

"WORLD FOOD INFORMATION SYSTEM"

ADDRESS BY HONORABLE HUBERT H. HUMPHREY
UNITED STATES SENATOR

FOR

THE WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE

ROME, ITALY

NOVEMBER 1974

I APPRECIATE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS THIS DISTINGUISHED GROUP TODAY. I WILL PRESENT A PLAN OF ACTION FOR COPING WITH ONE OF THE KEY ISSUES ON THE AGENDA OF THE WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE--THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MORE USEFUL WORLD FOOD INFORMATION SYSTEM.

WE ARE MEETING AT A TIME WHEN AN IMMEDIATE COOPERATIVE EFFORT IS URGENTLY REQUIRED TO PREVENT THE ESCALATION OF PRESENT FOOD SHORTAGES INTO A PATTERN OF CHRONIC MALNUTRITION AND STARVATION FOR MILLIONS.

THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD HAVE BEEN WAGING A COMMON BATTLE TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR TWENTY-FIVE YEARS. AS A RESULT OF THE ADOPTION OF HIGH-YIELDING SEED, INCREASED USE OF FERTILIZER, EXPANDED ACREAGE, AND SOPHISTICATED AGRICULTURAL TECHNIQUES AND EQUIPMENT, WE HAVE ACHIEVED QUANTUM INCREASES IN FOOD PRODUCTIVITY.

BUT WE STILL ARE IN DANGER OF LOSING THE WAR AGAINST FAMINE. GROWING POPULATIONS AND INCREASING PER CAPITA FOOD CONSUMPTION HAVE ABSORBED ALL OF OUR GAINS.

EACH YEAR, FIFTEEN MILLION CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF FIVE DIE BECAUSE OF PERSISTENT DEFICIENCIES IN CALORIES AND ESSENTIAL NUTRIENTS. MILLIONS MORE ARE PERMANENTLY CRIPPLED, MENTALLY OR PHYSICALLY.

THERE WILL BE NO IMMEDIATE RELIEF FROM THIS TRAGIC WASTE OF HUMAN LIVES AND ABILITIES. THIS YEAR'S OUTPUT OF GRAINS ONCE AGAIN HAS FALLEN FAR BELOW EXPECTATIONS, BOTH IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD.

THE CRITICAL PRICE AND SUPPLY GYRATIONS OF THE LAST THREE YEARS COULD BECOME COMMON IF WE FAIL TO TAKE STRONG, IMMEDIATE ACTION. UNPREDICTABILITY OF COMMODITY PRICES, COMBINED WITH RAPID ESCALATION OF

PRODUCTION COSTS FOR FARMERS, COULD INHIBIT THE PLANTING OR ADEQUATE FERTILIZATION OF BASIC CROPS,

-- FARMERS HAVE FACED MAJOR RISES IN FOOD PRODUCTION COSTS DURING THE LAST TWO YEARS, ESTIMATED FOR THE UNITED STATES AT AS MUCH AS 50 PERCENT.

-- FARMERS THROUGHOUT THE DEVELOPING WORLD HAVE STAGGERED UNDER FERTILIZER PRICES, AND SPORADIC UNAVAILABILITY OF FERTILIZER, WHICH HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO MAJOR GRAIN SHORTAGES.

-- AND THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, FACED WITH THE PROHIBITIVE COST OF OIL, WILL BE FORCED TO CURTAIL PROGRAMS FOR MECHANIZING THEIR AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS.

MUCH OF THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF RECENT EVENTS ON THE WORLD FOOD INDUSTRY COULD HAVE BEEN SOFTENED BY ADVANCED PLANNING AND PROMPT ACTION.

-- BUT WE FAILED TO FORESEE THE CROP FAILURES OF 1972.

-- WE FAILED TO FORESEE MAJOR CHANGES IN THE GRAIN PURCHASING PATTERNS OF THE SOVIET UNION IN 1972 AND 1973.

-- WE FAILED TO FORESEE COST RISES AND SUPPLY SHORTAGES IN FOOD AND FERTILIZER.

