

# The Flood of '93 puts national food self-sufficiency on the world agenda

by Marcia Merry

Over June-October 1993 in the U.S. upper Midwest, the massive damage to crops caused by the once-in-500-years flood of the Mississippi-Missouri basins resulted in a 31% drop in 1993 U.S. corn output over 1992 (a bumper crop year), or close to a 15% drop compared to an average year in recent times. In turn, this has brought down 1993 world corn output by 15% from 1992, or 7-8% down from recent average years. The quality is also poor, having low nutritive content and being heavily pest-ridden. Crops such as spring wheat, barley, and other small grains have been similarly affected.

However, this damage toll constitutes not merely one record bad harvest for the unfortunate Midwest, nor even one "lost" year of availability of U.S. cereals output for export or potential food relief internationally. Rather, the dramatic damage toll of 1993 marks the point at which world food catastrophe is under way, because 1) for over 25 years, dozens of nations have been forced into extreme food-import dependency under International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and related strictures, while their domestic food production potential has been blocked; and 2) the United States is currently following a policy of converting large areas of its cropland into a so-called "natural" state, i.e., non-food producing, and ruining farmers, and the U.S. is attempting to enforce this policy on the other few food-surplus producing regions internationally, especially France.

Therefore, instead of a trend line of food output increase per hectare in world farm regions over the past two decades, there has been only an increase in food-import dependency, hunger, starvation, and *speculation* in food and other scarce commodities. The Mississippi "Flood of '93" puts on the agenda the national right to food self-sufficiency and economic development.

## World underproduction

The volume of grain production (of all types) needed internationally each year to provide 5.2 billion people an aliquot of cereals and animal protein products must be in the range of over 3 billion metric tons annually, or about 3.5 pounds of grains a day per capita in the food chain of cereals and livestock production.

However, as of the late 1980s, grains production has stagnated well under 2 billion metric tons. The official annual world grain harvests, in billions of metric tons, as posted by

the Rome-based U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), are: 1989-90: 1.871; 1990-91: 1.950; 1991-92: 1.881; 1992-93: 1.963; 1993-94: 1.894 (current harvest period).

In the jargon of the FAO, this inadequate level of world cereals output is referred to as "a tighter global cereal supply situation in 1993/94," as stated in their November 1993 *Food Outlook* publication. While citing acute food supply problems in parts of Africa, central Asia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the FAO observes only that their own "forecast of 1993 world cereal production is 1.894 million tons, 3.5% below the previous year and *below trend*" (emphasis added). In reality, leaving aside the question of how accurate the FAO's statistics are, their premise that there should have been an upward trend line in yearly world cereals and food output in recent years is against all common sense and cause and effect.

