

# Floods, Food Losses; Obama Oblivious

by Marcia Merry Baker

May 23—The deadly May 22 super-tornado which flattened Joplin, Mo., is the latest, dramatic marker of extreme weather in the Americas, reflecting planetary reactions to larger, solar and galactic activity. But beyond Joplin—where at least 116 people died during the megatwister—the state of Missouri is part of a multi-state storm zone of the Flood of 2011, now devastating the central United States, where cropland, agriculture-related transportation, and food processing is concentrated.

Two features stand out in this situation: Firstly, whatever flood control systems and emergency preparedness capacity were in place, have been demonstrated to be crucial protections in the face of weather tumult. For example, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' MR&T (Mississippi River and Tributaries Project) for flood abatement is fully in place, and working.

The lesson? A shift must be made immediately, to broadening this kind of real disaster defense, and the thinking behind it, through a policy-shift to unleash economic activity and build-up of the entire national platform of productivity and protection. This requires re-instituting a credit system through re-establishing Glass-Steagall banking, and killing monetarism, bail-outs, and speculation. It's life or death.

Secondly, President Obama is oblivious. His Administration is doing a dance of disaster-aid-as-usual, and commiseration, when the disaster conditions require an extreme shift to sanity.

Obama made only a token stopover in the flood zone May 16, by jetting into Memphis, then rushing back to Washington to host an afternoon party for the basketball team winners from University of Connecticut, of the 2011 NCAA National Championship. He spent barely a half hour with Memphis flood victims, emergency workers, and officials; then, in a speech, Obama's message to disaster victims was, you're on your own. He praised "communities in Memphis and all across the

South, who have banded together to deal with flood waters and to help each other in the aftermath of terrible tornadoes."

## Army Corps Structures Work

What actually protects citizenry, are science, structures, and operations to understand and control nature. The MR&T is a case in point. On May 14, for the first time ever, all three major floodways of the Corps' MR&T project are in utilization at the same time, and working as planned. The Birds Point-New Madrid Floodway in Missouri; and the Bonnet Carré and Morganza Spillways in Louisiana. Devastation is still vast, but no comparison to what it would be without the floodways, and many other features (levees, pumps, dredging, reservoirs on tributaries, etc.) built to handle huge run-off.

"The performance of the MR&T system to date during the great flood validates the wise investment this nation made to help prevent another calamitous flood like the great 1927 disaster," stated Maj. Gen. Michael Walsh, president of the Project's Mississippi River Commission, in a letter he released May 15. He acknowledged the hardship on those having to vacate the floodways, but underlined that failure to use the diversion systems of the MR&T would have been far more devastating.

The MR&T was authorized in the 1928 Flood Control Act, further designed in the 1950s, and, despite underfunding, still mostly maintained. Most areas in the rest of the nation—including the Upper Mississippi Watershed—have not had protective systems fully developed for disasters—earthquakes, as well as floods. That is the task before us. In addition, the unique task for a radically expanded Army Corps of Engineers, is to spearhead the North American Water and Power Alliance (NAWAPA), for the benefit of the continent and the entire planet.

## Vast Farming Damage; Lost Rice Crop

The lack of such an approach, is seen in the vast damage to agriculture in the storm/flood corridor of the Mississippi/Ohio, which comes at a time of simultaneous crop and livestock losses in the severe drought area covering large parts of Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. Add to this, the crop problems from a wet, cold planting season in the northerly latitudes, and the April tornado damage in the southern states, and the impact on farming and the food chain is clear. For certain, the most-af-



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*Even before Joplin, Mo. was shattered by the mega-tornado May 22 (shown here), the region was reeling from the continuing effects of the Flood of 2011, which now threatens the U.S. food supply. President Obama's malign neglect provides further evidence for his impeachment.*

affected single crop is rice.

Of the U.S. total annual rice production, 75% is accounted for by the four lower Mississippi Basin states of Arkansas (45%), Louisiana (13%), Mississippi (16%), and Missouri (6%), now devastated by storms and flooding. Millions of acres of already planted rice-land are ruined, as well as fields of corn, soy, cotton, Winter wheat, and other crops. U.S. rice losses are an automatic hit for the world food supply, given that the U.S. has become, under cartel-rigged trade, the world's third-largest rice exporter.

Estimates put out by the American Farm Bureau Federation in mid-May, in the stricken rice states, put flood-hit acreage of crops (all kinds) at about 1 million acres each in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee. The damage toll in Louisiana is still spreading.

In Missouri, before the latest tornado storms, the Farm Service Agency estimated that at least 560,000 acres were severely damaged, including the 130,000 in the Birds Point-New Madrid Floodway. Now, in the Tornado Alley counties around Joplin, there will be thousands more crop acres destroyed.

Combine the area of flooded fields in these and more northerly flood zone states, and the total approaches over 2% of the national figure of 350 million acres of cropland, with ricelands most widely harmed. The impact of agricultural losses concentrated within these Lower Mississippi states is devastating.

In Arkansas, 22% of Winter wheat will likely be abandoned as too wet to harvest, on about 120,000

acres. This may rank as only 0.2% of the U.S. total wheat acreage of 42 million acres, but what is at stake is the productive existence of the region. Only Arkansas has been able to even assemble a preliminary estimate of damage by crop, to rice, corn, soybeans, and other plantings. There will be a loss of 300,000 acres of rice crop in Arkansas, out of a projected planting of 1.3 million rice acres in 2011, according to the state's Farm Bureau.

Mississippi Farm Bureau spokesman Greg Gibson said, "There is a good chance

that many farmers will not have time to replant this year since many fields will be wet until mid- to late-June. About 95% of the corn, soybeans and cotton had already been planted in the lower delta near Vicksburg."

Many farmers had already advance-sold their (expected) crop—a practice imposed under globalization—so they are now desperate to replant, because they have no means to buy grain to fulfill their contracts. They face utter ruin.

In response, under Obama, the Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency, FEMA, etc., are giving the usual delimited disaster aid, consisting of restricted grants for immediate emergency use (food, temporary shelter); partial aid (up to 75%) for approved restoration; intervening with your insurance company—if you have insurance!—to designate spillway flooding as an act of God (so the insurers will pay), and otherwise, good luck to you.

Instead, the full force and precedent of the FDR approach can be mobilized for programs to replant and rebuild. This includes field clearance, planting of short-season crops where possible, planting elsewhere to compensate, and otherwise full restoration of cropland for next season. These commitments to the national good require resources for support of the farm households and communities: Slap on food price controls; and outlaw the speculation on the food commodity exchanges.

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