Study Guide 2007

The following outline covers five one-hour sessions on *Hunger 2007: Healthy Food, Farms and Families*. Groups should not feel restricted to covering just these topics. However, even if groups choose to discuss other issues in the report, this guide will still serve as a useful starting point.

Session One: Farming in the United States (1 hour)

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Micah 6:8, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

For reflection: Read Micah 6:1-8. What is the controversy God has with the community? How does the community respond to God? Verse 8 sums up Israel's prophetic tradition. Discuss the three requirements the prophet puts before the community. What do you think Micah would say to us today about the current U.S. farm policy?

1. According to Tim Nissen, the farmer described on page 19, the current farm system discourages farmers from diversifying their business and thinking more creatively about their planting decisions. Given what you've learned from reading this report, what do you think are the reasons U.S. farmers would be struggling?

2. Chapter One discusses four myths about farm subsides (pages 20-23). Why are these myths so powerful and continue to seem plausible to so many Americans?

Session Two: Life in Rural America (1 hour)

"Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. The LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps."

Psalm 85:11-13, NRSV

For reflection: Read all of Psalm 85. This psalm is a lament and plea to God for restoration. What is the psalmist lamenting? What would be the lament of people living in rural communities today? The last four verses paint a vision of peace and justice. Note that the vision includes the land as well as the people. How would you translate this vision for rural communities today?

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages to living in rural America, and in what ways can government programs strengthen rural America?

2. Box stores like Wal-Mart offer rural communities low-cost items, employment opportunities, and tax revenue. However, they also make it difficult for small, local business to compete and are known for paying low wages and providing minimal employee benefits. Are there ways to create an environment that welcomes outside development to rural areas but also encourages local small business development?

Session Three: Trade and Agriculture (1 hour)

"I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance."

II Corinthians 8:13-14, NRSV

For reflection: Read II Corinthians 8:1-15. Why does Paul compliment the Macedonian churches? Why is Paul appealing to the church in Corinth? Paul seems to be equating generosity and grace; do you agree? Do you think Paul's appeal is relevant to the issue of agricultural trade today? If yes, then in what ways? If no, then why not? What would be a "fair balance" among nations today in terms of trade?

1. There are nearly 3 billion people in the world living on less than $2 per day. Raising their incomes to $5 or $9 per day could give a substantial boost to U.S. farmers by expanding the available markets for agricultural exports. But raising incomes from $2 per day to $5 or $9 per day does not happen overnight. Nor is it likely to

happen without reform of U.S. agricultural trade policies. What are the reforms that U.S. agriculture needs to adopt to achieve the gains described in the paragraph above?

2. A new multilateral trade deal could make a big difference for the future of agriculture in developing countries, but as this chapter explains, simply improving developing countries' access to international markets is not everything. What issues outside of the trade policies of developed countries need to be addressed to improve the ability of developing countries to compete in the global market?

Session Four: Obesity and Malnutrition (1 hour)

"Taking the five loaves and the two fish, [Jesus] looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men."

Mark 6:41-44, NRSV

For reflection: This story occurs in all four Gospels and twice in Matthew and Mark. Why is it such an important story? What's the miraculous part of the story? Would ending hunger in the United States take a miracle? If not, then what would it take?

1. The fact is that in high-poverty areas where obesity levels are highest, hunger is also lurking. It may sound like a paradox, but hunger, poverty and obesity can and do co-exist. Severe hunger in the United States…has been cut sharply since the 1960s, but the more common form of hunger today, "food insecurity," affects a startling number of people." What does Chapter 4 tell us about the relationship between hunger, poverty and obesity?

2. Come up with 5 creative ideas that school administrators could use to combine nutrition education with the school lunch program? For starters, perhaps you should consider Figure 4.5 on page 83, showing the difference between annual spending on food and beverage advertising and spending on nutrition education.

Session Five: Looking Forward (1 hour)

"When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: 'A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.' As he said this, he called out, 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!'"

Luke 8:4-8, NRSV

For reflection: Most scholars think that parables have just one point. What is the point of this parable? How does this parable inform the work of social justice?

1. "… policymakers must develop solutions that help struggling U.S. farmers, strengthen rural communities, provide an adequate, nutritious diet for hungry people in this country, and support the efforts of small farmers in developing countries to get their products to market and feed their families." This report has tried to present a vision that can accomplish all the above objectives. How would you inform someone indifferent to the farm bill that these objectives converge there, and what recommendations do you think are the strongest to achieve progress in reducing hunger through the farm bill?

2. What are some ways your church or campus could promote policies that are recommended in this report?