



Agricultural Reorganization in the Third Reich: The Reich Food Corporation
(Reichsnährstand), 1933-1936

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AGRICULTURAL REORGANIZATION
IN THE THIRD REICH:
THE REICH FOOD CORPORATION
(*REICHSNÄHRSTAND*), 1933-1936

In 1933 German agriculture was in the throes of a serious depression. The same could be said of all segments of the German economy and of the economies of most nations. The response of Hitler's National Socialist government to the crisis in agriculture has not been ignored by scholars; however most of the research and writing on German agriculture has centered on the more romantic features of the Nazi program.¹ The Hereditary Farm Law (*Reichserbhofgesetz*), which purported to make the social position of the farmer a noble and honored one, was unique and very important in the mind of the Nazi Minister of Agriculture, R. Walther Darré. However, by emphasizing this segment of the platform and by citing the slogan "*Blut und Boden*," the highly misleading impression has been given that these represented the major portion of the Nazi program.

Darré was genuinely interested in the farmers, and he believed that, as a class, they were in danger of being engulfed by the growing industrial society of Germany. His program was designed to raise the social status of farmers, so they could be proud of their occupation, and to improve their economic standing, so they could afford to stay on the farms.² Propaganda about the nobility and the racial purity of the farmers and the Hereditary Farm Law were designed to deal with the first half of this platform, but the second half, which was at least equally important to Darré and more important for the economy as a whole, was accomplished by the less publicized market control effected by the *Reichsnährstand* (Reich Food Corporation).

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¹ E.g., see Henry W. Spiegel, "Land Inheritance under the Swastika," *Agricultural History*, XIII (Oct. 1939), 176-188.

² For some of Darré's public statements on his program in general and on the *Reichsnährstand* in particular, see *Berliner Tageblatt* (Berlin), July 14, 1933, Evening Edition; July 17, 1933, Evening Edition; and Sept. 19, 1933, Evening Edition. For some background on Darré's basic ideas, see Clifford R. Lovin, "*Blut und Boden*: The Ideological Basis of the Nazi Agricultural Program," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXVIII (April-June 1967), 279-288. See also Darré's full-length books, *Das Bauerntum als Lebensquell der Nordischen Rasse* (2nd ed.; Munich, 1933) and *Neuadel aus Blut und Boden* (Munich, 1930).

Manipulation of the market was probably the only way the prices for German agricultural products could be raised to a level which would provide an adequate income for the farmers. This is not to say that this was the only conceivable policy. However, the alternative, a free market, was undesirable to the Nazis because it meant that the agricultural population would continue its flight from the country due to the inability to make a living on the relatively poor farmland of Germany. Therefore, the Food Corporation was established for the purpose of providing an adequate income for the farmers of Germany by setting prices at an artificially high level.

The authority to organize agriculture had been given to the Minister of Agriculture in July 1933, but it was not until September 13 that a law was passed which specifically empowered him to set up "the Reich Food Corporation or particular groups to regulate the production and sale . . . of agricultural products, if this appears necessary after study for the interests of the whole economy and the public welfare."³ The framework for such an organization had already been created by Darré. Many agricultural associations had previously been organized under his leadership, but by this law he was given authority to unite or annex any organizations—a power used immediately in the union of the grain mills on September 15.⁴

The Food Corporation which emerged was defined as "the agency of the German farmers and German agriculture" and as "a self-governing corporate body under public law." This meant that, instead of a variety of independent agricultural organizations—political, technical, and economic—trying to serve and represent the farmers, there would now be one unified, powerful association with authority to carry out these duties. This corporation was not to be a government agency, but an autonomous organization with its own head (*Reichsbauernführer*) who was subject only to the supervision of the Minister of Agriculture. Its membership comprised various groups and such individuals as agricultural bureaucrats, owners, special occupiers, lessors, or tenants of agricultural enterprises as well as their family members and employees. Even former owners who remained connected in some way with their property were included. Agriculture was defined for the purposes of membership as "soil cultivation and animal raising . . . particularly cultivating, grazing, forestry, gardening, vine-growing, fishing in inland and coastal waters, beekeeping, and hunting." In addition, all sellers and processors of agricultural products became members. Cooperatives were required to become a part of the corporation, but other farm organizations were not unless the executive of the corporation, Darré, "in order to simplify the structure and the administration of the *Reichsnährstand*" decreed that "associations, leagues, and unions which

³ *Reichsgesetzblatt*, I (1933), 626. Subsequent orders which along with administrative directives completed the structure of the corporation can be found in *ibid.*, 1060-1061; (1934), 32-33, 100-102; and (1935), 170-171.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I (1933), 627-628.

have as their goal the economic, political, professional and spiritual furtherance . . . of agriculture" become members.⁵

These associations were dealt with in three different ways. If they served a purpose essential to the corporation, they were incorporated (*eingegliedert*) and made an integral part of the structure. Among organizations handled in this manner was the German Agricultural Council, which became Reich Central Bureau II in the Administrative Department. Other unions were dissolved if their functions only duplicated those of the corporation. This led to the curious spectacle of 100-year-old organizations voluntarily dissolving themselves at the behest of local agricultural leaders.⁶ A third class of associations, primarily professional and highly specialized groups and by far the most numerous of the organizations affected, were attached or annexed (*angegliedert*) to the corporation.⁷ Their independence and primary functions remained intact, but they acknowledged the sovereignty of the all-embracing corporation and worked within the limitations it imposed.

