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Laura Elizabeth Pohl

A Question of Balance

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The 2012 Hunger Report recommends ways for the federal government to better respond to the agriculture and nutrition challenges of today and tomorrow.

With one in four Americans participating in a federal nutrition program, the nation's nutrition and farm policies absolutely need to be aligned. Farm policy should significantly increase production of healthy foods. But farm policies alone can't automatically improve nutrition among low-income families. Nutrition programs need to do more than provide food for hungry people; they must ensure that healthy food is available to all.

The 2012 Hunger Report recommends ways for U.S. development assistance and food aid programs to work together more efficiently. Food aid programs should follow the lead of Feed the Future—the new U.S. Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative—by focusing more deliberately on improving nutrition outcomes for the most vulnerable people, especially pregnant and lactating women and children under the age of 2. This will help achieve the strongest possible nutrition outcomes with the limited resources available.

On the eve of 2012, Congress is negotiating dramatic cuts in the federal budget. Cuts to programs designed to overcome the effects of poverty are in neither the short- nor the long-term interests of the nation. The recommendations in the 2012 Hunger Report are all the more relevant because the budget decisions are so urgent.

People may disagree about what items in the federal budget are necessary for the public good, but we take for granted that it's in everyone's interest for the government to fight hunger. In fact, there should be zero tolerance for hunger—no matter what the size, ideology, or other responsibilities of the government may be, it must do what is necessary to keep people from going hungry.

Global hunger and U.S. hunger rarely converge as closely as they do in the farm bill. Normally, change in food and farm policy occurs incrementally. The 2012 Hunger Report calls for bolder, more determined thinking about how U.S. food and farm policies can meet the global and domestic challenges of the 21st century.

Introduction

Recommendations

- Domestic nutrition programs serve in both the country's short- and long-term interest by protecting people against hunger and by reducing the cost of treating diet-related health conditions.
- U.S. food aid and development assistance that helps poor countries to reduce poverty and hunger also can benefit domestic farmers by cultivating new trading partners for higher value U.S. agricultural products.



Tomas de Mui/IRIN

Policymaking is always a question of balance: balancing interests near and far, in the present and future, in the world as it is and the world as it should be. Soon Congress will begin writing the next farm bill, which must rebalance U.S. food and farm policies in ways that link agriculture with nutrition and health and promote viable, sustainable livelihoods for farmers—both in the United States and in developing countries. The 2012 Hunger Report aims to show how U.S. food and farm policies can achieve these objectives.

2011 brought Americans little peace of mind about the nation’s economy. On the eve of 2012, Congress is negotiating dramatic cuts in the federal budget. Bread for the World and other anti-hunger groups are working hard to fight cuts that would harm people living in poverty. This report lends support to that effort by explaining how food and farm policies are inseparable from the problems facing people in poverty.

The recommendations in the report are all the more relevant because the budget decisions are so urgent. Cuts to programs designed to overcome poverty are in neither the short- nor the long-term interests of the nation. The report makes clear the costs of jeopardizing long-term benefits to the nation to lower the current budget deficit: it would be a Pyrrhic victory. For a less costly and more sustainable way to reduce federal budget deficits, the government should follow policies that promote economic growth, such as those included throughout this report.

As surprising as it may sound in view of recent political rhetoric, the budget challenges today pale in comparison with far more serious long-term challenges. Around the world, land and water resources are becoming scarcer because of climate change and unsustainable farming practices. Agricultural productivity may not be able to keep up with global population growth, in part because agricultural research has been starved for public support. Shrinking food supplies, and the use of food crops to make bio-fuels, such as corn to make ethanol, are driving up the cost of food well beyond what people in poverty can afford, including people in some of the world’s most volatile regions. The 2011 Horn of Africa famine is just one result.

