

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

Food, Agriculture, and Human Dignity

U.S. Food and Agricultural Policy should respect and support the dignity of the human person, the integrity of creation, and our common humanity.

Introduction

As people of faith committed to social and economic justice, it is imperative that our food and agricultural system is in line with our ethical principles. The food and agricultural system should support the dignity of the human person, the integrity of creation, and our common humanity. Unfortunately, the current system does not quite measure up. This section looks at the reasons why.

Dignity of the Human Person

Right to Food

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that every person has the right to food. More broadly defined, every person has the right to an adequate amount of nutritious food, through production or purchase, to sustain a dignified human life. Guaranteeing **food security** – when all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life – is one way to ensure the right to food.

Despite decades of domestic and international initiatives, 852 million people on earth are still hungry. One of the main reasons for this continued epidemic is that our current agricultural system is driven by large corporations, banks, and individuals, whose primary goal is profit, not feeding people. The current profit motives of the food system deny access to food for those without the necessary economic resources, in turn infringing on the human right to food. **Food is not the same as any other commodity.** It differs from shoes and cars because it is necessary for survival. Therefore, the allocation of food should not be decided by market

forces alone. A significant shift in the current food and agricultural system will need to be made to ensure that everyone has access to adequate food to be able to reach their full human potential and contribute to the development of their community.

Agricultural Sector Workers

Finding justice in the food system is an especially difficult task for agricultural sector workers. Farmworkers in the U.S., many of whom are immigrants looking for ways to improve their lives and the lives of their families, often face inhumane treatment. And for farmworkers in the Global South, many of whom are small farmers who were forced off of their land, working conditions are usually even worse.

- Farmworkers in the U.S. are some of the lowest paid employees in the workforce, often earning **annual incomes below \$10,000.**
- Under federal law, farmworkers are not guaranteed overtime pay when they work more than 40 hours in a week and are **not guaranteed the right to organize themselves.**
- Farmworkers are often exposed to hazardous pesticides and other chemicals that can lead to serious **health problems.**
- Many farmworkers do not receive medical insurance from their employers, which means that they are not able to get the health assistance they need or are forced to spend much of their income on medical care.

Improving the treatment of farmworkers needs to be a core part of reforming the agricultural system.

Integrity of Creation

Corporate Consolidation

Respect and support for the integrity of creation requires that the vast resources on earth, including agricultural resources, are shared in a just manner. The heightened levels of corporate consolidation that have occurred over the past decades within the international food and agricultural system threaten the equitable distribution of agricultural resources. In fact, the current organization of the food system closely resembles an oligopoly. An oligopoly is when a small number of firms control enough of a given market to set prices for consumers above their competitive level.

- In 2002, only two corporations, Monsanto and DuPont, controlled 65% of the global seed markets for maize, excluding China.
- While nearly three quarters of all human food is grain-based, four corporations – Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland, Louis Dreyfus, and Bunge – controlled approximately 73% of the global grain trade in 2003.

High levels of agribusiness consolidation have been combined with a trend toward **vertical integration** within the industry. Vertical integration is when firms begin to control more of the process, from “field to table,” in a given market. When put together, consolidation and vertical integration create an environment where it is possible for large corporations to manipulate the prices that consumers pay while at the same time driving down the prices paid to farmers. By driving down the incomes of farmers while food prices continue to rise, the highly concentrated and vertically integrated food system is one contributing factor to the perpetuation of hunger and poverty.

Common Humanity

Rural Development

Agricultural policy plays a central role in rural development and has the potential to promote our common humanity, the ability of all people and

communities to reach their fullest potential. Unfortunately, there is still much work to be done to reduce poverty in rural areas in the U.S. and around the world. As larger farmers become more powerful and agribusiness continues to consolidate, the trend has been that family farmers in the Global North and small farmers in the Global South have gone out of business. For family farmers in the Global North, this has meant needing to find “off-farm” work.

- Currently, less than 10% of rural Americans live on farms.
- Only 2% of rural Americans earn their primary income from farming.
- As much as 89% of the income for farm households came from “off farm” sources in 2003.

