

Food Production Keeps On Increasing But So Do the World's Hungry Mouths

JAN 15 1984

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It seems like just about everything Oklahomans grow on the farms is in surplus, and we could grow more wheat, cattle, cotton, peanuts, etc., than we do now.

Yet hungry people of the world could and would consume all of our surpluses if they could get them. Food supplies have little to do with the claims of hunger in the United

States or in so-called developing nations.

Food piles up in productive nations because the world's political and economic systems cannot equalize supply and demand.

According to current estimates, the world population is increasing by 250,000 people per day. By the time a youngster now in first

grade finishes college, world population is expected to grow from the present 4.6 billion to 6.1 billion people.

Ninety-two per cent of the increase will occur in the poorer nations, whose principal "products" are more children.

During the past 15 years, world food production has increased almost one-third, hitting a record high in 1983. But per capita food supplies have increased only about 5 percent.

The fundamental problem is that many of these countries have either very limited or unutilized resources and the majority of their populations are unproductive. Lack of management skills, capital, motivation and job training keeps them that way.

Poverty, rather than a world food shortage, has been identified as the major cause of hunger. Yet poor countries grow fastest.

Population forecasts indicate a 65 percent gain in Africa by the year 2000. Latin America population will go up 44 percent. Asia's present 2,730 million will increase 30 percent to reach 3,564 million. That's 3.5 billion people, more than were in the entire world only a generation or two ago.

The United States has provided technical assistance, loans or grants to pay for labor, and financed farming equipment trying to help hungry nations grow more food, with only limited success.

In addition, the United States has helped almost every country in the world with food aid programs. During the 1970s, the U.S. shipped more than 10 million tons of food to other countries. In 1979, the U.S. shipped 10.5 million tons, a record. But the U.S. has not been able to keep up with the demand for food aid.

Because poor countries often have weak governments, food aid does not always reach those in need. It is needed to help these countries develop their own food production practices. Some

countries have gone into debt beyond ability to pay to buy food.

USDA economist Kevin Lanagan, who directed an Economic Research Service study on world food conditions last year, says food aid needs will be greater in the 1983/84 crop year than they were in the 1982/83 year.

For many years, the heaviest burden of international food aid was borne by the United States, but recently the European Community nations, Japan, Canada and Australia have significantly expanded their flow of supplies into the developing world.

The strength of the dollar is a handicap to food importing nations, as well as to American farmers. It results in reduced volume of food purchases from the United States and supplies pile up.

Barter, the system of trading products without money or by mutual purchase agreements, has not found widespread favor either in government or business in the United States. Recent estimates show that the percentage of world trade conducted through barter has tripled in the past decade, now amounting to almost one-fourth.

In November, the U.S. government traded 14,000 tons of surplus dairy products to France for 14,000 tons of bauxite valued at \$136 million. It would seem that much more of this type of trading could be developed to the benefit of all participants.

Selling food for cash or trading it for minerals and other resources needed by this country will depend largely on the extent to which the U.S. government is willing to trade food for minerals and other resources. It is a matter of policy.