

FAO Official Says Unemployment, Not Hunger Greatest Danger From Population Explosion

Hunger in the developing countries is no longer the greatest danger resulting from the population explosion, according to Keith Abercrombie, an Englishman who is a senior economist of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Writing in the current issue of FAO's Monthly Bulletin of Agricultural Economics and Statistics, he says that employment problems in poor countries threaten to be more difficult to overcome than the lag in food production.

Abercrombie points out that while improved farming methods and high yielding seed varieties are beginning to ease the world food situation, it is generally the larger and medium farmers with savings to invest and access to credit who are in a position to take advantage of the new technology.

The rural areas of most developing countries will for a long time to come contain large numbers of farmers with little economic opportunity beyond the production of their own subsistence needs," he says.

The persistence of such groups will be prolonged if rapid population growth continues, as well as by policies of concentrating scarce resources on more favored areas. Their difficulties will be increased as the extension of the agricultural area becomes less easy and the pressure of the agricultural

population on the available land area increases."

The massive population growth beginning in the 1950's has swollen the labor forces of the poor countries, and many young people are moving to the urban areas to find work, only to join the ranks of the unemployed or semi-employed. Since it is impossible to create urban opportunities quickly enough, it is desirable that for the time being as many people as possible should be induced to stay on the land, where they at least have a relatively assured food supply and some employment, he says.

Abercrombie's article lists a number of actions which should be taken to help these groups:

The first essential is to recognize their existence, which

has tended to be obscured in recent years by the urgent need to solve the short-run food supply problem as rapidly as possible," he writes.

When there is a choice between employing more people or displacing them by machines, labor-intensive methods should obviously be used wherever possible.

"Scarce capital resources should be used to increase urban employment rather than to reduce rural employment," he adds.

The article says that it should still be possible to find ways of limiting inequalities in the farm community without jeopardizing the pace of agricultural development spearheaded by the more advanced farmers. Land reform in some areas — includ-

ing tightening up tenancy regulations — improved credit facilities and the introduction of group farming, are among measures which would help.

"At the same time it will be necessary to take deliberate measures to increase alternative

employment opportunities, part-time as well as full-time," Abercrombie writes. "Part-time farming — both in the sense of farmers working part time in members of the family work-other occupations and of some on the farm and others elsewhere — has assumed considerable importance in most developed countries, and is beginning to do the same in some developed countries."

The article says that agricultural processing industries often find it more economic to be close to consuming areas than

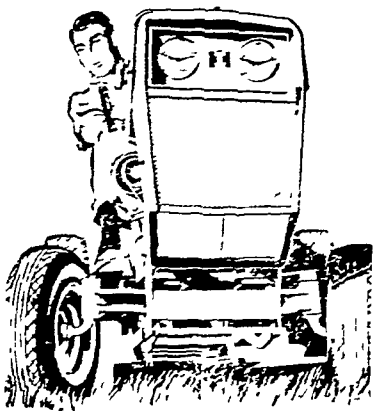
(Continued on Page 19)

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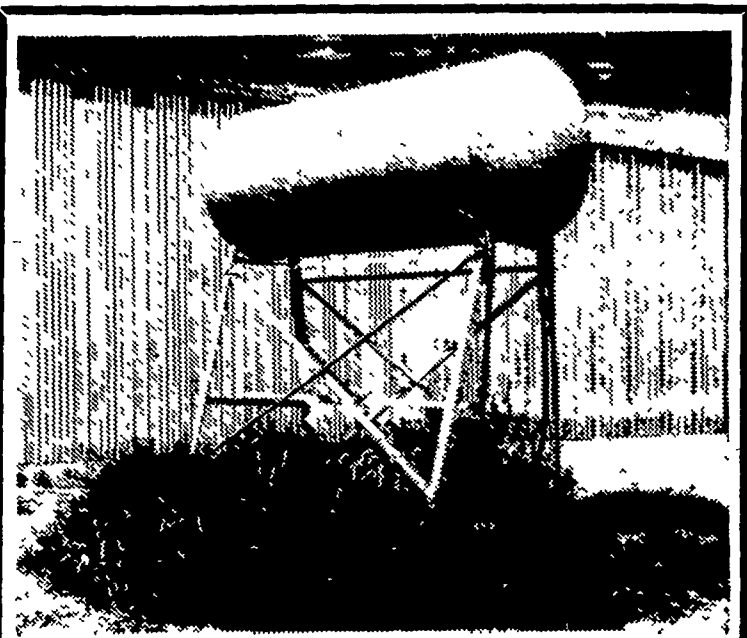
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