It is important to note, however, that this displacement of farmers to “off-farm” jobs often comes out of necessity, not desire. A similar trend of displacement from rural communities to urban areas and other countries can be seen throughout the Global South. Current rural development policies are not meeting the needs of rural people, which in turn threatens our common humanity.

Sources:

- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, (www.fao.org/spfs).
- Bread for the World (www.bread.org).
- Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs, (www.afop.org/advocacy).
- Farmworker Justice Fund Inc, (www.fwjjustice.org).
- William Heffernan, “Consolidation in the Food and Agriculture System,” Report to the National Farmers Union, 1999.
- Agribusiness Accountability Initiative, (www.agribusinessaccountability.org).
- Organization for Competitive Markets, ed. Michael Stumo, “A Food and Agriculture Policy for the 21st Century,” 2000.
- Boston Consulting Group, “AWB (International): Maximising Returns to Growers Supplying the Single Desk, 2003,” in AWB (International), “Submission to the 2004 Wheat Marketing Review,” 2004.
- Peter O’Driscoll, “Part of the Problem: Trade, Transnational Corporations, and Hunger,” 2005.
- Sophia Murphy, Ben Lilliston, and Mary Beth Lake, “WTO Agreement on Agriculture: A Decade of Dumping,” Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, 2005.
- Environmental Working Group, (www.ewg.org).

Food, Agriculture, and Democratic Participation

U.S. Food and Agricultural Policy decisions should be transparent and should involve the meaningful participation of the most vulnerable stakeholders.

Introduction

The voices of those who are directly affected by public policy decisions should be involved in the decision-making process, regardless of their race, ethnicity, economic status, or gender. Decisions that are made around U.S. farm policy, however, seem to include certain voices more than others. Those with money tend to have more influence over farm policy decisions than those without money. When money is a central factor in the political influence that one has, the voices and participation of the most vulnerable are excluded from the process.

Influence Over the Legislative Process

Campaign Contributions

Agribusiness firms have much to gain from ensuring that federal legislation is in-line with their interests. This means that they are very involved in the legislative process:

- During the 2004 election cycle, the agribusiness industry contributed **\$52,593,698 to political campaigns** (www.crp.org).
- Of the more than fifty million dollars contributed by the agribusiness industry, \$4,923,904 went directly to George W. Bush's campaign, while \$785,831 went to the campaign of John Kerry (www.crp.org).

In light of these facts, it is telling that President Bush's plan to lower the maximum dollar amount of subsidies a given farmer could receive, which would have impacted large farmers the most, was dropped as a priority of the Administration a few months after the idea was introduced.

Agribusiness Political Contributions

The agribusiness industry gives significant financial contributions to political campaigns to ensure that they have sway with elected officials.

Agribusiness Campaign Contributions

Election Cycle	Total Agribusiness Contributions
2004	\$52,593,698
2002	\$54,376,954
2000	\$59,479,067
1998	\$43,070,787
1996	\$51,590,880

How Does the Agribusiness Industry Compare to Other Industries in Terms of Campaign Contributions?

Industry	2004 Campaign Contribution
Health	\$122,645,001
Agribusiness	\$52,593,698
Energy	\$52,250,361
Transportation	\$50,711,369
Defense	\$16,121,553
Tobacco	\$2,651,927
Environment	\$2,060,863

Source: Center for Responsive Politics (www.crp.org)

Direct Lobbying

In addition to making large campaign contributions, farm associations and agribusiness firms hire skilled lobbyists to put continual pressure on elected officials to vote for legislation that benefits them.

- In 2004, **Monsanto Co. spent \$3,257,000 on lobbying** efforts (www.publicintegrity.org/lobby).
- In 2004, Cargill Inc. spent \$460,000 on lobbying efforts (www.publicintegrity.org/lobby).

Influence Over Federal Agencies

The limited voice that small farmers have in the legislative branch of government (the Senate and the House of Representatives) is also seen in federal agencies, such as the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Many of the individuals who were previously leaders in the corporate agribusiness world are currently the people designing the regulations for agricultural policy at the USDA.

Among the top ranking political appointees at the USDA in 2004, there were nearly as many people who previously worked with agribusiness firms or their trade associations, lobbying firms, and research arms as there were career civil servants (Mattera, “USDA, Inc.,” 2004).

