¹³² Will Lissner, "Meat Boycott's Impact on Prices Here Is Slight," *New York Times*, April 9, 1973.

¹³³ Linda Charlton, "How Was It Possible?," *New York Times*, April 8, 1973.

¹³⁴ "Changing Farm Policy to Cut Food Prices," *Time*, April 9, 1973.

Beef policy limped on after the April boycotts but it had lost its public luster by then. Nixon's failure tainted the entire project of government support for beef by showing public policy to be weaker than industry willpower. Nixon did not claim victory against prices in 1973 and contributed to souring Americans on the idea that government had any role to play in managing the economy. The government's inability to hold prices in check helped propel the narrative that the government only caused problems and never solved them. Failure tainted beef policy just as had happened to the Office of Price Administration at the end of World War II.¹³⁵ Only this time, there was no more good will left to save the policy. Additionally, an oil crisis soon took center stage and further disenchanted Americans to the New Deal idea of a pocketbook protecting federal government.¹³⁶ Aiding this change, demand for beef dropped following the boycott even as the cattle industry built up stock in anticipation of future profits. The resulting price squeeze led to Nixon signing one of his final laws, a bill meant to support the cattle industry, because, as he announced, "without some form of assistance as provided in this bill, there might ultimately be a reduction in the number of producers, which would in turn lead to reduced supplies and higher prices for the consumers."¹³⁷ Imports returned as a pressing issue for 1974. After Nixon lost interest in using imported meat to bring down consumer prices, he began courting producers once again. Quotas remained suspended

¹³⁵ On failure and the OPA, see Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 231.

¹³⁶ On the oil crisis, see Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump*.

¹³⁷ Richard Nixon, "Statement about Signing the Emergency Livestock Credit Act of 1974," July 26, 1974, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed October 21, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4309>.

but the administration moved to announce estimates that the anti-import domestic industry could live with.

By June 1974, the administration still had not decided on a plan for implementing quotas.¹³⁸ Butz wanted to ensure that quotas did not disrupt the market and was holding off on recommending renewed levels so that his department could study the situation. In one of the final documents produced by the administration concerning beef, Norman Ross, Jr., the Assistant Director of the Domestic Council, explained the problem facing the beef industry by noting that worldwide stocks of beef cattle had built up to a point that U.S. consumers, even with their reduced beef consumption, served as an important global service in absorbing the 1.2 billion pounds of imported beef expected for 1974.¹³⁹ While the White House may have found a way to reinvigorate postwar beef policy, Nixon resigned August 9, 1974 amid a scandal that emerged from a break-in he authorized at the Watergate Hotel in Washington, DC. With his resignation, he also ended the thirty year policy of bringing beef to the multitudes.

The Nixon administration spent five-and-one-half years battling the crumbling of one economic order and promoting the rise of another. Beef was a key part in the transition since successive administrations had made beef a meal of mass consumption. Beef had become a meat of both high status and low status, and Americans proved to

¹³⁸ Max L. Friedersdort to William H. Natcher, June 15, 1974, EX TA 4/CM Tariff-Imports [CM 20-5], Box 30, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

¹³⁹ Norman Ross, Jr., to Mike McCormack, August 2, 1974, EX TA 4/CM Tariff-Imports [CM 20-5], Box 30, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

have a near bottomless appetite for the versatile meat. In transcending status, beef had become a dietary staple. But, mass beef consumption rested on a stable economic order that included a gendered division of labor and steadily rising wages and near full employment. As trouble loomed, Nixon fought to preserve beef and its central place in the American diet. He came into office stung by the 1960 loss, one he blamed on high prices. Vowing to win in 1972, he successfully used beef quotas and economic controls to bring beef prices down and boost his reelection but was unable to deal with the resultant economic backlash. It was a backlash that helped upend domestic tranquility. His two agriculture secretaries, Hardin and Butz, both viewed their job as being farmer-centric and retreated from an earlier focus on rural improvement and consumer pocketbooks. The high hopes of dietary rights that seemed so possible in 1969 no longer mattered by 1974 and Americans found that they lacked the stomach for a federal government supporting beef production and consumption. Beef had become a meat of the multitudes to an extent unimaginable in 1945 but that success rested on an active federal government that was willing to shield producers and consumers from the consequences of plentiful production.

By the mid-1970s, Americans had begun rethinking beef as a heathy food in the wake of increases in heart disease attributable, at least in part, to the amount of fatty beef in their diets. The policy had rested on a near unanimous national consensus that beef was wholesome and healthy and was an important, even necessary, part of a good diet. That consensus gave the government the political space it needed to work on serving the needs of both producers and consumers, and, in doing so, the beef consensus created the conditions that allowed beef to become a daily dietary right for almost all Americans. All that changed in the 1970s.