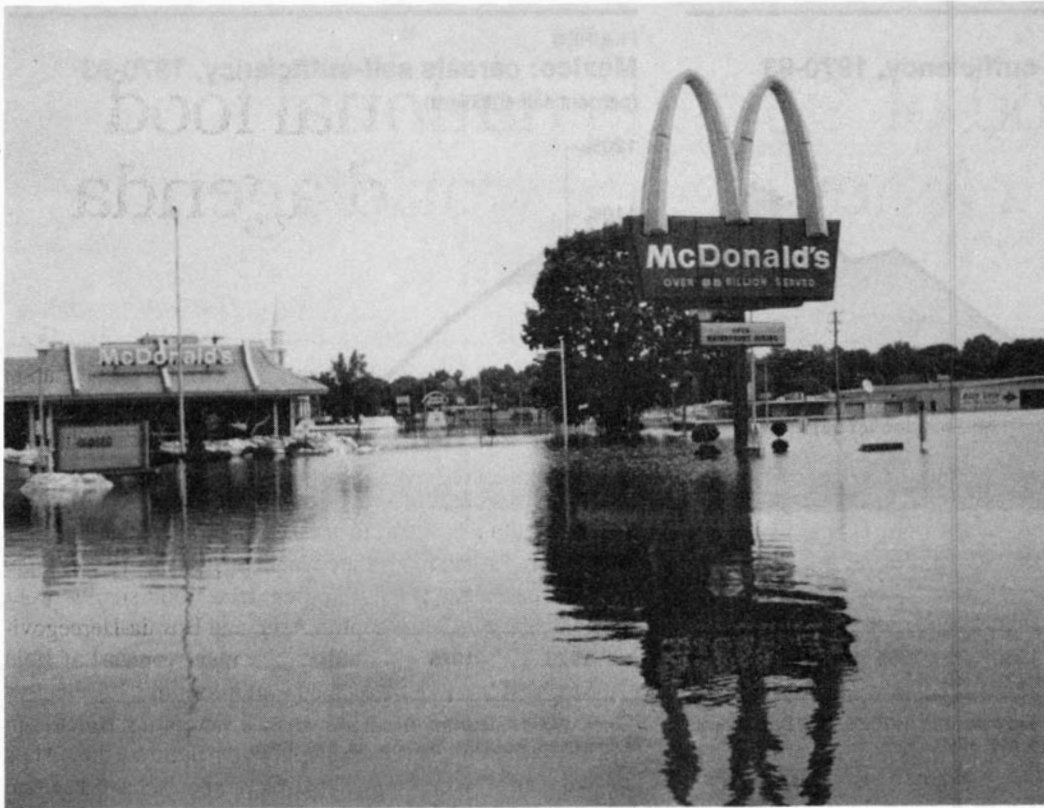
What the fall-off in cereals output reflects is the sharp fall-off of necessary inputs and resources improvements of all kinds in agriculture over the past 25 years. This decline ranges from fewer irrigated acres in the United States, to a steep drop in fertilizer applications in the former Soviet bloc, to lack of machinery and farm chemicals, and exhaustion of the soils.

However, neither the decline in inputs nor cereals output is inevitable. Today's crisis reflects the decades of austerity and free trade policy that have denied development of agricultural systems, to the point that today we have a global famine at hand.

## National food self-sufficiency

One way to take a summary look at the trend of devolution in agriculture in recent decades is from the point of view of the declining degree of food self-sufficiency for dozens of countries, and from that vantage point, to look at the crisis today when the purported food surplus countries are not producing volumes of staples for supplying the "free market" for food-importing nations.

A "cereals self-sufficiency ratio" has been calculated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, covering 1970-89, with seven time points, for a selected list of nations. The ratio is based on adjustments for stock changes, and takes into account all types of domestic use, including feed for livestock. All types of cereals are included in the calculations—wheat,



*The Mississippi River floods at St. Louis, Missouri, July 1993. The \$25 billion in damage caused by the flood could have been prevented, had infrastructure been maintained. The worst of it is, that Washington has not learned this lesson, and is instead proceeding to shut down productive communities throughout the floodplain area.*

barley, millet, corn, sorghum, etc.

Looking first at the cereals self-sufficiency ratio for the United States (**Figure 1**), two features of the last 23 years are immediately apparent. First, during the 1970s, and extending into the mid-1980s, the U.S. self-sufficiency ratio climbed to a level of 155-172%, reflecting actions by the food commodities cartel companies, and the USDA itself, to induce U.S. farmers to mass produce grain (and soybeans) for export—which surplus was used by cartel interests for ongoing food-as-a-weapon practices in many parts of the world.

