

Farmers Detail How the U.S. Food Supply Is Being Destroyed

June 7—Speaking on *EIR*'s weekly Internet radio show, *The LaRouche Show*, today, farmers Ron Wieczorek of South Dakota and Andy Olson of Minnesota provided a graphic picture of how the U.S. food supply at present, and for the future, is being destroyed by current U.S. government policy. Their reports were supplemented by moderator Marcia Baker and LaRouchePAC organizer Bob Baker, who had just spent a month in the Texas Panhandle, an epicenter of the devastating drought threatening all forms of life in the southwestern United States.

The show began with a report by former hog farmer Bob Baker, who described the conditions in northwestern Texas. He was followed by Olson, a livestock and grain farmer, and Wieczorek, a cattle rancher.

The Northern Texas Panhandle

Bob Baker: Well, I think one of the striking things that jumps out at you is the magnitude and power of the U.S. agricultural industry, as a food-producing machine across the nation. When we were traveling around the Panhandle, which is the topmost northern 26 counties of Texas, it really jumps out, the power of man-made technology to take an area that would be next to a desert, and turn it into a flourishing food-production area, specifically the irrigation systems that were put in to grow all kinds of crops—cotton, corn, etc.

But from driving around this area, just hundreds and hundreds of windmills have popped up. Oil wells sitting all over the place—okay, we need oil. But, water transport semis going up and down the road; wherever you go, you see all the infrastructure to support the



Bob Baker

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fracking [hydraulic fracturing], which in many communities, is the boom, and a very major source of income now.¹

If you get on the computer and do a Google Map search, put it on satellite, and zoom in on some cities, like Seminole, or La Mesa, or Denver City, or even areas around Amarillo, what you'll see is lots of little circles. And these are irrigation systems that have been put in over many years, most of which are supplied by water from the Ogallala Aquifer. They have many test wells they monitor each year, and they're finding

areas where the water table in the Ogallala has dropped up to 19 feet *a year*!

And so, this is a shocking thing. In Wichita Falls, for instance, the water is so short there, that for the first time in history, they are recycling waste water.

So, again, if you zoom in on a city like Seminole, Texas, you'll see all these irrigation circles, 640 acres, maybe, 500 acres in a circle, 200 acres. But you'll also see all these little dots, right around the city, little white dots. And if you zoom in on them, these are all fracking holes. And they all have roads connecting them, and they almost look like grid paper.

It really jumps out at you that this is a massive infrastructure input. And each one of these holes may be a mile deep. Imagine drilling a hole 12 inches in diameter, a mile deep, through solid rock, or cement—just to visualize—and then you slip a steel pipe that's about a half-inch thick, the rim of it is, maybe 10 inches in di-

1. See Marcia Merry Baker and Paul Gallagher, "A National Emergency: Impeachable Crimes—Fracking Is Genocide, Shut It Down!" *EIR*, April 25, 2014.

ameter, and you screw these together—they're about 30-foot lengths—and you stick them down a mile deep. And then you stick another pipe inside of those, which is very thick, maybe 8 inches in diameter. And then you fill the hollow space around each pipe and around the hole, with a cement mixture. The idea is to seal up the hole so that any of the gas that would come back up, would not enter the soil, and contaminate other water sources.

Well, this is going on by the hundreds and hundreds all over these cities, and people are very concerned.

So then you have semis hauling water all over the place. You can be driving along and you'll see whole fields with chainlink fences around them, with just 50 or 100 transports sitting in them, that are moving water around. Big semis, with dual engines they're pulling around on the semi bed, to pump the water down into these holes, in order to fracture the underground rock formation so that the gas can percolate out.

Now, that's a contrasting image to looking at the farmland. I was really impressed with how flat the Panhandle is. You could drive 50-60 miles or longer, and it's just almost perfectly flat, and farmland on all sides as far as you can see. And cotton, some corn. But in particular, because it's a dry-land farming area, they have to use a ridge-till type tillage operation, where they pull an implement through the land, that builds ridges, maybe 14 inches tall, and every 18 inches. So the ridges are 18 inches apart, and with a valley in between them of about 14 inches. And they try to till horizontal to the prevailing wind.

