

If you're anti-food, vote Bush or Dukakis

by Marcia Merry

As the presidential election draws near, commentators observe that Dukakis doesn't seem to be able to take advantage of the disaffection with the Reagan-Bush "Recovery" that exists in the beleaguered farm sector. Partly, this reflects an attitude among farm voters of, "A plague on both your houses."

Partly also, Dukakis has conducted himself in the farm states like "Bo-Peep in Wonderland." Over a year ago, before he got heavy counseling, Dukakis made the gaffe of telling financially troubled farmers in Iowa (the world's leading corn and meat state) that they should switch from producing staples, and produce "alternative crops," like Belgian endive. He told wheatgrowers in the Dakotas to consider carnations—a pleasant, high-value, low-volume "alternative" commodity.

Since then, Dukakis has been re-wired to appear less yuppie, despite being a "lawyer from back East." But still, Dukakis associates himself not with actual farmers, whatever their political views, but with such notorious pseudo-hay-seeds as Agriculture Commissioners Jim Hightower of Texas, and Jim Nichols of Minnesota. Even some of the Old Guard of the conservative Democrats in the Midwest came out publicly, according to an Oct. 5 Reuters news wire, criticizing Dukakis for allying with such radicals. Hightower is a fanatical advocate of how farmers can "adjust" to economic decline by direct-marketing their crops on roadside stands or to restaurants and supermarkets, and other such schemes.

The Bush campaign strikes a more traditional pose, using former Iowa Congressman Cooper Evans and others as the "idea" men. Bush himself made the infamous reply to a farm policy question, on a farm state junket, "I'm running for President, not for Secretary of Agriculture."

How they agree

On a deeper level, there are two main areas of agreement between the Bush and Dukakis farm programs, both of which are deadly for the world food supply. First, their perspective is that there is a problem of "overproduction." Second, both think international agriculture trade is "unfair," and the agencies such as GATT (the U.N. General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) should be empowered to "even out the playing field." According to the Bush rhetoric, when farm subsidies are ended and free trade is established, then food production will be balanced by supply and demand. The Dukakis cam-

paign line is that U.S. production should be "managed" to avoid "surpluses," and that we should get tough with foreign farm export competitors. The Dukakis people attack the Bush campaign for being extremist free traders, and the Bush people attack the Dukakis campaign for advocating mandatory production controls.

The measure of each campaign platform is the fact that the world now faces the onset of perhaps the worst food crisis in history, and what any competent farm program should address is how to rapidly increase U.S. and allied food output, and how to rapidly restore the farm sectors and agro-industrial base of Western economies.

For the second year in a row, the total annual world cereals output is millions of tons below the recent average world cereals consumption. Food reserve stocks are being drawn down to nothing. This has been aggravated by the record 1988 drought in North America, but the conditions for agricultural decline have been intensifying for the past 20 years, because of policies in Washington, Brussels, and other policy centers.

Meanwhile, the Soviet bloc has reached a phase of its militarization program, in which its food supply chain is breaking down, and the Soviet Union is demanding a guaranteed supply of grain from the West—in quantities which at present rates of farm output do not exist.

A set of emergency measures is needed in the United States to maximize the prospects for large harvests next season, and for conserving the breeding stock for beef, cattle, and hogs right now. An all-out cropland planting program should be initiated, with special provision of credit, and mobilization of industrial inputs—fertilizers, pesticides, tillage, storage and transportation equipment, and water supply development.

Instead, both the Dukakis and Bush campaigns are reiterating their support for taking land out of production, as the bipartisan 1985 "National Food Security" farm law mandated, in the unprecedented Conservation Reserve Program. There are now over 23 million acres committed to "non-food" groundcover, in this program, out of a 1990 goal of 45 million acres—over 10% of our national cropland base.

Both the Dukakis and Bush campaigns are stressing their commitment to finding non-food uses for grain—ethanol, industrial materials, de-icer compounds, etc. Neither campaign gives even passing recognition to recent cries of warning from such quarters as the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, or even the Vatican.

Both campaign programs reflect the self-perceived interests of the food multinationals in the world food cartel (Cargill, Continental, Bunge, Garnac/André, Louis Dreyfus, Archer Daniels Midland/Toepfer, Unilever, and others) who desire food scarcity for their political purposes, and are working with GATT to bring about this "free trade" utopia.

If you think food is bad for you, then it doesn't matter whether you vote for Bush or Dukakis.