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# THESIS

ON

## FOOD AND WAGE LEGISLATION IN MASSACHUSETTS 1630-1650

BY

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DATE June 1909.

*Submitted in partial satisfaction of requirements for M.A. degree.*  
*Approved*  
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The attempt of this brief paper is to interpret the attempts of the Massachusetts Bay colonists to settle the questions which arose in adjusting themselves and their varied interests, in the matter of food and wage prices, to the new conditions in America. We note their English traditional attitude to begin with and their inability to see the new situation with any perspective, as was perfectly natural. We see too the landed magistrates thinking they are relieving the situation when they place foods, and food profits, at such a scale that they may without such palpable <sup>or</sup> fairness keep down wages to level profitable to them, and near the English standard of their days in that country.

They had no idea of elastic competitive prices. They worked under varied conditions and found adjustment hard. The wage problem varied from an attempt to make prices reasonable in a new unorganized moderately circumstanced colony, to a question of how to live from grain raising when the market decreased just as labor was scarcest. And the food problem from one of how to make an imperfect supply cover the needs of a "new world" situation to one of making the better crops furnish the country with a medium of exchange whose supply would meet its most pressing needs.

The methods attempted were none of them new. Wage legislation was the English rule and the interfering with food supplies to the advantage of the poor was irregular practice. Common storehouses and communal buying was fostered while surveys to prevent stringencies was compulsory in early 17th century England. Speculation was made impossible by moderating rates thru great reserve supplies under municipal or shire

control! So the corn surveys and ~~common~~ buying schemes we find in Massachusetts had their prototypes in the situation these Puritans had been raised under. Prices of wages in England gradually rose from 1642-1652 owing to the results of a war taking so many men afield. This rise was fought by the smaller, landed gentry. It was the period of the sway of these easy circumstanced, agricultural, aristocracy and the economic system bore marks of the direction of their interests and these same circumstances, (the few servants coming out latterly making American laborers as scarce as English wars made theirs), were the basis of the scheme attempted by the New England growers. The American situation was simpler but the same general trend as modified the European attempts was evident in their history.

There are two reasons for setting a definite price on grain. In years of scarcity it means a price, higher than which it must not go to be fair to the straitness of the times, and the comparative poverty of the people. In periods of plenty, especially of the later years, it means a price lower than which a man may not be compelled to part with his "corn" as legal tender. In one place it is to keep prices down; in the other, to keep them up.

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1. Report of Lord Mayor 1629 shows prices kept down an easy supply and 1500 quarters left from that year's magazine in public hands.

Note. The general reference for English conditions is Volume III Traill, particularly pages 131-143 and pages 270-273.

Food and Wage Legislation in Massachusetts.

Chapter I.

Wages.

I. A. a. During the late summer and early fall of 1630 we find accounts in Winthrop's Journal of the beginnings of labor legislation. The Massachusetts Bay colony arrived in June. At the first court held in August, carpenters, joiners, bricklayers, etc., are to have two shillings a day.<sup>1</sup> In the latter part of September we find master craftsmen of the ordinary trades (mostly building trades) getting sixteen pence and diet, while second workmen have twelve pence and diet,<sup>2</sup> with laborers at twelve pence, or sixpence and diet per day. A fine of ten shillings is provided for each offense against this scale. This last bears the date of October 19th. These regulations are chronologically so close that they must be equivalent scales. Conditions evidently made explicit regulation of wage and diet necessary.

b. By the spring of 1631 (March 22)<sup>3</sup> wage control was given up for a time and freedom of rate was allowed. It was settled between master and workman.

c. There are no entries pointing to any policy of regulation again, until the fall of '33, when the same craftsmen are allowed two shillings a day, or fourteen pence and diet, tailors twelve pence and diet, their assistants eight pence and diet, and laborers eighteen pence, or eight pence and diet. Inferior workmen in each class have their wages settled by a

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1. Shurtleff Colonial Records of Massachusetts, Aug. 23, 1630.
  2. " " " " " " Sep. 28, 1630.
  3. " " " " " " Mar. 22, 1630.

constable and any two inhabitants appointed by him.<sup>4</sup> The lowered scale is immediately followed by the setting of 33-1/3 per cent as the highest profit which may be taken. Winthrop tells the demand of carpenters had been for three shillings, and the unskilled laborer for two shillings and sixpence, thereby, he claims, raising commodities to twice their value retail. A penalty of five shillings for breaking these<sup>rules,</sup> reduced from the ten shillings of two years before, is set, but repealed the next spring.<sup>5</sup>

Evidently wages have been rising since the first regulations until a shilling higher has become the usual pay. With the general attempt to adjust labor and trade profits the old scale is reestablished. The landed magistrates and company members have attempted to place the blame for the high prices upon the laborer, not seeming to realize that these men could not obtain more than their labor was worth, rather thinking wages rose by reason of greed and could be arbitrarily reduced.

