

Dope moves in where farm policy failed

by Marcia Merry

Last December, the *Chicago Tribune* syndicated an article titled, "Hemp touted as cash crop with side effect of legalized marijuana." It sang the praises of marijuana for making paper, medicine, and other uses, saying that farmers could make huge profits from growing hemp, according to the Illinois Marijuana Initiative (IMI). "This is definitely a cash crop. It could mean billions of dollars for U.S. farmers. . . . It's already the nation's leading illegal cash crop," said the IMI's Mike Rosing.

Such arguments are aimed, not at farmers, but at softening up the non-farm population for more dope and degradation. No traditional, independent family farmer, in his or her "right mind," is so befuddled that he thinks it is wise to base national farm policy, and individual decisions about what to grow, on dope.

However, U.S. farm policy over the past 25 years has been a disaster. And millions of Americans—farmers included—have been "out of their minds" to have tolerated it. If it continues, they will soon have no choice but to grow pot—or starve.

What 'recovery'?

Over the 1980s decade of the "Reagan-Bush recovery," crisis hit the U.S. farm belt. An estimated 400,000 farmers were bankrupted or forced to quit by selling out or abandoning their operations.

Under orders from the food cartels, whose executives direct the programs of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. government followed a radical free market policy, in the 1985 five-year farm bill and in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations. A government study predicts that if the U.S. GATT proposal were to go through (or a domestic farm law equivalent), 500,000 farmers more would be wiped out by 1992.

The mass impoverishment of American family farmers over the 1980s was accomplished by a combination of high interest rates, removal of financing sources, devaluation of farm assets, plus high costs for inputs, and low prices for outputs. This is in exact parallel to the impoverishment of Third World nations.

In 1981, U.S. agriculture had a total assets value of \$1

trillion, which dropped to \$760 billion by 1990—a 24% plunge. Over this decade, lending agencies devalued the collateral backing farmers' loans, and demanded more collateral and higher interest rates on debt. After Paul Volcker became head of the Federal Reserve in 1979, his high interest rate policy caused some farm lending to exceed a 20% interest rate.

For awhile, in the early 1980s, farmers scrambled to hock everything they owned, and went deeper into debt. Applications soared to the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA), the farmer's lender of last resort.

By the mid-1980s, total agriculture debt reached over \$215 billion, held by three major lending groups: the FmHA, the commercial banks, and the Production Credit Associations (PCA), a private entity with limited government backing. Then the axe fell. The Reagan-Bush administration ordered creditors to "tighten up" on loans. By 1990, total national agriculture debt was brought down to less than \$190 billion, by a process of shutting down hundreds of thousands of farmers, and squeezing others to the bone. The USDA dumped thousands of their FmHA farm borrowers through forced bankruptcy. Hundreds of small, local farm banks went under.

This situation prevails today. Farm communities have become ghost towns. And with the low prices for farm commodities, farmers are still unable to service debt and capitalize their operations.

The prices of all farm commodities in the United States, just as internationally, are artificially depressed by the food cartel companies—Cargill, ADM/Toepfer, Louis Dreyfus, Continental, Bunge, André/Garnac, and a few others—whose policy is to liquidate the independent family farm. Most farm prices are less than half of parity (a fair price covering cost of production, and a return on investment sufficient to guarantee the capitalization necessary for continued food production). The USDA issued a report in 1987 saying that parity is an outmoded concept.

The case of wheat

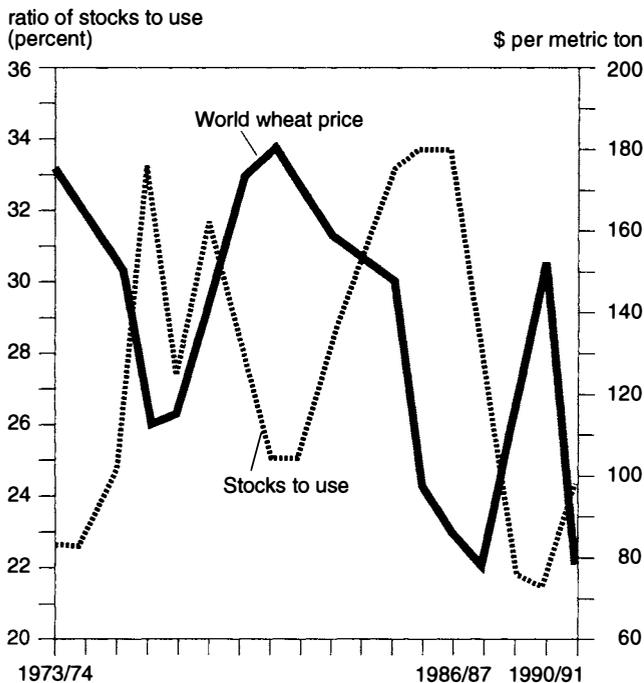
The crisis is exemplified by the current situation of wheat, the staff of life. **Figure 6** shows that wheat prices have plunged over the last eight months. The average price today is \$2.38 a bushel, lower than it has been in 20 years, and *half* the minimum cost of production.

