

Ag and Food NEWSLETTER

Food Dilemma

THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION of the United Nations says falling prices and mounting stocks of unsold food, particularly in North America, threaten to increase the worldwide gap between the few well-fed and the many hungry. Latest surveys show a trend back to the conditions of the thirties when excess food coexisted with hunger. For the first time since the war, total world food production has slightly passed the world's population increase—there is more to eat on a per capita basis. FAO experts urge a more selective approach to agricultural expansion to replace present policy of merely increasing food production.

Exports for Surpluses

A METHOD MUST BE DEVELOPED to permit the free flow of American agricultural products into the world market with a minimum of government interference, according to Senator George D. Aiken (R.-Vt.) speaking before the recent National Foreign Trade Convention in New York. The Senator said he has an "open mind" concerning the proposed two price system for wheat, which would provide parity price supports for wheat sold for domestic consumption, and put export wheat into a free market, letting it get whatever the market price is. The international wheat agreement seems to be headed for the rocks as far as solving problems of distribution of American wheat is concerned.

Losses Piling Up

THE COMMODITY CREDIT CORPORATION of USDA has announced that it has set aside a record \$768 million for anticipated losses under the current crop support program. This amount represents the value of unredeemed loans made to farmers on this year's crops. As the crops pass onto the Government, the losses to CCC increase. At present Commodity Credit has an inventory of crops worth about \$2.5 billion. Meanwhile, it is facing additional losses due to deterioration of stored surpluses. Stocks of butter and oils, piling up in government storage, are now beginning to spoil and tons of these commodities will probably be disposed of at fractions of the original cost, resulting in an almost total loss for CCC.

Farmers against Supports

SOME FARM GROUPS seem to be opposed to the high farm price support program. The National Milk Producers Federation has come out against government price supports; they want to assume responsibility for surpluses themselves. The board of delegates of the Illinois Agricultural Association has made a statement against 90% parity price supports. That group wants to have Congress adopt Secretary Benson's "flexible support system." Despite the much publicized "cattle caravan," some farmers seem to be actively backing the harried Secretary of Agriculture.

"Hot" Oats

A RELATIVELY large number of rust-resistant mutations in oats have been induced by thermal neutron radiation at the Brookhaven National Laboratory. The artificial mutants are similar in many respects to the naturally occurring rust resistant varieties of oats. Rust resistant varieties won't be commercially available for some time; scientists want to make a more thorough study of the data. Economic implications of this work for plant geneticists: artificial mutations can save time by offering a technique to by-pass the complicated plant breeding schedules necessary to isolate rust resistant genes from wild plants. Probability seems good that the radiation technique will help to develop varieties with other characteristics such as improved yield and quality.

Education on Chemicals in Food

AT THE MANUFACTURING CHEMISTS' ASSOCIATION meeting in New York earlier this week, we got a first look at a new booklet prepared by MCA to tell the important role played by chemicals in food. Called "Your Food and Chemical Research," the two-color booklet tells how chemical aids to farming are the equivalent of 50 million acres of fertile land in meeting our food requirements. At the other end of the food chain, it points out, chemical products and research preserve foods and improve nutritional and sanitary characteristics of the nation's diet. MCA plans to have plenty of copies available for anyone interested in furthering public education on the chemicals in food issue.