-- WE FAILED TO FORESEE THE GRAIN SHORTAGES OF THIS YEAR.

AS A RESULT, WE FAILED TO RESPOND TO ANY OF THESE EVENTS WITH SOUND POLICIES. ACTIONS WERE RAPIDLY IMPROVISED AND POORLY PLANNED, AND CONTRIBUTED TO THE PRICE AND SUPPLY INSTABILITY WHICH FOLLOWED.

WE CAN NEVER HOPE FOR A SURPRISE-FREE FUTURE. BUT WE CAN BETTER PREPARE FOR DEALING WITH A RANGE OF POSSIBLE FUTURES.

PLANNING DEMANDS FORESIGHT, AND FORESIGHT REQUIRES RELIABLE, THOROUGH, TIMELY AND SYSTEMATICALLY ORGANIZED INFORMATION.

THE INADEQUACY OF EXISTING METHODS OF GATHERING, ANALYZING, AND DISSEMINATING INFORMATION ON THE WORLD FOOD SYSTEM IS A MAJOR CAUSE OF THE PRESENT INSTABILITY OF WORLD FOOD MARKETS. RAPID IMPROVEMENT OF CURRENT FOOD INFORMATION SYSTEMS IS A NECESSITY IF WE ARE TO PROVIDE A RELIABLE BASIS FOR POLICY MAKING.

I PROPOSE THAT THE WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE ADOPT AS ONE OF ITS MOST URGENT TASKS THE DETERMINATION OF IMMEDIATE STEPS TO IMPROVE THE WORLD'S FOOD INFORMATION SYSTEMS. I SHALL RECOMMEND THAT THE CONFERENCE SUPPORT TWO PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVES WHICH ARE ESSENTIAL TO THE REALIZATION OF THIS GOAL.

I AM FULLY AWARE THAT OTHER PROBLEMS ALSO MUST BE DEALT WITH IF WE ARE TO STABILIZE THE WORLD FOOD SITUATION AND MEET WORLD FOOD NEEDS. I CALLED ATTENTION TO A NUMBER

OF THESE PROBLEMS LAST MAY AT A CONFERENCE ON THE
INTERNATIONAL FOOD SITUATION. I SUGGESTED THE FOLLOWING
FOUR PRIORITIES:

-- WE MUST INCREASE FOOD AID FROM THE LARGEST FOOD
PRODUCING NATIONS.

-- WE MUST DEVELOP AN INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM OF NATIONAL
FOOD RESERVES ALONG THE LINES OF THE PROPOSAL BEING
CONSIDERED BY THE WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE,

-- WE MUST IMPROVE THE WORLD'S SYSTEM OF FERTILIZER
DISTRIBUTION AND PRODUCTION.

-- WE MUST INCREASE THE EMPHASIS ON AGRICULTURAL
DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE DEVELOPING NATIONS.

I STILL BELIEVE THAT THESE ARE PRIORITY CONCERNS FOR
THE WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE.

BUT THESE OBJECTIVES CANNOT BE EFFECTIVELY ACHIEVED IN
THE ABSENCE OF ADEQUATE AND CONTINUOUS INFORMATION ON THE

STRUCTURE, CURRENT STATUS, SHORT-RUN AND LONG-RUN PROSPECTS OF THE WORLD FOOD SYSTEM.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUCH AN INFORMATION SYSTEM HAS BECOME SO CRITICAL BECAUSE WE ARE FACED FOR THE FIRST TIME WITH THE DANGER OF FOOD SHORTAGES WHICH CANNOT BE MET FROM ANY EXISTING RESERVE.

IN THE PAST, NORTH AMERICA--AND PARTICULARLY THE UNITED STATES--APPEARED TO BE A POTENTIALLY ENDLESS RESERVOIR OF FOOD SURPLUSES. IF CROPS ELSEWHERE FAILED, FOOD STILL COULD BE PROVIDED FROM U. S. STOCKPILES.

