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MARKETING THE GOLDEN RULE:
NEAR EAST RELIEF AND PHILANTHROPY'S ROLE IN THE POLITICAL ECONOMY, 1915-1930

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Marketing the Golden Rule: Near East Relief and Philanthropy's Role in the Political Economy, 1915-1930

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The history of the American aid agency Near East Relief (NER), particularly its Golden Rule Sunday campaign from 1923 to 1928, reveals an integral part played by philanthropy in the broader political economy in the interwar years, specifically in the American food industry. Millions of Americans participated in the campaign by eating a simple four-cent orphanage-style meal and donating the cost difference from their normal Sunday dinners to support starving children orphaned by the Armenian genocide. By the mid-twenties NER's Golden Rule Sunday became a nation-wide cultural phenomenon.

The relief group was founded in 1915 as a temporary effort to send relief funds. But after World War I, the magnitude of the humanitarian catastrophe propelled it to establish facilities across the former Ottoman Empire which supported tens of thousands of Armenian and other orphans until 1930. To care for its charges, NER initially bought or solicited farmers to donate corn and wheat surplus and asked Americans to buy and donate processed foods such as corn syrup, macaroni, cocoa, flour, and sweetened condensed milk. Then, to meet dire demands and spur giving, the 1923 Golden Rule Sunday campaign fully co-marketed with processed foods industries. NER worked particularly closely with the Corn Products Refining Company (CRPC), which paid for NER Golden Rule advertising and in turn received NER endorsements that its *Karo* corn syrup was as healthful for American children as it had been in nourishing Armenian children. Meanwhile, the CRPC battled the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) over the labeling and healthfulness of corn syrup even as it was supported by the Department of Commerce to develop more commercially viable crystal corn sugars to add to other processed foods. Into this federal food fight and battles for consumer acceptance waded Near East Relief with its record of humanitarianism and reputation for child health expertise.

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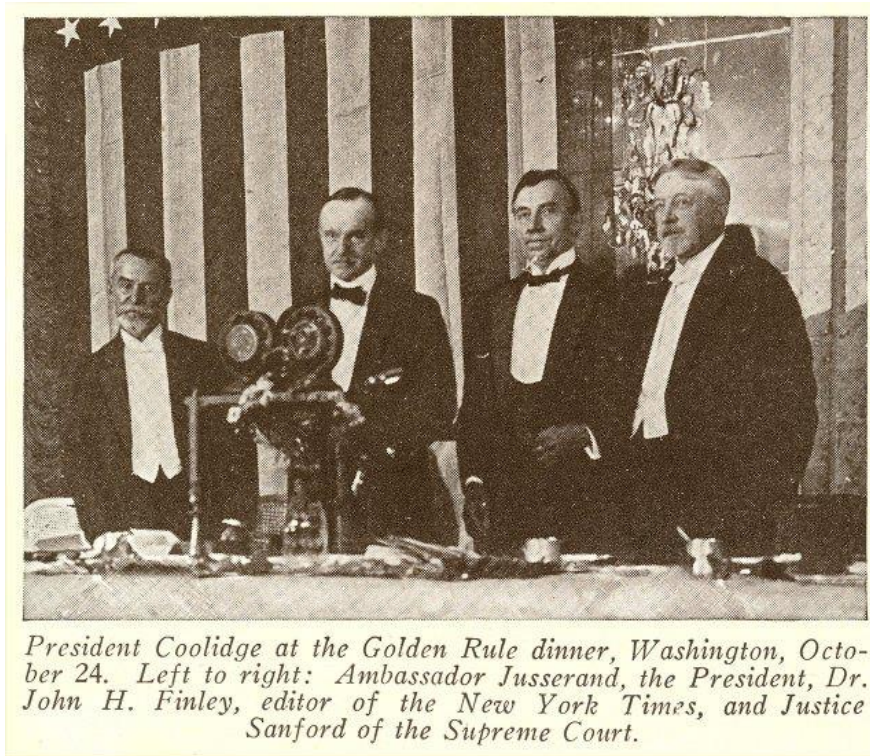


Figure 1. President Coolidge at the Willard Hotel, Oct. 25, 1923.¹

New York society turned out one evening in September 1924 to dine in the Grand Ballroom of New York's newest luxury hotel, the Hotel Roosevelt, with fifteen hundred of the city's most prominent citizens. In finery and furs they sat down to a menu of macaroni and cheese, apricots with corn syrup, and bread served on tin plates. They toasted with tin-can cups filled with cocoa and sweetened condensed milk. A month later, President Coolidge hosted the same dinner menu at the swanky Willard Hotel for a thousand

¹ Picture of President Coolidge from the "Preliminary Report of International Golden Rule Sunday, 1924," folder 1, box 18, series 2, Talcott Williams Papers (Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University)

prominent Washingtonians decked out in black or white tie. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. sat down to a similar meal, as did King George of Greece, George Clemenceau of France, and Prince Carl of Sweden in their European capitals. And the less glamorous also partook. In 1925, in Tacoma five hundred people—Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Buddhists, and Native Americans—sat down together. In the town of Mexico, Missouri, members of local churches enjoyed their meal on tables provided by the Knights of Columbus and chairs loaned by the Ku Klux Klan. In 1924 alone an estimated one million Americans enjoyed this frugal supper.²

These diverse peoples were observing International Golden Rule Sunday, a fundraising campaign organized by the American aid agency Near East Relief (NER). From 1923 to 1928, millions of Americans observed the event, held between Thanksgiving and Christmas each year, by eating a simple four-cent orphanage-style meal. NER asked Americans to donate the cost difference from their normal Sunday dinners, calculated as three dollars for the average family, to support starving children orphaned by the Armenian genocide. By the mid-twenties, NER's Golden Rule Sunday became a nation-wide cultural phenomenon. The relief group was founded as the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ACASR) in 1915 by wealthy businessmen and missionary educators as a temporary effort to send relief funds. But after World War I, the magnitude

² See picture at the Hotel Roosevelt in the "Preliminary Report of International Golden Rule Sunday, 1924," p. 8, folder 1, box 18, series 2, and "International Golden Rule Observance: Golden Rule Campaign, Tacoma, Washington," p. 16, folder 10, box 7, series 2, Talcott Williams Papers (Burke Library); "1,500 Eat 4-Cent Meal" *New York Times*, Sep. 26, 1924, p. 21; "Dinner at New Hotel," *ibid.*, Sep. 22, 1924, p. 9; "Aid, Not Alms, U.S. Offer to Europe, President Asserts," *Washington Post*, Oct. 25, 1924, p. 1; "Million Americans Aid Near East Poor," *New York Times*, Dec. 3, 1923, p. 15; Charles Vickrey, *International Golden Rule Sunday: A Handbook* (New York, 1926), 90.

of the humanitarian catastrophe propelled it to establish facilities scattered across the former Ottoman Empire which supported tens of thousands of Armenian and other orphans until 1930.³

To care for its charges, NER initially followed the example of Herbert Hoover's private and public food aid work during and after the war in buying or soliciting farmers to donate corn and wheat surplus with the inducement of creating new markets in the Near East. NER also began asking Americans to buy and donate processed foods such as corn syrup, macaroni, cocoa, flour, and sweetened condensed milk. But to meet dire demands and spur giving, the Golden Rule Sunday campaign fully co-marketed with processed foods industries to encourage donations of these foods deemed healthful for malnourished children. NER worked particularly closely with the Corn Products Refining Company (CRPC). The CRPC paid for NER Golden Rule advertising that featured NER endorsements that its *Karo* corn syrup was as healthful for *American* children as it had been in saving *Armenian* children.

This marketing relationship blossomed as the CRPC battled the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) over the labeling of corn syrup in a decades-long crusade to convince American consumers that corn syrup was healthy. The USDA constrained the corn products industry's labeling practices at the very same time the Department of Commerce supported the industry's development of more commercially-viable crystal corn sugars to

³ For the recommendations on the cost of an orphan's meal, see "Golden Rule Sunday," *New York Times*, Nov. 30, 1923, p. 14. The organization was founded as the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ACASR) in 1915, then renamed itself the American Committee for Relief in the Near East (ACRNE) in 1918. It became Near East Relief (NER) upon congressional charter in 1919. After 1930, NER incorporated a new state charter as the Near East Foundation (NEF) with an emphasis on development aid.

add to processed foods. Into this federal food fight and battles for consumer acceptance waded Near East Relief with its record of humanitarianism and reputation for child health expertise. Although it is difficult to gauge how much CPRC's partnership with NER contributed to consumer acceptance of corn sugars, the long battle ended with the government's 1930 decision to liberalize corn sugar labeling policies. As the Golden Rule Sunday campaign developed, it also partnered with retail grocers and wholesalers to encourage consumers to buy food products for donation *and* for their own consumption all year long, thereby making humanitarianism work for entire food supply chains within the marketplace.⁴

This essay illuminates how NER, particularly through its Golden Rule Sunday campaign from 1923 to 1928, forged an integral role for philanthropy in the broader political economy in the interwar years, specifically in the American food industry. To meet its dire needs, NER worked within the market to commodify generous giving as a consumer activity. Farmers and expanding processed food industries supported NER's noble humanitarian efforts to feed starving children—while also creating new markets for its goods, earning government support and consumer acceptance, and reaping economic benefits. The corn sugars industry specifically leveraged NER's proven record of humanitarianism and child health expertise in the Near East to market its products to American consumers as beneficial for growing children.

