

U.S. Agriculture Seen Meeting Domestic Needs

American agriculture up to 1985 will likely have the capacity for a little excess production but not always enough to meet occasional surges of demand for exports, declared Dr. George E. Brandow of The Pennsylvania State University during the annual meeting of the American Agricultural Economics Association at College Station, Texas, on August 20.

Dr. Brandow said the current U.S. food situation is a severe instance of abnormal export demand and is being extended by serious drought.

A specialist in farm and food policy, he presented the annual Fellow's lecture at the AAEA meeting. His views for a long-range outlook were based on projections of food

production and use in 1985 for two different situations. In the first, long-established trends would dominate the outlook rather than recent exceptions such as worldwide drought.

The second situation would hinge on possible growth of export demand beyond unusual levels. Either situation, he said, could be combined with restrictions on agriculture's capacity to meet demands due to shortages of fertilizer and other supplies or because of severe environmental measures.

If exports should go back to pre-1972 trends, Brandow reported, production could keep up with growth of the total market at prices no higher in relation to other consumer prices than were usual prior to 1972. A small

surplus would be likely in the usual case, the study showed, but surges of export demand such as experienced in 1966 and 1972-73 could create temporary shortages.

Expansion of farm output would be speeded up if high demand and prices created a strong incentive, he pointed out. His figures for that situation showed a 25 million acre increase over the 325 million acre of harvested cropland otherwise to be expected. The figures also showed slightly higher average yields per acre despite the lower productivity of new cropland. Total grain production would be boosted by 12 per cent and export availability of grains by two-thirds if high prices prevailed.

The United States probably would be able to provide about as much food aid to poor countries as at the peak of past aid even without the stimulus of high prices, according to the study. Crop prices that remained as favorable to farmers as in 1972-73 might generate four times as much food for aid, a representative projection showed. Even that volume of food could not itself long sustain all the less developed countries, Brandow concluded, because it would be absorbed by

three years' population growth in the late 1980's if present birthrates continued.

It is not certain that poor countries will be desperate for food in the 1980's, the agricultural economist observed. He expressed doubt that massive food aid would be provided even if

needed. The public might be unwilling, he thought, to bear the costs, which would include higher prices of food to consumers, higher taxes to buy and transport food for aid, and loss of dollar earnings from commercial exports.

Increased production of food for aid could be en-

couraged if the public wanted it, he said, by long-term guarantees of favorable returns to producers and cheap credit for land development.

Professor Brandow emphasized the need to take uncertainty into account in forming food and agricultural policy and argued for flexibility capable of dealing with events as they unfold. He pointed to stabilization of market supplies as a leading problem but warned that the task would be more difficult than formerly thought.

"One of the surest conclusions in an uncertain world," he affirmed, "is that the United States can feed itself for a long time to come."

If serious reverses were to occur in agriculture, he would recommend the use of reduced exports, more resources committed to agriculture, and a shift from animal to plant foods. He added that although some measures would not be pleasant, all the people could be nourished adequately.

Crop Disaster Payment Program

Crop disaster payments to producers of 1974-crop wheat, feed grain and cotton may total a half billion dollars, Secretary of Agriculture Earl L. Butz said today.

Producers of wheat, corn, grain sorghum, barley and upland cotton who have suffered catastrophic losses due to excessive moisture last spring followed by severe summer drought may recover some of their losses under a provision of the Agriculture and Consumer Protection Act of 1973.

Under the disaster payment program provision of the 1973 Act farmers are eligible for indemnity payment when they are prevented from planting crops due to natural forces or if the total actual production from planted crops is substantially less than the normal production of allotments. The indemnity payments are equal to one-

third of the specific target prices on a quantity equal to the amount of reduced yield.

The Department's estimate of disaster payments to farmers was based upon a recent survey of crop conditions by county Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service office personnel. An estimated \$45 million will be paid for prevented planting and \$455 million because of reduced yield.