The high concentration of former agribusiness personnel working at top level positions within the USDA has created an unwritten “**revolving door**” policy for current agribusiness industry executives. This means that current agribusiness leaders have easy access to, and significant influence over, USDA decision-makers. Needless to say, the policies resulting from high levels of agribusiness involvement tend to benefit large corporations more than small businesses and family farmers.

International Consequences

Decisions made by elected officials on domestic policy issues in the U.S. have an impact on people around the world. Food and agricultural policy is

one area where the impacts of U.S. domestic policy decisions have enormous implications for people living in other parts of the world.

People in other countries who are affected by U.S. domestic policy decisions, however, do not have voting rights in the U.S. or official means to directly influence the decisions made by U.S. politicians. Currently, people in the international community who are affected by the domestic policies of another country are forced to look to international institutions to address their concerns. For agricultural and trade issues, countries around the world look to the **World Trade Organization** (WTO) as a forum for addressing their objections to U.S. domestic policy. There is much international debate and concern, however, about the **lack of transparency and undemocratic nature** of WTO processes. Without transparency and democratic participation at the WTO, the countries that are hurt most by U.S. agricultural policy, mainly developing countries, have no place to bring their grievances. It is important to keep this issue in mind as U.S. agricultural policy is written and implemented.

Reflection Questions

1. Why is it important that governments and international institutions function in a democratic and transparent manner?
2. What are some of the obstacles to democratic participation around food and agricultural policy in the U.S.?
3. What would you do to increase the democratic nature of the decision-making processes around food and agricultural policy?

Sources:

- Philip Mattera, “USDA, Inc: How Agribusiness has Hijacked the Regulatory Policy at the U.S. Department of Agriculture,” 2004.
- Center for Responsive Politics (www.crp.org).
- International Gender and Trade Network (www.igtn.org).
- The Center for Public Integrity (www.publicintegrity.org).
- Agribusiness Accountability Initiative (www.agribusinessaccountability.org).
- Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment (www.tradejusticeusa.org).

Food, Agriculture, and the Common Good

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.

Introduction

The food system has great potential to promote the common good. The direct connection between agriculture and food means that a just agricultural policy can promote universal access to adequate food, which is a necessary ingredient for people to live dignified lives and be active participants in the development and governance of their communities. Current global economic, political, and social arrangements, however, permit growing inequality and injustice, which threatens the common good. Small farmers and farmworkers worldwide as well as African American farmers are among those who experience this growing injustice.

Farm Subsidies

For those who care about eliminating hunger and poverty it is important to understand the links between domestic agricultural policy in the United States and international trade. There are currently serious debates going on at the World Trade Organization (WTO) about the relationship between agricultural subsidies in the U.S. and the EU and their relationship to perpetuating hunger and poverty around the world.

What is a Farm Subsidy?

A farm subsidy is a form of support, usually money, given by a government to a farmer. Subsidies can be cash payments that farmers receive as checks in the mail or other forms of support such as loans.

Different Types of Subsidies:

There are two main categories of subsidies given to farmers: export subsidies and domestic subsidies.

1. Export Subsidies:

Export subsidies are payments given by the government to farmers so that they will sell their product abroad. Export credits ensure that those who want to export their goods will have the credit necessary to do so.

Problems with export subsidies and credits:

Export subsidies and credits make it easy and profitable for farmers to sell their goods abroad. But, farmers in other countries often do not have the same support from their government, which means that export subsidies and credits in the U.S. can lead to agricultural “dumping.” Dumping is when a business from one country sells agricultural goods to another country at a price that is lower than what it actually cost to produce the product. Dumping makes it difficult for farmers in the Global South to compete, even in their local markets, which perpetuates poverty for many small farmers in the Global South.

2. Domestic Subsidies:

Another form of farm support is domestic subsidies. These subsidies are given by the government to encourage a producer to grow more of a certain crop, assist farmers who are not making a profit, promote environmental protection, and respond to the needs of farmers when natural disasters occur. Different types of domestic subsidies include:

Farm Payments: These are usually cash payments or special loans made directly to participating producers. These payments are generally given only to the producers of certain commodities including corn, wheat, soybeans, rice, upland cotton, and oilseeds. Farm payments given to support the production of certain commodities totaled over \$11 billion in 2003 (www.ewg.org).

