Spice Lands Feel War's Sting

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Spice Lands Feel War’s Sting

New sources of common spices must be found to compensate for war changes, says Clara Dollar

The gourmet today has just cause to wonder what seasoning his next dish is to contain. The war has had a drastic effect on the spice trade. Some spices are entirely unavailable, while closed markets on others have dropped the price to low levels.

Consumption and destruction in the warring countries have caused the stocks of peppers to be severely depleted. The present cost of Lampong pepper is only slightly above a fifty year low. The red pepper trade, however, with the exception of pimento, has been the most active of the entire market.

What about the cloves for that baked ham? Shipping facilities for Madagascar cloves are extremely limited. In spite of this, both grades of cloves have had a fairly steady price range.

When it became apparent that the normal European markets of West India Nutmeg were closed, the price dropped sharply. The closing of European markets has proven a stalemate to those spices usually sold in large amounts on the continent.

When freight space for the China type of cassias became scarce, the Batavian variety became more widely used, although the price remained fairly steady. For two years, importers have been making efforts to have the twenty percent duty on the African and Cochin types of ginger abolished. When they finally won their point, the 1940 crop of African ginger was sold out immediately with offers for the 1941 crop still coming in.

Even though the important European outlet of pimento is closed, the shortage of supplies, coupled with certain speculative endeavors, is raising the price of pimento to what is probably an all-time high. The United States consumption has been less than usual, although exports to Sweden, via Petsamo, and to Russia and Central Europe continue.

No paprika addict need worry at present about securing all his heart desires, for the new Spanish crop can be obtained although high in price. It is brought to Lisbon by Spanish coasting vessels, and hence to America. The quality is fully comparable to that before the war.

For the past six weeks Hungarian paprika has not been accessible, its value ascending in proportion to the disappearance of the supplies. Before Italy entered the war, large quantities of the 1939 Bulgarian crop were shipped in and some are still available. There are also a few parcels of Algerian and Morroco paprikas on reserve in the United States at the present time.

Supplies of French celery, marjoram, thyme, and savory are nearly gone although their values are high. Indian celery has been replacing the French product since the outbreak of the war.

Laurel leaves, which for years could be purchased for a penny, became a rare product when the Turkish and the Greek varieties were no longer accessible. Consumers are paying 30 to 32 cents for it these days. Attempts are being made to arrange shipments of this article from Greece, from which point the war risk insurance rate is from 20 to 25 percent.

Important parcels of Turkish poppy seeds are on their way to Basra, Iran (Persia), where American steamers await their arrival for export to the United States. The entire shutting off of all imported yellow grades of mustard, except the Chinese, combined with shortages in all domestic crops has caused a sharp price rise.

Natives of Zanzibar sort cloves to add to the world supply of spices.