
Conference Report

There's no tradeoff between food production and population growth

by Marcia Merry

Crocodile tears flowed freely at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C. on Oct. 16-17, when 100 people gathered for the 17th annual conference of the Agriculture Council of America (ACA). The conference was entitled "Food and the Environment: a Crisis of Public Confidence," and its theme was how to reconcile the job of feeding hungry people with that of providing "safe" food (free of "chemical contamination," etc.) and of not depleting the environment.

A close look at the concepts presented over the two days shows that the conference actually resembled a gathering of foxes discussing how to be charitable to the poor chickens.

Among the more than 20 speakers were former Agriculture Secretaries Orville Freeman—president of the ACA—along with John R. Block and two members of Congress active in agriculture and environmentalist legislation, Sen. Wyche Fowler (D-Ga.) and Rep. Pat Roberts (R-Kan.). The event was co-sponsored by the Resources for the Future subgroup of the National Center for Food and Agriculture Policy.

The theme struck by the conference is, on the surface, a reasonable one: There should be no tradeoff between feeding people and maintaining the environment. In the words of Freeman, "As I have said on many occasions before, I think we make a potentially dangerous mistake when we frame the question in an adversarial light—to serve humanity or the environment. These goals need not and should not be mutually exclusive. Properly focused, the combined resources of the food and fiber industry, along with the environmental and conservation community, should be able to acknowledge the importance of both goals, and forge a commitment to pursue them together."

Orville Freeman has even been making an issue of the fact that millions are starving in the world. In July, at the World Future Society Conference in Washington, D.C., Freeman said that meeting the food needs for population increase "will take a total mobilization of all global productive resources—including land, infrastructure, people skills, and technology—to prevent massive famine in the decade

of the 1990s and beyond. Even conservative projections call for a population increase of over 1 billion people—bringing the world's population to 6.2 billion by the year 2000. These same projections predict a population of nearly 11 billion by the year 2050. This increase will take place in a world where already over 75% of the population can barely feed themselves; where almost 500 million people are severely malnourished; where 15 million children worldwide die each year from starvation—that is over 41,000 every day."

In this sentiment, Freeman would appear to stand out in opposition to such other "experts" as Lester Brown, the head of the Washington, D.C. World Watch Institute. Brown says, "The only reasonable goal will be to try and cut [population growth] in half by the end of the century, essentially what Japan did in the '50s and what China did in the '70s."

But look again. Orville Freeman has had a long career of service to the international food cartel, which has wrecked the production capabilities of independent farmers in the advanced sector and kept Third World countries in backwardness. For many years he was governor of Minnesota, the home base of Cargill Corp., one of the premier food cartel companies. He then served as agriculture secretary in the Johnson and Kennedy administrations, where his "free trade" agriculture policies gave a free rein to the cartel companies.

And look behind the façade of reason presented by Freeman in his "Opening Remarks" section of the Oct. 16 conference agenda, and you find policies elaborated that will lead to further starvation, on the scale of genocide, if they are implemented. The key, is the elimination of advanced technology in agriculture.

Look at the conference panels.

The first panel was "Agritechnology in the 21st Century; A New Era of Sustainability." Here various types of retrograde agriculture practices were presented, which any farmer would be familiar with, which systematically call for *less* energy per acre to be applied to food output (e.g., manure, not chemical fertilizers; foregoing insecticides) This is an automatic prescription for less food in the future, for degrading acreage, and for pauperizing farmers. The common de-

nominator to these proposals is that the farming would be *low cost*—primitive and labor-intensive. The buzz words for these practices are “sustainable” or “alternative” agriculture, as distinct from “conventional” or modern, high-technology farm practices which enhance the environment and produce higher food yields at the same time.

It is estimated that by systematically imposing low-energy farming, also called Low Input Sustainable Agriculture, or LISA, food output would drop by at least 15-25%, and the environment would accordingly decline. Many of the member organizations of the ACA know this full well, especially the chemical companies, but they favor population reduction, and go along with the hoax that low input agriculture will not reduce yields.

Another panel was called “A Balancing Act of Science and Politics.” Foremost among the speakers on this topic was Georgia Sen. Wyche Fowler. Fowler is decidedly “unbalanced” on the side of radical environmentalism. His key points were that if there is even a hint of public suspicion of danger from a farm chemical or other practice, then the chemical or practice should be eliminated immediately, and don’t worry about the scientific issue involved. He said this would prevent undue conflict between Congress and the regulatory agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Back to the pyramids?

Fowler is the pet politician of fanatic environmentalist circles like the World Wildlife Fund/Conservation Foundation, the Audubon Society, and the Rodale Institute. This past spring, he introduced draft federal legislation, in the name of “Water Conservation and Farm Preservation,” that called for sweeping penalties on farmers for violations of proposed new regulations to maintain water purity and other environmental concerns. Fowler said that the “sustainable” farming practices of ancient Egypt were good for the environment and a good model for today. He joked that he possesses these insights because he has been reincarnated from the time of ancient Egypt until now. One can only assume that he has overlooked the fact that the only thing “sustained” since the time of ancient Egypt are the tombs—the pyramids!

The final conference panel was on “Public Impressions: Media Images of the Food and Fiber System.” Here, the introductory speaker, former Agriculture Secretary John Block, now president of the National American Wholesale Grocers Association, gave a flag-waving tribute to how science should prevail over “fiction” when it comes to questions like the safety of chemical pesticides. On the surface, Block spoke in opposition to Fowler; but he simply appealed for public education to counter the onslaught of misinformation over food safety now being spread by the media.

What the event added up to was a mish-mash of platitudes and wrongheadedness—such as that of poor Senator Fowler—called “Witch Fowler” by Georgia farmers—while the

real “public education” drive of the group will be run from behind the scenes.

On Oct. 18, the new chairman of the board was elected, William F. Kirk, from the agriculture products department of Edgar Bronfman’s Du Pont Corporation. This reveals more of the real story behind the entire gala proceedings. In case after case, Du Pont has led the way in both sabotaging new technologies that would produce more food, and do it safely. For example, in the case of applying pesticides to crops, there could be one-quarter less chemical pesticides used in greenhouse and field crops if the chemical application were electrically charged first. The R&D for this was worked out decades ago. FMC Corp., the food and farm equipment manufacturer, was prepared to start mass-producing the needed equipment. But Du Pont did everything possible to sabotage this innovation, in the wrong perception that its own interests would be harmed by falling sales of farm chemicals. FMC backed away from manufacturing the equipment.

Even more outrageous, Du Pont has done everything to orchestrate the international ban on chlorfluorocarbons, which are used in refrigeration. Now Du Pont expects to gain simply from controlling, along with a cartel of other chemical firms, the patents on processing of alternative, less efficient refrigerants. This will make food refrigeration prohibitively expensive for billions of people.

So much for the new leadership of the ACA. Yet the membership of the group is so diverse, that the confusion that ACA can wreak upon the public is great. The ACA does not lobby for legislation, but functions as an umbrella public relations group for a broad spectrum of food related groups and companies.

The ACA officers and members of the board include individuals from ICI Americas, the Chicago Board of Trade, the pork producers, peanut growers, the wheat associations, and John Deere and Co. The ACA Education Foundation board includes representatives from the National Farmers Union, National Farmers Organization, Riceland Foods, Du Pont, and Women Involved in Farm Economics.

Over its 17-year history, the ACA has defined the “line” that is to go out through many different channels to the farm and food community. For example, in recent years two ACA-certified issues have been the necessity for international “fair trade,” and the issue of Third World development. In both cases, the ACA put out smokescreen propaganda for the international financial and commodities cartel interests—such as Du Pont and the major banks—which defined fair trade as that which was free from sovereign, national restrictions on the functioning of the cartels. These select interests defined Third World development as requiring only low-cost, low-level, “appropriate” technology for agriculture and the food industry.

At its Oct. 18 board meeting, the ACA adopted a new program, “A Program for Environmental and Food Related Issues,” which is to be elaborated over the coming months.