



Factsheet: What Can Faith-based and Anti-hunger Activists Do to Sustainably Feed the World?

A shared value that binds humanity together is a mandate to feed the hungry. Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, atheist – it really doesn't matter – our instinct is to offer sustenance to those in need. But how? What is the best way to help the world's one billion plus hungry people? Many of us know the platitude: give a person a fish and they can eat for a day; give them a fishing rod and they can eat for a lifetime. But designing effective food aid policies and programs is a more complex matter. This factsheet presents information about what we are doing wrong in our approach to eradicating hunger... and what we can do right.

The problem: With their focus on export and the production of low-priced commodities, U.S. agriculture and trade policies have caused farmers world-wide to lose their markets and leave their land. Sadly, our food aid policies have a similar impact, tending to favor corporations over communities. For example, two stated objectives of the U.S. Food Aid program are to expand international trade and to develop and expand export markets for U.S. agricultural commodities. This means the commodities donated any given year tend to reflect U.S. agricultural surpluses regardless of the receiving countries' needs. Current official food aid programs are based on free trade principles (including dumping) and hurt farmers and farm workers everywhere.

- U.S.-based agribusinesses and shipping companies benefit substantially from the U.S. food aid program. Representatives from commodity groups, such as the North American Millers Association, sit on the committee that advises our major food aid programs. (Source: Thomas Marchione "Foods Provided through U.S. Government Emergency Food Aid Programs: Policies and Customs Governing Their Formulation, Selection and Distribution" in "The Journal of Nutrition, 2002)
- Similarly, even while cutting domestic anti-poverty programs, the U.S. government donates millions of pounds of (often unhealthy) food from big agribusinesses to domestic food banks. A little spoken rationale for this program is to protect these companies from price drops due to overproduction. (Source: Brahm Ahmadi and Chrisine Ahn, Food First Backgrounder: Beyond the Food Bank, Fall 2004 <http://www.foodfirst.org/en/node/221>)
- The World Trade Organization's (WTO) Agreement on Agriculture and other free trade agreements force countries to reduce import taxes, called tariffs, on agricultural goods that protect local markets and small farmers. As a result, floods of U.S. corn, soybean and other commodity crops, grown on industrial farms and subsidized by taxpayers, have inundated developing countries, pushing local farmers off of their land. The sale of products at prices below the recipient country's costs of production is a practice known as dumping. Its prohibition is rarely enforced by the WTO.
- Public Law 480 Title II, in the Trade Title of the U.S. Farm Bill, is a key food aid policy. Under this policy, the U.S. Government donates commodities and foods processed in the U.S., ships them overseas on American ships, and distributes the food through international charities. Donating U.S. commodities instead of buying food produced locally costs more, takes 5 months for the food to get there (rather than, for example, 5 days) and can hurt local farmers by not purchasing food directly from them. Canada and the European Union have already switched to making cash donations for local food purchases, a new practice with which U.S. will experiment through the 2008 Farm Bill.
- In 2003, wheat was exported by the U.S. at an average price of 28% below the cost of production and rice was exported from the U.S. at an average price of 26% below the cost of production, hurting farmers in importing countries (Source: Sophia Murphy, "WTO Agreement on Agriculture: A Decade of Dumping," Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy www.iatp.org) Under NAFTA, Cargill's net earnings from 2001 to 2003 jumped from \$333 million to \$1,290 million. (Source: Farm Aid Factsheet: Globalization and Consumer Choice www.farmaid.org/)
- Migration has skyrocketed since NAFTA. Today, nearly 500,000 Mexicans per year attempt to cross the border into the U.S. in search of employment, as opposed to 250,000 before NAFTA. (Source: National Family Farm Coalition www.nfffc.net/issues/fnf/fnf_1.html) With an average income of \$8,000 per year, farm workers earn less than any other wage or salary workers in the United States, making them a likely food pantry client. (Source: <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/food/pubs/reports/farm-bill>)





Factsheet: Food Sovereignty Means Sustainable Food Aid Programs and Fair Trade for Everyone!

There is a better way! Food sovereignty is the right of nations and communities to take back their food system and local markets. This means countries can protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade to achieve sustainable development objectives and restrict the dumping of products in their markets. Food sovereignty is not against food aid or trade, rather, it seeks to protect the rights of people to safe, healthy and ecologically sustainable production. (Source: Statement on Peoples' Food Sovereignty" by the Via Campesina, et al., 1996)

We Need A U.S. Farm Bill that Empowers Local Communities, Not Corporations

- The Trade Title in the U.S. Farm Bill should give cash rather than U.S. commodities to communities in need overseas. This would allow receiving countries to strengthen their own food systems by purchasing culturally appropriate food from local producers.
- We need a Commodity Title in the Farm Bill that establishes price supports for sustainable family farms instead of producing cheap raw materials like corn for corn syrup for processors. With innovative public support, these sustainable family farms can then be alternative sources for local food aid programs rather than these programs having to rely on unhealthy agribusiness donations.
- The Nutrition Title should increase funding to Community Food Projects, Farm-to-Cafeteria Programs, and Buy Direct Entitlements that strengthen community food systems to source food locally and empower communities to feed themselves, rather than relying on emergency food aid programs.

Fair Trade for Farmers and Justice for Farmworkers

- Agriculture should be removed from the World Trade Organization's agreements that insist on making poor farmers compete with agro-industrial giants. Food is a human right and should not be treated the same as other commodities. Instead, we need international agreements for fair trade to ensure prices that cover the cost of production and allow farmers and farmworkers to make a dignified living without having to resort to migrating far from their families in search of work. Forced migration is a major contributor to hunger.
- Food aid programs should pressure decision-makers to protect farm workers rights, including the right to organize, safe working conditions and fair wages. (Source: National Family Farm Coalition <http://www.nffc.net/>; Global Exchange, Food Security, Farming and the WTO www.globalexchange.org)

Worldwide Ban on Dumping and Overproduction

- We need a worldwide ban on dumping. The U.S. should be seeking agreements with other exporting countries to end resource-depleting overproduction. (Source: <http://www.nffc.net>)



For More Information:

International Food Sovereignty Movement Building: Grassroots International www.GrassrootsOnline.org

International Food Security: World Hunger Year www.worldhungeryear.org

Immigration and Farmworker rights: Border Agricultural Workers Project www.farmworkers.org

Free Trade and Dumping: Church World Service www.churchworldservice.org