Conclusion

“Remember the Beefsteak Election of 1946?” the *Washington Post* asked its readers in a 1979 editorial. The editorial team of the newspaper wondered because “the current maneuvering over the gasoline shortages is beginning to resemble the political mistakes that led up to that debacle for an earlier Democratic administration.” President Jimmy Carter, as with President Harry S. Truman before him, risked electoral defeat if disruptive economic controls were enacted. Looming controls meant that consumers risked losing access to a critical commodity that was theirs by right; while earlier it had been beef, now it was oil. While the economic assessment was debatable, the editors were correct in noting that oil was remaking the national political landscape as beef once had.¹ As the *Washington Post* understood it, Truman’s beef controls had alienated voters by leading to a national meat shortage. Producers seeking higher prices at a later date slowed down production and dried up the supply of beef. It was a situation all too likely to be repeated if Carter pushed ahead with his proposed oil controls. Such controls would lead only to ruin: “Any rationing scheme is necessarily going to be a crude and awkward affair, creating more unfairness than it can ever cure. It is the last resort.”² Oil, they warned Carter, had become the new beef and it was up to him to avoid Truman’s fate.

¹ On oil and consumer politics in the 1970s, see Meg Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump: The Energy Crisis and the Transformation of American Politics in the 1970s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2016), 26-27, 306-07.

² “The Beefsteak Election,” *Washington Post*, May 11, 1979. The term was popularized in 1977. Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 229-38

The editorial staff at the *Washington Post* may have hoped to influence policymaking in the Carter administration but, by choosing the historic example of Truman and beef, the piece is more important for its insight into a recent revolution in consumer politics. As they implied, Americans were no longer using beef as the inflation barometer they once had. That role was now played by oil and gas prices. With oil replacing beef, what, then, happened to beef? Once the ubiquitous marker of prosperity, it had become just another meat, having lost its singular political economic significance. Nothing better reflects beef becoming just another meat than the national per capita consumption trend. Initially, beef consumption going into the 1970s was strong and beef was the most consumed meat (see figure 7.1). A national boycott in 1973 disrupted the market in ways that upset the industry for years afterward. Producers' responses to the boycott exacerbated the decline of beef consumption. By holding cattle back from feeding, cattle owners swelled the beef cattle population, which reached 46 million in 1975, for a total cattle population of 138 million.³ The built up supply had to disappear into the consumer economy in order to prevent the excessive cattle population from hurting producers. And disappear it did; per capita consumption spiked until reaching a record-breaking 127 pounds per capita by carcass weight in 1976. That pinnacle marked the highpoint of beef consumption but also marked a turning point. Beef consumption afterward dropped precipitously, dipping to 105 pounds by 1979. The drop in beef consumption signified that beef no longer anchored the American diet as it once had. A

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Statistical Reporting Service, Crop Reporting Board, "Cattle," February 2, 1977; U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, "Charts and Maps," https://www.nass.usda.gov/Charts_and_Maps/Cattle/.

replacement meat was eventually found in chicken when per capita consumption of that meat surpassed beef for the first time in 2003.

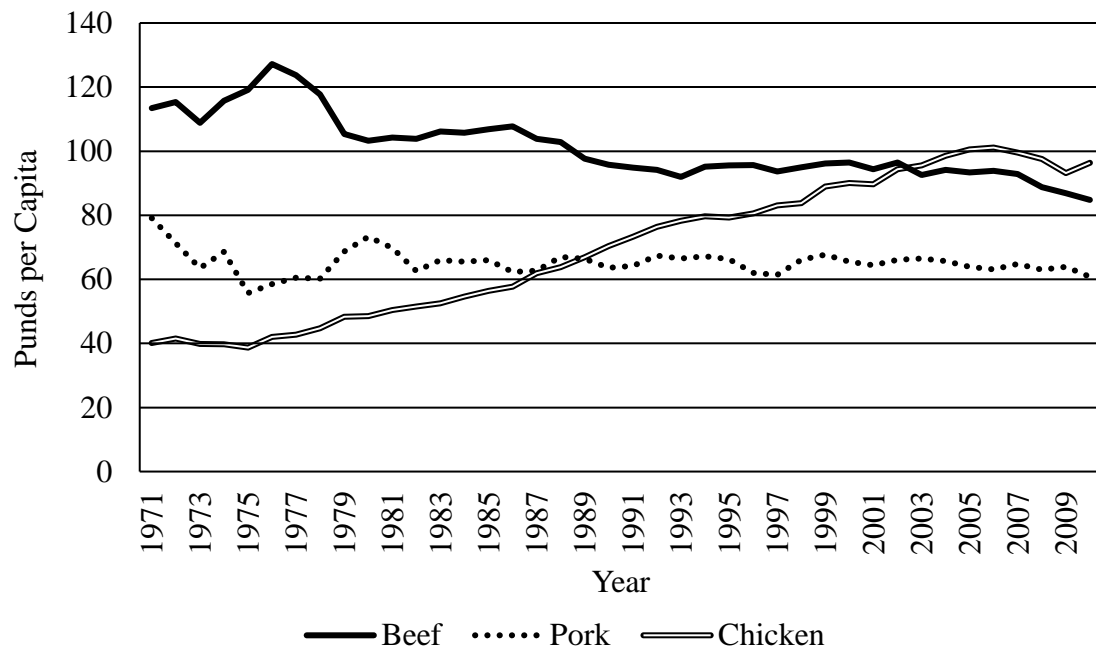


Figure 7.1: Estimated per Capita Meat Consumption by Carcass Weight for Beef, Pork, and Chicken, 1971-2011.

Source: US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, “Red Meat and Chicken (Carcass Weight),” by Jeanine Bentley and Jean Buzby, accessed December 18, 2014, [http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-\(per-capita\)-data-system](http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-(per-capita)-data-system).