So that no question would exist as to who was to be a member, an order was issued in February 1934 which divided agriculture into ten sections and listed all individuals and businesses which came within the framework of the corporation. The list was extremely detailed. For example, Section 7, dealing with the fat and milk industry, reads as follows:

a. Milk dealers, dairyowners, cheese makers, butter and cheese dealers, pasteurized milk product dealers, oil dealers, as well as products subject to the fat monopoly; oil fodder dealers, fat and fat-products dealers, blubber dealers.

b. Pasteurized milk commodities production including cheese production, lactose factories, oil mills and oil factories, as well as the products subject to the fat monopoly, and margarine mills.⁸

This kind of cataloging was also done for the other segments of agriculture, such as the cattle and sugar industries. So as not to leave anyone out, the tenth division included "retail food dealers not in the designated specialties." The only loophole in the law was the specification that merchants who handled only an unimportant amount of agricultural products could be excused from membership.

The principal goal of this vast new corporation had already been spelled out in public statements by Darré. It was designed to relieve the farmer of the uncertainties of a capitalistic market economy so he could serve his

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1060–1061.

⁶ For examples, see *Hannoversche Land- und Forstwirtschaftliche Zeitung*, LXXXVI (Oct. 13, 1933), 737, 739, and (Nov. 24, 1933), 891–892; and *Niedersächsische Bauernzeitung*, LXXXVII (March 9, 1934), 305.

⁷ For more complete information on these organizations, see Hermann Reischle and Wilhelm Saure, *Aufgaben und Aufbau des Reichsnährstandes* (Berlin, 1934), 50–54. Also, an interesting account of the decision to incorporate a purely technical association, the *Deutsche Landwirtschaftsgesellschaft*, appears in Heinz Haushofer, *Die Furche der DLG, 1885 bis 1960* (Frankfurt am Main, 1960), 202–203.

⁸ *Reichsgesetzblatt*, I (1934), 101.

nation better both as a food producer and culture bearer. This freedom from economic anxiety would enable the farmer to make his optimum contribution to the nation. The responsibilities of the corporation in this regard were specifically stated in the law:

The *Reichsnährstand* has the duty to unite its membership in its responsibility to the people and the nation, as a vital prop for the structure, the preservation, and the strengthening of the German people. It has in particular the duties, to advance the German farmers and agriculture, the agricultural associations, and land dealers as well as the processors of agricultural products, to regulate the economic and associational affairs of its members, to harmonize the efforts of the different forces for service to the public welfare, to use the administrative authority of the *Reichsnährstand*; to assist farmers, especially by dispensing information and by appointing experts.⁹

The vast authority which this measure gave the head of the corporation over the activities of the individual farmer led *Das Neue Tage-Buch*, an anti-Nazi publication, to assert that the Farmers' Leader could decide,

- 1) Whether the farmer can cultivate his own property or whether he has to join an association.
- 2) What and how much he has to cultivate.
- 3) What and when he must sell.
- 4) To whom and at what price he must sell.
- 5) The price at which the buyer resells it.¹⁰

Although this statement is incorrect in some details, many Nazis might have accepted its wording but would have claimed that the author had completely missed the spirit of the law. Indeed, Darré in a speech to representatives of German industry early in 1934 pointed out that control and freedom were not mutually exclusive. He asserted that while farmers certainly needed to be aware of their responsibilities and duties, they also had to be free men. He said:

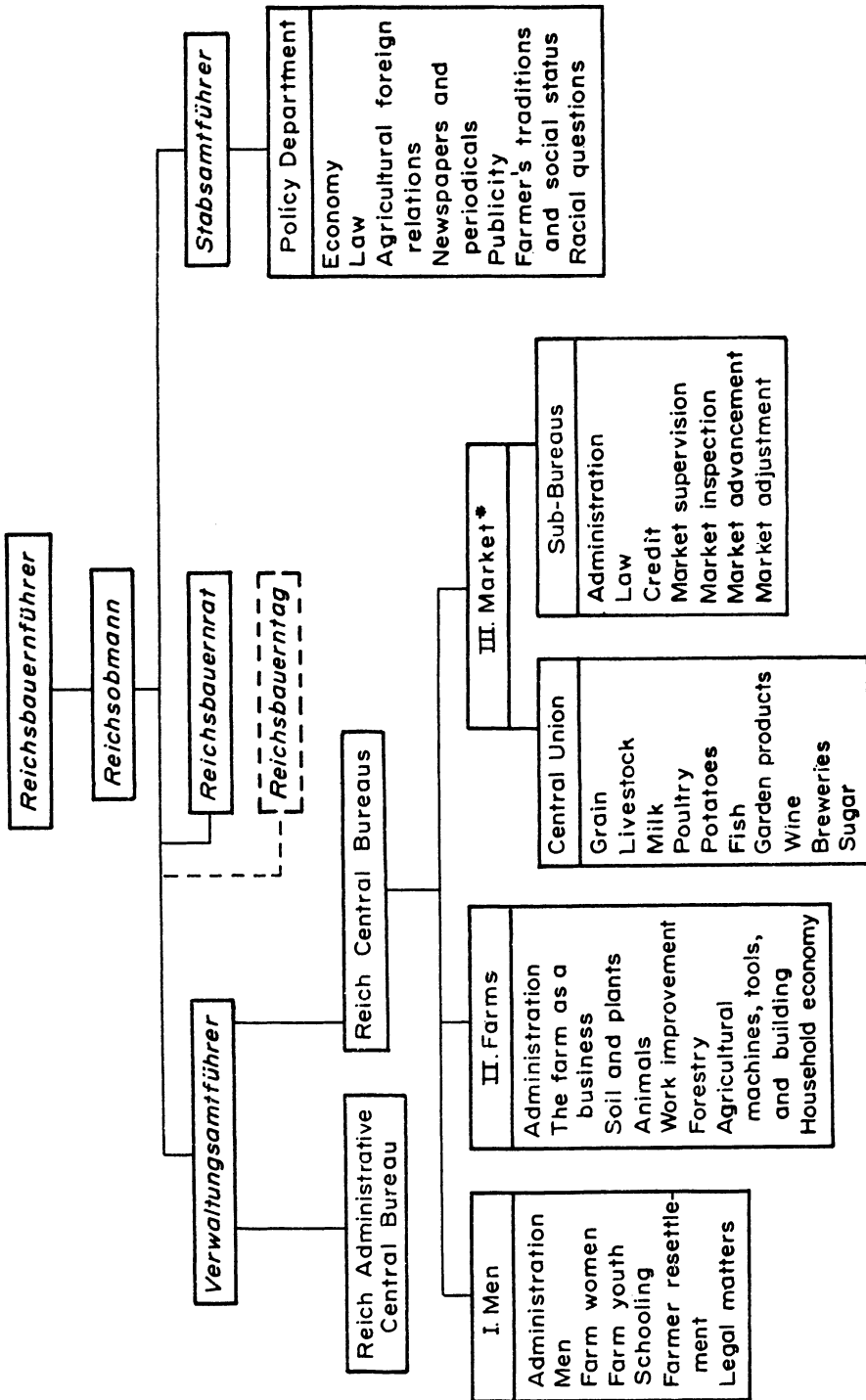
We demand that each farmer freely submit to relentless discipline; we order him as a soldier in the battle for food—but we must give him freedom, so he can fulfill this national obligation. We can make strict economic and cultural demands only on farmers who live freely on their soil.¹¹

To Darré freedom was not license to do as one pleased; that was the degenerative nomadic concept which he had castigated in his books. True German freedom emphasized the community and the opportunity to serve it. Darré felt that farmers were only free if they could till the soil without fear that this right could be taken away from them. One of the ways to guarantee this freedom was to withdraw the farmer from the free market, the fluctuations of which often reduced his income to a substandard level.

⁹ *Ibid.* (1933), 1060.

¹⁰ *Das Neue Tage-Buch*, I (Sept. 23, 1933), 303.

¹¹ *Der Deutsche Volkswirt*, VIII (Jan. 19, 1934), 676.



STRUCTURE OF THE REICH FOOD CORPORATION (*REICHSNÄHRSTAND*)

source: Primarily Reischle and Saure, *Reichsnährstand*, 2nd ed., pp. 26-27, 70, 115-142, and 153. * Divided into two sections—cooperatives and other agricultural organizations—until Feb. 1935.

Thus the Food Corporation was to do its part in "freeing" the German farmer.

The varied duties and responsibilities of the corporation were to be administered by a vast, highly organized bureaucracy. At its apex stood the powerful Reich Farmers' Leader (*Reichsbauernführer*) who was appointed by the Chancellor and was the legal leader of the Food Corporation.¹² As "the chief of all the services, groups, bureaus, employees, and workers," he had authority to appoint and dismiss any of his subordinates; to organize and reorganize the structure of the corporation; to issue and revoke orders affecting all or any of the individual or associate members; and to regulate the payment of the fees necessary to operate the framework.¹³ There was only one check on this leader according to the law, and that was the Minister of Agriculture. Since Darré was both *Reichsbauernführer* and Minister of Agriculture, the only effective limitation on his power came from the National Socialist party and its *Führer*, Adolf Hitler.

In the actual tasks of formulating policy and administering the corporation Darré was aided by an assistant (*Reichsobmann*) and the two leaders of the main divisions (*Stabsamt* or Policy Department and *Verwaltungsamt* or Administrative Department). In the vast array of bureaus and sub-bureaus which made up the corporation, it is imperative to distinguish between the sections of these two departments. The *Stabsamt* was the idea branch of the executive. It was the "heart of the corporation" which gave substance to its basic concepts and expounded its duties and responsibilities, while the daily business operations were carried out by the Administrative Department.¹⁴ It should further be noted that the Policy Department represented something new in farmers' organizations. It was not an association left over from the Weimar period for which a place had to be found in the new framework, but an innovation which was to prove useful.

The duties of most of the bureaus listed in the accompanying chart are made clear by their names and positions in the hierarchy. It should be noted that most dealt with practical agricultural problems, but the dual nature of Darré's program found its place here also. For example, Reich Central Bureau I took care of all duties which served "the human, economic, social, political, and spiritual furtherance of agricultural people" and dealt with some of the basic questions of agriculture, such as hereditary farms and resettlement.¹⁵ One of the divisions of this bureau, "Farm Women," even went so far as to include subsections on "the woman as the bearer of the spiritual heritage" and "the woman as the bearer of the racial heritage."¹⁶ The leader of this bureau emphasized the importance of

¹² *Reichsgesetzblatt*, I (1933), 1061. Darré was officially appointed to this post on Jan. 12, 1934. See *Völkischer Beobachter* (Munich), Jan. 12, 1934.

