

World Grain Stocks Plunge; Food Aid Needs Go Begging

by Marcia Merry Baker and Rock Steinbach

As of February, warnings and appeals are coming from international food agencies on the danger of world grain reserves falling, and on the lack of donations and pledges for humanitarian aid, even in the worst food crisis situations in the world. As graphically shown in **Figure 1**, we face “the largest drop in world cereal stocks in more than two decades”; so stated the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in its February *Food Outlook* report, which reviews end-of-year stock estimates for the past five years. A huge 19% drop is expected in grain stock levels from the 2002 crop year, to the end of the 2003 crop year. At the same time, urgent calls are coming from the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), and other groups, for donations and pledges of emergency food aid.

For example, in the Gaza Strip, the need for food relief has shot up from providing for 11,000 persons two years ago, to over 750,000 today. In the Palestinian Territories overall, some 2 million, out of 3 million population, have been forced into food aid-dependency and terrible risk (see article, page 6).

But in the face of this, the principal donor nations (the United States, nations of Western Europe, Australia, Japan, and so on) are not making even their “normal” pledges; i.e., the *inadequate* commitments typical of recent years. And multinational contributions have also been cut back drastically.

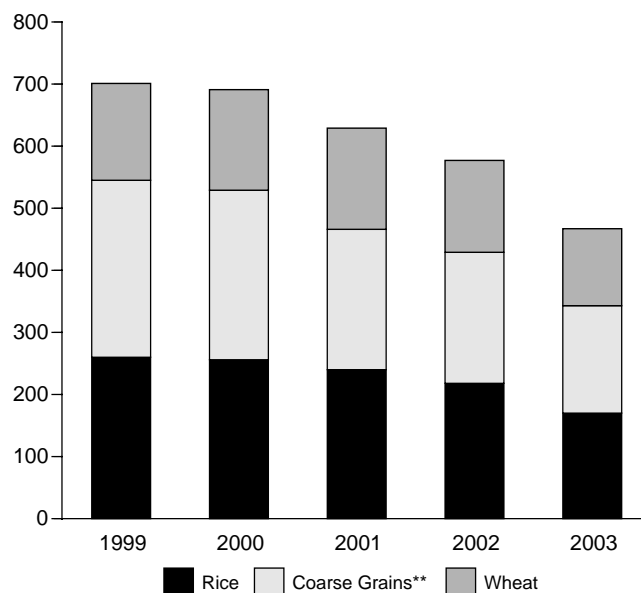
Therefore, it is best to clarify the two key points that govern the situation, before proceeding to review the scope of today’s crisis. Firstly, it should be understood that principal donor nations are holding back from making pledges and getting food into the relief-pipeline, *not because of the limitations of declining world grain stocks*, but rather because of governmental policy decisions.

What reasons are given? A characterization was made

Feb. 17, by Walter Fust, the head of the Swiss government’s Agency for Development and Cooperation, who said, “Some donor countries think they do not want to disburse money because they could be considered as looking at the [Iraq]

FIGURE 1
**World Cereals Stocks To Drop 19% in 2003
(World Carryover Stocks)***

(Metric Tons, Millions)



*Refers to estimated volume of grain stocks at the end of the crop year.

**Coarse grains include corn (maize), sorghum, barley and others.

Source: U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization.

war as not being avoidable. And the other ones think that they cannot invest in something before it [an Iraq war] happens. And a number of countries do pledge money to commit support, but they don't do the disbursement in adequate time."

The second point to explore, is the following: What if adequate, timely aid pledges were, indeed, made? Would there not be insufficiencies of stocks—of grains and all other food categories? The answer is yes; however, a grain and food-producing mobilization—as the world has seen at other key times, such as in the United States during World War II—can and should be mustered successfully. There are models of how to proceed to provide backing to farmers (low-interest credits for inputs—seeds, fertilizer, chemicals; additional labor help, transportation and storage; discounted energy and fuel; etc.), to ramp up farm output. Additional food output can be thus "commissioned" as a matter of policy. All of this is just an essential, urgent part of the kind of emergency economic restoration program Lyndon LaRouche has been calling for in his infrastructure-building campaign.

