Farm to Table: The Supermarket Industry and American Society, 1920- 1990

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A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of History

University of Virginia
April 2018

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Acknowledgments

Writing this dissertation took far more effort and time than the average trip to the supermarket. I visited archives and conducted research in more than fifteen states and accumulated at least 200,000 frequent flyer miles in pursuit of a history that, at least initially, proved to be hidden. It likely took as many people and institutions to help me complete this project. It is impossible to name them all.

Olivier Zunz was an unflinching advisor who gave me the space and freedom to explore food and retail history. Over eight years of writing and research, his penetrating insight and sharp eye reeled in my worst impulses and ensured a final product that we could both be proud of. I will always be grateful for his guidance, support, and belief in me and this topic.

At the University of Virginia, Brian Balogh, Sarah Milov, Guian Mckee, and Mel Leffler all provided ample support and insight at critical moments. I will always appreciate Brian's insistence that I investigate civilian-state partnerships robustly. Joseph C. Miller more than once lent me his keen mind to consider the historical processes at work more broadly and analytically. Max Edelson always ensured I received the funding necessary to travel to far-flung parts of the United States in search of answers. John T. Edge at the University of Mississippi helped me write about food in new ways and Justin Nystrom at Loyola University of New Orleans pushed me to think about the ways my project spoke to people outside of history.

Beyond the generous support I received from the University of Virginia, I could not have completed this project without support from the Harry S. Truman Library, the

Jack K. Hulston Foundation, and the Business History Conference. Archivists at the University of Southern California, the University of California Santa Barbara, the Wisconsin Historical Society, the Southern Historical Collection, the Harry S. Truman Library, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, the University of Arkansas, and the Shiloh Museum all helped me find elusive documents hidden in their collections.

Graduate school is a long, lonely process, but I owe my fellow students a debt of gratitude. Tom, Zach, Emily, Lauren, Alec, Mary, Trevor, Chris, and Ryan all provided to be life-long friends and the right sort of people to surround myself while I wrote and researched.

At home in Seattle, I had many friends tolerate my long digressions into parking lot theory and poultry rearing that they never asked for. They likely share my relief that I finally completed this dissertation. Scott Emerick generously provided me time needed to finish writing the last chapters.

Kathy has been a supportive partner and sounding board through the writing process, always willing to let me talk through ideas and tolerant of me spending night-after-night glued to my computer. I promise that I will stop talking about chicken genetics every time we go to the store.

Writing this dissertation proved to be one of the great challenges of my life and I am elated to finally finish the project. I have lived and breathed supermarkets for years, forging an understanding that shapes my worldview. I have sought to forge the most accurate and objective history possible; any errors in the text are my own.

Introduction: Buying America at the Supermarket

On June 14, 2017, online retailer Amazon.com bought Whole Foods Market for $14 billion. Although Whole Foods is popular with young urban shoppers, the chain only captures about two percent of food retail sales annually and struggles outside of that core demographic. But the purveyor of organic foods was the perfect springboard for America's largest retailer, Amazon, to launch itself into the $5.32 trillion food marketplace precisely because Whole Foods' products appealed to the same tech-savvy shoppers who already make most of their everyday purchases online – and usually through Amazon. Quickly, the Seattle-based e-commerce giant made moves to integrate Whole Foods offerings with its Prime Now service, offering customers the ability to buy their food through a mobile app, and installed lockers in its new grocery stores where shoppers could pick up their online purchases while buying a rotisserie chicken for dinner.

Amazon's purchase also sparked concerns that a powerful corporation notorious for crushing its competition would exert control over how the nation bought its food.[1] As one observer wrote shortly after the sale, "Amazon's move into the grocery marketplace signals that the giant appears poised to realign consumer habits around how we buy quinoa, cereal, and meat in precisely the same way it changed the way we buy books, clothes, and detergent."[2] Workers, too, felt threatened. Marc Perrone, the president of the United Food and Commercial Workers International, the organization most directly

[1] "Food Expenditures," Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture, https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-expenditures.aspx

[2] Steve Holt, "Will the Amazon-Whole Foods Deal Mean Better Food for All?" https://civileats.com/2017/06/20/will-the-amazon-whole-foods-deal-mean-better-food-for-all/. Accessed November 23, 2017.

concerned with organizing grocery store employees, told reporters, “Amazon’s brutal vision for retail is one where automation replaces good jobs.”[3] Unlike other corporate sales happening at the same time –only days later, AT&T and Time Warner announced a merger affecting nearly all the nation’s digital media– Amazon’s moves left many concerned that the tech company might force a change in the ways Americans would use their most ubiquitous public institution– the supermarket.[4]

The Whole Foods sale was not the first time Americans worried about changes to the ways they used supermarkets, the main site of food distribution in modern America. Below, I argue that the supermarket industry is responsible for determining how we eat and grow food. The simple act of acquiring food presents unique challenges – can you trust food grown by other people? Is the price fair? Are you eating food suited for your social class and race? These questions became more pressing during the early twentieth century when the population urbanized and industrialized, rendering the culture of rural self-sufficiency into one of dependence on the retailers who transported food from the countryside into growing cities and towns. In the 1920s and 1930s, consumers worried that professional grocers did not offer honest prices or goods of the desired quality, compelling some to open stores called “supermarkets,” not just because they offered a wide selection of goods, but also because they gave consumers the opportunity to control their shopping experience. Rather than hide food behind counters guarded by clerks, supermarkets allowed shoppers to wanders aisles stuffed with every conceivable edible, an experience of liberation and democratic consumerism that attracted wary housewives, urban workers, and others. Because of this expectation, stores have been sites of cultural,

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[3] Nick Wingfield and Michael J. de la Merced, “Amazon to Buy Whole Foods for $13 Billion,” *The New York Times*, June 16, 2017.
[4] “AT&.T Plans Major Changes After Buying Time Warner,” Ad Age, July 14, 2017.

social, and political strife. During the 1930s, economic "minute-men" physically blocked access to some supermarkets because they believed operators set prices on staple items too high for Depression-era families. By the 1960s, African-Americans picketed grocers that refused to open stores in urban minority neighborhoods, demanding access to same food feeding white suburban families. Many more people during the 1960s felt as though they lived in a "supermarket trap" because retailers had so successfully squashed other forms of competition that no other options remained. That unease inspired farmers' markets, organic farms, and restaurants promising a return to "natural foods" not available in supermarkets.

Defining a supermarket is a much more difficult task than simply highlighting its importance to modern American life. There are nearly 40,000 stores described as "supermarkets" in 2017, making up 30% of the overall food market and responsible for over $5 trillion in economic activity in the United States annually. [5] All of these are descendents of stores built in 1920s Los Angeles that offered a full-range of fresh fruits and vegetables, meats, fish, and staple items, as well as amenities like parking and self-service that other contemporary food stores did not offer.[6] Operators also promised lower prices than those offered by the dry goods merchants and dedicated "green grocers," who hawked food in cities and towns. Moreover, supermarkets are America's most universal consumer experience; the average person visits a store twice a week and there is likely no one in the nation who has not entered a supermarket at some point in their life.[7] But how do these stores differ from bodegas, corner stores, or farm stands, for instance? As I

[5] This number includes restaurants. "U.S. Grocery Shopping Trends 2016 Overview,"
[6] "Supermarket Facts," Food Marketing Institute, https://www.fmi.org/our-research/supermarket-facts, accessed December 10, 2017.
[7] "U.S. Grocery Shopping Trends 2016 Overview," Food Marketing Institute, https://www.fmi.org/docs/default-source/research/presentation.pdf?sfvrsn=0, accessed December 10, 2017.

explain in chapter one, the first supermarkets catered to motorists looking to park their cars near the places they bought ingredients intended for home cooking. Later, as chapter two shows, retailers turned supermarkets into bastions of low-price food shopping, undercutting street merchants, corner stores, and established chain grocers. By the time the Second World War ended, as I describe in chapter three, supermarkets had morphed yet again, into physical expressions of conspicuous consumption and national abundance. Later, as chapter four demonstrates, supermarket operators led the scientific transformation of America's fields, designing our food to suit the needs of mass-marketing. Chapter five lays out how an upheaval similar to that happening in the fields also occurred in the factories and small towns supplying grocers, as previously good-paying jobs in slaughterhouses became minimum-wage jobs at cost-cutting processing plants. Finally, in chapter six, I examine the ways that the 1960s counterculture spawned a new critique of supermarket retailer –that it was wasteful and artificial, responsible for making the food system plastic and anodized– to show how the industry fragmented into different sectors appealing to culture and cost-conscious shoppers. All of this suggests the supermarket can be defined as a retail store geared towards selling food intended for home consumption in industrial quantities while offering shoppers a lower price than other kinds of vendors along with amenities desired by affluent consumers.

Studying the supermarket reveals the tensions, contradictions, and successes that characterize the American food system. In recent years, academic, pundits, and others have questioned the economic, social, cultural, and environmental impact of fast-food culture and industrial agriculture.[8] The dilemmas and dangers of this style of eating and

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[8] A limited list includes Dan Barber, *The Third Plate: Field Notes on the Future of Food* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014); Aaron Bobrow-Strain, *White Bread*: *A Social History of the Store Bought Loaf* (New

growing are well known. The roots of the obesity epidemic, animal abuse, water and ground pollution, rural poverty and more are found in the way we grow and eat our food.[9] I originally began this project seeking to understand America's addiction to cheap, environmentally-suspect, and industrially-produced food; I found my answer in the aisles of the supermarket. As I investigated, I found other questions that shaped this project – how did grocers design the foods they sold? How did rural laborers growing food cope with the emergence of industrial-scale processing and consumption? How did supermarkets shape the design of our cities and towns? When grocers built the first supermarkets, there were no factory farms capable of delivering massive supplies of food

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York: Beacon Press, 2012); Tracy Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Barry Estabrook, *Pig Tales: An Omnivores Quest for Sustainable Meat* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016); Barry Estabrook, *Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit* (Kansas City, MO: Andres McMell Publishing, 2011); Samuel Fromartz, *Organics, Inc.: Natural Foods and How they Grew* (New York: Harcourt Inc., 2006); Ted Genoways, *The Chain: Farm, Factory, and the Fate of Our Food* (New York: Harper Collins, 2014), Paul Greenberg, *Four Fish: The Future of the Last Wild Food* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2010); Taras Grescoe, *Bottomfeeder: How to Eat Ethically in a World of Vanishing Seafood* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008); David Kamp, *The United States of Arugula: The Sun-Dried, Cold-Pressed, Dark-Roasted, Extra-Virgin Story of the American Food Revolution* (New York: Broadway Books, 2006); Mark Kurlansky, *Birdseye: The Adventures of a Curious Man* (New York: Doubleday, 2012); Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Tracie McMillan, *The American Way of Eating: Undercover at Walmart, Applebee's, Farm Fields and the Dinner Table* (New York: Scribner, 2012); Michael Moss, *Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us* (New York: Random House, 2013); Marion Nestle, *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Michael Pollan, *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2013); Michael Pollan, *The Omnivores Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006); Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

[9] Historians have highlighted the ways corporate agribusiness has upended community life. Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1986), xi-xvi; Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields: Southern Agriculture 1865-1980* (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1984), 180-207; Monica Richmond Gisolfi, "From Crop Lien to Contract Farming: The Roots of Agribusiness in the American South, 1929-1939," *Agricultural History* 80, No. 2 (Spring 2002), 167-189; Kathy J. Cook, "Expertise, Book Farming, and Government Agriculture: The Origins of Agricultural Seed Certification in the United States," *Agricultural History* 76, No. 3 (Summer, 2002), 524-545;); David Goodman, Bernado Sorj, and John Wilkinson, *Farm Farming to Biotechnology: A Theory of Agro-Industrial Development* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987). Alan Olmstead and Paul Rhode, "An Overview of California Agricultural Mechanization, 1870-1930," *Agricultural History* 62, No. 3 (Fall 1988), 86-112; Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

to cities and small towns. To be sure, farmers coaxed massive amounts of corn, wheat, and cotton from the ground long before the first grocers opened supermarkets, but their stores opened a new era in the history of America's rural spaces where fields and pastures were directed towards satisfying consumer demand for fresh, cheap food. For these reasons, what follows is not a comprehensive history of every supermarket chain in the nearly eighty years I cover. Rather, this is a history of supermarket operators, their suppliers, and the very concept of the supermarket as seen from both the stratosphere and the very small decisions made in store aisles, laboratories, and farmhouses.

The supermarket burst onto the scene in the early twentieth century by serving the needs of a predominantly white consumer class which gained economic mobility at the same time they could access an affordable means of personal transportation– the automobile. The car helped create the suburb and in turn, a whole new geography of shopping anchored by the sites grocers built their stores. Grocers' core idea was thusly to offer industrial amounts of high-quality food in a location where consumers could easily park their automobiles. This came with unexpected trade-offs –stores had to be placed in low-rent areas with available, affordable land peripheral to the downtown core, a strategy suiting the growing trends towards suburbanization and car ownership.

The automobile only partially explains supermarkets' mass appeal, though; retailers offered consumers a chance to purchase a wide range of foods affordably, conveniently, and in settings reinforcing well-to-do white shoppers social aspirations. Fundamentally, supermarket operators were discounters, relying on volume sales to turn a profit representing only a tiny fraction of their total sales. As a practice, grocers leaned on their suppliers to streamline processing and maximize the production of items like tomatoes or chickens that would typically be subject to natural processes like seasonality or long maturation rates. To guarantee low prices, retailers needed farmers, ranchers, and factory owners to deliver homogenous food in industrial quantities, inspiring geneticists, breeders, chemists, and others to literally reach into the ground to transform the very biological makeup of our food. At the same time, the supermarket became the de facto site of technological consumption in modern America. To deliver all these items, grocers built tens of thousands of stores across the country outfitted with some of the latest scientific advances like commercial freezers and genetically modified animals– indeed, by 1940, there were nearly 7,000 "supermarkets" nationwide. By 1950, grocers had built over 15,000; by 1970, 25,000. Grocers would nearly double that number again in the four decades afterwards.[10] Supermarkets became so ubiquitous that they even created new forms of commercial architecture that included such everyday structures as the strip mall, the parking lot, and the shopping center. Finally, grocers sited their stores in places and offered product lines that appealed to the white population moving into suburbs during the twentieth century. Although the stores constructed during the 1920s and 1930s appeared in parts of major cities that could support large structures with affixed parking lots, postwar grocers catered exclusively to new suburbanites needing to feed growing families, rendering the supermarket into a suburban institution. Store construction inside of cities, particularly in neighborhoods populated by minorities, was almost nonexistent after 1950. Grocers also failed to build supermarkets in the same rural areas responsible for growing the food that fed suburbia. Moreover, the kinds of foods sold in stores were marketed exclusively to white homemakers trying to live "the gracious life." Postwar

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[10] Rom Markin, *The Supermarket: An Analysis of Growth, Development, and Change* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1968), 66; Urban Land Institute, ULI Market Profiles 1999: North America (Washington, DC: Urban Land Institute, 2000), 164.

commentators might have described supermarkets as offering a "democracy of goods," but the stores themselves were hardly democratic.[11]

In the chapters that follow, I argue supermarket operators created a new diet and model of farming in America. Food was a massive part of the average family's budget during the 1920s and 1930s, totaling as much as thirty percent of weekly income.[12] Grocers knew this, and used cutthroat buying practices and clever advertising to offer food in unprecedented volumes and prices. These stores meshed perfectly with the cultural moment, which stressed not only living comfortably but also doing so affordably. The midcentury food culture also emphasized availability over quality, a turn that perfectly suited retailers bent on supplying product in unlimited quantities. Retailers fundamental project, then, was the defiance of biological processes like seasonality and physical impediments like unionized labor to ensure they had sufficient supplies of cheap food to sell. Processing plants relocated to the countryside to take advantage of low-wage labor just as farmers turned to bioengineered crops that could arrive in the market quickly. Retailers did all this while fostering a broad transformation of American politics and consumer culture. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, individual citizens had called upon consumer groups, labor unions, and the federal government to contest the power of industrial agriculture in the marketplace. Grocers easily folded themselves into this narrative, using their ability to deliver low prices to make good on the same desires, scoring a success when other institutions and organizations struggled. Thanks to retailers'

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[11] For more on ideas about "the gracious life," see chapter three; Laura Shapiro in *Something From the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1960s America* (New York: Viking Books, 2004) also covers the idea extensively.
[12] Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States* (1976), 457, 467-68, 483. On USDA targets, see "The Brannan Farm Plan" Folder "Brannan Plan (3 of 7)" Box 11, Charles F. Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

efforts, working and middle-class consumers by the 1960s accepted agribusiness' and retailers' ability to decimate organized labor and defy government regulations in exchange for perpetual low prices and unlimited supplies of genetically-modified factory foods. [13] Grocers sold the good life to U.S. consumers by forcing an industrializing of our food's biology and deskilling the labor required to bring those items from the fields to stores.

The supermarket did not immediately have all these characteristics, slowly evolving into a retailing style that would have immense impact on the ways Americans, and people the world over, grew and consumed food. The Houston, Texas-based Henke and Pillot company, a small grocer looking to make a name in the crowded food business, opened the first fully-developed supermarket opened in 1923 by copying –and enhancing– a style of store design first conceived in Los Angeles.[14] Within a few years, there were dozens of stores in Southern California that were open nearly all day, offered a wide-variety of consumer items, and provided parking. These were not the sole characteristics of the supermarket – since their original stores embodied an ethic of both conspicuous and constant consumption– but within a decade the idea of a "supermarket" capable of providing all of the items someone needed to feed their family was an

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[13] On the tension between business and consumer activists, see Gary Cross, *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America* (New York, 2002), esp. 122-24; and Daniel Scroop, "The Anti-Chain Store Movement and the Politics of Consumption," *American Quarterly,* 60 (Dec. 2008), 925-49; Rachael Louise Moran "Consuming Relief: Food Stamps and the New Welfare of the New Deal," *Journal of American History* 97, no. 2 (March 2011), 1004.

[14] Many industry leaders identify "King Kullen Supermarket," opened on November, 29, 1933 in Elizabeth, New Jersey as the first supermarket. While this is the first store to bear the name, I describe Henke and Pillot's operation, which was called a "branch store" as the first supermarket as it was the first retail outlet to combine all the features of the supermarket in a single location. For more on Henke and Pillot, see "Advertisement," *Houston Post*, November 30, 1923, 6; Charles M. Tunnell, "Henke and Pillot Stores Grew from Houston Public's Demand," *Supermarket Merchandising* 2 (February 1937), 3-5; "Employees Buy Henke and Pillot Supers for $1,500,000," *Supermarket Merchandising 5* (August, 1940), 10.

entrenched part of American society. It only took another decade for the supermarket as both an idea and as a mode of distribution to completely take over all direct food retailing in the United States. Mom-and-pop green grocers and butcher shops anchoring neighborhood commercial districts shuttered across the country. Meat factories in tiny towns far removed from major cities replaced the old urban slaughterhouses. Grocers catalyzed the development of American gastronomy, inspiring some to start organic farms and avant garde restaurants which juxtaposed their "natural food" with supermarket products.[15]

Grocers also inaugurated a new turn in public debate on whether large corporations were beneficial to society. Though American society had a vigorous debate over corporate excess in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, resulting in legislation like the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890, attitudes changed.[16] After experiencing a revival during the Great Depression, this skepticism towards corporate America faded by the end of the 1940s as corporations began offering more concrete improvements to daily life, one of the most important being the supermarket. A one-stop shop for virtually everything necessary for daily life, supermarket business became the largest retail sector of the American economy for almost all of the twentieth century.[17] And while retailers had their detractors –an entire "natural foods" movement rose in

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[15] The definitive study of this movement is Warren J. Belasco, *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 29-67. See also Thomas McNamee, *Alice Waters and Chez Panisse: The Romantic, Impractical, Often Eccentric, Ultimately Brilliant Making of a Food Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007); Joan Reardon, *M.F.K. Fisher, Julia Child, and Alice Waters: Celebrating the Pleasures of the Table* (New York: Harmony Books, 1994).

[16] Although the legacy and motivations of the nineteenth century populists who forced this legislation is still hotly debated, there is consensus in the key role played by ordinary citizens in prompting policy change. see Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[17] Deutsch, *Building a Housewives' Paradise*, 3.

opposition to mass-food retailing– their success in feeding the population meant consumers fundamentally trusted big business to provide their meals. Consumer protests targeted stores that *failed* to live up to ideals constructed in conversation with their shoppers. By proving that big business could do good, supermarkets helped pave the way for companies like Amazon or Apple to dominate entire sectors of the economy. Put another way, supermarkets had such a monopoly over food distribution that they paved the way for Americans to accept new kinds of monopolies, specifically those in the tech sector, in the twenty-first century.

Although scholars have persuasively shown that private citizens worked with the state and big business to forge a political economy based on personal consumption, little work has been done on the actual sites of commerce, and ways business practices shaped public debate.[18] This project shifts the focus retailers and their supply network to

[18] The debate has settled on questions of consumer identity and activism and not the specifics where these notions might have formed. Lizbeth Cohen argues, for example, that consumption patterns among working-class Chicagoans paves the way for cross-ethnic communication and, eventually, unionization. Lizbeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1990), 327. Meg Jacobs makes the point that labor benefitted from the prominence of consumption in the 1930s through the alliance that formed between unions and middle-class consumers. Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 5. Together, "purchasing power" coalitions like these politicized their consumer needs and directed New Deal policies toward support of their consumerism and away from the needs of big business. This turn of events was a stark contrast from the 1920s, when leaders like Herbert Hoover saw big business as the state's natural partner in economic development and managing the economy. Many historians have examined elements of this era, though none have done so in a comprehensive, integrated way. These scholars include Lizbeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); Meg Jacobs, *Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and War-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Retail Revolution: How Wal-Mart Created a Brave New World of Business* (New York: Picador Press, 2009; Andrew Hurley, *Diners, Bowling Alleys, and Trailer Parks: Chasing the American Dream in Postwar Consumer Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000);); Susanne Friedberg, *French Beans and Food Scares: Culture and Commerce in an Anxious Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); William Leach, *Land of Desire : Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (1994). A particular classic is Daniel Boorstein's *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

construct the retail environment which people encountered, negotiated, and constructed twentieth century political economy.

The supermarket story is also the history of the relationship between rural and urban spaces in modern America. Historians have recently begun assembling a history of rural America in the twentieth century, showing how the countryside was a site of economic, social, political, and cultural struggle.[19] The bridge connecting these spaces to city and suburbs was the supermarket, where the physical items created on farms were transported and consumed. The supermarket not only determined the pace of economic activity but also dictated individual farmers' decisions about which crops to plant and

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[19] My explanation of rural labor systems resolves many of the major debates in American food and agricultural history. More than just the phenomena of pickup trucks loading up with food bought from the local Kroger, the death of rural self-sufficiency (however flawed that idea was in practice) meant a fundamental transition in the way Americans utilized land and labor. For many decades, historians have been trying to understand the process by which the rural south traded, in the words of historian Jack Temple Kirby, "a culture of living at home in favor of living out of bags." Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986, 115 Scholars have largely pinpointed the role of federal policy in but debate whether individual programs specifically targeting rural life or those responsible for arming America to fight the Cold War catalyzed the emergence of a system of political economy supported by cheap labor. One camp looks to the failure of New Deal-era farm programs to adequately support small farmers competing with larger ones, particularly those in the Midwest. Important examples of this school of thought include Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Deborah Fitzgerald, *The Business of Breeding: Hybrid Corn in Illinois, 1890-1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Douglas Cazauz Sackman, *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2005); Frank Ellis and Stephen Biggs, "Evolving Themes in Rural Development, 1950s-2000s," *Development Policy Review* 19, No. 4 (Winter 2001); David Goodman, Bernado Sorj, and John Wilkinson, *Farm Farming to Biotechnology: A Theory of Agro-Industrial Development* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987); Mark Friedberger, *Farm Families and Change in 20th Century America* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1988; Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Michael Johnston Grant, *Down and Out on the Family Farm: Rural Rehabilitation in the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).
On the other side, a rich historiography details the ways that Cold War defense spending brought new people and industries to the West and South, uplifting parts of the economy while leaving the countryside all but untouched. Margaret O'Mara, *Cities of Knowledge: Cold War Science and the Search for the Next Silicon Valley* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Bruce Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991; Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Retail Revolution: How Wal-mart Created a Brave New World of Business* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009); Ted Ownby, *American Dreams in Mississippi: Consumers, Poverty, and Culture, 1830–1998* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

companies to sell to. By understanding how the supermarket worked as an engine of change for the countryside, remaking industrializing agrarian lives, the political and cultural trajectory of these communities –the embrace of right-wing populism in the early twenty-first century– can be understood as a revolt against a system of political economy that relies on depressing the value of rural labor and products.

My arguments presented here about public policy, economic planning, civil society, and retailing demonstrates how fulfilling a basic human function– finding food– defines the ways capitalism orders the most mundane of spaces and directs the most basic daily pursuits. Rather than make capitalism a purely controlling "force," my analysis reveals the contingencies and enormous importance of an ordinary trip to the supermarket. Simple choices like choosing to buy beef or chicken have impact across the global economy, affecting a supply chain that stretches from a neighborhood store all the way back to a rancher or grower struggling to pay their bills or a scientist struggling to breed an animal capable of becoming market ready in only a matter of weeks. It might seem surprising to make supermarkets into an engine underlying much of the twentieth century's economic planning, technological development, and consumer habit formation, but as the site where people made their most essential economic choices, grocery stores became the place where people bought modern America.

Chapter 1: The Birth of the Supermarket

On November 30, 1923, Houston grocery company Henke & Pillot opened the first supermarket.[20] Offering fresh produce and dry goods alongside an in-store baker, butcher, and fishmonger, the new store combined services typically provided by independent retailers under a single roof. The company even bought fruits and vegetables grown on farms in Texas, California, and Florida to compete with established chain-grocers and street peddlers. They did the same with meat bought from commercial ranches throughout the West and nationally branded consumer goods like Arm and Hammer baking soda. The growers selling food to Henke and Pillot were among the first factory farms, specializing in bringing farm products to market year-round, overcoming seasonal and geographic limitations that kept fresh food out of stores for much of the year.[21] The store's physical structure was just as novel, featuring over 30,000 square feet of shopping space and a 300-spot parking lot, possibly the largest single-use car park attached to a retailer in the United States at the time.

The Henke and Pillot store was one of the 1920s most ambitious retail operations. At the time, most grocery stores were smaller than 1,000 square feet and situated in the midst of clogged urban commercial districts and residential areas, relying on foot traffic to generate business. Once customers entered stores, clerks pulled items

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[20] Many scholars identify "King Kullen Supermarket," opened on November, 29, 1933 in Elizabeth, New Jersey as the first supermarket. While this is the first store to bear the name, I describe Henke and Pillot's operation, which was called a "branch store" as the first supermarket as it was the first retail outlet to combine all the features of the supermarket in a single location.

[21] "Advertisement," *Houston Post*, November 30, 1923, 6; Charles M. Tunnell, "Henke and Pillot Stores Grew from Houston Public's Demand," *Supermarket Merchandising* 2 (February 1937), 3-5; "Employees Buy Henke and Pillot Supers for $1,500,000," *Supermarket Merchandising 5* (August, 1940), 10.

for them from behind long counters separating shoppers from the food they wanted. The varieties of products available were limited, too. Few stores, even the biggest chains, offered more than a few dozen products on their shelves. The Henke and Pillot store flipped these conventions on their head. Shoppers could self-select their purchases from spacious, open shelves filled with thousands of different products. Most importantly, with its parking lot, Henke and Pillot's store was liberated from structural constraints faced by retailers in crowded city centers.

The Henke & Pillot store was the culmination of new developments in American food retailing. Until the mid-1920s, urban food shopping was a difficult and time-consuming process involving a myriad of different grocery stores, street peddlers, and public markets. If one went to a grocery store, they were patronizing a retailer like the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (A&P), the nation's largest chain. A&P operated nearly 20,000 outlets across the United States, capturing 2.5% of all retail sales annually by 1920. However large, A&P stores were very different than supermarkets like Henke and Pillot; few offered more than 300 unique items, most of which were different varieties of tea and coffee.[22] For other items, consumers turned to independent and small-scale butchers, bakers, fishmongers, and "green grocers" –produce vendors– who bought from regional or local distributors and operated small stalls, shops, or pushcarts tucked into organized and informal street markets. Because retailers lacked a reliable system of distribution, the prices consumers paid for food were unstable, sometimes changing hourly, frustrating cash-strapped consumers who struggled to both afford their purchases and find desired items. A one-stop shop –the supermarket– did not yet exist.

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[22] Geofrey M. Lebhar, *Chain Stores in America, 1859-1962* (New York: Chain Store Age Books, 1971), 24.

Retailers responded to consumer dissatisfaction by offering services that first organized the chaotic, unpredictable food marketplace and then applied the same logic governing heavy industry –uniformity, mass-production, and mass-distribution– to the food cycle. This was not an immediate transformation. The A&P, founded in 1859, and other early chains specialized in easily produced, bulk-packaged dry goods, leaving the unpredictable meat and vegetable trade to independent shopkeepers and street peddlers. As the A&P grew, other retailers began specializing in markets and services Great Atlantic avoided, making a mastery of the meat and produce trade through technological and conceptual innovation a hallmark of early-twentieth century food retailers.

Adapting to American automobile culture proved just as difficult – and important– for the early food retail industry. In the late 1910s, cars became more affordable and commonplace, turning cars into an indispensible shopping accessory. American cities had little space available for parking near crowded downtown commercial districts, though, pushing affluent shoppers away from established retailers. Quickly, new "drive-in" markets, complexes of independent vendors tied to parking lots and gas stations, replaced older stores in established commercial districts and ushered in an era of mass-motor retailing that gave birth to the Henke and Pillot store and all of the other supermarkets that followed.

America's first grocery stores served middle- and working class urban consumers frustrated with a monotonous diet dominated by meats and grains mixed with whatever meats and vegetables were available. In late-nineteenth century America, there was no sustained system of distribution to bring produce and other crops grown on farms into cities, limiting city-dwellers to meals built from cheap and easily transported staples, like corn. Perishable items were hard to find, even in season, because there were neither dedicated retailers nor a sustained infrastructure to deliver goods to urban shoppers.[23]

Meat was centerpiece of this limited diet. Late nineteenth century Americans ate vast quantities of meat – even the poor ate as much as 140 pounds per year, four times more than destitute Europeans– because animal parts could be transported over long-distances by rail, was cheap compared to other items, and, quite simply, tasted good.[24] Farmers and other people living in the countryside had access to wild game like deer or turkey, and those living near the ocean or freshwater enjoyed fish and local delicacies like oysters, but most people subsisted on readily-available beef and pork. These foods became even more plentiful and cheap after Chicago-based meatpackers built dedicated rail links to eastern urban centers during the 1860s and 1870s, ensuring year-round supply.[25] For Americans at all levels of society, few days were complete without at least some salted pork or another kind of inexpensive, preserved meat served alongside equally cheap cornbreads and corncakes. Fried beefsteaks also figured prominently. Even though it was cheap, meat was also a potent symbol of luxury and American identity. The popular *Century Cookbook*, published in 1895, advised homemakers that "meat is the chief component to an American meal," because "our national bounty is borne by our

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[23] Laure Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 68-72.

[24] Roger Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table: Taste, Technology, Transformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 11-17.

[25] William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1992), 238-245.

livestock."[26] *Good Housekeeping* told homemakers that meat was the embodiment "of her husband's labor and a necessary foundation to the home."[27] Even without these endorsements, meat was an essential component to any special occasion. For holidays like the Fourth of July, Americans prepared "forests of roasted pigs." Thanksgiving and Christmas traditions demanded similar feasts.[28] Immigrants also embraced meat as distinctly American. One Italian newcomer wrote a letter encouraging his family to emigrate by assuring them that in the United States "in one week, we have more meat than we might have in a year back in Italy, or more."[29]

The average city-dweller barely ate fruits and vegetables because they were expensive and usually in poor condition when they arrived in urban markets. All farmers devoted some of their land to crops like pears or potatoes, but this acreage was negligible compared to the space devoted to items like corn, wheat, or cotton, which they sold into established international commodities markets. Instead, farmers reserved most of the produce they grew for their families, selling most surpluses either locally or to wholesalers who supplier urban markets. Farmers close to cities sometimes sold to urban merchants, but only after long wagon trips along shoddy roads or river barges left much of the food crushed or rotten.[30] Even the few growers who exclusively grew consumer crops, like Sanford, Florida's Chase family, failed to overcome these problems. They began shipping oranges, tomatoes, and carrots to New York and Philadelphia by sea in

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[26] Mary Ronald, *The Century Cook Book* (New York: The Century Company, 1895), 39.

[27] "About Beef, Mutton, Veal, and Pork," *Good Housekeeping*, March 1, 1890.

[28] Robert F. Moss, *Barbecue: The History of the America Institution* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 19.

[29] Hasia Diner, *Hungering for America*, 121.

[30] "Dump Story All Bunk," *The Western Fruit Jobber* 4 (January 1918), 43.

1891, routinely losing more than half their shipment en route to rot and poor handling. Rough seas destroyed so much fruit that by the time ships arrived in New York, “a deep pool of fermenting orange and tomato juice fill[ed] every container,” putrefying much of the surviving product.[31] Teamsters accustomed to handling hardy bales of cotton or bags of wheat, would then “throw our products about with no regard for quality.”[32] Shippers and wholesalers passed these losses onto consumers, who paid regardless of high prices because, as family patriarch Sydney Chase, explained, “the hunger for fresh food in Northern cities is so great as to compensate for any of our buyer’s losses.”[33] Losses in transit also meant that, in addition to higher prices, cities ultimately had less fresh food available. The wealthy could afford to buy scarce fresh produce, but the middle and working classes had no choice but to buy fruits and vegetables in bulk when possible and preserve them into countless pickles, chutneys, jams, jellies, and ketchups (nineteenth-century Americans were especially fond of mushroom ketchup).[34] Hardy roots and tubers like potatoes and turnips could be kept for months if stored properly, but few urban families had the space to do so. Put simply, many Americans, particularly those in Eastern cities, had restricted access to desirable fresh foods.

Even distributing food at all was difficult because distributors had no guarantees their products would find sellers in city markets so they did little to develop that side of

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[31] Letter, Sidney Chase to Henry Chase, February 5, 1901, in Folder “February, 1901,” Series Family Correspondence, 1881-1910” Box 7, Chase Family Papers, University of Florida Special Collections, Gainesville, FL. Hereafter Chase Papers.

[32] Nathan Mayo, “Why Insist on Quality,” Folder, “Why Insist On Quality,” Box 1, Nathan Mayo Papers, University of Florida Special Collections, Gainesville, FL.

[33] Letter, Sidney Chase to Henry Chase, February 5, 1901, in Folder “February, 1901,” Series Family Correspondence, 1881-1910, ” Chase Papers.

[34] Andrew F., Smith, *Pure Ketchup: A History of America’s National Condiment* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 14-16.

the business. To be sure, wholesalers would buy from growers like the Chase family and ship to population centers, but there was no organization to these shipments. Instead, food arrived randomly in urban areas and was sold and resold several times before finding ending up on someone's table.

The complicated distribution network meant that street-level peddlers often controlled the food trade in late-nineteenth century cities and towns even when there were more organized alternatives. Hawkers sold fruits, vegetables, cooked and fresh meats, and seafood out of pushcarts or stalls set up on street corners or busy thoroughfares. Peddlers also set up informal, disorganized markets in residential neighborhoods, literally bringing goods to consumers' doorsteps. While these sorts of markets were technically illegal in many cities (especially New York), there was virtually no enforcement because they were so popular with the public. Most, like the massive Jewish-run pushcart bazaar lining New York's Hester Street during the 1890s, were ad hoc affairs, run by the children and wives of local residents and geared towards community tastes –the Hester Street market specialized in cured fish.[35] Some cities tried to regulate the trade by constructing covered marketplaces like New York's Clinton Market, but these proved unpopular with sellers used to setting up amongst clusters of townhouses and tenements. Other cities designated particular intersections or public spaces as pushcart market areas, but these were typically undesirable spots underneath bridges or around railroad tracks.[36] Shoppers haggled over prices, often relying on word

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[35] Earl R. French, *Push Cart Markets of New York City* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1925), 7.

[36] Middle-class reformers and social workers encouraged the construction of the covered marketplaces, which eventually became bases for graft and corruption. New York's markets, which included Clinton, Hester, Chelsea Markets and more, were constructed just as reformers advocated a narrow view that the

of mouth to justify paying less – newspapers often published the wholesale prices of vegetables recently arrived in cities to guide shoppers.[37] Since pushcarts and stall owners generally stuck to their chosen territories, they formed close relationships with their customers, who equally depended on the pushcarts to find affordable food. To be sure, there were other places to buy food – below, I discuss how contemporary grocery stores operated– but because fresh food was so ephemeral street peddlers trying to move their entire stock in a morning were the ideal people to sell such fragile items.

The pushcarts were the endpoint of an informal distribution network linking farms to urban consumers. By the 1890s, professional food wholesaling had become a profitable business. Wholesalers came into the trade haphazardly, often initially selling fruit and vegetables as a side business. In New York, many wholesalers started out as merchants like Edward Leverich, whose family had been shipping cotton and sugar from Louisiana since the 1840s. In 1883, he started sending tomatoes, peppers, and other vegetables along with cotton shipments, selling them straight off the boat. By 1892, boll weevils had destroyed much of the cotton crop in the Mississippi Delta, and Leverich

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street was an artery for traffic and commerce (described fully below). Divorcing small-scale retailing from the street in theory would encourage greater building density and eventually higher real estate values. In cities that embraced the concept like New York, Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit, who established peddlers bureaus (New York founded its own in 1906) to sell permits for the new markets, which would be managed by public employees and protected by the police. However, patronage systems quickly developed. Peddlers bribed managers to get the best spaces. Hawkers often bribed police to prevent their stalls being closed down on trumped up charges of filthiness. It was also hard to get food delivered from wholesalers since, at least in New York's case, the covered markets were far from the rail depots and docks where food entered the city; pushcart vendors usually started their day at the warehouses and then traveled to their territories. Suzanne Wasserman, "Hawkers and Gawkers: Peddling and Markets in New York City," in *Gastropolis: Food and New York City*, ed. Annie Hauck-Lawson and Jonathan Deutsch (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 156-159; Harry Morton Goldberg, "Early History of the Markets in New York City– Continued," *East Side Chamber News*, July 1929, 13; Thomas De Voe, *The Market Book: A History of the Public Markets of the City of New York* (New York: Kelly Publishers, 1970), 28-29.

37 For example, *American Grocer,* a trade magazine for food merchants, was widely read by the public.

began focusing exclusively on "fragile fruits."[38] He was not the only cotton dealer who turned to produce. James Casey, a broker from Galveston, Texas started buying locally grown vegetables and sent them to New York wrapped in cotton bales in 1890.[39] With cotton prices falling throughout the 1880s and early 1890s, and boll weevils wiping most of the crop after 1892, the entire cotton complex found produce wholesaling to be a useful supplement to their income.[40] At the same time, the USDA was pushing failing cotton farmers towards growing consumer crops like tomatoes.[41] These cotton merchants-turned-wholesalers conducted business in the way they always had, loading shipments back to New York or other cities and selling them to brokers and industrial agents for further use. In New York, the regional grain dealers copied the cotton merchants and brought locally grown produce into the city along with their other shipments.[42] No one ordered any of this food. Rather, merchants brought it to cities with an expectation that, once arrived, their products would find a buyer.

Small-scale distributors called jobbers typically distributed the food men like Edward Leverich shipped from the distant countryside. Jobbers would buy goods directly from wholesalers and then transport those items to retailers and peddlers on wagons, making them more salesmen than specialized merchants like Leverich. It was common

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[38] Letter, Edward Leverich to Ayers & Cannon General Commission Merchants, November 6, 1892, Folder 9, Box 18, Leverich Papers, New York Historical Society, New York, NY. Hereafter NYHS.

[39] Letter, James Casey to Edward Leverich, February 20, 1890, Folder 6, Box 18, Leverich Papers, NYHS.

[40] Ibid; Robert Nixon, "Cotton Warehouses: Storage Facilities Now Available in the South," *Bulletin of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, No. 216* (Washington, D.C., GPO, 1915), 20.

[41] Letter, John C. Black to David Fairchild, Folder "Civil Service Commission" Box 9, Correspondence of the Office of the Chief, 1900-1908, Records of the Bureau of Plant Industry, Soils, and Agricultural Engineering, Record Group 54, National Archives and Records Administration, Beltsville, MD. Hereafter NARA 2.

[42] French, "Pushcart Markets of New York City," 32.

for one to show up at the docks or train terminal in the early morning and simply buy whatever arrived. To be sure, jobbers would deal in items they had the most familiarity with, but it was more a range of goods determined by forces well outside their control than any particular focus. Often, jobbers would simply go to streets filled with pushcart vendors and sell whatever they had available at a profit. Because jobbing was such an uncertain business, many thought it was a dishonest profession. Adulteration was common, especially with manufactured goods like flour and baking soda that jobbers could cut with sawdust or other fillers. With the jobbers living day-to-day, these sorts of tactics were necessary and understood as normal. Trade publications warned shopkeepers, "the small jobbers are supported on the cash forcibly wrung from the retailer," because the jobbers were de-facto distributors bringing goods from manufacturers and merchants to the streets.[43] In part, this was because, as one astonished congressional committee reported, "the buyer desiring to purchase apples packed in the two types of packaging secures his supplies at different docks some distance apart. If the same buyer desires certain other fruits or vegetables he must go to still other docks."[44] The jobbers were small-scale enough to work within this chaotic system.

Consumers were powerless to make choices about the foods they ate. Pushcart peddlers and city markets were open only during the day and usually ran out of food before noon. Jobbers would make trips throughout cities during the course of the day, but generally the peddlers ran out of goods quickly, forcing anyone seeking food after 4:00 or

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[43] E.A. Bigelow, "The Contract or Rebate System," *Pharmaceutical Record and Weekly Market Review* vol 9, December 9, 1889, 379

[44] U.S. Congress, Joint Commission on Agricultural Inquiry, *Marketing and Distribution*, 105.

5:00 P.M. to improvise. [45] Consumers would often have to plan their days around going to markets, or accept the very real possibility of settling for goods that they had not set out to buy or going home empty-handed. What consumers craved was the ability to plan meals. Late-nineteenth century culinary writers and nutritionists challenged homemakers to spend more time making their family's diets more healthful by avoiding staples like ham, bacon, and lard-soaked corncakes that caused gout or other ailments.[46] This was impossible, however, on streets where "uncontrollable vegetable peddlers rule what housewives serve."[47] Moreover, since so many pushcart vendors were poor immigrants, the well-to-do white middle class wanted nothing from people they viewed as dirty and untrustworthy. Thus, getting food meant finding places where food was available, in good quality, and socially palatable.

The social and commercial shortcomings of street-level retailing created the grocery store. Shoppers wanted predictability and quality from their purchases, which jobbers and peddlers could never hope to provide, something early grocers prioritized at the expense of offering the same expansive, if idiosyncratic, collection of items found in the street stalls. However, this was a necessary decision. Beyond the questions of food safety, bringing shopping indoors pleased well-to-do white customers looking for a shopping experience adhered to carefully constructed notions racial and class superiority challenged by haggling with the African-Americans and immigrants who sold food in the public markets.

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[45] French, "Pushcart Markets of New York City, 23.

[46] Fannie Farmer, *The Fannie Farmer Cookbook* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 321; Anne Mendelson, *Stand Facing the Stove: The Story of the Women Who Gave American the Joy of Cooking* (New York: Scribner, 1996), 115-121; C.F. Langworthy and Caroline Hunt, *Economical Use of Meat in the Home* (Washington: G.P.O., 1910, 25-26.

[47] "Report of the Secretary of Agriculture for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1899" (GPO, 1899), 127.

George Gilman, A&P's founder, invented the chain grocery store out of his New York teashop. The son of a wealthy tanner, Gilman entered the tea and coffee trade in 1859, turning some of his family's sprawling lower-Manhattan workshop into warehousing and office space. Tea and coffee consumption soared in mid-nineteenth century America, from one pound per capita in 1840 to ten by 1860, giving Gilman and his partners, brothers John S. and George H. Hartford, a powerful incentive to leave the dirty and difficult hide business for the more respectable tea trade.[48] Breaking into the new business was no easy feat, though. There were only an average of 75 annual tea shipments arriving in New York from China during the 1860s, all claimed by established merchants. Without enough money to buy a ship, Gilman and the Hartfords became bottom feeders, buying water-damaged tea and coffee from other merchants, selling at a reduced price through mail order and directly from their storefront.[49]

Gilman's approach was revolutionary. At a time when most merchants sold in bulk to jobbers and small shopkeepers, Gilman sold both small and large quantities direct to other businesses and individual consumers.[50] He did away with standard packaging, too. Established merchants shipped tea or coffee in large, lead-lined chests that protected their product en route. Gilman instead packed his product in small, retail-ready envelopes stamped with a large label bearing the name, "Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company," effectively putting his company's name on a product usually sold anonymously. That his

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[48] "Gilman's Tea Business," *Hartford Daily Courant*, December 1, 1901.

[49] There is some debate whether Gilman or one of the Hartfords decided to introduce direct retailing; both families claim it was their ancestor. At the time, though, journalists writing about the company attributed most of the big ideas to Gilman and the day-to-day operations to the Hartfords. Much of the debate is the product of the later success that John S. Hartford's sons had in helming the company during the 1900s and 1910s.

[50] Bullock, "History of the Chain Grocery Store," 18-21.

product was originally spoiled was irrelevant (nor was it likely his customers knew they were buying damaged teas). Customers would accept a product that often tasted inferior to other options so long as it was less expensive and packaged in such a way to guarantee cleanliness and convenience – a principal that would later govern the items sold in supermarkets.

Gilman's marketing transformed the food trade from a business where wholesalers, peddlers, and jobbers traded an ever-rotating set of products to one where marketers and retailers made good on their promises to deliver the same items consistently. He devoted himself to convincing customers that his stores were worthy of their business. Advertisements proclaimed that the company was an enterprise on a par with some of the largest companies of the time – one ad described Great Atlantic as the "Pennsylvania railroad of the tea trade," and not just another ambitious jobber.[51] Gilman backed up his braggadocio by opening dozens of small stores throughout New York City, few larger two or three hundred square feet. This brought the retail business he built along the lower Manhattan waterfront to millions of new customers. It was a daring move. A retail "chain," a term coined by the *Brooklyn Daily Times* to describe Gilman's company, was unknown, but consumers embraced their newfound ability to buy the same set of products in stores throughout the city – Gilman would open over 40 stores in the New York area by 1870.[52] According to one newspaper, the stores were "literally run

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[51] Explicitly, Gilman compared his firm to one of the largest companies in New York City, Cornelius Vanderbilt's New York Central Railroad. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 8, 1865.

[52] Boy Bullock, "History of the Chain Grocery Store in the United States," Unpublished Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1933, 15.

down with customers, and thronged until the hour of closing."[53] Even though tea was popular, this sort of consumer interest was unprecedented, wholly the product of Gilman's flamboyance and imagination.

Gilman's boldest move was introducing brand-name teas in 1870. At the time, there were few branded goods other than patent medicines on the market, but in that year congress enacted a new law allowing businesses to register and protect products designed in-house. Although initially intended solely for pharmaceuticals, trademark protection allowed food manufacturers to create unique goods and market them to consumers without fear of imitation. Immediately, Gilman introduced Thea-Nectar, a blend of several different teas that promised "pure black tea with the Green Tea Flavor." Quite possibly the first branded foodstuff, Gilman asked customers to accept the idea that foods could be designed and mass-marketed like any other manufactured item, such as textiles.[54] So unique was the concept that the company had to explain the idea to consumers, publishing advertisements saying, "the Great Atlantic & Atlantic Pacific Tea Company have secured by Congress the exclusive right to exclusively sell in this product, Thea Nectar."[55] With his branded tea, George Gilman was on the leading edge of marketing in America. This too, was a critical first step on the way to the supermarket, introducing consumers to the idea that corporate mass-retailers could deliver specialty products to every consumer in the nation thanks to modern packaging and processing.

Gilman expanded his business aggressively during the 1870s, creating the first truly national food chain. Gilman and his partners expanded to Chicago in 1871. By

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[53] *Peterson's* Magazine 54 (May 1868).

[54] *Atlanta Daily Constitution*, May 23, 1873.

[55] *Peterson's Magazine 58,* May 1870.

1875, they had opened outlets in St. Louis, Boston, Cincinnati, and thirteen other cities. Although the mail order business made up the majority of the company's $1 million in total sales, the retail shops were more prominent and, to middle class consumers, a welcome change from street peddlers.[56] Stores, especially those opened as flagship outlets, featured ornate crystal chandeliers and expensive showcases. Clerks were well-dressed, spoke clear English, and, most importantly, kept stores spotless. The company also released a line of lithographs depicting famous events in American history and encouraged city dwellers to visit stores to buy more; the images became a popular piece of décor in taverns and poorer homes. In 1877, the company even launched a coupon campaign. After purchasing tea or coffee, customers received certificates that could be exchanged for glassware, china, or A&P branded tea. Not only did these campaigns foreshadow later promotional giveaways and coupon programs, but they were also crucial ingredients in building a wide and loyal customer base who saw the retailer has a more respectable, reliable option than the pushcarts. Indeed, Great Atlantic was the first retailer with a presence across much of the country.

Other tea and coffee merchants, insecure with their eroding market positions, unsuccessfully attacked Great Atlantic as a fraud. *American Grocer*, a broadsheet for food wholesalers, published a series of articles in 1870 promising to reveal how Gilman and his partners were "unprincipled monopolists," seeking to control the country's vast retail trade through unscrupulous undercutting and outright lying. The paper showed how the company's fabled links to China were nothing more than a hoax, explaining how "this company never personally visited any tea district except that in the immediate vicinity of

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[56] "Gilman's Tea Business," *Hartford Daily Courant*, October 25, 1901.

Wall and Water streets of this city [New York], and the auctions sales where damaged teas are disposed of."[57] A later exposé claimed Gilman bought "wet and damaged teas," bought for as little as seven or eight cents a pound, "and afterward dried, colored, and repackaged, and resold to the consumer for ninety cents." Thea Nectar, A&P's most famous offering, was just such a product.[58] The negative press did little to stop the company's relentless expansion, with the 300th store opening in 1878. Attacks did invent an important cultural precedent, however. Rather than subvert mass-retailers by offering lower prices, local merchants depicted communities under attack by unprincipled men peddling products. This line of attack would help inspire anti-chain legislation in the 1930s and anti-supermarket pamphlets written by the counterculture in the 1960s.

George Gilman retired a rich man in 1878, leaving the business to his partner, George H. Hartford, who had built much of the company's infrastructure, including the distribution network responsible for stocking stores. Lacking Gilman's creativity, Hartford's hewed to his predecessor's strategy of aggressive promotion and expansion, opening 175 stores by 1885. Great Atlantic outlets opened as far west as Minneapolis and as far south as Atlanta, spreading along established transcontinental railroad lines. Hartford also put stores in small towns like tiny Fremont, Ohio, a hamlet along a major rail line that got an A&P in 1886.[59] In big cities like New York, Hartford maintained fleets of wagons and central warehouses, but in other places where Great Atlantic had only one or two fixed locations, he hired jobbers who acted as his personal distributors for the region. Although this cut deeply into the company's profits, the scale of the

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[57] "The Tea Trade and Certain Monopolies," *American Grocer*, November 12, 1870.

[58] "Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Fraud," *American Grocer*, December 3, 1875.

[59] "Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company to Open," *Fremont Weekly Journal*, October 22, 1886, pg. 4.

business meant that sales generated elsewhere compensated for expensive rural operations.

During the 1880s, Hartford installed tight managerial and cost controls on the chain. He required managers to keep simple ledgers with two facing pages for each week, listing the day's sales per item and the weekly totals while the other showed the store's expenses. The difference between the two totals was remitted to company headquarters, who assumed the cost of goods, allowing Great Atlantic to track sales across its entire network. If one store only made $10 per week in profit and another made $300, the excess from one location kept the weaker one open. The supermarket industry continues to rely on a similar system even today.

As Hartford drove A&P's relentless expansion, he also expanded the company's product line, offering consumers greater access to desired goods. American sugar consumption was on the rise, from 35 pounds per capita in 1870 to nearly 50 in 1890, propelled forward by new, efficient production methods and Americans' formidable sweet tooth.[60] Hartford began selling sugar in 1884, saying, "this important product holds the future for our great company."[61] He had an immediate hit, with sugar accounting for some 20% of the company's business by 1890. It was an easy product to sell and popular with consumers who liked being able to buy another frequently adulterated product from a trusted retailer. In 1888, Hartford replicated the Thea-Nectar experiment by introducing a branded sugar called "A&P #1 Granulated Sugar" marketed

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[60] Consumption figures compiled from Hietmann, *Modernization of the Louisiana Sugar Industry*, 81; U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1885* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1885), 63-65; James Langland and George Edward Plumbe, *Chicago Daily News Almanac and Year Book* (Chicago: The Chicago Daily News, 1899), 75.

[61] "Sugar News," *Hawaii Daily Bulletin,* February 20, 1884.

as a unique, special blend even though it was identical to the sugar sold elsewhere.[62] Great Atlantic also sold sugar in bulk through its mail order business. Although sugar had limits as a product –like tea and coffee, geopolitics and trade policy held sugar's value captive– Great Atlantic's expansion into new markets broadened the company's profile from a tea and coffee merchant toward a general grocer, the first of its kind.

Hartford added to his product line again when he began selling baking powder in 1885. Baking powder was an important product. Invented in the 1850s, it allowed cooks to produce lighter cakes and breads thanks to the main ingredient, sodium bicarbonate, making baking powder a critical ingredient in a world where most households did their own baking. It was also very controversial since merchants included any number of potentially hazardous industrial byproducts or even sawdust to bulk up their product.[63] With so many concerned, some state governments, notably New Jersey, warned the public that "the only guaranty of an undoubtedly wholesome and efficient [baking powder] appears to be the seller's reputation."[64] George Hartford reached the same conclusion and began to market baking powder branded under Great Atlantic's label and certified by a chemist from New York's Bellevue Hospital Medical College as the only

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62 Levinson, *The Great A&P*, 47.

63 For more on baking powder's chemistry, see Harold McGee, *On Food and Cooking*: *The Science and Lore of the Kitchen* (New York: Scribner Press, 2004), 531-534.

64 USDA, Bureau of Chemistry, *Foods and Food Adulterants, Part 5: Baking Powders*, (Washington, D.C., GPO, 1889), 588.

baking powder guaranteed to contain “pure materials.”[65] No other baking powder on the market at the time came with a similar endorsement.[66]

A&P baking power was an important product in the history of retailing. With it, the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company, and many of the competitors that followed, began a transition from being commodity brokers to more general grocers who offered a wide variety of foodstuffs in amounts that suited daily use. This transition would dramatically change Americans’ daily lives over the succeeding decades.

By 1900, Great Atlantic had inspired many competitors who copied A&P’s business model. With nearly 400 retail stores in the United States making nearly $5 million in revenue annually, A&P was easily the largest such company of its time, and carried an unmatched media presence. However, with so few stores –most were still in New York City– imitators could easily carve space for themselves in the marketplace. One of the most important was Kroger Bakery and Grocery, based in Cincinnati, Ohio. Founded in 1883 by former A&P employee Bernard Kroger as the Grand Western Tea Company, the business was a direct challenge to Great Atlantic, which had only just begun to open stores in the area.[67] Relying on the same accounting techniques and a virtually identical product line, Kroger slowly built a Midwestern grocery empire. He also introduced product lines Hartford avoided, building an industrial-scale bakery in 1890 supplying his then-10 store chain with fresh, cheap bread. By 1902, Kroger became the first grocer to put a meat department into a grocery store, igniting a long battle with

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[65] Advertisement, *New York Herald*, July 17, 1888.

[66] In later years, Arm and Hammer Baking Soda, sold by New Jersey’s John Dwight Company, used the same tactics. T.K. Treadwell, *The Advertising Cards of Church and Dwight* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997, 11-13.

[67] John N. Ingham, “Bernard Kroger,” *Biographical Dictionary of American Business Leaders, Volume 2* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press), 744-746.

meat interests who often short-weighted sales to his stores. By that time, the young company dominated the Ohio Valley, positioning itself as a store that did everything Great Atlantic did and more."[68] In so doing, Kroger established the rule that would govern the grocery industry until the 1930s – to compete, a store had to challenge the omnipresent A&P by offering more comprehensive and far-reaching services.

Kroger was not the only grocer that used innovative services to compete with A&P. In 1912, Boston's Economy Grocery Store Company introduced self-service shopping –a year before Memphis' Piggly Wiggly did so– transforming the way consumers interacted with store employees.[69] A&P and the other chains kept their items behind long, wooden counters manned by clerks who physically retrieved goods for customers upon request. Although retailers explained by the practice as a form of deterrence– proprietors assumed shoppers would shoplift if given free access to their inventory– counter service gave retailers an opportunity to increase profits. Shoppers often requested items generically (for example, asking for "black tea"), giving clerks a chance to either push alternatives that brought higher profits, like A&P's Thea-Nectar. For their part, retailers saw no reason to be simply act as distributors for the manufacturers like Church and Dwight, the makers of Arm & Hammer baking soda, who made products competing with in-house versions. According to one A&P manager, "it is time for the retail grocer to wake up and protest against the unfair treatment according to him by so many of the national advertisers of the day who want to make of him a mere automation for the vending of their wares, with little or no compensation for services

[68] Advertisement, *The Asheville Daily Citizen*, Asheville, N.C., November 23, 1902.

[69] Information on this chain is scare – It changed its name to Stop and Shop in 1947 – but it seems to have only numbered four stores, mostly located in suburbs like Brookline and Somerville.

rendered."[70] Another A&P executive was more acerbic: "the customer simply puts the money in the slot and the manufacturers gets it all at the expense of the grocer."[71] Counter service effectively gave retailers a tool to exert control over manufacturers and producers, potentially sabotaging (and benefiting from) manufacturers' expensive marketing campaigns.

Consumers hated counter service. The practice not only enabled clerks to steer shoppers towards more expensive house brands, but it also made it possible for retailers to abuse their customers. Shop managers rarely posted prices inside stores with the exception of a few, choice items. Managers did place placards in store windows announcing the prices for popular items, and A&P had always advertised some of its prices in newspapers, but otherwise customers were in the dark about how much things actually cost. If someone asked for a series of goods, like, for example, canned peaches or coffee, they would receive the most expensive versions of these items – it took considerable savvy simply to avoid getting bilked. Though most shoppers tried to be very specific, clerks could still upcharge them and social conventions prevented many shoppers from complaining directly or publically since those were conversations assumed to come from the poor. To this end, many women's newspapers lamented how "grocery stores' practices have made them too expensive a luxury."[72]

Collecting payment was an even more unpleasant experience. Many working families lived hand to mouth. Cash was also in short supply in middle class homes.