By '34 and '35<sup>6</sup> the central control seems less stable as we find first, cases of contracts unfulfilled judged by three referees appointed by the town where the dispute is localized.<sup>7</sup>

In the fall of 1635,<sup>8</sup> though rather removed, comes the repeal of all wage scales with the appended warning that offense against the spirit of fairness is punishable as the great Quarter

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4. It is notable here that the diet allowed at eight pence in 1630 is allowed at ten pence now, while corn is far cheaper in '33, having come down from 10 or 11 shillings to 6 shillings. And Winthrop notes Nov. 5, '33, that corn had to be sold at 6 pence, (a high rate) to newcomers, to keep up Commonwealth because of the high wages and idleness. Vol. I, p. 138.

5. Mass. Col. Records, Apr. 1. 1634.

6. Records, date Apr. 1, 1634.

7. That there were disputes shows the tendency to discontent and the lack of ability of any centralized body to legislate scales of wages.

Court shall judge. By the spring of '36 it seemed necessary to set forth that "all men shall be rated in all work for their ability."<sup>9</sup>

e, f. However, the next fall ('36) Winthrop says in describing high prices that a carpenter got three shillings a day, and other workmen accordingly.<sup>10</sup> While from the "Records" about the same time we find that the order is made for each town to settle its wage schedules, and in case the schedules clash between two, to any hurtful degree, order shall be "set therein" by the Quarter Court at Boston, or by the Governor and Council.<sup>11</sup> From the time that these adjustments begin to become localized in the towns the old idea of government control is losing.

g. The workmen seemed able to keep their prices up. The three shilling wage was accepted. The European scale has failed to work and competition rather than regulation sets the rule of prices. But there is another essay to hold some power in the matter. For in the spring of 1638 we find a committee of twenty-nine members appointed by a Quarter Court to devise remedies for the excessive wages demanded by both skilled and unskilled labor.<sup>12</sup> What this committee ever did is not recorded but the appointment of it looks to a state of affairs very unsatisfactory. Tho the reasons and causes were too far reaching to legislate about. In the fall of the same year we find a recording that the penalty for a man's taking more wages than contracted for, between the individual employer and employee, may be taken from his earnings.<sup>13</sup> The men were breaking even what seemed high contracts for great<sup>er</sup> compensation, or extortion

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8. Records, date Sep. 3, 1635.

9. Records, date Mar. 3, 1636.

10. Winthrop's Journal, Vol. I, 246.

as it seemed to the ones who payed.<sup>14</sup>

h. by the early summer of 1641 there had grown such scarcity of wealth that the court adopts a curious rule.<sup>15</sup> First stating that "estates had grown so poor" they could scarcely support the labor required upon them, it sets no scheme but threatens punishment for offense against the straitness of the times. But the underlying cause was not the poverty of estates because of wages or prices, but rather the supply had passed the needs of home consumption and none was needed for newcomers. Their demand of supplies until they established homes and trade was a big market.

In the fall of '41 we find another place of settling wage disputes. It is first to be referred to two indifferent freemen, one chosen by the master, one by the employee, and if these cannot agree it is to be referred to the nearest constable or magistrate as a third arbitrator.<sup>16</sup>

1. By 1645<sup>17</sup> the situation had reached its greatest stringency. Winthrop says there were no servants coming out. Those they had demanded "unreasonable terms". The crisis was

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11. Col. Records Mass. Date Sep. 28, 1636.

12. " " " " Mar. 12, 1638.

13. " " " " Sep. 6, 1638.

14. A provision of Dec. 1, 1640 found in Massachusetts records is noteworthy here: of one Hefford being placed in the service of J. Johnson. (Not a servant newly arrived but one transferred). He is to receive five pounds a year for three years, whereas early in the colony's history there was no compensation except enough to keep the servant from being absolutely destitute at the termination of his service. This same man is to serve a year and a half more but the wages are to be set at the immediate time in that case, perhaps showing the hope of a lowered scale.

15. Mass. Col. Records date June 2, 1641.

16. November 13, 1644 the "Records" show "constantly" employed workmen to be freed from military service. This might be taken to show some considerable number of partially employed but it is more likely to show such a scarcity of craftsmen that even in this year of more considerable military preparations they were so constantly needed no excuse could take them from their trade.

acute for, when the European demand for American products was smallest, the fewest settlers were coming out to bring more currency, and no servants so that the few who were there could demand such wages as ate up their masters' property, and there was absolutely no money.<sup>18</sup>

In August we see provision made for saving the harvests of those absent on military duty, by the towns supplying hands.<sup>19</sup> Again in the fall of 1646 there is made a rule that craftsmen, not steadily employed, must aid their farmer neighbors (on request) or pay the fine of a days' wages to the poor.<sup>20</sup> This probably exemplifies two things, that wages were such that the partially employed craftsman was too well off to need to be a harvest hand, and that that sort of labor was woefully scarce.

