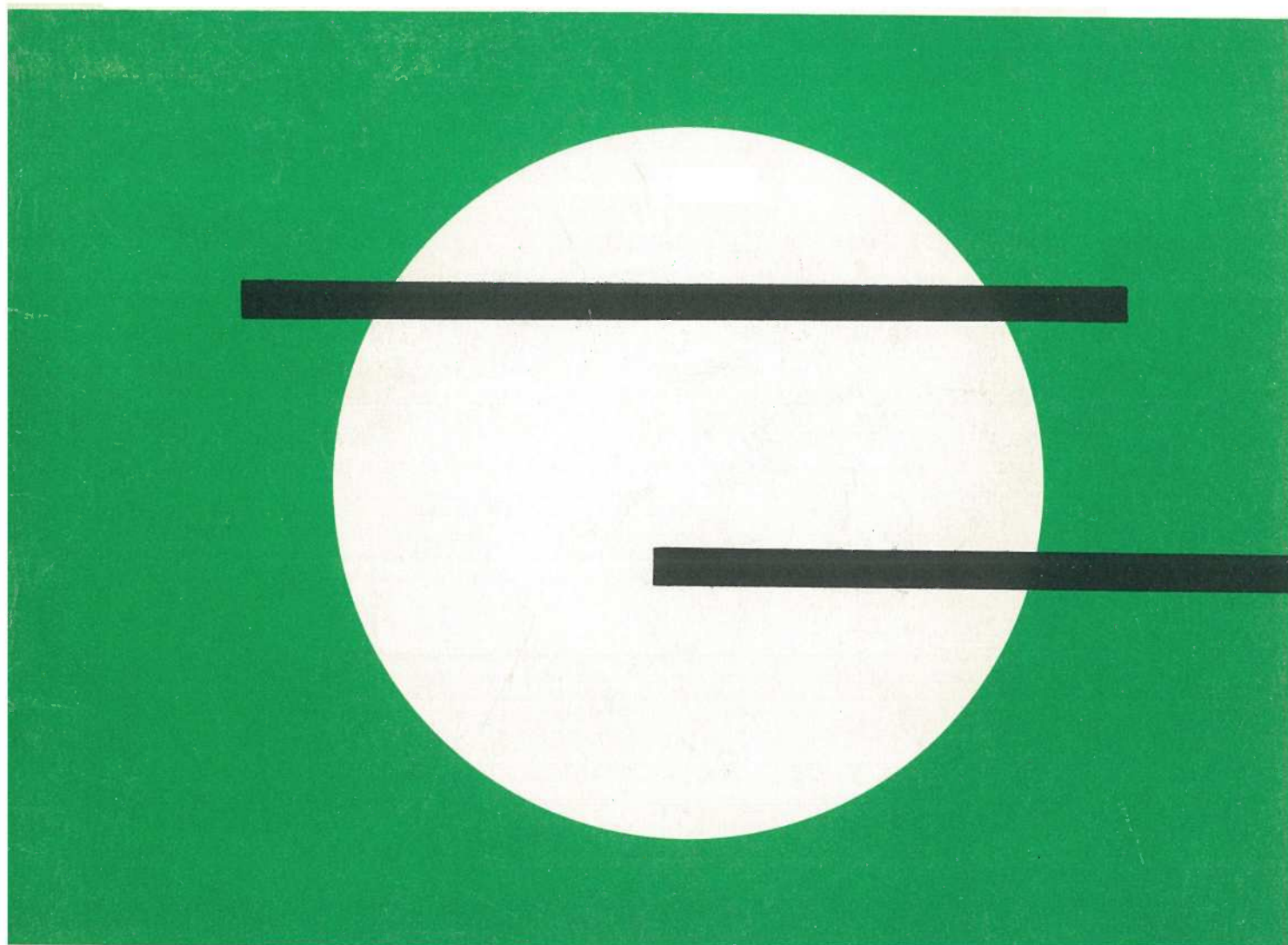


**PEOPLE, FOOD AND THE
WELL-BEING OF MANKIND**



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

SECOND McDOUGALL MEMORIAL LECTURE, 1961

PEOPLE, FOOD AND THE
WELL-BEING OF MANKIND

by JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER III

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
ROME, 1961

© FAO 1961

Printed in Italy

Internal Printing

FOREWORD

In October 1958 the Council of FAO decided to honor the memory of Frank L. McDougall of Australia, one of the founding fathers and a faithful servant of the Organization, by establishing the McDougall Memorial Lecture. This lecture is delivered at the beginning of each session of the FAO Conference, which meets every two years. The first was given in 1959 by Dr. Arnold Toynbee, the British historian.