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[70] *ABF,* pg 130

[71] ibid, 131.

[72] Anna Barrows, "The Corner Store and Its Possibilities," *Everyday Housekeeping: A Magazine for Practical Housekeepers* 14, No. 4 (January 1901), 144.

Retailers thusly had to offer credit or risk seeing even fewer customers walk through the door. About half of all food stores, and the vast majority of independents, extended credit to their customers, usually on the basis of nothing more than a name or address. During the 1910s, perhaps one-third of all grocery sales generated a handwritten entry in a credit ledger rather than a cash payment. In poorer neighborhoods, credit sales could be even higher, sometimes as much as 70 or 80 percent.[73] One grocer in Washington, D.C, explained "you'd ask them for money to pay and then they wouldn't come into the store no more," to justify staking their livelihood businesses on individuals who were likely to move away or plead hardship to avoid paying bills.[74] Stores offering credit typically charged higher prices to cover these inevitable losses, furthering customer resentment.

At the same time, Great Atlantic was losing its edge in the tea and coffee business. During the 1890s, English merchants Lipton and Tetley flooded American cities with cheap, high-quality Indian tea. Thea-Necter had been an innovative new product in the 1870s, but compared to British imports like "Earl Grey" and "English Breakfast," it was a tired brand. Prices had also shot sharply upwards after Congress applied a steep tariff to tea in 1898 to finance the Spanish-American War. With consumers accustomed to cheap tea, A&P had nothing to offer but an increasingly expensive product. In any event, coffee had supplanted tea as America's beverage of choice. In this field, A&P was far from an industry leader; it did not even rank in the top twenty firms importing more than ten thousand fifty-pound bags through the port of New

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[73] Bureau of Business Research, *Operating Expenses of Grocery Stores in 1923* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, 1924), 61.

[74] Pearl Cohen Interview, Box 8, Oral History Collection, Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington, Washington, D.C.

York in 1904.[75] The largest importer was Arbuckle Brothers of Pittsburgh who sold America's best selling coffee product, a bag of sugar-glazed beans called "Ariosa." In 1896, Arbuckle announced plans to start refining sugar in a bid to lower prices and capture even more of the market, igniting a price war with the powerful American Sugar Refining Company. After the refiner purchased the Lion coffee brand, planning to offer an even cheaper alternative to Ariosa, the two companies engaged in a vicious price war that cut deeply into Great Atlantic's bottom line.[76]

Amid these competitive battles, Hartford reorganized the business in 1904, moving away from the tea and coffee trade towards general groceries like flour or canned fruit, an essential step on the way towards mass-food retailing since this was the first time that a firm with such a large distribution capacity set itself towards selling food. By that year, the chain sold $5 million in groceries, making a profit of $125,000, an insignificant sum compared to companies like Andrew Carnegie's United States Steel Corporation, capitalized at $1.4 billion, but an unheard amount for a food retailer.[77] In 1907, struggling to maintain these numbers, Great Atlantic announced they were building a new complex in Jersey City, New Jersey that would feature facilities for manufacturing and processing baking powder, flour, coffee, tea, fruit, and baked goods. In years to come, they would add facilities for processing chocolate, macaroni, and more. There was no other facility like it in the United States capable of processing so many distinct goods in a single place. Simultaneously, it further separated A&P from other grocers by effectively

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[75] "Coffee Importers," *American Grocer*, January 18, 1905.

[76] "The Sugar-Coffee Fight," *New York Times*, October 6, 1898; "The Coffee War," *American Grocer*, January 3, 1900.

[77] Financial information reported in George H. Hartford's court filings in his legal battle with the Gilman family, *Hartford v. Bridgeport Trust Company*, 143 F. 558; David Nasaw, *Andrew Carnegie* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 587.

making the company a manufacturer with a direct retail arm. Already, its purchasing agents removed the layers of jobbers and wholesalers from the company's dealings, but until this point they still depended on other businesses to actually prepare their products for them. As the Jersey City complex went up, Hartford, joined by his two sons, George L. and John, kept opening new stores, bringing the total number in the system to nearly 500. With immense manufacturing capacity, and able to wield impressive buying power for items not made in its factories, A&P was able to deliverer goods more cheaply to customers than ever before.[78]

In 1912, Great Atlantic transformed itself yet again, opening up thousands of low-price, "economy stores." Other grocers had taken the lead in applying scientific management by standardizing stores and abandoning costly practices such as credit and delivery. John Hartford, who was responsible for the company's marketing and promotion efforts, applied these ideas to his company when they opened a small experimental store, just twenty feet wide and thirty feet deep, in Jersey City that featured no adornments and only a single employee. There were only a few shelves and counters alongside a small ice refrigerator for butter, lard, and eggs. Unlike other stores in the system, this one offered no credit, no premiums, and no trading stamps. Nor was there a telephone for customers to call for delivery orders. The company's total investment, including inventory, came to only $2,500. The small investment and minimal labor expense permitted low markups, so the store could offer very attractive prices. The first

[78] J.C. Furnas, "Mr. George and Mr. John," *Saturday Evening Post*, December 31, 1938, 38.

economy store did not even advertise, lest customers demand economy store prices in the regular store nearby. With no promotion beyond low prices, shippers came in droves.[79]

Hartford turned the Economy Store into a powerful new marketing technique. The 1912 test in Jersey City showed, unsurprisingly, that a store with a small stock of merchandise priced well-below average sold fewer groceries than the average Great Atlantic outlet. It also revealed an important and enduring lesson: lower costs could lead to a higher return on investment and sales volume. The Hartfords concluded that if they opened many locations, the new format could generate higher profits and propel the company's growth and rebranding. They called the new format "A&P Economy Store," putting the initials "A&P" on a store's nameplate for the first time. In 1913, the Hartfords opened 175 Economy Stores, more than five each week, compared to only 35 traditional outlets. In 1914, another 408 Economy Stores opened. By 1915, when the company opened 864 more Economy Stores, the low-price banner accounted for more than half of its total sales.[80] While it would be a mistake to cast these outlets as supermarkets –they offered few products and proudly avoided amenities that would prove essential to the stores opening a decade later– but they were an essential laboratory for many of the marketing techniques used by early supermarket operators.

Great Atlantic's suppliers were unenthusiastic about the explosive growth of chain stores. The new format's success relied on the Hartford's ability to demand special terms from suppliers: they asked manufacturers to ships good directly to A&P's

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[79] Pundits debated how to best apply aspects of Taylorism to the food trade for several years. King, "Can the Cost of Distributing Food Products Be Reduced?, *Distribution's Place*, 206; "Reducing the Cost of Food Distribution," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 50 (1913); A Chicago wholesaler proposed to create a new retail chain on the same principles. *American Grocer*, June 24, 1911; Bullock, "History of the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company Since 1878," 66.

[80] Bullock, "History of the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company Since 1878," 67.

warehouses, without going through established wholesalers, and give Great Atlantic the standard wholesaler's commission. This put manufacturers in a difficult position because A&P effectively paid less than other retailers. The makers of popular products like Campbell's soups and Crisco shortening voiced misgivings while the Cream of Wheat Company, purveyor of a popular breakfast food, tried to get Great Atlantic to charge retail customers at least fourteen cents per package so as not to undercut smaller retailers. When A&P Economy Stores put Cream of Wheat on sale for twelve cents, the maker cut off supplies. When Great Atlantic sued to resume shipments in 1916, a judge ruled against them, on the basis that, with its size and market power, Great Atlantic was a monopolist trying to squelch competition. Saying, "[Cream of Wheat] and many retailers would be injured (if normal shipments resumed), and the microscopic benefit to a small portion of the public would last only until the plaintiff was relieved from the competition of the 14 cent grocers, when it, too, would charge what the business would normally and naturally bear."[81] From the perspective of the law and the rest of the food industry, A&P's low-price retailing was a suspect enterprise, threatening to completely consolidate the entire market in the hands of the biggest seller.

By the 1920, economy stores and urban chain grocers in general had reached their apex. Great Atlantic had grown so large that it captured 2.5% of all retail sales. Other chains had reached an equal scale. Bernard Kroger's Midwestern chain had grown to over 5,000 stores and Frank Woolworth's variety stores, a New York-based chain that sold clothing and housewares totaled nearly 2,000 outlets. Throughout the United States, modest storefronts in city neighborhoods and along small-town main streets brought the

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[81] *Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company v. Cream of Wheat Co,.* 224F. 574.

sorts of predictability and quality to shopping that consumers, particularly the status-conscious middle class, wanted from retailers. However, chain retailers, for all their success, faced a host of new challenges during that that led to the creation of the to the supermarket, especially the emergence of a mass-motor culture.

Automobiles completely transformed shopping habits. Although cars first became available in the 1880s, they remained rare until manufacturers like Henry Ford introduced cost-saving assembly methods and economy models –the Model T being the most important– during the 1910s. Consequently, car-ownership increased fifteen-fold between 1910 and 1920, from five vehicles per every thousand Americans to 86. By 1930, the number increased nearly 250%, to 217 per every thousand.[82] Car ownership varied significantly by region. In particular, cars were most common in the South and West, where public transportation options were few and cities and towns too spread out for pedestrians to window shop. By 1920, for example, nearly one fourth of Californians and more than a fifth of Texans owned a car, but less than a tenth of New Yorkers did.[83]

Even though most car owners were far from big eastern and Midwestern cities, urban planners struggled to accommodate them. Drivers wanted to use their automobiles to run their daily errands but that was virtually impossible in clogged urban centers like New York or Cleveland that had few public places to park nor streets set aside solely for traffic – pushcarts and peddlers still littered thoroughfares well into the 1920s. Western and Southern cities, which were far less developed, had a far easier time making room for cars. Seattle and Los Angeles built some of the first municipal parking lots in the early

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[82] Stacy Davis et al, *Transportation Energy Data Book: Edition 31* (Oak Ridge, TN: Oak Ridge National Laboratory, 2012), 179

[83] *Ibid*, 181.

1910s and San Diego passed some of the first off-street parking regulations, in 1925.[84] Some of those same municipalities also pushed vendors, usually minorities, off the streets with heavy-handed police tactics. But without the cheap land and open spaces of the west, eastern city planners struggled to master the politics of zoning allowing for skyscrapers, commercial building, tenements, factories, and cars to coexist. In New York, for example, urban planners expended considerable effort to determine building height and sidewalk space, but much less work went towards installing dedicated parking areas, particularly in the commercial and residential districts chain stores called home.[85]

Retailers struggled as much as city planners to accommodate car owners. Overwhelmingly, automobile buyers were the same middle-class homeowners who constituted the bulk of chain stores' customer base. As these people began moving to suburban bedroom communities throughout the 1910s and 1920s, they came to rely on their cars even more to conduct day-to-day business.[86] In Los Angeles, many of these shoppers were people who had recently come into the city because of the oil boom, the emergence of Hollywood, and other kinds of economic development. In other words, the same people fighting with rural interests to divert massive amounts of water from northern and central California to the city of angels were also members of a rapidly

[84] There is some contention as to which city created the municipal parking lot –there is a convincing case the first was built in Seattle in 1913– but what is certain is that Western cities were better equipped to handle automobile traffic than Eastern ones. Axelrod, *Inventing Autopia*, 14-21.

[85] Even though New York first introduced regulations to manage driving in 1903, determining how to reconfigure land as empty space was an immense challenge. See John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *Lots of Parking: Land Use in a Car Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 22-25. See also Suzanne Wasserman, "Hawkers and Gawkers: Peddling and Markets in New York City," in *Gastropolis: Food and New York City*, ed. Annie Hauck-Lawson and Jonathan Deutsch (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 156-159

[86] Roy Bullock, "History of the Chain Grocery Store in the United States," Unpublished Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1933, 15. Although suburbanization is closely associated with the post-World War II period, the process began much earlier. For more on this earlier stage, see Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 157-171.

coalescing middle class skirmishing over the few available parking spaces near popular stores. Trying to first find curbside parking and then navigate busy streets only made shopping more difficult for time-strapped homemakers. New suburbs, especially those in and around Los Angeles like Pasadena, Santa Monica, and Burbank, only compounded this problem. Writers complained in women's magazines that life in new suburbs was not so easy because "there are no grocery stores around the corner…[thusly] making a pleasant, restful home all the more hard work to upkeep."[87] After decades of relying on grocery stores to provide safe, affordable, and dependable foodstuffs, the middle class found themselves separated geographically from retailers.[88]

For people living in the cities, the explosion in discount retailing might have meant food was less expensive, particularly in comparison to those in rural areas where most people lived near a farm selling crops for local consumption, but it did not mean that companies like A&P were offering all of the products shoppers wanted to eat. By the beginning of the 1920s, refrigeration and transportation technology had finally caught up with farmers' ability to profitably ship fresh produce, particularly from California. With trucks and improved locomotives, lettuces, fresh peaches, and tomatoes –all warm-weather vegetables and fruits– could be shipped to eastern cities from the distant countryside quickly days after being picked no matter the season. This gave birth to dietary fads emphasizing the centrality of natural vitamins to good health. Culinary guidebooks began advising readers their bodies "depend on vitamins as surely as the stream-engine depends on steam," after USDA researchers discovered these nutrients in the 1910s. Foods like green vegetables, dairy, and whole grains, identified as vitamin

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[87] "News Letter," *Lutheran Women's Work* 15, No. 7 (July, 1922), 223.
[88] Longstreth, *The Drive-In and The Supermarket*, 31-39.

rich, were deemed "protective," compensating for the deficiencies of white flour, preserved meat, and processed staples – items forming the backbone of the urban-industrial diet. The most famous vitamin evangelist, Johns Hopkins university chemist E.V. McCollum, argued "there is no good reason to believe a very simple and monotonous diet is chemically satisfactory for the maintenance of health," since it lacked the dietary fiber found in vegetables like watercress or fresh green beans. McCollum's message caught on most soundly with the middle and upper classes who already avidly consumed health literature and also formed the core of A&P shoppers (as well as other grocery chains).[89]

Many chefs adapted their menus to suit health conscious diners, subtlety changing home cooking in the process. The posh Edgewater Beach hotel in Chicago offered a variety of salads, including one called the "Doctor's Salad," made with lettuce, tomato, watercress, cottage cheese, cream cheese, and chives. Other offerings included a "Health Salad" made from raw vegetables that, "if masticated properly will prove beneficial to all who eat it, no matter what complaint, fancied or real." The menu even explained that this natural bounty came direct from California on new, faster rail connections.[90] The Edgewater put out their own copies of *The Edgewater Beach Hotel Salad Book*, which explained the vitamin and mineral content of "nature's most prolific crops."[91] Other, similar guides compared fresh vegetables to rejuvenating tonics, advising, "lettuce means

[89] E.V. McCollum, "What to Teach the Public Regarding Food Values?" Journal of Home Economics 10 (1918), 202.
[90] Menu 31-472, "Edgewater Beach Hotel Dinner Menu, November 3, 1924," in Greenbaum Menu Collection, Culinary Institute of America Special Collections, Hyde Park, NY. See also Friedberg, *Fresh*, 158.
[91] Arnold Shircliffe, *The Edgewater Beach Hotel Salad Book* (Chicago, Hotel Monthly Press, 1926), 68. Other important salad cookbooks include Elizabeth Hiller, *The Calendar of Salads: 365 Answers to the Daily Question: "What Shall We Have for Salad?"* New York: P.F. Volland, 1916); H.J. Heinz Company, *Heinz Book of Salads* (Pittsburgh, 1925.)

health and health means youth."[92] Home cooks looking to recreate these recipes had to turn to the streets to look for salad greens since the big grocers were barely equipped to handle perishables, though peddlers often sold damaged and dirty produce.[93] For people concerned with good health, buying from peddlers hardly fit the bill.

Established retailers were unequipped to satisfy the natural foods fad. Few of the stores in the A&P system had the space or sufficent electrical wiring to support the electric refrigerators necessary to store lettuces and other vegetables. Nor did the company have the infrastructure in place to set up icehouses without making a substantial investment. After decades of dominating the dry goods trade, the giant stumbled. The Hartfords delegated decisions on how best to carry fresh produce to local managers. Many used company funds to buy centralized icehouses and refrigerated warehouses in shipping hubs. For example, a manager in Buffalo, NY bought an icehouse to store produce for more than 500 local stores in the spring of 1922.[94] That summer, another manager turned one of the company's Philadelphia warehouses into a refrigerated complex, buying 20 carloads of tin plate and three massive compressors. Managers in the Kroger organization made similar moves.[95]

Great Atlantic and other established grocers also struggled to integrate fresh produce into their existing product lines. After decades of being able to get their way with manufacturers, the Hartfords found that farmers growing consumer crops, almost all based in the Deep South or California, could easily resist pricing demands. Most growers

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92 "Creamery Notes," *Refrigerating World* 57, No. 4 (April, 1922), 46.

93 "Marketing Lettuce," "Department Bulletins No. 1401-1425," United States Department of Agriculture (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1923), 11.

94 "New York," *The Iron Age* 109, No. 4 (April, 1922), 1029.

95 "New Plants and Improvements," *Ice and Refrigeration* 63, No 6 (June 1922), 495.

preferred to sell their harvests into the existing wholesaling system for a quick profit rather than deal with company buyers peddling the same sorts of futures contracts offered by companies like Cream of Wheat, which paid months in advance of delivery but often far below going prices.[96] As Americans began to eat more and more greens in the 1920s – between 1918 and 1925, average per capita lettuce consumption increased from half a pound per year to nearly 10 pounds– farmers and wholesalers could practically bully the big grocers.[97] Ultimately, the Hartfords left decisions on fresh produce up to local managers, who would compete with jobbers and pushcart peddlers in early morning auctions to buy recently arrived produce.[98] Without their enormous buying power, A&P and the other chains, who also had to turn to the markets for produce, had no ability to sell produce at bargain rates. Just as soon as some observers had declared the era of the pushcart over, the peddlers returned to the streets stronger than ever before.[99]

Grocers in California solved some of the challenges posed by changing dietary habits and automobiles by combining their stores with gas stations, creating "drive-in" markets. Los Angelinos, living in one of the most car-saturated cities in the United States, already pioneered gas station design. Initially, gas station owners built fuel pumps on the curbside, but this was impractical since lines of waiting cars halted traffic. By 1913, owners abandoned conventional ideas about commercial architecture, land use, and aesthetics to adopt a configuration consisting of a large, paved pull-in, a series of pumps,

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[96] Farmers were aware that they enjoyed better market position by holding from company buyers trying to shove fresh greens into their existing distribution systems.

[97] "Lettuce Men Strike Back," *American Grocer*, October 10, 1922.

[98] Tom Wilder, "Planning Filling Stations For Efficiency, *Motor Age* (6 Oct, 1921), 16.

and a small shed for the attendants. Much of the property was left completely empty.[100] Many owners tried to find profitable uses for vacant areas. Selling billboard space was lucrative, but some operators added mechanic shops and hardware stores to their lots. Others built storefronts next to the attendant's shed and rented the space to chain groceries, bakeries, and butchers. These strategies were the most profitable and, as the trade magazine *Progressive Grocer* later described, "the future of our industry."[101] Shoppers embraced "drive-ins" – by the end of the twentieth century the same structures would be called "stripmalls"– for the simple reason that several different retail services were available in a single location that also included dedicated parking spaces.[102]

George Ralphs was Los Angeles' leading drive-in developer. In 1914, he opened a grocery store in a drive-in located on a road connecting the city's downtown commercial district to the suburban San Fernando Valley featuring self-service shopping and produce hauled in from the nearby Central Valley in addition to the sorts of dry-goods sold by chains like A&P. It was a daring enterprise. Conventional wisdom held that grocery stores needed walk-in clientele to survive; Ralphs relied on drivers going to and from their workplaces making the choice to stop in an otherwise undeveloped part of the city. He also integrated another innovation introduced by the Piggly-Wiggly company in Nashville Tennessee – self-service– that allowed shoppers to pick their goods without depending on a clerk to pull them from behind a counter. Many grocers shied away from self-service because they believed it lowered profits even if customers preferred to make their selections in private. Ralphs aimed his advertisements at housewives and

[100] John H. Jackle and Keith A. Sculle, *The Gasoline Station in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 125-131.
[101] "The Drive-In Grocery," *Progressive Grocer*, March 1917.
[102] Longstreth, *The Drive-In and The Supermarket*, 33-35.

emphasized the convenience of self-service, strongly contrasting A&P's price-based ads.[103] He targeted women who dropped their husbands off at work in the family car and then would drive past the store, thinking they would quickly make their purchases on the way home. Ralphs also offered a service where women could telephone in their orders to the store so their husbands could pick them up at end of the workday.[104] By 1926, Ralphs expanded to over 40 stores across Los Angeles, all sitting beside roads connecting middle-class enclaves to the urban core.

Ralphs built upon a strategy developed elsewhere. Petroleum companies had been experimenting with a version of the drive-in concept during the 1910s. Oil executives knew money was to be made in selling branded gasoline similar to the way A&P had made money-branding items like tea or coffee. Many of these companies had burst into existence after the federal government broke up Standard Oil in 1911, creating a marketplace with dozens companies struggling to gain traction over each other. Retail gasoline sales represented one path to victory.

Corporations like Shell, Southern Pennsylvania Oil (Pennzoil) and Socony (Standard Oil Company of New York) struggled to build a retail gas businesses, however. Major investments had to be made in land, infrastructure, and advertising. In California, independents like Ralphs took the lead, but in states like Wisconsin or New York, where car owners made up a smaller percentage of the population and fewer people were willing to enter a business with such a high capital investment, the oil companies decided to market directly to consumers. Although it's not entirely clear where the trend began, petroleum companies decided to open drive-ins, using the rent from on-site stores to

[103] "Ralphs Serves the City," *Hollywood Daily Citizen*, June 8, 1928.
[104] "Ralphs Adjusts Marketing System," *Hollywood Daily Citizen*, January 2, 1926.

recoup the costs underlying the retail gas business. Petroleum firms privileged major national chains like the Woolworth's Five-and-Ten store and the A&P that were sure to draw customers. As one executive explained to the Wisconsin tax board, "only major, national chains will support our investment."[105] Shell put an A&P inside of a drive-in market opened in Milwaukee in 1924. Around the same time, they opened similar property nearby that included a Kroger.[106] In form and practice, these were small-scale buildings, closer to A&P's economy stores in size and shopping experience meant to be little more than profitable annexes to gas stations. They were never intended to be destinations in themselves.[107]

Ralphs had a more expansive vision for the drive-in, rooted in his own experiences. Founded in 1873, the company was built to compete directly with Great Atlantic, which had a strong presence in Southern California they were unpopular. Many landowners and farmers had bad contracts forced on them buy company buyers –Great Atlantic bought significant amounts of fruit in the region and worked hard to depress prices. Local entrepreneurs like Ralphs seized on this distrust. Initially, his stores offered a range of services and perks Great Atlantic did not, like citywide delivery and spacious, well-lit stores. Ralphs also featured fresh produce prominently alongside a variety of high-quality consumer goods and an industrial bakery operation. This effectively brought the pushcart trade indoors, bestowing otherwie absent middle-class respectability on

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105 Letter, Wisconsin Tax Commission to Sinclair Refining Company, March 13, 1936, Folder "Oil Companies," Box 5, Records of the Wisconsin Tax Commission, 1933-1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin. Hereafter WHS. This letter, sent 12 years after the location opened, was an appeal for lower taxes.

106 Letter, Wisconsin Tax Commission to Shell Petroleum Company, September 12, 1935, Folder "Oil Companies," Box 5, Records of the Wisconsin Tax Commission, 1933-1939, WHS.

107 For example, Exxon, then called "Standard Oil of New Jersey," opened dozens of similar buildings around New York and Philadelphia advertising its economy gasoline. See Advertisement, pg 11, *New York Herald Tribune*, January 11, 1924; Advertisement, pg 15, *New York Herald Tribune*, March 21, 1925; Advertisement, pg 5, *New York Herald Tribune*, October 11, 1925.

produce sales. Doing so also allowed Ralphs to attract more customers than the A&P, even though his company had no ability to match Great Atlantic's low prices; customers appreciated the convenience of his early stores along with the nods to white women's discomfort with street shopping.[108]

Ralphs also satisfied consumers' desire for fresh foods by working closely with local farmers. All of the city's grocers took advantage of their proximity to the parts of California growing consumer crops like lettuces and tomatoes. Thanks to the large-scale irrigation efforts in the Central and Imperial Valleys, farmers were growing huge amounts of water-intensive foods intended for the national market. While this improved the market for fresh fruits and vegetables nationwide, it also meant that Los Angelinos had access to cheap, super-abundant produce. Ralphs employed a team of produce buyers who purchased daily from these farmers and trucked goods directly to "branch" stores that would then distribute food directly to individual outlets, a small-scale copy of A&P's distribution system. But this system only worked because farms were a few hours drive from stores and refrigeration was unnecessary. Ralphs also took advantage of the fact that Los Angeles had plenty of space to build spacious drive-in markets, impossible in built-up eastern cities struggling to come up with solutions to the parking problem.[109]

Ralphs' success with the drive-in concept encouraged other people to open similar stores across Southern California. Operators and architects envisioned drive-in markets as community centers for the new century, emulating the architectural features of a downtown commercial district while also accommodating automobiles and middleclass

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[108] "Ralphs Buildings and Methods Reflect Age," *Hollywood Daily Citizen*, June 8, 1928; "New Hollywood Stores," *Hollywood Daily Citizen*, June 5, 1929; "Thousands Enjoy Opening," *Los Angeles Times,* April 29, 1928.
[109] Longstreth*, The Drive-in*, *The Supermarket*, 39-40; Max Zimmerman, *Super Market: Spectacular Exponent of Mass Distribution* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1937), 27-37.

sensibilities. Sanitized for white shoppers, stores were clean and well lit. Operators even mandated employees wear pressed white uniforms and maintain good hygiene. The structures themselves embodied many elements of avant-garde design, including electric signs, asphalt parking areas, and open shopping areas bearing little resemblance to cramped urban chain-groceries. At the same time, architects played on cultural touchstones familiar to shoppers. Complexes had names like "Spanish Court," "El Adobe Market," or "Town Plaza Market" evoking town squares in nearby Mexico that were social and commercial hubs for the community. At this pivotal moment in the history of retailing, Los Angeles business owners were among the first to realize the implications of a mass-motoring populace. Drive-ins were destinations in themselves, scattered in the intermediate zone lying in-between residential and occupational spaces perfect for a standalone retail industry catering to the needs of consumers with little time for traditional retailing. Thusly, the new sites of consumption would be the logical replacements for older markets. [110]

Los Angeles drive-in operators literally delivered the goods by combining several food operations into one building. Across the country, big chains were testing stores offering diverse services, and Los Angeles, where space was plentiful, was the perfect laboratory. Back east, A&P and other chains built "combination" stores typically consisting of a meat counter flanked by established lines of branded and packaged foods.[111] These new features relied on the first commercial refrigerators, such as the one marketed by the McCracy Company, which were little more than aluminum cases wired with fans circulating air cooled with Freon gas that made it possible for stores to offer

[110] Longstreth, *The Drive-In, The Supermarket*, 82-90.

[111] "Chain Store Progress in 1930," *CSA-A*, January 1931, 34.

new products needing constant refrigeration.[112] However, combination operators believed shoppers would recoil from utilitarian pieces of technology in the midst of the shopping area. Kroger, who became the biggest combination operator, turned its combination stores into upscale markets meant for the well-to-do. Within, food was more expensive, but selection and service were better than typical economy stores, which did not offer meat or fresh produce. On the east coast, combinations had limitations –they were plagued by a lack of parking– but Los Angeles drive-ins avoided these problems. Ralphs stores, for example, offered far more than an A&P. Not only did he have a full range of products on sale, but also the large parking lots attached to stores satisfied consumers looking for both convenience and selection.

Despite drive-ins' popularity, white Angelinos struggled with the reality that they were buying food in what was little more than a glorified gas station. Drive-ins were marketed towards the same people whose concern for cleanliness and respectability had, a generation before, convinced shoppers to abandon the pushcarts for the chain groceries like the A&P. Persuading them to buy meat or apples only a few feet from mechanics performing oil changes or drivers filling-up trucks with gasoline was no easy feat. Operators used gaudy architecture and other features to distract shoppers that both isolated on-premise gas stations and garages, but also highlighted the tension between middle-class desires and working-class realities.[113]

The conflict between convenience and respectability gave birth to the first supermarket. The Houston-duo Henry Henke and Camille Pillot had much in common with Los Angeles' George Ralphs; like the Californian, they built a small grocery chain

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[112] Advertisement, *CSA-A,* March 1930, 2.
[113] "Beautiful New Ralphs Store," *Hollywood Daily Citizen*, April 13, 1932.

that undersold major nationals like the A&P and they were early-adopters of the drive-in model. And like Ralphs, the Texans contended with customers unhappy with shopping alongside truckers and mechanics. Their solution was building a "branch store" in 1923 a company-owned and operated store meant to accommodate automobiles and carry a full range of items from fresh meat to baked goods while also serving as a central distribution hub for their other stores; some years later they began calling it a supermarket. They viewed the new operation as a solution material and psychological problems faced by drive-in and chain groceries because their single location would provide everything to consumers, be open late into the night, and feature plentiful parking. At the core of the new store was a promise of consistently low prices ensured by the company's purchasing strategies but also by Henke & Pillot's introduction of self-service, which limited their workforce to just a few shelf-stockers and cashiers. They eliminated delivery services under the assumption customers would simply put their purchases in their cars. To facilitate this, the store provided hand-carts for shoppers, the forerunners of the metal shopping cart, which were doubly necessary because the store was over 30,000 square feet, and goods were arraigned in long aisles by category. Initially, Henke and Pillot figured that the store would serve as a central distribution hub for its other stores, but the model proved so enormously popular that Henke & Pillot had built three more branch stores in other parts of Houston by 1925.[114]

George Ralphs, perhaps inspired by the Houston store, opened a supermarket of his own in 1926. His West Hollywood store combined many of the features of a local

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[114] Ruel McDaniel, "Fancy Grocery Appeal Speeds Texas Chain's Turnover," *Chain Store Review* 2 (March, 1929), 39-41; "Weingarten's Grocery," *Houston Post* September 27, 1924; Abe Weingarten, "Designing Stores for Maximum Display," *Chain Store Age* 9 (June 1933), 41-43; "New Grocer," *Houston Post* November 30, 1923; "Employees Buy Henke and Pillot supers for $1,500,000," *Super Market Merchandising* 5 (August, 1940,) 10, 27.

drive-in with none of the drawbacks. At almost 10,000 square feet, it was much larger than other Ralphs stores. Most significantly, the property was an entirely stand-alone, warehouse-like structure with a large parking lot. After decades tucked into residential neighborhoods or being attached to other commercial buildings, the grocery store had evolved into separate entity altogether.[115] Highlighting the novelty, Ralphs' architects gave the store some of the same drama incorporated into stylish department stores downtown while avoiding some of the hokey features used in drive-in design. Echoing a Spanish palace, the building had a struccoed façade lined with small towers. Inside, high raised ceilings flooded the selling area with natural light.[116] The home economics columnist for the *Hollywood Daily Citizen*, Harriet Bursdal, described the supermarket as "beautiful beyond expectations," offering a shopping experience akin to a "marketplace of Rome, where Phoenicians came to peddle their bright silks and bits of treasure from afar."[117] That treasure was carefully curated meats, fruits, and vegetables.

Ralphs' new style of retailing attracted white women who, in most cases, grew up shopping in grocery stores located in the Midwest and East Coast. Indeed, 1920s Los Angelneos joked the city was Kansas, Illinois, and Iowa's tropical colony. Coupled with the influx of New Yorkers arriving along with the movie studios, shoppers expected services more in line with an A&P economy store.[118] Architecturally, the supermarket's open form represented not just liberation from the drive-in or the corner store, but the termination of a standard of living defined by women bustling from store to store struggling to get their daily errands done. This was because efficiency and convenience

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115 "Ralphs to Open New Structure," *Hollywood Daily Citizen*, November 15, 1926.
116 Longstreth, *The Drive-In, The Supermarket*, 82-83.
117 Harriet Bursdal, "Ralphs Buildings and Methods Reflect Age," *Hollywood Daily Citizen*, June 8, 1928.
118 Axelrod, *Inventing Autopia*, 35.

were just as central to the supermarket (a name that would soon attach itself to the Ralphs property) as was its independent construction and easy parking. Although the store operated on a self-service basis, employees still paid close attention to consumers' needs. Attendants helped locate items and, if requested, bring full baskets to the central checkout area, striking a careful balance between personal liberation and commercial service. The system also saved customers considerable time both in the transaction and in having goods packaged.[119] As the influential Bursdal put it, "It's getting to be such a pleasant proceeding, going to the market, that many women who have not been enthusiastic about housekeeping must succumb before long to the spell of it."[120]

Ralphs palatial stores inspired copycats across Los Angeles, just as the company's earlier drive-ins had done. The Young Grocery Company opened one of the first new supermarkets in Beverly Hills in 1927. The impressive structure included departments specializing in meats, coffee, and fancy baked goods throughout, grossing some $8,000,000 in sales during its first year.[121] Opening soon afterwards was the Union Public Market in Van Nuys, the Homecroft Public Market in Long Beach, Hattems Shopping Center in Inglewood.[122] A wave of other stores followed, so many that by 1930, Los Angeles had at least thirty supermarkets.[123] Ralphs remained the king of Los Angeles supermarkets, though. From the end of the 1920s until 1937, the company had the largest network of supermarkets in any region of the United States, building upwards of eighty

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[119] Longstreth, *The Drive-In, The Supermarket*, 92-93.
[120] Harriet Bursdal, "Thousands Enjoy Opening of New Ralphs Store," *Hollywood Daily Citizen*, September 21, 1928.
[121] "Young's Standard of Service" *Glendale Nightly Press*, October 3, 1929.
[122] ; "New Open Mart" *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 1930; Home Croft Market Opens," *Southwest Wave* April 18, 1930; Longstreth, *The Drive-In, The Supermarket*, 96.
[123] Longstreth, *The Drive-In, The Supermarket*, 98.

stores across Southern California. In the process, the company overcame the challenges poised by supermarkets' unique architectural traits and local tastes.[124]

Ralphs' success was the first of what would become a nation-wide phenomenon. By the mid-1920s, drive-ins became a common sight in automobile-saturated cities like Houston or Washington, D.C. (although none was as car-crazy as Los Angeles). Towns like Hoboken, NJ and Gary, Indiana also became drive-in hotspots since public transportation systems in nearby cities did not extend that far yet many middle-class workers commuted from those places. Along with the rapid changes in the ways consumers bought their food came new or enlarged chains like Maryland's Giant Foods, California's Safeway, Tennessee's Piggly-Wiggly, and Florida's Publix. These new companies eschewed building neighborhood stores– a market still dominated by A&P– and instead copied businesses like Ralphs', building new outlets on city fringes, major arteries, and other locations capable of accommodating cars. Even established brands like Boston's Shop & Shop started placing stores on the same lots as drive-ins.[125]

These first supermarkets were uncertain and ambitious extensions of the existing chain store system tailor-made for America's emerging mass-motor culture. Beginning with George Gilman, professional grocers worked to match their services to consumers' desires for easier, more predictable, and ultimately more affordable food shopping options. In these early days, the industry paid close attention to crafting a consumer experience around standards of service and cleanliness unmatched by street vendors and small independents. In years to come, supermarket builders would perform the same

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[124] Harriet Bursdal, "Ralphs Buildings and Methods Reflect Age," *Hollywood Daily Citizen* June 8, 1928; "Ralphs Adjusts Marketing System," *Hollywood Daily Citizen*, January 2, 1930.

[125] Arthur Goodwin, *Markets: Public and Private* (New York: Montgomery Printing Co., 1929), 71-83; Ann Satterwaite, *Going Shopping: Consumer Choices and Community Consequences* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 251-257.

feats, using their using their political and economic power to craft agricultural goods the same way they had done so with the consumer experience, a process described in chapter two.

Chapter Two: Grocery Wars: Chains, Independents, and Supermarkets during the New Deal, 1930-1941.

In the fall of 1937, Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (A&P) president John Hartford made an announcement that turned the food retailing business on its head. Beginning immediately, America's largest retailer would shutter thousands of under-performing neighborhood grocery stores and replace them with hundreds of supermarkets.[126] At the time, the supermarket was a daring marketing concept pioneered by retailers in Los Angeles, and few Americans had shopped –or even seen– these new kinds of stores that were defined by the wide-range of services offered under a single roof, most especially convenient access to fresh meats, fruits, and vegetables, and ample on-site parking. Supermarkets were the exact opposite of the older stores in A&P's system, small chain grocery stores tucked into urban neighborhoods that primarily offered dry goods like flour alongside canned fruits and vegetables. Within a few short years, Hartford's decision ensured that supermarkets entered towns and cities across the United States.

Hartford pushed for the supermarket because he thought the concept would revitalize his struggling company. The Depression had been hard on the giant retailer. Sales had fallen from a 1929 high of $1.2 billion to only $650 million in 1936. Over 44% of Hartford's 15,419 stores –nearly 8,000 in number– were losing money. Many were

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[126] Government Exhibit 188, Box 31, *United States v. New York Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company*, 67 F. Supp. 626, R. September 21, 1946 (Eastern District of Illinois Federal Courthouse, Danville, Ill.). This federal anti-trust suit filed in 1942 and ruled on in 1946, was a successful attack on A&P's business practices by small, independent grocers located in eastern Illinois. Thousands of pieces of evidence were collected for the case, including transcripts from executive meetings, making the remaining records the best archival source on the grocery business during the 1930s. While I cite these records extensively below, I will not discuss the trial itself until chapter 4. Hereafter, government exhibits will be denoted as GX, defense exhibits will be denoted as DX, and all records from the trial were be referred to as Danville trial (Danville, Ill was the site of the proceedings and where the records are still kept.)

barely turning a profit.[127] Although declining consumer spending following the 1929 stock market crash accounted for a portion of A&P's falling sales, most of the company's problems were political. Only a few months after Black Tuesday in 1929, populist politicians began attacking the ways companies in a range of industries priced their goods, dealt with distributors, and even opened new stores. Grocery chains were among the hardest hit. In Indiana, Louisiana, and elsewhere, onerous anti-chain taxes sought to limit the continued expansion of companies like A&P by applying escalating fees for each store a corporation operated in a state. Some were so extreme that companies had to retreat from certain markets entirely; Louisiana's tax would have caused A&P to pay as much as $8.25 million in taxes for each store it owned there.[128] Hartford faced an equally significant challenge from maverick grocers who brought the supermarket concept to east coast population centers, expanding consumer expectations about what to expect from food retailers and putting pressure on grocers to reliably offer fresh produce. Losing the battle of public opinion along with the political war, A&P transformed its image by becoming a supermarket corporation. By the end of the 1930s, nearly every major grocery corporation in the United States followed Great Atlantic's lead.

This chapter explains how government policies and private resources combined to make the supermarket concept the basis of America's food retail economy. More than simply a case of corporate sleight-of-hand –A&P's executives were quite conscious that closing thousands of stores would dramatically lower the company's tax burden– Great Atlantic and the other grocers who opened supermarkets during the 1930s did so because

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[127] Marc Levinson, *The Great A&P and the Struggle for Small Business in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), 169-170.

[128] *Ibid*., 146.

the style of retailing perfectly matched consumers' desires. Franklin Roosevelt's election in 1932 came with a powerful mandate to improve consumer purchasing power by regulating prices and installing production controls. Although historians have written extensively on ways the political climate translated into popular organization and a new sense of the consumers' power, much less is known about the relationship between activism and business strategies.[129] The spread of the supermarket, however, and its quick acceptance as the ultimate form of food retailing in America, illustrates the ways that consumer desire and identity were shaped by the contours of the marketplace. As I explain below, the immense popular anger directed at national retailers, most especially grocers, sent many shoppers looking for alternatives to grocery stores operated by companies like A&P. Often, this quest led to the creation of consumers cooperatives and other explicitly democratic retailing options. In other cases, entrepreneurs opened discount warehouses marketing food and other items to the public at lowered costs. Both styles convinced the public that the old mode of retailing, characterized by high prices and limited selection in urban groceries, no longer suited the political or material moment; the supermarket was there to stay.

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[129] Lizabeth Cohen argues, for example, that consumption patterns among working-class Chicagoans paves the way for cross-ethnic communication and, eventually, unionization. Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1990), 327. Meg Jacobs makes the point that labor benefitted from the prominence of consumption in the 1930s through the alliance that formed between unions and middle-class consumers. Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 5. Together, "purchasing power" coalitions like these politicized their consumer needs and directed New Deal policies toward support of their consumerism and away from the needs of big business. This turn of events was a stark contrast from the 1920s, when leaders like Herbert Hoover saw big business as the state's natural partner in economic development and managing the economy. For more see, Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003). On the tension between business and consumer activists, see Gary Cross, *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America* (New York, 2002), esp. 122-24; and Daniel Scroop, "The Anti-Chain Store Movement and the Politics of Consumption," *American Quarterly,* 60 (Dec. 2008), 925-49.

The early years of the Great Depression sent a shockwave through the food retail industry. Between 1929 and Franklin Roosevelt's first year in office in 1933, total consumer spending fell by over 40 percent.[130] With millions out of work there were obvious market contractions, but it would be a mistake to assume food retailers faced the same problems as clothes salesmen or car dealers who faced sharp declines in discretionary spending. Instead, grocers wrung their profits from customers with very little money to spend on food, often cobbling together humble meals based on stomach-filling starches and inexpensive cured meats.[131]

To bring shoppers through the door, national grocery chains aggressively cut prices. A&P's weekly sales hovered around $20 million per week in 1930, down from $22 million in 1929. However they were selling more food than ever before, a 12% increase from the previous year, as shoppers stocked up on cheap items like flour, corn meal, and canned vegetables.[132] A&P biggest competitor, the Kroger chain, reported similar figures over the same period, with sales volume increasing almost 10% while cash

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[130] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States*, (GPO: 1945), 319.

[131] The depression-era diet was something of a step backwards for American diners, as many of the luxury goods from the 1920s either fell out of favor or simply became too expensive for middle-class shoppers under existing distribution methods. As a consequence, the "hog and hominy" tradition revived itself with a vengeance. See Rachael Louise Moran "Consuming Relief: Food Stamps and the New Welfare of the New Deal," *Journal of American History* 97, no. 2 (March 2011), 1004; Bryon R. Newton, "Lacking Foresight: Much Might Be Done Easily to Relieve Distress," *New York Times,* October 29, 1932; "Market Conditions for 1932," *USDA Bulletin for 1932* (GPO, 1933), 17.

[132] "A&P Dollars Sales Decrease as Tonnage Volume Rises," *Chain Store Age, Administrators Edition* (hereafter *CSA-A*), January 1931, 74.

receipts tumbled nearly 7%.[133] The chains kept turning a profit because the floor had fallen out of the agricultural market. Crops prices had been falling for some time, but the downward spiral of debt and overproduction only accelerated with the collapse of farm prices and rural credit systems – the all-to-common image of Oklahoma families packing their belongings onto old cars and searching for a new place to live, immortalized in John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, was no exaggeration. Wheat, for example, fell nearly 50% between 1929 and 1933, after falling by the same amount over the previous ten years.[134] Even consumer crops like potatoes or green beans lost value.[135] But even with efficient marketing mechanisms, farmers found themselves unable to get good prices from wholesalers aware of their desperate economic situation.[136] Strawberry growers in Houma, Louisiana, for example, had made good living after setting up a market cooperative in 1915 but found themselves struggling to make ends meet when wholesalers cut prices in 1931.[137] Suddenly dragged down, they, like countless other rural

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[133] "Chain Store Sales," *CSA-A*, January 1931, 74.

[134] Adam Sheingate, *The Rise of the Agricultural Welfare State: Institutions and Interest Group Power in the United States, France, and Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 122. See also, USDA, *Yearbook of Agriculture for 1935*, 33; Edwin Griswold Nourse, Joseph Stancliffe Davis, and John Donald Black, *Three Years of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration*, (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution, 1940), 125.

[135] During the 1920s, these and other similar crops had been triumphed by the USDA as potential solutions to farmers' financial woes. See chapter two for more details.

[136] Lawrence Westbrook, "Objectives and Suggested Procedures for Rural Rehabilitation" June 27, 1934," pg. 3, folder 2, box 63, Rural Rehabilitation General Files, "Old General Subject" Series, March 1933-Jan. 1935, Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Central Files, 1933-1936, Records of the Work Projects Administration, RG 63, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md. (Hereafter NARA-II).

[137] Agricultural administrators saw the Houma cooperative as a model for other farming and its struggles in the early 1930s put the total collapse many parts of the farm economy were undergoing in sharp relief. C.W. Kitchen, Memorandum, August 13, 1920, Folder "C.W. Kitchen," Box 6, "Potatoes and Fruits, 1915-1917" Miscellaneous Marketing Correspondence of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and Earlier Marketing Bureaus, 1914-1931, Records of the Agricultural Marketing Service, RG 136, NARA-II Lawrence Westbrook, memorandum to Harry L. Hopkins, November 5, 1934, folder 1, box 63, Rural Rehabilitation General Files, "Old General Subject" Series, March 1933-Jan. 1935, Federal Emergency

communities, joined the ranks of what the government was by 1934 calling "stranded families." In a position where they made just enough money to continue operations and survive, these farmers were effectively stuck in an economic position where they had no choice but to deal with the few wholesalers and distributors that had ready cash to buy agricultural goods: national grocery chains like A&P. [138]

This relationship was just another aspect of the immense tension between the public and chain grocers. Even amid the general prosperity of the 1920s, many Americans had become uncomfortable with the economic power commanded by the chais, especially A&P. Although chain stores commanded only about 20% of national retail sales overall (Great Atlantic controlled half that quantity), smaller independents rightfully believed they had little ability to succeed in a marketplace because the large national corporations set prices and operated distribution networks that gave them a decisive advantage.[139] These resentments meshed perfectly with the anger directed at the bankers and industrialists blamed for the 1929 stock market crash and was most potently felt in rural areas where young men often looked to a career in retailing as a way out of a dreary farming life, dreams that were often crushed by the national chains that, throughout the 1920s, had moved aggressively into small towns. Aspiring storekeepers

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Relief Administration, Central Files, 1933-1936, Records of the Work Projects Administration, RG 63, NARA-II.

[138] Lawrence Westbrook, "Rural-Industrial Communities for Stranded Families," July 10, 1934, folder 2, box 63, Rural Rehabilitation General Files, "Old General Subject" Series, March 1933-Jan. 1935, Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Central Files, 1933-1936, Records of the Work Projects Administration, RG 63, NARA-II.

[139] On overall sales, see F.J. Harper," *A New Battle on Evolution"*: *The Anti-Chain Store Trade-at-Home Agitation of 1929-1930*, 16.

could get good jobs at rural A&P's or Krogers, but could attain none of the social benefits of going into business for themselves.[140]

To be sure, independent groceries were truly struggling. Small chains and single-operator stores could never command the same discounts as A&P because they did not deal in similarly large quantities of food. For example, the Atlantic Commission Company, the company's produce-buying wing (responsible for filling massive orders of canned or preserved fruits and vegetables) dealt in farm products worth as much as $44 million annually, buying mostly from farmers who had signed futures contracts.[141] In contrast, the small Standard Produce Company in Charlottesville, Virginia, a supplier for local independent grocers and small restaurants, dealt in about $50,000 worth of produce annually, an amount so tiny that they had no hope of obtaining any sort of bulk savings, passing on higher prices to retail cash registers.[142] They, along with the stores they supplied, could offer only more personal service to shoppers. However, their favored customers were often some of the very people most directly affected by the depression, that is, working class Americans hungry for a good bargain. In other words, the independents that had always traded on faithfully serving the local community (especially in immigrant enclaves) had been pushed out of the marketplace by the 1930s' economic realities.

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[140] James L. Palmer, "Economic and Social Aspects of Chain Stores"; Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise*, 78-80; for more on anti-capitalist populism, see Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark: A Cultural History of the Great Depression* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2009). Esp, 441-461.

[141] See chapter two for more on the exploitative nature of futures contracts. See also H.A. Baum, "Chain Store Methods of Buying Fresh Fruits and Vegetables," *The Journal of Farm Economics* 12, No. 2, (April 1930), 282.

[142] "1930 Ledger" Standard Grocery Company Records, pg, 1-10, Papers courtesy of owner.

The depth and severity of the Depression encouraged some merchants to politically organize against the chains. In 1920, well-off urban independents and wholesalers organized the National Association of Retail Grocers and the National Association of Grocery Wholesalers. At the time neither organization was very powerful, but the influence of both grew after the stock market crash, filling their ranks with t vendors struggling against the more powerful national chains.[143] During the early 1930s, representatives for the two associations argued that chain stores sucked money out of small towns, providing little more than a few low-paying clerking jobs while selling products manufactured far away.[144] Even though only a very small minority of grocers, almost all located in California, sold locally produced food, advocates traded on the powerful image of the self-supporting rural community deeply woven into American political and economic culture. No matter that countryside retailers primarily dealt in items like wheat and corn produced and sold into national markets, Association representatives pushed the idea that local farmers could easily support their towns and families' culinary desires, simultaneously rejuvenating beleaguered local economies and hurting big business.[145]

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[143] George Schultz, "Retail Grocer, Surrounded by Chain Competition, Tells How he Succeeded," *National Bulletin of the National Association of Retail Grocers*, January 1923, 8.

[144] Stevens, "Comparison of Special Discounts and Allowances," *National Bulletin of the National Association of Retail Grocers* 67, July 1935; E.S. Briggs to Summers, July 8, 1935, Records of the House Judiciary Committee, 74th Congress, RG 223, HR74A-D21, box 187, National Archives and Records Administration Legislative Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter NARA-LA).

[145] It should be mentioned that unlike later iterations of the local food movement that coalesced after the 1960s (discussed in chapter 6), these advocates were unconcerned with the state of the environment or with nutrition, but rather wanted to curtail the economic reach of national corporations. During the 1920s, only very few places, in particular those in the rural Midwest and Appalachia, found such messages appealing, but as millions of Americans began losing their jobs in the early 1930s and many more found themselves struggling economically, the public began pushing for new legislation to keep money out of the hands of big business.

Anti-chain-store forces pushed many state legislatures to pass laws that would tax big retailers out of existence. In early 1930, Indiana's legislature passed an anti-chain tax that applied graduated fees for each store that a single corporation owned and operated in a state. A single property would pay a $3 annual license fee. For each additional store owned by the same company, a higher fee, rising to as high as $250 per store would be applied.[146] Typically, the average corner grocery operated by A&P or Kroger made only about $1,000 in profit annually; the Indiana law would bleed money from a system already under extreme stress.

Once Indiana's graduated chain store tax survived a Supreme Court challenge in 1932, twenty-two more states followed suit. Hundreds more equally stringent ordinances passed at the local level. Many levied fees far higher than the Indiana bill. For example, Wisconsin passed a law that seized 1% of chains' gross profits if a company owned more than 20 stores in the state. Florida's legislature came within one vote of banning chains altogether in 1935; instead it imposed a "privilege tax" of $400 for each store a chain operated after the fifteenth. Louisiana's law was the most severe. Passed at the height of Huey Long's "Share our Wealth" campaign, this bill taxed corporations based on the numbers of stores owned nationwide, with fees reaching an astounding $550 per store for chains that had only more than five properties. A single A&P operation in Louisiana would thusly have owed $8.25 million in taxes – a fifth of the grocers' total 1934 profits.[147] Almost overnight, anti-chain sentiment had completely disrupted the operations of hundreds of major corporations. One journalist writing in the *Harvard*

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[146] "Anti-Chain Store Law Constitutional, Federal Court Holds," *CSA-A*, March 1930, 36.

[147] "Chain Stores Taxes (as of May 15, 1937)," Office of Tax Policy, Subject Files, Box 13, RG 56, General Records of the Department of the Treasury, NARA-II.

Business Review captured the moment acerbically: “whenever a little band of lawmakers are gathered together in the sacred name of legislation, you may be sure they are putting their heads together and thinking up what they can do the chain stores.”[148]

Anti-chain crusaders relied on a notion that chains were not only bad for the local economy but also bad for democracy in general. In the 1932 Supreme Court decision that upheld the Indiana chain store law, Justice Owen Roberts argued chain stores belonged in special economic category because of their unique administrative capability and buying power. This conclusion did more than single out large grocery corporations for special treatment by state and local governments, as Roberts’ words also suggested that chain stores represented a threat to Americans’ economic freedoms. In part, this idea had resonance because parts of the South, Midwest, and West had long believed themselves exploited at the hands of Eastern industrialists and bankers. For these people, chain retailers were just another manifestation of economic abuse by distant corporations. In other words, shoppers in small towns like Columbia, Tennessee, or Kannapolis, North Carolina felt as though chains had complete control over their material lives because of their massive size and distributive capacity. Harry Schacter, a liberal Southern journalist, put it best in 1930, suggesting that the fight was another version of the issues underlying the infamous Scopes Monkey Trial, saying, “[a] new battle on evolution is raging in the South, this time, however, the issue is not religious but economic…The battle, which is being waged on many fronts, is between the small retailer, taking the fundamentalist position, against the chain store, an exponent of

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[148] Charles F. Phillips, “State Discriminatory Chan Store Taxation,” *Harvard Business Review* 14 (Spring 1936), 350.

modernism in distribution. In this battle, we are fighting for our very right to make our own choices."[149]

Sometimes, anti-chain anger exploded into grassroots action. W.K. Henderson, a popular radio host in Louisiana closely allied with Huey Long, intoned listeners to "wake up!" to the threat posed by the chains, because "we can whip the whole cock-eyed world when we are right…we can drive them out in thirty days if you people will stay out of their stores."[150] Henderson's program was the most popular in the South, while he launched an organization, the "Merchants' Minute Men" defending local storekeepers from the chains by physically keeping people out of A&Ps, Krogers, and other mass-retailers. More than a mere fad, by 1931 Henderson amassed a force of 35,000 Minute Men in over 4,000 towns across the South and lower-Midwest, all intent on fighting the unpopular chains by physically keeping people from shopping in their stores.[151] Foremost in Henderson's and his many imitators' language was a rhetoric of invasion and regional warfare that cast the chain store as a foreign menace, "coming into your town and taking your money and sending it out to a bunch of crooked, no account loafers in Wall Street."[152] In this formulation, everything chain stores did to lower prices and improve consumer access, a major theme of A&P's business model, meant very little, as there ultimate goal was to turn small town main streets into corporate outposts.[153] Although

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[149] Harry W. Schacter, "War on the Chain Store," *The Nation* 544 (1930), 130.

[150] F, J. Harper, *A New Battle on Evolution": The Anti-chain Store Trade-at-Home Agitation of 1929-1930, 414*.

[151] *Ibid*, 417. For more on Henderson's Minute Men, see Levinson, *A&P*, 116-121.

[152] "Chains Face First Fight As South's Politicians Seize Issue," *Business Week*, March 5, 1930, 22.

[153] The anger and mistrust was real. By 1930, there were at least twelve anti-chain store radio stations and twenty-four anti-chain newspapers. J. Edward Collins, "Anti-Chain Store Legislations*, Cornell Law Quarterly* 24, 198-202.

much of this anti-chain tension was extant before the stock market crash, the resulting social turmoil gave new life to a belief that big chains had an octopus-like control on local commerce.[154]

Anti-chain activists found powerful, if unexpected, allies among Franklin D. Roosevelt's advisors. For much of the 1920s, liberal social scientists like Rexford Tugwell, Adolph Berle, Gardiner Means, Leon Henderson, and Paul Douglas –all men who would go on to play significant roles in FDR's administration– argued that the growing concentration of corporate control over the American economy led to a loss of purchasing power on the streets.[155] Looking at the structure of the economy, they believed firms like Great Atlantic had little to fear from competition or regulation, meaning they could put out products of inferior quality or hike prices at will. When the economy had still been growing and consumer purchasing power remained on the rise, these concerns seemed trivial, but with the 1929 crash, the issue became urgent. In 1932, Paul Nystrom, one of the few economists studying retailing, began describing corporate sales practices as a "new form of exploitation [of] menacing proportions," after yet-another round of chain-driven price cuts.[156]

Initially, many New Deal price reformers agreed with anti-chain activists that large retailers' pricing strategies posed a threat to economic liberty.[157] In 1932, Adolph

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[154] The octopus metaphor was apt as many Americans used it to describe the power exerted on local economies by large corporations, especially the A&P, Standard Oil, and U.S. Steel.

[155] All of these men, especially Tugwell, Berle, and Means, would have prominent roles in shaping New Deal economic reforms. For more, see Paul Douglas, *The Coming of a New Party* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1932), especially 71-85.

[156] Paul Nystrom, "A Restatement of the Principles of Consumption to Meet Present Conditions," *Journal of Home Economics* 24 (October 1932), 871.

[157] The New Dealers conception of economic liberty should not be confused with the views of Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek, working at the same time. These two Austrian economists believed that any

Berle and Gardiner Means, two of the most important members of FDR's famous "Brain Trust," published *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*, a manifesto laying out much of the intellectual groundwork for New Deal economic policies. They argued that the associationalist view of government put forward by Herbert Hoover and other 1920s policy makers failed to make business accountable to the public interest. Rather, corporate leaders had come to believe that the state was accountable to them.[158] Rexford Tugwell, the future director of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, agreed, writing in 1931 that "those individuals who insist upon the right to make profits fail to accept the responsibility of stabilizing private investment and of maintaining the continuity of society's producing, selling, and consuming operations."[159] Ideas like these helped establish at the heart of the New Deal a sense that large corporations presented a dire threat to individual economic freedoms.

Once in office, the New Dealers tackled the chain problem through price regulation. From the perspective of the administration, consumers were overly concerned with boosting their purchasing power through labor and tax reforms, that is, higher wages and draconian anti-chain laws, than with restructuring how goods were marketed. Paul Douglas set the tone, arguing "common interests of consumers and citizens tend frequently to be ignored by radicals because of their preoccupation with the struggle in the workshop…but the they tend in the main to be different facets of a common issue,

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intervention in the economy by the state threatened personal freedom. Rather, the New Dealers thought that it was unfettered capitalism that was the greater threat to individual liberty. For more on the early moments of what would become known as libertarianism, see Kim Phillips-Fein, *The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2009), 26-52.

