

Chronological: National Pineapple Cooking Classic Food Editor Symposium, Honolulu

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news from

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topic: World Food Situation

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Three years ago we faced a threat that some 40 to 50 million people around the world would die because of food shortages. And, many millions did. Today, countless millions still live on the brink of starvation and this is in spite of the fact that the world's grain reserve stockpiles this Spring are expected to be at a 6 year high of 167.8 million metric tons, up 51% since last summer.

For many years, development economists have talked about the rural poor and the global food problem, but until recently they have not been able to convince the world's governments to translate these theoretical and humanitarian concerns into concrete actions. So far, little real change has been made to avoid another 1974. When disaster does strike again will we be forced to scramble and muddle through or will we be prepared for the problems which are surely ahead?

This is the topic I would like to talk to you about this morning: What are the dimensions of the world food crisis and what efforts can we take to meet it?

In the vast areas we refer to as the developing world, between 400 and 500 million people are suffering from malnutrition. Experts may quibble about whether the figure should be closer to 400 million or to 500 million, but the fact that there is extensive hunger and malnutrition in the world is not in question. Malnutrition for these people is not some distant abstract proposition. It is a daily experience for hundreds of millions. Its

effects are shocking. Inadequate diets impair learning, reduce labor efficiency, and bring death at an early age. Children whose brains are damaged and whose growth is stunted because of poor diet are often doomed to a life of dependency and poverty.

The problem has frightening dynamics and it is one which will be with us for a long time to come.

Consider this: Every two seconds five lives are added to the human population, four of them in the developing world. Of every five children born in the developing world, one will die before the age of five years. At a minimum, one half of these deaths will be directly related to malnutrition. Of those who manage to survive beyond their fifth birthday, many will suffer permanent mental impairment or physical disability.

To understand the dimensions of this problem we must consider the ever increasing numbers who must be fed. The world's population currently expands at less than 2% annually. Believe it or not, even this is an improvement. Because of population planning programs the world birth rate declined from 3.4% in 1965 to less than 3.0% in 1974. There are some hopeful signs that this improvement will continue. Nonetheless, even at this improved rate, the world's population will almost double within 35 years.

The developing countries were virtually self-sufficient in their food supplies in 1950. By the late 1960's, however, they were importing annually between 25 and 30 million tons of grain, half of which was in the form of food donations. By 1975, the gross imports of these countries had reached more than 50 million tons per year.

It is estimated that by 1985, food deficit countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America will be short some 100 million tons in cereal grains. Fifteen years later, in the year 2000, if we are to provide adequate diets for all, the world will have to increase its annual food output by two and one-half times the 1976 output.

These statistics are alarming; they are made even more so when we recognize that despite the great gains made in food production in recent years, the world's population increase is outstripping its ability to produce more food. We are still losing the race between population growth and the production of food in many parts of the world despite our technical expertise and our effort.

Our attention and our resources have too frequently been focused only on the delivery of food to the world's poor. We must also focus on self help programs which increase the local production of food by the world's increasing population. We must also now redouble our efforts to control the population explosion. In a world of finite resources, population growth cannot continue indefinitely.

Unless we concern ourselves with both food supplies and population growth, we may fail to keep the specter of hunger from our own door and population growth will be arrested only by the harsh controls imposed by famine, war, or pestilence. It is not the politics of governments which will command this response. Rather, it will result from the inexorable logic of mathematics.

But, there is hope.

As Chairman of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee, it has been my obligation in recent years to scrutinize our efforts to meet the threat of world starvation. It has also been my responsibility to muster support for foreign assistance expenditures--which, believe me, is not the easiest of tasks. I have spoken often of the needs of the world's poor.

Our government has in recent years increased AID funding for programs in Food and Nutrition assistance. The Congress has also appropriated more funds than the last Administration requested for the efforts of the Peace Corps. I believe, for humanitarian and practical reasons, that it is critical that we do all in our power to generate support for food production and population control; to prevent the spread of disastrous famine; and to restore hope to the starving millions in many parts of the world.