With consumers no longer valuing beef as they once did, beef consumption declined and formalized the end of the policy of mass beef consumption. Part of the reason was perceptions of meat had changed. Consumers lost confidence in a meat that they no longer saw as a health food essential to their citizenship. Research since the late-1950s had linked red meat consumption to heart disease and, by the 1970s, the idea of beef as harmful took hold in the popular imagination.⁴ Fear rose so much that even the federal government began warning Americans to monitor the amount of beef they

⁴ “Fat of the Land,” *Time*, January 13, 1961, 48. On the decline of beef as a nutritious food, see Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 251-53.

consumed to protect their health.⁵ Public health concerns were not limited to cholesterol and heart disease, though. It was feared that beef also caused cancer. Revelations that the animal feed additive diethylstilbestrol (DES) and other synthetic estrogens were linked to cancer spurred a massive consumer backlash.⁶ The Nixon administration tried to save the reputation of beef feed additives but to no avail once a direct link between DES and cancer was established thanks to a cluster of rare cancers in New York being traced back to the artificial hormone.⁷ In addition to beef losing its reputation as a health food, a sudden surge in Malthusian caused many to question the wisdom of a diet of luxury and plenty and fear that population growth outstripped food production.⁸ The best-selling book *Diet for a Small Planet* warned in 1971 against the mass production of meat because it was too wasteful to be ecologically sustainable, which helped spark a countercultural rebellion against meat.⁹ But such thoughts were not consigned to the political fringes. As *New York Times* reporter Boyce Rensberger explained, the world situation was worsening in 1974 and “as the daily ration of rice becomes steadily smaller

⁵ Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, *Dietary Goals for the United States, Second Edition*, 95th Cong., 1st Sess., 1977, 25-31.

⁶ On the history of beef and cancer, see Alan Marcus, *Cancer from Beef: DES, Federal Food Regulation, and Consumer Confidence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

⁷ Nancy Langston, *Toxic Bodies: Hormone Disruptors and the Legacy of DES* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 112-33.

⁸ On hunger and Malthusian thinking as popularly understood in the 1960, see Georg Borgström, *The Hungry Planet: The Modern World at the Edge of Famine* (New York: Macmillan, 1965). Fears of global hunger predated World War II but became acute enough after the war to create a global anti-hunger campaign. Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁹ Warren Balasco, *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took On the Food Industry*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 54-60.

in several poor countries, some Americans are beginning to look at their dinner plates of steak and potatoes not with pleasure but with a trace of guilt.”¹⁰

Beef policy lost its social anchor during the 1970s. While Americans were reevaluating beef in their diets, a broad and sweeping social transformation ensured that beef consumption could not continue in its previous form. Postwar beef consumption patterns had relied on a specific family structure and pace of life that had ended with the collapse of the post-World War II male-breadwinner family during the 1970s. That family type, the product of the end of World War II, was built on a specific gendered division of labor with men earning an income and women working inside the home. The ending of economic prosperity that had supported that family pattern doomed mass beef consumption. As dual-income households became the norm, women’s workforce participation raised family incomes and allowed families to maintain their standards of living but at the cost of having to feed their families with less time or energy for cooking.¹¹ The increased demands women faced altered how Americans consumed meat. As the historian Roger Horowitz explains, “Consumer demand, shaped by seismic changes in family structure and workplace participation, established the new terrain for meat consumption practices.”¹² That new terrain meant that families needed meats that were convenient and cheap to match lives that included less time available prepare meals or dine together. Increasingly, Americans chose meats that had most of the preparation

¹⁰ Boyce Rensberger, “Curb on U.S. Waste Urged to Help World’s Hungry,” *New York Times*, October 25, 1974.

¹¹ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: Americans Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, 2016 ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 266-67.

¹² Roger Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table: Taste, Technology, Transformation* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 152.

done by others, by dining out at a restaurant or by buying processed meats that needed little preparation before eating. Fast food restaurants like McDonalds exploded in popularity. The rise of convenience meats was not lost on the industry with one McDonald beef supplier dubbing the rise of convenient meats and dining out the “hamburger phenomenon.”¹³

With beef policy collapsing, the beef industry fought against the pattern of declining consumption throughout the mid-1970s and 1980s with private initiatives. Major rebranding efforts attempted to redefine popular perception of beef and remind Americans of the desire they used to have for beef. With beef having lost its reputation as a health food, consumers ceased viewing beef as an essential food item.¹⁴ Advertisers hoped to combat this trend even though the need to advertise beef, let alone having to develop it as a brand, was new to producers. Not that meat companies had never advertised or branded meat; smaller firms had found success by branding their product lines, as Oscar Mayer did with their line of bologna.¹⁵ But this was the first time that beef itself needed commercial promotion. Beef had been so lucrative and so desirable for so long that advertising had hardly been needed. In 1965, at the height of mass beef consumption, two leading meatpackers spent between .06 percent and 1 percent of sales on advertising, a number far lower than any found in other food companies that year,

¹³ On convenient meat, see Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table*, 129-30. On the hamburger phenomenon, see Henry J. Pabst, “The Hamburger Phenomenon,” *Reciprocal Meat Conference Proceedings* 32 (1979): 17-19.

¹⁴ Levenstein, 209.