Depressed grain prices due to surpluses posed a serious economic issue after the First World War. At the same time, other agricultural dynamics were developing and

⁴ For an excellent discussion of the Corn Products Refining Company's labeling fights, see Kelly J. Sisson Lessens, *Master of Millions: King Corn in American Culture* (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2011), 307-356.

converging: the American farm lobby achieved greater national power, the associative state bolstered agribusiness, and the growing corn sugars industry pushed against the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act for greater consumer acceptance in the burgeoning processed foods market. NER's work meshed with each of these significant interwar developments in the political economy. Furthermore, with the era's series of revenue acts that enshrined individual charitable deductions and continued corporate business deductions, support for NER meant tax-subsidized power to shape consumer food trends.⁵

One historian recently argued that the twentieth-century political economy developed through a "fiscal triangle—the state, a largely corporate economy, and a largely corporate 'nonprofit sector'." NER's history illuminates the third leg of this fiscal triangle as it operated in the political economy during a period of rising consumerism and marketing. NER inherited what historian David Kennedy calls the "mobilization of emotion" during World War I and used it to entice American giving as a consumer activity. Its relief efforts worked with Hoover's food programs, the congressional farm bloc, expanding farm lobbies, and food industry groups to feed foreign populations while supporting American farmers and food processors. Meanwhile, the interwar growth of associative governance led to sharp disagreements about bureaucratic organization, agribusiness policies, and pure food laws between the Agriculture and the Commerce Departments, with lobbyists and

⁵ The Wilson-Gorman Tariff Act of 1894 and 1909 Revenue Act exempted charitable corporations from taxes. The Revenue Act of 1913 established the national income tax and the Revenue Act of 1917 authorized private charitable deductions. Paul Arnsberger, Melissa Ludlum, Margaret Riley, and Mark Stanton, "A History of the Tax-Exempt Sector: An SOI Perspective," *Statistics of Income Bulletin* (Winter 2008), 106-107. On corporate deductions of advertising expenses, see *Standard Income Tax Manual, 1920* (New York, 1920), 116.

businesses ranged on both sides. The history of NER’s marketing campaigns illuminates how an American nonprofit organization was integral to these developments.⁶

Historians of American philanthropy lament that the field has been either neglected or questionably segmented from broader trends in social and political economic history. NER’s innovative work places “philanthrocapitalism” and “causerism,” or “shopping for a better world,” in historical context a century before recent observers coined the terms to describe modern marriages of philanthropy, capitalism, and consumerism. It also reveals the understudied role of nonprofit corporations in the history of the politics and culture of food, with its significant implications for nutrition, health, and ecology today. Additionally,

⁶ Jonathan Levy, “Altruism and the Origins of Nonprofit Philanthropy,” in *Philanthropy in Democratic Societies*, ed. Rob Reich, Chiara Cordella, and Lucy Bernholz (Chicago, 2016), 42; see also Jonathan Levy, “Appreciating Assets: New Directions in the History of Political Economy” *American Historical Review*, 122 (Dec. 2017), 1494; David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (1980; New York, 2004), 119. On the interwar organizational turn and associative state see Ellis W. Hawley, “Herbert Hoover, the Commerce Secretariat, and the Vision of an “Associative State” 1921-1928,” *Journal of American History*, 61 (June 1974), 116-140; Ellis Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order: A History of the American People and Their Institutions, 1917-1933* (New York, 1979); Gary Gerstle, *Liberty and Coercion: The Paradox of American Government from the Founding to the Present* (Princeton, 2015); Brian Balogh, *The Associational State: American Governance in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, 2015).

it adds a crucial *domestic* component to the historiography of American humanitarianism abroad, its efforts in the Near East, and its associational role in spreading U.S. influence.⁷

⁷ On the history of philanthropy, see Oliver Zunz, "Why is the History of Philanthropy Not a Part of American History?" in *Philanthropy in Democratic Societies*, 45–58; Oliver Zunz, *Philanthropy in America: A History* (Princeton, 2012); Merle Curti, "The History of American Philanthropy as a Field of Research," *American Historical Review*, 62 (Jan. 1957), 352–63; Robert Bremner, *American Philanthropy* (Chicago, 1960). On modern philanthropy and capitalism, see "Survey: The Birth of Philanthrocapitalism" *Economist*, Feb. 25, 2006, p. 9; Matthew Bishop and Michael Green, *Philanthrocapitalism: How the Rich Can Save the World* (New York, 2010); Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte, *Brand Aid: Shopping Well to Save the World* (Minneapolis, 2011). On consumerism and philanthropic fundraising, see Scott Cutlip's *Fund Raising in the United States: Its Role in America's Philanthropy* (New Brunswick, 1965); Kevin Rozario, *Culture of Calamity: Disaster and Making of Modern America* (Chicago, 2007). On the history of food industries, see Bartow J. Elmore, *Citizen Coke: The Making of Coca-Cola Capitalism* (New York, 2014); Helen Zoe Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food: Self-Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, 2015). On American relief for the Armenian genocide, see Robert L. Daniel, *American Philanthropy in the Near East, 1820-1960* (Athens, OH, 1970); Joseph L. Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East: Missionary Influence on American Policy, 1810-1927* (Minneapolis, 1971); Suzanne E. Moranian, "The Armenian Genocide and American Missionary Efforts," in *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915*, ed. Jay Winter (New York, 2003), 185-213; Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* (New York, 2003); Merrill D. Peterson, *Starving Armenians: America and the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1930 and After* (Charlottesville, 2004); Keith David Watenpaugh, *Bread From Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Oakland, 2015). I'm indebted to two pieces of scholarship that discuss NER's partnerships with American mass marketing, see Jaffa L. Panken, "Lest They Perish": The Armenian Genocide and the Making of Modern Humanitarian Media in the U.S., 1915-1925" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2014) and Sarah Miglio, "Civilizing the World': Progressive Religion and Politics from Chicago to the Middle East, 1890-1925" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2012). For broader treatments of American humanitarianism, see Ian Tyrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton, 2010), Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918-1924* (Cambridge, 2014); Stephen Porter, *Benevolent Empire: U.S. Power, Humanitarianism, and the World's Dispossessed* (Philadelphia, 2017); and, for an earlier ground-breaking treatment, Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York, 1982).

Plight of the Armenians

Herbert Hoover wrote that “Probably Armenia was known to the American school child in 1919 only a little less than England.” The plight of Armenian and other Near East Christians had risen in American consciousness since NER’s founding in 1915 as the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ACASR). In the spring of 1915, the American Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, Sr. was inundated with reports of Turks forcing ethnic Armenians and other minorities out of their businesses and homes and being shot, burned, or deported from their villages in long genocidal marches. American, Canadian, and even German missionaries told Morgenthau about the latest horrors in a long history of periodic Ottoman purges of the Christian minority. Through the summer of 1915, Morgenthau tried to intervene with Minister of the Interior Talaat Pasha and urged the intercession of the Wilson administration.⁸

Talaat Pasha proved impervious to American pressure. On September 3, 1915 Morgenthau telegraphed the Secretary of State Robert Lansing, “Destruction of Armenian race in Turkey is progressing rapidly. . . . Will you suggest to Cleveland H. Dodge, Charles Crane, John R. Mott, and Stephen Wise and others to form committee to raise funds and provide means to save some of the Armenians.” The State Department sent the message to Dodge and to James Levi Barton, the Foreign Secretary for the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). Dodge was vice-president of the Phelps Dodge Corporation, a friend of President Wilson, and a longstanding supporter of protestant colleges in Constantinople and Beirut. He convened a meeting at his office in

⁸ Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: Years of Adventure, 1874-1920* (New York, 1951), 385; Henry Morgenthau, Sr., *Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story* (Garden City, 1918), 328.

New York on September 16, 1915. In attendance were Barton and a number of other men representing the boards of missionary organizations and American educational institutions in the Near East. The group set an initial goal of \$100,000 and raised half that sum among those present before the end of the meeting.⁹

The group dispatched Barton and Charles Crane, a wealthy businessman and supporter of President Wilson, to confer with State Department officials in Washington. “The entire files of the Department were placed at their disposal,” according to Barton. From these files and other sources Barton amassed a report of atrocities which convinced the group that their mission would not be temporary. These men joined with three smaller relief organizations in November 1915 to form the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ACASR), the original name for NER. From these groups ACASR received lists of thousands of wealthy donors known to contribute to such relief. It also began feeding reports and editorial material to the media in order to solicit general donations from across the country. Barton acknowledged the early support of the Rockefellers. The Rockefeller Foundation donated some \$610,000 by the end of 1917. NER also received another \$10 million dollars through the American Red Cross War Relief fund by 1920—much of which came from the Rockefeller Foundation, \$175,000 donated by the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial fund in 1925, and other donations directly from Rockefeller family members.¹⁰

⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement* (Washington, 1928), 988; James L. Barton, *Story of Near East Relief, 1915-1930: An Interpretation* (New York, 1930), 4-9.

¹⁰ Barton, *Story of Near East Relief*, 9-15, esp. 10; “Tell of Horrors Done in Armenia,” *New York Times*, Oct. 4, 1915, p. 1; “Consolidation of Near-East Committees” and Jerome Greene, “Armenian and Syrian Relief,” Oct. 18, 1916, folder 718, box 76, subseries 100N, series 100, RG 1, FA386a, Rockefeller Foundation records, “Armenian and Syrian Relief,”

The New York-based ACASR rapidly organized local committees throughout the U.S. and, within nine months, had 38 committees in sixteen states. It was quickly overwhelmed by the scope of its task. In April 1916, ACASR asked the Laymen's Missionary Movement (LMM) for the use of its office spaces and staff at 1 Madison Avenue for three months. The LMM's Charles V. Vickrey took charge of promotional programs for ACASR. Vickrey and the professional focus of the LMM propelled the ad hoc missionary-focused ACASR down the road towards professional humanitarianism. Copying fundraising techniques pioneered by the YMCA, the LMM systematically canvassed businesses outside traditional church giving. Most useful for ACASR was LMM's network of "state and city Co-operating Interdenominational Committees." Vickrey used this national network to build more local ACASR committees. He copied the LMM handbook on soliciting techniques from wealthy donors and publicized gut-wrenching accounts of Armenian suffering to the general public. Despite its outreach beyond church giving, Vickrey's early publicity still relied heavily on faith-based messages for the rescue of Armenians as the oldest Christian nation in the Bible Lands.¹¹

From its inception, ACASR developed close ties with American government entities. Members of Congress endorsed ACASR's work, and in June 1916 Congress passed a joint resolution asking President Wilson to declare a day of giving for Armenian relief. Wilson

Charles Vickrey to Hamilton Holt, March 18, 1920, and Livingston Farrand to Hamilton Holt, March 20, 1920, folder 356, box 41, RG 32Q, FA326, Office of Messieurs Rockefeller (Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York); Charles V. Vickrey to Albert Shaw, Jan. 30, 1925, folder 142, Albert Shaw Papers (New York Public Library, New York City).