Now, why do they do that? Well, there are several reasons. For example, with cotton, there's a lot of wind. Every day there were 20- to 35-mile-an-hour winds, day after day after day. And these fields are just lying wide open, so there's a lot of dust blowing. We did get caught in one dust storm that was amazing. It was as if it was snowing—you couldn't see. You see dirt drifting like snow drifts in the fields; in some cases it was almost up over the fence posts.



EIRNS/Bob Baker

This truck for hauling water to fracking sites is located near Jacksboro in the Barnett shale region, north Texas. The sign on the truck says, "Now Hiring" for drivers.

So, these ridges are put in the field, and farmers have done it for a long time, because when the wind blows across them, it starts the soil particles spinning, and the idea is, the ridges help keep the particles from being blown away, so that they fall into the depressions. Also, when they plant the cotton, they plant it at the bottom of the ridge, in the depression, because the early plant, when it gets up to 6-8 inches, is very vulnerable to sand and wind. So it protects it until it gets taller. It also helps conserve any rain that they get, to increase the moisture level.

So you see mile after mile, as far as you can see, of ridge-tilled land to produce cotton, connected to a man-made irrigation system, that's putting water in center-pivot irrigation on top of the land, but also now there are many underground micro-irrigations going on, which is very expensive, but people are doing it.

So, in this kind of environment you see manifested the tremendous technology that human beings can do, to increase the production with this kind of irrigation; but it also brings it to the point that the water in the Ogallala is getting down, and we've got to get more water in there....

It's a powerful thing. You're driving and you see all this food production, technology, you see the wind mills, you see the oil wells pumping all over the place, and then you drive through a lot of cities and you see this extreme poverty. You could tell it was a city or a small town that was very productive, but now you see, in many cases the gas stations on all four corners of an intersection are shut down. You see building after building boarded up, or for sale, or for lease. You drive through a main street with four lanes of paved street,



EIRNS/Bob Baker

A small farm town in Texas: The sign says it all.

but buildings everywhere for sale or lease. Which indicates that there was something much more there than just the fracking and that kind of production at one time, and that's where people were open to the discussion of getting the financial system reorganized....

Marcia Baker: West Texas is where the Texas Colorado River rises. There's a Colorado River in Texas that rises in the West and goes down to the Gulf. It goes through Austin, the capital, and there's so little water there that the rice growers south of Austin, who have been there for 100 years, don't have their water allocation. I understand that where you were there was nothing in the river.

Bob Baker: We were invited out to a ranch to discuss the water crisis, and the gentleman directed us to his property, and he said, Well, you go so far, and you cross the Colorado River, and then you turn right. And we kept driving and we didn't see the Colorado River, and finally we called him, and he said: Oh, I forgot to tell you that there's no water in it.

It's just weeds everywhere. It's as if there never was a river, that's how dry it was.

What's Threatening the Food Supply?

Marcia Baker: This is a vivid picture. And of course, this goes with the fact that, in the last few years, you've seen this drastic reduction in the number of cattle in Texas, the decline in wheat production this

year, including up through western Oklahoma, western Kansas.

But it's not just that. Andy, you're up there in the northern Plains, and you still have water running in your rivers. But you have so many factors also contributing to the agriculture and food crisis where you are. Do you want to go through that?

Andy Olson: Just look at the financing of agriculture. We've had many cycles where agriculture's been pretty good, and then the famous one when Paul Volcker [Federal Reserve chairman, 1979-87] raised the interest rates to 19%, and maybe a little bit higher; that just collapsed agriculture. We had this major crisis in the mid-80s, where farmers were forced off their land. They couldn't pay the interest on their loans and so forth. So there was a real changeover in financing.

There was the FDR Production Credit Association (PCA) and Federal Land Bank, which financed agriculture, as well as cooperatives, which were formed under FDR's time period also, the Capper-Volstead Act.

What happened then is that many farmers were forced to sell out, and Farm Credit had never foreclosed on farmers to this scale. But they were forced by the Federal Reserve to do this. Essentially the farm cooperative system was bankrupted, especially the finance end of it—the PCA and the Federal Land Bank. But interestingly, while a lot of small commercial banks did go under and were absorbed by other independent banks, the Farm Credit system never went bankrupt.

Which was strange because they were actually bankrupt.