¹⁵ On branding and meat, see Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table*.

such as Coca-Cola's 7.5 percent or Kellogg's 11.8 percent.¹⁶ But by the early 1980s, beef producers were desperate enough to use an industry supported check-off program to pay for advertising, memorably coming up with the 1991 slogan, "Beef, It's What's for Dinner." With that slogan, the industry captured the previously unimaginable: Americans had forgotten that beef is what is for dinner!

Throughout the turmoil of collapsing demand starting with the mid-1970s, the beef industry continued to realign its production system but without the same level of support. Thanks to land grant colleges and agriculture research stations, new cattle breeds were ready to perform better at feeding than ever before, including the "leaner, taller, meatier" Beefmaster, which were more efficient than ever at putting on weight at the feedlot.¹⁷ Capital-intensive feeding was required to get cattle up to the weight and fat content required for modern processing. This helped put upward pressure on cattle feeding costs, which soared from 22.8 cents for every pound an animal gained in 1966 to 50 cents in 1974 before reaching 66 cents in 1982.¹⁸ Feeders struggled to survive and amid a wave of consolidation. The Texas high plains, the leading section of the most important cattle feeding state, lost maybe as much as one-fourth the total number of large feeders.¹⁹ Soon a small number of feeders capable of feeding tens, if not hundreds, of

¹⁶ Exhibit A, [1965?], Packaging (Truth-in-Packaging) 1966 PL, Box 96, President's Commission on Consumer Interests and the Consumer Advocacy Council, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX. Calculated by *Advertising Age*.

¹⁷ Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 2008), 144.

¹⁸ Jimmy M. Skaggs, *Prime Cut: Livestock Raising and Meatpacking in the United States, 1607-1983* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986), 182.

¹⁹ Lennart A. Palme, Jr., "Integration in the Feeding Industry," *The Feedlot*, ed. Irwin A. Dyer and Clayton C. O'Mary (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1977), 256-57; Skaggs, 182.

thousands of head per year dominated the industry. The giant feeders worked on speeding up how long cattle took to finish since faster feeding times were essential to profitability.²⁰ Time to finish Choice grade cattle at the feedlot shrunk from three to four months in the mid-1970s to two more recently.²¹ Feedlots also mechanized feed distribution and found additives that sped up cattle's weight gain such as growth hormones, subtherapeutic use of antibiotics, and protein rations, which worked as a kind of nitro fuel that overcharged their digestive system.²² The spread of feedlots across the globe has devastated local environments and threatens the climate by speeding up the accumulation of the greenhouse gas methane in the atmosphere.²³

As the surviving feeders expanded their capacity, slaughtering plants faced a similar fate. Slaughter plants capable of handling over one million head per year were being built by the early 1980s, allowing solitary firms to consolidate their hold on the industry.²⁴ The number of beef packers soon dwindled from 717 in 1972 to 417 in 1983.²⁵

²⁰ Hamilton, *Trucking Country*, 144.

²¹ Irwin A. Dyer and Rodney P. Kromann, "Cattle Feeding," *The Feedlot*, ed. Irwin A. Dyer and Clayton C. O'Mary (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1977), 166; Barry Estabrook, "Feedlots vs. Pastures: Two Very Different Ways to Fatten Beef Cattle," *The Atlantic*, December 28, 2011, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2011/12/feedlots-vs-pastures-two-very-different-ways-to-fatten-beef-cattle/250543/>.

²² Orville Schell, *Modern Meat: Antibiotics, Hormones, and the Pharmaceutical Farm* (New York: Random House, 1984).

²³ Richard P. Tucker, *Insatiable Appetite: The United States and the Ecological Degradation of the Tropical World*, concise rev. ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 182-83. As of 2014, food production and consumption produced about one-quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions. Marco Springmann, et al., "Analysis and Valuation of the Health and Climate Change Cobenefits of Dietary Change," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 113, no. 15 (April 2016): 4146-4151.

²⁴ Azzeddine M. Azzam and Dale G. Anderson, *Assessing Competition in Meatpacking: Economic History, Theory, and Evidence*, GIPSA-RR 96-6 (Lincoln: Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1996), 20, 29.

²⁵ Skaggs, 216.

One firm, IBP of Iowa, became the single largest beef producer, being responsible for 40 percent of national boxed beef production and over 20 percent of all beef in 1980 despite being incorporated not even twenty years before in 1961.²⁶ The key to the firm's success was its mastery of boxed beef, which was a new production technique that resulted in beef being shipped frozen in boxes, thus allowing for sped up production time and a reduced need for skilled butchers in grocery stores. Additionally, the firm succeeded, according to the historian Shane Hamilton, thanks to its reputation for aggressive expansion and anti-labor policies as well as its willingness to work with organized crime to bust into otherwise closed eastern markets.²⁷ Consolidation soon swept the industry and a new Big Four emerged. In addition to IBP, the other Big Four in 1980 were Excel, SPICO, and ConAgra. Together, they dominated the industry with the share of total cattle slaughter done by the largest firms rising from 29 percent in 1973 to 40 percent by 1983.²⁸ Through leveraging their concentrated cattle buying and beef selling power, the big four had successfully recreated the old "oligopoly-oligopsony."²⁹

The seismic transformations in the consumption and production of beef were accompanied by a reorientation in consumer politics after the early 1970s, which sheared off the popular base of support that had sustained beef policy. The transition entailed an embrace of an entrepreneurial form of citizenship in which citizens, as consumers, felt obliged to innovate solutions to problems of consumption and purchasing power on their

²⁶ Skaggs, 195; Azzam and Anderson, 18. IBP has gone by IBP, Iowa Beef Packers, and Iowa Beef Processors.