In establishing the Lecture, the Council indicated that the lecturer should be a person of world standing, of any nationality; the lecture should have some relation to world problems of food and agriculture and to population and food supply, but the speaker should have considerable latitude in the choice of subjects, and the views he expresses are not necessarily those of the Organization.

For the second McDougall Memorial Lecture the choice has fallen upon John D. Rockefeller 3rd, an eminent citizen of the United States of America. Mr. Rockefeller is Chairman of the Rockefeller Foundation, an institution which has achieved world recognition for the assistance it has been rendering to the less-developed countries of the world, particularly in the field of agriculture. It is a source of gratification for FAO to be associated in this way with Mr. Rockefeller and his Foundation in their common task of bettering the living conditions of mankind.



B.R. Sen
Director-General

PEOPLE, FOOD AND THE WELL-BEING OF MANKIND

It is a signal honor to be with you today. To have the privilege of addressing your Organization, in a lecture series begun by the distinguished Professor Toynbee, is an opportunity for which I am deeply grateful.

There are few organizations working as effectively as yours in the great task of our age - the creation of a fuller and richer life for the peoples of the world. This is indeed a noble work, and all who labor in its cause have great reason to be proud.

It was most gratifying to note how, in his recent encyclical, Pope John XXIII, expresses "sincere appreciation for the highly beneficial work which the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization is undertaking to establish fruitful accord among nations, especially in countries in the process of development, and to alleviate the suffering of hunger-stricken peoples."

In preparing for this talk, I reviewed the history of FAO and its predecessor, the International Institute of Agriculture, which was organized in this city more than a half century ago. I noted the important part that Frank McDougall

played in the founding of FAO. I was impressed by the high idealism which so obviously inspired and sustained this respected humanitarian. His ideals shone through long years of pioneering in awakening the world to the potentialities of cooperation in the feeding of the world's millions.

It was in the 1930's that Mr. McDougall and his colleagues presented a proposal to the League of Nations. They urged a world-wide effort to make it possible for people to get more of the foods they needed for health. The League Assembly was impressed, and Mr. McDougall's sense of mission was so keen that he wired the news to an associate with these words: "We have this day lighted such a candle, by God's grace, in Geneva, as we trust shall never be put out."

Of course, no one man is responsible for a work as great as yours. As an American, I am proud of the role that our president Franklin D. Roosevelt played in the founding of FAO. I understand that it was Mr. McDougall's conversation with Mr. Roosevelt in the White House that later, in 1943, resulted in the historic Hot Springs conference on food and agriculture. That was to lead to the establishment of a permanent international organization, the organization I have the honor to address today.

Recalling this White House conversation, one is reminded of how often the seemingly insignificant actions of individuals can alter drastically the course of history. Given the will and the desire, the dedication and the opportunity, we as individuals can influence profoundly the whole of the human condition. We too can light candles that shall never be put out. Lighted one by one, these candles can some day illuminate the way to solution of the great problems that confront our world today.

When Mr. Sen asked me to address you, he spoke of my service as chairman of the Rockefeller Foundation. In this capacity, I have come to recognize the kinship of ideals that motivate the work of your organization and ours. Both of us strive toward a common objective: the well-being of mankind throughout the world. I am sure that all of us can conceive of no greater work; that all of us regard service to mankind as our grand mission and our good fortune.

In this cause there is no more basic work than yours the adequate feeding of the world's present and future billions of people. You pursue this work in a fast-changing world, and against the inexorable pressure of a fast-rising population.

You know the challenges you face. You know that, even today, one-half of the people in the world are undernourished; that in the least privileged areas the struggle for mere existence is so severe that the vast majority of the population is forced into the practice of subsistence agriculture, leaving little manpower to support other facets of social progress and economic growth. And you know also the relentless increase in the world's population - the awesome fact that year by year, day by day, the family of man, the number of mouths to be fed, continues to grow, adding still greater challenge, still greater urgency, to your work.