Conservation Payments: There are also agricultural subsidy payments made to farmers for

environmental and conservation purposes. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Conservation Security Program (CSP) are two primary programs in this category. The CSP provides money to farmers who engage in sustainable agricultural practices. Since agriculture is one of the most heavily polluting sectors of the economy, this program is aimed at protecting environmental resources. In 2003, the U.S. spent just over \$2 billion on conservation payments to farmers (www.ewg.org).

Disaster Payments: Disaster payments are made to crop producers when either planting is prevented or crop yields are abnormally low because of problematic weather conditions. Funding for disaster payments totaled \$2 billion in 2003 (www.ewg.org).

Problems with domestic subsidies: In certain cases, domestic supports can encourage overproduction because if the government is paying producers of a certain crop, others will want to start producing it too or will produce more of it than normal. This can make global prices lower, which can lead to agricultural dumping and can make it very difficult for small farmers in developing countries to survive. The extent to which domestic supports actually create these problems is a topic of much debate among farmers, politicians, trade negotiators, and researchers.

African American Farmers

Small farmers in the U.S. have faced many challenges, but for African American farmers the difficulties in the agricultural sector have been extraordinary. The historical examples of slavery and sharecropping are clear, but the obstacles persist through the present:

- Even though African American farmers make up one percent of United States farmers, they only receive one-tenth of one percent of all crop subsidy payments (Jackson, “40 Acres and a Mule, Denied”).

- In 1910, African Americans owned 14 percent of the country’s farms. Today, they own about one percent of farms (Jackson, “40 Acres and a Mule, Denied”).
- The rapid decline in farm ownership among African Americans is not in line with the broader trend; African American farm ownership has declined at three times the rate that it has for white farmers (www.ewg.org).

The rapid decline in land ownership can be attributed to factors including various land inheritance problems, inaccessibility of affordable legal counsel, as well as racially discriminatory practices by the USDA around access to governmental resources (www.federationsoutherncoop.com). In seeking justice through farm policies, it is imperative that African American farmers receive the resources that they need.

Agricultural Dumping

The term “dumping” is used to describe the process whereby a business in one country exports a product to another country at a price **below the cost of production** (when the price a product is sold for is lower than what it actually costs to make the product). In our current global system, the United States and the European Union are most commonly criticized for dumping agricultural goods (wheat, soybeans, corn, rice, cotton, etc ...) into developing countries. It is necessary for people in the U.S. to understand “dumping” because it is one contributing factor to the perpetuation of poverty in developing countries, therefore inhibiting the common good.

Why does dumping happen?

Although there is much debate about the root cause of agricultural dumping, some of the factors contributing to dumping include:

- A lack of effective **supply management**. Traditional economic thinking would usually dictate that as prices drop, producers will slow down their production until prices rise again.

However, as agricultural prices drop, farmers tend to continue producing as much as they can to try to maintain adequate revenues.

Agriculture differs from other industries in this way. This means that oversupply occurs frequently in agricultural production, which means that prices are often low. In turn, this means that the cheap agricultural goods are exported at below the actual cost of production. A form of supply management could assist in solving this problem.

- Currently, the government gives payments to farmers who produce certain commodities such as corn, wheat, and cotton. These payments,

“Dumping Rates”

In 2003, the United States consistently “dumped” goods into markets in the Global South:

- **Wheat** was exported by the U.S. at an average price of **28%** below the cost of production
- **Soybeans** were exported from the U.S. at an average price of **10%** below the cost of production
- **Corn** was exported from the U.S. at an average price of **10%** below the cost of production
- **Cotton** was exported from the U.S. at an average price of **47%** below the cost of production
- **Rice** was exported from the U.S. at an average price of **26%** below the cost of production

Source: Sophia Murphy, “WTO Agreement on Agriculture: A Decade of Dumping,” Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (www.iatp.org)

called **domestic supports**, are the topic of much debate among politicians, farmers, and the international community. Some believe that these domestic supports encourage farmers to produce more of their crop, which creates an oversupply of that crop, which U.S. farmers and agribusinesses then dump into the developing world. Others believe that these domestic supports, in general, are not the cause of dumping. They see export subsidies and agribusiness consolidation as the leading factors contributing to dumping.

