

Agriculture's Role in Combating Global Hunger  
Hearing Before Senate Agriculture Committee  
December 2, 2015  
Testimony for the Record of Richard Leach  
CEO, World Food Program USA

Good morning Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow and members of the Senate Agriculture Committee. On behalf of World Food Program USA (WFP USA) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP,) I want to thank you for holding this important hearing to examine the U.S. role in combating global hunger. I appreciate this committee's work and the leadership of the chairman and the ranking member.

WFP USA works to solve global hunger through policy advocacy, education and fundraising in the U.S. in support of the mission of WFP, the largest humanitarian agency fighting hunger worldwide. Last year, WFP delivered life-saving food assistance to more than 80 million people in 82 countries, providing hope to communities affected by natural disaster, refugees surviving conflict and families living in extreme poverty. WFP programs provide school meals, nutritional assistance to mothers and young children, and support to communities in building long-term food security that in turn reduces their future need for food aid. The U.S. is the largest donor to WFP programs. We are proud of our partnership with the U.S. Government in delivering hope to millions of extremely vulnerable people in some of the most dangerous and remote places in the world

It is important to recognize the strong, bipartisan support this committee has provided in fighting global hunger – from creating the Food for Peace program back in the 1950's, to launching the McGovern-Dole school feeding program over 10 years ago, to establishing the Local and Regional Purchase program in the 2014 Farm Bill.

#### U.S. Agriculture's Historical Role

The United States has a long history of providing food assistance to vulnerable people in time of need, beginning as early as 1812 in response to an earthquake in Venezuela. Over the last century, American involvement in international food assistance took on a wholly new dimension as the United States began to emerge as a world leader, notably by providing food assistance to the people of Europe during the First World War.

Thirty years later, following the devastation of the Second World War, in June 1947, Secretary of State George Marshall proposed a strategy to rebuild war-torn Europe known as the Marshall Plan. The affected nations of Europe came forward with their first request through the Marshall Plan: a request for food, which became a major component of U.S. assistance to rebuild Europe. As the U.S. took its first step

as leader on the stage of a post-war world, it was U.S. agriculture in the form of international food assistance that served as a primary catalyst for that entry. U.S. leadership, and the ability of U.S. agriculture to feed people in need, had become a primary source of global stability at one of the most crucial moments in world history.

A decade later, the Eisenhower Administration worked with the Congress to enact sweeping legislation that set in place the major U.S. international food assistance tool that remains the flagship program for American food aid, the Agricultural Trade Development Assistance Act of 1954, enacted as Public Law 83-480 (known popularly ever since as PL 480), and designated in 2008 as the Food for Peace Act.

Title II of the Food for Peace Act is designed to target populations suffering from emergency conditions and those highly at risk from food insecurity and malnutrition. Since the 1950's, Title II expenditures, adjusted for inflation, have totaled nearly \$140 billion. I cannot overstate the importance and incredible outcomes Title II activities have and continue to achieve throughout some of the most troubling and tragic places on earth.

While the Food for Peace Act may be viewed as the most important and far-reaching food assistance program this Committee has created, it was certainly not the last. The Agricultural Act of 1980 created the Food Security Wheat Reserve, known today as the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust. Later, the Food for Progress program, included in the Food Security Act of 1985, provided mandatory spending out of the Credit Commodity Corporation (CCC) to use U.S. commodities abroad for developmental purposes.

In this century, recent farm bills have authorized two new programs that have become important tools in the fight against global hunger. These are the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, included in the Food Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, and the program for Local and Regional Purchase (LRP), authorized in the Agricultural Act of 2014.

The McGovern-Dole program is achieving remarkable results in providing nutrition to impoverished children, combined with a school setting, to ensure that not only young bodies, but young minds, especially those of girls, are receiving proper nourishment, growth, and development. Based loosely on the mission of our domestic school feeding programs, McGovern-Dole activities bring together improved nutrition, basic education, health outreach, and community support targeted to long-term sustainability. In fact, a number of countries have graduated from international assistance and now fund their own school feeding programs.

The LRP program is another opportunity to improve food security on a regional basis by supporting local food producers, many of whom are small-scale farmers, and local food marketing systems. The practical benefits of LRP may seem obvious through the potential for more rapid emergency response and lower delivery costs.

But the higher long-term benefit is the development of food systems that may, in time, increase the availability and predictability of the food supply, allow market forces to improve farmer and regional income, and in time contribute positively to the global economy. The UN World Food Programme (WFP) has been an innovator in using its considerable local food purchasing power to buy more from small farmers, thus increasing their market access, incomes, and food security.