But, at the same time, what an opportunity for humane service is yours. And how bright are some of the prospects. No one familiar with the field will deny the vast potential of our earth to yield human sustenance. For example, of the more than 250,000 known species of plants about 300 crop plants are now under cultivation - yet for 90% of the world's food supply, we presently draw upon only twelve. And scientific efforts at a greater exploitation of these twelve indicate that theoretical yields two or three times as great are within possibility.

Rice, for example, is the most important of man's foods. It provides 80% of the calories for 60% of the people, and is the major food in those parts of the world where population pressures are most severe. Yet large-scale scientific studies of the rice plant have only recently been intensified. If, as is hoped, the yield of this plant could be doubled, it would represent an important holding action in the contest between population and food.

Much is being accomplished in the field of conventional agriculture to realize the potential of our earth. FAO's "Freedom-from-Hunger" Campaign is focusing attention on the need for increased efforts to develop more adequate food supplies on a sustained basis. It is a world-wide program to arouse the conscience of thinking people everywhere and to win support for new policies, new sacrifices, and new actions.

Another heartening sign is the growing interest being shown by countries in the Far East in the improvement of corn production. An indication of the potential of applied agricultural techniques can be read in recent statistics from Thailand. In 1960 Thailand exported 515,000 metric tons of corn - more than 20 times the average of 25,000 tons exported in the years 1950 to 1954.

Then too, it is encouraging to note that Japan has now achieved self-sufficiency in rice production and that the diet of the Japanese people is gradually broadening. The advances in crop protection and pest control are also significant, especially when one considers that losses from crop diseases and insects are estimated at from 15 to 20% of the world's total crop production.

I am, of course, personally more familiar with the agricultural program of the Rockefeller Foundation. This work began in 1943 when the Mexican Government invited the

Foundation to join in a cooperative effort in agricultural improvement - a concerted attempt, through research and education, to improve the production of the major food crops in Mexico. In the last ten years, Mexico has enjoyed an average annual increase in agricultural production of seven per cent. During the same period, the Mexican population was growing at an annual rate of about three per cent. Naturally no one program or organization can assume credit for this achievement, but the improved plant materials and production practices, and the qualified agronomists developed through cooperative research and training have played a significant role in making the advance possible.

The Foundation has since extended the plan of cooperation developed in Mexico to Colombia, Chile and India. Also from our Mexico experience have evolved hemisphere-wide cooperative projects for the improvement of corn and wheat and a world-wide program of rice improvement.

In the present achievements and future potentials of conventional agriculture, there is valid reason for encouragement. And there is promise, too, in the still largely unexplored field of non-conventional agriculture. The science of nutrition is still new, and there are those who say that man may ultimately draw the bulk of his sustenance in ways that we today cannot even begin to imagine. The algae of the sea may someday be manna for all mankind. The development of non-conventional agriculture has hardly begun, largely because so much remains to be accomplished in conventional agriculture.

The tone of my remarks so far has been optimistic. I find that almost all who work in this field are inclined toward optimism. It is easier to say that the world's larder is half-full than to say that it is half-empty. There is pride in achievement, because each success means fewer people are hungry. There is determination to succeed, and we cheer each

advance. The work is new, and each day's journey is measured by how far we have come - and not by how far we have yet to go.

But we must not be blinded by too bright optimism. We must see as well the darkness and the difficulties. Scientific and technological progress in agriculture is significant, yes. But it is not being matched by equal advances in the equally important sociological and economic areas.

Here formidable barriers rise up to daunt our efforts. There is the barrier of cost for one. How can a poor farmer, barely able to grow enough for his own survival, afford even the simplest investment that may produce a better crop? How will he buy the seed, the insecticide, the machine that he so desperately needs? On a national scale, how can his government, with a struggling economy, afford to give him the subsidies, the extension programs, the technical assistance that he must have?.

There is also the barrier of individual motivation, which, multiplied a million-fold, creates mankind's cultural patterns. How can a man be persuaded to grow more than he consumes? How can he be persuaded to abandon age-old primitive methods to experiment with the new and the foreign? How can he be persuaded to work in intelligent concert with others, sometimes total strangers?

There are these socio-economic barriers, these and many more, and we cannot ignore them. In fact in many countries they are so formidable that - barring a decline in the rate of population growth - even our best scientific and technical efforts can result in only an unnecessarily slow increase in per capita food supplies, or no increase at all, or even in an actual decline.