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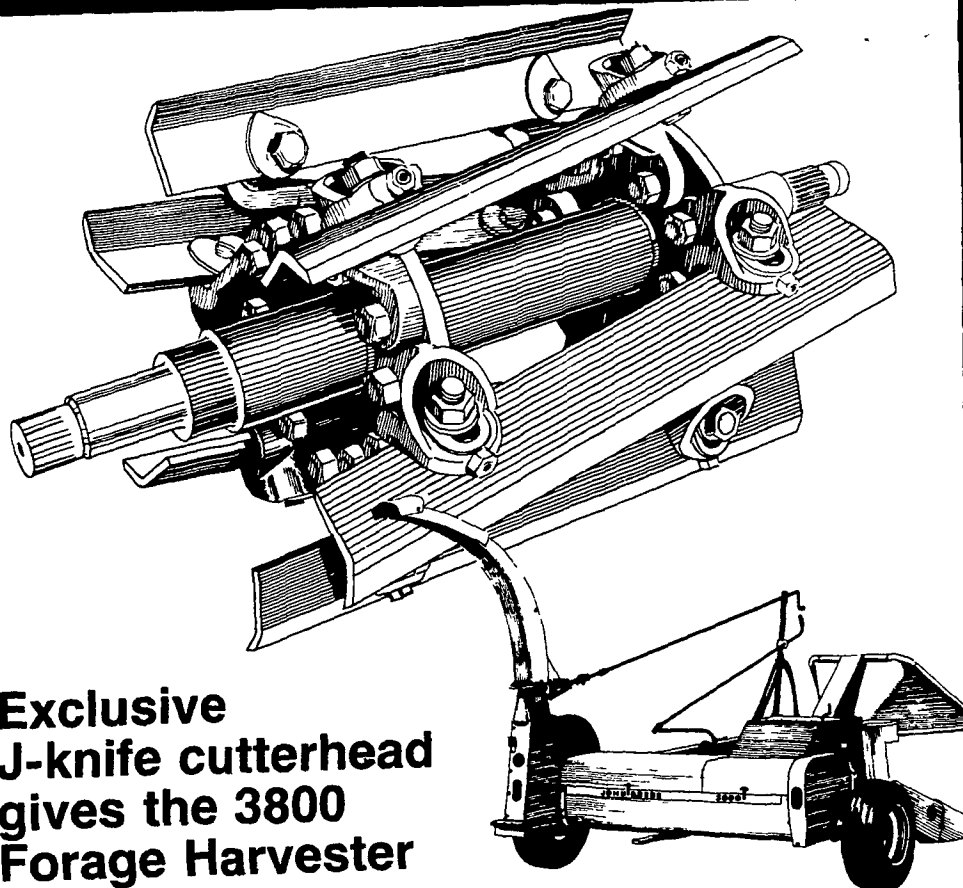
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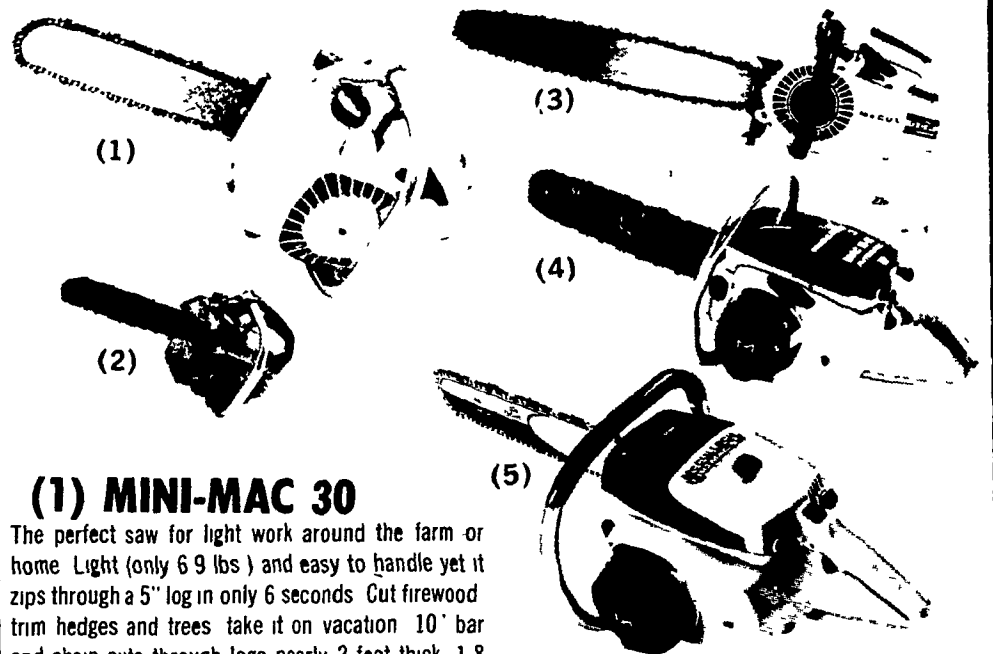


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