

Global grain harvests drop as depression worsens

by Marcia Merry

As of the end of June, when the U.S. harvest begins in the Midwest wheat belt, the picture of grain crops worldwide is grim. The decade of the 1990s, instead of ushering in an age when people were well-fed the world over, is marking the advent of malnutrition, disease, and starvation on the scale of global output breakdown and genocide.

The latest estimates project an absolute decline in 1993 world grain production compared to last year. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates a drop of 2%. The International World Wheat Council in London also projects a decline of that order. These calculations presume ideal growing conditions until the harvests come in, so the end-of-harvest volumes could be even lower.

In the United States and other important wheat-exporting nations, including Argentina and Australia, wheat harvests are expected to be up (although the southern hemisphere projections are long-range and unreliable). However, these increases are offset on a world basis, by declines in other wheat-producing regions. Lower harvests are anticipated in the Community of Independent States, China, and North Africa. In Canada, the European Community, and Saudi Arabia, which are exporters of wheat on the world market, wheat harvests will also be lower than last year.

Apart from grain itself, the volume of food output overall, in tonnage terms, is declining as of the decade of the 1990s. The Rome-based U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), whose statistics, though frequently self-serving, are the most reliable global figures apart from those of the USDA, has published a world review of the food situation for 1991, which shows that total world food production declined overall for the first time since 1983. According to the FAO, the immediate reasons for this 1991 decline were smaller harvests in North America, Australia, eastern Europe, and in the former Soviet Union. Also, the developing

countries could not expand their food production significantly. In most parts of South America and the Mideast, food production declined.

For the crop year 1991-92, the world output of grain of all types was estimated by the FAO to have been 1,891 million metric tons—fully 4% less than the previous crop year of 1990-91 of 1,952 million metric tons. The main reasons cited by the FAO for this dramatic decline were reduced area planted and lower yield per unit area. The latest FAO estimates show that the 1992-93 grain harvest was around 1,948 million metric tons, and so it also did not equal the 1990-91 crop year.

Since the early 1980s, the annual world grain output, taking into account losses from handling and spoilage, has been below levels required to provide adequate amounts for consumption, direct and indirect (through the livestock chain). Therefore, the conditions for today's mass food shortages have been building for over ten years. As of the 1990s, we are not even providing the minimum staff of life for the world's people.

No emergency measures taken

What has been done? Next to nothing, or worse. What is required is a combination of infrastructure building—water supplies, land improvements—and mechanization, strategic locations of intensive “protected agriculture” (hydroponics, aeroponics, greenhouses), improved seed and genetic stocks available to all, continuing education in scientific farming, and food processing.

These measures, in turn, require a stop to the practices now undermining physical production, such as the derivatives speculation bubble and the free trade swindles, and a return to policies of economic development by sovereign nation-states.

Instead, the farmbelt areas of the world are disintegrating. That is what even the gross global food production figures of the FAO now manifest. Look at some of the farming regions around the globe:

- **Europe.** Total cereal production last year dropped dramatically from the two previous years, to a level of 258.9 million metric tons (1992), down from 307.2 million metric tons in 1991, and under 284.9 million in 1990. This is the combined output of the European Community, plus Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Sweden.

- **Southern Africa.** Total cereals production in this corn belt fell from 20.5 million metric tons (1990) to 19.7 million (1991) to 9.6 million metric tons in 1992—the year of a “drought of the century.”

- **All Africa.** Total cereals output ranged from 88.5 million metric tons in 1990, up the next year to 99.2 million, then down to 82.2 million metric tons in 1992.

- **Community of Independent States.** A dramatic fall in cereals output went from 209.1 million metric tons (1990) to 149.3 million (1991), and down to 183.3 million (1990).

- **Canada.** Cereals output has gone from 57.1 million metric tons in 1990, to 53.8 million metric tons the next year, and 50.8 million last year, in this grain exporter.

- **United States.** Cereals output ranged from 312.5 million metric tons in 1990, to 279.8 million in 1991, and 353 million metric tons last year—all of which bounty is being used by a tight cartel of food companies (Cargill and others) to take advantage of nations desperate for food.

The above patterns do not just apply to grain. The picture is similar for other food staples.

In the latest scandal of food policy in foreign affairs, the food cartels—on behalf of Anglo-American geopolitical designs—have succeeded in having France and the European Community acquiesce to cutting back EC farmland used for oilseed production, in deference to the cartel demand that the EC buy from cartel-controlled U.S.-produced oilseed stocks.

The impact of years of acreage cutbacks, and impoverishment and dispossession of farmers worldwide, has led to food shortages and starvation on genocidal levels. In the forefront are those without food in Bosnia, and large areas in Africa.

Let them eat roots

In a travesty of agriculture practice, the rosy production figures for the root vegetable cassava (also called manioc) show the immoral economic policies now dooming the world to hunger and despair.

World cassava production in 1992 is estimated to have risen by about 7% to a record of 161 million tons in root equivalent. This mainly reflects a large increase in plantings and production in Africa. While food output and nutrition levels overall in Africa have been falling over the past 15 years, the output of cassava has been rising. Last year cassava production hit an estimated 81 million tons, 17% above

1991's output of 69.3 million tons, and above 1990's level of 67 million tons. Nigeria alone produced a record 32 million tons—55% over 1991.

Along with a variety of green vegetables, fish, meat, dairy, fruit, and nuts, cassava has a special place in the cuisine of West Africa and other regions of the world. However, the spectacular increase in cassava production in Africa over the recent years reflects a forced reliance on the root vegetable as a monoculture, heavy-bearing crop, on which people can subsist. On its own, the tuber is one of the least nutritious, though most filling, members of the plant kingdom.

Increased yields in Africa have been furthered by technical improvements devised at the cartel-backed International Institute for Tropical Agriculture. This institute has provided relatively pest-resistant high-yielding varieties. However, just as in the case of other much-touted green “revolutions” in crops, the issue is: Will fertilizers and other inputs be used, or not? Already, Nigeria anticipates a fall in production because of scarcity of fertilizer.

Moreover, the push for cassava in Africa has been part of the cartel scheme to use African-produced cassava pellets as cheap livestock feed in Europe. This does nothing at all to benefit the hungry people of Africa. The FAO praised this scheme in a report on world cassava in its April *Food Outlook* publication from Rome.

Hunger in the United States

While these needless atrocities are perpetrated by world governments and the cartels, in the United States itself, hunger is spreading widely.

Fully 18% of U.S. children go hungry, according to a new study by Tufts University. The study says that about 12 million American children experience hunger, most pronounced in some southern states, where 25% or more of the children don't get enough nourishment.

An AP wire from June 15 stated: “The study from the Center on Hunger, Poverty, and Nutrition Policy at Tufts University estimated that 18% of U.S. children under age 18 experienced hunger in 1991.

“Mississippi had the highest rate at 34%. Louisiana, West Virginia, Arkansas, Kentucky, Alabama and Texas placed in the top 10.

“The report's author said child hunger is not just a problem in the South, which historically has been burdened with high poverty. New York, California, South Dakota, New Mexico, and Michigan had child hunger rates above 18%. The Virginia figure was 13.3%.”

Since 1991, the situation has worsened. AP adds: “The Tufts report is based on Census Bureau data and data from food assistance programs. Last year the Tufts center estimated that 30 million Americans experience hunger, defined as a condition in which a person repeatedly doesn't consume enough nutrients.”