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Comments on Proposal for an
INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT SERVICE

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The proposal for an International Agricultural Development Service, in conjunction with the Rockefeller Foundation, is well written, complete, and logical in its approach to the international agricultural problem.

It goes into all facets of the problem--including need, leadership, seed production, commodity and animal food production, irrigation, fertilizing, educational support, and so on. As a matter of fact this is one of the proposal's serious weaknesses. It tries to be all things to all people, and represents a kaleidoscope of every international agricultural problem that exists.

The proposal is basically academic in its orientation, although it pretends to be practical. It talks about specialists, researchers, administrators, implementors, representatives, yet assumes that the conglomerate group of specialists and others will somehow end up in practical results in distant, foreign countries.

Thus, there is a curious contradiction in the proposal. On the one hand it is quite complete in enunciating the over-all problem in all of its facets, but then it lacks an honest confrontation with the practical realities of getting the over-all job done. It proposes cooperative efforts, working with other countries agencies, lending assistance when and if requested, subduing its image, not setting up foreign offices--in fact doing what other organizations have tried to do but not very successfully.

The proposal deals with the long-term factors as far as food production is concerned. This certainly is realistic. But bearing in mind all the things that the IADS intends to do, too many millions of people will already have starved to death before any real progress is made. For example, it is conservatively estimated that about 10,000 people die of starvation each day and that perhaps as many as 400 million people are living under starvation conditions. If these figures are correct and increase in size rather than improving, millions upon millions of people will have died long before the long-term fruits of the proposal are realized.

Naturally, the long-term aspect is important. Nonetheless, I believe one serious weakness of the proposal is its limitation to long-term considerations only.

Perhaps my greatest reservations about the proposal have to do

with its methods of implementation rather than its objectives or analysis of the problem.

If management by objectives (MBO) has anything to offer, it states that an organization has to develop the proper means for achieving objectives. This, as I see it, is the most serious weakness of the proposal.

It states long-range objectives which I believe are commendable. It analyzes rather well and in complete form all facets of the problem. Then it describes a minuscule form of implementation which would take years to become workable.

First, for example, there is no real staff or budget.

Second, it's tied to the Rockefeller Foundation, which gives it an implication of self-serving, adverse interests. After all the Rockefeller interests have been active in South America and other tropical and marginal agricultural areas for profitable reasons. This could be interpreted the wrong way by other donors, particularly in the beginning.

Third, the proposal indicates that there will be no direct involvement in foreign countries--either with offices or in direct image fashion. Everything will go through local political and/or institutional arrangements which have in the past proven difficult, if not impossible to do.

In many of the countries involved there is a definite plan to obstruct the improvement in agricultural living standards, largely for revolutionary political reasons.

Fourth, options presented are in terms of developing greater production of crops and animal foods in other countries. This will be done by education, on-site consulting forms of training, improved fertilizers, better educational facilities, and so on. And, this kind of work will be done with smaller, family-type farmers.

Obviously, it's very easy to state these objectives, but it's a gargantuan task for a group of consulting service representatives to deliver this approach across millions of square miles of grass-roots farming where there are agricultural problems, language differences, educational deficiencies, and so on.

The proposal itself says there are a myriad of agricultural service groups trying to do this already, yet the problem of food production world-wide is apparently growing worse relative to need.

Perhaps other options should be considered in the proposal. For example, nothing is said about improving the production or productivity of food crops in this country, specifically for export. Perhaps we ought to have some innovative suggestions about how

specific acreages in the United States could be allocated for export only and for foodstuffs which could be made available in some non-competitive fashion, as far as American crops are concerned.

One big problem in the past has been the tendency of any sizable export of foodstuffs, like grains, from the United States to affect the domestic price of the crop. Also, the lack of typical international monetary funds has prevented backward nations from being able to buy the crop, even if available.

Perhaps the International Agricultural Development Service might want to add to their proposal more innovative ideas, such as the following:

1. Perhaps the IADS could become a consulting service to American companies which would like to take over foreign acreages and agricultural productions on a much larger scale, using IADS services with local people to become part of a larger, mass production-type of agricultural industry.

This would require favorable treatment by foreign countries of American and similar producers, the availability of large land mass areas, perhaps

favorable tax treatments within those countries, and a whole host of related development services with regard to native agricultural leaders who could intern on such installations. If this could be done with the cooperation of the IADS, the world bank, favorable tax treatment within countries, and some form of accelerated write-off so that these farms could be placed with domestic investors at a later date, this would be an extension of free enterprise economics in the farm area, as well as a realistic way of getting large-scale agricultural production at low cost within a given country.

Agriculture for personal need is a rather poor way of trying to maximize IADS's staff and services, when they are available. We need the economies of large-scale agricultural development, in production terms that mean something.

2. Furthermore, we need a logistic system within most nations. Even if food is available in substantial quantities, it has to be moved back and forth throughout a country. It must be stored. There have been many instances where emergency food

relief has been made available at central areas, but it has never been distributed to remote but real areas of need. Any large-scale production activity within a large country will require a suitable transportation network, if distribution is to be done at all well. Otherwise, staff services and help will simply be image concentrations in areas far removed from the people who will either have to learn to produce their own agricultural product--or, larger scale production will never get distributed well.

It's foolish to believe that a Ph.D. or a M.A. with or without field experience is going to go back into the jungles in some remote area to teach 55 small farmers how to improve their minuscule individual crops. In the long run this would be a waste of basic resources.

3. We should think in terms of some kind of new, international agricultural or commodity dollar, so that agricultural credits and debits might be removed from customary international accounting. This may seem like a fly-by-night idea, but I believe there

is more flexibility in the international monetary system than most economists believe.

Moreover, the third world countries tendencies to want to use their raw materials for bargaining purposes might be blunted, if the developed countries can find a way to convert some of their extra pricing into a commodity-agricultural offset dollar. Even Arab oil money has not been creatively employed in this direction.

4. In the United States we should start trying to come up with an innovative idea--such as allocated acreage for export of agricultural commodities only. This can be in areas which are not typically American-type crops. It could be for the production of hybrid seeds to be used abroad. It could be in the development of certain protein-based types of produce which do not have high American consumption usage. It could be under a different form of support program which could be used for encouraging specific farmers on specific acreage to experiment and/or produce for export certain items which the IADS feels are essential.

They could become experimental plots for training

foreign farmers in agricultural methods, even if the specific application to a sub-tropic or tropical region is not truly complete. Farm management could be improved by this approach, independent of where the farm is located.

In this context, the IADS could become a type of service academy for training their own managers in the United States. These could then be fanned out to other countries.

Conclusions

My feeling about the over-all proposal is that it is a typical proposal, but better prepared than most.

It appears to have been prepared by a proposal writer who has spent considerable time researching the farm problem.

It is complete and well documented. But it appears to be intended to get monetary support for carrying out a grandiose group of research and related educational activities which will not bear real fruit in increasing production of agricultural products for many years to come. Meanwhile, millions of people will die of starvation while the IADS carries on its longer range development services.

The proposal should be made more practical and more innovative.

Tying it into the Rockefeller Foundation offices does not create a good image. It smacks of adverse interest.

But with a careful combing, I do believe it can serve a viable purpose in helping to produce food crops, particularly over the long run, if its implementation program is made on the same scale as the statement of its objectives.