

South Korea Army Fights Drought

Worst dry spell in ninety years threatens rice farmers

by Jae-Suk Yoo

South Korean soldiers put down their guns and picked up buckets and water hoses to fight a new enemy: drought.

Facing its worst dry spell in ninety years — and a threat to its staple food, rice — South Korea mobilized a fifth of its total military force to farms. The 130,000 troops were dispatched to ninety hard-hit regions armed with drilling machines, trucks, excavators, and pumping motors to dig wells or draw water from reservoirs.

“It’s like pouring water into a bottomless pot,” said Warrant Officer Oh Kwang-Jei, supervising sixty soldiers watering a parched rice paddy. “But we will make this land wet again, and fit to raise rice.”

For two days, Oh’s 9th Infantry Division soldiers, who usually guard part of the tense border with communist North Korea, used trucks to carry 62,400 gallons of water from a reservoir to rice paddies near Koyang, sixteen miles north of Seoul.

“We are here to serve the country,” said Cpl. Chung Jee-myong. “I think this work is as meaningful as defending the nation with guns.”

In Koyang and other drought-hit areas in the northern part of South Korea, fire engines, military, and construction trucks rolled along dusty paths to fetch

Jae-Suk Yoo prepared this report from Koyang, South Korea, for the Associated Press. This reprint is from The Detroit News of June 13, 2001, page 8-A.

water. Soldiers in green T-shirts and camouflage pants

used plastic buckets to water paddies that were parched and cracked.

“I can’t say how happy I am. They came here to save my life,” said Lee Kisun, a 70-year-old farmer.

South Korea maintains a 650,000-member military to guard against North Korea, with which it is technically still at war after the 1950-53 Korean War ended in a truce. All eligible South Korean men must serve twenty-six months in the military.

Since March, South Korea has had a nationwide average of only 3.7 inches of rain — less than one-third of the usual rainfall of 11.4 inches for that period.

The drought, which is expected to last another week, hit during the crucial rice-transplanting season that began in May and usually ends in June. A rice paddy must be submerged under at least an inch of water to

support young rice.

North Korea, too, is suffering from a protracted dry spell that has decimated the fall harvest.

Nearly ninety percent of the potato, wheat, barley, and maize seed sown in North Korea earlier this year have dried up, the Agriculture Ministry said, according to KCNA, the North’s foreign news outlet.

Ravaged by floods, drought, and mismanagement, the impoverished North has just two-thirds of the food it needs to get through the year, the UN World Food Program said in April.

Earlier Tuesday, South Korean President Kim Dae-jung issued a nationally-televised statement urging the public to join the fight against drought. Kim also promised tax cuts and low-interest loans for drought-hit farmers.

Since March (2001), South Korea has had a nationwide average of only 3.7 inches of rain, less than one-third of the usual rainfall of 11.4 inches for that period. Many farmers face financial ruin.

The Carrying Capacity of South Korea

by John H. Tanton

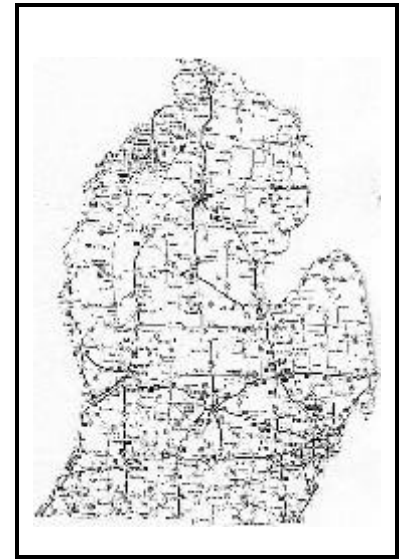
The drought in South Korea as reported in the Detroit News article on the previous page can serve to remind us of the concept of “carrying capacity” which can be defined as the maximum population that can be provided for in the *worst* of times. If any country grows in numbers to the carrying capacity that can be supported in only the best of times, then hardship will follow during the natural downturns that are part of all cyclical phenomena. This includes the weather. As the foregoing article notes, it was this dry 90 years ago — just yesterday in the memory of such an ancient country.

This calls to mind the story of Joseph in Egypt and his leadership during “the seven good years followed by seven lean years.” The people survived that latter period only because they had laid up a surplus during the former. We seldom do this today since the time-value of money locked up in reserves is too great for modern financial tastes.

South Korea has a surface area of 38,000 square miles, which is only slightly smaller than Michigan’s Lower Peninsula at 42,000 square miles (see maps 1 and 2). However much of Korea’s land is mountainous, with peaks up to 6,000 feet. The population, which has increased from 20 million in 1950 to 47 million today, is naturally concentrated in the lowlands (see map 3). Michigan has about 9.5 million residents in its similarly-sized Lower Peninsula, so South Korea has about *five* times as many people on a comparable land mass that, owing to the mountains, is much less suitable for human support. The country is populated to a density that few Americans would relish, but one we are headed toward



Map 1 — South Korea

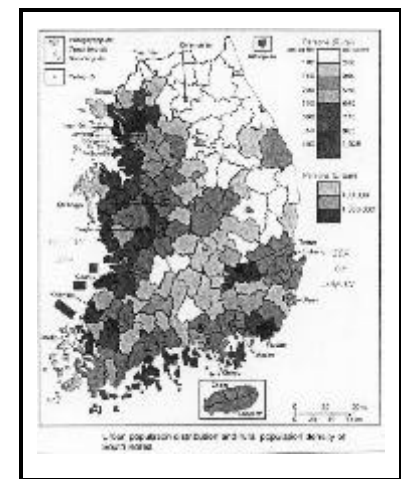


Map 2 — Lower Michigan

thanks to current immigration policies. These policies are projected to add twelve new Michigans to the U.S. population in the lifetimes of our children. Where will all these additional people live? Where will they get their water, food, and energy?

South Korea is jam-packed by our standards and, as the drought is showing, is way over its carrying capacity. It is a badly overpopulated nation. One can understand why so many of its native sons and daughters want to leave.

It is past time to wake up to the fundamental matters since Mother Nature is unforgiving to those who violate



Map 3 — Population Density

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her laws — among which “carrying capacity” ranks high.

Ask Joseph and his brothers.

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