¹³ Reischle and Saure, *Aufgaben und Aufbau*, 55.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁶ *Niedersächsische Bauernzeitung*, LXXXVII (Feb. 23, 1934), 231-232.

the romantic part of the Nazi program when he stated that the purpose of his bureau was to create a farmer "for whom the love of the soil, the people (*Volk*), the home, the fatherland is not a question of physical desires, but rather a vital question and a vital duty; for whom the work for seedtime and harvest is not a material question, but rather a service for the family and the people, a God-given duty, which he has to fulfill."¹⁷ These words, however, should not obscure the fact that the primary aims of the Food Corporation were eminently practical. Reich Central Bureau II was to provide "the technical and scientific furtherance of particular goals of agriculture—land cultivation, running the business of a farm, tax questions, care of agricultural machines, technical schools, practical work schools, agricultural information, establishment and maintenance of research institutes and model farms, etc., etc."¹⁸

Although it is clear that the first two bureaus were important for German farmers, the most significant bureau for its effects both on the agricultural class and the economy at large was Reich Central Bureau III. The establishment of the "Market Bureau" required more time than the others. In the initial structure of the *Reichsnährstand*, there was a third and a fourth bureau, the former including all existing cooperatives and the latter made up of sellers and processors of agricultural products. As it turned out, these were only transitional bureaus which were combined in February 1935.¹⁹ The principal subdivisions of the "Market Bureau" were vertical unions (*Hauptvereinigungen*), which included all individuals involved in the production, processing, and sale of one crop or group of crops. Central unions were set up for grain, cattle, milk, potatoes, eggs, garden products, vine products, breweries, sugar, and fish. Technically independent, these unions followed policy lines laid down by the Food Corporation. In the initial stages of organization, the members had a voice in the choosing of a president, but later the authority of appointment was granted to the Minister of Agriculture who had to consult the Farmers' Leader. The duty of this official was to help establish the market order which would be responsible for the raising of production, "for the betterment of market and price conditions, for improvement in all areas of life."²⁰ He was to be not so much the spokesman for an economic group as the leader of it. An administrative council, chosen by the Farmers' Leader from among the various economic groups representing farmers, processors,

¹⁷ Helmut Reinke, "Die Betreuung des bäuerliche Menschen," *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte*, IV (March 1934), 200 (the entire issue was devoted to a discussion of the farmer and the new agricultural law).

¹⁸ Reischle and Saure, *Aufgaben und Aufbau*, 59.

¹⁹ *Reichsgesetzblatt*, I (1935), 170–171.

²⁰ Hermann Reischle and Wilhelm Saure, *Der Reichsnährstand, Aufbau, Aufgaben und Bedeutung* (3rd ed.; Berlin, 1940), 167 (hereinafter cited as Reischle and Saure, *Reichsnährstand*, 3rd ed.). Much of the material in this article has been gleaned from one of the three editions of this official commentary on the Food Corporation. Insofar as possible the first edition is used (cited as *Aufgaben und Aufbau*) so that the corporation can be pictured in its earliest stages. The second (1936) and third editions, however, are more complete and are used when necessary.

and dealers, assisted the president. This council was made up "not only of representatives of their groups, but . . . intelligent experts . . . who should work together on the formation of market conditions in responsible and imaginative ways."²¹ Another advisory group, the price board, was appointed by the president.

The power of the unions over the market was great. They could regulate production quotas and grading requirements and could prohibit any new enterprises. It is interesting to notice, however, that the control exercised over the farmer came only indirectly. Generally speaking, the farmer was free of restraint because he could grow what he pleased. On this basis, the Nazis were justified in their contention that the farmer was free, but control could be and was exercised by the manipulation of prices and the establishment of selling quotas, not to mention propaganda pressure.

The regulation of the market, then, was effected primarily by the central unions, but help came from several other governmental agencies. *Reichstellen* (Reich Boards), the first of which was established in 1930, were made up of members appointed by the Minister of Agriculture. They could set import quotas as well as store and buy food to help control prices.²² Reich Commissioners were appointed officials who had the power to regulate certain of these industries until the central unions were established.²³

The agricultural economic system resulting from the interaction of these various bureaus and agencies was called the market order (*Marktordnung*), which, according to the National Socialists, was more than mere regulation.²⁴ It was, they said, different from and superior to the planned and forced economic system of Bolshevism and the unplanned chaos of liberalism. It was a purposeful order which rested on the ideas of stability, justice, orderliness, accomplishment, leadership, and cooperation. Only as an integral part of a greater organism could agriculture make its greatest contribution to the German *Volk*.

In order to better understand the evolution of market control through the central unions, it would be instructive to look in detail at the development and the power of the German Milk Industry Union.²⁵ An interim association (Association of Sterilized Milk Producers) was estab-

²¹ Reischle and Saure, *Reichsnährstand*, 3rd ed., 169.

²² *Reichsgesetzblatt*, I: corn (1930), 88; grain (1933), 313–314; milk, oil, and fat (1933), 1109–1110; eggs (1933), 1104–1106; meat (1934), 228–230; garden and vine products (1936), 857–859.

²³ Reischle and Saure, *Aufgaben und Aufbau*, 178–179.

²⁴ See speeches by Darré and Reischle (who was the leader of the Policy Department) in the *Berliner Tageblatt*, Feb. 14, 1935, Evening Edition, and March 29, 1935, Morning Edition. See also Hans Merkel, "Die Marktordnung des Reichsnährstandes und die deutsche Wirtschaft," *Odal*, V (Nov. 1936), 357–365; and Hans Merkel and Otto Wohrmann, *Deutsches Bauernrecht*, (4th ed.; Leipzig, 1942), 104–106.

²⁵ For helpful accounts of the structure of the milk industry, see Karl Brandt, *The German Fat Plan and its Economic Setting* (Stanford, 1938), 198–203; Hermann-Ernst Günther, "Die Neuordnung der deutschen Milchwirtschaft," *Der Deutsche Volkswirt*, VIII (August 10, 1934), 2015–2018; and Reich and Prussian Ministry for Food and Agriculture, *The Present State of the German Dairy Industry* (Berlin, 1937), 89–96 (hereinafter cited as RPMFA, *Dairy Industry*).

lished on October 14, 1933, under the supervision of the Reich Commissioner of the Milk Industry. In the charter of this new organization the aims and methods were described as follows:

The purpose of the association is to regulate the use and the marketing of milk and cream products by combining all businesses which produce such commodities, with the hope that this will contribute to the marketing of milk at fair prices. The purpose can be obtained by the advancement of all measures which aim at the betterment of the economic conditions of the members of the association, by the adjustment of supply and demand, and by the regulation of marketing according to a uniform code of economically fair prices.²⁶

Just five months later, on March 27, 1934, the German Milk Industry Union was created.²⁷ Everyone in Germany who was connected with the production, processing, and distribution of milk was a member. The union was subdivided both geographically and occupationally. As usual, the power came from the top down. A president and an administrative council were the organs of the union with most of the power resting in the hands of the president who was appointed for a two-year term by the Minister of Agriculture. Not only did he have complete control over the economic activities of the member associations (not, however, over individuals within the associations), but he had authority to appoint the heads of the fifteen district unions. The law left nothing to chance in the legal construction of the milk industry, and by 1934 the structure for market regulation in this area was complete.

This new organization operated satisfactorily for over two years.²⁸ During that time, the member associations worked hard to increase production by a rationalization of the operation of the dairies themselves and by market regulation. Compulsory deliveries were introduced by the local associations. Educational requirements were set for dairy managers. Regulations concerning sanitation were imposed on an increasing number of farms. A new milk union was established by an order of the Farmers' Leader on June 18, 1936.²⁹ It involved no important changes but simply streamlined the administration.

All ten of the central unions operated in a similar fashion. Of course, the structure and regulations of each differed according to the nature of the product and the regional problems, but the basic aim and the general framework of each were much the same.³⁰ Certainly the system did not work

²⁶ *Reichsgesetzblatt*, I (1933), 738.

²⁷ *Ibid.* (1934), 259-262.

²⁸ For a general discussion of the work of the union in the first two years, see Brandt, *German Fat Plan*, 203-218, and RPMFA, *Dairy Industry*, 73-89.

²⁹ *Government Measures Affecting Agricultural Prices*, III (Jan.-March, 1937), 9.

³⁰ In addition to milk, five central unions were set up in 1934 for the following products: fish, Jan. 26; eggs, May; cattle, June 12; grain, July 10; and sugar, Nov. 10. See *Reichsgesetzblatt*, I (1934), 64-70, 355-364, 481-490, 629-708, 1173-1185. Three more were set up in 1935 and one in 1936: garden products, Feb. 27; potatoes, April 13; breweries, April 18; wine, Oct. 21, 1936. See *ibid.*, I (1935), 343-345, 550-552, 556-558; and (1936), 915-916.

perfectly. There was criticism of its provisions and its aims.³¹ But the claim of the Nazis that regulation had changed agricultural production from a wild, unpredictable, destructive river to a tranquil reservoir which operated for the benefit of all appears to contain some truth if one compares the market conditions of 1932 with those of 1936.³²

Although the market control apparatus of the *Reichsnährstand* was of paramount importance to German economy, it must be remembered that a plan of market control cannot operate without the support and assistance of a large number of people at the local level. There were advisory bodies in the framework of the corporation which were designed to solicit the advice and participation of a large number of farmers. Among these institutions were the *Reichsbauernrat* (Reich Farmers' Council), which was made up of Nazi farmers who were supposed to advise the Farmers' Leader;³³ the *Reichsbauerntag* (Reich Farmers' Congress), which prepared and held annually a great farmers' convention;³⁴ and the *Reichsbauernthing* (Reich Farmers' Assembly), the duties and responsibilities of which were obscure even then. All of these seem more important for propaganda purposes than for anything else.

The men at the local level who were important were the officials of the corporation. The economic unions which have been mentioned comprised only the market section of the corporation and were inferior to the agrarian-political leadership at the regional, district, and local levels. The *Reichsnährstand* divided the country into nineteen regions which contained organizations called regional or state farmers' associations (*Landesbauernschaften*).³⁵ These were divided into 541 districts and between

³¹ There was a great deal less criticism of the *Reichsnährstand* than there was of other parts of Darré's program such as the Hereditary Farm Law and the lack of farm credit. The individuals who were critical of the Food Corporation during the first years of its operations can be divided into three groups: émigrés, Communists, and business-oriented Germans who rejected the idea that farmers should be given special treatment. For examples of these, see *Das Neue Tage-Buch*, III (Nov. 16, 1934), 1084; N. Steinburger, *Die Agrarpolitik des Nationalsozialismus* (Moscow, 1935), *passim*; Carl Goerdeler's press conference in *Berliner Tageblatt*, Nov. 9, 1934, Evening Edition. For examples of Darré's replies to criticism, see *Berliner Tageblatt*, Sept. 17, 1934, Evening Edition, and *Nationalsozialistische Landpost* (Berlin), Sept. 7, 1934.

³² Reischle and Saure, *Reichsnährstand*, 2nd ed., 146-148.

³³ There is very little material available on this and the other advisory bodies. They rate only about five lines in each edition of Reischle and Saure. See *Aufgaben und Aufbau*, 27, 55. There were eighty members of the council in 1934, but apparently the number was not fixed. See *Das Deutsche Führerlexikon, 1934-1935* (Berlin, 1934), 69-70, for the names of the members of the council in 1934.

³⁴ The major speeches at these conventions as well as the complete schedules and pictures comprise the *Archiv des Reichsnährstandes, I-IV* (Berlin, 1934-1936).

³⁵ These regional associations were usually drawn along traditional provincial lines. The names of the associations in 1934 were Baden, Bavaria, Braunschweig, Hanover, Hesse-Nassau, Kurhessen, Kurmark, Mecklenburg, Oldenburg, East Prussia, Pomerania, Rhineland, Saxony-Freestate, Saxony-Province, Silesia, Schleswig-Holstein, Thuringia, Westphalia, and Württemberg. See Reischle and Saure, *Aufgaben und Aufbau*, 64. The *Landesbauernschaft* of Saarpfalz was added in 1935. A map of the *Landesbauernschaften* in 1937 can be found in Bernhard Mehrens, *Die Marktordnung des Reichsnährstandes* (Berlin, 1938), 50.

50,000 and 55,000 local associations (*Kreis- und Ortsbauernschaften*).³⁶ A giant pyramid was thus created, which, at each level, was structurally patterned after the Berlin model. For example, a regional association was headed by a regional farmers' leader, a regional farmers' council, and a regional administrative department with four (later three) regional central bureaus. The district and local associations were set up in a similar fashion.

Without this vast network of local farmers' leaders it would have been impossible for the Food Corporation to have operated effectively. Naturally the principal aim of these leaders was to further the execution of the policies set by the national headquarters. But there was much more to it than that. These men wielded a great deal of power in their local area. For example, they were given the authority by the Reich Farmers' Leader to punish those who violated regulations. This delegation of power was challenged in the National Court (*Reichsgericht*), but Darré's action was upheld.³⁷ The influence of these leaders operated in the opposite direction also. Not only were they the agents of the corporation with all the authority appertaining thereunto, but conversely they represented the needs and desires of groups of farmers to the national headquarters.

In some cases the political power of the Nazis in an area rested upon the professional prestige of the agricultural representatives there, for, although many of the *Bauernführer* themselves were political appointees, they usually chose their assistants for their professional competence rather than their political views. According to Thyge Thyssen, who was an agricultural expert in the corporation during this period and has achieved a place of importance in postwar German agriculture, some of the local leaders were "little Hitlers," but, generally speaking, they and their associates were competent as is indicated by the large number chosen for responsible positions in agriculture after the war.³⁸ These men, all of whom below the regional level worked for little or no pay, were, as one National Socialist writer put it, "the real bond between the centers of the *Reichsnährstand* in the nation or *Gau* and the many villages throughout the land." The leader of the smallest unit had the essential duties of bringing "all the personal and professional strength of his village to its highest capability" and of mobilizing "his neighbors for the practical goals of the *Reichsnährstand*."³⁹ In addition to their authority within the framework of the Food Corporation, these local leaders had important legal duties under the Hereditary Farm Law.⁴⁰

That disputes over power and jurisdiction would arise in the Food

³⁶ Exact figures here could not be verified. These are found in Reischle and Saure, *Aufgaben und Aufbau*, 67, and Mehrens, *Die Marktordnung*, 8. Complete statistics can be found in *Die Landesbauernschaften in Zahlen, 1939-1940*, (3rd ed.; 1941), but by this time the Reich had expanded and many changes had been made.

³⁷ *Wochenblatt der Landwirtschaft für Schlesien*, II (June 22, 1935), 1168.

³⁸ Thyge Thyssen, *Bauer und Standesvertretung* (Neumünster, 1958), 298-299.

³⁹ Artur Schürmann, *Nutzungslehre* (8th ed.; Berlin, 1943), 274.

⁴⁰ See Reischle and Saure, *Aufgaben und Aufbau*, 65-69.

Corporation is understandable. The conflicts of authority between the economic unions and the farmers' associations concerning the complaints of individuals who felt they were unfairly treated created the need for a court system which would deal with administrative and jurisdictional problems not adjudicated by the civil tribunals. Such a system was set up in 1935 and 1936. The first network of these courts was supposed "to pass judgment on disputes originating in the framework of the market order and to guarantee a protection of rights. This duty lay outside the area of so-called civil rights."⁴¹ Courts were also set up within the associations to deal with local disputes. Decisions from any of these courts could be appealed to the High Court of Arbitration in Berlin. This court "guaranteed the uniformity of the administration of justice and the preservation of the basic principles of the market order."⁴² A second general system of courts was established in 1935 and 1936 by orders of the *Reichsbauernführer*. These were called Delivery Dispute Courts, and their purpose was to arbitrate disputes which concerned the rights of individuals arising from the sale and distribution of agricultural products. An appellate court for this system was set up at the headquarters of the *Reichsnährstand* in Berlin.⁴³

