



AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search
<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>
aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

Food and Population: Priorities in Decision Making

Report of a Meeting
of the International
Conference of Agricultural
Economists, Nairobi, August 1976.

EDITED BY
T. DAMS
the late K.E. HUNT
G.J. TYLER

© The International Association of Agricultural Economists, 1978

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of Teakfield Limited.

Published by Saxon House
Teakfield Limited, Westmead, Farnborough,
Hants, England.



British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

International Conference of Agricultural Economists,
16th, Nairobi 1976

Food and population.

1. Food supply - Congresses 2. Population policy -
Congresses

I. Dams, T II. Hunt, Kenneth Edward III. Tyler, G
338.1'9 HD9000.5

ISBN 0-566-00250-7

Printed in Great Britain by Biddles Limited, Guildford, Surrey.
Typeset by Supreme Litho Typesetting, Ilford, Essex.

Summary of discussion from the floor

Perhaps the aspects of the whole food and population situation which seemed to attract most discussion were those of political will and political skill in implementing policy, the choice of appropriate policy, the effectiveness of customary approaches to population control, institutions, and aspects of education, technological and general.

The discussion of policy, though occupying more time than that on most other issues, was not wholly coherent. There seemed to be a feeling that policies had not been rigorously enough developed. For example, it was argued that long term contracts for food such as those between the US and Japan and USSR were, as effected, as much of a disincentive to developing countries' agricultural output as was food aid. They mean that surpluses which might be available from LDCs would not find a worthwhile market and thus these countries would be forced to a policy geared purely to satisfy their own internal needs. Policies should in fact be keyed to the resource/population pattern of the countries concerned. Much too little attention had been given to handling the problems of regional policies for agriculture in developing countries where, often, regional disparities in situation were very considerable. In relation to the resources used to feed those sectors of the world's population eating at very high levels it was commented that criticism of the situation was frequently met but it was not developed to the point of a policy proposal. One might be (though the implications of this were not developed) a policy of taxation of meat. Bearing in mind that many countries had experienced massive migration from rural areas to towns the importance of distinguishing in policy matters between marketed food supplies and total food supplies was stressed. What governments needed was usually supplies which could flow to where they were needed. There was some feeling that the really important decisions might still remain to be made and the responsibility of the economist in choosing his research areas and disseminating the results of his researches in order to make for more effective policy was stressed. There was not, however, any extended discussion of the problems of relating the central policy decision maker to the researcher.

In respect of population, although the general problems created by pressing numbers of people were recognised, there were various hints of greater complexities in the population story than had been tabled in the main paper. For example, evidence was referred to that showed that the level of fertility varied between countries and regions and that certain economic variables affected the birth rate. Again, evidence from South East Asia was referred to suggesting that where the

asset level of the family (mainly land) was low the desire for children was greater — perhaps to be seen as an investment in security. However, this pattern was subject to variation with the likely opportunity for labour earnings. Where, for example, the labour market for a particular caste was saturated the birth rate was high, whereas if it were work for another caste then the birth rate was lower. This suggested that a good deal more research on motivation as regards desired family size was needed. There was also reference to a question whether family planning as an attack on population problems was likely to be effective where tribalism was still an emphatic feature of the scene. Family planning might need, in such situations, to be deferred until the pattern of tribal emphasis had been modified.

The lack of human will for development and the factors affecting it was a subject of varied comment. Some felt that the operations of large enterprises, dominant in rich countries and exploiting poor countries by a variety of activities, were important. Poor countries needed to put themselves, if they could, into good strong positions for negotiation — as OPEC had done over oil — if they were to be able to take the road to a better situation. More attention needed to be given to an inventory of ways of improving the joint operation of developing countries and much more attention needed to be given to this. Others saw the kind of capital intensive approaches interlocking with 'the green revolution', as by their nature almost designed to disrupt the will to achieve better things of the body of the population of developing countries.