²⁷ Hamilton, *Trucking Country*, 158-62; Thomas W. Lippman, "Iowa Beef Makes Its Move on Anxious Pork Industry," *Washington Post*, April 18, 1982.

²⁸ Skaggs, *Prime Cut*, 215.

²⁹ Skaggs, *Prime Cut*, 188.

own rather than through collective action or legislative channels. Accompanying the change was the end of labor and consumers being political allies in a coalition together.³⁰ Historians have taken note of this transformation, with Lizbeth Cohen darkly noting that it reflected the “*Consumerization of the Republic*” with a narrow vision of consumer well-being trumping all other considerations.³¹ Meg Jacobs explains that the transformation came with labor’s loss of political power and the end of policies that “paid attention to the relationship between wages, prices, and profits,” resulting in a retreat to a politics built around consumers hunting individually for bargains rather than engaging with broader questions of political economic policy.³² Fueling the split of consumer and labor as political allies was consumption ceasing to be seen as labor. As the historians Emily Twarog and Tracey Deutsch reveal, women had once understood consumption to be a form of labor and the housewife was its militant public face. With the collapse of the breadwinner family and the birth of women’s liberation, consumption ceased having a family-based unpaid labor component and women lost the related ability to organize around their shared status as unwaged food workers.³³ The 1973 boycott was the last of a string of meat boycotts that had started in 1936 and marked the end of the nationwide

³⁰ Emily E. LB. Twarog, *Politics of the Pantry: Housewives, Food, and Consumer Protest in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 111.

³¹ Lizbeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 15.

³² Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 261.

³³ Twarog, 114; Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife’s Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 217. Tracey Deutsch likens the outcome to the 1967 movie *The Stepford Wives* since women were now expected to mindlessly shop while being figuratively erased as individuals.

meat boycott as a consumer political tool. The political identity of the housewife lost much of its broad appeal as did the politics of mass organizing that had accompanied it.

Along with consumption ceasing to be labor was the collapse in the idea that the government could solve consumers' problems. Nixon's inability to fight either the rising meat prices or the oil shocks, as Jacobs contends, "Contributed to the erosion of faith that Americans had in their government to solve their problems."³⁴ This is exactly what occurred following the 1973 national beef boycott when Nixon attempted, but failed, to bring down prices. Consumers afterward decided to individualize their problems and devise solutions based on their own individual efforts, whether that meant giving up meat, eating more hamburgers, or buying wholes sides of beef, they did so without the ad hoc organizing structure of the postwar years or their previous identity as housewives.³⁵ If economic peace and a national consensus seems to have emerged out of the 1970s, it is because one side stopped fighting.

With consumers replacing the politics of mass organizing with a politics of individual innovation, policymakers and civil servants abandoned the beef policy that had forged a national diet. Instead of attempting to balance the needs of consumers and producers, which had once been the foundation of beef policy, the federal government now worried most about producers and about ensuring that regulations would not impose an undue burden on businesses. This was part of a larger shift within federal policymaking that accompanied the end of the Great Exception, policies that resulted in

³⁴ Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump*, 9.

³⁵ Jerry M. Flint, "Nation's Meat Consumers Are Still Angry but Less Rebellious," *New York Times*, May 27, 1973.

resources shifting to finance and away from manufacturing.³⁶ Even a Democratic president like Carter, who spoke in his party's language of consumer rights, desired to balance the budget and battle inflation rather than engage in the countercyclical spending that had once characterized his party's pro-consumer and pro-labor political economic stance. As president, he supported deregulating industries in order to save consumers from the government agencies that had become, as he saw it, enthralled or "captured" by the very industries they were to regulate.³⁷ Carter rolled back regulations of several industries, including airline and telecommunications, with the idea of letting competition set prices rather than government agencies. This pro-business mindset echoed throughout the administration. Charles Jennings, the head of the Packers and Stockyard Administration and soon to be an executive at IBP, dropped an investigation into IBP's illegal business practices, getting in exchange an "informal agreement to not violate the law."³⁸

Some politicians fought to retain some aspects of the older beef policy and hoped to protect consumers as well as producers with public policy. Congressional liberals had not yet lost interest in saving some vestige of beef policy and worked to protect consumers from economic concentration in the beef industry. Through a series of hearings held between 1977 and 1980, House Committee on Small Business chair Neal

³⁶ Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

³⁷ Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump*, 162-64, 170. Carter based his political economy on the idea that government intervention drove up prices and harmed consumers, part of a larger transformation in liberal political economic thought in the 1970s and 1980s.

³⁸ Thomas W. Lippman, "Iowa Beef Makes Its Move on Anxious Pork Industry," *Washington Post*, April 18, 1982.

