

The Next 100 Years



*J. B. KENDRICK JR.
Vice President
Agricultural Sciences
Director, Agricultural
Experiment Station
University of
California*

NOVEMBER IS THE MONTH when citizens of the United States traditionally give thanks for a bountiful harvest. In November of 1974 we are being reminded that there are places where hunger and starvation still exist in a world that could produce enough food for everyone. We are being reminded once again that world population growth is overtaking our ability to meet basic food needs—if all factors remained the same as in November, 1974.

This reminder comes from the United Nations-sponsored World Food Conference held in Rome this month. While the conference will focus world attention on this problem, a solution to the dilemma is unlikely.

The food producing capacity of the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Western Europe will be challenged to supply countries unable to meet their own basic needs. There will be strong pressures to maintain a world reserve of food grains to cover catastrophic crop failures. There will be conflicts of philosophy between food exporting countries that have substantial governmental subsidies and those with low or no governmental subsidies for food production. There will be contests to determine who controls the world food reserve and how equities are determined. In short, I expect the World Food Conference to produce more differences than agreements, more rhetoric than solutions.

But on balance, the conference should result in an increased understanding by many citizens of the world that we can no longer ignore the consequences of unrestricted births, increased life expectancy, irresponsible exploitation of the earth's life-giving resources of air, land, and water, and increasing costs of material, land, and labor needed for food production, and lack of concern about the future. We would be callous indeed if we intentionally left our children and grandchildren a world divided between the hungry poor and the well-fed affluent. A hungry or starving nation will fight for its

life, and food is a potent instrument for peace that this nation must use to reduce international tensions.

The startling statistics of population growth, the estimated costs in effort and materials required to increase food production, and the need to maintain an economically sound production capacity all lead to the conclusion that the U.S. and the other industrialized nations cannot continue to feed the world. A Confucian proverb summarizes the real answer: "You can give a man a fish and satisfy his hunger for a day, or you can teach a man how to fish and satisfy his hunger for a lifetime."

The United States has the greatest food producing capacity the world has ever known, and it has the largest collection of scientific knowledge and skills that ever existed with which to back up that capacity. This knowledge can and should be used to teach other countries "how to fish," so that they can satisfy some of their own basic food needs. To be sure, we have already engaged in many programs of international agricultural development, but these programs have resulted in more failures than successes. We need a national commitment with supporting budgets to accomplish this educational goal. We need an understanding that success is not achieved under a three- to five-year contract. Education is a matter of generations, and patience is an essential ingredient in programs once initiated. Our past experience will enable us to avoid some useless programs.

As we complete 100 years of organized agricultural research in this country and reflect upon the advances made in our food producing capacity during this period, it seems fitting to me that we not only dedicate our next hundred years to improving our own food production, but that we strive to eliminate hunger and starvation throughout the world. With much research and education remaining to be done, the University of California could play an important part in the solution of the world's food crisis.