¹¹ "Sends \$100,000 to Aid Armenian Refugees," *New York Times*, Oct. 9, 1915, p. 6. Barton, *Story of Near East Relief*, 16, 373-375; William T. Ellis, *Men and Missions: With a Foreword by John B. Sleman, Jr. Founder of the Laymen's Missionary Movement* (Philadelphia, 1909), 74; *A National Test of Brotherhood: America's Opportunity to Relieve Suffering in Armenia, Syria, Persia, and Palestine* (New York, 1916).

declared October 21 and 22, 1916 as “joint days upon which the people of the United States may make such contribution as they feel disposed” for Armenian relief. To distribute funds, American diplomatic posts in the region used a network of committees and individuals made up of missionaries, U.S. government consuls, educators, doctors, journalists, and businessmen scattered through the Near East. After the U.S. entered World War I in April 1917, ACASR’s funds were funneled through the Swedish Embassy in Constantinople, although nearby U.S. consuls continued to help distribute funds. During World War I and after, the U.S. government donated over \$25 million in supplies, equipment, and funds to the NER, often through the U.S. Food Administration, American Relief Administration, or American Red Cross. Throughout its fifteen-year history, national figures such as William Howard Taft, Franklin Roosevelt, Elihu Root, Charles W. Eliot, Charles Evans Hughes, Leonard Wood, and Allen Dulles served as trustees.¹²

In June 1918, the organization renamed itself the American Committee for Relief in the Near East (ACRNE) due to the expanded geographical scope of its work into the Caucasus, Persia, and the Levant. Then, with the end of the war, ACRNE decided to deploy its own relief workers to establish operations on the ground in the Near East. Starvation loomed for at least half a million Armenians and others, particularly for tens of thousands of orphaned or abandoned children. President Wilson issued a proclamation in support of ACRNE’s 1919 campaign to raise \$30 million dollars in order to fund its expanded mission. The initial expedition with nearly 500 workers and leaders from ACRNE departed on the *Mauretania* in January 1919. The Wilson administration provided three navy ships and

¹² U.S. Congress, House, *Relief of Armenians*, 64 Cong., 1 sess., June 21, 1916, H. Rpt 837, Serial 6910; Barton, *Story of Near East Relief*, 381.

army transports to move personnel, supplies, and equipment. Government war surplus transported for NER included 100 trucks, 36 motor cars, 20 motorcycles, 15 ambulances, and fifteen 100-bed hospital units.¹³

To garner greater governmental and public support, in late 1918 ACRNE petitioned for incorporation by a special act of Congress. After contentious debate, the bill finally passed in the next session, and President Wilson signed it on August 6, 1919. Incorporated as Near East Relief, it was only the second humanitarian organization after the American Red Cross to receive a congressional charter. Although Rockefeller's General Education Board had received a congressional charter in 1903, by the 1910s Congress was much more leery about big-money philanthropy and denied federal charters to both the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations.¹⁴

The July 1919 House debates over the NER's incorporation illuminate political leaders' concern at the time with how federal endorsements for nonprofit corporations might impact American and international political economies. Congressman George Graham, Republican of Pennsylvania, argued that NER's incorporation would help America answer the "most pathetic and distressing" cries of the persecuted Armenians and would imbue the relief agency with the U.S. government's "dignity of approval" so that it could negotiate with entities in the Near East. In contrast, Congressman Louis Cramton, Republican of Michigan, argued that "we should be interested in determining whether

¹³ Woodrow Wilson, "A Proclamation," Nov. 29, 1918, p. 48b, *American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief: Minutes, 1915-1919*, RG 2, FA1305, Near East Foundation Records (Rockefeller Archive Center); "Advance Guard Sets Sail for Turkey," and "First Contingent of Relief Expedition Underway," *News Bulletin*, 3 (Jan. 1919), 1-2, 10-11, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/101790506>.

¹⁴ U.S. Congress, *An Act to Incorporate Near East Relief, Public Law 66-25/Chapter 32*, 66 Cong, 1 Sess., Aug. 1919, 273-274;

some gentlemen are securing here a charter that even if they execute it properly in years to come may grow to be a gigantic corporation, with millions of wealth in its hands, which might be used for sinister purposes in this country. . . . I appeal to this House not to be carried away by their natural sympathy for charity . . . but instead they should look at this as a hard business proposition.”¹⁵

Whatever the reservations of some congressmen, with its new congressional endorsement NER’s fundraising campaigns increasingly joined the broader trends in American mass marketing and consumer culture that exploded during and after the war. In late 1918, NER hired the Division of Pictorial Publicity (DPP), the poster-making arm of George Creel’s Committee for Public Information (CPI), to create fundraising posters for its huge 1919 fundraising campaign. Public relations personnel from the CPI and the artists from the DPP had honed their techniques during the war, and many would go on to help accelerate American mass consumer advertising in the 1920s. Seeking to professionalize and mass-market NER’s humanitarianism, NER’s General Secretary Vickrey approached donors as the potential consumers of humanitarian and Christian idealism in order to convince them to spend their money to save vulnerable children. In December 1919 alone, NER appeals appeared in full-page ads in 3,034 newspapers, 1,500 trade and class publications, a special pictorial supplement in the widely-circulated *New York World*, ads in every other New York daily, and 3,000 pages of free ads in hundreds of other publications. NER sold all the good reasons—charity, humanity, global brotherhood, Christian responsibility, character building, and sacrifice—to buy critically-needed help for

¹⁵ *Congressional Record*, 66 Cong., 1 Sess., July 1919, pp. 2545-2548, 3007-3015, 3151-3154; *Corporations Chartered by Special Act of Congress* (Washington, 1948).

desperate orphans. American consumers also bought in because of NER's perceived moral authority and competence in saving children—all endorsed by the U.S. government. Humanitarian impulses were thus commodified; charitable giving became a consumer activity.¹⁶



Figure 2. A fundraising poster for ACRNE created by the Division of Pictorial Publicity. "They Shall Not Perish," Douglas Volk (1918).¹⁷

Edward Bernays, a nephew of Sigmund Freud, was an early pioneer in public relations and served in the CPI during the war. In the 1920s he pioneered the link between corporate sales campaigns and social causes when, while working for a tobacco company,

¹⁶ Referring to NER here simplifies the confusing name changes from ACASR to ACRNE to NER all between 1918 and the end of 1919. For an excellent analysis of NER's marketing efforts see Panken, "Lest They Perish," 108-124; Eric Van Shaak, "The Division of Pictorial Publicity in World War I," *Design Issues*, 22 (Winter 2006), 32-45; Barton, *Story of Near East Relief*, 389-391; E. D. Owen to Charles Vickrey, Dec. 15, 1919, and Charles Vickrey to Albert Shaw, Dec. 18, 1919, box 138, Albert Shaw Papers (New York Public Library).

¹⁷ Douglas Volk, "They Shall Not Perish: American Committee for Relief in the Near East" (New York, 1918), Library of Congress Prints and Photograph Division, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/94513740/>.

he convinced women's rights activists marching in New York City to hold up Lucky Strike cigarettes as "torches of freedom." Tracing the history of social causes and the "public relations counsel," he said that colleges and social-service projects, citing NER by name, were among the first to use "appeals and a technique comparable to the war propaganda." He went on to write that "charity as well as business . . . have to adopt propaganda, for the public must be regimented into giving money. . . . The Near East Relief . . . and all the rest, have to work on public opinion just as they had tubes of tooth paste to sell." Lilian Brand, an economist with the Charity Organizational Society at Columbia University, was also among the first to analyze why people donated to philanthropic causes. She wrote in 1921 about the donor as a "psychological problem" to whom the right appeals must be applied because "the emotions become fatigued." Challenging religious teachings, she insisted that philanthropy was "not so much a matter of reason or of conscience as of habit, tradition, imitation, social pressure, and sentiment." The YMCA was among the first charities to use modern fundraising techniques such as "Y" campaigns and door-to-door solicitations in the first decade of the century. Great Britain's Save the Children and Society of Friends Relief Mission successfully used donor canvassing, clothing bundles, and child sponsorship in post-World War I Europe. And the American Red Cross advertised their sponsor's products—Wrigley's chewing gum, Jell-O, Lucky Strike cigarettes, and beauty products—in the *Red Cross Magazine*. NER followed their lead, but its relationships with American food producers, and particularly its Golden Rule Sunday campaign, far surpassed these organizations in its mass marketing reach and commodified moral branding.¹⁸

¹⁸ "Easter Sun Finds the Past in Shadow at Modern Parade," *New York Times*, April 1, 1929, p. 1; Edward L. Bernays, "This Business of Propaganda," *Independent*, Sep. 1928, p. 198; Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York, 1928), 26; see also Edward Bernays,

Farmers and Food Industries

To meet the demands of feeding tens of thousands of children after the war, NER began soliciting direct donations of surplus grains. During the war, Herbert Hoover's U.S. Food Administration had convinced desperate allied purchasing commissions to pay enticingly high prices for American grains. Corn production jumped by 5 million bushels in 1917 and gained over \$1.2 billion in value by 1918. Farmers bought more land, and farm mortgage debt rose 163 percent from 1910 to 1920. The war's end sent agricultural prices plummeting 85 percent from 1919 to 1921, and the corn glut caused prices to drop 66 percent. Farmers began to lose their land. The crisis spurred a more muscular farm lobby, built around the growing county agent system, to create the powerful American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) which by 1921 had close to a million members.¹⁹

Senator Arthur Capper of Kansas, a leader of the congressional farm bloc and owner of a number of farm publications, volunteered to chair an agricultural committee within NER to urge farmers to donate surplus corn and other grains. NER's Agricultural Advisory Committee counted among its members former farm-state governors, farm lobby heads,

Crystallizing Public Opinion (New York, 1923). Lilian Brandt, *How Much Shall I Give?* (New York, 1921), 25-27, 104-106, esp. 106, Bremner *American Philanthropy*, 124-125. Brad Watson, "The Origins of International Child Sponsorship," *Development in Practice*, 25 (Aug. 12, 2015), 867-879. Rozario, *Culture of Calamity*, 437.

¹⁹ Alonzo E. Taylor, *Corn and Hog Surplus of the Corn Belt* (Palo Alto, 1932), 7-10; Lawrence A. Jones and David Durand, *The Mortgage Lending Experience in Agriculture* (Princeton, 1954), 80-81; "Price of Farm Products," *Federal Reserve Bulletin*, 10 (Oct. 1924), 790; USDA, *Yearbook of the USDA, 1919* (Washington, 1920), 509, 511; "Huge League of Farm Bureaus Launched Here," *Chicago Tribune*, March 4, 1920, p. 22; Tore Olsson, *Agrarian Crossings: Reformers and the Remaking of the U.S. and Mexican Countryside* (Princeton, 2017), 109-10; Kennedy, *Over Here*, 117-123; Gerstle, *Liberty and Coercion*, 194-98.

and luminaries from government, business, and academia. Supported by the American Farm Economic Association and the International Farm Congress, Capper asked farmers to save starving orphans while creating a taste for corn and “a possible new market for the great American staple.” The Indianapolis NER office told farmers that it “was the first introduction of corn products into the Caucasus and already several inquiries have been received from local governments as to the possibility of arranging for direct purchases in the United States of large quantities of corn meal and flour.” More than a million members of the National Farmer Cooperative and Educational Union from thirty states endorsed NER’s work. Working with the National Corn Miller’s Association, the agricultural committee delivered 500 train cars of corn after the 1921 harvest; in 1922 it delivered 765 cars of primarily corn and grits, but also wheat, barley, rye, and beans—with freight donated by the railroads. One “small town in South Dakota furnished 100 teams, 100 farmers, 100 wagon loads of corn.” In 1921, the *Indiana Farmer’s Guide* declared a “grain week” for Hoosier farmers to donate corn and wheat to NER. County agents helped with donations and grain operators offered their work for free. The *Guide* reminded farmers that by donating they were “paving the way for new markets in future years.”²⁰

²⁰ “Appeal to Farmers to Assist Starving,” *Putnam County Indiana Herald-Democrat*, Dec. 16, 1921, p. 4. For a list of members in the NER Agricultural Committee, see a letter to 10,000 “Gentlemen Farmers” from Arthur Capper, folder 5, box 14, series 2, and “Grain Campaign,” folder 3, box 8, series 2, Near East Relief 1921, Talcott Williams Papers (Burke Library); Alonzo E. Wilson to Barclay Acheson, telegram, Sep. 28, 1921, box 142, Albert Shaw Papers (New York Public Library); “Grain for the Near East Sufferers,” *Indiana Farmer’s Guide*, 33, (Nov. 5, 1921), 6; *Agricultural Review*, 13 (Nov. 1921), 4; “Near East Relief Work,” *Indiana Farmer’s Guide*, 34 (May 13, 1922), 502. On the congressional farm bloc, see Patrick G. O’Brien, “A Reexamination of the Senate Farm Bloc 1921-1933,” *Agricultural History*, 47 (July 1973), 248-63.

