

Set-aside is genocide

by Marcia Merry

Both the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the European Community bureaucrats are ordering set-asides of cropland—either for nominal “conservation” and “environmental” use, or supposedly, for farm income “stabilization.”

The table here shows harvest-area calculations of the number of lives to be lost simply from the decline in wheat cropland now taking place in the eight top wheat-consuming and exporting nations. A simple per person factor was used: 0.1064 tons of wheat, or 3.3 bushels of wheat, necessary for a person to get about 675 calories a day from eating various forms of wheat bread product—only part of the total daily diet requirement of 50% of calories from carbohydrates. The presumption was that the person needs about 2,400 calories a day (an average adult male), from all food groups.

For the new year 1989-90, we are facing a drop in wheat acres harvested, compared to a “high” planting year earlier this decade for these eight major wheat nations, of 36.617 million hectares, or 90.45 million acres. That is close to one-quarter of the entire cropland base of the United States. This will take the bread off the tables of 327 million people.

Set-aside is genocide. The following are country-by-country details.

United States: There has been a marked decline of wheat acres harvested since 1981, down to 21.54 million hectares (53.2 million acres) last summer. Even if the weather became favorable again, and we returned to 28.3 million wheat hec-

tares harvested this summer, 100 million people would still not have their daily wheat ration because of the 4.31 million hectares of wheat land that is to be idled.

Canada: In 1986, Canada harvested 14.217 million hectares of wheat. Last summer, fewer than 13 million were harvested, due to the drought and smaller plantings.

France: Harvested wheat land has fallen from 5.1 million hectares in 1984, to an estimated 4.892 million hectares last year. Parts of central France are being depopulated as farmers abandon their fields. The land not planted to wheat last year would have given 10.8 million people their “daily bread.”

China: Annual wheat cropland harvested is reported by the USDA to vary between the 29.7 million hectares of 1986 and the 28.923 million hectares of 1987, and perhaps up to 29 million again last summer. But, the *average yield* fell because of severe drought and floods. Hunger and starvation are affecting 100 million Chinese these winter.

India: There has been about a 2 million acre decline in estimated total acreage for wheat in India since 1984, although yields in many areas have improved, and other crops have been planted on some wheat acreage.

Soviet Union: Although figures are unreliable, declines in harvested acreage and low yields represent a loss of daily wheat for 35-48 million people.

Argentina: Wheat acreage has dropped sharply from 7.3 million hectares in the early 1980s, to about 4.5 million hectares in the last few years. This represents the loss of a daily wheat ration for 50 million people.

Australia: In 1984-85, there were 12.078 million hectares of wheat harvested. The soil is being rapidly depleted through lack of fertilizer application, and drought damaged the crop just harvested.

Wheat cropland out of use in major producing regions

Wheat exporting nations	Area harvested (mn hectares)		Unused land ¹ (mn hectares)		Food lost ² (mn metric tons)		People starved ³ (millions)	
	Recent largest	1988-89	1988-89	1989-90	1988-90	1989-90	1988-90	1989-90
U.S.A.	32.65	21.54	10.93	4.3	25.11	10.73	236	100
Canada	14.217	13.0	1.217	2.2	1.68	3.77	15.79	35.43
France	5.1	4.892	0.208	0.4	1.148	2.21	10.79	20.75
Argentina	7.3	4.5	2.8	2.8	5.26	5.6	49.436	52.632
Australia	12.078	9.5	2.578	2.578	3.66	3.66	34.399	34.399
India	24.672	22.2	2.472	2.472	5.018	4.94	47.16	46.429
China	29.696	29.5	0.196	1.696	0.58	0.509	5.451	4.784
U.S.S.R.	51.061	48.0	2.061	3.061	3.813	5.2	35.837	48.872
Totals	176.774	153.132	22.462	19.517	46.269	36.619	434.86	343.296

1) Land that is potentially tillable for wheat, but out of production due to factors including the Conservation Reserve Program and annual set-aside (U.S.A.), similar environmental and set-aside plans in Europe and Canada, impoverishment and dispossession of farmers, which degrades soils and infrastructure breakdown in the U.S.S.R.

2) A recent average yield-per-hectare was used to compute these totals.

3) A factor of 0.1064 metric tons of wheat per person per year was used, based on 3.5 bushels of wheat a year needed to give a person 670 calories a day of some wheat-based food.