Today, whenever we need food, we go to the local grocery store and buy whatever food we want. What would happen if the government said we were not allowed to do that anymore? Well, that is what happened during World War II in the 1940s.

When America became involved in World War II, the government needed to make sure there was enough food, gas, tires, and other supplies to send with the soldiers who were fighting the war. So, the government began rationing these things. To ration means to equally divide the supply of something.

Rationing started in 1942, and the first product to be rationed was sugar. Along with sugar, other food items like coffee, meat, butter, cheese and canned foods were rationed. Items like rubber, gasoline, tin, and even shoes and fabric had to be rationed as well.

Ration books were given to every man, woman and child. The ration books contained stamps of different colors. The red stamps were used for goods like meat, cheese and other dairy products. The blue stamps were for canned fruits and vegetables. There were also special stamps for sugar, coffee (although children did not receive coffee rations) and flour. Every week, each person had sixteen points to spend on food.

The stamps were like a permission slip. To buy a rationed item, you had to have the right number of stamps to purchase it, and you had to pay the full price for it. The stamps did not give you a discount, like food stamps today.

Ration books did not come to people through the mail. People had to go to their local elementary school to pick up their ration book. The Office of Price Administration wanted to make sure everyone had their ration book and every family had the correct amount of points. Before getting a ration book, people had to give an entire list of all the food products they had in

Use it up. Wear it out. Make it do. Or do without.
their house. Every canned food item meant eight less points for the person or family.

The point value of goods changed almost daily. One day an item could be five points, and the next day it could be ten points based on the demand. The points, however, were set by the government so that point values were the same throughout the country.

Although many items were rationed, there were items that never went on the ration list. Food items like bread, cereal, milk, pasta, poultry, and jams were not rationed. Fresh fruits and vegetables were also items that were not rationed. Fresh fruits and vegetables often came from victory gardens.

Victory gardens helped to provide people with fresh fruits and especially vegetables. Victory gardens could be found in backyards, front yards, parking lots and even horse racetracks. By 1943 over 20.5 million victory gardens had been planted.

The use of rationing along with the planting of victory gardens helped to provide much needed supplies to the men fighting over seas.

Let’s Review

1. When did rationing in America start? _______________________________

2. Why did the government want to ration items? _______________________________

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3. Name six things that were rationed? _______________________________

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