NER also began to buy or solicit food donations from food manufacturers, wholesale and retail grocers, and consumers. In 1920 Hershey Chocolate donated 25,000 pounds of cocoa. One 1921 NER relief ship held 5,500 tons of grains from midwest farmers, 330 tons of canned goods donated by Pennsylvania school children, and 5,000 cases of *Karo* corn syrup bought by NER. The National Cannery Association endorsed its members to donate any canned goods. NER's "Say it With Flour" campaign enlisted retail grocers to set up "coin posters" for consumers to buy portions of flour to send to orphans. In 1922, two Chicago manufacturers donated 30,000 pounds of macaroni after NER's medical officer Doctor John C. Curran told the annual convention of the National Macaroni Manufacturers, "We physicians...have observed the wonderful recuperative value of macaroni to these starving little bodies. We would rather have macaroni than any other food for those hungry children." Brooklyn school children sent 40,000 cans of condensed milk to NER. Even before the Golden Rule Sunday campaign, NER was becoming proficient in encouraging American food industries and consumers to buy and donate certain processed food products.²¹

²¹ "A Christmas Gift to Orphaned Children," folder 2, Box 7, series 2, Talcott Williams Papers (Burke Library); "Near East Relief Grain Campaign," *Ellis County Kansas Hays Free Press*, Dec. 29, 1921, p. 1; "Canned Goods Offered Hoover," *Retail Grocer's Advocate*, 26 (Feb. 25, 1921), 15; "Say it With Flour," *ibid.*, 26 (May 18, 1921), 8-9, 13; "Macaroni Gift Made to Near East Relief by Manufacturers," *American Food Journal*, 17 (Aug. 1922), 40; "Two Miles of Milk," *New Near East*, 7 (March 1922), 4; "Car Load of Milk in Relief is Reached," *Indianapolis Star*, June 17, 1923, p. 7.

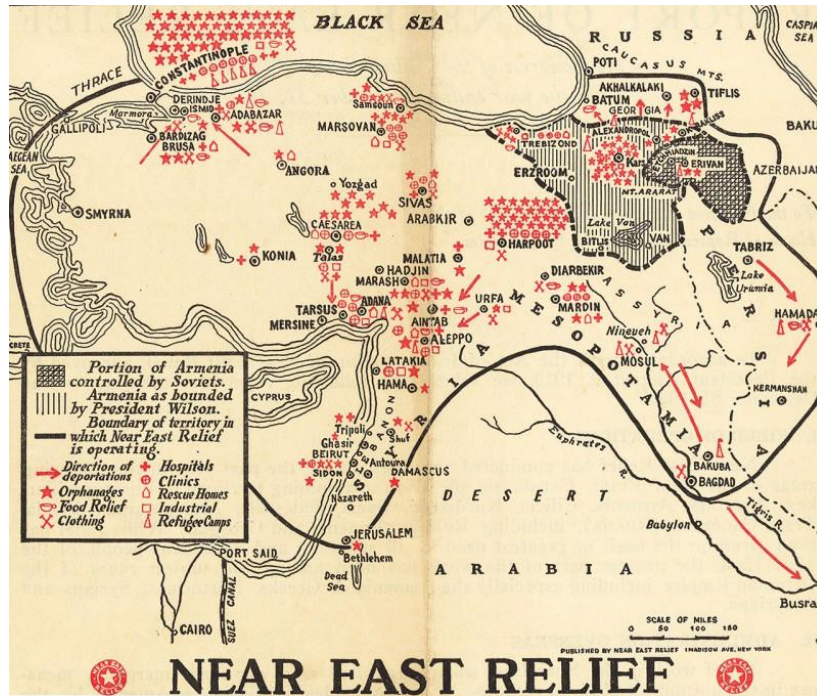


Figure 3. Near East Relief map of operations in 1921.²²

Golden Rule Sunday

By 1923, NER needed ever more food and funds to meet the staggering humanitarian demands caused by continued post-war Turkish attacks on its minorities. Vickrey's new idea forged an unprecedented marriage of philanthropy and consumerism fully enmeshed within the American food industry and supported by the state. In the fall of 1923, as donor fatigue appeared to affect giving, NER announced its inaugural International Golden Rule Sunday campaign to be observed on December 2, 1923. The previous year President Harding had issued a special proclamation to state governors declaring December 3, 1922 as Near East Emergency Sunday, a day on which state and local officials,

²² "Near East Relief," map, Near East Museum, <https://neareastmuseum.com/archives/near-east-relief-map-1921-2/>.

businesses, and civic organizations should encourage giving to NER and the American Red Cross.²³

Vickrey expanded on this idea to energize these same state and local entities and to merge the entire enterprise of giving into the complex fabric of the American food industry, from the farmer to the consumer. The first dinner mobilized NER's huge network of churches, schools, civic organizations, businesses, labor unions, and local governments. In Chicago in 1923, an estimated 20,000 families took part. Governors, mayors, and other officials across the U.S. proclaimed support. Celebrities such as football star Red Grange endorsed the campaign, and child actor Jackie Coogan headlined condensed milk drives. The Grafton, North Dakota *Walsh County Record* wrote that "in a day when so many of our people have provincial attitudes, so provincial that many of them can glory in the slogan 'America First' in its narrowest sense, we need this day in order to enlarge our vision and make us think of all nations and all men as members of one common family." By 1927 there were over 16,000 local Golden Rule Sunday organizing committees, and 26 governors headed their state committees. On September 1, 1924 NER presented the idea to the Assembly of the League of Nations and, by 1928, it was observed in 53 countries.²⁴

²³ "Are You Fed Up?" *New Near East*, 7 (March 1922), 6; *Church Co-operation in Near East Relief: Containing Denominational Endorsements, Advisory Committees, Plans of Co-operation, and Statements by Leader* (New York, 1923). Vickrey, *International Golden Rule Sunday*, 57, 130.

²⁴ "20,000 Families Here to Have Orphan Fare Tomorrow," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 6, 1923, p. 17; Mabel S.C. Smith, "Civic Cooperation in the International Golden Rule Campaign," *American City*, 31 (Nov. 1924), 483, and "The Mayors and Golden Rule Day," *ibid.*, 33 (Nov. 1925), 513; "Grange Gets \$30,000; Says It's Secondary," *New York Times*, Dec. 7, 1925, p. 1; "Near East Bulletin: Jackie Coogan Funds," June 21, 1924, folder 9, box 7, series 2, Talcott Williams Papers (Burke Library); "Jackie Coogan Here Today," *New York Times*, Aug. 16, 1924, p. 6; "Calendar: International Golden Rule Sunday Report," Dec. 7, 1924, box 142, Albert Shaw Papers (New York Public Library); U.S. Congress, Senate, *Near*



Figure 4. Doctor Mabel Elliott works to save the life of an Armenian boy in Nov. 1922.²⁵

The new campaign no longer simply asked for donations of grain surplus, coins, or canned goods. NER fully partnered with certain processed food industries to commodify NER's child welfare expertise in endorsing their food products as healthy. Doctor Mabel Elliott, the "modern Florence Nightingale," directed NER hospitals and by the early 1920s was fairly well known in the U.S. With the rollout of Golden Rule Sunday publicity, Elliott figured prominently in articles syndicated to dozens of American newspapers. Placed under President Calvin Coolidge's endorsement for the event, the article "American Foods Best Says Famous Doctor" quoted Elliott saying that certain "foods are now the backbone of all our menus for rebuilding children. . . . Our menus include . . . American flour . . . corn grits and liberal use of corn syrup, American condensed milk and American cocoa and macaroni, thus making a balanced ration to meet all scientific requirements as to relative

East Relief. Report of the Near East Relief for the Year Ending December 31, 1928, 70 Cong., 2 Sess., Feb. 25, 1929, S. Doc. 257, Serial 9000, p. 17.

²⁵ "Harvesting by Night," *New Near East*, 7 (Nov. 1922), 7.

food values, calories, and vitamins.” Food industries used Elliott’s expertise in saving starving Armenian children to promote specific food products, not only for Golden Rule Sunday, but also as healthy food for American families all year long. Retail grocers put up window displays highlighting the campaign and these same products. The 1924 Golden Rule Sunday campaign sent out thousands of brochures entitled “The Golden Rule—and Big Business” to encourage endorsements and contributions across the country.²⁶

NER’s closest food industry relationship was with the Corn Products Refining Company (CPRC) and its *Karo*-brand corn syrup. The CPRC donated thousands of advertisements reminding Americans that its meals should include “milk, rice, bread, cocoa, beans, macaroni, and *Karo*, the great American food . . . that helped save thousands of these little children from starvation.” Ads with titles such as “A Lesson for American Mothers” included a letter signed by NER’s chief medical officer, Doctor John C. Curran, stating that the “food experts of the NER have chosen *Karo*, along with condensed milk, beans, rice, macaroni and cocoa,” to give health and energy to the 115,000 recently starving orphans under its care. The campaign included recipes for the orphan’s favorite pudding of “corn grits with cocoa, sweetened with corn syrup . . . and American condensed milk.” This and similar recipes appeared in women’s magazines and newspapers through the 1920s. For Golden Rule Sunday in 1924, the CPRC donated 60,000 window displays, 3.5 million

²⁶ See letter regarding Mabel Elliott’s speaking tour, Irving J. Gumb, April 8, 1924, folder 9, box 7, series 2, Talcott Williams Papers (Burke Library); E. Guy Talbott, “Back to Ararat,” *Forum*, 72 (Aug. 1924), 284. A search of contemporary newspapers and magazines yielded several articles mentioning Elliott’s work before 1923. “American Foods Best Says Famous Doctor” *Marysville Ohio Evening Tribune*, Nov. 22, 1923, p. 2; although archival records do not indicate the circulation of this set of articles, in a cursory search I found it in at least four dozen American newspapers in late 1923; “Indorse December 2 Golden Rule Sunday,” *Washington Evening Star* Nov. 22, 1923, p. 19; “The Golden Rule—and Big Business,” box 138, Albert Shaw Papers (New York Public Library).

