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The Food Crises in Honduras

Even at my home in rural Iowa, we are feeling some the effects of the changing food markets. Regularly, TV ads and commercials preempt their message with something such as “In these tough times...” or “Food budgets are getting tight....” True. The average local Iowa price of milk is \$3.90, up from about \$2.20 before this recent increase. My family goes through about five gallons of milk per week. Now we are paying about seven dollars and twenty-five cents more per we than we used to. That means we are spending three hundred seventy dollars more per year on milk alone! Now, my typical American family is a far cry from an impoverished Honduran household, and this paper is written with great humility and respect for the Honduran farmers who are suffering far more than their American counterparts. Indeed, upon researching for this paper, I became increasingly thankful for the secure food I so regularly eat. This paper is intended to address real steps it is possible to take in order for more people to feel this sense of food security I am now so thankful for..

Introduction:

Agriculture in development: Food security in an era of increased demand. When you read the words of the theme this year, the first word is the most tell-tale. Agriculture is the most important part of any country, a factor that has given success or demise to great empires of the past and present. Countries unable to produce their own food via agricultural practices have to import everything the inhabitants of the country are eating. If we can help people develop their agricultural techniques they can spend less money in the long run, and this does not always mean increasing yields. The ability to store food is sometimes the more pressing demand. Developing countries need the most help in this regard. Transforming primitive farming to modern industrial agriculture is too daunting of an immediate task in a country like Honduras, where many farmers have a strong agricultural basis already. Before worrying about producing more food, the traditional, small means Honduran farmer and community need to establish a way to store crops. **Storing food on a year-round basis is the most immediate way to make Honduran food supplies more secure.**

While most of the media is focused on glitzy images of war and natural disaster, the reporters are missing a substantially important issue: food security. In fact, many of the wars and natural disasters are likely related either through cause or effect of food security. If people are food secure, they do not live in hunger or fear of starvation. The more food secure we make areas of the world, the less starving people on the planet we will have, and inevitably, the more peaceful our planet will be. Now, that is a goal the entire world should have.

Also, now we are in an era of increased demand. We have more people than ever living on this planet so the demand for food goes up. Besides population increases, many people on the planet are acquiring a diet rich in protein and variety previously unknown. Globalization is causing an increase in demand. This drives the prices of all ag related inputs, especially those producing large scale commodity crops such as corn, beans, rice and wheat. This trend shows no signs of changing, so creative solutions are needed. In the poorest regions of the country of Honduras, finding a better way to store grain will directly prevent people from going hungry. Furthermore, it will enable the country to spend less on imported goods, and stabilize a country's ag system that is currently in great turmoil.

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund have played a part in the turmoil, but in ways too overlapping and vexing to adequately explain here. The end result is essentially the opening of Honduras to the global ag marketplace, where the country has no chance of competing. So, what used to be a "breadbasket" of Central America now imports more than 80% of its rice. This is a very sad statistic for a country that had 20,000 rice farmers in the 80's, and only 1500 today.

About Honduras:

Honduras is a tiny country, without large tracts of open agricultural fields. Located between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean makes the climate ideal for many crops. In land area it is 112,090 square kilometers which is roughly the same size as Tennessee. The capital, Tegucigalpa, is now a place of protests led by farmers. The climate is temperate in the mountains and tropical in the lowlands. It is mostly mountainous with narrow strips of coastline on either side. They often have hurricanes or earthquakes.

It is the second poorest country in Central America. Hurricane Mitch in 1999 caused two billion dollars in damage, and the nation has never fully recovered. The affects of Hurricane Mitch can still be seen vividly across the country today. Even with the country experiencing so much hardship, eighty percent of people over the age of fifteen are literate. The unemployment rate is about twenty-nine percent. Of those who are employed, forty-three percent have service jobs, thirty-four percent deal with agriculture, and twenty-three percent are involved in industry. Of all the numbers, I have found dealing with the country of Honduras, I find one in particular the most heart wrenching and the most astounding. 50.7% percent of all people who live in Honduras live below the poverty line, in a country of 7,639,300. That means that 3,819,650 people live in poverty. That is the entire population of Iowa plus another plus another one million people!