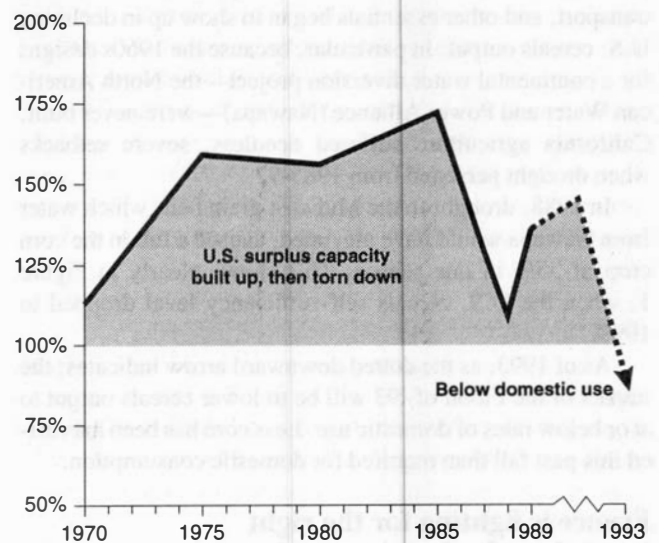
The companies involved include Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland, Continental, Louis Dreyfus, André/Garnac, Bunge, among others. The cartel-serving food control deals struck during this time included, among others, 1) a U.S.-U.S.S.R. arrangement for a specified minimum volume of U.S. grain to be purchased by Moscow each year; 2) guaranteed access for Cargill/ADM-brokered soybean products to be purchased by the European Community.

Moreover, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger went to the U.N. World Food Conference in Rome in November 1974 and, shedding crocodile tears for the hungry, made various bogus relief proposals that strengthened the control of the food cartel. Privately, Kissinger commissioned a National Security Study Memorandum in December 1974, which called for wielding the U.S. food surplus as a weapon against targeted nations.

Then, following the decade of surplus cereals output from

**FIGURE 1**  
**United States: cereals self-sufficiency, 1970-93**

(percent self-sufficient)

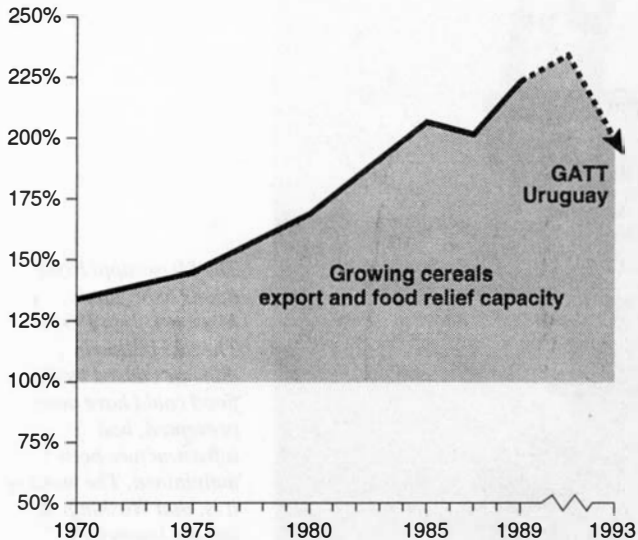


Source: *World Agriculture, Trends and Indicators, 1970-89*, U.S. Department of Agriculture Research Service, No. 815, 1990.

FIGURE 2

**France: cereals self-sufficiency, 1970-93**

(percent self-sufficient)



Source: *World Agriculture, Trends and Indicators, 1970-89*, U.S. Department of Agriculture Research Service, No. 815, 1990.

the mid-1970s to mid-1980s, the U.S. cereals self-sufficiency ratio of surplus-for-export began to decline. Thousands of farmers were ruined by several years of Federal Reserve Board Chairman Paul Volcker's high interest (and therefore, high debt service) rates, plus high energy costs related to inflated oil prices, plus systematic underpayment of farmers by the cartel companies.

At the same time, in the mid-to late-1980s, the results of the cumulative lack of infrastructure improvements in water, transport, and other essentials began to show up in declining U.S. cereals output. In particular, because the 1960s designs for a continental water diversion project—the North American Water and Power Alliance (Nawapa)—were never built, California agriculture suffered needless, severe setbacks when drought persisted from 1985-92.

In 1988, drought in the Midwest grain belt, which water from Nawapa would have alleviated, caused a fall in the corn crop of 35% in one season. This shows clearly in Figure 1, when the U.S. cereals self-sufficiency level dropped to 109%.

As of 1993, as the dotted downward arrow indicates, the impact of the Flood of '93 will be to lower cereals output to at or below rates of domestic use. Less corn has been harvested this past fall than required for domestic consumption.

