



April 25, 2008

Subject: The Hunger Crisis

Dear President Bush,

You have already responded to the increase in global food prices, and I understand you are considering yet bolder action. This letter recommends elements for a Presidential Hunger Initiative. It would include completion of a reformed Farm Bill, funding for assistance to hungry people and agricultural development in poor parts of the world, and global policy initiatives.

The hunger crisis strengthens your case for finalizing an improved Farm Bill. You have conveyed your views via the Secretary of Agriculture and White House statements, but I hope you will now speak out and intervene personally to close the deal. Congress and the administration must reach agreement on a reformed Farm Bill, so that U.S. farmers know the rules as they plant this spring, and because the hunger crisis requires an urgent response:

- You are right to insist on reducing market-distorting subsidies to affluent landowners. This would make U.S. agriculture more efficient and reduce the extent to which U.S. and European farm policies depress agriculture in developing countries. The money can be better used to help struggling U.S. farm and rural families, for investments in U.S. agricultural productivity and to increase food assistance to hungry people.
- The Farm Bill should include reforms and funding to get more food aid to hungry people in poor countries. Your proposed local-purchase reform would provide about \$150 million a year in additional food to hungry people at no extra cost to taxpayers. You should also support the House's proposed expansion of the McGovern-Dole child nutrition initiative as part of our country's response to the current hunger crisis.
- Higher food and fuel prices, unemployment and more constrained credit have increased hunger and poverty in our own country. Your administration has indicated you are willing to go along with the \$10 billion increase in nutrition funding that Congress wants to include in the farm bill. In view of the changed situation, you should actively support increased funding for food stamps and food banks.

A compromise on the Farm Bill is within reach. But in any case, it would be wrong to extend the current Farm Bill for another year in the midst of today's hunger crisis without strengthening food assistance to hungry people.

Looking beyond the Farm Bill, a Presidential Hunger Initiative should also include additional funding for food assistance and for agricultural development in Africa and other poor parts of the world. We are impressed by the proposal that is being discussed within your administration -- \$2 billion (half for immediate assistance to hungry people and half for agricultural development) and complementary policy initiatives. The immediate assistance component should include \$600 million for food aid in this year's emergency supplemental.

Agricultural development is the way to turn the current hunger crisis into powerful and permanent progress against world hunger. The high prices that are causing hardship for 100 million of the world's poorest people represent opportunity for another 600 million undernourished people who make their living from agriculture. Agricultural development will reduce food prices and also increase incomes in rural areas. About half of Millennium Challenge Account commitments are for agriculture and rural development, because that is what good governments in poor countries are asking for. But USAID's agriculture programs were drastically cut in the FY08 appropriations. A Presidential Hunger Initiative should include money for USAID agriculture programs, starting with \$300 million in this year's supplemental. We urge the largest possible increase in poverty-focused development assistance for FY09, including \$600 million for USAID agriculture.

We understand that administration officials are considering a presidential speech on the hunger crisis and several global policy initiatives: completing the Doha agriculture deal, steps to make agricultural technology available internationally, and developing biofuels in a way that does not add to hunger. These are great ideas, and we would add one more. A recent assessment of different approaches to child hunger (sponsored by the Gates Foundation and World Bank) shows that the highest impact interventions focus on nutrition for pregnant women and babies and add missing vitamins and minerals to basic foods. Child and maternal undernutrition causes more death and disability than any disease, and you could provide leadership for a targeted, cost-effective global campaign to improve global health through child nutrition.

Finally, the next economic stimulus package in this country should include funding for food stamps. Hungry and poor families were left out of the first stimulus package, even though they are hardest hit by the economic slowdown. The best way to reduce hunger in America is through improvements in earnings, income and assets among low-income people. But the fastest, most direct way to reduce hunger – and stimulate the economy – is to strengthen the food stamp program.

Bread for the World is a collective Christian voice urging our nation's decision-makers to end hunger at home and abroad. We pray for you and other leaders of this richly blessed nation.

Sincerely yours,



The Rev. David Beckmann
President