It should be noted, that most of the food assistance programs mentioned above have been historically, and statutorily, tied to U.S. agricultural production. This partnership has served well the interests of both the U.S. farmer, and the food recipients on distant shores, and has also benefitted the U.S. transportation sector. In 2008, this Committee created a pilot program for Local and Regional Purchase (LRP) and fully authorized LRP in the Agricultural Act of 2014. These LRP initiatives complement US in-kind food aid and, as was recognized in the 2014 farm bill, LRP linked to the McGovern-Dole program can help make the transition from international assistance to nationally funded sustainable school feeding programs.

While not a program under the jurisdiction of this Committee, it is important to mention another food assistance program that plays an essential role in emergency response and complements the programs described above. It is the Emergency Food Security Program (EFSP), part of the International Disaster Assistance account authorized under the Foreign Assistance Act. EFSP supports local and regional food procurement, food vouchers and cash in emergency situations.

Development food security programs efforts such as Feed the Future and global health nutrition funding also work in tandem with those created by this Committee all toward a common goal of combating global hunger. These programs draw upon America's rich agriculture tradition and experience in order to help small farmers around the world feed themselves and their communities. This experience includes our land grant universities, agricultural experiment stations, and the cooperative extension service that have literally built, perfected, and disseminated the dynamic knowledge base of our current agricultural system.

This combination of program benefits and outcomes, over the course of six decades, is evidence of a larger, and welcome, evolution of U.S. international food assistance programs. Program experience brings recognition of the potential for innovation. In short, U.S. food assistance programs continue to improve in both content and execution, and only through all participants working together can we achieve, or at least approach the goal of a world free from the individual and societal degradation of hunger. To move forward we must embrace a continuing expansion of partners, each with unique purpose, to challenge and overtake hunger as a long-term outcome.

## A Comprehensive Approach to Ending Global Hunger

Ending global hunger by 2030 as called for by the Sustainable Development Goals is an ambitious but achievable goal. U.S. leadership in contributing to ending hunger requires a comprehensive global food security strategy in which international food assistance is only one of the important ingredients. Nutrition programs with a strong focus on mothers and young children; assisting countries to build food safety nets for those who lack the economic resources to meet food needs; and agricultural development to help increase incomes and food security for poor, small scale producers should also be important priorities for the U.S. Government. U.S. commitments to the Feed the Future Initiative and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement are essential contributions to implementing a comprehensive global food security strategy. More attention should be given to how the US can assist developing countries willing to invest in effective safety net systems that can reduce chronic hunger and mitigate the negative effects of food crises caused by natural disasters and/or economic shocks. Effective coordination between all U.S. government agencies and department involved in food assistance, nutrition and agriculture is essential to implementation of a comprehensive U.S. government food security strategy.

### Current Challenges

The world has made substantial progress in reducing hunger over the past 25 years. The proportion of undernourished people in developing countries fell by almost half, from 23.3 per cent in 1990–1992 to 12.9 per cent in 2014–2016. This means there are 216 million fewer hungry people in the world today than in 1990. There are still, however, 795 million chronically hungry people that can achieve food security with the right policies and sufficient investments in proven approaches to hunger reduction. Progress in reducing this number further is threatened by the large number of food crises resulting from protracted conflicts and weather-related disasters.

There is currently an unprecedented need for emergency food assistance. South Sudan, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria are the largest of the many humanitarian crises resulting from conflicts that are the main reason so many hungry people need international food aid to survive. There are now nearly 60 million internally displaced, refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people globally—the most since World War II.

Weather events are also affecting the most vulnerable and increasing food aid needs. This year's El Nino effect is one of the largest on record with weather disruptions projected to peak between October 2015 and January 2016. It has already produced droughts in Central America and parts of Africa. Its impact will be felt by millions more people in Eastern and Southern Africa throughout 2016.

Food aid donors, led by the United States, have been generous in responding to these expanded needs but rising contributions still fall short of the even larger increase in food aid requirements. As of November 3, the \$3.8 billion in contributions from all donors to WFP in 2015 are still less than half of total annual WFP program requirements of \$8.6 billion. Funding shortfalls have already forced WFP to cut rations for nearly two million refugees and displaced persons affected by conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Mali. As the effects of El Nino continue to grow, food aid programs in the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa may also face cutbacks due to funding shortfalls.

Credible international assessments have found the recent drop in humanitarian support to Syrian refugees has correlated with the increase in the number of Syrians risking their lives in the hope of finding a better future in Europe. Continued robust funding of U.S. international food assistance programs is vital. Failure to respond adequately to food security crises in conflict situations contributes to instability that ultimately affects U.S. national security interests.

Effective and efficient responses to growing emergency and development food needs require a mixed toolbox of food assistance instruments. The food aid community's needs assessment and market analysis tools are more sophisticated than ever. We have learned a great deal about which types of food assistance – international in kind commodities, local and regional purchase food purchase (LRP), food vouchers, and cash – can best meet the food and nutritional needs of vulnerable people in different circumstances. This knowledge should be applied to the maximum extent possible in the design and implementation of all international food aid programs, including those funded by the U.S. government.

