



# Rebalancing Act

Updating U.S. Food and Farm Policies

2012 Hunger Report

## Executive Summary



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# Rebalancing Act

## Updating U.S. Food and Farm Policies

The global agricultural system faces many daunting challenges. Seven billion people currently inhabit the Earth, and the population is expected to rise to 9 billion by 2050. Food production must increase as climate change puts additional stress on natural resources. Nearly one billion people around the world suffer from hunger, and in the United States one in four people participate in a federal nutrition program. U.S. food and farm policies absolutely need to be aligned.

The 2012 Hunger Report recommends ways for the federal government to better respond to the agriculture and nutrition challenges of today and tomorrow. Normally change in food and farm policy occurs incrementally. The 2012 Hunger Report calls for bolder, more determined thinking about how U.S. food and farm policies can meet the global and domestic challenges of the 21st century.

Farm policies should significantly increase production of healthy foods. But farm policies alone can't automatically improve access to nutritious foods for low-income families. Strengthening the nutrition safety net is also critical. Nutrition programs need to do more than provide food for hungry people; they must ensure that healthy food is available to all.

The 2012 Hunger Report recommends ways for U.S. development assistance and food aid programs to work together more efficiently. Food aid programs should follow the lead of Feed the Future—the new U.S. Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative—by focusing more deliberately on improving nutrition outcomes for the most vulnerable people, especially pregnant and lactating women and children under the age of 2. This will help achieve the strongest possible nutrition outcomes with the limited resources available.

On the eve of 2012, Congress is negotiating dramatic cuts in the federal budget. Cuts to programs designed to overcome the effects of poverty are in neither the short- nor the long-term interests of the nation. The recommendations in the 2012 Hunger Report are all the more relevant because the budget decisions are so urgent.



## Farm Policies for Today and Tomorrow

America's farmers and the federal government are natural allies in the fight against domestic hunger and malnutrition—and this alliance is enshrined in the nation's farm policies. The U.S. public needs farm policies to ensure a safe and affordable food supply, to protect the sustainability of vital natural resources that agricultural production depends on, and to produce well-balanced, nutritious foods.

A cursory look at the U.S. food system reveals the latter—producing well-balanced, nutritious foods—as badly in need of attention. Rising healthcare costs associated with chronic diet-related diseases should lead policymakers to reassess the balance of farm policies. Current policies favor production of calories, not nutrients. Today, the United States does not produce enough fruits and vegetables for Americans to meet the recommended daily allowances (RDAs) of vitamins and minerals. Farm policies should lean more towards the production of healthy foods.

A rapidly growing segment of the U.S. population is demanding healthy, sustainably produced foods. Small and medium-size producers, the farmers best suited to meet this demand, receive virtually no support from U.S. farm policy. The largest, wealthiest producers of a limited number of crops are the biggest beneficiaries of government support in good times and in bad. At a time when they are earning record high farm income, it makes little sense for them to be the main beneficiaries of national farm policy.

Recent policy improvements require schools to serve children healthier meals, and when possible to source more of the foods used in child nutrition programs from local and regional producers, mostly small to medium-size producers. This merits much stronger support from policymakers. Not only would it benefit children, including low-income children, but also a great many farmers and their communities, reviving a connection between agriculture and rural development that once was much stronger.

## The U.S. Nutrition Safety Net

Preventing people in the United States from going hungry is the single most important objective of federal nutrition programs. In times of high unemployment and reduced incomes, government spending on nutrition programs increases to help people cope with these difficult economic conditions.

In the past three years, since the country plunged into a severe recession, participation in nutrition programs has skyrocketed. The economy continues to stumble. Millions of people can't find work or can't find sufficient work to support their families. The programs are



People who earn their living as farmers have a unique role in society as stewards of an essential public good—an agriculture system that feeds and nourishes everyone.

doing precisely what they're designed to do: counteract the impact of the recession on families and help prevent the recession from getting worse.

Once the economy begins growing again at a steady and sustainable rate, the number of people eligible for nutrition programs will be closer to what it usually is.

Federal nutrition programs go a long way towards reducing hunger, but they accomplish much less by way of ensuring a healthy, well-balanced diet. This is especially troubling since more than half of all participants in nutrition programs are children. Dietary habits form early in life and tend to last a lifetime. Rates of obesity and other diet-related health conditions are soaring, and the medical costs associated with obesity have risen to hundreds of billions of dollars a year. Thus, nutrition programs need to make greater efforts to enable low-income families to overcome barriers to purchasing healthy foods.