The United States, too, uses unsustainable agriculture practices. In addition, the United

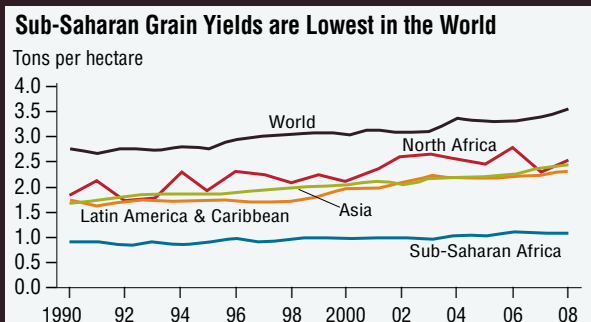
Drought in the Horn of Africa forces people to flee their homes in search of food. Famine conditions persist in areas of Somalia.



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebbie

13 million

The number of people in the Horn of Africa affected by drought and/or conflict in Somalia.



States faces an epidemic of obesity and the health problems associated with it. These are significant contributors to the spiraling healthcare costs that are the country's single biggest fiscal challenge. In fact, unless we get healthcare costs under better control—which will require lowering obesity rates—the U.S. government will have fewer and fewer resources available for other, non-healthcare-related needs.

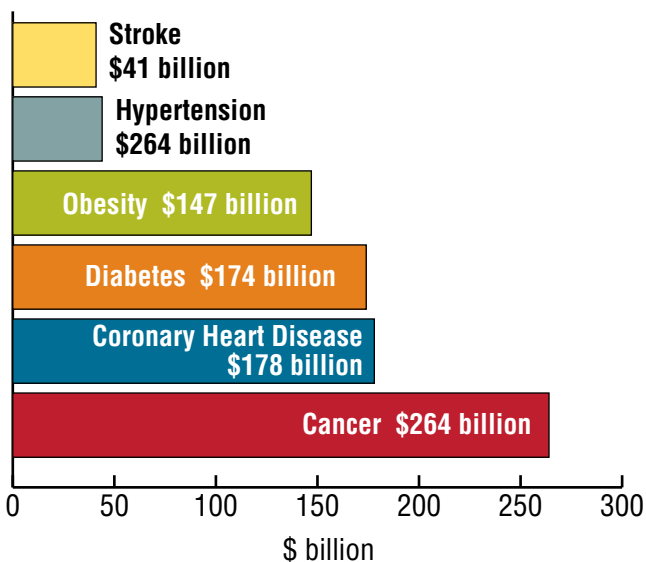
The 2012 Hunger Report takes up these challenges and shows how to address them.

Public Goods Are Public Sector Priorities

As Congress and the White House debate over which programs to cut, we might take a moment to consider why it is necessary to use government resources to meet challenges like those just mentioned. Let's assume most of us agree that government resources should be used for public goods (things that are in the public interest), especially when the private sector has no inherent reason to provide these. Food security is a public good: people may disagree about what items in the federal budget are necessary for the public good, but we take for granted that it's in everyone's interest for the government to fight hunger. In fact, there should be zero tolerance for hunger—no matter what the size, ideology, or other responsibilities of the government may be, it must do what is necessary to keep people from going hungry.

The optimal solution to hunger is a good job that pays well enough for an individual or family to survive without help from public resources. But when the U.S. economy doesn't have enough such jobs—and is producing few jobs of any kind—the most direct way to prevent hunger is with federal nutrition programs. These include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly food stamps; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC); and the school lunch and breakfast programs. Sometimes people find themselves in need of help from nutrition programs for longer than they ever expected, such as when long-term unemployment is at an historic high—meaning now. At such times, programs need

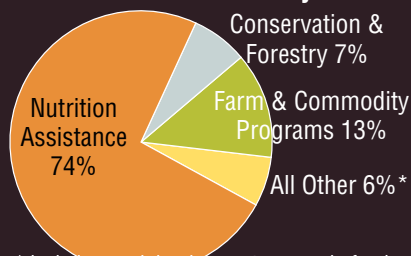
Figure i.1 Economic Costs of Diseases to which Diet is a Major Contributor



Sources: American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Diabetes Association, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

\$98.5 billion of agricultural exports in 2009 produced a total domestic economic output of nearly **\$227.6 billion** and **828,000 jobs**.