This paper focuses on a smaller part of Honduras. The area I am using as an example is in the southwestern region. The Catholic Diocese of Santa Rosa de Copan includes five departments. A Department (or Departamento as it is called in its native language) in Honduras is similar to a state or province. The Departments in this diocese include Copan, Santa Barbara, Gracias, Ocotepeque and Intibuca, and they make up about one-fourth of the area of the country. 90% of the 1.9 million people in this region

are Catholic. This region is the poorest part of the country. The landscape is mountainous, covered in pine trees. The agricultural activity in this area includes subsistence farming of tobacco, coffee, and bananas, and whatever grains can be produced in the rocky terrain.

The Honduran Food Crises:

One statistic that causes troubles for developing countries such as Honduras is that people in America spend only about thirteen percent of their budget on food. People in Honduras spend anywhere from forty to sixty percent of their budget on food. In Honduras, there is nothing to cut back on; they have no room for extra wasteful spending in their budget. These people who already go without a lot of the basic needs have to cut back even more. Should the adults cut back a meal just so their children can eat? What else must these people do? Should they not send their kids to school because they can't afford school supplies? Should they not be able to go to the doctor if they can't afford treatment? Something has to be done to help the people in Honduras, to help people in developing countries everywhere. If food security can be insured, then they don't have to spend as much on food so they can spend more on these other problems.

Most average people in Honduras ran out of their last year's basic grain reserve in May or June. Until harvest they do not have any food. They have to buy grain back at a price that is an amazingly large amount over what they sold it for in the first place. These months are the hardest part of the year for these people. They are spending almost all of their money trying to get food so they can eat. The worst part is that if they could store more grain they could have basic grains stores longer allowing them not to have to buy it back at an outrageous price. Projects to help them store more basic grain are a reality and are taking place now to help the Honduran people.

The Solution:

A family on a farm in Honduras would most likely have anywhere from four to six people. One of the best immediate things happening in many areas of Honduras are missionaries. For example, a Catholic missionary from Ames, Iowa is part of a project helping farm families in the diocese of Santa Rosa de Copan. His name is John Donaghy, he has been in the diocese since June 2007. He has taken part in many agricultural projects in Honduras, but to me one of the most interesting and important projects is silo construction.

This is not just the idea of Catholic missionaries. At Iowa State University, Professor Carl Bern studies and innovates new ways to store grains for locations around the world, including developing countries. His research and designs may be key in helping developing countries such as Honduras that are facing the global food crisis.

St. Thomas Aquinas church in Ames is helping fund the cause. They are teaching people how to build silos so they can store essential grains the entire year. That way they never have to buy back the grains they sell after harvest. The people in these areas will

be much more food secure because they will have food for the entire year already in storage instead of having to scrimp and save during the summer to put food on the table.

Padre Efrain and John Donoghly are the people who have organized workshops for people to attend so they can learn the basic steps. They were working in the area around Dulce Nombre Parish April 5, 2008. They started out by talking to people from different communities who grew a lot of basic grains. The idea of a way to deal with food security was embraced. They know they need to be able to store grains to conserve their harvest in order for the people in this area to survive.

The silos themselves are made out of galvanized steel seamed together. They can store eighteen hundred pounds of grain. The first silos were completed during the summer months of 2008. Hopefully they will bring people out of poverty using the fall 2008 crises. Hopefully the silos are making more people food secure.

Closing:

On the larger scale, the global market can be helpful or detrimental to a population of farmers, depending on the role they have. While governments will no doubt have the most important job in creating food security in the long term, immediate solutions such as the aforementioned silo projects can be a necessary transition, if only to assure that the ability to produce food continues. If the income of people is continues not to rise with the price of food, then even more innovative, cost-effective, and immediate solutions are needed during this period of global agricultural flux. If not, eventually entire countries could die of starvation, and once again, the media will start reporting famine along with war and natural disaster. We as a human race need to do our part to help the people in Honduras, just one country in this large picture of global food security.

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