Smith (D-IA) hoped to provide enough evidence of monopoly to force the Carter administration to intervene in the beef industry. At the final hearing, Smith made it clear that he thought that his hearings had demonstrated the need for vigorous action to fight rising consumer prices.³⁹ Concentration drove costs down but firms kept consumer prices high through collusion. A 1979 report released by the subcommittee, authored by Willard F. Williams, warned that predatory firms stood to gain from the surplus cattle slaughter capacity that had recently built up combined with dwindling cattle numbers, allowing firms to buy up competitors.⁴⁰ Throughout, the Carter administration defended its pro-industry stance, even if the secretary of agriculture did eventually agree to investigate the matter further. In 1979, Secretary of Agriculture Robert Bergland claimed that “consumers of this Nation have a wholesome, high-protein source of food which is not available in all nations in the world. There is every reason to take pride in this industry.”⁴¹ At the same hearings, Jennings defended the beef industry as having become profitable after the troubles of 1973, a prosperity that was “long overdue.”⁴² The Carter administration’s eventual agreement with Smith came in 1980, in time for Carter to lose the presidential election to the Republican candidate Ronald Reagan. The Reagan

³⁹ House Committee on Small Business, Subcommittee on SBA and SBIC Authority and General Small Business Problems, *Small Business Problems in the Marketing of Meat and Other Commodities (Part 7—Monopoly Effects on Producers and Consumers)*, 96th Cong., 2nd sess., 1980, 50.

⁴⁰ Willard F. Williams, “The Changing Structure of the Beef Packing Industry,” in House Committee on Small Business, Subcommittee on SBA and SBIC Authority and General Small Business Problems, *Small Business Problems in the Marketing of Meat and Other Commodities (Part 4— Changing Structure of the Beef Packing Industry)*, 96th Cong., 1st sess., 1979.

⁴¹ House Committee on Small Business, Subcommittee on SBA and SBIC Authority and General Small Business Problems, *Small Business Problems in the Marketing of Meat and Other Commodities (Part 3—Concentration Trends in the Meat Industry)*, 96th Cong., 1st sess., 1979, 13.

⁴² Charles Jennings quoted in House Subcommittee, *Small Business Problems in the Marketing of Meat and Other Commodities (Part 3—Concentration Trends in the Meat Industry)*, 20, 26.

administration withdrew from the commitment of the prior administration, and, in 1982, the Federal Trade Commission announced that “no further action is warranted” regarding the meat industry.⁴³

The collapse of beef policy included the end of the decades-long commitment to forging a singular national diet build around mass beef consumption and for creating a nation of undifferentiated Americans. By the mid-1970s, dietary modernism and dietary citizenship ceased to drive that policy that assumed that all Americans ought to have access to a beef-based diet. As with the ends of regulations of beef industry monopoly, the decay of these ideologies can be seen in hearings conducted by Congress. The hearings at issue covered revisions to the federal nutrition standards, which had their origins in World War II preparedness. The hearings were a way for lawmakers to reassess dietary standards and take stock of the dizzying pace of change in the study of human nutrition.⁴⁴ The Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, chaired by George McGovern (D-SD), held hearings in the mid-1970s and released a report that called on Americans to reduce the amount of dietary cholesterol and animal fat in their diets.⁴⁵ It was a stark reflection of the declining status of beef, which was once seen as a food essential to human health.

A response to those hearings revealed that the idea of universal human dietary needs was in doubt, despite once being a core feature for beef policy. Charles H. Percy (R-II) along with two other Republicans rejected the idea of national dietary standards by

⁴³ “TFC Closes Probe of Beef Industry on Price Fixing,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 22, 1982.

⁴⁴ On the changes in nutritional science from World War II to the 1970s, see Levenstein.

⁴⁵ Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, *Dietary Goals for the United States*, 2nd ed., 95th Cong., 1st sess., 1977.

citing the American Medical Association as claiming that “universal dietary goals” could not be set for all Americans without likely causing harm since dietary needs were individualistic and doctors had not yet reached a consensus on what a good diet looked like.⁴⁶ The proposition put forth by these Republican dissenters was that the government had no business recommending dietary goals for Americans, who ought to be left alone to establish their own goals. Percy even explained that the disappearance data collected by the USDA failed to cover what was actually consumed since it did not account for fat-trimming by consumers or food processors, meaning that, even if it wanted to, the government lacked the knowledge needed to devise national dietary standards in the first place.⁴⁷ While these objections likely included partisan disagreement, the Republicans’ opposition to the national dietary standards spoke to the growing mistrust of federal power then making its way through the nation.

With this drift away from the underpinnings of beef policy, programs that had been enlisted to serve the policy fell into decay, perhaps none more than meat inspection (renamed Food Safety and Inspection Service in 1977). The Johnson administration promised with the expansion of federal inspection in 1967 that consumers would soon enjoy the most wholesome beef possible since the federal government would force all producers to follow the same high sanitation and labor standards. The bill did this by placing all meat sold in the United States under federal inspection standards. It was an attempt at setting one standard of food safety for all Americans. Yet, since the passage of

⁴⁶ American Medical Association quoted in Charles H. Percy, Richard Schweiker, and Edward Zorinsky, “Supplemental Forward by Senators Percy, Schweiker, and Zorinsky,” Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, *Dietary Goals for the United States*, 2nd ed., 95th Cong., 1st sess., 1977, viii.