[158] For more on Berle and Means see Fredric S. Lee, "A New Dealer in Agriculture: G.C. Means and the Writing of *Industrial Prices*," Review of Social Economy 46 (October 1988), 180-202; Theodore Rosenhof, *Economics in the Long Run: New Deal Theorists and their Legacies, 1933-1993* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 23-43; see also Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 99-104.

[159] Quoted in Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 101.

namely, that of how society can collectively plan and control its economic and social life so that the interests of its members may best be furthered."[160] In other words, the New Dealers believed that large corporations, especially retailers, had an important role to play in the new economy they sought to build. The challenge lay in stamping out predatory practices.

The first move against corporate practices came with the enactment of the National Recovery Act (NRA) in 1933, which made almost every one of the big chains' pricing strategies illegal. The NRA sought to mutually balance the interests of producers, manufacturers, and consumers by establishing firm controls over production, distribution, and most importantly, pricing. According to The *New York Times*, the program would keep "prices high enough to cover increased labor costs and to leave in addition a 'reasonable' profit for the employer, but low enough to encourage the consumption of foods and to protect the public against gouging."[161] The program relied on "codes of fair competition" written by groups of executives and lawyers representing the leading firms in individual industries, supervised by administrators working for the new National Recovery Administration (also called NRA). Codes regulated work hours, minimum pay rates, and more. Once accepted by the government, a code would apply to every company in that industry, no matter the size, and if a business failed to adhere to statutes, the government could levy fines up $500 per day per store. Perhaps most significantly, businesses would be forced to adhere to certain price floors meant to stamp out cutthroat competition. Some industries, like coal or textiles, welcomed the chance to collude, but food retailers like A&P exploited their large integrated distribution systems to undercut

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[160] Douglas, *Coming of a New Party*, 78.

[161] "Field Day for Critics," *NYT*, February 28, 1934.

smaller chains and independents. Almost overnight, chain grocers' business strategies had gone from controversial to illegal.

Coping with the new regime would mean that businesses would not only have to change how they priced goods but also recoup added costs by reorganizing the entire way they managed their businesses.[162] NRA codes eliminated "loss-leading," the practice of selling items below cost to bring customers in the door and making up the cost with other higher-priced goods they would also buy, which was perceived as the most destructive of the grocery business' strategies. The research director of the Chain Store Research Bureau, a service run by the industry-leading *Chain Store Age* magazine, estimated that in the late 1920s and early 1930s the leading retailers sold 15 percent of their merchandise without profit.[163] The FTC backed this claim, saying in a 1932 report to Congress that "an important aspect of chain-store price policy is the frequent use of 'leaders' consisting of specially low-selling prices on particular items."[164] Loss-leading was especially common in the food business. Typically, chain grocers priced staples like flour or butter below cost not only to draw-in customers but also to help sell the fresh produce that many storekeepers began stocking in the 1920s. Shoppers would buy their basic items while clerks would push fresh goods, ensuring that perishable products did not rot away on shelves.[165] A&P, for example, regularly promoted a few items, like flour

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[162] Levinson, *A&P*, 141; National Association of Chain Stores, *The Chain Store Industry Under the National Recovery Act* (New York: 1934), 41-53. See also DX 144, Box 66, Danville Trial.

[163] Baxter, *Chain Store Distribution and Management*, 17; Levinson, *A&P*, 159-162.

[164] FTC, *Chain Store Inquiry*, Vol. 3, *Chain Stores: Chain-Store Leaders and Loss Leaders*, Senate docs. 51, 72nd Congress, 1st sess. (1932), xi.

[165] "Self-Serve Groceries," Report, November 26, 1918, Folder "Self-Serve Groceries," City Marketing 1915-1920, Box 1, The City Marketing and Distribution Project, 1914-1920, Records Relating to Studies, Projects, and Surveys, RG 83, Records of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, NARA-II.

and baking soda, at rock-bottom prices to bring customers in the door. To independents, loss-leaders were unfair, a form of "destructive competition," possible only because of the immense buying power chains held over producers and the savings realized when moving goods through their own distribution systems.[166] To be sure, loss-leading was undeniably a boon to consumers, who received lower prices, but the New Dealers saw the practice differently. As Gardiner Means, one of Roosevelt's chief economic advisors, put it, "the shift from economic activity coordinated by the market to administered coordination has steadily reduced the consumer to a mere appendage of the production system."[167] It was precisely this sort of relationship that NRA price floors intended to stamp out.

The NRA went even deeper into reworking the grocery business. Food manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers were all expected to adopt codes of fair competition under the National Recovery Act. Officials made clear that wholesalers were to write one code, retailers another. However, the writers of the original law – economists like Rexford Tugwell and Raymond Moley who had backgrounds in agricultural economics– intended to even the playing field across the entire supply chain. Thusly, chain and independent grocers in addition to the wholesalers, jobbers, and transport firms they partnered with were all covered by the same series of codes. According to one AAA official, "the government's thought in this connection is that when an industry comes together to draw up a code, the thoughtful men in every line will pretty nearly embrace

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[166] FTC, *Chain Store Inquiry*, xi.

[167] Gardiner C. Means, "Competition Called From Ordinary," *NYT*, November 4, 1934.

the same opinion." Food retailers of all sizes were expected to agree to "a truce in competition."[168]

Wholesalers and smaller retailers used the codes to strangle the largest retailers. The National Association of Grocery Wholesalers and the National Association of Food Chains, the leaders of the anti-chain movement, were the most influential groups in the talks planning the NRA grocery codes; A&P, Kroger, and Safeway (the three largest chains) were not members of these organizations. Indeed, the industry leader, A&P, responsible for selling one-sixth of all groceries, was not even invited to join the code-writing bodies, who took the opportunity to target loss-leading, brokerage allowances, and even more of the big chains' pricing and business strategies.[169] In addition to banning below-cost sales, small-business groups pushed for regulations banning the sale of any grocery product for less than the invoice cost plus a 6 percent markup.[170] Lobbyists knew that price floors on everything except meat, which was covered by a separate code, would cripple the big chains even more than simply banning loss-leading. A&P's business depended on keeping margins low and sales volume high, but since the majority of their stores carried so little overhead, they could operate at something near an average of two or three percent markup, giving them an insurmountable advantage over small, less-efficient grocers.[171] Legislating a price floor hardly served consumers' interests, since big

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[168] National Association of Chain Stores, *The Chain Store* 65-67.

[169] Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly*, 197.

[170] Initially, retail groups wanted a 10 percent price floor, but both Roosevelt and NRA director Hugh Johnson thought that was far too high. See Levinson, *A&P*, 144. There was also a push from FERA (Federal Emergency Relief Administration), where director Harry Hopkins and assistant director Lawrence Westbrook worried that such a high markup would force chains to cut down their purchases of farm products at precisely the same time his agency was trying to stimulate the rural economy. Westbrook, "Objectives and Suggested Procedures for Rural Rehabilitation," 3-4.

[171] DX 43, Box 19, Danville Trial.

chains' low margins also lowered prices, but it served the administration's goal of keeping less efficient retailers in business to avoid additional unemployment. The new regulations also pushed up the prices of farm goods, helping farmers. The NRA Consumer Advisory Board ignored protests by lawyers representing Kroger and Safeway, among others.[172]

The ultimate grocery code, signed by Roosevelt at the end of 1933, cut deeply into big chains' dwindling profits in addition to reforming sales practices. Like all NRA codes, the grocery regulations were stuffed with provisions to limit corporate savings on labor costs at a time when falling prices and high unemployment were pushing market wages down. Individual employees could work no more than ten hours in a day and forty-eight hours in a week. Children younger than sixteen could work no more than three hours per day. The minimum wage for grocery clerks would be $15 a week in large cities, $10 per week in small town, amounts nearly double what A&P and other chains paid in some areas. Later on, workers even gained the right to form unions to bargain collectively with employers through the 1935 Wagner Act. But none of these provisions applied to family labor in independent stores or the smaller chains with only a few employees. Of the 482,000 food stores in the United States in 1933, as many as half were unaffected by the labor rules in the code, but the big chains were forced to comply, often hiking prices to the general displeasure of their hard-pressed customers.[173] Losing the ability to set their own margins essentially destroyed the profitability of big chains, since their sales

[172] NRA Consumer Advisor Board, "Purpose of the NRA as Seen by the Consumers' Advisory Board," Folder "Purpose of the NRA as Seen by the Consumers' Advisory Board", Box 2, Gardiner Means Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY (hereafter FDR). On protests, see DX 43, Box 19, Danville Trial.

[173] Alexander, "N.R.A. and Distribution," 147.

only made money by leveraging manufacturers' allowances for advertising, brokerage, and prompt payment against their operating expenses. In other words, it was the vast scale of the A&P, Kroger, and others that made them profitable, not their pricing practices. Now allowances could not be considered in setting prices; any retail price below 106 percent of invoice plus freight constituted unfair competition and would bring swift legal action. A&P often featured prices well-below cost at new stores to build up a regular clientele, but this pricing was also barred. Even individual products that had served as loss-leaders, like fresh milk, had to be sold at a single price across an entire region, in local mom-and-pop groceries as well as the A&Ps. Gone were the days when a regional manager could slash prices for a few days to cripple local competitors. Nor did retailers have control over prices. For example, The NRA macaroni codes barred sales "below a fair and reasonable price," leaving it to program administrators to decide when the manufacturer's wholesale price constituted "destructive price cutting."[174] The damaging effects of such stringent regulation on the big chains were immediate. Within the A&P system, only 3.1 percent of its stores were unprofitable in 1932, and almost all of those had only recently been opened and were being intentionally operated at a loss to develop the business. In 1934, the first full year of the NRA, nearly 35 percent of its stores operated at a loss.[175] Even sales slipped as customers moved on to independents with more flexible prices. After pulling in over $1 billion in sales in 1932, A&P barely

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[174] For more on markups, see Phillips, "Price Policies of Food Chains," 379.

[175] Adelman, *A&P*, 450.

cleared $750 million in 1934. Although some of the losses can be attributed to declining consumer spending, NRA codes played a more important role.[176]

AAA and NRA codes and regulations hurt independents, too. Regardless of size, retailers could not remain open for more than sixty-three hours per week, fulfilling a long-standing demand of independent grocers who had to stand behind their counters every moment their stores were open in order to compete with chain grocers capable of hiring multiple clerks. For chains of any size, the sixty-three-hour limit effectively mandated each store to close for a day and a half weekly, cutting into all-important sales volume, and even stores' ability to be open during the all-important late-afternoon and early-evening shopping hours when working people looking for quick meals faced the choice of picking up groceries or going to restaurants.[177] Premiums like trading stamps, another important practice important to building up a clientele, were forbidden. Two-for-the-price-of-one sales or similar discounts were also banned. Combined with sharp regulation of the trucking industry, prices climbed by almost 20% in the first full year as nearly every facet of the trade fell under government regulation.[178]

In mid-1935, the Supreme Court struck down the NRA as unconstitutional, triggering a new attempt to strangle the chain with taxes. Shortly afterwards, Texas Democratic Congressman Wright Patman launched an opportunistic personal crusade

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[176] "A&P Sales Drop in 1933" *CSA-A*, February, 1934, 51.

[177] During the 1920s, this part of the market was among those growing the fastest. Trade magazines suggested that store owners accommodate them by stocking food that could be quickly turned into meals, like beef steaks or popular brands of canned beans, but it was widely acknowledged the best way was to stay open late into the evening when workers were going home from factories and offices. Fred W. Albrecht, "Designing Chain Stores that are Community Assets," *CSA-A*, March 1930, 55.

[178] On trading stamps, see Fox, *The Economics of Trading Stamps*, 37-60; Adam Mack, "Good Things to Eat in Suburbia": Supermarkets and American Consumer Culture" Unpublished Dissertation, University of South Carolina, 2006, 87-89. On prices, see Dameron, "Retailing Under the N.R.A., I." 201.

against the chains, partnering with populist legislators looking for a way to limit the "the trade practices of individuals, partnerships, and corporations engaged in big-scale buying and selling of articles at wholesale or retail."[179] At the center of his proposed legislation was a plan to apply a federal tax on larger numbers of stores that chains owned, in addition to NRA-style price controls.[180] After a short, but lively, political battle lost after A&P was caught trying to infiltrate Patman's office, the Texan passed a bill that put in place new regulatory controls. [181] Manufacturers could grant discounts to chain stores as well as wholesalers, but they had to justify those moves to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), tasked from then on with regulating chain stores. The act also recognized a "good faith" defense to charges of illegal price discrimination, meaning that discounts were legal in the event a price had to be dropped in order to better compete with other local stores doing the same. Prohibitions against brokerage and advertising allowances returned. Most significantly –and controversially– violations were no longer a civil offense; they became criminal offenses. Should John Hartford negotiate a deal for a product like canned peaches that was deemed an unfair discount (essentially a price unattainable by other vendors), he would serve hard time in federal jail. Patman's plan to viciously tax chains for each of their stores did not survive as part of the final bill.[182]

Building a Shopper's Paradise: Supermarkets Go National, 1935-1942.

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[179] Wright Patman, to John J. O'Connor, May 31, 1935, Box 37, Wright Patman Papers, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin Texas. Hereafter WPP.

[180] Levinson, *A&P*, 153-154; Jonathan J. Bean, *Beyond the Broker State: Federal Policies Toward Small Business: 1936-1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 33-35; Wright Patman, *Congressional Record* (May 27, 1936), Vol. 80, Pt. 7, p. 8114.

[181] J. F. Carroll to Wright Patman, May 29, 1935, box 37, WPP.

[182] Levinson, *A&P*, 154-58.

Patman's bill was the final stage in a series of price and marketing laws that transformed the grocery trade. State and federal legislation had played an important role in mollifying populist resentments but had done little to actually change the experience of food shopping, particularly in major population centers. Rather, much of the innovation in the retail sector came from the grassroots, driven by consumer cooperatives and maverick entrepreneurs divining consumers' moods. In the 1930s, the supermarket concept traveled east from California, finding a new home in working class communities ravaged by Great Depression. Other consumers built cooperatives to break the power of chain retailers, which they believed no longer served their interest. Faced with competition from unexpected places and ever-increasing regulation and taxes, the chains, most especially A&P, became one of the invaders, adopting emerging retail styles as their own. Perhaps most incredibly, the turn towards supermarket was made possible by the very laws meant to destroy the large grocery chains. The lower tax burden, drastically reduced overhead, smaller numbers of employees, and a positive image in the public mind compelled chain-store executives to see the supermarket as the solution to their many problems.

The turn towards chain supermarkets was achieved only after other, alternative forms of food retailing had run their course. The first of these different retail styles, and perhaps most likely to succeed given the political hostility, were consumer cooperatives. A perfect fit for the era's penny-wise consumer culture, cooperatives were unable to satisfy all of shoppers' material desires.

Cooperatives were the physical embodiments of a new, politicized vision of consumption. Inspired by the Consumer Advisory Board (CAB) working to write NRA codes, these groups took it upon themselves to organize stores that flew in the face of accepted retail practices. Groups calling themselves things like the United Conference against the High Cost of Living (UCHCL) or the Chicago Consumer's Cooperative (CCC) built and operated stores of their own, drawing on farmer's co-ops and cash-starved wholesalers to stock new community-owned and -operated stores.[183]

Women in particular were drawn to the co-ops. During the 1910s and 1920s, chains' advertising had targeted them, creating a message that corporations shared housewives' burdens in running an efficient household. With the anti-chain forces' implied victory in the early days of the New Deal came the implication that A&P and other chains has essentially bilked their customers. Consumer cooperatives simply fed on this rhetoric to build up a customer base, providing an answer to the central question faced by consumer advocates: how a popular movement composed of a seemingly disparate group of people like middle class homemakers, working class women, African-Americans, rural business owners, and others could actually wield political and economic power. Even when, as in 1938, pundits declared that "the consumer [was now] the ultimate master of the business world," there was little idea how to take advantage of the political mood. [184]

Cooperatives were also an important vehicle for groups of people who had been left behind by the expansion of chain retailing, namely African-Americans. Big retailers like A&P built their business by cultivating the white middle and working classes at the

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[183] Orleck, "We are that Mythical Thing Called the Public;" Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise*, 110-112.

[184] Quoted in Deutsch, *Building a Housewives Paradise*, 114; U.S. Congress, House, Temporary National Economic Committee, *Hearings Before the Temporary National Economic Committee*, pt. 8, *The Problems of the Consumer*, 3303.

expense of Americans thought to be less desirable or even unreliable customers. To be sure, some chains sold directly to minorities through subsidiaries, but retailers largely ignored minority groups. In New York City's Harlem neighborhood, civil rights activist Ella Baker organized the "Young Negros' Co-operative League" in conjunction with the local NAACP chapter in 1936 in an attempt to stoke community consciousness. She argued that "the building of a strong Cooperative Movement among our people is equivalent to a battle. Not only shall we meet with opposition from those who livelihood is the direct antithesis of cooperative economics; but worse still is the skepticism, and inertia among the people the themselves."[185] Cooperatives, then, became a way to manifest leverage in the marketplace denied to minorities. Baker's group was joined in this mission by Chicago's Ida B. Wells Consumers' Co-operative, which grew so quickly after that by 1940 it had outgrown its space several times over.[186]

The dramatic growth in the number, size, and scope of the consumer co-ops in the 1930s and 1940s is startling. By 1944, more than 1.5 million people nationwide belonged to "retail distributive consumer cooperatives," which generally referred to grocery stores. Although it was a small portion of the American population – slightly less than two percent overall – that number was an 800 percent increase from 1929.[187] Expansion of the number of cooperatives and individual members was strongest in 1937 and, with the exception of a slight pause during the 1937-38 recession, remained strong through the mid-1940s. Stores and buying clubs reported that membership increased an average of 25

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[185] Ella Baker, "On Promoting Consumers' Clubs," Memorandum, Folder "Young Negroes' Co-operative League," Box 1, Ella Baker Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, NY. Hereafter Ella Baker Papers.

[186] Deutsch, *Building a Housewive's Paradise*, 126.

[187] *Ibid*., 233-234.

percent annually between 1935 and 1944, with those numbers highest in the years immediately after the Patman bill took effect.[188]

Cooperatives had severe limitations that supermarket retailers would ultimately use to their advantage. By the end of the 1930s, co-ops gained a reputation for being the sorts of places where only the well-to-do or minorities shopped. Of the 1.5 million regular cooperative shoppers in 1940, African-Americans were the largest single demographic, followed closely by Latinos.[189] Many of the larger cooperatives, like the Hyde Park Society in South Chicago, were mixed-race, driving away many potential shoppers who preferred single-race shopping environments.[190] This directly contradicted one of the oldest dynamics of the shopping trade, and one that had helped drive A&P's expansion – the creation of racially and socially acceptable environments for middle-and-working class white women. Even during the late 1920s, when drive-in and combination markets advertised their services to married men, it was understood that shoppers would not be forced to confront people they deemed unacceptable or offensive.[191] Cooperatives were also, in general, more expensive and struggled to stock a full-range of the most popular products. Many co-ops, like the Young Negros' league, bought only from farmers' cooperatives, who typically marketed food at higher prices which they passed on to consumers. And virtually no cooperatives carried nationally branded products like Dove soap or Crisco shortening, meaning the consumers faced the all-too-familiar

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188 "Operations of Consumer Cooperatives in 1944," *Monthly Labor Review* 61, 471-472.

189 "Operations of Consumer Cooperatives in 1944," *Monthly Labor Review* 61 (September 1945), 471-472; Survey of the Whittier District of Metropolitan Los Angeles," August 6, 1951, pg. 10, Box 10, Folder 25, Los Angeles Bureau of Municipal Research, Collection 239, Regional History Collections, University of Southern California Special Collections, Los Angeles, California. Hereafter USC Libraries.

190 Board of Directors Minutes, April 18, 1939, HPCS.

191 See chapter one.

problem of having to make multiple stops to get everything they needed or wanted to buy.[192]

Maverick supermarket operators opening new stores in the early and mid-1930s were not only more capable of satisfying consumers but also able to force big chains to match their marketing strategies. Initially, these supermarkets were temporary affairs, popping up in former industrial sites and selling goods bought from cash-starved wholesalers. In other words, these ad-hoc facilities traded on the supermarket name but had little resemblance to the properties with ample parking being built for relatively affluent customers in Los Angeles. But by the time the Patman-Robinson Act was on the books and the cooperative movement had stoked consumer desire for something different, mass-food retailing was particularly appealing to large corporate chains trying to navigate a troubled and packed marketplace.

The supermarket concept entered Depression-era public consciousness when In 1930, Edward Cullen, a former clerk for the A&P and a regional manager for the Kroger chain, opened the King Kullen store in the Flushing neighborhood of Queens, New York. Borrowing ideas from the George Ralphs and other California grocers, Cullen proposed a new kind of store that would move food at bargain prices, netting only a 3% profit on sales but also drawing in so many customers that the sheer volume alone would be the basis of profitability.[193] He envisioned a cavernous operation between 5,200 and 6,400 square feet in size, about the same size of Ralph's Los Angeles groceries but at least six

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[192] George Schuyler, "Consumer's Co-operatives: The Negro's Economic Salvation," Folder "Co-operatives– Young Negro Co-operative League (1931-1934)," Box 4, Ella Baker Papers.
[193] Longstreth, *The Drive-In, The Supermarket,* 121-123.

times bigger than an A&P combination.[194] All payments would be in cash, there would be no delivery service, and –in a major break from what was happening in California– the store would be located in a low-rent area or a warehouse property with ample parking. Of course, many of these features had already been pioneered in Los Angeles, but not even the most daring Californian grocer would dare put his shop in the midst of a disused industrial park. Cullen needed a significant of amount of cheap space to stock thousands of products, and made the gamble.[195] The storefront, set up in an abandoned warehouse, was adapted without embellishment – it was essentially an industrial-age cavern stuffed with food and other goods bought from cash-starved distributors.

Cullen was the right man at the right time to bring the supermarket to the east coast. Within three years of opening his first store in Queens he had a network of eight stores on Long Island and in the Bronx, ranging from 10,000 to 32,000 square feet in size. Virtually overnight he seized control of a significant portion of the food trade in New York's outer boroughs. Cullen knew the market well. The Depression was in full swing by the beginning of 1931, his first full year of operation, and consumers cared more about discounts than the social conventions that played such an important role in West Coast shopping. From the start, shoppers filled his stores. New Yorkers never before had access to shopping centers with off-street parking, which his did, giving the many thousands of people, mostly suburbanites, living within driving distance easy access to the store. Nor had shoppers been able to go to a self-service grocery with a commitment to wide-selection and value. In Cullen's own words, his stores would "lead the public out of the high-priced house of bondage into the low prices of the house of the

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[194] Quoted in Tedlow, *New and Improved*, 225.
[195] Longstreth, *The Drive-In, The Supermarket*, 123.

promise land."[196] Designed for Depression-era shoppers, King Kullen was many shoppers' introduction to a style of mass-retailing created in Los Angeles only a few years before.

Cullen's chain conceptually underpinned an even more ambitious supermarket called Big Bear, which opened its first store in a vacant automobile plant in Elizabeth, New Jersey before the 1932 Christmas shopping season. The owners, Robert Otis and Roy Dawson, took a page from Great Atlantic's book and joined forces with food wholesalers to present an array of merchandise in unprecedented volume and lowered cost. The store occupied 50,000 square feet of a 2,000,000 square foot plant and included departments for drugs, cosmetics, radios, electrical supplies, sporting goods, and automobile parts in addition to considerable amounts of groceries. Like King Kullen, Big Bear's owners emphasized self-service and spartan interior design. They also advertised themselves as a "price-wrecker" that customers could not afford to avoid. The strategy worked, with shoppers coming from as far as forty miles away to visit the store. Big Bear even had the largest parking area attached to a retail space in the United States, a vast lot numbering at least 1,000 spaces.

In its first year, Big Bear had over $3.8 million in sales, four times the sales of a Los Angeles super and at least one hundred times the amount taken in by the average A&P operation. The grocery department alone accounted for over half that amount. Big Bear soon expanded to other locations; by 1935, stores could be found in every major city on the East Coast.[197]

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[196] Quoted in Zimmerman, *Supermarket*, 32.

[197] Scholarship on the Big Bear chain has been virtually non-existent. Only Richard Longstreth, *The Drive-In, The Supermarket*, 122 gives more than a passing mention. For more on Big Bear's opening, see "Big

Big Bear and King Kullen inspired dozens of imitators across the United States, which began to incorporate design elements commonly found in California to differentiate themselves. In Indianapolis, the Standard Grocery Company opened a Big Bear-type store in early 1933.[198] A grocery wholesaler opened a store in Kansas City in conjunction with local beef packers that same year, creating a sort of mass-beef emporium.[199] Other examples include operations in Duluth, Minnesota, Gary, Indiana, and Louisville, Kentucky.[200] Called "Barney Stores" by the public, these operations revolutionized urban retailing, showing how people were willing to sacrifice conveniences like time, location, and service emphasized by the chains in exchange for substantial savings at the checkout counter.[201] The industry reacted in much the same way. Many trade magazines openly wondered that if atmosphere and quality-of-goods could be sacrificed, what other cherished ideas about retailing were also wrong. However, "barney" supermarkets were not a new enduring paradigm but rather a catalyst for a still more substantial change.[202]

"Barney" markets faded away when the NRA went into effect in the spring of 1934. Much like the big chains, "price wreckers" could not escape regulation and had to sharply raise their prices in response to code-mandated price floors, pushing customers back to their local chain stores or to independents left beyond the reach of price

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Bear: Wrecking Competitors Prices," *Retailing*, March 6, 1933; "Bears & Bulls," *Tide* 7 (March, 1933), 14-16; Alexander Kaylin, "Supermarkets Scare," *Retailing,* February 18, 1933. For more on sales, see Zimmerman, *Supermarkets*, 56; "Inside Figures Concerning a $500,000 Super Market" *Progressive Grocer* 14, no. 4 (April, 1935), 40-42; James Holden, "Super-Markets" *CSA-A* (February 1934), 56.

[198] "New Stores," *Progressive Grocer* 12, no. 6 (June 1933), 52.

[199] "Super Market Makes Good in Kansas City," *Retailing*, October 23, 1933.

[200] B. Summer Gruzen, "Automobile Shopping Centers," *Architectural Record* 76 (July 1934), 43-48.

[201] "Our Saleschecks Tell Us Everything," *CSA-A*, June 1930, 60.

[202] It is unknown where the "Barney" term came from, however it is widely used in periodical literature throughout the era. Ralph F. Linder, "Is the Supermarket Coming or Going?" *Progressive Grocer* 13 (February 1934), 32, 68-72.

inspectors. Struggling to keep sales volume up, they closed one after another; the last Big Bear closed in 1937, only five years after the first had captured the imaginations of millions of urban shoppers.[203]

Barney markets' brief success, in conjunction with the stringent price regulation, helped lure many chains into building supermarkets. However, the stores they opened were copies of the ones built in the 1920s in Los Angeles. A&P, Kroger, and other chains began experimenting with larger stores at about the same, combining several services typically managed by independent vendors in a single building. The first few of these stores were opened in Los Angeles, simple evolutions of the popular drive-in market concept that swept the country in the mid-1920s.[204] Regional chains like Indiana's Standard began experimenting with "combinations" that most typically consisted of a meat counter flanked by established lines of branded and packaged foods, especially as refrigeration technology improved sufficiently that companies could operate centralized butcher operations and simply distribute pre-cut meat to their stores.[205] The most significant new device was the McCray refrigerator, the first aluminum case cooled with air chilled by Freon, a gas developed by DuPont. Less expensive and more hygienic than ice-chilled refrigeration, McCray cases made it possible for stores to offer new products that needed constant refrigeration.[206] However, combination operators believed that shoppers would recoil from utilitarian pieces of technology in the midst of the shopping area. Kroger, who became the biggest combination operator, turned its combination

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[203] Zimmerman, "Super-markets," July 23, 1936.

[204] "Grocery Firm to Build New Store," *Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 1926.

[205] "Chain Store Progress in 1930," *CSA-A*, January 1931, 34.

[206] Advertisement*, CSA-A,* March 1930, 2.

stores into upscale markets meant for the well-to-do. Within, food was more expensive, but selection and service were better than typical economy stores, which did not offer meat or fresh produce.

Kroger was the biggest combination operator. By 1930, the company built just under 3,000 combinations, nearly all opened after 1927, which constituted half of company's 6,000 stores.[207] Other combination operators followed a similar track. A&P turned about 3,000 of its 15,000 properties into combinations by 1935, marketing them as an upscale alternative to their economy stores. They did so by installing wood paneling, leather banquettes, and, in at least several hundred instances, crystal chandeliers.[208] These stores were essentially retail palaces, offering one or two more services than the older chains groceries in a uniquely extravagant setting.

While combinations served only to enhance the anti-chain message through their inherent elitism, independents and smaller chains continued to innovate. Los Angeles grocers were at the forefront, in particular the Ralphs chain, which had opened the first supermarket in 1926. From the end of the 1920s until 1937, the company had the largest network of supermarkets in any region of the United States, building stores across Southern California in neighborhoods standing at the boundaries between downtown business districts in Los Angeles and San Diego and those cities' middle-class residential districts.

Stores would only be profitable if consumers bought as many products as possible during each visit. Ralphs architect Russell Collins, who worked for one of the most important firms in Los Angeles, solved some of these problems with a labyrinthine store

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[207] Colonel V.O. Sherrill, "How We Decentralized," *CSA-A*, August 1930.

[208] "Chain Store Progress in 1930," 35.

layout forcing customers to walk past the most perishable products, which needed to sell very quickly.[209] Creating the interior of the modern supermarket, Collins envisioned a layout where interior aisles stocked with canned and dry goods were surrounded by cases of meats, fruits, and vegetables. He reasoned customers would spend most of their time walking along the edges of the main aisles, passing items like potatoes or fresh pork they had not intended to purchase. Shoppers planned their visits almost exclusively around acquiring items like flour or canned vegetables that were always available, and not fresh foods subject to seasonality and the quirks of agricultural production. Seeing those items on display might make customers put them in their basket along with the . More significantly, Collins' firm wanted every supermarket to have an identical layout so customers could always find the same items in the same places in stores. To contrast interior uniformity, exteriors had sense of drama and whimsy. One location, built in Pasadena during 1929, had a lighthouse serving as a beacon to potential customers. Another store, built nearby two years later, incorporating a portal evoking the entryways to of the most popular Hollywood movie studios opening into dedicated parking lot. Other storefronts incorporated other, conspicuous architectural features like Asian pagodas or art deco paint schemes meant to evoke modernity, cosmopolitanism, and sophistication.[210]

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[209] Collins worked for prominent Los Angeles firm Morgans, Walls, and Clements, responsible for many important buildings in early twentieth century Los Angeles. While the degree to which Collins collaborated with other architects at the firm is unknown, it seems as though the Ralphs stores were his own designs. For more on the firm, see Richard Longstreth, *From City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, The Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (Cambridge, MA: The Mit Press, 1998), 111; Robert Winter and Alexander Vertikoff, *The Architecture of Entertainment: LA in the Twenties* (Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2006), 125.

[210] Longstreth, *The Drive-In, The Supermarket*, 88-91. Collins is most known for his architectural work in Santa Barbara. David Gebhard, *George Washington Smith*, *1876-1930: The Spanish Colonial Revival in California* (Santa Barbara: University of California, Santa Barbara Press: 1964), 163-170; David Gebhard,

Supermarket designers also integrated some of the newest technologies. By 1935, Ralphs operated 41 supermarkets in Southern California. Independents and smaller chains owned about 100 more. All of these stores followed Collins' design schemes, but the constant fight to attract customers led many to experiment. He, along with his collaborators, envisioned stores with very high ceilings that could be cooled with mountain breezes, but grocers began to feature air-conditioning. This was no mean feat – commercial air conditioners were expensive and difficult to install, particularly in buildings never intended to support the weight of motors, ductwork, and condensers. Climate control had immense benefits, even though units often broke down and it was difficult to ensure that cool air circulated uniformly throughout a building. Air conditioners made shoppers more comfortable and gave products longer shelf lives. Builders ultimately solved of the problems by copying an innovation first developed by movie theater owners: a large fan and duct system built into the ceiling that channeled air throughout the store. Ralphs stores regularly including this system by 1930, which would eventually become one of the most conspicuous design features of the Los Angeles supermarket.[211]

A byproduct of this architectural innovation was the way Los Angeles supers helped reaffirm established city's racial hierarchy. Throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, Los Angelinos continued to purchase automobiles at a pace exceeding the national

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Santa Barbara: The Creation of a New Spain in America ((Santa Barbara: University of California, Santa Barbara Press: 1982). See also O'Connor, "Planning the Super-Market," 14-19.

211 American engineer Willis Havilland Carrier perfected the first mechanical air conditioner in 1902. Arsenault, "Long Hot Summer," 599-601. For more on Ralphs and technological innovation, see "Ralphs Stages Food Show," *Hollywood Daily Citizen*, October 23, 1936; "Ralphs Finest Store Opens," *Southwest Wave*, January 1940, 17; "Ralphs Opens New Modern Store," *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1940; "Ralphs Opens New Super Unit," *Supermarket Merchandising* 5 (March 1940), 14-15. For another vision of the air-conditioned market, see "Driv-in-Curb Market" Folder 40, Box 1, Julius Ralph Davidson Papers, University of California Santa Barbara Special Collections, Santa Barbara, California.

average. Indeed, by 1935 as many as one-third of the city's residents owned a car, compared to only one in ten New Yorkers or one in eight Philadelphians. Among the white population of the city, the proportion of car ownership was even higher, standing around fifty percent, while only one in four Latinos, African-Americans, or Asians (Los Angeles' major minority groups) could say the same. This disparity shaped the city's rapid suburbanization, beginning in earnest during the 1920s. Whites tended to take advantage of the open space on the city's exterior, building up suburban and semi-urban neighborhoods in the San Fernando Valley, Hollywood, Beverly Hills, and elsewhere. More than simple white enclaves, Los Angeles suburbs became centers of wealth and sophistication closely tied with the movie industry and the prosperous agricultural sector (farming underpinned the local economy until 1952, when LA county's last orange grove was torn down).[212] Naturally, these areas also became the site for the city's supermarkets, catering almost exclusively to a white clientele, in no small part because mass-food retailers were perfectly equipped to serve car owners – carless Angelinos would struggle to even get to stores lying far from their homes. Those shoppers, almost exclusively poor whites and minorities were still concentrated around the downtown business district and the primarily Mexican enclave on the city's east side and continued to buy their food from older public markets and urban groceries.[213] Indeed, of the nearly 250 supermarkets opened around Los Angeles by 1939, only 10 were in downtown areas; the rest served

[212] "A Study of Alternative Lot Sizes for City Planning Purposes" May, 1960, pg. 19, Box 6, Folder 12, Los Angeles Bureau of Municipal Research, Collection 239, Regional History Collections, University of Southern California Special Collections, Los Angeles, California. Hereafter USC Libraries.
[213] The city's major grocery firms through the 1980s in particular ignored Latinos. Wilshire Organization for Community Redevelopment, "Broadway Consumer and Business Survey," January 1985, Folder 35, Box 5, Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project Records, USC.

outlying white-dominated neighborhoods.[214] Whether operators intended to or not, the supermarkets popping up across Southern California in the 1930s became white-only institutions in addition to fixtures of modern design and distribution. In part, this was because a new supermarket had the potential to transform the demographics and economic life of an area, but it was also because operators carefully built stores adjacent to the most desirable clientele.

Around the same time the NRA was declared unconstitutional in 1935, members of the industry began modeling their supermarkets, which were growing in size and complexity, more and more towards the Los Angeles style. [215] One business analyst believed barney stores created a new breed of "can-opener cooks," who would rather buy cheap food at a cavernous Big Bear than hunt down ideal ingredients from corner groceries and street peddlers. New shoppers even visited stores at different times of day different from their predecessors: "There is the desire or willingness on the part of many customers to do some shipping in the evening. I do not understand this desire fully, but it seems to exist and supermarket operators are satisfying it."[216] Indeed, Los Angeles supermarkets had seemingly thrown out certain social conventions (while maintaining important racial divisions and buttressing gender roles) along with those thought important to building a successful food store.[217] When an editorial cartoon from *Super Market Merchandising* (shown below), a new trade journal first published in 1936, depicted a Los Angeles-style grocery store, a symbol of "the new supermarket… emerging from the chrysalis," of a makeshift store modeled closely after a Big Bear, the

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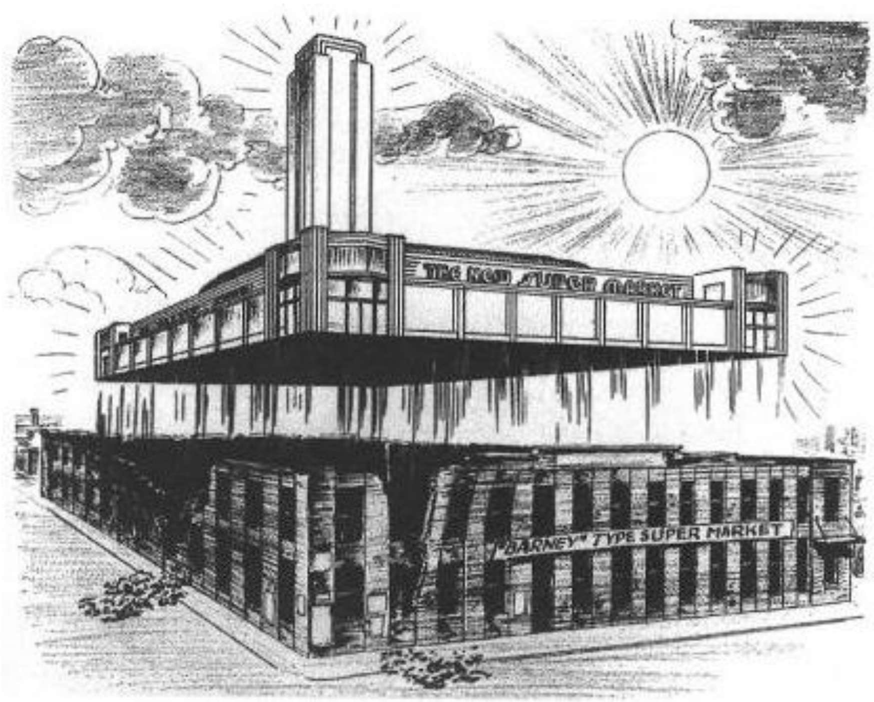
[214] Davidson, "What About Supermarkets?" 82-83; M.J. Rowoldt, "How Supers Operate in California," *Progressive Grocer* 16 (October, 1937), 30.
[215] Godfrey M. Lebhar, "As We See It" *CSA-A,* March 1936, 23.
[216] A.E. Holden, "Is Price-Wrecking Wrecking the Super-Markets?" *CSA-A* (June 1933), 18-19.
[217] "Chains Go Supermarket," *Business Week*, May 1, 1937, 45.

message was clear – grocers in Los Angeles had devised the retailing system of the future.



Fg. 1 “Emerging from the Chrysalis,” *Super Market Merchandising*, August 1937, 12.

Independent grocers brought some of the first truly Los-Angeles-style stores to eastern industrial cities. Chicago got its first supermarket in 1936, and within a year, chains and small independents in the city had opened as many as twenty-five such stores. One property, operated by the Indianapolis-based Standard chain, claimed more than $3 million in annual sales.[218] Similar stores opened around New York, Boston, and Washington, D.C. These early supermarkets emulated the West Coast-style architecturally, with an emphasis on off-street parking, elaborate façades, and expansive selections of food.

[218] M.M. Zimmerman “Super Markets: Growth and Progress in Industrial Centers,” *Super Market Merchandising* 2 (March 1937), 7.

New stores relied on showy marketing campaigns to attract customers. When the Family Market Basket opened a ten thousand square-foot store in Chicago's North Side, it gave away pictures "suitable for framing" and shopping bags to the twenty thousand people who visited on opening day.[219] Another Chicago supermarket gave tours of its empty interior to people eager to see the future for themselves.[220] "The secret," wrote *Super Market Merchandising* "is too create so much ballyhoo – just such mass impressions, even to the display of merchandise… that customers will realize their lives are forever changed."[221]

By 1937, the big chains began operating supermarkets, which made good economic sense for struggling corporations like A&P. Great Atlantic's sales had fallen to just under $650 million annually from their $1.3 billion high in 1929. Beyond simple reductions in consumer spending, a wave of populist anti-chain laws levying heavy taxes to corporations had hurt the company. In Louisiana, for example, A&P had to turn over 5% of its gross sales in taxes for each store in its system. Pennsylvania had a chain store tax in place levying thousands of dollars in taxes per store after the 100th; Great Atlantic had upwards of two thousand in the state. Many executives had come to the conclusion that the company could survive only two or perhaps three years more years if sales kept falling at that rate. Faced with these facts, nearly all of the company's managers agreed that a new strategy was necessary, but there was some debate as to what to do.[222] As John

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[219] "Family Market Basket Reopens in Chicago," *Super Market Merchandising* 2 (July, 1937), 5.

[220] "Remodeled Super Reopens in Chicago," *Supermarket Merchandising* 4 (March 1939), 47.

[221] "Dawson's Trading Post in Chicago Does a Volume of $3,000,000 Annually" *Super Market Merchandising* 1 (November 1936), 18. See Tracy Detsch, *Building a Housewive's Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) for more on Chicago-area stores, especially chapter 5.

[222] Government Exhibit 188, Box 31, *United States v. New York Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company*, 67 F. Supp. 626, R. September 21, 1946 (Eastern District of Illinois Federal Courthouse, Danville, Ill.).

Hartford later explained, "we had a conflict at headquarters whether we should adopt [supermarkets]…some said it wouldn't last- you can't operate without selling under cost, and that we can't do anymore."[223] Almost all of the chains were already experimenting with supermarkets. Kroger had turned about one hundred of its combination properties in Ohio and Illinois into supermarkets during 1936, and the Standard Company announced it would begin to convert its entire 1,200-store chain into about 200 supermarkets by 1942.[224] A&P opened its first supermarket in Paducah, Kentucky, in 1936 as a test case. Although there were concerns it would not make enough money to cover expenses – executives thought Los Angeles-style stores operated in such a unique setting as to defy the normal rules of business– the Paducah property brought in over a million dollars in sales during its first year with substantial profits.[225] On that basis, John Hartford commissioned more trials, opening 10 more supermarkets in Philadelphia later that year. Those stores were even more successful, pulling in sales equal to as many as 200 smaller A&P operations across the city.[226] Hartford began closing those extra stores and discovered an unexpected benefit – his company's taxes went down dramatically. By the fall of 1937, the writing was on the wall. Closing thousands of underperforming corner stores and replacing them with supermarkets serving well-to-do residential districts would lessen the chain's tax burden, lower its overall expenses, permit them to shed tens

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This federal anti-trust suit filed in 1942 and ruled on in 1946, was a successful attack on A&P's business practices by small, independent grocers located in eastern Illinois. Thousands of pieces of evidence were collected for the case, including transcripts from executive meetings, making the remaining records the best archival source on the grocery business during the 1930s. Hereafter, government exhibits will be denoted as GX, defense exhibits will be denoted as DX, and all records from the trial were be referred to as Danville trial (Danville, Ill was the site of the proceedings and where the records are still kept.)

[223] Trial Transcript, Danville Trial, 438-439.

[224] Adelman, *A&P,* 65-69.

[225] "A&P Help Yourself Store," *WSJ*, September 9, 1936.

[226] "A&P Opens New Stores," *WSJ*, December 17, 1937.

of thousands of employees, and hopefully put A&P back in its place as the industry's leader.

Hartford began planning the transition in November 1937. He was worried about A&P's competitors, which no longer included simply lesser corporations but also a host of powerful and innovative independent and chain supermarkets operating in Los Angeles, Chicago, and elsewhere. Unless the company moved faster to shed low-volume stores and build big ones, he argued to fellow executives, it would face increasing difficulties holding on to customers. As Hartford put the matter in an October 1936 board meeting: "we have not progressed nor adopted our business in pace with the changing times." In addition to sharply falling profits, fully half of A&P's stores were relics of the 1910s that did not even sell meat, downright dowdy in comparison to Los Angeles' retail palaces. Moreover, Great Atlantic's thousands of combination stores might have been innovative for the 1910s but were obsolete in comparison to Los Angeles-style supermarkets. As Hartford put it during the same meeting, "perhaps only 20 or so of our stores [all experimental supermarkets] are truly competitive."[227] Shortly afterward, it was announced A&P would shutter thousands of underperforming stores and transition the remainder to supermarkets.

Opening supermarkets posed a troublesome management problem for the A&P. The company decided to emulate the moves made by the Safeway Corporation, a California-based chain that had begun a similar transition in 1934 after losing much of their business to Ralphs and other independents based in Los Angeles. Safeway's management decided to position themselves as the value option, opening "economy

[227] GX 188, Box 31, Danville Trial; Transcript, pg, 818, Danville Trial.

supermarkets," with many of the features of more luxurious stores featuring a uniform and less-expensive look they believed would appeal to working-class shoppers enamored with Big Bear.[228] A&P followed this strategy, building low-standing rectangular supermarkets with off-street parking, air-conditioning, and Los Angeles-style interiors. Hartford believed this style would not only save on architectural costs but also could easily include special regional features like Georgian columns in the South or Spanish façades in California. It was more challenging to find sites for new stores and plan which older properties would close since it was difficult to introduce the lower-price, mass-retail format without destroying the profitability of the company's established stores nearby. Hartford preferred price discrimination: when Great Atlantic opened a new supermarket, the company used it as a price-wrecker, advertising low prices at the new store while maintaining prices for the same items in conventional stores. This approach would destroy these stores' sales and make it easier to justify their closing to employees. Of course, this policy of self-induced obsolescence left employees and managers bewildered. Tasked with opening sixty-four supermarkets in the first four months of 1938, the Eastern Division of New York, which included New York City and about half of New York state, struggled to turn longtime employees out on the street, opening only twenty new stores while closing 103.[229] The head of the New England Division, J.J. Byrnes, wrote to one of his branch managers in 1938, "do you realize that we have gone all this quarter with only two supermarkets being opened in the Division? I shall have to go in again and try to have an alibi, which I dislike very much doing, as to the reasons

[228] "Safeway Changes Course," *CSA-A*, April 1935, 71.
[229] Dx 511, Box 66, Danville Trial.

why we have not procured more supermarket locations."[230] Forced to throw away decades of established business procedures and abandon prime locations, A&P managers shared little of Hartford's enthusiasm for the supermarket.

It required a massive personal effort from John Hartford to overcome this considerable institutional inertia. He seems to have realized early on that the supermarket would be as much a suburban institution as his earlier economy stores had been embedded in urban life. He also understood that his company had a limited time to snatch up good locations along major roadways and in residential areas. In a December 1937 meeting, Hartford "emphasiz[ed] the importance of doing this quickly," because he was "completely convinced that the rapid carrying out of the program outlined…is the only salvation of the business."[231] In 1937 and 1938 combined, Hartford opened 750 new supermarkets while closing of just over 4,000 stores, about one-third of the company's entire system. The new stores all had meat, produce, and dairy departments while featuring about double the amount of shelf space in Great Atlantic's combination markets. Hartford even purchased tens of thousands of metal shopping carts, an invention of the Tennessee-based Piggly Wiggly chain, to help customers navigate wide aisles; he believed that if customers could easily carry an enormous number of items through the store, they would spend more money.

A&P's rapid transition into a supermarket chain turned what had been a wild marketing concept into a familiar feature of everyday life. At the beginning of 1937, there were perhaps 350 supermarkets in the entire country. About 250 were in Southern California. By 1940, Hartford's transition plan had trimmed A&P from a chain of 15,000

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[230] *Ibid*.

[231] Transcript, pg, 849, Danville Trial.

stores to only 6,500, of which just under half were supermarkets. Kroger had opened about 2,000 supermarkets during the same period. A collection of other chains had opened upwards of 3,000 more across the across the country.[232] Supermarkets offered economies of scale in almost every area of store operations. Customer services, restocking costs, store rentals, and administrative costs all were much lower relative to sales than those of older combinations and corner groceries and even smaller supermarkets. Bigger was, in fact, better. In the largest supermarkets, operating costs per dollar of revenue were barely half those of traditional A&P or Kroger economy groceries. For the biggest chains, supermarket retailing them allowed to recapture consumers lost to rouge retailers like Cullen and the Big Bear, particularly in the marketing of nationally branded manufactured goods. The sole drawback was in advertising expense, since big stores had to draw customers from larger geographical areas; chains would spend more than ever before on circulars, newspaper ads, and radio commercials.

Los Angles was the inception point for this national –and eventually international– transformation in food distribution. During the 1910s, 1920s, and especially the 1930s, the city experienced unprecedented development and population growth rendering it a modern metropolis. Simultaneously, the abundance of open land fostered low-density growth challenging existing retailing strategies. The swelling Anglo-American population had consumer desires and lifestyles that exceeded the services older, urban chain groceries could offer, forcing businessmen to innovative to survive. The supermarket was born out of this competitive drive. Building stores that first catered to car owners' most basic needs, retailers soon discovered that more ornate, clean

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[232] "Supermarkets: 50 Years of Progress," *Progressive Grocer* 59 (May 1980), 26.

buildings with even more expansive selection would attract even more shoppers. In this, they tapped into an emotion that would drive retailing for decades to come, that consumer society wanted freedom and convenience in purchasing basic goods. As this style of shopping was exported, the emotional and physical landscape of urban spaces was changed forever.

The supermarket revolution origin's though, did not so much come from the desire to serve customers better to but escape corporate taxes and defeat independent retailers political activism. By 1937, more than half the states had imposed anti-chain taxes in addition to the constraints of the Patman-Robinson bill. Shuttering thousands of stores shrank chains' tax bills from coast to coast, shriveling the budgets of regulatory agencies in the process. These advantages all came with the added benefit of making the more-established big corporations more competitive against independents and small chains. After assaulting the A&P and other national chain operations politically, independents found themselves struggling to compete economically with new supermarkets that offered so many new, enticing services. A move made for the most conventional of business reasons, preserving market share and retaining customers, won the 1930s' grocery wars for established and powerful retailers.[233]

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[233] Adelman, *A&P*, 54.

Chapter 3: Supermarket USA: The Industry Conquers Postwar America

After World War Two, the supermarket evolved from a fringe marketing concept to one of modern America's most important public institutions. Grocers opened new stores across the country that brought affordable and convenient food to cities, suburbs, and small towns. Before the end of the 1950s, supermarkets would travel abroad, selling American consumer culture to Europeans and East Asians. In the immediate postwar years, stretching from 1945 to the mid-1960s, the United States managed to create massive farm surpluses that translated into affordable foods. Supermarket retailers' challenge –and central project during this period– was making these deals accessible and exciting to shoppers. This came at a cost, however: the supermarket became a battleground for the different cultural, racial, and geopolitical struggles during the 1950s and 1960s.

Despite these tensions, retailers focused on their stores' ability to give customers access to new technologies and consumer items. Grocers built at least 25,000 supermarkets nationwide between 1945 and 1960, an average of 32 per week.[234] Magazines, television programs, and government officials portrayed supermarkets as the very foundation of "modern living," that is, a mode of existence embodying the era's technological and cultural advances– advertisers liked to suggest that the Saturn V rocket and the supermarket were indistinguishable from each other. Accordingly, the supermarket became an institution of mass-consumption, whose ubiquity and reach spurred the movement of populations from cities to suburbs. Policy makers and entrepreneurs chose this moment to export the supermarket abroad, taking mass-retailing

[234] "A Decade of Growth," *Supermarket Merchandising*, January 1960, 14.

first to Latin America and then to Europe and Asia, with supermarkets playing a part in the Cold War struggle by physically representing American capitalism. As much the supermarket brought opportunity, mass-food retailing could not escape the unique racial tensions of the postwar era, as retailers participated in the political and cultural segregation of the era, depriving minority communities, inner-cities, and rural areas of the food options available to suburbanites. This chapter explains how the supermarket was the manifestation of America's immense agricultural, geopolitical, and commercial capabilities during the postwar era, but also how mass-food retailing reflected racial prejudice and geo-social classism.[235] This duality, the supermarket as a tool of consumer choice and technological advancement, as well as a weapon against those same forces, made food a political and economic issue defining how consumers used the supermarket.

The twenty years following the Second World War was a transformative era in American food culture. Regional culinary traditions survived alongside the new, mass-consumerist model of dining that emerged at the end of the 1930s. For instance, processed foods like baloney and wonder bread had an important role in the diet, particularly for the young and affluent, though many had the knowledge to make

[235] Many historians have examined elements of this era, though none have done so in a comprehensive, integrated way. These scholars include Lizbeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); Meg Jacobs, *Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and War-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Retail Revolution: How Wal-Mart Created a Brave New World of Business* (New York: Picador Press, 2009; Andrew Hurley, *Diners, Bowling Alleys, and Trailer Parks: Chasing the American Dream in Postwar Consumer Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000);); Susanne Friedberg, *French Beans and Food Scares: Culture and Commerce in an Anxious Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); William Leach, *Land of Desire : Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (1994). A particular classic is Daniel Boorstein's *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

sausages or bread at home. There was a tension between those older culinary skills and the emerging culture of "gracious living," emphasized by any number of media sources and institutional authorities aimed at the female population.[236] Women's colleges–which saw enrollment highs during the 1940s along with all forms of higher education–aggressively cultivated this idea, teaching students how to sit on a sofa or sip from teacups.[237] Incomes had been rising steadily since 1945 because jobs opened for millions of veterans in new industries like electronics, defense, and aeronautics in addition to older professions like steel and home construction.[238] Young couples flush with cash and ideas about modern living strived to conform to the consumerist ideals saturating media, which singled out mass-food retailers as important partners to the postwar dream. Magazines bulged with pictures and advice explaining how readers could find sophistication in the supermarket, showing one couple after another using processed foods like canned onions to make "authentic French onion soup" or "ham de luxe, cooked in champagne."[239] The implication was clear. Grocers enabled young couples to live the gracious life since they conveniently supplied desired items.

Beyond advertising, new technologies and the after-effects of wartime food policies determined America's new food culture and attitudes toward supermarkets. For instance, meat rationing changed tastes. Beef and pork still figured highly in the diet, but

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236 Laura Shapiro, *Something From the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1960s America* (New York: Viking Books, 2004), 26.
237 Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (New York: Twanye Publishers, 1982)*,* 8.
238 Southern California, the home of the supermarket, especially benefitted from the explosion of new jobs in burgeoning and established industries Kevin Starr, *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950-1963* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 36-41. See also Shapiro, *Something from the Oven*, 27.
239 "Mr. and Mrs. In the Kitchen," *Living*, April-May 1949, 78; Janet W. Misch, "Thanksgiving Without Turkey," *Living*, November 1950, 107.

the relative availability of chicken, which only saw tight price regulation during the war and not outright rationing, meant more people were eating poultry than ever before.[240] Gone too was Depression-era hog-and-hominy cooking. During the early 1950s, prewar salads came back into fashion, part of a more general movement towards fresh vegetables promoted by women's magazines.[241] Advances in packing and processing, originally intended for the battlefield, had real world benefits as well. Frozen food, milk in waxed paper cartons, and electric appliances had all become commonplace in addition to concentrated and evaporated foods.[242] However, not everyone liked the new products. In 1954, *The Boston Globe's* women's page editor received a torrent of angry mail responding to their publication of a speech by a food industry consultant trumpeting all the advances made possible by the transmission of defense research into consumer life. "How long is it since you spent a day without the benefit of science?" the expert asked. "Our kitchen culture may be founded on tradition, but each year science has made its gifts to the homemaker." Offended readers bombarded the paper with letters asking "just how much more do packaged foods cost?" "How much time do we homemakers save when using packaged foods?" One reader even posed a question that had been reverberating in nutritional circles since the beginning of the century: "how does packaged food assure a healthier family?"[243] While few readers questioned the utility and cleanliness of processed items, many wondered how those items would change daily life, especially for women tasked with daily meal preparation. Early twentieth century women's education had stressed cooking, particularly among those in the middle class,

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[240] Stephen H. Strausburg, *From Hills and Hollers: Rise of the Poultry Industry in Arkansas* (Fayetteville: Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station, 1995), 45-48
[241] A.I.M.S. Street, "The Gastronomical Year," *Saturday Evening Review,* February 13, 1954, 35.
[242] Shapiro, *Something from the Oven*, 6.
[243] *Boston Globe*, January 1, 1954.

and many were uncertain if items like instant mashed potatoes or TV dinners could replace timeworn classics that served as edible representations of one's ability to maintain a home.

Few home cooks knew how to use modern products. During the war, manufacturers had kept stores stocked by providing many of the same foods that accompanied soldiers. Consumers needed to continue purchasing those goods after the peace to validate manufacturers' enormous capital investment, sparking an effort to convince individual consumers to spend hard-earned dollars on new industrial foods, especially since so many of items companies sent into the marketplace after the war were little more than field rations repackaged for mass-consumption. For instance, by 1947 there were as many as forty different varieties of canned meat developed for military purposes available, like Spam, along with items like dehydrated potatoes and powdered orange juice.[244] Other foods entering civilian life were canned pre-cooked hamburgers powders made from dried sherry or port that could be reconstituted with water or grain alcohol.[245] Few people actually wanted all of these new items, though – there was at best microscopic demand for powdered Madeira wine. A writer in *Quick Frozen Foods*, a new magazine put out by packaged foods makers, captured the mood when it complained consumers would not buy items like frozen camembert cheese or frozen whale steaks.[246] What was needed, the magazine's editor argued, was a public education program that taught consumers how to use new technological foods.[247] This agenda served two unique outcomes. Firstly, retailers' sales would increase if shoppers bought more of the shelf-

[244] *American Cookery,* February 1946, 8.
[245] Shapiro, *Something From the Oven*, 9.
[246] Williams, "Think Twice!" *Quick Frozen Foods*, February 1954, 108
[247] *Ibid.*

stable products created by wartime research. Secondly, stocking supermarkets with new technologies meant retailers were at the frontline of American consumer culture.