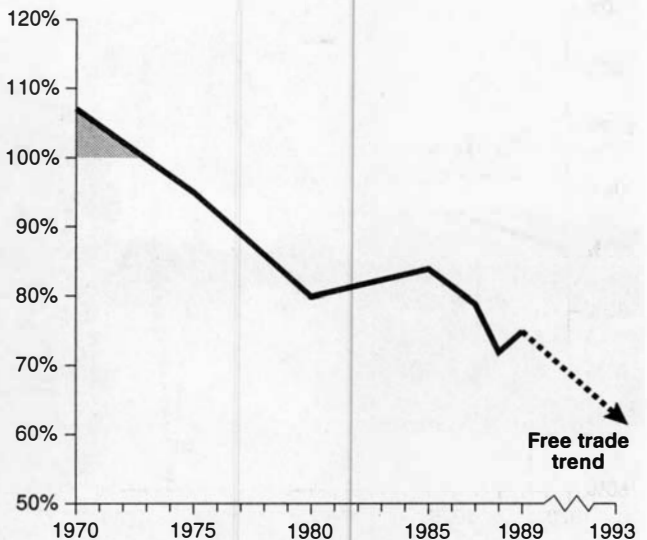
**France is fighting for the right to produce food**

Figure 2 shows the rapid rise in the grain (mostly wheat) output potential of France after the 1960s when, under the

FIGURE 3

**Mexico: cereals self-sufficiency, 1970-93**

(percent self-sufficient)



Source: *World Agriculture, Trends and Indicators, 1970-89*, U.S. Department of Agriculture Research Service, No. 815, 1990.

Common Agriculture Program (CAP) of the European Community, France built up its agricultural productivities dramatically. As of the mid-1980s, France reached levels of cereals self-sufficiency of over 200% and became a significant grain-for-export producer. Partly in response to this, a bloc of U.S.-London financial interests in 1986 initiated the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), designed to coerce nations to give up their right to set food and farm policies, banking, currency, and other previously sovereign national policy rights.

In December 1993, after seven years of fighting, France and the other negotiating member nations caved in to the Uruguay Round free trade scheme. From 1990 to the present, thousands of French farmers have taken to the streets to protest this plan, and to demand that the national right to produce be maintained. Figure 2 projects France's fall in cereals self-sufficiency under the new GATT treaty.

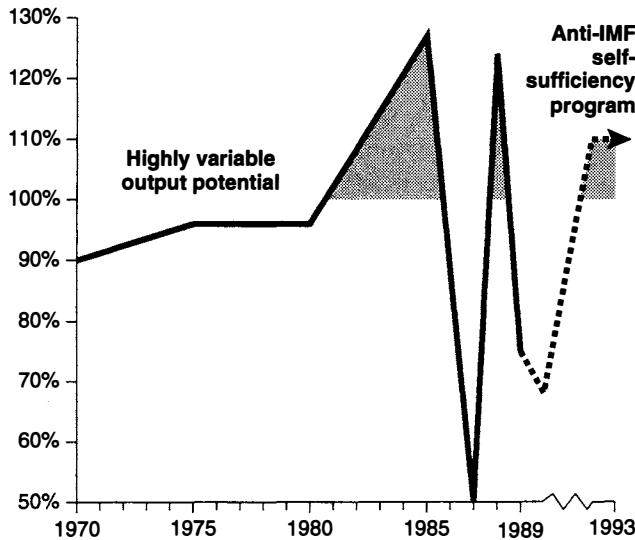
**Mexico goes from grain exporter to desperation**

Figure 3 shows the stark decline in national food self-sufficiency in Mexico, from being a grain exporter in the 1960s, as shown by the cereals self-sufficiency ratio of 107% in 1970, to being import-dependent for grain, with only a 72-75% cereals self-sufficiency ratio in the late 1980s. In the early 1980s, there was an effort to resume cereals self-sufficiency, under President José López Portillo. But today, as shown by the falling arrow for 1993, the national food supply situation is desperate.