12-page recipe booklets, 1.5 million Golden Rule menus (using *Karo* corn syrup), and full-page advertisements in the morning and evening papers of major American cities. In 1925, CPRC donated 4 million recipe booklets, added 5,000 billboards for one month, and paid for more than \$50,000 in newspaper advertising. On December 2, 1926 alone, Golden Rule Sunday *Karo* ads appeared in 77 major U.S. newspapers.²⁷

²⁷ For ads, see for example *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 30, 1923, p. 6, *Bridgeport Telegram*, Dec. 4, 1924, p. 7, *Reno Evening Gazette*, Dec. 4, 1924, p. 7. For recipes, see for example *Bellevue Gazette*, Nov. 22, 1923 and *Fairport Monroe County Mail*, Nov. 22, 1923. Vickrey, *International Golden Rule Handbook*, 112; "Malvern Churches Unite for Observe Golden Rule Dinner," *Malvern Leader*, Jan. 31, 1929; "Preliminary Report International Golden Rule Sunday Observance, 1924: Cooperating Committees and Organizations," p. 7, folder 1, box 18, series 2, "Near East Relief Bulletin: Golden Rule Plans," June 21, 1924, folder 9, box 7, series 2, "Docket of Executive Committee Meeting," May 25, 1925, folder 5, box 14, series 2, and "NER *Karo* Syrup Golden Rule Sunday Advertisements for Dec. 2, 1926, folder 9, box 15, series 2, Talcott Williams Papers (Burke Library). Executive Committee minutes indicate the Corn Products refining Company (CPRC) donated 400,000 window displays in 1924, see "Minutes: Executive Committee Near East Relief, Sep. 30, 1924," p. 388, box 1, RG 2, FA1305, Near East Foundation Records (Rockefeller Archive Center); "International Golden Rule Dinner Menu," box 142, Albert Shaw Papers (New York Public Library).

THE EVENING STAR, WASHINGTON, D. C., FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 1923.

A Lesson for American Mothers Taught by Orphans of the Near East

*How the Greatest Nourishment for the Least Money Was Achieved
for Thousands of Children by the Near East Relief*

THE present ruddy health of thousands of children, only recently starving in the war regions of the Near East, affords a most striking object lesson for American mothers. The food experts of The Near East Relief organization, knowing the necessity of giving children energy and health through genuinely nutritious foods, chose Karo as one of only six.

These experts know, and their Near East children now show, that as an invigorating, health building food, Karo is among the first in food value. (Read carefully Dr. Curran's letter to the right.)

Here is the reason why Karo is so highly recommended:

Karo contains a large percentage of the vitalizing food element, Dextrin, which your doctor can tell you has a tremendous health value. This essential element, Dextrin, is assimilated almost directly into the blood and tissue cells—and furnishes the fuel and energy of your body.

And children delight in the delicious flavor of Karo spread on bread. Blue Label and Red Label Karo are equally nutritious.

INTERNATIONAL "GOLDEN RULE SUNDAY"
DECEMBER 2, 1923
Endorsed by President Coolidge

BY Presidential Endorsement, December 2nd is set aside as "Golden Rule Sunday." On this day you are asked by the Near East Relief to eat only those six inexpensive but highly nourishing foods: Milk, Beans, Rice, Macaroni, Cocoa and KARO.

These are the foods which have given health and energy to thousands of children in the Near East who were only recently starving.

By eating them you will get the highest nourishment at the very lowest food cost.

And the Near East Relief asks you to give what you save on the Sunday Dinner to continue its great work among the orphans and children of the war-stricken regions.

Your grocery will give you a folder of menus by famous chefs, prepared from these six foods which have transformed half-starved orphans into happy, healthy children.

On December 2, 1923, instead of the usual dinner, I will use the equivalent of the simple meal served to the orphan children of the Near East, and give the balance to them.

Name _____
City _____
NEAR EAST RELIEF, 151 Fifth Avenue, New York City

Please sign the coupon and mail it to
The Near East Relief
151 Fifth Avenue
New York

"Karo has helped to save the lives of the oldest Christian nations in the world."

Figure 5. Karo ad, *Washington Evening Star*, Nov. 30, 1923, p. 36.²⁸

The tax implications of supporting philanthropy changed radically for individuals during the period of NER's work, but corporations could also benefit from making donations. After the national income tax took effect in 1913, the War Revenue Act of 1917 allowed individual charitable deductions up to 15 percent of taxable income to offset the 60 percent surtax levied on high incomes. In 1918, individual charitable bequests could be deducted from estate taxes. By the end of the war, the wealthy increased private giving and

²⁸ "A Lesson for American Mothers," *Washington Evening Star*, Nov. 30, 1923, p. 36.

established more charitable trusts. Although tax law did not allow corporate deductions for charity until 1936, companies could write off advertising as business expenses and several states began allowing state tax deductions for corporate giving in the mid-1910s. Congress rejected a corporate deduction in 1919, 1928, and 1934, considering it controversial for corporations to use funds outside their duty to shareholders and beyond the powers of the state laws of incorporation. However, some corporations got around the deductibility issue by giving shares to charities as a “foregone dividend.” Beginning in 1925, NER owned shares of CPRC stock, although it is not clear from archival sources if they were donated by the CPRC in this manner. In any event, what is clear is that the nonprofit NER and for-profit CPRC worked closely together. From 1925 to 1928 CPRC’s Director Edward T. Bedford served on NER’s National Golden Rule Committee. Bedford was a former Standard Oil executive who launched into the corn syrup industry in 1901 with \$2.5 million in capital from the Rockefellers and other Standard Oil executives. The Rockefeller family retained the majority of CPRC stock while its philanthropic arm was an early major financial supporter of NER.²⁹

Scholars and legal experts may debate whether corporate support of charities should be attributed to ideals of corporate social responsibility, the “halo effect,” or

²⁹ Bernhard Knollenberg, “Reflections on the Income Tax,” *Atlantic Monthly*, July-Dec. 1920, pp. 112-119; Brandt, *How Much Shall I Give?* (New York, 1921), 15; Bremner, *American Philanthropy*, 133; Nancy J. Knauer, “The Paradox of Corporate Giving: Tax Expenditures, the Nature of the Corporation, and the Social Construction of Charity,” *DePaul Law Review*, 44 (Fall 1994), 1-97, esp. 18; “Auditors’ Reports on the Accounts of American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief and Near East Relief,” box 10, RG 2, FA1305, NEF Records (Rockefeller Archive Center). On the connection of Edward T. Bedford, Standard Oil, and the Rockefellers, see “New Corporations,” *New York Times*, Feb. 14, 1901, p. 14, and “Corn Products,” *Fortune*, Sep. 1938, pp. 58-60; Barton, *Story of Near East Relief*, 18, 370, 409.

“enlightened self-interest,” but this essay shows that the mutually-beneficial relationship of NER and the CPRC played an integral part in the political economy of processed food in the 1920s. NER, as does any nonprofit organization, required help in spreading pleas to the American public to support its noble work in feeding tens of thousands of children. For the 1924 Golden Rule Sunday campaign, NER budgeted only \$100,000 for national publicity and urged its huge network to solicit free advertising from commercial and other organizations. NER also needed donations of money and calorie-rich foodstuffs with long shelf-lives that could be easily transported. The CPRC and other food manufacturers made huge donations of advertising to associate their brands with the work of NER in saving these starving children. NER accepted these donations and thereby associated their work in feeding children with the grains and processed foodstuffs that formed the staples of their orphanage meals. In particular, the interests of the CPRC and NER converged in promoting corn syrup as a healthy and calorie-rich food to nourish children.³⁰

Setting the Stage: Corn Syrup and the Pure Food Fight

The decades-long controversies over consumer acceptance of corn sugars and the state’s role in its labeling shed light on why NER’s endorsement of corn syrup became so important for the CPRC in the 1920s. The debates also illuminate both the cooperative and contentious interactions within the political economy of food during the period. The philanthropy-business marriage proved significant to the interwar political economy of

³⁰ Knauer, “The Paradox of Corporate Giving,” 7; “Financial Organization and Cashing In,” *International Golden Rule Sunday Report*, Dec. 7, 1924, box 142, Albert Shaw Papers (New York Public Library).

processed food because the CPRC had been battling for decades with pure food experts to establish its products as healthful unadulterated foods for the American consumer.³¹

Voluntary organizations, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, began leading the push for unadulterated foods in the 1870s. Glucose, or corn syrup, was developed in 1881 by cooking cornstarch in an acid. It had half the sweetness of sugar made from cane or beets, which was chemically known as sucrose. Brewers and confectioners enthusiastically incorporated the cheaper sweetener. But glucose had an image problem, and many food producers and consumers were suspicious. Glucose was cooked with sulfuric acid and sounded like it came from a glue factory—consumers blanched and pure food crusaders had a field day. Farm journals criticized factory-made glucose as unhealthy compared to sorghum, maple, or cane syrups. In the 1890s, Harvey Wiley, Chief of the USDA Bureau of Chemistry, took up the pure food fight. He did not argue that glucose was inherently unhealthy but championed unadulterated foods and proper labeling of any additives to inform and protect consumers.³²

When first marketed as a table syrup in 1903, the *Karo* brand had to convince consumers that it was wholesome and tasty. The Corn Products Company, precursor to the CPRC, enlisted the state's help to win over consumers. In 1904, Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson approved the company's request to have the new USDA Standards Committee

³¹ The term "corn sugars" was used in the period to describe syrup or granulated sweeteners derived from corn.

³² Brian Peckham, *Economics and Invention: A Technological History of the Corn Refining Industry of the United States* (PhD Diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1979), 129–44, 176, 193–95. On the labeling fights, see Lessens, *Master of Millions*, 292–293; Oscar E. Anderson, *The Health of a Nation: Harvey W. Wiley and the Fight for Pure Food* (Chicago, 1958), 71–74; Lorine Swainston Goodwin, *The Pure Food, Drink, and Drug Crusades, 1879–1914* (Jefferson, NC, 1999).

allow manufacturers to substitute the term “corn syrup” for the unappealing term glucose. *Karo* ads declared corn syrup “the New Table Delicacy” made from “that portion of the corn kernel which contains the greatest strength-giving, energy-producing, and flesh-forming elements.” Neither the terms glucose nor corn syrup had to be listed on low-cost jams and jellies, which increasingly contained glucose in place of more costly cane sugar.³³

The glucose labeling decision did not last long. In 1906, the year that Bedford consolidated several firms as the Corn Products Refining Company (CPRC), Wiley and pure food crusaders succeeded in their long battle to convince Congress to pass the Pure Food and Drug Act. Within days of the new law, the USDA reversed its earlier decision and prohibited manufacturers from using the term corn syrup in place of glucose. The new law further stipulated that prepared foods must “conspicuously state” their ingredients starting in 1907. The CPRC got more bad news when Pennsylvania police arrested 500 small candy dealers for violating that state’s new pure food law which prohibited glucose made with sulphuric acid. The months-long litigation received nationwide attention highlighting CPRC’s five million dollar fine and leaving consumers with the impression that sulphuric acid remained in glucose after processing.³⁴

The CPRC chose to skirt the new labeling laws as it lobbied the USDA that corn syrup was a fitting term for glucose and a wholesome food. New *Karo* labels identified the

³³ Published as Circular Nos. 10 and 13, “Pure Food Standards,” *New York Times*, Nov. 22, 1903, p. 10; Clayton A. Coppin and Jack High, *The Politics of Purity: Harvey Washington Wiley and the Origins of Federal Food Policy* (Ann Arbor, 1999), 136–137; Lessens, *Master of Millions*, 304; “Karo Ad,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 4, 1904, p. 12.