Institutional changes were also a subject of a diversity of contribution. The idea that they led to a fall in output was contested, Chilean data being quoted to show a rise in output per unit and per head following land reform measures. Though the importance of the institutional element in the whole picture clearly got general support, the discussion did not help greatly in deciding whether the pessimists were justified in their view that necessary institutional changes were unlikely to occur rapidly.

The special problems of small part-time farmers were discussed at some length. There were obviously doubts as to whether extension services were in fact effectively helping the small farmer to develop or indeed whether thoroughly perceptive research into the economic behaviour of small farmers had been undertaken on the scale required. The reference to part time farming attracted a question about where such farmers were going to operate — were they on the fringes of towns only? If so, did this have any particular relevance to the great mass of agricultural activity in the country?

Although the subject did not always arise directly there were numerous references to the importance of marketing in furthering agricultural economic development. Considerable need was discerned for further studies identifying the local problems of marketing and distribution, particularly for the needs of countries' internal markets and for developing appropriate processing and marketing organisation. Finally a very forceful emphasis was given to the importance of developing general education as a fundamental requirement if many of the changes spoken of under specific headings were to be feasible. This was linked to the importance of

effective extension services, information services, international flows of situation appraisal information and the like.

The importance of improved inter-human and international relationships came up from a number of original contributions. The nationalistic behaviour of many countries was seen as, in effect, a form of 'apartheid' and there was some feeling that all kinds of 'apartheid' were severely detrimental to human development and that there might be benefit from recognising that most countries behave indefensively.

The general discussion followed a series of somewhat disparate lines of thought. Fairly general agreement was expressed on the importance of 'integrated rural development', but it was emphasised that trying to do everything at once would bring disaster. Priorities were essential. Some saw 'unimodal' strategies for agricultural development which would promote increases in productivity and income amongst a large and growing fraction of households as high on the list, as it becomes recognised as a strategy which makes feasible both employment and livelihood for a growing farm population. It was seen, too, as possibly providing a favourable environment for the spread of family planning. An important associated development was seen to be an integrated programme for the delivery of nutrition, health and family planning services in a way that would achieve very wide coverage of the rural population. In turn this was seen as involving active participation of local communities and provision for using local resources in eliminating under-nutrition. Some of the speakers believed that there were ample resources at the grass roots level to achieve this but unless there was the will effectively applied at the village level there was no hope of getting change simply through promotion at the national level.

The technical possibilities for expansion were referred to at various levels. For instance, the importance of increased supplies of inputs (e.g. fertilisers) in India in recent years in creating an output level which was not previously expected for another 5 years held the hope that, with still further increases in technical inputs, advances in production could be looked for at a very attractive rate. However, even though a 'doomsday' outlook did not figure largely in the discussion it was stressed that a number of resources were likely to become more costly as less accessible and less convenient sources had to be drawn on. There was also some discussion of the factors which in practice would govern the carbon producing capacity of the world and the possible interaction of the systems leading to food production and the live systems in the natural — or more or less natural — environment. This line of thought suggested that we may be being unduly complacent when we think of agriculture as requiring only a small part of the energy used in any industrialised country. We may need to consider the energy demands of the industrial sector on a very wide scale if we are to assess the prospective situation realistically.

Various contributors to the discussion agreed with Klatzmann's pessimism in saying that economic assistance by rich countries could not solve the food problems of the poor countries. It was noted, incidentally, that apart from a few minor

countries and the OPEC group, developing countries are exporters of food. We distort the picture when we think in terms of cereals alone. However the next stage in this argument did not attract a similar consensus. While it might be agreed that a solution to the world food problem should be sought primarily in mobilisation of the internal resources of particular countries, there was a difference of view about the role of industrialisation. Some doubted the extent of its role in providing a basis for the development of agriculture in poor countries. Others regarded it as the key to solving these problems. They were not thinking in terms of heavy industry necessarily, though in some countries it did in fact provide the foundations for the development of agriculture. Some stressed the importance of a balanced industrial investment, which in poor countries might be largely orientated towards providing foundations for agricultural development based on direct deliveries of the domestic means of production of industrial origin and by financing imports of those means.

