

## Agriculture by Marcia Merry

### No record harvests in 1986

*But all the talk of record "surpluses" in Congress and the media has set a record.*

**T**he Oct. 10 crop harvest estimates released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, show no record grain harvests. Most crop harvests will be lower than last year, with a few exceptions such as sugar cane, sugar beets, and oranges. Yet, the talk of how to cope with the grain "surpluses" has reached record levels, with numerous proposals coming from both the so-called right (free market) and so-called left (mandatory production controls) because of the November elections.

Those commentators not bound to electioneering, such as the newsletter *The Reaper*, to name one, also wrongly agree that there is overproduction of food commodities. However, *The Reaper* has the sense to identify part of the cause of the current farm financial crisis as the result of policies imposed by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the Federal Reserve.

The reason there is the aura of truth to the myth of "food surpluses" is that you can see grain piling up in make-shift storage in the foodbelt states, because: 1) world food trade volume has declined by millions of tons a year, and U.S. grain exports have been the major part of that decline; and 2) domestic grain use for livestock has declined because U.S. meat animal inventories are declining rapidly. In addition, the storage network of the country has been hit by bankruptcy and deterioration in the past few years of "recovery."

What is required is a drastic change in foreign policy to favor treaty-commitments among Western nations for food flows to Africa and other points

of need, and among developed nations, at parity-related prices, in order to favor the mutual interests of the trading partners and upgrade nutrition levels.

Instead, there are proposals for more food trade wars, and production cutbacks.

Senator Tom Harkin (D) from Iowa is leading the grandstanding for food reduction and mandatory production controls, as part of the Democratic Party drive to win more Senate seats in farm states. He has introduced a "Save the Family Farm" bill (which will die with this congressional session) calling for 70% parity and compulsory food reduction.

A liberal outfit called the Populist Forum is running what it calls a "Hope for the Heartland," get-out-the-vote campaign for the elections. The famous country yeller Willie Nelson fronted \$250,000 from FarmAid, Inc., for a Sept. 11-13 "Farm Congress" in St. Louis, a big splash for Harkin's bill.

Most farmers do not see this as a decent alternative to the current disastrous farm policy, nor do they favor the radical "free market" proposals to have farm commodity prices fall even more, for the sake of mythical "competition." Wherever there have been "LaRouche" candidates, Democrat or Republican, running in farm-state primaries, for example, in Oklahoma, where farm leader George Gentry polled 33% in the statewide race for Senate, the farm vote has been 15-45% in favor of the LaRouche emergency economic program.

For most farmers, the litmus test

of a decent farm program is the question of morality: Why should food be decreased, or allowed to rot, when there is hunger in the world? By this criterion, there are no "surpluses."

Even according to the latest USDA crop estimates, which usually overstate the truth, the 1986 harvests are not so huge relative to potential domestic and world need, and in all cases down from last year:

The corn harvest is estimated at 8.22 billion bushels, 7% smaller than last year.

Soybeans are down an estimated 5% to 1.99 billion bushels.

Grain sorghum (an important animal feed) is estimated to be 887 million bushels, down 20% from last year.

The total wheat crop this year (spring and winter combined) is estimated at 2.07 billion bushels, down 13% from last year's 2.4 billion bushels.

Rice production this year is estimated to be 130 million hundred-weight bags, down 5% from last year.

Peanut production is estimated to be 3.37 billion pounds, down 18% from the 1985 harvest.

The problem is, these crops have "nowhere to go." At present, grain is rotting and becoming infested at rates not seen in this country since the days before chemistry. The key grain storage fumigant, EDB (ethylene dibromide) has been banned by the Environmental Protection Agency, to the rage of farmers and insect-control firms.

Media promotion of the myth of "surpluses" is providing Congress with the excuse to do nothing to save the mass numbers of farms now going out of business. President Reagan has no idea what is going on. Through people like Daniel Amstutz, Cargill and the grain cartel interests are running the USDA; they want total control of less food. Congress is complying.