LaRouche's 'Food for Peace'

Specifically, an emergency food-provision approach was called for by Lyndon LaRouche as a revived "Food for Peace" policy in 1988, when the Schiller Institute formed an organizing effort by that name in September of that year. LaRouche spoke in Berlin in October, and in Chicago in December 1988, elaborating his strategic proposals for foreign policy and economic development—especially as regards the pending break-up of the Soviet East Bloc. LaRouche reiterated it again 10 years later, when then-Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov attempted to mobilize a build-up campaign for Russian agriculture, beginning with poultry.

But instead of this, over the past 15 years, there has been an anti-food security policy forced into effect among nations—except for China—in the form of the worsening free trade and "global sourcing" of food, by cartel-dominated trade and political forces. High-tech family farms have been driven out of operation in much of the former farm-belts of North America, Australia, and other former agriculture powerhouses like Argentina. Infrastructure essential for farm output potential—water and land management, transportation, etc.—has not been built or maintained. When a drought hits—as it did in the grainbelt of Canada and the United States during 2002—there is little mitigating infrastructure.

Per capita, grain output worldwide has been *less* than consumption in each of the past three years, and this current year 2003—barring a "miracle" intervention to increase output, could see harvests again less than consumption levels—this time, by a whopping 111 million metric tons, according to the FAO's February forecast warnings.

This is the dire back-drop, from which to understand that the current appeals for food-aid should be met out of both humanitarian morality, and simultaneously, as a call to action to restore and build food output capability again.

Emergency Food-Aid Appeals

On Feb. 7 in Rome, the World Food Programme, the principal food-relief coordinating agency worldwide, held a "Consultation on Resources" meeting, at which seven regional directors reported on the shortfalls of pledges for their areas. Regional Director Khaled Adly reported on, "Contingency Measures for a Potential Conflict in Iraq" and on food relief planning for Afghanistan.

Only 10% of the overall 2003 anticipated requirements of the WFP are covered by pledges as of Feb. 3. The value of donations to the Programme was lower in 2002 (\$1.806 billions), than in 2001 (\$1.902 billions).

Worse, in late January the WFP urgently warned that its food-aid "pipelines" for both the 21 stricken African countries, and North Korea, were drying up and would be empty by the end of March. The latest "2003 Overview" report by the WFP summarizes: "In 2003, over 78 million people will continue to depend on WFP's food aid to survive or to preserve their livelihoods. Over 4.8 million metric tons of additional food aid are needed to assist them. WFP requires \$2.4 billion to fully meet the needs of its beneficiaries."

Already, even minimal rations have been cut in several locations, for lack of supplies. Some of the recent announcements and appeals for food aid:

- On Feb. 10, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the largest aid provider in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, announced that its emergency appeal for funding last December, has gone *completely unanswered*. Without support, life-preserving operations for close to 2 million people will grind to a halt.

- On Feb. 14, an urgent appeal for food aid for 1.2 million refugees in sub-Saharan and northern Africa was made by both the WFP and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. In a joint press release, the agencies specified that 112,000 metric tons of food, worth an estimated \$84 million, is needed over the next six months. Some of the refugees are already receiving only half of their monthly food rations. In Tanzania, for example, more than 515,000 refugees—from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, had their corn (maize) ration cut in early February, for the second time since November 2002. Stocks of many commodities will run out by the end of March, unless more funding is supplied.

- On Feb. 15 and 16, a meeting was held in Geneva, of international aid experts and officials from donor governments, called together by the Swiss government in an attempt to break the funding deadlock for food donations.

- On Feb. 18, a meeting took place in London of representatives of the most important donor nations to the Palestinian Authority, to confer on how to meet the rapidly increasing needs. The meeting was convened by Norway, the world's leading per-capita contributor of humanitarian aid. It chairs the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee set up according to the 1993 Declaration of Principles between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, to see to "temporary" transition needs, and now faced with being an ongoing relief operation.