

TOP STORIES

Gardiner Expressway reconstruction results in sleepless nights for many downtown residents

DECEMBER 30



OPINION

## The climate crisis is like a world war. So let's talk about rationing

It's time for mandatory cutbacks on the kinds of consumption that threaten all of us

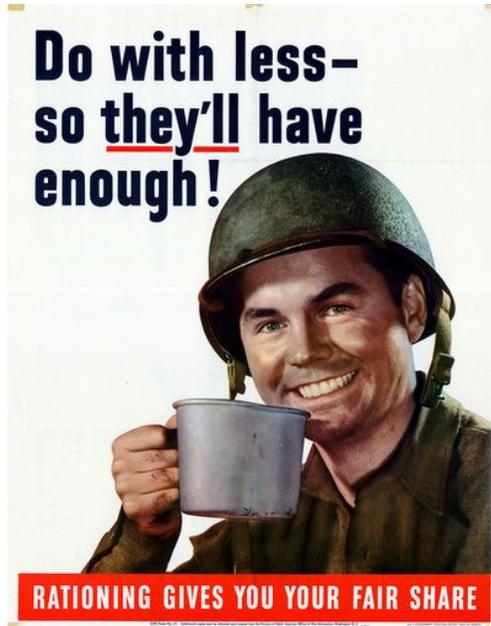
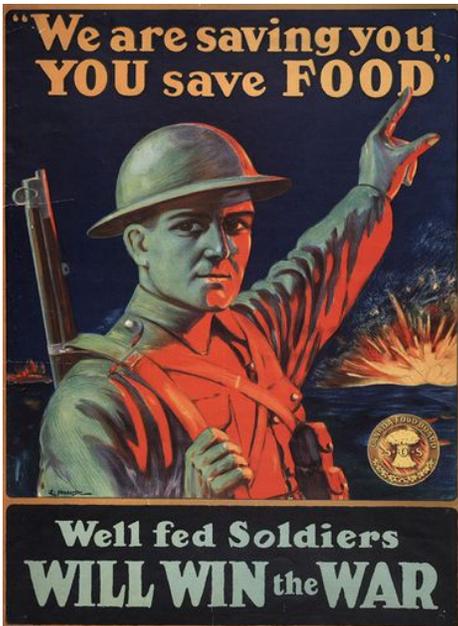
ELEANOR BOYLE

SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

PUBLISHED DECEMBER 14, 2019

UPDATED DECEMBER 21, 2019

850 COMMENTS SHARE



Appeals for rationing through the ages: A Canadian Food Board poster from the First World War, a U.S. military poster from the Second World War, and a protest sign at a Madrid climate demonstration in 2019 that reads 'meat is the No. 1 cause of climate change.'

TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARY; U.S. OFFICE OF WAR INFORMATION; AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Eleanor Boyle is a Vancouver-based writer. She is the author of High Steaks: Why and How to Eat Less Meat and the forthcoming book Mobilize Food! Wartime Inspiration for

Environmental Victory Today.

It's too bad meat is so tasty, driving so convenient and airline travel so desirable. Because those all create large amounts of greenhouse gases and worsen the climate crisis. We know it, and some of us feel guilty getting on a plane, hopping in the car or eating burgers. But how are we to cut back when we're not sure what level of a high-emission behaviour is sustainable – and when everyone else is doing it?

Some environmental activists and leaders suggest we should practise moderation, take the bus, eat veggie burgers. But voluntary measures just can't deliver when the problem is this big and time is so short. That's why it may be time for mandatory cutbacks on the kinds of consumption that threaten all of us.

It may be time for rationing.

**'We would all be starving in the dark.' Is the climate crisis like a world war? Readers debate the merits of carbon rationing**





At a Canadian butcher's shop in the 1940s, a patron looks at a meat chart to see how much the ration coupons in her hand will get her.

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA VIA THE CANADIAN PRESS

### **RATIONING SOUNDS AWFUL**

I know, I know, it sounds awful – even shocking given our expectations. Rationing is for populations at war. But given the terrible consequences of climate change, we are in a war to save ourselves.

