

## EUROPE IS HUNGRY

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**Russell:** We have thought of the beet-root seed for Poland. And other things, too. The seed, for example, must be suited to the particular climate where it is going to be sown. The same variety wouldn't do everywhere in Europe. Something can, let us hope, be requisitioned from the countries that have caused the trouble, from Germany, Italy and Hungary for instance. Potato seed is likely to be the most difficult. The only countries with any to spare may be Britain, perhaps the Netherlands, and possibly Poland, unless hunger in that tortured country is too great. But probably we'll have to go farther afield: Canada and the U.S.A., for example.

**Easterbrook:** That means ships. It will be an enormous problem in transport alone — a million tons of seed to meet Sir John's minimum requirements, quite apart from carrying the tractors and farm machinery to grow them. And on top of all that, millions of tons of food to feed the people while the crops are growing. But what a lifting of the heart there will be the day we start sending tractors and food to Europe instead of guns and tanks! But you've only told us half the story, Sir John. Your committee has not been spending two years on just this little question of supplying seed for a whole continent and growing crops to feed a few hundred million people at short notice? What about livestock? I should think that must be even more difficult?

**Russell:** Much more difficult. We mustn't make the mistake we made after the last war when cattle were sent before the food was ready for them, so that they had to be slaughtered. Re-establishment must come mainly from natural increase. It is no good sending the livestock that happens to be available, or what the rest of the world thinks South-eastern Europe ought to have. They must be the types that thrive there, and the breeds that have been evolved in the different regions through generations of trial and error.

### All the Best Cattle Gone

**Alexander:** I was going to say a word about that. European cattle breeds fall into two main groups, the peasant types and the good estate types. The peasant types must be hardy, healthy, and used to living on rough food. They are used for many things, including milk, work, breeding, meat and leather. They are very localised. The Polish red cattle are hardly to be found outside Poland. And in South-eastern Europe, sheep are important, and are used for several purposes, including milk. When you said earlier that up to the middle of last year, a quarter of the pre-war population of Europe's cattle had gone, that isn't all, is it? We know the position has deteriorated further since then, and will continue to get worse as the Nazis grow more desperate.

**Russell:** That is perfectly true. Greece and Yugoslavia have suffered worse with sheep, whose losses are probably as great as those of cattle. Half Europe's pigs have gone, and a third of its horses have been requisitioned for the German Army. Poultry has suffered worst of all — less than a quarter remain. We must face this problem, and we are facing it, but I don't want to hold out rosy hopes. Restoration of the livestock position is bound to be slow and laborious, for you

can't hurry Nature. Something can be done by supplying more and better food to the animals that survive. Germany can be made to disgorge some of the pedigree and utility animals she has plundered. Hungary may supply some of the peasant breeds used both in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and some may be forthcoming from Switzerland. Some of the Italian breeds, too, would be useful in Greece. Non-peasant breeds such as Holsteins are also used in this part of Europe — and Britain, Canada and the U.S.A. could supply some useful stock in this respect.

### Artificial Mating

**Easterbrook:** Here, again, transport is a major difficulty. A five to eight thousand ton cargo boat would have to make 1500 journeys if as many as a million cattle from outside Europe were imported as foundation stock. But what about this new idea of artificial mating, of keeping the bull possibly in Britain, and dispatching the semen by air in test tubes?

**Russell:** The bulls would be better kept in the different countries, at strategic centres, as you might say. Courses of instruction have been arranged in this country for veterinary officers selected by the different Governments, so that when they get home again they can at once put the method into operation. It seems unlikely that the cattle population of Europe can be restored in less than six years. Horses will take even longer. Little addition can be expected for the first five years after the war, and full restoration may take 15 years. For the first period much of the cultivation will have to be done by tractor. Under good conditions, the sheep population should recover more rapidly than the cattle, but in poor and hard conditions it will be slower. Pigs and poultry, on the other hand, can recover very quickly indeed. The trouble with pigs is that they eat so much of the same food as ourselves — grain, potatoes, skim milk, fish and meat. The same is true of poultry.

### "People Will Be Very Hungry"

**Easterbrook:** Plans for a certain amount of administrative action have been made, I suppose? I mean, people will be very hungry. It would be understandable enough if some began eating the seeds or the livestock that did remain. But this, in the end, would only mean prolonging the suffering and make things far worse.

**Russell:** That is so. Immediately the Germans are expelled from any region there will have to be a strict control of the slaughter of animals, especially females suitable for breeding and milking, and some of the working bullocks. Distribution of feeding stuffs will have to be regulated. Governments of European countries will have to take immediate action to restore soil fertility when they regain possession of their lands. These and other measures have all been thought of on our committee, which represents all the nations concerned.

**Alexander:** Yes. You — and they — are certainly laying the foundation of a magnificent job. What appeals to me about it is that you're not just doing what I might call "soup-kitchen" work. It is not just relief and dishing out a little food to hungry people that you're thinking about. On the contrary, "relief" has been interpreted by your committee in terms of restoration — of rebuilding.

(A very full account of the problem presented to the Committee appears in *Nature*, April 17, 1943. It is written by Sir John Russell himself.)

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