In the upcoming farm bill, policymakers have an opportunity to make the needed improvements to nutrition programs. The nation's largest nutrition program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the Food Stamp Program, is reauthorized in the farm bill. Most

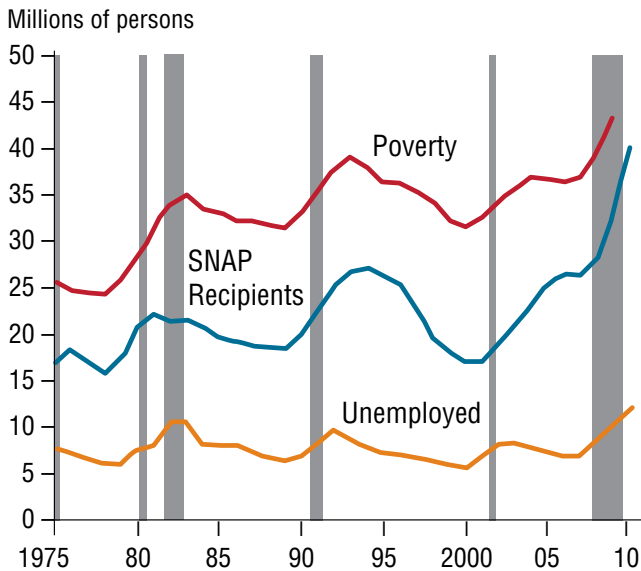
importantly, SNAP benefits must be maintained.

In addition, SNAP should continue to scale up incentives to use benefits to purchase healthy foods. The farm bill can also provide more healthy foods to schools and daycare centers. Allowing schools to purchase more locally or regionally sourced foods when possible would benefit struggling small farmers and rural communities.

## Farm Workers and Immigration Policy

For more than a century, agriculture has been an entry point into the labor market for immigrants in the United States. Presently, close to three-fourths of all U.S. hired farm workers are immigrants, most of them unauthorized. Their unauthorized legal status, low wages, and inconsistent and

**Number of SNAP Recipients, Unemployed People, and People in Poverty, 1975-2010**



Note: Vertical bars indicate recessions.  
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service.



**58%** of all unauthorized immigrants to the United States are Mexican.

**1 in 7 PEOPLE**  
in the world is chronically  
**HUNGRY.**

sometimes unpredictable work schedules contribute to a precarious economic state.

Immigrant farm workers fill low-wage jobs that citizens are reluctant to take. Attempts to recruit citizens for farm worker jobs traditionally held by immigrants have failed. In the absence of immigrant labor, farmers would be forced to shift to mechanized crops or stop producing altogether. Domestic production of fruits and vegetables—foods Americans should be consuming more of—could decrease significantly without immigrant farm workers.

In spite of the key role they play in U.S. agriculture, unauthorized immigrant farm workers labor under increasingly hostile conditions. The Agricultural Job Opportunity, Benefits and Security bill (AgJOBS) was developed cooperatively by farmers and farm worker advocates to address the status of farm workers. Public concern about unauthorized immigration by and large has held up prospects of enacting the bill into law.

The status quo is unacceptable. Farm workers should be able to work without fear of deportation, and farmers need a steady source of labor and assurances they will not lose access to workers they depend on. It is up to policymakers to help the public see the importance of immigrant farm workers to the U.S. agricultural system.

AgJOBS—or any agricultural guest worker program that recruits from Mexico or Central America—should include development assistance to reduce poverty in rural areas where these workers originate. Rural development can provide poor people with alternative sources of livelihood than migrating to the United States.

## Food Aid and Development Assistance

The United States responds directly to hunger and malnutrition in the developing world with food aid and agricultural development assistance.

U.S. food aid programs and agricultural development assistance are increasingly focused on the 1,000-day window of opportunity by targeting pregnant and lactating women and children younger than 2. Even



Laura Elizabeth Pohl

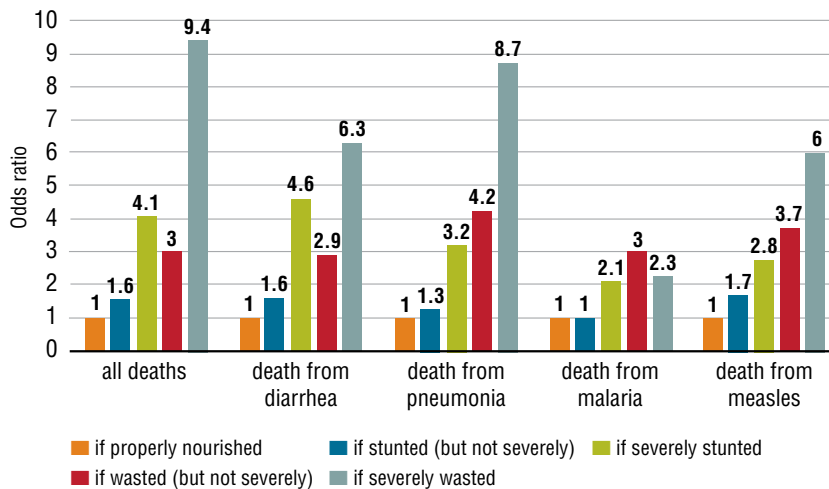
About one million crop and livestock workers in the United States are unauthorized immigrants.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that if women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could **increase yields** on their farms enough to **reduce the number of hungry people** in the world by **12–17%—up to 150 million people**.