USDA 2012 Outlays



* includes rural development, research, food safety and marketing, and regulatory functions

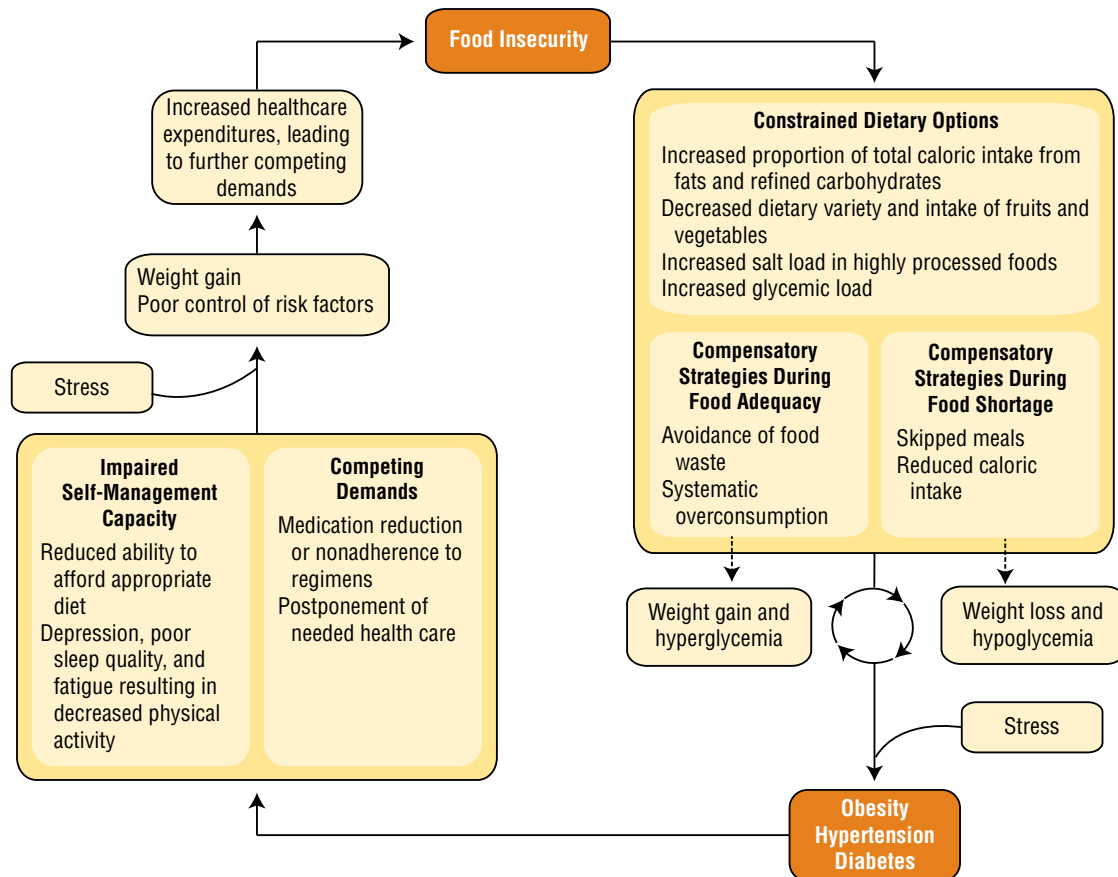
to do more than provide food for hungry people; they must ensure that the food is healthy.

Hunger is a direct threat to health. In fact, people who are hungry are by definition people in poor health. There is only a difference of degree: the severity depends on how long a person has been hungry. Even intermittent hunger can be harmful to human health.