“The climate crisis is our third world war,” writes Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz. “It needs a bold response.”

According to writer and activist Bill McKibben, “it’s not that global warming is *like* a world war. It is a world war. And we are losing.”

The dramatic Green New Deal proposed by some Americans calls for a wartime-like retooling of our economies and our lives. We need to immediately put the brakes on consumption, with everyone sharing the burden. This is not to lay the climate crisis or its entire solution at the feet of you and me or absolve governments of action. But every person needs to play a role.

Rationing isn’t actually all that radical or unusual. Consumer and social goods are limited and need to be deliberately allocated, ecologist Stan Cox says in *Any Way You Slice It: The Past, Present, and Future of Rationing*. During summer water shortages, we’re told to hold off on dousing the flowers every day. Before heading into backcountry areas, you’ll probably need a recreation permit that limits the number of visitors to sensitive places. To fish, you need a licence setting a quota on how many you can catch. Health-care professionals decide which patients get which treatments and how quickly – especially if there are wait times for surgery or a shortage of drugs – even in emergency-room triage, which sorts patients by severity. It’s more obvious for cars and clothes: Human wants are greater than the goods available.



Similarly, owners of vehicles eligible for a "Special" category, who can prove their need, will be granted an extra recreational allowance, fixed in advance for the year ending March 31, 1945. In determining the extra allowance—which will be measured in individual needs—the previous category and mileage of the car will not necessarily be an important consideration. The extra recreational coupons will again be issued in books.

each coupon. These must be pasted also together on its windshield a 1944-45 sticker, showing the category of the coupon book submitted at the time of the purchase. If the owner of a motor vehicle sells, transfers or disposes of it in any way, it is his obligation to see that the gasoline licence and ration coupons for that vehicle are returned immediately to the nearest Regional Oil Control Office.

**PROCEDURE TO BE FOLLOWED BY APPLICANTS**

**For Category "AA" or "Motorcycle" Category**

- 1 Secure Category "AA" application form at nearest Post Office.
- 2 Obtain 1944 motor vehicle permit card/for license plates.
- 3 Submit properly completed application form, together with motor vehicle permit and registration fee of \$1.00 on issue of motor vehicle license.
- 4 From the issue you will receive your Category "AA" or "Motorcycle" ration book, and the return of your motor vehicle permit stamped to show that a ration book has been issued.
- 5 Affix "AA" sticker to car windshield.
- 6 Write in ink on each coupon the license plate number of the motor vehicle.

**For "Special" Category**

- 1 Secure application form for both Category "AA" and "Special" category from nearest Post Office.
- 2 Obtain Category "AA" ration book and affix "AA" sticker to windshield.
- 3 After it is properly and correctly completed, mail special category application form to the nearest Regional Oil Control Office, along with motor vehicle permit.
- 4 If you are granted a special category, form to the first page of "Special" ration book, where the number of units you will be allowed for the year ending March 31, 1945, will be noted. On the back of this allowance, place your car's year's driving.
- 5 Affix "Special" category sticker to windshield.
- 6 Write in ink on each coupon the license plate number of the motor vehicle.

(Only registered owners of passenger-type motor vehicles—other than commercial motorcycles, buses, taxicabs, and drive-yourself cars—who must of necessity use their cars in essential business, are eligible to apply for a "Special" category).

**GUARD YOUR RATION BOOK**

When you receive your 1944-45 gasoline ration book, guard it carefully. Do not leave it in your car. If, because of your negligence, it is lost or stolen, it may not be replaced.



**DEPARTMENT OF MUNITIONS AND SUPPLY**  
Honnorable C. D. HOWE, Minister

**CANADA IS SHORT OF GASOLINE - USE YOUR COUPONS SPARINGLY**

In this regard, the policy of the Oil Controller is as follows:

- If, through negligence, you lose your gasoline ration book before October 1, 1943, you may be allowed no more, and perhaps less, than half the coupons to which you would be entitled if you were making an original application.
- If through negligence, you lose your ration book on or after October 1, 1943, you may be allowed no more, and perhaps less, than 25 per cent of the coupons to which you would be entitled if you were making an original application.