Of all the items coming on to the market, frozen foods offered the most promise. When surveyed, nearly all consumers liked the idea of ready-made frozen items that could be stored indefinitely such as whole meals or pre-cooked vegetables, but few had any ability to store those products. In 1952, for instance, the American population of 155 million owned about 33 million refrigerators, which closely correlates to one inside every individual home in the country. Only about four million people owned home freezers, though, and most of those were on farms, where rural folk used the devices to store surplus meats and vegetables.[248] Most new refrigerators coming on the market, typically purchased by suburbanites, had separate freezing compartments, but these remained small, barely big enough for some ice cubes and a container of frozen peas.[249] In other words, the very people who the industry identified as the likeliest consumers of frozen food, namely working couples and families in the cities and suburbs, had no place to keep frozen food. Moreover, many consumers living in small houses or apartments were convinced they did not have the space for a freestanding freezer while many homeowners were unsure of the extra expense.[250]

Supermarket operators, already working to refine stores to please more affluent postwar shoppers, took up processors' education mission as their own, thinking that items like frozen food fit perfectly with the ethos of mass-food retailing. Beginning in the late-

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[248] For example, a study of homemakers in two upstate New York communities, conducted in 1952, a Cornell PhD student found that 80 percent of the farm households had access to a freezer, either at home or in a nearby community ice house, compared with about ten percent of urbanites. Elizabeth Wiegand, *Comparative Use of Time of Farm and City Full-Time Homemakers and Homemakers in the Labor Force in Relation to Home Management,* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1952), 42.
[249] "Getting the Home Freezer into the Living Room, *Quick Frozen Foods*, March 1953, 1920.
[250] *Ibid*.

1940s, industry mouthpieces began emphasizing that grocers needed to offer consumers something other than low prices. *Super Market Merchandising*, one of several new trade magazines, told operators to transition "from the hard-hitting, bold and black headline type of yesterday that kept the competitor on his toes to the more dignified, quality type of copy now generally employed by the most Progressive Supers [sp] today."[251] Michael Zimmerman, head of the Supermarket Institute, a Washington-based lobbying organization set up by retailers, told grocers to stress "educational and institutional" messages describing the quality of their foods and the ways cooks could transform products like frozen vegetables into elegant meals.[252] These efforts were the first stage of a transition from the supermarket's status as a depression-era urban discounter towards an industry dedicated to serving luxury-minded suburbanites.

To achieve this goal, virtually everyone in the supermarket industry agreed that they needed to change how consumers perceived stores by casting themselves as the place where consumers could access modern technology. Although the supermarket was still a relatively new institution in American life, so many had been built in such a short period of time that stores had become architectural clones of each other. Nor did the major retailers offer many distinctive products – only a few processors and farmers could supply food on industrial-scale in the early 1950s, so almost all supermarkets sold the same items.[253] Writers in the trade magazines pushed operators to create new incentives for shoppers stocking cheap food. While some suggested grocers look to department stores like Gimbel's or Marshall Fields as models, pundits like Zimmerman proposed that

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[251] "Lineage Survey Reveals Supers Gain on Chains in 1939," *SMM*, September 1940, 87.
[252] Michael Zimmerman, "The Changing Times, *SMM,* June 1954, 170.
[253] Adam Mack, "Good Things to Eat in Suburbia": Supermarkets and American Consumer Culture" Unpublished Dissertation, University of South Carolina*,* 2006, 53.

the industry deliver new technologies directly to consumers by building features into stores that maximized their existing appeal while speaking to a culture in thrall of new technology. Freezers, banks of refrigerators, and aisles of shelf-stable packaged foods all figured highly in these plans, which meshed perfectly with major processors' needs.[254]

Industry leaders embraced a vision of the supermarket that cast their stores as cultural and commercial institutions that introduced new technologies into everyday life. Advertising continued to emphasize price –discounting would remain supermarkets' base appeal– but executives stressed the degree to which women could improve their cooking with the help of their stores. An executive with Detroit-based supermarket chain Wrigley (not to be confused with the gum manufacturer), told 1953 Supermarket Institute Convention attendees that "ladies…shop and compare ads for more than price,' since stores also provided lifestyle cues.[255] Around the same time, a writer in *Supermarket Merchandising* told executives their stores could overcome the confusion caused by new technologies. "With the automatic washing machine, automatic dryer, and prepared cake mixes practically doing the work themselves…many women feel guilty."[256] Other writers liked to imagine the supermarket as the conduit for the "kitchen of the future" composing of "freezer space, electronic cook[tops], automatic dishwash[ers]" and other tools that would "emancipat[e] women right out of the kitchen."[257] For instance, an ad campaign launched by the California's Food Giant chain featured a woman wearing futuristic garb pushing a cart loaded with fresh vegetables, Tide laundry detergent, and Reynolds Wrap

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254 Thomas Patrick McMahon, "How to Use the SMI-McCall's Advertising Promotion Service," *SMM*, June 1950, 90-1.
255 "Ad Under Construction –A Skit," *SMM*, June 1953, 91.
256 Virginia Miles, "You've Got to Know What She Wants," *SMM*, May 1955, 185.
257 E.W. Williams, "Frozen Foods A.D.: A Frantasy of the Future," *Quick Frozen Foods*, February 1954, 101.

with spaceships and buildings straight of *The Jetsons* in the background, a mixture of (imagined) new and old technologies.[258] These sorts of emotional appeals – the supermarket can make your life easier *and* help make sense of all these new products!– resonated with the well-to-do women flocking to the suburbs to live the gracious life as well as defining the supermarket as a site of technological consumption.

Retailers complemented their more abstract depictions of the supermarket with appliance giveaways and other promotions. Food retailers had been using special promotions to attract customers since the 1870s when the A&P gave away lithographs depicting various scenes from American history in packages of coffee and tea.[259] They also issued coupons redeemable for items such as glassware or other A&P products, which that helped create a devoted customer base. Many other chain grocers during this era also used trading stamps and coupons. Though the practice faded by the 1910s, the shortage of freezers after World War II opened the door for its revival. As early as 1953, M. M. Zimmerman penned an editorial in the trade press entitled "The Era of the Giveaway," arguing increased competition encouraged supermarket operators to begin using promotions again. Some stores, like the Depression-era Big Bear, staged spectacular events that sometimes included prizes like automobiles, but they saved these for special occasions like the opening of a new store. Most stores opted towards special sales or smaller prizes like appliance giveaways that could help spur sales of new, modern items like frozen food, the basis for a whole new form of customer engagement.[260] By 1954, seventeen percent of all supermarkets offered special

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[258] "Using Advertising to Put Over a New Store," *Food Topics*, January 1964, 12; "The Tea Trade and Certain Monopolies," *American Grocer*, November 12, 1870.
[260] M. M. Zimmerman, "The Era of the Giveaway," *SMM*, August 1953, 146.

promotions on a regular basis, giving away freezers, refrigerators, and televisions to customers.[261]

Developments in advertising strategy matched supermarkets' architectural evolution during the 1950s. By the beginning of the decade, as many as 75 percent of the supermarkets in the United States had been either built or extensively renovated since the end of the war.[262] The average size of individual properties increased significantly in the postwar decade, from roughly nine thousand square feet in 1945 to twenty two thousand square feet by 1957.[263] Retailers used that extra space to stock much more merchandise. When the war ended, typical stores carried about three thousand different items; a decade later that number had climbed to seven thousand.[264] Many of those items were frozen or highly processed, like the TV dinners that began coming onto the market in the mid-1950s. To accommodate so many new items, stores refined the architectural formula first devised in Los Angeles some decades prior. Operators had traditionally placed the most perishable items – vegetables, fruits, meats, and dairy– in refrigerated cases lining the walls of stores while canned and dry goods filled free-standing shelving.[265] With the advent of frozen foods, stores used larger floor space for long aisles of mechanical freezers, especially in properties owned by the Cincinnati-based Kroger. This new

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[261] Curt Kornblau, "The Supermarket Industry Speaks, *SMM*, June 1954, 76-77; Curt Kornblau, "The Supermarket Industry Speaks, *SMM*, May 1955, 72. For more consumer alienation, see chapter six

[262] Jeffrey R. Price, *Super Market Institute: The First Forty Years* (Chicago: Super Market Institute, 1977), 10.

[263] "Not Much More Room to Grow," Business Week, June 4, 1960, 46.

[264] Ibid.; Rom Markin, *The Supermarket: An Analysis of Growth, Development, and Change* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1968), 66.

[265] Longstreth, *The Drive-In, The Supermarket*, 88-91.

addition played on the techno-utopianism of the early Cold War era to create a purely mechanical space holding all the food necessary to feed a family.[266]

Rebranding the supermarket from a working class discounter to a luxury emporium meant building stores that resembled, at least internally, department stores like Macy's or Marshall Field's. Rather than playing on the open, almost barn-like floor plan encouraged by the earliest Los Angeles supers, corporate stores opening in the 1950s strongly embraced segmentation, breaking stores into areas that sold different kinds of merchandise, each emphasizing distinct food items like meat or vegetables. Oregon-based Fred Meyer was a pioneer of this style, offering clothing, appliances, and hardware in addition to a wide-range of foodstuffs. "There are only five ways in which a consumer can possibly be responsive to any selling appeal," *Super Market Merchandising* told readers, "namely through the senses of seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling."[267] As a result, they devoted attention and resources towards building attractive interiors that made shopping less of a utilitarian hunt for bargains –recall the frenzied scrimmages at depression-era Big Bears– and more a form of leisure that strongly appealed to the affluent.[268] After "hit[ting] 'em in the eye" with striking visual display, *Super Market Merchandising* suggested, the best stores offered an "useful, pleasant [interior] design which means that the market represents a place of comfort and pleasure, as well as low prices." A speaker at the SMI's third annual meeting described the strategy clearly when he told listeners "bright lights, gay colors, ornate fixtures, [and] eye-catching displays that serve to make your *store* attractive, will not alone bring you lasting

266 "The Freezer Aisle," *Chain Store Age*, August 1953, 32.
267 Marcus McLean, "Better Lighting for Better Profits," *SMM*, September 1938, 22.
268 William B. Sherrill, "Dallas Super Boosts Volume by Unique Volume Displays," *SMM*, June 1940, 22.

success," if the food itself was not attractive. "Attract and entice the crowds into your store in whatever manner you will," he explained, "but don't forget that – face to face with your merchandise –the customer must have the *Desire to Possess* [sp] a specific food in sufficient strength to propel him toward that merchandise."[269]

Supermarket operators went beyond modernizing store interiors; exteriors also saw extensive upgrades during the 1950s. Before the war, supermarkets fit neatly into two architectural tropes. The first descended from the earliest Los Angeles supers, characterized by bright open spaces, high ceilings, and open floor plans. Externally, dramatic facades created a sense of luxury and theatricality. Consider, for example, how many early California supermarkets used adobe or Mexican motifs to mimic traditional Southwestern marketplaces. The second major form were the urban stores first emerging with New York's Big Bear that reached an apogee around 1941 when A&P was opening as many as two new supermarkets a week.[270] Evolving from disused industrial spaces that initially housed stores into purpose-built buildings, these east coast supermarkets blended elements of the Los Angeles aesthetic with utilitarian features like boxy concrete exteriors that fit neatly into the urban environment.

During the 1950s, these two architectural styles moved closer together thanks to the industry's focus on portraying itself as an avatar for a sort of affluent modernity. Although individual stores varied from site to site, many basic characteristics of branch design in the postwar years were relatively uniform to ensure that refrigeration and other important features could be incorporated into building plans. The explosion in new supermarket construction also occurred at the same time modernism had become a

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[269] Robert A. Latimer, "Rapp Opens New $100,000 Super," *SMM*, September 1940, 14.
[270] "A&P Will Open New Supermarket," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 21, 1941.

guiding force in American corporate architecture. Inspired by New Deal-era urban and resettlement experiments like the Greenbelts, architects looked to a new aesthetic that emphasized clean lines, utilitarian layouts, and easy access to roadways that fit neatly with the modernist thought overtaking urban design at the same moment.[271] The new school of thought, led by instructors from Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania, designed commercial properties of all kinds that were orientated primarily to the roadway, with visual flourishes that attracted the motorists. Large rooftop signs, like those used to advertise urban commercial buildings served this function, as did the towers designers lifted from earlier Los Angeles stores. The suburban stores, pushed into a modernist mold, used large windows above ground level to break up long expanses of wall surface, which, treated as an abstract sculpture, could attract passing drivers by describing special sales. Muraled wall surfaces also afforded an effective backdrop for large letters, often molded in script proclaiming the store's identity in a manner deemed suitable for well-to-do ladies; major department stores like Macys did the same. As unprecedented as these branches must have seemed to those living on the metropolitan periphery, they conveyed a social message akin to the one made by family living in a detached suburban home.[272] Kroger's postwar branches dotting Midwestern suburbs, for instance, played on these aspirations by painting stores white and requiring every outlet to have an electric sign at least fifty feet tall. No less influential were the enormous stores built in Los Angeles during this period. As Southern California transitioned from an agro-industrial economy to one dominated by defense and entertainment industries, land

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[271] Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal" Postwar Urbanism* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 48-51.
[272] Richard Longstreth, *The American Department Store Transformed, 1920-1960* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 151-152.

previously dominated by orange groves transitioned to suburban housing tracts. As one city planner described it, "retailers taking advantage of the lack of open commercial space elsewhere have expanded properties to new, massive sizes."[273] Los Angeles stores developed an approach to development that merged the existing opulent California style with the more modernist designs. They created low-slung "ranch-style supermarkets" that welcomed consumers with wide parking spaces arranged in front of stores and paint schemes that meshed with nearby suburban tract housing.[274]

As supermarket architecture and offerings advanced, grocers began to merge their services with other kinds of retailers. Although the 1920s-era drive-in markets that created the supermarket offered a wide variety of different services, during the 1930s and 1940s, grocers built their stores as independent structures, partly to provide parking but also to highlight the supermarket's novelty. The trend towards suburbanization opened the door for other retailers to follow the supermarket into the urban periphery, converting department stores, toy stores, and more into car-friendly outlets catering to new families almost wholly dependent on the automobile. To alleviate traffic congestion and parking problems, commercial developers built these stores in the same open spaces where the new middle class lived and drove, seeking to recreate the experience of urban commercial zones in curated, self-contained environments.[275] By grouping together different kinds of stores –clothing, toys, hardware, and the supermarket– developers created a more ambitious form of the drive-in that eventually took on the name, "shopping center." By

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[273] "Preliminary Study of Highland Avenue Shopping Center," June 1954, Box 6, Folder 12, Los Angeles Bureau of Municipal Research, Collection 239, Regional History Collections, University of Southern California Special Collections, Los Angeles, California. Hereafter USC Libraries.
[274] Longstreth, *The American Department Store Transformed, 1920-1960*, 131.
[275] Richard Longstreth, "The Mixed Blessings of Success: The Hecht Company and Department Store Branch Development After World War II,: Occasional Paper No. 14, January 1995, Center for Washington Area Studies, George Washington University.

1957, there were 940 of these commercial metropolises nationwide. By 1960, the number had doubled, and would double again by 1963; by 1976 the United States' 17,520 shopping centers had completely redirected daily commercial activity to the suburbs.[276] This was no subtle redirection of economic activity; the supermarket industry forced other business to follow it to the suburbs to satisfy the needs of middle-class homeowners.

Initially, developers built shopping centers in "strips" mimicking older drive-ins along the new highways linking suburbs to the urban core. In both form and function, these properties were little different from their ancestors, other than the essential inclusion of a supermarket, the primary draw for passing motorists. As one journal described it, "supermarkets guarantee the right sorts of customers will patronize neighboring businesses."[277] By the late 1950s, developers –many of whom invested in non-food department stores– began building more elaborate "regional shopping centers" aiming to satisfy suburbanites' commercial and community needs, which did not exist in planned suburban housing tracts like Levittown, New York.[278] Constructed strategically along major roadways, these retail complexes appealed to people living within half an hour's drive who would come by car, park in the massive parking lots, and proceed on foot through a site offering the same variety of services found in older town squares, providing synthetic centers for suburban residential areas.

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276 Although not every shopping center was built in a strictly suburban area, as many were built inside of cities, these structures by and large brought death to established downtown commercial areas. Wilshire Organization for Community Redevelopment, "Broadway Consumer and Business Survey," January 1985, Folder 35, Box 5, Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project Records, USC. For construction rates, see Cohen, *Consumer's Republic*, 258.

277 "What the Supermarket Can Do for You!" *SMM*, June 1952, 27.

278 Cohen, *Consumers' Republic*, 258.

The need to provide convenient place for suburban families to buy goods inspired shopping center construction. Macy's chairman Jack Isidor Straus, who oversaw the development of the massive Garden State Plaza in New Jersey, explained in 1965, "our economy keeps growing because our ability to consume is endless. The consumer goes on spending regardless of how many possessions he has. The luxuries of today are the necessities of tomorrow."[279] Situating new stores proximate to the most dynamic sources of demand in postwar America – high-consuming suburbanites– was simply shrewd economic sense. Straus was not alone in his faith in the shopping center. The *New York Times Magazine* explained growing interest in commercial communities, explaining "there is a widely held belief that American households are ready to do more buying than they presently do…They would do it more readily but for the difficulty of getting to the 'downtowns' where the full range of goods is available."[280] The supermarket, as both a physical building and an abstract institution, served as the beacon to bring people to these new, modern examples of the town center as the point of contact consumers would use most.

Although the new shopping centers evoked prewar drive-in architecture, their ties to ideas of modernity and the gracious life made them an important development in the history of mass-retailing. Victor Gruen, easily the most prominent shopping center designer, believed commercial complexes offered decentralized suburban populations "crystallization points for suburbia's community life."[281] Urban pushcart markets and street commerce enabled a sort of neighborly engagement that could not be replicated

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[279] "The Economy: The Great Shopping Spree," *Time*, January 8, 1965, 58.
[280] C.B. Palmer, "The Shopping Center Goes to the Shopper," *NYT Magazine*, Nov. 29, 1953, 52.
[281] Victor Gruen, "Introverted Architecture,' *Progressive Architecture* 38 (1957), 204.

with suburban tract housing. Gruen argued that shopping centers could easily simulate those meeting spaces by placing stores along open-air pedestrian walkways landscaped and equipped with benches and children's playgrounds, turning them into "today's village green," with fountains serving as a central "gathering place for young and old alike."[282] Gruen built over fifty shopping centers across the United States by 1975, while inspiring designers of hundreds of others who all saw retail parks as a modern day equivalent of older commercial districts and the gateway to new technologies and modes of living.

For these reasons, the supermarket was an essential inclusion. Shopping center operators relied on grocery stores to attract consumers since many purchased food on a daily basis. The Country Club Plaza in San Bernardino, California, for example, serviced the growing suburbs east of Los Angeles when it opened in 1954. The developer lined up a number of general retailers who sold items like clothes or toys, but not a supermarket, which city planners and investors suggested would bring in enough foot traffic to keep other stores busy. These stores generated far less income per square foot than a supermarket, which made an average $221 per square compared to the $42 made by an apparel store. Given that a supermarket was nearly eight times larger than these other outlets, nothing could compete in terms of constant revenue generation. And grocers generated a better return on rent, paying as little as 1.4% of sales as opposed to 6% for a normal, high-volume retail store. Nor was the city of San Bernadino certain the complex would generate sufficient tax revenue to cover the cost of road construction through sales taxes without the sort of constant business generated by food retail. Supermarkets, on

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[282] Quoted in Fienberg, *What Makes Shopping Centers Tick,* p. 101.

average, added about $200,000 in value to a commercial lot and paid roughly $20,000 annually in taxes to the local municipality (at least in states like California and New York); an apparel store only added $15,000 in value and typically paid less than $3,000 in taxes in similar regions.[283] One research service even suggested that a supermarket could bring in as much as $1.3 million in extra property taxes from the surrounding area in a radius of 3 square miles that would help build up supporting infrastructure because food stores would attract other, popular retailers. This is why as many as two-thirds of new shopping centers built between 1950 and 1960 included a mass-food retailer. Of the remainder, roughly half closed within five years.[284]

Individual supermarkets and shopping centers like Country Club Plaza relied on government-funded infrastructure projects to attract desirable class-conscious consumers. The Eisenhower administration passed the federal highway act in 1956 with the intention of creating a continental network of high-quality roads, but the nation had been on a road-building binge since the end of World War II, particularly on the municipal level. As commercial infrastructure migrated from city centers to secondary neighborhoods during the 1930s, poor roads were a minor issue, but the rapid construction of suburban shopping centers highlighted local roads' poor quality. Many of the state and government-run routes linking cities to market towns were often two-lane relics of the nineteenth century that had been paved during the 1920s to accommodate heavy automobile traffic. Southern California led the way in municipal road construction during

[283] Survey - Memorandum to John R. Quinn, County Assessor in Re: Shopping Center Assessments for 1957 by the Los Angeles Bureau of Municipal Research 1957, Folder, 2, Box 2, Los Angeles Bureau of Municipal Research, Collection 239, Regional History Collections, University of Southern California Special Collections, Los Angeles, California.
[284] "San Diego County– Mission Valley Zoning MayCo Retail Site, 1958 Folder 11, Box 2, Los Angeles Bureau of Municipal Research, Collection 239, Regional History Collections, USC Special Collections.

the postwar period to accommodate the ever-growing number of cars, first building over 6,000 miles of "freeways" linking the state's major cities together and then building another 19,000 miles of two and four-lane roads tying peripheral communities to the urban core.[285] These merged with the federal interstate system –which helped fund many of the smaller projects– to create a webway enabling someone to drive on a paved roadway from Los Angeles to New York in only four days—the first time in world history someone could conceivably travel such a distance in so short a time on a completely graded and paved roadway. All this road construction accelerated the movement of commercial activity out of the urban core. Cities like Washington, D.C and Detroit had lost 10.3 and 13.3 percent of the commercial businesses to the periphery. Los Angeles had lost 18.1 percent. As one report put it, "this ribbon zoning of highways and major streets for business use has proven impractical and, therefore, unprofitable. In downtown Los Angeles, the main department stores are widely separated. Parking space is not always available, traffic police are strict, and there are so many obstacles to carefree shopping that average sales per store are falling below the average of stores in the new shopping centers outside."[286] With many city roads at 200 percent capacity, authorities rushed to build conduits to peripheral supermarkets that kept people moving away from the most clogged areas.[287] These roads and highways also linked suburban consumers to stores in such a way that they could completely eliminate urban shopping

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[285] Survey - Memorandum to John R. Quinn, County Assessor in Re: Shopping Center Assessments for 1957 by the Los Angeles Bureau of Municipal Research 1957, Folder, 2, Box 2, Los Angeles Bureau of Municipal Research, Collection 239, Regional History Collections, USC Special Collections.
[286] Survey - Preliminary Study Highland Avenue Shopping Center - San Bernardino, California by the Los Angeles Bureau of Municipal Research, 1957, USC Special Collections.
[287] Survey- Market Area of Lincoln Shopping Center by the Los Angeles Bureau of Municipal Research, August 21, 1958, USC Special Collections.

from their daily lives, providing an experiential foundation to the idea of the gracious life directly by suburban housing tracts.

While new roadways helped funnel well-to-do suburbanites into supermarkets, they also provided the industry with the ability to further marginalize communities considered unprofitable – the people who did not fit the suburban identity retailers pursued. Local and federal road construction stressed easy access to peripheral commercial and residential zones, but did little to improve the movement of automobiles within cities themselves. Firstly, planners reckoned cities now had adequate space left over from the initial period of urban rebuilding that occurred in the early twentieth century, which opened space for cars to maneuver in the most basic sense. Any further renewal to make room for more spacious roads would happen gradually as buildings were torn down and replaced.[288] Operators further believed the supermarket model was a poor architectural fit for cramped downtown commercial spaces precisely because of the needs for massive amounts of expensive negative space in the form of parking lots. But these structural issues complemented a larger belief that cities housed few of the high-income shoppers sought by retailers; in practice, this meant that supermarket retailers had no plans to offer their services to the minorities and working poor left behind by flight of middle class whites to the suburbs.[289]

Supermarket placement decisions particularly affected African-American neighborhoods. Even before the Second World War, retailers funneled substandard goods

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[288] Wilbur E. McCann, "Economic Base Study Las Vegas, Nevada," July 1958, Los Angeles Bureau of Municipal Research, Folder 12, Box 24.

[289] "White Flight" and its consequences have been portrayed by many scholars. See Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

into low-income inner-city neighborhoods, especially those populated by Blacks. These items were often overpriced.[290] If postwar minority neighborhoods were lucky enough to have supermarkets operated by national and regional chains –often left over from the immediate pre-war rush to open supermarkets in parts of cities with cheap real estate and working class consumers– these outlets were stocked with the same inferior products sold at inflated prices since buying agents trying to offload products rotting in corporate warehouses to consumers deemed unimportant.[291] A 1964 investigation of a Washington D.C.-based supermarket chain found that the store only stocked items like "wilted" lettuce, "bruised" apples, "shriveled" green peppers, and meat "brown around the edges in stores located in run-down sections of the city, whether white or negro." Customers from poorer neighborhoods suspected (but had no definitive proof) that the browned meat in their local supermarkets were "leftover, shipped from chic stores which must stock meat to meet the demands of well-heeled customers." The condition of perishable items was much lower grade and higher price than those found in the supermarket outposts in the nearby affluent Georgetown neighborhood.[292] Other inner-city supermarkets also failed to offer the least expensive brands of packaged foods, big sellers in the suburbs, and many items even lacked any indication of how much they cost. Customers would have to ask supermarket staff for prices on items only to discover that, as with produce and meat, packaged items might be more far more expensive than advertised. Some supermarket chains managed to get away with inventory and pricing inconsistencies because their competition in low-income areas typically consisted of bodegas or green

[290] Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise*, 212; Chin Jou, *Supersizing Urban America,* 44.
[291] "Modern Warehousing" *SMM*, June 1959.
[292] James F. Ridgeway, "Segregated Food at the Supermarket," *New Republic*, December 5, 1964, 6-7.

grocers with poor selection and even higher prices, rendering locals "captive," especially if they did not have cars to search out stores offering better deals.

Even if shoppers had the wherewithal to travel to better supplied stores, racism stopped many from making the trip to the suburbs. Jet magazine reported in 1953 that Black shoppers who went to new suburban supermarkets faced "considerable racial bias." Although retailers did not overtly instruct store employees to discriminate, African-American shoppers reported that employees followed them throughout the store and refused to carry their bags – a courtesy often extended to white, female patrons. Latinos and poor whites reported similar experiences. As one activist put it, supermarket operators, "penalized [consumers] financially for not only being black but poor."[293]

Rural shoppers faced some of the same hurdles. The countryside was never going to receive the same attention from major retailers as more developed regions since planners building a new supermarket in the 1950s looked for a core population of at least 34,000 people within a ten mile radius.[294] While many market towns in the countryside received supermarkets, in general these were independents run by local grocers serving as the main purveyor for their area even if that meant charging higher prices than the national chains. This created thousands of small supers, usually about 7,000 to 10,000 square feet in size, stocking about 2,000 items, and counting on patronage from a fifty-mile radius. These businesses could be profitable, government agents studying the rural economy concluded, but they could never achieve the economies of scale big suburban

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[293] "Woman Power Means Us!" Folder "Young Negroes' Co-operative League," Box 1, Ella Baker Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, NY. Hereafter Ella Baker Papers.

[294] "Survey Facts & Issues of Municipal Incorporation - Belleflower" by the Los Angeles Bureau of Municipal Research 1956

chains used to slash prices, meaning that rural consumers never matched suburbanites' access to cheap, high-quality food. It was not that food was unavailable, but rather that a brutal combination of higher prices and mitigated choice limited the nutritional options of these communities. In the coming years, these spaces would be called "food deserts," but during the 1950s, urban minorities and rural folk were simply not the target audiences of mass-consumerism. In the abstract, it was never grocers intended to deny services to consumers, but the pursuit of the consumers pursuing the same culture of technological modernity and possessing high incomes meant that supermarket retailers capture of food distribution in the 1950s benefitted only particular slices of the American population.

The government tried to help low-income consumers through developmental programs meant to stimulate small businesses, but racism remained a considerable barrier to equal access. The Eisenhower administration founded the Small Business Administration in 1953 to "aid, counsel, and assist, and protect," small businesses, largely by providing loans or loan guarantees to new and existing companies. In general, the SBA would support loan-seekers by promising the government would cover the costs of the loan in the case of default. The program was the grandchild of earlier New Deal-era programs meant to stop the expansion of national chains, channeled through the White House's belief that business and government could mutually encourage commercial development. The SBA did not specifically target urban minorities, but the agency's priority was to stimulate the creation of new businesses in economically depressed areas, in particular the cities losing capital and citizens to the suburbs. In 1966, for instance, the agency created the Equal Opportunity Loan Program (EOL) specifically to create businesses in majority African-American areas. Independent supermarkets run by minorities were ideal candidates for this program since many big banks viewed such stores as significant credit risks.[295] Nor were urban food distributors, many reorienting themselves towards providing produce to restaurants as opposed to the grocery chains, likely to offer credit to small grocery stores. Instead, Black grocers had to pay for their items when they arrived with cash, limiting their ability to create the same massive meat and vegetable displays characteristic of the suburban supermarket.[296] Government capital could mitigate the effects of racism by simply providing the liquidity to open and operate.

For these reasons, there was considerable push to use government money to open African-American-run grocery stores. For instance, Baltimore-based, black-owned Jet Food Corporation operated supermarkets serving inner-city blacks across the industrial Northeast during the mid-1960s. As company president Herman T. Smith put it, the company had three main objectives: to ensure that profits remained in black communities, to create jobs in the same areas, and to provide inner-city African-Americans with cheap, high-quality, affordable groceries – an timely articulation supermarket's original purpose. Jet was only possible because the SBA provided a loan for the first store, though – agency's chief Robert C. Moot even helped cut the ribbon for the grand opening of Jet's Baltimore supermarket in 1967.[297]

Jet was one of the many minority-owned supermarkets that opened in the 1960s with the goal of improving access. Seattle-based Uwajimaya catered to the area's large Japanese community, just as the Houston's El Ahorra chain delivered items for Latinos. Uwajimaya received some government assistance; many other similar stores did, as

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[295] Hodge, "For Big Franchisers, Money to Go; Is the Dispensing Corporate Welfare?"; Chin Jou, *Supersizing Urban America* (Chicago, Ill: Chicago University Press, 2017), 65.
[296] Charles R. Perry, *The Negro in the Department Store Industry* (Philadelphia, PA: Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, 1971), 93.
[297] Jou, *Supersizing Urban American*, 22;

well.[298] However, these stores were exceptions, leveraging local buying power to keep prices low and quality high, small enterprises that hardly impacted the larger national scene. By choice, America's national supermarket chains became a tool of Jim Crow.[299]

The supermarkets' cultural meaning – as a tool of both suburbanization and social ordering– stayed with stores when American entrepreneurs brought mass-food retailing to other countries during the 1950s. The first supermarkets outside the United States opened in Canada during the late 1930s, often as extensions of existing American chains. A&P, for instance, opened a Toronto store in 1938. After World War II, stores opened in Mexico and Panama, though the latter served American personnel stationed along the Panama Canal. Indeed, by 1950, there were about 300 supermarkets in Canada, many operated by Safeway or A&P. Mexico City had nine stores, selling American-made branded items like tide detergent and Oscar Meyer baloney alongside local items to the well-to-do.[300] These early international stores, particularly those in Canada, were extensions of the United States' supermarket building boom, relying on easy access to American manufactured goods and some of the same affluent shoppers domestic retailers pursued.

The onset of the Cold War meant that supermarket's status as a class-defining institution turned stores into vital tools in the fight against global communism. Beginning in the mid-1950s, American aid organizations like the Rockefeller Foundation began looking to develop stores in Europe, where the resurgence of incomes following the

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[298] Memorandum, August 10, 1947, Folder "Village Supermarket, Seattle, Washington," Box 14, Hugh B. Mitchell Papers, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.
[299] Robert J. Yancy, *Federal Government Policy and Black Business Enterprise*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 40-45.
[300] Wayne G. Broehl Jr., *United States Business Performance Abroad: The International Basic Economy Corporation* (Washington, DC.: National Planning Association, 1969.

Second World War created large populations of shoppers fitting supermarkets' ideal demographics. Rockefeller, in particular, appropriated the supermarket as a cold war weapon when the philanthropy funded the International Basic Economy Corporation (IBEC) in 1947 to promote "social objectives and capitalistic incentives" while also "raising living standards and earning substantial profits."[301] In practice, this meant that the IBEC exported American capital, technology, managerial expertise to Europe. Investing in housing construction and general infrastructure were one part of this equation, but so was the creation modern food distribution and marketing networks. Rockefeller agents believed, much in the same way as domestic supermarket executives, that giving consumers access to modern food technologies could enhance standards of living and create enthusiasm for the new, industrial diet. The added factor in these international efforts, foundation experts thought, was that the supermarket could viscerally display the superiority of the American system more broadly, too.[302] The IBEC first experimented food marketing when it opened a supermarket in Maracaido, Venezuela in 1949, followed by others in Peru and Puerto Rico.[303] That initial effort was part of Rockefeller's larger anti-poverty project based in rural parts of Latin American and the American south based that introduced technology and medical knowledge; supermarkets that opened regionally served as outlets for items grown on model farms more than advertisements for American capitalism.

[301] *Christian Science Monitor,* August 3, 1961.
[302] Boogaarrt to W.D. Bradford, December 13, 1958, Reel 9, International Basic Economy Corporation, Rockefeller Archives Center, Sleepy Hollow, N. Y (Hereafter Rockefeller Center Archives).
[303] Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through Twentieth Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 378. For more on third world anti-poverty efforts, see Tore Olsson, Agrarian Crossings: Reformers and the Remaking of the US and Mexican Countryside (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

By the early 1950s, the IBEC conceived of its newer European project as an extension of American foreign policy. Since the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union had been bombarding Western Europeans with propaganda promoting the communist system. With every distribution system fundamentally disrupted by the war, claims that centralized planning could bring a return to prewar comfort, especially in the cities, had tremendous appeal. During the early Eisenhower years, public and private strategists in the United States understood that the supermarket, a physical representation of American abundance, was a new and powerful weapon against this propaganda. For example, when speaking to the Grocery Manufacturers of America in 1962, former United States ambassador to the United Nations Henry Cabot Lodge said that if he had only one example of the superiority and efficiency of the American system, it would be "a supermarket, filled as it is with the products of your industry."[304] Lodge had been certain of this since he escorted Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev through a San Francisco supermarket in 1960. "I remember taking chairman Khrushchev and his party into a supermarket in San Francisco, and the expression on their faces was something to behold."[305] An abundance of cheap food provided America with a powerful but peaceful weapon to use in demonstrating the superiority of not just American agriculture and food production, but the quality of American capitalist institutions as well.

For these reasons, Europe became a battleground in the gastronomic Cold War and the Rockefeller Foundation was on the front line. The IBEC tapped Kansas-based supermarket operator Richard Boogaart with the job of showing how its "hard to be a Communist with a full belly," an argument first made by Richard Nixon in 1959 in his

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[304] Quoted in Bryan L. McDonald, *Food Power: The Rise and Fall of the Postwar American Food System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 51.
[305] Harvey Levinstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 105.

"kitchen debate" with Nikita Khrushchev. The owner of a successful supermarket supply company, Boogaart was already a skilled hand at retail diplomacy after opening a store in Mexico City with the help of the IBEC in 1948.[306] Later, he worked with the organization in Venezuela where he met Nelson Rockefeller, who recruited him for the European project.[307] The Rockefellers were hardly the first Americans to enter Europe's retail sector.[308] Michael Zimmerman, head of the American Supermarket Institute, began pushing for just such a move after the Second World War when the U.S. government sent him on a research mission. The six-week trip, which began on November 18, 1947, took Zimmerman around Europe in search of "high spots of self-service activity." His conclusion, inspired by meeting with executives from prominent European general retail chains like Britain's Tesco, was that the old world was ready to participate in an international network of food commerce orientated around America's agro-industrial economy.[309]

The First International Congress of Food Distribution was the outcome of these meetings, setting the stage for the IBEC's entry into Europe. Begun on June 20, 1950 in Paris, the conference brought together 1,000 delegates from twenty-two nations to consider the challenges of mass-marketing food when so few continental farmers grew in those quantities. The event's main sponsor was Paridoc, a French self-service chain modeled after A&P chain founded in 1930 whose president Henry Toulouse had been a proponent for supermarket retailing after shopping in an American store in 1938. By the

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306 R. W. Boogaart to W. B. Dixon Stroud, Milan, February 18, 1957, reel 7, IBEC, Rockefeller Center Archives.

307 R. W. Boogaart, quoted in Moffett, "American Supermarkets in Milan," 3.

308 "Supermarket Growth Abroad Helps U.S. Food Marketers," *Printers' Ink*, June 17,, 1958, 60-62.

309 M. M. Zimmerman, "Self-Service Spreads in Europe," *Supermarket Merchandising* 15 (March 1950); 35.

time the convention met, Paridoc controlled over 7,000 stores including 70 self-service proto-supermarkets selling packaged foods along with some fresh produce purchased in bulk from regional distributors. Paridoc's stores were so American in style and experience that they even received Marshall Plan monies to develop its warehousing and transportation facilities.[310]

Toulouse's speech to the gathered businessmen tapped into Cold War tensions as well as the culture of gracious living. Vowing to "work along with the community of Western nations…to resist disintegrating," Toulouse argued American-style retail institutions, especially the supermarket, guaranteed "the welfare of the people, who know that their security and happiness depends on," easily available consumer items. Wanting to find a symbol for their undertaking, Toulouse invoked the Atlantic Alliance only to discard its political leaders, like Truman, in favor of the consumer. "She," Toulouse emphasized, was "a young woman…of no particular nationality" who, guided by her strong personality, knows how to pick and choose in view of her family's needs and budget," and possessed "the spirit and soul to dream about the future." A none-too subtle invocation of Marianne, the avatar of French democracy, this abstracted shopper could find "*libre-service"* at the supermarket, a freedom Toulouse explicitly contrasted with Soviet and Nazi market controls.[311]

Invoking the freedom of the supermarket was not only consistent with American 1950s advertising tropes, but also appealed to continental consumers who worked around their limited shopping options. Europeans described the supermarket concept as a more democratic –and modern– version of self-service. Italian entrepreneur Quirlino

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310 De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 382; *Premier Congrés International de la Distribution des Produits Alimentaries, Proceedings,* Paris, June 20-23, 1950 (Paris, 1950).
311 Quoted in De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 382.

Pedrazzoli, who opened many supermarkets himself, described the experience of mass-food retailing thusly:

> The buyer once inside the supermarket and having all bags and packages at the checkout stand is provided with a cart mounted with a basket, which he circulates around the store. As he goes, he comes across numerous shelves, but with no clerks, on which the most varied merchandise is displayed, all appropriately packaged…above all foodstuffs, each with a special sticker showing its price
>
> The customer is free to pick whatever he wants and place it in the cart. Once the rounds are finished he brings the cart to a checker, who, after adding up the stickers, calculates the total bill Thereafter the cart with the goods goes to the outstation while the customer goes to the cashier to pay.[312]

Despite the fanfare, Rockefeller agents were not certain how the supermarket would translate abroad. When Boogaart visited Europe on behalf of the IBEC in 1956, some believed that it was risky to open a mass-retail business on the continent because Europeans had very settled shopping habits, particularly in the ways they visited public markets. Political considerations were important, too. Communism was making headway in Western Europe, and many wondered if socialist politicians would turn supermarkets into a battleground between different systems of political economy, subject to demonstrations or even destruction in the event of a popular uprising. Nelson Rockefeller welcomed the idea, saying "lower food prices represent the same thing as an increase in wages," for the struggling working class, dampening the appeal of other ideologies. This development would in turn "pressure suppliers into lowering prices" and "force…manufacturers to re-organize more efficiently, modernize, etc." The net result would be a victory for capitalist forces.[313]

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[312] Quoted in Scarpellini, *Comprare all' Americana*, 83. Translated by Author.
[313] Moffett, "American Supermarkets in Milan," 3.

The challenge, according to Boogaart, was determining which European cities were best suited to American supermarkets. Beginning in France, he discovered "high taxes, low incomes, short store hours, limited availability of merchandise, strong cartels and guilds, government controls and licensing restrictions, few automobiles, shortage of building sites and materials and many others," were all obstacles to successful mass-retailing. England, for instance, was "a country of chain stores": self-service stores like Lever (owned by Lipton), Sainsbury, Tesco, as well as working-class cooperatives, offered services similar to American supers, albeit with far fewer food options. Moreover, the British economy was struggling tremendously after the war, and it was difficult to import equipment up to U.S. standards. West Germany was promising due to its food processing potential thanks to the Marshall Plan, but General Foods, Kellogg's, Kraft and other had already entered the country, investing in domestic retailers who could sell their processed foods.[314] France presented even more problems. There was a lack of new housing development and strict regulations on importing equipment and processed foods. Additionally, any new entrant would have to complete with the green grocer-turned populist leader Pierre Poujade, who had marched on Paris in January 1956 at the head of 250,000 small merchants to protest chain store competition, particularly from Paridoc. In a national election held later that spring, he netted 2.3 million votes running as a populist reform against De Gaulle, creating a culture of skepticism towards chain retailing.[315]

[314] Richard W. Boogaart, "General Summary of Supermarket Possibilities in Western Europe," [July 1956], Box 37, IBEC Archives.
[315] Stanley Hoffmann, *Le Movement Poujade,* (Paris: A. Colin, 1956); De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 389.

Nonetheless, the IBEC pressed supermarkets on Europeans. At the Third International Congress of Food Distribution, held in Rome in 1956, a massive "American Way Supermarket" pavilion generated considerable attention. Assembled by the National Cash Register Company, which had made millions selling equipment to the industry in the United States, the display was a fully-functional 8,000 square-foot supermarket selling American-made processed foods imported specifically for the event. During the event, the USDA and the State Department set up a promotional exhibit in conjunction with the National Association of Food Chains that also sold 2,500 American-made food items. When the exposition closed after thirty days, 450,000 had visited, including prominent members of the Italian government and celebrities. The next year, the same companies built a temporary supermarket in Zagreb, Yugoslavia that introduced mass-food retailing to a communist country. As one state department official put it, the stores so successfully implanted the seeds of American consumer culture that "propaganda slogans were totally redundant," in many of the Cold War's ideological battlegrounds.[316]

Richard Boogaart opened his first Rockefeller store in the midst of these rapid developments. He ultimately selected Milan, Italy as the site for the first IBEC property since the city was undergoing a wave of industrialization that created good middle-class jobs and the city had avoided significant damage during the Second World War. And while the city did not create any motor-reliant suburbs, many families had left the city center for more peripheral housing proximate to their places of employment. Boogaart

[316] Moffett, "American Supermarkets in Milan," 7.

targeted these Milanese with a wave of advertisements describing how Supermarkets Italani, the new chain's name, would bring American technology and consumer items into their daily lives. Thanks to the knowledge gained over decades in the United States, Boogaart was able to organize a network of regional food distribution that meshed locally-produced fresh and processed items with American-made goods. He also imported canned fruits and vegetables from South Africa (from factories originally built to feed British soldiers stationed in far-flung parts of the Empire), processed cheese from Denmark, and frozen fish from England, forging one of the first truly global grocery networks. In an era when the original supermarkets in the United States still drew on the national larder, European operators pioneered a supply system that would eventually send Peruvian asparagus to Massachusetts and Italian Avocados to Tokyo. Other staples such as pasta or bread had to be manufactured in industrial-scale quantities, difficult to do in Europe, so the IBEC used Marshall Plan money to build production facilities in addition to contracting farmers to grow the new Vantress chickens designed by American companies (see chapter four). To supply equipment, in particular the all-important open refrigerators used to store fresh produce and meat, the IBEC first imported technology and then built factories to make those devices, hoping that trade deals inked with former colonies would open otherwise closed export markets could send Italian or French-made kitchen appliances to Africa or Asia.[317]

IBEC's industrial bakery, also located in Milan, was the most impressive undertaking, responsible for bringing American-style industrial baking to the continent. The average Italian family (and most others in Western Europe) ate

[317] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 392.

twelve kilograms of bread per week, compared to two of rice and potatoes, and three of pasta. With Boogaart projecting as many as 20,000 unique visitors weekly, he needed more bread than any single Milanese bakery could supply. American industrial bakeries had developed methods during the 1930s that could easily fit these needs, but there were no similarly scaled operations in Western Europe outside of American military bases.[318] Rather than import equipment, Boogaart hit on the novel solution of buying equipment directly from Western European military bases and hiring away the same officers overseeing their use. Almost overnight, the IBEC built an operation capable of producing millions of loaves weekly.[319]

Low prices and processing infrastructure brought European consumers into American-made supermarkets. The IBEC store, with its vertical construction, close attention to local and seasonally dietary habits, and orientation towards urban shoppers on foot was ideal for cities like Milan, Rome, or Marseilles. Indeed, the Milan store sparked a rush of supermarket construction on the Italian peninsula –there were 538 in operation by 1971– but Italians only spent two percent of their total food expenditures in supermarkets, in contrast to seventy percent in the United States. Other Europeans countries had similar uses for supermarket retailing. Only 14 percent of French consumers patronized supermarkets, for instance, using the new service to primarily buy processed foods. These figures added weight to the doubts that Boogaart and other American operators had about the supermarket's viability outside of the United

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[318] 100 pounds of flour to make 143 pounds of bread, mostly by injecting excess moisture, whereas Italians obtained 115 from 100.
[319] R. W. Boogaart to W.D. Bradford, July 17, 1957, reel 7, IBEC.

States. Residents in the zones lying just around the Milanese stores, for instance, only spent 6-10 percent of their food budgets there. "Knowing that saving money is the most important thing a low-income family could want to do, I can only say that we have a problem that isn't operation or prices; it is a resistance to our stores for their size…[and] the manner in we sell." Victoria De Grazia, in her history of American-inspired consumerism in twentieth-century Europe, sheds light on this dynamic, writing "there was a general political [and public] consensus that small commerce performed indispensable functions, the principle one being to absorb unemployment."[320] West Germany alone had over 2,000 supers in 1971; France had 1,833. Mexico had just under 800 built and operated by American, French, and local corporations. Japan had 1,900 to call its own, one supermarket for every 23,000 inhabitants, far from the 1 store-to-every 10,000 ratio achieved in the United States by 1970, but nonetheless a substantial commitment to mass-food retailing.[321]

The globalization of the supermarket by the mid-1960s made accessible food retailing a cornerstone of the postwar liberal order. Consumers across the capitalist bloc expressed their desire for grocers capable of selling a wide variety of fresh items that were also easy to prepare, the sorts of personal calculations decisively favoring the supermarket diet. Globally, consumers had a choice between two kinds of retailing, one being an older model relying on personal connections and localized food culture. The other, physically represented by the supermarket, had a monopoly on the big brands and ideas of modern living. Little

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[320] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 403.
[321] *Ibid*.; R. W. Boogaart to W.D. Bradford, July 12 1958, reel 7, IBEC.

stores could plan on patronage from loyal local customers, but those stores had little realistic defense save stocking the sorts of products offered by massive-retailers and lowering prices on some goods while offering services far different from the big chains. One IBEC observer in Florence observed that Italians were becoming "a precious and contended creature; every store is trying to secure his or her loyalty, offering discounts and proffering smiles." This was true in the United States, too, where giveaways, promotions, and even store placement were determining factors in the war to win and keep shoppers.[322]

The IBEC's supers, like many other similar properties across Europe and elsewhere, represented the changes in American consumer culture catalyzed by the supermarket since the end of the Second World War. Like in the United States, the supermarket became a bridge to modern culture. Italian singer Renato Carasone captured the mood with his 1958 hit "Tu vou fa l'Americano" – "You want to act like an American," that equated things like baseball and rock and roll with mass-retailing.[323] Carasone was not alone. Across the continent, retailers found ways to surmount the high cost of land and provisions by relying on the same calculus spurring supermarket construction in the United States– a focus on offering modern, technological, amenities in addition to low prices For instance, Inno supermarket of Paris was a well-stocked store that could have competed in any American city, finding space for food in addition to housewares and general consumer items housed in a facility that the French trade-magazine *Libre-Service-*

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[322] Roland Hood to W.R. Bradford, June 25, 1961, reel 8, IBEC.
[323] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 398.

Actualité described as "nouveau-moderne."[324] At home and abroad, the supermarket set the pace of innovation while also establishing a global network of food distribution and consumption.

As time passed and more supermarkets were built globally, supermarkets became the central institution of material life. In an earlier era, chain stores had introduced self-service. The supermarket added to that innovation freezer units filled with frozen fish and peas, and shelves with canned pineapple, sweet corn, and salmon. They also filled their shelves with standard brands, like the products of General Foods, Tyson, Iowa Beef Processors, and Heinz. Operators also put unique services on display: attentive service, the element of local color in addition to advertising and habit that made it familiar in addition to parking lots that made stores accessible to motorists and pedestrians alike. By the end of the 1960s, these features made the supermarket so ubiquitous and obvious a fixture that consumers no longer remembered a time before ubiquitous mass-food retailers.

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[324] *Libre-Service-Actualité*, April 2, 1962, 11.

Chapter Four: Stocking Shelves: Creating Food for the Supermarket in Postwar America

Once Supermarkets became a common part of American life, retailers faced the challenge of stocking their stores with affordable food.[325] Retailers promised consumers "a democracy of goods," but the idiosyncrasies of agricultural production limited retailers' abilities to make good on their claims. Finding millions of potatoes, onions, and chickens was a real challenge in a marketplace where farmers primarily grew those kinds of foods as a side-businesses to more established trades in grains and cotton, limiting availability and frustrating buyers for the growing number of retail chains. After the Second World War, however, things began to change. Food processors and farmers, supported by retailers, scientists, and government regulators began growing food specially designed for mass-marketing.

Few events symbolized the new era more than a ceremony held on June 9th, 1951. Ten thousand people sitting in the University of Arkansas' Razorback Stadium watched U.S. Vice President Alben Barkley declare that California poultry breeder Charles Vantress was the winner of the Chicken of Tomorrow contest, a national competition funded by several universities, the USDA, and the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (A&P). Begun in 1946, the contest asked breeders to create a chicken suited to the supermarket. Vantress' bird, a cross between a red Cornish rooster and a Chinese hen, had unusually plump breasts, grew to maturity in only sixteen weeks – far faster than other breeds used for commercial meat production– and was considerably mild in flavor.

[325] By 1941, there were about 5,000 "supermarkets" in the United States. The name generally described a grocery store specializing in a range of fresh and processed products. Most were operated by either A&P or Korger. For more, see Chapter 2.

This was a chicken that could easily feed a family of four, and satisfy even the pickiest of eaters.[326]

What started as an attempt to make farm production more predictable would ultimately lead to the biological transformation of many different foodstuffs. The Vantress chicken and its descendents, which account for nearly 99.7 percent of the global poultry population in 2014, was perhaps the most emblematic of these new foods, but many others underwent similar alterations.[327] University of Florida scientists created tomatoes that with a perfectly round shape, for example, while the seed company Monsanto designed strains of corn that cattle could easily digest, a boon to ranchers.[328] Similar to the ways retailers built supermarkets that sold food in unprecedented quantities, farmers delivered agricultural products in volumes never before imagined. However, the genes of existing foods had to be redesigned to ensure that they could be grown easily for very little cost. The Chicken of Tomorrow contest was the new era's opening salvo.

This chapter focuses on the poultry industry, which is the ideal example to show how corporations rebuilt food products' unique biologies. The same story could be told

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[326] Both the University of Delaware and the University of Arkansas funded the contest. "The National Chicken-of-Tomorrow Contest Program" Folder: "Periodicals Featuring "Chicken-Of-Tomorrow," Box 1, Chicken of Tomorrow Contest Papers, University of Arkansas Special Collections, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR. Hereafter Arkansas Special Collections.

[327] For obvious reasons, it is very difficult to get an exact count on the global poultry population. As of 2014, roughly 12 billion chicks are hatched across the world annually. Roughly half are born in the United States. American firms processed an average of 528 million birds per month, which is roughly a quarter of the birds slaughtered over the same period globally. Virtually all of these birds belong to the Vantress line and take about six weeks to reach maturity, though some producers wait for nine or as long as twelve weeks. It should be stated that these numbers are highly variable due to a variety of seasonal and demand factors. When the number of birds used for egg production is considered, at any given time there are roughly 6.5 billion chickens on the planet – nearly one for every human. United States Department of Agriculture, "Livestock and Poultry: World Markets and Trade," October 2015, http://apps.fas.usda.gov/psdonline/circulars/livestock_poultry.pdf

[328] Barry Estabrook, *Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit* (New York: Andrew McMeel Publishing, 2012), 23;

with tomatoes, lettuce, almonds, or even cattle, though no agricultural product matched the intensity of chicken's biological and genetic transformation in the name of mass-food retailing. Below, I also show how agribusinesses, a broad term describing large-scale agricultural production directed by corporations (as opposed to being managed independent family farmers), was promoted as a positive turn in rural life, despite the implications for public health, the environment, and animal welfare.[329] Moreover, agribusiness as a phenomenon can be seen as a strategy to avoid some of the riskiest aspects of the new agriculture economy, especially investments in scientific research, processing, and transportation. These were all tasks perfected by the poultry business first, and with brutal efficiency. Indeed, to understand some of most important economic and social transformations of the American countryside during the twentieth century, one need not look further than the industrial henhouses dotting the heartland.

In 2012, Chicken finally overtook beef as America's most popular meat, supplanting beef and pork. Americans were consuming nearly 100 pounds of chicken

[329] Agribusiness as both an idea and a reality has been a significant part of public and academic discourse for much of the last twenty years. Scholars and pundits alike have roughly hewed to the position that agribusiness arrived in the wake of the New Deal as a response to particular policies of the Roosevelt Administration and the Second World War. A limited list includes Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1986), xi-xvi; Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields: Southern Agriculture 1865-1980* (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1984), 180-207; Monica Richmond Gisolfi, "From Crop Lien to Contract Farming: The Roots of Agribusiness in the American South, 1929-1939," *Agricultural History* 80, No. 2 (Spring 2002), 167-189; Kathy J. Cook, "Expertise, Book Farming, and Government Agriculture: The Origins of Agricultural Seed Certification in the United States," *Agricultural History* 76, No. 3 (Summer, 2002), 524-545;); David Goodman, Bernado Sorj, and John Wilkinson, *Farm Farming to Biotechnology: A Theory of Agro-Industrial Development* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987). Alan Olmstead and Paul Rhode, "An Overview of California Agricultural Mechanization, 1870-1930," *Agricultural History* 62, No. 3 (Fall 1988), 86-112; Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). Arguably the most important public commentator on these issues has been Michael Pollen, whose *Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), is a central text of the contemporary natural foods movement.

annually, up from a paltry twenty pounds per capita in 1950. During that period, chicken had become the literal and proverbial centerpiece of the American table thanks to its extraordinary versatility.[330] Beyond classic dishes like roast chicken or chicken potpie, food processors turned chickens into thousands of different convenience products like the chicken nugget. Corporations like Kentucky Fried Chicken had convinced consumers that a bucket of chicken was an easy solution to a busy weekday dinner just as every supermarket chain in America offered bags of marinated chicken breasts ready for cooking alongside rows of precooked rotisserie birds sitting in plastic clamshells. Indeed, the entire prepared foods industry depends on chicken. Thanks to intensive bioengineering, chicken is less expensive per pound than beef or pork and easily rendered into items that consumers love, like McDonald's famous nuggets. To be sure, many home cooks have healthy and novel uses for chicken, but most of the time, Americans encounter the bird in products that have undergone intensive processing.

Chicken's emergence as a lynchpin of twentieth century American food culture was the result of careful scientific research and advertising that relied on the supermarket to introduce it as an everyday protein to shoppers that easily sat beside the more expensive staples, pork and beef. But once poultrymen, working in partnership with a matrix of other interested parties, converted chicken from a luxury food eaten only on special occasions to something so common that its flavor is cultural synonym for food with no discernable flavor of its own – if something tastes like nothing, it "tastes like chicken."[331] But before supermarkets were selling bags of frozen chicken fingers, both

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[330] "Poultry Production," U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, http://www.epa.gov/oecaagct/ag101/printpoultry.html; Andrew Lawler, *Why Did the Chicken Cross the World?: The Epic Saga of the Bird that Powers Civilization* (New York: Atria Books, 2014), 208.
[331] Processors' labor practices, discussed in depth in chapter 5, are as an important part of the story.

consumers and farmers had to believe that chicken could meet their needs –much in the way consumers discovered the supermarket as a solution to the problems they faced buying food– a process beginning in the early 1920s when a Delaware housewife started selling chickens to butchers in nearby Philadelphia.

Cecilia Steele was an unlikely character to unleash a revolution in agricultural production, but she benefitted from the right geography and timing. She lived in Oceanview, Delaware along with her husband, a sailor in the coastguard. Like many rural women supplementing meager farm incomes, Steele kept a small flock of chickens and sold their eggs. After a hatchery sent her 500 birds by mistake in 1923, she resolved to sell them for meat.[332] Located on the Delmarva Peninsula, a stretch of land separating Chesapeake Bay from the Atlantic Ocean containing Delaware as well as parts of Virginia and Maryland, Steele had easy access to the New York, Philadelphia, and Washington markets where large Jewish populations wanted chickens for both daily consumption and as components to certain religious rituals.[333] Like many women scraping by in small farming communities, Steele knew demand existed but had none of the financial resources to experiment in an unproven business; the hatchery's mistake gave her a chance.[334] Steele eventually sold her birds for a huge profit, 62 cents a pound

[332] Perhaps as many as half the rural women across the United States maintained small flocks like Steele's. During the early 1920s, women started to raise bigger flocks for commercial purposes, particularly in areas hard-hit by falling crop prices. Church cooperatives sprang up across the South to market eggs and dressed chickens to urban areas. Others used the moment as an opportunity to achieve economic autonomy. The wife of a textile manufacturer in western North Carolina owned a large hatchery that could handle hundred thousand eggs. Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 85.

[333] Hugh Johnson, "The Broiler Industry in Delaware," University of Delaware Experimental Station Bulletin no. 250 (October 1944), 46-47.

[334] Gordon Sawyer, *The Agribusiness Poultry Industry: A History of Its Development* (New York: Exposition Press, 1971), 37.

compared to the usual 35 cents received for old stewing hens.[335] Quickly she ordered a thousand chicks and began a new life raising poultry.[336]

Steele's success encouraged other Delmarva farmers to also raise chickens for meat. At the time, many Americans raised chickens, but most did so just to sell eggs. Men busy planting cash-crops or herding livestock left poultry rearing to mothers, wives, and daughters who fed birds leftovers and kitchen scraps, making for a no-cost sidebusiness that fit neatly with popular ideas about women's role in the home. But this reputation meant serious farmers gave no thought to raising chickens in the same way they focused on cotton, wheat, or corn. 90 percent of North Carolina farms might have had chickens, for example, but the average flock was only 22 birds, enough for household consumption and a small egg business but little else. Numbers were similar in Delmarva.[337] When Steele first started growing birds in 1923, there were perhaps fifty thousand birds on the Peninsula; within a decade that number had shot up to more than seven million living on nearly five hundred different farms, representing as much as one-tenth of all the chickens in the United States.[338] Although men were involved in raising these birds, women still drove the expansion of Delmarva broiler production, the market name that evolved for the ready-to-cook birds sold direct to urban consumers. Flocks remained small, often only a few hundred birds, but the peninsula was quickly becoming an agricultural powerhouse since there were few barriers to entering the poultry business and high profits. Although data is scarce on just why so many farmers on the peninsula

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[335] Lawler, *Why did the Chicken Cross the World*, 206.

