

## Agriculture by Marcia Merry

### World 1993 grain harvests fall

*Even USDA crop estimates show that harvests and stocks are down dramatically—the food just isn't there.*

**T**he U.S. Department of Agriculture is infamous for inflating its harvest estimates, and the media perpetrate the lie that “there is plenty of food . . . somewhere.” This is for the benefit of the monopoly food trade companies (Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland, Pillsbury, Grand Metropolitan, Louis Dreyfus, Bunge, Continental, and a few others) which in turn claim that because of “oversupplies,” farmers must receive low prices from the companies. It is argued that under the so-called law of supply and demand, this will drive down production.

However, this crop season, the Mississippi Flood of '93 drove down U.S. corn production (which accounts for about 40% of world output) to the level of domestic use, i.e., nothing for export. At the same time, farmers are being driven off the land after years of underpayment from the food cartel. So future output is being destroyed as well as 1993 harvests.

With local variations, this is the same picture worldwide: food output decline, and decline in *output potential*. Therefore, this year, even the doctored statistics of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) can't hide the catastrophic dimensions of the food crisis.

On Oct. 12, the USDA released its latest “World Agriculture Supply and Demand Estimates.” The following summary harvest estimates show declines in all the grain crops that form the staple foodstuffs for the various preferred diets around the world—corn, wheat, rice, millet, sorghum, and others.

Overall, world grain output is esti-

mated to be 1,704.65 million metric tons, which is both stagnating at about the same levels as in recent years (1,693.71 million tons in 1991, and 1,768.64 million tons last year), and is way below the world output need for adequate nutrition—3,000 million metric tons.

The conclusion to be reached from these statistics is that only emergency measures for restoring nation-based food output will solve the food crisis.

- **Corn.** Although livestock feed is the principal use of what, in the United States, is called “field” corn, nevertheless, the volume of corn for either direct human consumption or animal feed is way down as of the current harvest.

The U.S. corn harvest will be 176.84 million metric tons this year, which is 38% of the total world corn harvest projection of 465.95 million tons. This is the lowest U.S. annual output in years, and pulls the world supply figure down from 487.21 million tons in 1991 and 529.67 tons last year.

For comparison, the U.S. corn output of 176.84 million tons this year is way below last year's record output of 240.78 million tons (much of which deteriorated in handling and was not “carried over”), and 189.89 million tons in 1991.

- **Wheat.** U.S. wheat output in 1993 is estimated to be 65.9 million tons, down from 66.92 million tons last year. (The U.S. crop the year before was no benchmark, because of bad weather.) The USDA plays down the significance of problems in this year's U.S. wheat harvest (which included waterlogged fields, pests, rot,

mold), and reckons world wheat output for 1993 at 564.44 million tons, a slight improvement over 560.01 million tons last year.

The USDA also plays down problems in the wheat harvest in the former Soviet Union. For the “FSU-12,” as the USDA calculates the harvest of the 12 republics formerly comprising the U.S.S.R., the wheat harvest estimate is given as 88.08 million tons, up slightly from last year's 88.05 million tons. However, observers on the scene report that this is untrue. The accumulated problems of lack of fuel, machinery, and spare parts have plagued the farm sector to the point that crop volumes are declining across the board.

- **World rice production** has stagnated for the past three years, and stocks of rice (the carryover or what is in the pipeline) have fallen drastically. Annual rice production is estimated, on a milled basis, to be 345.21 million metric tons this year, after 350.98 million tons last year, and 348.36 million tons in 1991. The decline is dramatic.

Rice output decline in China is also dramatic. This year an estimated 124 million metric tons will be produced (roughly 36% of world output), which is down from 130.35 million tons in 1992 and 128.67 million tons in 1991. Rice production this year is also down over previous years in India, Japan, South Korea, and Thailand.

- **Grain stocks.** As world harvest volumes have declined or stagnated in the 1990s, the “ending stocks” or annual food reserves of all grains have likewise dropped precipitously. The USDA estimates that the ending stocks worldwide for all grains this year will be 303.82 million tons, or barely 17% of world consumption (figured at 1,748.24 million metric tons). This is below the 316.83 million tons in 1991, and 347.41 million tons in 1992.