The new gasoline rationing system, effective on April 1, will be strictly enforced. Under its provisions, the motorist, as well as the service station attendant, is held responsible if any infractions occur. It is contrary to the orders of the Oil Controller:

- 1 To purchase gasoline with 1942-1943 coupons.
- 2 To purchase gasoline unless you have the correct category sticker affixed to your windshield.
- 3 To detach coupons from your own book. (The removal of the coupons is the duty of the attendant.)
- 4 To have in your possession a gasoline ration coupon not attached to, and forming a part of, a gasoline ration book.
- 5 To have in your possession a gasoline ration book other than the book issued in respect of a vehicle you own, or in respect of a vehicle driven by you with the full consent of the real owner.
- 6 To alter, deface, obliterate, or mutilate any gasoline ration book or coupon.

If you sell your motor vehicle, remember that before making delivery you must remove the windshield sticker or stickers. Remember also that after the sale is completed, you must mail to the nearest Regional Oil Control Office in your province the gasoline ration book or books issued for the vehicle.




**THE DEPARTMENT OF MUNITIONS AND SUPPLY**  
Honnorable C. D. HOWE, Minister

**CANADA IS SHORT OF GASOLINE - USE YOUR COUPONS SPARINGLY**

Your gasoline ration coupons are not valid until your motor vehicle licence number has been written in ink on each and every coupon. This must be done immediately upon receipt of the book. This is your protection against theft, forgery or misuse of your gasoline ration coupons.

The 1944-45 "AA" sticker must be affixed to your windshield immediately upon receipt of your gasoline ration book. If you have a special allowance, you must also affix your special category windshield sticker at once, regardless of whether you are using the special ration book to purchase gasoline.

Please remove old windshield stickers.

**WRITE YOUR CORRECT LICENCE NUMBER  
IN INK ON EVERY COUPON TODAY**



**CANADA IS SHORT OF GASOLINE - USE YOUR COUPONS SPARINGLY**

Gasoline coupons became a precious commodity once they were introduced. Government ads warned Canadians to guard the books closely, and to diligently fill out the paperwork to prevent counterfeiting.

GLOBE AND MAIL ARCHIVES

**'FAIR SHARES FOR ALL'**

Fairness is what rationing is all about. That's why so many citizens approved of it during the Second World War. Polls in Canada in 1945 showed that more than 90 per cent of adults felt that rationing had done a good or fair job during the conflict in distributing food equitably, Ian Mosby writes in his 2014 book, *Food Will Win the War*. Even in Britain, where wartime rationing was more extensive, opinion polls showed that most citizens agreed with government policies aiming to ensure "Fair Shares for All."

