

Food Becoming Critical Resource

THE world is adding 80 million people a year. In order to accommodate that growth, output of nearly everything will have to be doubled over the next few decades just to stay even.

That awesome thought is from an article on "The Human Population" by Ronald Freedman and Bernard Berelson in Scientific American magazine. There are other stupendous observations in this issue, which is devoted mainly to problems of world growth.

Experts foresee a world population of 8.2 billion by 2050, with 90 per cent of the additional people in underdeveloped countries. Everywhere, cities are growing faster than countries, meaning that pressures on food supplies will be magnified.

In another article by Ansley J. Coale, it is noted that there never has been a census of all the people in the world, but it is estimated that if present population increase rates are maintained, the population would double in 35 years, and in less than 1,200 years the human population would outweigh the earth.

That is why mankind is coming closer to a precipice where mass starvation may occur whenever drouth or plant diseases result in below-average crop production. Already, slight decreases in world food supplies are likely to cause sharp rises in prices, according to Roger Revelle, writing on "Food and Population".

Revelle says that no country and no region of the modern world, except possibly some interior areas of

New Guinea, are self-sufficient in food. World production of cereal grains, the principal staples of the world food supply, more than doubled between 1951 and 1971 while population increased by less than 50 per cent. But the increase in food was not equally shared by growing countries.

Charles F. Westoff says that a large fraction of a billion people have access to a kind of life that formerly was known only to a privileged few. "Understandably," he says, "inhabitants of underdeveloped lands look to the day when their own countries will cross the imaginary, elusive line that separates the haves from have-nots."

A movement is under way to try to solve these imbalances by forced redistribution of world food supplies, including establishment of an international food bank. Many authorities believe that a more practical approach would be to expand food production in nations that are growing

most rapidly in population.

"Agricultural modernization in underdeveloped countries is one of the great challenges facing mankind," Revelle wrote. "For future human welfare such modernization must proceed much more rapidly than population growth, so that standards of living can be raised and opportunities for improvements in conditions of life can be increased. If it does not take place quickly, it may not be possible at all."

Developed countries possess a large share of mankind's ability to gain knowledge through research, and they have ability to finance sizable costs involved in transfer of technology, skills and equipment needed to expand food production and economic development.

Sending food abroad will help this year and next, but only by helping overpopulated countries to feed themselves can we hope for a well-fed, peaceful world. Hungry people will fight for bread!