

FOR THE DEAF WHO WON'T LISTEN

A summary of the FAO declaration from its headquarters in Rome, on May 16, 2007.

World cereal production is on track to reach a record level in 2007. In spite of this, supplies will be barely adequate to meet increased demand, boosted by the development of the biofuels industry.

International prices for most cereals have risen significantly in 2006-07 and the current forecast shows that prices will stay high in 2007-08, according to the relevant report "Crop Perspectives and Food Situation". It is forecast that the cereal import bill of the low-income food deficit countries will increase by about 25 percent in the current season.

The rapid growth of the demand for maize-based ethanol is expected to increase by 9 percent the use of that grain in 2007-08.

Expectations for the world wheat harvest are down slightly since the April forecast.

In North Africa, a sharp decline is expected in 2007 cereal production, reflecting dry conditions in Morocco that are anticipated to halve the country's wheat production this year.

In Southern Africa, a reduced cereal harvest is expected for the second consecutive year. In Zimbabwe, a huge rise in the price of maize, a basic staple for millions, is anticipated as a result of the drought.

In Malawi, an ample exportable surplus will be available following a bumper harvest.

Emergency assistance is required for large numbers of vulnerable farmers in Bolivia affected by serious crop and livestock losses following drought and floods during the 2007 main cropping season.

The flare up of conflict in southern Somalia has displaced hundreds of thousands of people and is likely to reduce the area planted.

A first provisional FAO forecast for world production of rice in 2007 points to a slightly improved harvest with some 422 millions of tons, thus matching the 2005 record.

Except for China and India -the main producers- the cereal harvest totals in the rest of the countries will drop slightly.

FAO recognizes the consequences of producing food-based fuels. That is something.

But it is also remarkable to see the news that the United States Congress decided to replace 23 thousand incandescent light bulbs with fluorescent throughout its offices. It is said that American families, on their own volition, have decided to replace 37 million incandescent light bulbs with fluorescent. In just a few months, the 37 million replaced light bulbs will save the equivalent cost of gasoline for 260,000 automobiles. Calculate the savings when billions of incandescent light bulbs are replaced.

I shall digress now to tackle a topic which deals with my person, and I ask for your indulgence.

The news dispatches talk of an operation. My compatriots were not too happy that I explained on more than one occasion that my recovery would not be without its risks. Generally speaking, there was talk

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about a date when I would make a public appearance, dressed in my olive green fatigues as usual. Well then, it was not just one operation but several. Initially, it was not successful and this implicated a prolonged recovery period.

For many months, I relied on intravenous procedures and catheters for the greater part of my nutrition, and I wanted to spare our people an unpleasant disappointment. Today I receive everything required by my recovery orally. There is no danger greater than that related to age and to a state of health which I abused during some of the hazardous times I lived through. Nowadays I do what I should be doing, especially reflecting and writing about issues which, to my mind, have some importance and transcendence. I have a lot pending. For the present, I do not have time for films and photos that require me to constantly trim my hair, beard and moustache, and to get dressed up every day. Moreover, such presentations multiply requests for interviews. Let me simply say to everyone that my health has been improving and my weight is stable at around 80 kilos.

I try to keep the reflections as brief as possible so as not to take much space from the press and television news programs. The rest of the time I am reading, receiving information, talking on the phone with many much comrades and carrying out the rehab exercises that are necessary for my recovery. I cannot say or criticize everything that I know, because if I did so, human and international relations would be impossible, and our country cannot do without them. But I shall be true to the motto of never writing a lie.

Fidel Castro Ruz

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