

GLOBAL FOOD QUARTERLY

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Avery Testifies Before Senate Ag Committee

Testimony by Dennis Avery, Director of the Center for Global Food Issues, Hudson Institute, Churchville, Virginia, before the U.S. Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee, March 11, 1997. Avery recommended that public funding for agricultural research be sharply increased in the U.S. and around the world "to help combat hunger and malnutrition in the world; to strengthen America's rural economy; and most of all to help us save the world's wildlands and wildlife species from being needlessly plowed down to make room for more low-yield farming." He noted that the world is just beginning the biggest surge of agricultural demand in all history; that efforts to convert billions of people to vegetarianism had failed almost totally; and that achieving higher yields

on the one-third of the earth's land already being farmed was the only visible path to saving room for the world's wildlife. He pointed out that the U.S. has a particular responsibility, because it has the world's largest tracts of prime cropland. The U.S. also has a large proportion of the world's farm research capability, and it is unlikely that other countries would be able to replace American leadership in time to meet the peak world farm demand projected for just forty-five years from today.

Mr. Avery. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Senators. My specialty is supposed to be the global overview, and that global overview tells me that this is an enormously important hearing. Looking globally, agricultural research is the most vital investment for the

twenty-first century for both people and the environment. I think we are familiar with the arguments about how good agricultural research is at helping people, at fighting hunger, and lowering food costs. We know that it is vital too for rural America, which has a higher wage structure than rural China or rural Poland and is facing a globalizing world market. But it is even more important to do agricultural research for the environment.

Looking globally, high-yield farming is the highest achievement of human civilization for the environment. I have an article coming out in the next issue of *Choices* (a peer-reviewed magazine put out by the American Agricultural Economics Association). It estimates that our increased crop yields since 1960 are saving 10 to 12 million square miles of wildlife habitat around the world from being plowed down for low-yield crops. That is equal to the total land area of the United States, Europe, and Brazil.

In addition, we have radically reduced soil erosion. When we tripled the yields on the best land, we cut erosion per ton of food by two-thirds. And then the farmers have turned chemistry into conservation tillage, cutting soil erosion by another 65 to 95 percent. The Soil and Water Conservation Society of the United States says that the most sustainable farming in the world today, the most sustainable farming ever, is that done with high-powered seeds, chemical fertilizer, pesticides used in integrated pest management, and conservation tillage.

America has a special responsibility here. We have more of the world's good cropland than any other country. We have more of the infrastructure needed to make that land productive than any other country. We have the best agricultural research infrastructure of any country in the world. We have the global training and leadership network with the other agricultural research institutions in the world. And as I say [in my written testimony], we have only forty-five

FOOD EXPERT WARNS AGAINST ENVIRONMENTAL 'EXTREMISM'

By George Anthon, Washington Bureau Chief of the Des Moines Sunday Register, March 9, 1997

Washington, D.C.—Norman Borlaug, the Iowa farm boy who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for helping defeat famine in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America is emerging from decades of self-imposed obscurity to warn that environmental "extremism" threatens to undo scientific advances that have kept world food output ahead of population growth.

Borlaug said he would like to invite officials of environmental groups to leave their offices in Washington, London, Paris, Brussels and Bonn to see firsthand the hunger in Africa that he says is being extended by their opposition to modern, technology-based agriculture.

Borlaug, 82, raised on a 105-acre farm near Cresco, led the development in the 1960s of high-yielding varieties of cereal crops, mainly wheat and rice.

Less Vulnerable

They are disease- and drought-resistant, nutritious, and have stout, short straws that make them less vulnerable to storm damage and better able to use nutrients, water, and sunlight.

The combination of plant-breeding advances, efficient use of fertilizer, pesticides, and irrigation water—along with social, economic and political changes—was referred to as the "Green Revolution."

Borlaug, although largely unknown in the United States because he has continued to work mostly in developing nations, is considered a hero throughout much of the world. There have been estimates that the Green Revolution has saved perhaps one billion lives, and

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years in which to achieve a tripling of world farm output and probably more than a tripling of American farm output. No other country has as much to gain or to offer through agricultural research.

Chairman Lugar. Mr. Avery, you have quantified what you think needs to occur in forty-five years. More or less, namely, a tripling of the world's food supply and as I recall ten times the amount of forestry supplies.

Mr. Avery. That is correct, sir.

Chairman Lugar. Let me just ask, how do you do this—given the problems of nation states, and who is likely to be able to pull together the international planning that would be farsighted enough to perceive that the best land is in the United States, for example; and therefore we ought to proceed full speed here and maybe somewhere else, or partially here with forestry and apportion out these roles so that the rain forests of the world are not chopped down and soil erosion does not go rampant in various continents?