Contrary to any propaganda you may hear, this does not represent a glut of wheat on the market, nor any suppression of prices according to some mythical law of supply and demand. Instead, it represents systematic underpayment of farmers by the cartel grain brokering companies that monopolize the world grain trade and domestic distribution. It has been the policy of London and Washington, D.C. to condone this underpayment of farmers for their food output, in the name of "free market" competition.

Wheat is, in reality, *scarce* relative to need. On a world

FIGURE 6

Food cartels depress wheat price to farmers despite low stocks



Source: USDA

basis, less grain of all types was harvested from 1987 to 1989, than was consumed. While over 2 billion tons of grains of all types were needed for consumption, only 1.6-1.75 billion tons were produced. Of this, wheat output leveled off at about 420 million tons. For the minimum for decent diets, over 3 billion tons would be required for direct consumption as cereals, and indirect consumption through livestock products.

Grain reserve stocks of all types were drawn down from 1986 to the present. Therefore, the first decent harvest year during that period, 1990, does not make up for this draw-down, nor for the fact that millions have been deprived of adequate nutrition. Over the 1980s, food output per capita declined in Ibero-America. Food output per capita in Africa has declined so drastically over the past 20 years that starvation is occurring on the scale of genocide.

The graph shows that the "stocks-to-use ratio" for wheat is low. This illustrates that prices to the farm should be much higher.

With minor changes, the wheat and grain picture holds true for other dietary staples—oils, sugars, meat, milk, fruits, and vegetables. Prices have fallen to the farmers while shortages are forcing millions to go hungry.

In this depressed environment, the "marijuana industry" has taken hold.

It's a lie that marijuana is 'safe'

by John Grauerholz, M.D.

The popular classification of cannabis as a "soft" drug is misleading, in view of its acute and chronic toxic effects.

Marijuana is a substance which for over 2,000 years has been reported to cause mental illness. Besides THC (delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol), the chemical euphoriant found in cannabis, 60 other cannabinoids have been identified, in addition to hundreds of other compounds such as sterols, terpenes, flavinoids, alkaloids, and furan derivatives. A list of the gaseous and particulate matter in the smoke of a marijuana cigarette reads like the contents of a toxic waste dump, including carbon monoxide, acetaldehyde, toluene, nitrosamine, vinyl chloride, phenol, cresol, and naphthalene. A marijuana cigarette contains twice the amount of carcinogenic tars, such as benzanthracene, as a tobacco cigarette of the same weight.

Now a more potent type of marijuana is being cultivated called sensemilla—Spanish for "without seeds." This type is produced by a female plant segregated from male plants to prevent pollination, and then allowed to grow large clusters of buds that never flower, called "colas." These buds have a significantly higher concentration of THC.

University of Mississippi researchers say that much of the pot being sold today may be up to 250% stronger than that of the mid-1970s. While the average marijuana of the 1960s was 1% THC, today's blend might register around 8%. Clinics are reporting seriously impaired marijuana users showing up for help.

Link to cancer, reproductive disorders

Experiments in animals and humans have documented that marijuana smoke produces cancerous changes in lung tissue and impairs the immune cells of the lung to a much greater extent than cigarette smoke. A group of young volunteers who smoked marijuana rapidly developed symptoms of airway obstruction which were much more severe than a comparable group of tobacco smokers.

Precancerous lesions were found in biopsies of American soldiers stationed in Germany who had smoked hashish heavily for two years.

In experimental animals, exposure to cannabis has been associated with disruption of all phases of reproduction. This results from the direct action of the drug on the pituitary gland, as well as on the gonads. In men, cannabis, THC, and other cannabinoids cause shrinkage of the testicles, with reduced sperm counts, an increased prevalence of abnormal sperm cells, and lowered hormone levels in the blood.