
Conference Report

'Vision' shortsighted on agriculture

by Carl Osgood

The headquarters of the National Geographic Society in Washington, D.C. was the site of a three-day "2020 Vision" conference co-hosted by the NGS and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) on June 13-15. The title refers to IFPRI's "vision" of "a world where every person has economic and physical access to sufficient food to sustain a healthy and productive life, where malnutrition is absent and where food originates from efficient, effective, and low-cost food and agricultural systems that are compatible with sustainable use and management of natural resources."

However, if the policies advocated at the conference were implemented, widespread starvation would be ensured.

The major themes of the conference included the alleged unsustainability of modern agricultural methods and the need to reduce population growth. The president of the NGS, Gilbert Grosvenor, opened the conference in a true pagan spirit, complaining that "as the world becomes more advanced, we detach ourselves more and more from the Earth. The more we withdraw from the Earth, the less we see a need to conserve our natural resources."

Grosvenor was followed by a slickly produced slide show on how the green revolution of the 1960s and 1970s solved the hunger problems of that time, only to bring on new environmental problems that make the green revolution unsustainable. This was followed by speeches by Per Pinstrup-Anderson, the director general of IFPRI, and Brian Atwood, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, both of whom presented their visions of what sustainable development should look like and their dire predictions of doom and gloom if those policies are not carried out.

Hoe and axe agriculture

The "vision" was probably best outlined by Ugandan Vice President Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe, who followed with a speech on behalf of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, the chairman of the 2020 Vision's international advisory committee. Kazibwe bragged about how agriculture in Uganda is worked with three tools—the hoe, the machete, and the ax—with human muscle being the primary source of energy. She described the system of farming in Uganda that depends on these implements as "very resilient," and boasted that "we have not lacked food in spite of all of our other

problems," including during the time of Idi Amin.

Kazibwe called for more research to improve the productivity of the small-holder farmers. "We need simple technology," she said, "like micro-dams in villages to trap rainwater, and wind power to pump it into the fields." Much of her speech was a feminist diatribe against men, because women make up most of the agricultural workforce, and therefore must participate in the making of agricultural policy.

On the second day of the conference, Lester Brown, president of the Worldwatch Institute, on a panel on "Improving Natural Resources to Feed the World: Prerequisites for Sustainable Agriculture," focused on the decline of ocean fisheries, the loss of topsoil to erosion, and the "threat" of the rapidly growing demand for imported grain in China. He specifically ruled out capital-intensive solutions to problems in any of these areas. Ultimately, he concluded, "the responsibility for maintaining the population depends more on family planning than it does on food production."

Development of water resources was treated the same way. Sara Scherr, a research fellow with IFPRI, called for

The International Food Policy Research Institute and the Worldwatch Institute were set up in the aftermath of the U.N. World Food Conference in November 1974. The U.S. delegate to that conference was then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who had forced then-Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz out of the delegation. Kissinger had already commissioned U.S. National Security Study Memorandum 200 (NSSM 200) which, among other things, made population control and the use of food as a weapon key aspects of U.S. national security policy.

The "2020 Vision" boasts an advisory committee that includes many leading propagandists for the special interests of the financial and oligarchical circles of the "Club of the Isles," headed by Prince Philip Mountbatten. The chairman of the advisory committee is Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. Museveni's commitment to International Monetary Fund policies has meant a drop, since 1986, in the average life expectancy in Uganda to 42.6 years, among the lowest in Africa.

IFPRI funds research papers for the low-input, labor-intensive agricultural policies reflected in NSSM 200. Worldwatch carries out the same functions but in a more sensationalist way, for mass circulation. IFPRI gets funding from 18 governments, the World Bank, four U.N. agencies, and the Rockefeller and Ford foundations. Worldwatch was founded with money from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund in 1974, and now brings in a reported \$2 million a year from literature sales.—*Carl Osgood*

market pricing schemes for water resources claiming that “such market pricing of water can help the spread to non-agricultural uses as well and help reduce waterlogging of soils.” Brown added that “water tables are falling in all major food producing regions of the world because human demand is exceeding the recharge rates of aquifers.” He suggested that “we ought to invest in water efficiency in the 1990s in the same way we invested in energy efficiency in the 1970s.”