**14.5%** or 17.2 million  
U.S. households were at risk  
of hunger in 2010.

Sources: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

### Relative Odds of Death for Children Under Age 5, Based on Nutritional Status



**Stunting:** Failure to grow to normal height caused by chronic undernutrition during the formative years of childhood.

**Wasting:** A condition in which a person is seriously below the normal weight for his or her height due to acute undernutrition or a medical condition.

Source: *The Lancet* (2008).

brief episodes of hunger among people in these vulnerable groups are cause for alarm. A third of all child deaths are attributable to malnutrition, while survivors face lifelong physical and/or cognitive disabilities. High rates of malnutrition cost countries losses of 2 to 3 percent in Gross Domestic Product.

The United States should strengthen its traditional role as the largest provider of food aid, while also moving quickly to improve its nutritional quality. New mothers, young children, and other vulnerable people, such as those living with HIV/AIDS, can benefit from highly nutritious forms of food aid now available. These cost more than

the foods normally included in U.S.

food aid, but it is possible to reduce costs by purchasing in or near the countries where they are needed and by phasing out the inefficient practice of monetizing food aid to conduct development projects.

The United States should strengthen its commitment to Feed the Future, the innovative U.S. Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative critical to long-term progress against hunger and malnutrition. Feed the Future represents the U.S. government's strongest support in decades for agricultural development in poor countries. The focus on agriculture is especially valuable because the vast majority of poor people in developing countries earn their living by farming, and the majority of these farmers are women.

The United States must make larger investments in agricultural research to help meet the global need to produce crops that can feed a growing population, respond to shifts in dietary patterns, and adapt to changes in climate. Current funding for both U.S. research institutions and the international network of agricultural research centers is hardly adequate to meet these challenges.

All poverty-focused development assistance is instrumental in helping poor countries achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Cuts to U.S. foreign assistance, including USAID's operating budget, would harm efforts to make foreign assistance more effective, efficient, and sustainable.



Laura Elizabeth Pohl

## MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE 2012 HUNGER REPORT

- Farm policies should lean more towards the production of healthy foods.
- Farm policies should help to build markets for domestic farmers to provide nutrition programs with healthy foods.
- Farm policies should be linked to local and regional development of rural areas.
- SNAP, formerly food stamps, should at least be able to protect all family members from hunger for the duration of their monthly benefits.
- SNAP should include incentive programs that make it easier for recipients to afford healthy foods.
- Child nutrition programs should provide meals that meet established dietary guidelines.
- Unauthorized farm laborers should have a legal means of being in the United States.
- An agricultural guest worker program should include support for rural development in migrant-sending communities of Mexico and Central America.
- The United States should strengthen its traditional role as the largest provider of food aid, while also moving quickly to improve its nutritional quality.
- The United States should strengthen its commitment to Feed the Future, the innovative Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative that is critical to sustainable progress against hunger and malnutrition.

Included in the 2012 Hunger Report is a proposal to restructure the current farm safety net. Income-support programs should be replaced by a more efficient system of revenue insurance, and support should be available to all farmers and based on principles of fairness and shared responsibility.

# Earlier Hunger Reports by Bread for the World Institute



*Our Common Interest: Ending Hunger and Malnutrition* covers the role of the United States in mobilizing global commitments to increase investments in agriculture, food security, and nutrition in developing countries. A dramatic rise in hunger and poverty in the wake of volatile food prices in 2007 and 2008 led to “Feed the Future,” a bold initiative from the U.S. government. The report examines events that led to Feed the Future’s establishment and how the initiative can deliver on its promise to benefit smallholder farmers and improve the nutritional status of women and children.



*Hunger 2010: A Just and Sustainable Recovery* focuses on recovery from the worst economic crisis in 75 years and the looming crisis of climate change. The recovery has the potential to create green jobs that offer people a path out of poverty and build a more sustainable economy. It offers an opportunity to put in place policies that reduce inequality, help low-income families to save and build assets for the future, and revitalize neglected communities throughout the country. The report also makes the case for U.S. leadership in reducing hunger and poverty around the world and in addressing climate change.



*Hunger 2009: Global Development: Charting a New Course* focuses on the partnership between developed and developing countries to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs include reducing poverty and hunger, increasing school enrollment, empowering women and girls, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, halting and then reversing the spread of deadly diseases, and ensuring environmental sustainability. *Hunger 2009* also analyzes the inefficiencies in the current structure of U.S. foreign assistance and maps out a series of reforms to elevate development as a foreign policy priority.



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Since 1990, Bread for the World Institute has produced an annual report on the state of world hunger.

Visit [www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org) and download a copy of an earlier report.

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