In addition to fighting hunger, federal nutrition programs work against the related threat of obesity. The obesity epidemic in the United States is widespread, and its causes range beyond not being able to afford healthy foods. But this is a significant contributor to obesity; households that qualify for nutrition programs have higher obesity rates than middle- or upper-income households. It is also a cause that the United States should be able to eliminate through nutrition programs. In reality, however, sometimes the programs come up short.

The prevalence of obesity across income groups tells us something troubling about the U.S. food system writ large. Farm policies are implicated in this: they are designed to support a handful of commodities in producing an abundance of calories. Technology has enabled agribusinesses to process cheap commodities into more and more low-nutrient, calorie-dense food products; they can then sell them to consumers for lower prices. Mean-

Figure i.2 **The Cycle of Food Insecurity and Chronic Disease**



Source: Seligman and Schillinger, *New England Journal of Medicine*, July 2010.

while, federal farm policies give virtually no support to crops with more diverse and healthy nutritional content. The policies have, in short, worked against a healthier diet for Americans nationwide.

In 2009, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated the medical costs of obesity at \$147 billion per year.¹ A 2007 study sponsored by the Sodexo Foundation made a conservative estimate of the health-related expenses of hunger in the United States: \$67 billion per year.² Undoubtedly, both figures have risen still higher since these studies came out. There is thus ample evidence that the cumulative costs of obesity and hunger are incredibly high. We can't afford them. This is why farm policies should focus on doing everything in the agriculture sector's power to contribute to better health outcomes—and therefore help reduce healthcare costs.

The 2012 Hunger Report is not recommending that farm policies directly subsidize production of healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables. Rather, policymakers should drop the current restrictions on farmers that discourage or prevent them from including these crops in their production plans. We recognize that production agriculture—the primary beneficiary of today's U.S. farm policies—has made significant contributions to reducing hunger by lowering the price of food. This report proposes reforms to federal farm policy that will help improve Americans' diets and equip the federal government to better respond to the agriculture and nutrition challenges of today and tomorrow.

Farm policy reform could significantly increase the nation's production of healthy foods. But farm policies alone can't automatically improve nutrition among low-income families. Two problems that fall within the purview of nutrition policy and programs must also be resolved: higher costs and less access. Healthy foods such as fresh produce still cost appreciably more than unhealthy foods such as fruit drinks and potato chips. It is also more difficult to find healthy foods in low-income neighborhoods than in wealthier communities, and these neighborhoods have a higher concentration of fast food outlets with cheap, unhealthy menu choices.³

Federal programs implemented through institutional structures such as schools can help solve these problems. The National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program can provide children with healthy foods that otherwise might be inaccessible at home and in their communities. Late in 2010, passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act—the legislation that reauthorized federal child nutrition programs—signaled that lawmakers have this intention. Child nutrition reauthorization improved nutrition policies, but it would have a much stronger impact if the full weight of farm policy were also working toward the goal of better child nutrition. The 2012 Hunger Report shows how the two could work together to improve foods served in school-meal programs.

Focusing on school meals is particularly important. Far more frequently among children than among adults, obesity is correlated with one's family



The National School Lunch Program serves 31 million children per day, two-thirds of whom qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

income. Also, research shows that dietary habits are formed early in life and are much harder to change when people get older.⁴ But as we work to create incentives for healthier food choices among school-age children, we must also protect SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly food stamps) and WIC (the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children). They must continue to work as intended, meaning that participation in the programs should rise in difficult economic times, when more people are in need.

Helping Ourselves by Helping Poor Countries

Some U.S. policymakers are convinced that rising federal deficits outweigh the value of U.S. investments in overseas development assistance. But evidence would suggest otherwise. In the long run, the U.S. economy benefits more by helping developing countries to reduce poverty, so that these countries become trading partners with us.

