

**C-SUITE CONNECT SERIES: *THE IMPACT OF ADVOCACY ON BUILDING ADAPTATION,
RESILIENCY AND FOOD SECURITY AT HOME AND ABROAD***

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Eric Mitchell

President, Alliance to End Hunger

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Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for being here today and giving me the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon. It is an honor to be here at the World Food Prize alongside so many dedicated individuals who are working to address one of the greatest challenges of our time – food security in a world that’s impacted by climate change.

Once again, let me introduce myself. My name is Eric Mitchell. I’m the president of the Alliance to End Hunger. The Alliance is a coalition of over 100 national organizations, including companies, nonprofits, faith-based institutions, academics who are committed to addressing the root causes of hunger, both here in the United States and around the world.

I began my journey over 25 years ago, following a different path. I was a staffer in Washington, DC, working for members of Congress on Capitol Hill. I started my career working for Congressman John Lewis, who is a civil rights icon, marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Junior, and dedicated his life to bringing truth to power.

Following my year as a Hill staffer, and throughout my private sector life, I advocated for issues and causes that were important to me, including the fight to end hunger and malnutrition. For those of you all who are familiar with U.S. politics in Washington, DC, I often tell people that I am a recovering lobbyist, but I’ve come to learn from my time in politics and walking the halls of power both in Washington, DC, and places around the world, I’ve learned that advocacy in its many forms can be a powerful tool for change.

One of the key strengths of the Alliance to End Hunger is the diversity of experience and expertise that each of our member organizations bring to the table. No two organizations are exactly alike, but we see that as a strength and not a weakness. And by working together, we tackle hard problems, including finding the root causes of hunger, few of which are more complex and consequential than the impact of climate change on agriculture and food security.

As you guys heard and as we stand here today, there’s over 730 million people around the world who are experiencing hunger and economic instability. Now, we all know that climate change is one of those leading root causes of that instability. It is wreaking havoc on families and communities everywhere, including my own. I am from the state of Florida, and as many of you all know, my community was hit by two category 5 hurricanes in a matter of four weeks. I have seen personally what intense climate conditions and extreme weather patterns can do to a community. But whether you live in the coastal shores of the United States or the mountains of Guatemala or the plains of sub-Saharan Africa, we all have seen the effects of hotter temperatures and more extreme weather events. And we all know that no sector feels those consequences more acutely than agriculture.

So the question I have for us today is: What are we gonna do about it? For decades the global response to climate change has lagged far behind the scope of the problem. And we're all paying the price for this neglect. To the degree that the world has been paying attention, much of our collective actions has been focused on actions to reduce emissions and protect our environment. And don't get me wrong – that is critical for a survivable planet.

The question I have for many is: What about the farmer that's currently facing a multiyear drought and is forced to leave their homeland with their families because they no longer have arable soil to grow food or earn a living.

At the Alliance, we know that adaptation and resilience is also crucial, but unfortunately far less attention has been paid to this equally critical part of the climate change conversation. Globally, smallholder farmers produce a third of the world's food supply, but they're also facing the reality of climate change every single day. And it's because of this we know that many of them have limited access to food every single day.

Climate change acts as a direct driver of food insecurity worldwide. It decreases agriculture productivity, disrupts markets, destabilizes the prices and makes it harder for hundreds and millions of people to be able to put food on the table. We need to ensure that these farmers have the resources to adapt to these challenges that they are facing right now.

Ending hunger isn't just part of our coalition's name. It's in our blood. It's in our DNA. And we know that this goal cannot be achieved unless and until we address both the root causes and the real-time effects of climate change. That is why we are proud to have member organizations who provide resources such as loans, agriculture inputs and other investments to smallholder farmers to help them withstand the climate extremes that they're facing right now. But we have to be realistic. Nonprofits and charities cannot do this alone. And despite the urgent need, funding for climate adaptation is far from sufficient, but it's going to take policy and the political will in order for us to reverse this trend.

From 2021 to 2022 climate mitigation funding totaled around \$1.15 trillion. Again, this is a worthy investment. But adaptation received just \$63 billion over that same time period. Now to put these numbers into perspective, smallholder farmers, who again are responsible for feeding billions of people, only receive .08% of total climate financing.

So let me be clear – this is unsustainable. And if we continue to fail to address the needs of our farmers, the global food crisis that we are seeing today will only worsen. Many of you in this room are researchers, scientists and policy experts and farmers, so I'm not telling you anything you don't already know. And you all know better than me what farmers need to adapt to climate change. Things like better soil management techniques, innovative seed technologies to withstand droughts and pests and improved water management policies are just some of the crucial tools that we'll need that will build resilience in our agriculture communities and food systems.

So as an advocacy organization, our call to action to policymakers worldwide is pretty simple: make climate adaptation financing for smallholder farmers a priority. Just as we invest in clean air and clean water, we must also invest in other farmers who feed our world. At the Alliance to End Hunger we know that advocacy works. We know this because we have fought tooth and nail for additional investments in global food programs. We've pushed for the coordination of a U.S. federal response to global malnutrition and for the development of a global nutrition strategy.

Every year we lead the charge for food and health programs that are funded through the U.S. Government's annual budget process. And starting next year, we have an opportunity to make real progress related to building agriculture resiliency both in the United States and around the

world. Here in the U.S., we will engage policymakers in Congress and the new presidential administration, regardless of who's elected, to rally support for increased funding for research, programming and climate adaptation policy.

Now, we recognize that the politics of climate are not always easy, but the vulnerabilities of agriculture are becoming more and more apparent to the growing number of people across the political spectrum. And while we will continue to push the U.S. Government to maintain and build leadership, a leadership role, when it comes to climate financing and adaptation, we will also be relying on cooperation among our communities and nations worldwide.

Now I know that there are many of you here today that call another country home, but everybody in this room has a role to play in advocating for increased global support for climate adaptation and food security. And the time for us to engage is now.

Starting next month at the G20 Leaders Summit in Rio, leaders will gather to discuss some of the world's most pressing issues. We need to make sure that those leaders prioritize actions on climate adaptation, global food security and nutrition. The one thing that we can do when we go back to our respective homes is to encourage our governments to join the Task Force for a Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, which is a key priority under Brazil's leadership at the G20. We should also push for this alliance to prioritize climate adaptation, finance for smallholder farmers as a tool to address hunger and poverty.

This message doesn't end in Des Moines, Iowa, nor does it stop in Brazil. We need to push the critical nature of this issue at every global movement we can, whether it's at the G7, COP, the U.N. General Assembly and beyond. This effort will require collaboration between companies, NGOs, academia and everyday citizens. So that's why I urge you to join the Alliance to End Hunger, because we are not just an organization, we are a movement that is committed to finding solutions to end hunger. We know that when we approach policymakers with a diverse and unified voice representing our interests, we can make an impact, and we can win. We know that this will not be an easy journey and that there will be challenges along the way. But we also know that this is a time, as my former boss would say – This is a time for us to get in good trouble, a time for us to get in the way. Or in the words of that famous Motown spiritual, we know that, *There ain't no mountain high enough*.

So as we leave here today, let us remember that the fight against hunger and the struggle for climate resilience are intertwined. Now is the time for us to act, because the farmers on the frontlines cannot wait, and neither can we. The solutions are clear, and the need for us to prioritize climate adaptation is urgent. Now is the time to ensure that our collective voices are heard, not just here but in every capital, at every summit, in every forum where decisions are made. The future of our food systems and our communities and our planet depends on it. Together we can build a world where no one goes hungry.

Thank you.