

## Agriculture by Denise Henderson

### Soviet herds being slaughtered

*Government attempts to maintain centralized control prompts food rationing cards; shortages are affecting entire food chain.*

The fall news reports of the state of food supplies and farming in the Soviet Union show how the crisis is worsening throughout the food chain.

The most graphic example is the kill-off of livestock because feed has not been arranged for wintering over. A front-page *Izvestia* article on Oct. 28 by V. Gavrichkin reports that beef and poultry production is 105-116% higher than a year ago in the Republic of Moldova (formerly Moldavia), according to the latest data from Goskomstat (State Committee for Statistics). However, this does not reflect expanded meat output potential. Just the opposite. The author states that "due to unreliable fodder reserves, the cattle herd is being hastily reduced on the eve of wintering over."

This is going on nationwide. Compared to last year, the entire Soviet Union has 2.8 million head fewer big-horned cattle, 6.3 million fewer sheep and goats, and millions fewer birds. The cattle kill-off, an estimated 2%, had already sustained damage, since the big-horned cattle herd in Soviet Kazakhstan has been ravaged by bovine brucellosis.

Despite the slaughter, Moscow has only four days' supply of meat. Debate still rages about who is responsible for the most recent jump in meat prices. Gavrichkin holds that the price hikes, announced and then canceled by the U.S.S.R. Council of Ministers earlier this year, set the stage for chaos on the meat markets, holding back of livestock in anticipation of higher prices, etc. But "if production remains at today's level . . . no matter how much we play with prices, the food shelves

will not get any richer," he wrote.

Food supplies are only at a level of three-fourths of the population's demand. "If we have a crisis with the provision of food, we must confess we are at a dead end as far as food production goes. . . . Farms are without fodder, while the overwhelming part of pastureland is under grain crops, and the harvest—even our current 'unprecedented' one—in comparison with world standards is no harvest. And we can't even bring it in properly."

On Nov. 1, *Izvestia* carried the text of the Supreme Soviet Resolution, "On the Readiness of the Country's Economy for Work in Winter Conditions." It noted that, "The work of bringing in the harvest and procuring potatoes, vegetables, and feed crops and the preparation of livestock premises and other agricultural facilities are considerably behind schedule." Reporting that ploughing and sowing of winter crops was behind schedule, it posed the question, "What will have to be done in order to prevent a shortfall in the amount of grain and other crops next year?"

One of the consequences of the breakdown between the central government of the Soviet Union and the republics has been the creation of a system of rationing or coupons within the republics. When Gorbachov announced on Nov. 2 his plans for continued centralized control over many aspects of the economy, including hard currency, resources like oil, gold, diamonds, and natural gas, and food production, the reaction in the food-producing regions, like

Ukraine, was to announce a coupon system. Coupons would only be available to residents of Ukraine. The result was a run on food stores, and complaints that the attempt to keep food products within the region was back-firing. It was alleged that the pro-independence Ukrainian government hadn't printed enough coupons, and that many residents had not received their coupons as of Nov. 1.

One of the most drastic results of the decentralization will be continuing food shortages in Moscow. Officials are claiming that the food supply situation will be no worse than last year, meaning more chronic food shortages. A Soviet reporter in Iraq underscored the cruel reality of Soviet food shortages, when he compared Moscow with the sanctions against Baghdad, with the comment: "If only we in the Soviet Union had food sanctions like that!"

Special shopper identification cards have already been issued in Moscow to prevent some 2 million daily visitors from emptying food shelves. However, this has not made food reappear on the shelves. Sugar has been rationed through monthly coupons for over a year.

In the Urals, soldiers of the Strategic Rocket Forces reportedly went hungry for over a week in October at their camp.

In Chelyabinsk, a large city in the Russian Federated Republic, food products are to be available only for those who hold a passport and ration cards. Each resident is to be guaranteed 1.5 kilograms of meat, 12 eggs, 100 grams of vegetable oil, 380 grams of groats, 600 grams of flour, and some spirits and tobacco goods per month.

Czechoslovakia, particularly the Slovak republic, is forecasting a run on its food supplies by "tourists" from the Soviet Union during the winter.