A few decades ago, the countries that are some of our strongest trading partners in Asia (South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, to name a few) had economies that were veritable basket cases—South Korea’s economy was weaker than North Korea’s at the time of partition⁵—yet these countries developed rapidly by historical standards, and their own efforts were facilitated by steadfast assistance from the United States.

At the time of this writing, the United States is on the verge of signing a free trade agreement with South Korea that is described by Democrats and

Republicans alike as crucial to the growth of the U.S. economy. It’s just one example of how consistent investments in overseas development pay off in the end, both for our partners and for us.

It’s worth noting that U.S. development investments in these countries began in the agricultural sector.⁶ The poorest countries are always agriculture-based economies, and the largest share of poor people earns a living in agriculture. When development occurs from the bottom up, the tide of progress carries poor people along with it. Growth spurs investments in education. Children can go to school rather than to the fields to support their family’s subsistence-level earnings. Education makes it possible for countries to participate more fully in the global economy, investing in technology (much of it purchased from the United States) to expand their industrial capacity.

U.S. investments in agricultural development through the Feed the Future initiative are helping partner countries that today resemble the South Korea of half a century ago. The initiative focuses most of its resources on Africa, targeting assistance to countries whose governments have a track



USDA

U.S. grain exports to South Korea began as food aid in the 1950s. The United States continued to provide food aid to South Korea through the early 1980s. Today, South Korea is a top commercial market for U.S. agricultural products.

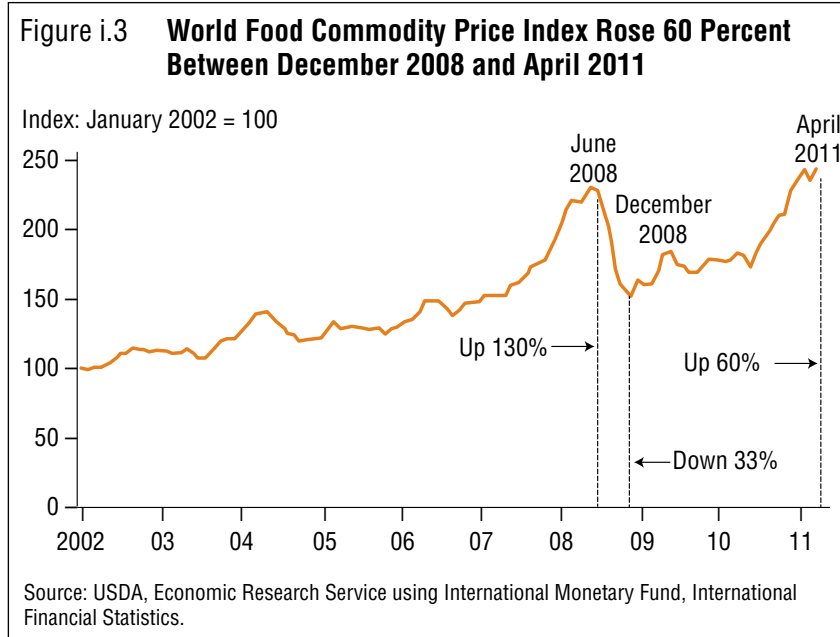
record of matching donor assistance with investments of their own. Feed the Future builds on lessons learned in the Millennium Challenge Account and PEPFAR programs by providing incentives to national governments that work together with private sector and civil society groups to solve problems. The U.S. government works with its own domestic partner organizations in a similar way.

African governments recognize that agriculture is a sector that they themselves must invest in to catalyze economic growth. Before Feed the Future, many countries had already begun to do so, taking steps to realize the vast potential of their collective agricultural resources through greater regional integration of their economies.

Donors realized their neglect and began to catch up when a surge in food prices woke them up to the critical role of agriculture in development. In a matter of months, more than 100 million additional people fell into hunger because the prices of staple grains rose so dramatically. In 2009, in the aftermath of the worst hunger crisis in history not related to a famine, the U.S. government established Feed the Future. In 2011, volatile food prices again drew international attention to the plight of the world's billion chronically hungry people. Food-price volatility has become the new normal. (See Figure i.3.)