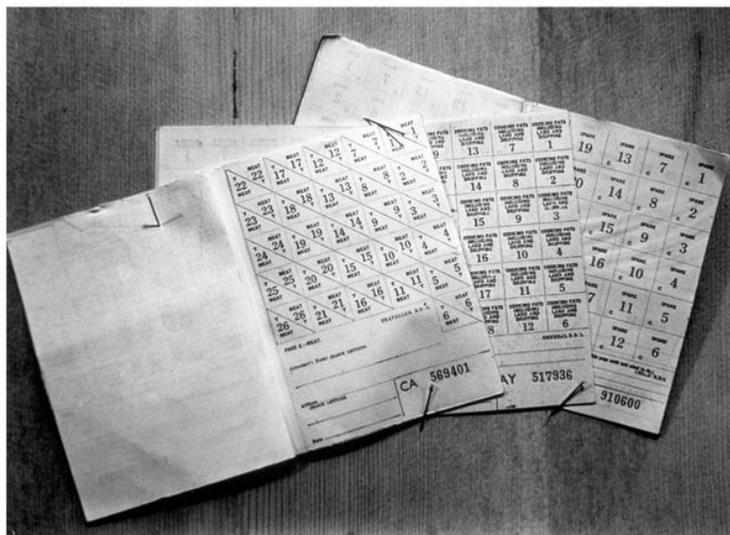
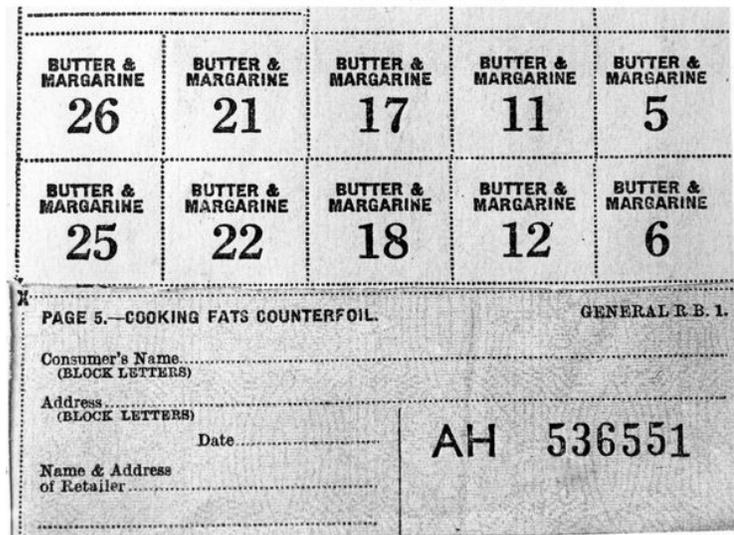
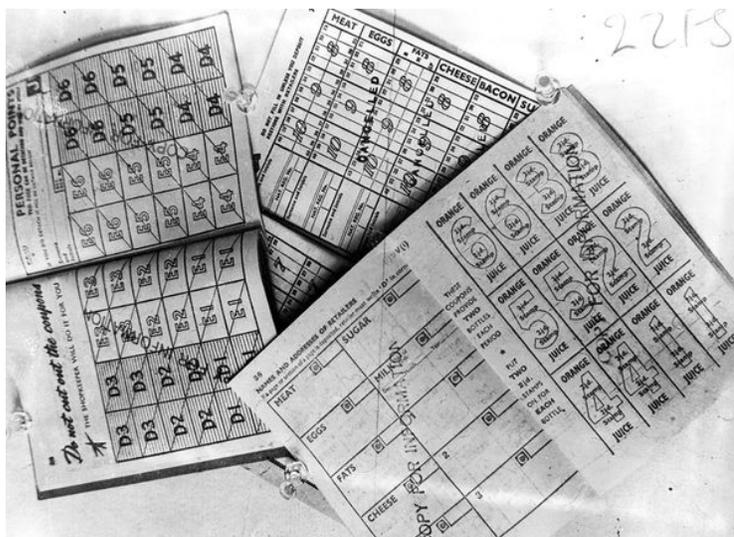
At the start, people weren't crazy about the limitations, but they soon perceived that the system guaranteed everyone (even low-income citizens who had been undernourished) adequate supplies of eggs, sugar, butter, meat and sweets, as well as clothing and fuel. Rationing becomes appealing when consumers come to see the positives as well. The glass may be half-empty but it's also half-full.

Wartime food programs have intrigued me for a decade.

I'd been writing about how we can eat more sustainably by lowering our meat and dairy intake. Then, my husband and I were in London and discovered the Imperial War Museum and its exhibit The Ministry of Food. There we learned of Britain's food-system overhaul in the 1930s and forties to keep its citizens fed through chaotic times. Because war can wreck normal infrastructures, including those for food production and distribution, the British government assessed the country's food network, refocused agriculture toward domestic needs and set clear objectives for every citizen to grow locally, minimize food waste and abide by the ration so everyone would have enough.

