

Food Subsidies Benefit Consumers

PEOPLE who complain about the cost of federal farm programs in the United States might have a different viewpoint if they compared U.S. costs with those of other countries.

Official Russian sources say the Soviet government shelled out \$175 per person last year to subsidize meat and dairy product prices. Total cost of holding down prices for consumers was \$48 billion, and government decides how much farmers are paid.

If the United States spent \$175 per person on food subsidies it would total more than \$40 billion. Russia's total is bigger because the population there is larger.

At least the Russians admit that their program is a consumer subsidy. Politicians in this country try to pretend that all food subsidies are farmer subsidies.

Total cost of federal food and farm programs for the current year is \$34.7 billion. The appropriations bill for federal farm, food and nutrition programs for 1985, now moving through Congress, amounts to \$34.2

billion (subject to last minute changes).

Of this, around \$11 billion is for agricultural programs, about \$5 billion for rural programs, and nearly \$15 billion for food stamps, school lunch programs, food for women, infants and children, nutrition education, commodity distribution, etc.

Of greater significance is the fact that Russia must buy large amounts of grain for food and to keep herds and flocks producing meat and milk. The Communists are expected to buy record amounts of grain in the year ahead from Americans whose capitalist system they criticize and would like to displace.

Americans rank sixth among nations in per capita income and 17th in amount spent per capita on food. Measured against total living expenses, Americans spend 12.7 percent of their income for food.

We eat well, too. Early this year the U.S. Department of Agriculture compared American and Russian diets. We eat more meat and animals fats, sugar and fruit than Russians. They consume more fish, dairy

products, vegetables and grains than we do.

Egg consumption in the two countries is about the same while Americans consume only half as much milk and milk products as the Russians. They consume 242 pounds of potatoes per capita compared to 79 pounds in the U.S. and 302 pounds of grain, double the 150 pounds eaten annually per person in the United States.

Of course, most industrialized nations eat pretty well, but Japan and others must rely on imported food, much of it subsidized.

The saddest situation is in Africa where severe drought has brought death and disaster to millions who seldom had enough to eat when it rained and times were good.

According to FAO, 24 of the countries of the world presently are facing food crises. We should be thankful that ours is a nation blessed with plenty and happy that our country is doing much to help feed starving people around the globe. Our system may not be perfect, but it certainly beats the best of the rest.