WORLD FOOD PRIZE 2009 YOUTH INSTITUTE ESSAY TOPIC

"National Responses to Food Insecurity"

INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUES

"What we are facing today is an unprecedented challenge. In part, it is a humanitarian emergency that demands urgent food and food-related assistance for the world's poor and vulnerable. But soaring food prices are also emblematic of a larger structural crisis that will have an even worse impact on the world's food supply if immediate measures are not taken to stabilize global food markets, and to increase investment in agriculture in a sustained way. Global demand for food will only grow in the future and we must be prepared for that."

His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the U.N. General Assembly, speaking on behalf of the U.N.'s High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis and its Comprehensive Framework for Action - July 15, 2008

- Global prices for major food crops such as wheat, rice and corn stabilized in 2009 after the sharp rises in recent years when demand grew faster than production. This global food price shock sent a wave of hunger and poverty rippling through the world's poorest nations for the first time since the early 1970s. These impacts reflect the role of wheat, rice, and other grains as the staple foods eaten directly by the majority of the world's population. Food prices stabilized in 2009 for several reasons. The United Nations' World Food Program, governments and international aid organizations responded by boosting humanitarian relief, food subsidies, and other social-protection programs. Farmers in the Americas, Europe, and other economically advanced farming countries responded with increased grain plantings which increased supply. The costs for land, fuel, fertilizer, irrigation and other agricultural inputs decreased due to the lowering of demand for commodities because of the global economic recession.

  Food insecurity has however persisted in many countries as food prices remain close to their 2008 peaks and the purchasing power of many poor and middle-income families declined from slowing economic growth. Consequently the global number of hungry people stands near one billion of which fifty million are malnourished children. Many families eat one meal a day rather than two or go without food altogether and farmers are unable to afford seeds and fertilizer continuing the food insecurity cycle.

- The stabilization of supply and demand in 2009 is precarious as global food reserves are at about 14% of annual consumption, a 50-year low. A major drought, plant disease outbreak or flood could quickly reduce supply causing prices to rapidly escalate. Economic uncertainty and the global credit crunch is also making it difficult for farmers to fund and plan their plantings and governments and humanitarian groups to provide food aid.

  Longer term trends over the next several decades also indicate increasing risks to the global food supply. With the expected growth of the world's population to 9 billion by 2030; consumption of more dairy and meat products in economically growing countries; and ethanol production from corn or sugar cane and biodiesel from soy and oil palm demand for food may increase by as much as 50%. At the same time, increasing farm production to meet the expected increased demand for food will be challenging due to: the expected loss of productive lands to urbanization and salinization; more droughts from changing rainfall patterns and increased temperatures; worsened plant pest and disease infestations; increased fuel, fertilizer, and irrigation water costs; and slowing

growth in per acre crop productivity from reduced investments in agricultural research and development.

- The global food price shock wave of 2007 – 2008 ignited street riots in many developing and developed countries, threatened to destabilize governments, and created conflicts within and between societal groups. The response of national governments of imposing price controls, raising import tariffs, increasing purchases to stockpile food and restricting grain exports to check the rise in domestic food also distorted the world food market and created conflicts between countries. The longer term trends over the next several decades toward increased demand and problems within food production threaten to unleash even greater public unrest, mass migration as people flee from the worst-affected regions and cross-border conflicts between nations.

- Food scarcity disproportionally impacts the world's poorest individuals. They are predominately rural small-scale subsistence farmers and the urban poor. The communities and countries where these farmers or urban residents live are areas of concentrated poverty containing over 92 percent of the world's households which consume one dollar or less of goods per person per day. Without the financial ability to pay more, they are experiencing increased suffering and economic hardship. The 1.5 billion people living on one to two dollars a day are cutting meat consumption and spending on items such as health care. The 1 billion living on one dollar a day are eating cheaper cereals such as sorghum and taking their children out of school. The absolute poorest living on 50 cents a day are selling their animals, tools, and other possessions. All are eating less food.

