

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

No bountiful harvest this Thanksgiving

Any "free trade" treaty in the face of world food scarcities is a prescription for genocide.

There is no bountiful harvest for which to give thanks this year. As 1991 draws to a close, the assessment of the world grain crop is that far too little grain has been harvested to provide even minimum nourishment for human life and dignity.

Globally, about 3 billion tons of grains of all types should be harvested each year for adequate consumption for 5 billion people (directly as cereals, and indirectly for livestock feed), and for national food reserves for emergencies. Instead, about 1.695 billion metric tons will likely be the 1991 world harvest, according to the November monthly "World Agriculture Production" report issued by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. And much of this grain will be in the grip of the world food cartel companies.

This abysmal picture is the result of 25 years of incompetent and immoral economic policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Under the dictates of these agencies, Third World nations have been unable to advance their agriculture-related infrastructure (water, transportation, industry, fertilizers). At the same time, farmers in the so-called advanced sector have been financially hard-pressed and have been induced to take land out of production. Enough crop land has been idled from production in the United States since 1985 to exceed the territorial size of the state of Massachusetts.

In the context of food scarcities, the cartel of mega-food companies has

moved to monopolize world food supplies for political control purposes. The world grain trade is dominated totally by a few companies—Cargill, Continental, Bunge, Louis Dreyfus, Garnac/André, Feruzzi, Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), and a few others.

The pressure for nations to agree to allow these companies free rein under a "free trade treaty"—the proposed GATT "Uruguay Round," and the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement of the United States, Mexico, and Canada—is tantamount to a guarantee of world famine. Under this scenario, all remaining national support for farmers would be disallowed, and nations would be forced to rely on the "world market" for their food—i.e., the food cartel companies.

Instead, national initiatives for food output expansion are required—*not* free trade.

Here is the summary harvest picture from around the world in the Nov. 13 USDA report.

Total grains. The USDA forecasts that total world grain output in 1991 (wheat, corn, rice, millet, oats, etc.) will be 1.695 billion tons, down 5% from last year's 1.78 billion tons and well below the harvest levels of several years in the 1980s. This decline is the result of declines in several crops in high-producing nations.

Wheat. Worldwide, growers are expected to reap 547.2 million tons, which is 8% below last year's wheat harvest—a record crop, but below what is needed for good nutrition.

The wheat crop in Australia, a

source of exportable surplus for food relief and trade, is drastically down, to about 10 million tons. In the past, it has reached 15 million tons. The drought in the top farm states of Queensland and New South Wales has caused dreadful damage. The wheat crop in the former Soviet Union is a low 78 million tons.

Feed grains. The USDA estimates for world total output (corn, grain sorghum, etc.) is about 801.5 million tons, which is down 4% from last year's harvest. Much of this is accounted for by weather damage to the heart of the U.S. corn belt—which in good years accounts for almost half of the globe's corn output. Iowa, a top corn state, along with Illinois, was slammed by floods in the planting season, followed by searing drought.

Australia's feed grain harvest is estimated to be about 6.9 million tons, 6% less than last year. This reflects the barley losses in the northeast part of the country. Feed grain production is also down in the Soviet Union.

In the face of these declines, the increases in some other grainbelt regions is not enough to compensate on a world scale. China, one of the largest grain producers, suffered huge losses of crops and life when flooding hit central China; however, there were good harvests in Szechwan and the North China Plain.

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization warned in its October 1991 "Food Outlook" report: "Output in the major grain exporting countries is down 5%, despite large harvests in Canada and the EEC [European Community]. . . . Regional food supply problems continue to worsen. In the Horn of Africa the situation is critical. In Somalia some 4.5 million people are threatened by famine. . . . The food and nutrition situation in Iraq is alarming, with increased incidence of malnutrition."