

New Era In World Ag Says USDA Official

A new era in world agriculture, characterized by "explosive increases" in major food crops of Asia, could bring one and one half billion people of the less developed countries into the Twentieth Century, according to Lester R. Brown, Administrator of USDA's International Agricultural Development Service.

Brown, leadoff speaker at a Kansas Symposium on World Population and Food Supply, said that the agricultural revolution in Asia, now entering its second year will affect not only food supplies, but political and social trends as well.

"Pakistan's and India's wheat crops are up 37 and 35 percent over the previous record. Yield increases in the two countries over the last two years have approached or exceeded those of the preceding two decades," he said.

"Thus far the most rapid advances have been concentrated in Asia, a region containing more than half the world's people. Within the next several years the agricultural revolution will likely spread to most of the less developed world."

While good weather was certainly a factor, Brown said the sharp rise in food output must be attributed to U.S. investments, public and private in agricultural improvement of less developed countries and increased interest in agriculture within those countries.

National budgets included higher appropriations for agriculture, fertilizer imports were increased and an exciting new technology—in the form of high-yielding varieties of cereals—was introduced.

"These varieties may be to the agricultural revolution in these countries what the steam engine was to the industrial revolution in Europe," Brown stated.

The new varieties are revolutionary in a variety of ways, he pointed out they use fertilizer more efficiently than traditional crops can be planted at any time of year in the tropics if water is available, and, they ripen in 120 days instead of 150 to 180, permitting double or triple cropping. Thus, Brown said, it pays the farmer to invest in equipment and irrigation, because each day an acre of land lies idle can cost him 40 pounds of paddy (rough rice).

Brown warned, however, that a host of "second generation" problems are already emerging. The big harvests are straining antiquated marketing systems. To take advantage of the new technology, small farmers will need credit. Another problem, he said, is the possibility of lower grain prices resulting from temporary surpluses in local areas, which might discourage farmers.

Rising food production could be a catalyst in building the economies of less developed countries.

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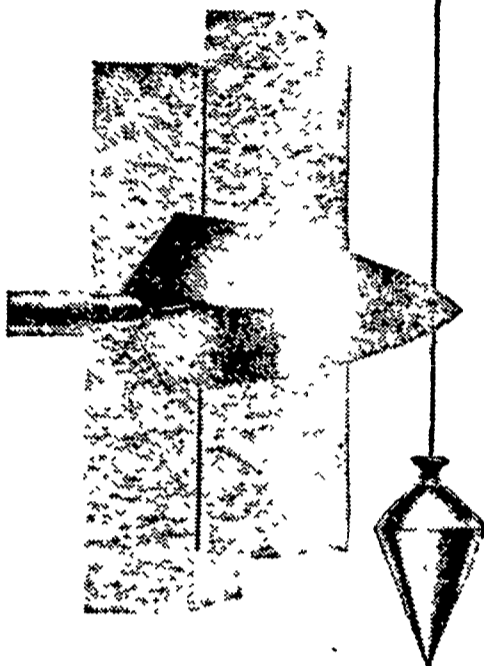
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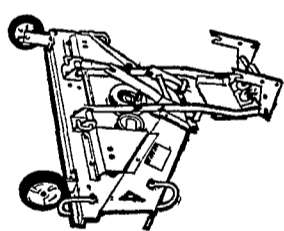
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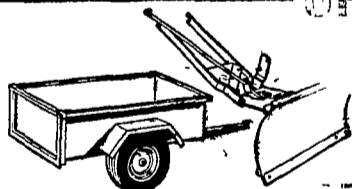
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