j. In the fall of 1647 laborers were made tax liable according to their returns, as property holders according to their estates, thereby increasing of course the liability of the more highly paid worker.<sup>21</sup> Men rated at <sup>eighteen</sup> pence a day were taxed three shillings four pence per annum and up and down accordingly. It pointed toward fitting other prices <sup>those of</sup> labor, as it earned for itself what the situation allowed it. In the short space of twenty years the adjustment of labor prices had assumed a new aspect to these transplanted Englishmen. It was not a matter to be settled according to a scale conceived at one time, and made compulsory on a change situation, nor was it one set of regulations to fit all places but rather such fluctu-

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17. Winthrop Journal, Volume 11, p.

18. In this connection Winthrop reproduces the conversation between a master and a servant at Rowley. The master objecting to the price asked by the man said it would soon turn his estate over to the employee. The servant answered that when it was all gone the employer could serve the other until he should earn it back.

ation as labor and the market for products would demand with it was hoped a steady influence exerted by cautions of moderation, and judicious selection of place for settling disputes. The rise of about a shilling a day for skilled laborers also was accepted as the regular wage. The new country had made its influence felt.

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19. Mass. Col. Records date Nov. 4, 1646.
  20. " " " " " 4, 1646.
  21. " " " " " 11, 1647.

## Chapter II.

### Food.

II. 1. A. The general ways in which we find food prices controlled and legislated about are, in setting a maximum price in time of scarcity and declaring for freedom of price in time of plenty when the supply was in no danger. Further when corn was so cheap that it became a commodity which none would take except they had to sell, and could get naught else, a uniform value was set upon grains as a medium of exchange and for use in public payments.

B. a. To prevent waste of the home grown product we find scattered through the Records and incidentally mentioned in Winthrop regulations to keep swine from destroying standing grain, also provisions for fencing corn and repairing fences against swine and cattle, and adjustment of disputes over damage done in this way.<sup>22</sup> But these are to further the interests of the wealthier landholders rather than measures to advance the public weal, for they were the first rulings annulled when the democratic element controlled in 1634.

b. A further method of preventing inroads upon the supply was by control of grain transportation.<sup>23</sup> This was of rather later adoption and used in time of great scarcity only.

C. a. The history of grain prices in Massachusetts as shown by Winthrop's Journal and the Colonial Records is one of varied rates. The highest quoted for "corn", which in this case means wheat (as is usual in the English use of the period) is fourteen shillings per bushel while the lowest is three and a

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22. These items are of such slight import and are so general in either of the mentioned works that I give no direct references.

half shillings. There is found mention in Winthrop of corn in Virginia at 20 shillings per bushel,<sup>24</sup> tho this surely is panic price.<sup>25</sup> This use of "corn", from the locality of the export, surely means maize.

b. From 14 shillings in early 1631 we find a drop to 10 shillings by May<sup>26</sup> and a record of a plentiful crop the fall of 1631 so that we are ready for a price of ~~four~~ shillings ~~six~~ pence in April of 1632,<sup>27</sup> which was the price obtained for 2000 bushel of Virginia corn in April 1632.

c. That must have been because of an unusual supply, for, in April 1633 we find that corn having been at ~~six~~ shillings<sup>28</sup> is put at liberty of the contracting parties.<sup>29</sup> Again in the fall of 1633 we have chronicled a plentiful crop and "corn" allowed to pass on tax payment ("rates") for six shillings a bushel.<sup>30</sup>

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23. "Records" May 10, 1648.

Winthrop Journal, Vol. II, pp. 39 and 45, May 22, 1648.

24. Winthrop, Vol. II, p. 228. This being a report of Samuel Maverick might perhaps be discounted as a "saying" but as it was not so extraordinary a price and Maverick goes on to describe the food conditions during that famine of 1636 it seems a probable valuation. ~~three and a half shillings~~.

25. This range from \$3.36 down to \$.84 even the highest price does not seem unheard of but we find diet or living for a carpenter allowed at 8 pence and laborers at 6 pence, that is, from \$.12 to \$.16 we see that this price was enormous to the day. In fact the condition in early 1631 of wheat at \$3.36 a bushel and wages at \$.50 and \$.75 per day seems a queer schedule and yet when corn drops to the moderate price of 5 shillings Winthrop complains that there is no reduction of labor prices. Vol. I, p. 138.

26. Winthrop Vol. I, p. 67.

27. Winthrop, Vol. I, p. 87.

28. Mass. Colonial Records, Date April 1, 1633.

29. Winthrop, Vol. I, pages 135-138.

30. In the short excerpts from the Charleston Records found in Young's Chronicles we find on page 386 an account of the winter of 1632 and 1633 wherein "pinched" for "food" conditions are set forth but it is noted that they are relieved by a ship-load of corn from Virginia which sold at 10 shillings a bushel. This however is merely a note of a short or local scarcity. Though these various items taken together would point to the existence of varied prices even while the "Record" proofs tend toward a fixed price stated by central authority. It may be

But it is notable that Winthrop makes a point that this price of six shillings is very dear to newcomers but necessary because of the exorbitant wages demanded by laborers which would point to its being a higher rate than crop conditions would require.