Before we can succeed, hundreds of millions of individual human beings must somehow be educated and persuaded to alter radically habits and customs of a lifetime. It is appalling to realize that we must not only lead the world to food, but we must somehow make it eat. And while this is already proving difficult with conventional foods, it promises to be infinitely harder in the case of the non-conventional foods.

Dr. Toynbee, in his address to you, put this problem well when he said: "The statesmen and the scientists have to face the hard fact that, even if they know how these urgent problems can be solved, and even if they are of one mind in wishing to see the feasible solutions put into effect, their wills - even their united wills - will not prevail unless and until they are able to convert the rest of mankind. Myriads of minds will have to be enlightened, and myriads of wills will have to be induced to make myriads of difficult personal choices."

We have looked at the bright side - and the dark side - of the problem of feeding the world's billions. While we cannot minimize the task ahead - and it would be dangerous to attempt to - we must maintain confidence in man's ability to shape his own environment, to make his world what he wills it to be.

Let us for a moment assume that such confidence is fully justified, that mankind will accomplish the long-sought balance of abundance, that freedom from hunger will one day be a universal fact of life.

Assume all this, I suggest, and then let us ask ourselves, is even so great an achievement enough to assure the well-being of mankind - the ultimate objective of our work? From the days of Malthus, we have inherited a tendency to feel that the answer lies in striking a healthy balance between

numbers of people versus quantities of food. To the difficult question "How much is enough?", this allows a simple answer, but too often the wrong one, because it equates man with animal and food with fodder. There is a third dimension, an aspect that touches the very essence of human life. This overlooked dimension concerns man's desire to live as well as to survive.

Man is more than animal. The needs of his life are more than bread alone. There are the precious intangibles that make life worth living. There is knowledge, for one, and the satisfaction earned by well-used leisure time. There is the quiet joy of appreciation of nature and art, and the abiding strength that comes from moral and spiritual values.

Highest of all the creatures, man has mental, emotional, and spiritual needs that arise from the very fact of his humanity. Deep within him, every man feels a need for positive self-expression; a need to assert, or to re-assert, his individuality; to exercise, merely because he chooses to, his own tastes, his own talents; and to play a distinctly personal role, if only a small one, in a creative experience.

These human needs go far beyond the bare necessities, the creature comforts, and mere material resources. They are the third dimension of which I speak. The opportunity to fulfill these needs should be every man's birthright. Every man deserves at least the chance to lead a life of satisfaction and purpose, to achieve in life more than mere survival.

The striving to meet these higher needs can be an ideal that will give direction and incentive to our work. But first there is the challenge of meeting man's basic needs; man's immediate and pressing need - not only for food - but for better health and education, for relief from gross poverty, and for some effective and acceptable means of population stabilization.

The meeting of these basic needs is an essential first step - an immediate objective - one that you in your work in agriculture are helping to meet daily, all over the world. But it is vital that we recognize - and I cannot stress this point too strongly - that all these basic needs - food, health, education, economic betterment and population stabilization - are bound together. They must be met together - as elements of a single historic challenge - and they must be met with vigor and imagination. Time is an ever more important factor if the effort is to be effective.

In this world-wide effort, is there a constructive role for us to play as individuals and as representatives of our governments and private organizations? I am convinced that there is. Let me suggest two broad areas for our initiative:

First, in our thinking and planning we must take into account all of man's basic needs. To make our work more effective we must broaden our outlook and recognize that food supply is one - but only one - of the basic needs I have outlined.

We must, all of us, understand better than we do how these needs are related to each other, how they are entangled, one with the other, each resistive to a single attack or to isolated solution.

To illustrate this interrelationship, may I cite the evolution of the program of the Rockefeller Foundation. In the first years after its founding in 1913, the Foundation concentrated its efforts in the field of public health, and with some success. Soon, however, the Foundation's leaders recognized the relationship between health and nutrition. They asked themselves, to put it simply, what was the value of making it possible for people to live longer through the eradication of disease if their future was to be blighted by starvation? Hence the Foundation began its work in agriculture.

But the "well-being of mankind throughout the world" - the words of the Foundation's charter - required more than the meeting of the basic needs. The leaders felt that, in addition, man must achieve the higher needs - that "third dimension" of which I have spoken. Consequently, the program of the Foundation was expanded into the field of the humanities - education and the arts.

Obviously, specialized agencies such as the FAO are restricted in their action to the field of their speciality. But such restrictions on action should not impair the abilities of their leaders to think and plan broadly and in concert with others.