This is not a job we can, or should do, alone. It is one which must enlist, and must increasingly engage, the other developed nations. Through a variety of regional and international organizations such as The United Nations, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, others are involved in this constant struggle. So also are private foundations and charitable organizations.

Many of my efforts in recent years have been devoted to pressing for increased contributions from other, well-off countries to these international organizations. I have also called for restraint in the administrative costs of these organizations; costs which are frequently so excessive that they detract from the very programs the organizations are supposed to be operating. I fully support our international assistance efforts, but I am going to ensure, as best I can, that every dollar is well spent.

The United States provides a large measure of its food assistance through these international organizations. In the past year, the United States took the lead in the establishment of the International Fund for Agricultural Development. The Fund's goal is stated in these words:

"Every man, woman and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition in order to develop fully and maintain their physical and mental facilities."

To meet this goal the Fund has raised a little over \$1 billion for use as loans to food deficit countries for programs which are designed to "introduce, expand or improve food production" and to strengthen agricultural institutions. To this effort, the United States has made a contribution of \$200 million.

Furthermore, our contributions to International Financial Institutions, such as the International Development Association of the World Bank, the Special Funds of the Asian Development Bank, the Fund for Special Operations of the Inter-American Development Bank, are working towards a solution to the world food and population crisis.

In our bilateral relations, the United States helps the poorer nations of the world meet their food needs not only through technical assistance programs but also through the provision of U.S. agricultural surpluses.

These commodities are made available to foreign countries under P.L. 480, the Food for Peace Program. During the 22 years since the law was enacted, 253 million metric tons of U.S. agricultural commodities, valued at \$24.3 billion have been donated.

Congress has, in addition, initiated an experiment. We have allowed a percentage of food debts to be forgiven when recipient countries use equivalent funds of their own for agricultural projects over and above their regular budgets. It is too early to judge the success of this experiment, but it may prove to be a valuable tool. On the one hand, our food resources will be used to offset agricultural deficits and on the other hand, the funds generated from their sale will be invested in productive endeavors.

Increasingly, we are basing our assistance on the premise that mankind's best hope for increased food production lies in the expansion of the farming technology employed in what is commonly referred to as the "Green Revolution". The application of modern technological and scientific practices to agriculture offers an opportunity to break the chains of rural poverty and to provide adequate nutrition for future generations. This is particularly true if we can bring these practices to the small farmer.

The focal point for increasing food production in the developing world must be the small farmer. Four-fifths of the farms in the developing world are twelve acres or less in size. The crop yields of these farms are well below those achieved by farmers in the developed world. Yet, the potential for increasing the production of the small farmer is promising.

The task, however, is not an easy one. It is not just a matter of providing a farmer with new seeds or fertilizer and letting him produce. Each situation must be thoroughly analyzed to see what are the principal bottlenecks. For example, it may be that the farmers need credit to buy agricultural implements or to finance a marketing cooperative so that they are not at the mercy of those middlemen who buy cheap and sell dear. If there are not adequate storage facilities, the food produced will rot or may be eaten by insects, birds or rodents. If there is an inadequate distribution system to see that seeds and fertilizer get to the small farmer in a timely manner then their existence is of little value. Then again, the fertilizer may be available, but without regular visits of a farm extension agent the farmers may not know how to use it. I know of one case, where farmers ended up using fertilizer to repair the roofs of their houses.

Our assistance programs no longer emphasize massive construction projects. We are now providing the small farmer with fertilizer and other agricultural inputs, with technologies adapted to his particular needs, such as irrigation pumps operated by hand, and with the training he needs. In the developing world, the hoe is at last replacing the crooked stick.

Our efforts are shifting from sending food to eat to providing the tools and knowledge required so that food may be grown.

This assistance program of the United States is a balanced one. It deals with the present needs of food deficit countries through the donation of our agricultural surpluses but with a growing emphasis on future needs through technical assistance with which food deficit countries can help themselves.

Our international food programs cannot be considered in isolation from our domestic food and agricultural programs, however. We need an overall national food policy.