⁴⁷ Percy, Schweiker, and Zorinsky, “Supplemental Forward by Senators Percy, Schweiker, and Zorinsky,” Senate Select Committee, *Dietary Goals for the United States*, ix.

the act, meat inspection failed to live up to that promise and has lost the popular support it once had. Investigations soon uncovered evidence of fraud by inspectors unable to resist producers' pressures to pass unwholesome meat.⁴⁸ After the act's passage, critics accused the Nixon administration of failing to hold states accountable to the new standards.⁴⁹ The Nixon administration argued in favor of returning federal meat inspection back to the states as part of the "New Federalism" project of rolling back federal power even though the Wholesome Meat Act had just been passed.⁵⁰ Ralph Nader's consumer advocate group, which had been a key supporter of the act, released a report accusing the federal government of failing to modernize meat inspection to require inspectors to use equipment capable of detecting bacteria and chemical contamination rather than just relying on what their senses could detect.⁵¹

After more than a decade of fighting, lawmakers still could not force the department to update inspection to match modern scientific standards, which would have required extensive investments in technology and training to reorient inspection away from its roots in senses-based, early-twentieth century science.⁵² Only after a deadly

⁴⁸ Skaggs, 208-211.

⁴⁹ Paul J. Delaney, "All but 3 States Fail to Comply With Clean Meat Deadline Established in 1967," *New York Times*, February 15, 1970.

⁵⁰ Walter Rubaber, "Nader Group Calls U.S. Lax on Meat Inspection and Pesticides," *New York Times*, July 18, 1971.

⁵¹ Harrison Wellford, *Sowing the Wind: A Report from Ralph Nader's Center for Study of Responsive Law on Food Safety and the Chemical Harvest* (New York: Grossman, 1972).

⁵² On lawmakers fighting to improve inspection standards, see Thomas A. Daschle (D-SD) quoted in Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, Forestry, Subcommittee on Agricultural Research and General Legislation, *Scientific Basis for Food Inspection: Hearings on Meat and Poultry Inspection Procedures*, 101st Cong., 1st sess., 1989, 2-3. On the science of meat inspection, see Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhodes, *Arresting Contagion: Science, Policy, and Conflicts over Animal Disease Control* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 213-14.

outbreak of *E. coli* O157:H7 at Jack in the Box fast food restaurants in 1993, which left over four-hundred sick and four dead, did the department finally take action by adopting the inspection techniques first called for in 1971.⁵³ Presidential administrations since then have increasingly viewed meat inspection as an unnecessary burden on business, with the administration of Barak Obama even attempting to have firms inspect their own meat.⁵⁴ The swing of political sympathy over to producers resulted in a federal meat inspection service lacking the consumer protective edges it once had.

The plight of beef packing plant employees since the 1970s is tied to the collapse of beef policy; their access to the better life was highly contingent on the middleclass wages that became standard with the master agreement. Workers had forced the major producers to agree to set high wages across the industry as well as including stringent safety requirements, giving them the income needed to eat a diet forged by beef policy despite meat packing being dangerous industrial work.⁵⁵ This helped ensure that meat workers could partake in mass beef consumption: year-round, steady employment with a living wage and relatively safe working conditions. By the 1970s, though, that foundation was on shaky grounds.⁵⁶ The beef industry leaders who conquered meat production that decade did so by specializing in breaking labor and rolling back the gains of the previous decades. The strongest industry leaders found ways around the master agreement and

⁵³ “FSIS History,” *U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service*, last modified March 24, 2015, <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/informational/aboutfsis/history>.

⁵⁴ Wil S. Hylton, “A Bug in the System,” *The New Yorker*, February 2, 2015, 30-36.

⁵⁵ Roger Horowitz, “*Negro and White, Unite and Fight!*”: *A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930-90* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

⁵⁶ On the general status of working class decline in the 1970s, see Jefferson R. Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2012).

managed to bring down wages and lower worker protections. They did so by shifting production out of the heavily unionized cities of the Midwest and into sprawling factories in the southern Great Plains. They also began importing a portion of their workforce through the U.S. guest worker program.⁵⁷ Management's aggressive anti-union tactics won and kicked meatpacking workers out of the middleclass.

The results devastated workers. Workers making more than \$8 per hour by the end of the 1970s would be making less than \$7 per hour by the mid-1980s. One plant closure in 1980 typified what workers had to endure: before closing, workers made \$10.69 an hour but, after reopening, workers made \$6.50 an hour.⁵⁸ The pace of work intensified, too, as the Department of Agriculture relaxed its standards. Accident rates skyrocketed, reaching 33.5 percent by 1982 according to the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Organization.⁵⁹ These findings indicate that one-third of all meat workers were injured, maimed, or killed that year, which says nothing about the chronic injuries like carpal tunnel syndrome associated with meat work. Union power in the industry collapsed and the master agreement on wages was finally abandoned. The most dramatic moment of meatpackers turning against their workers came when Hormel in Austin, MN, broke its union, P-9 of United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW), in 1986. The union had enjoyed a relatively stable relationship with Hormel for decades until the firm began undermining its previous commitment to workers.⁶⁰ Tensions flared into a

⁵⁷ On the transformation of the meatpacking workforce during the 1980s and 1990s, see Donald Stull, Michael Broadway, and David Griffith, eds., *Any Way You Cut It: Meat Processing and Small-town America* (Lawrence: University of Press of Kansas, 1995).

⁵⁸ Skaggs, 208.

⁵⁹ Skaggs, 203.

