

People vs. Food

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Humans Multiplying Faster Than Food Supply

By Ferdie J. Deering

Like wage earners who spend their incomes as fast as pay checks can be cashed, the world eats up nearly all it grows each year and obligates future crops with increased population.

Only a few countries have been able to overcome this extravagant way of living. The United States is one of them, but many Americans were almost panic-stricken last year when they realized how our carryover food supplies had been depleted.

Among the reactions have been demands that we should impose an embargo on food exports. Other extremists are demanding that we should help set up a world food reserve so that everybody may claim equal shares of the total food supplies.

Neither position is justifiable. If we shut off exports, we would have surplus commodities stacked all over the landscape, and farmers would go bankrupt. If we join the food reserve, we could be called upon to give away too much and be unable to feed ourselves.

Reliable figures are scarce on just how much reserve food the world has. At a world population conference in Bucharest in August, one report estimated that the world had only a 27-day supply. Earl L. Butz, secretary of agriculture, disputed the claim, saying that it is more like a 400-day food reserve.

Whichever it is, the margin of security is not great.



As long as the vast majority of the world's people will not utilize available means of limiting the numbers of children born each year, the food reserve will continue to decline.

Most countries have never had much more than enough to get by from one harvest to the next. Often they refuse to employ new methods to increase their food output.

Even with this lack of efforts to help themselves, such people arouse concern of others who would like to alleviate the suffering and death. The United States has carried on extensive and expensive foreign aid programs for decades.

Giving food to underdeveloped nations may only prolong the problem, or have other undesirable results. Food control is people control, and leaders sometimes have used food donated or financed by the United States to advance political ideologies detrimental to freedom, or antagonistic to this country.

Records show that making more food available to

indigent people tends to accelerate population increases. People become more procreative, they live longer, and the infant mortality rate declines.

Some scientists say that the present population of about 4.5 billion already is greater than the earth can maintain adequately as free human beings. Others argue that the earth could support from 35 to 47 billion people with the type of diet eaten in the United States. The latter seems to be impossible.

Still others say that the way to solve the food and population crisis is for those who are eating well to stop it. A professor at Harvard, where many exotic theories originate, suggests that "if Americans ate like the Chinese, we'd have most of the problem solved."

A World Food Conference has been scheduled for Rome November 5-16, where about 130 nations will try to establish an international food reserve, from which any country needing food would be able to check out supplies. Others would provide.

The U.S. delegation to this FAO conference may be headed by Secretary Butz, who has said he would enter it with a "spirit of constructive helpfulness, sharing and co-operation", but he does not want to create a government-owned food reserve system. Other top personalities in government seem to hold different views.

The Overseas Development Council and the World Council of Churches have been plugging for such a plan. So have spokesmen for many of the nations that will be represented.

A number of congressmen support a food reserve plan. Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey, D-Minn., introduced a food reserve bill this summer "to assure

needy nations of emergency supplies and to stabilize prices by purchasing grain in times of surplus and selling in times of shortage."

About two months ago, Sen. Henry Belmon said: "From the unlikely places we are hearing learned talk about food reserves, sale of American food commodities on concessional terms, fertilizer shortages and malnutrition. At least a part of what is going on is a carefully organized effort to build the case and lobby Congress to increase food giveaway programs and establish a food stockpile to replace the one that recently existed in our grain surpluses."

Reaching way back to the Truman administration, when Dr. Henry G. Bennett was working in the Point Four program, a more practical approach to the problem may be found. This idea is to help other countries grow more of their own food, instead of growing it, hauling it over there and giving it to them.

In fact, that may be the only solution. From a world viewpoint, the food shortage is being made permanent by the population surplus. This country can't feed everybody!