The United States does not now have and never has had a national food policy. When we have made policy decisions they have too often been reached in periods of stress to deal with farm prices or farm surpluses or as a result of political motivation. Your group could play a very useful role if you each urged in your communities a full national discussion of this whole matter.

It is time that we recognize things have changed in the U.S. as in the rest of the world. The agricultural surpluses of the fifties and sixties are no longer with us. Today, we have no assurance for either American producers or consumers--that prices and food supplies will remain reasonably stable. The people affected by food and agricultural decisions--and that is all of us--deserve a known and explicit national food policy.

Such a policy must be based on an independent assessment of the complex interrelationships of the various elements of our food system. Clear responsibility and accountability by a single official in the administration must be established. Food policy must be more than occasional decisions by an ad hoc committee of the various competing departments and constituencies adopted in a crisis atmosphere.

A Council of National Food Policy Advisors, similar in structure to the Council of Economic Advisors, has been suggested. Such a body could assure that the facts are fully considered and brought to the attention of the President, the Congress and the people.

The demand from developed countries for our food crops, as well as the needs of the developing nations, must be considered in determining our food policy. We must be protected against sudden and unanticipated major purchases, such as the Russian wheat deal with its sharp impact on food costs for the American consumer. At the same time, the American farmer deserves regular access to the world's markets to encourage his productive enterprise.

Our new Administration has started off on the right path. Secretary of Agriculture Bergland has called for "innovative" approaches to food and agricultural policies. One such policy he says might be world-wide food agreements. These would be plans, agreed to by the consuming countries, to allow the producing countries to pre-determine markets and then assure stable supplies and prices.

These are only beginning steps by the Carter Administration but they are steps in the right direction. Repeatedly, the world food problem has been dramatically presented and then quietly allowed to drift from the minds of those who were concerned.

What is needed throughout the world is the determination to carry out our objectives. We have the technology. We have the resources. What we collectively lack is the political will to put together rational national policies and implement them. It is these policies which will determine the availability of credit to farmers, the profitability of growing enough to have a surplus to sell and the efficiency of marketing and distributing food on a broad scale--and an end to "hunger and starvation".

We can do it if we will, but will we do it?

Having said all of this, I am certain that some of you were muttering under your breath "Why should we spend our good, hard earned money to feed these foreigners?" Others may be asking "Are we serving our national interests by feeding and caring for these foreigners?" My response is yes, we should feed these people because it does serve our national interest.

Today there are approximately 4 billion people living, working, killing, dying, etc. on this planet. It is estimated that if we are not able to stem our population explosion, or to do much more than we are doing currently, by the year 2010 the number of people will be doubled.

Studies indicate that this growth will come almost solely among the poor nations of the world. About ten years ago, I recall reading a report suggesting at that time that approximately 65% of the people in the world were categorized as the "have not's" and 35% were categorized as the "have's". The report also suggested that this was a reasonable, workable division; a ratio that would provide sufficient stability in the world. However, we know that ten years ago there were riots in Pakistan and Bangladesh. South America and Africa were also experiencing similar problems.

If that 65 - 35 ratio was correct years ago, I wonder what the world will be like in the year 2000--if the world's industrialized countries achieve their zero population growth or close to that figure and growth comes about only among the less developed nations? Our worst fears may be realized and the ratio could well be 95% "have not's" to 5% "have's".

I am just a politician, I am not an expert on population or world economics, but that ratio frightens me. It is a ratio fraught with danger. It could be a time when the world would experience constant riots; famine and starvation would be commonplace. Riots and political instability oftentimes evolve into wars--civil or otherwise.

Ours is a wonderful country, and we have been blessed with plenty. I grant you that there are those who have not fully shared these blessings, but for most Americans, life has been good. Our industry is strong, our standard of living has been high.

It does not take much of an expert to predict that it is important to the maintenance of our democracy and our standard of living that we not be encircled by a sea of turbulence, a sea of starving, rioting people. The maintenance of our democracy and our security in its fullest require stability and peace on a world-wide basis. We require adequate markets for our products and access to raw materials and products in short supply and these depend upon friendly relations with other countries. Yes, I think it is in our national interest to prevent such a holocaust.