

U.S Agriculture Will Hold Its Own In World Market

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Prior to World War II, prices of American farm products generally were little affected by developments in other countries. But, for two decades afterward — during the 1950s and 1960s — U.S. farmers faced the rosy challenge of virtually feeding the world.

However, the effects of the Green Revolution began to change things noticeably on the world scene in the 1970s. And by the early 1980s, U.S. farmers were facing stiff competition in the world marketplace from their counterparts in Europe and South America.

Countries like India, with a long history of starvation, suddenly

were able to feed themselves. And products like palm oil from the South Pacific became a market burden for U.S. soybean producers.

So what about the future of U.S. agriculture? Does the Green Revolution spell its virtual demise on the world scene in the next century? Should housing developments, industrial parks and recrea-

tional areas be allowed to turn this nation into a city-state?

Some relevant answers to these questions are provided in a recent essay by Dennis Avery, senior agricultural analyst for the U.S. Department of State. His article, "Agriculture in the Next 20 Years," is the final chapter in the USDA's 1985 Yearbook of Agriculture.

Avery notes that this country cannot afford to give up its farm exports, which contribute greatly toward helping to reduce the U.S. trade deficit. Turning away from farm exports, he says, would eliminate hundreds of thousands of U.S. farm and farm-related jobs.

U.S. farmers traditionally have looked on their fertile cropland and relatively ideal climate as a major part of their competitive advantage. But the advantage today is shifting toward modern technology and high productivity. In addition, this nation has excellent off-farm systems which enhance farm efficiency greatly.

These systems include the personal incentives provided by a democracy, land-grant colleges in every state with their agricultural research and Extension education programs, and a long-established manufacturing and distribution base.

In addition, the United States can take pride in its marketing complex of air and rail lines, waterways, hard-surface roads and rodent-proof storage facilities, which permit large volumes of agricultural commodities to move rapidly from farms to consumers at low unit costs, which are the envy of most of the rest of the world.

The shift toward modern technology can be regarded partly as a continuation of the Green Revolution that began approximately 25 years ago. This shift is being accelerated by the advent of biotechnology, or genetic engineering.

Land-grant colleges and the U.S. Department of Agriculture led the way in both the research and educational aspects of hybrid corn, which revolutionized this nation's agriculture in the 1930s.

But the biotechnology revolution of the 1990s is shaping up as a three-way partnership among land-grant universities, USDA and agribusiness.

At least one large commercial seed company has made significant progress in developing hybrid corn varieties that are resistant to certain grass-killing herbicides. Two or more agricultural companies have made breakthroughs in developing soybean and cotton strains with tolerance to specific herbicides which kill broadleaf weeds.

And a Maryland biotech firm has received approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to field-test a genetically engineered corn variety which holds great promise for resistance to the European corn borer.

All of this will make management decisions more complex for farmers. But it portends better quality and residue-free food for consumers.

As long as American agriculture remains on the cutting edge of technology and productivity, it should continue to make an important and well-rewarded contribution to this nation and the world.



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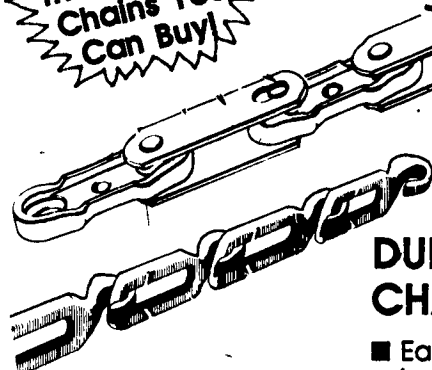
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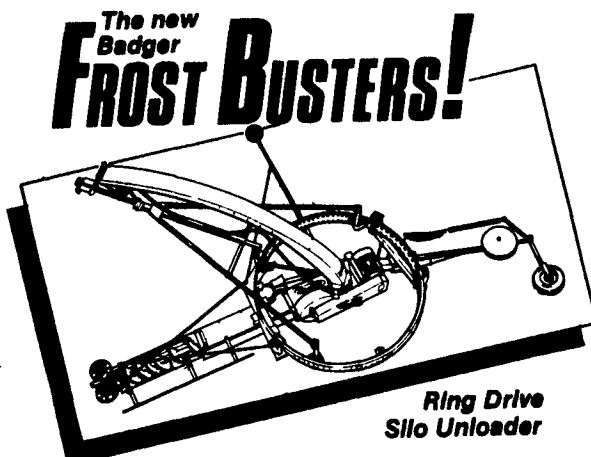
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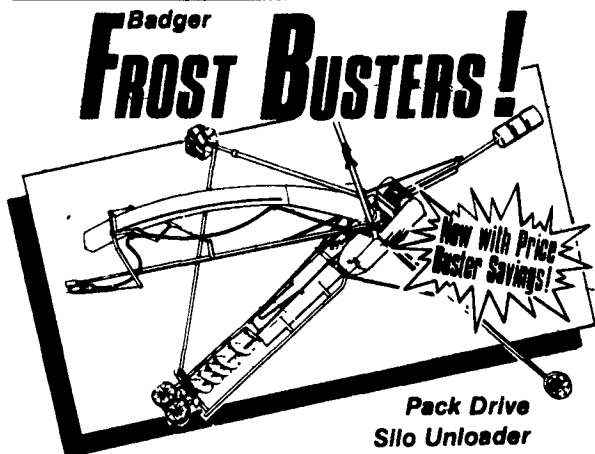
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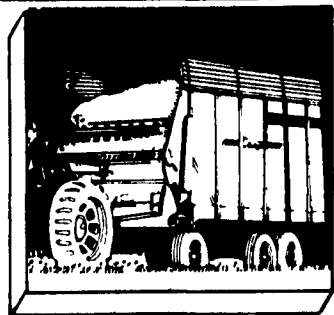


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