In the spring, as seems to be becoming a custom, the restriction of price is taken off and the food is again at liberty of agreement.<sup>31</sup> In May, 1634 is given a rather vague idea, of what such provisions as were left from ships' cargoes, sold at. In this month some were disposed of, biscuit selling at ten shillings per hundredweight, while beef went at six pounds a hogshead.<sup>32</sup> In the late summer of 1634 corn was at four shillings and three shillings, and some even cheaper, according to Winthrop's statements.<sup>33</sup> Also in his account of expense and receipts we have itemized "corn" received at six shillings which would not sell for above four.<sup>34</sup> The grain supply had now become so large that there was no shortage, either for permanent needs of those established or in supplying those new arrivals who bought until their homes and occupations became fixed.

However, in the spring of 1635 there is, instead of the usual corn at liberty provision, one which makes the penalty for shipping corn out of the country eight shillings per bushel,<sup>35</sup> though there is no price set except a provision against raising Indian corn more than six pence. This scarcity intimated by such provisions, but not further described or accounted for, is in all probability, due to this being one of the years of such

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safe to conjecture that setting the price at liberty meant allowing it to drop. The regulation usually is of a spring count and not at a time when it is at all likely that there is danger of shortage.

31. Records, April 1, 1634.

32. Winthrop, Vol. I, p. 159. How large the hogshead of beef was is a question but Winthrop notes these as "easy rates."

33. Winthrop, Vol. I, p. 166.

heavy migration from England, thereby increasing the supply demanded. The rest of the year 1635 and early 1636 we have no indications of legislation. Winthrop gives scattered scraps that point toward scarcity.<sup>36</sup> There is mention of Bermuda potatoes being sold at a price comparatively small but this was evidently a curiosity Winthrop mentions rather than any influence on the market.<sup>37</sup> However the September "Court" provided that corn be sold at <sup>five</sup> shillings per bushel with bread at <sup>nine</sup> shillings and ten shillings per hundredweight.<sup>38</sup>

The next spring, that of 1637, we find the March Quarter Court providing that corn shall pass at <sup>five</sup> shillings the bushel in payment of "rates."<sup>39</sup> This order is revoked in August<sup>40</sup> and liberty of rate restored.<sup>41</sup>

The great cheap period began in the fall of 1637 when corn was put at three and a half shillings, in payment of "rates", and there is begun to be noted items of the court's allowing certain remittances to those who received payment of corn at higher values and are now great losers by the transactions.<sup>42</sup> The remittances from corn at five shillings the bushel are the only evidence we have, but conclusive, that corn has remained cheap all through 1638.<sup>43</sup> Through '39 there is no sign and evidently

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- 34. Mass. Records Sep. 4, 1634.
  - 35. " " Mar. 16, 1635.
  - 36. Winthrop, Vol. I, p. 216, Feb. 25, 1636.
  - 37. " " " " 217, Mar. 8, 1636.
  - 38. " " " " 245-6, Nov. 16, 1636.

It may be here remarked how this compares with the loaf "assizes" of 1646 given at the end of this study. There a penny a loaf when wheat is at 5 shillings weight 7-3/4 ounces. 2-2/5 pence here buys 16 ounces and the penny buys 6-2/3 ounces, at 10 shillings a hundredweight or 7-11/27 ounces at 9 shillings. This would indicate a higher price than the later one.

- 39. Mass. Colonial Records, Mar. 9, 1637.
- 40. " " " " Aug. 1, 1637.

the food problem was not pressing itself much upon public notice.<sup>44</sup>  
The crops met all the needs once more, with the resulting drop of prices.

In the spring of 1640 the "rate" prices for grain quoted by Winthrop are ~~six~~ shillings for wheat, five shillings for rye, and four for Indian corn. This is a decided rise.<sup>45</sup> In this connection Winthrop notes stores of provisions coming both from England and Ireland but few people and those with little money so that coin was entirely "drained from" them, and these corn rates were for legal tender.

In the fall of 1640,<sup>46</sup> evidently foreseeing the harvests results, there are given rates for home grown food products. Summer wheat and peas at ~~six~~ shillings, barley and rye at ~~five~~ shillings, Indian corn at ~~four~~ shillings, while hemp and flax bought at ~~two~~ shillings. This corresponded with spring values for the same year. In this same fall Winthrop testifies to the absolutely dire want of money. In November, he says, merchants would only sell for money (cash) and men failing to pay their debts, though they had enough foodstuffs to live on, prices fell

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41. Winthrop chronicles in August of 1637 that plenty of mackerel is to be had at 3.12 pounds per hogshead. This may be set over against cheap beef at 6 pounds per hogshead--probably the same measure and a familiar one to the colonials.