But what happened is that Wall Street picked up the Farm Credit system, and today it's known as a government-sponsored entity. And this now is a thorn in the side of the small town independent banks. With this government support, and Wall Street's backing, they pretty much moved out of their old facilities and into new ones—it's called AgStar now. This is now undercutting the small commercial banks with their easy financing, the lower interest rates. So, the small banks are struggling, and we're going to see a further consolidation of this.

I don't think many people realize what did happen: that the Farm Credit system then became a bigger presence, but it's not in the control of the farmers anymore; it's Wall Street right in the middle of all these towns.

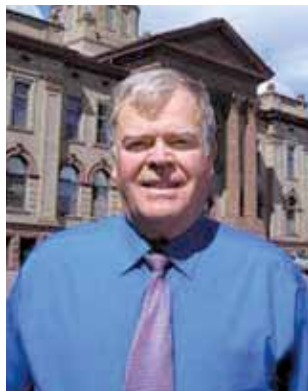
I emphasize the financing part of agriculture because it's a big part of agriculture. And then we've had the environmentalism, with all these wind towers. We have them here on some of the best farm land in the world. . . . It's a real primitive kind of energy.

Another part is animal agriculture, especially in beef cattle, where because of the shrinkage of the cattle herd from about 140 million back in the 1960s, to under 100 million and dropping today, that has resulted in shortages. We've seen a doubling in the price of beef, and on the way to almost tripling it. . . .

Also we have a lot of hog production, and that's been impacted by disease this year.

The ethanol plants have taken a lot of the feed, so that's put pressure on the animal agriculture that needs the feed, and we're burning up our food by running it up and down the road in the gas tank. If you wanted to design a policy to destroy American agriculture, what I've just talked about is really what has created a very negative impact. . . .

The land price has inflated—it's unbelievable what the price of farm land is now—\$10,000 an acre, you just can't support it. At that price, you have to have some pretty deep pockets, and it's highly risky. And this is what's happened in America over decades.



Courtesy of Andy Olson
Andy Olson



Courtesy of Ron Wieczorek
Ron Wieczorek

The View from South Dakota

Ron Wieczorek: I was just thinking about what Bob was talking about, with the fracking in Texas. The result of that has been about an 18-20% drop in the cattle numbers in Texas alone. And the effect on the dinner table has reached almost a panic state in the price of hamburger and other beef.

The other aspect of that is, in the irrigation system they have down there, when they were putting the water out on the open land, the added moisture in the air would help the surrounding wheat crop. I talked with a family member—I have several who are in the wheat-harvesting business—and normally they go into Texas this time of year, but this year only one of them out of the three went down. And a couple days ago I was talking to them, and they just finished a 700-acre field that made 3.4 bushels an acre, and they were just moving into another, which, by the combine monitors, was estimated to be making about 11 bushels an acre.

So the wheat production there is only 5-10% of what it normally should be in that area. That's what's happening to our food production in an area where our water is being wasted on an unessential energy source, where we should have been going with Kennedy's fusion energy program. . . .

Here in South Dakota, the last several years we've been very fortunate—we've had a very decent crop up here. Of course, with the high-priced corn and high-priced soybeans, they took and broke up all the pasture land that used to produce cattle in our area. And then last Winter we had a severe storm that took out a large number of the cattle, in West River here, in the snowstorms, where they smothered to death, and the farmers couldn't get to them and recover them.

Anyway the cattle number in our area has collapsed too, and now we have prices of cattle about three times what they were. So if a young man wants to get into the cattle industry today, he really can't afford it, because these cows are running around \$3,000 a head, and there's no way the credit is available for these young people. . . .



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An official from the Agriculture Department reported that in South Dakota, there are several million bushels of corn piled on the ground—rotting, for lack of transportation. The railroads have been diverted for hauling water to fracking sites. This grain pile is from Goodland, Kansas, April 2012.

Up here in South Dakota, because of the lack of transportation, lack of infrastructure, we've not been able to get a bumper crop out. I just had a government official interview me a couple days ago from the Department of Agriculture. She brought up that over here at Emery, there are *several million bushels* of corn piled on the ground—two piles with several million bushels in them. The plastic covering on it, in the storm we just had, was torn off, and they got 3-9 inches of water on those corn piles.