³⁴ “A Fortnight Under the Pure Food Law,” *New York Times*, Jan. 13, 1907, p. SM5; “No More Bleached Glucose,” *ibid.*, Aug. 21, 1906, p. 3; “Tainted Candy War Cost Trust \$500,000,” *ibid.*, Dec. 8, 1906, p. 7. I found over one hundred articles with the tainted candy news, for example “Glucose Co. Admits the ‘Poison’ Charge,” *Mitchell Daily Republican*, Aug. 24, 1906, p. 1.

product as “Karo corn syrup with cane flavor,” neglecting to mention glucose. A similar controversy brewing over whiskies convinced Agriculture Secretary Wilson to appoint Wiley as head of a new three-man advisory, the Board of Food and Drug Inspection, to review industry appeals of pure food decisions. Wiley asserted that whiskey blends should not be labeled as whiskey because they derived their color from additives, not oak aging. President Theodore Roosevelt disagreed, and the U.S. Attorney General overruled Wiley’s interpretation on whiskey, setting an important precedent for food labeling under the Pure Food law. The Attorney General’s 1907 ruling stated that “the intention of the law will be best observed by giving to such articles *names readily understood* and conveying definite and *familiar ideas to the general public*, although such names may be inaccurate in the view of a chemist.” According to the state, what mattered for food labeling was how the public *perceived* a product rather than its chemical make-up. This decision foreshadowed the importance of molding consumer perceptions through marketing that would shape corn sugar fights in the 1920s—and the importance of endorsements as to its wholesomeness.³⁵

After losing a hearing before Wiley’s three-man board in September 1907 to allow the term corn syrup on its labels, the CPRC ramped up its appeals directly to Secretary Wilson and Roosevelt by mobilizing chemists, doctors, state food commissioners, grocers, and corn-belt state senators to attest that corn syrup was chemically similar to cane syrup and provided Americans with cheap healthful food. Bedford reminded Wilson about the

³⁵ See for example *Karo* ads in the *New York Times*, Dec. 6, 1907 and March 27, 1908; Lessens, *Master of Millions*, 309–310. On the whiskey controversy, see Coppin and High, *The Politics of Purity*, 100-17; “Rival Whiskey Makers at Food Law Hearing,” *New York Times*, Sep. 20, 1906, p. 5; Anderson, *Health of a Nation*, 201–03. On the Attorney General’s 1906 whiskey decision, emphasis is mine, see USDA, *Food Inspection Decision 83*, Nov. 22, 1907.

Attorney General's recent decision on whiskey labeling and that the glucose industry bought significant quantities of corn from American farmers.³⁶

In a new December 1907 hearing, the CPRC and Wiley argued the glucose labeling issue before Wilson himself. Responding to Bedford's charge that the labeling decision hurt corn farmers, Wiley countered that the glucose industry was destroying the beekeeping, maple sugar, cane syrup, and sorghum industries. By 1906, corn syrups were outselling maple and cane syrups by a five-to-one margin. Interestingly, Wiley failed to disclose that he was also a paid consultant to cane and beet sugar refiners. Wilson asked for written opinions from the three members of the Board of Food and Drug Inspection. Wiley submitted a 172-page complaint against the CPRC. However, the two other board members had changed their minds since September, and Roosevelt again weighed in on a pure food issue. Upon examining a vial of *Karo*, the President concluded that it was a syrup made from corn. Wilson later recalled Roosevelt's opinion as, "you must make the manufacturers call a spade a spade, but don't make them call it a damn shovel." In February 1908, the Secretaries of Agriculture, Treasury, and Commerce signed Food Inspection Decision 87 declaring that manufacturers could label glucose as corn syrup. Wiley's disagreement with the decision would have to play out in the court of consumer opinion. A few months later, Wiley told the "Mother's Congress" that table syrups, other than maple syrup, should "be carefully scrutinized in regard to their purity." When he left the USDA in 1912 to join *Good*

³⁶ Corn Products Refining Company, *Copies of Opinions of Chemists and Others on the Meaning of the Word 'Syrup' and the Use of the Term 'Corn Syrup' Under the 'Food & Drug Act' of 1906, Presented to the Honorable James Wilson, Secretary of Agriculture, Dec. 1907* (New York, 1907), esp. 52, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100230986>.

Housekeeping magazine, Wiley refused CPRC advertisements and continued writing opinions against the labeling decision.³⁷

Wiley might have taken some consolation in the fact that corn syrup was still considered an adulterant when added to processed foods and had to be listed as an ingredient on food labels. Issued in 1907, USDA Food Inspection Decision (FID) 66 only allowed cane or beet sugar, known as sucrose, in processed foods without being listed on labels. FID 66 and later USDA decisions determined that a sweet taste was sufficient to tell the consumer that sugar was present, in essence ruling that only sucrose was considered sugar. The CPRC fought for the next two decades to convince consumers and the USDA that corn sugar was healthy and should be treated as regular sugar in processed foods—and therefore not added to the label. Between 1906 and 1916 Bedford spent over \$5 million in advertising *Karo*, corn starch, and corn oil as wholesome corn products. Its 1916 annual report stated that “as a result of its activities, people everywhere are coming to realize that corn starch, corn syrup, and corn oil are among the most wholesome and nutritious, as well as the cheapest foods.” *Karo* grew in popularity yet still experienced consumer skepticism and Wiley’s continued attacks. Processed food manufacturers hesitated using corn syrup in their products due to lingering consumer distrust and sporadic USDA enforcement of

³⁷ “Brief of H.W. Wiley, Corn v. Glucose, Dec. 31, 1907,” in *Expenditures in Department of Agriculture, Volume 2* (Washington, 1907), 1275-1421. On Roosevelt’s involvement, see Coppin and High, *The Politics of Purity*, 136-42, esp. 140. On the Dec. 1907 debates and decision, see USDA, *Food Inspection Decision 87*, Feb. 13, 1908; Lessens, *Master of Millions*, 312-14, 320-22; Anderson, *Health of a Nation*, 206. On the Mother’s Congress, see “Can Dr. Wiley Possibly Be as Small As This,” *American Food Journal*, 3 (April 15, 1908), 14. The National Congress of Mothers was a forerunner of the National Parent Teacher Association; “Harvey Wiley Explains His Resignation,” *Daily Princetonian*, March 16, 1912, p.1; Shots from Dr. Wiley,” *Good Housekeeping*, Feb. 1913, p. 254; “Sparks from the Bench,” *ibid.*, Nov. 1914, p. 631.

labeling requirements. Bedford complained to Secretary Wilson that food manufacturers were “afraid to use our products.”³⁸

The controversy lay dormant until 1923, the same year that NER launched its initial Golden Rule Sunday campaign. That year, the CPRC’s development of a crystalized and more commercially-viable corn sugar called “dextrose” launched the company on a renewed campaign to gain consumer confidence, remove USDA labeling restrictions, and alleviate farmers’ corn surplus. The USDA had struggled with solutions to the corn glut but, when Herbert Hoover took over as Commerce Secretary in 1921, he determined that his agency should be the primary engine to transform American industry, which included its food supply. He directed his Bureau of Standards to expand public-private collaboration in scientific research to support industry. The CPRC had been consulting with Bureau scientists since 1915 about making a more commercially-viable corn sugar. Corn syrup was useful as table syrup or in jams, mincemeat, and beer, but food manufacturers wanted a granulated corn sugar to substitute for expensive sucrose in processed foods needing a dry ingredient. In 1923 William Newkirk, a Commerce Department scientist first loaned to and then hired by the CPRC, developed a purer crystalized and commercially-viable corn sugar, known by chemists as dextrose and branded *Cerelose* by the CPRC. Wiley castigated the

³⁸ “The Use of Sugar in Canned Foods,” *Food Inspection Decision 66*, issued April 29, 1907, see Charles Wesley Dunn, ed., *Dunn’s Pure Food and Drug Manual* (New York, 1912), 76–77. On CPRC advertising expenditures, see “Corn Products Refining Co., New York: Report, Feb. 28, 1906 to Dec. 31, 1916,” *Commercial Financial Chronicle*, 103 (Dec. 23, 1916), 2337. On continued consumer skepticism, see “The Dangers in Store Candies,” *Good Housekeeping* Jan. 1913, pp. 109–10; “Lessens, *Master of Millions*, 320–22. The CPRC also faced negative publicity from 1913 to 1919 due to anti-trust litigation, see “Corn Products Company Must Be Broken Up,” *New York Times*, Apr. 1, 1919, p. 20.

Commerce Department for purportedly designing the CPRC's \$500,000 research facility where Newkirk developed the product.³⁹

Cerelose cost pennies a pound and proved superior to sucrose for feeding baker's yeast, texturizing candy, and preventing ice crystals in ice cream. It promised a cheaper sweetener and preservative in canned goods and for pickling. The CPRC doubled its initial production of 20 million pounds of the new product in the first year. But the Pure Food and Drug law and FID 66 continued to constrain the CPRC because the addition of any sweetener other than sucrose to processed foods had to be indicated on their labels. Some manufacturers still balked at listing corn sugar on its labels—much less the chemical term dextrose. The CPRC joined pro-farm newspapers, corn-belt politicians, and agribusiness interests to lobby the USDA to allow dextrose to join sucrose as a hidden additive. They argued that a robust corn sugars industry would absorb 480 million bushels of corn a year, larger than any previous surplus. It would revitalize corn prices for American farmers and create new export markets for corn—such as those being cultivated in the Near East. And it would provide healthy and cheap calorie-laden nutrition to the processed foods that were increasingly feeding America's expanding population. Other farm advocates sought farm price supports rather than relying on the processed foods industry to stabilize agriculture.

³⁹ On Hoover's efforts in Commerce, see Hawley, "Herbert Hoover, the Commerce Secretariat, and the Vision of an Associative State," 117-19, 121-25. On the development of crystallized corn sugar, see Rexmond C. Cochran, *Measures for Progress: A History of the National Bureau of Standards* (Washington, 1966), 265-267; Peckham, *Economics and Invention*, 338-41; Harvey Wiley, *A History of a Crime: The Amazing Story Of The National Food And Drugs Law Intended To Protect The Health Of The People Perverted To Protect Adulteration Of Foods And Drugs* (Washington DC, 1929), 300-03.