42. Mass. Colonial Records for dates November 2, 1637 and November 20, 1637.

43. Mass. Colonial Records for September 6, 1638.

44. Letter of Winthrop to Ezekial Rogers of Rowley Life and Letters, Vol. II, page 420. Winthrop tells of his troubles where his own supply of corn is sold for 12 pence or at two shillings under the market value, showing the rates excessively cheap.

45. Winthrop's Journal, Vol. II, page 8.

46. Mass. Colonial Records, date Oct. 7, 1640.

47. This remark of October 1640 is well to compare with what he has to say in the grain famine of the spring of 1643 when ~~he~~ the almost lauds the agriculturerevenge on those who scorned corn in trade. See account of times and conditions, Winthrop, Volume II, p. 37.

enormously. In the spring of '41 he says the "expectation of a new world" at home, after the overthrow of Stafford and Laud, was keeping almost all men in England. Further that foreign commodities grew scarce and "our own of no price." Corn would buy nothing. Prices in money had fallen off three-fourths because the very small amounts of the precious medium would buy four times what it had three years before.

The court placed corn at the "wonted price" and payable for all debts. That this had to be made an order, points to the reluctance with which "corn" was received. The "wonted price", probably six shillings for wheat and so on down, was fixing a rate lower than which it ought not to pass.

In the fall of 1641,<sup>48</sup> accompanying liberty in price for all sorts of corn, goes a provision prohibiting the use of wheat except for ships' biscuit and counseling that this single medium of exchange to be husbanded to trade in England for needed foreign commodities. And again the pitiful tale of a remittance to one Cooke of <sup>twelve</sup> pence per bushel on some corn (probably Indian) received at <sup>four</sup> shillings and now worth but <sup>three</sup> shillings. Winthrop observes this summer a cold and wet one<sup>50</sup> with spring wheat spoiled early and Indian corn later, but it seems not to have affected the price very much.<sup>51</sup>

d. In the fall of 1642 good harvest-time weather after a rather "unseasonable" summer is taken note of by Winthrop and a<sup>52</sup>

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48. Mass. Colonial Records, Oct. 7, 1641.

49. It seems that this prohibition of use of wheat was because of no scarcity but only it was the most desired on trade with Europe.

50. Winthrop, Vol. II, p. 61.

51. Winthrop, Vol. II, p. 75. May 1642 is found an account of the ship Eleanor from London being cheaply stocked so much so that it attracted the attention of the master.

52. Winthrop, Vol. II, p. 102.

few days later the court lays down the corn prices for the ninth month (November) tax: namely wheat and barley at ~~four~~ shillings, rye and peas at ~~the~~ shillings ~~four~~ pence, Indian corn at ~~two~~ shillings six pence. While these prices are cheap the later account from the same source of the terrific scarcity of the spring is remarkable. The account says it was worth, for cattle, <sup>twelve</sup> ~~12~~ pence more in the bushel than its value in money.<sup>53</sup> And Winthrop here takes occasion to comment on the former aversity to corn payments and the justness of the scarcity as a providential punishment. The scarcity was of short duration for in the late fall we hear of corn laden ships to foreign ports <sup>57</sup> and another corn loss remittance case.<sup>55</sup>

e. In November of 1646 the "Records" state corn to be as cheap as might be without injury to the country and then set the price in payment of debts at <sup>three</sup> ~~2~~ shillings <sup>eight</sup> ~~7~~ pence a bushel for wheat.<sup>56</sup> In the fall of 1647<sup>57</sup> for the first time the order is passed that from year to year corn shall be in prices as the court shall decree. While the court most years has set the price, it is not till now that it seems conscious of its place in the matter. The prices set for this season on wheat, ~~four and one half~~ shillings; rye and peas, ~~three and one half~~ shillings; barley, <sup>four</sup> ~~3~~ shillings, and Indian corn <sup>three</sup> ~~2~~ shillings.

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53. Winthrop, Vol. II, p. 113.

54. Winthrop, Vol. II, p. 182. The Hopewell must have put out after the harvest of '43.

55. Records Mass. Colonial, date October 17, 1643. This remittance may, however, not be adjudged upon a recent transaction though the scarcity probably would have adjusted the difference if it had not been recent.