Mr. Avery. Mr. Chairman, it might very well be that the UN or some other international body would volunteer for this management role. I do not have a great deal of faith in those kinds of management plans, and you will recall that the last element of my high-yield conservation prescription was free

trade in farm and forest products. If we make the market transparent, if we give everybody the opportunity to see the real value that can be derived from either a farming activity expanded or a forestry activity expanded, then I have every faith that the investment will be made and be made promptly. Perhaps not perfectly, but quite effectively.

Chairman Lugar. This is technically achievable in your judgment, the tripling of the supply of food?

Mr. Avery. I wish I could guarantee that we can triple yields again. I hope we can. I think with adequate investments and a regulatory system that welcomes new productivity advances, we should be able to come close. I do know that with low-yield farming and forestry, we cannot.

Mr. Roberts. I want to thank all of the witnesses and thank you for your contributions down through the years in regards to this topic. I especially want to thank Dennis Avery who, in my opinion, has been shining the light of truth in the darkness for some time. I wish the national press would pay more attention to him. I think it is a paradox of enormous irony, Mr. Chairman, that... if you encompass the advantages of high-yield agriculture, you achieve some of the very goals the very critics of high-yield agriculture claim that they are for, and I am talking about saving our nation's topsoil and not only feeding those in need but... preserving the wildlife habitat that Dennis mentioned.

Dennis, would you just say again one more time how much land area is involved that we can preserve for wildlife habitat and topsoil conservation if we pursue high-yield farming?

Mr. Avery. If we had not gotten the yield increases that we have achieved since 1960, we would have already lost, just on the crop side, another ten to twelve million square miles. It is very difficult to estimate the livestock component, but that involves additional millions of square miles. We are saving whole continents' worth of wildlife, and agriculture has gotten absolutely no credit for doing that.

Mr. Roberts. I basically made that speech to Public Voice, when I borrowed and plagiarized from your remarks—to be met by some criticism from that organization. But I again want to thank you for what you do.

Mr. Gramm. Let me thank you first, Mr. Chairman, for what I thought was an

excellent panel.

Mr. Avery. I am totally convinced by everything you say. I think if we were actually trying to look at the funds we have available in agriculture, we would want to spend a much, much higher proportion of what we are spending on research.

Mr. Avery, it seems to me that what you are really saying is that given the projected growth in population...

Mr. Avery. And even more, the income growth which drives diet improvement.

Mr. Gramm. Clearly this massive increase in demand is coming. We also know, based on human behavior, that when people are hungry or where there are food shortages or where you have got a gross distortion of price, people are willing to sacrifice the environment in those areas.

Mr. Avery. It is happening now.

Mr. Gramm. That is right. So really your argument is that it ought to be an environmental issue, a preservation issue, a wildlife issue; that we should be dramatically changing funding priorities and funding the research that will be needed for the technology which, if combined with free trade and free capital markets in an efficient functioning world market, could enable us to avoid this wholesale assault on the rain forest, and wildlife habitat, and on nature in general.

Mr. Avery. You are exactly right, Senator, I think it is remarkable that agricultural research has kept as much funding as it has had in an era dominated by international trade barriers and a domestic surplus of farm products. But we never had a surplus of farm products globally. We had a surplus of trade barriers. And I think it is enormously important that America has now taken the step of putting its agriculture on the market and, hopefully, putting more research funding behind its competitive position. But if the world understood clearly how vital this agricultural research is to our environmental goals, I think we could achieve the kind of funding increase that the ag research community has dreamt about and produce the kind of dramatic results again that we produced in the Green Revolution.

Mr. Roberts. On page six of your testimony, Dr. Alberts, you are indicating here something that I think is indicative of what Dennis says. It is in the last paragraph. You say, these formulas were generated in an era