Some forceful sections of the discussion were concerned with the fact that the total supply of foodstuff relative to the total needs was not an effective indicator of the state of wellbeing of the food situation. Depending on the operation of the socio-political institutions and programmes, increased production could simply result in the rich eating better and the poor still starving. Distribution of income is man-determined. Those stressing this aspect did not think that the papers presented provided a concept of the problem in terms which contributed effectively to its solution. The core of the problem was the rapid growth of the numbers of people who were without adequate means of subsistence — without land and without sufficiently productive employment. Typically, such people have no political voice. We cannot expect that extra food supplies will be produced for those who cannot afford to pay for them and mere increase in food supplies will not prevent a growth of numbers of the people unable to get access to them. It was quite possible to picture science and technology itself precipitating a crisis — for example if new technologies permitted rapid increase in crop yields with reduction in the labour requirements. In principle such innovations could be beneficial but, in practice, with our present operational arrangements they probably would not be. We should, in these discussions, see food supply and income distribution as inter-dependent problems to be handled together. Put another way, the central problem is how both to absorb non-subsistence labour productively and to increase total production. If we are to progress on the critically important question of whose incomes, whose output and whose employment have to be improved we have to make fundamental changes in agricultural planning techniques.

Though strategies for increasing labour intensive technologies spreading the range of people benefiting under policy measures might be useful they would not make enough impact on the problem in many countries — the agricultural population was too big a proportion of the total. Application will have to be selective. Such approaches demanded a degree of political will with which we are not customarily familiar. It also needed the means to steer the economy more closely than we are accustomed to. Agricultural economists would need to

play their part in identifying the target groups and means of reaching them. We confused the picture when we asked 'Will humanity avoid disaster?'; it is tolerating massive chronic and growing disaster all the time. The question is when will it be recognised as a disaster?

Much of the discussion related to governments, marketing and farmers but participants were urged to pay much more attention to the behaviour of the housewife and its importance in this picture. Housewives in low income farm households could respond to better opportunities much as could farmers. There was scope for better food storage, better household equipment and generally cheaper consumer durables. The prices of the latter are often very high because of inefficient manufacture or import substitution. We know that the human life span in low income countries has increased by forty per cent in the last twenty-five years but we fail to see the profound implications of this gain for productive labour and for the fewer births which would be needed — and, no doubt, desired — when adjustment to the longer life span is perceived.

Innovations generally were seen by some participants in the discussion as very closely linked with credit. Some aspects of this cross linked with discussions under other headings of the input picture; more credit means that a farmer has more productive energy under his control generally. However, we ought to give rather special emphasis to aspects of grass root involvement in the credit story. On the one hand, it was critically important to get farmers themselves involved with the operation of loan boards so that there would be widespread participation in the knowledge of the realities of credit. Further, working with this level should tap sources of funds which would free farmers from such heavy dependence on central government sources and would leave their destiny very much in their own hands.

Participants in the discussion included: M.K. Alhigazi, *Pakistan*; G. Ancey, *France*; P.C. Bansil, *Zambia*; H.F. Breimyer, *USA*; J. Brossier, *France*; W. Herer, *Poland*; B.F. Johnston, *USA*; L. Joy, *UK*; S. Kakli, *Pakistan*; D.H. Kim, *Korea*; J.F.S. Levi, *UK*; H.C. Love, *Canada*; M.E. Mlambiti, *Tanzania*; M.A.M. Maro, *Tanzania*; J.T. van Riemsdijk, *Netherlands*; R. Saran, *India*; T. Schultz, *USA*; R.G.F. Spitze, *USA*; J. Strasma, *USA*; D. Tomic, *Yugoslavia*; P. de la Vaissiere, *France*; A. Weber, *Federal Republic of Germany*.