

FOOD INFORMATION SYSTEMS

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1975

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT BOARD,
OFFICE OF TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT,
Washington, D.C.

The Technology Assessment Board met at 9:30 a.m., pursuant to notice, in room 6202, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Hubert H. Humphrey (member, Technology Assessment Board) presiding.

Present: Senator Humphrey and Congressman Brown

Staff present: Mr. Emilio Q. Daddario, director; Mr. Daniel V. De Simone., deputy director; Mr. J. B. Cordaro, food program manager; Dr. Walter W. Wilcox, consultant; Ms. Ellen Terpstra, research associate; Ms. Ann Woodbridge, administrative assistant.

Mr. BROWN. The hearings will come to order. The purpose of these hearings is to discuss the information requirements for a national food policy. Senator Humphrey has been detained, but I would like to insert his opening statement into the record at this time.

STATEMENT OF HON. HUBERT H. HUMPHREY, A U.S. SENATOR
FROM THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

Chairman HUMPHREY. Today is the third day of hearings that I have chaired for Congress' Office of Technology Assessment. Before we begin today's dialog with our distinguished panel of experts. I would like to review the purpose of these hearings and share some of our earlier findings.

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In 1974 I requested, with the endorsement of Chairman Talmadge of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, that the OTA make an assessment of food information systems and their adequacy for policy planning. The combination of world events that occurred in 1972, 1973, and since, have underscored the necessity for this assessment. These events have been well chronicled, and their consequences and effects are still being felt today; and the recently revised Soviet harvests—down from 215 million metric tons to 137 million metric tons—further support this critical need.

Increased attention has been given to the importance of agricultural information:

In 1972 Senator Bellmen and I visited the Soviet Union. Our report, "Observations on Soviet and Polish Agriculture," recommended among other things increasing the number of agricultural attaches assigned to the Soviet Union.

The 1974 World Food Conference recognized the vital role of adequate, timely, and objective information. I wrote to the U.S. Food Conference Coordinator urging that our delegation support the establishment of a World Food and Agricultural Information System. I was pleased that the U.S. delegation did give strong support to my request. The Conference adopted a resolution calling for the establishment of a worldwide "Global Information and Early Warning System."

Numerous other reports and experts have brought to the public's attention the urgency of correcting the deficiencies that exist in U.S. and worldwide information systems.

Today's hearings are especially timely. We no longer know from day to day what the next food policy pronouncement will be or who will make it. The capricious food policy decisions and statements of Government officials in the past 6 months have seriously affected farm prices, created uncertainties in the markets, and demonstrated to Congress that anew and stable food policy structure is urgently needed.

As long as apparently limitless reserves were available, there seemed little need to gather exact information on the world food situation. Emergencies could always be met. However, that is no longer the case, since administration policy has allowed food reserves to dwindle from a 90-day supply to less than a month.

This hearing will explore proposals for a more pragmatic, more consciously planned approach to developing and implementing a national food policy. OTA's Board will weigh and balance these differing approaches in order to frame options for congressional consideration.

We need a national food policy. We need to make significant changes in our food, agriculture, and nutrition programs and policymaking process.

As one of our experts today will state, a comprehensive and consciously coordinated national food policy should be framed in terms of a body of broad general objectives which would:

- (1) Provide adequate supply and reasonable price stability to consumers;
- (2) Assure fair returns to farmers;
- (3) Provide assured supply for a continuing high level of commercial exports;
- (4) Provide an available supply for feeding programs or disaster relief at home or abroad;
- (5) Enable the United States to fulfill its international commitments and attain its objectives in food matters;
- (6) Improve nutrition at home and abroad.

These six goals are well reflected in the two most significant elements that must be addressed within the framework of a national food policy, which are: (1) the need for the United States to improve its resource production and management activities and policies; and (2) the need for the United States to be equally concerned with the postproduction elements of the food system, especially those which affect nutritional status and health of consumers.

A national food policy created to meet these objectives is not only possible and desirable but essential. The United States must utilize

its food production capability to maximize the economic, political, and social benefits. Only an organized, coordinated, and well-integrated national food policy can accomplish this. To state the goals and the need is the easy part.

The difficult part is to design or fit the elements into a systems concept and the development of programs within each component. I have asked OTA to accept the responsibility in this task. They will explore the total food system from the viewpoint of (1) production, (2) marketing and processing, (3) retail distribution, and (4) consumption and nutrition.

Only through adequate planning and careful coordination of national food policies, in the light of systematic and timely information on the current food situation, can the world improve its present condition.

We must reduce the realm of the unpredictable and eliminate some of the guesswork in agricultural policymaking. Only in this way can we provide a sound basis for developing world food security.

Information is a precious commodity. To be useful, it must be objective, timely, and reliable. Such information will not automatically insure the right decisions, but it will improve the tools available to decisionmakers.

The report submitted to the Office of Technology Assessment by OTA's Food Advisory Committee in June made 12 recommendations to improve food information systems. Today's hearings are designed to expand the content of these recommendations and explore ways in which these options might be implemented by the Congress.

OTA's Food Advisory Committee will hold a further session which is scheduled for January 15, 1976.

Because Congress needs to obtain outside information upon which to base its decisions, it was necessary to focus on some of the main sources of information and especially the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

We also had, at our earlier hearing, the opportunity to hear from representatives of the farm organizations and the private grain trade and review the food and agricultural organization's plans for an expanded global information and early warning system. These materials will be used in the preparation of OTA's final report to Congress.

Today's hearings provide an opportunity to go one step further, to consider the informational requirements for a national food policy.

I am pleased to have with us such a distinguished panel of experts. Each individual has a prepared statement, but in the interest of time, he will present a short summary, with the full statement made a part of the record.

Present with us today are:

Willard Cochrane, professor of agricultural economics at the University of Minnesota;

Lauren Seth, chairman of the Agriculture Committee of the National Planning Association;

Luther Tweeten, professor of agricultural economics at Oklahoma State University; and

E. A. Jaenke, of the agricultural consulting firm, E. A. Jaenke & Associates.

MR. BROWN. Our first witness this morning will be Mr. Ed Jaenke of E. A. Jaenke & Associates.