

Seeking Justice in the Food and Agricultural System

An Introduction

Introduction:

Access to adequate quantities of safe and nutritious food is necessary for individuals and communities to flourish and reach their fullest potential. The food and agricultural system has the potential to provide everyone with the food that they need. However, even though there is currently enough food produced to feed everyone, there are still 852 million people who suffer from hunger around the world. The structure of the food and agricultural system is not working to meet the needs of everyone on earth. As people who care about hunger and poverty, we must change the food and agricultural system to ensure that everyone has the right to safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food.

Interfaith Principles on the Food and Agricultural System:

Over the next five weeks, we will be looking at the food and agricultural system and its relationship to hunger and poverty worldwide. Each week will focus on a different ethical principle adapted from the principles of the Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment (www.tradejusticeusa.org). The five ethical principles we will use are:

1. U.S. Food and Agricultural Policy should respect and support the **dignity of the human person**, the integrity of creation, and **our common humanity**.
2. U.S. Food and Agricultural Policy decisions should be transparent and should involve the **meaningful participation** of the most vulnerable stakeholders.
3. U.S. Food and Agricultural Policy should advance the **common good** and be evaluated in light of its impact on those who are most

vulnerable, both domestically and internationally.

4. U.S. Food and Agricultural Policy should **safeguard the global commons** and respect the right of local communities to **protect and sustainably develop** their natural resources.
5. U.S. Food and Agricultural Policy should reflect that the U.S. government, in collaboration with civil society, is creating public policies that encourage the **development and welfare of all people**, both domestically and internationally.

The Farm Bill:

The Farm Bill is the piece of legislation in the U.S. that includes many of the policies dealing with agricultural production (farm subsidies), nutrition (the Food Stamp Program and the National School Lunch Program), as well as Environmental Conservation (the Conservation Reserve Program). In 2007, the Farm Bill will be reauthorized, meaning that Congress will write a new piece of legislation dictating what will happen with agricultural, nutrition, and conservation programs. The outcomes of the Farm Bill debates will have life-changing consequences for farmers, farmworkers, citizens, and consumers worldwide. It is important that people of faith think about how the new Farm Bill will assist in guaranteeing everyone the right to food globally and addresses economic justice, environmental sustainability, and human rights for small farmers and farmworkers.

The Global Consequences of U.S. Agricultural Policy:

Due to the economic and political power of the United States, the way that the U.S. structures its food and agricultural system has global consequences. How people eat and the agricultural

policies that are set by U.S. politicians directly affect the lives of farmers and farmworkers, consumers and citizens, both domestically and internationally. Changes to U.S. agricultural policy, in conjunction with restructuring international trade and investment policy, has human rights implications and the potential to alleviate or worsen poverty and hunger worldwide.

Countries around the world are starting to pay close attention to U.S. farm policy and many countries, especially in the developing world, are quite critical of what they see. Many of them see the U.S. asking them to take away all the protections for their farmers while the U.S. does not do the same. This double standard is concerning to people in the Global South and should concern citizens of the U.S. as well.

Reflection Questions:

1. What is the U.S. Farm Bill? Why is it important when we are talking about hunger?
2. Why are people hungry? In what ways do you think hunger in the U.S. differs from hunger in other parts of the world?
3. What are your initial thoughts about how we could change the food and agricultural system to ensure that everyone has enough nutritious food to eat?
4. In what ways do you think that U.S. agricultural policy has global consequences?

Sources:

- Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment (www.tradejusticeusa.org).
- Bread for the World (www.bread.org).
- Martin McLaughlin, "World Food Security," 2002.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (www.usda.gov).
- Via Campesina (www.viacampesina.org).
- National Family Farm Coalition (www.nffc.net).
- Agribusiness Accountability Initiative (www.agribusinessaccountability.org).
- Food Research and Action Center (www.frac.org).
- Community Food Security Coalition (www.foodsecurity.org).

Domestic and Global Hunger in Perspective

Hunger and poverty exist in all corners of the Globe, even here in the United States. To better understand the scale and scope of hunger and poverty, look at some of the following statistics:

Globally:

- 852 million people across the world are hungry, up from 842 million a year ago.
- In the developing world, more than 1.2 billion people currently live below the international poverty line, earning less than \$1 per day.
- 815 million people in the developing world are undernourished. They consume less than the minimum amount of calories essential for sound health and growth.
- 11 million children younger than five die every year, more than half from hunger-related causes.

In the United States:

- 36.3 million people, including 13 million children, live in households that experience hunger or the risk of hunger.
- Research shows that preschool and school-aged children who experience severe hunger have higher levels of chronic illness, anxiety and depression, and behavior problems than children with no hunger.
- In August of 2004, over 24.6 million people participated in the food stamp program in the U.S.

"Hunger does not exist because because the world does not produce enough food. We have the experience and technology right now to end the problem. The challenge we face is not production of food and wealth, but more equitable distribution."

- Bread for the World

Source: Bread for the World, www.bread.org