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Prospects for agriculture during the coming year are under discussion here this week at the Annual Outlook Conference of the USDA. Topmost consideration naturally is being given to the food grain and feed grain situation in relation to the world food crisis, and much of the thinking about farm operations for the next 12 months is in terms of meeting as effectively and efficiently as possible world food distress.

It is very easy for the average citizen to tire a little of as much emphasis as has recently been placed on starvation and inadequate food throughout many parts of the world. But when one hears the reports of our health officials in some of these spots telling that the incidence of tuberculosis has tripled since the end of the war, that in the American occupied zone of Germany the average weight of men, the major labor force, between the ages of 20 and 40 is 131 pounds compared with 154 pounds in this country--and the minimum for useful and effective work is prescribed as 142 pounds by health experts on the spot--and that the school children of age 12 are so stunted that their average height is three inches below prewar, it is painfully obvious that responsible leadership is not very far from the truth in regarding the handling of the world food situation as a grave showdown issue for Western civilization.

The Director-General of the World Food and Agriculture Organization, Sir John Boyd Orr, was quoted today as reporting that careful studies show that during the next year more people will die of starvation than were killed by actual warfare and bombing in any one year of the war itself. USDA nutrition experts reported that urban populations in the distressed countries will have a diet in the next year 25 per cent below prewar and in some countries 30 per cent below the low prewar level. In many countries trying to get back on their feet economically, this means lowered work output, stunted bodies, and mental and physical ailments almost beyond comprehension and beyond repair.

Because of these conditions, needs and demands for American farm products, particularly grains, appear to be insatiable and far beyond the ability of this country's farms to meet them. Therefore USDA officials foresee another year of high level incomes for American farmers about equal in total dollars to 1947. Total physical marketings are expected to be less in 1948 because of smaller grain crops and less livestock and livestock product out-turn, but higher prices are expected to offset the smaller physical volume. One prominent expert, however, stands alone in underscoring the probability of a price recession in 1948, but this is the third successive year he has been bearish.

In view of all these critical conditions, state college and extension people are being urged to carry to farmers the recommendation that the maximum of food production for human use be achieved, especially that shorter feed supplies be used as efficiently and sparingly as possible to get the maximum meat output from livestock feeding--which spelled out means no choice or prime cattle and lighter weight hogs.

A responsible state department representative told us that his department does not say that without a foreign aid program Europe will go Communist, but that unless a substantial program is worked out, unrest and prolonged civil war will result, and very harmful, if not fatal, damage will be done to Western democracy.

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