

# Farmers consider life after the bomb

By Rosemary Collins  
Farmers would have to defend grain stores with guns against hungry townspeople as tidal waves would swamp the Sussex Downs after a nuclear attack, a conference on the likely impact of the bomb on agriculture was told yesterday.

A large number of farmers and landowners an even more county council officials attended the Oxford conference to discover what their role might be if the bombs fell.

Farmers for a Nuclear-Free Future, a Devon-based group set up two years ago to persuade the Ministry of Agriculture to update its 1958 guide to nuclear survival on the farm, brought along its own range of advisory leaflets, published in despair that the promised ministry revisions will ever be circulated.

"We should abandon any delusion that the rural areas will be safe," the group claims. "In a nuclear war agriculture would be devastated. Farming as we know it would not survive."

A succession of academic and professional speakers underlined this claim. Livestock might survive an initial blast outside the immediate vicinity, but would soon die for want of food and water or from intestinal bleeding caused by radiation.

Crops would fare more or less badly according to the season. A nuclear war in July or August would have far greater repercussions on grain supplies than one during the winter. But the ensuing months of cold and darkness would stunt the growth of any surviving crops and make any new growth impossible.

Survivors trying to cultivate the land with shovels and spades would be handicapped by a complete lack of fuel, chemical pesticides and fertilisers. Horses, FNEF suggests, would become a rare asset and sheltered stabling should be provided for them before a nuclear attack.

Dr Norman Myers, an Oxford consultant on the environment, suggested that the best farmland survivors would be insects and weeds. Survivors might have to revert to the hunter-gatherer lifestyle of their forefathers.

Farmers were understandably uneasy. "We had food and mouth and all our stock destroyed," said a woman dairy farmer from Lincolnshire. "We thought that was the winter of our greatest trouble, but it was nothing to what you suggest may happen."

barley and wheat would only produce about 25% of their present yields.

"If the nuclear attack came in the summer, uncontrolled fires spreading over the countryside would destroy most of our crops and timber.

"And Arctic conditions springing upon us during a period when the plants are growing would virtually stop them all in their tracks.

"Something could be saved in a winter attack. Winter cereals normally survive through very severe weather conditions anyway, and the chances are that these could survive."

Dr Longman sees the Oxford conference as an indication of a changing attitude among the farming community. "Most farmers have long felt that nuclear attacks, like the blitz in the last war, would mainly affect cities and urban areas and have not considered themselves to be directly involved. But new evidence coming to light points to everyone being involved, no matter where they live.

"The assumption has been that if you are living in a remote part of the Highlands, away from the Central belt and the Lowlands, that you might escape. But we know this to be no longer true.

"Even one nuclear bomb dropped on the Border between Scotland and England could affect the whole of Scotland, including the Orkneys and Shetlands and the Western Isles, depending on the direction of the wind at the time."

The National Farmers' Union is also starting to take an active interest in the effects of nuclear attack, although it appears to be seeking guidance from a Government booklet which has been out of print for the past 15 years.

Philip Butcher, the union's assistant director-general, stated: "We have not yet done a lot of work on this important area because we have been assuming that the Ministry of Agriculture booklet, Home Defence and the Farmer, was going to be reissued.

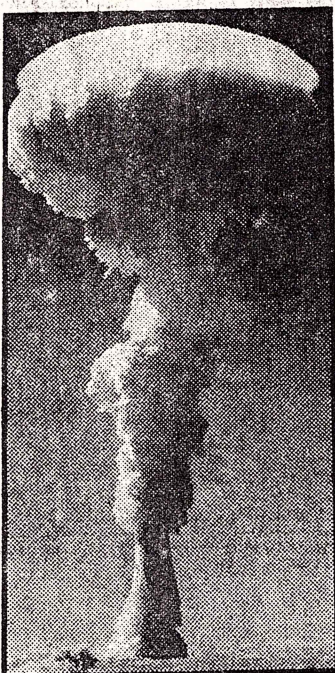
"However, as there is no prospect of it appearing in the near future, we are having to make an in-house start from scratch, finding authoritative sources elsewhere. The coming conference at Oxford will obviously be extremely valuable to us."

Michael Jopling, the Minister of Agriculture, has been invited to present a paper at the conference dealing with "the Government's position on farming and food supply in the context of nuclear war or accident."

Professor Ian Percival, of Queen Mary College, London, who has made detailed calculations of the environmental consequences for the British Isles, will be followed by Dr Norman Myers, an expert on the biology of the environment, and George Crossley, Bradford University, who recently completed a PhD on civil defence with special reference to agriculture.

## Hope of another harvest after the bomb?

By GEORGE BECK



Crop survival would depend to a great extent on the time of year any bombs were dropped.

Market crises of butter "mountains," wine "lakes," and the dumping of surplus apples into the sea.

Latest estimates claim that after the bomb, UK agriculture would only be able to support about 7,000,000 people on average, about one-ninth of the present population.

Survivors would certainly face periods of famine, a situation endured by our ancestors who considered themselves fortunate to have one meal a day.

Dr Alan Longman, an Edinburgh scientist and convener of the Scottish Group of Scientists Against Nuclear Arms, is going to the Oxford conference.

He stated: "There's no doubt that farming as we know it would cease to exist. There would be no electricity, no fuel, and without fertilisers and other agrochemicals, crops like oats,

nuclear war ever comes, the vital of farming, even on a modest scale, will depend on the time of year the bombs are dropped.

An attack in the spring or summer, for example, would hit crops at the vital growing stage, and most of them would be killed in the Arctic "winter" following in the wake of the clear explosions.

However, survival prospects would appear to be brighter in a late-autumn/winter war, when plants are already acclimatised to frosty weather. Conditions at that time of year would also help reduce the fire damage to crops and trees.

These are a few of the facts farmers will learn when they met at Oxford on March 19 for a major one-day conference titled, Farming after the Bomb. The event, sponsored by the Defence Research Trust, a non-political charity whose purpose is to work out truly effective minimum-risk defence policies, will include accounts by scientists of the kind of conditions likely to be faced by farmers after even a limited clear exchange.

The National Farmers' Union has given it its blessing, indicating growing awareness among the rural community that bombs are no longer a problem for only city and urban dwellers, and that those living in even the most remote areas could be affected.

Much of the information now available to farmers stems from a large two-year study in America, involving the biggest computer programme ever written.

When presenting their findings at a conference in Washington last November, before an audience including several Nobel prizewinners and 100 of the West's leading scientists, the researchers admitted they were so shocked at the results that they had admitted them to more than six months international scrutiny and criticism by fellow scientists before publicly unveiling them.

Perhaps the most important finding was that a six-month inter of Arctic severity, accompanied by violent storms and continuous twilight or near-darkness would follow even a limited exchange of nuclear weapons.

The message to farmers was simple: "It will be very dark, intensely cold, and all, or most of our plants will die."

A summary of the Washington findings stated: "A spring or summer war would kill or damage virtually all crops in the northern hemisphere. All uncultivated food supplies would disappear, and most farm animals die."

This would have a cascade effect through all the food chains, with a collapse of Third World agriculture due to the withdrawal of support and material supplies. "Agriculture as we know it would cease to exist," the summary concluded.

Survivors would likely remember fondly, and with a little bitterness, the present Common