FIGURE 4

**Sudan: cereals self-sufficiency, 1970-93**

(percent self-sufficient)



Source: *World Agriculture, Trends and Indicators, 1970-89*, U.S. Department of Agriculture Research Service, No. 815, 1990.

While over the 1980s, the period of imposed free trade, Mexican imports of U.S. corn and beans, Canadian wheat, and other foodstuffs increased, according to the commodities' cartel schemes; in fact, Mexico's food gap has widened, and undernourishment and malnutrition now afflict an estimated two-thirds of the 86 million people of Mexico.

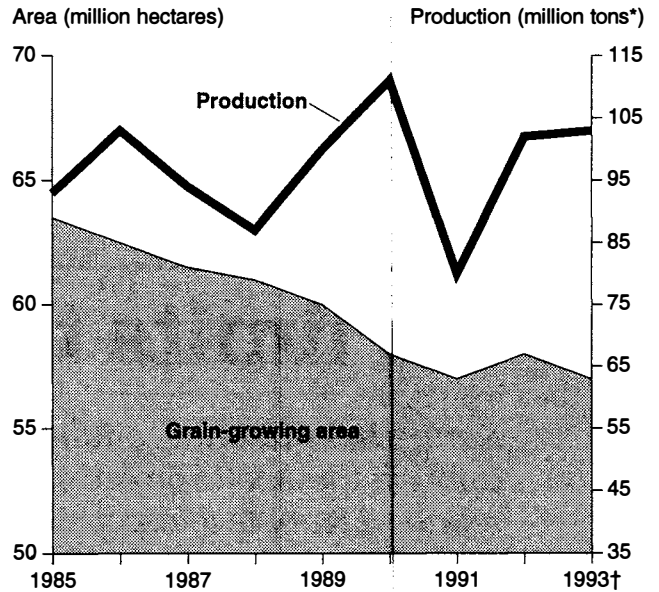
Over 1993, a nationwide farm protest movement arose in response to the secret financial agreements connected to the North American Free Trade Agreement, which would result in the elimination of two-thirds to 80% of Mexico's family farmers, who provide most of the national grain output.

**Sudan embarks upon emergency food self-sufficiency program**

Figure 4 shows the high variability in output potential for Sudan, Africa's largest nation in size and one of the potentially most productive, naturally endowed food belts in the world. The self-sufficiency ratio of cereals production (mostly sorghum) swings from 127% in 1985, down to 50% in 1987, and back up to 124% in 1988. This reflects what can happen in a region such as the Sahel, where rainfall is highly variable from year to year. But mostly, the swings reflect anti-development interventions by the IMF, World Bank, and related agencies to prevent water, power, and mechanization projects from going forward to insulate food output against annual precipitation swings. For example, the Jonglei Canal, designed as a 380-kilometer cut to straighten and improve the upper White Nile, was half built as of the mid-1980s, then shut down under pressure from the IMF.

FIGURE 5

**Grain-growing area production in the Russian Federation, 1985-93**



\* Tonnage in clean weight.

† Forecast, October 1993.

Source: *Former U.S.S.R. Update*, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Oct. 12, 1993.

In November, Sudan President Omar El Bashir announced in an interview with the Paris daily *Le Figaro* that Sudan would soon resume the Jonglei Canal construction and other projects in its national development program. The El Bashir government came to power in 1989, and in 1991, adopted a food-self sufficiency program, despite expulsion by the IMF.

**Russia's food emergency**

Russia and other former Soviet bloc countries now rank among the food emergency regions of the world. Figure 5 shows for the Russian Federation the decline in absolute area planted and harvested, and also the expected drop in the 1993 harvest.

In 1990, thanks to fortuitous weather, the availability of farm chemicals, a mobilization of harvest machinery, and other measures, the total grain production was 111 million metric tons. The October 1993 estimate shown is for 103 million tons, which is overstated, according to more accurate reports. Moreover, as of October, Russian winter grain seeding and soil preparation for the 1994 crop were 30% behind because of delays in bringing in the 1993 crop, and bad weather. Between 1985 and 1989, the grain area harvested dropped over 3 million hectares, and fell another 3 million in the last five years.