- A trend over the past few decades has been for the number of agribusiness firms to decrease, leading to fewer and fewer agribusiness firms controlling more and more agricultural processes. For example, three firms – Archer Daniels Midland, Bunge, and Cargill – control 71 percent of all soybean crushing. This level of **corporate consolidation** has contributed to international agribusiness firms being able to export agricultural goods at below the actual cost of production. A few agribusiness firms buy goods from thousands of farmers giving them the power to drive down the prices they pay to producers.
- Governments offer payments and credits to agricultural producers to encourage them to export their goods. These payments, called **export subsidies** or **export credits**, are given to farmers and are aimed at getting rid of the surplus of agricultural goods produced in a country and keeping exporters competitive in the global market. Export subsidies and credits, however, are one of the main causes of dumping because they make it cheap and profitable for agricultural goods to be exported to developing countries.
- Over the past decades there has been pressure on developing countries to remove any tariffs, quotas, or other protections for their economies. The process of removing protective measures, called **economic liberalization**, has made it difficult for developing countries to protect their

farmers from goods produced below the cost of production in other countries.

What are the problems with dumping?

Do below-cost imports in developing countries provide cheaper food to consumers in that country? Not necessarily. Dumping of agricultural goods creates serious problems in the Global South and does not necessarily mean cheaper prices for consumers. Some of the negative impacts of dumping include:

Flooding local markets in the Global South with below-cost agricultural goods makes it nearly impossible for small farmers to compete, even at their local market. This has far-reaching effects because such a large percentage of people in the Global South rely on agriculture for their primary income. Seventy percent of rural household income in Asia and sixty percent in Latin America and Africa comes from farming and farm labor.



Displacing small farmers. As small farmers are not able to compete, they are often forced to leave their land and find work by migrating to either a local city or another country. Many do not find a job that pays them enough to survive. Some farmers who are displaced from their farms in Latin America end up migrating to the United States to work as farmworkers, forced to work long hours, receive very little pay, and often have to work with dangerous pesticides.



Limiting agricultural development. As artificially cheap agricultural goods flood markets in the Global South and local farmers are not able to compete, improvement of the agricultural sector in the developing world becomes very difficult for an enormous number of people living in poverty. Dumping stunts the growth of the agricultural sector in the developing world, which in turn makes it more difficult for farmers to break free of poverty.

Conclusion:

The food and agricultural system has the potential to promote the common good in many ways – including providing food to the 852 million people on earth who are hungry. Control of the food system by large corporations and profit motives, however, prevents the agricultural system from realizing this goal.

Reflection Questions:

1. How is food and agricultural policy connected to the common good?
2. What are agricultural subsidies?
3. What specific obstacles do African American farmers face?
4. What is agricultural dumping?
5. What are some of the main causes of agricultural dumping?
6. What problems are produced by agricultural dumping?
7. How would you make an agricultural policy that increased the common good?

Sources:

- National Family Farm Coalition (www.nffc.net).
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Food, Agriculture, and Environmental Sustainability

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.

Introduction

Safeguarding the global commons and the vast natural resources that exist on earth should be part of any agricultural and food policy. Sustainable agriculture and food production, however, is not the norm. There is much work left to be done to ensure that future generations are able to enjoy our natural resources.

Environmental Protection

The shift away from family farming and into industrial corporate farming over the past decades has had significant impacts on the environment. Some of the impacts of heavy industrialization in agriculture include:

- Soil and water contamination because of increased dependence on pesticides and chemicals
- Soil erosion from monocropping
- A loss of biodiversity

(Agribusiness Accountability Initiative,
www.agribusinessaccountability.org)

The trend towards massive industrialization, which threatens clean water and soil, also threatens the sustainability of the global commons – a necessary component to achieving the common good. **The agricultural industry accounts for more pollution than nearly any other industry.**

Agricultural pollution is also non-point source, which means that unlike the pollution from smoke stacks, agricultural pollution does not come from a single geographical point. Non-point source pollution is much more difficult to contain. Although there are many sustainable and environmentally sound ways of producing agricultural goods, much of U.S. farm policy has

encouraged the industrialization of farming, which perpetuates greater pollution of the global commons.

