

*Food Aid*

people around the world. This is an area in which I have been very interested for a number of years. I have a professional background in agriculture and I have studied the question in some depth.

In the last day or so I have had an opportunity to read the remarks of the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) on the occasion of his address to the fourth session of the World Food Council in Mexico City. I want to be among those congratulating the minister on what I thought was an excellent presentation and I would commend his remarks to the attention of all hon. members. I believe the mover of the motion before us would be encouraged by the response of Canadian farmers to this most urgent problem.

In discussing a subject as significant and wide ranging as this, it would be well to situate our views in the global context of food production and nutrition. The Minister of Agriculture dealt extensively with this issue. I might also remind the House that last year in Ottawa, at Carleton University, a symposium was held on the subject—I am sure members on both sides followed the proceedings closely and, quite likely, made contributions to them.

It is generally agreed that while some progress has been made, the international community has not been very successful in overcoming the world food problem. In too many countries there are acute food shortages. Although, on a global basis food production per capita has kept pace with the growth in population and mass famine has been avoided, we have not been able to give a consistency to efforts to overcome food shortages over time and in different parts of the world.

Since the end of World War II, opinions about the magnitude of the world food situation have swung like a pendulum between pessimism and optimism. Thus, in 1945, the main problems were rehabilitation of agriculture in war-devastated countries and formulation of agricultural policies that would bring stability and prosperity to farmers all over the world. However, as surpluses began to accumulate in North America in the early 1950s, it seemed that getting rid of the surpluses was more of a problem than shortages. There was a wave of optimism. It appeared that the world was on the verge of a food breakthrough. But by the mid-1960s, acreage controls, food aid programs, unfavourable weather in a number of countries, as well as increased exports by major suppliers, reduced the surpluses. In 1966, world grain stocks were rapidly drawn down, mainly as a result of greatly expanded imports by India and the U.S.S.R. Pessimism crept in. More and louder statements were being made about the impending shortages.

By 1972, any optimism about the world food situation and prospects that was prevalent in the previous decade gave way to widespread anxiety. The world food situation in 1973 was the most difficult since the years immediately following the devastation of World War II. Supplies were down. We had a World Food Conference to work out an international program to increase food production, to improve human nutrition.

[Mr. Milne.]

Agricultural production, especially grains, did recover in 1975-76 and food production by 1976-77 was at a record level. The strong demand, short supplies and higher prices led to a substantial increase in grain production, especially in North America which now provides about 80 per cent of the world's grain exports. Larger crops in these two years have enabled a rebuilding of world cereal stocks which had been drawn down for three consecutive years to their lowest level in 20 years. According to FAO, at the end of this past crop year these stocks totalled 163 million tons, or 18 per cent of apparent consumption. Carry-over stocks of wheat at the end of the 1976-77 crop year were the highest since 1969-70.

Both total and per capita food production, as recorded by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, rose in 1975 and 1976. Following a gain of about 3 per cent in per capita food production in the developing countries as a whole in 1975, there was a further rise of about 1 per cent in 1976. By developing regions, per capita food production in 1976 was at or close to peak levels in each, with the major exception of Africa. FAO also reported that in general, dietary energy supplies which dropped sharply in many developing countries, particularly in 1972 and 1973, appear now to have recovered approximately to the levels prevailing in 1969-71. There are, however, many countries, especially in Africa, where recovery has not yet taken place.

On the whole, I would say that we are now in a period of cautious optimism. The magnitude of the world food situation now and to 1985 should be viewed in the light of the following data, none of which is new, relating to population, land resources, income, consumption and food requirements and investment:

1. Currently four billion people have to be fed. By 1985 it will be around five billion people.
2. In 1976, there were 115 developing countries—the majority being new nations—with a population of nearly three billion, or 73 per cent of the total world's population, and will likely reach 75 per cent in 1985.
3. It is expected that the marked rural-urban migration will continue and the trend toward urbanization will accelerate, especially in the developing countries. The effect of this urbanization is a progressive disappearance of good farmland and an increase in the number of people seeking employment off the farms. This rapid urbanization in the developing countries will result in a more intensive competition for capital between the rural and urban areas and this may affect seriously agriculture's capacity to expand food production.
4. Among the factors of production, the world has the people—the working force. It also has the land, but not enough of it is in production. On the whole, the land resource is not a major factor in retarding the rate of expansion of food production, although there is a growing concern over availability of water and the encroaching desert.