[336] Roger Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 108.

[337] Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work*, 87.

[338] Johnson, "The Broiler Industry in Delaware," 48; "1952 Goals for Production," Folder: Poultry," Box 46, Charles F. Brannan Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO. Hereafter Truman Library.

began raising birds, it is certain that many looked to poultry as a source of income that easily replaced crops like tobacco that sometimes struggled in the area's soggy climate.

Delmarva's farmers lacked coordination or even rudimentary business knowledge. Many started working with chickens by accident. Shelby Delaware's Homer Pepper bought a Model T in 1923 to haul ice cream, but he switched to chickens after a farmer hired him to tote eight coops to Philadelphia. After a year of transporting chickens, he turned his single car into a two-truck operation, each capable of carrying 60 coops.[339] During this period most Delmarva chickens were "liveshipped" to New York or Philadelphia auctions, where brokers bought them in lots before distribution to local butchers and chain stores. Though most new entrants raised chickens on their properties, many other young men followed Pepper's example, since hauling birds was easy; the biggest challenge was simply keeping birds alive in transit.[340] The same was true of raising the birds themselves, which, when combined with the profits fetched in cities, made the poultry business positively glamorous compared to a life of rural drudgery raising wheat or tobacco.

By the mid-1930s, Delmarva's growers outgrew their patchwork operations. They were bringing so many chickens to northeastern cities –nearly 30 million by 1936– that many butchers refused to take bulk deliveries of birds they would have to kill themselves and possibly sell at a loss.[341] To soothe relations, Delmarva farmers opened rural processing plants that would inexpensively kill and package birds for sale. At first, these were simple affairs, little more than icehouses where birds would be killed in the kosher

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339 Sawyer, *Agribusiness Poultry Industry,* 44-45.
340 William H. Williams, *Delmarva Chicken Industry: 75 Years of Progress* (Georgetown, DE: Delmarva Poultry Industry Press, 1998), 8.
341 Donald D. Stull and Michael J. Broadway, *Slaughterhouse Blues: The Meat and Poultry Industry in North America* (New York: Cengage Press, 2004), 44.

style (an important concession to the urban Jewish market), plucked, cleaned, and finally wrapped in cellophane.[342] This was an important evolutionary step for the industry. These early processing facilities might have been simple, but they were the first step in the consolidation of poultry rearing and processing in the hands of companies willing to invest in infrastructure capable of producing and then butchering chickens quickly and cheaply for the retail market. Moreover, once farmers started processing birds far from their end consumers, they found a ready market for their birds in the supermarkets just then opening in Northeastern cities. Retailers were looking for products that required little on-site preparations, keeping labor costs down, and found a potential hit with dressed chicken.

Delmarva chicken farmers were not the only agricultural producers taking control of processing during this period to better supply eastern supermarkets. During the 1910s and 1920s, iceberg lettuce growers in California had grown rich shipping greens to the east coast on refrigerated rail cars. By the 1930s, iceberg waned in popularity because prices spiked during the Depression and consumers were getting tired of lettuces that were often rotting by the time they got them home. Growers solved the problem in much the same way Delmarva chicken farmers had, by consolidating as much the packing and processing onto themselves. At first, growers built giant icehouses where workers would package lettuce in cellophane wrappers designed to protect vegetables from rot-inducing water. Along the way, workers had to shovel ice onto the vegetables at designated stops. By the early 1940s, this translated into massive evaporators that instantly cooled lettuces for the long journey to stores. Other new inventions, like machines capable of condensing

[342] Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table*, 108. Cellophane was a new invention just then gaining traction among food processors who saw the new product as yet another way to make their products appeal to the middle-class homemakers seeking assurances that meat slaughtered far away was fresh and hygienic.

carbon dioxide into "dry ice" kept iceberg safe all the way to the East Coast, ensuring retailers had little more to do than display items as they arrived.[343]

Technological advances in processing coincided with important changes in the way the public saw many foodstuffs, particularly chicken. During the 1920s, middle class whites began to attach a special importance to poultry as both a sign of personal affluence and a more healthy dietary option. Herbert Hoover's famous 1928 promise that he would put "a chicken in every pot," was one of many manifestations of this attitude, as was the increasing number of recipes published in women's magazines highlighting chicken as a wonderfood that would lead to slimmer waistlines.[344] Chickens were not an unknown item, of course, but few outside the Jewish community ate poultry regularly. Most Americans ate about tens pounds a year. Chickens were thought of as a farmhouse food, something to be thrown in a stewpot after a bird had become too old to lay eggs, and not a dish capable of satisfying like a beef steak. Only the wealthy or those raising birds themselves could afford younger chickens suited to roasting or frying (a similar story can be told about lettuces before California growers starting long-shipping iceberg).[345] But as incomes rose during the 1920s, particularly among populations who saw chicken as luxury, so too did demand. This happened to overlap with a new, albeit short-lived, attention to healthy eating that triumphed chicken as an alternative to fatty cuts of pork or beef.[346] Together, these forces created a legitimate interest in eating more chicken that

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[343] Susanne Friedberg, *Fresh: A Perishable History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 180-184.
[344] *Ibid*., 87-91.
[345] W.T. McAllister, "Mr. Poultryman: Marketing Is Your Business," University of Delaware Extension Service Bulletin no. 56 (August 1951).
[346] For more, see chapter one

encouraged Delmarva producers (as well as those elsewhere) to expand operations as quickly as possible.[347]

Other foods saw similar shifts in public opinion. Tomatoes were no longer simply for making relishes or ketchups. Lettuces were essential parts of a respectable diet. Perhaps most significant was the way traditional pillars of the American diet, namely preserved pork and grains like corn grits, not only fell out of favor but came to be seen as the mark of someone poor and hopelessly out-of-touch with current fashions. Although these shifts had been in motion for some time, the spread of supermarket retailing had brought the California-style of eating, based almost exclusively on fresh meats, fruits, and vegetables to major population centers, ensured consumers could easily acquire these items.[348]

If supermarkets and changing tastes put chicken on American tables, the Second World War made the trend an enduring part of the national food culture. Unlike strictly rationed items like eggs, pork, or beef, poultry meat only saw price regulation, ensuring that it was almost always available to civilian consumers. Chicken become so popular that shortages were commonplace, even though the federal government set high prices to encourage farmers to produce more. Complaints that many of the chickens were scrawny creatures barely fit for cooking were also frequent, though that did little to keep birds off of people's tables.[349] To better control production, the War Food Administration seized all the broiler chickens and processing facilities on Delmarva in 1943, in addition to

347 Improbably, consumer desire for poultry defied depression-era penny-pinching.
348 Davison, "Super City."
349 Lawler, *How did the Chicken Cross the World*, 207; Sawyer, *The Agribusiness Poultry Industry*, 77.

many of the larger hatcheries across the country.[350] Soon government-bred "meat-type" chickens filled stomachs in private homes and military camps across the country.[351] Federal breeding programs were so successful that by the time the war ended Americans were eating nearly three times as much chicken as they had at the start. Barely twenty years after Steele raised her first broilers, chickens had become a major industrial enterprise as well as a matter of national security.

Thanks to generous government subsidies, the Second World War also helped spread industrial poultry production across the United States. New industrial-sized farms with the capacity to bring tens of thousands of birds to market annually had become commonplace, especially in Southern states like Georgia that had large military bases.[352] The most important of these production centers was the Ozarks, a region encompassing parts of Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Illinois, and Kansas. Much like Delmarva, the region was an economic backwater before the war. The farmland was notoriously poor and few people ever escaped crushing poverty. Indeed, the area reflected preindustrial, preurban, and preimmigrant America to such a degree that celebrated New Deal-era muralist Thomas Hart Benton, famous for capturing scenes of country life, called the Ozarks "America's Yesterday."[353] The Great Depression only succeeded in making life there more difficult. The collapse of the farm economy during the 1920s devastated corn markets along with profitable regional businesses like apples and pigs so badly that by a

[350] Solomon I. Omo-Osagie, *Commercial Poultry Production on Maryland's Lower Eastern Shore: The Role of African Americans, 1930s to 1990s* (Latham, MD: University Press of America), 49.
[351] African-American cooks in these camps can be credited with introducing many soldiers to dishes like fried chicken.
[352] Stephen H. Strausburg, *From Hills and Hollers: Rise of the Poultry Industry in Arkansas* (Fayetteville: Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station, 1995), 45-48.
[353] Thomas Hart Benton, "American's Yesterday," *Travel*, July 1934.

decade later the USDA's Rural Rehabilitation Commission determined the Ozarks was the part of the United States where someone was most likely to die of starvation.[354]

Poultry offered a critical lifeline for local businessmen. One of the earliest projects under the Works Progress Administration was the construction of a highway linking Kansas City to the Gulf coast, cutting through some of the Ozarks' poorest towns. Almost overnight, the grueling overnight drive between the major railheads in Kansas City and the hills of Northwest Arkansas became an easy four-hour jaunt, opening up new economic opportunities for farmers able to supply items in demand in major population centers like Chicago or New York.[355] Almost immediately, Arkansans began building chicken houses inspired by those in Delmarva.

Trucking companies took control of the poultry business in the Ozarks. The most important was the one owned by John Tyson, a truck-driver from Springdale Arkansas who began shipping birds to Kansas City in the mid-1930s.[356] Unlike other nearby truckers who treated chickens as a sideshow to the more established trade in fruits and vegetables, Tyson saw poultry as a money-maker, even taking special pains to ensure birds stayed healthy during long-distance travel.[357] Profits were high enough that by 1940 Tyson operated a small fleet of trucks, nearly twenty in number, which moved chickens all across the Midwest and South. Other men in the area followed his example, putting

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[354] "Decline of Apple Industry Gave Birth to Poultry Business," *Arkansas Gazette*, August 13, 1949, Folder Poultry- General NWA History," Shiloh Museum; Harry L. Hopkins, Memorandum, November 5, 1934, folder 1, box 63, Rural Rehabilitation General Files, "Old General Subject" Series, March 1933-Jan. 1935, Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Central Files, 1933-1936, Records of the Work Projects Administration, RG 63, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md. (Hereafter NARA-II)

[355] Stephen F. Strausberg, *From Hills and Hollers,* 21-27.

[356] Don Tyson interview by Franklin Everts, June 1987, unpublished oral history collection, Shiloh Museum of the Ozarks, Springdale, Arkansas, Volume 1, p. 58 (hereafter Shiloh Collection).

[357] Tyson was probably the first poultryman to installed automatic feeders on his truck to keep the birds feed and watered. He also built metal coops that would not fly off the vehicle on tight turns, and even installed heaters to keep birds comfortable in winter.

together small-scale trucking empires based entirely on bringing local chickens to major transportation hubs.[358]

Small companies like Tyson gradually consolidated and organized the chicken business in the Ozarks, an important step towards reconfiguring the young industry around mass-consumption. Arkansas farmers typically entered the poultry business haphazardly, often following the example of a neighbor. Most simply grew as many birds they wanted. If feed grain prices were rising, farmers might raise less chicks, and vice-versa. Haulers looked to get more control over their supply lines by taking over other aspects of poultry rearing than simply bringing birds to market. Here again, John Tyson was the key innovator. In 1943, he bought a farm outside of Springdale with the express purpose of birthing chicks that farmers would grow on their properties, paying landowners what was effectively a salary. In 1951, Tyson would buy an even bigger hatchery, enough to produce 10,000 chicks per week. This not only insulated Tyson from the most expensive parts of the rearing process –it was assumed farmers would absorb the costs of feed and sanitation as part of their blanket fee while Tyson himself owned the birds and, sometimes, the physical henhouses.[359]

Tyson did not invent contract farming, however. Another Ozark-based firm, Arkansas Valley Industries (AVI) pioneered “the integrated poultry market” in the late 1940s.[360] The system devised by AVI president Harold Snyder enabled Arkansas firms to own and control their broiler stock throughout every stage of production by hiring formerly independent farmers to raise company-owned chickens for a fixed price.

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358 Washington Country Poultry Collection, Shiloh Collection.
359 Marvin Schwartz, *Tyson: From to Market* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1991), 4-6.
360 Harold Snyder, Arkansas Agricultural Hall of Fame.

Primarily, Snyder's company sold feed, historically the most expensive ingredient in raising chickens. He figured that controlling who used his feed would ensure a more stable profit steam –a logic similar to Tyson's. Integration also protected small farmers from uncertainty at the expense of their independence since corporations controlled everything from the genetics of the chickens, to their feed, and even the size of animal enclosures. This was done in the name of producing a cheap, consistent product always available to supermarket retailers.

By the time the Second World War ended, the Ozarks easily surpassed Delmarva and other important centers of poultry production, like Northern California. Expansion was driven as much by the contract system and transportation improvements as the fact that government seizures of the Delmarva companies sent a significant amount of business towards Arkansas-based firms who could fill supermarket contracts.[361] All producers, though, ran into the roadblock that chickens were biologically unsuited for commercial meat production. The breasts were scrawny, the legs tough and stringy, and the meat was intensely flavored. Poultry fanciers and professional breeders had spent decades developing stocks of poultry best suited towards egg production, limiting the potential of chicken as a protein source on par with beef or pork. This was a problem retailers had with many other agricultural products at this precise moment. Decades of selective breeding and amateur horticulture had created plants and animals that could be cultivated in any number of environments, but little thought had been paid to consistency, marketability, or even durability. Tomatoes, oranges, and onions could easily be crushed in transit. Lettuces needed surgical care to survive cross-country voyages from California

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[361] Strausberg, *From Hills and Hollers*, 45-50.

to the east. Chickens were just one of many of many items poorly suited to mass-marketing.

Under these conditions, a coalition of different parts of the industry launched the Chicken of Tomorrow project. In 1945, Howard Pierce, the research director for the A&P, held a meeting with a group of company managers who all expressed concern that, once beef and pork were no longer rationed, industry investments in the poultry business made during the war years would go to waste. What consumers needed, executives reasoned, was a chicken that was more like a turkey, with meatier thighs and drumsticks and breasts that could be sliced like steaks. Not only would this satisfy consumers looking for more unctuous birds, but it would also complement new styles of retailing. A&P was already dominating the growing trend towards supermarkets, having opened nearly 3,000 since 1937, and saw poultry as another product that could be used chance to further mold shoppers' habits since a single chicken could easily serve as the basis of a family dinner. The scrawny birds bred for egg-laying usually sold in supermarkets during the mid-1940s hardly fit this strategy.

Pierce pulled together an impressive coalition of collaborators that included the federal government, industry trade groups, and major universities. Chief among them was the USDA's cooperative extension service, responsible for developing new farming techniques. Specialists in Arkansas and Delaware were among the biggest supporters of the project, and were instrumental in turning a corporate-driven research project into a national contest involving thousands of breeders and farmers. The contest would only offer a modest cash prize, but the winner would make a fortune on hatchery contracts.[362]

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[362] Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table*, 111.

USDA agents were also critical in attaching a vision to the entire enterprise. As Delaware-based poultry specialist J. Frank Gordy put it, farmers had a "duty to use growing practices that tend to produce better market quality."[363] The contest would settle the questions over just what those practices were, and what sort of birds were best suited to mass-retailing. Other important backers were industry groups like the Arkansas Poultry Improvement Association, the Delaware Poultry Association, and major trade publications.

The contest began in 1946 and would continue until 1950. To monitor participants' progress, organizers held yearly qualifying trials across the United States that culminated in two national finales, in 1948 and 1950. At each stage, contestants delivered fertilized eggs to the competition committee who hatched them under identical conditions, usually state extension facilities. Chicks got the same food, received the same vaccinations, and were kept in identical cages. Finally, judges compared birds to a plastic mold representing the ideal meat-type chicken. They also evaluated "economy of production" and the quality of the chicken passing through an industrialized killing floor.[364] Although breeding at this stage was more haphazard and idiosyncratic than the intensive genetic manipulation that would emerge later –in no small part of because of the limits of scientific knowledge- several important trends in poultry rearing emerged during the early stages of the competition. The first was that no single breed of chicken was ideal for mass-retailing. Instead, breeders created mixes picked for their unique commercial characteristics. Taking a lesson from the beef industry, breeds needing the

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[363] Quoted in W.T. McAllister, "An Appraisal of Marketing Problems in the Delmarva Broiler Area," 1954, Willard McAllister Papers, Hagley Library

[364] "The Chicken of Tomorrow Contest," *American Poultry* 25 (January 1949).

least amount of feed to grow muscle tissue were prioritized, often combined with other varieties that typically had larger muscles. Breeders sought rapid maturity as well.[365]

The emerging science of genetics also played an important role in the contest, as well as the food industry as a whole. While breeders were working, scientists discovered the genetic architecture for sickle cell anemia, a discovery leading to James Watson and Francis Crick to propose the double Helix Structure of DNA in 1953. These two discoveries triggered an explosive growth in the study of molecular genetics. Breeders, already concerned with improving animals over each generation, latched on to the idea that particular genes could be selected or even removed. Simply transferring selected strands of DNA from one animal to another, then, could create a better chicken. While the technology and knowledge to individually sequence DNA would not become available until the late 1960s, breeders did use new scientific data as a guide for better breeder. For example, Arkansas-based poultry scientist Dr. J.N. Thompson tried to identify the unique genes responsible for meatiness or quick maturity in a lab attached to his hatchery. As one publication published in the midst of the Chicken of Tomorrow put it, "we now have new scientific tools available that the 'old-timer' poultryman could not dream of. Most especially, we have the lessons of the new gene science."[366] Many of these lessons came haphazardly or even by surprise since this first generation of geneticists used chicken eggs to conduct experiments, creating a fuller understanding of poultry biology before the scientific community had even developed even a basic roadmap of the human genome. Many geneticists went to poultry firms to get funding for

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[365] Margaret E. Derry, *Art and Science in Breeding: Creating Better Chickens* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 165.
[366] Merton Moore and E.M. Gildow, "Your Future with Poultry" (Fayetteville, AR: Albers Milling Company, 1950), 3.

further research, creating a pipeline where Arkansas breeders applied the lessons of cutting-edge science to their birds, finding new ways overcome chickens' biological limitations. Tyson, for example, gave money to the Berkeley Genetics lab and provided thousands of eggs for research purposes during the 1950s and 1960s. In return, the company learned how to do things like maximize the size of chickens' breasts.[367]

The winner of the 1948 and 1950 competitions was California breeder Charles Vantress. Considered something of a rogue in poultry circles for breeding meat-type chickens as early as 1935, Vantress likely knew more about commercial poultry engineering than anyone else in the United States. His entry, a bird he had begun developing in the late 1930s, was a cross between a Cornish rooster and a New Hampshire red hen that had many of the qualities sought by A&P and other retailers, most especially meaty breasts. By the time Vantress received his $5,000 prize in Fayetteville, many of the larger growers, most especially those in Arkansas, were growing his birds.[368]

Vantress had an equally significant impact on hatchery operations. Most firms worked on an ad hoc basis similar to many poultry farmers. Breeders would offer proprietary bird created by a combination of trial and error and consultation with available scientific guidebooks. Most hatcheries served a general region, or a network of dedicated buyers. Many were small operations, hatching perhaps 10,000 to 20,000 birds annually and selling them in groups of twenty or thirty at a time. The largest was the

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[367] "Breeding for Success," *Arkansas Gazette*, April 13, 1979, The link between "big science" and the poultry industry is best thought of as what Olivier Zunz has described as a "matrix of inquiry" where university scientists and businessmen, in addition to others, crated a dialectic whereby each group got the needed to support to develop their business independently while creating new products and ideas that benefitted the whole. Oliver Zunz, *Why the American Century?* 4-13.
[368] Derry, *Art and Science in Breeding*, 50.

Topeka, Kansas-based Seymour Company, which birthed nearly 100,000 birds annually for the Midwestern market. Indeed, the business was so small that most shipments of birds moved through the U.S. Postal Service. Vantress had a different, more expansive vision for poultry breeding; he planned to turn his meat-type chicken into anchor product for an international network of hatcheries selling a chicken specifically designed for mass-production. Under this model, hatcheries would become franchises, birthing chickens designed in a central laboratory and distributing birds across the United States.[369]

Even before Charles Vantress received his prize, the Chicken of Tomorrow competition set the stage for the entire industry to devote itself to engineering foodstuffs for industrial-scale production. Participants turned over a small portion of their eggs to the contest, leaving tens of thousands more available for sale. Even if these birds were not optimized like the Vantress, they were still considerable improvements over what was typically sold to retailers. As the Arkansas Farmer explained, "The Chicken of Tomorrow Contest has led to a breeding stock with broader breasts, fatter and broader backs, no pin feathers, unblemished skin….[and] thicker drumsticks regardless if a grower or breeder participated in the event."[370] These were chickens supermarkets could easily sell. Even more, the contest enhanced the status a select group of poultrymen who raised the new meat-type chickens and were willing to take risks on new scientific research. Perhaps the biggest risk-taker was John Tyson, who began hatching Vantress chickens at the Tyson Feed and Hatchery in 1951. Tyson was not the first Arkansas poultry processor to run a hatchery specializing in meat-type birds –Harold Snyder's Arkansas Valley Industry's

[369] "Charles Vantress Dies," *Pacific Poultryman* 69 (November 1963).
[370] "Chicken of Tomorrow Changed Poultry's Face," *The Arkansas Farmer*, June 1951, 6.

first did so in 1947– but the Springdale-based company's breeding wing was the largest, putting as many as five million Vantress chickens on the market in 1952.[371]

Tyson became one of the biggest, and most aggressive, poultry companies after the Chicken of Tomorrow Contest, setting the stage for other processors like Cargill, Conagra, and Kraft to scale up their own operations. Indeed, John Tyson and his son, Don, were perhaps the people most responsible for shaping the trajectory of not just the poultry business, but the entire processed foods industry by setting a model on how to expand upon a core range of products while seizing control of supply lines and developing complementary brands. Without this system, the supermarket form of retailing that evolved after World War II would not have been possible. Tyson's business had grown dramatically during the war years, and their acquisition of feed and breeding facilities, in addition to their already considerable fleet of trucks, was the beginning of a new kind of agro-industrial integration that began in farm products very genes and ended on the dinner table. Unlike other forms of business integration, which rely on linking different business strategies, poultry processors took control of the entire chain of production and distribution. For example, Tyson contracted with farmers for feed, prepared the same feed in company-owned mills, and finally fed that grain to birds hatched in their facilities and grown on contract farms. When it came time to harvest and cull the birds, trucks owned by the company would arrive along with men who would quickly empty hen houses and ship the birds back to processing plants owned by Tyson. Finally, market-ready chickens would be shipped out on company-owned trucks to retailers.

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[371] Don Tyson interview by Franklin Everts, June 1987, unpublished oral history collection, Shiloh Collection, p. 60; Ronnie Cameron interview by Franklin Everts, January 1988, unpublished oral history collection, Shiloh Collection, Volume II, p. 145.

Other corporations followed the Tyson model. Kraft Foods, which had pioneered shelf-stable "American Cheese" in the 1920s, began buying diaries in the late 1940s to ensure they had enough milk to make good on swelling orders from A&P, Kroger, and other retailers. Battle Creek, Michigan's Kellogg contracted with Minnesota-based Con-Agra to buy up wheat and cornfields across the midwest to ensure they could get enough to grain to make Corn Flakes and Cheerios. Across the country, corporations who had been experienced in buying their products off the open market worked to integrate their operations with rural suppliers.

Tyson to put its own system together in the immediate period following the war, faster than other postwar integrators like Kraft or Smithfield Pork, which began marketing premade sausages and buying hog farms around the same time. In 1945, Tyson still bought most of its birds from local hatcheries and farmers and understood itself as trucking company specializing in chickens. A decade later, Tyson had expanded that fleet to nearly 300 vehicles, and managed a network of hatcheries and farms in Arkansas raising more than eight million Vantress chickens annually. They also opened a factory to process chickens that could slaughter and package as many as 10,000 birds a day. They did experience some growing pains, though:

> "Knowledge was very limited in those days, how to mix feed, how to breed chickens, how to raise chicken. Diseases would just come thru, wipe us out, in a sense. We would lose 10 or 15% of the flock and we just didn't know exactly what happened, but hoped it wouldn't happen again…we followed Vantress' guidance…And then we got more sophisticated, and the University of Arkansas was a great help to us. And of course, when we got larger we put in our own research and developing, still looking to the University for some guidance."[372]

Tyson was not the only food processing company ballooning in size. Springdale, Arkansas-based Peterson Chicken kept pace with Tyson in size, as was Harold Snyder's

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[372] Don Tyson interview by Franklin Everts, June 1987, unpublished oral history collection, Shiloh Collection

AVI; the three companies formed a virtual stranglehold over regional poultry production. Indeed, just as backyard chicken houses seemingly offered a powerful new way out of poverty for tens of thousands of impoverished Ozkarkians, corporate consolidation and integration all but shut the door for most. Consumers could now buy affordable chickens at supermarkets year-round.[373]

The Vantress chicken, along with other processed foods sold in supermarkets, burst onto the scene at same time Washington policy makers were changing the way the government managed agricultural production. Not only had supermarket retailing put new stresses and demands on farmers, but so too had the evolving geopolitical situation. Coming out of the Second World War, agricultural officials in the Truman Administration believed that many of the same idiosyncrasies in farming frustrating retailers were responsible for the some of the problems the government faced ensuring that the public had enough food during the war. Charles F. Brannan, Truman's Secretary of Agriculture argued previous administrations had failed to see farm production as a national security issue, in the sense that ensuring adequate supplies of food for both civilian and military purposes would be essential to winning any future conflict, just as it had been during the Second World War.[374] The looming conflict with the Soviet Union reignited this problem since Brannan wanted to ensure civilians would not have to endure prolonged rationing while military authorities stockpiled food in preparation for an actual

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373 As I explain below, independent producers had all but ceased to exist in the Ozarks and other major poultry producing areas by the mid-1950s. See "How is a Hatchery Contract Now Being Used in the Arkansas River Valley?" Folder, "Stetchel's Hatchery, 1958-1959," Box 80, Records of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI. Hereafter WHS.

374 "Report of the Administrator of the Production and Marketing Administration, 1951" Folder "Production and Marketing Administration, 1950-1951 (1)" Box 43, Charles F. Brannan Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO (hereafter Truman Library).

war. To this end, Brannan reworked the parity system developed during the 1930s allotting how much government assistance farmers received for growing particular crops so that farmers could continue growing food at a wartime footing while also providing consumers with an unlimited range of foodstuffs.

Many of the administration's concerns were satisfied this way. Firstly, Brannan and other officials believed that consumers would no longer tolerate wartime privations, especially with no actual conflict underway. Secondly, it was important in the mind of leaders to contrast American abundance with the privations faced by those living in the Soviet Union, which was still recovering from the Second World War. There were also important food aid programs to European and Asian countries vulnerable to communist subversion. To ensure that the United States won the peace, American farms had to produce more food, and better food, than ever before. The supermarket may have been the face of the strategy, serving as a physical representation of capitalist abundance, but the corporate farms managed by Tyson were the heart.

Brannan believed that the new agenda hinged on efficient livestock production. Meat consumption already figured highly in the American psyche as a social signifier of affluence and comfort. This was especially true in the case of beef and pork, but the wartime boom in poultry consumption had elevated chicken to the same status. As the administration saw it, the American public would want to eat more meat then ever before.[375] Not only were soldiers returning home and resuming their lives, but the population was rapidly growing, too. In 1951, Agricultural planners estimated that by the end of decade the United States would need another five and a half billion pounds of

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[375] "Analysis of U.S. Food 'Surpluses'" Folder "Farm Program—July 1949" Box 26, Charles F. Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

animal protein annually to feed everyone at the same rates. This would include many millions more cattle, hogs, and sheep in addition to tens of millions more chickens for both meat and egg production. More importantly, this figure only anticipated increases in consumer demand; if another war broke out, or gifts of food to Europe continued in earnest, immense strain would be put on the system. In other words, America was producing plenty of food, but not enough to feed a starving world, prepare for another global war, and satisfy everyday domestic demand.[376]

To solve these disparities, Brannan and his assistants used existing programs to put tighter market controls on farmers, while also encouraging further investment in breeds of plants and animals specially configured for mass production, like the Vantress chicken. One administration official put it thusly:

> "now [after the war] our job an entirely different job. It is one of getting adequate production and in some cases, carrying greater reserves than we would normally because of the very emergency nature of the situation. I realize this, that when we go out asking farmers for the all-out production that we have asked for…and I think most farmers realize it, that they are thereby running the risk of producing themselves into less dollars rather than into more dollars. However, there is another side to this, and that is the one that confront us. That is how we go along with these price supports and get the support of the people of whom we have to have the support in order to establish higher support levels for the basic commodities we now know as essential."[377]

New types of farm goods such as the Vantress chicken would play the pivotal role of giving farmers a better product to sell and processors and while providing retailers a more useful product to sell.

In part, policy-makers took this position because they had come to realize what corporate men like John Tyson had learned firsthand: the farm economy was now defined by mass-consumption. In this new arraignment, farmers had lost much influence as an

376 United States Department of Agriculture, Production and Marketing Administration, "The Fifth Plate," December 1951, Folder, "PMA-General (1952)" Box 43, Charles F. Brannan, Truman Library.
377 "Testimony of Mr. Geissler," Folder "PMA—Poultry," Box 46, Charles F. Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

economic bloc since so much buying power lay in the hands of the processors and retailers who prepared products for market. The same people also planned future production. Looking at the farm economy as a system of distribution (as opposed to the viewpoint of previous generations that saw a purely productive system), Brannan and other key officials in Washington began to understand that the old formula to fight rural poverty by boosting the raw prices of farm goods was essentially a failed strategy.[378] Reviving ideas coming out of the Greenbelt Cities movement, Brannan and other Truman administration officials looked to stimulate consumption and production simultaneously, making the question of falling prices moot– with more people eating more food that had been produced more efficiently, national security priorities and consumer society would receive equal service. In this era, long before obesity would become a national obsession, wide waists meant rural prosperity.[379] This, of course, entailed massive intervention in at all levels of the agricultural marketplace, from supermarket shelves all the way back to the very genetic foundations of foodstuffs themselves.

Federal money poured into research making chickens more marketable, affecting how processors raised birds. Consumer studies done by the USDA extension service and other federal agencies found that "chicken apparently has not fully achieved the status and prestige of a meat item…in fact many housewives to do not consider chicken to be a

[378] "Agricultural Price Support Recommendations," Folder "Price Support –1949" Box 41, Charles F. Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

[379] Greenbelt Cities were an intellectual product of the New Deal. Roosevelt administration members believed that they could lift many farmers out of poverty by strategically locating them around cities and suburbs to serve as an attached producer class to urban and suburban professionals. Though the idea fizzled by the mid-1930s because different programs, like the AAA, failed, the idea that farmers could directly supply nearby consumers with food remained a powerful component of different rural developmental schemes. The difference by the Truman era was that large agricultural corporations like Tyson had stepped in and taken over the role of production. In other words, Greenbeltism after World War II was a corporatist vision of agricultural production accounting for mass-marketing. See Chapter 5.

meat."[380] Researchers reasoned that three distinct factors played into housewives' impressions of poultry. The first, as one study put it, was that customers suffered from "chicken fatigue," since "not only must she make a choice between beef, pork, and chicken, but she also must choose between beef steak and beef roast; pork chops and ham; whole fryers and fowl."[381] Chicken simply lacked beef and pork's variety. Commercial chickens also poised a problem for either smaller or larger families. One shopper surveyed put the matter thusly: "there's just my husband and I here now and it lasts too long with only two people." Large families had the opposite problem, since a bird could hardly feed a family of five or six the way a large, inexpensive piece of pork could.[382] Finally, chicken did not quite yet have the same cost-per-pound value that beef had. The Vantress' superior feed conversion value had dramatically lowered production costs, but at roughly $.50 cents a pound in 1955, chicken was still considerably expensive in comparison to other meats.[383]

Consumers had similar views of other products lining supermarket shelves. Similar studies reported that frozen vegetables tasted "old" and the industrial nitrates added to Oscar Meyer Hot Dogs made them rubbery.[384] Although chickens were delivered to consumers in a less-adulterated form than other items, the scale and pace of production combined with technologies still in their infancy meant that not all of the food sold in supermarkets was of a higher quality than that sold by more traditional vendors.

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[380] Richard Saunders, "Socio-Psycho-Economic Differences between High and Low Level Users of Chicken," Maine Agricultural Station, A.E. Progress no. 2 (November 1960).
[381] R. C. Smith, "Factors Affecting Consumer Purchases of Frying Chickens," University of Delaware Agricultural Experimental Station Bulletin no. 298 (July 1953), 5.
[382] Saunders, "Socio-Psycho-Economic Differences" 34.
[383] William Lemley interview by Franklin Everts, June 1987, unpublished oral history collection, Shiloh Collection, Volume II, p. 99.
[384] USDA Economic Research Service, "National Food Situation" September 1957, 30.

Processors and scientists reasoned that they could overcome some of the public skepticism towards industrial food by following the familiar strategy of making food less expensive and more convenient to use. For chickens, this meant that processors would further engineer the bird to be a bigger animal that appealed to housewives.[385] In Arkansas, the Cobb Hatchery began marketing a Vantress-descended chicken in 1958 they called a "White Rock" breed specifically to save processors money on feed by growing to maturity faster –savings that would be passed on to consumers. A Vantress bird took sixteen weeks to grow to a market size of four pounds, consuming sixteen pounds of feed in the process (a conversion rate of 4:1). White Rock achieved the same size in only thirteen weeks at a rate of 3.5:1. As one of the scientists working for Ralson Purina, the largest feed company in the United States, later explained, "we had a big barrier as far as genetics was concerned…chickens just didn't grow fast…but the breeders came into this with new science and knowledge...that made it possible for chickens to grow bigger than thought possible."[386] A concerted effort was made to "map" chicken's genes (even before a similar project for humans begun) and aggressively target the qualities like muscle size, speed to maturity, and feed conversion. One of the leading scientists in this effort was I. Michael Learner, a geneticist at the University of California-Berkeley responsible for not only popularizing some of modern genetics' key ideas, but also for discovering how to artificially fertilize eggs with a variety of different

[385] This would mirror the process that saw cattle breed to fatten quickly on a mixture of pasturage and grain.
[386] Jerry Hinshaw interview by Franklin Everts, July 1987, unpublished oral history collection, Shiloh Collection, Volume II, p. 99.

genes to create a viable hybrid.[387] The White Rock was the first "laboratory chicken" that brought advanced science to the barnyard.

The introduction of breeds optimized for more efficient production helped push chicken consumption to new heights by the mid-1960s, with almost every bird getting sold in a supermarket. By 1965, Americans were eating an average of 45.5 pounds of chicken per capita thanks to falling costs and a more-consumer friendly bird; up from about 25 pounds at the end of the Second World War.[388] The White Rock had been joined by virtual copies designed in labs run by major poultry firms like Tyson, Peterson, AVI, Con-Agra, North Carolina's Holly Hills, and Delmarva-based Perdue (these were some of the largest grower-processors). Each bird, whether designed in a dedicated hatchery like Cobb, the California-based Vantress, or another firm pushed the limits of feed-conversion, speed-to-maturity, and breast size to their biological limits. As one Tyson executive put it, the goal was "to get the best performing bird there is."[389] Feed-conversion ratios kept tumbling downwards; the White Rock 200, the successor to the earlier bird introduced in 1966, had a ratio of 3.25:1.[390]

The new emphasis on the genetic engineering did not stop with chicken. Tomatoes underwent a similar biological transformation during the 1950s and 1960s. The fruit had been an important agricultural product since the end of the nineteenth century,

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387 It should be noted that many early geneticists used chickens in their experiments regardless of the commercial implications since poultry eggs were already a common scientific tool. Many of these early researchers simply targeted commercial traits since it was easier to secure funding from major corporations and the federal government. I. Michael Learner, *The Genetic Basis of Selection*, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1958), 243.

388 U.S. Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Service, *Food Consumption of Households in the United States, Spring 1965*, (Washington, D.C., GPO, 1966).

389 Kirk Hale interview by Franklin Everts, June 1989, unpublished oral history collection, Shiloh Collection, Volume II, p. 415.

390 *Ibid*., 418.

when tomatoes began to be an ingredient for many processed food items like ketchup. Growers struggled to keep up with demand, especially since tomato season was fairly short – just the warm weather months. Farmers in Florida and California took advantage of longer growing seasons to offer fruit nearly year-round but the long trip to industrial centers in the North damaged ripe fruit intended for the fresh market. Cuba was also a major provider.[391] Quality improved during the 1930s when E. F. Kohlmann, a chemist working for an industry trade group, the International Canner's Association, developed a process for artificially ripening fruit with ethylene gas that gave distributors more control.[392] Even though the flavor of these tomatoes was substandard, they worked well for canning and cooking purposes. By the early 1960s, however, dietary habits had decisively swung in favor of more fresh tomatoes. Rock-hard Florida and California-grown product intended for canning tomatoes no longer satisfied shoppers.[393]

A coalition of interests similar to the group responsible for the Vantress chicken came together to design an industrial tomato. Research scientists at the University of Florida, supported by the USDA, developed the Florida MH-1, a hybrid designed to be perfectly round (an important concession to retailers concerned with marketability), rosy-red, and genetically predisposed to artificial ethylene ripening. They even bred the fruit to grow well in the sandy, water-starved soil that constitutes nearly all of Florida's arable land. Growers would still have to perform a botanical miracle, growing the equivalent hydroponic tomatoes without greenhouses, but they could easily stock supermarkets year

[391] Barry Estabrook, *Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed our Most Alluring Fruit* (New York: Andrews McNeil Publishing, 2011), 7.
[392] Tellingly, Kohlman argued this was only a stopgap measure since, "it should clearly be understood that by no known method of ripening except on the vine can a tomato be produced equal to a tomato fully ripened on the vine." E. F. Kohman, "Ethlyene Treatment of Tomatoes," *Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* (October 1931), 1112-1113.
[393] Arthur Allen, *Ripe: The Search for the Perfect Tomato* (Berkley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2010), 45-50.

round. In the process, the tomato industry became virtually homogenous, with fields almost exclusively populated by a by a few, industry-minded cultivars, such as the Heinz 9780 (used for that company's famous ketchup) or the VF315, identical to the Florida MH-1 but tailored to California's drier climate. Much like the White Rock, these tomatoes existed purely for the purpose of supplying consumers with identical foods year-round. Flavor meant little in a calculus titled heavily in favor of superabundance.[394]

By the mid-1960s, bioengineering had significantly transformed the taste, appearance, and affordability of food sold in supermarkets, but there were limits to how much food the public was willing to buy. This was especially true for chicken. New, larger breeds helped ease "chicken fatigue," but did little to alter the fact that virtually all chickens were sold as whole birds. If industry studies done during the 1950s suggested that consumers wanted chicken to be easier to cook and more versatile, poultry companies had only half-gotten the point: chicken was still poorly suited to large families. Some supermarket chains answered the need by butchering chickens into individual parts such as thighs, legs, or breasts. The Kroger chain, for instance, broke down birds by parts during the 1950s and 1960s, though this was an expensive in-store procedure requiring trained butchers who were often unionized, demanding wages far higher than retailers wanted to pay employees.[395]

Responding to their retail partners, integrators began investing more in facilities to package and process chicken into more consumer-friendly products during the mid-

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[394] John W. Scott, James R. Myers, Peter S. Boches, Courtland G. Nichols, and Frederic F. Angell "Classical Genetics and Traditional Breeding," in *Genetics, Genomics, and Breeding of Tomato*, ed. Barbara E. Liedl, Joanne A Labate, John R. Stommel, Ann Slade, and Chittaranjan Kole (New York: CRC Press, 2013), 47-49.

[395] "Second Annual Survey in Retail-1956" Folder "Surveys-Retail" Box 43, Records of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America, WHS. See chapter 5 for a discussion of the kinds of workers supermarkets favored and how they were paid.

1960s, ushering in a new wave of poultry engineering aimed at making poultry a more convenient meal. If producers had been concerned in the past with simply getting consumers to regularly include chicken in their diets, they now needed a coherent strategy to spur further consumption. Again, Tyson led the way, developing a series of "value-added" products that specifically intended for supermarket meat cases. The first was the introduction of the Rock Cornish Game Hen in 1963, a small bird sold very young that was supposed to be eaten in its entirety by a single diner. According to Don Tyson, the idea was to offer something "a little special" that would stand out in supermarket meat cases while simultaneously moving the poultry business to resemble something akin to the beef and pork markets, which were defined by specialty cuts and variety.[396]

After the success of the Cornish game hen, Tyson began marketing directly to busy middle-class housewives. By the end of the 1960s, Tyson was offering chicken in seven different forms; by 1975 they would offer some two dozen different kinds of chicken *products* (a semantic turn reflecting the new ethos behind poultry processing and consumption); by the mid-1980s the company was selling chicken in thousands of different forms, from frozen prepared nuggets preseasoned with shelf-stable sauces to unadulterated whole birds. As one piece of company literature from 1979 put it, "we are moving away from being a commodity company towards being a marketing company with specialized products using the Tyson brand."[397] To be sure, the company still understood itself primarily as an agricultural producer and processor, but they had so expanded their understanding of what it meant to process farm goods that they included

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[396] Marvin Schwartz, *Tyson: From Farm to Market: The Remarkable Story of Tyson Foods* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1991), 14-15.
[397] "Putting Its Brand on High-Margin Poultry Products," *Business Week*, August 20, 1979.

virtually all the actions leading to the consumer physically cooking a product. It also fit into the emerging consensus among retailers that their interests were best served by splitting marketing costs with producers – Tyson would create demand for their products through their own advertising programs while retailers would devote their energies to just getting shoppers into the door, often through a combination of loss-leading and strategic store placement.[398]

To achieve these aims, Tyson and other poultry producers would have to further engineer the commercial meat-type chicken, creating birds that could easily be broken down by machines. They also needed to develop a whole new science of meat processing, since such a high degree of specialization meant companies were now doing tasks historically done by home or restaurant cooks.

One of the most prominent of the new poultrymen was Robert Baker. Unlike the Tyson family, who got their start as truckers, or even the Southern farmers who built up Delmarva industry, Baker was a scientist responsible for over fifty new chicken products between 1960 and 1980 while also serving as the chair of Cornell University's Poultry Science department. His creations included chicken hot dogs, baloney, salami, canned chili, hash, pastrami, and ham. Almost all of these ended up in supermarkets as part of the first wave of convenience products intended to make home cooking easier, particularly "rush meals" like lunch or breakfast. As Baker explained in 1984: "Chicken…was a loss leader [for retailers] pretty much from 1955 to 1970. Once we started the convenience industry, put the chicken in different forms, consumption started going up again."[399] Baker's role within the industry was to reverse this, first designing optimal versions of

[398] Tyson Foods, Inc., "Annual Report 1969" Box 1, "Tyson" Shiloh Collection ;see chapter 4 for more on contemporary retail strategies.
[399] N.R. Klienfield, "America Goes Chicken Crazy," *The New York Times*, December 9, 1984.

these products and then engineering processed versions that could be made in bulk, frozen (or otherwise preserved), and survive a long trip to a supermarket that might take many weeks. For example, his chicken hot dogs, introduced in 1967, were first made in the Cornell lab and then tested rigorously to ensure that a version made with less-expensive ingredients and with less-skilled labor matched the ideal. Only then were products introduced to the public.[400]

Advances in chicken engineering were uneven during the 1960s and 1970s. Even with the help of universities, poultry companies had to make a considerable investment in order to introduce a new product (which often required individual advances in production technologies) and then advertise it to the public. Furthermore, consumer acceptance of the new processed item was not a sure thing. Tyson introduced a "giblet burger" (designed with help from Baker's research) made from the innards left over by the fabrication process. The burger flopped in supermarkets across the country and even the Arkansas prison system, who actually refused to serve the product to inmates, fearing riots.[401] Despite the occasional misstep, the push toward further processing was unrelenting. Poultry companies had little choice. Simply selling more chickens in their unaltered form was longer an economically defensible strategy.[402]

Branded chickens accompanied convenience products. Unlike beef packers who simply marketed animals generically, poultry producers began marketing themselves and their unique qualities as food processors by the late-1960s. For instance, the Vantress chicken would not be marketed in the same way the National Beef council promoted the

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[400] "Hot Dog Test Results," May 18, 1967, Folder "Hot Dogs," Box 5, Robert F. Baker Papers, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. Hereafter Cornell Special Collections.
[401] Dick Anderson, "Don Tyson Rules the Roost," *Southpoint* (November 1989), 16-20.
[402] The biggest pressure was on smaller firms, who had neither the advantages of scale nor the same attraction of a purveyor. Striffler, *Chicken*, 22.

Black Angus cow, an advertising campaign launched by the National Beef Council in 1972 to stimulate beef sales (thanks in no small part to the rise of chicken).[403] Rather, companies like Tyson sold Tyson chickens, obscuring the fact that they sold birds genetically identical to those sold by AVI, Peterson, or other competitors. This also helped processors sell their products to supermarkets. Historically, corporations had an uneasy relationship with the ways retailers marketed their goods since they simply wanted to get customers to spend as much money as possible in their stores. What shoppers bought was unimportant so long as they bought anything at all; most items carried the same profit margins. Loss-leading was the most commonly used strategy to attract business, meaning that in-demand products like chickens were deeply discounted. Retailers' buying agents often squeezed processors like Tyson since supermarkets were the only customers for mass-market poultry, putting pressure on integrators to cut costs elsewhere.[404]

The first poultry company to successfully brand its birds, and indeed one of the first agricultural companies to successfully market itself directly to consumers, was the Delmarva-based Perdue. Its founder, Frank Perdue, had built his company after Second World War by bringing Arkansas-inspired methods to Delaware (one factory worker told a reporter around the same time that "Mr. Frank ain't like the old guys around here – he makes money!).[405] Facing stiff competition from Tyson and other Arkansas firms, Perdue started using major media, including TV commercials, to reach customers in the same

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[403] M.R. Montgomery, *A Cow's Life: The Surprising History of Cattle and How the Black Angus Came to Be Home on the Range* (New York: Walker and Company, 2014), 214-16.
[404] By the late 1980s, Tyson could point to branding as a key ingredient in the company's long-term success. "Tyson Plans Major Expansion," *Tyson Update*, June 1989, pg. 2, Box 1 "Tyson," Shiloh Collection.
[405] "Poultry Dethrones Old Kings," *Arkansas Courier Gazette*, June 30, 1968.

northeastern cities responsible for building up the original Delmarva industry. Unlike his competitors in Arkansas who portrayed themselves as value options, if they distinguished themselves at all, Perdue portrayed his birds as superior to generic supermarket chickens. Of course, the chickens were all the same, made from the same genetic stock in hatcheries and fed with the same feed in virtually identical henhouses across the South, but this hardly mattered as a point of marketing.[406]

Perdue's sales more than quadrupled between 1968, when he began his campaign, and 1974. Most of his advertising dollars were spent in New York, in part because the city's residents had a reputation for being discerning customers willing to pay for quality but also because the Big Apple was the unrivaled as a taste and culture-maker. Perdue transformed from a small-time player in the New York area, selling about 14,000 broilers a week, or about 1 percent of the total market, to nearly 350,000, nearly a quarter of all the chickens sold there.[407] Of course, this was only a fraction of the overall poultry market in the early 1970s: Tyson sold more than 233,992,000 broilers annually by this time.[408]

Perdue's advertising onslaught targeted female supermarket shoppers. Ray Kremer, a Madison Avenue advertising executive who managed much of the campaign worked to make sure television viewers knew the difference between Purdue birds and generic ones:

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[406] "Perdue: He Was the First to Brand the Chicken Successfully," *Media Decisions* (April 1974): 62, 112-116.
[407] *Ibid*., 113; Striffler, *Chicken*, 24.
[408] Numbers for exact numbers of birds grown are hard to come by due to processors' notorious secrecy. These figures come from a local Chamber of Commerce report and only accounts for broilers. Not included are the millions of turkeys, Cornish hens, and egg-laying fowl also managed by Tyson. By comparison, Perdue's entire system, which was solely composed of broilers, barely topped 50 million. "Broilers Marketed (1970), Folder "Poultry- Misc" Shiloh Collection.

> "We wanted to show housewives exactly what the original red, white, and blue Perdue wing tag looked like so they could make sure they were getting one of the company's chickens. [We] placed 60 to 70 ten-second [TV] spots weekly, buying vehicles with substantial women's audiences. Buys included afternoon quiz shows on ABC, spot participation on NBC's *Today Show*, [and] CBS soap operas."[409]

Purdue went further, buying commercial time during television coverage of the Apollo 11 moon mission in a bid to tie the company's products to the era's signature technological achievement. During breaks in the marathon coverage, cartoons featuring a chicken wearing a space helmet walking on the moon were accompanied by the tagline "Perdue Chickens Are Out of the This World."[410]

After the initial explosion in sales, Perdue's business began to taper off. Studies showed consumers thought Perdue was little more than showman when he claimed that he sold better chickens. Indeed, only about 20 percent of his customers believed there was any noticeable difference.[411] Fundamentally, Perdue wanted shoppers and grocers to do something that went against one of the core rules of supermarket retailing – paying more for commodity foodstuffs. To overcome this psychological hurdle, Kremer borrowed a tactic from another chicken-related business, the Kentucky Fried Chicken chain, and put Frank Perdue on television to sell his birds directly to housewives. Hokey cartoons were replaced with Perdue gruffly telling the public, "It takes a tough man to make a tender chicken."[412] He even targeted typically ignored markets like Latinos by appearing on Spanish-language TV with the message "my chickens are yellow. I'm the Chiquita of Chicken."[413] The same tactics had been used when Kentucky Fried Chicken advertisements made Harlan Sanders the face of the company in its long fight with the

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409 "Perdue: He Was the First to Brand the Chicken Successfully," *Media Decisions* (April 1974): 62, 114.
410 *Ibid*.,115.
411 Stiffler, *Chicken*, 25.
412 "Perdue: He Was the First to Brand the Chicken Successfully," *Media Decisions* (April 1974): 116.
413 *Ibid*.

Tyson-owned Chicken Hut restaurants. Sanders' company won eventually won out in much the same way that Perdue would, by simply creating a greater brand awareness that trumped any claims of superiority.[414]

Other poultry firms began branding their birds in early-1970s. Tyson poured resources into building a more personal relationship with customers, running ads with suave country singers serenading Tyson frozen dinners and broilers. Other Tyson commercials promised that the company would "[feed] you like a family."[415] Internally, Tyson executives believed Perdue experiments proved customers would trust processors on face; the days of housewives prodding every bird in the case were over. Partly, this was thanks to retailers who insisted that everything they was of a consistent (if not always superior) quality, but this was also a reflection of the success processers had breeding commercial chickens.[416] Branding, after all, was yet another way to make good on the enormous investment in scientific research. The strategy also helped give processors take more control of their advertising from supermarkets, rendering stores into little more than retail boxes for carefully designed products.

Branding also helped consumers overcome anxieties about the supermarket as a site of mass-consumption. Advertising studies showed that the range of options in supermarkets often intimidated shoppers. This became especially acute during the 1960s

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[414] Chicken Hut was a short-lived chain of fried chicken restaurants located in the South and intended solely as a way to increase Tyson's sales; the company had invested heavily in the Chicken Hut and had an exclusive contract to supply them. Between 1965 and 1980, the chain opened about 200 stores, but they went out of business when forced to compete with the Kentucky Fried Chicken and the relentless marketing machine built up around the company's founder. Josh Ozersky, *Colonel Sanders and the American Dream* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 87-95.

[415] Nancy Giges, "Ad Outlays Become Important as Brand Names Gain in Chicken Market," *Advertising Age* (September 13, 1976), 50-54.

[416] Jerry Hinshaw interview by Franklin Everts, July 1987, unpublished oral history collection, Shiloh Collection, Volume II, p. 108.

when the average store began stocking more than 20,000 individual items.[417] Companies like Tyson used branding to remove all but the most basic decisions from shopper's minds, helping them overcome the confusion caused by dozens of similar items. As one executive from the 1970s explained, a processor could not force a consumer to change their mind from buying pork over chicken if they had come to the store deciding to do so, but they "ensure that at all times, if they plan to buy a chicken, it is a Tyson chicken."[418] Not all processors sought to overturn their relationship with retailers through branding, though. Arkansas-based Peterson Chicken felt that there was no need to advertise their chicken since this would clash with their retail customers' own advertising –much more effort went into securing lucrative contacts to stock supermarkets with generic birds for in-house product lines.[419]

Branding also spurred a further entrenchment of the Vantress genetic line. In 1974, Tyson acquired the Vantress Hatchery and all of its breeding stock. Now, America's largest processor owned hatcheries responsible for the heritage of nearly 80 percent of the worldwide broiler population. This gave Tyson a powerful patent and trademark claim on any number of Vantress descendents being marketed by competitors as well as the resources to further engineer the bird.[420] In the 1950s, the Vantress was recognized as a superior specimen because it had a 4.25:1 feed conversion ratio. Selective breeding got that number down to just about 3:1 by the end of the 1960s, but the ultimate

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[417] For more on this period, see Chapter 3. "Retail Market Summary," Folder "Market Analysis of Bunker Hill," Box 11, Bunker Hill Redevelopment Records, University of Southern California Special Collections Library, Los Angeles, CA.
[418] "Looking to the Future," *Tyson Update*, October 1977, Box 2 "Tyson," Shiloh Collection.
[419] Joseph Neal, "History of the Poultry Industry," Folder "Poultry- Manuscripts- Joe Neal" Shiloh Collection.
[420] Glenn E. Bugos, "Intellectual Property Protection in the American Chicken breeding Industry" *The Business History Review* 66, no. 1, 157-59.

goal remained 1:1. Rather than spend money on swallowing up wheat or corn farmers to lower feed costs, the logic went, just spend money on getting existing grain purchases to go further. It would be far more profitable over the long run to get additional marketable poultry meat out of the same amounts of food. Tyson's bioengineers pushed the ratio to 2.5:1 by 1975 while breasts, legs, and thighs grew ever larger.[421] In this latest round of experimentation, Tyson's greatest ally was the pace of poultry production itself. In a single year, scientists could test literally dozens of generations of birds, watching Darwinian evolution in real time. One scientist found this to be continuation of the earlier project to create the ideal commercial bird, saying, "the Chicken-of-Tomorrow for the 1980s and 1990s [will be made through] gene splicing… so a four pound chicken will mature in only 5 ½ weeks gaining a pound on 1.5 pounds of feed."[422]

With these sorts of numbers, industrial chickens no longer resembled the birds populating small barnyards in the 1920s. Since chickens were raised in cages, no work was put into strengthening the leg bones, meaning most of these "chickens of tomorrow" could barely stand. Of course, this did not matter since breast size had increased so much that it was not uncommon for knee cartilage and bones to snap trying to support a chest many times larger than nature intended. By this point, Tyson scientists had effectively turned the chicken into little more than a mobile protein delivery system.

Around the same time, major food processors found that fast-food restaurants became a more important customer than retailers, signaling a major change in the agricultural marketplace and American eating habits. For the poultry business, this meant that one of Robert Baker's creations, the chicken nugget, found a home in the fry baskets

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[421] *Ibid*., 160.
[422] Joseph C. Neal, "Arkansas Poultry," P. 51 , Folder "Poultry-Manuscript- Joe Neal," Shiloh Museum**.**

of McDonald's, the nation's fastest growing restaurant chain. The nugget itself was a quirky creation, a fried patty made from a paste of cartilage, meat, and other scraps leftover from butchering. In other words, the nugget existed purely to use up what little viscera remained on a bird that already given its breasts, thighs, legs, and more to consumers. The nugget was also an entirely new way to eat chicken, since this was an item that could be eaten in the car with one's hands. From that point forward, chicken products (along with a great of other major agricultural items) would be marketed towards harried people looking to eat on the go rather than housewives cooking for their families. As the *New York Times* noted, "what really ignited the further-processed stampede was McDonald's introduction and vigorous promotion of Chicken McNuggets" as a time-saver for the workingperson.[423] Within weeks of the 1980 introduction, McDonald's was one of the largest users of chicken in the world, purchasing around 1.5 percent of the nation's total broiler production for its McNuggets.[424] Within two years the McNugget would account for 10 percent of McDonald's total sales, a considerable achievement given that the chain was famous for burgers and fries.[425]

McNuggets also made Tyson into the largest poultry producer in the world, as well as the most powerful supplier for the fast food business. The Arkansas giant was the processor best poised to supply nuggets, fingers, and patties to chain restaurants since it had already had significant processing capacity. Throughout the 1970s, the company had transitioned many of its plants from properties preparing whole chickens for market to more complex facilities capable of preparing products like microwavable bowls of

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423 N.R. Klienfield, "America Goes Chicken Crazy," *The New York Times*, December 9, 1984.
424 Striffler, *Chicken*, 27.
425 Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 139.

chicken alfredo. One of these plants, in Berryville Arkansas, became a dedicated nugget-maker, churning out nearly 5,000,000 individual pieces daily. Sensing the future, Tyson inked deals with other chicken-centric restaurants like Kentucky Fried Chicken, Church's, and Popeye's, supplying butchered parts, nuggets, strips, and more in unprecedented volume; by the end of the 1980s, Tyson was raising and butchering as many as a 450 million chickens annually, almost all raised in the Ozarks.[426]

By the time Tyson reached these heights, American food production was completely in-thrall to mass-marketing. The Arkansas processor was not the only company signing dedicated supply deals with fast-food chains. Procacci Brothers Packing, a Florida-based vegetable company, became the sole supplier of McDonald's tomatoes and lettuce in 1983; all of its products are heavily engineered. Grain-processing giant Con-Agra forged deals to supply flour to most of the major industrial bakeries in United States by 1990, ensuring that the hamburger buns on fast food burgers were made from the same flour that was also used in consumer favorites like Wonderbread.[427] In only a few short decades, these companies helped guide American farms into factories rendering plants and animals into packaged units. The catalyst for this transformation was the advent of supermarket retailing, which created demand for infinite supplies of homogenous food year-round. Chickens were one product created in the onrush of new consumables, and perhaps the most emblematic.