This broad thinking and planning requires that we have more knowledge of all man's basic needs. In some areas, we already have the advantage of the facts; your own organization can muster and interpret information on food and agriculture; the World Health Organization is constantly studying man's physical well-being; many organizations, public and private, can provide facts on education and economic development. Yet, our knowledge of mankind's needs contains a dangerous gap. This is the area of population, a subject that is crucial to almost every field of human endeavor. This leads me to my other suggestion for our individual initiative.

Second, for effective thinking and planning, we must urge our governments to obtain full and accurate facts on population growth and its implications. We need this background if our work is to be truly successful. And as citizens we have every right to impress this fact upon our leaders.

It is sad, if not shocking, that man today knows so little about so vital a subject as the relationship between population growth and economic and social development. Many nations are unable to determine their total populations, much

less to forecast their rates of growth or decline, or the implications of population changes on their national life.

Why is this? Why do we not have full, carefully studied demographic facts? There are obviously several reasons: lack of funds; lack of trained personnel; economic, religious, political, and military considerations. But I wonder if basically we are not afraid to face the facts on population, much like a man who hesitates to get a physical checkup from his doctor, because the facts may demand decisions and action - decisions he is afraid to make, and actions he is afraid to take.

Or I wonder if the issue of birth control - only one of the many facets of the population question - has not in some countries pushed the entire question beyond public discussion, outside of open and reasonable consideration. I submit that we must grow up to our responsibilities. Let the world first learn the facts on population growth and their broad implications. Then, on the basis of full knowledge, let our responsible leaders, country by country, decide whether population stabilization is required, and whether acceptable means can be found.

It is unfortunate that too few nations - including the United States - are fulfilling their responsibilities to their people by obtaining this knowledge. Yet, the facts on how population growth relates to the whole of life must be the basis for crucial and far-reaching decisions, each capable of greatly affecting the lives of all of us.

Every nation has the duty to summon competent, trained, responsible individuals to devote full time and energy to the study of population questions and their long-term implications. Equally important, this information should be made available to the citizenry. Only thus can government programs, once properly planned, be popularly supported.

Private groups can contribute much in the way of information, specialized knowledge, and trained personnel. But population problems are so great, so important, so ramified, and often so immediate, that only government, supported and inspired by private initiative, can attack them on the scale required.

The individual members of this Organization, because they are the designees of their governments, are in a strong position to influence their national leaders to obtain the facts on population. I urge - with all earnestness - that you do.

To my mind, population growth is second only to the control of atomic weapons, as the paramount problem of our day. Thinking men and responsible leaders everywhere are working with strong purpose to find a way to assure that atomic and hydrogen bombs - the frightful fruits of our nuclear age - will never be used for man's destruction. This is clearly, in terms of urgency, the major task of our time. Yet equally awesome are the ultimate problems engendered by the rapidly expanding populations of the world. All of us hope and pray that the world's nuclear suicide can be avoided. But there is a cold inevitability, a certainty that is mathematical, that gives the problems posed by too-rapid population growth a somber and chilling caste indeed.

The grim fact of population growth cuts across all the basic needs of mankind and, more than any other single factor, frustrates man's achievement of his higher needs.

Within the lifetime of today's children, the number, health, education, and culture of the world's people will change dramatically. The direction of this change - whether it be for good or ill - may well turn on our actions, yours and mine. Yet we, in our thinking and planning, often lack broad perspective. Like bricklayers, intent upon building a wall, we may

fail to perceive we are building a cathedral. And we, and our nations, remain almost unaware of the dimensions and the implications of population, whose unchecked growth may ultimately overcome all that we build.

Our effort, then, must be concerted and dynamic - an effort great enough, dedicated enough, to master so large a challenge.

And we must also be stirred by a true sense of history, and its broad perspectives, so that we may have the strength of patience in meeting this challenge. So great a task as the building of a better world - a fuller life for all mankind - cannot be accomplished in a mere decade, nor even in a generation.

Yet ours is the generation that has the chance and the honor to begin this task as it has never begun before. We have this chance, thanks to the vision of men like Frank McDougall and to the imaginative pioneering of such organizations as yours.

Let us - each one of us, in his own individual way - begin the great work, stirred by the greatness of the challenge, dedicated to its patient meeting, and confident of a final victory.