

## AGRICULTURE

### Food Grain Output Conflicting Reports

The FAO foresees a comfortable food availability situation the world over this year. It expects a rise in the combined world wheat and coarse grains output in 1978 and hopes that even in the case of that expectation not materialising carried over stocks of cereals, estimated at 176 tonnes, could act as a buffer and ensure minimum world food security in 1978/79, albeit at higher prices.

FAO's first tentative estimate of combined wheat and coarse grain production in 1978 is for 1,120 million tonnes, which is slightly higher than in 1977 and includes a five per cent higher wheat crop of 405 million tonnes and one per cent higher coarse grains crop at 715 million tonnes.

An FAO survey has also indicated that there were 45 "seriously affected" countries where food production per person decreased by 0.4% during the period 1970 to 1976. Although there was food in the world to feed everybody, inadequate distribution increased world's food hungry by nearly 14 per cent since 1970. The number of under nourished people in the world has risen from 400 million in 1971 to 455 million in 1974.

A recent study of the rice situation in the ASEAN countries shows that Indonesia was most in need of imported rice; severe drought and pest attacks in the past two years have resulted in considerable depletion of her rice stocks in 1978 too. Despite an expected harvest of 15.3 million tonnes of milled rice Indonesia anticipates a demand shortfall of 1.5 million tonnes and would need to import annually two million tonnes. Singapore would be looking into the possibility of buying rice from the Philippines this year; while Malaysia would be in need of regular imports of glutinous rice "estimated at 25,000 tonnes this year from Thailand". Philippines annual production is estimated at 4 million metric tons with a projected surplus over domestic consumption of 650,000 tonnes at the end of June 1978. Thailand is expected to have a surplus of 1.2 million tonnes but a major part of this has already been committed on a Government to Government basis for shipment in 1978, mostly to other Asian countries. There are still serious food shortages and nutritional deficiencies in several areas of the Asian region. One cause for concern is that one-third of last year's entire world trade in rice (over two million tonnes) went to Indonesia.