

U.S. Food Problems Preferable To Those in Rest of the World

By Ferdie J. Deering

Virtually every country in the world has either a farm problem or a food problem. Many have both.

The farm/food problem in the United States is costly and apparently unsolvable. But in comparison with those of other countries, it may be the best kind to have.

Food lines in the United States occur mainly where loaded shopping carts clog check-out counters. Consumers spend only about one-sixth of their take-home pay for food, compared to more than half in many countries.

Numerous nations simply do not have enough food available for their populations and lack money to buy it. The present famine in Africa probably is the worst in this century.

Productive nations have problems, too. Britain, Denmark, Belgium, France, West Germany, Greece, Holland, Italy, Ireland and Luxembourg, the 10 countries that make up the European Community, have as much trouble agreeing on farm policies as Congress does.

Farm subsidies consume more than 60 per cent of the \$23 billion EC budget, largely to pay farmers higher prices for products that are sold for lower prices on world markets.

Farm income fell 21 per cent in West Germany last year, nearly 10 per cent in France, and 6.5 per cent in Britain. Britain, usually allied with West Germany, wants to reduce subsidies and lower retail food prices. France is trying to maintain political tradeoffs.

Then there's the Russian farm problem. Although rated as the

Analysis MAR 25 1984

world's largest wheat-producing nation, it must import huge quantities of grain to provide bread for its people.

In an interview conducted and published by the Oklahoma Foundation for the Humanities, Henry Bellmon, farmer and former U.S. Senator, told of a conversation he once had with Alexei Kosygin. The former Soviet premier had difficulty in believing that one American farmer could produce as much as 50 or 60 Soviet farmers.

"At the highest level of government the Soviets are distressed by their failures in agriculture," Bellmon said. "Failures both for reliability and productivity. The don't get much out of their people or out of their land."

Now that's a real problem, which causes the Russian people to stand in line almost daily to buy whatever foods are available.

In dozens of nations, political intervention is a major handicap to both food production and distribution. Some don't have facilities for handling food, even if donated. Sometimes graft keeps it from reaching the hungry.

A few months ago, the Wall Street Journal reported that "bureaucratic blight" had hit farm productivity and purchasing power in Japan, Taiwan and South Korea, Asia's most prosperous and successful economies.

About 40 per cent of the "developing world's population" live in India, where per capita food supplies remain below "recommended nu-

tritional minimums." A billion people in China apparently get enough food for work, but menus and diets are severely limited.

At least 18 nations in Africa face food problems of starvation dimensions. During 1982-83, it is reported some 100,000 persons die of starvation in Mozambique in southeast Africa.

Many developing countries have gone hopelessly into debt trying to buy food, but even rich nations do not get all of the food they

want. The Japanese people would like to eat more beef, but farmer opposition to imports keeps it off most tables.

Argentina, Australia and Canada made big gains in world trade when a series of grain export embargoes gave the United States a reputation of an "unreliable supplier." They still have problems, as we do, because of a global wheat glut and prices are low.

If we went shopping on the world market for the farm/food problems that might be regarded as preferable over others, most of us might choose to keep the one we have.