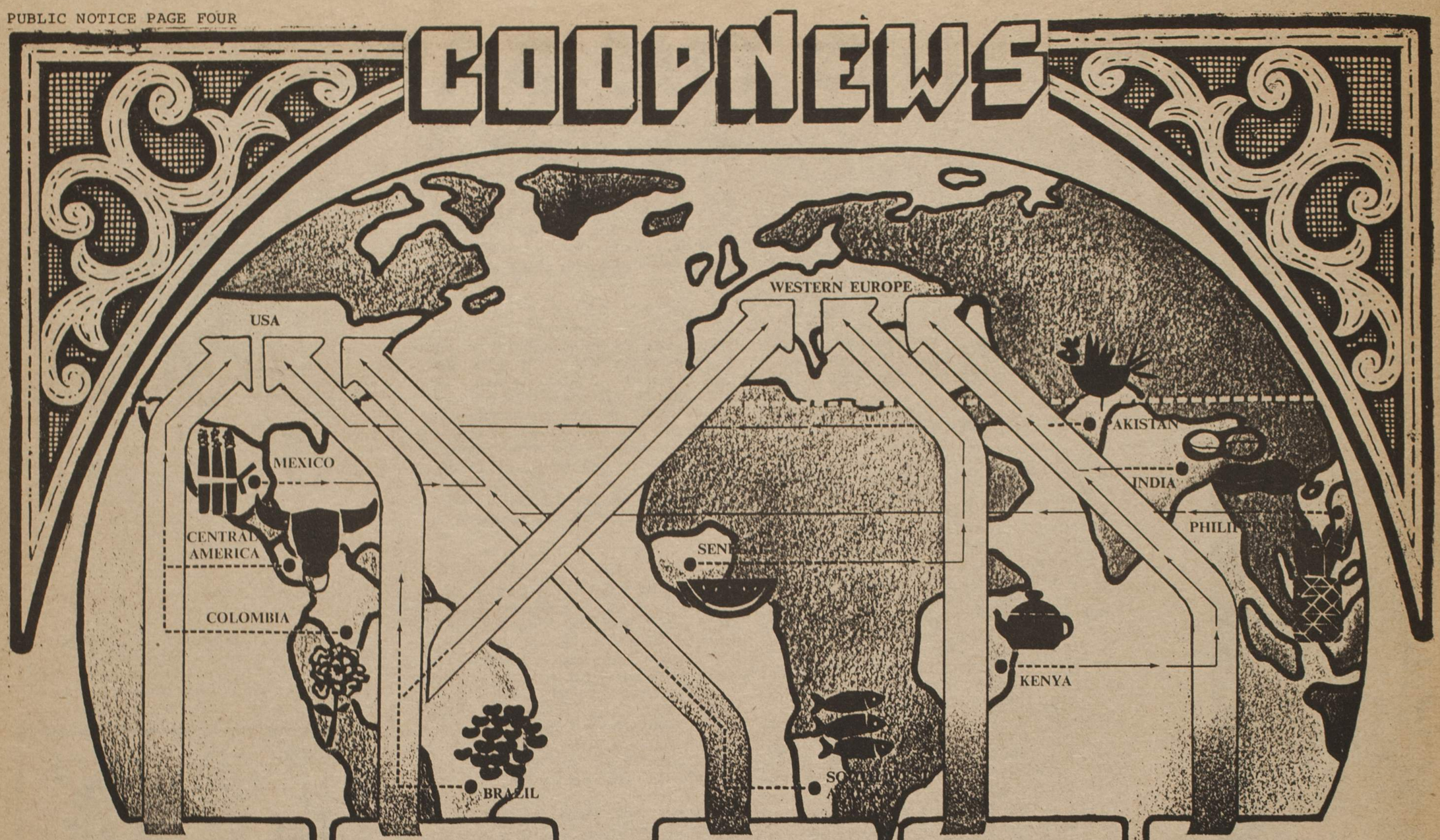
COOPNEWS



LATIN AMERICAN AGRIBUSINESS CORPORATION: A consortium of 15 giant U.S. corporations, including Borden, Ralston Purina and Gerber. Incorporated in Panama to avoid paying U.S. taxes, it still receives U.S. loans. Exports beef, vegetables and carnations from Central America and Colombia for Safeway and Southland (7-Eleven). Land and labor costs in Latin America run it as little as ten per cent of those in the U.S.

CARGILL: The world's largest grain commodity trader. The Minneapolis-based multinational is the largest family-owned U.S. corporation. Return on net assets increased more than 40 per cent after the Soviet wheat deal. Now expanding into poultry in Pakistan and Taiwan. The company is also relying more heavily on its Brazilian soybean base. Successfully survived expropriation of its Peruvian fishmeal operations.

DEL MONTE: World's largest agribusiness corporation. Ownership of Del Monte's Filipino pineapple and banana plantations is being contested by peasants who claim the company threatened to encircle their farms and cut off all access unless they signed leases. Shirley Temple Black sits on the board of directors. Recently moved its asparagus production from California to Mexico; 90 per cent of the crop is then exported.

