Rice Research Body: New Green Revolution Needed

The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) of "Green Revolution" fame, based in the Philippines, in early May, said that a "new agronomic revolution" was possible and urgently necessary to meet the global food and food-price crisis.

The IRRI's released report, "The Rice Crisis: What Needs To Be Done?" confronts the failure of the world's developed nations to continue funding the breakthrough research of the "Green Revolution," instituted after the 1980s. Already from 1991-2000, public investment in agricultural research and development from the United States, Europe, and Japan fell, in absolute terms. That has gotten worse since 2000, with the Bush Administration now at the extreme of contemplating—amidst a food crisis threatening famine in many countries—a 75% cut in U.S. funding of the Green Revolution institutes.

As a result, says IRRI head Robert Ziegler, the astonishing rice yield growth of 2.14% annual average from 1970-1990, has been replaced by virtual yield stagnation since 2000. (Dr. Ziegler was interviewed on the research funding crisis and its impact, in *EIR*, March 2, 2007.)

The IRRI puts what has to be done scientifically, in nine steps:

- "Bring about an agronomic revolution in Asian rice production" by filling an "unexploited yield gap" of 1-2 metric tons more per hectare, which Asian rice farmers could produce. Key are agricultural extension service-type programs to improve land preparation, water and nutrient management, and pest and disease control.
- "Accelerate the introduction and adoption of higher yielding rice varieties," as the first Green Revolution did.
- Reverse the decline in worldwide funding for scientific agricultural research, and develop new rice varieties with increased tolerance to drought, flooding, salinity, insects, and diseases.
- "Accelerate research on the world's thousands of rice varieties," 90% of which have not been studied scientifically.
- Cut post-harvest losses by new technologies of storing, drying, and processing.
- Train a new generation of rice scientists and researchers, particularly in Asian countries.
- Increase public investment in the infrastructure of agriculture—irrigation systems, and road and rail grids.
- Improve marketing systems for both inputs and outputs of agriculture.
- Strengthen "food safety nets" for the urban and rural poor, especially nutritional programs focussing on early childhood.

—Paul Gallagher (See full report at www.irri.org).