

EIR Feature

Drought in U.S. means worldwide food catastrophe

by Marcia Merry

As of mid-July, the extent of damage to the North American farmbelt from the "Drought of '88" was clear: U.S. crop and livestock losses are on a scale that threatens global disaster.

In a "normal" growing season, the United States accounts for half the world's output of corn and almost three-quarters of the world's soybeans—both critical livestock feeds. Because of the early onset of drought in the U.S. cornbelt, world corn production will be down by at least 25%. "Miracle" rains may yet save some of the soybean crop—on a different schedule from corn—but world soybean output could also fall by at least 30%.

The corn harvest in Iowa, accounting for 20% of the U.S. crop, will be down more than 50%. The corn loss in the number-two corn-producing state of Illinois will be at least 50%. The corn loss in number-three Indiana will be off at least 40%.

Because of the searing heat, lack of water, loss of pastures, and cost of feed, hundreds of thousands of beef, milk, and pork animals are prematurely on their way to market. Prices are plummeting because of the temporary glut. This represents the liquidation of a large part of U.S. breeding stock—beef cattle, high-producing dairy cows, and young sows. This also represents big losses for thousands of farmers.

U.S. crop acreage and livestock inventories were already low before the drought set in, because of the combined impact of federal food reduction policies (land set-aside, the Dairy Herd Termination Program, etc.), and the disintegration of the independent family farm and agriculture supply sector during the recent years of the "Reagan Recovery." Over 90 million acres, more than one-fifth of all potential crop and pasture land, were idled this year. National cattle inventories at the start of the year were down to 99 million head, from 130 million head just a few years ago.

Despite a few alarming weather reports and scare stories, however, government and media commentaries continue to downplay the significance of the drought and the associated losses. July 7 *Washington Post* headlines spoke of the "Winter



Robert Baker

A vacant feed grain business in Iowa. The drought emergency never had to happen; it was caused by the looting policies of the cartels, the banks, and the "free enterprise" budget cutters. Yet, the measures are at hand to reverse the crisis, even now.

Wheat Harvest Bounty"; television has stressed how some farmers will "reap higher prices." The function of the warped coverage is to confuse and distract the public and policymakers alike.

Buffer stocks?

It is a lie that there are world "buffer stocks" to compensate for the drought. Both the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization statistics—unreliable as they are—show that the world food cupboard is bare, even by the most minimal reserve standards. According to the July 11 FAO "World Food Outlook," annual world grain carryover has sunk to an official 17%, when carryover of 25% of annual harvest is considered the bare minimum for food security.

The Agriculture Department released a special drought report on July 12, which minimized the danger to food supplies from the drought, while listing preliminary crop shortfall estimates. The conclusion:

"Based on what we know about existing levels of stocks, supplies are adequate and will be more than enough to meet the needs of domestic users and our foreign customers. Meat supplies this year will actually be larger because of the drought. The immediate problem is not one of shortages, but rather one of responding in a compassionate way to the losses faced by American farmers."

On the same day that the Agriculture Department released its revised forecast, Congress began debate on a package of "compassionate emergency legislation."

The truth is, the incidence of food shortfall is seen grimly across the entire continent of Africa, across more and more of Ibero-America and Asia, and in the growing number of hungry and ill-fed throughout the formerly "developed" world. Almost daily, there are emergency requests for food shipments through the FAO Global Early Warning System on

Food and Agriculture in Rome. In June, for example, Vietnam called for food relief of 165,000 tons to feed 7 million people in its northern provinces.

What will turn the U.S. drought disaster into a world catastrophe is the continuation of the lies and policy of scarcity that have prevailed to this point. The major food cartel companies (Cargill, Bunge, Continental, Garnac/André, Louis Dreyfus, Archer Daniels Midland, Nestlé, Unilever, etc.) have dictated policies to Washington and European Community headquarters in Brussels. These cartel companies are moving to hoard grain and other staples, that they might dictate price and destination. The cartels are brokering hundreds of thousands of tons of grain to Moscow and the East bloc, to serve the objectives of "New Yalta" deal-making.

A military/logistics-style approach to the food crisis is the only effective course. All staples exports from the United States must be stopped, pending a national grain audit, and determination of priority allocations. War Mobilization Board-style action is required to expedite measures to preserve breeding stock, and maximize crop production.

The very persistence and intensification of drought cycles in recent years are in some part attributable to the extensive decline in agriculture and general physical economic practices over this time period: the failure to switch over to nuclear and hydro power, the poverty-based denudation of groundcover for heating and cooking, the substitution of "wilderness" vegetation for high-density, high-evapotranspiration cropping, and the elimination of advanced animal husbandry because of the impoverishment of farmers. These are some of the factors that have degraded the global ecosystem, and marginally contributed to the huge energy shifts involved in the recurrent adverse weather patterns. If, faced with famine, we finally rise to the challenge of restoring plenty to the globe, then we may truly be able to "change the weather."