If you're thinking that slice of history isn't relevant because people don't want government to be involved in food, it's too late. Elected officials and their administrations already oversee agriculture, food safety, dietary guidelines and more. Besides, we in Canada want the government to act in key sectors such as transportation, education and health.

Given that food is even more essential than those, because we need to eat to survive, and given that climate change is threatening global food production, we need public leadership. We need visionaries with the foresight of British wartime leader Winston Churchill to inform and inspire us and require that we act.



Various examples of the ration books issued by the British government in the 1940s. Like Canada's books, the British ones had a tiered system for different grades of food. Over time, authorities combined the coupon books for different products, including clothing, for convenient use.

HULTON ARCHIVE, KEYSTONE/GETTY IMAGES

### DEMAND MANAGEMENT HAS BEEN ON THE TABLE

Intervening in the market to dampen consumer demand and emissions has been proposed before. In B.C. and elsewhere, we have carbon taxes on fossil fuels. Internationally, some jurisdictions have imposed taxes on meat.

As for more ambitious programs, in 2006 British Environment Minister David Miliband recommended widespread rationing to limit personal carbon emissions. Officials explored the possibility but felt citizens would never agree to it. Here and there leaders have considered personal carbon allowances, tradeable energy quotas and carbon entitlements. In the early 2000s, British activists formed Carbon Rationing Action Groups, which helped individuals lower their footprints but were hard to administer without legal frameworks. The ideas were ahead of their time.

Now, however, there's awareness and a hunger for action. A recent Canadian poll shows that three-quarters of respondents are "worried" about climate change and 42 per cent believe it is now "an emergency." That research from Abacus Data was commissioned by policy analyst Seth Klein for his forthcoming book on mobilizing Canada for the climate crisis. In the United States, polls say it's a top issue and that citizens want the government to act. In Britain more than a decade ago, commentator George Monbiot called for personal carbon rationing. More recently, Guardian writer Sonia Sodha confessed that she talks a good environmental game but burns a lot of fossil fuels. She suggests legal limits be implemented on her and the rest of us. We're not bad people, she says. Just human.





In 1941, these British children are making do with carrots on sticks instead of ice cream, which is not available due to rationing.

ASHWOOD/FOX PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES

### HOW WOULD RATIONING WORK?

There are numerous possible models. Carbon could be a kind of currency that we spend (along with regular money) when purchasing high-emission goods or services. Each of us could receive an allocation of carbon points to spend in a month or year. These could be stored on a smart bank card. When paying for gasoline or airline tickets or certain foods (or, more broadly, energy use), the card would electronically deduct money plus appropriate numbers of carbon points. If we used our entire allocation, we might be able to purchase more – there are pros and cons to tradeability – from individuals who don't need them, rewarding them financially for their low-carbon lives. Prices of goods such as meat would not necessarily rise. Rather, everyone would only be allowed to purchase certain amounts.

Would rationing be complicated to design and implement? Sure, but it's doable. Problems would include accommodating variations either regional (more meat up north) or personal (people who need to drive for work). But these should be solvable in today's data world. Already government payments – say, for employment insurance – are calculated differently based on factors such as where you live and local employment levels. Allowing for complexity doesn't require an army of people with pencils and calculators, but rather good data sets and effective software programs.

Would there be abuses and a black market? Yes, because humans will always be crafty. But Britain demonstrated in wartime that if fair-share systems are transparent and perceived as equitable, abuses and black-market activity can be minimized.

**Where to Find It**

|                    |    |                 |    |
|--------------------|----|-----------------|----|
| Amusement .....    | 11 | Homemaker ..... | 11 |
| Birth, Death ..... | 24 | Radio .....     | 24 |
| Business .....     | 24 | Sports .....    | 24 |
| Editorial .....    | 24 | Went Aft .....  | 24 |
| Medical .....      | 24 | Women .....     | 24 |

# The Globe and Mail

Clear, Warm;  
Thunder Tonight  
Detailed Weather Report on Page 2.



