

# RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

COMMUNIST AREA

*min Amelunke*

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## THE BLIGHT OF RED WEEDS

Excessive weed growth caused by poor soil management and a shortage of chemical herbicides for weed control substantially cuts crop yields in the socialized sector of agriculture of the East European Communist countries. This is a new judgment made by a leading U.S. soil scientist after an extensive tour of the agricultural regions in the Soviet Union, Rumania, and Hungary last year. In fact, the weed menace and the inability to control it so impressed the visitor that he considered it a primacy deterrent to an abundance of food products.

Among other retarding factors which account for the stagnant crop yields, the scientist cited the wholly inadequate supply and distribution of chemical fertilizers, both in quality and quantity. Evidence of nutritional deficiencies in plants was widespread, he reported. This shows up by foliage discoloration and blight and is caused by an imbalance of plant foods which only a technologically advanced fertilizer program could correct. On the organizational structure of Communist agriculture, the lack of economic incentives for farm workers was given as a third depressant in the sluggish development of agricultural output in the Communist countries, recognized long ago by western authorities and, in recent years, by Communist officials themselves.

Thus the herbicides (weed killer) industry, a fast growing sector of the chemical industry in the western world, begins to assume greater importance in the development of East European Communist agriculture and complicates further the efforts of the regimes to solve the chronic farm production problem.

The American soil scientist's critique of the Communist weed menace was confined to the socialized sector of the agrarian economies. In the USSR, Hungary and Rumania, the private plots of collective farmers and workers were singularly free of retarding weed growth, he observed, and this he attributed to peasant incentives to use the hoe to keep weeds under control. Everywhere he observed the higher yields on the private plots which were clean as compared to the state and collective farm fields where weed growth was rampant.

Heavy weed growth, besides competing with crops for soil moisture and plant nutrients, favors insect growth and plant diseases, which in turn reduce yields. The scientist was particularly surprised at the extensive damage to crops caused by plant diseases and insects. He saw little evidence of a systematic effort to combat these crop destroyers through chemicalization or improved soil management, including weed control.

As the formula of many herbicides, pesticides, fungicides, and defoliants are well known it seemed surprising to the U.S. observer that the production of these chemicals was not proceeding with despatch. If the experiment stations and model farms that were visited did not adequately use the protective chemicals in their cropping practices, the scientist assumed that the degree of utilization by the rank-and-file state and collective farms was at an even lower level.

The backward state of the farm chemical industry was found difficult to understand by the American since many of the scientists he visited were fully informed of the progress and technology of the herbicide sector in the United States and other western countries. The crux seemed to rest with the planning authorities.

In the technological, commercial agriculture of today weed control by hoeing or even machine cultivation in many crops is becoming obsolescent. Particularly with corn, small grains, and some vegetables the use of chemicals to kill weeds is a widespread and profitable practice. It is especially a labor-saving method -- a factor of particular weight in the labor-short bloc countries. Generally it takes only one or two treatments with herbicides to control weeds compared to four or five mechanical cultivations.

The lag in the chemical industries of the USSR and East European Communist countries may well be accentuated for processed farm chemicals. Herbicides and pesticides are no longer auxiliary materials in an advancing agricultural order, they are fully as vital for food production



as chemical fertilizers. But many sectors of the national economy of the bloc countries compete for essential chemical components -- industry, defense, space, -- so the dilemma of "who gets what" faces the planners. In this process of priority the pattern of the past shows scant consideration in resource allocation for the chemicalization of agriculture. The struggle against weeds and plant diseases may well prove as difficult to overcome as the very struggle for an abundance of food itself. Any improvements in the supply of herbicides in the foreseeable future will have to come through central decisions on resource allocations or by direct importations.

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In the technological, commercial agriculture of today weed control by means of machine cultivation in many crops is becoming essential. Particularly with corn, small grains, and some vegetables the use of chemicals to kill weeds is a widespread and profitable practice. It is especially a labor-saving method -- a factor of particular weight in the labor-short and poorest countries. Generally it takes only one or two treatments with herbicides to control weeds compared to four or five mechanical cultivations. The lag in the chemical industry of the USSR and East European countries cannot be well be ascertained for processes of mechanization, low wages and pesticides are the major obstacles. The lag in the chemical industry of the USSR and East European countries cannot be well be ascertained for processes of mechanization, low wages and pesticides are the major obstacles. The lag in the chemical industry of the USSR and East European countries cannot be well be ascertained for processes of mechanization, low wages and pesticides are the major obstacles.