
Interview: Lukas Brader

One year ago, FAO chief KO'd spraying

Lukas Brader, a Dutch agronomist, is director of the Emergency Center for Locust Operations at the headquarters of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome. He is also director of the FAO's Self-Protection and Protection Division. This interview was conducted over one year ago, on Feb. 18, 1987, by Marjorie Mazel Hecht.

EIR: Can you describe the threat to the 1987 cereal crops in Africa?

Brader: First of all, there is the grasshopper situation in the Sahel and Western Africa—from Chad to Senegal and Mauritania, six or seven countries there. They were invaded last year, much wider than the year before, and the eggs will hatch with the beginning of the rainy season in June. So, the invasion is over a very wide area.

EIR: I have had some discussions with Mr. Rafink Skaf, your assistant in Rome. We disagreed completely on the approach that should be taken to eradicate the locusts. I argued that there should be large-scale spraying and that big planes should be used more, as they were in Senegal. Mr. Skaf said, "No, no, our policy is simply to protect the crop-land." My contention is that, because there was not more widespread spraying last year, it has resulted in this vast area, 40 to 50 million acres, where eggs were laid, that will now hatch and be a problem *this year and next*. He told me at the time that it was not just a question of money, but it was the FAO policy not to spray in a more widespread way. I would like you to comment on that.

Brader: You have to take into account the problem of grasshoppers as it evolves. They come after dry periods of a couple of years. If the rains become normal again, their multiplication intensity is very high, and countervailing natural mortality factors—parasites, predators, and so on—are very low or very ineffective. If we look at history, an upsurge like that usually lasts about two years until the biological equilibrium is reestablished. Normally, there is a 50 to 60% mortality from all sorts of other insects that eat these grasshoppers. That is one of the basic reasons that we feel we should not spray where it is not absolutely needed. Because if you spray everywhere, you would really not allow the natural balance

to reestablish itself and, in fact, you would prolong the plague beyond the two or three years it would normally last.

EIR: Of the many entomologists whom I have talked to in this country, no one agreed with that position.

Brader: But it's up to them, of course. In Africa, that is the situation, and we have now reviewed the whole situation of last year—the locust campaign. We have said that, okay, you have some choices. There's no doubt, you can have ground applications, you can have small planes. You may also have big planes if there is a dense enough infestation in a homogeneous way over a large enough area. When I say there is a potential infected area of 45 to 50 million hectares, this is not a homogeneous infestation. You have pockets of grasshoppers here and there. So, you are going to spray a tremendous amount of pesticide that is not really needed, and we need to be concerned about the environmental impact of this.

EIR: What is the environmental impact of spraying pesticides? It is a very light application, less than one ounce per acre.

Brader: How do you control all the other parasites and predators that are useful—that kill the grasshoppers?

EIR: The people I talked to in this country involved in grasshopper control said that is a silly point. Parasites have no effect whatsoever in a plague situation.

Brader: I don't know where they know that from. We only know from our observations, and in fact, I was just in Chad and Niger, where there are now egg masses in the ground again, and you find 45 to 50% natural mortality.

EIR: But look at the rate at which the insects multiply. If you don't spray more widely in the areas where they are breeding, *then you are bound to get next year an explosion of the insect population*. The people in the United States who control grasshoppers say that the FAO approach is just wrong. In Senegal last year, there was a disagreement, the FAO did not want big planes to come in and spray. Yet, the country decided it wanted to.

Brader: You still have heavy infestations now, so what is the end result?

EIR: You spray again, if you want to get rid of the problem. This brings me to another point. What the FAO seems to be saying, in the literature that we have seen, is that it does not believe that you can eliminate this problem. Its approach is one of keeping it under control as much of the time as possible.

Brader: Oh no, no, no, you can't eliminate it. What you can do is equip the countries with early warning and surveillance systems to have a much better early control approach—and this we are trying to do. But how can you eliminate a

problem of this kind? It's absolutely impossible.

EIR: Are you saying that it's not just a problem of money, that indeed if the money were available that you still would not do the large-scale spraying?

Brader: For 40, 50 million hectares? No.

EIR: Or, wherever you felt the pockets of breeding were most intense?

Brader: Doesn't that imply 40 or 50 million hectares of spraying?

EIR: Perhaps somewhat less.

Brader: No, I would not recommend it.

EIR: And why?

Brader: Because the environmental impact would be such that you would just prolong the plague.

EIR: You are saying that the environmental impact would be that you are killing off the natural parasites.

Brader: Yes.

EIR: Clearly, the entomologists I talked to in this country, some of whose interviews we have published, said that that was baloney.

Brader: That is not the opinion of the experts we brought together at our meeting in Rome in December. It's not just the opinion of the FAO. We base our opinion on the expert groups we put together, and on their advice, we make our strategy. . . . People have different opinions. I have never heard scientists who all had the same opinion.

EIR: And yet, in this country, we control grasshoppers and spray routinely millions of acres each year. Here they spray 13 to 17 million acres routinely every year to keep the grasshopper population down.

Brader: I don't think routinely. They do it on the basis that a real infestation is there, and then they control it. But where the infestation is not, they won't control it.

EIR: This has been true, certainly over the past two years. Why isn't the same approach used in Africa? And, if the insects are allowed to multiply like this in the grasslands, it adds to the process of desertification, especially in the Sahel area, where this is already a problem. It also eliminates your fodder for the animals that depend on those grasslands for their food.

Brader: If there is a homogeneous large infestation, we will treat grasslands, but if not, we won't treat it. If it is not a homogeneous large infestation, you will not get grasslands disappearing. I have no reports from the Sahel from last year that there was really grassland eaten up, that it was barren soil.

EIR: But this is the same area that this year is now full of eggs that will be ready to hatch in mid-June. Is that correct?

Brader: Yes.

EIR: The egg infestation is tremendous, from what I understand from FAO reports.

Brader: Pretty dense, yes.

EIR: You are saying that if these infestations are that dense and these eggs hatch. . . .

Brader: And in a homogeneous manner, then we will advise spraying in that area.

EIR: Even if it includes 40 million hectares?

Brader: Oh, 40 million hectares, we won't be able to spray—we won't get the money. I mean that's not a problem. You get a certain amount of money, and you have to spray where it's most effective.

EIR: I want to discuss the question of population in Africa. I was quite upset in my interviews with three of the past deputy directors of the FAO, including Count Ignatiev and Mr. Phillips, that they feel that people are the problem in Africa. They look at Africa as overpopulated, and believe it would not have such problems if it had fewer people. I wonder if you share that view.

Brader: In certain areas, the carrying capacity of the soil is rather limited so that population is getting too dense in certain areas. Yes, I would agree.

EIR: It seemed to me that, in looking at the FAO's map of carrying capacity for Africa, the areas that are called overpopulated, are exactly where the infestations take place.

Brader: Oh yes, no doubt. I agree.

EIR: Certainly, in the FAO literature it states very directly—that were high technology and financial inputs to be applied to this area, population carrying capacity could certainly be greatly increased.

Brader: Yes, and I don't know what that has to do with locusts.

EIR: If you go way back, even to the 1930s and 1940s, they understood then that if you made great infrastructural changes, and began to develop the land, that it would very much affect the breeding areas of the locusts. You could change the ecology.

Brader: Oh, it would be many years. Is that what you mean? Oh yes, I would agree, yes.

EIR: Then, it is a question of how you approach the continent.

Brader: But developing it is taking years and years and years. . . .