One of the most crucial matters to be dealt with by the developing corporation was its relationship to the party.⁴⁴ The position of the party in a one-party state is always nebulous. This lack of clarity was increased by the fact that Darré himself was not an old Nazi warrior. He had not been a member of the party during its days of tribulation. Although he had achieved a high place in the party hierarchy and although his personal influence among the farmers made him indispensable, he was not accepted by some of the old guard because, from the available evidence, he refused to accept blindly every decision of the party leadership. According to his testimony at his postwar trial, Darré successfully opposed the party leaders on two occasions in the fall and winter of 1934.⁴⁵ On the latter occasion, which was the *Gauleiter* meeting in December, his colleagues wanted to absorb the corporation entirely into the party framework. They wanted to merge the Agrarian Political Apparatus with the Food Corporation and thereby bring the activities of the corporation in their local areas more closely under their control.⁴⁶ The Regional Farmers' Leaders, after all, were not responsible to the *Gauleiter* but to the *Reichsbauernführer*. The impasse was finally resolved by a compromise

⁴¹ Reischle and Saure, *Reichsnährstand*, 2nd ed., 80. The order setting up the courts can be found in *Reichsgesetzblatt*, I (1935), 293-298.

⁴² Reischle and Saure, *Reichsnährstand*, 2nd ed., 82.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 88-94.

⁴⁴ For the actual structure of the agrarian office in the party, see *Der Reichsorganisationsleiter der NSDAP, Organisationbuch des NSDAP* (Munich, 1936), 313-316.

⁴⁵ *Nürnberg Trials*, Case XI, Vol. 43, pp. 18595-18596.

⁴⁶ The Agrarian Political Apparatus was Darré's personal political machine within the National Socialist party. See an article on it by Darré in *Völkischer Beobachter*, April 6, 1933.

between Darré and Hess, which the latter released on February 12, 1935.⁴⁷ The order forbade party organs to interfere in the activities of the Food Corporation. The members of the Apparatus continued to be under the jurisdiction of the party, but they were directly under Darré in his position as a party *Reichsleiter*. The order went on to prescribe that all farmers' leaders be approved by the *Gauleiter* concerned, since a close connection continued to exist between the party and the corporation. It was further agreed that the corporation would work together with the party, labor, and women's organizations so as not to duplicate functions. Also, the party would continue to issue the necessary public orders, while purely agricultural directives could be published by the corporation. Finally, Hess urged the farmers to be faithful in paying their dues so that their organization could maintain its independence.

On almost the same day this order was released, Darré delivered a speech to the members of the Agrarian Political Apparatus in which he explained the meaning of the order for his audience.⁴⁸ He pointed out that they still had an important duty, but it was a narrow, carefully prescribed one. They had to continue to propagandize the farmer with the basic Nazi agrarian ideas, especially concerning race, and should attempt to increase understanding between the city dweller and the farmer. Technical and economic questions in agriculture, however, lay outside their purview. They should not dabble in the affairs of the Food Corporation. These words of Darré were strong, almost harsh, especially when one realizes that these were the men who had played such a significant role in bringing Hitler to power and who continued to be a part of the hard core of Nazism, while the corporation included experts who cared little or nothing about political affairs. This pronouncement in conjunction with Hess's order made the autonomous position of the corporation more clear. Although it would be an exaggerated claim to say that the corporation could do as it pleased, it could not on the other hand be called a party organ.⁴⁹ It was no small achievement for Darré to preserve the semi-independence of the corporation, at least until the introduction of the second Four-Year Plan.

In order adequately to assess an institution, it must first be asked what the purposes were and how well these were fulfilled. From the beginning of his campaign to win the farmers for Nazism, Darré had promised higher prices for agricultural products. On the other hand, he had promised the nation that in return for economic security for the farmer German agricultural production would rise significantly. Was Darré able to fulfill these

⁴⁷ *Berliner Tageblatt*, Feb. 12, 1935, Evening Edition.

⁴⁸ *Völkischer Beobachter*, Feb. 11, 1935.

⁴⁹ For evidence corroborating the claim of real autonomy, see the complaints about the separateness of the corporation personnel in a local district by the Gestapo and a government official in Bernhard Vollmer, *Volksopposition im Polizeistaat: Gestapo- und Regierungsbereichte, 1934-1936* (Stuttgart, 1957), 64, 73. See also Sigmund von Frauendorfer and Heinz Haushofer, *Ideengeschichte der Agrarwirtschaft und Agrarpolitik im deutschen Sprachgebiet*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1957-1958), II, 223.

promises? The statistics of 1936 indicate that the question can be answered affirmatively.