The USDA's Henry Charles Taylor decried that Washington was more interested in providing cheap food to urban workers than in supporting farmers.⁴⁰

In 1924, Bedford asked the USDA's Director of Regulatory Work Walter Campbell to allow the USDA's interpretation of sugar in processed foods to include "dextrose sugar." Campbell informed Bedford that the USDA could not simply decide what constituted a familiar food. In an opinion reminiscent of the U.S. Attorney General's take on whiskey in 1906, the USDA declared that "popular understanding and trade custom largely establish standards and this Department in its announcements undertakes to reflect . . . public judgment in those matters." Only if consumers accepted that corn sugar was as wholesome in providing sweetness as cane and beet sugar would the USDA consider reviewing labeling standards. The *Chicago Tribune* predicted that the new product would have to "overcome the conservatism of the kitchen" by convincing homemakers of its wholesomeness.⁴¹

Golden Rule Sunday and Corn Syrup as Health Food

Thus, as Golden Rule Sunday swept the nation, the CPRC ramped up its campaign to convince consumers that corn sugar was not only as healthy as sucrose, but in fact more healthy. Doctors had used corn syrup since the nineteenth century to treat malnourished

⁴⁰ Peckham, *Economics and Invention*, 338–41; Lessens, *Master of Millions*, 329–330; Scrutator, "Surplus Corn of Future May Turn to Sugar," *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 17, 1924, p. A10s; "Corn Sugar," *Fort Madison Evening Democrat*, Nov. 7, 1924, pp. 447, 455; "Sugar From Corn May Lower Prices," *Washington Post*, April 20, 1924, p.1. See 1920s debates on the McNary-Haugen Act. Taylor was dismissed as the head of the USDA's Bureau of Agricultural Economics in 1925 and wrote of his experience in government in 1926 in *A Farm Economist in Washington, 1919-1925*, which was not published until 1992 by the University of Wisconsin Press.

⁴¹ Lessens, *Master of Millions*, 332; Scrutator, "Sugar Made of Corn Entering Market Slowly," *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 16, 1924, p. 16.

children or invalids because it was easily digested and calorie-rich. Golden Rule Sunday *Karo* ads told consumers that “Near East children show that as an invigorating health-building food. . . . *Karo* contains the vitalizing food element, Dextrose, which your doctor can tell you has a tremendous health value.” The CPRC highlighted NER endorsements from its orphanages in conjunction with new medical studies about the health benefits of dextrose and glucose for babies and children. These studies recommended *Karo* as an additive to milk to make a nutritious and fattening infant formula. The CPRC placed ads for *Karo* in *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences* in 1924 touting the nourishing qualities of corn syrup as the best ingredient for homemade infant formula.⁴²

Also prominent in the Golden Rule Sunday campaign, Borden’s condensed milk was using corn sugars for sweetening by the mid-twenties. Employing NER endorsements, Borden’s Nutrition Department in 1924 launched a national health crusade against malnourishment in American children. Borden quoted Curran, “Our experience with 115,000 orphan children of the Near East shows that there is no more valuable food than condensed milk for restoring half-starved children to health and strength.” *The American Food Journal* provided Golden Rule Sunday recipes using condensed milk from Oscar, chef at the Waldorf-Astoria. After the first Golden Rule dinner, NER launched an effort to collect one million cans of condensed milk on a transcontinental train. Curran travelled on the

⁴² Dextrose is a monosaccharide and more easily metabolized than the disaccharide sucrose which must be broke down in the stomach to be absorbed, see Peckham, *Economics and Invention*, 98, 115, 341. See an example *Karo* ad touting Dextrose, *Charleston Gazette* Dec. 2, 1926, p. 7. On medical benefits, see “Pediatrics,” *American Journal of the Medical Sciences*, 167 (Feb. 1924), 255, quoting a study “Acidified Whole Milk as a Routine Infant Food,” *Journal of American Medical Association*, 81 (1923), 2007. On ads, see for example “A Good Milk Modifier in Infant Feeding,” *American Journal of the Medical Sciences*, 167 (April 1924), 9; “A Valuable Addition to the Diet of Child and Adult,” *American Journal of the Medical Sciences*, 168 (Nov. 1924), 8.

milk train endorsing the healthful effects of sweetened condensed milk. NER recruited the nine-year old child star Jackie Coogan to sail on the “Million Dollar Milk Ship” filled with condensed milk, corn syrup, and flour and deliver it personally to Near East orphanages in support of the “Golden Rule Crusade.” Boy Scouts collected and packaged up donations along the route. In 1925, Borden paid for a “four color card in all street cars and subways in the United States” endorsing Golden Rule Sunday.⁴³

The CPRC and NER, along with other food producers, looked for creative new joint marketing techniques to encourage Americans to buy more *Karo* and other processed foods for both NER donations and for their own consumption. For the 1925 Golden Rule Sunday campaign, Curran, serving as both chief health expert and NER’s key liaison to the processed foods industry, attended the National Retail Grocer’s convention to discuss NER’s project for “Golden Rule Sunday and the Retail Grocer.” In addition to buying certain processed foods for their Golden Rule Dinners and donating the cost difference to NER, the new program encouraged consumers to buy these foods throughout the year to send to

⁴³ “Running a Near East Orphanage,” *Journal of Home Economics*, 13 (Aug. 1921), 382; Helen Rich Baldwin, “Commercial Nutrition Work Among Children: Borden Company Conducts Experiments and Class Work in Cooperation with Health Organizations and Schools,” *American Food Journal*, 18 (Aug. 1923), 382-383; “The Scourge of Childhood Threatens Our Schools: Join the New Health Crusade Against Malnutrition,” *American Food Journal*, 19 (Jan. 1924), 24-25. On Curran’s quote, see Helen Rich Baldwin, *Nutrition and Health: With Twenty Suggested Lessons for Nutrition Classes* (1924; New York, 1929), 74. For an example of recipes, see “Some Golden Rule Dinners,” *American Food Journal*, 19 (Nov. 1924), 534-525. On the milk drive, see “Milk for Near East Relief,” *New York Times*, Feb. 10, 1924, p. E3; “The Golden Rule Crusade,” *New Near East* (Sep. 1924), 12, box 168, series 10, RG 1, FA 406, Near East Foundation (Rockefeller Archive Center); “Boy Scouts,” *New York Times*, March 23, 1924, X13; “Jackie Coogan Here Today,” *ibid.*, Aug. 16, 1924, p. 6; “Paris Gives Jackie a Royal Welcome,” *ibid.*, Sep. 21, 1924, p. E2; Boy Scouts of America. *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America, June 4, 1924* (Washington, 1924), 29. On Borden’s ads, see “International Golden Rule Observance 1925: Cooperating Industrial Organizations,” p. 12, folder 10, box 7, series 2, Talcott Williams and NER Correspondence, 1924-1926, Talcott Williams Papers (Burke Library).

NER because of their nutritious properties for growing children. Backed by the CPRC, Retail Grocers Association, Borden Milk, and Pillsbury Flour, the campaign allowed people to fill out cards with their local grocers indicating which products they wished to purchase for NER orphans. Retail grocers took payment and sent the cards to the wholesale suppliers to ship foods directly to NER. Both the retailer and wholesaler made their profits, passing on profits to manufacturers and farmers, and the NER received goods paid for by American consumers. Grocers joined the CPRC and NER to tell American mothers they were doing the right thing by buying these products. Ultimately, NER developed a system of philanthropy that spurred much-needed giving but also supported profits for entire supply chains of several American food industries.⁴⁴

With the benefit of several years of positive NER-related publicity for the healthfulness of corn syrup, Bedford, farm lobbyists, and corn-belt politicians asked Congress to amend the 1906 Pure Food and Drug law itself to get around the USDA's regulatory interpretation. In December 1925, Senator Albert Cummins and Congressman Cyrenus Cole, both of Iowa, introduced a bill to expand the definition of sugar to include corn sugars. The *Chicago Tribune* reported that "the bill had the backing of more than a million farmers and businessmen of the corn belt." The newspaper promoted a six-plank farm program which included removing "the stigma from corn sugar." Grass-roots lobbyists gave away free samples of dextrose to housewives. Grocers set up displays with sacks of corn sugar and—however unpalatable—corn syrup poured over corn flakes. The powerful American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) lobbied hard in support of the bill, which

⁴⁴ *Dubuque Telegraph Herald*, June 24, 1925, p. 1.; "Golden Rule Sunday," *American Food Journal*, 20 (Oct. 1925), 481.

quickly passed the Senate and gained Coolidge's support. But growing criticism derailed a quick passage and led the House to call hearings on the bill in March 1926 before the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce.⁴⁵

At the hearings, Commerce's Bureau of Standards pitted itself against the USDA's Regulatory Service which brought in pure food crusader Wiley to lead the attack against the measure. Frederick Bates, head of the Bureau of Standards, testified that "a carbohydrate of great food value, great stability, great purity, and great cheapness" should be made available to consumers while helping the corn industry and American farmers. The Bureau provided a report with numerous doctors and scientists attesting to the healthfulness of dextrose and its chemical similarity to honey and sucrose. Without specifically mentioning NER's work with orphans, the report cited American doctors attesting to corn sugar being the "best product on the market" for "feeding malnutrition cases in children and small babies." But while the carefully-worded endorsements agreed that dextrose was healthy "in moderation," when used "in an ordinary diet," and that it posed the risk of diabetes "no more than the same amount of sucrose," the experts did not address the effects of consuming large quantities of dextrose if it were added to many processed foods.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ "Iowans Fight Pure Food Ban on Corn Sugar," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 25, 1925, p. 27; "A Sweet Thing for the Corn Belt," *ibid.*, Dec. 31, 1925, p. 6; Arthur Evans, "See Corn Sugar as One Relief for Farm Woes," *ibid.*, Jan. 1, 1926, p. 35; "A Farm Program," *ibid.*, Jan. 8, 1926, p. 8; "1,000 Samples of Corn Sugar Are Given Away," *ibid.*, Jan. 26, 1926, p. 26; "President Agrees to Farm Bloc Bill," *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 1926, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Wiley, *A History of a Crime*, 307; "Dr. Wiley Assails Corn Sugar Bill," *New York Times*, April 28, 1926, p. 19; U.S. Congress, House, *Corn Sugar*, 69 Cong., 1 Sess., April 16, 1926, H. Rpt. 911., pp. 4, 6-7, 10. Congress also appropriated another \$25,000 in 1926 for Commerce's Bureau of Standards to research commercial corn sugars.

Wiley countered that he did not object to the basic healthfulness of glucose or dextrose, but that their extensive use in processed foods could be dangerous to the American diet. "I have no quarrel for use of dextrose in hospitals," Wiley said, but its easy absorption could harm the natural digestive process and, because dextrose had half the sweetness of sucrose, twice as much of it was required in place of sucrose in processed foods. Wiley argued that too much dextrose in the body cannot be burned: "It is converted into an inert substance called glycogen and is stored up in this condition in the liver and in the tissues. . . . If we flood our stomachs with dextrose, then we will need half a dozen artificial pancreases." He fundamentally believed that consumers should know of any additives to their foods. But his primary concern was the danger to health if cheap corn sugars were increasingly added to processed foods—particularly without telling consumers that they were present. By "permitting dextrose to be used in food products without notice, as much as two billion pounds would enter into the stomachs of the American people annually."⁴⁷

Wiley did not sway congressional leaders who sided with King Corn's agricultural and industrial lobbyists. The bill passed in the House by a small majority, but when returned to the Senate for a final vote, Senator Matthew Neely of West Virginia successfully filibustered it by reading from *Good Housekeeping* magazine. Neely said his aims were to protect American consumers from adulterated foods and to defend the Pure Food law. Others agreed. The *Washington Post* noted, "The food law has been of inestimable value to food consumers of this country. It would be a misfortune to begin its mutilation." The *Wall*

⁴⁷ Wiley, *A History of a Crime*, 315, 318.

