

# Cartels' Soy Revolution Kills Argentine Farming

by Cynthia R. Rush

In Argentina, the country known historically as the “granary of the world,” people generally didn’t die of hunger—at least up through the 1980s. While pockets of hunger and poverty could certainly be found in the country, people generally had access to a nutritious and varied diet, and food production was directed to the domestic market as well as for export. The fertile “pampas” were world famous, as was Argentina’s excellent quality beef.

Yet between 1990 and 2003, as agronomist Alberto Lapolla reports, *450,000 Argentine citizens did die of hunger*. In a June 2004 paper sent to *EIR*, Lapolla elaborated: Every day, 55 children, 35 adults and 15 elderly die from illnesses related to hunger.

## ‘Let 200,000 Agro Producers Disappear’

How did such a tragedy occur?

The blame lies with the criminal financial predators behind the international food cartels—Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland, Bunge, etc.—that have systematically destroyed Argentina’s food-producing capabilities over recent decades, replacing them with large-scale production of genetically-modified soy for export to a globalized market. The imposition of unbridled free trade, exemplified by Carlos Menem’s embrace of the International Monetary Fund’s policies during his 1989-1999 Presidency, has returned Argentina to “the colonial model of commodity export,” Lapolla writes. “We have ceased to be a nation.”

Although the attempt to transform Argentina’s agricultural model began as early as the 1960s, it intensified dramatically after José Martínez de Hoz took over as Finance Minister of the 1976-83 military junta. A longtime servant of the City of London’s financial elites, Eton graduate “Joe” was known to complain that Argentina’s “huge internal consumption of food” was an obstacle to larger agricultural exports. Let the “market” decide everything, he argued—even if people starve.

While quintupling the foreign debt, De Hoz spent his time in office dismantling state-run regulatory agencies that protected the nation’s productive apparatus. His legacy was then carried on by Menem’s Finance Minister, Wall Street errand boy Domingo Cavallo. Lapolla reports that one of Cavallo’s staff members demanded in 1990 that “at least 200,000 agro producers should disappear in Argentina because they are inefficient.” Cavallo did his job. Of the 260,000 family farmers

who went out of business between 1967 and 2001, 160,000 of them did so after 1990.

## A Soy Republic?

In an October 2004 document also made available to *EIR*, Argentina’s Rural Reflection Group (GRR) charges that this attempt to impose monoculture on the once-agriculturally diverse country has produced “an agriculture without farmers.” Government ministries and scientific agencies once assigned to deal with problems related to real production have been roped into this offensive, prodded by such well-financed Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as the British Crown’s Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Greenpeace.

Under the guise of protecting the environment, the WWF has supported the food cartels’ “Sustainable Soy” model, advocating expanded soy production only, while simultaneously demanding that large swaths of land be set aside as pristine ecology parks, protected from “contamination”—and agricultural production.

Soy is now the country’s most important crop: it represented 50% of the country’s 2003 grain harvest of 70 million tons. Small family farmers can’t compete with larger producers who get credit and advanced technology to cultivate Monsanto’s “Roundup-Ready” strain of genetically-modified soy.

In an article published in 2003, agronomist Walter Pengue reported that not only are the historically fertile “pampas” now dedicated in large part to genetically-modified soy production, but soy production has also expanded into the northwest, northeast and western parts of the country.

While rice, corn, wheat, and sunflower production declined in significant percentages between the 1996-1997 and 2001-2002 harvests, soy production increased by 75%. Deforestation of regions cleared for soy cultivation has had disastrous ecological and economic results, including flooding and desertification.

In a nation where 50% of the population still lives in poverty, the soy offensive has had a criminal impact on diet and health. At the beginning of 2003, per-capita beef consumption had fallen to 51 kilograms annually (about 110 pounds) compared to 61.4 kilograms in March of 2002—a decline of 10 kilograms per person, or 16%, in one year! Lands traditionally used for cattle grazing have declined, to give way to soy production for export.

The IMF policy imposed on the country since the mid-1970s had already forced changes in food consumption patterns, especially among the poor, by the mid-1980s. High-quality animal protein, fruits, vegetables, and dairy were increasingly replaced by pasta and bread, although the former were nonetheless still present in the diet.

But today’s soy “revolution” has brought intense efforts—such as the “Soy Solidarity” campaign financed by such foreign multinationals as Monsanto—to *replace animal protein with a diet based almost exclusively on soy*. Despite unknown health consequences of such a diet, especially for very young children, soy products are increasingly the staples offered at soup kitchens for the poor around the country.