## Canning Sugar Ration



# Boosted Three Pounds

## Europe Needs \$29 Billion, Diplomats Say

Washington, Aug. 27 (AP).—The United States State Department, concerned over reports that Europe may ask more than \$29-billion from the United States

## Boredom Menace To Britishers In Coming Winter

London, Aug. 27 (Reuters).—Hunger stared Britain in the face tonight. It wasn't the swollen hunger of malnutrition; it was the "hunger of boredom," the certainty of still another year piled on seven years of cumulative restrictions. It was the hunger of doing without the extras. It was facing endless more months of eating bread with little butter on it. It was the prospect of 21

## British Denied Petrol, Meat Ration Reduced

London, Aug. 27 (AP).—Britain's rationing during the darkest days of the war, sliced her scanty food ration thinner, banned pleasure motoring and outlawed foreign travel for most of her citizens today in a series of sweeping moves to keep

## Immediate Purchase Authorized

Ottawa, Aug. 27 (CP).—A three-pound boost in the individual canning sugar ration, lifting it to 13 pounds for this year, was announced tonight by the prices board. A board announcement, ascribing the increase to "remaining improvement in the prospects" for future sugar supplies, said three extra canning sugar coupons—Y-11, Y-12 and Y-13—were being distributed

Canada's Second World War rationing didn't end when the fighting stopped. The measures were eased, but still continued until 1947 so Canadian produce could be saved for export to Britain and other battle-scarred European nations. Here, a Globe and Mail front page from August, 1947, reports the loosening of Canadian canning-sugar rations and the tightening of British meat rations.

GLOBE AND MAIL ARCHIVES

### IT'S A HARD SELL

I realize this is a tough sell. Rationing sounds scary (maybe right-wing, maybe left-wing, but probably bad) and out of line with the freedoms we've come to expect. In our consumer culture, as Mr. Cox tells it, suggesting rationing is like shouting an obscenity in church. Besides, scarcities aren't always visible. For meat, there's no actual shortage of chicken, pork or beef – just scarcities of the land, fresh water and greenhouse gas capacity needed to sustainably produce them.

Nor would this be easy. Rationing would change our lives and involve a word I've been trying to avoid: sacrifice. But what are we to do? Science shows we have barely 10 years to avoid disaster, suggesting we shouldn't count entirely on technological innovation or self-moderation. Meanwhile, we're all in a lifeboat with just enough space for each of us. Should we really be complaining about not getting first-class seats if doing so would bump others? That's what we're doing when we consume too much of the stuff that fuels climate change.

It wouldn't work without political will. Environmental scholar Maurie Cohen analyzed wartime rationing and concluded it might be effective today if consumers were given specific objectives; if legislation was flexible to allow for surprises and change; and if political leaders were genuinely committed.

I'm not alone in my uncertainty about eating animal-source foods and getting on planes. I'd like to know how much driving and home energy use are justified. Based on science, a rationing system would remove the guesswork in addressing the climate emergency. It would also assure us that if we're going to cut back on vacations, others will, too.

There would be psychological benefits as well. Knowing we are living within planetary boundaries would bring hope to those who are frightened or depressed, boosting societal

morale. Morale was a justifiable concern in wartime, especially in Britain, which needed everyone to optimistically support the quest for victory. Today, our countries need policies and practices that inspire confidence in humanity's prospects. Programs such as rationing could fairly share emission-intensive goods, give people meaningful ways to contribute and help maintain our commitment to a livable future.

## More From The Globe and Mail

Carbon regulations may be better route than tax for heavy emitters, SFU professor says 🔑



How we will travel in the decade ahead 🔑



### OPINION

How business can help fund a nature-based solution to climate change

BILL MORRIS AND JOHN LOUNDS



Canada's conundrum on auto emissions: Follow Trump's retreat or take risky leadership role in climate fight 🔑



How we'll eat in the decade ahead 🔑



### OPINION

Making the best of a bad Brexit

WILLEM H. BUITER

