

# RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

## COMMUNIST AREA

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### THE GRAIN-MEAT OUTLOOK IN COMECON

The promise of an abundant food supply through the socialization of agriculture has been an article of faith in Communist ideology for rationalizing forced collectivization. The period implied for reaching the vistas of abundance was generally of an intermediate run of time. Other than in Poland these canons of faith have hardly been challenged. So that now, it comes as a distinct breakthrough in the prevailing dogma that an impeccable Communist source refutes the promise of abundance in agriculture.

In an article on the urgent problem of solving the imbalance in world food production, the Slovak trade union daily, Praca, declared that even in the Comecon countries the production of grain and meat does not now meet the demand, nor will it do so in the immediate future.<sup>1</sup>

This is unusual candor on the part of a Party-controlled organ of the trade unions. The declaration is all the more revealing in that an unusual sequence has occurred in Comecon agriculture with the growing of two successive good harvests. Both the 1966 and 1967 harvests were among the best in history. As a result, the USSR, Rumania, and Bulgaria will be able to export normal amounts of cereal grains this year, assuming no undue stockpiling for reserves. Total imports of over six million tons of grain, however, will need to be made by Poland, Czechoslovakia, DDR, and possibly Hungary. Most of this trade is in food grains while the Praca admonition named meat as an essential food which is in deficient supply in the Comecon countries. As meat output is largely a function of the grain supplies, so grain becomes the

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1) Praca, 6 October 1967, "Food Supply a Primary Task."

main indicator of the world's and Comecon's food supply, for in the last analysis most of man's food comes, either directly or indirectly, from grain. It is in this sector of agriculture that the Comecon countries face their major production problem. Cereal grains are coming in fairly good supply in the last two years, but feed grains are far in arrears of demand.

The dietary levels of the Comecon countries on a caloric basis are fully adequate and improvements have taken place in recent years. However, in the quality components of the diet -- livestock products -- there has been a general stagnation on a per capita basis. The consumption of meat changed little in 1966, and meat is the primary quality food in an industrial society. It is axiomatic that the pattern of the increase of per capita food consumption of a country depends on rises in production, income, and the demand for food increases in the quality sector. In the Comecon economies rises in income and demand have been realized; only production has failed to respond.

A comparison of meat supplies on a per capita basis for the Comecon countries as listed in the FAO Yearbook shows up as follows:

Country	Year	Net Meat Supplies <sup>2</sup> (kilograms per capita per year)
Hungary	1962	49.9
Poland	1961-63	54.3
CSSR	1964	59.2
Rumania	1961-63	34.8
USSR	1964	38.0

2) FAO Yearbook, 1965, page 261-2

Narkhoz 1965, page 597

Statistika Rocenka, 1965, page 408.

The FAO study shows a relationship between northern, industrial countries and higher meat consumption levels as compared to the lower levels in the southern, less industrialized countries. Thus the CSSR, with the highest meat consumption index in the bloc, can be compared with neighboring Austria which has 65 kgs per capita; Poland with 54 kgs can be compared to West Germany with 66 kgs; Hungary with 49.9 kgs to France's 82 kgs; and Rumania 34.8 kgs to Greece's 33 kgs. The United Kingdom ranks as the highest meat consumption nation in Europe with 74 kgs per capita (USA 103 kgs). On the other hand, the Soviet Union, with one of the highest livestock populations in the world, by their own figures, ranks low on the world list with a meat consumption of 38 kgs. Lack of feed grains, not cattle numbers, accounts for the relatively poor nutritive showing in the USSR and should be an object lesson to state planners that the number of livestock is not alone the determinative factor for meat abundance but rather that adequate feed supplies are decisive.

If a weighted average among the Comecon countries (Mongolia excluded) were used to determine average annual net meat consumption it would be of the order of 45 kilograms, or about 65 percent of the West European norm of consumption. This level, in the opinion of western nutritionists, could still be raised to improve national health and well being.

The article in the Slovak trade union daily, Praca, representing a country with the highest meat utilization in Comecon, although still short of demand, correctly links up meat output with grain supplies. With some regional exceptions, such as potatoes and beets for seasonal feeding, the key to an improved meat supply lies in a sharp upsurge in feed grains. And as the Comecon bloc as a whole has yet to provide a stable and abundant base of food grains, although progress toward that goal has been achieved, the solution to the feed grain problem is still to be reached in the future. Nor can any real assistance be forthcoming from the Comecon neighbors -- ~~not~~ one has an exportable surplus of feed grains foreseeable in the future. Importation from the West will remain the primary means of augmenting feed grain supplies for a long time to come. Meanwhile a pronounced improvement in meat output to improve the dietary levels seems rather visionary, as Praca implied.