In our 2011 Hunger Report, we applauded the U.S. government for responding forthrightly to the hunger crisis. In the 2012 report, we emphasize how this is no time to pull back on the investments the U.S. government pledged in Feed the Future. It is also no time to pull back on food aid. Nothing the United States does for people in crisis situations around the world is more of a lifeline than food aid, a \$2 billion annual investment that keeps nearly 50 million people each year from going hungry.⁷ In the 2012 Hunger Report, we recommend ways for Feed the Future and U.S. food aid programs to work together more efficiently.

For example, we recommend that food aid programs follow the lead of Feed the Future by focusing more deliberately on improving nutrition outcomes for the most vulnerable people—who are pregnant and lactating women and children under the age of 2. In recent years, research has shown that nutrition interventions occurring at key times in people's lives—especially during the 1,000 days from pregnancy to the second birthday—dramatically improve their developmental potential for their entire lifetimes.⁸ All U.S. development programs should seize on these findings and incorporate them appropriately. In particular, the United States should coordinate the two areas most specifically focused on fighting hunger: the one-two punch of food and farm policies in the developing world. This will help achieve the



BOX i.1 STARVATION IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

by *Faustine Wabwire*

Bread for the World Institute

A catastrophe that was long forewarned is unfolding right before our eyes. The current drought in the Horn of Africa is the worst in 60 years, and the refugee situation is the world's worst humanitarian crisis. A combination of high food prices, failed rains, and continued conflict and displacement has put more than 12 million people on the brink of starvation.

By September 2011, the United Nations officially declared a state of famine in six areas of Somalia.¹¹ Among the worst-affected people are small farmers and agro-pastoralists who have no more stocks of cereals and cannot afford to purchase staple foods.

History teaches us that food shortages may be triggered by drought, but famine is not the inevitable result. For a famine to occur, it usually takes a combination of drought, extreme poverty, and, above all, political instability and weak governance.

Somalia has experienced several years of civil war and has been without a central government since 1991. In 2009, 3.2 million people were in need of food assistance as a result of internal displacement, conflict, and drought. The same combination of causes is responsible for the current tragedy, only this time it is much worse because food is so much more expensive.

In Somalia, prices of the two major commodities that are produced domestically, red sorghum and white maize, have increased by 30 to 240 percent and 50 to 154 percent in one year,¹² respectively, across the country. Prices of

imported food commodities, such as rice, sugar, wheat flour, and vegetable oil, are also higher than a year ago.

Despite early warnings of looming food shortages as far back as August 2010, the World Food Program remained 60 percent underfunded by March 2011, and had to cut back its feeding programs in Somalia and Ethiopia. The value of early warning systems is rapidly eroded if not matched by a sufficient political commitment to early action.

The situation in the Horn of Africa underscores the importance of one of the recommendations in the 2012 Hunger Report—to take greater advantage of pre-positioning food aid in areas where it is known it will be needed. It's better and cheaper to prevent calamities than to respond to hunger emergencies. Often, though, funds for preparedness and contingency planning are in short supply, while large amounts of money are spent on post-disaster responses.

In the Horn of Africa, long-term solutions are needed to mitigate the impact of future droughts due to the changing climate in the region. Focus on diversifying livelihoods and supporting indigenous crops will cushion vulnerable populations against climate shocks. Providing drought-tolerant seeds and livestock breeds that can withstand dry-land conditions can improve food security. Experience shows that long-term development requires sustained commitment from national governments and the international donor community.

The U.S. Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative, Feed the Future, is an important step forward in U.S. policy to support sustainable agricultural development in food insecure nations. But for programs like that to work in countries like Somalia, which are war-torn and without any government structures, it is vital to help restore stability. This will require stepped-up diplomatic efforts on the part of the international community, including the United States, combined with efforts to foster economic and social development.¹³

Faustine Wabwire is a policy analyst in Bread for the World Institute.