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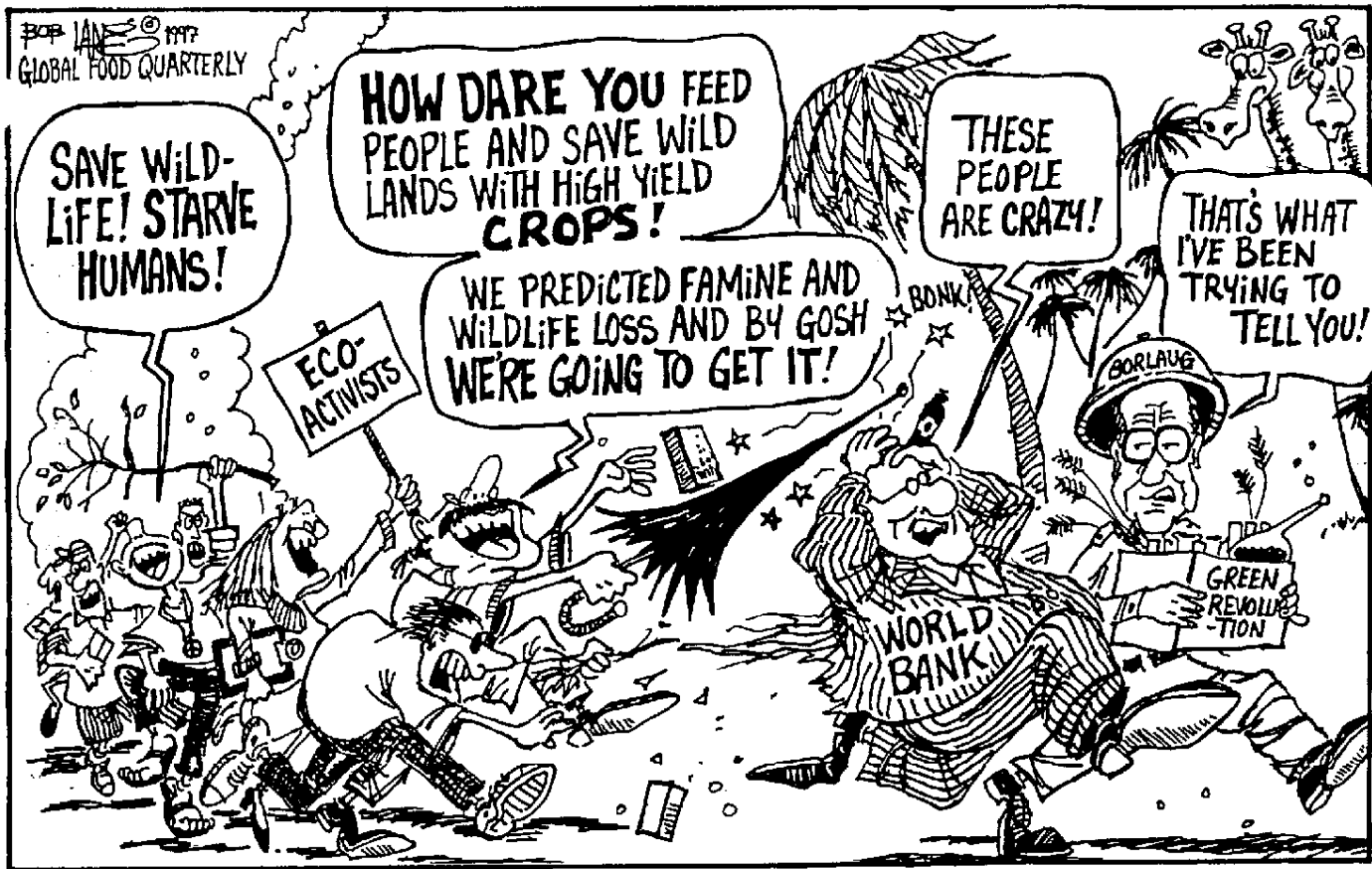
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Senate Ag Committee

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where a much higher percentage of the nation's population was rural and farm-based, and the nation's agricultural interests were dominated by concerns with domestic crop production and food security. And it goes to what we are saying that you have several generations of folks now who take their food supply for granted, even the cost of food. They seem to be more concerned about the safety of their food supply—that and convenience. Consequently, we have really reached a new millennium, if that is the proper word.

I guess what I am saying is I would like to follow Dennis Avery's suggestion. This is terribly important.

Mr. Harkin. Mr. Avery, those are just very provocative statements of yours and provocative thinking. I like people who think provocatively. The two things I would ask you to think about are if we had to meet the needs of the new population, the emerging population that is coming, with what we have done in the past—that is, chemical farming—I challenge you that we would be in deep trouble. What we need to do is get

away from that to the new biotech. **Mr. Avery.** You raise some very interesting points. I do not want to get away from chemicals. We are going to need them. We do not have any substitute for weed control chemicals, none in sight. I debated a guy from Greenpeace on public TV a year ago, and he wanted people to worry about captan (one of the chemicals) and cancer. I asked him, "How much wildlife do you want us to plow down to be rid of a chemical that is one-ten millionth as carcinogenic as drinking water?" I think we have been over-focused on getting zero risk from the chemicals. I think our agricultural research team has done a really fabulous job of giving us, not zero risk, but near-zero risk. I am not sure that I want to breed all of the pest control into the plant, because so often that involves natural toxins being enhanced and you cannot wash them off.

Chairman Lugar. I would just add a comment because mention was made of the difficulty of getting a mission statement for research. One reason why that has been difficult is the ambiguity of our overall agricultural policy, in my judgment. On the one hand, you gentlemen are testifying today that we will need to produce a great deal more

in the world, a great deal more in this country, and that our research ought to undergird and make that possible.

