

WorldWatch

by Staff

Forerunner, "WorldWatch," June 1999

Agriculture

A New Mexico farmer claims, "My granddad got more for his wheat in the 1940s than I do now." Within two years, he says, no farmers will be left in the area, as conditions are reported to be worse than the 1930s. Farmers lay much of the blame on NAFTA, which has precipitated heavy imports of wheat and cattle from Canada and Mexico, depressing prices.

Disease

A tropical virus has killed at least 90 people in Malaysia, and virologists are stumped as to how it spreads. It is believed to spread from pigs to humans, and thousands of swine are being slaughtered as a precaution. A spokesman for the U.S. Centers of Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta says, "This is a new, previously unrecognized virus found in humans."

Drought

China is experiencing its worst drought in more than a decade with 19 million residents lacking drinking water and more than 21.5 million acres of farmland parched. The drought immediately follows one of the worst summer flooding seasons on record.

Ecology

» For the first time in living memory, the Nile River in southern Sudan is afloat with carcasses of fish, hippos and crocodiles. Government officials are baffled, and residents believe it is from pollution. Carcasses aside, the local government claims that tests show the water is safe for human consumption.

» A Russian nuclear expert recently warned that a lack of storage facilities for radioactive waste could endanger Russia's northwest, which has just one storage facility at Sosnovy Bor, 50 miles from St. Petersburg. He says, "A lack of storage sites for radioactive waste is our greatest problem, and as waste increases, the consequences could be dangerous."

Genetics

» Heightening environmentalist's fears about the dangers of genetic engineering, a weed altered to resist a herbicide also developed far greater ability to pollinate other plants and pass its traits on to them. Scientists recognize that when a genetically engineered crop grows near a weed relative, the gene-engineered trait will eventually pass on to the weed.

» Genetic resistance bred into wheat crops 40 years ago has begun to break down, resurrecting the threat of crop plagues not seen since the last major outbreak in the U.S. in the 1950s. A new, mutated form of the stem-rust fungus, a disease that virtually

disappeared after destroying as much as half of wheat yields decades ago, has reappeared in Uganda.

Morality

France now gives full legal status to unmarried couples, be they heterosexual or homosexual. Opponents fear it will ultimately lead to adoption of children by homosexual couples.

Y2K in South America

With a handful of exceptions led by Mexico and Chile, Latin American governments were late in grasping the severity of the computer problem. They are now scrambling to avert disaster but lack time, money and programmers. For example, Venezuela's information systems manager estimates 40% of Venezuela's food-processing plants will be paralyzed. Only about 10% of the electrical supply system has been fixed, and the country needs \$1.5 billion to finish repairs. Even if they had the money, they would require 2-4 years to accomplish the fix.