

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

'Let them eat dirt'

The administration and congress are arriving at a farm package that will mean a massive reduction in food output.

The month of July's flurry of last-minute voting by congressional committees on the new 1985 farm bill is a signal of a cold coup: U.S. agriculture policy is now completely in the hands of the European-based feudalist cartels. This oligarchy's advice to the nation makes Marie Antoinette seem a republican. They say, "Let them eat dirt."

The Senate, House, and administration have concurred on implementing an unprecedented "land reserve" in which 20 to 30 million acres—out of a total national farm acreage base of 421 million acres—are to be removed from food production over the next ten years.

Farmers are to sign an unbreakable long-term contract with the government to remove land from food production, in exchange for government money to plant trees or non-food cover crops. The deal is advertised to cost less than current government programs—loans, price subsidies, and storage costs—that guarantee the national food supply. Farmers who would prefer to provide food, will nevertheless be coerced to sign up by circumstances: They have no money for operating expenses, and face losing their land in any case.

At a news conference June 28, Agriculture Secretary John Block said that he regards 1 in 8 acres of U.S. cropland eligible for the program, 53 million of 421 million acres.

The World Wildlife Federation, the Sierra Club, the Conservation Foundation, and other aristocracy-serving networks are gloating as they anticipate vast, new wilderness areas opening up under their control.

Parallel to the land reserve program, millions of acres of prime farm land are even now reverting to government or cartel takeover through collateral foreclosures by the Farm Home Mortgage Association and other federal or quasi-government credit agencies, insurance companies, and commercial banks.

The two rationalizations fed to the public for the feudalist land reserve scheme are: First, fragile lands must be protected; second, less food output will give distressed farmers higher prices, by reducing "food surpluses" and activating the laws of supply and demand.

First, consider the national food supply question. Both the "surpluses" and the "laws" are mythical.

Additional provisions of the new farm bill are designed to guarantee food output reduction, even before the land reserve is created. The national milk reduction program has been approved by the House for renewal. Another provision mandates grain farmers to vote in a national referendum on how much less grain they will grow and market, or, if they choose not to vote, they face mandatory production quotas.

The result of these measures—whatever the details of the final package as President Reagan may receive and sign it—will be a guaranteed drastic drop in food output. To divert public attention from these consequences, the USDA and the media have conducted a misinformation campaign on anticipated huge crop "surpluses" this year. The July 8 *New York Times* carried stories of a mythical "World Wheat Glut." The July USDA

projections of the expected "huge" fall grain harvests are an Alice-in-Wonderland hoax. Such projections have always been used to justify the low prices paid to farmers by the cartel companies—Cargill, Inc. and the rest (Louis Dreyfus, Bunge, Continental, etc.). Since 1983, a top Cargill executive, Daniel Amstutz, has been the power at the USDA from his position as Undersecretary of Agriculture for International Affairs.

On the soil erosion argument, typical of the sources is the Conservation Foundation, which has been lobbying Congress for a "National Resources Conservation Act" to lock up farmland and create wilderness zones. On May 6 and 7, the Conservation Foundation co-sponsored a forum in Washington, D.C. with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service. The symposium released a 252-page book, *Eroding Soils—The Off-Farm Impacts*, making the bogus claim that too much food production was creating undesirable run-off of soil and chemicals into the waterways. The study was financed by those famous defenders of the national resource base: the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Atlantic-Richfield Foundation, and Exxon Company, U.S.A.

The Conservation Foundation itself was founded in the 1940s as the U.S. continuation of a royalty-club called the Nature Conservancy Society of Europe, which called for the elimination of inferior "breeds" of human beings.

It is an oligarchy-serving lie that soil depletion is the inevitable result of growing food to feed people. With proper land management, energy availability, and inputs, soil erosion can be minimized; soils can even be built up out of deserts. The impoverishment of farmers, unable to afford needed inputs, is responsible for U.S. soil erosion of recent years.