- Resolving these trends requires sustainable growth in food production and equitable markets. If the increased food production continues to come primarily from the large farmers in America, Europe, and other big producers, then the world's poor and the communities and countries where they live will remain dependent on a food production system that is vulnerable to environmental, economic and political shocks. All of these factors will continue to disproportionally affect their food security.

  Including the world's small-scale subsistence farmers and poor urban gardeners into the effort for growing more food would directly benefit them by raising family incomes. Yield increases translate into increased food security by providing more money for farm and urban families and their communities. With increased incomes they can attain improved diets and health care, better educate their children, and purchase household goods and farming technologies. Subsistence farmers also manage a disproportionate share of the world's water and land resources, so raising the productivity of their existing land would be more environmentally beneficial than clearing more land for fields.

  Yield improvement for subsistence farms or urban gardens depends on the following: agricultural science; access to land, credit, technology, energy, water and education; roads, storage facilities and other necessary infrastructure; open markets, fair trade practices and economic incentive or stabilization policies; and family-community-supporting health, education, social service and legal institutions. Appropriate action must address these interrelated factors in ways that balance increasing global production with the interests of farm and urban families and their communities.

- ❖ Great efforts have been made during 2008 to address global food insecurity. Farm and urban family groups, community organizations, governments and international organizations in many of the affected countries have worked hard to tackle this crisis. But we know it is not enough. Governments, communities and international organizations must make a coordinated and sustained scientific, economic and political response to the interlinked water, energy, environmental and societal factors affecting agricultural productivity and food security.

Food Security Primer: Food security is when people do not live in hunger or fear of starvation. Food insecurity exists when people are undernourished as a result of the cost or physical unavailability of food and/or inadequate nutrition. World-wide around 852 million people are without enough food to eat on a regular basis and 2 billion face intermittent food insecurity. There are 22 countries, 16 of which are in Africa, in which the undernourishment prevalence rate is over 35%.

There are strong, direct relationships between agricultural productivity, hunger, and poverty. Families with the financial resources to escape extreme poverty rarely suffer from chronic hunger; while poor families not only suffer the most from chronic hunger, but are also the segment of the population most at risk during food shortages. Three-quarters of the world's poor live in rural areas and make their living from agriculture. Hunger and child malnutrition are greater in these areas than in urban areas. Moreover, the higher the proportion of the rural population that obtains its income solely from subsistence farming (without the benefit of pro-poor technologies and access to markets), the higher the incidence of malnutrition. Therefore, improvements in agricultural productivity aimed at small-scale farmers and urban gardeners will benefit the rural and urban poor first.

As farmers and urban gardeners are able to grow more food, better diets and, under market conditions that offer a level playing field, higher family incomes will result. With more money, farmers are more likely to diversify production and grow higher-value crops, benefiting not only themselves but the economy as a whole.

How to Write Your Essay

Your Mission: You will select and research ONE of the factors affecting food production and food security in developing countries *(see Step I below)* in ONE country *(see Step II below)* of your choice. You will then prepare your *Youth Institute Essay (see Step III below)* with your research findings and recommendations for increasing food production and availability in ways that improve food security and farm or urban family income in the country on which you have focused.

***Step I*. Select ONE Key Factor in increasing agricultural productivity and improved food security from the following:**

1. Conducting scientific research into crop biology and agronomic technologies for improving yields, disease and drought resistance, and sustainable agricultural systems.
2. Reversing natural resource degradation and adapting farming to water scarcity and climate change.
3. Equitably allocating farming output to the following: wheat, rice, and other grains which are the staple foods of the poor; dairy and meat products from corn and soy for those with larger incomes; and ethanol from corn and sugar cane or biodiesel from soy and oil palm as fuels for transportation.
4. Providing the energy and water resources needed to increase agricultural productivity and provide for the needs of a larger population and an expanding economy.