Street Journal urged the corn sugars lobby to educate and seek the approval of “the housewife” to achieve labeling changes.⁴⁸

In response, the CPRC launched new campaigns to sweeten the American consumer on corn sugars and continued to tie *Karo* and dextrose to children’s nutrition in Golden Rule Sunday marketing. Ads targeted mothers with cartoons of healthy children raised on *Karo*, the “energy food” or “health food,” that built strong bodies. In home economics journals, CPRC ads claimed: “Leading Doctors, dieticians and pediatricists highly recommend *Karo* for children—particularly in cases of malnutrition.” In op-eds supporting the corn industry, commenters referred to NER medical endorsements of corn syrup as healthy, noting that “orphanage directors testify as to the wonderful food values of corn syrup.” To better infiltrate American kitchens, the CPRC commissioned Ida Bailey Allen, among the first celebrity cooking experts, to write a corn products cookbook called *The Modern Method of Preparing Delightful Foods*. She advocated *Karo* for both its wholesomeness and for “that deliciousness achieved by the best French chefs.” Babies particularly benefitted from milk spiked with corn syrup which is “easily assimilated” to “furnish immediate energy.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ “House Passes Corn Sugar Bill,” *New York Times*, June 18, 1926, p. 14. On Senator Neely’s reasoning, see Wiley, *A History of a Crime*, 321–23; “The So-Called Corn-Sugar Bill,” *Washington Post*, June 16, 1926, p. 6; “Advertise Corn,” *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 25, 1926, p. 1; “Outlook Favors Corn Products,” *ibid.*, March 24, 1927, p. 10.

⁴⁹ See Golden Rule Sunday ad in *Oakland Tribune*, Dec. 2, 1926, p. 18. For CPRC ads, see *Home Economist*, 19 (March 1927), 161; “Home Economics Authorities Offer Suggestions for Golden Rule Sunday,” *Home Economist*, 5 (Oct. 1927), 167. For an example of NER endorsements in an op-ed, see “The Story of a Grain,” *Quanah Tribune-Chief*, Aug. 3, 1926, p. 7. Ida Bailey Allen, *The Modern Method of Preparing Delightful Foods* (New York, 1926), 12, 89, 99.



Figure 6. Karo ad in the *Fairfield Ledger*, Nov. 17, 1927.⁵⁰

Interestingly, corn farmers went silent about corn sugar labeling in 1927 and 1928. Manufacturers increasingly bought up corn sugars for cattle feed, rayon, synthetic rubber, explosives, tanning, and food additives such as citric acid and riboflavin. Corn sugar production jumped by nearly 400,000 pounds from 1925 to 1927, increasing nine-fold from 1920 to 1929. Illegal but profitable uses for corn likely also help explain farmers' sudden lack of interest in labeling fights. Prohibition Commissioner James Doran estimated that ninety-five percent of illegal whiskey was made with corn sugar from the "bone-dry" Midwest. After the 1929 Jones Act strengthened federal penalties for bootlegging, one corn sugar producer reported a twenty-five percent drop in orders.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Karo ad, *Fairfield Ledger*, Nov. 17, 1927, p. 12.

⁵¹ "The Myriad Uses for Corn," *Indiana Farmer's Guide*, July 1, 1922, p. 689; Lessens, *Master of Millions*, 339–40; Peckham, *Economics and Invention*, 605. On production changes and illegal uses of corn sugar, see "Corn Sugar is the Basis of 'Moon,'" *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 18, 1929, p. 6; "Capture Stills in Shadow of Church School," *ibid.*, July 30, 1924, p. 3. In 1930 the U.S. District Court in Springfield, Illinois charged the CPRC and Fleischman Yeast with shipping 200 carloads of corn sugar to bootleggers, "Fleischman Firm Indicted," *New York Times*, Feb. 11, 1930, p. 3; "Jones Law Affects Corn Sugar Producer," *ibid.*, April 24, 1929, p. 14.

By 1930, events converged to renew the push for more relaxed labeling. The country faced more failing farms and the farm lobby was once again interested in legal corn sugars. In March, the CPRC formally petitioned Agriculture Secretary Henry Hyde for a new policy recognizing corn sugar “as a pure, wholesome and nutritious food placed upon an equality with other sugars.” Bedford reminded Hyde that the CPRC bought more than thirty percent of the cash corn crop. The AFBF, supported by a letter campaign from its corn-belt housewives, and midwestern newspapers rallied around the measure. In a three-hour hearing before Hyde in July 1930, a CPRC attorney said that under the current regulation many manufacturers were still unwilling to use corn sugars in their processed foods. He argued that approval would mean farmers could sell 40 million more bushels of corn a year. Senator William Hull of Illinois argued that if corn sugar was “beneficial to sick babies it cannot be considered anything but beneficial to mankind in general.” Years of humanitarian and medical-expert messaging now permeated the debate. In opposition, Mrs. Harvey Wiley (her husband had died the previous month) joined a group of non-corn belt state agricultural departments and beekeepers headed by Congressman Franklin Menges of Pennsylvania. Anna Wiley declared that “to the housewife sugar is sucrose” and that selling processed foods without alerting consumers to other ingredients was deceptive.⁵²

With no decision by Hyde forthcoming, the AFBF and a large group of corn-belt politicians urged President Hoover to force a decision. As noted, Hoover’s Commerce

⁵² Lessens, *Master of Millions*, 305–06, 317, 319, 341–45, 348; “Corn Sugar,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 28, 1930, p. 14; C. W. Raymond, “Voice of the People: Corn Sugar,” *ibid.*, July 30, 1930, p. 10; “Corn Sugar Battle Rages for 3 Hours Before Hyde,” *ibid.*, July 26, 1930, p. 7; “Fight Over Corn Sugar Carried to White House,” *ibid.*, Aug. 2, 1930, p. 10; “Corn Producers Find Opposition in Sugar Fight,” *ibid.*, Aug. 3, 1930, p. 21.

Department had been behind development of crystalized dextrose in the first place. The day after Christmas 1930, Secretary Hyde gifted the CPRC and corn farmers a new regulation that declared “the use of pure refined corn sugar as an ingredient in the packing, preparation, or processing of any article of food in which sugar is a recognized element need not be declared upon the label of any such product.” Hyde, likely pushed by Hoover, now believed that economic support for farmers trumped consumer perceptions as long as the product was not considered unhealthy. He declared that corn sugar was a “wholesome and healthful food.” The CPRC announced it would double production of corn sugars and build another plant. Anna Wiley lamented that the revision “will do much to weaken the confidence of consumers in the federal enforcement of the pure food which heretofore had been a bulwark of safety for the food of the nation.” Corn sugars would not have to be labeled on processed foods again until 1966.⁵³

Philanthropy and the Political Economy of Food

It is difficult to ascertain how much NER’s endorsement of corn syrup contributed to the product’s ultimate acceptance by consumers and the ensuing changes in food additive regulations. Likely the concern with helping farmers by absorbing corn surplus weighed heavily with the state. But for the first three decades of the twentieth century, the corn

⁵³ “Fight to Lift U.S. Bar on Corn Sugar in Food,” *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 15, 1930, p. 16; “Iowans Would Remove Sigma of ‘Corn Sugar’,” *Fairfield Daily Ledger*, Dec. 24, 1930, p. 1. On Hyde’s decision, see USDA Food and Drug Administration, “Service and Regulatory Announcements, Food and Drug No. 2 (First Revision) Supplement No. 3,” Dec. 31, 1930; “Hyde Opens Up New Market to Corn Farmers,” *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 27, 1930, p. 3. “Corn Sugar Ruling Hailed as Opening Large Market,” *ibid.*, Dec. 28, 1930, p. 13; “Company to Double Corn Sugar Output,” *New York Times*, Dec. 30, 1930, p. 38; “Mrs. Wiley Attacks Ruling on Corn Sugar,” *ibid.*, Dec. 29, 1930, p. 2.

products industry expended tremendous resources in convincing American consumers and the state that its products were healthy. The USDA consistently told the CPRC that it had to change consumer perceptions of healthfulness in order to change labeling regulations. The CPRC needed the endorsement of experts considered eminently unbiased and credible. NER fit this bill perfectly with its well-earned image of humanitarianism and child health expertise. The before and after pictures of horribly starved children testified to NER's competence and corn syrup's value. The CPRC and its *Karo* brand absorbed this image as its own. Well into the 1950s, *Karo* still marketed corn syrup as a health food for children. Good mothers fed their children plenty of carbohydrates, and "eminent child specialists" recommended *Karo* for "easy absorption...without strain on the delicate digestive tissues of the child's body." The most famous babies of the era, the Dionne Quintuplets born in 1934, were raised on corn syrup formula, and the CPRC paid \$15,000 a year for the babies' endorsements.⁵⁴

By 1930, NER had ended its Golden Rule Sunday campaign and, with orphans aging out of its care, NER trustees voted to incorporate a new Near East Foundation in New York State and to shift focus to developmental aid. Over its 15 years, NER raised over \$116,000,000—over two billion dollars today—and supported 132,000 orphans into adulthood. The organization estimated that it had saved the lives of over a million Armenians and others. Its heroic relief workers fanned out across the Near East bringing the bounty of America to millions in need.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ "Karo Brings Plenty of Nourishment to Active Bodies," *San Antonio Light*, Feb. 7, 1932, p. AW8; see also ads for *Karo Health Food* in *Ogden Standard Examiner*, March 20, 1942, p. 6B, and *Sealy News*, June 10, 1954, p. 8; "Dionnes: The First Victims of Hype," *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 8, 1978, p. E1.

⁵⁵ Barton, *Story of Near East Relief*, 365.

And back in the U.S., NER helped farmers offload grain surpluses and pioneered partnerships with American industry to acculturate consumers to buy retail products in order to help others. Through its Golden Rule Sunday campaign, NER integrated mass philanthropy into the interwar political economy by partnering with the state and business, endorsing consumer confidence in certain processed foods, and commodifying the giving impulse. Its experience shows that the tripartite amalgam of state, business, and nonprofit sectors operated in collaborative and also contested ways. In NER's case, it did not grow to occupy the sinister position that some congressmen imagined when it was federally incorporated, but its humanitarian role did give it unique power to influence how consumers and the state interacted with the American food industry. NER's history illuminates a significant early chapter in understanding how philanthropy has developed an integral role in the American political economy.