56. This under date of Nov. 4, 1646. This was at the time of the loaf "assizes" later embodied in the work.

57. Records, Nov. 11, 1647.

f. May 10, 1648 the "Records" show the first use of a new method of providing for emergencies in the food supply. A "Corn Survey" is ordered. It is discovered that the supply will not more than scantily provide through the season, so transporting is forbidden and a fine of <sup>twenty</sup> 20 shillings set upon every offense, <sup>59</sup> one-half to go to the state and one-half to the informer. The available grain is to be used for home consumption, for strangers coming in, and for victualling ships. <sup>59</sup> The scarcity was due to large exporting to West Indies and Portugal as well as other places. The prohibition <sup>was</sup> not to apply to imported grain or to that brought in from other colonies and not unloaded, or to that sold in port. <sup>60</sup> As to the result, he says grain did not rise over <sup>twelve</sup> 12 pence per bushel and the scarcity was not much felt. This is borne out by the October "rate" prices: wheat and barley 5 shillings, rye and peas 4 shillings and Indian corn <sup>three</sup> 3 shillings. <sup>61</sup> These same but with single rise of ~~5~~ <sup>62</sup> 6 pence on barley are set as legal in 1649.

That the comfortable prices were due to the foresight of the survey is very probable and that the prohibition of export was not made needlessly <sup>must</sup> we admit, when we remember that it was at this time the most valuable commodity which the company had at its disposal that would obtain money or foreign commodities. This situation must have been precarious but wisely averted.

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58. Records, May 10, 1648.

59. Winthrop's Journal, Vol. II, page 395.

60. This was not to interfere with contracts already made.

61. Records, Oct. 18, 1648.

62. Records, Oct. 17, 1649.

D. Besides control of scales of prices according to the condition of supply there was legislation aimed at the control of profit rates in general: both of importing merchants and of shopkeepers. also control of milled products. The legislators thus appear to have had not only regulation of values in general but also regulation of the greed of retailers.

a. The profit phase early presented itself, that is, comparatively speaking. For by the fall of 1633 we find November 8th set aside as a special day for the consideration of how such gains may be controlled. This is the day when the relation of labor and food prices and therefore their relation to profit makes it necessary to lower the wages and profits, allowing staple foods to adjust themselves.<sup>63</sup> Winthrop says commodities had grown to twice their value. So wages were lowered a shilling a day generally and a maximum profitallowable was fixed at <sup>four</sup> pence in the shilling higher than the market value in England.<sup>64</sup>

This (33-1/3 per cent) profit was for all articles except those as oil, cheese and wine which, because of the hazard of their bringing, must demand higher gains and such goods as

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63. The situation is this: from the "Records" we gather that the "certainty of wages" fostered idleness and higher prices--November 8, 1633. From Winthrop we have the actual demands: carpenters, 3 shillings, laborers, 2 shillings 6 pence, etc.

64. Mass. Colonial Records, Nov. 8, 1633.  
Winthrop's Journal, Vol. I, page 138.  
That Winthrop's attitude is the usual one of the producers should not pass unnoticed. He lays the initial impulse in the overvaluation upon the workman who asked too much for his hire. This is apt, however, to be a not unbiased aspect though he states facts as to the surplus these men got over living expenses, which pretty well buttresses his view.

were stored in small space would naturally bring less; but this was left to discretion. A penalty of forfeiture of value of article sold was affixed! This law was repealed in September of 1635 together with all wage regulations.<sup>65</sup> However a spirit of fairness was counselled and offense against the spirit of reasonable moderation in which this repeal was made was punishable as the General Court should decide.<sup>66</sup>

aa. A method of revenue increase which would naturally affect food prices was the impost law of December 1636<sup>67</sup> which provided that there be an impost of ~~one~~<sup>sixth</sup> the value assessed to retail dealers, and ~~one~~<sup>third</sup> to consumers on all imported commodities. These to be taken in charge by an officer appointed by the Governor and Council. This is classified as not extending to newcomers bringing in their household goods or provisions and repealed on sugar, fruit and spices in about a year.<sup>68</sup>

bb. In the fall of 1639<sup>69</sup> occurred a rather remarkable case of a prosecution for offense against the spirit of the 1633 ~~one~~<sup>third</sup> profit regulations. It is the case of Capt. Robert Keayne who Winthrop explains is taking 50 and 75 per cent profits. It is his conviction that while there was no law in force more moderation should have been exercised in that very consequence.<sup>70</sup> Keayne, it should be noticed, was not the only offender in this wise, but is was a rather general taking advantage of

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65. Records Mass. Colonial Sep. 3, 1635 date.

66. Winthrop's wording for the reason for repeal as found in the Keayne case affair is that they "were found neither safe nor equal." Vol. I, page 380.

67. Records Mass. Colonial, date Dec. 13, 1636.

68. " " " " Nov. 15, 1637.