None of the scientists, retailers, or farmers responsible for making the supermarket system imagined that fast food restaurants would ultimately drive the agricultural economy. The chicken nugget, along with the Big Mac, Filet-O-Fish, and

[426] "Tyson Foods, Inc Annual Report for 1989," 1-16, Box 2, "Tyson" Shiloh Collection.
[427] Melanie Warner, *Pandora's Lunchbox: How Processed Food Took Over the American Meal* (New York: Scribner, 2013), 17.

countless other items signaled the evolution of the food business where the convenience of the supermarket, couched in the idea that a shopper could get any base ingredient anytime they wanted, was replaced by McDonald's promise of a full meal composed from many of the same hyper-consistent and super-abundant ingredients developed for mass-retailers. This transition, made possible by utilizing the flesh of chickens, cows, and other living creatures, was the future of food in the United States.

Chapter Five: Working at the Supermarket: Rural Labor and Mass-Food Retailing

On September 3, 1991, faulty electrical breakers started a fire that ripped through the Imperial Foods chicken processing plant in Hamlet, North Carolina. Twenty-five workers died. Almost all had recently come off local farms to prepare chicken fingers for restaurants and supermarkets at minimum wage.[428] Among the dead were men and women, whites and African Americans who took these difficult, monotonous jobs out of desperation: thousands of small family farms and other sources of rural employments had died over the preceding decades, leaving the working poor with few options.

The Imperial workers were victims of the labor system that supplied food to supermarkets. One county official, trying to explain why authorities had failed to address the plants' mechanical issues, explained to a historian examining the fire that "we all worship at the altar of jobs," but the types of jobs created by the imperial plant in Hamlet or other towns captured by food industry like Greely, Colorado or Garden City Kansas were unskilled, onerous, and provided wages incapable of lifting workers out of poverty often caused processors undercutting more marginal farms.[429] Earlier, I have described how retailers promoted scientists and corporations to create plants and animals optimized for mass-marketing, a component of the modernist ideology that more broadly influenced supermarket construction and patronage. In this chapter, I show how mass-food retailing built a labor and distribution system that delivered food as cheaply as possible. Consumers won out in this new economy, particularly the cash-strapped urban and

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[428] Jurg Gerber and Eric L. Jensen, "The Imperial Foods Plant Fire," *The Encyclopedia of White Collar Crime* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Publishing, 2007), 138.

[429] Bryan Simon, *The Hamlet Fire: A Tragic Story of Cheap Food, Cheap Government, and Cheap Lives* (New York: The New Press, 2017), 52.

suburban middle class who, during the 1960s and beyond when inflation cut deeply into budgets, struggled to balance paying for mortgages, insurance, and children's educations along with their food budget. Supermarkets and their suppliers were allies in the struggle to simply remain comfortable. Food workers were the losers in this new political economy. Rather than provide profitable outlets for farm products or good jobs fabricating meat, the relentless push to cut costs meant processing companies and factory farms invested in technologies that limited to opportunities to bare subsistence.

When supermarkets first become a national phenomenon after the Second World War, serving as the commercial motor for suburbanization, there was little supporting infrastructure to supply stores. Supermarkets fought with smaller green grocers, co-ops, and neighborhood butchers to purchase from the same limited supply of fresh produce and meats shipped into urban centers. Although some chains, like Ralphs in Los Angeles, worked closely with local farmers, even the biggest firms like A&P struggled to source in-demand items. This competition led to higher prices that threatened supermarkets' mission of offering food at the lowest possible price. Grocers staked their reputation on their ability to offer high-quality foods, relying on farmers across the United States to make the supermarket concept feasible. Retailers resolved to work with producers, research universities, and government authorities to increase the flow and quality of food arriving in stores. The Vantress chicken was an important part of these efforts, but so too was the construction of labor laws, transport regulations, and farming practices that would ultimately cut the cost of food.

Retailers' plans to make food cheaper coincided with –and ultimately hijacked–a larger project to fight entrenched poverty in the countryside launched by academics and government administrators during the 1920s. Once Franklin Roosevelt took office in 1933, his administration launched a full assault on the culture and practice of farming, focusing on lifting struggling small farmers out of debt by promoting more diversified crops and resettlement in areas providing better access to consumers. The Second World War and simultaneous rise of the supermarket derailed these plans, as the need to industrialize the food system replaced the many plans intended to help small family farms. Much like the ways in which the political culture of the 1930s stimulated popular acceptance of the supermarket, the developmental schemes launched by the Roosevelt and Truman administrations during the 1930s and 1940s promised better life for farm families, but ultimately helped large corporations and landowners consolidate the country around the same vision of mass-marketing energizing supermarket construction.[430] Small farmers had little hope of producing food in sufficient quantities throughout the 1950s and 1960s, without accessing the government support earmarked for larger growers. As options dwindled, many rural folk made a choice: work for businesses offering little more than minimum wages or try to eek a living off a few acres of land. As this chapter

[430] Agribusiness as both an idea and a reality has been a significant part of public and academic discourse for much of the last twenty years. Scholars and pundits alike have roughly hewed to the position that agribusiness arrived in the wake of the New Deal as a response to particular policies of the Roosevelt Administration and the Second World War. A limited list includes Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1986), xi-xvi; Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields: Southern Agriculture 1865-1980* (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1984), 180-207; Monica Richmond Gisolfi, "From Crop Lien to Contract Farming: The Roots of Agribusiness in the American South, 1929-1939," *Agricultural History* 80, No. 2 (Spring 2002), 167-189; Kathy J. Cook, "Expertise, Book Farming, and Government Agriculture: The Origins of Agricultural Seed Certification in the United States," *Agricultural History* 76, No. 3 (Summer, 2002), 524-545;); David Goodman, Bernado Sorj, and John Wilkinson, *Farm Farming to Biotechnology: A Theory of Agro-Industrial Development* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987). Alan Olmstead and Paul Rhode, "An Overview of California Agricultural Mechanization, 1870-1930," *Agricultural History* 62, No. 3 (Fall 1988), 86-112; Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). Arguably the most important public commentator on these issues has been Michael Pollen, whose *Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), is a central text of the contemporary natural foods movement.

explains, the supermarket might have widely expanded suburban families' consumer choices, but devastated rural folks' economic opportunities.[431]

Long before the first supermarket opened, a devastating crash in farm incomes beginning in 1919 set the stage for a corporate consolidation of the countryside. Farmers financially struggled long before the First World War because of tightly controlled international markets and high transportation costs that pushed down wheat and corn prices –the two most commonly grown items in America– to levels below the typical cost of actually producing them. Frustrated farmers successfully agitated for currency reforms, railroad regulation, and free trade deals, but this barely addressed their most significant

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431 My explanation of rural labor systems resolves many of the major debates in American food and agricultural history. More than just the phenomena of pickup trucks loading up with food bought from the local Kroger, the death of rural self-sufficiency (however flawed that idea was in practice) meant a fundamental transition in the way Americans utilized land and labor. For many decades, historians have been trying to understand the process by which the rural south traded, in the words of historian Jack Temple Kirby, "a culture of living at home in favor of living out of bags." Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986, 115 Scholars have largely pinpointed the role of federal policy in but debate whether individual programs specifically targeting rural life or those responsible for arming America to fight the Cold War catalyzed the emergence of a system of political economy supported by cheap labor. One camp looks to the failure of New Deal-era farm programs to adequately support small farmers competing with larger ones, particularly those in the Midwest. Important examples of this school of thought include Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Deborah Fitzgerald, *The Business of Breeding: Hybrid Corn in Illinois, 1890-1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Douglas Cazauz Sackman, *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2005); Frank Ellis and Stephen Biggs, "Evolving Themes in Rural Development, 1950s-2000s," *Development Policy Review* 19, No. 4 (Winter 2001); David Goodman, Bernado Sorj, and John Wilkinson, *Farm Farming to Biotechnology: A Theory of Agro-Industrial Development* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987); Mark Friedberger, *Farm Familes and Change in 20th Century America* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1988; Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Michael Johnston Grant, *Down and Out on the Family Farm: Rural Rehabilitation in the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).
On the other side, a rich historiography details the ways that Cold War defense spending brought new people and industries to the West and South, uplifting parts of the economy while leaving the countryside all but untouched. Margaret O'Mara, *Cities of Knowledge: Cold War Science and the Search for the Next Silicon Valley* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Bruce Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991; Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Retail Revolution: How Wal-mart Created a Brave New World of Business* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009); Ted Ownby, *American Dreams in Mississippi: Consumers, Poverty, and Culture, 1830–1998* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

problem – the chronic overproduction of commodity crops such as cotton, corn, or wheat.[432] Desperate to offset falling prices through sheer volume, large and small producers intentionally grew as much as possible, flooding the market with ever-cheaper crops. The war temporarily eliminated the surplus problem, doubling the price of wheat between 1914 and 1917 and increasing the value of farmland in grain-producing areas by 70 percent before prices plummeted after the war once international markets returned to normal demand levels. Values fell even further when the United States government ended the price controls protecting consumers from wartime profiteering.[433] Wheat, for example tumbled to less than 85 percent of its wartime high by 1922. Corn, beef, and pork fell equal amounts. The revival of local production in Europe all but killed the American export market while domestic consumers, accustomed to doing without vast quantities of meat or wheat, did not resume prewar dietary habits.[434] Farmers' enormous excess capacity for production exacerbated the problem by further depressing prices. At the same time, the price of nonfarm goods shoot upwards—in 1919 farmers could buy a gallon of gasoline for the cost of one-fifth a bushel of corn but by 1921 the same amount cost thirty bushels– because urban shoppers began to make purchases that had been delaying by wartime rationing faster than manufacturers could keep up.[435]

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[432] For more on populist grains, see Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[433] *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture, 1919* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1920), 10-13; Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), 100.

[434] See chapter one for more on early twentieth century culinary sensibilities.

[435] Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory*, 19. During the war, many consumer's put off private purchases, sending the prices on common consumer goods downwards. Sometimes called "the buyer's recession," farmers were the biggest beneficiaries since this period coincided with the peak in commodity prices. For more, see Giles Slade, *Made to Break: Technology and Obsolescence in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 11. See also chapter one, pgs 31-38.

Farmers' economic vise created an equally severe rural banking crisis that helped open the door for more industrial-style farming. Lenders found themselves holding mortgages on thousands of farms that had fallen into disrepair because owners lacked the capital to do necessary upkeep or purchase seeds and supplies. Drained of the capital derived from mortgage payments, more than 5,000 small-town lenders across the United States closed between 1920 and 1925, shutting down sources of the sorts of short-term loans necessary for agricultural production.[436] This only exacerbated the surplus problem since many landowners only increased what they brought to market to ensure they had enough money to cover future production and their mortgage payments. As desperate banks calling in loans, farmers simply planted more.[437]

An underlining factor of the crash –one that would later prove consequential to supermarket suppliers– was the way the war changed the geography and business of farming. Many farms, especially grain-producing properties in the West and Midwest, had taken out loans to purchase heavy equipment like tractors. The familiar rationale for mechanization –that there were not enough humans to perform necessary labor– was literally true with so many young men in uniform. While many landowners worried about the long-term cost of maintaining these tools, few could argue with higher yields. A similar logic led to a dramatic expansion of the territory used for wheat and corn production, into the prairies and pacific coast. These farms were fundamentally different from operations farther east. Aridity was the main concern, but the isolation of farmlands,

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[436] As will be explained below, commodity-producing farms in the prairie and Midwestern states had the most precarious economic positions. *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture for 1926* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1927), 13.

[437] W.S. Spillman, "Memorandum for the Assistant Secretary Relating to Agricultural Problems in Spring Wheat Sales," December 7, 1922, Miscellaneous Correspondence, Bureau of Agricultural Economics (Hereafter BAE), RG 83, National Archives and Records Agency, College Park, MD (Hereafter NARA).

the high cost of shipping grain and livestock to markets, and many other challenges meant farmers who moved to the far west had to completely readjust their methods if they were to succeed.[438] Typically, they invested in machinery that might have ensured mammoth amounts of production but did little to insulate owners from swings in the marketplace. In fact, these made them more susceptible should demand shrink or sources of credit dry up.[439] If these businesses, which numbered in the hundreds of thousands by 1920, were to succeed, they had to carefully consider how to use available land and water, as well as which crops were likely to sell for high prices in Eastern markets. They also molded the politics of states like Montana, South Dakota, and California towards supporting the needs of large-scale farming. That included setting aside money for irrigation and infrastructure projects as well as regulation of transportation networks.

Economists working for the federal government argued the crash could be remedied if food production was more cost effective and market responsive, a struggle that neatly aligned with the needs of mass-food retailers opening nationwide at the same time. Traditionally, business and urban political leaders blamed farmers for their economic problems, especially after the legislative victories secured by agrarian populists at the beginning of the century pit rural folk against their urban customers. With those impediments lifted, some argued, any problems faced by growers were due to defects in

[438] Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 101; Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory*, 18; Mary Hargreaves, *Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains, 1900-1925* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 23.

[439] Bonanza farms new farms built on virgin land on the western prairies. Bonanzas were typically super-productive in their first operative years, drawing on nutrient-rich topsoil to reap massive harvest. Once that soil was gone, a process that took about five years, farmers then struggled to wring the same amounts from the land. Many bonanzas were then abandoned in favor of properties father west. Hargreaves, *Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains*, 19-21.

intelligence or the lack of a strong work ethic.[440] The depth of the depression convinced many academics and public administrators that rural poverty was not because of any personal failure. Warren Harding's Secretary of Agriculture, Henry C. Wallace, the father of Franklin D. Roosevelt's USDA chief, captured the mood this way:

> In times such as these the problems of farm management on most farms are reduced to the simplest terms and can be stated very briefly…Produce as much as you can and as cheaply as you can produce best; spend as little as you can; do without everything you can; work as hard as you can; make your wife and your children work as hard as they can. Having done this, take what comfort you can in the thought that if you succeed in doing what you set out to do, and if most other farmers also succeed, you will have produced larger crops than can be sold at a profit and you will still be under the harrow.[441]

It was not simply that the proverbial floor had fallen out underneath farmers, but rather that rural life had become irrevocably tied to a market value of a few commodity crops such cotton or corn. During the war years, the increase in farm incomes reaped real social benefits. Increased profits and tax revenues sent children to school, helped fund public health and sanitation measures, and even electrification programs. This all came to a screeching halt with the postwar crash, sending officials in search of ways to raise rural wages.[442]

Surveying the food economy, Washington economists observed that farmers were too reliant on items that were easiest to ship, rather than growing crops most likely to appeal to individual consumers. While this might seem like a small distinction, farmers were far more likely to grow grains that could survive long distance travel than the perishable fruits and vegetables that were popular features in the California supermarkets

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[440] Henry C. Taylor and Anne Dewess Taylor, *The Story of Agricultural Economics in the United States, 1840-1932* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1952), 597-598; M.L. Wilson, "Reminiscences of Milburn Lincoln Wilson," (New York: Columbia Oral History Research Office, 1975.

[441] Wallace, "A National Agricultural Program," 2.

[442] Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory*, 62.

opening during the 1920s (as well as nationwide). Federal and state agricultural services already provided growers with extensive information about these opportunities, in addition to seed loans, but this hardly worked to push farmers into crops they had little experience successfully bringing to market. Solutions to this dilemma varied. In short of completely replanting America's fields, administrators like Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover wanted to help farmers set up cooperatives to help regulate production and negotiate better prices from corporate buyers.[443] Others pushed for a more drastic program. Following the lead of philanthropic organizations like the Rockefeller Foundation, USDA agents fanned out over the country to answer the question if agricultural production had simply gotten too complex for those without an education in good business practices to succeed. One 1924 experiment funded by Rockefeller and the federal government set up experimental farms across Montana – one of the states hardest hit by the crash–to test out different agricultural styles. After nearly a decade, only one of the fifteen properties managed by the experiment was still in business. That farm was the largest and most capable, growing hundreds of acres of corn affordably with the help of machinery.[444] These sorts of nongovernmental organizations, taking up the mission of eliminating rural poverty, introduced another dilemma: could the family farm even survive as an economic institution? Arthur Packard, a Rockefeller Foundation project manager, cast the strongest doubt, saying, "the outlook [for agriculture in general] is very

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[443] Salutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 280-291.

[444] Howard Fabian to Arthur Woods, February 26, 1930, Folder, "Fairway Farms Corp, 1924-1942," Box 46, Business Affairs, 2 OMR, John D. Rockefeller Papers, RAC; M.L. Wilson, "The Fairway Farms Project," Folder, "Fairway Farms Corp, 1924-1942," Box 46, Business Affairs, 2 OMR, John D. Rockefeller Papers, RAC; M.L. Wilson, "Reminiscences of Milburn Lincoln Wilson," (New York: Columbia Oral History Research Office, 1975.

dark…there are probably 25,000 farm families in Montana and millions more elsewhere who face low peasant-like, non-commercial income farming unless there is a phenomenal improvement in conditions." Every study had shown that farmers made decisions based on the belief that only a few products, like wheat, corn, or hogs, were truly marketable. But the Rockefeller Foundation, along with its research partners in the USDA and at universities, put forward the idea that farmers could simply adopt the same ethic animating commercial development across American society, that is, a total devotion towards satisfying well-to-do urban consumers.

The liberal economists who joined the Roosevelt administration agreed with this thinking. FDR selected a group of agricultural advisors who had not only taken the Fairway report to heart, but sought to disrupt the status quo in food production and distribution. The two men at the center of the new policy regime, Henry A. Wallace and Rexford Tugwell, had been important players in the world of agricultural economics since the end of the First World War. Wallace backed scientific research, rural education, and farm diversification programs meant to maximize production on the best-run farms and gradually push less-successful growers into other lines of work. Tugwell had spent much of the 1920s advocating for a more consumer-centric model. Together, the two men shared the view that the future of agriculture depended on making farmers more responsive to scientific development and market trends and less dependent on commodity crops.

After taking office in early 1933, Wallace, Tugwell, and others created a farm program with ambitious goals. During Roosevelt's first days in office, the administration passed the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), which g ave federal officials the power to limit production on farms in addition to providing for loans, education programs, marketing assistance, and direct aid to homeless farmers forced off their land. Further legislation set up rehabilitation programs to help farmers start new businesses as well as correct widespread soil erosion, damage to irrigation systems, and other environmental problems.[445] Through the newly established Farm Safety Administration (FSA), famers with less than 100 acres of land (roughly 70% of the nation's farms) could receive special low-interest loans or grants to repair their properties or plant new kinds of crops. The Farm Bureau ran a similar program for larger operations. These different initiatives would first correct the immediate problems in agriculture and then later ensure farm folk could avoid the practices responsible for the collapse in prices.[446] USDA agents armed with literal bags of money fanned out across the country paying farmers to stop planting corn or rearing hogs in addition to other important products that by the summer of 1933 cost more to produce than sell. Officials supplemented direct payments with bought massive supplies of cotton, wheat, and more, storing them in government warehouses or burning them outright. Wallace, for instance, generated considerable controversy when in August 1933 he ordered 100,000 piglets culled and 30,000 acres of prime cotton land in the South bulldozed.[447] Tens of thousands of Americans were outright starving and many more needed support buying clothing and other essentials, but "the slaughter of little pigs

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[445] Adam Sheingate, *The Rise of the Agricultural Welfare State: Institutions and Interest Group Power in the United States, France, and Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 122. See also, USDA, *Yearbook of Agriculture for 1935*, 33; Edwin Griswold Nourse, Joseph Stancliffe Davis, and John Donald Black, *Three Years of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration*, (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution, 1940), 125.

[446] Lawrence Westbrook, "Objectives and Suggested Procedures for Rural Rehabilitation" June 27, 1934," pg. 3, folder 2, box 63, Rural Rehabilitation General Files, "Old General Subject" Series, March 1933-Jan. 1935, Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Central Files, 1933-1936, Records of the Work Projects Administration, RG 63, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md. (Hereafter NARA-II).

[447] John C. Culver and John Hyde, *American Dreamer: The Life of Henry A. Wallace* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000), 124.

might make tolerable the lives of a good many human beings dependent on hog prices."[448] The administration's tough love worked; prices began to creep back up in 1934 and the pace of foreclosures slackened. Conditions continued to improve even after the Supreme Court struck down the AAA in 1935, arguing the government did not have the power to destroy personal property as a regulatory tool. Not only had the AAA and related programs managed to slow the decline of the agriculture, but they addressed farmers' fundamental problem: the dependence on products with limited marketability.

Once prices stabilized, Tugwell wanted to move struggling farm families into "greenbelt towns." For many years, he had argued growers struggled because they did not pay sufficient attention to consumer desire. Greenbelts, Tugwell reasoned, would physically put farms next to consumers on properties adjacent to cities and suburbs. There, growers would produce items for immediate sale in addition to staple crops like corn or cotton –literally circling towns with attentive farmland. Greenbelts would thusly eliminate the two biggest problems facing growers: overproduction of staple crops and the difficulty of directly engaging consumers. In time, greenbelt farmers would abandon troubled staple markets and produce solely more sought-after items like vegetables, chickens, and more. If the overproduction of staple crops launched the agricultural depression, greenbelt towns would be an effective form of regulation that also resettled farmers pushed off of worn-down land.[449]

Tugwell built the first of these communities in the winter of 1935. Calling the town, "Greenbelt," he moved about one hundred homeless families into an unincorporated part of Maryland close to Washington, D.C. that had fallen on hard times.

[448] Quoted in *Ibid*.
[449] United States Department of Agriculture, *Greenbelt Towns, a Demonstration in Suburban Planning* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1936), 1-20.

In his thinking, workers inside the town would provide finished goods and services to the surrounding farmers in exchange for locally-produced food. In other words, Greenbelt's local economy would provide participants with some form of income so long so they were capable of participating in it. Moreover, Greenbelt was no short-term experiment but a real, living community populated by nearly five thousand people. Creating a micro-economy was an expensive proposition, though. Tugwell used $14 million in federal money to construct homes, plant crops, and provide equipment. After the cost spiraled to over $10 million to build another Greenbelt outside Milwaukee and then $12 million more for a similar project in New Jersey, Congress canceled the program in 1939, telling administrators that the government was not in the business of building towns for the dispossessed.

Legislators denied Tugwell the money not only because Greenbelts were very expensive social engineering projects, but also because they had to compete with another, even more consumerist vision of agriculture: the supermarket. The burst of supermarket construction occurring at the end of the 1930s opened new markets for farmers based on fresh fruits, vegetables, and proteins. To be sure, farmers could always ship produce into cities for sale in the old public markets and certain chain grocers, but the new supermarkets put pressure on farmers to send these hard-to-get items to cities hundreds of miles away and in industrial amounts. Combined with status-driven middle class shoppers seeking out those items, supermarkets quickly bought up every crate of perishables entering urban areas. As one administrator described during the rush of new store construction, "supermarkets force crop diversification in ways that were previously impossible."[450] For much of the previous twenty years, government administrators had tried to provide higher incomes for small family farmers, devising technocratic solutions to the dilemmas of the free market. Supermarket retailing was the free-market alternative, rewarding farmers for producing enormous amounts of produce suited to mass-consumption.

The outbreak of the Second World War also helped push Greenbeltism out of policy-making. Even before Pearl Harbor, government administrators realized that growing enough food for civilians, the military, and foreign allies would be a considerable challenge. Policies like the AAA had restrained staple crop production while new opportunities supplying supermarkets opened opportunities in vegetables and fruits poorly suited to a global conflict; USDA and other government agencies had to cultivate farms capable of feeding soldiers and civilians adequately.[451] Once America entered the war, government officials established adequate price supports, provided sufficient laborers (often POWs and Mexican migrants), and supplied machinery to larger farms already suited to mass-production – the western factory farms that had survived the Depression by scaling up and chasing consumer trends. Rural political leaders, especially those who ran the influential Farmer's Union, encouraged members to take advantage of high commodity prices to pay debts and purchase additional land from smaller operations incapable of filling military contracts.[452] In the case of Southern and Western farmers, this meant vegetables like green beans, lettuces, or tomatoes. Property owners on the Great Plains planted sweet corn and soybeans, the latter of which became the oil

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[450] "Do We Want A 'Brannon Plan'?" *Open Meetings on Agricultural Policy*, Michigan State College, Folder, "Brannon Plan (4 of 7), Box 43, Charles F. Brannan Papers, Truman Library.
[451]] Grant, *Down and Out on the Family Farm,* 161.
[452] Bureau of Soils, United States Department of Agriculture, "Soil Survey for the State of Kansas*,"*(Washington, DC: GPO, 1965), 57.

lubricating rifles and cannons. Because the rural rehabilitation program never progressed beyond its "emergency" status, the only parts of New Deal regulatory regime remaining were the subsidies and loans put in place through the Farm Bureau and various AAA production controls that had survived, dinosaur-like, in pieces of subsequent legislation. Congress even killed off the dedicated supports for small farmers when they shuttered the FSA in 1943. In this new policy environment, there was little to help small farmers stay on their land, but a wide variety of programs to help the largest landowners expand their properties and production for the war effort, in addition to selling their food into the hungry civilian market.[453]

By the end of the war, average farm size in the three main agricultural regions of the United States had skyrocketed while the number of farmers had fallen dramatically. Nearly 30 million new acres were under cultivation in California alone, combined with 10 million across the Southeast and 20 million across the Midwestern plains, part of nearly 80 million acres of new farmland contributing to national food supply.[454] Curiously, these gains in farmland did little to increase the number of rural jobs, particularly on proprietor-operated farms. As one USDA official wrote in 1950, "in 1945, at least twenty million Americans worked in agricultural professions. Our population has increased. The amount of land in use has increased. Yet at least two million fewer people maintain properties now than they did five years ago."[455] Officials pointed towards

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[453] Stanley Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 350-356.

[454] Report from the Secretary of Agriculture, "The Agricultural Functions of the Government Belong in the Department of Agriculture," Folder, "The Truman Administration's Agricultural Policy, 1945-48 (1 of 16) Box 1680, Presidents Official File, Truman Library.

[455] American Farm Bureau Federation, "Summary of The Price-Support Program in Relation to Postwar Farm Income," August 16, 1945, Folder, "American Farm Bureau Federation," Box 1524, Presidents Official File, Truman Library.

increased farm mechanization, but also to a lack of investment in agriculture-related industries that provided jobs to people in the countryside. To be sure, many of the young men who went to war did not return to farms, choosing to pursue other livelihoods, but the surge in the amount of food grown on American farms that did not spark an equivalent number of jobs in the fields or in the network of businesses supporting farms, like grain mills. New machines like vacuum coolers, automatic threshers, and root washers –all made more affordable thanks to wartime industry– had replaced many jobs, never to return.

These conditions enabled food industry participants in both the public and private sectors to begin discussing the ways the postwar food economy would differ from that of earlier eras. Even before the fighting stopped, USDA planners began suggesting that to achieve certain societal goals, such as widespread home ownership, the overall expenditures on food had to fall. Before the war, Americans spent as much as twenty percent of the average annual median income of two thousand dollars. Now that the conflict had ended and incomes had budged slightly upwards, administrators wanted to take advantage of increased agricultural knowledge and mechanization to make food cheaper, so that the average American might spend only ten percent of their income on food.[456] Wartime regulation showed that the easiest route to these levels were the price controls and direct payments deployed as regulatory tools since 1933. The Truman administration, however, had promised to roll these programs back once it was no longer necessary to feed millions of soldiers. The answer, USDA and White House planners realized, was to promote not only wide-spread mechanization but also expanding the

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[456] On incomes, see Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States* (1976), 457, 467-68, 483. On USDA targets, see "The Brannan Farm Plan" Folder "Brannan Plan (3 of 7)" Box 11, Charles F. Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

largest farms at the expense of smaller properties. Perhaps most importantly, government officials saw that the emergence of mass-food retailing in the form of the supermarket meant that they not only had a partner in slashing how much Americans spent on their food, but a template for farmers to follow.[457] By focusing on how much Americans spent on their food as opposed to how much income farmers derived from those sales, policy-makers organized the agricultural economy around consumer desire at the expense of producers, a perfect environment for the supermarket to flourish.

More than any of the factors affecting how much Americans paid for their food, retailers believed that utilizing new, emerging technologies could help achieve lower prices by removing the need for expensive skilled labor. Beyond modernist thinking shaping advertising campaigns and store design, retailers thought atomic age technological gains could help slash processing costs. Speakers at the same 1946 A&P sales meeting that sparked the Chicken of Tomorrow Contest argued the best way to lower the cost of food was slashing the costs associated with processing products; bioengineering better foodstuffs was one part of the equation, streamlining processing was another.[458] This built off claims made by Great Atlantic's president, John Hartford, in an antitrust case that same year. In sworn testimony, he defended retailers' pricing strategies as the result of decisions made in the fields and factories supplying his stores: "Now, we have very little control of how much individual crops cost. Rather, our agents seek out the best prices from farmers. Once the cost of preparing items for customers are added to those earlier expenses, we arrive at a selling price fair to both the company and

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[457] Roy W. Lennartson, "Between the Farmer and the Consumer," in United States Department of Agriculture, *Yearbook of Agriculture* (Washington: GPO, 1951), 40-49.
[458] "The Chicken of Tomorrow Contest," *Supermarket News*, January 1947

the public."[459] Although this was only half true – farmers were subject to market dynamics and buying agents for a company like A&P could easily depress prices by simply driving a hard bargain– Hartford was correct. Transportation and processing costs constituted the majority of a food item's final cost.[460] By the end of the 1940s, New Deal policies inability to develop a viable alternative to and changing political priorities gave retailers incentives to not only bioengineer crops but compel processors to slash labor costs and increase productivity to achieve the goal of cheaper food.

To this end, retailers took advantage of Truman-era USDA chief Charles Brannan's plan to streamline the marketing of food products to urban areas. This was another component of his scheme to maximize strategic crop production described in chapter four. Brannan's concern, similar to those held by retail leaders, was that there was no way to raise farm prices without hurting urban consumers. At the same time, there was no way to blindly remove wartime price controls, which kept prices high, without harming farmers, something administrators saw firsthand when the Wilson administration axed similar policies after the First World War.[461] This was even more difficult since the public supported OPA production and price controls.[462] After Congress shuttered the OPA in 1946, the USDA began deregulating the wartime economy, axing rules effecting transportation and labor while scaling down price and production supports for farmers in such a way that growers would move towards strategic crops and the growing methods

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[459] Transcript, pg, 782, Danville Trial

[460] This was confirmed by any number of important stakeholders in the agricultural economy. See W. T. McAllister, "An Appraisal of Marketing Problems in the Delmarva Broiler Area," 1954, Willard McAllister Papers, Hagley Museum and Library, Greenville, Delaware.

[461] "Brannan, Kline in Sharp Clash," *The Cooperative Consumer*, February 28th, 1950, Folder "Brannan Plan (4 of 7)" Box 11, Charles F. Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

[462] House Agriculture Committee, *Long-Agricultural Policy, Part I, Hearings,* 80th Congress, 1sr sess., April 21, 22, 23, 1947.

that deemphasized the need for skilled labor. At the time, Brannon argued "obviously farmers would like to grow whatever crops they believe produce the best income, [but]…we need to ensure that our farmers work with the national good in mind."[463] Federal officials chose system, based on financial incentives, because they believed it would preserve American ideals of free enterprise while still giving them reasonable control over the food supply. Within government, officials had completely abandoned greenbeltism for a form of national planning consistent with the American political tradition.[464]

This set up the 1946 congressional elections, a critical moment in not just the history of rural America, but labor too. Clinton Anderson, Truman's first agriculture secretary, had removed the price ceilings from many commercial and strategic farm goods like beef which ignited a race to slash virtually all the price and production controls set up under the OPA and the New Deal, including the farm regulations set up under Wallace and Tugwell.[465] Retailers like A&P had already promised to deliver a new "Eden" of goods at supermarkets now that the war was over, and quickly blamed the government for empty shelves when there was plenty of food available. In response to the criticism, Truman canceled all remaining price controls and rationing in October 1946 but that did little to stop the political damage.[466] Republicans used the administration's fumbling of the food issue to gain a congressional majority for the first time since 1928 with a mandate to roll back New Deal liberalism. This meant a complete reset to the food

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463 Charles F. Brannon, "Misconceptions and Facts About the Farm Aid Program," Folder "Brannan Plan (5 of 7)" Box 11, Charles F. Brannan Papers, Truman Library.
464 "Gist of Allen Kline's Four-Minute Statement Over Town Meeting of the Air, at Perioa Ill., on March 29, 1947," Folder "Brannan Plan (5 of 7)" Box 11, Charles F. Brannan Papers, Truman Library.
465 Hamilton, *Trucking Country*, 82.
466 "The Election," *Supermarket News*, Feb 46; Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 228-31.

and farm policies blamed for the high cost of living. Indeed, the GOP campaigned on the slogan “Had Enough?” and used the image of empty supermarket shelves –a powerful symbol for white middleclass voters– to tap into a widespread sense of discontent with the failures of economic liberals to manage food prices.[467] To be sure, the war did not erase the myriad problems facing farmers but the rhetoric deployed by bureaucrats had convinced the public earlier reforms had worked. To make matters worse, the Beef Trust, aided by farm bloc congressmen, ranchers, and the National Association of Food Chains (NAFC), deflected consumers’ anger away from monopoly power towards the Democrats running the federal government, diminishing support for interventionalist farm programs like greenbelts. Even though every available metric suggested rural conditions had not improved significantly for small farmers, GOP rhetoric turned the homeless dust bowler into a fat farmer living off government payouts.[468] The move towards a political economy rejecting New Deal liberalism’s Keynesianism meant industrial farming was the new normal in the American countryside.

This does not mean that the GOP did not seek to create a farm policy that, at bare minimum, would control the decades-old problem of farm surpluses. The heightened demand for U.S. farm products during the war had put the surplus problem on the back burner, but the demise of FSA and OPA controls meant that there was little to restrain farmers from overproducing staple crops. Sure enough, U.S. staple crop production remained 33 percent higher at the end of the 1940s than it had been a decade earlier,

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[467] Matusow, *Farm Policies and Politics,* 52-61.
[468] Corey, *Man and Meat*, 91-92.

meaning that if prices fell again, homeless farmers would again populate the countryside.[469]

In 1947, the House Agriculture Committee began holding extensive hearings to plot new, long-range approaches to surplus management that coincided with the burst in supermarket construction in suburban America.[470] The results of the meetings, published under the title *Dare Farmers Risk Abundance?,* concluded farmers were conditioned to produce as much food as possible, no matter how strongly administrators worked to limit production and keep prices high. With farmers demanding guarantees of high farm prices, consumers insisting on reasonable prices at the checkout counter, and corporate processors steadfastly resisting government intervention in the food economy, the stage was set for a reconsideration of New Deal-era farm policies beyond even the market control measures proposed by Brannan.[471]

In the aftermath of the congressional hearings, the USDA put together a stopgap subsidy system that kept farmers financially protected while also keeping consumer costs to a minimum. One of the few Roosevelt-era agricultural reforms that survived the administration's policy purge was direct payments, a tool used by the original 1933 AAA program to manage surplus planting.[472] Brannon revised the system in 1949 to include quotas, limiting the amount of money farmers could expect to receive if their crops failed to gain a profit. Essentially, the system worked by devising a quota for each individual participant based on their amount of land and the total number of people growing the

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[469] Matusow, *Farm Policies and Politics*, 3, 12.
[470] Hamilton, *Trucking Country*, 83.
[471] National Planning Association, *Dare Farmers Risk Abundance?* (Washington: National Planning Association, 1947).
[472] Hugh Rockoff, *Drastic Measures: A History of Wage and Price Controls in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 101.

crop nationally. They would then receive payments to ensure that they made profit on their quota crop, but nothing on additional plantings. The USDA also created a limited surplus-buying program. Importantly, Brannon tied subsidy payments to the designated strategic crops, meaning the government incentivized farmers to grow items like barley, corn, wheat, and rice over other items, like the fruits and vegetables promoted by the Greenbelt program. Livestock like cattle, hogs, and chickens were not eligible, but because their feed grain was now subsidized, farmers' financial outlays were less. Brannon defended expanded payments by suggesting that prices would fall under the new regime: "While it is not desirable for the government to make large cash outlays, with subsidies we can expect farmers to continue working their land in the national interest. At the same time, the longstanding problems with the surplus can be turned into an asset, as we can expect prices to continue to fall if production levels remain consistent."[473] While Brannon was technically correct, the subsidy system invited farmers to flood the market with commodity crops, the very thing generations of government administrators and economists had spent careers fighting, though payments did little to curtail planting practices. Brannon might have sold the program as a temporary solution, telling Congress, "we expect the current version of direct payments to last only so long as farming continues to be a profession plagued by bad economics," but there was little political or institutional momentum towards solving surpluses other than advising farmers to grow fruits and vegetables for supermarkets, which they could only do in limited

[473] Charles F. Brannon, "The High Cost of Error," Address before National Grange, Sacramento, California, November 19, 1949, Folder "Brannan Plan (7 of 7)" Box 11, Charles F. Brannan Papers, Truman Library.

amounts.[474]Aware of the subsidy system's ironies, *The Wall Street Journal* acerbically wrote "its now good business to be a bad farmer."[475]

Although the farm economy had stabilized, administrators still wanted a more complete solution to rural economic problems**.** In late 1949, The National Planning Association met again to debate surplus management. The committee, composed of economists, consumer advocates, and farm leaders agreed that maintaining a healthy economy required farmers to receive reasonable returns on their crops without depending on government controls. To do so without driving up the cost of living for consumers, most likely through price supports, required a new approach to the farm problem that would ultimately have far-reaching consequences: a targeted assault on slashing costs throughout the processing and distribution chain.[476] Whereas agricultural policymakers had always focused on regulating food production, now they also believed that they could achieve the same ends by stimulating consumption. The recommendations not only bolstered the new direction in farm policy promoted by Brannan and others, but affirmed the supermarket system of retailing as policy tool – retailers were already so bent on delivering cheap food that it would only be a simple matter to convince Americans to eat more. That new direction became the Agricultural Marketing and Research Act of 1949 (RMA), which ordered the USDA to devise technologies to streaming the marketing of U.S. agricultural products. It was understood that, since retailers had already devised a system of mass-distribution in the form of the supermarket, efforts funded by the RMA would go to bolster retailers' supply chains rather than try to create a competing system.

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[474] House Agriculture Committee, *Hearings, Part II, Hearings,* 81th Congress, 2nd sess., October 18, 1949.
[475] "Brannan Plots New Price Control System," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 20, 1949.
[476] National Planning Association, *Must We Have Food Surpluses?* (Washington: National Planning Association, 1949), 18.

Grocers now had the full scientific expertise of the federal government working to trim their bottom line.

The main sponsor of the RMA was Kansas Republican Congressman Clifford R. Hope. Describing the bill, Hope explained that “the [RMA] is based upon the idea of abundant production and efficient distribution and utilization of food and other farm products.”[477] Efficient food production, he argued, required technologies and business partnerships capable of lowering or eliminating labor costs, the very machinery that drove the political economy of mass-consumption. Retailers had already done much of this work with advertising campaigns describing stores as sites where individual consumers could access and use new technologies. Furthermore, the new state-sponsored technological solution would come with the avowed acceptance of an economic philosophy of abundance –the same logic responsible for the supermarket– rather than the scarcity-inducing policies developed during the New Deal-era and earlier. Much as the Brannan Plan was simultaneously doing, the RMA placed consumer needs above that of producers.[478]

The faith in technological solutions reflected the new optimism science could transcend persistent problems in American life. Despite the destructive potential of nuclear weapons, American writers in the postwar years pointed to atomic energy as “a blessing that will make it possible for the human race to create a close approach to an earthly paradise.”[479] Many people involved in agricultural policy-making embraced techno-utopianism, thinking that atomic science could increase yields or play an

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477 *Congressional Record,* 79th Congress, 2nd sess., July 15, 1946, vol. 92, 9031.
478 Hamilton, *Trucking Country*, 90; Douglas E. Bowers, “The Research and Marketing Act of 1946 and Its Effects on Agricultural Marketing Research,” *Agricultural History* 56 (January, 1982), 249-63.
479 Paul Boyer, *By Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 109.

important role in bioengineering, even though many scientists warned that the bomb might not necessarily translate into consumer gains. However, the optimism was not ill-placed. Wartime advances like plastics and prefabricated housing had so transformed consumer society it is reasonable to suppose that more other new technologies could do the same.[480] Indeed, items helped inspire rural businessmen, catalyzing the Chicken of Tomorrow Contest while also reflecting a tendency in the debate over rural job creation to turn towards simplistic, reductionist solutions that also happened to support the need to create cheaper food for the cities and suburbs.

By the time Congress passed the RMA, all of the government's developmental efforts went towards finding easy technological fixes to more persistent structural issues. With over $30 million in funding in the first five years, agricultural engineers and economists embarked on hundreds of projects aimed at streamlining the marketing of agricultural products. Researchers studied everything from transforming corn into automobile fuel to developing dehydrated and frozen foods. RMA money even supported Chicken of Tomorrow experiments.[481] The majority of studies, though, focused on issues of labor management and more efficient processing. Administrators believed that mechanizing expensive, skilled labor positions would play an important role in cutting costs for consumers, leading to a focus on improved processing, packaging, and warehousing methods, the single largest costs in bringing food from farm to table.[482]

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[480] Jeffrey L. Meikle, *American Plastic: A Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 168.
[481] Agricultural Research Administration, *Report of Activities under the Research and Marketing Act* (Washington: GPO, 1951-53)
[482] Hamilton, *Trucking Country,* 92; Ralph I. Dewey and James C. Nelson, "The Transportation Problem of Agriculture," in USDA, *Yearbook of Agriculture* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1950), 720-39.

One the earliest successes came from lettuce farmers in California. By 1950, vegetable farming had become increasingly mechanized, reliant on vacuum cooling as a technological fix to the costs and spoilage caused by ice cooling (see chapter 2). But savings did not simply end with better packaging. Farmers took advantage of the new devices to push out expensive unionized ice workers and make better use of cheap migrant labor. Since 1943, a congressional program delivered a steady supply of Mexican *braceros*, guestworkers contractually bound to individual employers for a fixed period, in the United States. In general, these men were experienced migrant workers who had been working American fields for generations without any protection from immigration enforcement, which the contracts provided. Receiving wages far below unionized shed workers, *braceros* helped break the back of unionized workers who had made real gains during the 1930s by working as pickers in conjunction with icemen.[483] As far back as 1940, *Western Grower and Shipper* warned that organizers were pushing farmers towards cheap migrant labor: "Representatives of labor, in their eagerness to increase the take home pay of their members, should give very serious consideration to placing the last straw on the camel's back before the break comes...and foreign workers take their place."[484] This is precisely what happened when Latino migrants capable of working simple vacuum chillers legally entered the workforce. With no need for skilled ice-men, farmers shed those well-paying jobs, often worth much as $1.62 an hour, for *Braceros* making an average of $0.87.

Retailers also played an important role placing high-tech machinery and low-wage workers in the fields. Supermarket operators had long been pushing for packing

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[483] Friedland, Barton, and Thomas, *Manufacturing Green Gold*, 66.
[484] C.B. Moore, "Labor Trends," *Western Grower and Shipper* (1950), 25.

solutions that would extend product shelf-life. Although the DuPont product cellophane, a creation of wartime had been available since the mid-1930s, the only company of note that made use of it was the "Sunny Sally" Packing Company, which sold spinach and salad greens in the Los Angele area; elsewhere, greens still traveled arrived in wooden crates packed with ice.[485] RMA-influenced modernizers, however, looked at cellophane packaging as another ingredient in the recipe for lowering distribution costs. As one grocery industry document put it, "fresh produce is the last great food packing fight that remains to be done."[486] Pre-packaged produce certainly suited supermarkets. Compared with "naked" produce, it was easier to buy, display, and track; it looked neat, sold faster, generally kept longer, and suffered less from inquisitive shoppers who picked their way through the produce bins. Additionally, plastic wrap also reduced in-store labor costs since it took some skill to properly de-ice long-shipped vegetables in danger of rotting.[487]

Consumers also wanted pre-packaging. A 1947 survey of 2,367 housewives by the Union Bag and Paper Corporation found that over 64% answered "yes" to the question of whether they preferred their food prepackaged and pre-priced; 21 responded "no" and only 15 percent were indifferent. Nearly three-quarters said they would be willing to pay more for prepackaged items. Perhaps most importantly, pre-packaging was most popular in the New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania suburbs where supermarkets were most popular. Retailers took this as evidence that consumers wanted their food prepackaged and portioned.[488]

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[485] Ironically, almost all of these came from California. J. H. Collins, "Vegetables Will Be Dressed Up," *Western Grower and Shipper* 17 (December 1945), 31.
[486] A.L. Martin, "Who'll Do the Pre-Packaging?" *Western Grower and Shipper* 17 (1946), 88.
[487] "Packing: Who Wants What?" *Western Grower and Shipper* (1955), 14.
[488] *Ibid*.

For vegetable growers, the message from their retailer partners was plain: pre-packaging food was the future. Many farmers balked at the cost of buying packaging equipment, but others, received money from the federal government through the RMA and other support programs embraced the marketing challenge. They had to make sure that their own customers, the supermarkets, appreciated the very rawness of fresh produce mattered to the housewife. "The salad is a 'convenience food" which can prepared in a matter of minutes," one California farm journal wrote, and stores had promised even greater convenience as they spread across America.[489]

The RMA had limits as a price-lowering mechanism, so the most effective means of driving down the cost of food by the early 1950s was deregulating particular parts of the food economy. The Eisenhower administration abandoned the direct subsidies the Truman Administration put in place through the Brannan Plan. Rather, they preferred a more flexible system, supported by the Farm Bureau, that scaled direct payments to production size while funneling money to bigger producers with more financial viability –continuing the Farm Bureau's policy of pushing the most inefficient farmers into new lines of work.[490] The administration also took advantage of a loophole in the 1935 Motor Carrier Act, which regulated trucking by granting special exemptions for farmers hauling food to market. In the original legislation, food haulers were exempt from union provisions requiring employers to only hire teamsters. The USDA, Commerce Department, and other industry stakeholders used this hole to hire cheap, independent truckers willing to bring food to market for less, cutting the wages of the people hauling food across the nation. Unlike the debates over price supports, farmers of all sizes

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[489] Barbara Tellus, "Salad Month Western Style," *Western Grower and Shipper* (1966): 13.
[490] Hansen, *Gaining Access,* 136-9.

supported this deregulatory move. During the 1930s and 1940s, unionized transportation firms relied on provisions in the 1935 Wagner Act to put a stranglehold on the transport of manufactured items, hiking costs on processed foods. Supermarkets reported that unionized trucking increased prices by as much as ten percent, particularly on in-demand items like crackers and canned fruit. [491] Eager to expand the presence of independent truckers –and subtly drive down prices, USDA supported a series of lawsuits launched against the ICC to open up trucking. One, led by Illinois driver Norman Harwood, helped open the definition of natural items sufficiently to include virtually any kind of foodstuff that did not pass through a formally-defined factory. In hearing his original petition, ICC commissioners, responsible for making these decisions, determined that placing the salad in cellophane bags constituted a process of manufacturing, and so required registration with the unions as an official hauler. The courts overturned this decision, ruling that "not only those agricultural commodities which are marketable in their natural state but those on which labor has been performed or mechanical skill applied, without materially affecting the natural state of the articles."[492] However disingenuous this argument was – Congress had no way to know when it originally wrote the regulations in 1935 that supermarket retailing would stretch the geographic boundaries of food transport– this decision open the door to lower costs across the food industry in a widespread attack on labor gains.

The meatpacking industry, arguably supermarket operators' most important production partner, was one of the biggest beneficiaries of the deregulatory wave and the segment of the food economy with the biggest impact on jobs in rural, suburban, and

[491] American Trucking Association, *American Trucking Trends* (1949), 1, 4.
[492] Interstate Commerce Commission, Docket MC-107669, *Norman E. Harwood Contract Carrier Applications*, 47 M.C.C. 597, Dec. 16, 1947.

urban areas. For decades, food regulation had centered on meatpacking. Beginning in 1906, a wave a laws scrutinized how slaughterhouses managed every aspect of their businesses. Initially, these took the form of health laws, but during the 1930s, powerful meat-cutters unions took control of industrial and retail butchery in the United States. Union butchers even found their way into supermarkets like Big Bear and Piggly Wiggly that otherwise only employed non-unionized labor.[493] While union labor and health regulation made meatpacking safer for both workers and the public, it also drove up meat prices. Indeed, Eisenhower-era USDA secretary Erza Benson had been a key voice speaking against the beef trusts in the 1920s for precisely this reason.[494] After the war, prices kept climbing because of high union wages and transport costs while cattle ranchers received dwindling prices at auction, a product of a beef glut and rising feed and pasture costs. Something had to give. Ranchers and consumer advocates pointed towards monopoly power that New Deal-regulations had failed to break. As one Georgia cattle producer put it, "there is too much spread between the price paid for live cattle and the price of steak and roast in grocery stores. Somebody is getting a heck of a profit! Didn't Swift show a 12 million dollar gain in NET profits this year over last?"[495] The Brooklyn Tenant Welfare and Consumer Council, a holdover from the 1930s-era co-op movement, peppered Benson's office with letters arguing that the high cost of meat was "obvious price-fixing" by big Midwestern meatpackers.[496]

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[493] See chapter 3. Also, Roger Horowitz, *Negro and White, Unite and Fight: A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930-1990* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).
[494] Hamilton, *Trucking Country*, 135.
[495] A. L. Ellis to Benson, December 27, 1953, Box 28, Entry 11, Agricultural Marketing Service Records, RG 136, NARA-II
[496] Laura Hall to Dwight Eisenhower, September 18, 1953, Box 28, Entry 11, Agricultural Marketing Service Records, RG 136, NARA-II

Public anger caught the administration in a bind. Although big meatpackers were incredibly unpopular, there was little obvious evidence pointing towards price collusion. Rather, the big meat firms argued rising prices were the result of increased sales to supermarkets pressing available supplies– an assertion grounded in fact and backed by the NAFC who showed that food retail sales increased as much as 6% annually between 1945 and 1950.[497] In other words, meatpackers claimed prices were rising because supermarkets were responsible for a net increase in food consumption across the United States and they were struggling to keep up.[498] This mirrors complaints launched by vegetable and fruit producers during the same period. Taking a queue from the strong anti-union sentiment in the Republican Party, Benson agreed with the packers that strong labor unions and high wages were driving up the price of beef and promised to roll back labor gains to help consumers. In particular, he claimed the contract Amalgamated Meat Workers signed with the Chicago meatpackers in 1955, bringing about a $50 million boost in wages, irrecoverably pushed up the cost of processing meat while forcing cattlemen to "take lower prices for meat animals."[499] Cutting costs at the point of processing by employing cheaper, unskilled labor would strike the perfect balance because consumer prices would drop without driving down farm prices. More importantly for the history of the supermarket, the government's move to a nonunionized food economy meant cheap, disposable labor would cut the meat and pick the vegetables powering the move towards a more industrialized distribution system.

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[497] Sales Expand Further," *Supermarket News*, January 1950.
[498] Willard F. Williams, "Structural Changes in the Meat Wholesaling Industry," *Journal of Farm Economics* (May 1958): 322-27.
[499] Earl Butz to Sen. Ed. C. Johnson, September 3, 1954, Box 2, Folder 4, Agricultural Marketing Service Records, RG 136, NARA-II

Public debate forced public and private stakeholders to rework the beef economy towards transforming the steer into a more efficient meat producer in factory-style feedlots, borrowing some of the strategies developed by poultry companies industry at the same time. These modern beef factories would begin to dot the Great Plains and Mountain West in the mid-1950s, confining tens of thousands of cattle in pens fattening on cheap corn. Before this moment, ranchers usually raised cattle on isolated ranches until they were nearly ready for market, perhaps a few months shy of the desired weight. At that point, a complex formula based on ecological and market conditions determined where and how a beef cow might spend its final days. For instance, cows from Kansas might be finished locally and butchered in Kansas City or shipped off to urban feedlots in Chicago, Omaha or even further, making the cattle business highly unsystematic, with none of the tight control exerted over the growing poultry population. Thanks to the agricultural trucking exemption, developments made using the RMA, and Eisenhower administration policy, it slowly became cheaper to ship cattle in the mid-1950s, with the unexpected result of flipping this old system on its head.[500] This was no small change, and one with enormous implications for the emerging supermarket economy since existing natural products like cows could be administered through an disassembly line capable of bringing animals to market at the requisite speeds. In one sector of the agricultural system, scientists were making animals like the Vantress chicken ready for an industrialized production process. In another sector, creations like the feedlot did the physical work of stocking the supermarket.

[500] Jimmy Skaggs, *Prime Cut: Livestock Raising and Meatpacking in the United States 1607-1983* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2000), 178; Kenneth R. Krause, *Cattle Feeding: 1962-89: Location and Feedlot Size* (Washington: Economic Research Service, 1991), 15.

The small town of Greeley, Colorado epitomized the new system. Founded as a utopian farming settlement in the 1870s, Greeley was neither an important agricultural center nor ranching hub. This began to change during in 1937 when a local schoolteacher named Warren Montfort started to buy grain from local farmers and feed it to his cattle. At the time, American livestock were mainly grass-fed, not grain-fed, and they either roamed the range eating native grasses or lived on farms consuming hay. Both methods were limited by the seasons, pegging meat prices to the availability of good fodder. By feeding cattle year-round on grain, Monfort could control the timing of his livestock sales and wait for the best prices in meatpacking centers like Chicago –usually during winter months when meat was at its most expensive. His beef had the benefit of being more fatty and tender than grass-fed beef, nor did it need several weeks of dry aging after slaughter to be market ready – this was truly farm-to-table protein. By the late-1940s, similar feedlots began opening across the rural Midwest, feeding cattle on the same surplus grain USDA bureaucrats were trying to minimize. Monfort had started his business in 1937 with eighteen head of cattle; by 1959 he was feeding twenty thousand.[501]

In 1960, Monfort opened a small slaughterhouse in Greeley adjacent to the feedlot, a break with industry practices. Meat processors were typically located in urban railhubs connected to a city's commercial districts and long-distance shipping infrastructure, like Chicago's Union Stockyards. Even early supermarkets got their food from these central hubs, fighting with jobbers and green grocers for apples, onions, and cows. The geographic decentralization of food retailing in the 1950s put this system under stress – meatpackers had to hire expensive unionized truckers to haul meat to stores

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[501] *Schlosser*, *Fast Food Nation,* 137; John Fraser Hart, *The Changing Scale of American Agriculture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 47-50.

in the suburbs.[502] This only added to big meatpackers' financial pressure, which had been building since they began inking big union contracts in the 1930s. Chicago-based Swift & Company, the largest of the big five meatpackers in 1960, estimated that as much as one quarter of its revenues went directly to paying wages to unionized meatcutters, fixed costs they claimed cost consumers.[503] This meant Monfort's slaughterhouse represented an alternative to these capital-intensive urban operations at the precise moment the cost of beef had become a significant political issue.

Monfort's plant was indistinguishable from big urban slaughterhouses except for a few critical distinctions that would all prove important to the industrialization of agriculture. Firstly, the remote location meant that the pool of available labor was desperate for work and willing to accept wages and benefits far below the industry average. The subsidy-driven consolidation of agriculture during the 1950s, particularly in sectors like ranching and grain farming, left many people in the rural west without meaningful work. One USDA report from the late-1950s described how small farmers are losing their properties across the Rocky Mountains because of the pressure of competing with Midwestern growers increasing their production thanks to government support.[504] As many as 4,000 family farms in Colorado alone had ceased operations between 1950 and 1960.[505] Some of these people went on to work the killing floor at Montfort. Secondly, Montfort had broad support from local politicians and community leaders.

[502] Early urban supermarkets opened in the 1930s and 1940s relied on existing supply sources for their food whereas west coast stores, especially those in Southern California, bought most of their product direct from farmer-partners at reduced prices. Recall that the Ralphs chain initially cornered the market in Los Angeles by hauling food direct from the Imperial Valley.

[503] Yeagar, *Competition and Regulation*, 200.

[504] United States Department of Agriculture, "Summary of Research Experience with Farming Activites in the Western States," TB #1167 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1957).

[505] Colorado Department of Agriculture, *Colorado Agricultural Statistics* (Colorado Department of Agriculture: Denver, Co, 1961), 84.

County and state money helped expand roads and water systems necessary for efficient operations. Rather than look for handouts, as the Chicago political machine notoriously did, rural politicians in Colorado (also in equally-desperate spots like Arkansas) actively assisted Monfort out of a sense of civic duty – at a time when stable jobs were hard to come by, the company was a powerful job creator capable of generating considerable tax revenue. State and local authorities passed tax credits to help the company retain profits as well as building up water and road infrastructure near feedlots.[506] Monfort had limits, though. The design was innovative, but the company was small. They could offer meat at a lower price than much larger firms but could only supply meat in such limited amounts that Monfort could only supply regional grocery stores.[507] At this early stage, companies like Monfort –single outfits in a wave of innovators developing different agricultural products– were small, unable to fully meet the needs of national chains, but they were creating an infrastructure for later firms.

In 1960, two Swift executives, Currier J. Holman and A.D. Anderson, decided to open a new meatpacking company that more neatly aligned with the needs of supermarket customers. The veterans of the old Chicago packinghouse believed they could compete with the industry giants by slashing costs, especially labor. Naming their company Iowa Beef Packers (IBP), they borrowed organizational strategies from the Monfort slaughterhouse and the poultry industry, installing a system for their first slaughterhouse in Denison, Iowa that used assembly-line style processing to eliminate the need for skilled labor. The new facility was a massive one-story structure based around a

[506] Roger Benedict, "Reeling Ranchers," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 08, 1964.

[507] William Blair, "Packers Battle Chain Stores in Marketing 'Revolution,' *The New York Times,* March 24, 1958. Ironically, the rising cost of Monfort beef in Denver supermarkets helped spark the 1967 supermarket protests. See chapter 6.

long conveyor belt where workers stood in place, each removing a single muscle or making a particular type of cut thousands of times per day. This eliminated the need for professional meat cutters.[508] As A. D Anderson later boasted to *Chicago Tribune* “we’ve tried to take the skill out of every step,” so that anyone holding a knife could work for a beefpacker.[509]

IBP spearheaded the westward and rural movement of meatpacking by building facilities across the “feedlot belt,” creating a beef economy –a subset of the larger food economy– thriving on unskilled laborers in parts of the country otherwise unexploited by major industry. The new interstate highway system made it possible to rely upon trucks –driven by independent drivers– to ship meat to supermarkets. Quality roads also made it possible to concentrate cattle from the thousands of individual ranches across the west into large feedlots like the one sitting beside the Greeley slaughterhouse. Once single Colorado facility was established, nearly 37 commercial feedlots each capable of hosting as many as 100,000 cattle at a time opened in Nebraska, Iowa, Oklahoma, and other Western states straddling the Ogallala aquifer (where the vast majority of American grain production occurs) by 1970.[510] Much like California had a generation earlier industrialized fruit and vegetable growing, the development of the highway system and cutthroat managerial practices created a new industrial beef regime that synergized grain and steer production across the prairies. Both development enabled supermarkets to offer cheap food to consumers.

