

## Better transportation is vital to farm exports

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — The nation's transportation system would be a major roadblock for substantially expanding U.S. agricultural production during the

1980s to meet world export demands.

And water-borne transportation is the weakest link in the system, notes Earl H. Brown, professor of

agricultural and resource economics at the University of Maryland. Brown spoke last Wednesday during the annual statewide Agricultural Leaders Forum on the College Park campus.

The former dean of the College of Agriculture at Maryland noted that the U.S. merchant fleet continues to play a small and declining role on the international scene, currently accounting for only three percent of the world merchant fleet's capacity.

Furthermore, the limited capacity of existing lack and dam facilities—particularly on the Mississippi and Illinois rivers—limits the volume of grain and oilseeds which can be transported to export points on relatively low-cost inland waterways.

It is unlikely that capacity of the inland waterways will be increased substantially by 1985, Brown noted.

"Prospects for expanding and

upgrading rail transportation are somewhat brighter. Transportation requirements above those which can be handled by water and rail will have to be met by increasing the capacity of the trucking system."

Brown commented that international trade in agricultural products does not occur in what is commonly thought of as a "free market," where prices are determined primarily by supply and demand.

Domestic food and agricultural policy has a direct effect on the quantity of agricultural products which a nation will produce, consume and either import or export. Most general domestic policies—either fiscal or monetary—also have some effect on agricultural trade.

In fact, various actions and decisions by any major government in the world can have a significant effect on the terms of

U.S. agricultural trade, Dr. Brown declared.

U.S. consumers can be expected to oppose large increases in exports of agricultural products if they believe that significant rises in domestic food prices will result. Conservation leaders may also oppose increased world trade if they believe productive soil is being "exported" due to erosion brought on by over-intensive cropping.

Agribusiness firms, on the other hand, are likely to be in favor of increased exports, as this expands the market for their products, such as fertilizer, seeds, machinery, processing and transportation.

"Solving many of the problems associated with increased farm exports, Dr. Brown said, will depend to a large extent on the continuation of effective research and extension programs by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and land-grant institutions such as the University of Maryland.

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