

Food future worries experts

COLUMBIA, Mo. — They criticized U.S. agricultural policy and worried that this country could face serious food shortages in the years ahead.

Sadness crept into their faces as they talked of millions of acres of farmland being lost each year of man and nature.

They spoke of the ethics of forcing American technology on developing nations, and decried the failing support for U.S. agricultural research and education.

The event was an April seminar on "U.S. Agriculture and the World Food Economy" at the University of Missouri-Columbia. More than that, it was an occasion to honor three recently retired UMC

professors who have made important contributions to agriculture:

• Douglas Ensminger gained world distinction for leadership in agricultural development. From 1951-1970 he was director of the Ford Foundation that developed a program in India. During ten years as professor of rural sociology at UMC, he headed a world study of population and food.

• J.M. (Milt) Poehlman is recognized internationally for contributions to crop improvements through genetics and breeding. The agronomy professor has released 18 varieties of small grains in his 45-year career and has served in India, Romania, Mali, and Tanzania.

• Ernest R. Sears is UMC's only member of the National Academy of Sciences and is considered the world's foremost authority on wheat genetics and evolution. In his 44-year career, he has developed basic genetic techniques and materials used throughout the world.

Sears could not be there for the special recognition: he's in Israel working with scientists to improve wheat by crossing it with wild grasses and other distant wheat relatives. He did however, write a paper that was presented at the seminar.

And Harold Breimyer was there. The professor of agricultural economics commented on policy

changes that would effect the world economy.

As each man spoke, there was a feeling that Planet Earth could be in serious trouble unless some things are done.

"If we are to maintain good agricultural productivity, there are some hard commitments that must be kept," Poehlman said.

"Among these are reducing the loss of prime cropland to non-agricultural use, reducing soil erosion, conserving genetic resources and developing and conserving water supplies."

Poehlman especially urged continued support for research, emphasizing that science requires a long-term commitment.

Breimyer concurred, noting

what he called the alarming "downward drift" in agricultural research funding

Both men emphasized the need for international trade and worldwide sharing of research and education

"We are a young country compared to India or China. Our agricultural system developed when land was plentiful and labor scarce," reminded Poehlman

"What would be our land and population situation when we are as old as India or China? Or just 50 years from now? Individually, we can't have much influence on increasing food production in India. Bolivia or Mali, but we can have

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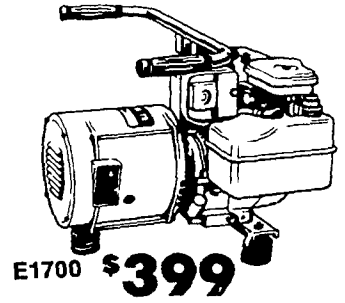
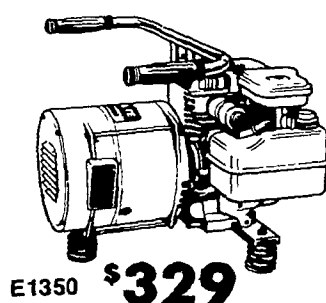
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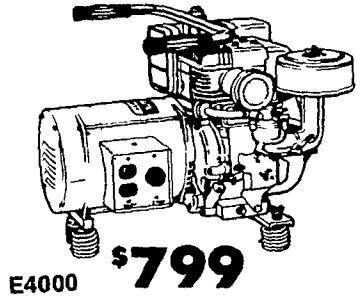
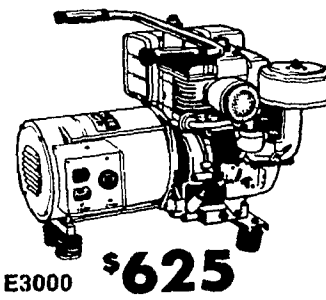
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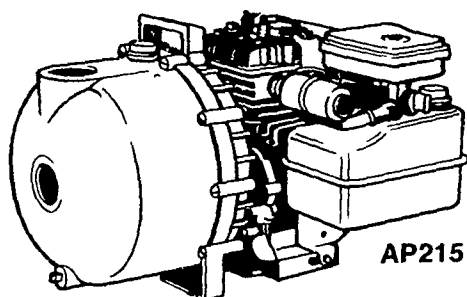
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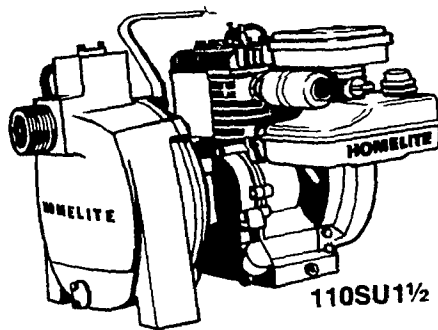
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