Community Participation

Additionally, the corporate nature of agriculture means that decisions about the use and development of natural resources are being decided by CEOs and stockholders, not the people whose communities are directly affected by corporate agriculture.

A clear example of the devastating effects of corporate control can be seen in India where communities are struggling against Coca-Cola around access to clean water. Throughout India, communities claim that Coca-Cola has contributed to water shortages, polluted groundwater and soil around its bottling facilities, and has distributed its toxic waste as “fertilizer” to farmers.

Many of the people affected by Coca-Cola’s practices are also the most marginalized in Indian society – indigenous peoples, lower castes, low income people, and agricultural day-laborers. This example, although from a different industry, illustrates the problems with corporate control over local natural resources (www.IndiaResource.org).

Beginnings of Sustainability

With significant pressure from civil society, the U.S. government has begun to promote basic levels of sustainability. A recent victory for promoting sustainable agriculture was the addition of the Conservation Security Program (CSP) to the 2002 Farm Bill. The CSP is a “voluntary conservation program that supports ongoing stewardship of private agricultural lands by providing payments and technical assistance [for farmers who are]

maintaining and enhancing natural resources” (National Resources Conservation Service).

The prospect for continued improvement in agricultural sustainability, however, is bleak. The current movement towards **international “free trade” encourages:**

- Limited government involvement in agriculture
- Increased agricultural production for export
- A movement towards agricultural industrialization

If **sustainability** is thought of as finding ways to meet people’s current needs without jeopardizing the needs of future generations, the current trend towards agricultural industrialization and consolidation appears incompatible with sustainability. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that the current global economic system is going to create the space for increased sustainable practices in the near future.

Reflection Questions

1. What does sustainability mean to you?
2. Why is sustainability important for you? For your family? For the world?
3. What do you think are the obstacles to creating a sustainable agricultural system?
4. What would you do to ensure that agricultural practices are sustainable?
5. What is the Conservation Security Program? What are its benefits?

Sources:

- India Resource Center (www.IndiaResource.org).
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (www.usda.gov).
- National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture (www.sustainableagriculture.net).
- Environmental Working Group (www.ewg.org).
- Environmental Defense (www.environmentaldefense.org).
- Agribusiness Accountability Initiative (www.agribusinessaccountability.org).
- National Family Farm Coalition (www.nffc.net).

Conservation Security Program

A Step in the Right Direction

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) is an innovative federal program that provides financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers nationwide to help them implement sound conservation practices that improve soil, water, and ecosystem health. Assistance applies to the full spectrum of working agricultural lands, from cropland to pasture to rangeland. Highlights of the program include:

The program rewards innovative and proactive stewardship practices. In comparison with its sister program, the Conservation Reserve Program, which provides financial incentives to take farmland out of production, the CSP rewards farming practices that implement conservation measures while simultaneously maintaining the land’s productivity. Farmers are thus encouraged to work the land in a way that benefits both the health of the ecosystem and the health of their business.

The program has generated an immense amount of positive feedback. During a public comment period prior to the inking of the first CSP contracts in 2004, over 14,000 farmers, ranchers, and technical assistance providers nationwide voiced their strong support for the CSP. In the program’s first year, contracts were signed with 2,188 farmers that implemented conservation practices on over 1.8 million acres.

Conservation payments are commensurate with accepted free trade regulations. At a time when U.S. agricultural policy is coming under international fire for its violation of doctrines of global free trade, conservation-oriented payments represent a sanctioned form of agricultural subsidies. Payments such as those of the CSP are aimed at conservation rather than production and do not distort trade. They are classified as “green box” subsidies by the WTO and are allowed without limits.

Source: Taken from the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture (www.sustainableagriculture.net)

Food, Agriculture, and Human Development

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.