⁶⁰ On Hormel and unions, see Horowitz, "*Negro and White, Unite and Fight!*", 268-74.

strike in 1985, which ended with the firing of over 700 workers and a 20 percent pay cut for the rest. Images of white male strikers in jeans jackets being beaten and dragged by police officers provided a stark reminder that unionism in the private sector was a relic of the past.⁶¹

The decline of unions in meat packing calls forth one of the most powerful literary tropes to exist in America, that of *The Jungle* returning. As a narrative arc, it makes the story of meat one of a return to the bad, old days. As a writing device, it lets the reader know that the once awful conditions and unsafe products have returned. The idea of meat production returning to *The Jungle* is so powerful, perhaps, because it is at once sickening and true. As the historian Roger Horowitz put it, “When union power collapsed during the 1980s, the result was a precipitous drop in packinghouse workers’ earnings and a dramatic increase in the intensity of work. Meatpacking in the late twentieth century manifests striking similarities to the industry a hundred years ago; only a resurgence of union strength can once again bring packinghouse workers out of the ‘jungle.’”⁶² The historian Wilson J. Warren explained it this way: “one could make the case that the industry is just as destructive of workers’ lives today as it was when Sinclair wrote [*The Jungle*].”⁶³ *The Jungle* did return, only with one major difference: it was now

⁶¹ *American Dream* directed by Barbara Kopple (1991; Santa Monica, CA: Miramax Home Entertainment, 2012), DVD. The film won an Academy Award for best documentary in 1991. Later documentary films have used images of the strike to dramatize workers’ plight since the 1970s. *Inequality for All*, directed by Jacob Kornbluth (2013; Santa Monica, CA: Miramax Home Entertainment, 2013), DVD.

⁶² Horowitz, “*Negro and White, Unite and Fight!*”, 10.

⁶³ Wilson Warren, *Tied to the Great Packing Machine: The Midwest and Meatpacking* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 4.

adjusted to cohabitating with the remains of the tools that had dismantled it originally and no political coalition has emerged to reverse this loss.

The termination of the postwar policy of mass beef consumption certainly does not mean that Americans stopped eating beef. Beef consumption continued, with beef remaining the most popular meat for decades as overall meat consumption continued increasing. Yet, a substantial change occurred in the relationship between producers, consumers, and the government within a broader political economic framework. Whether a term like “Sunbelt Capitalism” or “Wal-Mart Economy” best describes it, the post-1970s political economy that emerged is one oriented toward production at the expense of labor’s and consumers’ political power under the idea that an unregulated free market will solve all problems.⁶⁴ It has kept meat affordable for the previous decades. Beef prices dropped after 1973 and remained low thanks to the economic concentration spurred by firms like IBP aggressively dominating the industry.

The resultant economy was riven with insecurity for workers and consumers. Yet, consumer goods were cheaper and more available than ever before, which “made it possible for hundreds of millions of people around the world to buy the necessities of life far more cheaply than ever before.”⁶⁵ But, by ceasing to balance the needs of producers and the needs of consumers, the country let producers decide what constitutes public welfare and safety under the guise of the free market knowing best. With beef production, the deregulated production system involves biological processes and environmental

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Hamilton, *Trucking Country*.

⁶⁵ Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Retail Revolution: How Wal-Mart Created a Brave New World of Business* (New York: Picador, 2009), 338.

relationships that the profit system has proven unable to manage. Changes in beef production turned diseases like *E. coli* O157:H7 poisoning, listeriosis, and salmonella from minor problems into nearly universal contaminants to the nation's food system with one in six Americans suffering from a foodborne illness each year.⁶⁶ Subtherapeutic antibiotic use in the beef industry sped up the spread antibiotic resistance among bacteria.⁶⁷ It is not just infectious illness but chemical contamination as well. Nothing stopped DuPont and 3M from dumping the estrogenic chemical perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA or C8) into the Ohio River basin and killing almost one-hundred cattle and sickening many more on a calf-cow farm near one of the dump sites.⁶⁸ This says nothing of the unknown and intentionally unstudied human consequences of ingesting PFOA from meat or ground water contamination. "Increasingly..." as the historian Nancy Langston explains, these types of chemicals "are a part of the natural world, and as persistent chemicals, many of them will continue to be a part of our bodies far into the future."⁶⁹ These health threats along with climate change make it unclear if humans can survive the production system that emerged after beef policy collapsed. What is clear, though, is that without even that pro-meat public policy option, our chances are lessened.

⁶⁶ U.S. Center for Disease Control, "CDC and Food Safety," April 4, 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/cdc-and-food-safety.html>.

⁶⁷ Melinda Wenner Moyer, "How Drug-Resistant Bacteria Travel from the Farm to Your Table," *Scientific American*, December 1, 2016, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-drug-resistant-bacteria-travel-from-the-farm-to-your-table/>.

⁶⁸ Sharon Lerner, "The Teflon Toxin: DuPont and the Chemistry of Deception," *The Intercept*, August 11, 2015, <https://theintercept.com/2015/08/11/dupont-chemistry-deception/>; Nathaniel Rich, "The Lawyer Who Became DuPont's Worst Nightmare," *New York Times Magazine*, January 6, 2016; Kevin Williams, "In Ohio's 'Chemical Valley,' a debate over good jobs and bad health," *The Washington Post*, December 22, 2015.

⁶⁹ Langston, 164.

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