But for a long while, we were not clear as a nation if we wanted to produce more. As a matter of fact, much of the supply control legislation we had worked in the opposite way. And this led many Americans to wonder what we were about in agricultural research. I do not think we are on that train any more. I think we have an opportunity to feed the world, and the opportunity comes in part through our diplomacy; that is, to knock down tariff and nontariff barriers, which is another part of this equation.

Given the lack of ambiguity about our mission—namely, to produce more with less resources—this is something that may be more exciting to the American people. I sort of buy the thought that one reason we are not excited is that the clientele was small.

Mr. Avery. If I could offer a suggestion. If we are going to do this, the first thing we need to do is to drop our characteristic phrase, "feeding the world," because people will not be excited by it. May I suggest "saving the wildlife."

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Legal Services Corporation

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actions against the members of the Washington County Fruit Growers Association. Ultimately, the orchardists cut down their trees, and the packing sheds closed.

Harvest of Injustice not only documents the Legal Services Corporation's vendetta against America's fruit and vegetable industry—but concludes that nothing short of eliminating the LSC will stop the assaults.

Ms. Isaac found that the corporation's enabling legislation, designed to protect the corporation from "political pressure," has succeeded so brilliantly that the Corporation itself has been unable to call off its legal attack dogs (on the few occasions when it has tried).

The vendetta against farm labor started almost as soon as Legal Services was founded in the 1970s. Ms. Isaac says that the attacks have been most severe in the "winter garden" states of Florida, Texas, and California—but the government-funded legal attack dogs have also struck hard at orchards in

New England, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, Michigan, and Washington State; at the cucumber farms of North Carolina; at the mushroom growers of Pennsylvania; at the pickle growers of Ohio; and at the chili growers of New Mexico.

In fact, the local legal groups that receive grants from the Legal Services Corporation have targeted virtually every visible cluster of farms that uses seasonal labor.

(It is important to remember that the Washington, D.C.-based corporation doesn't actually hire young activist lawyers itself; it just grants lots of taxpayer money to obscure activist organizations that do.)

At first, the Legal Services farmer attacks seemed to be an effort to unionize migrant and seasonal workers. But then, the Legal Services lawyers turned on the very unions they had helped form! The self-righteous young lawyers apparently have felt that getting rid of all seasonal farm workers is critically important to their fight for "social justice."

Gary Bellow, then of the Legal Services Institute, wrote, "Most of us agree that America maintains a deeply stratified class system; changing this system... is a primary concern of most of us who do legal services work..." In other words, they demand total equality between a family orchard that has built up its business over generations in a successful U.S. economy and an illiterate Haitian guest worker trying to surmount a dysfunctional Haitian economy—even if that means putting both out of their jobs.

At first, the young lawyers could point to Edward R. Murrow's famous "Harvest of Shame" and claim they were trying to improve the lot of poor immigrant workers. But

in recent years, the groups funded by Legal Services have smothered family farms with blizzards of legal complaints and lawsuits even when they paid high wages and offered good housing.

By 1995, when Dan Rather and CBS-TV revisited Murrow's famous program ("Legacy of Shame"), he was able to document migrant workers sleeping in the streets of El Paso and decry the fact that growers no longer provided transport to the fields. Rather failed to mention that these problems had been created by Legal Services' own efforts! To wit:

- More than half the field worker housing in the U.S. has been torn down in recent years, often to prevent Legal Services lawyers from filing housing complaints. (In many cases the housing was virtually new; in some cases, the lawyers induced workers to trash their own housing in order to provide grounds for complaints.)

- Instead of keeping unsafe buses off the road, the government has imposed such high insurance requirements on any vehicle transporting farm workers that the cost of insuring one is now six to eight times the cost of a bus. Thus the workers must get to the fields in private vehicles operated by crew leaders or friends, often at exorbitant fares.

Rather pointed no fingers at Legal Services. In fact, he spotlighted Greg Schell, the nemesis of the Maryland apple industry, as a "noble advocate" for the poor farmworker.

Rael Jean Isaac has done a fine job in **Harvest of Injustice** documenting a significant constraint on the revival of rural America that should be a vital companion to the world's growing affluence and drive for better nutrition.

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Chairman Lugar. Not as humanitarian, but nevertheless—

Mr. Avery. Believe me, the man on the street is not connecting to famine in faraway places.

Chairman Lugar. Nevertheless, producers, agribusiness, in the United States will connect with this. The fact of having these very large markets, new profitability, new vitality on farms, the small cities of America which comes from this, is something that is very exciting to most of us and certainly to this committee.


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