Introduction

Government exists to serve the needs of society. It has an essential role in setting priorities and making decisions about trade and investment in order to advance the common good. Civil society, in its turn, has the right to freely express its views about society's needs, address them in public policy, and to otherwise participate in the decisions affecting social, economic, and environmental justice.

Food Sovereignty

The current push from the World Trade Organization (WTO) and many international institutions, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, is to increase the role of "free markets" and decrease the role of governments in promoting the welfare of people globally. **Food sovereignty**, however, sees the important role that governments should play in promoting people's welfare. The main premise of food sovereignty is that members of civil society and governments should have the "right to define their agricultural and food policy, without any dumping vis-à-vis third countries" (www.viacampesina.org). The pillars of food sovereignty include:

- The prioritization of local agricultural **production to feed people** over producing mainly for export
- The right of farmers and peasants to produce food and the right of consumers to be able to decide what they consume, and how and by whom it is produced
- Access of peasants and landless peoples to **land**

- The right of countries to protect themselves from below-cost agricultural and food imports
- Agricultural prices **linked to production costs**
- The **participation of civil society** in agricultural policy decisions
- The recognition of the **rights of women** farmers

Food sovereignty is one way that governments, in conjunction with civil society, can promote food security that in turn guarantees everyone the right to food.

Government Procurement

In addition to promoting food sovereignty, governments also can be key promoters of racial and gender equity, public health, environmental justice, and community development. One way of promoting these societal goods is through the purchasing decisions that government's make, known as **government procurement**. What, how, and from whom a governmental body purchases its goods and services can have a significant impact on society. **Government buying typically represents ten to fifteen percent of a country's Gross Domestic Product** (GDP is a measure used by economists to talk about the size of an economy).

Intentional government procurement of agricultural goods and food can encourage sustainable agricultural practices, local agricultural development, and provide important financial support to family farmers. For example, the 2004 budget for the National School Lunch Program, one of many federal nutrition programs, was \$6.5 billion dollars

(www.frac.org). In the future, relationships between the National School Lunch Program and local farmers could be developed to support sustainable agricultural practices and guarantee nutritious food for students.

Under the regulations of some “free trade” agreements, however, government procurement would need to be as “non-discriminatory” as possible, meaning that decisions about purchasing would need to be based solely on the price and quality of a given product or service, not social or environmental concerns. The potential for trade agreements to limit the role governments can play in promoting sustainable agricultural development and community food security, both in the U.S. and abroad, raises important questions about the current model of “free trade.”

Reflection Questions

1. What role do you think that a government should play in ensuring that people have enough food to eat?
2. How does food sovereignty differ from the “free market” model?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the “free market” model? The food sovereignty model?
4. What effects can trade agreements have on government procurement decisions?

Sources:

- Via Campesina (www.viacampesina.org).
- National Family Farm Coalition (www.nffc.org).
- American Friends Service Committee (www.afsc.org).
- World Trade Organization (www.wto.org).
- Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (www.iatp.org).
- Citizens Trade Campaign (www.citizenstrade.org).
- Center of Concern (www.coc.org).
- Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment (www.tradejusticeusa.org).

Trade Agreements and Government Procurement

Trade agreements under the current “free trade” model limit the policy-making role of governments in promoting people’s welfare.

In order to create space for foreign competition, global trade agreements are being used to undermine the ability of governments at all levels to enforce vitally important procurement measures. Government procurement is the purchasing of goods by a governmental body or state-owned enterprise.

Many local governments have agreed to comply with the procurement provisions of these trade agreements, despite the fact that many of their commonly used policies could be challenged as “barriers to trade” by foreign contractors. “Barriers to trade” could include policies that offer preferences to businesses that:

- Are locally-based and enhance local development
- Offer a living wage
- Are pro-union or anti-sweatshop
- Offer workers health benefits
- Provide environmentally friendly products and services
- Are women- or minority- owned
- Do not do business in countries known for human rights abuses – such as policies used to help bring an end to apartheid in South Africa

The manner in which the current “free trade” model has the potential to impede on governmental attempts to protect people’s welfare should raise important questions for those concerned with political, economic, and social justice.

Source: Information is from the American Friends Service Committee’s (www.afsc.org) Trade Justice Campaign.