

for the Life Science, Medical Sectors & Industry - 25. May 2008, Vol. 11

Have fun and learn! Don't you want to improve your technical English skills & comprehension? Then test your understanding by reading the text below, and use the 'Questionnaire link' to answer questions that are based on the text & charts on the pg. 2. Please send your answers ⇒ LTE Newsletter Editor.

Global Food Supplies at Risk – NY Times/Herald Tribune, 19. May 2008

"World's Poor Pay Price as Crop Research Is Cut", by Keith Bradsher & Andrew Martin

(Note: Due to its world wide implications, this special NYT article was selected, especially with its affects on the life science sectors. Furthermore, due to the article's length, 'Round-the-World Life Science News' will be omitted from this issue. We do hope from reading & responding to this article, you will gain a further appreciation for the various ways technical English language can be applied, which is a goal for our LTE Newsletter subscribers.)

LOS BAÑOS, Philippines; The brown plant hopper, an insect no bigger than a gnat, is multiplying by the billions and chewing through rice paddies in East Asia, threatening the diets of many poor people.

The damage to rice crops, occurring at a time of scarcity and high prices, could have been prevented. Researchers at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI-Philippines) here say that they know how to create rice varieties resistant to the insects but that budget cuts have prevented them from doing so.



Researchers at the IRRI, the world's main repository of information about rice, are trying to deal with problems like the rice hopper, which destroys the rice crop.



This is a stark example of the many problems that are coming to light in the world's agricultural system. Experts say that during the food surpluses of recent decades, governments and development agencies lost focus on the importance of helping poor countries improve their agriculture.

The budgets of institutions that delivered the world from famine in the 1970s, including the rice institute, have stagnated or fallen, even as the problems they were trying to solve became harder.

"People felt that the world food crisis was solved, that food security was no longer an issue, and it really fell off the agenda," said Robert Zeigler, IRRI's Director.

Vital research programs have been slashed. At the rice institute, scientists have identified 14 genetic traits that could help rice plants survive the plant hopper, which sucks the juices out of young plants while infecting them with viruses. But the scientists have had no money to breed these traits into the world's most widely used rice varieties.

The institute is the world's main repository of rice seeds as well as genetic and other information about rice, the crop that feeds nearly half the world's people.

But nowadays at the IRRI, greenhouses have peeling paint and holes in their screens and walls. Hallways are dotted with empty offices. In the 1980s, the institute employed five entomologists, or insect experts, overseeing a staff of 200. Now it has one entomologist with a staff of eight.

Similar troubles plague other centers in Asia, Africa and Latin America that work on crop productivity in poor countries. Agricultural experts have complained about the flagging efforts for years and warned of the risks. "Nobody was listening," said Thomas Lumpkin, director general of the International Maize & Wheat Improvement Center in Mexico (IMWIC).

Now, a reckoning is at hand. Growth of the global food supply has slowed even as the population has continued to increase.

But cuts in agricultural research continue. The US is in the midst of slashing, by as much as 75%, its \$59.5 mill. annual support for a global research network that focuses on improving crops vital to agriculture in poor countries. That network includes the IRRI.

Robert Bertram, who oversees the funding for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), said he was still trying to stop the cuts and argued that research to improve crop yields was "like putting money in the pockets of poor people, and I mean billions of poor people."

Check your understanding on the above text & chart.

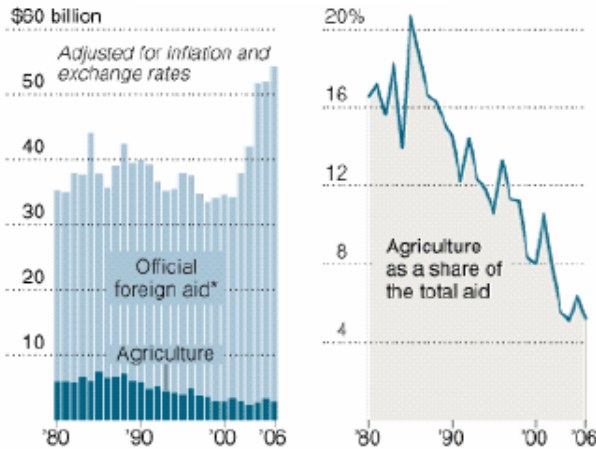


If you click on the LTE Newsletter's 'Questionnaire link', you will find questions to answer. Then please send your answers to Mr. 'H'. We look forward to helping you to improve your technical English skills!

Global Food Supplies at Risk – NY Times/Herald Tribune, 19. May 2008 (cont.)
“World’s Poor Pay Price as Crop Research Is Cut”, by Keith Bradsher & Andrew Martin

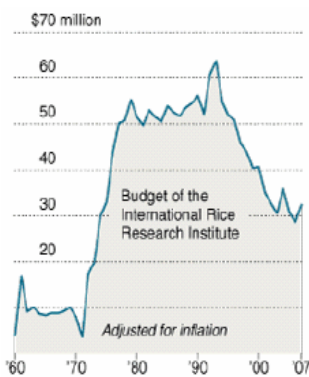
Note: All charts below should be applied towards questions from the ‘Questionnaire Link’. Be advised that some figures below due not include certain sharp fluctuations like humanitarian aid.

Foreign Aid

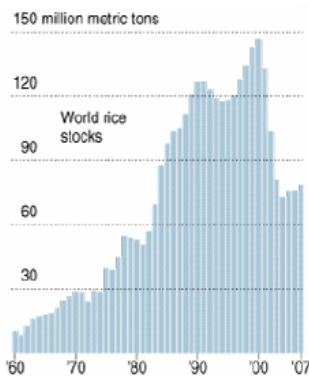


Amid food surpluses, agricultural development aid from wealthy nations to poorer ones declined... (cont. below)

Research



Rice Stockpiles



...which led to a decline in the kind of research that had created higher crop yields. The importance of such research is becoming clear as annual demand for cereals like rice has begun to outstrip production. Agricultural output has particularly lagged in Africa.

Sources: OECD, IRRI, USDA and UN-FAO (via World Bank)

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