69. Winthrop Journal, Vol. I, pp. 377-382.

70. Winthrop Journal, Vol. I, p. 378.

tolerance of high prices. There was great commotion over the punishment to be meted out to such an offense and offender. Biblical precedent offered nothing but one and one-half, or double restitution. There were two punishments to be determined, legal and ecclesiastical. For the legal, the deputies determinedly made it 200 pounds, of which 100 pounds was to be paid immediately and the rest left over to another court. As a matter of fact 60 pounds was paid and the rest rebated. The church taking up the case, Cotton took occasion to preach upon true and false principles of trade, it having been determined that Keayne's offense was in point of judgment rather than conscious, that he had erred through false principles. He swayed those for an excommunication to be content with only an admonition. The gist the Puritan divines "true" economic philosophy was that prices can only be raised when the hand of God is on the stuff and not on the individual; namely in time of scarcity. In all other cases a drop of prices it is the man's "cross" who loses, and he must bear it. As rules of trade these seem rather unique but thoroughly characteristic of Massachusetts theocracy.

b. Communal buying too was attempted at this period. In the spring of 1634<sup>71</sup> it was allowed by a court order, that each town should have a cargo buyer who might dispose of the goods of any ship to the colony at  $\frac{5}{100}$  per cent profit to himself over the prices payed to the importer. The next January Mr, Hugh Peter, a Boston clergyman and busy spirit in general, tried to raise a public stock to be used in setting up a common storehouse of fisherman's provisions, in order to do away with the

excessive profits made by merchants and seamen on selling to individuals.<sup>72</sup> This, while not exactly the prototype of the company buying of England in this period, ~~is~~ has a similar bent.

c. There are notes too of inventories of ship cargoes to determine what the maximum selling price might be. This of course meant a control of excessive prices on imported goods.<sup>73</sup> Again, we have miscellaneous profits as those which Winthrop notes on Bermuda potatoes being bought at ~~two~~ shillings ~~and~~ six pence and sold at ~~two~~ pence per pound, a profit of 69 per cent.<sup>74</sup>

d. Another order which must of course be considered an influence on food price is the one which makes the regular price for milling grain not more than one-sixteenth of its value.<sup>75</sup>

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71. Mass. Colonial Records, date June 25, 1634.

72. Winthrop's Journal, Vol. I, page 210. The result of this attempt was not to be found but as Mr. Peter had already raised one-half of the sum by American subscription and hoped to have the rest "out of England", it is reasonable to suppose that this was an accomplishment and not merely an attempt.

73. Records, Mass. Col., Nov. 13, 1644.

May 14, 1645.

74. Winthrop's Journal, Vol. I, page 217.

Of rates on wines and liquors which were not foods in any exact sense and whose prices were regulated rather more to influence revenue to state than consumers' wants we find regulations of two sorts-- one (May 14, 1645, Massachusetts Colonial Record) providing a tax of one-twenty-fourth the value to be payed by the importer, of course, and in direct tax, and again one-twentieth of his value by the retailers. But in the fall of the same year the plan was changed and 10 shillings per butt on sack with a scale on wine in proportion of 2-1/2 shillings per pipe on French wines was adopted as the scheme. These of course are not nearly all of the regulations upon wines which went into the most minute details but they represented the two methods. The various graduation and scales take upon large spaces, especially in the later forties. Beer, which, because of the habits of nourishment and the quality of food, was almost a necessity, was provided to be sold at a penny a quart and fines for greater charge are frequent.

75. Mass. Colonial Records, Mar. 3, 1636.

76. " " " " May 26, 1647.

77. These regulations found in the Massachusetts Colonial Records, May 22, 1639.

A. A number of what might be termed food price legislative acts are scattered through the two principal sources for the period. True weights and measures are to be provided, inspected in each town and those which have met the requirements stamped by a public stamp.<sup>76</sup>

B. Fish in many places are given large importance in the country's diet and regulations to cheapen and make more plentiful fresh supply are such as giving large grants of free land for cattle and corn of fishermen, also of boats and accoutrements free from taxation for a number of years to start the craft. Also there are orders that fish may not be used as fertilizers except offal. Further there are exceptions from service in other trades of those men who during the season would engage in fishing.<sup>77</sup>

C. Much space in the records is given to the licensing of cook-shops and houses of entertainment and provision that eating-houses shall serve as patrons desire, and not set meals evidently somewhat costly and at a given price, is made a law.<sup>78</sup>

a. For example, buns and cakes may be used only at weddings and burial feasts.<sup>79</sup> Again that bread may not be finer than that which would sell at <sup>twelve</sup> pence for a ~~12~~ ounce loaf.<sup>80</sup>

b. The following table is found in the Records November 4, 1646 and must be observed at the price of forfeiture of all non-standard loaves. The penny loaf must be at the below grain rate.