On the third day, Anders Wijkman, assistant administrator of the U.N. Development Program, talked about making small farmers in underdeveloped countries a part of the policymaking process. He worried that introducing new technology into agricultural systems may not really address the problems perceived by the small farmer. “In this context,” he said, “it is important to take into account the experiences of traditional systems which are most often well adapted to local conditions.” He criticized approaches that look upon soils as being “part of an industrial system, being able to deliver higher yields year after year.” He claimed there is evidence that “this very mechanistic view is no longer possible. . . . The management of living systems is different from manufacturing. There are limits to growth and there are certain eco-principles that have to be followed.”

Pinstrup-Andersen presented a six-point program for achieving the 2020 Vision of a sustainable world by 2020:

- Developing country governments must be strengthened to undertake activities best done by governments, such as law and order and market regulation functions. At the same time, they must “let go of activities best done by other groups of society, such as private enterprises and non-governmental organizations.”

- Developing countries must invest in poor people by providing access to employment, productive resources, and credit, basic health care (primarily meaning family planning), and education.

- Developing countries must increase agricultural growth by sharply expanding investment in agricultural research (into questions premised on unavailability of high-technology farm methods and infrastructure).

- Agriculture must be made more productive in ways that are sustainable to include better fertilizer management, reduction in pesticide use, and more efficient use of water resources. The program rules out development of new water resources because it is “expensive and may have harmful environmental consequences.”

- Expenses of moving food from farmer to consumer must be reduced.

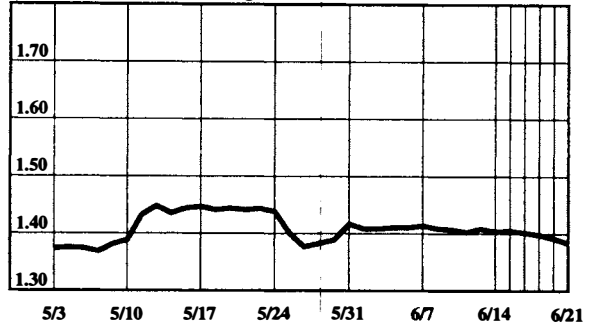
- Foreign assistance should be made available to countries that have demonstrated a commitment to reducing poverty, hunger, and malnutrition and to protecting the environmental goals in the 2020 Vision.

These policies will only serve to further concentrate the control of agricultural commodities in the hands of cartel companies, as happened with oil in the 1970s.

Currency Rates

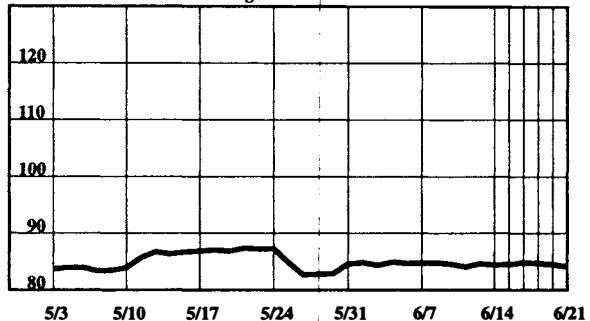
The dollar in deutschemarks

New York late afternoon fixing



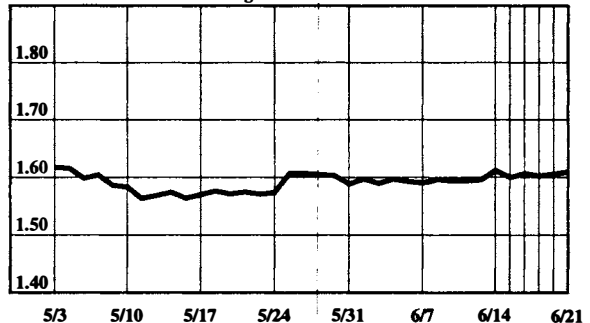
The dollar in yen

New York late afternoon fixing



The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing



The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing

