

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

New rice substitute created

But instead of a blessing for a food-short world, this "rice" is conceived as a weapon in trade warfare.

A new, ersatz rice has been created in recent months that has a higher-than-rice protein content, a lower-than-rice cooking energy requirement, and is readily fabricated from wheat and either corn, sorghum, or millet. So far, the product's promoters have not given it a name; and in the meantime, they do not want to raise the hackles of rice farmers by using what they call the "R word."

There is reported to be great interest in the product from Namibia, and from the agriculture ministers of four other African countries. The product is designed to team up U.S. hard red wheat with African-grown white corn, or with millet or sorghum. The African Development Bank, the largest in Africa, is interested in funding cereal enterprises that would produce the ersatz rice from wheat imports and local corn and millet.

At the end of July, the first shipment of a test quantity of the rice substitute is due to arrive in Africa.

All of this is to the good. But the developers and backers of the new product are part of the network of the Minnesota-based Cargill food cartel company. The particular entities involved are the Minnesota Wheat Research and Promotion Council, and U.S. Wheat Associates, based in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

Cargill and the other cartel grain companies expect to broker U.S. wheat to Africa for the new product which, in turn, would displace the rice exports to the continent now coming from Thailand, Pakistan, and Vietnam, at a rate

of about 2.4 million tons a year. Promoters of the ersatz rice figure it will be 40% cheaper in price than Asian rice, and thus, an automatic "sale" to financially desperate African nations.

The Knight-Ridder weekly *Agweek*, based in North Dakota, the center of North American hard red spring wheat belt, gave front-page coverage July 1 to the new African export market prospects. "The targeted destination is sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Angola, Cameroon, and Namibia. . . . If the product catches on, there is a potential of 88 million bushels of wheat exports, which could mean about \$217 million" in sales.

Thus, the ersatz rice is yet another example of a useful product arising from compromised circumstances. Cargill interests are blandishing the idea of opening new wheat export markets to beleaguered U.S. wheat farmers, whom Cargill has been systematically underpaying for years. Of course, Cargill and the other companies (Continental, Louis Dreyfus, Bunge, André/Garnac, Archer Daniels Midland) have no intention of paying wheatgrowers more in this new trade.

Moreover, the cartel companies are making no moves to rush the new rice product into production for relief needs in Iraq, the Horn of Africa, and other points of acute need around the globe.

An example of a similar product is a fortified soy "milk" developed years ago by Archer Daniels Midland

(ADM)—a cartel cohort of Cargill. This nutritious substitute has never been made widely available. The policy of the U.S. Department of Agriculture is to facilitate the food-control interests of these cartel companies, over and above the interests of farmers or nutrition needs.

Conversely, products such as margarine and non-dairy ice cream, all "substitute" products, have been promoted to the hilt in the United States because ADM has a USDA-protected monopoly on supplying constituents of these ersatz foods from processing soybeans, peanuts, etc. The substitutes are all useful, particularly in cases of individual dietary requirements, but the generalized promotion has been for cartel, not nutritional, gains.

The new rice is reported to have very desirable properties. The product starts with a mash of wheat mixed with either corn, sorghum, or millet. Then the flour mix is run through a screw device, which squeezes the mixture, and partially cooks it—an extrusion process. Finally, the mix is molded in dies to form firm little kernels.

This is the same process as used for pasta products. The resulting substitute rice is similar to real rice in both color and flavor, and higher in protein content because of the wheat.

The test product now on the way to Africa has rice from two different recipes for a group of 150 people in five nations to decide which they prefer. One is a mixture of 70% wheat flour and 30% white corn; the other is a 60-40 mixture. For the test, the corn came from the United States.

Grain scientists were prompted to devise the new product from the example of "corn rice," a ground corn product, with an appearance of "Cream O'Wheat," common in South Africa since the trade sanctions imposed on that country curtailed the flow of rice imports.