During the first three years of Nazism, agricultural production increased, but not dramatically. This can be measured in two ways—one which does not subtract the imported fodder necessary for cattle from total production and one which does. According to the first method, output increased from a volume index level of 104 (1928–1930 = 100) in 1932–1933 to 113 in 1936–1937. The advance as calculated by the second method was from 108 to 127.⁵⁰ The fact that the increase was greater by the latter computation is significant because it demonstrated the increasing use of home-grown fodder. A striking illustration of the real increase of particular crops is revealed in a comparison of the 1936 harvest with the average annual output for the years 1928–1934. Translated into percentages, the potato crop of 1936 was 104 percent of the average of the previous years; the sugar beet crop was 112 percent; fodder beets, 128; cabbage turnips, 110; clover and alfalfa, 117; hay, 122; and rye, 96.⁵¹

The rise in production itself, however, was not as important as the degree of self-sufficiency which it helped Germany obtain. One of the primary purposes of Nazi policy was to decrease dependence for foodstuffs on foreign countries. In the nineteenth century, Germany had been almost totally self-sufficient, but with the rise of industrialism the amount of food produced in Germany decreased. The decline in the percentage of domestic production in total consumption was from 95 percent in 1880 to 66 percent in 1926. From that point on, this percentage began to rise so that the figure was 77 by 1930, 81 in 1934, and 84 in 1936.⁵²

Progress was made not only in food production, however. The home output of agricultural raw materials for industry, such as fiber plants, rose from 29 percent in 1927 to 43 percent in 1935.⁵³ Generally speaking, the goal of complete self-sufficiency was not and indeed could not have been reached in Germany. It is doubtful that any Nazi leaders ever believed that complete self-sufficiency was possible, and Darré himself repeatedly denied that total autarky was his aim. But this is a moot point. The increase in production undeniably occurred, and the real question is whether or not the National Socialists can correctly take the credit for the movement toward nutritive independence. In general the answer to this must be yes. This does not ignore the fact that the decrease in imports was due quite as much to the depression and the lack of foreign credits as it was to agricultural policy, nor does it deny the fact that the trend had already been set before the Nazis took office. The continuation of that tendency in spite

⁵⁰ *Weekly Report of the Institut für Konjunkturforschung*, X (Oct. 20, 1937), 92–93.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* (Feb. 10, 1937), Supplement, 2.

⁵² *Ibid.*, XI (Nov. 2, 1938), 90. See also Woermann, "Die Ernährungslage der Welt," quoted in Burton H. Klein, *Germany's Economic Preparation for War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), 49.

⁵³ *Weekly Report of the Institut für Konjunkturforschung*, X (Jan. 13, 1937), Supplement, 2.

of difficulties, however, is a measure of success for the agrarian policy which was very important in Nazi economic planning.⁵⁴

The success of another basic objective of Darré's agricultural policy cannot be questioned. The income of the farmer rose swiftly and steadily during the first three years of Nazi rule as a direct result of the power and planning of the Food Corporation. Gross income continued to rise (from 6.4 billion Reichmarks in 1932–1933 to 8.9 billion in 1936–1937), and, in spite of the fact that the tide began to turn with respect to expenses in 1935–1936, net income remained relatively high. Total income per hectare increased markedly in almost every crop from 1932 to 1936. In potatoes, for example, the increase was from 500 to 800 Reichmarks per hectare. The net return per unit for all crops rose even more.⁵⁵ On farms from 5 to 20 hectares, the net return went from 17 to 50 Reichmarks per hectare from 1934–1935 to 1935–1936.⁵⁶ The increase of the net return on the larger farms was not as great but was still impressive.

If a final assessment of the *Reichsnährstand* rests entirely on material bases, then it must be adjudged successful. The market control brought increased agricultural income and productivity as well as accelerated rationalization in agriculture. These were the goals. That these goals were achieved by 1936 cannot be denied. Furthermore, if one compares the structure and operation of this market control machine with programs in other countries during the 1930's, it is clear that the similarities to be found are more striking than the differences.

⁵⁴ For a good critical account of Germany's autarkic attempt, see Benjamin H. Higgins, "Germany's Bid for Agricultural Self Sufficiency," *Journal of Farm Economics*, XXI (May 1939), 435–461.

⁵⁵ *Vierteljahreshefte zur Konjunkturforschung*, XI (April 24, 1936), 27.

⁵⁶ Joseph Deslarzes, "Changes in the Profitableness of Agriculture in Certain Countries of Europe," *Monthly Bulletin of Agricultural Economics and Sociology*, XXX (June 1939), 329.

A Proposed National Bureau of Agriculture, 1851

The institution of an agricultural bureau by the general government has been a subject of public discussion for years, and is now (as it has repeatedly been) under the consideration of Congress. The legislatures of several states have passed resolutions in favor of its organization, and so have agricultural societies in various sections of the Union. Agricultural writers have inculcated its importance, and practical men have repeatedly urged the necessity of it in their communications to this office. Presidents Taylor and Fillmore have followed the example of Washington in calling the attention of Congress to the subject. All that has been done towards carrying these views into effect is the employment of a temporary clerk in the Patent Office, whose salary, and the cost of purchasing and distributing seeds, etc. have been borne by the Patent Fund.

(*Thomas Ewbank, "Agricultural Bureau," U. S. Commissioner of Patents, Report, 1851, Part 2, Agriculture, pp. 653-656*)

U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1897

About a month ago I talked with Dr. Armstrong, of Rothamsted, England, who is sent here every three years at the expense of Sir J. B. Laws to lecture along scientific agricultural lines to the representatives of our agricultural colleges and experiment stations. This expense is gone to on account of the pure good-will this grand Englishman has for the American people. While Dr. Armstrong was in this city he came to the Department of Agriculture to stay an hour or two, but instead he spent three days here. Before leaving he said that no other nation in the world had such an organization for carrying on lines of scientific inquiry for the farmer as we have in the United States; and he further complimented us by saying that the Department of Agriculture has the finest corps of scientists to be found anywhere in the world.

(*Secretary James Wilson to John W. Heston, Nov. 17, 1897, U.S. National Archives, Files of the Secretary of Agriculture*)