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[508] Shelton Stromquist and Marvin Bergman, *Unionizing the Jungles: Labor and Community in the Twentieth Century Meatpacking Industry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 25-33.
[509] Quoted in Stull et al., *Any Way You Cut It.,* 19.
[510] Krause, *Cattle Feeding: 1962-89*, 11.

An example of the trend is IBP's Dakota City, Nebraska plant, which opened in 1967. There, workers processed cattle from an on-site feedlot into carcasses and then smaller cuts of meat that could be vacuum-sealed and plastic-wrapped as "boxed beef."[511] Packaged for immediate consumer use, boxed beef was as much a gift to the grocery industry as an improvement in distribution. Meatcutters were the single most expensive class of workers employed in supermarkets since they were not only skilled workers but also typically unionized. They also had powerful support. Organizers, especially in the Northeast, spent more time working with supermarket workers than those working in rural feedlots because of both proximity and the perception that urban retail workers would ultimately compose a larger group of possible members. Boxed beef eliminated the need for this entire class of workers, eliminating any need for high-wage meatcutters in supermarkets.[512] IBP also defeated unions trying to get a foothold in its facilities. By opening plants in rural areas far from cities, the essential ingredients for organized labor never coalesced. Workers in the Nebraska or Iowa countryside often came from farms put out of business and were quite simply grateful for work that kept them in their communities.[513] This new way of marketing beef also created byproducts like leftover bones and bloods that became profitable byproducts like dogfood. IBP even added "grinding lines" to plants that could make hamburger in enormous quantities fit for both supermarkets and the ever-growing number of fast food restaurants like MacDonald's, a move that drove smaller processors and wholesalers out of business. Tapping into the

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[511] Hamilton, *Trucking Country*, 152.

[512] "Agreement on Cooperation and Jurisdiction," Folder: Retail Department, 1960-1965" Box 42, Records of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

[513] United States Department of Agriculture, "Survey of Rural Conditions: Midwest," (Washington, DC: GPO, 1965), 16.

same logic that organized the supermarket, IBP's low wage and mass-production techniques transformed the entire food industry, from the field to the store counter.[514]

IBP's attitude towards labor went beyond simply suppressing wages. When workers in the Dakota City plant went on strike in 1969 to bring in the United Meat Cutters, the company simply hired scabs to replace them. Faced with union resistance in New York City the same year –teamsters refused to unload boxed beef that threatened union jobs– the company brokered a deal with the mafia that ensured IBP meat found its ways onto stores in the Big Apple and other cities with a mob presence. When the FBI revealed the extent of criminal activity in 1974, the company simply fired the responsible executives (many of whom went to jail) and kept shipping meat to the east coast at the same rates the Mafia had set for them. IBP had cheap beef to sell in supermarkets, and consumers had grown so accustomed to its products that they were willing to accept a criminal meat monopoly.[515]

Driving down wages and crippling unions coincided with efforts to continue rationalizing cattle slaughter. IBP introduced minute divisions of labor throughout the slaughtering process, each requiring minimal skills from individual employees and allowing the company to hire new recruits who could be ready for work in a matter of hours. Currier and Holman organized plants around the disassembly line, a rapid, horizontal track that moved through refrigerated spaces that prevented the shrinkage of meat. In 1964, IBP could take a live animal from the feedlot to a truck bound for the supermarket in only thirty-two minutes; a decade later it was down to twenty. The combination of low-wages, deskilling, division of tasks, and rapid movement allowed an

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[514] Stull et al., *Any Way You Cut It.,* 18.
[515] Hamilton, *Trucking Country*, 156-158.

IBP-plant to slaughter a cow for less than $15 in 1975, while their Chicago-based competition paid $18 to $20 per head. By shaving costs and taking advantage of government investment infrastructure, IBP could undersell nearly all its competitors while making remarkable profits. The tiny company founded in 1960 with a $300,000 loan from the Small Business Administration became a ranking member of the *Fortune* 500 in 1969, with $534 million in annual sales.[516]

The relentless competition presented older Chicago-based meatpackers with the choice of either moving their operations to similar rural locales or going out of business, a calculus that older food companies across the nation faced when presented by more modern competition. One-by-one, the old meatpacking trusts followed IBP to the West and the South in search of cheap labor and more closely integrated operations. Plants operated by existing firms opened in Iowa, Kansas, Texas, Colorado, and the Dakotas offered desperate rural folks a lifeline, offering wages as much as 50 percent lower than what union meatcutters earned in Chicago but still more than what local positions offered.[517] At the same time, new meatpackers established control over the terms and prices on which they purchased live cattle. By the mid-1960s, IBP perfected a system of direct buying from stockyards across the West, using two-way radios to coordinate agents across the west. Instantaneous feedback on market conditions prevented them from buying at prices that did not meet with approval from management, just as agents used

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[516] House Small Business Committee, *Small Business Problems in the Marketing of Meat, Part 5, 8;* Tinstman and Peterson, *Iowa Beef Processors,* 8; "Ahead of the Herd in Automation," 106; "Rough Riders," *Forbes*, June 15, 1974, 65; House Small Business Committee, *Small Business Problems in the Marketing of Meat and Other Commodities, Part 4, Changing Structure of the Beef Industry, Hearings*, 96th Congress. 1st session., June 25, 1979, 10; "300,000 Pounds Dressed Beef a Day is Goal," *Garden City Telegram*, October 28, 1965; "The Youngest Giant," *Fortune*, May 15, 1969, 293.

[517] Memorandum, June 10, 1964, Folder, "Farm Labor 1950-64," Box 34, Records of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America.

telegraphs to coordinate A&P's national buying campaigns at the beginning of the century.[518]

Urban unions, the lynchpins of the old prewar suppliers to the chains, were slow to see the threat. Lodges had spent much of the 1950 and 1960s celebrating their success getting major concessions from big meatpackers and securing a place for union butchers in supermarket butchers' sections.[519] Not only was there little infrastructure for a push into the rural West and South, where local authorities and laws were avowedly hostile, but experience. Miners and farmers' organizations had organized the rural west for much of the twentieth century, often facing determined violence, but had little in common with Eastern and Midwestrern industrial workers. Likewise, urban industrial unions had never had to fight for better railroad freight rates or organize cooperative production among hundreds of small farmers. As one official for the Amalgamated Meat Workers put the matter in 1961, "new IBP workers in the Dakotas have little reason to believe that organizations based in large Midwestern cities can represent their interests when for decades local workers' representatives had failed to do so."[520] Another official with the same organization saw "resistance from workers unable to find jobs elsewhere in any field, let alone meatcutting. Plant employees are coming in from failing farms, and have no particular interest in the meat cutting profession except as a means to an income."[521]

518 House Agriculture Committee, *Prohibit Feeding of Livestock*, 24.
519 Getting Concessions from the A&P, for example, was seen as a major success. "Memorandum," February 10, 1962, Folder: "1962-A&P Survey," Folder 22, Box 41, Records of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America.
520 Local Union 304, "Civil Rights Questionnaire," Folder 27, Box 41, Records of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America.
521 "Third Annual Survey in Retail," Folder 13, Box 43, Records of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America.

Policymakers viewed the transition to industrial processing as a permanent solution to the problems poised by large numbers of unorganized producers sending their goods into the marketplace blindly – a feature of the food economy supermarket operators proudly claimed to have eliminated. With IBP and other direct-to-store processors pushing direct marketing, urban stockyard managers pressed the government to implement rules slowing the relocation of cattle processing to rural locales. For example, they wanted a national exchange for cattle that would prevent the rancher-to-feedlot contracts funneling livestock to the new, rural companies – a scheme similar to a proposal from citrus firms looking to prevent direct sales from farmers to supermarkets. The USDA's Packers and Stockyards Division refused to act, informing supplicants the government did not see feedlots as a competitive threat to existing packers since they purchase the same cattle. Regulators also argued rural processing was good for consumers since it was more efficient; the older businesses simply needed to keep up.[522] These decisions sent the central stockyards in Chicago and Kansas City into a death spiral that ended when they closed in 1971 and 1973, respectively. The government did nothing as those businesses died and thousands of union butchers lost their jobs since Washington believed concentrated economic power in the food economy as no longer a significant issue so long as prices stayed low. As one USDA assistant secretary put it, "The Department believes that packers and other buyers should be free to purchase, and that producers and other sellers should be free to sell, livestock for slaughter at any point. Feedlot packers…[are not] a restriction on our competitive system."[523] Better technology and

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[522] House Agriculture Committee, *Equalize Livestock Marketing Competition*, 87th Congress, 1st Session, 16.
[523] Ibid, 59.

labor management had upended long-standing patterns meant better prices for consumers, the new end goal of all agricultural policy.

Retailers supported rural processors both politically and with hefty contacts. At a 1968 meeting of the National Association of Food Chains, an A&P executive told attendees that "certain developments in meat packing and processing that drive down the cost of purchasing help our industry more than opening a store in every town in America."[524] The NAFC and other industry trade groups lobbied Washington and state lawmakers to either pass new rules loosening antitrust rules or put anti-labor policies in place. Fourteen states passed Right-to-Work laws between 1960 and 1975; all were significant agricultural processors like Arkansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota.[525] The NAFC even joined with the Teamsters to push for national transportation standards in 1973, hoping to cut red tape.[526] Retailers supplemented political moves by buying from new, cost-slashing processors. IBP's sales to supermarkets increased 400% between 1969 and 1975, to nearly $3.5 billion annually.[527] While many of these sales went to smaller, regional chains looking for good bargains, like the Idaho-based Albertson's, a significant number went to companies like Kroger that had already developed internal infrastructure for meat processing.[528] IBP's meat was simply cheaper than anything the chains could prepare themselves. One trade magazine even advised, "enterprising buying agents thinking of the company's bottom line [to buy] high-profit boxed beef rather then whole-

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524 Steven Weinstein, "Celebration at the NAFC," *Supermarket News*, October 1966, 18.
525 Gilbert J. Gall, "Right-to-Work Referendum Voting: Observations on the Aggregate Historical Statistics," *Labor Law Journal* (December 1988), 805-12.
526 "New Trucking Regulations," *The International Teamster* 71, , No. 2 (February 1973), 31.
527 Thomas L. Friendman, "Iowa Beef Packers Revolutionized Meat-Packing Industry," *The New York Times*, June 2, 1981.
528 James Risser and George Anthan, "The Meat Price Explosion and Chain Stores," *The Washington Post*, March 9, 1975.

carcasses requiring costly in-store butchering." This way, they could undercut other, competing, grocers, union meatcutters, and independent town butchers who survived thanks to their dedication to personal service. In an earlier era, supermarkets had killed off village green grocers through the same methods. By the 1970s, supermarkets were driving off the smaller companies responsible for supplying food to them.

Retailers were especially successful collaborating with processors to accept some regulations, particularly those concerning product safety, while pushing back against agency rulings at the federal and state levels that could have restricted buying power. As far back as 1957, industry mouthpieces argued that the government was an important partner in establishing consumer confidence in products.[529] By the time Congress established the National Commission on Food Marketing in 1964, it was taken for granted that, in the words of President Johnson's agriculture commissioner Orville Freeman, "the food retailer, once the tail end of the food marketing chain, is rapidly becoming the dominant influence in the food industry."[530] By the time the committee released its report in 1966, it claimed the "food marketing system is generally competitively sound," and that government would be best served using its enormous power to ensure food was packaged and processed safely.[531] These decisions put antitrust enforcement off the table, even though large retailers exercised so much power on the buying end of the food chain producers of all sizes could only hope to succeed if they delivered products on industrial scales suited to mass-marketing. The Commission did increase the degree to which the government was involved in food processing, however.

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[529] Eugene Lejeune, "Washington and the Supermarket," *Supermarket News*, August 1957, 11.
[530] Orville L. Freeman to Lyndon B. Johnson, March 24, 1964, Folder 17, Box 4259, RG 16, Records of the Secretary of Agriculture, Entry 17, NARA-II
[531] Lyndon B. Johnson, "The President's News Conference at the LBJ Ranch," March 28, 1964, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1964), 428.

Federal meat, fruit, and vegetable inspection, in addition to strict USDA and FDA supervision on packed items, conducted at the point of packing became law in 1965 (though it had been required for many items since 1908). Industry trade magazines celebrated this move, because "the federal government is now a direct partner in delivering food to stores."[532] Companies had a bigger reason to celebrate: government inspectors were not on company payrolls and provided a federal stamp of guarantee that doubled as a powerful advertising tool.

Farm organizations, much like urban packers, were late to the battle against consolidated rural capital. Only the National Farmers Organization (NFO), a young organization founded in 1955 to speak for small farmers, supported the central stockyards in their claim that urban terminal marketing expanded the choices cattlemen (had within the market. Unlike the heads of the older farm organizations, like the Farm Bureau, NFO leaders believed political alliances with either of the two major parties was insufficient to achieve their aims of supporting family farmers; only direct intervention in the workings of the farm economy would improve conditions.[533] Revisiting some of the reformist ideas from the New Deal, NFO leaders believed that their members should withhold grain and livestock from the marketplace to hike prices, a desperate action that could easily backfire if even a few money-hungry farmers broke ranks and sold to corporate processors. The problem, as NFO Vice President Robert Casper described, was that central terminals were "the only price-basing mechanism [the farmer] now has."[534] If commercial feedlots and direct buying schemes replaced those economic chokepoints,

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[532] Gordon Bloom, "Government Is Our Partner" *Supermarket News*, January 1967.
[533] Hamilton, *Trucking Country*, 150.
[534] House Agriculture Committee, *Equalize Livestock Marketing Competition*, 87th Congress, 1st Session, 29-30.

farmers seeking to sell their live cattle had to bargain as individuals in a lightly regulated marketplace. To be sure, many, especially grain farmers, had special protections in the form of price control and subsidies, but the prices farmers received would be set by a few buyers for large corporations. The depot system had many flaws, but the open auctions helped smaller farmers compete with larger ones.[535]

As it turned it, the NFO was right in its prognosis, but they failed to understand that the problems facing farmers were not so simple as the conflict between centralized and decentralized processing –supermarkets and the interstate highway system had changed the geography of distribution to such a degree that withholding was never a viable strategy. The NFO's withholding plan began on Labor Day, 1962, demanding meatpackers pay $32.45 per hundred pounds for cattle, nearly ten percent that the highest recorded postwar market price, but one that more accurately reflected costs for smaller producers. Other products saw similar strikes, like barley, though none had the political or economic significance attached to the meat trade. The Farm Bureau and the many of the big urban packers threatened legal action against withholders for breaking futures contracts, but the big urban firms like Swift, dependent on open auctioning, broke the protests by offering even higher prices to ranchers, effectively caving to the NFO after only a few days. [536]

Rural processors chose to undermine the strike from the start by sending ever-cheaper boxed beef to cities, cementing the movement of food processing infrastructure to the countryside. Big feedlots run by Monfort or IBP always had enough livestock on hand to supply customers for several weeks, if not months. When the withholding action

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535 Skaggs, *Prime Cut*, 190.
536 John T. Schlebecker, "The Great Holding Action: The NFO in September, 1962," *Agricultural History* 39 (October 1965), 207-11.

crippled urban distributors' ability to make good on orders to supermarkets, retailers who did not yet to stock boxed beef began to do so. Over a period of several years following the withholding action, chain grocers began to exclusively stock feedlot beef because, as one industry magazine argued, "grocers can be assured that the control [companies like IBP] have over their supply system ensures we can satisfy customers."[537]

With the unions, farm organizations, and central processors critically weakened, there was little effective resistance to the steady transformation of many well-paying rural food jobs into positions requiring few skills and even less financial security. If the early years of the supermarket boom created a variety of good jobs growing, packing, and hauling food, the technological gains achieved through the RMA and other developments threatened those positions. Food processing was not immune from the cost-saving and output-increasing automation changing the landscape of other industries, like automobile manufacturing. However, new technologies in other sectors removed mostly unskilled positions, leaving behind a core of highly skilled engineers and technicians.[538] The opposite logic governed farm and food automation. To be sure, machinery replaced some of the more onerous and intensive tasks, but the majority of jobs lost were well-paying skilled positions in ice houses or killing floors. From 1965 to 1975, for instance, nearly 30,000 skilled meatcutting positions were lost nationwide and replaced by as many unskilled roles in assembly lines where workers only needed to learn a single cut or movement.[539] Nearly as many jobs identifying the sexes of chicken were lost over the same period as a wave of easy-to-use tests replaced older methods of visual inspections.

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537 "Witholding Actions Defeated." *Supermarket News*, November 1963.
538 Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis,* 130
539 Michael J. Broadway, "From City to Countryside: Recent Changes in the Structure and Location of the Meat-and Fish-Processing Industries," in *Any Way you Cut It*, 27.

At least 50,000 ice house jobs in California and the South were lost thanks to field packaging, since vacuum chillers could be purchased for the cost of two or three of these skilled workers per year.[540] So too was the canning industry devastated, when automatic scales and pipe-fillers replaced the workforce experienced with filling and sealing. Human hands were still essential in the process, though. Farmers still needed people to pick fragile vegetables in the fields and just as corporations needs people to fabricate animals in ways that machines were not capable of doing. Even in supermarkets, there was no technology available to replace the very basic tasks of stocking shelves and working cash registers.[541] Food industry jobs remained, but these positions were perilously low-paying, and required no skills other than physical endurance.

As relocation and automation gutted food jobs, a new workforce arrived willing to take the low-wage positions remaining. The *Bracero* program established a tradition of low-wage Latino labor in rural areas. By the time the government stopped sending contract laborers north of the border in 1964, cheap Latino field workers formed the bulk of the agricultural workforce in California and the rest of the Southwest. Large pockets were across the South, too. But few of these men (and almost all of these migrants were men) had industrial jobs. *Braceros* were dedicated farm labor, and even those who stayed on after their contracts ended tended to continue working fields. That core of Latino workers provided an anchor for later migrants, encouraged by high wages relative to Mexico and the United States' political stability (despite entrenched white supremacy). When Congress passed a sweeping series of immigration reforms in 1965 making it

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[540] Kathleen Stanley, "Industrial and Labor Market Transformations in the U.S. Meatpacking Industry," in *The Global Restructuring of Agro-Food Systems,* ed. Philip McMichael (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 130.
[541] This feat would not be accomplished until the early 21st century.

easier for Latinos and other immigrants to come to the US, nearly 100,000 new arrivals from Central and South American began arriving between 1965 and 1975. Thanks to the successes of the Civil Rights movement, particularly Ceasar Chavez's United Farm Workers, immigrants received improved working conditions and legal aid.[542]

Many of these people arrived looking for work, and took advantage of the opportunities offered by agroindustrial businesses looking to slash labor costs. Union rolls from meat packing facilities, even those relocated to rural areas like IBP's Dakota City Plant, show that the vast majority of workers during the 1960s were white. That plant, which employed over 1,600 meatcutters was 96% white in 1968.[543] At a Sioux Falls, SD plant operated by Morrel's, a second-tier cattle processor selling directly to restaurants and large institutions, there were so few non-whites that a union representative wrote back to headquarters that "I don't know if they have had any applications from negroes for years."[544] These employment patterns changed quickly in the early 1970s as Latino immigration swelled. While many migrants found their ways to cities like Los Angeles, Houston, or Chicago, people found their ways to former *Bracero* enclaves in the small towns hosting packing facilities. Garden City, Nebraska's IBP had 1,200 workers in 1970; 97% were white and the remainder with a mixture of African-Americans, Latinos, and "foreigners."[545] The city itself, with 10,000 people, was less than 1% Latino. Five years later, the plants' workforce had swelled to 1,400 but 25% were

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542 Timothy J. Henderson, *Beyond Borders: A History of Mexican Migration to the United States* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2011), 58-89.

543 Local Union 5, "Civil Rights Questionnaire," Folder 27, Box 41, Records of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America.

544 Local Union 304, "Civil Rights Questionnaire," Folder 27, Box 41, Records of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America.

545 Local Union 304, "Civil Rights Questionnaire," Folder 27, Box 41, Records of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America.

described as "Mexican." The city itself had grown to over 13,000 and, while census data is scarce for that year, it seems these new workers constituted the bulk of new citizens.[546] Similar patterns exist elsewhere, like major tomato-packing city Immokalee, Florida. In 1970, eight thousand people lived there. Almost all of whom worked in tomato agriculture and were nearly cleanly split between a large white population with smaller African-American core of unskilled laborers. A decade later, nearly 12,000 lived there, and all of the population gains were in Latino migrants from Mexico, Guatemala, and elsewhere.[547] As social workers at the time noted, "older, established agricultural workers have been replaced by gangs of Hispanic men working for fractions of the pay expected by skilled pickers."[548]

Although Latinos did not intend to upend established rural labor systems, the influx of workers willing to take below-average wages encouraged employers to push out the sorts of workers who had been failed by government and business. Employers saw Latinos as the perfect sort of worker for the emerging political economy, where loose regulation and discount retailers gave their businesses to processers who delivered food at rock-bottom prices. Government subsidies and research programs did their part, but business and government continued to see labor costs as the biggest obstacle in the war to drive down prices.[549] Companies could easily fit Latino workers with limited English language ability or knowledge of American labor laws into this schema. At the same

[546] Local Union 475, "Civil Rights Questionnaire," Folder 27, Box 41, Records of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America.
[547] David Griffith, Ed Kissam, David Runsten, Anna Garcia, Jeronimo Camposeco, Manuel Valdes Pizzini, and Max Pfeffer, "Farm Labor Supply Study" (Washington, D.C.,United States Department of Labor, 1991).
[548] Quoted in David Griffith and Ed Kissam, *Working Poor: Farmworkers in the United States* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 27.
[549] "The Way Forward," *Supermarket News*, August 1969.

time, the swell of low-skill, high-motivation immigrant labor, which only kept increasing in the 1970s and 1980s, powerfully depressed wages. After unions lost their battles with big companies like IBP, processors purged many workers who had spoken against corporate practices and replaced them with immigrants or otherwise desperate rural folk with little inclination to speak out against unsafe practices.

By the 1980s, the trickle of immigrants became a flood. As existing rural institutions broke down, in no small part due to competition with agribusiness, new immigrant-centric businesses like restaurants served as cultural liaisons for new arrivals looking for work. The states with the fastest growing "Hispanic" populations were also sites of major agricultural processing. North Carolina experienced a fourfold increase in Latino residents; Arkansas was not far behind; Georgia and Tennessee each had around a threefold jump; and South Carolina and Alabama experienced a doubling of their Latino populations. South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, and Colorado each had a fourfold increase over the same period, too.[550] As low-wage labor markets in California became increasingly saturated by Latino and Asian immigrants, the rural economic boom in U.S. South and West drew those same populations of workers. All told, at least three million immigrant workers came to rural states during the 1980s. Most initially looked for seasonal labor, picking fruits and vegetables, but found the higher wages, year-round indoor employment, forty-hour workweeks, and relative job security in processing plants attractive.[551]

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[550] Manuel Torres, "The Latinization of the South, *Mobile Register*, June 28, 1999; Russell Cobb, "The Chicken Hangers;" *Identify*, Feb. 2, 2004; U.S. Census 1990, 2000.

[551] William Kandel and Emilio A. Parrado, "Industrial Transformation and Hispanics in the American South: The Case of the Poultry Industry," in Hispanic Spaces, Latino Places: A Geography of Regional and Cultural Diversity, ed. Daniel D. Arreola (University of Texas Press, 2004); William Kandel and Emilio

The disaster at the Imperial Foods plant in Hamlet, North Carolina occurred at the crescendo of this movement of people and capital. The surrounding county had lost 80% of its nonfarm jobs over the previous ten years after a textile mill, railway depot, and furniture factory closed thanks to lower cost competition, leaving imperial the only large employer left in the area. The local farms were almost entirely small, family affairs averaging less than 10 acres and earning an income of roughly $10,000 annually—an amount hovering near the poverty line.[552] Regionally, the only profitable agriculture came through raising chickens or amassing enough land to grow tobacco or corn at levels that received significant government subsidies. As one commentator put it at the height of the crisis, "our fixation with efficiency blinds us to the reality that we are paying for boom and bust agriculture– the destruction of a system that protected dispersed ownership, the foreclosure of the chance to farm for all but the wealthy, and the death of a way to life so satisfying to many Americans that they cling to it against all odds."[553] The people who took jobs at Imperial were among these economic refugees, latching on a source of local income that helped keep their properties afloat –of the 25 people killed in the Imperial fire, 16 listed their profession as "farmer," despite the fact they worked full-time cooking chicken fingers.[554] Indeed, Imperial had more in common with a company like IBP, hiring down-on-their-luck local farmers and immigrants for minimum wages. In fact, the factory itself had relocated from Pennsylvania to take advantage of North Carolina's right-to-work laws and lower taxes. The very absence of government

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Parrado, "U.S. Meat-Processing Industry Restructuring and New Hispanic Migration;" paper presented at the 2003 Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America, Minneapolis, May 1-3, 2003.

552 North Carolina Department of Agriculture, *Yearbook of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Agriculture, 1990), 17.

553 Frances Moore Lappe, "Keeping Them Down on the Farm," *The New York Times*, June 11, 1985.

554 Gerber and Jensen, "The Imperial Foods Plant Fire."

oversight, a feature of the Reagan-era laissez-faire, enabled the safety violations that started the fire. As always, plants operators could convince state officials to go along with company practices because processing plants brought much-needed money into struggling communities.[555] Imperial is thusly emblematic of the sorts of trade-offs delivering consumers cheap steaks, chickens, and tomatoes.

Corporate chains and consumers, in particular the suburbanites targeted by retailers, are the winners in this political economy, reaping financial benefits at the expense of farmers, rural workers, and even the animals caught up in industrial processing. But this is not a perverse neo-plantation system. Rather, farmers and other rural laborers used their participation in a handful of sectors, like beef or corn, to survive the corporatization of the countryside. The key for these survivors was to scale up and take advantage of government programs that further accelerated staple crop output. For the people who failed to do so, either because their properties were too small, they experienced some form of prejudice applying for federal loans or subsidies (common for blacks and Latinos), or they simply could not make it work financially. This latter group constituted a near majority of the agrarian producers in postwar America and as well as the forming the core of people who would work production lines in chicken plants and slaughterhouses. These are the losers of the supermarket economy; they are also the people who enable mass-food retailing to exist at all by filling low-wage jobs in processing plants, driving trucks, and working in grocery stores. The supermarket economy had opened the door for corporations to use cheap, non-unionized food labor,

[555] Quoted in Hamilton, *Trucking Country*, 162.

ultimately creating one of the few viable means of employment in the American countryside.

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Chapter 6: Express Checkout: The Counterculture and the Working Class Reject the Supermarket.

During the 1970s, many Americans began to doubt they were getting a good deal at the supermarket. Supermarket retailers had achieved a stranglehold over food distribution in America, but the emergence of the counterculture and a turbulent economy weakened the supermarket's grasp on the national diet as two distinct groups of Americans attacked retailers. On one side, the working class revolted against imagined high prices at the supermarket. On the other, members of the counterculture rebelling against mainstream society believed mass-food retailers were selling an anodized, plastic version of food with no real connection to the lived experience, inspiring many to open stores selling "natural foods" free from the taint of industrial agriculture.

The catalyst for the revolt against mass-food retailing was not only cultural change but acute economic anxiety. By the end of the 1960s, a savage combination of inflation and shrinking job markets cut into many supermarket shoppers' ability to pay for food, particularly affected lower-income families with already-stretched budgets who suddenly could no longer afford the supermarket diet if fresh beef or orange juice was surging in price. At this critical juncture, supermarkets could not simply cut prices to please an angry populace, nor could the government step in with New Deal-era price ceilings – inflation, oil shocks, and other economic turmoil cut too deeply into consumers' pockets for these quick fixes. Instead, food retailers ceded considerable market share in cheap food to fast-food restaurants and big box retailers like Wal Mart capable of delivering meals to hungry shoppers at the lowest possible prices. These firms had mastered vertical integration and distribution in addition to developing the sorts of relationships with food processors that had fueled the burst of supermarket construction in the 1950s.

At the same time, the counterculture created its own cuisine, based around the idea of "natural foods." As many participated in the movements for environmentalism, animal rights, and peace, they also pursued profits, opening stores that catered to the desire for ethically-acceptable foods. Dietary rebels understood natural foods –a floating definition in itself– as more than a business opportunity, but as a larger crusade for sustainability, health, and social harmony. They believed processed food and the overabundance of animal products had made Americans sick in every sense of the word, the supermarket diet representing a form of "food pollution." Natural foods sellers saw their stores and restaurants as the means to a lifestyle of physical, environmental, and spiritual rejuvenation and believed their products offered an ethical alternative to corporate agribusinesses and supermarkets that pursued profits by exploiting rural laborers and destroyed the environment through destructive extractive processes. Natural foods sellers and shoppers proudly embraced their small retail spaces bypassing America's chain supermarkets, which they considered promoters of a "plastic" consumer culture. And like many activist retailers, natural foods sellers saw their stores as battlegrounds for making work more democratic through consensus decisions making open records, hiring by vote, and other collectivist management practices. Natural foods, in short, were both the path to a different diet, but also a different way of selling food.

As I argue below, this chapter shows how consumers remade food retailing from the homogenous industry composed of full-service supermarkets into a variety of *industries* serving distinct constituencies. Historian Daniel Rodgers has described this era of American life as an "age of fracture," where political identity came to be composed more from individual experiences than a shared consensus about the direction of America.[556] This same battle for identity played out in the aisles of the supermarket, remaking how and where people shopped, in addition to punctuating the end of the era where the supermarket as an institution dictated how people bought their food.

Bottom Shelf: How Supermarkets Lost the Working Class to McDonald's

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In the fall of 1966, consumers across the United States began protesting the how expensive shopping at the supermarket had become. The price of food, particularly meat and dairy, had been rising for some time, and many people were simply fed up. Most blamed the esoteric ways grocers supplied their stores. Others attacked the discount coupons and appliance giveaways that played an important role in inter-chain competition. One protester in Denver, where the demonstrations had begun, told the *New York Times,* "we don't like to feel we're being taken to the cleaners and we're tired of hearing about some rich, invisible middleman who is causing prices to go up."[557] Within a few days of the first Colorado protests organized by the Housewives for Lower Food Prices (HLFP), thousands of women marched in front of local stores demanding lower prices. Banners read "down with frills, stamps, and gimmicks," and leaders like Mrs. Jay S. Threlkeld (national papers never gave her first name) turned out with thousands of

[556] Daniel Rodgers, *The Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1-14. For other descriptions of the 1980s that share the same conclusions, see also Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Macmillan Press, 2012); Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

[557] James Nagle, "Food Price Rises Stir Resentment," *New York Times,* October 16, 1966.

women who chanted "down with frills, stamps, and gimmicks!" outside of stores. The Denver protests focused on promotions like trading stamps and other premiums. Middle-class protestors, many taking to the streets for the first time in their lives, believed they unfairly shouldered the costs of these programs, and they threatened a boycott until retailers lowered prices.[558]

The Denver boycotts quickly became a national phenomenon. Chains like Safeway lowered prices on in-demand items like beef and milk, but the protests fatally damaged stores' reputations. Women in more than 100 cities across 21 different states organized similar demonstrations. Groups like HELP (Housewives to Enact Lower Prices), MILK (Mothers Interested in Lower Kosts), and the We've Had It Club picketed stores in New York, Florida, and Los Angeles. President Lyndon Johnson sent his Special Assistant for Consumer Affairs, Esther Peterson, to Denver to lend her personal support to the demonstrators and gauge the tension on the ground. Appearing with HELP's founder, Mrs. Paul West (her first name was also not mentioned), Peterson told reporters, "I am definitely on the side of the consumer and the housewives."[559] Echoing the popular complaints leveled against retailers that consumer bore too much of the burden for promotions and giveaways, Peterson intoned, "I want to know how much we are paying for these extra things."[560] Calling for a Federal Trade Commission (FTC) investigation, Peterson thrust the government directly into protests, backing demonstrators' belief that retailer practices made food unnecessarily expensive. She also signaled that in a market wholly dominated by mass-food retailers, grocers could no

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558 *Ibid*.
559 "Women Threaten Food Store Boycott," *Washington Post*, October 24, 1966.
560 "Esther Peterson Raises Flag," *The Washington Post*, October 21, 1966.

longer count on the public to acquiesce to their control as they had during the era of expansion following the Second World War.

Echoing the chain store protests from the 1930s, boycotts galvanized around the price issue and the more serious question if supermarkets were good for families. Like their predecessors, protestors took to the streets – or in this case, parking lots. Virginia-based Shoppers for Lower Prices picketed grocery stores in the wealthy Washington, D.C. suburb Fairfax County and accused stores of raising prices so they could keep running games and other promotions. Many placards featured moneybags marked with "15%" (the overall price reduction the group demanded), and their handbills asked consumers to "play this new game called Win a Bonus Boycott" at major supermarket chains like Safeway, A&P, Acme, and Giant. Leaflets threatened that "supermarkets will play by our rules or suffer the boycott!"[561] Atlanta's We've Had It Club took out advertisements in local newspapers explaining that the boycott as a parallel to the Civil Rights movement in the sense that suburban housewives wanted fair treatment by public institutions.[562] If supermarkets were bilking customers, protestors reasoned, why should they get their business?

Retailers could not form a meaningful response to the protests. The 1966 annual meeting of the National Association of Food Chains (NAFC) fell just a few weeks after the protests began. Speakers there attempted to downplay consumer discontent by arguing that the media and politicians had exaggerated the size and public support for the boycotts even while acknowledging that tens of thousands of women had publicly turned against the nation's primary system of food distribution. As NAFC mouthpiece

[561] Maurine Mclaughlin and Frank Porter, "Housewives Picket Food Stores," *Washington Post,* October 28, 1966.
[562] Murray Wyche, "Atlanta 'Had Its' Set" *Supermarket News*, October 24, 1966.

Supermarket News put it, industry leaders "seemed hurt that the American housewife…has turned on her long-time benefactor – and with such vehemence."[563] The keynote speaker, Stop and Shop chief executive Gordon F. Bloom, argued, "American consumers have been spoiled" by the industry's gains in distribution and design. He also suggested that declining food surpluses and growing foreign aide commitments were hurting housewives, passing the blame for higher prices on Washington.[564] Consumers were "accustomed to low prices based on surpluses that are simply no longer with us." His speech ended with the warning, "the honeymoon is over."[565]

The grocery industry had always depicted itself as the housewives' best ally in the fight to adequately feed their families, but economics of the late 1960s challenged this relationship. During the 1920s, A&P had described itself as the housewife's friend, a mantle that Michael Cullen and other operators stole during the 1930s. During the era of expansion following the Second World War, the industry at large used the same language to appeal to shoppers, especially after the 1946 Danville decision broke up the A&P. By the mid-1960s, no amount of advertising or family-friendly imagery could hide the fact that supermarket retailers could no longer offer food as affordably as they once had, though not because of promotions and giveaways, as protestors claimed.

The real force behind rising supermarket prices was inflation and shifting politics of agricultural management, economic catalysts for the working and middle classes' skepticism towards the supermarket as well as the counterculture's search for "natural foods." Beginning in 1966, the annual rate of inflation shot up at least three percent, and

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[563] Steve Weinstein, "Sound & Fury at NAFC: Only Two Pickets Appear," *Supermarket News,* October 31, 1966, 24.
[564] "NAFC Leaders Expecting Prices to Remain High," *Supermarket News*, October 31, 1966, 27.
[565] "NAFC Leaders Expecting Prices to Remain High."

often much higher. By 1974, inflation would hit eleven percent. Prices on all consumer goods had equal or higher spikes during the same period.[566] In the meantime, wages remained stagnant. If rising wages defined the period from 1945 to 1966, the late 1960s and 1970s saw many of the same families who prospered earlier struggled to make ends meet and make the judgment that supermarkets were simply too expensive. However, the industry's success in all killing all other forms of competition meant that companies like Kroger and Giant left consumers with no choice but picket stores until prices went down.[567] These cash-strapped middle-class shoppers joined an entire class of people who had struggled throughout the atomic age to not only put food on the table but also achieve any of the era's significant consumer goals like owning a home or simply purchasing products like refrigerators or color televisions.

Ironically, retailers were themselves caught in a similar price trap. Although the supermarket boom had created an entire class of products optimized for mass-consumption, the concept depended on carrying very low margins at both the point of production and the point of sale. Retailers not only sold most goods with the intention of making a two or three percent profit, but leaned on their suppliers, companies like Tyson and IBP, to accept similar margins on their products. These practices could not survive massive upswings in costs like those hitting the industry in the latter half of the 1960s.

The protests died down during the winter of 1966 after many companies permanently eliminated promotions like the appliance giveaways targeted by protestors. This did little to halt rising prices, though. Rising inflation hit retailers especially hard.

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[566] Robert J. Samuelson, *The Great Inflation and Its Aftermath: The Past and Future of American Affluence* (New York: Random House, 2010), 5.
[567] This is a point powerfully made by Jeffersonian Cowie in *Stayin' Alive*: *The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

For example, the price of milk and beef both climbed about ten percent between 1967 and 1970.[568] Raw items like wheat and barley also climbed. On one end of their supply chain, farmers kept hiking prices as the individual components necessary for production became more expensive while on the other end, sent fuel prices began surging even before the 1973 OPEC oil embargo. Additionally, declining surpluses and additional users, like food aid recipients, the military, and mass-meat processors squeezed supplies of staple foods like milk and grains. Spiking prices of the latter hit food processors in the meat and cereal fields especially hard since they had to pay for spiraling grain and transportation costs. Corporations passed these increases onto consumers spraining to spread meager salaries among not only food purchases, but many other consumer goods as well.[569]

Inflation was not the only reason consumers were furious at supermarkets. Corporate real estate practices dating back to the 1950s, responsible for creating "food deserts" (see chapter 3), had created an entire generation of African-Americans, Latinos, and working class inner-city whites who believed mainstream supermarkets were vicariously racist or classist. In the summer of 1967, for example, African-American rioters in Newark, New Jersey, rebelling against a stream of racist incidents, burned the city's only corporate supermarket while ignoring smaller, less well-stocked black-owned grocery stores. When asked why the community destroyed the only place to buy many popular products, a local citizen responded by saying "that place was as a bad as the police." Prices were higher than in other stores owned by the same chain in the suburbs and often, according to local activists, the property stocked shelves with subpar or old

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568 "Meat Boycott," *The Washington Post*, March 23, 1973.

569 Terry Branstad, "What Should Be Done for the Farmers?," *The Washington Post*, February 26, 1985. These economics dynamics are covered at length in chapter 5 and underlie the success of companies like IBP at the expense of established urban packers with higher costs.

food. During much of the 1950s and 1960s, retailers had used their stores as an example of American abundance in contrast with Soviet privation, even going so far as to say that supermarkets represented American democracy (see chapter 3), but those claims failed to impress minorities who had little access to those items or stores.

Mainstream supermarkets did little to quell consumer anger. While the deprived inner-cities raged at older practices, retailers' responses to the 1966 protests were poor, at best. Privately, retail leaders worried chains' reputations could not survive a sustained assault by their most important customers – white, middle class women. A confidential memo created by an emergency meeting of the Super Market Institute (SMI) concluded that the Denver boycotts had been successful in forcing major price concessions from local chains. Such "apparent 'success' is now breeding a climate for other boycotts" that could "happen anywhere," it continued.[570] The document concluded that "demonstrations for other causes have evidently convinced the public that no matter how small your problem, demonstrate and you can gain attention."[571] But the SMI and other outlets had no solutions other than establishing good public relations with local media to ensure that protests did not get wide attention.[572] During the 1930s, the supermarket was created by consumers' concerns about the rising cost of food, yet by the 1960s, when the industry needed to respond to the same tensions, interest groups only offered better media management.

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[570] Michael K. O'Conner, Memo to the Members of the SMI, October 24, 1966, clipping file, folder "Consumer Affairs: Consumer Boycotts, 1976 and Before," Food Marketing Institute Information Service, Food Marketing Institute, Washington, D.C. (hereafter FMI Library).
[571] *Ibid*.
[572] Super Market Institute, "The Denver Story, n.d., 1, clipping file, folder "Consumer Affairs: Consumer Boycotts, 1976 and Before," FMI Library.

On the ground, the chains also told individual managers to deflect potential protesters by explaining that stores always kept prices to a minimum. In the aftermath of the protests, the Grocery Manufacturers of America (GMA) sent out a document entitled "Basic Policy on Food Prices," that employees could give to pickers. The pamphlet stressed the industry's basic argument why consumers paid more at the supermarket: inflation and government pricing policies, over which retailers had little control. At least 5,000 supermarkets at the end of the 1960s had this document at the ready should boycotters appear.[573] Other documents carried the basic message that inflation constituted the real problem. Kroger prepared a flyer that pointed to specific economic pressures including mounting labor costs, depleting food surpluses, heavy government spending on social programs and on Vietnam, as well as runaway inflation were the cause of more expensive food, and not any special sales that individual stores chose to offer.[574] Grocers wanted to challenge consumers' notions that elaborate decor, fancy advertising, and promotions caused rising prices. However, retailers fundamentally believed that people really enjoyed supermarket shopping and that the protests were an aberration. As one industry watcher put it, consumers loved "the excitement factor" of the supermarket, as well as the "glamour and glitter of a great merchandise showplace."[575] This included fancy promotions. These, of course, were very old arguments deployed by supermarket architects since the 1920s to justify design decisions.

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[573] "Basic Policy Statement on Food Prices," November 3, 1966, clipping file, folder "Consumer Affairs: Consumer Boycotts, 1976 and Before," FMI Library.
[574] "Kroger Plan RE Consumer Boycotts, clipping file, folder "Consumer Affairs: Consumer Boycotts, 1976 and Before," FMI Library.
[575] Robert F. Chishol, *The Darlings: The Mystique of the Supermarket* (New York: Chain Store Publishing Corporation, 1970), 186.

It is important to note that, no matter what protestors believed, the retailers were right –food prices were largely outside their control. By the end of the 1960s, food retailers only averaged about 1.3 percent profit on every sales dollar. Through a quirk in the way analysts considered profits, firms' earnings were measured not by considering the profit of yielded from each sales dollar, though. Rather, they looked at a firm's return on investment, called net profits. This figure had peaked during the mid-1950s at 15 percent, falling to 11 percent by the end of the 1960s. These falling numbers came from the diminishing return on early investments in infrastructure and architecture that failed to yield meaningful gains as the industry matured. The only bit of "glamour and glitter" left to supermarkets by the time of the protests was cutting prices ever lower even as raw costs were going up.[576]

These tensions between the industry and its customers reemerged at the height of the inflationary wave in 1973. Prices continued to rise following the 1966 protests, hitting a new peak in March 1973 when food prices jumped more than any other single month since the end of the Second World War thanks to the OPEC oil embargo. Meat, already at postwar highs, would nearly double in price by the end of the year.[577] Political cartoons featured housewives asking butchers if they offered layaway plans for steak.[578] The

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[576] Paul F. Edward, "Food Picket Subsides but Aches Remain" *The Washington Post*, November 6, 1966.
[577] NBC Nightly News, March 16, 1973, Vanderbilt News Archive, (https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/tvndisplayfullbroadcast.pl?SID=20140228166717529&code=tvn&getmonth=03&getdate=16&getyear=1973&Network=NBC&HeaderLink=469207&source=BroadcastSelect&action=getfullbroadcast)
[578] "Cartoon for Steak on Layaway Plan Stirred Connecticut Wife to Call Meat Boycott: Vitamin Pills Offered," *The New York Times*, March 30, 1973.

satirical voice of the nation, Johnny Carson, joked meat prices were so high that "Oscar Meyer had his wiener appraised."[579]

Just as they had several years before, housewives mobilized against high meat prices. The idea of a meat boycott first caught on in suburban Connecticut, where the Federation of Women's Clubs began to press their congressman to hold hearings about the spiking cost of living.[580] Other women's groups agitated for just the same thing. In suburban Los Angeles, one women's group organized thousands of housewives to stop buying meat on Tuesdays and Thursdays. "We are focusing on particular days so they can see we have clout," an organizer explained. "The American mother and her family is threatened, you see. Threaten a mother bear's cubs and you watch out!"[581] These women distributed over eighteen thousand leaflets, whose recipients copied and distributed them many thousand times more. By the middle of March, leaders of the boycott started getting calls from the enraged chief executive of the South Dakota Steak Growers Association, suggesting they find cheaper cuts for their "family servings of protein."[582]

Nixon, trying to mollify angry housewives and the powerful meat lobby, had his consumer advisor, Virginia Knauer, go on television offering advice to shoppers. In a press conference broadcast on all the major networks, she suggested "liver, kidney, brains, and heart can be made into gourmet meals with seasoning, imagination, and more cooking time." Reminding shoppers that the supermarket was primarily a discount retailer, she argued "from my own experience I have found a shopper can generally trim

[579] Rick Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 77.
[580] "Cartoon for Steak on Layaway Plan Stirred Connecticut Wife to Call Meat Boycott: Vitamin Pills Offered," *The New York Times*, March 30, 1973.
[581] "Housewives Rebel: Two L.A. Women Provide Impetus for Meat Boycott," *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 1973.
[582] "The Roast Beef Rebellion," *The New York Times*, March 25, 1973.

as much as ten percent off her food budget," with savvy buying strategies. In the background, an aide actually used a slide rule to demonstrate cost-per-saving. That night, NBC news led off with Knauer's presentation, but contrasted it with a human-interest piece describing how a Virginia housewife was slipping horsemeat into her husband's lunchtime sandwiches to save money.[583]

Consumers rejected Knauer's offal advice. When Nixon told housewives to buy liver and brains at a press conference later that week, letter writers inundated the White House with "unprintable" threats.[584] Other attempts to set an example also fell flat. A White House dinner featuring a concert from country singer Merle Haggard, Nixon pointedly served broiled chicken, America's up-and-coming protein.[585] The tensions between the public and the Administration compounded when many smaller retailers started profiteering. The *Washington Post* reported how independent stores were hiking prices on goods not even related to meat: a pound of striped bass in the capital went for fifty cents on a Monday, and ninety at week's end. "It makes me literally sick to go into the grocery store," one suburban Virginia mother told the paper.[586]

A growing public movement wanted price controls modeled after the ones imposed during the 1930s. Housewives in Manhattan marched behind a paper mache cow emblazoned with "WE WANT MEAT NOT PROMISES," and other signage demanding that Washington cap the price of beef and pork to December 1972 levels. Other boycotters passed out peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to Senate staffers with wrappers demanding 1967 prices – levels achieved after retailers bowed to consumers after the last

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[583] NBC Nightly News, March 16, 1973, Vanderbilt News Archive
[584] "The Roast Beef Rebellion."
[585] "Country Superstar Rouses White House; Ex-Convict Invited by Nixon to Stand in Reception Line," *The New York Times*, March 19, 1973.
[586] "Housewives Organize Meat Protest," *The Washington Post*, March 15, 1973.

wave of protests. "I don't know what Nixon is eating for lunch today," one of the sandwich protesters declared, "but I bet there's meat on the table."[587] One group based in San Francisco mailed yard-long sticks of bologna, which had gone up forty cents per pound over the previous few months, to Nixon and Governor Ronald Reagan (who himself faced criticism for his notable investments in beef cattle).[588]

By early April 1973, the meat protests grew beyond women's groups. The United Autoworkers endorsed a boycott for the entire month. Connecticut Representative William Cotter introduced into the *Congressional Record* a protest form introduced by the Virginia Citizens Consumer Council: a one week meatless menu, featuring lentil soup, macaroni, tuna casserole, and "lasagna without meat."[589] Tyson executives toyed with developing a soybean burger –a crop used to feed their chickens– to take advantage of the boycott.[590] A Cleveland judge became a folk hero after he set a three hundred thousand dollar bond for a man caught stealing seventy-seven pounds of steak from a restaurant, explaining that the sentence was "a warning to the public generally that society will not countenance the stealing of meat, which is more precious than jewels."[591] For decades, retailers and agricultural administrators in Washington had told the public that not only was meat the most important part of the American pantry, but they had a right to cheap meat. Runaway inflation meant that ideal was crumbling.

Things got worse by early May when even retailers started protesting Nixon's inaction. After a press secretary said that the president and first lady were eating more

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587 NBC Nightly News, March 16, 1973, Vanderbilt News Archive, https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/tvn-displayfullbroadcast.pl?SID=20140228166717529&code=tvn&getmonth=03&getdate=16&getyear=1973&Network=NBC&HeaderLink=469207&source=BroadcastSelect&action=getfullbroadcast.
588 "$17 Baloney Token Sent to Reagan," *The Los Angeles Times*, March 1973.
589 "Meat Boycott," *The Washington Post*, March 23, 1973.
590 Tyson Update, July 1973, 16, Box 1 "Tyson," Shiloh Collection.
591 "Beef is Precious is Judge's Ruling," *The Nashua Telegraph*, April 2, 1973.

leftovers and fresh vegetables –instead of copious amounts of meat– the Washington, D.C.-based Giant chain temporarily closed their stores in protest of the president telling consumers to shop less. The even bigger Stop-and-Shop chain in Massachusetts joined them.[592] Futures traders in Chicago, who had been bullish on cattle and pork bellies (the bellwether stock for pork), took industry solidarity as a sign that somehow prices would fall, triggering a massive selloff that sent prices plummeting and triggering a panic that permanently closed some of the Chicago meatpackers.

Nixon blamed the whole crisis on Vietnam. In a televised address, the president told the public that "four years and two months ago, when I first came into this office as president, by far the most difficult problem confronting the nation was the seemingly endless war in Vietnam…[and] rising prices are one of the most terrible costs of war." But he dismissed the idea of prices controls –the same bromide that kept food affordable during World War II– by invoking the plight of prisoners of war: "A few days ago, in this room, I talked to a man who had spent almost years in a Communist prison camp in North Vietnam. For over four years, he was in solitary confinement. In that four-year-period he never saw and never talked to another human being except his communist captors. He lived on two meals a day, usually just a piece of bread. I believe that all Americans can make smaller sacrifices."[593] The message was clear – stop complaining about meat prices because POWs had to make due with less.

Nonsensically linking spiking meat prices to the unpopular war only angered consumers more. Millions of people joined the boycotts. The *Chicago Tribune* found 85 percent of its readers supported the boycott, and that there were 50 percent fewer meat

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[592] "Food Chain Joins Boycott, Won't Sell Meat Mondays," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 30, 1973.
[593] Richard Nixon, "Address to the Nation About Vietnam and Domestic Problems," March 29, 1973, University of California Santa Barbara Presidency Project.

sales across the city. Sales were down 80 percent in some parts of New York.[594] Another new movement composed of elderly people called "the Gray Panthers," were "ready to be radicalized" because of the administration's meat policies. They ultimately organized a march on the White House after Nixon served beef tenderloin at a banquet in honor of South Vietnamese dictator Nguyen Van Thieu, flooding Pennsylvania Avenue with angry retirees.[595] *Time* magazine even took a break from covering the ongoing Watergate scandal to run several covers on expensive meat.[596]

The issue hit a crescendo on April 11, 1973 when boycott leaders told Betty Funchiss, chair of the National Consumer Council (NCC) that "meat is just the tip of the iceberg." Rebels planned to boycott Coca-Cola and Pepsi to protest the industry practice of creating "exclusive territories" where only one or the other beverage was sold, a violation of anti-trust law. A Chicago group wanted to revive the supermarket boycotts by insisting that stores have uniform freshness codes. Another group had collected more than 500,000 cash register tapes they intended to send to Nixon –and to keep sending them weekly– until the president put price controls in place.[597] That same week, meat sales in supermarkets plummeted by as much as 80 percent; an estimated fifty million people swore off pork and beef until prices fell (unsurprisingly, chicken sales hit an all-time high thanks to the low prices processors offered). The momentary pause in sales temporarily pushed down prices as unsold products sat in retailers' warehouses,

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594 "Meatless Sunday for Boycotters," *The Chicago Tribune*, April 2, 1973.
595 NBC Nightly News, March 18, 1973, Vanderbilt News Archive, https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/tvn-displayfullbroadcast.pl?SID=20140228766845703&code=tvn&getmonth=03&getdate=18&getyear=1973&Network=NBC&HeaderLink=469229&source=BroadcastSelect&action=getfullbroadcast.
596 Time, April 9, 1973.
597 "Boycott Leaders Still Beef," *The Chicago Tribune*, April 13, 1973.

weakening the boycott's momentum.[598] The protestors lost even more energy at the end of April when Nixon put a sixty-day freeze on prices using New Deal-era regulations still on the books. The President might have flip-flopped on his opposition to economic controls, but this calmed the working and middle class women sending cash register tapes and yard-long bolognas to the White House. In a televised speech where he was flanked by boycotters, Nixon conceded, "we must put the consumer first." Later, he offered the more candid assessment that "there is no way with or without controls to prevent a substantial rise of food prices."[599]

The 1966 protests and 1973 boycotts revealed some of the emerging cleavage in the consumer marketplace that would come to define how supermarkets would operate in the latter third of the twentieth century. Both eruptions of anger came from a broad coalition of working class and lower-middle class housewives; the wealthy could afford to keep eating meat. For example, New York City steakhouse Peter Luger's reported that elites packed its dining room during the April 1973 boycotts.[600] The protesters, on the other hand, were caught in what writer Jennifer Cross termed, "the supermarket trap." Writing in 1970, she argued that postwar supermarkets, for all their success in bringing a variety of products to people, generated consumer resentment because shoppers naturally concluded architectural costs, fancy décor, and flashy promotions inflated the amount they paid at checkout. "To captivate Mrs. High Income…some retailers have given

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[598] The Associated Press, "Meat Prices," April 13, 1973.
[599] Peter N. Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: America in the 1970s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 130.
[600] *Ibid*.

selected stores the full-scale, film star treatment," she wrote.[601] Since the 1920s, architects and operators had decided stores needed have a sense of drama and theatricality, such that "scattered across the country, connoisseurs can find stores in Japanese, early American, New Orleans, ranch, riverboat, or nautical styles; the Roman forum, the Hollywood store, the New England barn, the Hacienda, the 'Wizard of Id, and the Camelot food palace."[602] To pay for these frills, supermarkets charged "a cent or two more on each item," and pushed high-margin, impulse items on housewives.[603] The 1966 and 1973 protests made it clear that women did not want any of these design amenities if it meant squeezing their budgets. As Jean Gardiner, an organizer of Women for Action, put the matter, "we want them to get rid of games and stamps first, then the fancy wrappers, pumped-in music, and elaborate advertising."[604] Gardiner's organization spoke not for Mrs. High Income, but for the millions of working class women caught up in the "supermarket trap," having no other option but to buy their food from a retailer increasingly optimized for the affluent and increasingly successful in pushing every other kind of retail into oblivion.

As inflation –and the cost of food – only grew worse during the 1970s, lower-income families began using the supermarket in different ways. The turbulent economy hit the working class hardest of all since inflation and oil shocks came with a steady loss of the manufacturing jobs. The unemployment rate nearly doubled between 1973 and 1975, from 4.9 percent to 8.9 percent. Job losses hit men particularly hard; over seven

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601 CBS Evening news, April 12, 1973, http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/tvn-displayfullbroadcast.pl?SID=20140228766845703&code=tvn&getmonth=04&getdate=2&getyear=1973&Network=CBS&HeaderLink=228169&source=BroadcastSelect&action=getfullbroadcast

602 Jennifer Cross, *The Supermarket Trap: The Consumer and the Food Industry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), 77.

603 *Ibid*., 80.

604 "Food Price Protests Strike the Nation's Supers," *Food Topics,* April 1973, 25.

million lost their jobs or took reduced hours over this period. This put many women into difficult positions since many were running households and not making an independent income. To compensate, housewives found low-paying work in retail, at restaurants, or office secretarial pools. Crunched for time and pinching pennies, many members of the working class did not so much abandon big retailers as they started looking for products to fit lifestyles that no longer included the time or money to prepare supermarket foods.[605]

Fast food restaurants like McDonalds were the biggest beneficiaries of changing habits. Fast food was a creation of the same postwar motor culture that assisted the spread of supermarkets. Unlike big retailers' middle-class and suburban orientation, quick service restaurants during the 1950s and 1960s marketed themselves to the working class and teenagers looking for a cheap meal. If affluent families did stop at a restaurant, it was because they were on a long road trip or giving their children a special reward; even then, an entire class of fast-service sit-down restaurants like Howard Johnson's catered to that crowd. In contrast, McDonalds, along with chains like Carl's Junior, popped up in Southern California near factories on the outskirts of Los Angeles. Burger King was a product of Miami's industrial district. Even though Kentucky Fried Chicken was the child of Harlan Sander's relentless drive to franchise his chicken recipe as a middle class meal, the early wave of stores catered to the working class. As we have seen in earlier chapters, large investments in bioengineering, processing, and distribution by companies like Tyson, Cargill, and ConAgra poised to deliver cheap, homogenous foods directly to

[605] Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, 276.

fast food restaurants. Those advances made fast food the perfect solution for cash-strapped families during the 1970s.[606]

Bolstered by cheap industrial foods and the recession, fast-food chains expanded rapidly, pushing into urban, suburban, and rural communities. Since the mid-1940s, supermarkets had largely avoided inner-cities, seeking the white shoppers moving into the suburbs. While this caused considerable anger among activists– consider how the 1967 Newark Riots crystallized around the absence of food retailers– few grocers were willing to invest in urban populations that by every available metric had a lower income than those in suburbia. Fast food operators had none of these reservations. Executives like Ray Kroc wanted to optimize sales by appealing to the widest possible set of potential diners. Part of this strategy included, as he put it, "showing how we can please as much as a supermarket."[607] That meant appealing to people that the supermarket, as an institution, ignored. Between 1972 and 1976, McDonalds opened 1,563 stores across the country, with a special focus on New York, New Jersey, and the rest of the Northeast Corridor; nearly one half of the new stores were there. This was also nearly double the number of restaurants the company opened during the preceding four-year period.[608] Other chains like Burger King and Kentucky Fried Chicken pushed into the Northeast, metropolitan South, and the Sunbelt at the same rate.[609] Fast food expansion during the 1960s followed a pattern that closely mimicked the expansion of supermarkets a decade earlier: companies built stores along suburban road arteries frequented by well-to-do

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[606] *Schlosser*, *Fast Food Nation,* 137-139.
[607] Lisa Napoli, *Ray and Joan: The Man Who Made the McDonald's Fortune and the Woman Who Gave It All Away* (New York: Dutton Press, 2016), 17.
[608] George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society* (New York: Sage Publications, 1991), 12.
[609] Josh Ozersky, *Colonel Sanders and the American Dream* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 87-95.

middle class whites. They also focused on interstate highway junctions. The push into inner-cities meant co-opting the role of retailers to provide cheap, abundant food options.