AS RECENTLY AS 1972, WHEN GLOBAL RESERVE STOCKS OF GRAIN STILL WERE AT 131 MILLION METRIC TONS, THE UNITED STATES HAD AN ADDITIONAL RESERVE OF IDLE CROPLAND WITH A GRAIN EQUIVALENT OF APPROXIMATELY 78 MILLION METRIC TONS.

BUT GLOBAL GRAIN RESERVE STOCKS NOW HAVE FALLEN FAR BELOW 100 MILLION METRIC TONS, AND THE UNITED STATES NO LONGER HAS ANY CROPLAND IN RESERVE.

SO LONG AS APPARENTLY LIMITLESS RESERVES WERE AVAILABLE, THERE SEEMED LITTLE NEED TO GATHER EXACT INFORMATION ON THE WORLD FOOD SITUATION. EMERGENCIES ALWAYS COULD BE MET.

THAT NO LONGER IS THE CASE. ONLY THROUGH ADEQUATE PLANNING AND CAREFUL COORDINATION OF NATIONAL FOOD POLICIES IN THE LIGHT OF SYSTEMATIC AND TIMELY INFORMATION ON THE CURRENT FOOD SITUATION CAN THE WORLD OVERCOME THE PRESENT CRISIS.

WE MUST DIMINISH THE REALM OF THE UNPREDICTABLE. WE MUST TAKE SOME OF THE GUESSWORK OUT OF AGRICULTURAL POLICY MAKING. ONLY IN THIS WAY CAN WE PROVIDE A SOUND BASIS FOR WORLD FOOD SECURITY POLICY.

SYSTEMATIC INFORMATION ON WORLD FOOD IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOR THE UNITED STATES, THE WORLD'S MAJOR FOOD EXPORTER, BECAUSE OF ITS OPEN, FREE MARKET SYSTEM.

THE ISSUE IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT, HOWEVER, TO NET FOOD IMPORTING NATIONS. THE SECURITY OF THEIR EXTERNAL SUPPLIES, THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THEIR INTERNAL FOOD POLICY, AND THE FULFILLMENT OF THEIR NEED FOR MORE EQUITABLE WORLD FOOD DISTRIBUTION ALL DEPEND ON A STABLE WORLD MARKET. SUCH STABILITY NO LONGER CAN EXIST IN AN INFORMATION VACUUM.

RECENTLY I REQUESTED THAT THE OFFICE OF TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT OF THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS UNDERTAKE AN IN-DEPTH STUDY OF FOOD INFORMATION SYSTEMS, AND OF THE MEANS BY WHICH THEY COULD BE IMPROVED. THIS STUDY HAS JUST GOTTEN UNDERWAY AND WILL NOT BE COMPLETED UNTIL MID-1975.

BUT I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU SOME OF THE PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS WHICH HAVE EMERGED FROM THE EARLY PHASE OF THIS STUDY.

WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF EXISTING FOOD INFORMATION SYSTEMS? AND WHAT DIRECTIONS MUST BE TAKEN TO

OBTAIN MORE ADEQUATE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CURRENT STATE AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS OF THE WORLD FOOD SYSTEM?

THE MOST ADVANCED AND COMPREHENSIVE OF EXISTING SYSTEMS ARE THOSE OF THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS, THE INTERNATIONAL WHEAT COUNCIL, AND THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

-- DETAILED DATA ON THE AGRICULTURAL AND COMMODITY SITUATIONS IN DEVELOPING AND DEVELOPED COUNTRIES IS AVAILABLE THROUGH EITHER THE FAO OR THE U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

-- VITAL INFORMATION ON THE WORLD FERTILIZER SITUATION IS PROVIDED THROUGH A JOINT PROJECT OF FAO AND THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY.

-- COMPREHENSIVE MONTHLY REPORTS AND ANNUAL PROJECTIONS ON THE WORLD WHEAT MARKET ARE PROVIDED BY THE INTERNATIONAL WHEAT COUNCIL.