In emergency situations, internationally provided in-kind commodities work best where market structures are weak and/or disrupted by conflict and a country faces large overall food deficits. This is the situation in much of South Sudan and Yemen, where in-kind U.S. food assistance funded by the Food for Peace Title II program has played a vital role in responding to emergency food needs. Delivery of U.S. in-kind food aid to respond to emergencies is timelier than ever before, due to better early warning, assessment, and advance shipment to pre-position food in areas of projected need.

Voucher programs are often the best choice for urban, non-camp refugee and displaced persons situations where local food markets function effectively. WFP and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have had considerable success in implementing efficient, and well-targeted food voucher programs to assist refugees from Syria, and urban and semi-urban displaced persons and refugees in Iraq and many parts of Africa.

Local and regionally purchased food offers advantages when there are areas that produce food surpluses physically close to other places where there are significant food deficits due to conflict, natural disaster, or chronic vulnerability.

Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Central America, and parts of West Africa are just a few of the examples where purchase of food locally can significantly reduce transportation and distribution costs and increase income and market opportunities for small-scale food producers.

Achieving the best nutritional results may require a combination of food aid tools within the same situation. For example, it can be very effective in many circumstances to complement an in-kind commodity basic ration with some cash/voucher assistance for purchase of fruits, vegetables, and dairy in order to provide better dietary and nutritional diversity.

### Looking Forward

Agricultural development for small producers, nutrition, safety nets, and emergency food assistance will continue to be the essential four pillars of a comprehensive approach to combating global hunger. U.S. agriculture is well placed to be a food assistance leader and innovator in strengthening all four of these pillars.

U.S. agricultural technical assistance and research can help increase small producer productivity in current food insecure regions, as envisioned by Norman Borlaug and currently supported by the U.S. Feed the Future initiative.

The U.S. food industry and research community can further develop food products with high protein and other features highly suited to address the special nutritional needs of young children, pregnant and lactating women, and people suffering from severe acute malnutrition.

U.S. expertise in food based safety net programs can help developing countries build their own safety nets to reduce hunger among their poorest and most vulnerable citizens. School feeding programs are one of the most widely used safety net programs around the world. The McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program should be implemented in a way that maximizes its contribution to building sustainable national safety net systems.

Congress should build on the positive elements of changes made in U.S. food assistance programs over the past several years. The U.S. is now the largest government donor of both in-kind and cash-funded food assistance. There is clear evidence of the success of the increased flexibility in food aid programming provided in the last two farm bills. Such changes have increased the flexibility of US food aid to respond to market conditions through expansion of programs like local and regional purchase and food vouchers.

The December 2012 Independent Evaluation of the USDA Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement (LRP) Pilot Program authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill found that food aid provided through the pilot program had significantly shorter delivery times

than traditional in-kind food aid with significantly reduced costs of up to 33% on all commodities except vegetable oil. The positive results of the additional cash flexibility in the Food for Peace program provided by the 2014 farm bill are also beginning to be documented by USAID and implementing partners, including WFP. The inefficient practice of food aid monetization has been further reduced, resulting in better programming that reaches more people at the same cost.

Modernizing our food aid programs should be based on evidence and the evidence is clear. Continuing to increase over time the portion of US food aid that can be used for local and regional purchase and food vouchers will increase program effectiveness and reduce costs. Ending the minimum requirement for food aid monetization should be seriously considered. Delinking Agriculture Cargo Preference (ACP) costs from the U.S. food aid budget would allow U.S. food aid programs to serve over a million more hungry people. To the extent the US government determines it necessary to subsidize American shipping for U.S. national security purposes, those costs should appropriately be paid by national security and defense accounts.

#### Need for Cooperation

I again want to thank the Committee for raising the topic of global hunger as the focus of this hearing. Today's international food assistance programs have grown from those first enacted sixty years ago, and it is appropriate to conduct their regular review and, as may be found proper and necessary, reform and improvement. Regardless of what programmatic changes this Committee and the Congress find prudent, it remains clear that U.S. agriculture has and continues to have a lasting role as we all face the ever-present reality of global hunger.

It is my hope that this Committee will succeed in bringing together all points of view on this critically important subject. It may appear obvious, but all programs benefit from a pursuit of flexibility, efficiency, and effectiveness. In a town growingly unaccustomed to agreement and compromise, international food assistance has long been a place of common ground, common recognition, and common action. Given all that is happening in the world today, there are millions of people who can't afford for our combined efforts to discontinue.

In the final analysis, we are all partners in the fight against global hunger, with U.S. Agriculture, and this Committee, leading the way. The history of this country is the story of how the American farmer had crossed a continent, tamed a wilderness, survived a Dust Bowl, and became the leader in a fight against global hunger. That fight, as are the American flag and symbols that adorn the packages of food delivered to the people most in need across the world, has come to be not only a source of great pride to all Americans, but says more than can words about who we truly are as a people.