Wheat Price, Shillings	White size	Wheaten size	Household size
3	11 1/4	17 1/4	23
3 1/2	10 1/4	15 1/4	20 1/2
4	9 1/4	14	18 1/2
4 1/2	8 1/4	11 3/4	16 1/2
5	7 3/4	11 1/2	15 1/2
5 1/2	7	10 1/2	14
6	6	10	13
6 1/2	6	9 1/2	12 1/2

E. Salt manufacture from salt water and its fostering may be well considered a part of food arrangements. Convenient lands are granted and tenants urged to freely give them up to such a public enterprise.<sup>81</sup> And it is provided that each town shall shall pay one bushel of good wheat as public "rate" for every bushel of good white salt delivered to it, the amount of salt delivered to be determined every two months and the general assessment made on the town. The salt to be sold at the rate of ~~tw~~ shillings a bushel, allowing two bushels to a family.<sup>82</sup>

3. The problem before the legislators upon food as that upon wages changes entirely during this period. The problem of making the supply cover the demands upon it at a reasonable rate, was the first solution to be made, while the one from 1640 on became how to use this same crop to provide needed foreign commodities when money of any sort had been completely drained from the land and the market was the poorest. The method in the first instance, control of prices to keep them

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- 78. Mass. Colonial Records Nov. 20, 1637.
  - 79. Mass. Colonial Records Nov. 20, 1637.
  - 80. Mass. Colonial Records May 13, 1640.
  - 81. Mass. Colonial Records May 10, 1648.
  - 82. Mass. Colonial Records Mar. 16, 1648.

down in times of stringency, and freedom in times when there was no shortage in near prospect, succeeded probably as well as any in such a new colony. The second attempt of keeping prices as high and regular as possible, as legal tender, was a hard task and the results were indeterminate. By high we mean as valuable as there was any hope of its passing. In '46, the middle of this period, Winthrop says "corn was as low as was consistent with sustaining the reputation of the colony." It should be borne in mind, in all cases, Winthrop was a grain raiser. Five shillings a bushel was the average price for both these periods though six shillings was the most commonly quoted price. Though no price is regular from the fact that the constant remittances made by the court on debts paid in grain show how the constantly changing rate was awkward and unsatisfactory.

The only period of long or abnormal stringency was the shortage of 1643, but this was not an unsurmountable difficulty. It would seem that there never had been a great deal of anxiety about the supply, or, earlier than '48, they would have used the familiar survey system. Of course in the earlier years an idea of the situation could be had without any formal survey. The colony was so small any extended inquiry was not needed. The situation was apparent.

The control of profits by actual restriction as to rate we see a failure. Importation and retailing were not governed by sufficiently stable conditions. Such regulation was "neither safe nor equal" but a general sentiment for about one-third of the cost as profit was considered "moderate", or at least it was a matter of complaint that Captain Keayne took

six pence in the shilling and above. Communal buying in connection with profits was only used in an isolated incident of a special branch of stores (fishing stocks) so it could hardly be considered as a real attempt. In fact but for prohibitive control in the matter of liquors profits were pretty much a matter of individual arrangement.

The prescribing of kinds of bread and prices of meals was rather legislation against extravagance and vanity rather than intended to influence food prices. But the sizes of loaves together with inspection of weights and measures were protective to the consumers.

The chief sources from which the material of this work is drawn are two: Winthrop's Journal known under the Title of History of New England and the Massachusetts Bay Colonial Records.

The Journal is actually a diary of those things the first government of Mass. Bay jotted down as worthy of notice. Of course they are unofficial records except that the place and standing of the author, in the colony, make them the valuable opinions, on all the more important concerns, of the man in the best position and eminently fitted, to see the course and trend of events as well as familiar with the narrative. The entries are by no means complete for each day or month and not free from Puritan and personal bias but whenever these seemed to influence the phase in which this effort was concerned I have attempted to make allowance for such tendency. But there has been but slight occasions only such as the producer attempting to fasten high prices on the prior demands of the workmen.

The Journal is edited in a two volume form by James Savage. The one the pages are cited from is the second edition by that author by Little, Brown and Company of Boston in 1853. The index to this edition however is numbered to the pages of the first which are found as starred numbers in the margins.

The Massachusetts Records are the proceedings of the General Courts and Quarter Courts for that colony but they are by no means complete or systematic records. And as such records naturally would be an very brief often mere sentences of results,

legislative or Judicial . It is edited by Shurtleff and I have referred to dates rather than pages as the dating scheme is worked out on the present everyday scheme and can be conveniently used. The Shurtleff editions is from the Press of William White, Boston, Mass. 1853. The first two volumes cover the period.

From Young's Chronicles of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay a collection of contemporaneous manuscripts by Alexander Young also from Little, Brown and Company, Boston, Mass. 1846. In this collection the only material of reference was in the XIX Document a fragment of early Charleston record pages 369 to 389, but this only for fragmentary use.

In Winthrops letters we find references to the food question and its puzzles in many places. These have only been used in indirect note reference and were not directly related to any actual legislation on food or prices of labor. This too is a Little, Brown and Company Publication Boston 1869 and edited by Robert C. Winthrop.

The Hubbard narrative copies only Winthrops observations and is of no direct value.