-- WORLD TEMPERATURE AND PRECIPITATION MAPS ARE PUBLISHED

ON A MONTHLY BASIS BY THE U. S. NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE.

-- IMPROVEMENT IN THE TIMELINESS OF INFORMATION AVAILABLE INTERNATIONALLY IS THE MAJOR OBJECTIVE OF FAO'S PERSONNEL TRAINING AND DATA COLLECTION EFFORTS FOR ITS FOOD INFORMATION SYSTEM.

MUCH OF THIS INFORMATION IS DISSEMINATED IN A VARIETY OF MONTHLY AND ANNUAL REPORTS. THE MAJOR LIMITATION ON THESE SERVICES IS THAT IMPORTANT INFORMATION SOMETIMES IS UNAVOIDABLY DELAYED, AND THAT WEAKNESSES IN THE DATA GATHERING SYSTEM OCCASIONALLY MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO BE CERTAIN OF THE DATA'S ACCURACY.

IT IS CLEAR FROM THIS BRIEF SURVEY OF CURRENT CAPABILITIES THAT WE ALREADY POSSESS MANY OF THE ELEMENTS NECESSARY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ADEQUATE WORLD FOOD INFORMATION SYSTEM, BUT EXISTING INFORMATION SYSTEMS NEED TO BE MORE FULLY DEVELOPED, TO BE INTERCONNECTED WITH EACH OTHER, AND TO

PRODUCE DATA THAT IS MORE READILY AND RAPIDLY AVAILABLE
TO THOSE WHO NEED IT.

OUR BEST EFFORTS WILL BE WASTED, HOWEVER, UNLESS ALL
OF THE MAJOR FOOD PRODUCING AND IMPORTING NATIONS COOPERATE
IN SHARING INFORMATION.

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA IS THE WORLD'S LARGEST
RICE PRODUCER.

THE SOVIET UNION IS THE WORLD'S LARGEST WHEAT PRODUCER,
LITTLE INFORMATION ON THE AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD COMMODITY
SITUATIONS IN EITHER COUNTRY HAS BEEN AVAILABLE TO THE REST
OF THE WORLD.

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA RECENTLY HAS JOINED FAO,
AND ITS PARTICIPATION IN THE ACTIVITIES AND INFORMATION-
SHARING PROGRAMS OF THE ORGANIZATION CERTAINLY WILL BE WELCOME.

THE SOVIET UNION AND THE UNITED STATES REACHED AN
AGREEMENT IN JUNE OF 1973 TO EXCHANGE AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION.

AS A RESULT, MUCH IMPORTANT NEW INFORMATION NOW IS AVAILABLE FROM THE SOVIET UNION, INCLUDING CONSUMPTION FIGURES FOR MEATS AND EGGS, AND STATUS REPORTS ON THE PERCENTAGE OF CROP ACREAGE HARVESTED.

BUT VITAL INFORMATION STILL IS LACKING. PARTICULARLY ESSENTIAL ARE:

- FORECASTS ON IMPORTANT CROPS,
- HARVESTING FIGURES ON YIELDS PER ACRE,
- RESERVE STOCK FIGURES,
- ADVANCE ESTIMATES ON IMPORT REQUIREMENTS.

THE WORLD FOOD SITUATION IS TOO PRECARIOUS TO WITHSTAND ERRATIC AND UNPREDICTABLE ACTIONS BY MAJOR FOOD-TRADING NATIONS--WHETHER THE 30 MILLION TON GRAIN PURCHASES BY THE SOVIET UNION IN 1972, OR THE SUDDEN CONTRACT CANCELLATIONS BY THE UNITED STATES IN 1974.

FURTHER DESTABILIZATION OF THE WORLD FOOD MARKETS--
WITH ALL THE PROBLEMS THAT IMPLIES FOR THE WELFARE OF THE
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES--IS HIGHLY UNDESIRABLE. NEW AGREEMENTS
FOR SHARING INFORMATION ARE NEEDED--BEGINNING NOW IN THE
SETTING OF THE WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE, AND CONTINUING NEXT
MONTH IN THE SOVIET-AMERICAN DISCUSSIONS ON FURTHER
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 1973 AGREEMENT.