Fast food restaurants could expand rapidly because food processors supplying supermarkets saw fast food as an ideal partner. Companies like IBP, Cargill, and Tyson were already supplying grocery stores across the country, and their business increased during the early 1970s when their cost-conscious methods translated into supply-side solutions to inflationary pressures. IBP increased sales by 20% between 1970 and 1976.[610] Tyson expanded by 15% over roughly the same period.[611] But fast food offered an even better market for these big companies than supermarkets, which required a wide variety of packaged and processed items, since chain restaurants sold items that either expanded existing product lines or complemented other products, like boxed beef. IBP could easily turn out millions of pounds of McDonalds hamburger meat composed of the trimmings left over after packing cheap steaks. Furthermore, big processors saw quick-service restaurants as cash machines and crucial instruments in the rush to further consolidate the industry. When Monfort packing merged with ConAgra in 1986, making the latter the largest meatpacker in the world, Ken Monfort explained the crucial role of fast food. "With all the hamburger restaurants out there, it seemed to me that the industry was going to be concentrated, and we should be at least [a] large player."[612] After the purchase, ConAgra, already the largest animal feed producer with its purchase of Ralston Purina in 1978, outpaced IBP to become the country's largest meatpacker.[613] By 1993, it

[610] "Iowa Beef Tells Holders Outlook is Strong, Sees Boost in Fiscal '77 Sales." *The Wall Street Journal*, March 4, 1977.
[611] *Tyson Update*, June 1989, pg. 2, Box 1 "Tyson," Shiloh Collection.
[612] Andreas, *Meatpackers and Beef Barons*, 76.
[613] "ConAgra to Pay $8.3 Million in Penalties for Fraud Scheme," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 20, 1997.

would be the largest single supplier to both supermarkets and food service, leading categories like French fries and hamburgers, standing second in terms of flour-milling and frozen-food, and lagging just behind Tyson in chicken processing.[614]

Fast-food restaurants needed to effectively partner with mega-processors because of the intense capital investments required to profitably process meat, grains, and other products, some of the same pressures causing supermarket price hikes, but more easily absorbed by no-frills, high-volume eateries. Unlike supermarkets who built up low-cost distribution and processing networks, chains like McDonalds needed to add an extra layer of industrial-scale handling. For example, Kroger buyers might only need to buy potatoes, but fast food joints needed to turn those into individual portions. For one or two properties, this could easily be done in stores, but once chains expanded to several hundred stores, restaurateurs could either build up intensive processing facilities or rely on the same supply chain already stocking retailers. Restaurants chose the latter, and became a more profitable customer than the grocers big processors supported. For instance, Idaho-based potato processor J.R. Simplot had already developed a line of frozen French fries in 1953, but these precooked potatoes did not crisp very well in home ovens, needing hot oil in a deep fat fryer to reach their maximum potential. The product languished in supermarket freezer sections until 1965, when McDonald's needed a more efficient way to serve their iconic French fires. At the time, Ray Kroc's employees peeled and sliced potatoes individually in their 725 stores, a time-consuming and expensive task. Simplot lobbied McDonalds to try his product, which the company switched to exclusively after customers did not notice any differences in taste or texture. After

614 *Ibid*.

signing the contact, Simplot built a factory outside of Boise, Idaho solely to process fries, followed by several more.[615]

Simplot was not the only processor that retooled its facilities for fast food. In 1967, IBP built grinding lines at some of its plants along with automatic patty-makers and blast-chillers just for McDonalds hamburgers and, later, Burger King Whoppers.[616] In 1971, Tyson built a plant near its headquarters to butcher chickens into the bone-in quarters used by upstarts like Kentucky Fried Chicken and their own chain, Chicken Hut.[617] These mega-processors enabled restaurants to simply contract out the complicated work of preparing menu items to mass-processors who had the capital and expertise to shape millions of patties or precook untold tons of French fries to exacting standards, leaving only the act of finishing and packaging items for restaurant workers. Combined with an impressive use of bioengineering –to make McDonald's meals taste good, an array of additives and new vegetables breeds had to be created– the fast food boom during the 1970s stood on the shoulders of the work done by supermarkets and their processor partners to sufficiently stock stores a decade before.[618]

Scientific innovation and processing technologies were only part of the recipe behind the fast food boom. Fast food jobs were a critical lifeline for the poor, but were also arduous and low-paying, little different from those IBP offered to struggling farm workers and immigrants at its slaughterhouses. Minimum wages were typical and few skills were necessary. But in a contracting economy only getting worse with the

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[615] John F. Love, *McDonald's: Behind the Arches* (New York: Paw Prints Press, 2008), 329.
[616] Pau Ingrassia, "Repackaged Packer," *The New York Times*, August 10, 1978.
[617] "Strategic Discussion With Management," *Tyson Update*, June 1980, pg. 4, Box 1 "Tyson," Shiloh Collection.
[618] Ruth Sambrook, "Do You Smell What I Smell? The Science of Smell and Taste," Institute of Food Research, March 1999.

aftereffects of the oil embargo, there were few full-time unskilled entry-level jobs outside of stocking supermarket shelves, making fast-food became an important component in the fight against poverty. A federal jobs report from 1970, for instance, described casual restaurants as "an important source of job training for those otherwise unemployable."[619] This was doubly true for inner city neighborhoods targeted by federal developmental projects that assumed the unemployed could get fast food jobs. For instance, during Los Angeles' downtown redevelopment project begun in 1975, city planners used federal money to lure McDonalds, Burger King, and Carl's Jr. restaurants that would serve as "employment anchors" for the new downtown.[620] Planners recognized that these jobs, while essential and even required as a condition for federal support, did not so much create economic opportunity for individual workers as they promised a "destination retail space" for office workers and others looking for quick, cheap meals.[621] Inflation, tightening job markets, and cheap processed food made fast food the best deal for cash-strapped workers.

Fast food vendors did more than simply sell cheap lunches, though. During the mid-1980s, companies began to upscale their offerings to appeal to time-crushed mothers in the workforce. In 1984, the Boston Chicken Restaurant opened in Newton, Massachusetts offering rotisserie chickens with prepared sides for only $9.99.[622] The birds themselves

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[619] United States Department of Agriculture and University of Arkansas Extension Service, "County Development," in Folder 17, Box 6, Rural Arkansas Community Development Records, MC 1053, University of Arkansas Special Collections, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR. Hereafter Arkansas Special Collections.

[620] "Overview of Federally Assisted Projects in Downtown Los Angeles: Implemented Projects and Future Opportunities by the Community Redevelopment Agency," December 1977, Folder 12, Box 24 Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project Records, Regional History Collections, University of Southern California Special Collections, Los Angeles, CA. Hereafter USC libraries.

[621] "Broadway Retail Trade Area Analysis," Folder 12, Box 24 Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project Records, Regional History Collections, USC libraries.

[622] Irene Sax, "Takeout Business Is Taking a Turn," *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1987.

were cheap Cobb-Vantress chickens paired with equally cheap processed vegetables from California factory farms, but the simulation of a home-cooked meal, centered on the protein of middle-class affluence, was a hit with consumers.[623] One writer exclaimed, "Boston Chicken offers a real dinner without the time!"[624] Another hit the message more pointedly, saying, "for working mothers, Boston Chicken's dinners promise the easy and stress evening."[625] Out of nowhere, the Massachusetts-based chain expanded from a single storefront to nearly 400 stores across the country by the end of the 1980s.[626] But this was not the only company offering cheap faux-home cooked meals during this moment. On the west coast, Del Taco offered cheap Tex-Mex meals complete with rice and beans and the Midwest's Culver's chain served up hearty meals based on German classics. Kentucky Fried Chicken's entire marketing strategy relied on convincing parents to pick up a bucket of chicken for the family dinner on the way home from work.[627] The chains were the obvious extension of a marketing strategy first created by the supermarket but appropriated by fast food with even greater success: corporations were partners in feeding families, making meal times easier by simplifying the cooking process. If the supermarket brought about single-site shopping and family-sized portioning at a discount, fast food eradicated the need to even cook.

Grocers countered fast food's rise by offering more food that looked, tasted, and prepared like fast food. TV dinners were already an important part of retailers' lineups, but beginning in the early 1980s, supermarkets began offering food that looked and tasted

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[623] "New Partnerships," *Tyson Update*, March 1990, pg. 10, Box 1 "Tyson," Shiloh Collection.
[624] John DeMers, "When the Choice is Chickens, Grocers Offer the Fresh and the Frozen," *Arkansas Courier Gazette*, October 22, 1987.
[625] *Ibid*.
[626] Michael Arndt, "There's Life in the Old Bird Yet," *Business Week*, July 18, 1988.
[627] Lisa Beth Pulitzer, "A Big Market and an Incubator for Fast Food," *The New York Times*, December 13, 1993.

like the ready-made meals sold at Boston Chicken. An early innovator in this new sector was the New York-based Wegman's chain. Based in upstate industrial towns like Rochester and Albany, the chain had always drawn its business from the area's well-to-do homemakers. To keep that business, ownership invested heavily in on-site bakeshops, luxurious butcher counters, and what they called a "hot bar" of ready-made meals kept hot in a steamtable. All shoppers had to do was scoop items into provided plastic containers and head to the cash register. As one of the company's executives told *Supermarket News* in a profile, "our customers could go to our competitors that offer a more standard line of goods, but we find that people come in for the little extra special things we offer."[628] At the time, few stores were willing to invest in the sorts of onsite kitchens and cooking staff necessary to offer a range of premade options but competition with fast-food restaurants forced supermarkets to satisfy consumers who had less time and money to spend on food preparation. However, many chains, Kroger in particular, invested in rotisserie cookers to mimic Boston Market's popular birds. By 1990, cheap precooked chickens –most priced around $3– were a major feature of American supermarkets who choose to use items they already had experience marketing –chickens– to emulate the fast food experience for time and money-strapped shippers.[629]

Even as many traditional supermarkets tried satisfy customers with new services during the mid-1980s, people still wanted everyday foods like cereal or salad greens, opening the door for retailers capable of offering popular items at a discount. One survey suggested that consumers believed "its too difficult to go to a supermarket and get the

[628] "Wegmans Draws Them In," *Supermarket News*, October 1987.
[629] Steven Pearlstein, "Boston Chicken: Hot Stuff: Company Serves Up Winning Recipe for Success," *The Washington Post*, July 4, 1994.

best deal. Everything there is just so expensive."[630] These attitudes opened the door to discounters, the most important of which was Wal-Mart, a company with the distribution capacity and retail experience to capitalize on the middle and working class income crunch. The Arkansas-based retailer had pioneered a form of discount sales based on the principle of just-in-time warehousing, only buying and inventorying items as needed while also squeezing suppliers for lower prices. Importantly, Wal-Mart positioned itself as a rural retailer, opening stores in parts of the country that were not typically served by supermarkets or other department stores, like Macys, who focused on upscale suburbanites and urbanites. This not only made Wal-Mart the most significant commercial entity in many areas, but a critical site of economic activity. This was not lost on various government agencies working on rural development; one member of the University of Arkansas' Industrial Research and Extension Center wrote that Wal-Mart was "the one anchor to mainstream consumer life many rural communities have."[631] In 1987, the company was eyeing new ways to expand beyond simply selling homegoods, seizing on a type of store design echoing the old Big Bear stores in Depression-era New York. The new "hypercenters" –later renamed "supercenters"– combined the company's already impressive consumer goods offerings with selected grocery items that included dry goods, meat, and perishables. Importantly, Wal-Mart selected suppliers who could stock their stores with huge quantities of food. This included branded items like cereal from giants like General Mills and ConAgra, IBP beef, and Tyson chickens. The limited

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[630] Wilshire Organization for Community Redevelopment, "Broadway Consumer and Business Survey," January 1985, Folder 35, Box 5, Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project Records, USC.
[631] Donald E. Voth, "On a Strategy for Rural Economic Development for the University of Arkansas,' in Folder, "District Agent Reports," Rural Arkansas Community Development Records, MC 1053, Arkansas Special Collections.

selection of fruits and vegetables came from California factory farms that could guarantee deliveries. Special attention was paid to frozen food sections, which were stocked with some of the same items sold to fast food restaurants like chicken nuggets and Simplot French fries; Wal Mart was giving Americans the ability to eat fast food at home. These strategies proved so successful that within five years, the Ozark company swallowed as much as ten percent of the food retail market.[632]

For smaller supermarket retailers who had always prided themselves on their fresh offerings, Wal Mart's entry into the grocery business caught them off-guard, triggering a round of closings and consolidation that changed the face of the industry. Wal Mart's different geographical calculus, favoring rural areas over the suburbs, pulled discount-minded shoppers into the countryside while eroding the sales of more-established stores that bridged suburbs and the increasingly-blighted inner-cities. With the economy still unstable and wages stagnating, many were willing to trade quality for affordability. Disproportionally, slackening sales hit the smallest chains and independent supermarkets hardest, since they did not have the buying power of a Kroger, Giant, or Stop-and-Shop to help push prices down. As many as 4,000 supermarkets closed nationwide between 1987 and 1992 and nearly 1,000 more were absorbed into larger chains battling Wal-Mart supercenters.[633] Smaller chains, like eastern Pennsylvania-based Weis, saw sales at some of its locations fall nearly 30% when Wal-Mart opened a series of supercenters across its territory.[634] At the heart of the tension was the very disorder

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[632] Russell Mitchell, "From Punching Bag to Retailing Black Belt," *Business Week*, Nov 20, 1989, 62.
[633] Louise Lee, "Warehouse Clubs Embrace Marketing to Fill the Asiles," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 17, 1995.
[634] David Leonhardt, "A Standoff at the Corner Store," *The New York Times*, December 19, 1999.

that had enabled so many chains to flourish after the fall of A&P, which left the entire industry captive to the new Great Atlantic—Wal-Mart.

Top Shelf: How Supermarkets lost the Wealthy to Alice Waters and Whole Foods

While the working class coped with a turbulent economy by eating at McDonalds and shopping at Wal-Mart, the affluent started shopping at specialty food stores and copying dishes created by acclaimed chefs. Wealthy and progressive shoppers' shared some of same skepticism towards supermarkets that animated protests during the 1960s and 1970s. For instance, many believed that the supermarket failed to offer a fair bargain and the products sold failed to live up to the promises of quality. Where these shoppers differed from the working poor was that they broke out of Jennifer Cross' "supermarket trap" by buying organic food, eating sushi, and idolizing progressive chefs. If they ate at a fast food restaurant, it was more of a guilty pleasure or caving to a child's demands than a financial necessity.

During the 1960s when housewives were picketing supermarkets, many others chose to drop-out of the food system entirely. As the intellectual energy animating the 1960s counterculture began to lose momentum at the end of the decade, the same people who began protesting the establishment control of politics and the Vietnam War turned their energy towards reforming the food system. From the hippie point of view, the American diet was as needlessly wasteful, corrupt, and destructive to the environment as the war itself, and, using that same logic, blamed the supermarket for the curse of bad food. Thanks to the emergence of mass-food retailing during the late-1930s, the same cultural forces that created the suburbs had also ensured virtually every meal was meatcentric, epitomized by simple dishes like roast beef or glazed ham with potatoes. Although these sorts of dishes had a long history in the United States, postwar cuisine was so highly processed that it borrowed little from earlier periods in terms of taste and appearance. Borrowing from popular critiques of mass-consumption in general, hippies broke the supermarket trap by turning to "cruelty-free" diets. Vegetarianism and veganism became popular, along with lesser fads like macrobiotics thought to improve both the natural environment and the human spirit. [635] One Chicago-area activist explained the new outlook in 1969, telling customers of a natural foods co-op "we are all one in making a better world through what we eat."[636]

Countercultural eaters split into roughly two groups. The first more or less stopped eating meat while others rejected agricultural practices more broadly. Vegetarianism and veganism had always been fringe dietary movements, particularly among an affluent, educated elite concerned about the healthfulness of the meat and fats dominant in the nineteenth century diet. Some consumers, taking their cues from different strains of Christianity or classical ethics, also kicked meat. During the 1960s, vegetarianism became the spiritual and ecological sibling to countercultural political rebellion since the average American ate about 160 pounds of meat in 1970, most of which was beef. As I have argued earlier, the virtually limitless availability of cheap, grain-fed beef was a principal component of the ideology of abundance created by the supermarket system. For hippies, those patterns of consumption reflected the gout in the nation's political and social life, a form of "toxic masculinity trapped in each beef

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[635] The definitive study of this movement is Warren J. Belasco, *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 29-67.
[636] "Rochdale Principles," March 23, 1969, Folder: "History of the Hyde Park Co-operative Society," Box 2, Hyde Park Cooperative Society Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections, Chicago, Illinois.

steak."[637] Within the same architecture, vegetables had a distinctly subordinate –if necessary– role. They were decorative additions to both the stores that sold them and the plates of meat they garnished. To be sure, retailers invested heavily in selling fresh and processed vegetables, but the very fact that store owners put those items in the front of their stores and meat in the back –making customers walk past in hopes of an impulse purchase– signified their status.

Diminishing the status of meat was an ambitious task, and even leading countercultural minds were uncertain about the wisdom or viability of turning Americans away from meat. Given that "the movement" was at best a loosely aligned collection of rebels coalescing around the ideas of personal freedom and respect for the earth, there seemed to be few prospects besides criticizing the industrial diet. As one prominent vegetarian lamented in 1968, "many people talk about what is wrong with our food, but few actually have a practical plan for mass-action."[638] In these early stages, countercultural diners worried less about cholesterol or animal welfare and more about the central ethical questions of eating meat. In this sense, simply confronting meat consumption was just another part of the consciousness-raising process animating wider political rebellion. A great many people did try vegetarianism during the 1960s, too. Numbers are very hard to pin down, but it is possible that as many as twenty million Americans attempted to forgo animal protein between 1965 and 1975.[639]

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[637] Quoted in Ricado Gomes Costa, "Meat Masculinity," in *Contexts: Understanding People in Their Social Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 56.
[638] Joyce McKinnell, *The Minus Meat Cook Book* (South Brunswick, NJ: Barnes Publishing, 1968), 6.
[639] Consciousness raising was a form of activism bent on raising awareness of issues through education, discussion, and debate that was the first part of the process behind the formation of countercultural ideas. Debra Michals, "From 'Consciousness Expansion' to 'Consciousness Raising': Feminism and the Countercultural Politics of the Self," in ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, *Imagine Nation:*

The pursuit of better food led many to try macrobiotics, a complex nutritional regime developed in Japan. The program promised an ambitious unification of diet, Eastern religions, and academic disciplines like psychology and chemistry that appealed to educated eaters looking for both a comprehensive world view and a program for individual action – with a healthy vegetarian diet linking each element together.[640] Drawing on Taoist thought, macrobiotics divided not just foods but all matter into oppositional yin-yang categories, suggesting that good health came from balancing the particular forces in one's life. Macrobiotics was thusly considerably more personalized than conventional diets, or even previous stabs at vegetarianism, and found an easy home among hippies and other countercultural thinkers who had already embraced cultural and social relativism as a guiding principle. Moreover, macrobiotics, which plotted an ideal diet through careful personal analysis, also fit the cultural moment by requiring systematic guidance and study, often at the feet of "gurus" well-versed in the program.[641]

Few new converts in the late 1960s got past the first stages, which involved simplifying one's sources of yin and yang goods to a few basic grains, beans, sauces, and vegetables. Macrobiotics followers deemed meat "too yang" for consumption, along with items that were "too yin" like chocolate.[642] The availability of suitable foods was also a problem. Macrobiotics called for emulating the Japanese practice of eating locally grown and seasonally available produce, but these were so hard to come by in diet hotbeds like New York that practitioners gravitated towards Asian staples like brown rice and soy

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The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s (New York: Routledge, 2002), 34; Belasco, *Appetite for Change*, 57.

640 Max Schoener, "Eat and Enjoy," *Good Times*, January 30, 1970; Belasco, *Appetite for Change*, 55-56.

641 Farb and Armelagos, *Consuming Passions*, 193.

642 Belasco, *Appetite for Change*, 56.

sauce.[643] It was, after all, hard to find strictly local foods thanks to the supermarket, but those products also appealed because they were seen as both distinctly Japanese and symbolic of the poor yet spiritually strong Vietnamese peasants many in the counterculture idolized. The soybean became a particularly important staple for ecological reasons, too. As popular contemporary anthropologists (and macrobiotics proponents) Peter Farb and George Armelagos noted, eastern civilizations discovered early on that soy was well adapted to a society pressed by growing population, limited territory, and scarce energy, the very opposite of the American experience, rich with cheap fuel and land.[644] Many countercultural thinkers argued that those days had ended – the dystopic film Soylent Green was one of 1973's most popular movies precisely because it depicted overpopulated, starving cities– so the food system had to adapt to a reality mimicking Asian history.[645] Moreover, the soybean was miraculously flexible. Soaked in water, it could be left to sprout into a nutrient-rich vegetable that could be eaten without any expenditure of energy; pureed, if could ferment into soy sauce or miso. Simmered, it turned into curd (tofu). Cooks could also transform soy into oil or flour. However, many new converts had trouble adhering to a diet of supermarket vegetables, brown rice, and soy products, limiting the appeal of the diet.[646]

Macrobiotics might have limits in its ability to impact the wider culture, but it laid the groundwork for a new outlook on the food system and eating in general that would have a tremendous impact on the ways 1970s Americans saw the supermarket. Although as many as ten million people tried elements of macrobiotics, the trouble acquiring

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643 Euegene Schoenfeld, "HIPprocrates," *Berkeley Barb*, April 4, 1967.
644 Farb and Armelagos, *Consuming Passions*, 194-5.
645 Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann, *Ecology and Popular Film: Cinema on the Edge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 93.
646 Belasco, *Appetite for Change*, 57.

quality products and the demands of avoiding popular luxuries like chocolate was too much. The epicenter for the next stage of dietary rebellion was Berkeley, California, a countercultural hotspot that happened to be nearby many of the factory farms supplying the nation's mass-food retailers. There, a graduate student in social work at the University of California named Frances Moore Lappé wrote a book entitled *Diet for a Small Planet* that first circulated locally and then caught on with the rest of the counterculture, selling over one million copies across the globe by the end of the 1970s. The argument was straightforward: by feeding vegetable protein (grain, soy) to animals rather than directly to humans, Americans were wasting scarce protein resources at a time when much of the world went hungry or had serious nutritional deficiencies. A grain-fed North American steer ate 21 pounds of vegetable protein for every pound of marketable protein. This inefficient process required vast quantities of land, fertilizer, water, pesticides, and herbicides while an acre of land devoted to cereals for direct human consumption produced five times as much protein as an acre devoted to livestock; an acre devoted to legumes was ten times as productive and an acre of leafy vegetables was fifteen times more productive. Lappé calculated that farmers fed 20 million tons of protein to U.S. livestock in 1968, yet processors only retrieved 2 million tons for human consumption. In other words, 18 million tons were lost, enough to provide 12 grams of protein a day to every person in the world. To cap her case, Lappé argued that, popular tastes notwithstanding, a vegetarian diet was nutritionally adequate because creative combinations of beans, nuts, grains, and dairy products would produce more than enough protein.[647]

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[647] Frances Moore Lappé, *Diet for a Small Planet* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), xi-xiv, 7-9.

Lappé's ideas had been making the rounds in underground papers even before *Diet for a Small Planet* came out, but she was the first to put those concepts in a readable, accessible way. In characteristically countercultural style, she merged the political and personal by combining economics and autobiography, consumerism and therapy, biochemistry and easily-to-follow recipes. Like most ecologists, she described a single world system that transcended petty national boundaries and emphasized the interrelatedness of all species. A shopper's decision at a Pennsylvania supermarket affected food availability in East Africa. Noting most Americans ate far morel protein than they really needed and that items like beef were relatively recent additions to the human diet, Lappé questioned whether the real "faddists" were those who were now returning to timeless grains and legumes or those binging on beef steaks.[648]

Lappé's ideas quickly circulated through countercultural kitchens. Lucy Horton, a self-described hippie who penned *Country Commune Cooking* in 1969, began touring different commune kitchens in 1971 and found about half had gone completely vegetarian. Most were Lappé's backyard – Northern California. Even in kitchens that kept buying meat, they purchased in bulk from farmers instead of major retailers, an endorsement of Lappé's idea that the supermarket system was ecologically wasteful, politically problematic, and ethically challenging in addition to being economically illogical. [649] The ethical argument was especially powerful. For instance, one writer for *The Liberation News Service* believed the supermarket had taken away the experience of processing and experiencing your own food:

> Sitting at the kitchen table yester, I cleaned and shelled a pound of fresh shrimp – the pink and white soft bodies stripped of the transparent flower-like shells, the gut system knifed out, the

[648] *Ibid*., 30-35.
[649] Horton, *Country Commune Cooking*, 14-15; Belasco, *Appetite for Change*, 58.

> heads chopped off. I felt murderous, yet a clam feeling was settling like a snow on me. I didn't feel stranded from nature as I do when I open a box or a can, and stare at the bloodless, diced, dried, powdered, unrecognizable "food" which permits us to look neither life nor death in the face."[650]

From this emerging perspective, the supermarket denied people the physical experience of growing and processing their own food.

Some communes attempted butchering their own meat. Stewart Brand, the editor for the *Last Whole Earth Catalog* championed the practice, explaining, "one advantage of doing your own butchering, you get to thank the animal personally, and see him all the way through what you're doing together. There's nothing abstract about it."[651] Many communities turned the process itself into a quasi-religious ritual. Guided by a 1930s-era USDA pamphlet entitled "Let's Butcher a Hog," one Northern California community collected wood, built a huge fire, and lead a pig named "Siegfried" to a stone circle standing in for an abattoir. After slaughter, participants drank from a common bowl containing a homemade wine, THC extract, and the pig's blood. Afterwards, a stoned celebrant told a journalist he felt "energized and clear, disconnected and numb, fearless, and in touch with my inner self."[652]

A chef from Berkeley named Alice Waters harmonized the different extremes of the countercuisine movement in 1971 when she opened a small restaurant named *Chez Panisse*. Waters had studied in Paris during the late 1960s, falling in love with the small, intimate bistros that presented unadulterated dishes made with seasonal ingredients. Back in the United States and looking for a career, she gravitated towards the kitchen but recoiled at the bad food served in American restaurants. Not only were the continental

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650 Jones, "On Not Eating Meat and on Eating Meat," *Liberation News Service #188,* August 23, 1969, 10.
651 *Last Whole Earth Catalog,* 198.
652 *January Thaw* (New York: Times Change Press, 1974), 125.

recipes poor facsimiles of the real things from Europe, but chefs did little to put a personal stamp on their cuisine, which was much more common in France. Ingredients were at best poor since the emphasis was on quantity and gargantuan hunks of meat. The cooking profession itself was also hopelessly unrespectable. Waters resolved to go in another direction. Her restaurant emulated many of sentiments of the counterculture, especially in the way that food would be the center of a whole complex of sensations. The dining room, housed in the ground floor of a large house on Berkeley's main artery, would be casual, welcoming, and well-lit. Her most significant decision was that dinner menu would offer no choice whatsoever. "I wanted it to be like going to somebody's house. Nobody gives you a choice about what to eat at a dinner party." Thusly, the restaurant put out a unique daily menu composed of several courses, sourced from local farmers, fishermen, and growers, that themselves might not be French recipes, but French in spirit. The entire staff, cooks included, came from Berkeley's graduate student population.[653]

Chez Panisse quickly became famous for embodying all of the counterculture's ideas about food, cooking, and farming. From the outset, everyone involved with the restaurant built it into an institution with special meaning. This included diners, journalists, and environmentalists in addition to the staff. Waters' mission of only cooking what was good, in season, and local, resonated most strongly with this community. Describing a meal eaten at the restaurant in the mid-1970s, the writer Bill

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[653] Thomas McNamee, *Alice Waters and Chez Panisse: The Romantic, Impractical, Often Eccentric, Ultimately Brilliant Making of a Food Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007); Joan Reardon, *M.F.K. Fisher, Julia Child, and Alice Waters: Celebrating the Pleasures of the Table* (New York: Harmony Books, 1994).

Buford recalled how Leonard Michaels, a popular fiction writer and pop-academic sat in rhapsody at the next table:

> Michaels had grown up on New York's Lower East Side, had an urban, jaded manner, and was refreshingly suspicious of wacky California enthusiasms. But on this occasion, Michaels, surrounded by three rapt disciples, was holding forth with uncharacteristic animation on a piece of food – an asparagus spear. He was holding it between his fingers and addressing it as if it were no mere green vegetable but a matter of great urgency – a manuscript by Milton, say, or Susan Sontag. Dinner had become an intellectual issue. In American, food had never been intellectual. In this asparagus was a revolution.[654]

Wittingly or unwittingly, Waters had found a medium that unified all of the diffuse ideas about food coming out of the counterculture. Her cooking was serious, yet informal and comfortable. It was ecologically sound and healthy, yet still delicious and equally appealing to carnivores and tofu fanatics. If the new politics of food dictated that consumers needed an emotional connection to their meals, Waters had shown that cooking fresh and local food without pretense was the way.

Academics and journalists celebrated *Chez Panisse* as both the voice and medium of the food revolution, but the impact of Waters' cooking was limited to the affluent and existing populations of countercultural eaters. *Chez Panisse* hardly changed the diets of McDonalds eaters. It cost a lot of money and took a lot of time to cook locally, especially during the 1970s when there were no year-round commercial vegetable farmers outside of California or Florida. Thanks to advances in meat and poultry processing, local proteins were also impossible to find. The *Chez Panisse* style of dining was, in fact, only possible in California, the place where most of America's foods came from.

Waters' Berkeley revolution did fundamentally change fine dining, restaurant cooking, and the ways the wealthy and progressive shopped for food they would cook at home, however. By the mid-1970s, Waters' reformed grad students had given way to

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[654] Bill Buford, *Heat: An Amateur's Adventures as Kitchen Slave, Line Cook, Pasta Maker, and Apprentice to a Dante-Quoting Butcher in Tuscany* (New York: Scribner, 2006), 22.

serious professional cooks drawn to Berkeley to learn a whole new style of cooking that would soon be called "California Cuisine." In the first half of the decade, the France's *nouvelle cuisine* movement reshaped the nation's fine dining. Based on the idea that traditional cuisine, and particularly restaurant food, had grown too heavy and recipes too sacrosanct, chefs began cooking lighter meals finished with unexpected sauces like vinaigrettes. Vegetables especially took on a new prominence as the centerpieces of individual dishes. *Nouvelle Cuisine* barely took hold in the United States except for a few restaurants in New York, however, because both chefs and diners expected restaurants to serve the old continental menus inspired by prewar-French cuisine.[655] Nonetheless, American cooks were not ignorant of the sorts of innovations happening in France. Many traveled to Paris or Lyon and learned at the hands of the Troisgros Brother or Paul Bocuse. During the 1960s, these restaurants had no equals in quality or even intellectual mission outside of France. *Chez Panisse* changed this, providing the United States with a culinary model of its own that could easily coexist alongside French *nouvelle cuisine*. They looked to satisfy a growing number of consumers who wanted as much access to the new style of cooking as possible; in coming years, the same diners would become shoppers in supermarkets offering the same items.

One of the first practitioners of the new California style of cooking was Jeremiah Tower, the chef hired to helm day-to-day operations at *Chez Panisse*. Tower had come to California from Massachusetts after getting a degree from Harvard in architecture and spending several years working in Boston-area restaurants. But unlike most professional cooks during this era, his education in design and philosophy provided an important

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[655] "Gastronomy," in ed, Lawrence D. Kritzman, Brian J. Reilly, *The Columbia History of Twentieth Century French Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 240.

directionality to the institution Waters was building. A self-described hippie, he built up *Chez Panisse's* food to reflect the same sense of authenticity other members of the counterculture sought in politics or art. *Nouvelle Cuisine*, he reasoned, was about adding vibrancy and novelty to authentic French recipes, but there was no single American culinary canon. Rather, American cuisine was a conglomeration of different cooking styles combined from a variety of different materials and historical traditions. American cuisine, such as it was, could be then united by ingredients, or more specifically, preparing the best possible ingredients in a manner that reflected the authentic terroir of the United States.[656]

Tower began talking about "American cuisine" and a California cooking ethic while many in the counterculture had a growing interest in various "ethnic" cuisines seen as more authentic than the industrial diet. Culinary rebels no longer grew their own vegetables or went vegan but instead ate Ethiopian, Japanese, or Indian food. The tens of thousands of immigrants, mostly from Southeast Asia, who had come to the United States during the 1970s and often opened restaurants serving their own cuisine became the biggest beneficiaries of 1960s-era attacks on the food system.[657] While many of these establishments were little more than lunch counters serving other immigrants, some catered to the well-to-do white upper and middle classes. In the process, many cooks changed flavors and preparations to suit American tastes. Thai and Indian chefs cut down on the chilies that made many of their dishes unbearably hot for diners unaccustomed to

[656] Jeremiah Tower, *California Dish: What I Saw (and Cooked) at the American Culinary Revolution* (New York: The Free Press, 2003), 67-75, 117-130; Jeremiah Tower, *Start the Fire: How I Began a Food Revolution in America* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017), iv-xiv; 54-69.

[657] In 1965, Congress dramatically changed immigration law, doing away with decades-old quotas. This opened the United States to millions of immigrants, most especially those coming from various parts of Asia. For more, see Franklin Ng, *The History and Immigration of Asian-Americans* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1998), 77-79.

spicy foods while Chinese chefs served plate-upon-plate of General Tso's chicken, a dish invented in Hong Kong but perfected in the United States during this period.[658] What drew diners to these international foods was a sense that cooks working outside the American canon had a sort of intellectual purity that those serving up processed baloney or bacon cheeseburgers could never attain. It was the uniqueness, not the quality, which filled 1970s-era ethnic restaurants.[659]

Curriculum changes at the Culinary Institute of America (CIA), the country's leading cooking school also reflected the new turn in the national food scene. Founded in 1948, CIA had long taken pride in training aspiring chefs in the classics of French cuisine. Anthony Bourdain, for example, described his time at the school in the mid-1970s as a trip into past: "Escoffier's heavy, breaded, soubised, glacéed, and oversauced dinosaur dishes were the ideal. Everything, it was implied, *must* [emphasis in original] come with appropriate starch, protein, and vegetable. Nouvelle cuisine was practically unheard of."[660] By the early 1980s, though, the school began adding classes in Asian and American regional cookery and even opened an on-campus restaurant called American Bounty that was the final working classroom for students before graduation. When it opened in 1982, American Bounty was a singular addition to the nation's restaurants, serving upscale-versions of Texas-style BBQ brisket or a New England shore dinner

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658 Andrew Coe, *Chop Suey: A Cultural History of Chinese Food in the United State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 221-251.
659 Belasco, *Appetite for Change*, 61-65.
660 Anthony Bourdain, *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000), 38.

while training a whole generation of chefs to think about American fare in the same manner many thought of French food.[661]

Supermarket shoppers had little idea that a food revolution was happening in restaurants unless they counted themselves one of the growing number of "foodies." If diners wanted to recreate California Cuisine at home, they would have to go to extreme measures. Ruth Reichl, the restaurant critic for the *Los Angeles Times* during the 1980s, spent nearly three weeks tracking down the same ingredients used to create a meal from *Chez Panisse* only to discover it was impossible – a memorable fennel dish had been literally foraged from a Berkeley hillside by the staff earlier in the day. Another critic tried to track down the lamb served at Jeremiah Tower's *Stars* restaurant (opened after he left *Chez* in 1981) only to find that a local farmer had raised the sheep specifically for the restaurant. "You can't get any of this food in grocery stores or even the few remaining local butcher shops." The relentless competition between different chains had shuttered hundreds of thousands of independent stores except in rural areas. Moreover, the close relationship between different packing companies, processors, and retailers had ensured that the number products available to the consuming public had sharply dropped in addition to the number of farmers producing food for the retail market.

Eventually, retail stores catering to people seeking food similar to restaurant cooking did open. The most vocal group pushing for new and better food options were the vegetarians, macrobiotics, and off-the-grid farmers reading Lappé.[662] This cultural bloc also formed a sizeable portion of the *Chez Panisse* crowd. What all these people had in common, beyond a simple connection of seeing Northern California has the

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[661] Florence Fabricant, "Culinary Institute's Restaurant," *August 11, 1982*; James Beard, "Beard on Food…Bounty for CIA," *Los Angeles Times*, September 9, 1982.
[662] Wade Greene, "Guru of the Organic Food Cult," *The New York Times*, June 6, 1971.

geographic home of the countercuisine movement, was that they had come to believe that the food system was both environmentally flawed and had failed to deliver healthy food. Waters, for instance, told a reporter that "here in Berkeley, we've created an alternative to the supermarket diet."[663] For the rebels, the next step in the revolution was obvious: open grocery stores that offered all the same services of a major supermarket, but only sold items that fit a particular ethical and environmental standard. Restaurants served one particular purpose, but few people could afford to eat at *Chez Panisse* every day. Drawing on the same political energy that animated the cooperative movement during the 1930s, counterdiners banded their meager incomes together to form stores selling a collection of products made popular by Macrobiotics, the Japanese food fad, and the natural farming movement. Tofu, brown rice, and soy sauce were important items, but so too were vegetables sold as "organic" which came to mean products created without industrial pesticides, chemicals, or even fertilizers.[664] Organic food as an idea had been a significant goal for hippie farmers during the 1960s, and many kept looking for those items long after they joined the workforce. Indeed, organic food was a draw in and of itself for many because it promised to uphold the values of the counterculture in a package that was amenable to capitalism.[665] In fact, the major problem with organic food, besides the fact that the definition itself was fluid, was that there was very little organic food available. Farming methods still prioritized the pesticides, and chemical fertilizers

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[663] Eugene Schoenfeld, "Taking with Alice," *Berkeley Barb,* October 9, 1974.
[664] Hilda S. White, "The Organic Food Movement," *Food Technology*, April 1972, 29-33.
[665] Belasco, *Appetite for Change,* 197-199.

deemed "unorganic," and even fewer farmers even knew a market existed for items like kale or arugula usually grown for personal consumption on small vegetable plots.[666]

A few merged entrepreneurial capitalism with radical food politics, catalyzing an explosion in the amount and quality of natural and organic products available. In Austin, Texas, a 25-year old businessman named John Mackey opened Whole Foods Market in 1978 as a way to profit from his vegetarianism. Like many young people at the time, he moved into a housing co-op with a meat-free kitchen in Austin shortly after finishing high school. Mackey did much of the cooking and eventually became the household's food buyer. Like many people in the same role across the country, Mackey found that after he purchased the usual set of hippie fare – brown rice and tofu– getting things like quality vegetables was very difficult.[667] Major supermarkets invested billions in developing dedicated streams of products that included things like lettuce, carrots, and snap peas. Individuals like Mackey could only buy in bulk from distributors that sold to restaurants or smaller independent grocery stores. "The quality just wasn't there."[668] Already interested in food, Mackey went to work in one of the natural food stores catering to his co-op, when he decided to follow the model of the big supermarkets who created suppliers for products they sold by offering a consistent market for it. The first Whole Foods was called "Saferway," and was housed in a three-story Victorian house in downtown Austin that included areas for produce, dairy, frozen foods, health products

[666] Walter Keichel, "The Food Giants Struggle to Stay in Step with Consumers," *Fortune*, September 11, 1978, 50-56; S. J. Kazeniac, "Flavor Trends in Natural Foods," *Food Technology*, January 1977, 26-33; Belasco, *Appetite for Change*, 115-117.
[667] Joe Dobrow, *Natural Prophets: From Health Foods to Whole Foods – How the Pioneers of the Industry Changed the Way We Eat and Reshaped American Business* (New York: Rodale Press, 2014), 178.
[668] *Ibid*., 180.

like vitamins, as well as a vegetarian café.[669] The name referenced Safeway, then the largest supermarket chain in America and one of companies most tied to the network of industrial food processors supplying products to the chains. However, supplying Saferway was a struggle. “You had these paper catalogs that you ordered all the food from. So, we flipped through the catalogs, looked up the food we wanted, called them up, and they would show up in trucks. We would stick it on the shelves, our customers would buy it, and we would restock the shelves.”[670] The store only made $5,000 in its first year, but after merging with another natural foods store, it changed its name to Whole Foods Market, implying that, like many other countercultural dining icons, they offered a purer form of food than other stores. After merging with another struggling natural foods to store to combine capital, Mackey changed his young enterprise’s name to Whole Foods Market, etching an identity for himself independent of the food items sold by mainstream supermarkets he was rejecting.

Whole Foods was not the only supermarket-style natural foods store exploding onto the scene. Boulder, Colorado, another counterculture nexus, hosted a variety of organic, vegan, and macrobiotic cooperatives serving students and faculty of the left-leaning University of Colorado. By the late 1970s, many of the graduates turned their energies into profit-making ventures, creating a “mafia” of organic food enterprises that had more in common with the big processors than the earlier hippie “free-straurants.” The most important of these stores was Mrs. Gooch’s Naturalmart, a single store sourcing food from co-op farms nearby to create something akin to a supermarket.[671] Peter Roy,

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[669] *Ibid.,* 181.
[670] J. D. Harrison, “When We Were Small: Whole Foods,” *The Washington Post*, July 30, 2014.
[671] Dobrow, *Natural Prophets*, 128-144.

who would later become the President of Whole Foods, visited the store in 1980 and described an ethical consumer's utopia. "It was the first natural foods store that I had ever been in that was selling protein. They had their big fresh meat department. A seafood department. And that was just revolutionary. I had never seen anybody merchandising produce in the way they were merchandising produce, really staking it high. It was electric."[672] Another store with the same emotional pull was the Berkeley Bowl, near the University of California, Berkeley, that had "towers of perfect, glistening vegetables."[673] These stores were single outlets, run with hip locals in mind that inspired counterculture entrepreneurs to build larger, more conventional properties similar to mainstream supermarkets.

Whole Foods expanded swiftly. Four stores by 1985, nearly twenty by 1990, and finally in 1992, an initial public offering netting over $80 Million, much more than A&P generated when its share were first traded on the stock market. Mackey got around the central problem that natural foods makers made items in small amounts by stocking popular products that seemed benign like corona beer and bottles of mineral water. He also formed partnerships in conjunction with other natural grocers to convince organic farmers and processors to scale up – a move that was both good for business and adhered to movement goals of developing a more ecologically friendly food system. Farms in California were capable of shipping organic vegetables year round since they could easily switch to types of pesticides not considered dangerous. One, called Earthbound Farms, located in Carmel, California worked a huge stretch of land that totaled 10,000 acres by 1990 (beginning with only 2.5 acres in 1984), farming dozens of different kinds of foods.

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[672] *Ibid*., 138.
[673] *Ibid.,* 139.

Another company, New Hampshire-based Stoneybrook farms, turned an organic farming school into a massive yoghurt-making enterprise that went from six cows to 6,000 between 1983 and 1990. Just as supermarkets a generation earlier helped expand small food processors like Tyson, Whole Foods and other natural foods stores created a whole network of organic food manufacturers.[674]

Whole foods cofounder John Mackey emerged as one of the most visionary and innovative business leaders of the new era. Most early Whole Foods shoppers –in addition to the patrons of any number of natural stores– bought their food there because of the legacy of countercultural dietary "empowerment." The idea that Mackey's food, sourced from organic farms and hip processors, was ethically superior meant consumers were willing to bear extra cost, often twenty percent above the amount a mainstream supermarket would change for a similar item. Of course, that was part of the appeal. As Mackey would later put it, "our shoppers are willing to pay a little more for items that transcend other options in the marketplace."[675] The idea of empowerment even spread to the workforce. Countercultural management techniques, preached by pop-authors like Robert B. Nelson, told employers they needed to empower their workers in much the same way they energized customers.[676] At Whole Foods, this meant employees were "associates" and part of a "team." Moreover, the teams, stores, and regions made their own decisions about which items to stock and the central office stayed out of it –a version of libertarian autonomy that meshed neatly with hip consumerism. This meant that, unlike homogenous mainstream supermarkets, Whole Foods' attempted idiosyncratic

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674 *Ibid*., 190-195.

675 Wendy Zellner, "John Mackey's Empire: Peace, Love, and the Bottom Line," *Business Week*, December 12, 1998.

676 Robert B. Nelson, *Empowering Employees Through Delegation* (New York: Irwin Professional Publishing, 1994).

expressions of the community. For instance, at one point in the early 1990s, Mackey rejected the idea of creating a centralized database of product photos even though he knew each regional marketing director was wasting money cataloguing the same items locally; he thought that what the company lost in efficiency, it would gain by making individual managers empowered to make own decisions**.** As Lex Alexander, who was in charge of sourcing artisanal private-label products, described it, "at Whole Foods, job satisfaction is defined as being able to do your own thing."[677] While no traditional food retailer would condone such independence, it worked. Whole Foods staved off unionization attempts well into the twentieth-first century and used each store's unique offerings to attract consumers who did not identify with the natural foods movement.

Mainstream grocery stores had little response to the increased demand for natural foods among former hippies who had joined the growing ranks of the middle class. Rising obesity rates during the 1980s, caused by the influx of fast and convenient foods ignited a national conversation about the physical effects of the American diet. A 1976 Senate hearing convened by liberal favorite George McGovern ignited the debates after producing a document called *Dietary Goals for America* that suggested high fat foods played an important role in sparking heart disease, cancer, and other ailments. For the first time, the government itself was suggesting that the diet promoted by decades of agricultural policy was dangerous.[678] From there, a flood of scientific research targeted fat as the enemy of good health. Much of this new data found its way into popular media. Cholesterol, the fatty plague that gathered in arteries closely tied with heart disease, even

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677 Dobrow, *Natural Prophets,*

678 Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, *Dietary Goals for the United Sates*, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1977).

featured the cover of *Time* magazine in June 1984.[679] This all translated into a demand for low-fat foods that was more easily responded too by the natural foods companies than the mainstream processors that had been pumping their products full of fat, salt, and sugar. As Lappé herself argued, "many people assume that foods made to preserve the planet will also trim the excess fat from their bodies. While this is not correct, I suspect many of those in the movement will take advantage of this misconception."[680] Stoneybrook Farm, for instance, partnered with began selling "low-fat" dairy items to chain supermarkets eager to stock items that would appeal to people concerned about their waists. Other natural foods makers followed suit, sending a limited number of specially-designed "lowfat" foods into major retailers' stores.[681] By 1992, the National Retail Federation reported that at least half of the nations' 20,000 supermarkets had some sort of space devoted to these sorts of products.[682] When major processors like Kraft followed suit, offering low-fat cream cheese, salad dressing, and more, those numbers only increased. The introduction of diet sodas, with normal sweeteners replaced by artificial ones, ratified the new era. What low-fat foods offered was an opening for some of the ideas fostered by the natural foods movement, most especially the argument that food should always be healthy, to enter the mainstream. The irony was, of course, that all makers of low-fat foods loaded their items with sugar or other unhealthy flavor enhancers to compensate for the lack of flavorful lipids.[683]

679 *Time Magazine*, June 1984.
680 Quoted in Trager, "Health Food: Why and Why Not."
681 "Cultures with a Conscience," *Prepared Foods*, October 1991.
682 Betsy Spethmann, "Nature's Bounty," *Brand Week*, September 6, 1993.
683 Moss, *Salt, Sugar, Fat*, 172-191.

The consequences of the move towards a more processed food system, despite the success of the natural foods movement in sparking public interest, was a marked decline in Americans' health. Many of the processed foods sold in fast food restaurants, Wal-Marts, and, increasingly, supermarkets –low-fat or otherwise– were designed to appeal to base instincts, such as the desire for salty or sweet foods. In other words, people did not enjoy eating fast food merely because it was cheap. Rather, items sold in McDonalds' or Wal-Marts also appealed to fundamental genetic imperatives. Restaurateurs, along with food processors, keyed in on research produced at the City University of New York that suggested sugar content helped suppress biological urges to stop eating. For instance, one scientist discovered that lab rats would gorge themselves to death if given high-sugar foods like fruit loops, since they lacked a natural appetite inhibitor for sweets. He went on to argue that humans were liable to do the same since, in early human history, sweet foods were those most likely to have the highest calorie content and thusly provide the largest amounts of energy. Processors saw an opportunity to make money in these results. Cereal maker General Mills funded further research on craving and sugar content, as did soda-maker Coca-Cola. Characterizing the new interest in sugar, one of the biologists involved in the new push, Morley Kare, wrote back to his sponsors at General Mills, "We currently are emphasizing the growth of our program on taste and nutrition. A study with adolescents is being planned, focusing on their desire for high concentrations of sweeteners, saltiness, and, evidently, the flavor and texture of fat."[684] By 1985, these and other studies pointed towards incredible profits from boosting the content of these particular additives, despite warnings of dire public health consequences. For instance,

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684 Morely R. Kare, "Memorandum," August 1, 1990 in Industry Documents Library, Tobacco Truth Foundation, University of California San Francisco, San Francisco, CA.

chicken nuggets increased their sweetness by 18% between 1983 and 1987.[685] This coincided with the push for more low-fat foods in supermarkets, where sugar boosted flavor. For instance, General Mills' low-fat yogurt brand "Yoplait" was sweetened so much that a single 4 oz serving contained 10 grams of sugar per serving, an amount that equaled the daily recommended portion and was nearly double what was included in an equal portion of ice cream. Ironically, Yoplait was marketed as a low-fat and nutritional snack, especially for children, drawing on yogurt's reputation as a health food first cultivated during the early days of the counterculture.[686]

The changing chemical content of processed foods played an important part in unleashing a public health crisis. In 1970, the government classified roughly ten percent of Americans as obese, the highest amount in the world. Nearly 25 percent were overweight. During the 80s, that number started creeping upwards. By the end of the decade, twenty percent of Americans were obese and over 35 percent could be called overweight. Even more alarming was the spike in childhood obesity, which topped twenty percent in 1995.[687] Cheap food caused this crisis, especially the items sold in fast food joints, school cafeterias, and supermarket freezer aisles. There was no small irony this new epidemic plagued not only the poor and working classes who could only afford the sugar and salt-laden processed items companies like Tyson had designed for McDonalds, but also the more affluent people buying low-fat items supposed to fend off these sorts of health issues.

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[685] John White, "The Role of Sugars in Foods: Why Are They Added" Added Sugars Conference, May 2010.
[686] Moss, *Salt, Sugar, Fat*, 7-8.
[687] Crister, *Fat Land*, 81.

By the time Americans had realized the degree to which the future of American medicine would be determined by the obesity crisis, the ways Americans approached the supermarket as an institution had fundamentally changed. Not only had the industry fragmented into many different niches following the 1960s, but few consumers believed that traditional stores still offered the best products or the best deals. Rather, chains like Kroger or Safeway were a compromise choice for when more fashionable or discount grocers were either unavailable or out of an individual consumers' reach. The supermarket had always been a battleground over different conceptions of fair pricing and access, but as the industry sputtered to satisfy constantly evolving desires, new kinds of grocery stores ensured that food retailing was no longer homogenous nor even a single industry, so much as an entire economic sector drawing on the resources of rural economy to satisfy the suburbs.

Conclusion: Paying for Dinner

Although it is too soon to label Amazon's 2017 purchase of Whole Foods Market a milestone on par with Ralph's original stores in Los Angeles or the introduction of products like the Vantress chicken, there are signs the online retailer is disrupting operations across the industry.[688] With its acquisition of the natural foods retailer, Amazon went from a non-player in the food business to controlling about three percent of the entire sector, promising to slash prices at the popular store.[689] The cost of food is falling more broadly, as well, despite devastating natural disasters in growing regions like Florida, California, Central Mexico, and lowland Peru that have reduced the supply of industrially-grown fruits and vegetables. Domestic competition from European low-cost chains Aldi and Lidl, in addition to Amazon forcing certain price concessions from purveyors, has triggered a price war among the largest chains, making popular items like chickens and avocados more affordable than ever before.[690] Moreover, industry watchers generally agree Amazon's plunge into the grocery business is the beginning of a longer plan to digitize food shopping, putting the e-commerce giant in the position of making food even more convenient to buy through mobile phone apps and other digital

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[688] I use the term "disruption" intentionally. In recent years, it has become fashionable among academics and the public to talk about new trends in existing business sectors as "disruption." Amazon has pioneered this sort of activity, along with any number of tech startups giving consumers new ways of shopping for insurance or books, for stance. See Caroline Howard, "Disruption vs. Innovation: What's the Difference?" March 27, 2013, Forbes.Com, https://www.forbes.com/sites/carolinehoward/2013/03/27/you-say-innovator-i-say-disruptor-whats-the-difference/#3a5b69946f43. Accessed January 17, 2018.

[689] James McGovern, "Whole Foods Brand Supported Amazon's Grocery Sales in the US," Businessapprise.Com, January 16, 2008, http://www.financeapprise.com/whole-foods-brand-supported-amazons-grocery-sales-us/. Accessed January 17, 2018.

[690] Craig Giammona, "While Amazon Grabs the Headlines, Lidl is Still the Grocer to Watch," *Chicago Tribune*, January 8, 2018; Sam Bloch, "Whole Foods New Limits May Squeeze Small Suppliers," The New Food Economy, January 9, 2018, https://newfoodeconomy.org/whole-foods-small-supplier-demo-system/. Accessed January 17, 2018.

services.[691] Such a move could dramatically slash the size of the food labor force, passing savings onto consumers even while putting even more pressure on workers to make ends meet.

Amazon's entry into the grocery sector reveals the ways America's grocery industry determines the nation's consumer habits, agricultural methods, and commercial geography while also displaying how important efficient service and providing access to new technologies is to supermarket retailers.

Since the early days of the A&P, food retailers have used different methods to streamline the ways Americans bought food, but have nearly always settled on the luxury warehousing model first introduced in Los Angeles in the 1920s and perfected after World War II. By organizing stores to funnel shoppers through distinct departments – meat, seafood, baked goods, etc– they could ensure their customers selected the maximum number of goods. Prioritizing open environments with self-service, grocers promised their patrons the freedom to choose their items in privacy. Retailers only sold those items that could be delivered in practically limitless quantities, thoroughly killing local, artisanal food production in America from the 1930s to the beginning of the twenty-first century when cooks and farmers rebelling against the supermarket diet revived certain products. By ensuring services were rationalized, grocers created a template for all retail enterprises in the United States, from Wal Mart to Hobby Lobby.

Supermarket operators' faith in science and technology sparked a revolution in the ways businesses and consumers adopted new devices and products. Early on, supermarket operators realized they could harness new developments like cellophane or

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[691] Daniel Gross, "Amazon's Endgame," Slate.com, June 16, 2017, http://www.slate.com/articles/business/moneybox/2017/06/amazon_s_purchase_of_whole_foods_is_about_the_last_mile_problem.html. Accessed January 17, 2018.

genetic science to better serve customers' needs. By funding scientists, like those working at the Vantress hatchery, and quickly adopting other creations like vacuum chillers, they could deliver on their promise to deliver fresh foods at the lowest possible cost. But as grocers acquired freezers, GMO meats, hydrogenated fats, and more, they provided Americans with their first experience of "Space Age" technologies that would have otherwise stayed hidden in research laboratories and military bases. Supermarkets sold the future to American consumers.

Grocers constructed our cities and suburbs in much the same way. Once civil planners and architects settled on the suburb as the ideal community for the postwar era, the supermarket became the physical structure builders used to orientate new communities. Roads linking commuters to their urban jobs passed by supermarkets just as grocery store-anchored shopping centers became the de-facto downtowns for countless Levittowns. The simultaneous decimation of urban markets, green grocers, and neighborhood butcher shops forged the "food deserts" and economic stagnation that typify so many American cities' core areas while simultaneously forcing an even greater dependency on mass-food retailers and their industrialized products.

Grocers' successes convinced skeptical Americans that corporate monopolies could make their lives better, determining what sort of businesses in general guided American civil society during the twentieth century. During the 1930s, A&P's market domination sparked anti-monopolist revolts; by the 1980s Walmart might been killing off Main Street, but its low prices made the Arkansas-based chain the housewives' friend. This was no small feat. Grocers' advertising and cost-cutting methods converted skeptical Americans into apostles of big business. The change in culinary habits to focus on retailers' premiere products was one result of this change in attitudes. Our cities, suburbs, and towns' geography is another. Grocers' decisions about where to build their stores determined the spatial relationships between roads, highways, and commercial districts. Indeed, retailers' ability to site their stores in areas lying between concentrations of people forged Americans' willingness to travel long distances for food and other economic activities. In 1910, it would be unheard of to travel twenty miles to get groceries; in 2018, many Americans, particularly suburbanites, would consider such a trip normal. For these reasons, Americans never stopped buying food in supermarkets once they had the ability to do so, regardless of concerns about grocers' methods or the grudging acknowledgment that they had no better option. The reason for such devotion was simple: supermarkets sold the food Americans wanted to eat, and did so conveniently. It took decades to convince home cooks to accept industrialized, processed foods, but once this first project was completed, the supermarket diet was such a fundamental part of American life that pursuing any alternative was difficult and expensive.

The original leaders of the supermarket industry, like George Ralphs or Michael Cullen, would likely not have been surprised to see that their creation had such an important effect on modern American life. They would probably favorably compare Wal-Mart's supercenters to Big Bear or the discount supermarkets opened by A&P in the middle of the Great Depression. Nor would they have been surprised that their stores inspired Whole Foods or luxury eateries like Chez Panisse. Their original idea was to capture an ideal of luxury while maintaining low costs, a balance the industry managed to achieve for most of the postwar period despite the challenges of building a global infrastructure to support mass retailing. And while these operators might have doubted how some of the key products of contemporary food culture, like sushi, might have market viability, they would have recognized how companies like Walmart and Whole Foods used many of the same marketing approaches that speak to consumers concerns that their diet properly reflected economic and political aspirations. Most of all, they would recognize how their stores and methods laid down the foundation for the system contemporary Americans use to bring food from farm to table.

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