BUD ANTLE: This concern uses some of the best farmland in Senegal to produce vegetables, melons and exotic spices for the European market. But the same land would be equally suitable for grains and other nutritious crops badly needed in local diets. In the early 1970s, exports increased as famine spread. Back in its Salinas, California, headquarters, the world's largest iceberg lettuce grower was instrumental in jailing Cesar Chavez.

UNILEVER: Manufactures more than 1,000 products. The name Unilever doesn't appear on any of them. In India, Hindustan Lever buys crops at low prices and packages them into Vanaspati vegetable ghee for the affluent. The makers of Birds Eye and Lipton Tea are not satisfied with near-monopoly status in Europe. A board chairperson commented: "It remains to be seen how soon the rest of the world can be brought into line."

Now Open: Global Supermarket

That fresh asparagus in your local chain store, if it could talk, might say a lot about hunger in the developing world--where it was probably grown--and why the world's food shortages are liable to get worse.

Until a few years ago, you could bet that asparagus came from central California. Today, it more likely comes from Mexico, where its production for export displaces foods formerly grown for Mexican peasants. It's a product of the expanding Global Farm that produces for the Global Supermarket--at the expense of farmers and consumers in both importing and exporting countries.

The shift from local and regional food production/consumption to the Global Supermarket has had profound, if gradual, repercussions in such areas as diet, growing techniques, marketing, local agricultural economies and food costs.

Frances Moore Lappé, author of "Diet for a Small Planet," with her new book, "Food First: The Myth of Scarcity"

But most important, the local farms that once produced food for the local populations of the underdeveloped world are giving way to a system that feeds a relative few at the expense of everyone.

Agribusiness firms from the developed Western countries, especially the U.S., are shifting production of high-value food items--beef, fruits and vegetables, even cut flowers--from domestic farms to the underdeveloped countries where cheap labor, land and water permit maximum profits.

By gaining control over global exports of certain foods, the giant firms can set prices on a global level. But in so doing, they make it necessary for the people of poor countries to compete with those in wealthier countries for the same food on the Global Supermarket shelf. Thus, because the Japanese have invested in Brazilian soybeans and can pay more for them than Brazilians, most Brazilian soybeans end up on Japanese dinner plates.

In order to supply the demands of the wealthier countries, more and more of the prime agricultural resources of the underdeveloped world are being channeled away from the local people for export to well-fed foreigners.

In Senegal, for instance, a desperately poor African nation, Bud Antle Inc., one of the world's largest iceburg lettuce growers, expanded its vegetable production for export to European cities, despite a worsening drought in Senegal. The company uses water piped in hundreds of miles to a sophisticated drip irrigation system, and flies its produce to Stockholm, Paris, and Amsterdam. Meanwhile, world relief organizations had to conduct massive aid programs to feed the Senegalese.

To make way for its mechanized production, Bud Antle uprooted giant baobob trees, which supply local people with material for making everything from rope to houses.

Ironically, while the Senegalese went without, European consumers of the Senegalese-grown food paid taxes to destroy their own domestically grown vegetables in an effort to support higher prices in the face of the cheaply produced imports.

The growing world demand for beef has prompted expansion of cattle farming in Latin America--even while beef consumption there has declined. In 1975, for instance, Costa Rica sent 60 million pounds of beef to the U.S. But per capita beef consumption had declined in Costa Rica from almost 49 pounds in 1950 to 33 pounds in 1971.

Alan Berg, in a Brookings Institution study of world nutrition, noted that despite dramatic gains in meat production in Central America, the meat is "ending up not in Latin American stomachs but in franchised restaurant hamburgers in the United States."

MEXICO'S BREADBASKET

Perhaps the most dramatic example of food exporting from the developing world is Mexico, where cheap land and labor is now supplying one-half to two-thirds of the U.S. market for many winter and early spring vegetables.

If recent growth trends continue, "in a relatively short time Mexico will account for almost the entire winter supply," according to a 1974 study by Ray Goldberg of the Harvard Business School.

The shift from cultivation for local consumption to production for the U.S. is largely contracted and financed by American firms.

Del Monte, for instance, is one of two growers that now controls

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"The biggest breakthrough against cancer is in the hands of the public, not the scientists." — Dr. John Higginson, Director of the International Agency for Research on Cancer in Lyon, France.

Old ideas die hard. The cancer establishment has been looking for a virus so long it seemed barely possible that another answer might surface. The nutrition people have been carping about diet for a while, rarely getting a hearing.

Now comes word from National Cancer Institute's Division of Cancer Cause and Prevention that there is mounting evidence that eating habits are a cause of cancer. "Improper diet," said Dr. Gori in Science Digest, "is related to about 40% of all cancers in men, 60% in women." The report noted that Seventh Day Adventists, who do not smoke, and whose diet consists chiefly of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and dairy products, have a cancer rate 50 to 70% less than other Americans. (ACRES, U.S.A.)