

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

'Bumper wheat crop' a cartel hoax

Even where the bushels harvested are normal in number, the weight is so far down that nutritional value is nil.

While the media promote the deliberate lie of a "bumper wheat harvest" this summer, the real story is shown in the parched fields of the drought-stricken High Plains, the stubble left by the grasshopper plague, and the millions of acres idled by the government or left barren across the country by farmers forced off the land.

Over the last several months, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has routinely released its "forecasts" of sizeable 1985 crops, despite all signs to the contrary. Corn is "predicted" to be a near record. And wheat, though predicted to be less than some previous years, nevertheless, is supposed to be large.

As farmers describe these USDA predictions: "If the acres are down, they'll say the yield is up. If the herds are down, they'll say the weight is up."

By the time they say there is a food shortage, you'll be hungry.

The wheat harvest is under way right now—already completed in southern latitudes, and in progress in the northernmost states where the hot, dry weather has pushed the harvest ahead. The picture is grim.

The custom combine harvester teams who work their way from south to north report that thousands of acres went unplanted last fall. (Most U.S. wheat is winter wheat—planted in the fall, and harvested in mid-summer.) Large numbers of wheat farmers opted for the government program to idle acreage in exchange for loans from the Commodity Credit Corporation (using crops as collateral) for their remaining crop acreage, in case wheat

prices went too low.

As the USDA and media promote the myth of the "good harvest," and even "world wheat glut," grain prices have plunged.

Demand for the loans is running so high that on July 17, the CCC took the unheard of step of announcing it has ran out of money. It stopped all loans until emergency congressional and administration action produced a special \$1 billion allocation, and the CCC loan window reopened July 22.

The reason for the dramatic drop in the grain prices has nothing to do with the mythical grain "bounty" of the nation, but reflects deliberate price control by the grain cartels (Cargill, Bunge, Louis Dreyfus, André, Continental) who dominate the world grain trade.

Then, there is the weather.

Weeks of searing weather has parched the entire Plains states from sections of Iowa and Wisconsin, west through Minnesota, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and into Montana and Wyoming. This area accounts for up to 30% of the U.S. wheat crop, despite the preeminent role of Kansas in world production.

In the bordering province of Saskatchewan, the wheat crop (spring wheat) is a disaster. The province normally accounts for 30% of Canadian wheat.

In places across the north of the Dakotas, fully 75% of the crop is no good. The wheat fields are being grazed by cattle—it isn't worth the cost to harvest—or else harvested for hay and straw. The other small grains, like oats and barley, are so stunted,

they weigh nothing. You might get dozens of bushels per acre, but they're just bushels full of husks, hulls, and air.

Some grazing cows have died from eating standing grain stalks that were so stunted for lack of water that they were overconcentrated with nitrogen fertilizer.

Even the biased USDA has confirmed that far too much of the wheat crop is "testing light." The underweight wheat kernels mean that the cereal lacks food value. Although a person could eat as much on a volume basis as good, nutrient-filled wheat, he would have less to eat in terms of nutrition.

The test weights in Texas and Oklahoma are down. In addition, there are some disease problems in Kansas.

The governor and agriculture commissioner of North Dakota have declared an "unofficial" emergency situation in at least 30 counties. Farmers in 36 of Montana's eastern counties, and farmers across South Dakota have made applications for federal farm loans under the disaster relief program.

Hay farmers in parts of Wisconsin were reporting a 40% crop loss at the time of the summer's first cutting. Montana's range forage is 40% of normal and is the worst in the country. Cattle have been sold off, or trucked, at great cost, to feed on rented forage land farther to the west. The national cattle herd has now shrunk to its lowest number in over 20 years.

Then, there are the grasshoppers.

At least 11 million acres of crop and rangeland have been devastated by grasshoppers this year, covering large regions of the western states. This is the predictable result of recent years of budget cutting in the federal spraying program, and in income collapse of farmers who cannot afford to undertake control measures.