



Rising Food Prices Hit Hungry And Poor People The Hardest

Rising food prices are taking an immense toll on the world's poorest people, who typically spend up to 80 percent of their income on food. Economists estimate that global food prices have doubled over the last three years. Recent spikes in the prices of rice, wheat, corn, and soy have sparked riots and social unrest in more than 30 countries and forced the resignation of the prime minister in Haiti, where more and more people are relying on mud cookies to sustain themselves.

Even before this crisis, the numbers of people around the world who go to bed hungry every night were staggering. The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that 854 million people across the world were hungry last year and that every day, almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes—one child every five seconds. But, according to the World Bank, as many as 100 million more poor people could be made worse off by this burgeoning hunger crisis. After 30 years of progress against hunger and poverty, that's a setback that the United States and the rest of the world cannot afford to let happen.

Rising food prices are the result of many factors—higher energy prices, growing demand for alternative energy sources, rising incomes in developing countries, the fall of the U.S. dollar (which makes dollar-denominated food more costly), and more extremes in weather conditions that may be linked to climate change. Many of these changes are likely to be long-lasting, not temporary, requiring a long-term approach as well as an immediate response to meet emergency needs.

One of the more powerful solutions to this crisis—the five-year, roughly \$250 billion farm bill—is in the hands of Congress and President Bush, and they now have until April 25 to finalize the bill. The alarming jump in food prices should spur them to enact genuine reforms that will end subsidies to wealthy farmers while strengthening nutrition programs for hungry and poor people.

A farm bill with true reforms should strengthen the Food Stamp Program, increase aid to our rapidly depleting food banks, and bolster international food aid. Changing the commodity payment system would also free up money to better support struggling farm and rural families of modest means in this country and around the world while providing help to low-income Americans caught between a weak economy and rising food prices.

One significant contributor to high food prices has been

misguided agricultural policy in rich industrialized countries. The United States is wasting billions of dollars on subsidies to well-off people to do things that don't make much sense. Those subsidies often frustrate agricultural production in developing countries, which is especially important to hungry people around the world. The money could also be reallocated to investments in research and development that would improve agricultural productivity in this country and around the world, and help developing countries adapt their agriculture to climate change. More productive and sustainable agriculture in the United States and around the world will help reduce food prices in both the short and long term.

Without genuine reforms to the farm bill, the progress the United States and the international community have made in reducing hunger and extreme poverty will suffer a tremendous and heartbreaking setback. We must not allow this to happen.

Act Now!

Ask your members of Congress to urge the House and Senate leadership and leaders of the House and Senate agriculture committees to ensure that the final farm bill includes permanent funding increases for nutrition programs at levels no less than those passed by the House—\$11.5 billion over 10 years—and reform of commodity payments.

Points to make:

- A final farm bill that underfunds improvements in the nutrition title is unacceptable. The final bill must include permanent funding increases at no less than the House-passed level of \$11.5 billion over 10 years.
- We need a strong nutrition title. Every month, more than 25 million Americans receive food stamp benefits to help them buy groceries. Congress must not compromise their safety net.
- Genuine reform of the commodity payments system is the key to creating a farm bill that addresses our nation's most urgent priorities. Congress can and should take the final step.

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