WITH FULL COOPERATION, WE CAN TAKE SEVERAL STEPS TO
DEVELOP A MORE COMPLETE, ACCURATE AND USEFUL INFORMATION
SYSTEM.

I URGE THE WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE TO ADOPT THE FOLLOWING
PROPOSALS AND TO ESTABLISH A CONTINUING COMMITTEE TO PREPARE
FOR AND AID IN THEIR IMPLEMENTATION:

FIRST, WE MUST ESTABLISH A WORLD FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
INFORMATION CENTER.

SECOND, WE MUST STRIVE TO AGREE ON THE USE OF AERIAL
PHOTOGRAPHY AND REMOTE SENSING FROM SATELLITES FOR MORE

EFFECTIVE MONITORING OF THE WORLD FOOD SITUATION.

THE WORLD FOOD AND AGRICULTURE INFORMATION CENTER
COULD BE ESTABLISHED EITHER AS A SEPARATE INTERNATIONAL
ENTITY OR AS PART OF THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CENTER WOULD INCLUDE:

- SERVING AS A CENTRAL BANK OF WORLD FOOD INFORMATION.
- COORDINATING AND AIDING THE IMPROVEMENT OF INFORMATION
GATHERING BY OTHER AGENCIES.
- CREATING A SOPHISTICATED EARLY WARNING SYSTEM.
- PUBLISHING A COMPREHENSIVE QUARTERLY DIGEST OF WORLD
FOOD INFORMATION.
- AIDING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW OR IMPROVED
COLLECTION SYSTEMS FOR DATA ON SUBJECTS SUCH AS WEATHER,
CHEMICAL, ENERGY AND FERTILIZER SUPPLIES, FOOD CONSUMPTION,
AND NUTRITION SURVEILLANCE.

THE USE OF AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY AND REMOTE SENSING FROM SATELLITES COULD BECOME INVALUABLE, WITH FURTHER DEVELOPMENT, FOR ESTIMATION OF CROP ACREAGE AND FOR GATHERING OF BASIC AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION.

BUT THEIR USE MAY RAISE SOME NATIONAL SECURITY CONCERNS. THE POTENTIAL OF THESE TECHNOLOGIES IS SO PROMISING, HOWEVER, THAT THE CONTINUING COMMITTEE IMMEDIATELY SHOULD ARRANGE NEGOTIATIONS TO ESTABLISH THE EXTENT AND LIMITS OF THEIR ACCEPTABLE USE.

THE PROJECT TO IMPROVE THE WORLD'S FOOD INFORMATION SYSTEMS CLEARLY CALLS FOR THE ACTIVE EFFORTS OF ALL NATIONS WHICH PARTICIPATE IN THE WORLD FOOD SYSTEM AND WHICH ARE REPRESENTED AT THIS CONFERENCE.

NARROW POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC OBJECTIVES OF ANY NATION OR GROUP OF NATIONS MUST NOT STAND IN THE WAY OF SO VITAL

A GOAL. WHATEVER THE TEMPORARY TACTICAL BENEFITS WHICH MIGHT BE OBTAINED THROUGH OBSTRUCTION, ALL NATIONS ARE CERTAIN TO SUFFER FROM CONTINUING INSTABILITY.

RAPID DEVELOPMENT OF A COMPREHENSIVE AND ACCURATE WORLD FOOD INFORMATION SYSTEM, PROVIDING FORECASTS IN TIME FOR EVALUATION AND PLANNING, WILL BE A MAJOR STEP IN RE-ESTABLISHING MAN'S CONTROL OVER THIS MOST CRITICAL PART OF HIS ENVIRONMENT.

WE MUST ACT NOW TO CREATE THIS FRAMEWORK FOR FULFILLMENT OF THE BASIC NEEDS OF PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.

#



Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



www.mnhs.org