UN Photo/Stuart Price

strongest possible nutrition outcomes with the limited resources available, getting the biggest bang for the buck.

Over the next 50 years, Africa's population is expected to grow by more than that of any other continent. Quantifying the benefits of reduced global poverty for the United States is not easy. But, for example, 50 years ago China's per-capita income was roughly the same as the countries of sub-Saharan Africa.⁹ Yet in the past 15 years, exports of U.S. soybeans to China have increased 26-fold.¹⁰ As we help African countries participate more fully in the global economy, we help our own country by cultivating more significant trading partners.

Rebalancing and the Farm Bill

Global hunger and U.S. hunger rarely converge as closely as they do in the farm bill. As the 2012 farm bill reauthorization approaches, Congress confronts an environment dramatically different from the lead-up to the 2008 farm bill. The world has experienced many changes that bear directly on issues members of Congress will be deciding (see Box i.2).

The farm bill gives policymakers the opportunity to help solve both short- and long-term challenges to global and domestic food security. Provisions could include investing in agricultural research at U.S. land-grant colleges to develop ways to grow food in changing climate environments; helping farmers sell their products directly to consumers to earn higher incomes—including sales to millions of low-income consumers who now lack access to healthy, nutritious foods in their communities; rewarding farmers who put in place sustainable and responsible environmental practices; and, in international policy, allowing greater flexibility in food aid procurement and improving the nutritional quality of the foods the United States provides as humanitarian assistance.

Normally, change in food and farm policy occurs incrementally. Given all that has happened recently and all that continues to happen, however, we need bolder, more determined thinking about how U.S. food and farm policies can be reformed to better meet the global and domestic challenges of the 21st century.

BOX i.2 A WORLD OF CHANGE SINCE THE LAST FARM BILL

- Volatile food prices and their disquieting effects on poor people and on geopolitical stability.
- Surges in food prices in 2007-2008, and again since 2010, which have exposed the deficiencies in the ability of the global trading system to deal with such shocks.
- Corn-based ethanol becoming a major contributor to food-price volatility.
- Growing concern about how the world will feed 9 billion people by 2050.
- Better understanding of the impact of climate change on agriculture and of how agriculture contributes to climate change and could potentially slow its impact.
- Better understanding of the importance of nutrition in human development in the 1,000 days between pregnancy and age 2, and the economic consequences of early malnutrition over a person's lifetime.
- Better understanding of the role of agriculture in promoting nutrition and health—and of the importance of linking these sectors through policies and programs.
- Rising public concern about hunger and obesity that is directing attention to policies that affect food production and consumption.



THE GOOD FOOD MOVEMENT

by Ken Cook

President, Environmental Working Group

“Food is *hot*.”

I get that a lot these days.

Local food, organic food, slow food, whole food, real food, sustainable food; foodsheds, food deserts, regional food; food patriotism, food justice, food rules, fair food, peak food; industrial food, genetically modified food, superfood, food sovereignty, food celebrity, Food Network; Know your farmer, Know your food: it's all hot.

You don't have to be a foodie to know that even raw food is hot.



Laura Elizabeth Pohl

So what's not hot about food? The politics of it. The politics of food are barely warm.

Consider all the attention paid in recent years, from the White House to Wal-Mart, to the need to reduce the damage the American diet is doing to our spreading girth and diminishing health. Heart disease is on the rise, diabetes is epidemic. Most disturbing of all, America's kids are increasingly both overweight and malnourished.

Children in low-income households have a very good chance of being both hungry and obese.

This past year we had a remarkable opportunity to intervene as a society and get our kids hooked from the start on healthy food and healthy eating when the school lunch program was up for review in Congress. An intervention would have cost money—billions of dollars more per year than we're spending now, so that we could serve kids lunches with more fruits, vegetables and other healthy fare. But we would have saved many more billions than we invested, because healthy school lunches will reduce the lifetime medical costs of diet-related illness and boost the economic productivity that comes with a healthier workforce. En route to those long-term gains, we'd have kids who are happier and perform better in school—especially poor kids, for whom school lunch is often the only reliable daily meal.

