

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

World's wheat regions in crisis

Anglo-American interests, playing food control power politics, have created a disaster for farmers.

As June approaches, when the winter wheat harvest begins in the northern latitudes and the winter wheat planting season starts in Australia, Argentina, and other points south, a look at the state of the world's wheat production and consumption shows disaster unfolding.

Farmers on every continent are hard hit by the artificially imposed low price for wheat. And the few companies that control the world wheat trade are collaborating with Anglo-American policy demands to starve Africa and prevent others in need from getting relief or producing food.

The companies (Cargill, Continental, Louis Dreyfus, Bunge, ADM/Töpler, André/Garnac, and others), have imposed a price below the farmers' cost of production. Farmers are getting \$2.40 or less a bushel. A parity price for U.S. growers would be \$7 a bushel.

But the U.S. Department of Agriculture, run for the last 20 years as a division of Cargill and the world grain cartel, has declared that there is a world wheat "glut," and farmers must be underpaid to lower production.

The latest U.N. Food and Agriculture report warns that over 17 million Africans need wheat and other grain relief. But "donor nations," those countries whose food policies are run or influenced by the grain cartel, have not pledged assistance.

To enforce this food control policy, cartel-approved propaganda says that low farm prices and high consumer food prices result from cutthroat "foreign" competition. This lie, in turn, is used to demand that a global "free trade" treaty be signed by the 101 mem-

ber nations of the U.N. General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and that a North American Free Trade Agreement be rammed through in Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

A brief world survey of farms and food stocks shows that free trade by cartels is causing ruination of farmers and hunger and starvation on the scale of genocide.

- In Canada, the Canadian Wheat Board is in the worst crisis of its history. Set up to offer farmers some protection from falling prices on the "free market," the Wheat Board is itself in a financing crunch.

The board has begun short-term borrowing from Wall Street, offering 30, 60, and 90-day bills on the New York bond market, and has appointed Goldman Sachs Money Markets, Inc., Lehman Commercial Paper, Inc., and RBC Dominion Securities, Inc. as its sales agents, with Morgan Guaranty to handle the note issues and payments.

Meantime, Cargill and other cartel companies have repositioned their grain elevator system in Canada and the United States since the free trade agreement went into effect two years ago, and record amounts of cheap Canadian wheat are flowing into the U.S. The same companies responsible for this are getting U.S. government handouts of free wheat under the Export Enhancement Program, and are shipping discount-price wheat to politically preferred importing nations such as Egypt, whose President backed Bush's Gulf war.

- In the United States, in Oklahoma, one of the top three wheat states,

at least one farmer is forced out of operation every week. In North Dakota, the U.S. durum center, one in seven farmers is expected to be forced to shut down within months. In response, the USDA advocates innovations, such as using wheat for cattle feed or for ethanol, whose manufacture is 99% controlled by Cargill and ADM, which get government subsidies!

- In Australia, thousands of wheat growers do not have the money to plant their crop because of the low wheat prices. Estimates are that this year's planting will be 9-25% lower than last year. That means that the wheat acreage sown will be barely 22 million acres, down from about 24.5 million last year. Output may drop to under 13 million tons, down from 15.7 million last year.

In April, wheat farmers staged a protest at a U.S. NASA tracking station near Perth. The farmers chained machinery to gateposts, painted slogans, and dumped wheat to dramatize that they are being ruined.

- In Europe, European Community Agriculture Commissioner Ray MacSharry has decried the 20 million tons of EC grain stocks, projected as of June 30, as proof there must be an end to "overproduction." Meantime, farm protests of record size have occurred for a year throughout Europe against low farm prices. In April, Polish farmers blocked roads in 16 provinces to protest low prices imposed by the cartels.

- In Argentina, the wheat cartel companies have imposed a "go slow" policy in marketing Argentine wheat. The cartels have forced Argentina out of exporting to many countries, where instead the cartel companies are handling U.S. and EC wheat, and gaining government subsidies. The Argentine government has asked for a wheat planting of 16.2 million acres, up from 15.2 million a year ago, but growers are in crisis and do not have the means.