Out in Kimball, there's probably—I'm just estimating here—millions of bushels of milo [sorghum] laying on the ground, that should have been moved, and either consumed or turned into ethanol or done something with. They are now trying to buy up quality milo around the country so they can mix it with this rotten milo they have on the ground. These insane kinds of situations we've created here in the agriculture sector are unreal to me. . . .

Bob Baker: I want to jump in on the credit question. You guys are right on the mark on stressing that this is now in the final lap of consolidation. A report just released shows that, at the current rate of depletion of the Ogallala Aquifer, in the next 20 years or less, we could

lose 35% of the land that now irrigated. And that's a major chunk of our food production. . . .

Marcia Baker: Every once in a while there's a national report about meat, about what's in cold storage. This is a guesstimate about what's in inventories and storage—hams, bacon, beef. Take hams: What's in storage now is 35% down from a year ago. It's 13% down from the five-year average. Same thing with beef. Beef inventories, all kinds of cuts, are down 21% from a year ago, and 11% from the five-year average. And I know any one of you could say, you can't make this up next year.

You can watch financial TV and say, oh, this is a great incentive for ranchers to produce more beef, but you don't snap your fingers. Ron, right?

Wieczorek: You just made me think of Plato's Cave, and the shadows on the wall. What they're holding up to these people, your security is the Federal crop insurance. What happened to a food reserve? Let's get back to reality. Let's get a food reserve where we can take care of people if we have a major crisis. . . . We're sitting here with pieces of paper. Let's do what we did in the '50s and '60s—let's have a food reserve. Let's have canned meat put away. Let's have this stuff stored up, so we have true, real security rather than this fictitious stuff—shadows on the wall, that seems to tantalize the mind of these modern-day idiots. It just frustrates me to think of the potential risk that we're putting the people in the cities in.

And back to getting young people into this game again: There are so many people my age that are ready to quit and nobody is going to take my place. I've got no kids that are going to be involved in farming. So, some bigger operation is going to take over. And this idea of bigger, bigger, bigger is not the solution. . . .

Marcia Baker: Andy, you've spoken of the age of



EIRNS/Bob Baker

The combination of the drought and diversion of water for hydraulic fracturing has had severe consequences. This photo shows what was White River Lake, Crosby County, West Texas: The water intake pipe is above the lake level.

farmers, and could you speak to how many years it takes to build up a herd?

Olson: You know, if Ron is correct in saying it costs \$3,000 to buy a bred heifer, that's a lot of money. You used to be able to buy a bred heifer for \$500 in the lean times. Inflation is wild in agriculture. And you have to feed that animal, and its gestation is 9 months, and then it takes 12 to 15 months to feed it out. As Marcia said, you don't just snap your finger and the beef is on the table. This is an infrastructure that is very delicate, in a sense.

We had a lot of density of production that's been taken out. And a lot of this pasture land went into the relevant state departments of natural resources. These people are in charge of our natural resources, but really, they're not. They're destroying our food production. And they're coming out of the colleges with degrees in environmentalism, and they have no clue of the priorities that the country needs. This is the policy of the Empire....

Railroads: Fracking vs. Agriculture

Marcia Baker: Can you explain how a great deal of the crude from the Dakotas has to go by rail—Warren Buffett is the biggest hauler—and you see it where you are? And then the rail cars carry sand the other way for

the fracking infrastructure. Can you just give an idea of what the use of rail for this fracking boom has meant over the last few months, for agriculture?

Olson: The railroads are what is supposed to help us out here, as far as moving all these bulk commodities, but now we have the fracking, which has called for a lot of this sand that's mined out of Minnesota and Wisconsin, silica sand, which is combined with the water and the chemicals which they fracture down in the pipe a mile underground.

Of the trains that are running through my home town here, I would estimate that at least a third of the transportation is sand cars from mines right along the Minnesota River. And it's a major Belgian company—I think it's the largest Belgian company, and one of the richest Belgian families, and it's called Unilin. And they have these huge mines. So, on a daily basis, hundreds of sand cars are moving down to the Permian Basin, the Niabrara in Wyoming, and down into the Eagle Ford, and I think they're even going east of the Marcellus [a major shale area] in Pennsylvania.

They've destroyed the rail infrastructure, and now they're kind of band-aiding it together to facilitate this. They don't know what they're doing. It's a Keystone Cops operation....