

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

U.S. corn could break hunger crisis

The corn crop looks good, but will the hungry be fed, or will the policy of planned food shortages continue?

July is a critical period in the North American corn belt, where over one-third of the entire world maize crop is produced every year.

"Everything happened that has to happen to make it work," was the description given July 29 by Iowa farmer Dick Baker of corn in the east central part of his state—the heart of the corn belt. After a poor start in the spring—dry weather and late frosts—things began to go right. Baker predicts possible yields in Keokuk County of 120 to 140 bushels an acre (compared to a normal 118 bushels), and foresees a possible spectacular yield of 170 to 200 bushels an acre north of Keota, Iowa.

Cool weather in southern Minnesota and elsewhere is slowing maturation of the corn, which will put the harvest back later into the fall when there is frost risk. But unless August weather is a problem—severely hot or severely cold—the world could be blessed this year with a bountiful harvest and an opportunity to begin to relieve hunger and to restore hope.

U.S. policymakers, however, continue to cause far more damage than bad weather ever could. U.S. farmers are receiving corn prices way below production costs, more and more corn is going into ethanol and other non-food uses, and the hungry are being told to go away. A good U.S. corn harvest is especially sought in 1992 because of the devastation of the corn belt in southern Africa this year. A searing drought destroyed almost 100% of the crop there.

The estimated area planted with corn in the U.S. this year is about 79

million acres, or about 32 million hectares. This is the largest area planted to corn since 1985, when 83.5 million acres were sown. The 1992 increase in acreage reflects changes in the federal farm law implemented since 1990.

During the spring months, drought affected large parts of the corn belt at the time of sowing, germination and early growth. In addition, a late frost in May necessitated replanting many fields. Overall, half of the corn belt had less than half of normal rainfall for April, May, and June. In late June the situation was critical. Then the rains came.

Parts of Iowa received 10 inches of rain during the month. This was enough to restore the state to year-to-date normal precipitation. Reportedly, this July is the wettest for Iowa since 1958, and the coolest since 1915.

Adjacent regions received equivalent amounts, relieving the band of drought through central Iowa eastward into Illinois and Indiana. In Iowa, 29% of the crop ranks as in excellent condition.

During the dry period, the corn plants put down deep roots in search of soil moisture. After the rains, these root systems found access to plentiful water and soil nutrients. A traveler in Nebraska reports "the greenest corn I have ever seen."

Besides plentiful downpours, July brought overcast skies and humid weather, with no hot, windy days—in other words, perfect conditions for maximum pollination. Instead of pollen from the tassels drying up and blowing off, it fell onto the ear below,

and stuck onto the moist silk hairs, which will result in the maximum number of kernels pollinated. Moreover, many corn stalks have set two ears each, not the customary one.

These are some of the features of what could be "the good crop of 1992." However, the grain cartel companies and their cohorts in the Agriculture Department and abroad are already spewing out propaganda to rationalize that no good can come from a good crop.

U.S. farmers, already suffering low corn prices of only \$1.90-2.40 per bushel, are being warned not to hope for higher prices. As the rains fell, corn futures on the Chicago Board of Trade posted eight straight daily declines, settling on \$2.32 a bushel as of July 17. This is far below the farmer's cost of production.

World aid officials, appealing for grain for food relief, have been warned by U.S. authorities not to hope for greater grain donations. Although most U.S. corn is feed corn grown for livestock use, it can be processed in many ways. However, the food cartel companies—Cargill, Continental, Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), Bunge, Louis Dreyfus, Garnac/André, ConAgra, and others—arrogate U.S. grain to their own ends, and are following the malthusian policy of allowing people to starve as a "solution" to alleged "overpopulation."

ADM and Cargill, for example, are the foremost processors of U.S. corn for ethanol for fuel use, and corn for sweeteners for the cola and soft drink companies.

A moratorium on these uses of corn for merely a few months, would make available millions of bushels of grain for food relief. ADM itself holds the patents on several types of fortified "corn milk" and "soy milk" that have been developed especially for food relief.