So what happened? Congress did pass a new school lunch law, and that law did make some laudable improvements. But funding for the legislation was woefully short of what was needed to fix school lunch.

And how did Congress come up with the modest amount of money that it did add to the school lunch program budget?

By cutting the budget of the Food Stamp Program—known now as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). While benefits were largely preserved, the cuts still weakened a program that now serves a record 45 million Americans, almost half of whom are children—the very same children the school lunch program is intended to help.

Where was the food movement when this momentous policy opportunity slipped through our fingers faster than a canapé of sautéed ginger prawn on an heirloom-potato latka with mango-avocado purée and just a hint of sea salt? Where were the legions of passionate locavores when local kids had a shot at

THE GOOD FOOD MOVEMENT

tasting local greens from a school salad bar, instead of a ladleful of over-salted slop from the lunchroom steam table? Where were the critics of industrial agriculture and factory farms when the freezer truck backed up to the grade school cafeteria loaded with chicken nuggets, mystery meat, surplus cheese, and chocolate milk?

Where were we? Why, we were right there in the fight—on the merits, in spirit, in our hearts, maybe even on our blogs. It's just that not nearly enough of us rang the phones, fired off emails or darkened the doorsteps of the politicians who ultimately decided that America couldn't afford to feed kids well at school—poor kids in particular—beyond a bit of money scraped together out of another program that feeds those same poor kids. Another thing those politicians thought they couldn't afford? Offending the vested interests that benefit from keeping the school lunch program as it is.

We face the same disconnect between the broadly shared values within the food movement and our ability to give political voice and power to those values in the looming federal budget fights. What is at risk? Federal nutrition assistance programs for low-income Americans, international food aid, food safety enforcement, an array of programs that support local food initiatives, conservation of land and water, the survival of small and medium-size family farms...just about any policy or program you could think of that is in support of the "good food movement" is on the chopping block.

If you were to interview any food shopper, whether strolling through a farmer's market or a supermarket, or if you surveyed the leaders of any of the hundreds of public interest organizations working to reform our food system, I'm betting they would agree with every one of the following values—and probably many more.

No child should go to bed hungry or poorly nourished, at home or around the world. We should be safe from foodborne illness, know where our food comes from, and

we have a right to know what's in it. Our food and diets should be a source of health and well being, not ill health and disease. The food economy should be one of opportunity, and its workers should be fairly compensated. Farm animals should be treated humanely. Agriculture should regenerate and protect the environment, not degrade it. Fresh, local, affordable food should increasingly be a commonplace, not a novelty, in American agriculture.

In order for the food movement to find the political voice we still clearly lack, we have to find ways to work together on the many values that unite us. Public interest institutions in the food movement have a special obligation to make this effort. It isn't easy or without risk. We have to fight our way out of issue silos that separate us and institutional habits that frustrate collaboration.

To my mind, if any organization is going to provide the leadership we need to capture the energy and passion of this new food movement and its shared values, it's Bread for the World. Bread for the World? No, actually, it's not that artisanal bakery in Sausalito where everyone goes for the fabulous rustic country 27-grain, gluten-free boule on the way to Pilates.

Bread for the World is a place where your heart meets your mind, introduces it to your spine, causing you to get off your duff to think and do something about the food someone else does not have—at all. Someone you've never met. Someone who's hungry, and who quite probably is just a child.

And then, after perhaps some prayer and reflection, Bread for the World is a place that helps you do something about it with like-minded friends.

That's the food movement I wish to be part of.

Ken Cook is president and co-founder of the Environmental Working Group (EWG), a public interest research and advocacy organization focused on protecting human health and the environment.