5. Securing property rights and access to credit; improving farm marketing infrastructure and institutions; and addressing problems created by globalization and trade policies for subsistence family farmers or urban poor.
6. Educating family farmers about results from agricultural yield and sustainability research and providing access to and support for implementing methods from this research.
7. Formulating public policy initiatives to address increasing populations, rapid urbanization, and gender or cultural discrimination.
8. Engaging in diplomatic initiatives for conflict prevention and resolution and governance based on principles of democracy, accountability and transparency in public institutions, and the rule of law that are basic to reducing the number of vulnerable members of society.

***Step II*. Select only ONE of the countries listed below as the focus of your research:**

***Example*:** If you consider **"Indian Subcontinent",** your research will focus on national responses to agricultural productivity and food security in ONE of these countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan or Sri Lanka

North Africa: Algeria, Canary Islands (Spain), Egypt, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco (including Western Sahara), Tunisia

Central Africa: Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo (Zaire), Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sudan, Zambia

East Africa: Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mayotte, Mozambique, Reunion, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda

West Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde islands, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo

South Africa: Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, St. Helena (U.K.), Swaziland, and Zimbabwe

Caribbean: Anguilla (U.K.), Antigua & Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda (U.K.), Cayman Islands (U.K.), Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique (France), Montserrat (U.K.), Netherlands Antilles, Puerto Rico (U.S.), St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Trinidad & Tobago, Turks & Caicos (U.K.), Virgin Islands (U.K., U.S.)

South America Tropical: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela

South American Temperate: Argentina, Chile, Falkland Islands (U.K.), and Uruguay

Central America and Mexico: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama

Indian Subcontinent: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka

East Asia: China, Hong Kong S.A.R. (China), Japan, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North), Republic of Korea (South), Macao S.A.R. (China), Mongolia, Taiwan

South East Asia: Brunei, Darussalam, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos), Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam

Middle East: Bahrain, Cyprus, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Yemen

Eastern Europe: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia/Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia/Montenegro, Slovakia (Slovak Republic), Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan

South Pacific: Christmas Island, Cook Island, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia (Tahiti), Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Pitcairn, Samoa, American Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Wake Island, Wallis and Futuna

Step III. Follow these instructions to develop your Youth Institute Essay:

1. Choose ONE of the countries above as the focus of your research.

2. Define a "typical" subsistence farm or poor urban family in your country: a) family size and composition, diet, education, and income; b) farm size, crops grown, agricultural practices, and marketing or, for an urban family, employment and wage, where they typically purchase food and have access to private or community gardens; and c) major barriers to improving farm agricultural productivity and income or, for an urban family, employment, wages and access to food markets or gardening opportunities.

3. Select ONE of the important factors *(Step I)* above as the focus of your research.

4. How does the factor you selected affect agricultural productivity, farm or urban family income or food availability and cost in your chosen country? Discuss the following:
   - What role does the factor presently play in causing your family to not produce enough food or earn sufficient income to purchase food?
   - What is the present status for this factor? How severe is the situation? What percentage of the necessary amount of food and income for the family is being attained? Is the environment being degraded? Are women, rural or urban poor, or developing countries disadvantaged?
   - Are the trends for this factor improving, worsening, staying the same? How are the trends for this factor measured? Do these measurements indicate the situation is changing? If so, how? Because of potential change, or no change, is the situation for your farm or urban family getting worse, improving or staying the same?
   - How would improving or resolving this factor increase the amount of food or income available to your family? Preserve the environment in a sustainable fashion? Benefit women, small farmers or urban dwellers in your country of focus?

5. How could increased agricultural productivity by small-scale subsistence family farmers or urban gardeners affect the status and trends of this factor? Improve or harm the yield or livelihood of your subsistence farm or urban family?

6. Based on your research give your recommendations as to how increased productivity by small-scale subsistence family farmers or urban gardeners should be implemented to improve the food security and incomes of your farm or urban family in the country on which you have focused?

7. Give your suggestions for appropriate roles of communities, national government, companies and other organizations (United Nations, World Bank, private or civic organizations and others) in implementing your recommendations in the country on which you have focused.

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